March 2003

HIMĀL

SOUTH ASIAN

WTO: Western cash cow

An ordinary history

The 'denizens' of northeast India

The Shroud

Shivering under the the Indus-Ganga fog

A HIMAL INVESTIGATION

Mid-morning, 8 January 2003

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CONTENTS

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The special feature on HIV/AIDS in South Asia was prepared with inputs from the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of UNICEF.

Cover design by **Suresh Neupane**

A fine balance

IT IS important to make sure that voices from the north and east are included when reporting on the Sri Lankan peace process. It is true that the United National Party-led government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have formed something of a partnership for the peace negotiations, but this does not mean that those in the south who support the peace process are yet able to articulate the interests of the Tamils. Too often this conflict has been viewed through a Colombo-centric, Sinhala-nationalist lens – which leads to a lack of understanding of the dynamics involved.

For instance, the commentary on Sri Lanka (*Himal*, January 2003) claims that efforts to curb the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) in the north and east are 'anti-democratic'. What is not mentioned is that the EPDP still retains its arms in areas where the LTTE is moving around unarmed. Also not mentioned is that in the islands where the main controversy is taking place, the EPDP did not allow electoral rivals to campaign in the last few elections. Several Tamil National Alliance candidates and campaign workers landed in hospital in the 2001 elections when they tried. Few outsiders have been allowed into these islands in years. In the 1996 elections, the EPDP swept the Jaffna parliamentary elections with fewer than 1000 votes (!). In some constituencies it garnered all of 10 votes. Although the EPDP has been provided a democratic component by being allowed to contest elections in army-controlled areas, its military arm has been funded and trained through the defence ministry since 1987. It is essentially a paramilitary arm of the security forces.

When accusations of "the murder, torture and disappearance of Tamil political activists in the north and east" are brought – again – what the writer forgets to mention is that these 'political activists' are armed members of the EPDP and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front. The ceasefire called for the disarming of these groups or their reposting to the south, but this has not occurred in a clear violation of the ceasefire.

The number one human rights and political issue that the Tamils are concerned about at the moment is the right to return to one's home. If you look at this map from the *Tamil Guardian* of Jaffna's high security zones and army camps, you can visualise the problem.

Avis Sri-Jayantha, by email

TAMIL GUARDIAN

Well meant but incorrect

YOUR COMMENTARY on the nuclear threat in South Asia (*Himal*, February 2003) is well meant but factually incorrect.

There is no ambiguity in Pakistan's nuclear policy. In view of the numerical asymmetry in conventional weapons with our adversary, nuclear deterrence is a key part of Pakistan's strategic defence to protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity against aggression. This policy, articulated several times at the highest levels, has been formulated not out of choice but compulsion – and it has worked. Pakistan is not unique in adopting such a policy since the US and NATO have also pursued this strategic doctrine in similar circumstances of conventional weapons asymmetry with their adversary during the Cold War.

> Pakistan is not oblivious to the horrors of nuclear war, and statements by our leaders reflect this

It does not follow that Pakistan is oblivious to the horrors of nuclear war, and statements by our leaders reflect this, as you have noted. For this reason, we have repeatedly proposed a reciprocal policy of 'no use of force', which goes well beyond our opponent's self-serving claim about 'no first use of nuclear weapons'.

Pakistan has also proposed a comprehensive 'strategic restraint regime' in South Asia to avert weaponisation of nuclear capabilities; de-mating (separation) of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems; renunciation of further nuclear tests; and institutionalised measures to avoid unintended or accidental use of nuclear weapons. A more balanced commentary on your part would not have ignored these facts.

Before alleging that Pakistan's military controls our capabilities, you ought to remember that the command and control structure was formulated during 1998-99 by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government, long before President Pervez Musharraf came to power, and includes both civilian and military leaders, as is the case in all nuclear states. More importantly, it is far more dangerous to have the nuclear button in the hands of the religious fanatics and fascists who opened this Pandora's box in the first place in South Asia.

The reference to allegations regarding Pakistan's export of nuclear technology ignores the fact that except for conjecture and speculation, no evidence has been provided to support these baseless charges. Also, any objective analysis of the nuclear threat in the region must take into account its root cause, the Kashmir

dispute. Your failure to do so is a fundamental flaw in your analysis.

Lastly, the US Ambassador to India is Robert Blackwill, not Richard Haass, as you claim. Mr Haass is director for policy planning in the US state department.

Kamal Ahmed
First Secretary
Embassy of Pakistan, Kathmandu

the editors respond

OUR FEBRUARY commentary did not set out to provide a comprehensive evaluation of relations between India and Pakistan, but instead to highlight aspects of each country's nuclear strategy that endanger all the people of South Asia. Looked at from the perspective of South Asian civilisation, any reliance on the nuclear arsenal for strategic objective is wrong.

Blackwill, indeed, is the ambassador in New Delhi.

History of foreign aid

SAUBHAGYA SHAH'S article (*Himal*, November 2002) is an interesting description of NGO-led development in Nepal. However, Shah does not devote attention to the larger history of foreign aid as a tool to promote donor nations' ideological goals, self-interests and, on occasion, humanitarian obligations. Nepal's situation seems to fit into a much larger context of aid and self-interest, a few examples of which are worth mentioning.

More than 80 years after its completion, the largest humanitarian mission in world history illustrates how wealthy nations advance multiple agendas through foreign assistance. In the summer of 1921, an estimated one-quarter of the Soviet Union's population faced starvation, a situation arising from the disastrous effects of the country's civil war between the 'Red' Bolsheviks and 'White' counter-revolutionaries (the second of which were supported by several Western powers), as well as Lenin's equally disastrous farm collectivisation policy, which was curtailed in March of that year. In Samara alone, three-quarters of the provincial population – two million people – faced starvation, of which 700,000 would eventually die, primarily from cholera and typhus.

Beginning in the fall of 1921, the now defunct American Relief Administration (ARA), led by future US president Herbert Hoover, set up emergency kitchens throughout an area comparable to present-day India and fed an estimated 10.5 million people. Hoover's agenda, while inspired in part by humanitarian impulses, also reflected Washington's attitude that massive foreign assistance might roll back Bolshevism. Hoover also wanted to provide a market for surplus American grain, an agenda which has remained at the heart of American foreign policy in the decades since. As with Nepal, massive foreign assistance to the Soviet Union raised questions of sovereignty. According to American sources, Soviet authorities attempted to discredit the ARA, even while the latter was feeding millions of people, in part because its success threatened the legitimacy of the Soviet government.

Other examples illustrate the oftentimes vexed role of foreign assistance. The US was the largest single donor to Nehruvian India, for example, though New Delhi rejected an offer of military assistance in the 1950s for fear of being entangled in Washington's foreign policy. (Pakistan, of course, accepted a similar offer.) In the 1990s, the US provided more food than any other country to Taliban Afghanistan, despite obvious political and ideological differences, and a similar arrangement held with North Korea until the recent imbroglio between George W Bush and Kim Il Jung. The objectives of these last two cases might be deemed to mirror the ARA's mission in 1921-22. Given current events, it is also worth highlighting the dearth in humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people since 1991, and the possible political, ideological and economic motivations explaining that omission.

Perhaps *Himal* could explore this history of foreign assistance? It certainly would be of interest, and it holds considerable political and moral implications.

Ryan Truax
Los Angeles, USA

INDIA ● PAKISTAN

DUTY OF THE INTELLECTUAL

THE RECIPROCATED expulsions of Indian and Pakistani diplomats from each other's capitals in February followed months of key political developments in both countries. Pakistan has returned to some form of formal democracy, however flawed, and the religious right in India has made more worrying gains at the ballot box. But it seems that nothing has changed in the countries' steadily deteriorating ties.

Given this state of affairs, where invective and distrust characterise bilateral relations, it is worth pausing for a moment to remind those in power in both countries that they will only do as well as their relationship with the other country. The India and Pakistan of today have been shaped more by their mutual relationship than any other single factor. This relationship has been sour at best, and hateful at worst. But it is this relationship that will determine to what extent any force in Indian or Pakistani politics – be it the military, the religious right, or maybe even the people – is successful.

Contemplating differences

There is no doubting that the post-partition histories of India and Pakistan are different. India associated itself with state socialism for much of its early existence, developing closer ties with the Soviet Union, while Pakistan tagged along with the United States for the most part, even if Islamabad has been much more fickle in its political leanings. External and internal factors have contributed to India's relatively robust electoral democracy, while external and internal factors have likewise contributed to Pakistan's love affair with military dictatorship.

Today in India, the urban middle class is expanding rapidly. Indian society is more open than Pakistani society, in spite of the fact that religious parochialism has gained much ground in India's electoral sphere. India's economy faces far fewer structural problems than Pakistan's, and is far less dependent on foreign money or dictation. India is also more consumerist, a perfect market for multinational capital, and therefore in some ways much more closely knit to the capitalist world economy.

Within the two countries, states and provinces differ from one another greatly, whether in terms of development, cultural diversity or tolerance. There is no intrinsic reason that explains the mistrust, rivalry, and even animosity prevailing between the two countries. Differences of any kind should not necessarily equate to intense hatred, especially when one considers that many of the nations with whom India and Pakistan are each friendly are far more different than Indians and Pakistanis will ever be.

The fact of the matter is that the majority of Indians and Pakistanis remain on the margins, unable to get much of a look-in. Sustained elections in India have made a difference, but as the invisible hand of the market strengthens its grip on the world, much graver threats face democratic ideals and principles everywhere than at any previous time. Electoral democracy of the kind currently practised has hastened the onslaught of monopoly capitalism rather than temper it.

> The India and Pakistan of today are shaped more by their mutual relationship than any other factor

And so working-class Indians and working-class Pakistanis have much to contemplate. The realities of power politics are such that neither the Indian nor the Pakistani establishment has ever genuinely tried to resolve the conflict between the two countries. Similarly, outside powers, including the US, are the least bit concerned about ordinary Indians and Pakistanis, and base their decisions to intervene in the region – in whatever form – on their own narrow self-interest. Little should be expected of those who perpetuate the conflict and marginalisation of far too many people.

Hatred detached from history

Much of the problem derives from either a lack or complete absence of accurate information among the people of the two countries. There is no comparable means of countering the heaps of propaganda that is spewed by both countries' official apparatuses, and therefore no way of debunking the many myths that are so conveniently transformed into immutable truths. What is called track two or track three diplomacy, or people-to-people contact, is simply not enough. Neither are token demonstrations,

nor candlelight vigils. These are all symbolic actions that are necessary, but hardly sufficient. After all, such efforts have not led to a resumption of train or bus travel across the border, or facilitated the resumption of even minimum levels of diplomacy. Those desiring genuine change must emphasise a comprehensive political vision that underscores that the peace dividend can only be reaped when a holistic alternative paradigm is articulated and worked towards.

At this time in history, it is incredibly difficult to build this vision. There has been de-politicisation at a global level as market-driven parliamentary democracy becomes more and more static. This is where the role of the intellectual becomes very important. It is important to recognise that a society develops very much along the lines of what intellectuals think. In Pakistan, intellectuals have been very willing to cater their views to the establishment. They have been ever willing to concede to the ideas that are propagated by official channels.

In India, the situation may not necessarily be much better. Indeed, as far as the issue of Kashmir goes, Indian intellectuals have always tended to be on the condescending side, including the more enlightened of the lot. Nevertheless, the habit of framing their ideas within at least a functionally democratic order has ensured that the Indian intellectual has tended to maintain more lasting principles – yet another relative comparison of course.

The role of the intellectual must be seen in the context of the distorted histories that now sit in the collective mindset of the Indian and Pakistani populations. Naturally, challenging these distorted histories is daunting, and often involves risk. In the current global climate, both the Indian and Pakistani establishments have found it all too easy to downplay ideas that constitute a threat to the status quo. Because intellectual resistance is erratic, both states' elites have even been able to get away with more repressive and arbitrary actions than in the past. The state-sponsored pogrom in Gujarat and the farcical general election in Pakistan stand out as two examples.

But this is why there is an even greater need than at earlier times to regenerate principled opposition to ideas that are manifestly regressive. There is a need to link the realities of India-Pakistan relations to the global capitalist order, and particularly the unilateralism of the United States. There is a need to understand how global capital is dictating to a far too dangerous extent the interaction between human beings. Ultimately, there is a need to recognise the long-term implications of historical events. In particular, after the fall of the Soviet bloc, the capitalist system, unchecked, has wreaked havoc around the world. Intellectuals must stand opposed to this ongoing demolition job.

Indians and Pakistanis who have access to the information that their fellow citizens do not must be intellectually honest. They must tell one and all the truth about the India-Pakistan conflict. They must point out that it is irrational, unaffordable, and ultimately, immoral. It is sustained because it serves a purpose for a small group of people, and not because it reflects an accurate view of how the world works. It therefore must be corrected once and for all. A subsistence farmer in India and his counterpart in Pakistan are kept on the margins by the same oppressive forces. The last person that either should be counting as the enemy is the poor farmer on the other side of the border. But as many people as possible have to say this again, and again, and again, and only then will the rhetoric of the past 55 years start wearing off.

–Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

SRI LANKA

ONE YEAR IN

THE FIRST anniversary celebrations of the ceasefire agreement on 22 February showed how different sections of society are responding to peace. The main event, sponsored by the government, was a lamp-lighting ceremony at Independence Square. The light of the lamps was meant to symbolise the hope that the ceasefire would be a lasting one. As part of its programme, the government sent directives to state institutions and schools to organise similar ceremonies.

Another event took place at an open-air auditorium in Colombo's main park, drawing in members of Sri Lanka's social elite, who have been largely untouched by the vicissitudes of life in the country. Youngsters with upper-class backgrounds,

enrolled in international schools, organised a peace concert where some of the country's best-known singers and bands played late into the night. The organisers charged a hefty entrance fee, with the proceeds going to deprived schools in the north and east.

A third event, an exhibition of photographs held at the national art gallery under the theme of 'A Year of Life', portrayed conditions before and after the ceasefire. Sponsored by the National Peace Council, this three-day exhibition was supplemented by a cultural show at the new town hall organised in association with the National Youth Services Council and the Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Refugees. The presence of the outgoing Norwegian ambassador, Jon Westborg, as a guest of honour was an indication of the important role of his country in the so-far-successful peace process.

While the formal celebrations are notable, there is widespread support for the peace process in most sections of Sri Lankan society, including those that did not observe the anniversary. All public opinion polls have so far revealed that 80 to 90 percent of people support the ceasefire agreement. These same surveys also show that most people have reservations about some of the terms of the agreement and its implementation. But virtually no one, except for members of extremist political organisations, wants the ceasefire to lapse and war to return. Even though the economy is not yet yielding its potential riches to the masses, the peace dividend of being safe from bomb blasts and gunfire is too valuable for people to disregard.

LTTE rationale

Intuition says that the benefits of peace accruing to the people of the north and east, where it was most violent, are greater than to the rest of Sri Lankans. The signing of the ceasefire has also brought about a lifting of the economic embargo placed on the region. Due to the destruction and deprivation in the past, people in the north and east continue to be much worse off than their counterparts in other parts of the country. But today they are better off than they were during the years of war.

It is in this context that the black flags, *hartals* and disruptions in parts of the north and east that accompanied the one-year celebrations elsewhere in the country need to be critically examined. The ostensible rationale for these protests was the continuing burden under which people in the north and east suffer. A consortium of humanitarian agencies in Jaffna issued a statement to this effect and joined in the protests. However, the agencies also expressed the legitimate concern that recent violent incidents between the Sri Lankan military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could destabilise the peace process.

Three incidents in the past month indicate that the ceasefire may be under stress: the apprehension of an LTTE arms boat and the suicides of its crew, clashes between Sri Lankan soldiers and LTTE cadre over belts worn by LTTE women cadre, and the fatal shooting of a Sri Lankan soldier who went beyond army lines. This apprehension was also expressed in the Jaffna NGO statement. Such worries help to justify the army remaining in a state of high alert in case the ceasefire agreement breaks down.

The other complaint highlighted in the NGO statement was the slowness of the relief and rehabilitation process in the north and east. The inability or unwillingness of the government to speed up this process and to enable people to return to normalcy gives rise to a valid concern. While there is certainly a dearth of both human and financial resources at the government's disposal, the LTTE can use Colombo's tardiness to present itself as the sole defender of the interests of the Tamil people.

Four challenges: the war mentality, partisan politics, developing a federal structure, and democratising the LTTE

But despite the continuing difficulties of life in the north and east, conditions have undoubtedly improved since the ceasefire's signing. It is the natural inclination of people to celebrate improvements in their lives, but the absence of public celebrations on the ceasefire anniversary in the north and east appears to stem more from the LTTE's needs rather than the public mood. The LTTE's refusal to permit the opening of the Jaffna public library in February might also be an example of this. A year into the ceasefire the LTTE's agenda continues to dominate life in the north and east.

The LTTE has used the last year to build its strength using the resources of the north-east. Perhaps to overcome the reduction in funding from expatriate Tamils, it is taxing people in the region heavily and still recruits children, even through forcible means. It is therefore necessary for the LTTE to use every opportunity to justify what

might otherwise, in normal times, be publicly seen and denounced as anti-people measures.

Four challenges

The contrasting public attitudes to the ceasefire's anniversary in the north-east and the rest of Sri Lanka underscore the four challenges that face the country as it begins the second year of ceasefire. The first is shifting from a mentality of war to one of peace. The readiness to utilise war as a means of advancing political objectives has not totally disappeared. A very large demonstration organised by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) against the ceasefire agreement two days before the anniversary shows that pro-war sentiment still exists in sections of the polity.

The second challenge is for the government to find a way to move the ethnic conflict beyond the scope of partisan politics. In this context, the government must win over the mainstream opposition to the peace process. Achieving a bipartisan approach to the ethnic conflict has been a long-standing need in the country and a long-standing goal of civic organisations. Among such civic organi-sations, the influential business community, in particular, needs to strengthen its initia-tives instead of being satisfied in its contribution to the signing of the ceasefire agreement.

The third challenge for mainstream society is to change its mindset from Colombo-centred to region-based thinking. This is necessary to pave the way for a constitutional transition from unitary to federal structures of governance. The setting up of joint government-LTTE institutions to decide on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the north and east is a positive step in this direction. Government representatives on these bodies should be prepared to take speedy decisions, together with the LTTE, so long as those decisions are in the interests of the people of the north and east.

The fourth challenge is for the LTTE to change its militaristic approach to power and democratise itself. This requires that the LTTE educate its cadres about the public's right to refuse LTTE demands. Requiring people to put up black flags, close shops and stay indoors on the first anniversary is not the way to win hearts and minds, whether in the north and east or elsewhere. The people in the south need to feel that there is goodwill and cooperation coming from the northeast. △

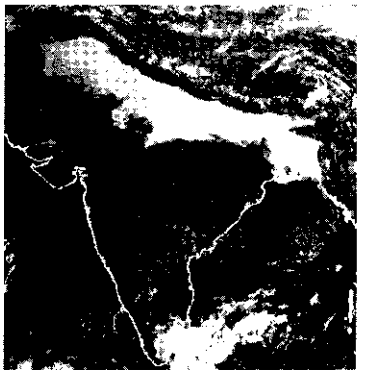
–Jehan Perera

The dark white shroud

The fog over the plains of northern South Asia is thicker and lasts longer than in earlier decades but few bother to locate the causes of this distressing trend. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of the poorest struggle unassisted through a sun-starved season.

by ***Shruti Debi***

In the winter of 2002-03, a protracted fog hugged the ground of the Indus and Ganga plains in the north and east of the Subcontinent for approximately 45 days. The resultant *seet lahar* (translated as 'cold wave') of December and January condemned 500 million people, living in a swathe of territory from Rawalpindi to Rangpur, to a sun-starved and frigid existence.



The fog disrupted life beyond just upsetting local airline schedules and delaying trains. In this, one of the most fertile belts of the world – the tropical and semi-tropical northern half of South Asia – lives a large section of global humanity, mostly in poverty. And it was exposed – under-clothed, undernourished – in the millions, to temperatures in the low single digits. The fog and the accompanying cold of the winter just passed struck a bitter blow.

The effects of this winter fog are compounded every year when its growing incidence coincides with the growing numbers of those it shrouds. Yet, as *Himal*'s investigation over the last two months has confirmed, the Indus-Ganga fog is a grossly understudied meteorological phenomenon. This shortcoming is evident when one begins to examine available literature. Meteorological data confirm anecdotal information that the duration and thickness of fog in the Indus-Ganga *maidaan* has been on the rise over the last half century, yet there is a singular lack of academic concern over its socio-economic impact, and not enough scientific interest in investigating comprehensively the factors behind this increase. While the changing air quality, which appears to have a significant impact, and the inversion layer that now persists for long periods of time preserving cold air at the surface, have received some attention, the rise in ambient moisture – more significant for the plains than in deltaic Bangladesh – as possibly a major cause has been neglected.

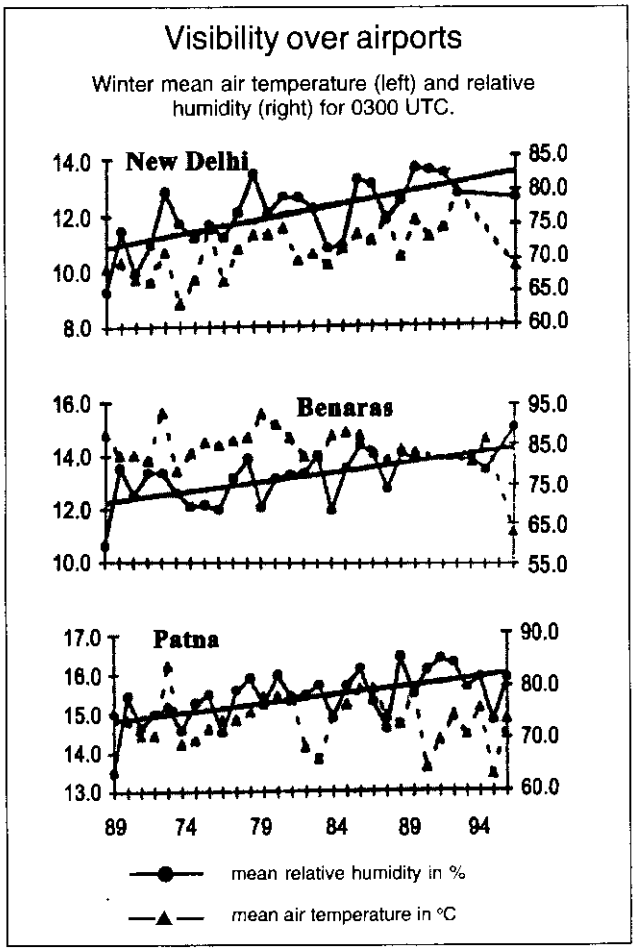
The familiar term 'cold wave' does us great disservice in this by implying that the cold comes from elsewhere. Even experienced meteorologists will fob off enquiries by invoking the 'northwesterlies' to explain away the cold as something nothing can be done about. True, the northwesterlies that blow over the land in the winter are cold moist winds that come from elsewhere (as all winds must), but they have always been coming down from that direction and therefore are a constant factor. In fact, the cause for the cold, in the sedentary fog that sits on the Indus and Ganga plains keeping the sun from warming the land and its people, may just be homegrown.

Engineering in this region, from Pakistan's Indus basin to the Nepal tarai, has interfered substantially in the last 50 years with the natural hydrological cycle of the plains. The result is that there is a lot of unseasonable water on the surface in the winter due to irrigation canals, the pumping of groundwater and the building of embankments and other structures which cause waterlogging. The impact on the weather of this ecological modification has gone entirely neglected by the Subcontinent's scientific community.

Finally, there is a distinct lack of caring when it comes to the impact the fog has on those living in abject poverty here, who number in the hundreds of millions. Living in a region that is warm or hot most of the time, even under normal circumstances the poor do not have the clothing, the diet, the shelter or the services to cope well with the cold. Given that historically the seet lahar lasted no more than a few days, it was possible to overcome the brief misery. But, with the number of foggy days extending up to a month or more now, misery levels have risen, and continue to rise. An index for this misery has not been proposed, let alone configured – not by physical scientists, nor by social scientists. While the media reports separately on the fog and the cold, there is no attempt to link the two and analyse the inescapable trend.

The fog has caught the metropolitan media's

'VISIBILITY OVER INDIAN AIRPORTS DURING WINTER SEASON', MAUSAM, OCTOBER 2001.



attention mainly because of poor visibility – flights and trains are often cancelled or delayed. Occasionally, when the numbers are sufficiently impressive, there is disconcerting news of so many "cold wave deaths" and the plight of the urban homeless. But the loss to the economy has not yet been calculated, the destruction of winter crops, the standstill in the brick-making industry, the slump for builders and masons, the impact on *dhobis* across the land whose clotheslines remain soggy in the absence of sunshine, and a hundred other professions and industries that are affected by the fog suffer without registering on the radar screen.

Sociologists have not thought it necessary to discover the number of people affected by the extended presence of the winter fog, and public health experts have not pressed for policy-level morbidity alleviation programmes. Observers and analysts have not considered the fact that the duration of the seet lahar (though getting longer, yet short when compared to the hot months) makes it unviable for the poor and very poor to even aspire to add a winter wardrobe, or to buy quilts, or build a heat-conserving space in which to live. In the Indus and Ganga plains, which register among the lowest on human development indices anywhere in the planet, it just does not do to say, "Let them wear sweaters", for people have only ever had to plan for thin cottons.

Flying blind

In his novel *Blindness*, Portuguese novelist José Saramago describes the progressive blindness of an entire city and the consequent breakdown of social order. Social order may not be under threat in this case, at least not yet, but the Indus-Ganga fog, in its engulfing whiteness, and in the neglect of it at various levels of investigation, draws a parallel to Saramago's tale. While the intuitive conclusion that the incidence of fog is on the rise finds numerical validation, most meteorologists still hide behind the "need to study data" before pronouncing a trend. Rather than concede to this insensitivity, *Himal* decided to extrapolate from its collated findings that the northern half of South Asia is indeed a foggier and more miserable place now than it was even in the 1970s.

As per the definition used by the Indian Meteorology Department (IMD), fog is the condition in which horizontal visibility on the surface is less than 1000 metres while relative humidity (RH) is above 75 percent. There is nothing new about the science of fog, and it still develops when there is the standard mix of atmospheric moisture, aerosols around which this moisture may condense, and appropriately low temperatures for the condensation to occur. The science of fog has not changed. What *has* is the increasing severity of the fog (and correspondingly the cold), in terms of both how long it lasts and how thick it is.

Weather data lie at the core of meteorology, and the best place to seek continuous data on the fog is the aerodrome, where meteorologists are more exercised than others about its incidence. Reduced visibility disrupts flights and inconveniences the privileged of an underprivileged Subcontinent.

Data from Safdarjang, now an under-used airstrip at the heart of New Delhi, reveal that of the last six Decembers, four have had over 20 foggy days. Compare this to the average of 6.2 days of fog for the month of December between 1951 and 1980. The average for January at Safdarjang was 6.8 foggy days. However, only in one year between 1996 and 2003 did New Delhi have less than 20 foggy days in January. This dramatic rise in foggy days in Delhi is repeated again and again in airport weather stations across the north Indian plains, whereas data from the south or from the Himalayan region do not show the trend.

A study was published in October 2001 on visibility at 25 Indian airports across the country, conducted by a team which included US De, former assistant director-general at the IMD. It shows that at 21 northern stations, the number of days with visibility of less than 2000 metres (the benchmark commonly used as the 'runway visual range') in the winter months (December-February) is on the rise. Tracking trends through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the graphs for Allahabad,

Amritsar, Benaras, Delhi, Lucknow and Patna are particularly steep.

In Amritsar, the number of poor visibility days has shot up from two out of 90 in the 1970s to 72 out of 90 days in the 1990s. Benaras registered an increase from nine foggy days to 72, Lucknow and Allahabad, from nine to 63, and Patna from 12 to around 75. The meteorologists, writing in the journal Mausam, say that "in the north Indian stations *viz.*, Amritsar, New Delhi, Varanasi, Patna, Lucknow and Allahabad... the visibility deteriorated significantly with poor visibility days increasing to 70 to 80 percent in the winter season".

Poor visibility days have shot up from nine to 63 in Allahabad and Lucknow, nine to 72 in Benaras, 12 to 75 in Patna, and two to 72 in Amritsar

Learning from recent experience that the fog has begun playing havoc with domestic and international flights, the airport at Palam in Delhi upgraded its landing instrumentation system this year to enable aircraft arrivals at even 500 metres runway visual range. But the fog beat the technology with visibility keeping well below that mark except for a small window during the day when the rush to clear flights often overwhelmed the system.

Irate passengers make for chaos at airports and may give airlines a bad name, but they are after all, at worst, only inconvenienced. The fog and the cold made obvious yet again the startling income inequality in the fertile plains of the Subcontinent. On the one extreme, in Lahore and Delhi, the two major international airports in the affected area, the hotel business picked up with five-star establishments gaining substantively from disrupted air traffic in the first three weeks of January.

At the other extreme, in Bihar, where the government distributed blankets in the last week of January, almost four weeks into the fog, only those who could prove below poverty line (BPL) status could take refuge in state largesse. Never mind that BPL computation is so flawed that it is not a realistic reckoning of poverty at all, the Bihar government linked blanket distribution to BPL schemes that require the applicant to furnish an address. As a result, not only were the not-poor-enough bereft of state protection but the too-poor were left at the mercy of the weather as well.

Meanwhile, it was reported that room heaters, blankets and hosiery saw brisk sales this winter.

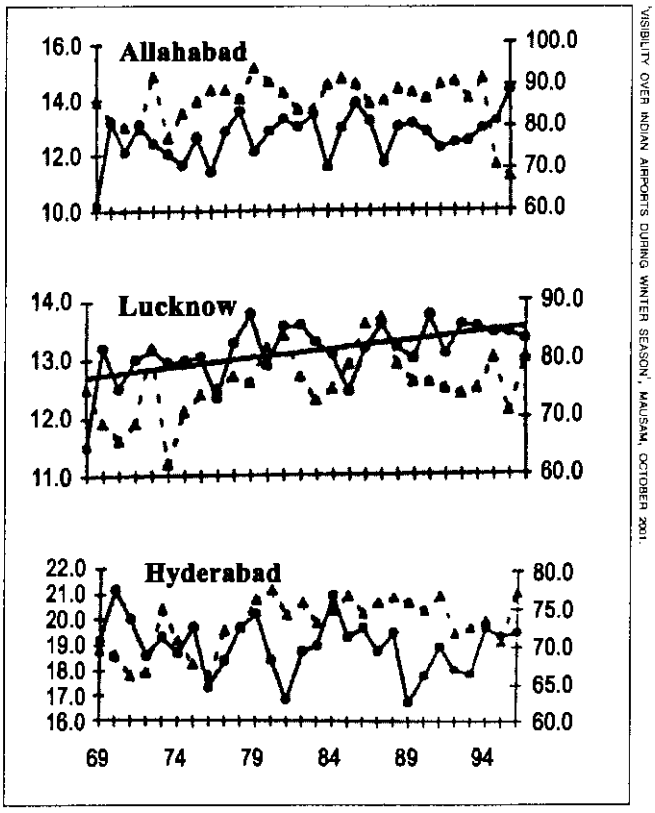
Nepal tarai

The Indian airport data provide convincing proof to support accounts that the Ganga plains have seen a dramatic increase in the incidence of fog and extended cold periods during December and January. The same seems to hold true, across the western frontier, in Pakistan, whose national meteorological department reported that, in January 2003, "The mean daily bright sunshine duration remained below normal all over the country due to persistent fog". Specifically, "thick fog persisted over the agricultural plains of Punjab and NWFP [North West Frontier Province]".

The conditions in Nepal's 800 km stretch of the southern plains are mirrored in the adjacent areas of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar and north Bengal. In its preliminary weather summary for January 2003, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology in Kathmandu dwells at length on the abnormally severe fog in the tarai. This year the tarai region reported "dense foggy weather resulting in severe cold condition for the long period from the last week of December 2002 till 24 January 2003... The sun was completely obstructed by the dense fog, preventing the sun's ray from reaching the ground".

The department's figures for December and January over the last two decades suggest that the tarai, from Dhangadhi in the far west near Pilibhit in India to Biratnagar in the east, close to Siliguri, is becoming progressively colder during the day but rarely registers negative variations from the normal at night. (Cold days and warm nights, as the meteorologist will confirm, usually indicate fog or cloudiness.) In January 1983, Dhangadhi's mean maximum was 20.2 degrees C, -1.5 from normal. In 1993, the variation was -2.6 degrees C; in 1998, -4.1 degrees C from normal; and finally this year, -6.1 below normal.

Right across the stretch of the tarai, Nepalganj,



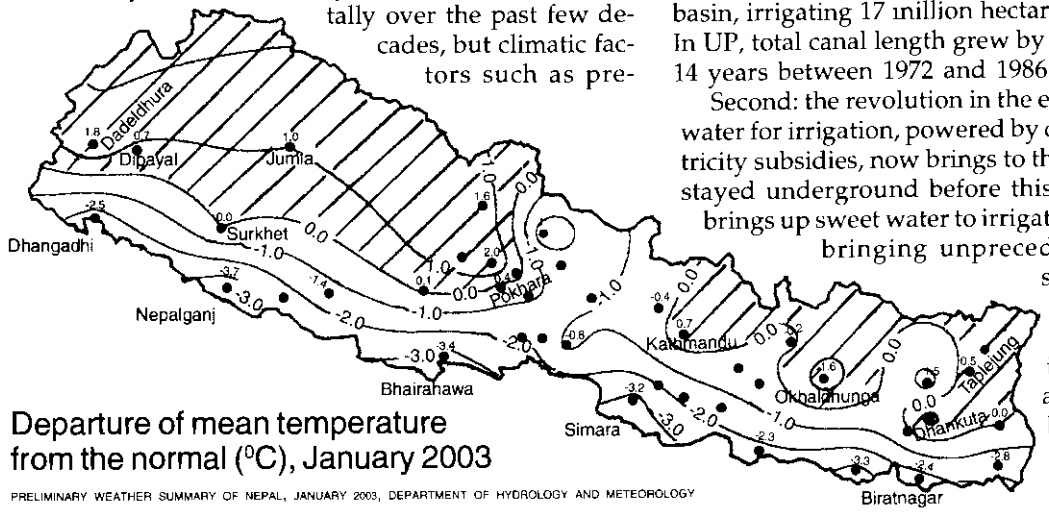
'VISIBILITY OVER INDIAN AIRPORTS DURING WINTER SEASON', MAUSAM, OCTOBER 2001.

Bhairahawa, Simara and Biratnagar are on a similar trajectory as Dhangadhi while, interestingly, Kathmandu valley and other hill towns seem headed the other way. There are ample narrative accounts in the tarai about the increased incidence of the fog. To begin with, conditions are such now that the plains folks, incongruously, have started heading up the hills to find sunshine and warmth. Since the ground-hugging fog does not extend beyond a couple of hundred feet, sunshine is often less than an hour's drive away. Says an anthropologist who grew up in the tarai town of Butwal, "I never remember fog in Butwal, but now to escape it and the cold, people go up to Palpa for warmth". Tulsi Basnet, a Butwal businessman, closed his shop and undertook the hour and a half's bus ride to Palpa to reach the sun's healing warmth. He says, "We heard it was sunny in the hills; we had to go there to give my father some relief from his asthma".

For at least the period of the seet lahar, the remote Himalayan districts of Nepal are actually warmer than places in the plains. Nepalganj is known to schoolchildren through their primers as the hottest town in Nepal. But these are abnormal times, and this year, for days on end fog-stricken Nepalganj was colder than the remote mountain district headquarters of Jumla directly to the north. At 2340 m elevation, Jumla had bright sunshine while in Nepalganj underclad *ricksa*-pullers shivered in the fog. On 19 January, for instance, Jumla recorded a daytime high of 21.3 degrees C, while Nepalganj had a maximum of 10.4. Two days earlier, Kanpur in UP, among the hottest places in the region in summer, recorded an "unverified" minimum of -0.6 on a night when yet again Srinagar, up in the Kashmir valley, was warmer.

Says one Kathmandu-based editor, "We used to hear of people dying of the *loohoo*, or heat wave in the tarai. Now more people are suffering and dying in the winter, and in a shorter period of time. And, it is the same people affected in both summer and winter, without air conditioning and without heating".

Globally, the weather may have changed incrementally over the past few decades, but climatic factors such as prevailing winds have remained relatively constant over the period. Given that, the moisture-bearing low-pressure northwesterly winds are ascribed more than their fair share of the blame, as they cannot be the explanation for the steady rise in winter relative humidity and Indus-Ganga fog over the last few decades. Instead, three key variables in the increasing fog are moisture, pollution and temperature inversion. The inversion layer, when normal atmospheric temperature 'inverts' so that it is coldest near the surface getting warmer with altitude, results in a cap where cold (in this case, polluted, foggy) air is trapped at the bottom. In the Indus-Ganga winter, a strong inversion layer forms at a low-level, which increases the longevity of the fog. The other two factors relate to human intervention in the Indus-Ganga belt: greater air pollution in the lower atmosphere, and the increased presence of water and moisture on the surface during the winter months.



Departure of mean temperature from the normal (°C), January 2003

PRELIMINARY WEATHER SUMMARY OF NEPAL, JANUARY 2003, DEPARTMENT OF HYDROLOGY AND METEOROLOGY

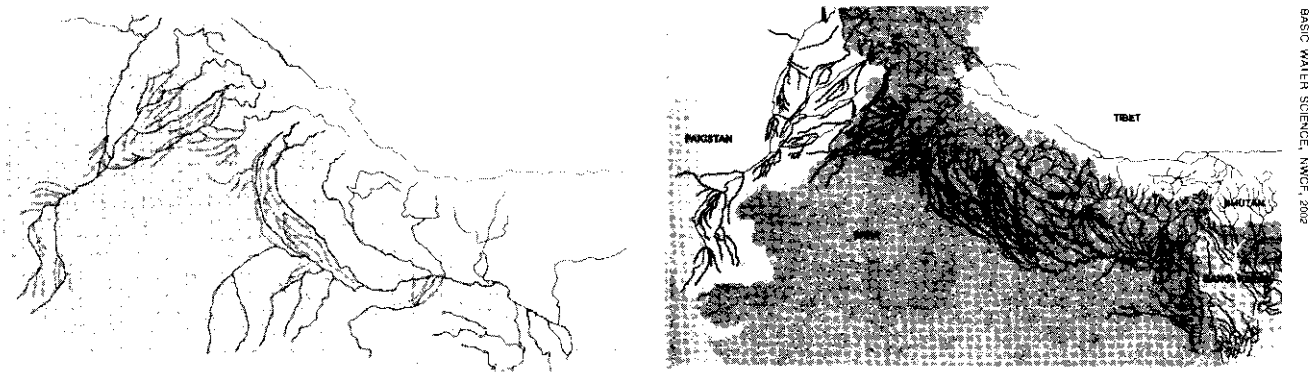
Command areas

There is now an unprecedented amount of surface moisture in the Indus-Ganga belt in the cold months, when historically the land would have been dry other than during the brief spells of winter rain. This appreciable increase in the presence of surface water is explained by the three following factors.

First: the building of a network of canals all over the plains over the last half-century, particularly in India and Pakistan where, post-independence, irrigation gained credence as the panacea for illnesses that ranged from rural poverty to agricultural production shortfall to the 'burden of backwardness'. So, from just a few hundred kilometres in 1950, there is now a network of thousands of kilometres of canals carrying water year-round to the 'command areas' that cover the length and breadth of the Pakistani and Indian Punjab, Haryana, UP and Bihar. Today, in the Indian Punjab, 1,527,000 hectares are under irrigation. Next door, the Indus Basin Irrigation System, the world's largest irrigation network comprising 45 main canals, diverts almost 75 percent of the average annual river flow into the Indus basin, irrigating 17 million hectares of contiguous land. In UP, total canal length grew by 3100 kilometres in the 14 years between 1972 and 1986 alone.

Second: the revolution in the exploitation of groundwater for irrigation, powered by diesel pumps and electricity subsidies, now brings to the surface water which stayed underground before this. Today, deep boring brings up sweet water to irrigate vast swathes of land, bringing unprecedented prosperity to some areas, but helping in the creation of fog conditions, which in the end adversely affect the very crops being irrigated.

Third: the building of concrete embank-



Indus-Ganga canal system, 1901 (left), 1994.

ments to control the waters of the Indus and the Ganga, which has been a 'growth industry' over the last five decades, takes its toll. Pushed by the perceived need to protect the people from floods, the embankment (*tatbandh*)-construction has become a populist measure used by political parties, with the active collusion of private contractors, to show their concern for the people. Over time, the activity has generated a momentum of its own, and the cumulative length of rivers roped in behind embankments has increased from almost nil in the early decades of the 1900s to thousands of kilometres today. In Bihar, where the tatbandh mafia is particularly influential, the total length of embankments grew from 154 km in 1954 to 3500 km in 1997.

The effect of both canals and the embankments is the same, ie they increase the moisture content of the soil or allow bodies of water to exist outside of the natural watercourses. Canals, by definition, divert water to areas where there is naturally none. And embankments, while they block floodwaters in the monsoon, play a significant role in ensuring that water does not properly runoff into the rivers. Yearround, as a result, there are large pools that do not drain out. Flawed engineering in both cases ensures seepages that result in waterlogged fields. Thus, an estimated 182,000 hectares of 'protected land' are waterlogged outside the eastern Kosi embankment, and another 94,000 hectares on the western side, apart from the 34,400 hectares waterlogged above the contour line.

The other variable, pollutants, plays an undeniably active part in the intensification of the fog. Particulate matter in the air act as nuclei for water vapour to condense on, and over the years, the increased activity of a rapidly growing population in transport, agriculture and other sectors has dispelled into the air a variety of pollutants. The effects of winter cropping, vehicular emissions, the output of tens of thousands of brick kilns and other more modern smokestack industries are only now being studied in some scientific depth. The effects of the greater availability of surface moisture from irrigation and embankments, meanwhile, have yet to ignite even a spark of interest in the scientific community.

During the *seet lahar*, the remote Himalayan districts of Nepal are actually warmer than the plains

Seet lahar

The most graphic visualisation of the fog is to be had from satellite imagery. The image on the magazine's cover, for example, captured by the geostationary satellite Indian Ocean Data Coverage (IODC), shows vividly just what the north South Asian fog is about. Hour after hour, day after day, an enormous white sheet wraps itself over the super-hydrated plains, staying stubbornly in place, only its edges fraying or consolidating, while clouds (which one can differentiate from the fog by a thin line of telltale shadow) and jet streams move over Asia and the surrounding oceans.

The term 'seet lahar' captures most evocatively the condition of the Subcontinental cold wave. Seet, which may be employed to convey both 'cold' and 'dew', however loses some of its dampness in English, breaking the connection between water and the winter for the influential English-educated in the Subcontinent. Indeed, because the term is translated into 'cold wave', the impression is of a chill blowing in from some distant trans-Himalayan region. Whereas the reality is that the long periods of cold of the last few years are linked to the increasingly longer periods of fog, which is actually predicated on the absence of winds any stronger than eight km per hour. Of course, not all cold days have to be foggy. 'Western disturbances' are known to bring gusty winds and rain, which bring the temperature down. But these conditions prevail over a period that is accurately described as a 'cold snap' – intense but brief. The protracted cold wave periods, in contrast, are about days on end of fog-induced misery.

Turning to the science of the fog, consider this. For two samples of air at temperature T, the one with more water molecules will have a higher dew point, which is temperature at which water vapour condenses to form water droplets or fog. So, even 'normal' semi-tropical temperatures (such as in the Ganga plain) that do not dip very low are conducive to fog formation because of

Smoky days

The National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in Delhi, in partnership with the IMD and the Central Pollution Control Board, is currently perhaps the only organisation studying the Ganga fog. Still in its nascent stages, the two-year-old study has focused on the effect of air pollution on the formation of fog, and has found that the two are not as simply linked as first thought. The NPL says that the particular interactions of individual pollutants – hygroscopic emission gases such as NO_x, SO_2 and CO, greenhouse gases and the secondary pollutant, surface ozone – warrant special attention. The NPL study has discovered two things: that the concentration of aerosols influences the size and distribution of activated fog nuclei, affecting the fog's liquid content and visibility. And, that the activation of fog nuclei occurs at different levels of supersaturation for different aerosols. Working on the hypothesis that fog density, frequency and longevity must depend on aerosol properties, the NPL team is investigating the particular ways in which different pollutants influence fog.

Pollutants affect the development of fog because exposure to aqueous air promotes chemical growth resulting in the evolution of aerosols, which become the nuclei for water vapour to condense on. While the formation of fog is predicated on low wind speed, clear nights, high humidity (above 80 percent, but especially between 90 and 100 percent), appropriately low temperatures and the presence of pollutants, according to Dr MK Tiwari of the NPL's Department of Radio and Atmospheric Sciences, the strength (density and longevity) of the fog depends on the concentration of hygroscopic pollutants and the low-height temperature inversion layer.

In the Subcontinent, low-height inversion in particular fosters the longevity of the fog. Land being a better radiator of heat than air, after sundown, it and the air close to it cool expeditiously as compared to the air above, thus 'inverting' the normal state where air gets cooler with height. While, as the night wears on, the air at ground level cools to its dew point promoting fog formation, the cap formed by the inversion layer stifles wind movement, discourages cloud formation and keeps the pollutants, including water vapour, trapped. Temperature inversion should be strongest over those soil types that absorb, and subsequently release, heat most easily, ie sandy surfaces. But the truly arid regions in west South Asia are spared the phenomenon because of strong convection, typical of desert environments. In semi-tropical UP, Bihar and the Nepal tarai, where the inversion layer does not persist, there is enough moisture available from the irrigated surface and low-pressure northwesterlies, and temperature and pollution conditions are aggravated enough, for thick fog to linger for long periods into the day.

the high atmospheric water vapour content. Then, because water droplets or fog are an even more effective absorber of radiation than water vapour, not only does the fog prevent the sun's rays from reaching the huddled masses of the Indus-Ganga plains, but it actually sucks up what heat is available in the atmosphere and soil. However, perhaps by force of habit, meteorologists continue to attribute winter humidity to the moisture-bearing northwesterlies, failing to explain the recorded rise in relative humidity at northern stations or connect it with the rising incidence of the fog.

The hundreds of millions of penurious or near-penurious, who are the worst hit, may know intuitively that the fog's incidence is on the rise but as with every water-related contention, they will yet again not determine what must be done about it. Instead, it is the influential pockets of urban South Asia, where those with access to woollens, electrically wired homes and heated vehicles live, only briefly exposed to the cold between the house and the car, that will persuade studies, legislation, even activist judges to consider the problem. They have heard that the fog has to do with the unacceptably high air pollution, and consequently, air pollution now occupies inordinate space in the 'national' consciousness. So, evening news features include minutiae on daily decimal variations of CO, NO_x and SO_2 emissions, and the study and resultant activism with regard to air pollution in New Delhi inspires even the lofty Supreme Court of India to plunge its gavel into the matter.

The apex court's exertions seem to have borne fruit with pollution levels having palpably altered in Delhi. But this has not had the expected corresponding effect on the fog, which continues to intensify even though pollution levels have fallen. This seemingly incongruous eventuality has prompted perhaps the only investigative study of the fog in India where, expectedly, the link being probed is the pollution-fog one (*see box*).

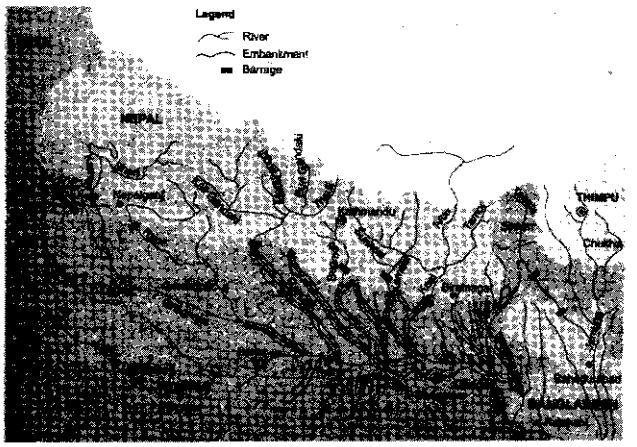
Having taken care of urban air pollution, the court has since shifted its attention outside the city, to direct the Indian government on a grand multi-crore "garland canal" scheme that will connect parched areas of India to 'water-surplus' areas. The effects of this are inconceivable in their entirety, not least because the matrix of the climate has not been comprehensively mapped yet. The immediate consequences are apparent though – massive rural dislocation, and the magnification of the already well-documented problems with canal irrigation.

Not among these well-documented problems however, is the one of fog. Indeed, there has been considerable study and activism related to other aspects of the hydrological cycle in the Indus-Ganga region. Organisations as diverse in approach and focus as the research and public information oriented Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi and the Bihar-based activist river movement known as the Barh Mukti Abhiyan have fought political, bureaucratic and engineering

obtuseness related to flood-control and waterlogging for years. However, even they have not yet made the link between canals, embankments, groundwater exploitation, the fog, and the misery it brings.

While this investigation by *Himal* suggests a causal link between faulty water engineering and the fog, the hypothesis needs to be scientifically investigated. A serious study must be followed by a sensitisation of those who matter, and (to the extent possible) mitigation measures to reduce the bitterness of the winter for those inadequately clothed or housed.

The exceptional situation of the Indus and Ganga plains is that for most of the year it is a hot and humid home for its overwhelmingly large population, where the poor expectedly have not evolved mechanisms to cope with cold. In the cold higher latitudes of the Chinese heartland, which also has a large population of poor, and where too the fog may be intensifying, people are prepared by historical experience to deal with the harshness of winter. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where a large number of the world's extremely poor live, it will never be cold or foggy. In the Indus and Ganga plains, however, the relative brevity of the bitter fog and cold renders unviable the building of new structures and the procuring of warm clothing – moreover, many would not even have the *place* to store such new clothes. So north South Asia, uniquely, is a site where people in the millions suffer from not having insulation through clothing or construction, a deprivation that is as primal as not having food.



BASIC WATER SCIENCE, NWCP, 2002

Embanked region of north Bihar.

> 'People used to die of the *loohoo*, or heat wave. Now more people are dying in the winter'

Vegetable crop

Whether in terms of construction techniques, purchasing power or agricultural practice, the sub-tropical north of the Subcontinent is fundamentally unequipped to deal with either the fog or the cold. Winter is still remembered as the season of relief between harsh summers and the long monsoons. Instead, it has become a dank cold season with endless days of physical and fiscal distress. For those with material means, it is distress over the crop or business, or medical bills and delayed travelling. And for those who have nothing, such as the millions of urban homeless, it has become the season for worrying about survival. With the sun's rays not penetrating the thick fog, hundreds of millions of people in the Indus-Ganga plains have just spent a season immiserated.

While the loss of human lives to the cold has been computed (at 1500 for this winter), a material cost evaluation exercise has not been carried out at the governmental level in Bangladesh, India, Nepal or Pakistan. That verified figures are not forthcoming on this issue is not, for once, due to official unwillingness to share data but rather to a complete lack of imagination. Dr RP Singh, head of the Department of Agricultural Economics at the Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI), concedes that putting a figure to the agricultural losses would be "socially relevant". And yet, a researcher at the institute shrugs off the suggestion, saying such an exercise "would not be economically viable in a developing country such as India". It is through cracks like these, in the disconnect between politicians and scientists and the 'constituency', that the common person falls.

Take the case of Prakash Yadav, who is chief whip at a taxi stand in DLF Gurgaon, a suburban Delhi locality. Gurgaon straddles Delhi's urban conglomeration and Haryana state, and many like Yadav travel the short distance from their fields in the latter to the bustling urban economy. Like so many others he knows, Yadav too has suffered the ills of the last few winters. While almost 40 percent of his mustard crop was laid waste by white rust, a fog-related disease, he calculated a 50 percent dip in his earnings from the taxi service for December and January.

Even if the scientists and administrators have not yet made the connection, the peasants and small farmers know well that the intensity of the winter fog is on the rise. In the Subcontinental belt under consideration, the major winter crops are wheat, mustard, potato and pulses. In India, owing to government policy fashioned in response to food grain surplus, vegetable cropping has for some years now been replacing wheat cultivation. The policy calculation obviously factored in import, export, storage costs, supply and demand, but it neglected, not atypically, to look at the data on the ground. Wheat is a hardy crop as compared to the 'short-duration young crops' of winter vegetables that farmers have been encouraged to adopt, which cannot withstand sustained exposure of even five hours to above-80 percent relative humidity in combination with temperatures as low as seven-12 degrees C in the crop canopy. Relative humidity above 80 percent promotes bacterial development, and this winter, when RH stayed as high as 90-100 percent for as long as 10 hours a day, the conditions were devastating. White rust and

alternaria blight struck the mustard this winter, and blight also affected other common winter crops including potatoes, tomatoes and brinjals.

Dr NVK Chakravarty, principal agricultural meteorologist at IARI, explains that the late-sown varieties of the vegetables are particularly vulnerable to the cold and fog. They are late sown because timetable for multicropping, an irrigation-enabled practice, is not quite synchronised yet. Thus, the plants are still in the early stages of development when the fog develops its intensity, and a high level of humidity promotes bacterial growth. Additionally, the fog also affects photosensitive growth activity in the plant, and low temperatures retard its development.

The narrative of human ambition vis-à-vis nature that frames the story of the fog is sublimated in the potato. The potato is not indigenous to the Subcontinent, but almost all major viral, fungal and bacterial diseases that it is vulnerable to are endemic here. An input-intensive crop requiring fertilisers, irrigation and expensive hybrid seeds that will enable it to fit an alien agronomic pattern as a short-duration crop, the potato never caught on in the Indus-Ganga plains till rapid canal proliferation post-independence, and state-inducements, made it possible. This winter, potato farmers from NWFP to north Bengal suffered crushing losses possibly because of the same irrigation network that enabled this unnatural cultivation in the first place.

> Because most of the year it is hot and humid, the poor have not evolved mechanisms to cope with cold

This winter was perhaps the worst for potato and mustard, but numbers are hard to come by. In January, IARI estimates for Punjab's losses (which contributes almost five percent of the national yield) varied wildly between 15 percent and 40 percent. In West Bengal, where 32,000 hectares are under potato cultivation, farmers were told to use pesticides when it became apparent that the fog would linger long enough to ruin the crop. Says Dr S Mishra, an agricultural meteorologist with the West Bengal government, "There is definitely an increased incidence and duration of fog during the winter months in this region. This is based on observation; we have not done any study on the phenomenon".

The absence of econometric application to fog by those whose job it is to do such study is glaring. An aggregation that takes into account aviation, railways and road transport, commerce, agriculture and industry, vehicular accidents, costs of delays, public health expenses, among others, has not been done and is not on the cards. Only if such an investigation is undertaken will ironies such as the plight of the potato farmers of the plains find a narrative framework. As things stand now, Prakash Yadav's woes continue to be blamed vacuously on the 'cold wave and unusual fog', while meteorologists debate endlessly whether the conditions are a regional manifestation of global climatic changes and the establishment as a whole prefers not to involve itself too deeply in this complicated and potentially controversial subject.

Cold threshold

Over the last few decades, the ground fog has grown from localised patches into an enormous blanket, as satellite imagery shows. While images from the early- and mid-morning show it covering a stretch from the Northeast to Pakistan, more usually, the concentration tends to be in between these two extremes. In that region where dense fog has recurred year after year, growing towards its present spread and intensity, live at least 400 million people. Of these, as per calculations from the most conservative government estimates, the poorest of the poor, those who are denied the basic opportunities of life to procure even adequate nutrition, number no less than 150 million. An additional 200 million, while not maybe 'the poorest', is still too poor to afford a severe winter and would need substantial state assistance to weather it.

Among this aggregate 350 million who were most profoundly affected by the fog and cold of the recent winters are groups such as the *kamaiyas* of the Nepal tarai, a traditionally disadvantaged community of former bonded-labourers that has received little support from the state after being 'freed' by it. At least 46 kamaiyas, mostly infants and the elderly, died in ex-kamaiya camps this winter from pneumonia and upper respiratory tract diseases. These deaths were not caused by sheer cold – temperatures have to be much lower than those in the region to induce hypothermia – but were contributed to by the fog. The cold and damp of the fog simultaneously weakens natural defence mechanisms, especially pulmonary resistance, and since high relative humidity promotes the formation of acid aerosols, increases toxicity in the atmosphere.

Though the kamaiya system has been abolished, it will be a long time before the thousands who were yoked to it will be able to afford special provisions – of such basic winter items as blankets, woollens and closed shoes – for the foggy days of winter. Whether in UP or Bihar, in the Nepal tarai or the Duars of West Bengal, in Punjab or NWFP, the majority of the people do not have the wherewithal to materially bolster themselves for two extreme seasons, especially when the winter season is barely even a season – lasting in its unbearable intensity for all of a few weeks.

One is struck by the oddness of it all. The same steaming plains which once repelled the first Mughal, Babar, making him homesick for the cool climes of Kabul, this year, at 1500, were the site for three times as many deaths in the five weeks of foggy winter than in the four months of summer last year when 400-500 people succumbed to the heat. This year's experience will

likely be a variant, a spike like was seen in 1997, a particularly severe instance, but still within a larger trend. The next winter will be judged against this one, and if not cold or foggy 'enough', which it will very likely not be, the season just passed will be remembered as an aberration. But, going by the data, the trend is a reality; only its causes may be open to discussion.

Someone do something

No doubt that climate is a complex rubric, and we are yet to figure out how exactly all the pieces fit. Perhaps it is really not even possible to conclusively answer questions of such proportions. But the Subcontinental fog, which may not even be caused by macroclimatic changes, should not be neglected because grander impossible questions *might* be attached. There is enough indication that the Indus-Ganga plains show a growing incidence of fog for it to warrant a scientific investigation from every possible angle, going beyond what this journalistic investigation has laid out. Probing the proximate link with pollution is clearly one. Another must be the rapid and relatively recent introduction of growth in surface moisture from groundwater extraction and the agglomeration of canals and embankments.

Regardless of whether the intensification of the Indus-Ganga fog has a causal relationship with the proliferation of canals, embankments and tube-wells, assuming it will recur at its current rate if not worse, a comprehensive loss calculation exercise must be undertaken. Only a quantified account of the gloom will enable the building of a model to try and reduce avoidable losses, and for streamlining costs which, as is the nature of losses, will mount if neglected. Also, to the extent that the fog can be minimised, such an analysis is indispensable for calculating whether the investment required yields a justifiably substantial drop in losses. Until figures can be ascribed to it, the fog will continue to be the shroud over the Indus-Ganga maidaan.

Even if the fog were not more prevalent now than before, it would have been time for sensitive scholars and administrators to consider the difficulties faced by the population due to it. Now that it looks as if the duration of the fog has risen dramatically, it is the duty of those in positions of responsibility, direct or indirect, to delve deeper into the phenomenon. It is simply not fair to say, as so many did to the reporter in the course of researching this article, "We do not know; no one has studied it". △

Fourth Orientation Course in South Asian Peace Studies

The Fourth South Asian Human Rights and Peace Studies Orientation Course of the South Asia Forum for Human Rights will be held from 2 May to 2 August 2003. The course has two components – distance education in human rights and peace from 3 May to 15 July, and a direct orientation course in peace studies to be held in Kathmandu from 19 July to 2 August. Participation in both segments is compulsory for the selected participants.

The foundation course offers several modules on various forms of violence, war, intervention, their impact on democracy, and draws on the experiences of human rights and peace activism, and the moral resistance to war in South Asia and elsewhere. The course is intended for peace and human rights activists, media persons, researchers, academics, and persons involved in policy work on conflict resolution.

Registration fee for South Asian participants is US $ 100 (or its equivalent in Nepali rupee) and for participants from outside the region US $ 300 (or its equivalent in Nepali rupee). Course material for selected candidates will be provided by SAFHR. Board and lodging will also be provided. 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 at 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 15 March 2003. Applications (forms are available on request or can be downloaded from SAFHR website www.safhr.org) 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 independently reach 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 orientation programme 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 communicating with the participants on their knowledge and experience.

Participants will have to support their own travel. A limited number of travel grants for which the selected participants will have to apply separately will be offered before the orientation course.

SOME SAD news to report about *The Hindu*, a newspaper which fortunately has not lived up to its name in the way that modern-day *Hindutva* defines it. On 5 February in Pondicherry, *Hindu* editor N Ravi accepted the Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Lifetime Achievement Award, named after the pro-nuke Hindutva acolyte. Pondicherry governor KR Malkani, well known for his Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) credentials, also spoke at the ceremony. Ravi's acceptance of the award is troubling on many levels, not the least of which being that it follows the acceptance of the Vajpayee government's Padma Bhushan award by *India Today* editor Prabhu Chawla. But all of this pales into insignificance when you have 'Veer' Savarkar's portrait unveiled in the Indian Lok Sabha, hanging opposite the hall from the man whose assassination he in all likelihood condoned – MK Gandhi.

■

IF YOU find *Himal* circumlocutory and recondite, or even downright operose to read, you are not alone. By the terms of Robert Gunning's 'fog index', which measures the readability of writing, this publication scores a 14, placing it in the stratum of very difficult (and to some, unintelligible) writing. The fog index is calculated by dividing the total number of words in an article or publication by the number of sentences, and adding to that the total number of 'difficult' words (without counting prefixes or suffixes, defined as being words consisting of three or more syllables excluding proper nouns or compound words) multiplied by 100, divided by the total number of words and then multiplied by 0.4. (If you find this foggy, consult the formula below.) Of publications evaluated, only *The Guardian* and *The Times* of London scored as high as *Himal*, while *Outlook*, *The Times of India*, *Newsweek* and *India Today* all registered an even 10. Chhetria Patrakar is torn between a sense of pride at elevating Subcontinental writing above the jejune standards of *Reader's Digest* (8 on the fog index) and concern that the index rating may be an animadversion that *Himal*'s prose suffers from gratuitous obfuscation. Readers, write in and offer your own assessment.

$$\text{Fog Index (FI)} = \frac{\text{Total number of words}}{\text{Total number of sentences}} + \frac{\text{Hard words} \times 100}{\text{Total number of words}} \times 0.4$$

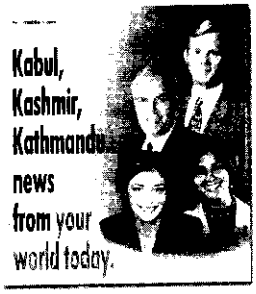
■

FRUIT AND vegetable distributor by day, Goliath of the wrestling ring by night, and president of a political party boasting one member... the formidable Bharat

Bahadur Bishural – aka The Nepali Himalayan Tiger – is truly a renaissance man of the South Asian expatriate universe. A former Royal Nepalese Army soldier based in New York for the last 11 years, the 90-kg Bishural is believed to be the first Nepali semi-professional *wrassler*, and certainly the first member of the Nepal Conservative Party to don war paint before paying spectators. His career began many moons ago with a bout against The American Black Panther (possibly an inspiration for his own nationality-adjective-carnivore ring name?), and Bishural has not looked back since: he has faced 650 opponents during the last decade and won 17 awards. Currently, the Tiger also holds the Nepali-American Wrestling Association (membership total unknown) title belt, so young expatriate South Asians with a hankering for testosterone glory might just have a new role model. *Grr-r-r.*

■

WHAT DO Kabul, Kashmir and Kathmandu have in common? Other than K-names, proximity to the Hindukush-Himalaya, and historical autonomy or independence from the British Raj, one might suspect not much. But owing to alliteration and turbulent recent histories, these three were recently joined together to suffer the common misfortune of being the catchline of a CNN advertisement in South Asia. In recent weeks, however, with Messrs Karzai and Franks lording over a less turbulent Afghanistan, Mufti Muhammad Sayeed taking charge in Kashmir, and Nepal engaged in peace, this alignment has lost its usefulness for CNN. The new triumvirate? Bali, Baghdad, Bangalore. One wonders how that tech-savvy capital made it to that list. What now: Lahore, Lucknow, Langley, or maybe Pokhara, Pondicherry, Pyongyang?



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THE SOUTH Asia Foundation, a well-endowed trust started by philanthropist Madanjeet Singh, is one of the few organisations actively seeking to foster people-to-people friendship in South Asia today. It has just put out a glossy booklet, handed to Chhetria Patrakar in New Delhi recently, on which s/he (Chhetria Patrakar) has a negative comment and a positive. Negative: a gathering of chairpersons was held in April 2002 at the Villa Surya, Beaulieu-sur-Mer in France, and included were hallowed personalities such as Inder Kumar Gujral of India, Sangay Ngedup of Bhutan, Ibrahim Hussain Zaki of the Maldives, Salima Hashmi of Pakistan and Lakshman Kadirgamar of Sri Lanka.

Apparently, the jurist Kamal Hossain of Bangladesh and Ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa of Nepal could not attend, or at the very least were still having their dessert when the photograph was taken. So what they have gone and done is digitally manipulate Mr Hossain and Mr Thapa into the group picture and put together a make-believe tableau. Tch. Tch. Positive: I like the way the designer (perhaps the same person who did the digital manipulation) chose to depict South Asia graphically in the form of a collection of dots. It is pleasing to the eye, gives a sense of unity to the whole matrix, and – very importantly – does away with all nationalistic posturing vis-à-vis Jammu and Kashmir. Try and find Siachen and the line-of-control among the polka dots!

■

SALEEM SAMAD was finally released by the Bangladesh authorities, for which we thank them. But for having incarcerated him, and tortured him, for nothing other than doing the duty of a journalist (which is to get a story out, no matter whom it helps or hurts) – *no* thank you. Samad came out of custody with his pen afire, and he has written compellingly of his ordeal in the Asian edition of Time, which you can read at http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501030210-41942

■

IT IS terrible how unthinkingly the media and academia now use 'terrorist' whereas a couple of years ago they would have been saying 'extremists', 'radicals', 'insurgents' or 'militants'. The world has not changed that much, notwithstanding 11 September, and it is time to go back to the old usages if you please. The adage still holds that often one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. How can we forget the long history of this debate just because, in this instance, America got attacked? Chhetria Patrakar hereby institutes a rebuke mechanism for all academics and media*wallas* who should know better but who use the term 'terrorism' without hesitation. Demerits will be awarded. And so....

Ladies and gentlemen, let me now introduce two institutions who get demerits for prejudiced use of the term 'terrorism' over the last month:

- The South Asia Terrorism Portal, for using the term in its very title.

- The Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, for calling a conference on 'Terrorism in South Asia: Impact on Development and Democratic Process', in which the keynote speaker was Ambassador Dr Georg Witschel, Commissioner for Combating International Terrorism of the Federal Government of Germany. For good measure, I also hereby award a demerit to Mr Witschel, for taking up a job that is so black-and-white and cut-and-dried in its definition when the world itself is so very complicated.

■

SYED IFTEKHAR Geelani is the Delhi bureau chief of *Kashmir Times* and son-in-law of Hurriyat leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani. He spent seven months in prison for possessing information which was 'prejudicial to the safety and security of India'. The information, unearthed by an income tax team (hmmm) in his computer hard drive was apparently about the placement of Indian troops in Jammu and Kashmir. *The Indian Express* thereafter reported that the incriminating document was already publicly available on the Internet and had also been printed by a Pakistani journal. The home ministry later stated that the report was baseless, and after it became clear that the journalist was being falsely implicated, he was released. *The Indian Express* needs to be thanked for staying with the case, as does the Delhi-based Network of Women in the Media, which organised a 'do' to mark Geelani's release. Simple things mean a lot in extraordinary times.

■

THE SCHIZOPHRENIA of New Delhi's national English dailies continues. Are they to become city newspapers, because that is where the middle-class readership lies, or are they to try and represent all of India, dealing with hoary national level politics and economics which will turn off that very readership which delivers the advertising? Recently, the *Hindustan Times* decided it was firmly of a mind to serve as a city paper when on 10 February and 14 February its front-page headline was on the bottled water scandal. No doubt, it is a good story, that every one of the bottled water companies in India was serving substandard aqua to the (bottled-water-drinking) people. But only if the *HT* is a city paper should that have made the headline. Ergo, it must be a city paper.

Hindustan Times

EU norms for bottled water: BIS goes slow

— Chhetria Patrakar

Injustice in god's country
The adivasi uprising in Kerala

In Kerala, adivasis mobilising for land rights faced state violence this February. Their struggle is one of thousands in India, where disadvantaged communities are taking the fight against an unresponsive state outside institutionalised mechanisms of redress.

by ***CR Bijoy***

'God's own country' is how the southern Indian state of Kerala packages itself for international consumption. A serene mountain range, the Western Ghats, runs along the state's eastern border with Tamil Nadu, though the hills quickly drop off on approach to the western coastline along the Arabian Sea. Like its topography, Kerala's political economy is characterised by extreme variation. The first place in the world to elect a communist government, Kerala simultaneously ranks highest among Indian states in the provision of basic needs, at measures comparable to those found in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and displays per capita production levels well below the national average. The state has defied conventional notions of development, improving human index measures even at times of economic stagnation.

But glossed over in these impressive averages and unorthodox development strategies lie the stories of Kerala's downtrodden *adivasis* (indigenous peoples). Numbering 320,967 in the 1991 census, the state's 35 adivasi communities constitute about 1.1 percent of Kerala's population and 0.47 percent of India's scheduled tribe population. The benefits of the state's human development gains have not been universally enjoyed by all of its residents, especially not by adivasis, who are still fighting for basic rights, including ownership of land. The community's depressed condition, and the failure of the state to provide meaningful upliftment or to honour its agreements, provide the backdrop of a tribal uprising for control of land.

> On 4 January, landless adivasis occupied barren land and eucalyptus plantations passing as state-protected forests

Showdown in Muthanga

On 17 February 2003, adivasis occupying tracts in the Muthanga forests of the Wayanad wildlife sanctuary within the Nilgiri biosphere reserve took captive 21 persons, mostly state policemen and forest department officials. The adivasis, who had been squatting on the land for six weeks as part of a land redistribution campaign, alleged that the group was setting fire to the forests in order to pin arson charges on them as a pretext for eviction. The next day, the adivasis handed over the captives unharmed to the Wayanad district collector, putting their statements on record, and were given assurances that there would be no further attempts at eviction.

On the morning of 19 February, about 1000 heavily armed police and forestry officials moved in, assaulting and injuring many adivasis. Huts were set on fire, and many saw their property ransacked and destroyed. Nonetheless, they refused to be driven away. During the operation, members of the media were waylaid, and footage of the violent action was destroyed. With the fall of dusk, some policemen made use of their weapons; 18 shots were reportedly fired in addition to teargas shelling. For the next 16 hours or more, the area was cordoned off from the outside world while police continued their operation.

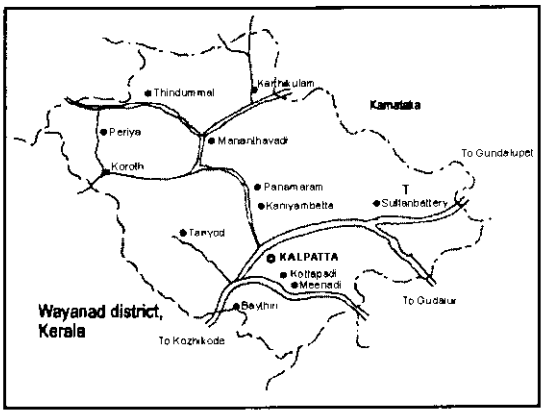
The assault continued on 20 February, producing an official death toll of two – one adivasi and one policeman. Scores were injured, many of them women, children and the old. About 300 adivasis were arrested while hundreds more simply went missing, leading to fears that the actual toll of those injured, if not killed, might be considerably higher. Anyway lacking medicine or food, a majority of the adivasis moved into adjoining forests and villages in the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to avoid police combing operations through the villages, especially in Wayanad and Kannur districts.

On 23 February, two prominent adivasi leaders, CK

Janu, an Adiya (literally, slave), and Adivasi-Dalit Samara Samithy ('adivasi-dalit struggle committee') chief M Geethanandan, emerged from the forests to surrender to authorities. Some members of the press who had witnessed the events of the preceding days claimed that the state was plotting extra-judicial murders of these two figures. Visibly exhausted, Janu and Geethanandan handed themselves over to a government which less than a year and a half earlier had reached an agreement with them about the distribution of land to adivasis.

Land for peace

The attack in Muthanga sent shock waves across the state, and numerous tribals found themselves caught in an unprecedented dragnet. The Congress-led United Democratic Front government justified what it termed a "very successful" action with a number of supposed revelations. It said that Geethanandan's group and the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha ('the grand assembly of adivasis'), a formation of village representatives from across Kerala led by Janu, were linked to such banned bodies as the Andhra-based Marxist-Leninist People's War Group, as well as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The state claimed that there were plans afoot to kidnap ministers, senior bureaucrats and foreign dignitaries from the recently concluded Global Investors Meet in Kochi. The chief minister, AK Antony, declared that the adivasis had armed themselves and established a parallel government.



Within days, despite the acceptance of many of these claims by sections of the mainstream press, the state's allegations began to unravel. It came out, for example, that the "arms" with which adivasis had supposedly battled authorities were actually farming implements. Reporters present during the attack have also begun to reveal the lawlessness and brutality of the late February roundup.

The occupation of Muthanga by over 1000 landless adivasi families began on 4 January, when they occupied barren land and eucalyptus plantations passing under the guise of state-protected forests. They put up over 700 huts and established a check post to regulate entry. These landless people, many of whom had arrived with all of their belongings, were preparing to settle down on land that had been allocated to them after several decades of attempted procurement through institutional avenues had failed. The ownership of land has eluded adivasis at least since the state divested many communities of land through the establishment of 'reserved forests'. The state's rejection of adivasi land claims, its obstruction of court-mandated rectification schemes, and its outright appropriation of existing adivasi lands, have occurred primarily beyond the scope of law.

The adivasi action in Muthanga was one part of a state-wide campaign to occupy land. According to adivasi leaders, the movement was both an attempt to redress the wrongs and an act of protest against the state's failure to live up to commitments made more than a year earlier. On 16 October 2001, the state acquiesced to various adivasi demands after a 48-day struggle led by Janu and Geethanandan involving the setting up of huts in front of important state offices. Adivasis, many of who were suffering from acute hunger, declared these huts refugee camps. In July-August 2001, 38 adivasis had starved to death in Kerala, though the government attributed the deaths to polluted water, liquor and ill health. The starvation deaths of the summer of 2001 were, of course, not the first of their kind.

Incensed by these deaths, and angered by the state's failure to fulfil its obligations and promises, adivasis, mostly women and children, marched to Thiruvananthapuram to set up refugee camps. With support from various sections of society, the adivasi campaign quickly gained currency as a democratic movement, and protests threatened to snowball across Kerala. Land, the source of survival, was agreed by the government and adivasi leaders to be at the heart of a solution, and the two sides reached an agreement in principle that landless persons, or those owning less than an acre, would receive up to five acres within one year, and that policies would be devised and enacted to make these lands self-sustainable within five years. Moreover, the central government would be lobbied to demarcate adivasi areas in the state under Schedule V of Article 244 of the Indian constitution. This provision confers rights and powers for a high degree of self-governance under the Panchayat Raj Act (Extension to the Scheduled Areas), 1996. Adivasis in Kerala, unlike those in 10 other states, have till date not been included under Schedule V. The government also agreed to abide by the outcome of pending supreme court cases on land transfers to scheduled tribes in Kerala.

By 1 January 2002, the government had identified 53,472 families as eligible to receive five acres of land, of which 22,491 were landless, while the remainder had less than one acre. Concurrently, the state identified 59,452 acres for distribution. The land transfers, which were to be completed by the end of 2002, began with the chief minister distributing land in Marayur in Idukki

district on 1 January. Among others, CK Janu was invited to attend the ceremony.

The land distribution plan, however, sputtered out with disappointing results for the adivasis. By the end of the year, only 843 families, 1.6 percent of the more than 50,000 identified, had received a total of 1748 acres, an average just exceeding two acres per family. Adivasi leaders pointed out that at such a rate it would take more than 50 years for every family to receive land. Those with vested interests in the forest- and plantation-based economy, who control much of the land in question, exerted their influence on the state machinery to scuttle the government's agreement with the adivasis. As 2002 proceeded, the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha, which had earlier declared that it would give the government the time necessary to complete land transfers, decided to implement its own programme of land distribution given the state's inadequate efforts.

The Mahasabha undertook a whirlwind mobilisation campaign through the state, which culminated in a meeting attended by thousands at Mananthavady in Wayanad district on 25 August. At this session, the Mahasabha constituted a 60-member tribal court, consisting of 20 women and 40 men, representing the various adivasi communities. The 'court', in full public view, declared that in light of the non-implementation of the agreement by the government, adivasis should occupy lands. This decision was based on traditional adivasi principles of participatory democratic consultation, and the Muthanga occupation of early 2003 was one outcome of this decision. Similar occupations have occurred in other parts of Kerala earlier.

Roots of a mass movement

The three dozen adivasi communities of Kerala have had varying fortunes over the last three centuries, though all have suffered setbacks since independence. In the Malabar region, the Paniyas and Adiyas, two groups heavily involved in the Wayanad occupation, became serfs to local landlords in the 18th century, unlike groups such as the Kurichiya and Kurumba. The inland Wayanad region today has the highest concentration of adivasis, in large part as a consequence of the Grow More Food programme initiated in 1942-43, which pushed many adivasis off their lands. In Attapady and Palakkad districts, home to the Irulas, Muduga and Kurumba communities, adivasis enjoyed relative freedom until the mid-1950s, when migration from surrounding areas reduced the adivasi population from 63 percent in 1961 to 30 percent by 1991.

Other adivasi groups, such as the Kanikar, Muthuvan, Urali and Mala Arayan, had been settled agriculturists under protective local kings in the pre-independence era. Still other groups, such as the Malapandaram, Kattunayaka and Cholanayaka, had remained hunter-gatherers throughout this period. But with the establishment of tea, coffee and rubber estates, and government appropriation of forests, many adivasis were reduced to bonded labourers.

With the gradual destruction of traditional livelihoods, adivasi communities turned to government assistance, without much success. Numerous tribal rehabilitation projects, including those in Wayanad district, have been mired in corruption since the beginning. Notable examples of failing, corruption-prone programmes are the Sugandhagiri cardamom project and the Vattachira collective farm. The state further refuses to acknowledge the plight of adivasis by dismissing numerous reports of hunger deaths as arising from ill health. Appropriation of adivasi land has also arisen as a consequence of hydroelectric projects and dams, such as those in Idukki, Chimmini and Karapuzha. The declaration of wildlife sanctuaries in traditional adivasi lands, while propping up tourism, has further contributed to their marginalisation. Tribal development projects and infrastructure development, in addition to facilitating massive corruption, have primarily benefited non-adivasi settlers and encouraged further in-migration, leading to the breakdown of social structures.

By the 1970s, over 60 percent of adivasis in Wayanad were landless, and today reports indicate that 90 percent of adivasis in the state are either landless or possess less than one acre. Even progressive legislation, such as the Kerala Land Reforms Act, has accomplished little to address the land ownership disparity. Non-tribals often lease tribal lands on short-term cultivation contracts and then register themselves as tenants with the authorities. The tenants then make claims of ownership on the land under the terms of legislation designed, ironically, to protect adivasi interests, dispossessing the tribal owners who have become 'landlords'.

Land is integral to the survival of adivasi communities, as is evidenced by the mass agitation of the past few years. The recent history of migration and dispossession, as well of ineffectual or even counter-productive government policies, has led adivasi groups to pursue land claims through extra-legal avenues. In this climate, the politicisation of land ownership and tribal grievances has become a dominating aspect of the ongoing struggle in Kerala.

Rule of subverted law

The late 1960s and 1970s saw the establishment of adivasi organisations within political parties. This coincided with the birth of the Naxalite movement, which struck a chord amongst the adivasis, especially in Wayanad. Some Adiya activists joined hands with the Naxalites and killed some landlords.

Adivasi political mobilisation has not been the exclusive purview of any one ideology, however. The Jan Sangh, the forerunner of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress and communist parties have all at various times taken up the adivasi campaign for traditional land rights. To wean adivasis away from revolutionary movements, in 1975 the communist govern-

ment passed the Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands). This act was later incorporated into the Ninth Schedule of the national constitution to protect it from legal challenges.

But the act's operational mechanisms were only developed in 1986, more than a decade after its passage. Under the terms of the law, all adivasi land transactions between 1960 and 1982 were invalidated, with land to be returned to the original tribal owners. Further, the transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals was prohibited from 1982 onwards. As early as 1960, the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission headed by UN Debar under Article 339 of the constitution, recommended that all tribal land transferred after 26 January 1950 – the day the constitution came into force – should be returned to the original adivasi owners. This legislation emerged from obligations of state governments to protect adivasi land rights as codified in Article 244.

Chief Minister AK Antony (left), adivasi leader CK Janu in October 2001 after the agreement with the government.

In Kerala, claims made under these provisions by 8754 adivasis on approximately 9910 hectares have returned only about 545 hectares to 463 petitioners. A case was filed in the high court in 1988 to expedite adivasi claims, but even though the bench delivered a favourable verdict, the state political machinery has obstructed implementation of court-ordered land restitution. After aborted attempts by United Democratic Front and Left Democratic Front governments to implement corrective land ownership policies, an amendment to the land distribution law was passed in 1996 to prevent its enforcement. KR Narayanan, then president of India, rejected the amendment, and the state assembly, threatened with contempt of court, passed the Kerala Restriction on Transfer and Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes Act in 1999 to replace the 1975 legislation. That same year, a high court ruling struck down the new legislation as unconstitutional and declared the Kerala government in contempt of court. Legal battles around these issues are still on.

Actions by the government to avoid returning land to adivasi families are also in violation of international agreements, both those ratified by India and those under negotiation or consideration. Kerala's nullification of commitments made to adivasis violates articles three, 13 and 14 of the ILO Convention 107, ratified by India, relating to the protection of properties, respect of customary procedures of transmission of traditional ownership of lands, prevention of non-tribals from securing ownership or use of lands belonging to tribals, and provision of additional land in the event of shortages. State actions also violate section two of ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, which explicitly recognises the territoriality of tribals, tribal identity as fused to land ownership, and the right of tribals to ownership and possession of lands traditionally occupied, though India has not yet ratified this agreement. Government behaviour also violates part six of the UN draft Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, currently under negotiation.

However, neither the 1975 act nor its 1999 successor addresses the issue of adivasis lacking documentary proof of past land ownership. The Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act of 1972, by which so-called private forests were taken over by the state, was designed to provide divested adivasis with about 23,000 hectares in the Western Ghats, a three-decade-old commitment with which the government is yet to comply. Among other excuses, it is alleged that the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 does not permit the allotment of official forest lands for non-forestry purposes, a claim that is not entirely true. In 1990, the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the government of India issued clear guidelines regarding encroachment on forest lands; reviews of disputed claims over forest lands arising out of forest settlement; disputes regarding titles, leases and grants involving forest land; and conversion of forest villages into revenue villages and settlement of other old habitations. These orders, which to some extent recognise the rights of adivasis, have also been disregarded. It is here that the CK Janu-AK Antony agreement becomes quite significant.

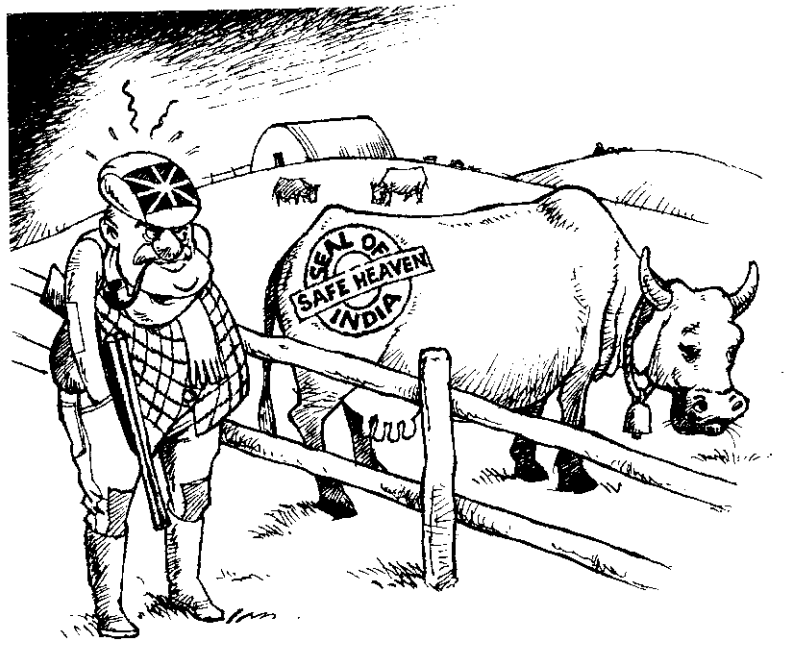
What is to be made of these agreements, laws, court cases and their systematic subversion? Governments of the two coalitions that have consistently run the state of Kerala since independence have consistently violated constitutional provisions. The existing politico-administrative structure fails to defend the law by failing to execute it. The law itself was amended and subsequently replaced in a manner contrary to constitutional obligations, despite public opposition. The government has violated high court orders and consistently disregarded judicial pronouncements. Judicial responses to all of this have been grossly inadequate, and parliamentary democracy and the political system have failed to uphold the constitutional rights of adivasis. In these circumstances, the adivasis recognised that the present political-administrative arrangement would not deliver justice and demanded a system that would transfer to themselves certain powers and responsibilities of enforcing the law. It is in this context that the actions of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha and other groups to evolve participatory self-governance and methods of resolving long-standing inequities have arisen.

Animal farming

COMMON CAUSES do strange bedfellows make. International animal rights activists, typically known for their left-leaning credentials, have lined up with Hindu right groups in India to protest the pitiable state of global cattle. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which opened an office in India in January 2000, has set up a website (www.cowsarecool.com) to draw attention to the plight of cattle in India.

Cow slaughter, which is legal in only a few Indian states, is reported by PETA to involve systematic brutality. While the group does not report saving the lives of any Indian cattle (its rescues to date are limited to 37 monkeys, 12 lions, 10 geese, two tigers and two goats), PETA does claim responsibility for drawing the interest of India's Atal Behari Vajpayee to the plight of *Bharatiya* bovines.

The *Hindutva* lobby, while undoubtedly concerned about Indian cattle, has also brought attention to the fate of the global cow. On 31 March 1996, when the United Kingdom government was debating killing millions of BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy)-infected cattle, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP) London spokesman, Hasmukh Shah, declared on the BBC, "We have offered to look after the 12 million cattle which are facing execution... It is immoral to slaughter these cows and they should be allowed to lead their natural lives".



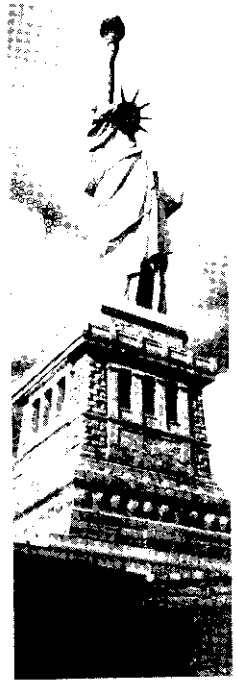
SUBHAS RAI

Willing to host but unable to pay the cost of transporting such a gigantic herd to an Indian safe haven, the VHP-UK asked the Brits to cough up 1 billion pounds. However, despite approaching the British health secretary, the VHP failed to transform the Subcontinent into a global cow infirmary. Even so, the VHP's concern for ambulatory creatures appears to be limited to only things bovine: it failed to come to the res-

Out in the cold

THE DISTRICT office of the United States Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a north-central state bordering Canada, stands just one kilometre from an international tourist attraction, the Mall of America. Like the famous shopping centre, the INS office attracts visitors from all over the world, with the important difference that its visitors are usually unhappy about being there. Inside the INS office winds a line, hundreds of people deep, that passes through a metal detector before even reaching processing points.

This line of international visitors has grown considerably longer in recent weeks as a result of a new INS regulation handed down in December 2002 'directing' non-immigrant male foreign visitors from certain countries above the age of 15 to register with a local office. In addition to North Korea, the regulation affects citizens of 24 countries, all of which are predominantly Muslim. The registration drive has been staggered into three waves, with citizens of Afghanistan in the first group, those of Pakistan in the second, and Bangladeshis in the third.



Since the new regulations went into effect, non-immigrant visitors in Minnesota, as in other states, who fall within the INS categorisation have had to come to this ice-covered office at 6:00 am to stand in line for one of 300 tickets, the number of appointments that the office can handle in one day. Within a couple of hours, the tickets are gone and security guards and staff must turn people away, telling them to return the next day, but earlier. "We understand it is a great hardship for them", says the district director, Curtus Aljets, "but the name of the game is customer service and making sure we get the required data".

While US immigration authorities estimate that

cue of Australia's ill-fated calcivirus-infected rabbit population in 1995, just to name one case of another quadruped.

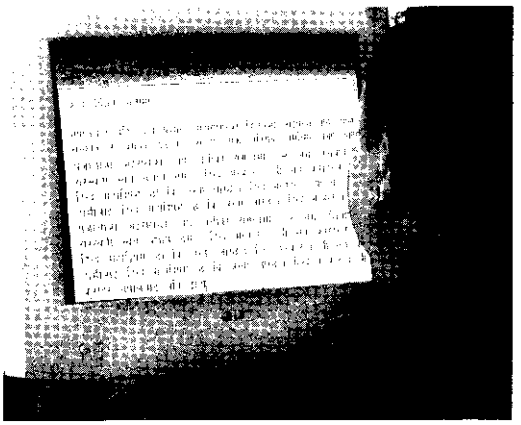
But religious munificence and animal altruism do, it appears, part ways on certain issues. In recent weeks, the Nepali media has been inundated with letters of protest, primarily from Brazil, drawing attention to the southern Bara district's *Gadimai mela*, in which, according to the activists, "fifty thousand animals are butchered in the name of religion". Animal sacrifice remains a regular feature of religious practice in the Hindu kingdom, so much so that its king, Gyanendra, even took the practice to secular India last June by (illegally, under Indian law) offering a *panchbali*, the sacrifice of five animals (in this case, a buffalo, goat, sheep, duck, and pigeon) at Assam's Kamakhya temple. Incensed, activists from the group People for Animals fumed that "the king and the priest who performed the sacrifices should be booked and punished under the law of the land". By that time, however, the king was back in his kingdom. △

Nepali ho!

NEPAL IS believed to have received its first computer in 1981 for use in the country's decennial census. Computer use grew steadily, if slowly, in the following years, though the dearth of local language applications proved a major impediment to it taking off among Nepalis who could not use the Roman keyboard. Commercial firms and media houses developed their own system fonts and characters, but the lack of a universal standard prevented application development from progressing beyond the most basic functions.

That began to change about five years ago. In 1998, a panel of Nepali academics and businesspersons published a white paper on how a single standard for Nepali could be created. This blueprint's possibilities gained momentum with Microsoft's release of Windows 2000, which includes Unicode programming for Devanagari, the script in which Hindi, Marathi and Nepali are written. There remained just two barriers to Nepali becoming a computer-friendly language: the development of a Unicode-based system of Nepali and its adoption throughout Nepali-speaking areas.

Thanks to the efforts of Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP), the country's largest repository of Nepali texts, and financial assistance from the United Nations Development Programme, only the latter challenge remains. Less than a year ago, a small team of technical experts coordinated by MPP's Amar Gurung, a native of Pokhara, set out to adapt Unicode Devanagari to the needs of Nepali programming. In January 2003, the team unveiled a



non-proprietary programme CD that allows Windows 2000 users to operate their systems in a Unicode Nepali environment. This CD is available for NPR 100, though the code can be downloaded for free from MPP's website (www.mpp.org.np).

While the technical challenges of code programming have been overcome, it must be universally adopted in order to become a standard. At the moment, there are more than a dozen Nepali font codes out there, each of which must be loaded on a user's computer in order to view pages in the respective fonts. If the Unicode standard is adopted throughout Nepal and Nepali-speaking areas of India, users will be able to view pages without such hassles. Ideally, in time, Nepali will be used for all manner of computer applications, from word processing

between 15,000 and 20,000 Pakistanis will register, unofficial figures put the number of Pakistanis in the US, both legal and illegal, at 100,000. Some illegal residents are reportedly concerned that the registration process is merely a pretext for opening deportation proceedings, a concern partially borne out by the fact that such proceedings have been initiated against 10 percent of registrants to date, though only one person has actually been deported. Many Pakistanis in the US believe that they are the target of the new regulation.

In February, reports appeared in the media that dozens of Pakistani families were attempting to claim asylum in Canada, which lies just north of Minnesota, where immigration laws are thought to be less strict. Overwhelmed at several border stations, Canadian authorities have been advising asylum-seekers to come another day. American authorities, in turn, have been arresting many returning adult males at the border points for lacking proper documents.

Stephen Thal, a Minneapolis immigration lawyer, has handled several Pakistani cases. He says, "On my last Pakistani special registration case, my client was arrested and placed in removal proceedings even though married to a US citizen and [with] a pending adjustment of status application". Thal thinks that his client will eventually receive the sought-after status change, but that the INS registration programme is misdirected in its attempt to enhance American security. △

Will Love, Minneapolis, USA

to accounting to email.

"There could be a minor social revolution in Nepal once the standard is accepted", says Gurung. "From the administration to the judiciary, in business, development, education, and in the social sector and media, Nepal is a country where there are millions of potential users who have been kept away from the computer because they do not have the ability to type in Nepali". The prices of computers have come down drastically, but in the requirement of the English language to use the machines, there is still a 'class barrier', says Gurung.

All of this means that Nepal is ripe for a computer revolution. The country is already home to a vibrant software industry, and with a single code available, the hope is that a sizeable chunk of Nepali programmers will switch to program-writing in local languages. Computer use has gradually expanded beyond the capital metropolis, but Nepal still must find a way to guarantee that the benefits from an advance in computing reach all cross-sections of society.

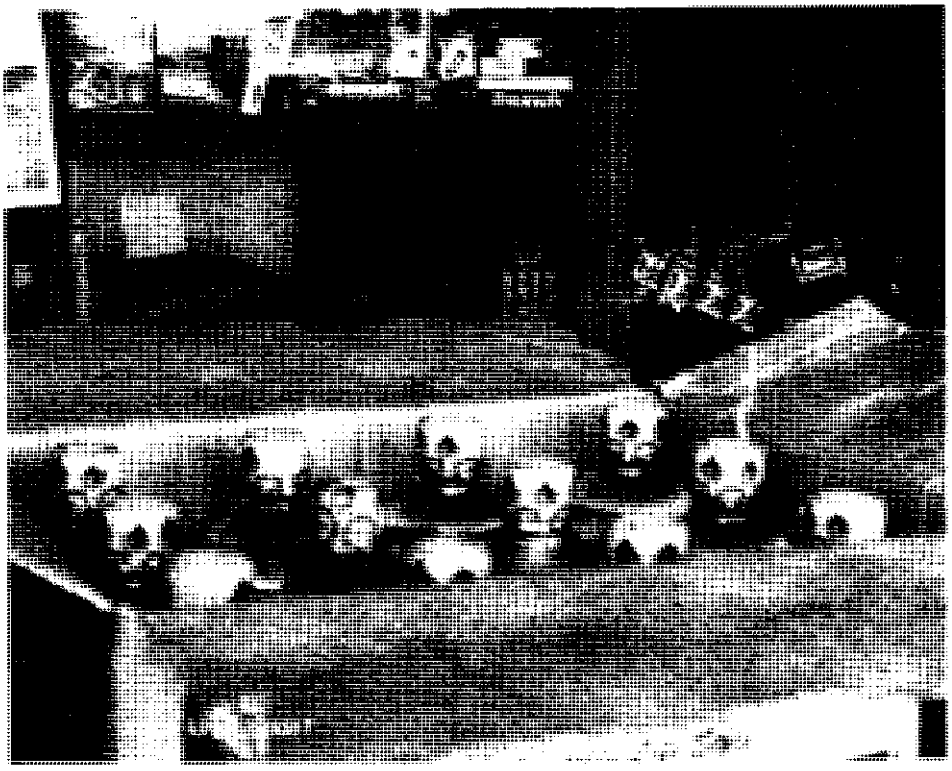
There may come a day, soon, when the computer is used in the Nepali language not just as a glorified typewriter but also to compute and data-process. The benefits to the society and economy would just follow as a matter of course.

The dangers of bottled water

THE USE of pesticides in India has had profound environmental impacts, not the least of which being the poisoning of rivers and streams, as well as groundwater, a vital source for the drinking supply. This point was recently brought home by a study of the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), which found pesticide residues in samples of all but one 17 bottled water brands tested, with some as much as 104 times above permissible European limits.

The CSE's findings expectedly provoked concern about an industry making INR 10 billion in annual sales. The government responded by bringing Indian bottled water standards in line with Europe's, and rescinded eight companies' right to use the logo of government endorsement on their packages. The problem, of course, is that most Indians drink water of the unbottled variety, so the new regulations will have no meaning for them.

Organochlorine and organophosphate pesticides detected in the packaged water samples, such as DDT, lindane, endosulphan, malathion and chlorpyriphos, are well known causes of cancer as well as neural and renal disorders. Many children in south India already suffer from chronic endosulphan poisoning, which manifests itself in mental and physical deformities. "According to recent research, the pesticides are highly immuno-suppressive", says Dr Anupama Kumari, a Patna-based researcher who studies pesticides in the natural environment. "This is more disturbing than the concept of pesticides being carcinogenic".



Malathion, an organophosphate pesticide, was detected in 85 percent of bottled water samples tested by CSE. Patna University's Dr Dilip Kumar explains, "Apart from causing cancer in human beings, this pesticide also affects reproductive physiology".

While the media has focused on the threat posed to bottled water drinkers by pesticide contamination, the bigger issue is the threat posed to the 'regular' Indian's drinking supply. Rural as well as urban folks tend to think that groundwater is pure and are completely oblivious to the leeching process by which pollutants get into the underground aquifers. The only solution is to limit the use of pesticides, as they will seep into water in its various forms of natural storage (rivers, lakes, ponds and, most importantly, aquifers).

Samir Kumar Sinha, Patna

HIMĀL
SOUTH ASIAN

- India's creeping plague
- Statistical overview of the crisis
- Evaluating failure, finding solutions

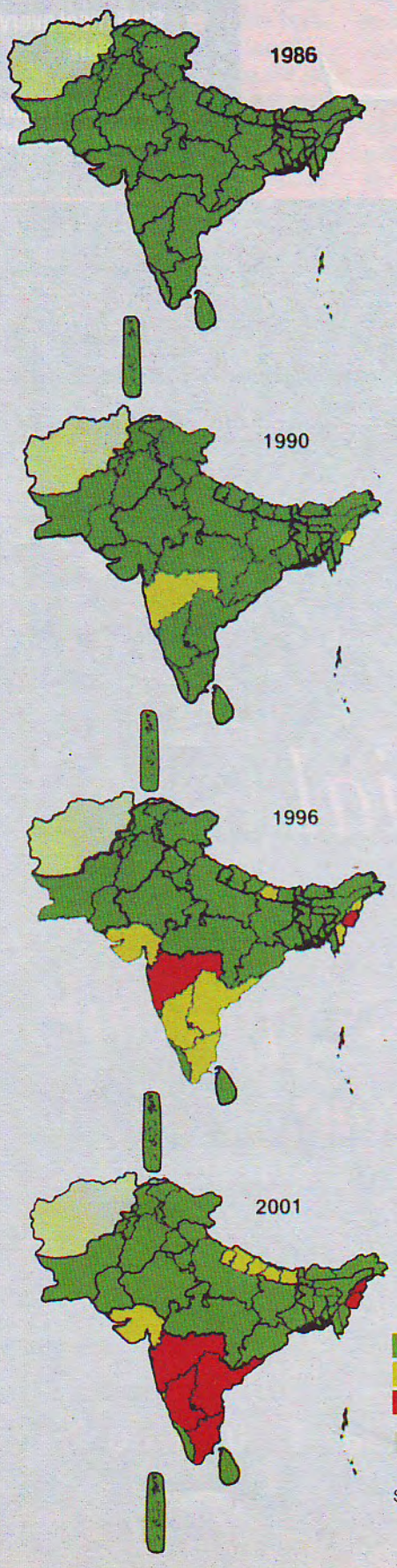
states of denial

the hiv/aids epidemic in south asia

special feature

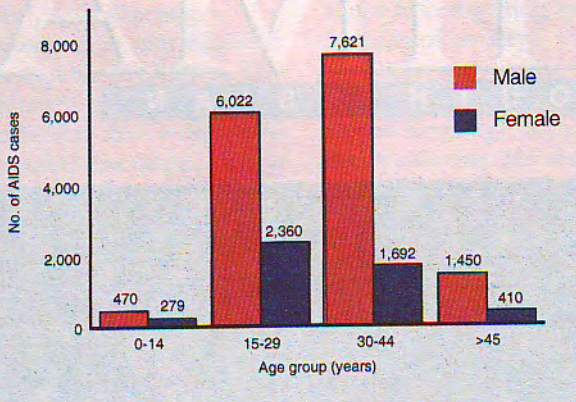
march 2003

Evolution of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Asia



Age and sex distribution of reported AIDS cases in India

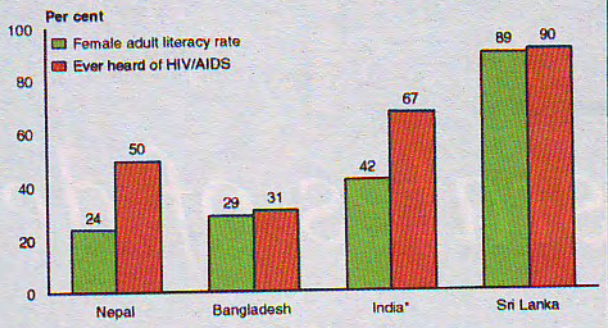
(n=20,304) May 1986-March 2001



Source: NACO, Combating HIV/AIDS in India 2000-2001, http://naco.nic.in/indianscene/country.htm

Literacy and awareness of HIV/AIDS among ever-married women 15-49 years old in selected countries of South Asia

(n=20,304) May 1986-March 2001



Source: Literacy; United Nations Children's Fund, The State of The World's Children 2003, UNICEF, New York (2002). Heard of AIDS: Nepal: Ministry of Health, New Era, and ORC Macro, Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2001, Nepal (2002). Bangladesh: Mitra and Associates, National Institute of Population Research and Training, and ORC Macro. Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, 1999-2000, Bangladesh (2001). India: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National AIDS Control Organisation, National Baseline General Population Behavioural Surveillance Survey 2001 (2001). Sri Lanka: Department of Census & Statistics, Demographic and Health Survey 2000, Sri Lanka (2001).

Less than 5% in groups at risk and less than 1% in antenatal women.

More than 5% in groups at risk but less than 1% in antenatal women.

More than 1% in antenatal women.

No data.

Source: UNAIDS and NACO.

States of denial

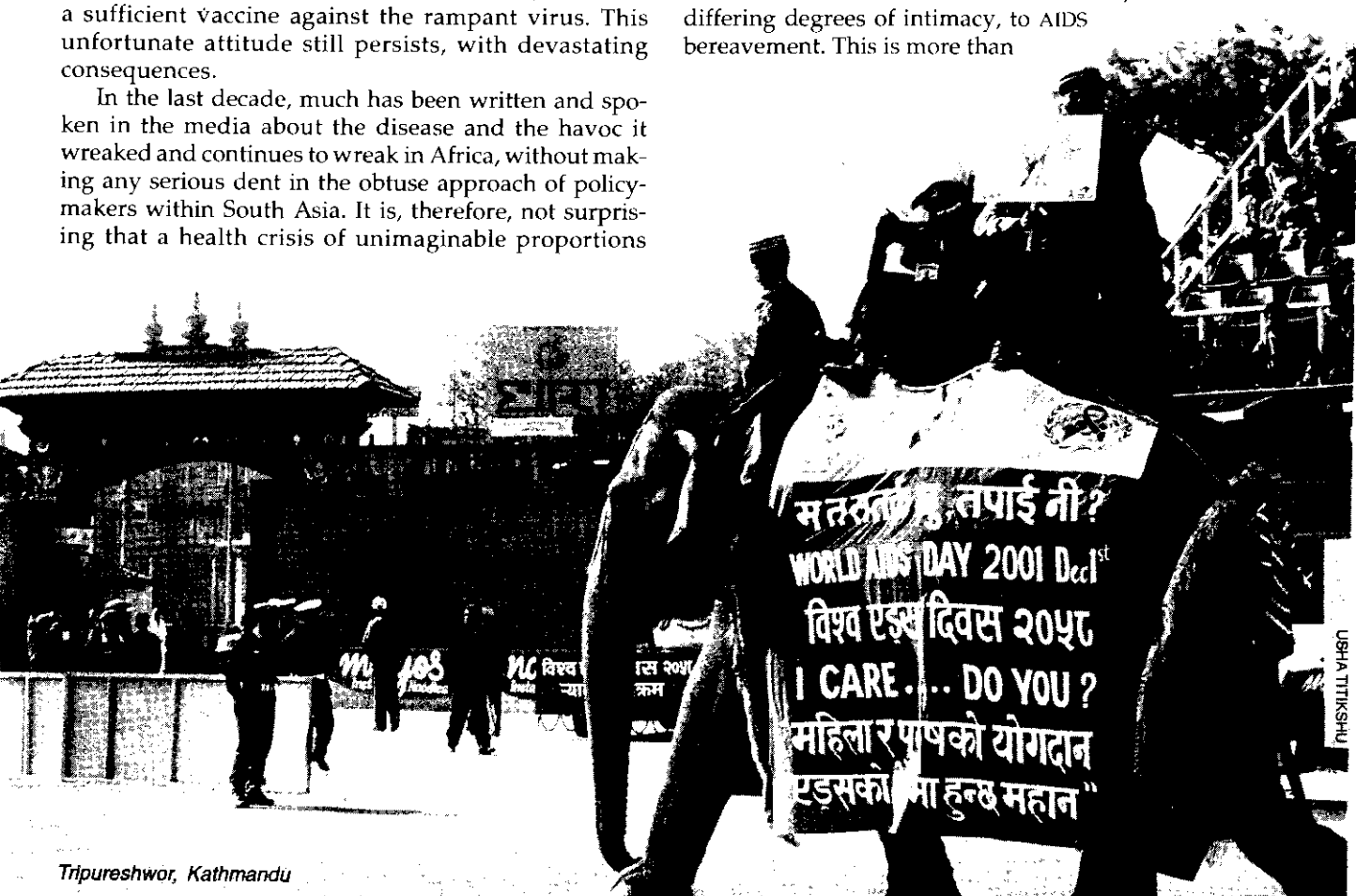
AIDS and South Asia

Each of South Asia's national governments has approached the spiralling AIDS crisis with its own unique blend of belated actions, hamstrung policies, and official denials. The window for containing the disease's spread is quickly closing, but indifference and irresolution remains the order of the day.

by ***Prakash Gupta***

For long HIV/AIDS was thought to be a disease of the West transmitted through 'deviant' practice. Then AIDS devastated Africa, especially its women and children, and it was suddenly not so obvious that 'deviant' practice had anything to do with it. But even so, it was thought to be an African disease, caused by the licentious conduct of African men. Orthodox South Asian values, it was assumed, would be a sufficient vaccine against the rampant virus. This unfortunate attitude still persists, with devastating consequences.

In the last decade, much has been written and spoken in the media about the disease and the havoc it wreaked and continues to wreak in Africa, without making any serious dent in the obtuse approach of policymakers within South Asia. It is, therefore, not surprising that a health crisis of unimaginable proportions looms over close to a billion and a half people, threatening to afflict some 25 million people, and hence directly affecting some 250 million who will have to live with the premature, painful and entirely avoidable sickness or death of at least one close relative. Of these, a minimum of 100 million could be immediate financial dependents. Add extended family and friends and upwards of 500 million will be connected, in differing degrees of intimacy, to AIDS bereavement. This is more than



USHA TITIKSHU

Tripureshwor, Kathmandu

one-third the population of the most populous and densely packed region of the world. These may be back-of-the-envelope calculations but, if anything, they perhaps err on the side of caution than of excess. There are better ways for a billion and a half people to learn about the imprudent causes and lethal consequences of a disease that can be prevented through more efficient and less debilitating means.

Factor in the statistic that HIV/AIDS primarily strikes the 15-40 age group, ie the group that is economically the most active and productive, and it becomes clear that the countries of the Subcontinent are staring uncomprehendingly at a social and economic crisis that will accelerate exponentially in the coming decade. All this for want of any official recognition of the need to seriously prevent the spread of a virus that has so relentlessly announced it presence through chilling statistics and tragic stories. Worse still, medical solutions are not about to come to the aid of negligent governments. All the recent attempts at developing a medical vaccine against HIV have come to nothing and the prospects are not encouraging.

The latest trials in February this year for a vaccine developed by the California biotech company VaxGen have failed. Even had VaxGen's efforts been successful, it would not have made much of a difference to South Asia, since medical research has concentrated on developing a vaccine for HIV subtype B, common in Europe and the US, while the strain prevalent in South Asia is subtype C. Under such circumstances, it takes remarkably dense polities to ignore a disease that could undermine South Asian society and bring it to the brink of implosion. Unfortunately, in public health matters at least, the polities are indeed remarkably dense, else we would not have been witness to the neglect of a decade and a half and the persistence of the gung-ho denials that characterise state reactions to prognostications of the coming crisis.

Medical research has concentrated on a vaccine for HIV subtype B, while the strain prevalent in South Asia is subtype C

Precarious trails

There are a great many compelling reasons why governments ought to approach the problem with more zeal, earnestness and coordination than they have displayed so far. For one, the geographical and demographic context is calamitous. China and India, sharing an extended border, between them account for over two billion people. This is a huge demographic surplus that accompanies an equally huge development deficit. The virus has already carved out well-established lines of transmission into the interiors of both countries. It is true that India's border with China is not particularly porous. But the eastern end of that border adjoins the virus entrepot of Asian AIDS – regions in Burma that serve as a junction for HIV strains to meet, recombine, mutate and proliferate through human agents who for various reasons are able to circumvent nation-state regulations.

According to experts tracking the trajectory of different virus strains, the frontline of the AIDS crisis lies in small towns on the Burma-China border where Chinese truckers, jade and ruby traders, and drug merchants from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Southeast Asian countries gather to conduct business and partake of the local sex industry. Random unprotected encounters that typically involve a few sex workers with a high turnover of multinational clients, some of whom shoot drugs, is sufficient to create an epidemiological context which is more than ordinarily conducive for the virus to turn even more virulent than it currently is. Virus maps charted by Japanese scientists suggest the emergence of a recombinant strain, type B/C, which is a mutation of the Southeast Asian type B, and the Indian type C, that incubated in these border towns and then swept three provinces of China along the heroin trafficking route.

Since these border towns have South Asian visitors who walk a precarious trail, and very likely engage in the same practices back home as they do on the Burmese border, it will not be long before the new strain sweeps across South Asia as well. Manipur, one of the most severely AIDS-affected states in India, is not only on the Burmese border, but is also a conduit for heroin besides being home to a long-standing insurgency and the dislocations that attend a violent conflict. In Manipur, over 50 percent of intravenous drug users are HIV-positive, an increase of 45 percent in infection rates over a two-year period.

It is not difficult to see how the new variant of the virus can transmit itself not just to the rest of the country, but also to Nepal and Bangladesh, two impoverished countries in the vicinity of this zone of concentrated risk convergence. There is a great deal of seasonal migration, particularly of single males, from these two countries into India and back again, all of it unmonitored. The possibility of HIV cutting across the epidemiological barrier between the high-risk groups and the general population is therefore very high. The loop of transmission has enlarged commensurately with the increase in the rate of mobility of the human populations and the lengthening of the routes of migration.

From the available pattern it would seem that in Bangladesh, India and Nepal the disease is teetering on the edge of spilling over into a larger catchment of vectors, if the projection of HIV-infected populations of 20-25 million in the next five years is anything to go by. The institutional mechanisms of the Subcontinent can no longer afford the luxury of the belief that the disease can be confined within circumscribed epicentres of incidence, restricted to conventional high-risk groups. There are no longer such conceptual fig leaves to hide

behind, and perhaps there never were, given that the social institutions and norms of the Subcontinent rendered meaningless the epidemiological distinctions elaborated in the West. It is not surprising that today over 90 percent of HIV-positive women are married and monogamous. What is clear is that, if anything, the values and morals of orthodox society, far from keeping the virus at bay, may actually have encouraged its spread.

Orthodox assumptions, unorthodox failures

In the early phase of its global history, HIV took its time to move out of high-risk groups in the West, and therefore a distinction between the risk-prone and the risk-free was valid. Further, this distinction could be sustained because the relatively less orthodox societies of the West were socially able to come to terms with the causes of the disease and the modes of its transmission. These societies were able to open up private life to public scrutiny and discussion. Besides, in the West, women are permitted greater choice in entering into conjugal relations on their own terms and, most importantly, are empowered to a greater degree to assert the right to safe sex within relationships.

By contrast, in the Subcontinent, sex is a theme that cannot be discussed publicly, individual choice for young adults in fundamental matters is strictly limited, and women's ability to assert their rights and preferences, particularly when sexual issues are concerned, is illusory. In South Asian countries marriages are arranged with grooms whose antecedents relating to HIV risk behaviour are almost never verified because such things do not enter into the negotiations between the parents of the couple. In such circumstances, the conventional definition of high-risk groups and the probabilities of transmission based on such a definition are vacuous. On the Subcontinent, owing to the nature of the matrimonial transaction, the risk factor in society is multiplied because the size of the high-risk group is twice the number of those who engage in high-risk behaviour. This will mean that a realistic redefinition of the term 'high-risk' is necessary if the statistical magnitude of the problem is to be accurately captured.

Unfortunately, when the issue of AIDS first surfaced in public, everything connected with it, including the statistical estimations of its spread and the epidemiological categories that arose on the basis of its social modes of transmission, had Western assumptions. This was the first mistake. While the probability of biological transmission, as between HIV-discordant couples (ie where one of the pair is HIV-positive), may not vary significantly across societies, patently the social rates of transmission will depend on the sexual protocols of each society. The probability figures of biological transmission are not a sufficient basis for projecting the levels of risk in societies where marriage itself can be classified as high-risk behaviour. Such probability statistics obviously never visualised the HIV-positive AIDS-widows of South Asia, who have to live the rest of their lives in shame, after having been abandoned by their families.

Where a veil of secrecy hangs over the virus because of the orthodox tendency to pretend that people do not have sex, that 'we do not do drugs' and that homosexuals are deviant people who can be 'cured' through marriage, and where the nature of the matrimonial system opens up a route of transmission into the population that does not engage in risk behaviour, the definitions and estimations of populations at risk ought to have been substantially different. Western experts and their native clients, the majority of whom typically wear such enormous analytical and cultural blinkers that they are unable to understand the societies that they speak so much about, made the first mistake.

But this was a mistake of ignorance that could always be rectified by redefining the nature of the problem and investing effort and resources in tune with the more precise estimation of its magnitude. By far the bigger mistake has been committed by the governments of the Subcontinent, which allegedly are more connected to the people who elect them to office. They have not only failed to recognise the greater danger of infection that the social specificities of the region pose, but have also neglected to take any action to address even the narrower scale of the problem that was originally presented to them. Thus, barring some perfunctory activity, intended to convey the impression that note had been taken of the disease, there was not much of an attempt, particularly in the early days, to even inform the conventionally identified high-risk groups.

> The values and morals of orthodox society, far from keeping the virus at bay, encouraged its spread

Instead, it was left to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), now rechristened civil society organisations by the global aid-combine led by the World Bank, to take the initiative independently of governments, and sometimes in the face of official hostility. The overall climate in which non-government initiatives function is not conducive to the efficacy of prevention on the scale required in populous societies. Part of the problem is that ever since HIV began attracting funds, a great many spurious organisations, some of them 'owned' by relatives of bureaucrats, have come up as family businesses. This not only diverts urgently needed resources away from the prevention campaign, but also undermines the credibility of authentic and bona fide organisations which are attempting to deal with the problem in very difficult circumstances.

Deficiencies in the Indian approach

It is a measure of the Indian government's utter lack of concern that it has not introduced enabling legislation

to override existing laws that actually obstruct AIDS activists. For instance, two years ago, police raided the premises of an AIDS prevention and awareness organisation in Lucknow, the capital if India's most populous and impoverished state of Uttar Pradesh, invoking an archaic colonial law (Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code) against homosexuality that continues to be in force. Four of its employees were taken into custody and held for over six weeks on the grounds of "conspiring to commit unnatural acts" and for possession of AIDS awareness material which the police deemed to be of a pornographic nature. Ironically, the organisation in question has been officially sanctioned by the government of India to undertake outreach work on AIDS prevention.

In another incident, a couple belonging to an NGO working in Almora district in the hill state of Uttaranchal was arrested under the National Security Act, a piece of draconian legislation intended for, and normally invoked to summarily detain, those who are deemed to be a threat to the nation-state. Clearly, the threat to the economic well-being and social stability of the nation-state from a virus that moves about with such ease has not been adequately recognised. Instead, the government at the centre has been more enthusiastic about pandering to the allegedly religious sentiments that get offended every time a public health issue involves even the slightest reference to sexual practices.

In fact, given the nature of government harassment of people working in different parts of India, there are two dismal conclusions to be drawn. The HIV/AIDS prevention campaign, especially in the countryside, will not achieve much if the attitude of government officials lower down in the hierarchy is as obtuse as that of the orthodox segments of rural and semi-rural society. This attitude of the lower bureaucracy is in no small measure an outcome of the lack of a coordinated national level policy on AIDS at the higher level of government.

This bureaucratic hostility to the public discussion of 'sensitive issues' and the lack of systematic government policy and implementation is not surprising in a country that was in collective denial for six years after the first infection came to light. It was not until 1992, after prevalence had shot up to unacceptable levels, that the government could bring itself to make the hesitant admission that Indian morality was not a sufficient deterrent to the proliferation of the disease. International funding for prevention was finally accepted and the first national level body, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), was established to combat the problem.

The local institutions being clearly ill equipped to undertake the task, it was left to the World Health Organisation (WHO) to devise a prevention programme that was financially supported by the United States Centres for Disease Control and the World Bank to the tune of a meagre USD 85 million. The first phase of the AIDS control programme involved the screening of blood through the distribution of kits to verify the HIV status of donated blood, and the training of personnel to disseminate information about the disease. Nothing of consequence appears to have been achieved 10 years down the line, and many AIDS-prevention trainees themselves subscribe to outlandish notions of how the virus can spread. When trained personnel fan out and spread the word that HIV infections are caused by the sharing of combs and visits to cinema halls, it becomes obvious that the government's typically bureaucratic solution of setting up yet another bureaucratic body has failed.

Over the decade, the number of NGOs being trained and funded by the NACO has gone up to 1800. In 1999, the Indian programme, still under the guidance of the WHO and the World Bank, moved to its second phase, with a budget of USD 300 million. The second phase of the programme involved the setting up of new clinics and the dissemination of television and radio advertisements. Evidently nobody had paid heed to the fact that 'radio penetration' in the country had come down substantially, and that the depth of television penetration in rural areas and the efficacy of brief spots warning people against AIDS is fairly low. Making use of truly mass forms of communication such as commercial film to explain the idea in detail through familiar narrative forms never entered the picture.

A realistic re-definition of the term 'high-risk' is necessary if the statistical magnitude of the problem is to be accurately captured

Instead, bureaucratically controlled central funds moved ponderously and hierarchically to state level units, where, in the absence of any monitoring and regulatory mechanism, the money was ill spent or well-spent according to the inclinations of those in charge of the expenditure at the regional and sub-regional levels. According to an evaluation by a team of international experts, only a third of all Indian states have made any progress in implementing the programme (as distinct from progress in achieving prevention), while in another third no work has commenced. Tragically, the most populous states, like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have not initiated a single project under the NACO's scheme.

The lethargy in dealing with HIV is pervasive. The Indian parliament has taken up AIDS issues in fits and starts. It introduced legislation imposing standards for condom manufacturers, as it should. But such measures mean little in a country that is notoriously lax in the use of prophylactics and where as much as seven percent of all adults are affected by sexually transmit-

ted diseases. Apart from this, all the apex body did was to create a parliamentary committee on HIV/AIDS, whose convenor once made an effort to visit a sex-work locality a year after his appointment. In the meanwhile, all other sources of infection continue to thrive as well, with no methodical attempt being made to reach intravenous drug users, professional blood donors and unauthorised blood banks, which thrive because the authorised blood banks do not have sufficient stocks and are concentrated in urban areas, leaving the rural population to fend for itself.

Statistically Bangladesh is free from the virus. Medically it is a different issue

Subcontinent-wide struggles

The situation, if anything, is worse in the other countries of South Asia. In almost all of them, the AIDS campaign is led by NGOs without any form of government support. In both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the number of HIV infections and reported AIDS cases are still very low, but an informed minority is convinced that the prevalence rates are much higher than the official figures pretend. In both countries, both the statistics and the campaign have to contend, as in India, with the antagonism of religious fundamentalists who resist the idea of public discussion and the indifference of politicians, who themselves are widely known to be promiscuous both in political and sexual matters. In both these countries, NGOs have found it necessary to go in search of responsible religious leaders to bring up issues that the orthodoxy resents indignantly.

In Nepal, where the current prevalence rate is 30 new infections a day, a figure that can be expected to rise, there are neither funds nor facilities for a campaign to be launched in the mid-hill, tarai and mountainous regions of the country. Nepal is urgently in need of preventive awareness since it is greatly affected by migration, trafficking and the dislocations of civil war.

A Bangladeshi child puts a prophylactic to use.

USHA TITKSHU

Everywhere on the Subcontinent, governments have in recent years enthusiastically set up more and more HIV bureaucracies that are supposed to take care of the problem in sanitised ways. Pakistan woke up to the HIV threat as late as 1994 by setting up a four-year National AIDS Prevention and Control Programme to expand on the limited activities of the 1987 Federal Committee on AIDS. The AIDS programme did not have independent status, but was included along with three other preventive health programmes, in the World Bank-funded Social Action Programme (SAP). Despite the official claim that prevention is the mainstay of the Pakistan AIDS campaign, the level of actual commitment is evident from the fact that it was clubbed along with other routine prevention efforts, without any recognition of the special attributes of AIDS.

Predictably, the early phase of the SAP had very little to do with prevention, the emphasis being on developing laboratory services and surveillance. The SAP moved into the second phase in 1997 to last till 2002, by which time the focus was on managerial and organisational strengthening at the federal and provincial levels of the national AIDS programme. Some lukewarm prevention messages were disseminated via the print and electronic media, ensuring that the majority of the population was left out of the loop. And even the surveillance programme did not amount to much with a total of 39 centres being established for a population in excess of 150 million people. It is not at all surprising that the reported cases of HIV/AIDS in the country is so low.

Bangladesh, the other populous country of the region, displayed the greatest bureaucratic enthusiasm. Since 1985, it has been setting up organisations to keep pace with the proliferation of the virus. In that year it set up a 'multi-sectoral' National AIDS Committee (NAC) to function in an advisory capacity. It then set up a 'multi-disciplinary' Technical Committee (TC) to advise the advisory body, NAC. The TC's functions include assisting the NAC to formulate programme frameworks; to guide programme personnel in the design, development and monitoring/reporting of their activities; and to review research protocols to be funded by the government. In other words, neither organisation had much to do exclusively with prevention.

The urge to set up more and more organisations was obviously getting stronger. In 1987, the government of Bangladesh started its AIDS prevention activities with technical and financial assistance from the WHO Global Programme on AIDS. A year later the government's planned prevention activities finally began under a Short Term Plan, which focused on determining HIV/AIDS prevalence and in developing prevention and control measures, particularly in the health sector. After a lull of two years, in 1989, a three-year 'Medium Term Plan' was formulated. During the 1990s, fresh activities were carried out, with WHO support, in areas of surveillance, laboratory diagnoses, and strengthening technical, financial, health education and management capabilities, all of which

came under the head of 'prevention'.

In 1990, the HIV-prevention activity began to draw circles around itself, with the formation of a coordination committee, constituted by key functionaries from institutions already engaged in HIV/AIDS related activities. Soon after, the tendency was further reinforced with the formation of the AIDS Information and Awareness Campaign Committee, led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and consisting of representatives from several ministries, WHO, other donor agencies, media and NGOs. In short, it took seven years and several committees before the first awareness campaign was launched. Eventually, in 1996, 11 years after the first committee was formed, the Bangladesh government signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to set up infrastructural facilities for a comprehensive AIDS control programme known as the 'Bangladesh AIDS Prevention and Control Programme' which continued until 30 June 1998.

In addition, in 1995, just so as to ensure multiple layers of bureaucratic protection against the virus, the Bangladesh Director-General of Health Services formed an 11-member 'task force' to initiate the process of policy formulation. Policy had begun to be formulated 10 years after the first advisory committee came into being. In October 1996, the national HIV/AIDS policy document was reviewed by a 19-member core group, after which it was examined by a multi-sectoral consensus workshop in which 10 stakeholder groups participated. The cabinet approved the resulting final document in 1997. After all this hectic and committed activity we still do not have realistic figures for prevalence in the country, nor the beginnings of a programme that pierces the veil of silence and secrecy by roping in influential members of the clergy on a nation-wide basis. Statistically Bangladesh is free from the virus. Medically it is a different issue.

The national AIDS programmes were all initiated only on the promise of external funding

Survival strategies

What is evident from all that has gone on is that, barring the proliferation of superfluous apex level organisations controlling foreign funds and with no specific purpose, there has been no clear response to the epidemic in South Asia. There is neither accountability nor an auditable mandate. For the rest, there are a large number of NGOs of varying credibility either soldiering on under difficult circumstances or helping themselves to some easy money. Given the general lack of interest among South Asian governments, it is not all surprising that the most urgent appeals and the few running programmes have come at the behest of multilateral bodies.

A noticeable aspect of the AIDS programmes of the Subcontinent is that they were all initiated only when external funding was promised. In this general atmosphere, where official interest is predicated on the availability of sufficient tranches of hard currency, periodically, international bodies mandated to oversee public health and development issues in developing countries have been forced to join hands with the concerned civil society groups to keep the agenda on the radar screen. On such occasions, governments advertise their heroic efforts in addressing public health issues and make their by-now familiar rhetorical declarations about the magnitude of the problem and the renewed efforts they are making to contain the menace. And all the while, the window of opportunity that is still available is quickly closing in the face of those who are struggling to make use of it.

The latest of such efforts was the high level conference, "Accelerating the Momentum in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS in South Asia, organised by UNAIDS and the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. The conference brought together global leaders in the fight against AIDS, and government officials, parliamentarians, media, children and young leaders from South Asian countries. The 'Kathmandu Declaration', one outcome of the conference, called for, among other things, increased political commitment, strong leadership from organisations and individuals contributing to the fight against AIDS, and renewed efforts to overcome stigma and discrimination. The hope was that this initiative, which included detailed presentations by senior representatives from the governments of Thailand and Uganda, the two success stories in reversing the spread of HIV infections, will stimulate governments in the region to stop looking at the disease as a source of funds and start viewing AIDS as a development issue.

Perceiving AIDS as a development subject would be the first step in the global struggle against AIDS, and one that may convince sceptics that the attention to this disease does not necessarily divert energy from other afflictions like tuberculosis (TB) and malaria. And indeed, money spent on HIV prevention is being bundled with funds for combating TB, malaria and anti-microbial resistance since all of these are crucial to limiting the mortality rates associated with AIDS. Further, the moment combating AIDS is seen as part of the development effort, governments will need to look for integrated solutions that strengthen health care systems, increase hygiene and sanitation awareness, reduce disparities in opportunity and raise the income levels of the most marginal and hence vulnerable sections. The calamitous nature of the disease can be converted into an opportunity to materially alter the structure of South Asian societies. But until that happens, AIDS will continue to haunt the region, and the pallbearers will have no time for rest.

India's creeping plague

The initial response of South Asian governments to AIDS when it appeared two decades ago was to hide behind the mantle of 'Asian morals' – a strategy that succeeded only in obfuscating knowledge of the disease's deadly, unchecked spread. After acknowledging the problem in the early 1990s, efforts to treat the disease's victims and prevent further infections have been hampered by a lack of reliable data and a glut of ill-conceived or under-funded programmes. India, the largest country of South Asia, is consequently burdened with a larger HIV/AIDS problem than the others. How many AIDS cases are there in India? Should the focus be on prevention or treatment? And, most importantly, in what direction is the disease headed? Policy failures aside, these and other basic questions remain.

by ***L Mehta***

It is appropriate to begin an article on AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) in India by asking lots of freewheeling questions and presenting 'facts'. Here they are:

Approximately 42 million people the world over are supposed to be infected with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the causative agent of AIDS. Almost one million people in Asia and the Pacific acquired HIV in 2002, bringing to an estimated 7.2 million the number of people now living with the virus in this region – a 10 percent increase since 2001. A further 490,000 people are estimated to have died of AIDS in the past year. About 2.1 million young people (aged 15-24) are living with HIV. India's national adult HIV prevalence rate of less than one percent offers little indication of how serious the situation facing the country is. An estimated 3.97 million people in India were living with HIV at the end of 2001 – the second highest figure in the world, after South Africa. One Indian is infected with HIV every minute. 10 percent of the world's HIV cases are found in India. Furthermore, about 60 percent of the country's population, the highest number of cases worldwide, is supposed to have tuberculosis, a disease that often preys on HIV-weakened bodies.

How are these statistics arrived at? Is the AIDS scare being blown out of proportion? Some practitioners of *ayurvedic* medicine say that it is a disease that is mentioned in ancient medical texts. If that is so, why is it only in the last two decades that one has been hearing about it?

What is the ground reality of AIDS in India? What projections are being made for AIDS in India? Because there are no early-stage symptoms of AIDS, what does one look out for as an early warning so that the disease can be nipped in the bud? In a word – nothing. For one thing, the infamous window period of the disease, in which it lurks in the system but gives no indication of its presence for as long as a decade, does away with the notion of an early warning system. The virus could be in you and yet manifest itself only years later. Meanwhile, depending on your sexual lifestyle, you could be aiding and abetting its spread. In any case, early warning is ultimately meaningless since there is no known cure for the disease. The means of its transmission are known. But there is no treatment and, still, no cure.

Then there is the issue of funding – do funders know what they are funding? If the enemy is not known how do you choose your weapons?

Now for the answers: there are none. This illustrates the bizarre state of affairs in the existing corpus of knowledge about AIDS. Needless to say, the approach to dealing with AIDS is a reflection of existing knowledge – bumbling, and burdened with an unfortunate pretence of knowing the general direction being taken.

Denial, stigmatisation and discrimination: these words sum up the social history of HIV/AIDS. They also are the reason for the remarkable manner in which the disease has managed to disregard every boundary and reach its present pandemic proportions.

Disease definitions

Perhaps one measure of the fear and hype that surround AIDS is the vague, incomplete knowledge that most people have about it. Ask an average person the difference between AIDS and HIV and you are likely to receive answers that would make the people who are responsible for disseminating AIDS information despair.

Government programmes have succeeded in creating awareness of the disease to the extent that people know about it. The problem lies with the extent and quality of this knowledge. 'Aren't they both the same thing?', 'HIV and AIDS are different diseases but you get both via sex': such attitudes mirror the public fascination and dread of AIDS. Curiosity to know more about AIDS is fuelled largely by a voyeuristic titillation about the manner in which it is acquired and exaggerated fear about its method of transmission.

On its web site, India's National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) demystifies the disease by simply breaking down the acronyms:

A I D S is

ACQUIRED - must do something to contract
IMMUNE - ability to fight off infectious agents
DEFICIENCY - lack of
SYNDROME - cluster of symptoms that are characteristic for a disease

H I V is

HUMAN - isolated to the human species
IMMUNO-DEFICIENCY - lacking the ability to fight off infectious agents
VIRUS - a disease-causing agent

First responses

Before plunging into basic questions about AIDS policy that have been asked by public health experts in India, a quick history of AIDS in the Asia-Pacific region has to be considered so as to understand the hows and whys behind the AIDS pandemic.

It is an accepted fact that because of various cultural prejudices and taboos facilitating denial, HIV/AIDS has grown into a complex maze – an assembly of myriad small epidemics evolving side by side. Each has its own characteristics that are constantly evolving, baffling the world of medicine and fuelling the virus's spread.

In 1986, the World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted a three-pronged approach to analyse the complexity of the problem. According to the WHO's assessment at that time, Australia and New Zealand fell into the first pattern of the epidemic, ie early and rapid HIV spread through homosexual contact and injecting drug use. Other Asian and Pacific countries conformed to the third pattern – late introduction of HIV, low levels of HIV prevalence, and infection traceable to contacts with infected people from outside the region. However, no country in the region conformed to the second pattern, which was characterised by the predominance of heterosexual transmission of HIV, and the consequent mother-to-infant transmission.

While the three-pattern division proved useful, it also suggested to governments of some countries in the region that they might be spared. Hence the decision of these governments to focus their efforts on HIV detection among foreigners and groups in possible contact with them. The outcome of this was that most government responses until the late 1980s were limited to HIV surveillance systems that screened specific populations. In some countries, these measures were unfortunately translated into coercive or punitive actions against HIV-infected people. Until 1987, governments in the region undertook little preventive education, except in Australia and New Zealand. These early efforts reinforced the belief that AIDS was an outcome of 'Western' behaviours such as homosexuality, sexual promiscuity and injecting drug use. Governments cocooned themselves inside the misplaced belief that the social and moral traditions of their various countries would protect them from the AIDS epidemic.

By the end of 1987, however, spurred on by a Asian and Pacific health ministers' conference that focused on the need for information, education and the protection of human rights, 30 countries had developed national AIDS programmes with support from the WHO's Global Programme on AIDS. Unfortunately, these programmes were beset with economic and political obstacles, though there were some positive outcomes.

The first to respond were Australia and New Zealand, which promptly mobilised their urban gay communities and created a partnership among government, the health sector, academic institutions and community-based organisations. Early participation by, and the targeting of prevention and care activities at, people who were particularly vulnerable to HIV contributed to the relative success of these programmes. In Australia, however, groups that have a history of being stigmatised for ethnic reasons – such as aborigines – or marginalised because of unclear legal status – such as Asian sex workers – remain at high risk.

From denial to action

A WHO report states that initial denial giving way to subsequent institutional commitment characterised the response to HIV/AIDS of the governments of Thailand and India. As a result of the initial sluggish response to the pandemic, these countries experienced HIV spread through a series of epidemics consecutively affecting male sex workers, injecting drug users (IDUs), female sex workers and their clients, and, increasingly, other sexually active adults and their children. Both countries were slow to recognise the vulnerability of their populations to the pandemic, which initially led to re-

strictive policies that actually worked against AIDS patients and made them socially vulnerable.

This pattern has now been altered and discrimination is vastly reduced. In Thailand, a health sector plan was drafted in 1987, a three-year plan was formulated in 1988, and by 1990 the Ministry of Public Health was operating its national AIDS programme. A year later, the National Committee on AIDS was placed under the chairmanship of the prime minister. In India, attempts were made from 1987 to 1990 to formulate state and federal plans. The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) was established within the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 1992. Today, the government is striving to catch up with an epidemic that some say threatens to run out of control.

To a lesser extent, Burma has followed the same pattern. After a period of denial, it sought support from United Nations agencies for a multi-sectoral response to the pandemic and invited international NGOs to participate. Initial enthusiasm slowly fell apart because of the country's political and economic isolation, other pressing domestic priorities and weak infrastructure. While results of AIDS policies are not easy to obtain, it is believed that Burma has not yet seen results commensurate with its government's stated high priority for HIV prevention. The WHO report says that other countries in the region – including Nepal, China, Indonesia and Vietnam – have also followed a similar trend, from denial to rising commitment. High vulnerability and a widening gap between those affected by the disease and government policy characterise other Asian countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka. Rising HIV prevalence is seen among sex workers and their clients, homosexual men, and patients attending clinics for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Bangladesh, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and South Korea. Giving cause for anxiety is the complacent attitude of the governments of various Pacific islands. It is believed that AIDS would be a rapid killer among such isolated populations.

Malaria, TB, cholera, gastroenteritis and hepatitis have all been longstanding epidemics in India

While there are no simple answers to questions raised about the adequacy of the government of India's response, the picture is nowhere as bleak as that of Africa, where the organisation UNAIDS says more than two million people died in the last year alone. However, India (along with China and Russia) is said to be on the edge of an outbreak that, if not tackled, could prove similarly devastating.

The establishment of the NACO in 1992 marked the beginning of India's attempt to come to grips with the HIV/AIDS reality. At that time, statistics said that there were close to two million people infected with HIV in India. While these numbers have not decreased, the NACO's statistics show that the rate of infection has slowed down. To that extent, a certain degree of control seems to have been exercised. The NACO is a part of the de-

How HIV attacks the body

A person who is diagnosed as HIV-positive has the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus, the virus that causes AIDS. Blood and body fluids carry the virus, which attacks cells in the immune system, the frontline defence against infection. The stage when the immune system is greatly weakened is referred to as AIDS. The period between the contraction of HIV and its manifestation as AIDS can be as long as seven to 10 years. Patients with HIV can stay healthy for years.

The virus

HIV is passed on through body fluids during sexual intercourse, transmission to a foetus from an infected mother, breastfeeding, infected blood and blood products, and drug injection using shared needles. Those with HIV can look and feel well for years, particularly if they take care of themselves. But the virus attacks their immune system – the body's defences against infection – and eventually leaves them prey to potentially fatal diseases such as tuberculosis. Once their immune system is severely damaged, they are said to have AIDS.

Where it hits

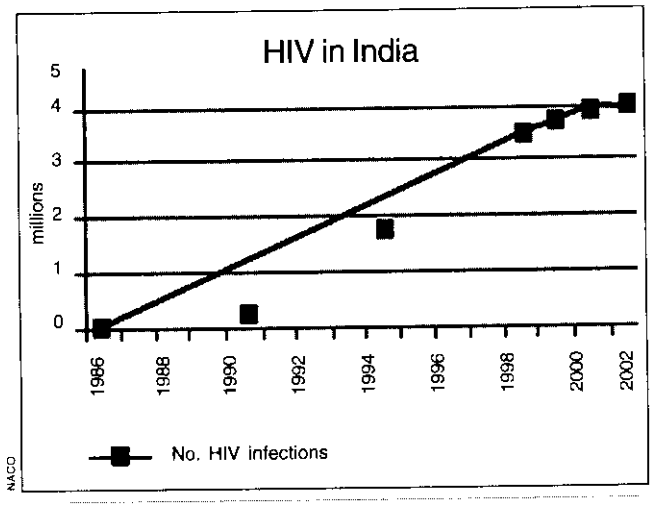
Once in the body, HIV mainly attacks crucial cells in the immune system, known as T-helper lymphocytes, which coordinate the body's response to infection. These cells have a protein called CD4 on their surface, to which HIV binds to gain entry.

How it acts

HIV seeks to replicate itself inside cells. HIV is a retrovirus, which means that its genetic information is not encoded as DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), but as ribonucleic acid, or RNA. In order to gain entry to the nucleus of the cell, the virus has to turn its RNA into DNA, which it does with the help of an enzyme called reverse transcriptase.

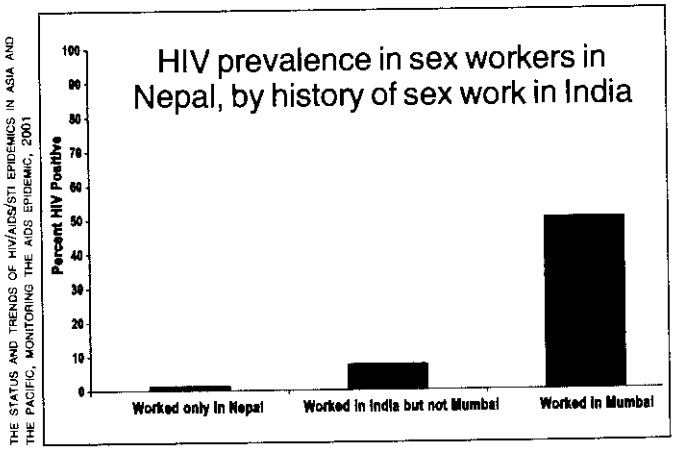
The result

The host cell can 'read' the new piece of viral DNA and admits it to the nucleus, where it starts to make many RNA molecules, which in turn make copies of the various parts of the virus. These migrate out of the cell, which soon dies, weakening the body's immune system, while the pieces of new virus join up and move on to infect more and more cells.



partment of health and family welfare of the government of India. It is a nodal organisation for the formulation of policy and implementation of programmes for the prevention of HIV/AIDS in India. In its mission statement, the agency says, "In a scenario with no vaccines or drug for cure in sight, information, awareness and education are the best ways to prevent the disease from spreading".

Consider the NACO statistics for India in the following graph: the annual estimates for 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001, were, respectively, 3.5 million infections, 3.7 million infections, 3.86 million infections, and 3.97 million infections. The number of new infections can therefore be put at 0.11 million (3.97 minus 3.86) in 2001, as compared to 0.16 million (3.86 minus 3.7) in 2000. This shows that while the epidemic is still spreading in the country, there has been a gradual decrease in new infections. The NACO expects that "over a period of time, the new infections may reduce to a negligible number" – an indicator of the plateauing of the epidemic. As part of its projections, the NACO believes that "the existing indicators show that such a phenomenon may occur in the next three to four years if a strong and effective programme is implemented in all the States/Union territories". The NACO report also advises making concerted efforts to prevent the disease's spread into north India, where infection rates are still low.



Tossing up numbers

For the last 15 years, two issues have been sidetracked. While donor agencies and the Indian government speak of projections and estimates about the AIDS epidemic, there is no epidemiological data supporting these claims. Secondly, no one disputes that AIDS is related to diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis (TB), which are not only more rampant but also easier to diagnose. In the turmoil arising from the AIDS scare, all the other disease programmes are being shunted aside in preference to AIDS programmes. One result of this glut in AIDS programmes is that they are often misdirected. AIDS funds flow freely into targeted intervention programmes – meant to be geared, for example, towards condom promotion or sex education but often amounting to nothing more than glossy brochures, billboard advertising and freebies.

Consider the matter of the statistics. There are officially 3.97 million people in India infected with HIV. There were 43,542 confirmed AIDS cases in India as of 31 January 2003. There has always been a cloud over AIDS statistics the world over. This is especially so in countries with conservative traditions where everything associated with HIV/AIDS from paid sex to men having sex with men (MSM) is socially frowned upon, making reliable AIDS surveys difficult to conduct.

The NACO uses the HIV sentinel surveillance system to gather data. The system has apparently been established as the best way to monitor trends of HIV infection in specific high- and low-risk groups. A few selected sentinel sites representing various groups are screened for HIV prevalence and the trends are monitored over a period of time.

In 1994, there were 55 such sites all over India, rising to 180 by 1998. By 2000 this had risen further to 232 sites monitoring various risk groups. The population groups and sites are chosen based on information of behaviour of various risk groups for HIV infection. The high-risk population groups include patients attending STD clinics, MSM and IDUs, while low-risk populations include mothers attending antenatal clinics (ANC). The rationale of choosing sentinel sites in these clinics is that data about people with risk behaviours, such as those engaging in multi-partner sex and injecting drug use, who make use of clinic services, will be collected at regular intervals.

In 2001, the number of sites increased to 320, of which 135 were in STD clinics, 170 in ANCs, 13 among IDUs and two sites for MSM. The collected data is being used to assess multi-year trends of HIV prevalence rates among identified risk groups and to estimate India's disease burden. Those are the facts according to the NACO.

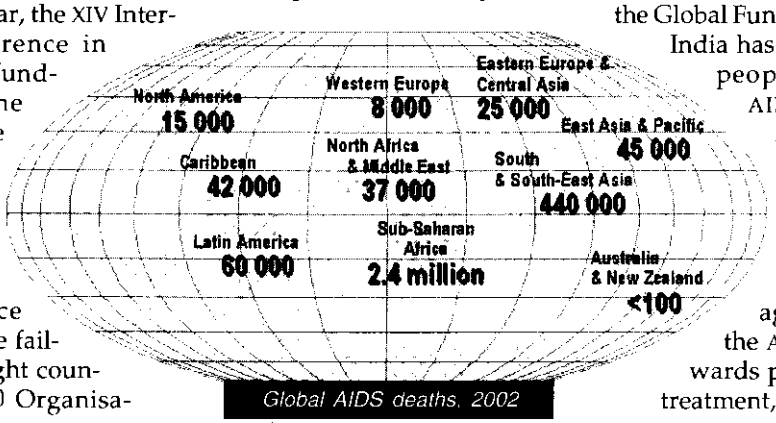
The main criticism of the sentinel surveillance method is that samples are drawn from sites that are not

uniformly spread across the country. Take, for example, the states of Bihar and Maharashtra. In the 2002 survey, Bihar showed an HIV prevalence rate of 1.2 percent in its five STD sites and 0.13 percent in its seven ANC sites. Maharashtra showed a 9.2 percent prevalence rate in nine STD sites and a 1.75 percent prevalence rate in 14 ANC sites. Information in Maharashtra was also gathered from one IDU site (41.38 percent), one MSM site (23.6 percent) and one child sex worker (CSW) site (52.26 percent). The deceitful analysis: Maharashtra has a higher rate of HIV prevalence than Bihar. Such uneven trends drawn from selectively chosen groups in a few areas are being extrapolated as official statistics, with often misleading results.

Despite the absence of epidemiological data, India persists in following a 'vertical' AIDS prevention programme. Public health care practitioners and AIDS activists say that AIDS programmes can easily be integrated into existing malaria and TB programmes. Not only are there medical reasons for doing this but also administrative justifications. The worst example of the government's blinkered approach lies in its failure to provide equal access to all people by combining the AIDS campaign with the vast existing primary health care system. Tragically, this system itself is gradually collapsing. No move is being made to revive it despite success stories in other countries, such as Thailand, which has very successfully employed AIDS programmes via the primary health care system. If a community does not have access to basic health care it is impossible for it to be responsive to messages of prevention – especially when the message speaks of a disease that has no identifiable symptoms, is contracted by socially unacceptable means, requires treatment which can be prohibitively expensive and for which there is no known cure. Donor agencies, at whose bidding the government often formulates AIDS policies, should realise that there has to be greater synthesis between India's national health policy (which is framed for a different set of priorities) and the specific needs of an AIDS policy.

AIDS aid

There has been a paucity of international development funding of late. Last year, the XIV International AIDS Conference in Barcelona identified funding constraints as the biggest hurdle in the battle against the disease. UNAIDS estimates that about USD 10 billion per year will be needed to fight AIDS globally. The resource shortfall is linked to the failure of the Group of Eight countries to honour a 1970 Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development pledge to commit 0.7 percent of national GDP towards foreign aid.



Global AIDS deaths, 2002
UNAIDS/WHO

Alarm bells about AIDS invariably jangle out two tunes – treatment of AIDS patients and awareness building and prevention of AIDS. The Indian government has chosen to give priority to AIDS prevention programmes. In January this year, India received USD 130 million from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, a multilateral public-private partnership currently chaired by the United States. Of the total amount, USD 100 million is earmarked for AIDS programmes and the rest for tuberculosis. This is the largest single country grant within Asia. In a press release, Richard Feachem, executive director of the fund, said, "Critical to any global effort to fight AIDS is preventing the Indian epidemic from exploding, which will otherwise occur over the course of this decade". Feachem will visit several states in India in March to support India's efforts to mobilise a broad, public-private response to AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

The fund also signed an agreement to sponsor an Indian tuberculosis programme proposal approved in April 2002 with USD 5.7 million in support over the first two years of a three-year project costing USD 8.6 million. This programme expands the ongoing Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program to cover 56 million people in all 47 districts of the three newly created states of Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal, and also provides some funding to an NGO in Madras, Tamil Nadu.

Meenakshi Datta Ghosh, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, maintains, "The grant for HIV/AIDS will rapidly expand and enhance the quality of interventions for prevention of mother-to-child transmission, implement a comprehensive care package for HIV-infected mothers, their infants and partners, and increase access to anti-retroviral treatment through public-private partnerships. The grants for tuberculosis will enable rapid scaling up and expanded coverage of the DOTS [Directly Observed Treatment] initiative in geographical territories and population segments within India, not covered so far". According to Purnima Mane, chief portfolio director for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, "Since India has the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS outside of South Africa, and also the highest burden of tuberculosis worldwide, these awards will significantly impact universal coverage globally". Most of the AIDS money will go towards prevention rather than treatment, as is implied by Fea-

cham's statement.

NGOs hope that the preventive programmes will be developed on a case-by-case basis tailored to the needs of individual states and districts, rather than through a thoughtless blanket policy. States where the prevalence of recorded AIDS cases is high require an even balance between treatment and preventive measures.

A *Lancet* study published last year recommends that the scarce resources available to fight AIDS should go towards prevention rather than treatment. The study says that for every life-year purchased with treatment drugs, 28 life-years could have been purchased with prevention. Apart from the specific calculations offered by the study, it essentially says that prevention should gain precedence over treatment.

The government must provide equal access to all by combining the AIDS campaign with the existing primary health care system

There is no doubting the urgent need for preventive programmes, but treatment cannot be shunted aside altogether. While AIDS is billed as an economic threat, the fact remains that malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, gastroenteritis and hepatitis have all been longstanding epidemics in India. They have never been seen as economic threats, let alone received the sort of funding that is poured into AIDS. India's current allocation for the National AIDS Control Programme is USD 300 million, which has also been supplemented by a USD 190 million loan from the World Bank.

Disease dollars

For health care providers, the day-to-day realities of AIDS are completely different from the conference room compulsions of the funders. Many are suspicious, believing the situation arises from, as one activist stated, a "dollar-driven agenda with the final goal of using Indians with AIDS as guinea pigs for vaccine trials". And yet, their dependence on it is undeniable – which is probably why most choose to speak on conditions of anonymity. Pramod, a health activist who now works for a government AIDS control programme that survives on international funding, says he is dissatisfied with the outcomes of how the money is used. "All the time we are putting up street plays, printing posters, glossy brochures, handing out condoms. The condom distribution is the only directly meaningful work we seem to be doing. The rest has become a *tamasha*. Why are we still wasting money on this childish level of awareness? Every CSW knows what AIDS is".

An interesting fact gleaned from the NACO's own statistics shows that while condom use is considered the cheapest and most effective preventive for the spread of AIDS, the availability of condoms is dismally low. A NACO survey showed that in most Indian states four out of five respondents stated that they had indeed either heard of or seen a condom. But did they have access to condoms? Good access to condoms, as defined by the NACO, was "access within 30 minutes travelling time from their normal place of residence (irrespective of the mode of travel). More than a third (37.4 percent) of respondents stated that it took them more than 30 minutes to procure a condom – a measure of poor access". And this despite the fact that the National AIDS Control Programme receives the highest budgeting allocation of all health programmes in India.

While the treatment versus prevention debate rages in international fora, social workers stress the need for funding to be more oriented towards care and relief of AIDS patients. "The need of the moment is relief. We have seen women thrown out of their homes just because their families suspected AIDS. People lose their jobs because of the social stigmas and fears. The government has a very unhealthy attitude toward AIDS patients. They think that these people are going to die anyway so let's concentrate on others not getting the disease. Counselling is almost zero", says one programme worker.

Those working with AIDS say they read about vast funds being given but cannot understand where the money goes. Most would like more money to be poured into public hospitals, which they believe should have hospice wards attached to them for AIDS patients. A nurse who identified herself as Shalini said she would like to see "adequate medicine for AIDS patients, sterile wards, counselling facilities for families, adequate, well-paid staff for AIDS patients, extra privileges for staff working with HIV/

AIDS cases in India

State/UT	Cases
Andhra Pradesh	2565
Assam	149
Arunachal Pradesh	0
A & N Islands	24
Bihar	148
Chandigarh	665
Delhi	737
Daman & Diu	1
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	0
Goa	139
Gujarat	2141
Haryana	247
Himachal Pradesh	106
Jammu & Kashmir	2
Karnataka	1617
Kerala	267
Lakshadweep	0
Madhya Pradesh	949
Maharashtra	9234
Orissa	82
Nagaland	298
Manipur	1238
Mizoram	34
Meghalaya	8
Pondicherry	157
Punjab	227
Rajasthan	630
Sikkim	6
Tamil Nadu	18276

NACO, 2003

The latest numbers on HIV/AIDS in India

As of the end of 2001, there were 3.97 million HIV-positive people in India and, as of January 2003, 43,542 AIDS cases. The HIV-positive figure is supposedly only second to South Africa. However, according to the National Intelligence Council report of September 2002, some experts believe the HIV total is 5-8 million currently and is likely to go up to 20-25 million by 2010.

Analysing the data, Avert, an international HIV/AIDS charity, says that although India's HIV prevalence rate is low (0.7 percent), the overall number of people infected with HIV is high. The official Indian figures do not reveal such a scale of infection, but weaknesses in the sero-surveillance system, bias in targeting groups for testing, and the lack of availability of testing services in several parts of the country, suggest a significant element of underreporting. Given India's large population, a mere 0.1 percent increase in the prevalence rate would increase the number of adults living with HIV/AIDS by over half a million.

Of India's 43,542 documented AIDS cases, the state of Tamil Nadu accounts for 41.97 percent, followed by Maharashtra (including Bombay) at 24.8 percent. Together with Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, these four Indian states represent three-quarters of all documented AIDS cases to date in India. The male to female AIDS ratio is nearly 3:1, and the majority of AIDS cases (52.8 percent) fall in the 30-44 age category, followed by 35.9 percent in the 15-29 group.

HIV/AIDS Surveillance in India

NACO, 2003

AIDS cases in India	Cumulative
MALES	32538
FEMALES	11004
Total	43542

RISK/TRANSMISSION CATEGORIES

(No of cases=43542)

Sexual	84.24
Perinatal transmission	2.61
Blood and blood products	2.99
Injectable Drug Users	2.83
History not available	7.32
Total	100.00

Age group	Male	Female
0 - 14 yrs	1033	633
15 - 29 yrs.	10526	5112
30 - 44 yrs.	18374	4603
> 45 yrs.	2605	656
Total	32538	11004

AIDS patients". Patients bear the cross and feel the brunt of the hard work and inadequate compensation of ward staff in public hospitals.

"Wards boys and *ayahs* can be especially cruel to AIDS patients. It is unfortunately very common for AIDS patients to be refused assistance. We are caught in a terrible dilemma. What we really need is a hospice ward where there is specially trained staff to deal with AIDS patients. The isolation will be good for the patients too. Right now what is happening is that everyone knows they have AIDS and so many ward staff avoid helping them. It is not only impossible to keep their illness a secret but I feel it would be wrong – ward staff have the right to know what they are dealing with".

Modern day outcastes

It will take more than awareness programmes to overcome the social stigma that persists against AIDS patients. Apart from the moralistic overtones that accompany popular beliefs of how AIDS is contracted, the other reason that contributes to social ostracism is the fear that people have of contracting the disease if they associate with AIDS patients. "Modern day leper" is how an AIDS patient at Bombay's JJ hospital sums up his predicament.

The terseness of this definition is borne out by Lakshmi and Inderpal's story. One day, Inderpal, a building janitor, brought home a woman named Lakshmi, saying that she was his wife. Rumour had it that she was a prostitute whom he had married. About eight months after their marriage, Lakshmi's physical well-being deteriorated noticeably. Her plumpness vanished, as did her energy levels. She said she was being medicated by a doctor but refused to give any more information. Her fear, however, was not her declining health but the fact that her husband would not let her sleep in their room any more. Indeed, soon she was made to sleep outdoors.

Once the neighbours noticed that Lakshmi was not allowed in her own house, she was barred from using the community toilet and from playing with the neighbourhood children. They also demanded answers from Inderpal about his wife's health. Using the opportunity to try and rid himself of a wife he no longer wanted, Inderpal blamed her for all his troubles and assaulted her on repeated occasions with a stick. The police would be called but Inderpal would disappear before they arrived and Lakshmi refused to press charges.

After a few months Lakshmi died. Her body was emaciated and covered with open wounds. Her husband refused to touch her body. When he was chastised for his unfeeling attitude, he disappeared, leaving others to call a municipal hearse. Later, in an effort to justify his actions and erase the memory of his callousness, Inderpal let it be known that Lakshmi had AIDS. He was immediately dismissed from his job.

As the patient from the JJ hospital says, "We are the modern day *shudras*. Would you drink water from my house if you knew I had AIDS?"

This begs the question: how do you identify an AIDS patient?

Patients and profits

There was a time when doctors could only watch as their patients died of AIDS. But in the last decade, drugs called anti-retrovirals (ARVs) became available. Initially touted as cures, they were in reality anti-HIV medication. The market now boasts 16 ARVs, which boost immunity to keep the patient free of sickness for a period. Even better, they can prevent mother-to-infant transmissions.

Since antiviral therapy suppresses the replication of the HIV infection in the body, it is seen as both a treatment and a preventive measure. Retrovir, also called Zidovudine or AZT, is the most commonly used antiviral agent to treat AIDS. Saquinavir, manufactured under the trade name Invirase, was recently approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for use in the

What India's statistics mean

The latest detailed results available are from a national behavioural survey conducted in 2001-2002. These data highlight important facets of the country's bid to curtail its AIDS epidemic. The survey shows behavioural change in areas where interventions have occurred and been sustained. But it also points to the difficulties in reaching some key groups (such as men who have sex with men), and large sections of the wider population (notably women living in rural areas).

An analysis of key points reveals that, countrywide, awareness of HIV/AIDS is high, with roughly three-quarters of adult Indians (aged 15-49) aware that correct and consistent condom use can prevent sexual transmission of HIV. But, in general, awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS remain weak in rural areas and among women. More than 80 percent of urban men recognised the protective value of consistent condom use, compared to just over 43 percent of rural women. There are marked exceptions though, such as in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, where awareness levels among women and men are approximately the same. Yet, even in those states, women report low levels of condom use (37 percent and 22 percent, respectively) – an indication that many are not able to negotiate safer sex with male partners. The gender divide remains wide.

The survey data shows that Indians who cannot read are six times less likely to use a condom during casual sex than are those who are educated beyond secondary school, and that rural residents are half as likely as their urban peers to use a condom with casual partners. Obviously, given the varying but essentially low levels of literacy in India, this is a major hurdle. This inability to read has partly been solved by using illustrations on condom packaging – an idea that was hit upon when India's family planning crusade was at its peak. The illustrations continue to be printed. The problem lies with the availability of condoms.

Striking, too, are the high levels of awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and the evidence of high condom use among vulnerable populations in states that have mounted consistent prevention efforts. For example, Maharashtra is home to a long-standing, generalised epidemic. There, HIV/AIDS responses appear to have resulted in higher levels of awareness and behavioural change among female sex workers, their clients and injecting drug users (66 percent, 77 percent and 52 percent of whom, respectively, said they consistently use condoms – among the highest rates in India). This may have helped prevent the state's epidemic from spinning out of control.

Similarly, Gujarat's focused programmes have helped ensure that some three-quarters of female sex workers used condoms the last time they had sex with a commercial or casual partner. But the state also realises that HIV/AIDS responses have to reach the wider population if the epidemic is to be kept under control. (Knowledge levels among women and rural inhabitants, for example, are very low: only about eight percent had no misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted.) By contrast, where interventions for general and marginalised populations have taken place together – as in Kerala – they have helped keep HIV prevalence low.

The survey shows that a significant proportion of men who have sex with men in India also have sex with women (almost 31 percent had sex with female partners in a six-month recall period), and many (36 percent during a month's recall) have sex with commercial male partners – hitherto hidden facets of the epidemic. Condom use rates, though, were low both with commercial partners (39 percent during last sexual intercourse) and with female partners (36 percent). This points to the need for urgent action, given the potential for wider and more rapid HIV spread through such multiple sexual networks.

A major challenge for India now is that of rapidly expanding the coverage of its HIV/AIDS programmes to all vulnerable groups. Flanking that is the broader challenge of ensuring that the response reaches young, illiterate populations and rural communities, especially women.

(Based on Nationwide Behavioural Surveillance Survey of general population and high-risk groups, 2001–2002, National AIDS Control Organisation, India/ORG MARG)

treatment of AIDS. It is the first to be approved in a new group of drugs claimed to be 10 times stronger than existing antivirals used in AIDS treatment. Other antiviral agents are in development and testing stages. Haematopoietic stimulating factors are sometimes used to treat anaemia and low white blood cell counts associated with AIDS. Preventive medications to avoid opportunistic infections such as *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia can keep AIDS patients healthier for longer periods of time.

But the downside of ARVs is their cost. ARV treatment can cost a patient USD 10,000 to 12,000 per year. Until two years ago, ARVs were considered the preserve of the rich. Bringing them to the poor meant risking an ethical argument of asking the pharmaceutical industry to bring down prices in order to save lives. The companies have always maintained that high prices were an outcome of extensive and continuing research and development. For a long while this argument stonewalled other appeals, but it became increasingly untenable as profits of pharmaceutical companies rose at the same time as deaths from HIV/AIDS. In a bid to make ARVs more accessible, in May 2000 UNAIDS began the Accelerated Access Initiative, which in theory would provide HIV patients in poor countries with cheap access to drugs. Five pharmaceutical corporations participated but only one reduced its prices. In late 2000, the Indian drug manufacturer Cipla manufactured the first ARV generic drugs in the country. The chairman declared that Cipla would offer the drugs at the "humanitarian price" of USD 500 to 800 per person. Later this was further reduced to USD one per day per person for African countries. In India, treatment costs for the Cipla ARV 'cocktail' stayed at USD 95 per month per person. Cipla chairman Yusuf Hamied said that he had offered the same price to the Indian government but never received a response.

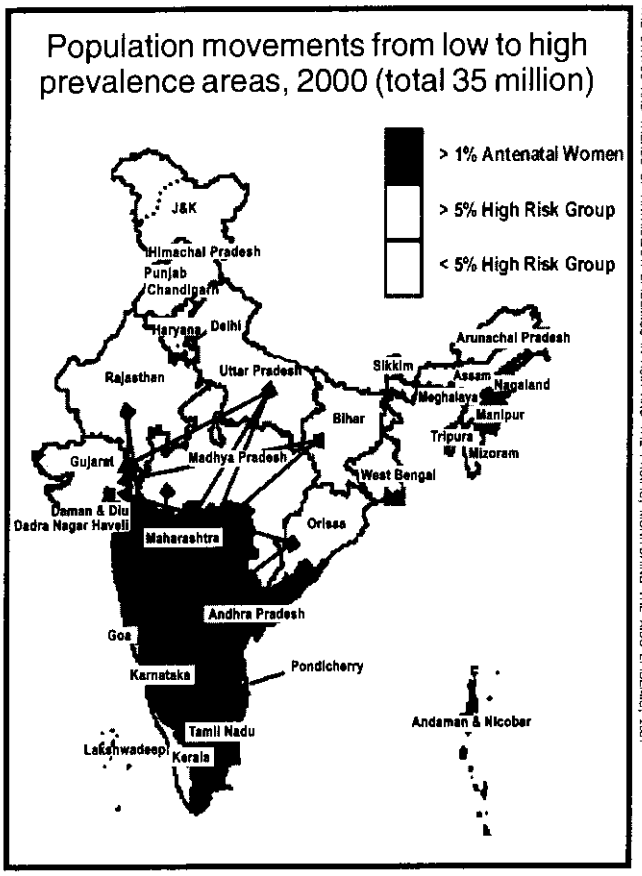
Once again, questions of whether or not unreasonable expenditures are being channelled into AIDS are raised. While ARVs are obviously welcome for those who are acutely ill, it is worth remembering that they are paid for at the cost of cutbacks in other health areas. It is also unclear if the necessary infrastructure to provide and monitor the effect of these drugs is in place.

Final questions

While attempts at suppressing HIV rely only on medical tools like ARVs, prevention techniques involve the dissemination of accurate information. However, the symptom spectrum contributes little to the spreading of awareness. Some of the indications are frighteningly similar to those expressed by people suffering from a general sense of malaise or exhaustion. So, unless specific tests are done, there is no conclusive symptom that says that a person has contracted HIV or that an HIV infection has developed into AIDS.

The list of symptoms posted on the NACO website is exhaustive: frequent diarrhoea; prolonged, unexplained fatigue; swollen glands (lymph nodes); fever lasting more than 10 days; chills; excessive sweating, especially night sweats; mouth lesions, including yeast lesions and painful, swollen gums; sore throat; cough; shortness of breath; changes in bowel habits, including constipation; symptoms of a specific opportunistic infection (such as *candida, pneumocystis*, and so on); tumour (*Kaposi sarcoma*); skin rashes or lesions of various types; unintentional weight loss; general discomfort or uneasiness (malaise); headache. Additional symptoms that may be associated with this disease: speech impairment; muscle atrophy; memory loss; decreasing intellectual function; joint swelling; joint stiffness; joint pain; cold intolerance; bone pain or tenderness; unusual or strange behaviour; slow, sluggish, lethargic movement; anxiety, stress, and tension; groin lump; generalised itching (*pruritus*); genital sores; blurred vision; double vision (*diplopia*); light sensitivity; blind spots in vision; decreased vision or blindness; chest pain; flank pain or pain in the sides; back pain; abdominal pain; loss of appetite, indigestion, or other gastrointestinal pain; muscle pain; numbness and tingling; seizures.

To add to this vagueness, a memo advises that "initial infection may produce no symptoms. Some people with HIV infection remain without symptoms for years between the time of exposure and development of AIDS. Many other symptoms may develop in addition to those listed above".



Most people would identify with at least six of these symptoms at any given time. So does the appearance of one or more symptom indicate that a person should be tested for AIDS? Of course not. The point to be understood is that diagnosis of this disease is a very difficult task. It also requires complete cooperation on the part of the patient since clinical tests may not throw up anything for quite a while. A doctor who works with AIDS patients sums this dilemma up by saying, "I think we in the medical profession have to understand one thing, that AIDS is such a medically and socially dreaded thing that people will only accept they are infected when they have no other option but to believe this. They will suffer the worst possible privations but they will always believe that the symptoms are something else. Some groups of people like CSWs and MSM will suspect they have HIV if they see things going wrong but they often do not reveal all the symptoms or tell us their sexual lifestyle because of the social stigmas. As a doctor I probe this but I need cooperation from the patient".

HIV infection is diagnosed on the basis of blood tests using three different ELISA/Rapid simple tests involving different antigen preparations. AIDS cases are diagnosed on the basis of two different ELISA/Rapid tests on different antigens and the presence of AIDS-related opportunistic infections. The western blot test is used for confirmation of diagnosis of indeterminate ELISA tests.

But the question is when a test should be carried out. Should everyone who is homosexual, has paid for sex, sells sex, is an injecting drug user, or falls in another high-risk category, regularly have himself or herself tested? Even regular testing is no guarantee of correct diagnosis. There is a window period of up to seven to 10 years before the virus manifests itself. During this time the infected person shows no indication of harbouring a deadly virus. Ironically, while not visibly affected, he or she is a carrier and can spread the virus.

More confirming indications come at a much later stage with the development of characteristic infections and tumours, called opportunistic infections of AIDS and AIDS-defining manifestations of immune deficiency. Sometimes the presence of one of these disorders is the first sign that AIDS is present. Other sure signs are when the HIV antibody test ELISA (Enzyme Linked Immunoabsorbent Assay) and western blot are positive, absolute CD4 lymphocyte count is less than 200, p24 antigen is abnormal and the T (thymus derived) lymphocyte count is abnormal.

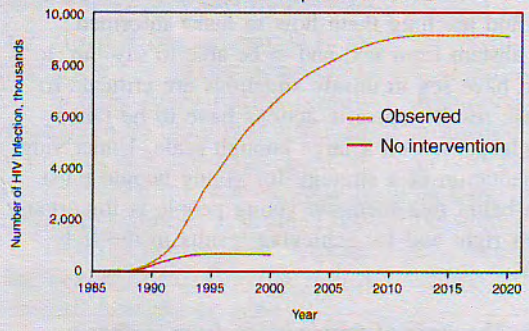
Questions about the accuracy of testing kits still exist, as do the doubts about the virus itself. On the one hand, the medical world protects itself by saying that the virus is constantly mutating and is therefore hard to detect. On the other, there are some situations (as in immigration visas and testing for CSWs) in which the test is made mandatory. If the virus is known to mutate is it not logical to assume that an HIV test can show a false negative result? And is the test capable of differentiating between HIV and malaria or TB or some other immune-destroying virus? Is it likely that a false positive result can be the outcome of testing on a TB patient?

And the final query: should public policy encourage HIV testing when there are doubts about the accuracy of the diagnostic materials? This question is of special relevance, since the test determines whether the individual will continue to be a part of society or instantly become outcast.

Meanwhile, a fundamental debate rages on whether the HIV virus is the sole cause of AIDS. Is enough thought being given to the possibility that AIDS could be related to lifestyle abuse rather than a virus? Merely stating that MSM, recreational drug abuse and stress disorders play a role in HIV promotion is inadequate. Pharma companies are devoting vast funds to develop an AIDS vaccine when no AIDS virus has as yet been isolated. When there are more questions than answers about the exact nature of the disease, would it not make sense for interventions to be more broad-based?

HIV/AIDS trends in Thailand: Lesson for South Asia?

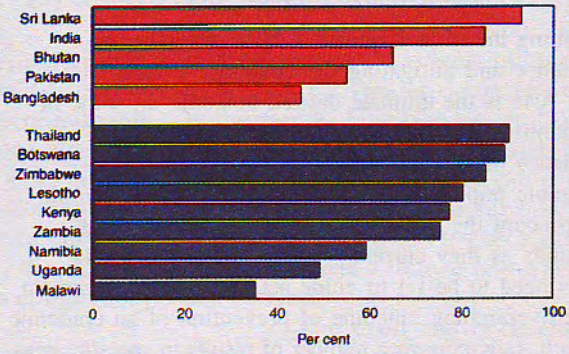
Scenario of the epidemic in Thailand, had there been no intervention through 2020, and observed epidemic curve



Source: Division for AIDS, Ministry of Public Health in Thailand; Thai Working Group on HIV/AIDS Projection (2001). HIV/AIDS Projection for Thailand: 2000-2020, for UNAIDS, Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic, 2002, Geneva (2002) in UNAIDS, Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic, 2002.

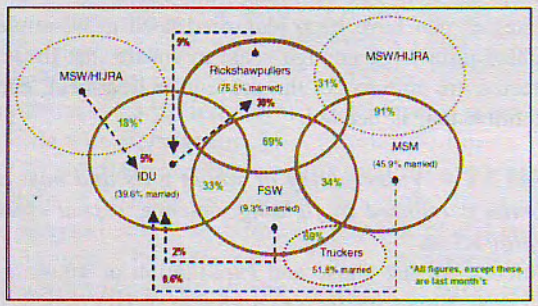
Population with access to health services

Selected Countries: South Asia and Sub-saharan Africa; and Thailand, 1990-95



Source: United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 1998, Oxford University Press, UNDP, 1998.

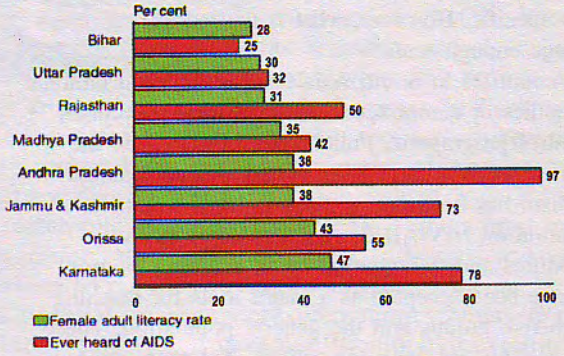
Potential spread of HIV from high risk groups to the general population in central Bangladesh



Note: MSW - male sex worker; MSM - men having sex with men; FSW - female sex worker; IDU - intravenous drug user.

Source: Second Generation Surveillance for HIV in Bangladesh, AIDS and STD Control Programme, Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare & Govt of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

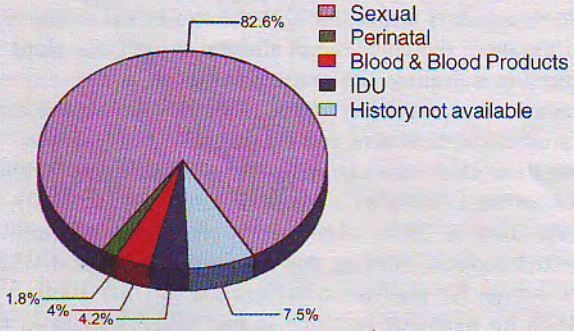
India: Female adult literacy rate and awareness of HIV/AIDS among married women in low literacy states



Source: United Nations Children's Fund, Multiple Indicator Survey (2000), India Summary Report, Department of Women and Child Development & UNICEF, India (2000). India Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National AIDS Control Organisation, National Baseline General Population Behavioral Surveillance Survey (2001).

Probable source of infection of reported AIDS cases in India

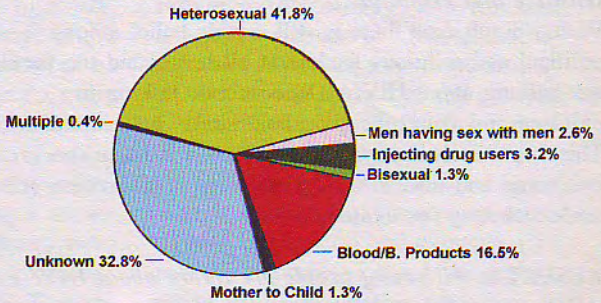
(n=20,304) May 1996-March 2001



Source: NACO, Combating HIV/AIDS in India 2000-2001, http://naco.nic.in/indianscene/country.htm

Pakistan, Mode of HIV/AIDS transmission

(n=1,787)



Source: Pakistan, National AIDS Prevention & Control Programme, July 2001.

UNICEF and UNAIDS on South Asia's crisis:

Accelerating the Momentum in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS in South Asia

Preventing the further spread of HIV, reversing its prevalence and mitigating the epidemic's impact in South Asia is the ultimate desired outcome. In some of the countries in South Asia, the aim is to maintain prevalence of HIV infections below five percent in vulnerable populations. Other smaller countries would like to count the numbers in less than a hundred or thousands as they currently stand. Country specific targets need to be set to guide actions. The achievement of the overarching outcome of prevention of an epidemic in South Asia requires a number of results in specific areas.

The greatest threat to fighting HIV/AIDS in South Asia is a belief that a large scale epidemic cannot or will not happen here. This must be treated as a myth if South Asia is to accelerate its fight against the disease.

The governments of South Asia have realised the possibility of an epidemic and its dire consequences. A number of actions are being taken and there are many small scale successes. The elements of an expanded response have also been outlined. They can be made country specific. However, what is needed are successes on a large enough scale.

All countries in South Asia have established national AIDS bodies or committees as part of their prevention and control programme. Policies are in place and the national objectives have been stated. A coordination mechanism has been put in place in most countries. Information on HIV/AIDS, access to services and commodities and the creation of an enabling environment have been accepted as a major tools for reaching the high-risk groups and the general population. These are all healthy and welcome actions. Yet past actions have not managed to stem the increase in the number of cases and reduce prevalence rates. A lot more needs to be done and done fast. This is what needs to occupy the minds of policy makers and implementers. It is important that the fight is accelerated so that the national, community and individual costs are minimised.

RESULT 1: ***Talking about sex and HIV/AIDS in South Asian society is not taboo – it is culturally appropriate, sensitive and essential.***

Within South Asia there is still a wide belief among political and religious leaders at all levels and the family that talking about HIV/AIDS is taboo. Talking to children and young people about sex is unacceptable. This is precisely the type of response that has to be overcome and instead an environment of awareness and understanding inculcated.

RESULT 2: ***All young people are aware about HIV/AIDS and use preventive measures.***

Experience in South Asia and elsewhere has shown what works among young people. Educating young people about HIV and teaching them how to make informed choices, to abstain from sex, and to he ahle to say 'no' to pressures to have sex in unsafe situations are critical. To achieve these results, specific actions have to he taken with the right groups on a large enough scale. Underlying the implementation of a strategy for young people must be the firm belief that focus on young people is important as both their right and for achieving results in the fight against HIV.

RESULT 3: ***The cycle of transmission from mother-to-child is broken.***

There is international agreement on the approach to preventing mother-to-child transmission. Experience shows that prevention strategies work. Relatively simple and inexpensive antiretroviral treatment has proven effective in reducing the risk of perinatal transmission and mothers with HIV need to be given the means to make informed choices about breastfeeding in order to reduce the transmisson through this route. However, the strategies that have been identified need to be implemented on a large enough scale to ensure that those affected are able to get the preventive treatment, care and attention that is needed.

RESULT 4: ***Vulnerability of young girls and boys and women is reduced by fighting violence, sexual abuse and exploitation.***

Violence, sexual abuse and exploitation of young girls and boys allows for the rapid growth of HIV/AIDS. Girls are particularly disadvantaged. South Asia has been classified as the most gender insensitive region in the world. For example, it has one of the most distorted sex ratios – 940 females to 1000 males. The gender insensitivity and the status of girls and women in society often leads to the difficulty in them being able to say 'no' to their male sexual partners even if they feel that this would be unsafe sex.

RESULT 5: ***There is adequate investment in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care.***

It is true that prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS will cost money. It is also a true that the slower the response and the more the epidemic is allowed to progress along an increasing trajectory, the more it will cost.

Various attempts have been made to estimate the costs of prevention, treatment and care of HIV/AIDS. These costs have also been extrapolated to indirect cost implications for the country as a whole. Estimates for India by the World Bank in 2000, when there were around 3.5 million infected persons, indicate that it would cost around USD 159 million for prevention as opposed to USD 1000 million for treatment resulting in unit costs of USD 45 for prevention and USD 286 for treatment.

Source of the above text and inside images: Accelerating the Momentum in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS in South Asia, UNICEF/UNAIDS, 2003.

Land of the pure (woman)

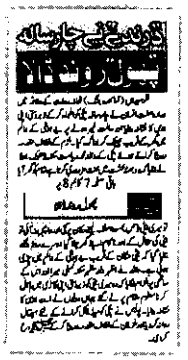
DOES USAGE of the term 'lady reporter' by many Pakistani newspapers unfairly marginalise female journalists in the country? After all, men are not referred to as 'gent reporters' when filing stories, so why is a woman's gender at issue? Likewise, does the portrayal of women in the Pakistani mass media reflect 'liberated' notions of gender or is it mired in oppressive representations of femininity? Or do representations strive for one of these two extremes, leaving little space for fusion of the two?

Large and small questions like these are the subject of *Changing Images*, a report recently released by Uks, an NGO devoted to researching the portrayal of women in the Pakistani media. The report was compiled from surveys, media monitoring and interviews with media practitioners about the state of women in Pakistani print journalism, television, radio and cinema. The data published and opinions voiced in the report reveal a society struggling to reconcile the demands of reactionaries with the aspirations of liberals in an evolving social climate in which women's roles vary from homemaker in *purdah* to the high profile, if still uncommon, corporate woman in a business suit.

The portrayal of women, which had previously represented the blended dictates of state policy and market strategies, regressed during General Zia-ul Haq's 11 years of military rule, which began in 1977. At one time, Zia's government forbade women and men from appearing together on screen in television dramas without a third person present, and popular programmes, with a few exceptions, depicted women as meek and subservient. Female characters in television serials who left the home to work invariably suffered penalties at the hands of society or god, and a strict dress code led to nonsensical scenes, such as women awakening in bed in headscarves.

While the stereotypes created and enforced during Zia's rule have remained dominant, there is today a limited space for more liberated gender portrayals. The ambivalence of Pakistani television content can be seen in the difference between PTV World and PTV 1, the first of which projects a more emancipated view of women for an international audience while the second continues to operate generally along the lines set out by Zia. 50 percent of Pakistanis watch television on a weekly basis, though the figure in rural areas, where 68 percent of the country's population lives, is 43 percent. (Interestingly, with satellite television reaching an estimated five million Pakistanis, Indian serials have to a limited extent repopularised the sari, which Zia had dissuaded many women from wearing.)

Continuing a policy established in the 1980s, the performing of classical dance is discouraged, especially by women. The reason seems to be that this is seen as 'high art', and consequently its performers cannot be easily dismissed as 'tramps' and thus represent a more serious threat to social controls than 'low end' cinema actresses. Zia banned the broadcast of performances by Naheed Siddiqui, an accomplished Kathak dancer, who has made only one subsequent appearance on PTV, in 1996. The appearance of women in cinema, which is often derided as a vulgar medium, reinforces stereotypes through the creation of female characters as either helpless damsels lacking agency or vulgar, immoral adherents of 'Western' modernity. In the words of the Uks report, "The vamp or saint image perpetuated by the Pakistani film industry caters to a world of lurid male fantasy", which has helped to reinforce gender prejudice at a time of rising sexual violence.



Married woman elopes with lover

RAWALPINDI—In Rawalpindi district, in the area of Jatli police station, a married woman eloped with her lover.

She had taken away valued jewellery ,cash and other articles along with her.

Muhtasib Khan lodged first information report (FIR) in Jatli police station that he was married with Zahooran Bibi.

The couple lived happy life. But soon her wife had developed illicit relations with one Ghulam Murtaza.

The complainant husband further stated to the Jatli police that in past few days, Murtaza lover of her spouse had been seen to come their home frequently.

He further said, that during past few days, he felt that her wife was not least interest in him and did not care about home affairs.

Before he talked to her on this subject, she eloped with her paramour Murtaza and took away gold ornaments of 18 tolas , other jewellery and cash worth Rs 24 thousand

Jatli Police has registered the case and looking forward for the eloped lovers.—PPI

The print media reaches an impressive audience in Pakistan, though given the relatively low literacy rate among women, it is a medium whose production and consumption is dominated by men. A 2002 survey counted 30.5 million newspaper readers in the country, and they were getting almost no coverage of what are known as 'women's issues', and certainly very few reports and analyses by women. In Peshawar, for example, women represent a mere two percent of local journalists, and a survey of 26,303 daily newspaper pages uncovered only 65 specifically addressed to women readers. English print media as a whole offers more women-friendly coverage, though of the country's 227 publications, only 55 are in English and their sales figures are tiny in comparison. (158 of the publications are in Urdu, 12 in Sindhi, and two in other languages.)

As the authors of *Changing Images* note, Pakistanis have enjoyed press freedom for less than 15 years in the entire half-century of Pakistan's existence. During that time, however, the country has witnessed a massive increase in "debate, discussion and exposure to various issues" as well as the spread of the printed word through hundreds of new publications. But the subjective coverage of women's affairs in Pakistan, it seems, could use some more debate, discussion and exposure. To receive a copy of the Uks report, write to uks@comstats.net.pk

Delhi's homeless homes

IQBAL AHMED has an interesting mix of jobs. During the day he sells bangles while in the evenings he ploughs a *ricksa* through south Delhi's busy Nizamuddin area. Nighttime is what he hates, especially in winter, because he has to travel far to seek shelter. He mostly goes to the Sarai Kale Khan bus stop. He does not consider staying at the nearby government-run shelter, popularly known as Rain Basera. "It is dirty, full of smack addicts and thieves", is the view of 40-year-old Ahmed, who came to Delhi 20 years ago from the town of Bulandshahar in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Talking to several guests at the night shelter, however, it seems that Ahmed may have been misinformed, and to his own disadvantage. Shiv Avatar, 35, also a UP migrant and *beldari* (daily wage earner) at a busy commercial complex in south Delhi, is here for his night's rest by 9:30 pm. "I have been coming here for the last 15 days and find this place extremely nice", he avers. "I earn INR 60 a day, out of which INR 20 goes for food, and I pay INR 6 here for a good night's sleep away from the threat of thieves, police and speeding vehicles".

In another row in the shelter, which has a capacity of 140, Bruno Rozario and Mohammed Nazeeb chat while preparing for sleep. Speaking in flawless English, Rozario, who is a captain in a south Delhi hotel, says, "In times of difficulty, I often come here and spend my nights without any hassle". He finds the place "neat and decently comfortable". Lying next to Rozario, Nazeeb agrees, saying, "Even though this is a temporary arrangement for me, I find it a great support for many poor people, especially during winters". For another resident, Sanjay, the Rain Basera "has been as good as home for the last so many years".

This picture of a night shelter, which runs counter to many widely held perceptions including those of Iqbal Ahmed, might sound distorted or exaggerated. But this reporter finds no trace of lice, smoke or drugs; the blankets provided are relatively clean; and the nine toilets and two showers too are fairly clean.

"People visiting here, most of whom are daily wage earners who have migrated from Bihar, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan, are warned beforehand about cleanliness in the premises. We take good care of everyone who sleeps here", says Ranjit Mukherjee, in charge of security at the shelter. But he is concerned about the low turnout, despite the shelter's prime location between the Dayanand Muktidham electric crematorium and Nizamuddin Park. "On average only about 40 people turn up here, out of which 20 might be regulars", Mukherjee says. He feels there are mindset and awareness problems which the shelter must address.

While such shelters such as Rain Bashera and their basic facilities are lying unused, Delhi's pavements are overcrowded. Amod Kanth, a project advisor with the organisation Delhi for Change, suggests that one reason for lack of use may be

USHA TITIKSHU

"Gurkhas for peace!"

WAR, IT would seem, is one thing that can bring South Asians together, as long as they are all opposed to it. The last few months have witnessed massive, multi-lakh demonstrations in many Western cities, and smaller, though no less dispersed, protests throughout South Asia against the prospective US-led attack on Iraq. On 15 February, a day of global protest, between six and 10 million people demonstrated in over 60 countries, including 10,000 in Calcutta and 3000 in Islamabad. While there is support for Washington's campaign in some quarters, South Asians have generally been cool to Bush Jr's war preparations. On 19 February, 1500 protesters assembled in Chittagong, and hundreds of Bangalore children expressed their opinion by staging an anti-war *dharna* in front of the city's Mohandas Gandhi statue on 24 February.

But owing to the Subcontinent's tremendous diversity – both cultural and ideological – protests have taken varied forms. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the blended culture of Kathmandu,

where in the span of nine days anti-Iraq-war events were held by a n ex-Gurkha soldiers association, leftist political parties and the city's Western expatriate community. The differences among these demonstrations reveal an array of perspectives and motives perhaps indicative of larger trends in South Asia.

Held on 15 February in concert with the global protests, the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation led a 2000-man procession through the city. As reported in *The Kathmandu Post* the following day, the ex-Gurkha protesters highlighted the fact that 60,000 Nepali soldiers have either been killed or taken captive while serving in the British army, and voiced resentment at the graded pay scale of Britain's military in which Nepalis receive lower pay than British citizens. The Gurkha demonstrators also expressed humanitarian concerns, and one protester carried a rather ironic sign reading "Gurkhas for peace not war". About 3000 Nepalis currently serve in the British armed forces, and there are an estimated 30,000 retired Gurkha soldiers. There are another 35,000 serving in the Indian army, and about 150,000 Indian Gurkha ex-servicemen.

Three days after the ex-Gurkha rally, several of Nepal's small, radical but non-Maoist communist parties led a procession estimated to number 300 to the US embassy. As might be expected, this rally had more explicit political overtones, with marchers holding signs denouncing US military aggression and expressing support for the UN process. Organisers led chants charging the US with imperialism and an oil-driven agenda, and dozens of marches hoisted hammer and sickle flags. Somewhat inappropriately, there was one placard supporting North Korea's 'right' to possess nuclear weapons.

Finally, on 23 February, members of Kathmandu's sizeable Western expatriate community lit 55,000 butter lamps on the famous Buddhist shrine of Boudhanath, underneath the 'all-seeing eyes' of the Buddha. The event's organisers explicitly steered clear of ideological comment, and the episode was free of the speeches and denunciations that characterised the Gurkha and communist rallies. There was no culminating moment, simply silent perambulations.

Beyond the tailored messages of the events, characteristics of each reveal aspects of the involved constituency. Either explicitly or implicitly, all appealed at some level to the humanitarian impulse, but the Gurkha rally involved at least a minimal degree of self-interest and moral authority – Gurkhas in the British army have already been sent to the Arabian desert, and the communist parties' rally contextualised the prospective military action in a worldview predisposed to view the exercise of American power in inimical terms. The Boudhanath lamp-lighting was remarkable for bringing together foreigners, many of whom are citizens of states likely to participate in an attack on Iraq if it occurs, though the lack of vocalised criticism shows a timidity that itself is incongruous. △

that "the atmosphere in such shelters is depressing and the element of companionship that many homeless are looking for is missing". The solution, he thinks, lies in "creating shelters which cater to other needs like recreation and companionship of the homeless and should not only be meant for the nights". Kanth, in collaboration with NGOs like Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA – the 'right to shelter campaign') and the Delhi government, is devising a "multi-pronged strategy to tackle the problem of homelessness".

Between 1995 and 2001, eight night shelters were closed, dropping the number to 12 with a combined capacity of 2400, as against an earlier capacity of 5044. During this same period, the number of homeless climbed to 140,000. While 'security considerations', 'beautification' and 'sub-optimum utilisation' were common reasons cited for the closure of the shelters, the fact that the capital city was seeing a dramatic rise in pavement-dwellers was being ignored.

But clearly, as the Nizamuddin shelter's experience shows, it does not do to simply build shelters, or even run them well. The word should get out that the city – not only Delhi – cares for those who provide services but have no home. △

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Uprooted in the Northeast

The imbalance of rights, ethnic claims and histories of dispossession

by ***Sanjib Baruah***

In Meghalaya in 1997, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, which has constitutional jurisdiction over Khasi 'customary law', passed the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill. The Khasis have a matrilineal kinship system and the bill sought to codify the system of inheritance through the female line. But it became highly controversial. A number of organisations, including the influential Khasi Students Union and the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai (literally, 'association of new hearths') opposed the measure arguing that instead of codifying an 'outdated system' of matrilineal succession, Khasis should 'modernise' their kinship system. They proposed a change that would allow only children of two Khasi parents to be regarded as Khasi.

Why did legally establishing who is and who is not a Khasi become so important? Because the Khasis are designated a scheduled tribe (ST) and the lion's share of public employment, business and trade licenses, and even the right to seek elected office is reserved for STs. Nearly 85 percent of public sector employment in Meghalaya, where a majority of them lives, and 55 of the 60 seats in the state legislative assembly are reserved for STs. While the historical disadvantages that the tribal peoples suffered account for this elaborate protective discrimination regime, the status of non-tribals in the northeast Indian state of Meghalaya, as well as in the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland, where such a protective discrimination regime exists, is best described as that of 'denizens'. In all these states, the rights to land ownership and exchange, business and trade licenses, and access to elected office are restricted.

The term 'denizen' goes back to the power of 'denization' that British monarchs once had to grant aliens some of the privileges of natural born subjects. At a later stage, the parliament sought to control the royal power of denization by passing laws that disallowed denizens from being members of the Privy Council and the houses of parliament, from occupying civil or military offices of trust, or from obtaining grants of land from the crown. While the restrictions on the rights of the non-tribal population have a very different history and rationale, the particular limits, eg on rights of property ownership, access to public employment and elected office are not dissimilar to those applicable to denizens.

The category 'tribal' and its definition would be considered problematic in many academic circles. In India, however, it remains part of the policy discourse because the protective regime necessitates the official recognition of certain groups as 'tribal'. Article 342 of the Indian constitution provides for the president of India by public notification, to specify the "tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes". The use of 'tribal' here simply means a group included in that list – hence scheduled tribe or ST. According to one scholar who has examined how the Indian government has arrived at the list, tribes were "defined partly by habitat and geographic isolation, but even more on the basis of social, religious, linguistic and cultural distinctiveness – their 'tribal characteristics'. Just where the line between 'tribals' and 'non-tribals' should be drawn has not always been free from doubt" (Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984).

This protective discrimination regime is the result of an incremental policy-making dating back to colonial times when policy instruments were devised to protect vulnerable aboriginal peoples living in isolated enclaves – once described as 'backward tracks'. Under the Sixth Schedule of postcolonial India's constitution, many of these enclaves became autonomous districts, and autonomous regions within those districts, each identified with a particular tribe. Subsequently, many of these territories became full-fledged states, whereby the protected minorities turned into majority groups in these states, and the system lost some of its original logic.

In three of these states – Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland – the continuation of the colonial institution of the 'inner line', which requires any outsider entering these territories to first secure a permit, creates an even stronger layer of protection against potential settlers. In spite of this, thanks to the changes in demographic trends inherent in economic development policies, such as the forging of national markets for large numbers of unorganised migrant labour crisscrossing the country, where again Indian citizens have become 'subjects without rights', the majority status of these protected groups is under increasing stress.

One of the unintended effects of the tensions between this process of incremental policy-making on the one hand, and migration into the area on the other, is that the notion of exclusive homelands, where certain ethnically defined groups are privileged, developed into an inflexible principle. This dynamic has translated into (often violent) exclusionary politics. Thus, the Northeast today is a hotbed of ethnic clashes between competing groups for exclusive rights to the same assets and, consequently, the site of significant levels of internal displacement.

Condemned to move

In recent years, internal displacements caused by violent ethno-national conflicts between tribals and denizens in many parts of northeast India have attracted the attention of refugee advocates. While most agree that there is substantial internal displacement in the region, calculating the precise number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has not been easy. Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Mahendra Lama describes the nature of the problem in India as a whole. Political sensitivities prevent the government from releasing data on displacement, he says. But without "a central authority responsible for coordinating data from central and state governments, regular monitoring is not possible in such a huge country". The "nature, frequency and extent of the causes of internal displacement" in India are so varied that it would be a "Herculean task to monitor and record them".

The Norwegian Refugee Council's profile of internal displacement in India in 2000-01 is illustrative of the wide divergence that exists between various available estimates of IDPs in northeast India while also pointing to the absence of data in some cases. The available estimates of the number of IDPs in the state of Assam in 2000-01, for instance, varied between 87,000 persons to more than 200,000. The estimates for Riangs displaced from Mizoram and living in refugee camps in Tripura varied between 31,000 and 41,000. The profile cites one estimate that at least 80,000 Bengalis have been uprooted in Tripura since 1993. In Manipur, conflicts between tribal groups have led to the displacement (at least temporarily) of as many as 13,000 Kukis, Paites and Nagas since 1992, but there were no estimates of the number of IDPs in Manipur. In Arunachal Pradesh, as many as 3000 Chakmas had become internally displaced, but the number of those who have left the area was unknown. The US Committee for Refugees in its report for 2000 estimated that there were 157,000 displaced persons in northeast India.

These estimates, even if not precise, underscore the magnitude of the IDP crisis in northeast India. It is important to delve into the historical conditions and the institutional context in which the typical ethno-political conflicts of the region take place and examine why these conflicts have proven to be conducive to ethnic violence and displacement.

In the 20th century, tribal societies in the Northeast went through a process of transition, from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to its commodification, and urbanisation and cultural change associated with a continuing process of 'modernisation'. The new economic niches created in this process of social transformation attracted large-scale migration to this sparsely populated frontier area of the Subcontinent. Today, except for Assam and Tripura, all the other states show growth rates that are above the national average during the 1991-2001 decade. However, in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland as well as in Assam's two autonomous districts (Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills), STs as a proportion of the total population are on the decline. At the moment though, except for Karbi Anglong district, the majority status of STs is not immediately under threat. This trend of population growth is, of course, the rationale for freezing the present balance of ST representation in the state assemblies. The protective discrimination regime, outlined earlier, arose partly as a response to these demographic trends.

Too often, the demographic change in the region has been seen only from the perspective of what scholars of migration call 'push factors'. But it is important to bring in the 'pull factors' as well – the economic transformation and process of class differentiation in these states that have provided significant economic opportunities to new immigrants – some of which may be hidden from the gaze of law. In one area of Karbi Anglong, for example, while ownership rights are in the name of tribals, 'Bihari', Bengali and Nepali denizens, more adept at the state-encouraged settled cultivation than the STs who are traditionally shifting cultivators, are the real owners. Indian security forces, ostensibly there to deal with the security threat posed by insurgencies, are appropriated by the denizens because of shared ethnic ties, and often assist in this process the agency for this.

There are informal ways in which denizens acquire *de facto* property rights that are likely to become *de jure* rights in future. In Meghalaya, for instance, some powerful individuals having captured what is formally clan-controlled land now exercise substantial control over both urban and agricultural land, sometimes up to 1000 acres – something that would never have been allowed by custom. Chiefs and headmen have been issuing land deeds to non-Khasis and Khasis alike for a fixed rent. The breakdown of customary modes of land control has meant the introduction of absentee landlordism, realisation of rent from land, sharecropping, land mortgage and even landlessness. Such land grab has also been made possible by official development policies that have encouraged plantation crops such as tea, coffee and rubber.

Since the protective discrimination regime in place restricts what denizens can legally do, numerous infor-

mal arrangements have emerged in the ownership and control of agricultural land and in business practices. And as exemplified above, those informal niches are sometimes positions of advantage vis-à-vis a person belonging to an ST and at other times the ST person may not be at a position of advantage. The normalisation of the idea of exclusive homelands for ethnically defined groups generates a kind of politics that is in dissonance with the existing political economy of the region. The emerging pattern of class differentiation taking place within the framework of the protective discrimination regime of these transitional economies is complex, with some settlers exploiting indigenous tribal people and others occupying the most marginal of economic niches. And, while the regime has enabled some tribal people to do well, it has not stopped the proletarianisation of others.

The other side of the privatisation of clan-held lands is the emergence of a poorer group of people eking out a living by working as agricultural workers or sharecroppers or by whatever other means possible. To be sure, most of them are local tribals, who despite the protection given to them as members of STs, lack the social and political resources to benefit from the privatisation of clan-lands or to be able to hold on to lands allocated to them. But occupying these economic niches, are also a large number of denizens – Nepalis, Biharis and Bangladeshis among them – who are easier to 'uproot' should a dispute arise.

This is the context in which the idea of exclusive homelands – expressed in the institutional language of "autonomous district councils" or "separate statehood" – has shaped the imagination of tribal as well as non-tribal activists of the region. This particular configuration of institutional legacy, demographic trends, and political discourse in northeast India has wrought an extremely divisive politics of insiders and outsiders that has led to the incidence of displacement. While this combination of circumstances is unique to this part of India, the introduction of similar ideas of exclusive homelands in demographically mixed situations has produced similar conflicts – with the attendant risk of ethnic violence and internal displacement – in other parts of India as well.

A notable example is the new state of Jharkhand where, in 2002, a government proposal to link public employment to "ancestral roots" through a domicile policy led to a *bandh* (strike) and violence in which many died. Whether a particular regime of differentiated citizenship can achieve its intended goals must be a matter for investigation for the costs of sacrificing the basic principle of equal citizenship are high, and regimes of differentiated citizenship have intended as well as, importantly, unintended consequences.

Excluded areas to exclusive homelands

Attempts to deal with 'aborigines' by creating protected enclaves where they can be allowed to pursue their 'customary practices' including kinship and clan-based rules of land allocation go back to the earliest period of British colonial rule in India. It is worth remembering, however, that the idea of protection came only after enormous violence was visited on some of the same people by the early colonisers in the course of pacification campaigns against 'savage tribes' and, after it became clear that the initial onslaught of colonial transformation had led to the massive dispossession and displacement of many of these peoples who were organised in pre-capitalist social formations. For many, whatever protection came along, was too little and too late.

As early as 1874, the Indian legislature had passed a scheduled districts act. The Government of India Act of 1919 empowered the governor general to declare any territory to be a backward track where laws passed by the Indian legislature would not apply. The Statutory Commission, which in 1930 had examined the political conditions in British India and proposed constitutional reforms, did not like the term 'backward tracks'. It proposed a change of name from 'backward tracks' to 'excluded areas'. The Government of India Act of 1935 therefore provided for "excluded" and "partially excluded areas" – so called because they were excluded from the operation of laws applicable in the rest of British-controlled India.

Some of the potential problems, especially the dangers to non-aboriginal people living in those areas, were anticipated by the debates about these measures even in colonial times. One of the best-known critiques of colonial-era tribal policies is GS Ghurye's 1943 book, *The Aborigines – So Called – and their Future* (Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, India, Publication No 11). "The acknowledgement of the right of the so-called aborigines to follow their traditional pursuits, like the practice of shifting cultivation, without any reference to the needs of the general community", wrote Ghurye in reference to the recommendations of the Statutory Commission, "was the most dangerous doctrine endorsed by the Commissioners". The commissioners, he charged, had not considered the impact on non-aborigines living in those places and "much less did they give their thought to the proportions of such people in the various areas, unless we discover it in the distinction of the two categories of excluded areas made by them".

If the distinction between excluded and partially excluded areas was indeed based on the proportions of non-aborigines living in those areas, he wrote in a later work, it was too broad a distinction to be useful. About the Government of India Act of 1935, Ghurye wrote that in its "eagerness to do something for the tribals", the British parliament barely considered the condition of the non-tribal people in whose midst the protected aborigines live and on whom they depend to some extent for their livelihood. That these non-tribals too have rights, that their goodwill and cooperation, next only

to the conscious and deliberate internal organisation of the tribals themselves, are the most essential factors for the welfare and future development of the so-called aborigines, failed to receive adequate consideration.

That some non-tribals may have indeed taken "unfair advantage of the simplicity and ignorance of the aborigines", Ghurye argued, was no reason to write off their contribution to "socio-economic development", and much less to treat all of them as a "right-less population".

Nevertheless, the Indian constitution of 1950, retained most of the provisions of the 1935 act, though the nomenclatures and some of the institutional forms were modified. Not surprisingly, Ghurye could reprint the same book with only a few changes and a new title in 1963. Most importantly, from our perspective, the constitution made a distinction between the tribal areas of Assam (five of the seven states of today's northeast) and those in the rest of the country. While the tribal peoples of the rest of India came under the Fifth Schedule, the Sixth Schedule provided for the administration of the tribal areas of northeast India.

The chairman of the subcommittee of the constituent assembly that drafted the Sixth Schedule, later Assam's chief minister, Gopinath Bordoloi, in presenting its proposals justified them by referring to the uncertain political conditions in the region at the time of independence. Bordoloi stressed the need for continued protection because of the doubts among the tribal people of what a postcolonial dispensation would bring; he spoke of the need to 'integrate' these peoples in a Gandhian way. The fear of being swamped by outsiders once the colonial era restrictions were suddenly removed was indeed a concern expressed by leaders of the tribal communities. That the Naga revolt broke out soon after independence – and continues till this day – indicates that the anxiety expressed by Bordoloi was far from theoretical.

Scheduled differences

The Sixth Schedule distinguished two sets of tribal areas of undivided Assam, which at the time was the entire Northeast barring Sikkim, using the administrative categories that were then in effect: a) the districts of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills (excluding Shillong), Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills, and b) the North East Frontier Tracts and the Naga Tribal Area. The first set of areas today comprise the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and parts of Assam, and the second category consists mostly of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and a part of the state of Nagaland. The Sixth Schedule institutions were meant for sets of areas, but the latter set of territories – which were mostly un-administered during colonial times – was considered to be not quite ready at that time for self-governing institutions. The administration of those areas was going to be carried out directly from Delhi – with the governor of Assam acting as the agent of the Indian president.

The Sixth Schedule provided for autonomous districts and autonomous regions within those districts with elected councils which enjoyed powers to levy some taxes, to constitute courts for the administration of justice involving tribals and law-making powers on subjects including land allotment, occupation or use of land, regulation of shifting cultivation, formation and administration of village and town committees, appointment of chiefs, inheritance of property, marriage and social customs.

However, the schedule was not intended to protect all the STs of northeast India. Only those that were considered to be relatively concentrated in the old excluded and partially excluded areas, and for which the constitution used the term tribal areas, came under the purview of the Sixth Schedule. The Bordoloi subcommittee did not consider the situation of other STs. Among them were groups such as Bodos, Misings and Tiwas that are described today as plains tribes to distinguish them from the hill tribes that came under the Sixth Schedule. In the Constituent Assembly, the special needs of the plains tribes were the responsibility of a separate subcommittee, which was in charge of minority rights. A Bodo politician, Rupnath Brahma, was a member of the minority rights subcommittee.

The process of formation of Autonomous District Councils, however, did not quite proceed the way constitution-makers had anticipated. The outbreak of the independentist Naga rebellion, for instance, meant that political conditions for holding elections to the Naga Hills District Council did not exist. Instead, in 1963, the state of Nagaland was created. The North East Frontier Tracts where the Sixth Schedule was eventually supposed to be in place also went through a different process of institutional change than the one anticipated prior to the Indo-China war of 1962. The area is now the state of Arunachal Pradesh, where tribals enjoy protection at the state level. Meanwhile, the Sixth Schedule has been extended to Tripura in response to tribal militancy, where the Tripura Tribal Areas District Council was formed.

It is not accidental that Nagaland was created in 1963, a year after India's war with China. The Chinese invasion exposed India's vulnerabilities in the region. Already, the Naga independentist rebellion had begun to make officials of the postcolonial Indian state anxious. There were stirrings of unrest in other parts of the region as well. Beginning with the China war, the managers of the Indian state began to see the external and internal 'enemies' in this frontier region coming together and constituting a looming threat to national security. Extending the institutions of the state all the way into the international border – nationalising this frontier space – has been the thrust of Indian policy ever since. Over the next few years, the governmental structure of the region was fundamentally redesigned to create what I have called a cosmetically federal regional order. Thus,

with the creation of Nagaland, statehood in northeast India became de-linked from questions of fiscal viability and of its implications for the constitutional architecture of the larger polity. Building on the elementary apparatus of state institutions created by the Sixth Schedule became a good way to ensure both the penetration of the state and the creation of local stakeholders in the pan-Indian dispensation.

Apart from consolidating the idea of exclusive homelands, organising the region into a number of mini states, all of them with the formal institutions of other Indian state governments, also had the effect of imposing a particular developmental paradigm. There is, after all, a standard vision of development which is contained in the routine practices of the bureaucracy of a 'developmentalist state' that allocates funds to departments such as public works, rural development and industries; and that vision only gets bolstered by the patronage politics of an electoral democracy. In the sparsely populated parts of this frontier region, these economic trends have invariably meant more immigration.

The most significant aspect of this new regional order, from the perspective of the theory and practice of citizenship, however, is that the vast majority of seats in the state legislatures of the mini states – indeed all but one seat in the case of three legislatures – are reserved for candidates belonging to the STs. The table below gives the number of reserved seats in the state legislatures of northeastern states and also gives the percentage of the ST population.

In the legislative assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland all but one seat is reserved for STs. In Meghalaya, 55 of the 60 seats are reserved. Apart from the issue of the denizens not being able to contest elections, the principle of one-person, one-vote, one-value has had to be undermined in other ways as well in order to achieve such a weighted system of representation. Generally, the norm about ensuring the equality of the relative weight of each vote in a democracy requires that in electoral systems with single-member constituencies, the electorates in all districts be roughly of the same size. That could not be done if the legislative assemblies were to have such a weighted system of representation. As a result, Nagaland's largest urban centre, Dimapur, for instance – which has a very high concentration of denizens – is divided into two constituencies and one of them is the sole unreserved (non-tribal) seat in the Nagaland assembly. This unreserved constituency has many times the number of voters of each of the other constituencies in the state.

Through another constitutional amendment the balance between reserved and unreserved seats in the assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland has been frozen in order to ensure that delimitation of constituencies in light of demographic changes in future does not change the current balance.

Whatever the philosophical dilemmas these arrangements present to the theorist of citizenship, the emergence of elected state governments under the control of tribal politicians and of a visible well-to-do tribal elite in those states has captured the imagination of tribal as well as non-tribal ethnic activists in the region. There is a perception that the STs in the states with the most comprehensive protective discrimination regimes have done well economically and have been relatively successful in insulating themselves from being swamped by immigrants. While a homeland has become something to aspire for on the part of those ethnic groups (STs as well as others) who do not have one, ethnic activists of the existing homelands have become zealous defenders of what they see as their statutory entitlements. This was exemplified in the case of Khasi activists in Meghalaya.

Returning to the controversy in Meghalaya over Khasi succession rules, the authority of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council to decide on Khasi succession rules is derived from the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. According to its sponsors, the goal of the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill was to stop non-Khasis from adopting Khasi surnames to take advantage of opportunities reserved for STs. The activists opposed to the bill would hardly disagree with that goal. However, the attempt to codify 'customary practice' drew public attention to the liberal way in which the Khasis have traditionally incorporated outsiders into their fold. The practice by which children of a Khasi mother and a non-Khasi father can become a Khasi came up for special scrutiny.

The opponents of the bill argued that the system allows too many people to pass off as Khasi and take advantage of opportunities reserved for Khasis. Thus, the president of the Syngkhong, Keith Pariat,

Northeast Indian states: Reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes in state legislative assemblies

States	ST as % of Population*	Leg. Assembly Total Members	Leg. Assembly Seats for STs	Leg. Assembly Unreserved seats
Arunachal	63.7	60	59	1
Assam	12.8	126	16	102 **
Manipur	34.4	60	20	40
Meghalaya	86.6	60	55	5
Mizoram	94.8	40	39	1
Nagaland	87.7	60	59	1
Tripura	31.0	60	20	33***

*BASED ON 1991 CENSUS DATA ** 8 RESERVED FOR SCHEDULED CASTES *** 7 RESERVED FOR SCHEDULED CASTES

was quoted in the press as saying that the matrilineal system no longer serves contemporary needs and that, if it was allowed to continue, the 'pure Khasi tribe' will become extinct in another 10 to 15 years. The bill, however, did not become law because it did not receive the governor's assent – a constitutional requirement aimed at moderating the powers of state legislatures.

By raising questions about the way 'outsiders' have historically been incorporated into the Khasi fold, the controversy had the effect of putting under the cloud the rights – including rights to property ownership, public employment and to seek elected office – of significant numbers of people living in Meghalaya, some for generations. And since the proposed reforms would have denied those rights to people who had some claim to being a Khasi, the climate generated by the controversy could only have been worse for most denizens – such as residents of Meghalaya who have no claim to being Khasi or a member of one of the other STs.

Ethnic homelands: An anachronism

While the Northeast becomes increasingly polarised over the insider/outsider groups of high-stakes politics of the region, people from the Northeast may in fact be quietly be joining the Indian mainstream. Modern India, according to the jurist Professor Upendra Baxi, has achieved "national integration without achieving national integrity". But, perhaps the postcolonial social transformation of northeast India, taking place under the protective cover of the Sixth Schedule, is slowly making the region a part of this grid of 'unconstitutional national integration' in somewhat unexpected ways.

The Bangladeshi and Nepali presence in the region points to a significant transnational dimension of this as well. At least a part of the demographic change in northeast India has to be explained by this migrating proletariat meeting the labour demands of the building boom in the region – made possibly partly by the state resources being pumped in and the substantial leakage of funds through corruption – and the class relations in the emerging forms of post-shifting cultivation agriculture. Their presence in these economic roles is certainly very visible to any visitor to northeast India today.

Slowly but steadily, the dispossessed tribal of northeast India is also sure to join this mass of humanity on the move. Thus, if the Bihari denizen in Karbi Anglong takes advantage of the misery of the poor Karbi to take effective control of his land, a tribal landlord in the Naga foothills, often empowered and enriched by positions in or connections to the state government of Nagaland, may be in a position of power and dominance vis-a-vis the Bengali denizen sharecropper informally leasing his land. Questions of social justice in northeast India are significantly more complex today than what the regime of protection was originally designed to accomplish.

How anachronistic the homeland idea has become in the context of the existing political economy of northeast India today is apparent in the demand for a homeland for the Bodos on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Bodo speakers today number only 1.1 million or 11.5 percent in the area they want for their homeland. They have come in conflict with the Koch Rajbongshis, who if they 'win' ST status will become by far the predominant tribal group in the recently approved Bodo Territorial Council area. They have also come in conflict with the All Assam Students Union, which spearheaded the Assam movement of the 1970s-80s against 'aliens', and is now in discussion with the state and central government about ways to protect Assam's 'indigenous people'. Since the term 'indigenous people' in international human rights discourse is roughly synonymous with what in India are called scheduled tribes, the extension of the word 'indigenous' to include a non-tribal people – especially one that is itself at loggerheads with some of Assam's STs – has aroused deep suspicion.

More than any other case, the displacement of Santhals in Kokrajhar district in the late 1990s – victims of violence by Bodo militants – dramatised this incongruity. The Santhals in Assam are descendants of tea workers brought to Assam as indentured workers, many of them more than a century ago. Their displaced forefathers provided the muscle for the tea industry that marked the arrival of global capitalism in Assam in the 19th century. That such a group could be displaced for the second time in the course of an 'indigenous' group's search for an ethnic homeland – no matter how tragic the story of injustice done to them – brings home the absurdity of the way insiders and outsiders are framed in the homeland discourse of northeast India. The discourse today has become a serious challenge to the foundational principles of citizenship. It cannot be expected to provide a framework for the struggles for social justice of today and of the future.

Dual citizenship

Minimally, what is needed is a framework that does not involve the state forever categorising groups of people in ethnic terms and making descendants of immigrants into perpetual outsiders. While mechanisms to control immigration are no doubt necessary, so are rules about absorbing the descendants of immigrants – no matter how restrictive. And at least a generation or two later, they have to become full citizens. This writer suggest that the notion of dual citizenship, not unknown in federal systems – citizenship both of India and of a state – might be able to provide such a framework. Such a regime of dual citizenship would be a variation in the theme of the differentiated citizenship regime that exists in northeast India. But its purpose would be to replace the ethnic principle with a civic principle and to give the right to define the rules of inclusion and exclusion to territorially defined political communities.

A quick review of the language in which the citizenship laws of countries are framed illustrates how the logic of the citizenship discourse necessarily differs from that of the discourse of homelands for ethnically defined groups. In principle, most countries recognise three ways of becoming a citizen: birth within the territory of a country (*jus soli*), descent from a citizen (*jus sanguinis*) and naturalisation. If jus sanguinis incorporates the principle of citizenship gained through blood ties to citizens, the other two principles can incorporate the ethnically or culturally different outsider. In contrast to that, the homeland discourse tends to define political communities in static and exclusively ethnic terms. Of course, in reality, countries vary enormously on how much of the jus soli principle is applied to the claims to citizenship of children of immigrants born in the country and on the degree of difficulties that are involved in obtaining citizenship through naturalisation. Indeed, in countries like Israel and Japan, jus sanguinis remains the predominant way of acquiring citizenship. Yet the openings for new members that exist in principle makes the discourse of citizenship different from the exclusionary logic of the discourse of exclusive homelands.

Certain recent developments in the citizenship policies in Europe help illustrate this point. Despite the political rhetoric against foreigners in Europe today, the trend in most European countries has been to extend the right of citizenship to second-generation immigrants. The labour demands during the latter half of the 20th century induced a major part of Europe's recent immigration. Originally, the migration was thought of as temporary, as illustrated by the notion of guest worker. However, as many temporary migrants became permanent settlers, countries have had to respond creatively to the reality of a growing number of foreign non-citizen residents living in their midst. Whatever their degree of economic and social integration, lack of citizenship had tended to separate immigrant groups from the broader community in significant ways and implicitly justified xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric. Thus, it was hard not to see a direct connection between Germany's inability to recognise Turks, Yugoslavs and other former guest workers as potential German citizens and the attacks on Turks as 'foreigners'. Germany, of course, has since 2000 changed the laws of citizenship recognising the right of second-generation immigrants to citizenship.

Indeed except for Austria, Greece and Luxemburg, the other 12 European Union countries now give second-generation immigrants the right to citizenship. Of course, there are conditions attached including, in some cases, double jus soli – besides the applicant, a parent too has to be born in the country. The point is not however to debate the laws, but to draw attention through example to the fact that, unlike the homeland discourse, it is hard within the discourse of citizenship not to recognise the right to citizenship of second-generation immigrants. In that sense the citizenship discourse is qualitatively different from the homeland discourse of northeast India that makes denizens and perpetual foreigners out of ethnically defined outsiders and their descendants.

The obvious advantages of the framework of dual citizenship are that it can define political communities in civic terms, introduce a dynamic element of incorporating new members and thereby make a decisive break from the notion of ethnic homelands that is part of the legacy of colonial subject-hood. Dual citizenship would imply that elected state governments and legislatures could make rules by which an internal immigrant becomes a citizen of the state and a member of the political community embodied in that state.

Furthermore, under a strong dual citizenship regime, even national citizenship could become a concurrent subject requiring for instance, that international treaties affecting the flow of people from outside the country into India – for instance the treaties affecting the rights of ethnic Nepalis or Bangladeshis in India – would need the concurrence of state governments. Making such treaty a part of state level political debates could give such treaties the popular legitimacy that they appear to lack in northeast India. Giving state legislatures a formal say in controlling the flow of people into the region – restrictions that exist today, but primarily through non-transparent colonial-era bureaucratic practices like the inner line or as an indirect effect of the protections given to STs – will give legitimacy to the internal immigration into the region that is only likely to increase in coming years.

> The framework of dual citizenship can define political communities in civic terms, incorporate new members and make a decisive break from the notion of ethnic homelands

Indian public opinion, however, is unlikely to be friendly to the idea of dual citizenship, which is been announced recently as a sop for the West-based non-resident Indian. Indeed, in the 1999 debate that followed the autonomy resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir assembly, commentators specifically pointed at the dangers of the dual citizenship idea. Columnist Arvind Lavakare, for instance, recently argued that if a state had such power, it would "discriminate in favour of its citizens in matters such as the right to hold public office, to vote, to obtain employment or to secure licenses for practicing law or medicine". He gave the example of Jammu and Kashmir, where the right to acquire immovable property is restricted to the state's permanent residents to illustrate how "politically explosive" the idea of dual citizenship can be. "With that solitary exception [sic]", he noted with satisfaction, an excep-

tion that could be removed by abrogating Article 370 of the constitution, "the Indian federation has largely achieved, and seeks to maintain, uniformity in basic civil and criminal laws". Like many Indian commentators, Lavakare is oblivious of the Northeast and of Article 371 (which immediately follows the much-reviled article on Jammu and Kashmir), that gives some of the northeastern states their special forms of autonomy.

The choice in the Northeast today is not between a new set of restrictions that dual citizenship would introduce for the first time and a uniform national citizenship where all Indian citizens have unrestricted rights to movement, residency and property ownership. What exists on the ground is a set of rules that distinguishes between citizens and denizens, rules that have fuelled an increasingly exclusionary politics of homelands and have been prone to generating ethnic violence and recurrent episodes of displacement. Dual citizenship in such a situation would be able to introduce for the first time a regime of civic citizenship that will be in line with the actually existing political economy of the region.

Such a citizenship regime will also be consistent with the traditional liberal incorporative ethos of the region. In the controversy over the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill, the matrilineal system of succession that Khasi activists would like to 'modernise' has a remarkably liberal and progressive conception of group membership. While descent is traced along the female line, that does not stop children of non-Khasi women married to Khasi men from being absorbed into Khasi society. Children of such marriages typically adopted the non-Khasi mother's given name or occupation as a clan name and over time such names became recognised as Khasi clan names. Indeed, there are many Khasi clans today that trace their ancestry to non-Khasi women who were wives or concubines of Khasi men, abducted from the plains in the course of trading expeditions and wars. This also does not discriminate against children married out of wedlock.

As Khasi sociologist Tiplut Nongbri points out in a recent paper on Khasi women and matriliny: while the Khasi rules of descent may render "the ethnic boundary of the Khasi highly porous, it makes the addition of new members into the society relatively easy and adds to the vibrancy of the system". Dual citizenship will only return the Northeast to the spirit of such progressive traditions of incorporating new members – so dramatically different from the caste sensibilities of mainstream India – and make a clean break from the colonial constructions of ethnic subject-hood that have generated today's lethal politics of homelands. ∆

(A longer version of this article appears in the March 2003 issue of Journal of Refugee Studies.)

Nothing free or fair about it

A complicated and veiled system of tariffs allows Western countries to protect their tiny farming populations while millions of farmers in developing countries are swamped under a tide of cheap imports. Such systemic hypocrisy in international trade must be confronted for the sake of the global poor.

by ***Devinder Sharma***

At the inaugural ceremony of the 2002 World Food and Farming Congress, held recently in London, I found myself sandwiched at a dinner between two poles – a former United States ambassador for agriculture to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Zimbabwe's permanent representative. Since this was the closest I had ever been to the trade negotiators, I summoned up the courage to ask a question of the former US ambassador: "Tell me, how do you arm-twist developing countries into submission?"

The former ambassador was taken aback. "Who gave you this idea that we arm-twist developing countries?" he asked. "This is propaganda, a figment of imagination of the international NGO community". I corrected myself, "You do not have to feel embarrassed. I am aware of how you have brought India to its knees. But tell me, how did you do it to the other two giants, China and Brazil?" Without flinching, the ex-diplomat replied, "Actually, China and Brazil are not the problem. The real problem is India".

> The per day per capita subsidy to European and US cows is twice the average daily income of small farmers in the third world

A few days later, the US secretary of agriculture, Ann Veneman, who had earlier served on the board of Calgene, the first company to market genetically engineered foods, spoke at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, DC. "Some developing countries argue that they should not have to open up markets until the developed countries first make domestic support reductions", Veneman said. "This is a formula for failure". Echoing the same brand of hypocrisy, World Bank Chief Economist Nicholas Stern, while travelling through India, denounced subsidies paid by rich countries to their farmers as "sin... on a very big scale", but warned India against resisting the opening of its markets. "Developing countries must remove their trade barriers regardless of what is happening in the developed countries".

"There is no way we can reduce tariffs on agricultural products unless the rich nations cut their domestic support subsidies as well as export subsidies", was the response to these words of economic 'wisdom' by India's agriculture minister, Ajit Singh. He was speaking to journalists at the end of his four-day January visit to Geneva, just weeks before the 31 March deadline on agreeing to modalities of the agricultural negotiations set at Doha. These negotiations of the Doha round are taking place in special sessions of the agriculture committee. Singh met WTO Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi and the chairman of the special sessions, Stuart Harbinson, as well as other protagonists – the US, the European Commission, members of the Cairns Group (*see box*) and some of the African group countries – and said that he had put forward India's position, an outcome of country-wide deliberations and discussions.

Such a stand has not just been taken by India – many other developing countries have time and again stood up against the hegemony of the so-called free trade regime. But tactical arm-twisting by the US, the European Union, Australia and Japan has always thwarted the building up of the collective power of underdeveloped countries. In the current alignment, what is significant in the context of ongoing negotiations is not what developing countries say in the absence of a collective stand, but how the EU reacts to American proposals. All other positions are reduced to insignificance. India, China and Brazil, all large states, each have histories of

The Cairns group

Founded in 1986, the Cairns group is an alliance of 17 food-exporting countries collectively responsible for one-third of global agricultural exports. It has pushed for the liberalisation of international rules governing the export of agriculture, and was instrumental in placing agriculture on the Uruguay round's agenda. The Cairns group countries are Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Paraguay, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Uruguay.

surrendering in the final stages of negotiations. The outcome of the ongoing agricultural negotiations, despite their serious implications for several hundred million small farmers, will not be any different.

Subsidising inequality

Developing countries must wake up to what is at stake. The 2002 US farm bill, for instance, which provides additional support of USD 180 billion over the next 10 years to the minuscule American farming population, is an indication of how unserious the industrialised countries are about meeting their obligations under the agreement on agriculture. The legislation also includes USD 15 million to be spent every year on promoting genetically modified foods. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries already provide their agricultural sectors with USD 311 billion in annual support.

The sheer scale of 'green box' subsidies in developed countries ensures the distortion of trade (*see box*). For example, the US spent USD 1.3 billion on income support for rice farmers in 1999-2000 when its total rice production was worth only USD 1.2 billion. Likewise, Japan's farmer subsidies are greater than the entire contribution made by agriculture to the nation's economy. Total transfers to Japanese agriculture amounted to 1.4 percent of GDP in 2000, even though the sector only represented 1.1 percent of GDP. Japan defends its massive agricultural subsidies along similar lines as the US and the EU, claiming that it needs to protect its industry to ensure against disruptions of international supply. Japan, the world's largest importer of food, already brings in 40 percent of its food from international sources.

The US justifies additional federal support by saying that it remains committed to reducing 'trade distorting' subsidies by five percent a year. The EU, which subsidises agriculture at a level comparable to the US, employs the logic of agricultural 'multi-functionality' to justify its support, much of which comes by way of direct payments. 'Multi-functionality' is agriculture subsidisation camouflaged under the garb of protecting rural landscapes and lifestyles, as well as the welfare of livestock, even if the policies are not efficient. The EU has been lobbying India to support this 'multi-functionality' argument.

Uruguay's Roberto Bissio, global coordinator of Social Watch, a social policy monitoring group, deems this argument a hoax. "With European Union subsidies it would be possible to send every European cow around the world on a business class ticket", he explains. In any case, the USD 2.7 per day per capita subsidy received by European and American cows is more than twice the average daily income of small and marginal farmers in the developing world. Such is the state of the world's disparities that OECD cows are fed according to their bodily needs while over 800 million people are malnourished in the rest of the world, a third of them in India alone. And yet dairy subsidies are justified on the grounds that they help mitigate nutritional deficiencies in the developing world.

Shading subsidies

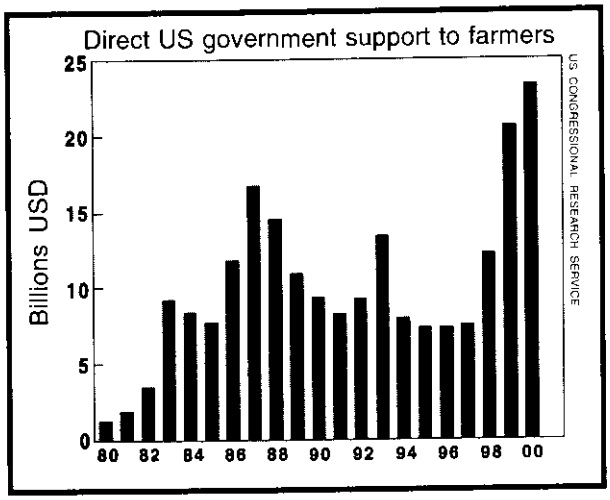
Under the terms of the WTO's Uruguay round, certain categories of agricultural subsidies are allowed, provided they fall into one of three 'boxes' – green, blue or amber. Green box exemptions are subsidies that are deemed to have little potential for distorting production or trade. There are 11 sub-categories within this exemption, but all green box allowances must be government-funded programmes (outlays or forgone revenue) that do not involve transfers from consumers or have the effect of providing price support to producers. Blue box exemptions cover direct-payment production-limiting programmes and must satisfy one of three secondary requirements: be linked to fixed areas or yields; be made on 85 percent or less of the base level of production; or, be based on a fixed number of livestock head. Finally, the amber box category, also known as the *de minimus* clause, allows certain subsidies provided they do not cumulatively exceed a low threshold. In this category, developed countries may provide product-specific domestic support if it does not exceed five percent of the country's "total value of production of a basic agricultural product during the relevant year", as well as provide non-product-specific domestic support if it does not exceed five percent of a member state's total agricultural production. Subsidies that do not fall in a green, blue or amber box are calculated toward the state's total allowed subsidies under WTO agreements.

A subsidy by any other name

All subsidies are not explicitly made. Many are so carefully interwoven into national agricultural policies through an approach called cross-subsidisation that it would take a special mission to uncover them, much like United Nations weapons inspectors in Iraq. A recent decision of the WTO appellate body, for instance, found the Canadian government's supply management system for the domestic market-subsidised production of export milk a trade-distorting export subsidy. This verdict, which reverses an earlier decision, offers one example of the countless hidden subsidies yet to be addressed in international fora. It is expected to drop substantially Canadian dairy exports from their current level of USD 278 million. Meanwhile, India, the world's largest producer of milk, is unable to export the product given its inability to subsidise production to overcome the low international market price. India, which has no dairy subsidies, is now forbidden from offering government support under the terms of WTO agreements.

In addition to subsidies, Europe and America have

also extended refunds, a result of which is the depression of global market prices, which in turn hurts domestic producers. The EU butter export subsidy, for instance, is currently at a five-year high, and butter export refunds have risen to an amount equal to 60 percent of the EU market price. Consequently, the import of butter oil into India has increased at an annual rate of 7.7 percent. This has negatively impacted the domestic market price of *ghee*.



Such is the reality of cross-subsidisation that American wheat is available in Chennai at a price much lower than that of Indian grain. Food processing units in south India, where wheat cannot be grown, find it cheaper to import wheat rather than transport it in from the northern parts of the country. The curious result is that while the wheat surplus of northwest India rots in the open, traders and food processors rely on imports. Meanwhile, wheat growers in India's north suffer, and many have gone bankrupt. The government is reluctant to purchase any more wheat, thereby contributing to an unprecedented crisis in the farming community.

Food dumping has now become a global phenomenon. Consider, for instance, the British method of dumping cheap wheat on the global market. In 2000, when the global market price of wheat stood at USD 116 a tonne, wheat production costs in the United Kingdom came to USD 180 a tonne, though UK wheat sold for USD 112 a tonne. In other words, UK wheat's selling price per tonne was USD 68 lower than its production cost. As explained by former Indian ambassador to GATT, BL Das, this was accomplished through large subsidies paid by the government in the form of direct payments – wheat farmers received USD 327 per hectare in 2001 in compensation for reductions in previous price supports – and through subsidies for 'set-asides', which came to another USD 327 per hectare. In 2000, the British government paid USD 731 million for two million hectares of wheat and another USD 203 million to set aside another 550,000 hectares.

Producer subsidies are also being converted into processor subsidies so as to fulfil the obligations of WTO subsidy reduction commitments, at least on paper. According to one estimate, in 1995-96 the EU provided USD 48 billion in 'amber box' subsidies and another in USD 40 billion in 'blue' and 'green box' subsidies. In 2002, it juggled its figures to provide USD 34 billion in 'amber' box and USD 52 billion in 'blue' and 'green box' subsidies. Net subsidy levels did not reflect any major change and in fact remained almost constant: USD 88 billion dropped to USD 86 billion. For farmers in developing countries, such permutations and combinations do not mitigate the misery and suffering of being dependent on market forces.

Hopes dashed

Gaining access to developed country markets has proved as elusive as the delivery of other commitments. Exports from developing countries are blocked with tariffs or sanitary and phytosanitary pretexts. Developed country exports have increased in comparison to developing country exports to the industrialised world.

Such is the level of sensitivity to imports from developing countries that even minor horticultural produce is blocked. The US, for example, greeted Argentine honey with 66 percent tariffs in November 2002, effectively shutting it out of the market and dealing a serious blow to the livelihood of thousands of farmers. Argentine orange exports earlier met a similar fate. And a few years before that, cut flower exports from India to Europe attracted a hefty import duty, thereby clipping the growth of India's nascent flower industry.

Yet despite all this, there seems to be no respite. Developing country cries of foul play have fallen on deaf ears. As the president of Nigeria, Olesegun Obasanjo, recently told an international gathering in Rome, "Hopes for fairer markets have been dashed by the strategic protection given by the developed countries to their agriculture through export subsidies, tariffs, quotas and other restrictions on commodity imports from developing countries". With the political leadership of the world's majority clearly divided or too weak to stand up, the EU, the US and the Cairns group of countries continue to take advantage of global markets to the detriment of the global South.

Regardless of the impacts on the world's poor, the powerful continue to strengthen inequalities. They develop their own rules of the games, while developing countries are expected to passively submit. The US, for instance, favours the 'Swiss formula' to lower trade-distorting domestic support to an amount equal to five percent of the value of a country's total agricultural production. This would, in theory, reduce domestic subsidies in countries that currently have the highest levels of trade-distorting support, and would reduce EU subsidies in this category from USD 62 billion to USD 12 billion and US support from USD 19 billion to USD 10 billion. Of course, this is just on paper while the shifting of subsidies to more suitable 'boxes' is already occurring.

The EU's proposal, which is still to be endorsed by each of the member countries, would reduce direct pay-

ments to farmers by three percent a year up to a total reduction of 20 percent, leading to estimated savings of between USD 500 million and USD 600 million by 2005. The proposal also aims to cap direct payments to individual farms at USD 300,000. Many will say that the EU proposal is a step ahead and argue that while the phase-out is in progress developing countries should open up. This, of course, ignores the fact that the direct payment proposed by the EU as the upper limit is more than the annual income of more than that of 1000 farming families in India's hinterland.

The Cairns group has called for tighter definitions of eligible 'green box' programmes. These food-exporting countries have been fighting for the elimination of farm subsidies and the unconditional opening of markets. But some food-exporting countries such as Indonesia, also part of the Cairns group, have serious reservations about reducing tariffs that would increase imports and effectively price domestic producers out of the market. Such a move would prevent the country from feeding its population of 200 million through domestic production. Indonesia recently faced a glut of cheap rice imported from Vietnam at the same time its own producers could not sell stocks. India is also under tremendous pressure to join the Cairns group, not realising that what the country requires is a food management system utilising its abundant manpower and natural resources to build a self-reliant food economy.

The various proposals advanced by developed countries share one underlying aim – how to protect their own food industries. The very survival of millions of small and marginal farming communities in the South is not even a remote concern to them. The phasing out and removal of tariffs has already flooded 14 countries with cheaper imports, with increases ranging from 30 percent in Senegal to 168 percent in India (as compared between 1990-94 and 1995-98). Food import costs have doubled for two giants, India and Brazil, and increased by 50 to 100 percent for Bangladesh, Morocco, Pakistan, Peru and Thailand. When one considers that importing food is equivalent to importing unemployment, increasing import contributes to the destruction of agriculture-based economies. Food imports have a strong negative impact on the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers in South, a fact that is widely acknowledged but commonly ignored.

A strategy for the South

Developing countries cannot afford to be silent spectators to this process. Globalisation has to be on equal terms, based on principles of equity and justice and not on economic might. If Western countries can protect their agriculture sectors, there is no reason why developing countries should feel shy about doing the same. Instead of succumbing to pressure tactics that accompany the proposed 'development box' package that help to minimise food security damages while protecting Western agriculture subsidies, a collective stand based on the following two planks appears to be the only way to protect agriculture, the mainstay of developing economies:

- 'Zero-tolerance' on agricultural subsidies: developing countries should make it categorically clear that negotiations will move ahead only when subsidies under all 'boxes' are removed. Any agreement that does not tackle Western subsidies will wreak havoc on developing country agriculture. Linking the elimination of quantitative restrictions with subsidy elimination is the only safeguard that can protect developing countries.

- 'Agriculture shields' for developing countries: following Mexico's example of an 'agriculture shield' to protect Mexican farmers from unfair competition with US crops, developing countries should unilaterally adopt similar approaches. The Mexican plan involves compensatory tariffs to balance US goods that enter duty-free. Such actions comply with WTO policies allowing nations to take protective steps when the viability of agricultural sectors is threatened by foreign competition. △

Blue revolution blues

The soil isn't soil any more
Water is water no more
Even then
The forest hasn't diminished
Tigers have not dwindled
Beasts manage to find preys
But grass doesn't grow enough
To feed the goats
-From Shivashankar Mishra's Hindi poem *Bagh-Bakari*

AN OCEAN is named after India. Bangladesh has an entire bay celebrating its location. Pakistan is the home of Harrappa, an ancient water-based civilisation. Rivers from Nepal feed 'mother' Ganga – a river that sustains one of the most densely populated regions on the planet. The mighty Brahmaputra flows down from Tibet through the mountains and plains of Assam and Bangladesh. In peninsular India, rivers such as the Narmada, Krishna, Kaveri and Godavari fight the rocks of the Deccan to make their way to the sea. Sri Lanka boasts of very old waterworks systems. Uncle Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives never misses a chance for complaining that the islands of his country risk drowning due to global warming.

During the monsoon months, the only news from South Asia in the global media is that of cloudbursts, gales, downpours and floods. By all accounts, South Asia should be floating on water. Perhaps it is. But it is also a region that is likely to face an extreme water crisis in the next 20 years. As populations grow, lifestyles change, cropping becomes more intensive, and as industrial uses of water increase, the demand for freshwater will soar. Already, due to urbanisation, per capita consumption of water in congested areas is spiralling out of control. Water may abound everywhere but there will be none to drink if serious attention is not paid to 'water cultivation'.

When the World Water Forum meets in Kyoto, Japan, this month, South Asia is sure to be the focus of its attention. Conflicts over riparian rights between neighbouring countries often hog the limelight. The problems between Nepal and India over the Mahakali river, between India and Bangladesh over Farakka, between India and Pakistan over the Indus – all of them feed on the fuel of patriotism. Within India, the demand for Kaveri water pits Krishna of Karnataka and Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu against each other. But these conflicts, complicated as they are, pale in comparison to the overall water management challenges facing South Asia.

The problem

The availability of water has remained unchanged for millions of years. Power from the sun continues to run the hydrological cycle that keeps the supply of freshwater at almost a steady pace. Water is not as scarce as it is assumed to be, at least not yet. In fact, the annual monsoon causes devastating floods. Access to water, however, is a different matter altogether. When the Ganga and Yamuna are overflowing, access to safe drinking water actually worsens in their floodplains. Much water is not necessarily much use.

In water*walla* jargon, *white* water is treated for consumption and transformed into *fresh* water. Some of it is discharged as *grey* water from kitchens and bathrooms, while most of it is turned into *brown* water in toilets. Then there is the *black* water laden with chemical effluents of industries. The management of this system is a nightmare, because science cannot replicate in scale the hydrological cycle of nature. Even if all our social resources are pooled, we can harness, treat, supply and recycle only a very limited quantity of water. The Chinese, more efficient than us South Asians, are trying their best, but with limited success.

The cost of water is another major issue. When it comes to what economists call the 'willingness-to-pay', the pricing of water becomes complicated. Consumers want water to be as cheap as, well, water. Even when an artificial flood of sorts needs to be provided to irrigate sugarcane in the parched fields of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, plantation owners want to pay a pittance. The low price of water implies that there is no incentive for its judicious use; the difference between a running tap and one turned off is marginal. Social and ecological costs are not reflected in the price consumers pay for water.

The indirect costs of poor water quality, however, are quite high. It is believed that almost two-thirds of all diseases in poor countries are water-related. Supply of polluted water for consumption, improper disposal of waste water, and poor water management create serious health hazards. Malaria, cholera and typhoid feast on public health department budgets in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (UP) in the Ganga plains. Arsenic in shallow tube-wells in Bangladesh is another cause of concern.

Looking at South Asia's water scene, the problems look too immense for the human mind. No wonder, framers of public policy in the region have begun to look for superhuman solutions, unmindful of sparing a thought for their unintended consequences.

The pharaoh complex

Dreamers of the so-called "garland scheme" of linking major rivers – the scheme takes on the character of a noose, actually – say that the source of their inspiration is mythological Bhagirath who brought down the Gan-

ga from the heavens for the salvation of his ancestors. In reality, planners of the modern *Bharat* are aspiring to become pharaohs of the 21st century.

Even though the plan to link rivers is pointless, it is likely to be executed precisely for that very reason. Firstly, rulers love grandiose schemes for it helps them divert the attention of the people from immediate problems that they are either unable or unwilling to solve. Secondly, huge projects offer immense opportunities for distributing sops to court faithfuls. Thirdly, mega-projects keep the educated elite gainfully employed and thus away from the race for power. Finally, the aspiring elite invests its support to take home the substantial crumbs at the table.

These proclivities have helped mobilise some public support for the idea of inter-linking India's rivers. The futility of the scheme will be felt only after trillions of rupees and decades of national effort are wasted, but many a public career will be made in the interim by hawking it.

By all accounts, Suresh P Prabhu's promise that work on some of these links will begin by the end of the UN Year of the Freshwater needs to be taken with some seriousness. After all, Mr Prabhu, head of the task force on the proposed project, has the Supreme Court of India's backing. For the court, 560,000 crores of rupees, the initial cost estimate, is just a figure; the number of zeroes will be worked out by accountants.

The technical complexity of the project is the easy part. Granted that pumping 20,000 cusecs of water from 200 ft above mean sea level (near Patna, the only point where the Ganga has divertible surplus) to the Vindhya range at 2860 ft above mean sea level is challenging but possible if the cost of the enterprise is not a concern. But does it make sense to move the millions of people in the way, from Bihar to Tamil Nadu, just to please some paddy farmers of Thanjavur and sugarcane growers of Mandya? Mr Prabhu has some explaining to do on the website that he has promised to launch very soon.

What is being sold as a long-term solution is nothing but a gigantic ecological disaster. It has been predicted that the wars of this century will be fought over fresh water. The *Hindutvawadi*s of Bharat have begun to draw the battle lines. Sadly, what they will end up with is Indians fighting Indians for the benefit of a select few of its power elite.

The solution

Despite democracy (or because of it?), most governments aspire to be industrial enterprises in the business of governance. The public sector has abandoned the notion of being institutions wedded to morality. When political leaders think themselves managers of business ventures, they are not likely to pay much attention to ecological or human concerns. All that matters to them is the financial health of the economy; its short-term growth being more important than its sustainability. Hence all the arguments about improving supply, economy of scale and the Indian prime minister's declaration that linking all the major rivers will be "an insurance against drought". Unfortunately, this is off the mark. For it is in demand-management that there will be a solution to the water crisis looming over the Subcontinent.

Demand management must begin with the acceptance that the smaller the scale of operations, more accurate its predictability, and thus planning. Such an approach requires the devolution of decision-making powers over natural resources to communities.

Managing the demand of water needs to begin at the household level (rational consumption by every individual), continue at the community level (lifestyle changes to suit water availability), endure at the state or province level (complement varying water needs of different communities), and dominate the thinking at the national level in terms of population control, waste minimisation and ecological resource planning. These issues are infinitely more complex than raising astronomical sums with all those zeroes required to pump entire rivers over plateaus. For the faithful, taking the mountain to Muhammad makes perfect sense.

It is estimated that while the world's population tripled during the 20th century, water withdrawals increased by over six times. In developing countries, water withdrawal has been growing by four to eight percent every year, much above the population growth rate of these countries. Clearly, there is a need to correct this anomaly, and the point to begin at is curbing the cultivation of water-intensive crops. It takes 25 litres of water to produce one kg of rice, and many times more to take one kg of beef to the supermarkets of West Asia. While it will be unreasonable to expect that we revert to the lifestyle of the Stone Age, it makes sense not to grow crops that consume a lot of water.

These are all generalities, the point being that the world must begin to realise that only the judicious use of water can lead to a sustainable planet – common habitat for all living being where modern-day pharaohs have no place to waste the scarce commons. When delegates to the Third Water Forum in Kyoto meet concurrently under the aegis of the "South Asian Solidarity on Rivers and People" to discuss "Dams and Development Partnership", they will do well to pay some attention to mundane issues such as rain-water cultivation, community storage of water in tanks and ponds, and the revival of traditional crops that use less water but give higher yields and do not require expensive pesticides that pollute community water sources.

After the green and the white revolutions, South Asia urgently needs a blue revolution. But this revolution must aim to help the people on the margins. The alternative is too horrendous to contemplate. Tigers will also perish if Shivashankar Mishra's goats do not get enough grass to eat. Both the *bagh* and the *bakari* have to learn to live together.

– CK Lal

Umbilical chords and family ideologies

Four generations of Indian women in Kenya and Britain, in a history of mixed genres and shifting emotional registers which hums like a wire stretched taut

Over the past decade, in fiction and autobiography, South Asian women have begun to explore the stories of their pasts in an efflorescence of writings. Among others, Mrinal Pande, Manju Kapur and Suguna Iyer have accomplished this through the medium of fiction, while Sara Suleri, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Mira Kamdar stand out for their memoirs. This proliferation has to do, in part at least, with such authors' complex historical situation. Tied to the Subcontinent either by birth or ancestry, many South Asian women, particularly those of the middle class, have moved so far beyond traditional gender roles that their present-day 'liberation' and achievement lies in sharp contrast with the lives of struggle and confinement led by their mothers and grandmothers. This produces not only the lived contradictions of their lives but also the burden of an intimate knowledge of a past through the lives of the women they have known and loved, women from whom they have derived their beings, no less. It is this situation that provokes their search for understanding, both of the self and of history.

Parita Mukta's memoir derives, at one level, from the wish we have all known at some point in our lives to ask: in what way am I a part of history? Indeed, am I, obscure, alone, driven along by circumstances, of any consequence in the larger movement of forces? It is in the intricate weave of individual lives with the community's, the precise placement of human beings within larger events, the acute sense of the shaping of people's everyday choices by historical forces – without leeching their lives of agency – that the rich narrative texture of this book is produced.

But *Shards of Memory* is, as well,

Shards of Memory: Woven Lives in Four Generations
by Parita Mukta
Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2002
£16.99, pp 214

reviewed by
Rajeswari Sunder Rajan

the work of a historian, though it wears the marks of that affiliation lightly. Parita Mukta's emphasis on family, on women in the family, and on a genealogy that is traced via the female line (Mukta is her grandmother's given name), means that it is also, specifically, a feminist history. And indeed Mukta belongs to a notable company of feminist historians of India who have expended considerable scholarly energy on recovering the lives of women. She owes an equal debt to contemporary British feminist historians on the left such as Carolyn Steedman, for whom autobiography is an intricately wrought product of social (class) history and psychoanalytically inflected understanding of gender relations within the family.

Work of this kind performs not only the necessary and never wholly-achieved task of 'adding women' to the historical account, but produces a paradigm shift in historiography by re-evaluating the criteria for what counts in the historical record. Thus the *ordinary*, whether describing events or people, achieves significance because the gendered perspective is, if arguably, necessarily personal, subjective, representative and inclusive. Generically, family histories occupy the terrain of the novel, and methodologically they mine myth and folk-tale as productively as they do the archives.

A tale of the ordinary

Now, a quick summary of this particular 'ordinary' story. The four parts of the memoir are focussed on four individuals: Ba, the author's paternal grandmother; Harshad, her father; Rajni, her uncle; and Sonpari, her daughter. Thus, this is the story of four generations (the last part includes the account of Mukta's own life). Beginning in the 1920s, when her grandparents arrived in Nairobi from Kathiawar in Gujarat to start their married life together, the narrative takes in events momentous and small, the defining one being her grandfather's death in 1948, leaving Ba a widow at the age of 33 with nine children to support, the youngest six months old, the eldest still in school. It then traces the slow trickle of the family to Britain through the 1960s and 1970s, and ends with the present, the generation of Ba's grandchildren, dispersed in many parts of the world. Mukta's daughter, now 12, is partly British by birth and culture. Mukta herself was an active partic-

ipant in the turbulent struggles of race and gender politics in Thatcherite Britain (one of the founders of Southall Black Sisters), moving away from the political scene in the mid-1980s out of sheer heartsickness. It was at that juncture that she entered the career of historical research and writing.

Mukta makes her family's ordinariness – a description and judgement that she frequently reiterates – serve several functions. One is that of truth-telling, a simple objectivity that is made to prevail over any desire to boast. The blazoning of success is a temptation that family narratives, particularly of the immigrant variety, are prone to. The men in Mukta's family followed ordinary professions with either ordinary success or outright failure – her father was a clerk in the Kenyan railways, her uncle Rajni owned a pharmacy in Britain which ended bankrupt – the women remained tied to domesticity. (By way of scornful contrast, Mukta drops an intriguing hint about a "philanthropist" who is now among the "top twenty Asian millionaires in Britain" who had appeared as a creditor in Ba's house soon after her husband died and "stripped it of all its possessions".) But a different and larger purpose is also served in recording the family's unexceptional qualities, which is to insist on the fact of survival: its survival as a family for over 70 years, in the course of which its members have dispersed over four continents; but also *sheer* survival, especially in the early years, the overcoming of starvation over seven years on a diet of *bhakhri* ("thick, crumbly chapatti", in the glossary). Hunger is the very leitmotif of this book, a topic to which we will have to return to, in order to do justice to its extraordinary forcefulness. Thus, success has been displaced in the telling of these life-stories because survival is the primary and more urgent account to render.

Parita Mukta

There is more at stake here, though: Mukta's is a family that made an ethical choice of living as they did. Their principle is one that Mukta, quoting Stuart Hall, states as follows: do not go out and eat this world. Hall's impassioned plea, made at a conference on children's education that the author attended, is recalled in an epiphanic moment in this book, a moment of "acute and intense recognition". Hall's words called attention to the "profligate use of both human beings and material resources" which Mukta views as a "central feature of history since the Columbian expansion". This is how the principle links to hunger, the focus of the second part of this book.

Varied appetites

It is the author's conviction that hunger leaves its indelible psychic imprint, whether as principle (her grandmother's austerity) or as pathology (her aunt Tara's shopaholism), on the people who have known what it is. Hunger appears at/as the origins (in India, Africa) of this family's history, which then moves towards plenty (in Britain, the United States) – it is not reified into a condition of perpetuity. But what it leaves nonetheless is its traces, not the less poignant for being borne as memory. "...[T]he disjuncture between the plenty found in the present and the memory of hunger lingers on... Unable to view themselves in the social universe, my father, aunts and uncles have imploded, the fissures leaving deep grooves on their faces".

Within the larger perspective of global political economy, hunger structures the geography of the world into a South and a North. One of the offshoots of this division is that some people in the world are spectacles, and the others spectators, of hunger. But Mukta insists on exploring the phenomenon that disturbs this neat divide: she explores the difficult ethics of witnessing hunger. "You cannot *just look*. The act of witnessing is fraught with difficult tensions, and at times trauma. There are shocking nightmares, sometimes death by suicide". Without this understanding of the costs of affluence (even if only for some, let us admit), fasting-feasting as a way of conceptualising difference might have produced a merely vulgar polemic.

Hunger is susceptible to easy tropological metamorphoses into 'hunger for' – into a metaphor for desire, sexual appetite, driving ambition, immortality itself. But Mukta keeps the focus simply and literally on food: its lack, and its consequences. This integrity is reinforced by her careful marking of the gradations of hunger in order not to sensationalise her after-all-middle class family's experience. What they knew was endemic hunger, not the starvation found in times of famine. Of the latter, "May no one *ever* experience this", she writes, and the fervency of that prayer says more than the rest of her writing on the subject.

As much, then, as family memoir as historical document, this is a reflective book driven by a clear political and ethical agenda. Understandably, the narratorial tone is not always stable, moving from the deliberately sought-after historical understanding of, for example, the reform movements around widowhood in 19th century India ('Archive Odyssey', 'Voices that rise from the Past'), to the passionate pity for her grandmother's privations following her husband's death:

> We [her daughters and granddaughters] hover around her, like anxious butterflies around a precious flower. We are chary of drinking of her sweetness, fearful of depleting this, intent always to say: 'Oh, but you are beautiful.' And swift comes the reply: 'Your eyes have made me so.'

This is as naked a love as one can find written in literature.

Sacrificial loves

The mixed genres and shifting emotional registers create a palpable tension within this book, producing a hum as on a wire stretched taut. Inevitably, given that an account of this kind must negotiate generational and cultural differences in beliefs and values, there are other kinds of tensions as well. There is, to begin with, the idealisation of the extended family – of the love and closeness it nurtures in an alien and hostile world – that must contend with (indeed, is asserted against) not only the fact of the actual dispersal of the family, but also the exclusions it performs, the costs it extracts.

Only briefly, for instance, does Mukta reflect on her mother's situation in the family she marries into, the eldest daughter-in-law in a household where all resources had to be shared (her wedding trousseau, for example, was passed on to her sisters-in-law); and in which she 'lost' her daughters' love to a mother- and sisters-in-law. As well, the hard labour of keeping the extended family together in a single household, first in Nairobi and then in Wembley – the large meals that had to be cooked and served all the time, if nothing else – was without a doubt performed by the women, her mother and the other daughters-in-law of the family. The family romance is preserved by the problematic, surely even dubious, assumption that domestic love lightens domestic labour.

'Sacrifice' – for this is one of its forms – is, indeed, the ideology and practice that proves most troublesome in writing about this family. "My father, mother, aunts and uncles became adept at crushing the expansion of their needs, stamping down on novel ideas and tastes". This expresses the grimness of (a necessarily sacrificial) family ideology. Mukta's father dropped out of school at 16 to go to work to support the family. Her uncle Rajni ('Haba' is his niece's nickname for him) "gave and gave and gave; he asked for nothing". He and another uncle, Pushker, died, she writes, "having borne the burden of settling a very large migratory family in the very heart of Britain". She adds, with bitterness, "While none of us has gone out to eat this world – we ate *him* up". Mukta's condemnation, arising from a modern individualist ethic as much as stricken personal guilt, is kept in check by her personal admiration and gratitude towards the sacrificers. Her dispassionate, somewhat remote, historical understanding also diagnoses within this the persistence of a "rural peasant household" ideology conditioned by a "subsistence ethic".

Sacrifice is accompanied by other religious values, passivity, exalted spirituality, acceptance, which are also both admirable and problematic. Mukta will not allow herself to be critical of her grandmother. "What if she had shown more courage", she begins to ask, but checks herself, "Stop, Pari. Stop this". Instead, she dwells on her strength, her calm, her transcendence of bitterness, her seeming oblivion even of suffering, her entry into the "dense yet luminous world" of religious faith, *bhakti*. Her grandmother's asceticism, which limits her to one meal a day, links her story to the thematic of hunger. Fasting is ordained as one of Hindu widowhood's ritual prescriptions, though for Ba obedience is a voluntary exercise in spiritual self-discipline. (Gandhi deliberately adopted and adapted this female religious ritual as an ethical and political praxis.) Thus, ascetic widowhood brings together (voluntary) sacrifice and (involuntary) hunger within a specific problematic of gender ideology to which I shall return.

Family romance is preserved by the assumption that domestic love lightens domestic labour

Here is another of the tensions that informs the book. I use the word 'tensions' rather than 'contradictions', which these moments could otherwise be taken for, in order to indicate that these crucial questions are consciously marked and allowed to remain as questions. The dilemma in judging the religious faith of others is one that I share (as a reader able to identify with the author in several respects). Between practising or at least accepting widespread and culturally 'authentic' ways on the one hand, and on the other making a commitment to a secular modernity that must function as an antidote to Hindu fundamentalism in India today, the Indian intellectual finds herself in muddy and deeply troubled political waters.

Ladli

I share another of Mukta's political and theoretical commitments, that of feminism. I have suggested already that I believe Mukta to be disingenuous in not fully acknowledging women's problematic position in the (idealised) family. But in other places, the question of gender is addressed in powerful and original ways. One of these is the examination of the "actual father", as Carolyn Steedman has described the contradiction of patriarchy in 20th century Britain. In Mukta's family patriarchy is posed not so much against the lack of stature of the actual fathers (for the patriarchs are indisputably the breadwinners in the family), but against normative cultural definitions of masculinity.

These gentle unassertive men, her father and uncles, how could they fulfil male roles which demanded success and authority above all things? Haba was thought to be a "bit of a simpleton", "anyone could walk all over him"; his goodness was "interpreted as weakness, as a lack of manliness". Mukta re-evaluates these qualities in paying homage to them. More interestingly (and characteristically), she also finds a genealogy for the weak man in the romanticism of a certain kind of historical male type, the co-

lonial Bengali *babu*. The icon of this type is Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's eponymous hero, Devdas, and especially his cinematic personification in the actor KL Saigal opens up a rich seam in the cultural terrain that Mukta mines.

Mukta opens up another site of gendering in the culture through her extended meditation on the figure of the *ladli*, the beloved daughter. Drawing on the legend of Sonbai, as well as memories of her own growing-up years – the fine education her father scrimped and saved to give her, the out-of-school treats he organised for her, the sheltering love of her grandmother, the companionship of sister and aunts – Mukta shows how the ladli becomes a particularly vulnerable social being, not only victim but also an agent of conflict in this culture. 'Beloved daughter' is a paradox that should be of particular interest to those pondering the murderous misogyny expressed in India as femicide (the killing of female foetuses, infants, young brides, or women's reduced life expectancy as a result of simple neglect in childhood), reflected in a national sex ratio that points to 37 million "missing females", in the words of the economist Amartya Sen.

Mukta does not attempt an answer to the puzzle of why daughters so beloved are yet destroyed. But that simple misogyny cannot be the answer points to the need to pursue the question within, if need be, psychic spaces in the culture (which need not be Oedipal stories). Analysis must venture into the structures and practices of the exchange of women, the rivalries of love, the complicated (il)logic of its expressions, and the confused psychology of filial fears, frustrations, anger. Mukta remains content with suggesting, as reason for her father's estrangement from her following her decision to choose an Englishman as a life partner, the likelihood that he was "raw" from "the injuries inflicted on him by a privileged race". No outsider, not even a reviewer, is authorised to probe such profound family events without presumption, especially since what Mukta reveals of the pain of a ladli's rejection by her father and community could not have been easy to write.

When she tentatively advances an explanation, it is in terms of the choices a daughter must make in this culture, between being a *baapkarmi* ("to be bound to the fortunes of the father"), and an *aapkarmi* ("to cut one's own path in life"). And having chosen to be the latter, she must pay the price in pain and isolation – but also must have the wisdom to seek reconciliation. But I cannot help thinking that explanations must go beyond ascribing sole agency to the daughter, into exploring the dynamics of father-daughter relationships in the culture more fully. If the framing of the choices in this particular, over-determined way is not questioned, the closure of this moral fable can seem too pat. (I must also admit that I found Mukta's device of narrating her own story in the third person in this section, in the persona of the mythical "Sonbai", irritatingly coy.)

'Beloved daughter' is a paradox that should be of interest to those pondering the murderous misogyny expressed in India as femicide

Pause, exhortation

In writing of religion, masculinity, childhood, Mukta draws upon the resources of everyday popular culture, the devotional Bhakti songs, the films and film songs, and the folk-tales and myths, which are to be found on everybody's lips in South Asia and its diaspora. In this way, the author finds a language – really a strategic shorthand – in which to write a history and autobiography that might otherwise have been too vast, as well as too personal, to handle. It is a very successful device for the most part. Sometimes, however, the references to too diverse a range of European and Indian sources (*Pinocchio* and Narsinh Mehta at the same time, for example), can seem random and eclectic, though admittedly this does describe the Western-educated South Asian's actual hybrid cultural knowledge quite accurately.

This book's thematics of diaspora and cultural hybridity, the invocation of 'magical' stories, the fragmented narrative structure, the privileging of memory: a recitation of these features would appear to add up to a recipe for the typical postcolonial/post-modern contemporary text. What I have tried to suggest, through a greater immersion into its form and politics in this review, is that this is a book that also resists such incorporation. As a feminist historical account it transforms our understanding of both stay-at-home nationalism and of diaspora, both of which have tended to be largely gendered male in the most influential accounts and theories of these phenomena in the Subcontinent so far. The title's mixed metaphor of "shards" of memory that depict the "woven" lives of four generations, points to the contrary pulls of severe (though not contingent) selection on the one hand, and the desire to make (comprehensive) meaning of one's life on the other.

Above all, *Shards of Memory* is a deliberately didactic work, reflected in the bibliographies and reading-lists, the frequent pauses for self-reflexive takes, and the self-righteous exhortations to the reader on political issues. Its gravitas places it at a distance – generic as well as political – from the exuberant tones and the playful historical licenses of, say, Rushdie's fiction and its ilk. The didacticism is likely to be hard to take for some readers, but for others it will serve as a sign of the integrity of the self that speaks in these pages. At the very least its difference should mark the heterogeneity of contemporary South Asian writing.

Many folds of the faith

South Asian Islam's varied and multiple forms

Muslims of the Subcontinent account for one of the largest Islamic populations in the world, and yet it is striking how little has been written about them. South Asianists tend to focus on Hinduism and Hindu communities, while many Islamic scholars view South Asian Muslims as marginal or peripheral to the study of Islam. Why this is unfortunate is that some of the most interesting and creative approaches to Islam have emerged from among its South Asian adherents.

Fortunately, there is now a slowly growing corpus of studies on South Asian Islam, and these two books are welcome additions, with each tackling historical periods that roughly overlap in the 18th century. In *India's Islamic Traditions*, a collection of essays edited by University of Arizona scholar Richard M Eaton, the contributors trace Islam's history in South Asia from the eighth century up to the time of the Delhi sultanate.

South Asia's contact with Islam dates back almost to the time of the Prophet Muhammad; according to legend, disciples of the prophet landed on the Malabar coast in peninsular India not long after Muhammad's death. The Punjabi Baba Rattan of Bhatinda is said to have been a companion of the prophet, and the legendary Raja Perumal Cheruman of Kerala is said to have travelled to Madina and accepted Islam there at his hands. Whatever the truth of these claims, India's association with Islam is ancient, and South Asian Muslims today are the single largest group of Muslims in the world.

Given Islam's long history in the region and the great internal diversity of South Asian populations, the immense variety of Islamic expression is hardly surprising. Perhaps to a greater degree than in other parts of the world, Islam took on different forms here, adapting to a variety of local cultural contexts and environments. It is with this fascinating variety of forms of Islam as a lived religion that Eaton's timely and well-researched collection is principally concerned.

South Asia, with its large, and, for want of a more appropriate term, 'Hindu' majority, posed particular challenges to early Muslim jurists,

India's Islamic Traditions (711-1750)

Richard M Eaton, ed.
OUP, New Delhi, 2002
pp 439, INR 650

Islam in the Subcontinent: Muslims in a Plural Society

by Mushirul Hasan
Manohar, New Delhi, 2002
pp 530, INR 995
ISBN 81 7304 451 1

reviewed by Yoginder Sikand

for neither the *Qur'an* nor the *Hadith* provides clear guidance for deciding the precise legal status of 'Hinduism'. Ultimately, however, the majority of the Hanafi Sunni *'ulama* accepted the Hindus as akin to the 'people of the book' (Jews and Christians) and granted them the status of *dhimmi* or 'protected citizens'. This did not, however, put an end to the ambiguity inherent in the ways in which Hindus and Muslims viewed each other. As Aziz Ahmad notes in his incisive piece in the book, Hindus and Muslims created diverse constructions of each other in the epics that they composed. Within the different versions of the same events, they did not uniformly construct 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' as inveterate enemies.

For one thing, in medieval epic and counter-epic narratives Muslims were generally described by the ethnic title of 'Turk' and its derivatives, and rarely as 'Muslims', thus suggesting that, at least as many Hindus saw it, the differences between them were ethnic rather than religious per se. Further, in several epics the boundaries between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' were blurred. Sometimes a 'Turk' was depicted as fighting alongside a group of 'Hindus' against another group of 'Turks', and vice versa.

Challenging the notion gaining ground that medieval Hindus and Muslims necessarily saw themselves as inherent foes, Yohannan Friedman's essay argues that within the broader Muslim fold there was a diverse range of opinions on Hinduism and its followers. Thus, while some 'ulama saw Hindus as unbelievers to be offered the choice of Islam or death, there were others who insisted that they should be granted dhimmi status on payment of *jizya*, in return for which they were exempted from military service and guaranteed protection of life, faith and property. Many Sufis, such as Dara Shikoh, Miyan Mir and Mirza Mazhar, went even beyond that and traced parallels between Hinduism and Islam, arguing that figures held in reverence by many Hindus, such as Ram and Krishna, were possibly prophets sent by the God of Abraham.

Sufi bridges

This process of reconciliation, of bringing Hindus and Muslims closer to each other on the basis of beliefs held in common, was advanced furthest by many Sufis and Bhakti saints, as Eleanor Zelliot shows in her contribution on the dialogue between the Turk and the Brahmin as depicted by the medieval Maharashtrian *bhagat* Eknath. Aditya

Behl highlights this remarkable side of the medieval Hindu-Muslim encounter in his absorbing account of *Hindavi* Sufi romances, showing how noted Sufi writers freely used concepts and terms from within the 'Hindu' tradition, although often investing them with a new meaning, in order to make their message more intelligible to a largely Hindu audience.

Such creative borrowing and use of local motifs was thus an integral part of the literature that many Sufis produced in different parts of South Asia, as is highlighted in Ishaq Khan's study of the Muslim Rishis in Kashmir, Toney Stewart's essay on Sufism in Bengal, Ali Asani's contribution on the mystical poetry of the Isma'ili Satpanthi Muslims, and Vasudha Narayanan's piece on Tamil biographies of the prophet, all included in this volume.

Owing principally to the Sufi-Bhakti movements, then, differences between Hindus and Muslims were not as sharp as might be imagined from a perusal of, for instance, the works of orthodox Brahmin scholars or the *fatwa* literature produced by the 'ulama associated with the royal courts. As Cynthia Talbot's essay suggests, in pre-British India, notions of community identity were much more fuzzy and overlapping than what we imagine today, with numerous communities existing side-by-side in remarkable tolerance. Talbot argues that the notion of Hindus and Muslims as constituting two monolithic pan-Indian communities is a very modern one, and owes principally to British colonialists and the efforts of the Hindu and Muslim elites. A pre-modern Muslim or Hindu generally saw himself or herself not so much as a member of a singular pan-Indian community than as a member of a particular *biradari* or caste and linguistic group which often cut across doctrinal divides.

If numerous Sufis and Bhakti saints carried forward inter-religious dialogue at the level of everyday life, some rulers, too, took a keen interest in the project, often for political reasons. Iqtidar Alam Khan discusses, for example, the religious policy of the Mughal emperor Akbar, arguing against the view that Akbar intended to formulate a new religion of his own. Rather, he suggests, Akbar's religious experiments must be seen in the wider context of debates over the notion of revelation and its universality in Islam, issues with which many Sufis were also concerned. Further, he argues, Akbar's syncretistic faith, Din-i Ilahi, must also be understood against the backdrop of intricate Mughal court politics and as an effort on the part of the emperor to consolidate his support base among the Rajputs.

A HISTORICAL ATLAS OF SOUTH ASIA (OUP, 1992)

Hindu, Jain and Muslim artisans collectively contributed to artistic projects during Akbar's reign, such as this late 16th century illustration from the Hamzanama, *an epic recounting the exploits of the prophet's uncle, the Amir Hamza (left). Akbar also patronised depictions of Hinduism, including this scene of Krishna holding up Mount Govardhana from the* Harivamsa.

Neither the *Qur'an* nor the *Hadith* provides clear guidance on the precise legal status of 'Hinduism'

Discussing the religious policies of the emperor Aurangzeb, who is often contrasted with Akbar, Satish Chandra makes a similar plea, stressing the need to understand Aurangzeb's policies vis-à-vis the Hindus in a more nuanced and balanced manner, as calculated to serve his own political interests rather than as reflecting a visceral anti-Hindu hostility. We need to remind ourselves that if Aurangzeb is said to have destroyed numerous Hindu shrines, a number of Muslim shrines and Shi'a mosques met with the same fate at his hands. If a number of Hindus were slain by him, so too were a number of Muslims, including his own brother and Sufi, Dara Shikoh, and the renowned Sufi of Delhi, Sarmad Shahid.

Overall, as Peter Hardy argues in his essay on the general characteristics of Muslim court historiography, one must not take the accounts of the religious policies of the emperors of Delhi as provided in the medieval Persian chronicles as always presenting historical fact. He stresses that the medieval chroniclers, lavishly patronised by the emperors, often deliberately exaggerated their patrons' supposed dedication to Islam and their harshness towards the Hindus in order to provide them with more exalted claims to 'Islamic' legitimacy. In actual fact, however, most of the sultans cared little for the prescriptions

of the *shari'ah* in their own personal lives, and thus can hardly be said to have been the ideal Muslims that their hagiographies present them to be.

The road to division

The rise of British power in the 18th century, the eclipse of Mughal authority in the 19th century and the sectarian-driven politics of the 20th century provide the historical backdrop of Jamia Millia Islamia historian Mushirul Hasan's *Islam in the Subcontinent: Muslims in a Plural Society*. The book opens with a discussion of Muslim life in British India, addressing the varying responses of different Muslim groups to foreign domination. Since the British had come to power by displacing the Muslim Mughals, it was but natural, as Hasan shows, that many Muslims viewed the British and the new forms of knowledge that they brought with them as threatening the integrity and authority of Islam. Yet there were other voices advocating a critical and creative approach to modern knowledge, believing in the compatibility of Islam with facets of modernity.

Despite the immense diversity within the broader Muslim fold, as well as among Hindus, Hasan argues that the British, for their own purposes, deliberately stressed the myth of Hindus and Muslims as two monolithic communities, neatly separated from, and therefore opposed to, each other. Besides promoting Hindu-Muslim strife, this meant that dissenting voices within each of the communities so defined were often stifled. This did not, however, necessarily prohibit the emergence or sustainability of existing alternative understandings of faith and identity. Indeed, as Hasan's study of the Shi'a-Sunni conflict in colonial Lucknow suggests, British rule provided new avenues for the articulation of intra-Muslim differences, which had existed earlier in non-violent forms. The same could be said of the rivalries between new groups such as the Ahl-i Hadith, Deobandis and Barelwis, all of which emerged during the period of British rule.

As one might expect of a book surveying Muslim responses to religious pluralism in India, several of Hasan's essays consider the diverse Muslim perspectives on Hindu-Muslim relations and, linked to that, the issue of Indian versus Muslim nationalism. The essay on the ideology and political career of the noted Khilafatist leader Maulana Muhammad Ali shows, for instance, how involvement in pan-Islamic causes could actually go hand-in-hand with concern for Hindu-Muslim unity and joint collaboration against the British in the struggle for a free India. But, as Hasan also shows, the forces of division overtook attempts to bring Hindus and Muslims together in a single post-Raj polity. As his sections on the Muslim mass contact campaign and the local roots of the Pakistan movement suggest, the conflicting interests of both the Hindu as well as Muslim elites sabotaged efforts at reconciliation and understanding, culminating, finally, in the blood-soaked partition of 1947.

> The pre-modern Muslim or Hindu was not so much a member of a singular pan-Indian community as a member of a *biradari* which cut across doctrinal divides

The remaining essays of *Islam in the Subcontinent* provide a general survey of Muslims in post-1947 India. Hasan shows how partition, which was ostensibly a means of protecting Muslims in areas where they were a minority, actually spelt doom for the millions of Muslims who remained behind in India as a vulnerable, marginalised population. Partition provided Muslims remaining in India neither succour nor solace, but rather a magnification of their woes. Writing on the Moradabad 'riot' of 1980, Hasan shows how increasingly aggressive Hindu right-wing groups, abetted by sections of the administration, having heaped havoc on Muslims, have been driving them further into ghettos.

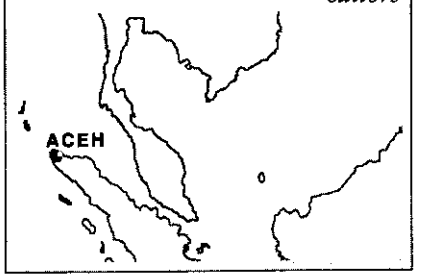
Indian Muslims' escape from peril, Hasan suggests, lies not in cutting themselves off from the 'other' society, but instead in seeking a dialogue with it, for their lives and interests are inextricably linked to the rest of India's people. The author suggests that this requires a revision of traditional understandings of the 'other' as well as reform within the community. It also requires a joint struggle of Hindus, Muslims and others against all forms of religious intolerance and communal antagonism to create an India at peace with its diversity.

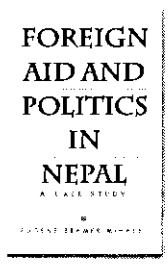
At a time when Hindu-Muslim antagonisms, taking recourse to carefully constructed myths about each other as historical rivals ever since their first encounter, are causing such devastation in our lives, these books serve a very important instructional purpose. The publishers must consider rendering them into Hindi, Urdu and other local languages, minus the academic verbiage, so that their messages might reach a wider audience where it truly matters. △

ERRATA

The January 2003 article 'Southeast Asia: Imagining the region' by Amitav Acharya, included a map on which Aceh was incorrectly placed. Aceh's correct location is identified on the map below.

–editors



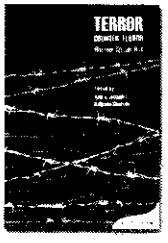


Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal
by Eugene B Mihaly
Himal Books, Kathmandu, 2002 (2nd edition)
pp lx+237, NPR 460
ISBN 99933 43 40 4

When Mihaly wrote this book back in 1965, he was one of very few scholars questioning the efficacy of aid. That was the era of the Cold War, and developing countries were the recipients of large volumes of aid. Nepal, too, could not remain immune to the worldwide phenomenon, and countries as diverse as India, China, Switzerland, the USA and the USSR poured in aid through various means. It had not been many years since the inflow of external assistance began when Mihaly conducted his study. But there is no doubt what his conclusions were: foreign aid had not achieved what it had set out to do for multiple reasons. This reprint of a recognised classic begins with a wide overview of Nepal's foreign aid scene from the very beginning by Nepali scholar Sudhindra Sharma, who also neatly encapsulates the many debates that have characterised the business of foreign aid in Nepal.

The Romance of the State and the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics
by Ashis Nandy
OUP, Delhi, 2003
pp xii+218, INR 495
ISBN 019565864 7

Ashis Nandy, the New Delhi-based social and political commentator, explores key concepts in the mainstream culture of Indian politics, ranging from secularism, development and terrorism to dissent and history. He offers a dissenting perspective on the crisis of Indian democracy, in which some elements of the ideology of the state – such as secularism, development, nationalism and national security – have attenuated status. The ordinary citizen's unconcern with them is seen not as a liability but as a key to the resilience of Indian democracy. Nandy holds the dominant ideology responsible for many of the ills of Indian public life – growing terrorism, massive corruption, communal and ethnic violence, passive submission to mega-technology, and the failure to visualise an autonomous, alternative future for the post-colonial world.



Terror Counter-Terror: Women Speak Out
edited by Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma
Kali for Women, Delhi, 2003
pp. xiii+284, INR 200
ISBN 81 86706 59 3

This anthology of women's voices against terrorism and violent counter-terrorism is compiled from previously published work in numerous magazines and journals from around the world. Contributors analyse the political, social and cultural contexts of violence in its varied forms and locations, but especially as it relates to women. Topics of discussion range from women's responses to the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent military campaign in Afghanistan to deliberations on communal violence in India and Islamist restrictions on women. The writings touch on aggressive masculinity, fundamentalism, war, global capitalism, politicised regions and ethnic nationalism.

If Each Comes Halfway
by Kathryn S March
Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2002
pp xvi+270, price not mentioned
ISBN 0 8014 8827 3

Kathryn March uses the life stories of the Tamang women of Nepal she has collected over 25 years as a researcher in the field in the regions north of Kathmandu valley to explain how these women and she have been able to bridge their cultural differences to find common ground. Using the Tamang women's voices as they speak about themselves, the author weaves in a narrative to portray their lives in the mountains and valleys of central and eastern Nepal, the Tamang ancestral homeland. The book includes a CD of songs in which March's subjects sing about their innermost feelings.

Child labour and the right to education in South Asia: Need versus right?
Edited by Naila Kabeer, Geetha Nambissan and Ramya Subrahmaniam
Sage, Delhi, 2003
pp 416, INR 595/USD 18
ISBN 0761996257

Child labour and child rights have become prominent topics of debate in South Asia. This collection of more than a dozen essays examines the conflict between children's right to education and the economic compulsions that lead families to send their children to work, the state's role in upholding child rights, the relationship of caste and gender to child work, and the impact of globalisation and trade agreements on the economics of child labour. With the UN Convention on Child Rights, now the most widely ratified treaty in the world, this volume comes as a timely resource in an atmosphere of increasing social activism and public discussion.

Compiled by ***Deepak Thapa****, Social Science Baha, Patan*

Note to publishers: new titles can be sent to GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal. Books are mentioned in this section before they are sent for detailed review.

Tie and noose

What does the *Homo Southasiaticus* do to ward off the winter chill? He procures a length of cloth, ideally 6 inches by 166; places at neck so as to leave 106 inches on one side, rings said longer side twice around neck, then wraps around skull, tightens the remaining length around the mouth and face, and taking the two ends, ties them into a knot that looks like a gigantic growth attached to the right cheek.

This is how the Western muffler ('comforter' to the *Bangali*), demurely placed under the dinner jacket or tucked delicately into the cardigan in the Occident, is adapted to South Asian weather and life situations.

Like the muffler, an import and not a *desi* invention is the vest, or *ganji* or *banyaan*. King Parakrama Bahu of Lanka was never found in one, neither, at the other end of SAARC, was Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha. Neither Akbar nor Birbal wore the banyaan. And nowhere in Rajasthani miniatures, the rock-cuts of Ajanta, or in the archaeological digs around Hastinapur do we find any indication that our ancestors BBTM* used refined cottons close to the skin.

But now the banyaan has become *de rigueur* because flabby male stars of Bollywood, who also doubtless wear Y-fronts (I think that is the term) in the lower elevations, go around in them and remind us that *"yeh under ka mamla hai"* (trans: this is an inside job).

Adaptation is a Subcontinental trait, and so we in the hot tropics, saddled with the banyaan, find ways around the constriction. The science of evaporation confirms that when it is hot and/or humid, it is best to let the skin interact with the atmosphere without intervening layers of garment. To overcome the banyaan, therefore, friends extending in a line from landlocked Champaran to the Jaffna peninsula have developed the only response possible: they walk around doing their chores and sit eating lunch off banana leaves with the undershirt pulled up all the way above the stomach, flashing the belly around like a sea-lion attached to their frame. They are cool, and they *look* like cool dudes.

What are we to do with the imported bits of inner and outerwear other than to try and turn them to our convenience? But sometimes, the rout is complete, such as in the case of the trouser. It is a piece of clothing to have been sent packing with the British in 1947-48, but the new elites that took over would not be caught dead in the pyjama, *lungi*, *salwar*, *dhoti* or *sarong*.

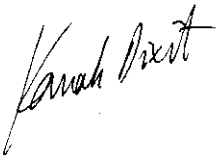
Have you thought of how we may have evolved as a people if we had been allowed to dress otherwise and not be constricted by the pant and shirt? Gandhi wore the dhoti, and he was a pacifist of not just this century or millennium, but of geological time. The cadre of Hedgewar's RSS chose khaki shorts; see the kind of havoc they have wreaked and they have not even graduated to full pants yet.

There would have been less psychological stress in South Asia if the belt and tie had never entered (or having entered, had departed) these shores. The belt keeps us uneasy, feeling tight, flatulent and uppity, and wanting to go right back to Kargil and finish off what we started in 1999. The tie depresses the flow of blood to the cranium and makes us want to neglect command and control structures even after we have gone nuclear. The tie, depending on how you look at it, and indeed if you will look at it at all, is more of a noose.

As you may have noticed, most heads of state and/or government of the Non-Aligned Movement (what movement, when did it last move, or even creep?) who gathered in Mahathir's Melayu recently wore – aha – ties. And they may even have had on trousers, but the television cameras never panned vertically so I could not tell.

To comment on the sartorial colonisation of the South, our frame of reference must of course be both the colonial and postcolonial periods. Perhaps we should also analyse why this sartorial takeover has been predominantly gender-specific? Should we be thankful that at least the women amongst us have shunned the tie and the belt? Wait, but what about high heels, platform shoes, the nightie-worn-during-the-day, and skin-whitening cream?

Editor's note to reader: Our investigations reveal that the columnist was wearing a pair of trousers with belt, as well as a banyaan and shirt while writing this 'Lastpage'. The next instalment, we are assured, will take a penetrating look at male attire in the form of the Nepali *labeda surwal* and the 'Pathan suit'.



* *blessed be their memory*

Survey of Pakistani print media

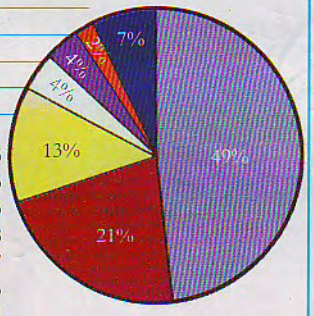
(see inside, page 27)

Distribution of sources in English and Urdu daily newspapers

Category	English press		Category	Urdu press	
News agencies	3689	(45.5)	Staff report	6028	(33.2)
Staff report	2206	(27.2)	News agencies	4813	(26.5)
Contributor	670	(8.3)	Correspondent	2085	(11.4)
Staff photographer	593	(7.4)	Staff photographer	1977	(10.8)
Advertising agency	258	(3.2)	Advertising agency	797	(4.4)
Reader	173	(2.2)	Contributor	655	(3.7)
Bureau report	141	(1.7)	Columnist	562	(3.0)
Editor	98	(1.3)	Press releases	538	(2.9)
Press releases	98	(1.3)	Bureau report	278	(1.6)
Columnist	65	(0.9)	Reader	220	(1.3)
Correspondent	47	(0.6)	Writer	105	(0.6)
Cartoonist	38	(0.5)	Editor	85	(0.5)
Writer	36	(0.5)	Cartoonist	48	(0.3)
Total	**8i12**	**(100)**	**Total**	**18,191**	**(100)**

Distribution of format categories in daily newspapers

Category	Frequency	Percentage
News items	12,743	49
Photos	5,637	21
News/photo	3,425	13
Advertisement	1,066	4
Photo feature	1,005	4
Columns	625	2
Others		7
Letters	393	1.5
Articles	378	1.5
Reports	337	1.3
Press releases	218	0.8
Editorials	182	0.7
Features	153	0.6
Cartoons	78	0.3
Stories	33	0.2
Book Reviews	29	0.2
Total	**26,303**	**100**

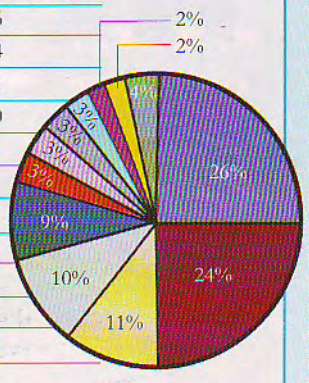


Treatment of women-related news in daily newspapers

Newspaper	Supportive		Non-supportive		Total
Al-Akhbar	1017	(85.3)	175	(14.7)	1192
Ausaf	1536	(84.0)	293	(16.0)	1829
Dawn	1618	(86.5)	254	(13.6)	1872
Din	1375	(82.5)	292	(17.5)	1667
Frontier Post	729	(92.9)	55	(7.0)	784
Jang – Rwp	1589	(77.9)	449	(22.1)	2038
Jang – Khi	1846	(79.8)	466	(20.2)	2312
Khabrain	2430	(77.2)	721	(22.9)	3151
Nation	1795	(82.8)	372	(17.2)	2167
Nawa-I-Waqt	1929	(82.6)	407	(17.3)	2336
Observer	1133	(81.1)	264	(18.9)	1397
Pakistan	1801	(80.7)	428	(19.2)	2229
Sahafat	1032	(71.8)	405	(28.2)	1437
The News	1565	(82.7)	327	(17.3)	1892

Weekly magazine categories by format

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Advertisement	522	26
Photo feature	507	24
Letters	236	11
Stories	217	10
Photos	185	9
Misc	70	3
Reports	68	3
News items	62	3
Features	58	3
News/photo	49	2
Articles	47	2
Others		4
Columns	35	1.7
Contributor	16	0.8
Cartoons	10	0.5
Book reviews	6	0.3
Editorials	5	0.05
Press releases	2	0.09
Total	**2079**	**100**

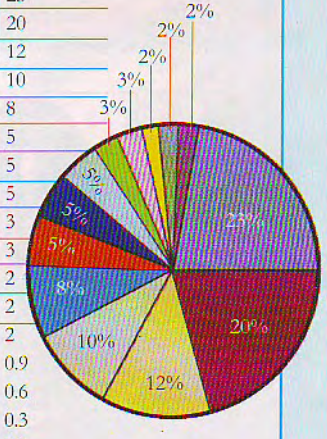


Treatment of women-related news in monthly magazines

Magazine	Supportive		Non-Supportive		Total
	f	%	f	%	
Herald	104	46.7	119	53.4	223
Newsline	118	52.5	107	47.6	225
Pakiza Digest	88	31.0	192	68.6	280
She	267	40.0	403	60.0	672
Women's Own	180	36.4	315	63.6	495

Page-wise distribution in daily newspapers

Category	Frequency	Percentage
National	5860	23
City	5322	20
Back page	3243	12
Front page	2548	10
Showbiz	2128	8
International	1423	5
Sports	1309	5
Misc	1266	5
Special Ed Features	754	3
Editorial	735	3
Sunday Magazine	577	2
Opinion	552	2
Others		2
Economy/business	233	0.9
Health/education	155	0.6
Women's page	65	0.3
Advertisement	60	0.3
Mid-week magazine	57	0.2
Kashmir	12	0.04
Life	2	0.01
Review	1	0.01
Style	1	0.01
Total	**26,303**	**100**



SOURCE: CHANGING IMAGES: A NATIONAL STUDY ON MONITORING AND SENSITISATION OF THE PRINT MEDIA ON THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN, UKS, 2003.

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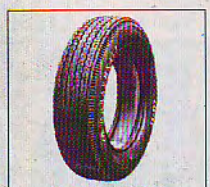

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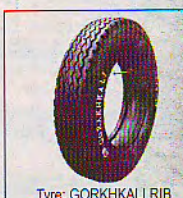

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