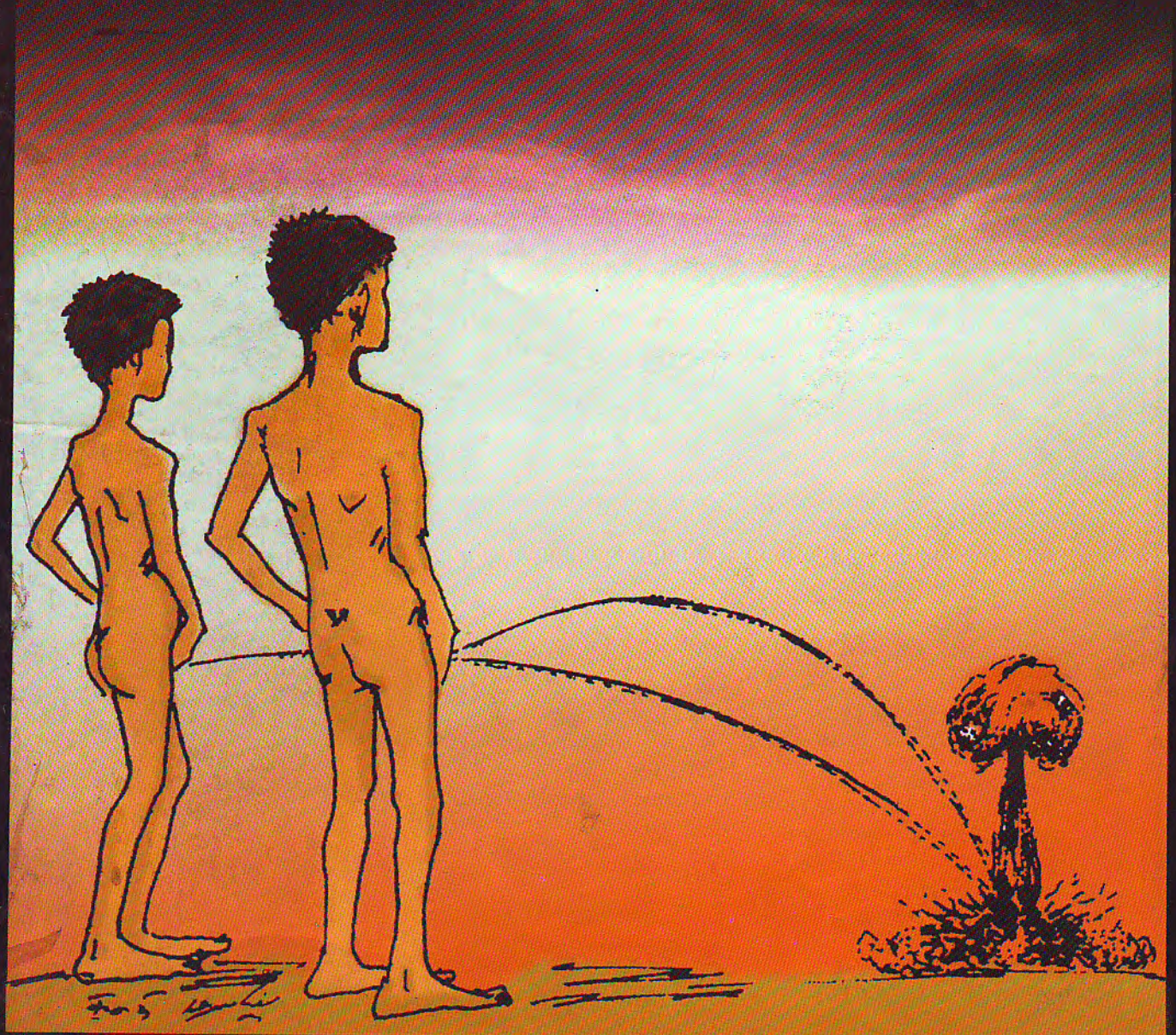
December 2003

HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

WHO NEEDS WSF?

The Indo-Pak Bomb



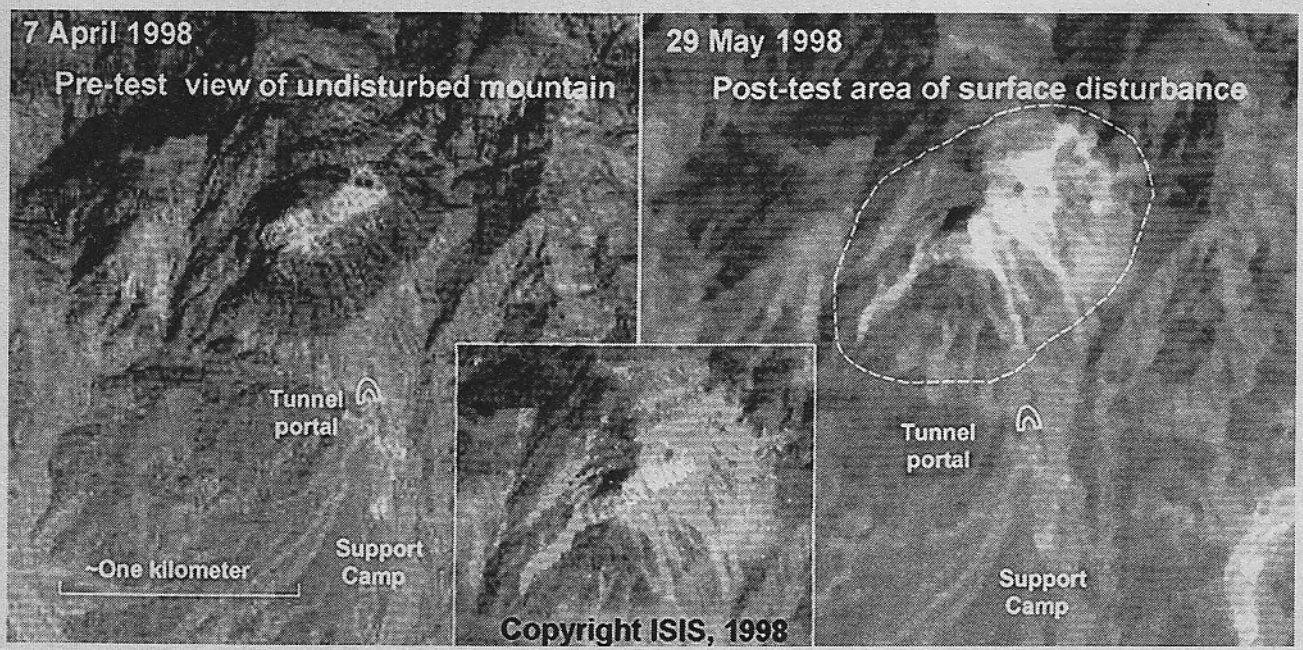
GROW UP!

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

HIMAL SOUTH ASIAN

Vol 16 No 12 December 2003

Nuclear Roundtable 9



Chagai, 1998

CONTENTS

HIMAL
SOUTH ASIAN
editors@himalmag.com

Editor
Kanak Mani Dixit

Associate Editor
Thomas J Mathew

Contributing Editors
CALCUTTA Rajashri Dasgupta
COLOMBO Manik de Silva
DHAKA Afsan Chowdhury
KARACHI Beena Sarwar
NEW DELHI Mitu Varma
N. AMERICA Amitava Kumar

Editorial Assistant
Joe Thomas K

Design Team
Indra Shrestha
Kam Singh Chepang
Suresh Neupane
Bilash Rai (Graphics)
Bhushan Shilpakar (Website)

Marketing
advertising@himalmedia.com

Subscription/Overseas Sales
Anil Karki
subscription@himalmedia.com

Nepal/Northeast India Sales
Sudan Bista
sales@himalmedia.com

Marketing Office, Karachi
Ajmal Kamal
City Press
316 Madina City Mall
Abdullah Haroon Road
Saddar, Karachi 74400
Ph. +92-21-5650623/5213916
email: cp@citypress.cc

Himal is published and distributed by
Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-5543333, 5523845
Fax: 5521013
Email: editors@himalmag.com
http://www.himalmag.com
ISSN 1012 9804
Library of Congress Control Number
88 912882
Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-5521393, 5543017

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

Contributors to this issue

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar is a Rawalpindi activist involved with people's movements.

Andrew Nash studies South Asian history at the Jawarhlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

CK Lal is a Kathmandu engineer and columnist with the weekly *Nepali Times*.

Jehan Perera, a human rights activist based in Colombo, writes a column in the *Daily Mirror*.

Mohan Guruswamy, Abhishek Kaul and **Vishal Handa** are with the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Rahul Goswami, based in Singapore, is a correspondent with the Inter Press Service.

Suhas Chakma is direcotr of the Asian Human Rights Centre, New Delhi.

Zia Mian, scholar teaching at Princeton University academic, is the co-author of the book *Out of the Nuclear Shadow*

Cover art by **Kunda Dixit** (Kathmandu) and **Beena Sarwar** (Karachi).
Cover and lastlast page design by **Tsering Phuntsok**. Lastlast page concept by **Joe Thomas K.**

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

subscription rates

	1 year	2 years
India	INR 580	INR 1125
Nepal	NPR 540	NPR 1000
Rest of S. Asia	USD 18	USD 34
Hong Kong/ Brunei/Gulf	USD 22	USD 42
Elsewhere	USD 40	USD 75

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

Country	Agent
Bangladesh	International Book Agencies Ltd., 61, Motijheel C/A 2nd floor, Dhaka. *Tel: +880-29-9551308/9560584*
India	Central News Agency (P) Ltd., 4E/15 Jhandewalan Ext, New Delhi 110001. *Tel:* +91-11-3670532, 3670534, 3670536. *Fax:* +91-11-3626036 *Email:* subs@cna-india.com or sanjeev@cna-india.com
Maldives	Asrafee Book Shop, 1/44 Chandhanee Magu, P.O.Box. 2053, Male. *Tel: +960-32-3424*
Nepal	Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd. GPO Box: 7251, Kathmandu, *Tel: +977-1-5543333-36*
Pakistan	Ajmal Kamal, City Press, 316 Madina City Mall, Abdullah Haroon Road, Saddar, Karachi 74400 Ph. +92-21-5650623/5213916, email: cp@citypress.cc
Sri Lanka	Lake House Book Shop, 100, Sir Chittampalam, Gardiner Mawatha, Colombo-2. *Tel: +94-1-432105/ 430581/430582*

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

Australia	Indra Ban, 12, Norfolk St, Paddington 2021, Sydney. *Fax: +61-2-635 3207*
Sweden	Empatum AB, Box: 26159, 100 41 Stockholm. *Fax: +46-8-141088*
The Netherlands	Frans Meijer, Zwanenburgwal 278, 1011 JH Amsterdam. *Fax: +31-20-625 6690.*
UK & Ireland	Joti Giri H SAUK, 33 Tyers Terrace, London SE 11 5SE. *Fax: 0207 820-9915. e-mail: himaluk@talk21.com*
North America	Barbara Bella &Associates, 500 Sansome Street, Suite 101, PO Box: 470758, San Francisco, CA 94147. *Fax: +1-415-986 7860 email: Bba2@aol.com*

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

Subscribers who wish to pay through AMEX, VISA or MASTER CARD can fax details to:+ 977-1-5521013 or e-mail us at <subscription@himalmedia.com>. For AMEX cards please include contact phone numbers.

www.himalmag.com

Judging Film South Asia 2003

IT IS commendable that despite itself being involved in Film South Asia '03 (FSA'03), *Himal South Asian* (November 2003) offered space for a discussion on the awards. My contribution to the discussion pertains to the three pieces: Lubna Marium's 'Judging Film South Asia', Manesh Shrestha's 'Goodbye documentary, hello non-fiction', and Nupur Basu's 'Jury out on the jury'.

A note on the three authors: Marium was one of the three-member jury that singled out five films for awards from the short-listed 43. Manesh Shrestha is the director of FSA. Basu writes in her capacity as 'participant-observer'. My intervention is also in a similar capacity, as a film viewer.

Basu is critical of the awards, and the bases on which judgements were made. Common to Marium's and Shrestha's articles is an attempt to justify the jury awards. This is obvious in Marium, but evidently also informs Shrestha's aarticle that otherwise is a potted survey of documentaries in South Asia.

The slogan of the festival was "documentaries can be fun". Not all the award-winning films were 'fun'. The fun aspect could be reinterpreted. None of the winners made anyone really sweat; they did not question political status quo. The absence of any directly political film making it to the dream group of awardees lead Basu, among others, to wonder if the jury was avoiding taking strong decisions that made a statement to the establishment, especially to the Indian government. Marium and Shrestha justify the jury's decision on grounds of the winning films' aesthetic appeal and creative craftsmanship. According to them, these help the films communicate better and reach to a wider audience. Here both presume on behalf of the 'audience'. Often it is the case that the popularity of a film rides on its awards; witness the acceptability of Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*. 'Creative' can conveniently become a euphemism for politically non-controversial.

Anand Patwardhan, Greg Stitt, Shubradeep Chakravorty, Lalit Vachani, KP Jayashankar and Anjali Monteiro, among others, used the audio-visual medium to stunning effect. Creativity was integral to these films. They spoke in the way audio or print could not. For example, Patwardhan's film on the armament and nuclear issue, put in print, would fill several issues of *Himal South Asian* and even then the print version would not communicate as effectively as the film did. Sanjay Kak's *Words on Water* clearly showed the injustice surrounding the Sardar Sarovar Project. Stitt's film was fun, musical, aesthetic, and hit brutally at the core of market-led globalisation. Rare footage of the complicity of the RSS in the demolition of the Babri Masjid is among the merits of Vachani's film. And Shubradeep Chakravorty's is a bold film that examines the big government-sponsored lie about Gujarat. Their films are not all particularly "entertaining" in the manner in which MTV is deemed to be, but neither can they be typecast as 'developmentalist', 'activist', or 'academic'. They are definitely not "governmental" since they challenge the rhetoric of the nation-state. Why did none of them make it to the golden five? Doubt enters and the credibility of the FSA is put at stake. While earlier festival awards too have generated debate, this was possibly the most contentious of the festivals thus far.

The jury made some comments on the length of the films. Was length a standard? The audience at the FSA'03 did not seem to find a short film necessarily riveting, or a longer one trying. If length was a criterion, then it should have been specified. If other considerations prevailed, then those too should have been made transparent. The decision of the jury seems arbitrary and feeble efforts at justification on the bases of alleged "creativity" or "aesthetic appeal" only reinforce the fragility of the verdict.

Given the controversial decision of the jury and the attempt by a section of it and the organisers to justify the decision, a question arises: what were the criteria for selecting the 43 films? Were some films dropped because they did not meet with stringent quality controls or aesthetic standards? Going by the lack of gravity of some of them, one is left to wonder. The Nepal films clearly disappointed. This brings me to the next point.

Shrestha, ruing the lack of hard-hitting films from the country, explains it away by citing "fear of reprisals from the government as well as the Maoists". First, fear of reprisal has not stopped any artiste or writer in Nepal thus far. Second, fear of reprisals is not exclusive to filmmakers in Nepal. Nor is it a good enough reason as the strongly anti-establishment films on display from other locales prove. The filmmakers risked reprisal and live with it.

Nepali films screened at the FSA'03 focused on enjoyable and light themes. The topics deserving treatment are then left to foreigners, often donor driven, with predictable results. A broader discussion on why FSA '03 had such a poor showing of films with depth from Nepal is needed. Here the role of the FSA'03, based in Kathmandu, and emphasising "fun" before other genres of the documentary in Nepal have been adequately explored, needs to be confronted.

The FSA is one of the only available fora in South Asia for alternative documentary films that engage with the margins not merely of a tenuously-defined aesthetic but also of the clearly-definable establishment. If the FSA encourages, subtly or overtly, through its selection of jury and their selection of films, tolerance to a margin or a border, then it abandons a crucial space and puts at risk its own brand equity and identity. The outcome of FSA'03 has given rise to a concern that the festival is precariously poised on the boundary that separates the alternative from the mainstream.

***Ramesh Parajuli**, Kathmandu*

PRESIDENT+ PRIME MINISTER = PEACE

ACCORDING TO President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the reason she took over the key ministries of defence, interior and media on 3 November was the deterioration of the security situation in the country. The visible advantages accruing to the LTTE due to their ability to move about freely and enter government-controlled territory in unlimited numbers was one of the most criticised aspects of the ceasefire agreement. However, after taking control of that part of the government most concerned with security issues, President Kumaratunga appears to be conducting affairs in much the same way as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was doing when his ministers were in charge of those ministries.

Apart from the cost considerations and volatile political atmosphere, the main reason an election is not an alternative to a negotiated solution is that it simply will not solve the problem. There is no alternative to civilised and rational "give and take" at the negotiating table

The president has made repeated public statements that she would honour the entirety of the ceasefire agreement. She also ordered the armed forces to abide by the rulings of the international monitors of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and respect their status as the arbiters of the ceasefire agreement. This was quite a turnaround from her past conduct, when she had been a strident critic of the SLMM, even to the extent of publicly demanding that the Norwegian government should remove its present head for being biased. While the president has not rescinded her demand that the head be removed, she has legitimised the role of the international monitors by her orders.

Furthermore, the president has not followed one of her own controversial directives to the former defence minister, whose portfolio she took over. In October the president had ordered the latter to remove the camp put up by the LTTE in an area of Trincomalee determined to be government territory by the international monitors. But, after assuming the role of the defence minister, she has been quiet about the LTTE camp, no doubt realising that any effort to forcibly remove it could severely endanger the ceasefire.

Therefore, it is clearly evident that the president, who took over the three ministries citing national security concerns, has not changed anything fundamental compared to what her predecessor as defence minister was doing. In the last week of November she even instructed the media ministry that she took over not to criticise the LTTE. Her own words towards the LTTE have become more conciliatory and beginning to sound more like that of the government that she only recently was criticising for being too soft on the Tigers.

This was followed by her proposal for a power sharing scheme with regard to the peace process which briefly raised hopes that a quick solution may be in the offing. In her proposal she sought to address the peace process as a first priority. A little earlier the president and the prime minister had appointed a joint committee of high officials to work out an agreement between them that could resolve the political crisis, but before the joint committee could submit its mutually agreed proposals, the president acted unilaterally and publicised her own set of proposals. If the prime minister felt let down that the president sought to gain an advantage at his cost, he had reason to feel that way. But it is in the interests of a negotiated settlement that the president's proposals should be evaluated on their merits.

The proposals provide for a substantial broad-basing of the peace process. One of the major complaints regarding the process has been the exclusivist attitude of the government. Only the members of the negotiating teams and a handful of others knew what was really going on in the peace process. It has sometimes been said that only the prime minister knows where he wants the peace process to go. The president's proposals envisaged setting up a joint council co-chaired by both the president and prime minister which would set the overall policy direction of the peace process and to which the negotiating team would report. The inclusion of presidential nominees in the negotiating team and a civil society advisory body are some of the other key features in the president's proposals, which in turn would ensure a much greater participation from diverse interest groups

in the peace process. The proposals were rejected by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in the first week of December.

In any negotiation much depends on the spirit with which the negotiators enter into the negotiations. An erosion of confidence at the outset itself is a bad sign. But the alternative to a negotiated settlement of the cohabitation crisis is not preparing for an election, as some members of the government seem to believe. Apart from the cost considerations and volatile political atmosphere, the main reason an election is not an alternative to a negotiated solution is that it simply will not solve the problem. There is no alternative to civilised and rational "give and take" at the negotiating table. This would also be the best way for Sri Lanka's political leaders to show the world that LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakharan was mistaken in his analysis of the present political crisis which had set the government and the president against each other as reflecting Sinhala racism. Today, the vast majority of Sinhalese people are united in desiring that the president and the prime minister, representing two different political parties, should work together to take the peace process forward. What stands in the way is not Sinhala racism but the politicians' quest for power.

The optimism that President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe would resolve the political crisis through a compromise agreement is now giving way to pessimism. It appears that decades of party rivalry, bolstered by personal differences, cannot be bridged. The leadership (as well as personality) factor in the present crisis cannot be discounted. Both the president and prime minister are undisputed leaders coming from opposing parties. The decision-making structures within their respective parties vest them with enormous authority. They have the power to set the tone for either confrontation or compromise, which the rest of the party membership can pick up. But their inability to find a solution to the political crisis brought about by the president's take-over of the three key ministries puts both of them in a potentially vulnerable situation.

The society-wide consensus that the president and prime minister should work together for the common good is born out of two circumstances. The first is that the solution to the ethnic conflict necessarily calls for a bipartisan approach by the two main political parties. If the president and prime minister were to work together, a two-thirds majority to change the constitution is possible for a start, to get an interim administration for the north-east underway. If they do not work together, even the next step forward cannot take place.

Tragically, much of the attention of the country's policymakers and media is being devoted to the political crisis rather than to dealing with the many other problems facing the country. In the north-east, for instance, the LTTE is continuing to recruit children on a significant scale, and the Muslim people of the east are at the receiving end of oppressive treatment. Yet there is scarcely any attention being devoted to these problems. The plight of displaced Tamil people in the north-east, and the economic reconstruction of the war ravaged areas is getting further prolonged.

More compromise

When assessing the political career paths of the president and prime minister, an ascending and descending trend can be seen. With the end of her second and final presidential term due in less than two years, President Kumaratunga is on a declining trend. She faces the terrible prospect of ending her political career as a person who presided over a failed war for peace and was kept out of the peace process that succeeded. On the other hand, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe is on an ascending trend. He has been more successful as prime minister than was expected, especially with regard to the peace process with the LTTE.

Both the president and the prime minister are currently involved in a tussle over the defence ministry, which is a very important institution of government. Both have legitimate reasons to stake their claim to it. Indeed, the president may have greater claim because from 1978 onwards, the presidents of the republic (there have been three prior to President Kumaratunga) retained the defence portfolio. Indeed, even after his party lost its parliamentary majority in 1994, President DB Wijetunga retained the defence portfolio.

Further, if we accept the notion that the party on the ascendant should compromise more than the party on the decline, then it is the prime minister who is in a better position to compromise on the defence ministry dispute. Accordingly, he should consider

accepting the president's offer of full cooperation in the peace process that she has requested him to take forward. There are precedents for power-sharing with regard to the defence ministry. In the mid-1980s President JR Jayewardene created the position of the national security ministry and while he retained the defence portfolio, he permitted Lalith Athulathmudali to conduct the war against the LTTE as the minister of national security.

There are several advantages in the prime minister accepting the president's proposal that she would keep the defence ministry but provide him with decision-making powers in relation to the peace process. It will provide a golden opportunity for the peace process to re-start on a firm basis of bipartisan support. Even the LTTE has recently been asking the president and prime minister to resolve their differences to enable a stable government that could re-start the peace process with them. The Tamil people will feel more confident that the peace process will yield a genuine solution if the president and prime minister are jointly involved in the peace process, as the constitutional obstacles to a just political solution will no longer be insurmountable barriers.

President Kumaratunga faces the terrible prospect of ending her political career as a person who presided over a failed war for peace and was kept out of a peace process that succeeded.

There is of course, the possibility that the president will not cooperate with the prime minister in a genuine manner, but seek to trip him up, for instance by revealing the details of secret negotiations with the LTTE. The president has an unhappy track record of being indiscreet and speaking her mind to the detriment of both her friends and foes, and indeed even herself. But peace-making is always a risky proposition, whether it is with one's democratic opponents or military opponents. There are also conflict resolution mechanisms, such as facilitators and monitors, to make it more likely that the trust placed will not be abused.

Up until now the prime minister has succeeded in the peace process with the LTTE because he took risks on the basis of a rational calculation that they would not go back to war and because he set up an international safety net. The LTTE too has a bad track record of suddenly going back to war. But the advantages of the peace process have kept them within its fold. The prime minister needs to make the same rational calculation now, and design adequate safeguards, on the rationale that working with the president is in the larger interests of the country. In the event that the president does not cooperate in good faith, the people will know that the prime minister did his best under the circumstances. Democracy is about letting the people be the final judges.△

–Jehan Perera

REVOLUTION AND RESPONSIBILTY

THE RELEASE of the annual report of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) was accompanied by the usual fanfare, including a very deliberate assertion absolving the Pervez Musharraf regime of any responsibility for the dramatic increase in poverty in recent years that the report begrudgingly acknowledges to be the conspicuous feature of the present economy. This admission follows long after the report congratulates the Musharraf economic team for improving macroeconomic performance significantly. It is pointed out that this improvement will provide the basis for a genuine effort to address the huge poverty problem.

The Musharraf tenure, like most periods of rule that have preceded it, has been characterised by a healthy rhetoric about the "revolutionary" changes that are being wrought by the government. The popularly propagated notions about economic recovery stand out in this regard. Despite the acute increase in poverty that has taken place since October 1999, the government has continued to insist that the economy is back on track and that it is a matter of time before the benefits of macroeconomic recovery trickle down to the wretched masses. That there is no evidence to suggest that the long-awaited trickle-down effect will materialise is another matter altogether. In any case, "revolutionary" changes in the economic sphere are just the tip of the iceberg. The consistent feature of all of the "revolutionary" changes that have been brought about, in the economic sphere or otherwise, is in their total and utter commitment to the status quo.

In the first instance, how can one ignore the fact that so many sitting cabinet members were on the Musharraf hit-list for quite some time after the 1999 coup? Sheikh Rasheed, Aftab Sherpao and Faisal Saleh Hyat were all proclaimed corrupt offenders who were to be given exemplary punishment in the name of accountability. But then again political horse-trading has become a regular feature of the country's political landscape, so perhaps we should ignore the fact that these offenders redeemed themselves quite miraculously, and focus instead on the genuine "revolutions" that have taken place in the life of the ordinary Pakistani.

Over the past four years, we have heard a great deal about the incredible changes that have been induced by the newly created local governments under the vaunted devolution of power programme. It is said that this exercise has produced a new face of representative politics at the grassroots, yet another initiative that will eventually lead to massive tangible benefits to the ordinary Pakistani. But there is some time before this revolutionary step does bear fruit however—the government has admitted that poverty-related expenditures remain lower than stipulated on account of bottlenecks in the functioning of the new local governments.

But just for the record, what has been the devolution experience? As far as ensuring smooth functioning of the October 2002 election and victories for the ruling PML-Q party, the devolution exercise was very successful. But why digress again into the realm of political engineering? Instead, let us consider what devolution has brought to the people of this country. As such, the local governments, and particularly those at the lowest tier, are still waiting for trickle down of finances so as to actually meet the demand of their constituents. That is of course, if the local governments are in any way, shape, or form, independent of the local elite from whom the devolution exercise was meant to confiscate power. In fact, far from confiscating power from the local elite, the devolution exercise has largely consolidated power in the hands of the elite. There is virtually no district nazim (nazims are heads of the new local government system established by President Musharraf under the Legal Framework Order) who does not hail from an old influential family. Therefore, to expect that service delivery at the local level is all of a sudden free from the patronage-based traditions that dominate Pakistani society is wishful thinking. Indeed, the devolution exercise has reinforced existing social structures and provided a whole new legitimacy to local elite groups, some of whom were struggling to maintain their control over societies in which elite power bases are being quickly eroded.

In the absence of comprehensive realignments of social and economic power at the local level, it is difficult to imagine the outcome of any election being too different from that of the local government elections in 2001. And since the confident land reform promises made by General Musharraf soon after assuming power have given way to Prime Minister Jamali's assurances that land reform is not part of the government's agenda, it is clear that comprehensive alignments of power are not about to take place anytime soon. And so, speedy justice to the doorstep and all of those other good things that were premised on the success of devolution will just have to wait.

One other significant promise made by the Musharraf government was that it would strengthen the Pakistani federal structure and address the nagging problem of provincial autonomy. As the discord over sharing of river waters has proven, there have been no revolutionary changes on this front either. In fact, the genuine concerns of working class Pakistanis who face acute water crises are even less likely to be addressed than ever given the fact that the dispute over water "rights" tends to completely overlook the nuances of water availability and access within the provinces for marginalised groups.

Finally, it is worth examining the claim that de-politicisation of state institutions would take place. Even pro-army commentators in Pakistan now find it difficult to defend the manner in which the army has politicised state institutions to a degree that was previously unimaginable. Between the hundreds of army officers—serving and retired—running civilian institutions, and the sheer nepotism that characterises decisions about everything from issuing of contracts, building golf clubs, and picking inept cricketers to represent the country, it is clear that state institutions are worse-off than ever, hardly responsive to the needs of citizens.

Naïve expectations

The army high command has succeeded in proving that the army does truly enforce its will on anyone and everyone, while rendering all mechanisms of accountability completely useless. And the army has also done all the favour of proving that "elected" governments in this country have never truly been independent of the *khaki* veto, further disillusioning ordinary people about the possibility that the political process offers them some hope.

In the midst of all of the mendacity, the government has recently decided to once again ban certain religious groups. The three entities that have been banned in the first phase of the "re-banning" are all groups that were previously banned and have since taken on new names and reorganised rather painlessly. That all it took for them to continue on with their operations was to change their names reflects how serious the government was in the first place, and why to expect any "revolutionary" changes on this front is as naive as to expect them on any other front.

So at the end of the day, the rebuilding of national confidence and morale, the first of the seven points of General Musharraf's famous initial agenda, which would have potentially represented the most revolutionary step of all, remains a pipe dream. Among other things, there is an urgent need to reconsider the now very common practice of misrepresentation, as the SBP report attempts to do by shifting the burden of blame for poverty away from those currently occupying positions of responsibility.

It is true that every government, regardless of type, makes tall claims to have addressed the critical problems facing the polity. But given the background of General Musharraf's ascendance to power, and the persistent accusations that his government has made about the mess that was made by previous rulers, it is inexcusable that so many "revolutionary" changes are taking place that are exacerbating the massive problems that existed well before General Musharraf assumed the reins. More than ever, this regime resembles the dictatorial and self-serving ones that came before it. ▷

–Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

The Indo-Pak bomb

by ***Itty Abraham***

In the progress of nuclearisation in South Asia, India has been the leader in the sense of provoking the next stage of escalation at every turn. In this context one of the questions that needs to be asked is the degree to which nuclear weapons in Pakistan has now become part of the Pakistani identity and the extent to which getting rid of nuclear weapons would need a certain kind of vacuum at least within the elite circles.

May 1998 was a turning point in South Asian nuclear history. The tests at Pokhran were initiated by the BJP government which had just come to power through a process which was characterised by extreme secrecy so much so that even the ministry of defence was one of the last to find out about it. The tests ended a period which had been underway from 1974, characterised by nuclear ambiguity or nuclear opaqueness. In 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test, which was described as a peaceful nuclear explosion. For the next 14 years, India worked hard to increase nuclear capacity, and Pakistan tried to systematise a haphazard nuclear programme. By the mid-1980s it was clear that Pakistan had in fact the weapon, but it took till 1998 really for that weapon to become public and the official nuclearisation of South Asia to happen.

New Delhi's decision to proceed with the nuclear explosions in 1998 is confusing from the point of view of international relations. At one stroke, India managed to get rid of its strategic advantage over Pakistan. India is many times more powerful and has resources far greater than Pakistan. The explosion allowed Pakistan to equate itself with India simply by setting off their own weapons. It became very clear that the aim of setting of these weapons was in fact to provoke Pakistan to do the same. Paradoxically, the fact that Pakistan was able to respond in the way that it did, came as a surprise to many in India. Until then, within the scientific community in particular, there had always been a suspicion that Pakistan's claims to have nuclear weapons were in fact bogus. But among a number of political leaders the attitude was that if India managed to provoke Pakistan into following suit, it would replicate in South Asia the putative cold war scenario of the United States exhausting the USSR into submission.

What is confusing, however, is why a country which already had a strategic advantage over another would decide to take an action which equated the two of them. The argument, confusing to some scholars, was that once the two countries had nuclear weapons it would result in a series of agreements and conventions which would prevent further escalation and impart greater stability in the relations between the two countries. This seemed logical from a theoretical point of view. Ironically of course this so-called theory of deterrence did not seem to work in South Asia because within a year of the tests, the Kargil war took place, initiated not by the stronger but the weaker country. This clearly seemed to suggest that not only had Pakistan equalised its strategic position vis-à-vis India, it also acquired a certain amount of freedom to take actions which in the past would be seen as extremely provocative and would perhaps have led to full-scale war. So the logic, now, of nuclear weapons in South Asia appears to be that it does not prevent war but prevents war from escalating. So, we can now assume that the series of confrontations and low-intensity conflicts that have been taking place in the region for a long time will only increase.

No matter how sure political leaders are that nuclear weapons are not meant to be used—that they are simply meant to be brandished as political weapons rather than as military weapons—all that is needed is a small miscalculation on one side or the other for the threat of nuclear use to become closer than it is today. Studies have shown that under conditions of crisis, decision-making time is reduced as the crisis advances. The time available is not sufficient for a response based on an understanding of what has happened and the true nature of the crisis. That is why mistakes happen, even if there is a well-established path by which decisions are meant to be taken, namely there is a chain of command, and a set of minimum conditions to be met before each succeeding step is taken. A burgeoning crisis creates the compulsion to take decisions which under normal circumstances may not have been taken. As the crises follow one another, the danger of the use of nuclear weapons becomes higher, and the possibility of something going out of control comes closer each time. The whole problem with nuclear weapons is that if they have to be a credible threat, they have to placed in a position where they can actually be credibly used, which means that they cannot be kept as far away as one would like for security purposes. They have necessarily to be kept in a somewhat vulnerable position. The Indian establishment claims that the chain of command is very secure. But, these arrangements are only as good as the first failure.

There is also one school of thought which believes that actually India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons completely under their control because they are only political weapons not ever intended for use as military weapons. In the present context where there is one global super-power and both countries are vying with each other to gain its attention, what better way of getting its attention than to threaten the use of nuclear weapons. There is a great deal of truth to this.

The United States' interests have to do with the western side of Pakistan much more than the eastern side of Pakistan. The Indian side is hoping that the Americans will put pressure on Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism, as it is called in India in relation to Kashmir. But the Americans show no interest, it seems, in taking further steps to resolve the Kashmir issue. Rather what is done is, what Pakistan has always wanted, namely to internationalise Kashmir. Given the strategic asymmetry between the two countries, every time Pakistan threatens the use the nuclear weapon it invokes Kashmir in the same breath. Therefore, Kashmir, is always on the table. It is not at all clear that we have gotten any closer to a resolution of this problem, which all said and done is the primary issue between India and Pakistan.

These aspects constitute the general backdrop against which the nuclear question in South Asian needs to be discussed.

Polished shoes, dirty feet

India began its nuclear programme even before independence. It was at that point clearly seen as an energy programme, restricted to producing nuclear power for civilian consumption. A peculiarity of the Indian programme is the location of its facilities. Bombay is not the place where you want to have these facilities, if the idea was to make nuclear weapons. You want to have them in the south or east, as far away from a potential threat from Pakistan as far as possible. This in a sense corroborates the view that the Indian programme to begin with was part of the larger developmental effort.

Homi Bhabha came back from England during the second world war and without much difficulty convinced Nehru and the political leadership that India needed nuclear power if it was to develop. It was as simple as that.

In 1955, India in the pursuit of this objective made a critical decision that was to open up other possibilities later. This was the choice of reactor, an aspect that does not always get the attention it deserves. The choice at that time was between a light water reactor and a heavy water reactor. Light water reactors were the most common form of nuclear reactors at that time. The United States had it and General Electric was willing to sell it. The Russians were also developing light water reactors. Heavy water reactors were much more of an unproven technology at that time, and only the Canadians had gone in that direction. Because of the heavy capital costs involved, India had to make a choice between the one or the other, as changing course subsequently would not be easy. At a closed door meeting of Indian scientists, it was decided to opt for the heavy water reactor because the case was made that one of the advantages of heavy water reactors was that plutonium was a by-product. Plutonium as a by-product should have been seen as something that is dangerous because it is an incredibly toxic metal. Ironically plutonium was the reason that clinched choice. So, by 1955, the initial idea of 1943-47 that India's nuclear programme was to be oriented towards civilian purposes had already gotten modified to the extent that the option was now kept open. Accordingly, contracts were signed with the Canadians.

As time passed, the amount of money sunk into the nuclear programme began to escalate. There had also been from the beginning some criticism from scientists not involved in this programme that nuclear energy was being monopolised by one or two centres and a very small team of leading scientists. Also, the financial resources they had access to were far in excess of what they actually needed, which was depriving other parts of Indian science of funds. In addition, there were no results to show for all this expenditure. They had promised in 1948 that within five years India would have a working nuclear reactor producing power. This was far from the case. Even in 1969, Vikram Sarabhai, who took over from Homi Bhabha, had promised that in a decade there would be 20,000 MW of nuclear energy being produced every year in India. It is still, today, under 3000 MW.

A programme that began with enormous attention had by the mid-1950s and even more so by the early 1960s lost its way and clearly was not going to fulfil its original objective. Some time in the early-1960s, the nuclear establishment decided that all Indian nuclear scientists were going to consider themselves nuclear weapons scientists as well. This would, incidentally, save the nuclear programme from public scrutiny.

Within the Atomic Energy Commission there had always been more than one faction. One of these was committed to the original energy objective. There was another group, perhaps more politically minded and perhaps less sure of their technical ability, which felt that the energy programme was not going anywhere and therefore the best way to hedge the bet was to start a weapons programme. This would in the long run always ensure that this particular set of institutions and people would be protected from any kind of resource crunch.

Within the Atomic Energy Commission, from the 1960s onwards, the development of nuclear weapons became an option being taken ever-more seriously. As it became clear that the energy option was becoming less and less viable—commercially and otherwise—the weapons option became stronger. In the 1960s, scientists

did not play an active role in the debate that took place after the Chinese tested, but from that point onwards, especially with the death of Homi Bhabha in 1966, and the death of his successor Vikram Sarabhai in 1971, the so-called bomb faction within the Atomic Energy Commission began to dominate. It has dominated ever since. That they had an interest in testing long before 1998 has become clearer with the admission by a former Indian prime minister, that every Indian prime minister has been approached as soon as they have came to power with a request from the Atomic Energy Commission to be allowed to test. Every Indian prime minister until Vajpayee said no.

All the five countries that have become nuclear powers before India have all had well-established separate military programmes of which the civilian programme was an off-shoot. In India, it was the other way around, a civilian programme having developed a military programme as an off-shoot. Because the Indian nuclear programme had an openly disclosed civilian energy objective, it was allowed access to technology from around the world, from which a secret military programme was created.

The Pakistani model took this one step further. It had a civilian programme of some kind in place but the bomb came about through a completely parallel route. It used covert means, using, for instance, connections with the underworld. Both India and Pakistan broke the mould for what new nuclear powers are meant to do.

Risk factor?

If you consider the production cycle from the extraction of uranium to the processing of it, and making plutonium to the manufacture of the bomb material, and the final placement—and if you drew a line on the map from the starting point to the end-point, the process in a sense travels across the country. It begins at Jadugoda in Jharkhand where most of India's uranium is mined. From here it goes to Hyderabad, where the nuclear fuel complex is located. The mined ore passes through Jharkhand and Orissa to Andhra Pradesh. There are no emergency mechanisms in case of a spill or an accident. At Hyderabad, the uranium is converted into fuel rods, and from there you could take it in any one of a number of different directions, given that there are reactors in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka. From there they are going to go all over the place. If the material gets converted into bombs, they could be sent to strategic storage facilities that may be located anywhere.

Nuclear fuel, if its properly managed, is relatively safe. We have no clear idea at this time what kind of safety precautions are being taken—for instance whether these trains that are carrying the material are in fact protected by troops in anticipation of a hijack. In case of an accident, are hospitals along the route equipped to deal with radiation poisoning? The answer clearly is no, because there are very few places in India where this kind of facility in fact is available.

Finally, there are the corrosive effects that nuclear weapons have on the form of democratic functioning. The secrecy that envelops the nuclear programme means that there is a certain kind of immunity given to those within the institution. This often leads to arrogance, and a tendency to take certain decisions without considering the full costs. Insulation from public pressure, accountability and responsibility makes you prone to being aggressive and hostile in posturing. These actions take place through the decisions of a small number of people without proper discussion, debate or scrutiny of publicly accountable institutions.

This happens even within polities based on democratic party systems. Within a system which is less than democratic and less accountable, the problems are even greater. For instance, over in Islamabad, decisions are being made for Pakistani citizens over which they have no control. The media and the public find out about developments well after the fact, and even then only in passing. The danger is that even after a democratic system comes back in full form in Pakistan, there may well be critical areas which are off-limits.

Pakistan also had a nuclear programme since the 1950s. There were two phases to it. There was the early nuclear programme during the 1950s and then the second phase which began in the 1960s but which really took off in the 1970s. In the 1950s 3 to 4 percent of Pakistan's science and technology budget went towards the nuclear industry. This was a comparatively small figure, because in the Indian case between 15 to 20 percent of the whole science and technology budget goes towards the nuclear industry.

After 1972, with the creation of Bangladesh and Bhutto coming to power, it became very clear that Pakistan was going to go full speed ahead and produce a weapon. There were obviously very clear indications that Pakistani decision-makers knew that India was well on its way to acquiring nuclear capability. But, this was going to be a deterrent against India, which had helped dismember Pakistan once and clearly they were going to do it again. The entire edifice of what is called deterrence is premised on a certain kind of communication that takes place between two sides. In the India-Pakistan case this communication has been always been a bit distorted because it has always gone through some indirect form.

The surreptitious manner in which weapons emerged in the two countries, the history of intractable problems, and the secrecy surrounding the control and command systems and the tendency towards brinkmanship in bilateral politics makes the idea of a real deterrence somewhat weak in South Asia. This is a factor that needs to be kept in mind in reflecting on the nuclear situation in the Subcontinent.

Going Nuclear, Talking Nuclear

Indians and Pakistanis meet to address a taboo subject – nuclear escalation in the neighbourhood.

A GROUP of journalists and scholars from India and Pakistan met by a lakeside in northern Italy recently to talk about a subject that is all important but little discussed back home – the nuclearisation of the Subcontinent. At the austere retreat in the village of Bellagio, the participants delved into not just the nuclear threat, but also all the underlying issues related to India-Pakistan tensions which threaten to take us down the road to atomic desolation.

Because we do not talk about the threat of nuclear annihilation does not mean it does not exist, and the South Asian enemies have come closer to potential use than other adversaries in the past. The density of population in South Asia, the short flight duration for ballistic missiles, the innate solvability of major India-Pakistan problems, all point to the 'nonsensibility' of contemplating the nuclear weapon as an option of choice or of bellicosity in the Indus-Ganga plains.

And yet, it does not do to merely wax eloquent about the nuclear threat that hangs above us all. What do we do about it? Approaching the subject dispassionately, the participants at Bellagio took it as a given that the nuclear weapon is a heinous proposition, but they went further to look with clear lenses at the inter-related problems of Indo-Pak perceptions, the all-important Kashmir issue, media jingoism, nuclear contamination at processing plants, international exigencies, and so on.

When the presidents and prime ministers meet at the SAARC summit in Islamabad in early January, we are certain that nuclearisation will not make it into the agenda. We are also certain that 'civil society' does not yet have enough clout to make denuclearisation the focus of official attention. We offer this issue of *Himal* as a contribution on a subject that the political leaders and opinion-makers of India and Pakistan do not have too much time to consider, at SAARC summits or elsewhere. Above all, we commend the ability of the participants at the 'Bellagio Summit' to be critical of their respective governments and national situations. This ability alone will take us ahead on the path of denuclearisation of South Asia – which perforce has to happen if we are not to convert ourselves into a killing fields of millions upon millions. - *editors*

Kanak Mani Dixit: How 'close' is close in the context of a nuclear conflagration. Have we in these moments of tension in the last few years between India and Pakistan come close to use of the nuclear option by either side?

Itty Abraham, Social Science Research Council, Washington DC.

Itty Abraham: Before even starting the discussion, it may be worth mentioning that the figures are roughly like this: a bomb blast over Bombay would kill three lakh people immediately, within a second of detonation. Another 12 lakh people will die over the course of the next few months. So a total of about 15 lakh people will be killed as an immediate effect of the bomb over Bombay, not counting the effects of radiation that will persist over the long term. This also does not include the effects of buildings falling and so on.

In terms of how close we have been to nuclear war in South Asia, I think 1987 was a major turning point in tensions in South Asia. It was the year of Operation Brass Tacks when, after 14 years of relative calm, there was clearly an effort within the Indian defence establishment to not only conduct the largest exercise that had ever taken place in the Subcontinent but also, possibly, to use that opportunity to attack Pakistan to "solve the problem once and for all". That did not happen but Brass Tacks was followed later by some Pakistani exercises. Brass Tacks was a serious crisis.

I think 1987 was another marker as that was when the use of the Indian flag as a symbol, as a sticker, as an image, proliferated as never before. From that point onwards there were far more *'Mera Bharat Mahan'* kind of moments. There is a level of patriotism which was being produced, a constructed patriotism, if you will, which was never wound up.

In 1991 there was the Gulf War. It was not a crisis in South Asia necessarily, but since then over the past 15 years or so we have been facing one military crisis after another. In 1995-96 there were the NPT-CTBT debates taking place in India, which brought up nuclear weapons into discussion like never before. And then in 1998 there were the tests. In 1999, there was Kargil and in 2002 we had the 10-month standoff between the two armies. So, in the last 15 years, there have been about eight fairly major crises. What it would have taken for the next escalation to have happened is not clear but 12 nuclear threats were issued during the Kargil war. Perhaps they were symbolic. It is certainly the case that seen from the outside the situation in South Asia looked far more dangerous than it was from within.

If you ask what is likely to lead to the use of nuclear weapons, it is difficult to say. Rather than the conscious decision to go ahead and attack somebody, we may have to consider the question of accidents and misperceptions which is far more likely as a source for the following reasons. During a crisis the time that is available to make decisions is very short and the level of misperception is very high. Once deployment of nuclear weapons takes place, the decision is taken from one place and the action for launch of weapons is taking somewhere else. A little separation between the point of decision and the point of launch—it could be a plane or it could be a missile—means that ultimately somebody else has their hands on the so-called trigger, even when the order is issued by someone in Delhi or Islamabad.

It is not known the extent to which technical means and systems have been put into place to prevent the unauthorised launch or use of nuclear weapons in South Asia. Both India and Pakistan have said they will develop their own systems to prevent unauthorised use. What these are we are not quite clear about yet. Finally, there is the question of threshold. This is again where the signalling issue comes in. There were two Italians who said that they had been to Pakistan and interviewed a whole range of generals and others, asking them what would force them to use the bomb. The generals laid out four conditions of which the key one is as follows: if Indian troops cross into Pakistani territory they feel that they have the right to use their nuclear bomb. This brings up the obvious question of why they would be mad enough to use it on their own territory. They replied that if they used it on their own soil it would not be considered a use of nuclear weapons against another country. So, it would amount to nothing more than a test in one sense except it happens to kill a bunch of enemy troops.

Ramchandra Guha, social scientist, Bangalore.

Ramchandra Guha: But that could have repercussions for Pakistani soil, including Pakistani civilians who will be affected.

Abraham: Absolutely. But this is how the irrational enters the picture when it comes to using nuclear weapons.

Siddharth Varadarajan: The Indian no-first-use doctrine has now been amended to say "no first use except if we are attacked—if India is attacked or Indian troops abroad are attacked'. In other words, Pakistan could still be attacked.

Rehana Hakim: There are also questions about the security of the nuclear weapons. In Pakistan they are talking about stationing them in six different locations.

Abraham: Pakistan talks of a very rigorous and robust system of command, which may not be true in the sense that it is under the control of the military. It may well be the case that because of this we have a solid security risk in place. The vigilance system allows these

weapons to be launched when the order is given by the appropriate authority.

Hameed Haroon: But that is not rigorous enough, because it is the 'appropriate authority' which is the problem in Pakistan.

Abraham: You have to consider the ratcheting up of tension. Each successive crisis now has raised the threshold a bit more and that obviously brings South Asia closer to war. Besides, it begins to look like the creation of crisis now is more about getting a foreign third-party mediator involved, which is a very dangerous game. They are playing with crisis over and over again in order to attract American involvement.

AS Paneerselvan, Managing Editor, Sun TV, Madras.

Akbar Zaidi: But I think they have never come close to it. I do not think nuclear war has been a real threat at all.

AS Paneerselvan: Well the first question here is where does the civilian programme end and the military programme start. This fine line has never been demarcated in the Indian context because the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) is technically in charge of affairs after the spent fuel has been re-processed. Till the re-processing it is with the Department of Atomic Energy. DRDO's own facilities in Hyderabad and in Pune do not have facilities to handle them. Which means it should be handled in Rajasthan or Bombay. Throughout the world you know exactly where the making takes place but in India we have no clue about the making of the weapon and delivery mechanisms. This is all the more dangerous because everything can be done within the civilian guise–you do not even have to assume a militarist posture. That is why it is so frightening. In India, this is the only civilian structure which is shrouded in so much of secrecy.

Abraham: Let me just take that one step further. Suppose something goes wrong in the process of making the programmes require the presence of all parties to an issue to be present. In this case, it will mean including India. On the nuclear issue the debate has to be constant and mutual because the nuclear phenomenon is continuous until it is disbanded and involves India and Pakistan. Therefore, doing programmes on a one off basis and doing them without involving Indians is meaningless. The idea is to try and create some sort of a South Asian platform where these kind of ideas and discourses to take place.

It is also necessary to engage the fanatic elements. Given a chance to appear on television, they will give you the Quranic version of the atom bomb and they will quote the fact that it is written in the Quran that the mountains will fly like pieces of cotton and so on. We have them engaged in some sort of a debate and tried to counter their views by quoting other sources. Television has this ability to expose them and since a lot of them want to be on TV they also end up discrediting themselves. There are hard questions to be asked

The other problem of course is the extent to which the Pakistani media is viewed in India and therefore influencing Indian perceptions of the debate in Pakistan. In the Indian media mindset, Pakistan does not exist, apart from the nuclear issue, Kashmir and terrorism. The purpose behind GEO was to engage in a dialogue of channels with India so that the distortions in perceptions could be rectified. Unfortunately, the Indian channels do not think like this.

–Imran Aslam

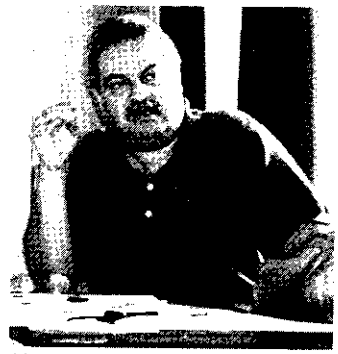
The South Asian platform

Pakistan's PTV is seen as one of the leading government organs. They have really skirted around issues, and restricted themselves to putting out the official version. Private channels like GEO on the other hand get an interesting mix of opinion. Talk shows for instance accommodate diverse points of view and sometimes very radical views are expressed. Some of these views question the very foundation of Pakistan, the idea of India and Pakistan and so on. In this sense, private channels discuss issues that have been buried under the carpet for so many years. For the first time there has been a fundamental questioning and the production quality of television has ensured that it has more audience appeal.

GEO TV has done quite a bit of coverage on defence and the possibilities in the event of a flashpoint. There have been several episodes on Bangladesh for the first time in the history of the Pakistani electronic media. These programmes actually went into asking questions about what happened in 1971, the conduct of the military, about the genocide, about Mujib's, Bhutto's and Yahya's role and so on. Given this trend of looking at hard questions, the nuclear issue will also be on the list of priorities for television. But, as with newspapers, television news channels need a peg to hang it on and that peg probably has not appeared.

The main language of debate is Urdu and the fact that television operates in the vernacular makes a tremendous difference. But to be effective, television

actual high explosive which combines with the nuclear material type bomb, what is immediately required is to first determine whether this was an accident, sabotage or an actual attack. What might happen if, for example, there is an accident? Are there sufficient systems in place to inform the designated authority in charge of taking the critical decision? For the decision-maker there may not be enough time to weigh the issue in balance. In the context, there is always the possibility of a television channel immediately jumping the gun and saying "We have been attacked and we have to respond". The nature of the existing system within South Asia actually allows them no other response in case something goes wrong. And, if they chose to term it sabotage rather than accident then pressure is going to build up immediately to demand a response. In that sense, a decision could be manufactured.



Hameed Haroon, Publisher, Dawn, Karachi.

Haroon: When you do not consider your enemy or the person across the border to be a rational person or a humane person, war hysteria can itself operate independently of more rational scenarios.

Dixit: To what extent does the media play a role in escalating tensions that could lead to nuclear conflagration? What is the role of the print media?

Zaidi: I don't think that newspapers in Pakistan are focussed on the nuclear issue. Official statements are reported but I think there is a lack of persistence. Perhaps after 1998 for a year or two there was some attention. Even during Kargil, the war itself was more important than the nuclear possibilities. In any case that was a reflection of the reality because even though Indian and Pakistani forces were at the border, the nuclear threat did not exist. It was the forces that were there at the border. There was possibility of war, the high commissioners were going back and forth, but the nuclear issue itself was not prominent.

Haroon: Are you saying that the nuclear issue does not dominate the spectrum of Pakistani newspaper writing vis a vis relations with India?

Zaidi: That is correct. India-Pakistan problems, yes, war, always. Kashmir, also always. But not the nuclear issue, because I do not think it is a real issue. I really do not think that either India or Pakistan is going to use the nuclear option

Imran Aslam: Also it's a settled issue, as far as the Pakistani public is concerned.

Haroon: No, I think it is quite to the contrary. For the generals who control the weapon, its use is not the real issue. They will use it, when they think it best and they will not use it if they don't think it best. They are not used to having public participation and they are not concerned particularly about it. The generals are not concerned because they feel that the use of the weapon is outside civilian control.

People don't have views about the nuclear issue because the whole mechanism of the nuclear issue is not terribly clear to them. Questions such as, how it works, what are the factors governing nuclear use, nuclear deployment, nuclear build-up, nuclear development, budgets. None of these things is visible in the public domain. It is all in secret. As a net result, the media is not obsessed with the nuclear issue. Another reason is that it is a difficult area to report on. There is nothing to go by other than government handouts, and government handouts will come when the generals want it to come. So it is not an easy terrain to write about.

Zaidi: I think the general perception of the Pakistani people at large would be that it is good that Pakistan has nuclear weapons. The belief is that at least we have nuclear weapons to defend ourselves, not as a means to attack. Hameed is absolutely right in saying that the generals do control the information situation. It is not in the public domain. As a result there is no anti-nuclear movement either except for a few NGOs. So the attitude is that it is good to have these weapons so that if anyone attacks us we can defend ourselves. Hence they are a deterrent. Possibly it will never be used but it is always there in case of a contingency. That is why it is a settled issue and the people on Track II discussions who are not in favour of this nuclear programme constitute only a small lobby.

Haroon: But doesn't Track II have a certain acceptabilty?

Two sessions on South Asia

This Nuclear Roundtable was organised by Panos South Asia, which seeks to promote quality in media in the region, with help from Himal South Asian. The panel was brought together by Saneeya Hussain (Karachi), Mitu Varma (New Delhi) and Aruni John (Colombo), and moderated by Kanak Mani Dixit (Kathmandu). The Bellagio meeting (20-23 July 2003) followed up on an earlier meeting, held at Nagarkot in Nepal (11-12 May 2002), to specifically discuss the media in the context of India-Pakistan rivalry. The discussions at Nagarkot can be downloaded from:

http://www.himalmag.com/2002/june/roundtable.htm

Zaidi: Yes of course, but in that sense there are also independent generals who do not think that the military should be involved with civilian affairs or government and who also do not maintain a hawkish view on militarisation and on the nuclear issue.

Aslam: Basically this theory that conventional forces will be reduced once we go nuclear is also playing on the minds of people within the army. Even these retired army guys basically do not know what this nuclear thing is all about, who really controls it, what the command structure is. No one really knows it. There is a suspicion that over a period of time the recruitment into the armed forces might come down. Nobody is talking to the people about these things for fear of a reaction from the ordinary people who are going to lose out in employment.

Imran Aslam, President, GEO TV, Karachi.

Haroon: If you consider Kargil from the Pakistani side, I would say that it was not the nuclear issue which offended the young officers and soldiers and others in the army. It was the fact that it was bad conventional strategy and that needless lives were lost. It was not the fear of a nuclear threat. I would say that they acted irresponsibly to bring the nuclear threat into the arena, on both sides. The nuclear angle was not central to that conflict.

Aslam: Kargil also probed the extent to which tactical conventional forces could be used in a nuclear environment, to see at what stage people will panic, and when people will start talking about using a nuclear option. And of course it could also perhaps be a method to gain some sort of ground on future occasions, for instance with relation to the Kashmir issue and internationalising it . It is a ploy to see the limits to which the Indians can be tested. It is perhaps a way of saying "if you push us too far we will press the button".

Varadarajan: In fact Kargil and Operation Parakram in the aftermath of the 13 December attack on the Indian parliament, which was the largest mobilisation of India troops along the India-Pakistan border since 1971, can be both read as excellent examples of how overt nuclearisation has served to ensure the cap-limit for even conventional options.

Abraham: It would appear from all this discussion that the role of the media in nuclear matters is completely dependent. It has no autonomy of its own when it comes to the nuclear issue or the Kargil case.

Haroon: I don't think that applies to the Kargil case. In fact I would say that the Pakistani media was more independent in reporting Kargil and more responsible

Kargil

Communist control

The anti-nuclear movement in India has witnessed what I would call the uneasy co-existence of Gandhians and communists which goes back to the peace movement of the 1950s. The Communist Party of India (CPI) led the pro-Soviet section of the movement and there was also a non-political Gandhian movement. The Gandhians in the 1960s were important figures in the anti-nuclear movement in India but their contribution is completely ignored even by the modern day anti-nuclear campaigners.

After 1998, for various reasons, the communists have acquired more and more control over the peace movement in India. I think a very critical lost opportunity in the peace movement in India was the debate around the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) from 1996 to 1998. That was one of the most important moments because there was a fairly active campaign, and even within the mainstream press there was a debate and there was a strong position that India should not sign it. This followed from the view that a kind of nuclear apartheid was in place that allowed only the white man to have the bombs. The people who said that India should not sign the CTBT basically followed the argument, partly of strategic national interest and partly of racial pride

On the other hand there were people who were vigorously articulating the need to salvage the CTBT. One of the arguments was the need to de-escalate tensions. The other was simply an adherence to the long Gandhian and Nehruvian tradition of disarmament. A third view was that since India was campaigning to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, signing the CTBT it would strategically help the Indian case.

My personal view is that if India signed the CTBT, there was the strategic advantage of compelling Pakistan to also sign it. Conversely, Pakistan had the option of not signing it if India did not sign it because of the Pakistani fear arising from the asymmetry in conventional weapons. Therefore, India signing the CTBT would have been a considerable step towards de-escalation in the Subcontinent.

This history of what happened is important in understanding a crucial weakness of the Indian anti-nuclear movement. In the debate on whether India should sign the CTBT, the communists were against

than the Indian media. It was not as dramatic as the Indian media but it was more responsible. It is on the nuclear matter where there has been a total failure to come to grips with the mechanics and the impact.

Dixit: Is there any truth to the belief that the Indian army has the power to manipulate the situation when it comes to nuclear issues?

Varadarajan: One could look at it in a number of ways. If we take the case of Operation Parakram and the deployment of Indian forces after the attack on parliament, all the indications are that the army was actually a restraining factor. The politician wanted a quick-fix solution, in essence summoning the army guys and saying, "Look, tell me if it is possible to exercise a ten day option where we can go in and come out, teaching Pakistan a bit of a lesson". The army brass came back and said, "If we do this, lets say we bomb a militant camp, there is no way the Pakistan will not retaliate. And once Pakistan retaliates, you tell us as a politician, will you be willing to call it quits at that stage or will you want us to do something further. Obviously you will want us to do something further and gradually we will have to be prepared for a longer and longer conflict in which nuclear escalation is possible".

Siddharth Varadarajan, Deputy Resident Editor, The Times of India, *New Delhi.*

It is not just the army that is involved. The international environment will have to be considered. So the authorities very quickly concluded that there was nothing much that could be done. But as far as both the armed forces and the international community are concerned, overt nuclearisation has reduced slightly the possibilities of conventional warfare. The army is less keen under the circumstances for obvious reasons, and the international community is also less keen because they know that in the event of a conventional conflict the boundary between one kind of war and the other cannot be maintained, especially when there is a lot of aggressive statements coming from Pakistan that if India attacks then all options are open.

Abraham: Why would you think that conflicts can be initiated but be maintained within the limits of conventional warfare?

Varadarajan: In fact nuclearisation has not only increased the probability of localised conventional conflicts, it has increased the possibility of tension between the two countries. But at the same time, you also have the imperialist core working quickly to tackle the situation. There is more international attention, but there are also more little conflicts of shorter duration. The presence of nuclear

signing the treaty. Communists who were influential in the mainstream press were gagging columnists who were in favour of signing the CTBT. This part of the history of the nuclear debate is important to recognise. As early as the 1960s, C Rajagopalachari, a prominent Gandhian and pioneer of the anti-nuclear movement in India, had said, "We should rescue the peace movement from the clutches of the communist party". This observation is still relevant.

Despite the environmental hazards, the ethical questions, the questions of secrecy in democracy and given the absurd promises made by the nuclear establishment that it would provide 10,000 megawatts by a specified time and so on, there has been no scrutiny of nuclear operations at all. This is an area which needs serious investigation. And one of the reasons serious investigation is not done is that the communists are as gung-ho about nuclear energy as some other people are gung-ho about the bomb. That is perhaps due to a naïve belief in science, or perhaps due to an old-fashioned loyalty to nuclear energy collaboration with the erstwhile Soviet Union.

After 1998, the Indian anti-nuclear movement has been reduced to a single agenda of simply saying no bombs. Among the reasons is the deep and pervasive influence of nuclear nationalists, and also because the communists, more specifically the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which is in power in three states increasingly controls the anti-nuclear movement in the country. Behind the scenes, they are trying to manipulate the movement. The CPI(M) has an ambiguous position on bombs In the early 1980s, EP Thompson and others came to India and the people who attacked them were the communists. The CPI(M) led a campaign against Thompson on the ground that he was an American agent undermining the security of the Soviets.

For a more informed critique of the nuclear industry and for recovering its own autonomy and credibility among the uncommitted public opinion in India, the anti-nuclear movement in India needs to be rescued from the clutches of the communists. This may be an unfashionable strategy but it is absolutely important if the reach and influence of the peace movement is to expand.

–Ramchandra Guha

weapons increases the frequency of tension, but it also contains within it the inherent ability naturally to de-escalate so that in the short term it does not go beyond a certain level. I completely agree with the need to put in place risk-reduction mechanisms. Various people have made very sensible suggestions to this end and even the bombwallahs are not opposed to it.

Guha: But there are political factors independent of control systems that need to be considered. One of the problems of the whole anti-nuclear discourse in India and which may also lead to a misunderstanding in Pakistan is the excessive demonisation of the Sangh Parivar. The equation of nuclear machismo with the Sangh Parivar or the equation of Indian hegemonic aspirations with the Sangh Parivar is not valid. I say this because, hypothetically, if Sonia Gandhi becomes prime minister, in a situation of crisis and escalation and low-level conflict, her Italian origin will compel her to strike an even more nationalistic posture vis-à-vis Pakistan. You can be sure of this. There will be more pressure on her to prove her patriotic credentials, which actually is a destabilising factor in this context.

Kazi Abid Asad, proprietor-editor, Ibrat group (Sindhi language), Karachi.

Haroon: Before you can posit problems like the Sonia factor, keep in mind that today conflict control is being handled not by two parties but multiple parties. Then you have yet more actors entering the scenario even though conflict perception and counter-measures and confidence-building and de-escalation measures are supposed to be the responsibility of two parties alone. Then you also have to be able to put forward hypothetical postulates about American behaviour as well. If the Americans decide that the Pakistanis are biting too hard or the Indians are scoffing too much and that the situation might be helped by a pull-back from mediation, backdoor mediation, then that can be a de-stabilising factor during conflict escalation and lead to a really dangerous situation. So the range of destabilising factors is quite vast.

Abraham: One of the many things that we know now is that signalling is done via the United States through the assumed use of spy satellites. Indian and Pakistani decision-makers know that satellites are passing overhead. You want to signal that a crisis is coming and you want American intervention. You do things in an open, blatant kind of way so that the satellites will see it. What happens when the satellites, for whatever reasons, do not see it? So what you get in that case is that although the signal is meant to have gone through it does not and then suddenly the weapons are already in position because the

Hindi press and social forces

There are many stereotypes about nationalist jingoism and responsible coverage in the media about nuclear proliferation. There is a belief that all English newspapers are basically very balanced and that the Hindi or other regional language newspapers are jingoistic. To say that most of the Hindi papers are jingoistic is totally wrong.

Social forces basically make up a magazine or newspaper's policy. The kind of response that you get from readers, phone calls, letters, the kind of articles that you get from contributors, all shape a newspaper's policy on crucial issues. We find that the reader's response forces us to take certain stands. Our reflexes are based to a certain extent on the readership profile.

Some of the regional papers in India are politically correct, whereas some others are jingoistic. It may sound ironical but at the level of the people there is a lot of goodwill towards Pakistan. For instance, the issue of the little girl from Pakistan who went to Bangalore for heart surgery evoked many letters from readers on the human aspect of the episode. The goodwill of that level has of course to do with the common heritage of culture, art, literature and so on. At the same time, despite this heritage there are deep-rooted communal hostilities. In India when I interact with people—politicians, bureaucrats, decision-makers—I find deep prejudices at work. Scratch below the surface and you find a communalist lurking below somewhere.

In terms of the audience, the vernacular readership may be unlike the English readership in that it could perhaps be more communal. In 1992 the newly-launched Gujarati edition of *India Today* had to be closed because there were very few readers owing to the fact that it had taken an an anti-communal stand. Similarly in MP where half the people vote for the BJP, and half the people vote for the Congress, there is a similar kind of response from the Hindi readers. Therefore, in taking a stand on issues with communal overtones, we have to be careful to reflect the views of the readers. This is not necessarily a compromise but an attempt to accommodate an influential point of view. An element of this influential point of view, entertained by the average Hindi middle-class reader, is that Pakistan is trying to create problems in India. This is a perception that cuts across party lines and political loyalties. Therefore this is a point of view that is bound to enter the picture in the perception of the nuclear weapons.

–NK Singh

pre-emptive exit option did not work.

Kazi Asad: The American factor and the fact that a lot of India-Pakistan problems have been internationalised by the nuclear issue is something that Pakistan is very happy about to a large extent. It has always been talking about mediation, always asking for observers on the Line of Control and so on and so forth. The Indians never wanted that. So gradually not only the Americans but also the international community has been sucked into this conflict. This has an impact on the nuclear situation.

Haroon: The creation of a third party in what should essentially be a bi-party risk evaluation system means that the third party has to be predictable and has to have its behaviour measured by certain parameters. But nothing that India or Pakistan can do will change parameters in Washington. Having three factors can sometimes reduce risks and sometimes increase it. It is important to remember this as well in studying nuclear risk in South Asia.

NK Singh, Editor-in-Chief, Dainik Bhaskar, *Bhopal.*

Varadarajan: I want to add one more scenario. There was this article which talked of American contingency plans to take over Pakistan's strategic assets in the event of the mullahs taking over, or a *coup de etat* by anti-American generals and so on. Suppose tomorrow some anti-American general overthrows Musharraf it is logical for him to assume that now his strategic assets are suddenly vulnerable to American bombing. For various reasons the Indian force would be on high alert anyway. The insertion of this kind of an external dynamic into India-Pakistan nuclear equations changes the picture completely. Deterrence works to the extent it does in a situation where you have only two players playing by similar rules and calculations.

Asad: I think this is an image problem. The fact is that the Indian bomb is in the hands of a fundamentalist regime and a regime that a lot of people know has a certain mindset. So that would apply for the things that Siddharth was talking about. Somehow or the other it is the Pakistani mad mullah or the mad general, who seems to pose a problem. And Pakistanis fall back on the argument that they are being discriminated against because they happen to have the Islamic bomb. This is being constantly fuelled. Nobody talks about Hindutva in this context.

Dixit: Clearly there is a need to broaden the scope of liberal and moderate opinion since the nuclear agenda seems to be driven primarily if not exclusively by the extreme end of the political and technocratic spectrum in both countries. Given that the Urdu press tends to be more conservative than the English press in Pakistan, would Urdu television channels make a difference by providing 'liberal opinion' to the Urdu mass?

Aslam: Definitely. That is certain indeed because that brings in people into media who have exposure and technological knowledge. The reporters will tend to be from a class of people who speak that language.

Dixit: If that is the case in Pakistan then in India the question would be about Hindi.

Paneerselvan: The danger with Hindi television is that the people who are willing to speak this *rashtra bhasha* are those who are part of the state, who have never questioned the state. These are the kind of people who are moving into Hindi. Because of a new breed of hawks that began to dominate foreign affairs, a hawkishness that was never there has entered the Hindi mainstream. They were quite content with Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan. Now they have to suffer G Parthasarthy and JN Dixit.

The television and the mainstream media today are actually taken over by a small segment. The Agra Summit was where I saw these guys first hand. From the moment the summiteers arrived the editors asked, "Don't do you think its going to fail". Luckily I had some access to the hotel through Murosoli Maran. I called him and I said "These guys are saying that the talks are going to fail". He said, "Look, we haven't even met".

Aslam: I had an argument with one such Indian commentator on television. He said, "get rid of all Pakistani diplomats. Get them out of New Delhi. They are all crooks". I replied, "We are two nuclear powers. Some sort of listening post is necessary, some sort of hotline is necessary".

Dixit: The Hindi satellite channels seem to command the airwaves. How are the South Indian channels different?

Paneerselvan: Even though Star Television started beaming in 1991, the Hindi channels are all post-BJP. AAJTAK was not there before that. There was no Hindi current affairs television. It is a creation of the Parivar, a post-BJP government phenomenon. The southern channels are different, there is programming on international affairs and regional cooperation. North-Indian television by contrast gave in to the aggressive PMO-Parivar manipulation. Some half a dozen hand-picked, sterilised byte-able guys began showing up all the time on screen. That is the reason Hindi television is scary.

It is a little different in the south as regards the print

media as well. The growth of vernacular newspaper in south India brought in its wake reform movements like the Dravidian movement, and in labour. The Hindi press today is an out and out commercial enterprise backed by very narrow political positions.

Dixit: if we cannot expect much from English press or television, there is still the need to reach the "vernacular intelligentsia" through the language.

S Akbar Zaidi, independent economist, Karachi.

NK Singh: In matters relating to India and Pakistan the level of interest varies according to the issue in the Hindi press. In July, the bus service between India and Pakistan was resumed and it was covered enthusiastically. There was this little girl who came by the bus to India for heart surgery, and she became a celebrity. That probably suggests that people on both sides would welcome peace and they want peace, even if this does sound clichéd. But, nuclear armament and nuclear issues constitute a different type of problem because it is not purely bilateral. It has something to do with world order. For India it is not a question of just Pakistan.

Zaidi: To what extent does the media- whether the vernacular press or the English publications, actually influence public opinion? There is often an assumption that you can change the way people think through articles in newspapers. I am not sure how valid that assumption is, especially in the case of Pakistan. I think the nature of the state dominates public opinion and how people should be thinking, which is what is reflected in newspapers. Barring a few exceptions like *Dawn, Newsline, Herald* which are usually in competition with the state, most other newspapers, particularly Urdu

The popular commonsense

There is no point of comparison between the English press and the Hindi press. The miserable condition of the Hindi papers arises basically because more and more proprietors have become editors. When the proprietor becomes the editor of the paper there are only two things on his mind—revenue and power. The net outcome can easily be imagined. This is what happens in the regional press. For this reason the Hindi press suffers from a lack of political vision. The other problem with the Hindi press is that the popular names from the English press—Khushwant Singh, Kuldeep Nayar, Balraaj Mehta, Menaka Gandhi—are reproduced in translation. Further, Hindi newspapers do not have correspondents in the south. Moreover, no Hindi newspaper has appointed a board of editorial directors. This deprives the paper of the skills of more sophisticated analysis which can inform a larger audience. That class is simply missing in Hindi newspapers.

Om Thanvi, Editor, Jansatta, New Delhi.

This makes a difference in the way critical issues are covered. On the nuclear issue per se, this failing comes through very clearly. When newspapers do not even have editorial meetings, when they do not have people who can write and no editors to lead the publication, it is pointless to expect them write sensible editorials on the subject. Therefore there is little point in talking about leading the masses to the right direction through the Hindi newspaper.

The structure of large circulation Hindi newspapers like *Punjab Kesri, Nayi Duniya,* which have a huge influence in the northern belt, limits the possibilities of discussing such matters in depth. Basically, these newspapers are geared to covering political activity. There is no page in regional papers for international news and therefore there is no editor who looks after international news or evolving international politics. There are no science reporters let alone someone who understands nuclear issues to tackle serious issues like disarmament, weapons development, and so on.

Usually, coverage on the subject is event-triggered as when the 1998 explosions took place or when there is some conflict with Pakistan. At such points the content tends to be emotional or romantic. They tend to toe the government's line in such matters. The articles tend to mirror the popular commonsense so that there is no informed debate on nuclear weapons.

In the visual media, there is an equally unhealthy trend. For instance, when *AAJTAK* was launched they felt that building up the India-Pakistan issue would be useful from a market point of view and so they did everything to focus on conflict between the two countries. And then Kargil happened and that is possibly what made *AAJTAK* successful. The point is that conflict had the visual potential to be saleable and so television took it upon itself to sell themselves through war.

In this context there is an interesting anomaly in the visual media. In the print media, the law requires to state in print who the editor, publisher and printer are, so that if there is any irresponsible behaviour there are at least three people who can be prosecuted. But in the case of television there is no such law and there is no way of fixing responsibility for errors or irresponsible conduct. There is no separate law for television that can check the content of output. This makes a difference in terms of the lack of restraint in reporting and discussing potentially emotive issues.

–Om Thanvi

newspapers and magazines follow the state's point of view.

Haroon: If it works in *Dawn*'s case it ought to work in the case of the others as well. The problem is not what the media can do. The problem is what we the media are doing. It is very easy to say that the media does not make much of a difference. That in any case is not true. However, the way we are going about it, we may be marginalising ourselves on certain issues. I can make out nothing more ill-informed than commentaries in Pakistan on serious issues like nuclear conflict and the impact and effects of the bomb.

Essentially therefore the question is not about what the media can do in Pakistan. I am sure it is no different in India. The media can raise a storm and can virtually paralyse state policy. But on issues like this we tend to remain silent.

Aslam: But there is also the problem of whether or not people want to do what you are asking them to do. There is a lot of debate that goes on but when it comes to the nuclear issue. There is this pride of being at par with India in terms of deterrence. The issue gets very difficult to pursue because it gets enmeshed in nationalism. We have not reached that stage where we can talk about ethical thresholds and so one. Remember, the issue is linked to the very notion of survival of the state. People in Pakistan live with that thought, possibly because of what happened in 1971. For them the nuclear umbrella is something that is extremely satisfying. It gives them some space and time to sit back and say, "That is taken care of, now lets move on". I am not sure that the media is going to sit back and say, "Let us get rid of the bomb". I don't think that is going to happen.

Rehana Hakim, Editor, Newsline, Karachi.

Haroon: The point I was making was that where the Indians go wrong in understanding Pakistan is in the mechanics of mobilising opinion. Opinion must ultimately be based on knowledge, understanding of issues and such like. In Pakistan even the smallest of academic institutions is directly controlled by the state through appointments. Control by the state of universities and academic establishments has been so absolute that scholars, who are the main persons to rely on for expert information, are reluctant to take a strong position for fear of repercussions. So, media organisations are not exactly awash in a sea of information.

On the one hand there are internal constraints. These could range from cost constraints to the government's power of intervention in the newspaper industry, which is unprecedented compared to that of any other industry. Even wage levels are determined by the government. The media is the only private sector industry in Pakistan whose wage structures are determined by the government. Pakistan does not have domestic newsprint production. The government can turn off supply when it wants. The potential for government control is even stronger in the case of television. Though they have full rights under law to use an uplink in Pakistan, they can quite easily be told that the right has been withheld.

But when all is said and done, it is pointless harping on the idea that the media does not have the power to make a difference. The media does have the power to do it.

Zaidi: Ironically there will never be a nuclear movement in Pakistan unless you are close to a nuclear skirmish. At the moment things are pretty much settled. There is not going to be a nuclear war and people are not concerned about it. The real issues are water, electricity, unemployment, poverty. The nuclear issue is too abstract. Even during Kargil, when the forces were at the border, the nuclear issue was not an issue. Peace was an issue.

Varadarajan: Even in the Indian context it is easier to mobilise on the basis of a pro-peace platform rather than an anti-nuclear one. In a sense the nuclear danger helps emphasise the importance and relevance of general India-Pakistan friendship and proper relations between the governments. But, independent of that the nuclear issue does not attract much attention.

Haroon: But why do people see what they see? In the anti-imperialist movement of the '60s people saw Hiroshima and the bomb as a failure of morality. Today what is the impetus? Where is the ideological baggage to define what the bomb can do? Does it exist? How can you blame the people if you do not give them information in a way that they understand it.

Varadarajan: We should consider the nuclear discourse in the West, where even the limited achievement of the anti-nuclear campaign, which was the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons, has once again broken down. The kind of weapons development that is going on in the United States and the sort of discussion that took place in the American press in the run-up to the Iraq war, with talk of bunker-busting nukes, tactical nukes, mini-nukes, micro-nukes, has left the peace movement in tatters. Once again generals and governments are talking about battlefield nuclear weapons that could actually be used. The peace movements are not able to respond.

Hakim: In South Asia, the whole anti-nuclear debate is restricted to just a few people. You can count on the

fingertips the people who are involved in it. As has been pointed out there is no sustained movement, and what little there is of it is scattered and restricted to certain pockets.

Paneerselvan: When we talk about the media, we cannot restrict ourselves to the newspapers and television. There are other kinds of the media which command a large readership. There are a lot of writers, artists, and theatre persons who are doing wonderful work and they succeed because they touch important emotional chords. The language press in south India has an entirely different approach from the north. The first thing is that they do not write essays on any of these issues. They do not print long unending articles. Instead they tend to fictionalise. A range of Japanese short-stories have been printed in Tamil on the nuclear issue and it created quite an impact.

Typically when we talk about the media, we focus on reportage. This is the genre of the non-fictional mainstream media which is terrorised, which is unimaginative. They are our normal response managers, conventional media that depends on a lot of structures. But the effective media is the one which is fictionalised, which has imagination, which tries to use other types of narratives. This has worked well in Tamil, Malayalam and Telugu. The amount of knowledge such fictional narratives have created is impressive. I cannot visualise a Praful Bidwai or an Achin Vanaik or another commentator, no matter how informal their style, generating the same emotional content, the ability to portray physical suffering and emotional loss. But there is this tendency to place fiction one step below in the hierarchy of knowledge. We should not make a fetish of non-fiction reportage. At some level we have to get into the notion of pain, of embeddedness, of agony rather than always talking in terms of concepts.

Haroon: Politics is an important element in mass media and when you consider the Pakistani scenario it is necessary to include the Indian mass media which has a powerful presence in Pakistan. What do Pakistanis see everyday in the Indian media especially Indian films. Indian films take up contemporary issues like terrorism in a very simple fashion, sometimes in a 'Hindu' fashion, like the film *Border*. Why is it that they cannot take up the bomb issue. It is the largest entertainment industry in the world. The problem lies in its own limitations and incapacities. If they make a film starring Aishwarya Rai and build it around an anti-nuclear theme I promise you every middle- and lower-middle-class household in Pakistan will be glued to the screen. But you need the will to do it.

Dixit: To what extent has radiation problems in the Jadugoda mines been covered by the local media or regional media in the north vis-à-vis covering the similar issues in the south.

Prisoners of the official line

There are the two defining constraints of mass media coverage of India-Pakistan relations in general and the nuclear issue specifically and it is difficult to see how they can easily disavow it. The first is that most of the coverage is prisoner of the official discourse. There may be individuals who look at things differently and not depend on the government, but by and large the news content is dependent on official sources. Virtually every paper, in the wake of the 13 December attack on the Indian parliament, editorially took a position against war in one way or the other, but the pressure from the news side was different simply because most of them consisted of official descriptions of events, official perceptions of what was happening, statements, declarations by ministers, bureaucrats. It generated a momentum which was impossible to counter through editorials written with the best intentions.

This resulted in the paradox of the edit-page invariably saying "India should not go to war with Pakistan" or "Settle with dialogue", and yet with page one having some minister saying, "Time not yet right to strike". Or, reports that troops were being mobilised. The ability of the state to regulate the temperature of media coverage of Pakistan and India-Pakistan issues is frightening. If the government says something dramatic there is a rash of articles that begin appearing about how terrible Pakistan is under Musharraf, and how there can be no dialogue with cross-border terrorism.

And the minute the signal comes of a softening of the government's stance, as in Vajpayee's Srinagar speech where he said "we offer our hand of friendship again to Pakistan", all these same commentators and journalists will come staunchly for dialogue with Pakistan. The official line at any given point of time is gospel for 95 per cent of the mass media and probably 100 percent of television.

The second constraint lies inherently with the 24 hour news television phenomenon that has burst on the Indian scene involving four or five competing channels rushing to make news out of very small increments of events. Invariably, coverage of Pakistan tends to be extremely one-sided and they always try to magnify any potential problem. The live coverage of trifling events provides misleading impressions. For example, when Sushma Swaraj (then minister for information and broadcasting) visited Pakistan for a SAARC Information Ministers meet in March 2002, the emphasis of Zee and AAJTAK was to show how Sushma triumphed at various meetings.

–Siddharth Varadarajan

Varadarajan: Jadugoda as an issue pops up every two or three years. Typically some newspaper or magazine will write about it. *The Times of India* wrote about it last year. Two years before that *The Indian Express* wrote about it. Three years before that the *Sunday* magazine covered it. It is one of those issues that never manages to develop into a campaign. Television simply does not pick it up even though there is great television material there. It is something that you could do a programme on. But nuclear energy and the environment risks involved are big taboo as far as television is concerned.

Dixit: If the nuclear energy issue is too abstract, and nuclear weapons too political, one would have thought that more local and concrete concerns such as mining and contamination would get coverage. Now you seem to be suggesting that even this is taboo.

Varadarajan: It is taboo not because of the government per se but because nobody considers it important enough. Even if the environment correspondent gets excited about it, it is unlikely that the editor will. The problem basically is the lack of interest on an issue not considered hot enough. Also somewhere in the background obviously is the sense of "let me steer clear of this path". That element is present but it is never explicit.

Abraham: It is useful to remember that in places like Jadugoda and around the various facilities there are no permanent upper middle-class residents. Therefore the problem is one that afflicts only the most marginal people, who are either adivasis or dalits. So there is a built-in marginality to the subject.

Paneerselvan: I don't agree with that view. Barring Jadugoda, the other Indian nuclear facilities are at the heart of affluence. Chandrababu Naidu's Hyderabad is seen as the future to which India should move. The Nuclear Fuel Complex is located there. Important facilities are located in Bombay, Chavara has titanium separating units, there is a reactor in Kalpakam.

Abraham: These are seen as industrial units, as hi-tech centres.

Paneerselvan: With reference to Jadugoda let us be very clear. I have been to that plant. I have seen the way tribals are being asked to clear out. You can actually walk across the mines. You are not going to be exposed because it is still raw. At Jadugoda, if you actually go and measure the background radiation using a Geiger counter there is far lower background radiation levels than, say, at some of the side deposits in Agra. The real problem comes from the plants and these plants are actually located in urban centres, for instance in Narora which is located close to Ahmedabad. And till date I have yet to come across a single story on Narora. It is a sort of a nation-building exercise which journalists have taken upon themselves. They feel that it is their duty not to cover such issues. They feel its their duty to put the necessary gloss on it. They become spin-doctors, hesitant, for example to write stories on the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board.

In terms of coverage of the effects of radioactive contamination and processing plants, in Tamil Nadu and Kerala there will be local uproar, and the plants are also closer to the cities. In Kerala substantial work has been done. In Tamil Nadu, however, the activism is losing steam. Things completely changed after Pokhran II. After that quite a lot of people slipped into gung-ho nationalism. Fear of war has created much trouble for anti-nuclear groups. A whole range of members have decided to pull out of such groups saying that nuclear weapons were probably needed.

Dixit: What is the kind of coverage in Pakistan?

Asad: In Pakistan, environmental threats from foreign companies doing oil exploration and the like are reported. As far as nuclear contamination is concerned, the press in Sindh does carry articles but those are not original articles. To do that you need to have people with the knowledge, which we do not have. But there are other problems too. Let me cite an incident. We published a piece on what we called a mysterious illness around Kahuta. This went on for a little while and then suddenly we went into this black hole. There were also phone calls that were made saying, "Let's not talk about it at all". It just disappeared in terms of follow-up. You will see lot of UFO-citing type reportage in the vernacular press as well as the English press, but nobody is able to do scientific analysis and come out with some sort of a credible report on whether the radiation levels are high. And of course, the awareness of what a bomb could do to you needs to be developed further.

Haroon: Forget the average journalist, even the informed journalist has to be able to put it in an acceptable credible narrative. That does not exist. To be honest, mainstream print media does not produce that much original material in Pakistan on the nuclear issue. Part of the problem with the press is that most people with access to technical information do not wish to be involved.

Generally speaking, writing on nuclear warfare or on strategic aspects in response to India's positions tends by and large to come from Islamabad and these are people who are linked to the think-tanks, people who are going after the foreign office, who meet the intelligence agencies for lunch and dinner, who are called to GHQ to lecture on various themes. These are not a formal set of people, but a whole subset who are considered kosher because the subject has to be kept under the close scrutiny of Islamabad. It is doubtful whether this kind of situation produces better writing. However, there are some writers outside this circle of

idea-implantation who come up with fairly honest and original thinking.

The reporter would like to have an objective testing mechanism for certain propositions in a story which may be about nuclear attacks. This ability to process is virtually absent. You can of course write sensible articles about the nuclear issue in terms of the involvement of people, the imperative for peace and so on, but, ultimately there is no substitute for technically proficient material. And it is time that media people are able to relate to, understand and objectify. If you cannot objectify facts you cannot even begin to comment on the rights and wrongs of various government positions in either Pakistan or India.

Asad: I do not entirely agree with Hameed because there have been attempts and platforms. In the last five years, our national newspapers have devoted space to the political economy, where a lot of informed debate takes place which we could tone down a bit for the message to get across in a journalistic way. And for five or six years there was coverage of CTBT, how much deterrence is necessary, what the Indian perspective is, etc. There was a constant debate, to such an extent that sometimes we were asked to tone it down. There were economists and political scientists and academics writing, with four to five pages every Sunday reflecting the ongoing debate. Perhaps the quality is not as good as we would like it to be, but at least there is debate and it is translated as I said in *Jang* and elsewhere.

Haroon: I wasn't talking about the absence of material. I was referring to the absence of a methodical approach, a uniform vocabulary, a uniform understanding of issues across the print media. The efforts of individual publications notwithstanding, an issue which is so vital for the survival of society should receive higher priority. It is not that the print-media is unable to recognise the priority of this issue. It is that the lack of information on the one hand plus the fact that papers don't wish to wrangle on a detailed basis with the government.

To the Pakistani public at large, Kargil as a post-nuclear conflict was an after-thought more than anything else. They did not really understand the rules of nuclear warfare and the containment of conflict in this kind of scenario. Nobody was aware that the real danger was not the loss of Kashmir or something similar, but some kind of unlimited nuclear conflict on the Subcontinent. That concept, except for specialists, remains largely theoretical. And there lies the danger.

Guha: I think the one thing we should never do is to underestimate the power of nuclear nationalism in India. The Indian middle-class still feels naked because China invaded India in 1962. And the ability of the Indian government to push the nuclear case is because you can continuously shift the goal post. If you say Pakistan is not a threat then you say China is, if you

Letting Kashmir go

The possibility of nuclear escalation becomes the strongest when information exchange between the two countries is at its weakest. The restriction on the travel of journalists between the two countries is the first major stumbling block in the flow of information. The two countries need more honest brokers, and there are some in the media but none among the political class. The second problem is the perception in India of what kind of political entity in Pakistan the Indians should deal with—would they rather deal with Musharraf or with a mullah government. The general view is that they will wait for the right kind of government to come to power in Pakistan. This was Indira Gandhi's and Rajiv Gandhi's view-point. But when Benazir Bhutto came to power it did not mean that the basic structure of the Pakistani nation had changed. The extended experiment by the Indian government to ignore the Musharraf government for the first one and a half years led nowhere.

Pakistan for its part has to accept that India is the foremost state in South Asia and it is in Pakistan's interest to help India up the ladder, because any improvement in India's status vis-à-vis the world situation should automatically lead to an improvement in Pakistan's status in the event of normal relations. Pakistan cannot get into an arms race with India, because the country just does not have the money. Likewise India has to accept, in absolutely categorical terms, that it cannot be a nation of considerable significance in world affairs without resolving problems with Pakistan. How can a country that cannot resolve a problem with Pakistan expect to be taken seriously as a player in the international arena?

Everybody pretends the Kashmir cannot be solved. The Indian argument is based on a false legalistic and a false historical notion. Borders are not cast in stone. What is practical is that India and Pakistan both have to learn to let go of Kashmir. Neither Pakistan nor India should pick and choose what voices they listen to. Putting the Kashmiri people into the equation is the core issue.

The problem between India and Pakistan is not psychological, it is the existence of large defence establishments. The biggest cause of conflict between the valley of the Indus and the valley of the Ganges was resolved in the Indus Water Treaty in 1962. They did it in a way that makes it all the more remarkable that we cannot do it today. That was a far more difficult problem to resolve than the reduction of tension in Kashmir.

–Hameed Haroon

say China is not a threat, you can say Pakistan is. Nuclear nationalism is influential in India at all levels, especially in north India, as in Pakistan. Don't make a mistake. Nuclear nationalism in India, as said earlier, is not the product of the Sangh Parivar. It goes much deeper than that and is widespread across the political spectrum and ordinary opinion. So the question of how to challenge it becomes even more complicated.

The second problem is that the Indian intellectual class represented in the media is not completely free. It is more free in some senses than the Pakistani press, but there it ends. Scientists in India are completely aligned to the state. Credibility is very important, and credibility will come from a top class PhD in physics doing cutting edge work and who may even have done nuclear work at some stage. But the Indian scientific community is as unwilling to speak up as the Pakistani counterpart. That is a great handicap for the anti-nuclear movement. Historians are free, journalists are free, sociologists are free, but not scientists. As the history of the anti-nuclear movement in the West shows, the absence of top quality scientists in the movement is a setback. There are top scientists in India, but they will never question anything remotely connected to the nuclear programme.

Would it help if we move away from this obsession with the opinion of the ordinary Indians and Pakistanis that the nuclear weapons are needed for some unimaginable war? Could we look at other things, other kinds of reciprocities and dialogues?

Dixit: But even if reciprocity and independent dialogues were hypothetically possible, there the Kashmir issue will continue to have a bearing on competitive nuclearisation.

Aslam: Whenever we talk about India and Pakistan 14 August will come along and 15 August will come along. It appears that we cannot escape the focus on this very traumatic moment of our history. In Pakistan the two-nation theory to a large extent has been resolved. There is no such thing anymore there. Ethnic cleansing or whatever you want to call it compelled migration. Even 1971 was similar because Bangladesh did not become part of West Bengal. It became an independent state and the only reason why it was an independent state was perhaps the fact that it had a Muslim identity. This is one of the things that keeps us floating along. India still has to understand this.

We might have regional disparities in Pakistan, we might have ethnic dislocations and so on, but as a state we hold dearly to this religious identification. India has a problem with this, and it crops up repeatedly with reference to Kashmir. This is because the Indian Muslim ultimately does not pass any given test, the cricket test or any other test. They are always presumed to be looking to Pakistan for comfort. They are discriminated against from time to time because of their presumed natural loyalty to Pakistan. I have seen this myself whether it is in Old Delhi or elsewhere. Indian Muslims have been living with this burden continuously.

This is because of the 'Destiny Kashmir' attitude. Indian Muslims feel that there is a widening divide between the two communities and it is not just in Kashmir. They are looked upon as some sort of fifth column among certain quarters in India. This has not helped the cause of resolving issues between India and Pakistan. For that reason, Kashmir becomes a very important factor. In trying to bring about a resolution India has to figure out what the state is actually all about and that involves questions about secularism, BJP, Indian Muslims. This is a festering problem.

Haroon: What is so sad and so pathetic about the India's Kashmir policy is that it allows Pakistani authoritarians to tap-dance to international acclaim because of the false symbolism that has been created around Kashmir. There is a simple case of double standards on Kashmir. Indian society will not be able to survive the crisis in democratic values by holding on to Kashmir by force because nothing in India's democratic polity can possibly endorse this kind of silent destruction of the will of a whole people.

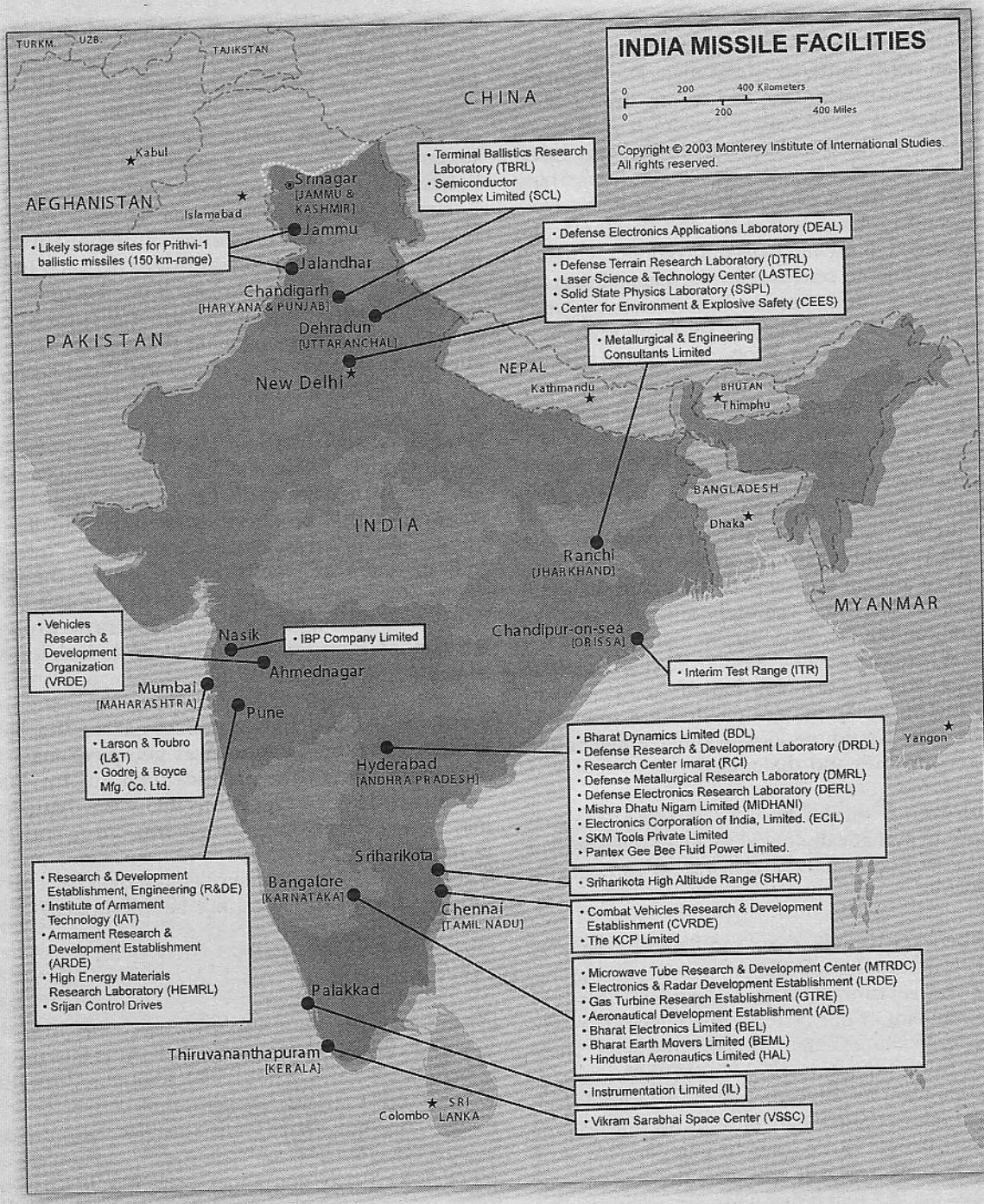
Abraham: Among Indian policy makers and opinion leaders some things never ever get questioned. For a long time, one of the justifications put forward by scholars and policymakers was that it is very important for Indian secularism to have a Muslim majority state in India. As a concept this is nonsense and yet this is something that is repeated over and over, as a given of Indian secularism that cannot be questioned.

Phoney talk

India and Pakistan have never come close to a nuclear war so far despite the posturing and threats. Such an outcome is not really a serious possibility. People raise the nuclear option in conversation or interviews but nobody specifies what the nuclear option is. The nuclear option does not mean that they are actually going use the bomb. If there was any seriousness about the possibility of nuclear action, it would be on the top of the list and government would take it seriously. There are problems about Kashmir but Kashmir and the nuclear issue are not coterminous.

Both countries realise that the consequences of one exploding the nuclear device could be followed immediately by the other responding. That is the deterrent that ensures that no one is going to use it first. This nuclear umbrella actually allows space to talk about the issues.

–Akbar Zaidi



Paneerselvan: All the previous elections in Kashmir could not be considered free and fair. But, the last exercise was a major development. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed coming in was actually a blow to a certain type of Delhi-based real estate imagination of Kashmir. It was as if Delhi's writ was being subverted by the people of Kashmir. Is that enough? Nobody says it is enough but for the first time the people were using an entirely different yardstick, that is the ballot paper. They were permitted to go ahead and exercise some choice of their own.

Haroon: Do you believe in your heart that the election represented the real aspirations of what the Kashmiri people want?

Paneerselvan: Casting a vote is not an expression of every true aspiration. No election will ever be able to do that. The issue is not whether India permitted a free election or not. The issue is that a third option or a third power has come to power there.

Varadarajan: At one level the lack of a policy in the

centre today vis-à-vis Kashmir is disappointing because you have on the one hand a landmark development like the election of the Mufti government, but it has not been accompanied by any of the other steps or measures that New Delhi could take in order to rapidly push forward towards some kind of a solution. A necessary ingredient for any peaceful resolution of Kashmir is to talk to Pakistan and to carry the people of Kashmir with you.

On this question of carrying the people of Kashmir, after 14 or 15 years of problems how do you do it? You have to build their confidence. You have to start by having an honest accounting of all the crimes that were committed by the security forces over the past 15 years, of the people who have gone missing, of the people who have been held in jail for 15 years without significant charge.

Hakim: Siddharth you keep visiting Kashmir? How do the Kashmiris really speak?

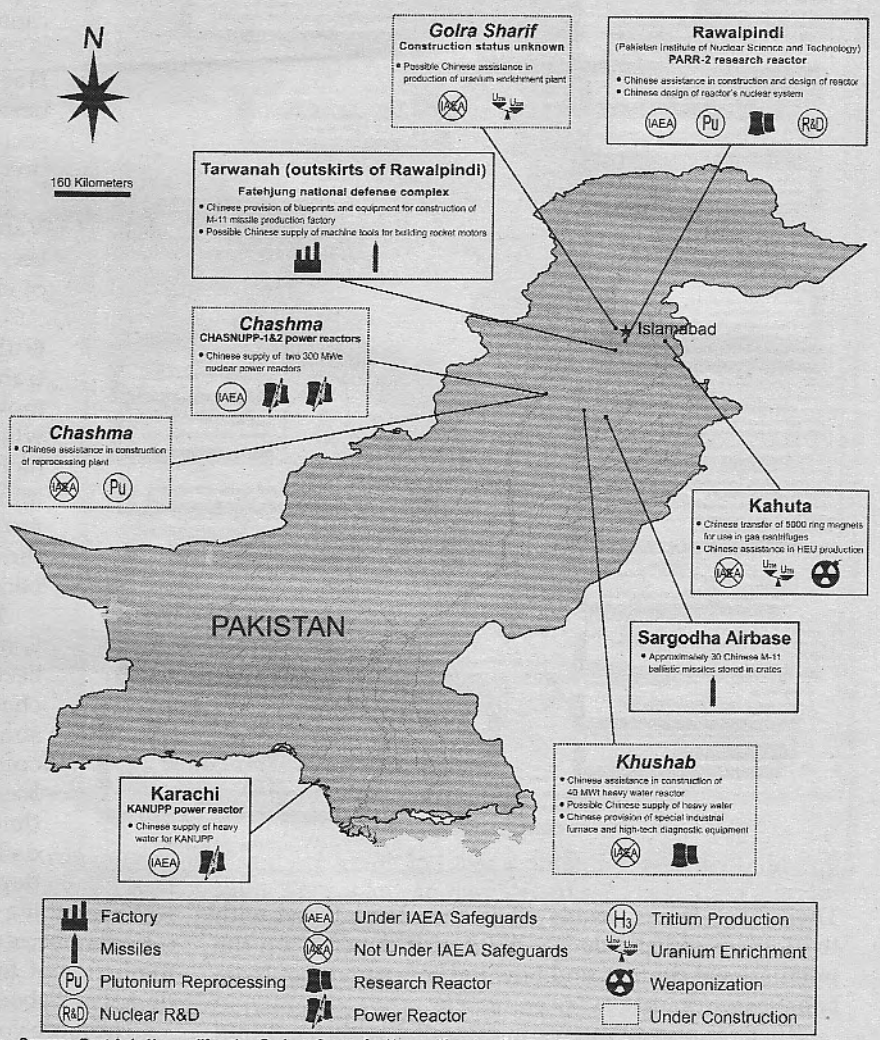
Varadarajan: This may sound insensitive but when you meet Kashmiris in a group and when you meet them individually their responses are different. So, the so-called Kashmiri street- or bazaar-opinion is always very uniformly anti-government of India, less uniformly anti-Pakistan but also increasingly anti-Pakistan and pro-azaadi. But, when you speak to smaller groups then you get the nuances. My reading is that were the government of India to take certain steps and the first among them, if they could try army officers and security force officers involved in some of the worst human rights violations, that would make ordinary Kashmiris see some hope. But, bizarre things happen—where the government admits killing civilians in a fake encounter, the whole thing is proven from DNA tests, and yet no murder case is registered, no action is taken and things carry on.

Dixit: Are you saying that if the government of India were to show a better face, Kashmiris might even be willing to consider staying with India?

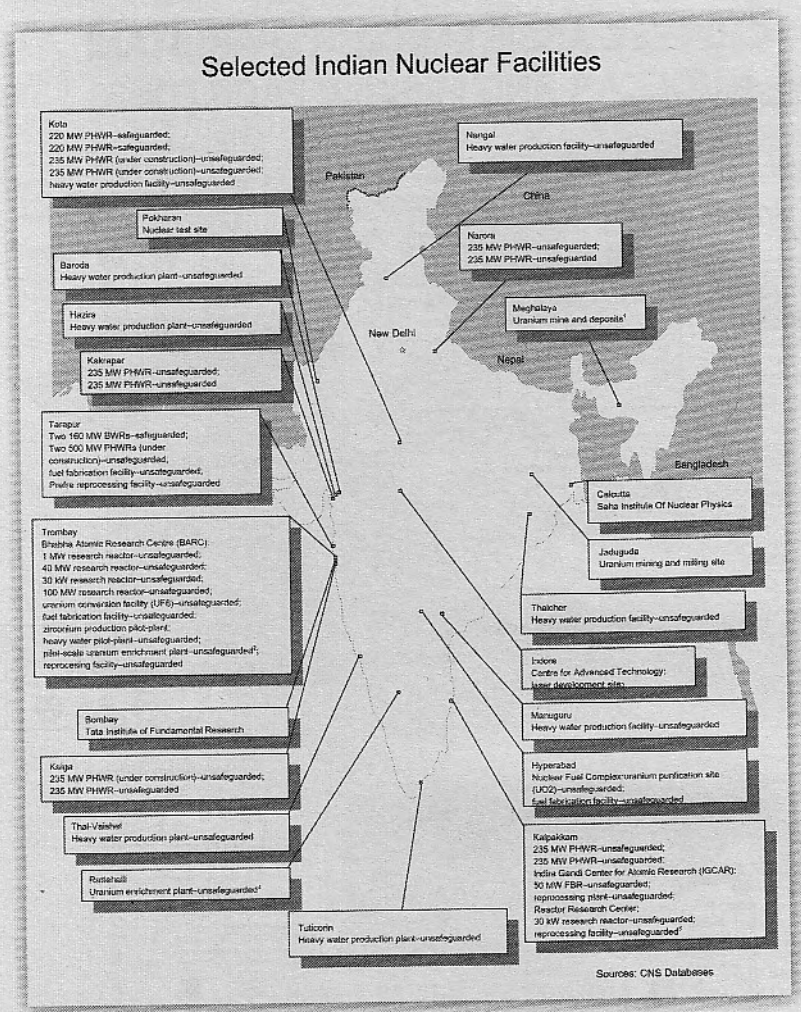
Varadarajan: For them to consider staying with India, India has to be a very different country from what it is today. Let's be frank about this, we have been discussing the nature of Pakistan and the nature of India, and I think both the nature of Pakistan and the nature of India have to change in order for Kashmir to be settled on a long-term basis. But, yes if centre-state relations were to change, if the whole question of the status of Muslims in India were honestly to be addressed and the security forces were to be held accountable and the rule of law were to be genuinely established in Kashmir, that would create an environment in which dialogue could take place in which, finally, the Kashmiri people freely express their opinion.

Guha: If you look at the history of India since 1947, what the evidence tells you about the people of the Valley is that there is no one voice in Kashmir. From 1947 onwards there have been periods in which Kashmiris have been more interested in India and there have been periods in which they have been very pro-Pakistan.

CHINESE ASSISTANCE TO PAKISTANI NUCLEAR AND MISSILE FACILITIES



Source: East Asia Nonproliferation Project, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies



There have been periods when they have toyed with the idea of independence. A lot of it depends on the international context, and how the government of India behaves.

There is a very interesting parallel with the Tamil question in Sri Lanka. There have also been points where the Tamils have been willing to be part of Sri Lanka and there have been times when they felt so alienated that they only want independence. You will see this ebb and flow since 1956, which is why the Tamil-Kashmiri analogy comes to mind. You have the same kind of divides, constitutional versus militant , the gun versus the ballot box.

As in Sri Lanka, there is also the question of what you term terrorism. There are some Indian journalists and secularists who only emphasise the human-rights violations of the army and there are some Indian journalists and Hindu-chauvinists who only emphasise terrorist acts. And as long as Pakistani liberals and Pakistani intellectuals are seen to, if not supporting Musharraf, then at least being silent on this question because they think that if they call what is happening in Kashmir terrorism it would be playing into the hands of Indian security forces and Hindu-chauvinists. This will only diminish the possibilities of registering the real aspirations of freedom in Kashmir. This is something that cannot be fudged and the Indian left-wing also cannot fudge it.

Haroon: But, you have to distinguish between the primary statement and the secondary statement. Musharraf's main premise is that he cannot control it.

Varadarajan: The Pakistani position has been more subtle. They never say that killing of civilians is freedom-struggle.

Guha: There has been an interesting transformation in the so-called freedom movement in Kashmir. This is something which both Pakistani and Indian liberals have not addressed for fear of playing into the hands of the enemy. We have to recognise the question of the perversion of the freedom movement in Kashmir, the perversion of their own context.

For example, the Hinduism of Togadia is not the Hinduism of Gandhi. There has been a fundamental transformation of the character of political Hinduism and the sooner we realise this and are able to confront it, the better. Likewise with Kashmir. Over the last 10 or 12 years—and that is what affects the readers of Hindi dailies like *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Jansatta*—the departure of the pandits from the Valley was something which Indian secularists never took up seriously because it would be seen to be playing into the hands of the Hindu chauvinist and the BJP. They do not talk about the suffering and plight of the Pandits.

The more you present a perspective from a one-sided point of view, disregarding the word terrorism, the more you will play into the hands of people like Togadia.

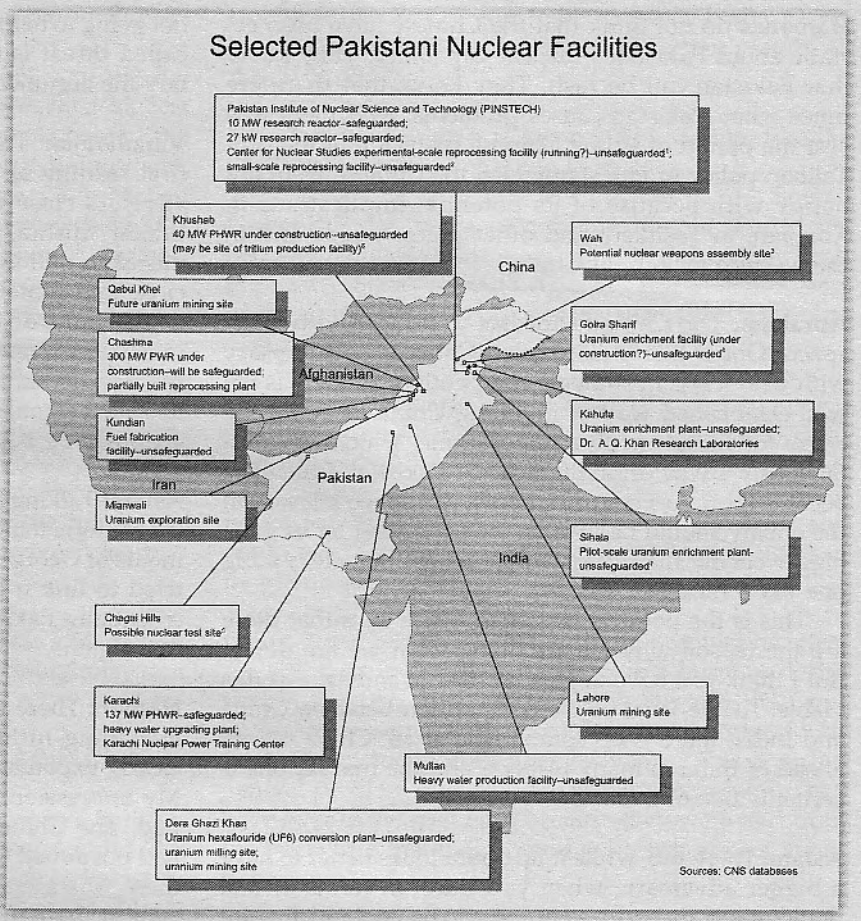
Dixit: Kashmir remains an intractable issue in the Indo-Gangetic basin of Pakistan and India. Is it as much of an issue outside this belt and if it is not, then does that make it any easier to mobilise against the bomb in those regions of India where neither Kashmir nor the pain of Partition have had a significant impact?

Paneerselvan: Pakistan or Kashmir do not really figure day-to-day in the south Indian media. There is an overwhelming belief that the north is silent about southern problems. They are not talking about Sri Lanka which is very important for the south. When Prabhakaran had his press-conference on 10 April and journalists from all over the world were present, the north India-based media was conspicuously absent in Wanni. *The Hindustan Times* report came out two days

late because of some 'logistical' problems. The general opinion in the south is that the north Indian cannot get involved in something geopolitical without messing it up.

The only link between these north Indian problems and south India are provided by the Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Foreign Service, the military top brass, who sometimes happen to be Tamil. At one time all these scary guys were from my state. Most of them are brahmins, with a few exceptions.

The public became really interested in Kashmir when the Hurriyat leaders decided to travel to south India two years ago, before the Agra summit. Since Tamil Nadu always felt that it has been deprived by New Delhi, the natural sympathy is with the Hurriyat and others similarly deprived. There is a natural affinity towards people who question the centre and the best example was the reception given to the Hurriyat leaders.



Haroon: I would like to share something which Lone said to me about that trip. He said it was the single most significant trip that he had made in his recent career. It completely changed his perception as to where the struggle was leading, and he felt that the response that they received in Tamil Nadu and the south was sufficient to justify a major change in emphasis for the Hurriyat movement because for the first time they felt that they were getting an understanding of their problem, from south India.

Dixit: But there still seems to be a passivity in the south when it comes to Pakistan and Kashmir. What you are saying is that we are not going to help until you pay attention to us.

Paneerselvan: No it is not passivity. It is very supportive of them in a very different manner. The south has never justified the Indian Army's excesses and the army has never been lionised there. The elections in Kashmir were never seen as a great democratic exercise. Whenever southerners look at Punjab versus Delhi, they immediately think in terms of the Sikhs who were burnt in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's assassination. After Rajiv Gandhi's assassination there were gross violations of human-rights in Tamil Nadu, which did not even register in the north Indian press. Another sore point was the vilification of a person called Premadasa by the New Delhi media. It was the first time that Indian diplomats started calling journalists and telling them, if you are going to have a dhobi for president, do you think Sri Lanka can ever progress? Premadasa's origin was a real issue to hit at him by New Delhi.

Dixit: What about the China axis to the nuclear question between India and Pakistan? Are there not issues outside the framework of India-Pakistan security rivalry?

Abraham: One aspect of Pakistan's nuclear policy, which may be worth considering, is the so-called attention given to North Korea, which was first announced by American sources and has not really been deconfirmed by anybody. This raises the question of China and its role, for the key link between Pakistan and North Korea is via Beijing.

India has always invoked China as being the ultimate threat to which it is trying to respond. This is ironic because in 1998 when the Pokhran tests happened, the relations between the two countries had been better than they had been in a very long time. China was trying to show itself as being even willing to make concessions on border issues and so on, which it had never done before. To invoke China at that point really was simply to say "turn some of those Chinese missiles towards India".

Haroon: I do not think that the Chinese have been ecstatic about Pakistan's nuclear capability. They know that Pakistan can be rash. They know that there are times when Pakistan causes problems. And there was also the period of strong Chinese suspicion of the pro-Taliban policy in Pakistan which the Chinese were not happy with because of its potential implications in Xingjian, in Tashkent and other places inside and in the western vicinity of China.

Abraham: The China factor has to be seen in two respects. One is that India regards China as an adversary with whom it is in strategic competition. So there is the well-established way of invoking China as being the cause for India's nuclear programme, which is simultaneously a way of saying it is not Pakistan. China has become more successful and powerful so we know who the enemy should be. It is, in a way, saying let us get a bigger enemy than Pakistan, let us get ourselves a big one like China.

This is the political language which says that these are the reason why we are doing what we are doing. But I think you have to go a bit further and ask—is this viable. At the level of the competition between China and India, there is no comparison at all. China is way ahead of India in many respects and the nuclear one is certainly one of them.

Aslam: Therefore, while it no doubt looks better to have a bigger adversary, when you think in terms of real deployment, there does not seem to be very much point in countering China

Abraham: There is of course the whole question of delivery systems. Until the Agni II missile becomes viable and actually deployable there is nothing you can attack in China which is within reach. Bombing Lhasa is not going to help. But even so the China threat or the so-called threat is enormously popular. A lot of people buy the argument.

Varadarajan: There are two ways of looking at it. The first reading is that it was another naïve attempt by advisors close to Prime Minister Vajpayee, such as Brajesh Mishra, to try to align India with the US in the mistaken notion that the US is anxious to actually encircle and contain China. It was perhaps the belief that in the light of this contain-China policy the Indian nuclear programme would become more acceptable to the Americans. The second reading, more dramatic, was to send a signal to the Chinese and to begin to be taken seriously by Beijing.

Aslam: Talking about the immediate fallout of the tests, the rhetoric that came out of India, apart from the statements of George Fernandes and a couple of others, who tried to link it to the so-called Chinese threat, it was essentially Pakistan-specific. I think that was also part of the game.

Haroon: There was a very successful Indian delegation to Beijing in September-October 1998 which fairly clearly explained the sort of impetus behind the tests. My impression was that the Chinese were quite satisfied. The Chinese seemed to believe that the Indians had not aimed the tests specifically at them. They knew there was a marketing ploy on. The Chinese are very cynical about this kind of thing, and what they are more concerned about is that India and Pakistan would destabilise the regional equations.

Varadarajan: George Fernandes' "China is our biggest enemy" statement which came around March-April of 1998, creates the impression that the anti-Chinese element was an obsession. There is a very high possibility that Fernandes was not even in on the decision taken to carry out the Pokhran II test.

Paneerselvan: There are two papers written by two Delhi hawks, one by Bharat Karnad and the other one by K Subrahmanyam. These were about the selection of Balasore in Orissa as a test range. According to them there was a conscious decision to locate it in the east because the threat to India is from the east. And the moment you say that, it is clear that you are not talking about Pakistan, and definitely you are not talking about Myanmar or Bangladesh. It has to be China. Keep in mind that Karnad and Subrahmanyam are both part of the establishment. It is also Karnad's thesis that if India bombs Kahuta, Pakistan it will become the supreme power.

Pre-and post-test satellite image comparison of the Pakistan nuclear test site showing physical effects

IRS-1C 5-m resolution image Courtesy: Space Imaging, Inc.

Detected changes through digital image subtraction

IRS-1C 5-m resolution image Courtesy: Science Applications International Corporation

Haroon: Where would you deliver a bomb from Orissa?

Paneerselvan: Why is India developing Agni II? Because Agni II is directed towards the so-called biggest enemy. If we try to discern some rationale behind the articles or this posturing, there is really nothing there, be it from Subramaniam or Karnad or even Raja Mohan of *The Hindu*. It does not really add up to anything. It is just a fancy idea because they want to sound original.

Abraham: There could be one more potential reading. If a hawkish opinion-maker, pulls out the idea that China is the threat, it can become something of a resource within the government between different factions who are vying for central positions. Suppose there is an anti-China faction within the NDA, they can use this particular article as a truth. But, we have to ask are these opinions by the hawks reflecting the existing positions of the government or is it the other way round?

Dixit: Paneer would you agree that there is a method in the madness in the kind of articles that Subrahmanyam and others write?

Paneerselvan: I see only madness. And it is working. Madness works.

Zaidi: I recently did a survey of 119 MLAs and 200 elected representatives in local government in Pakistan. This was a few days before the Americans invaded Iraq. One question I asked was—do you think Pakistan should give up its nuclear programme. 300 respondents said absolutely not, under no circumstance. The second question was, what about the Americans and the weapons of mass destruction. They said, fine, we need our weapons. Another question which was asked was—which country do they think our government favoured the most. Obviously the answer was America. Then, the next question was—to which country do you think the Pakistani government should give greatest priority, and the answer was China. India did not feature at all—which was surprising. There was China and then there was something called the Muslim world—Saudi Arabia, Iran—a couple of people said Iran, but mostly Saudi Arabia. India and SAARC and South Asia did not seem to exist for my respondents. And these are the people who are supposed to make policy as elected representatives.

These people seemed to think that China was the direction Pakistan should be looking to and with whom bridges ought to be built. Perhaps it is because China is now also emerging as an economic power and seems to be getting bigger. It is perhaps a shift in the consciousness after Afghanistan, and the belief that Pakistan needs another friend.

Zaidi: India has ambitions of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and to be seen as a larger player in international affairs. What role does that play in all this, if at all?

Varadarajan: I think it is a non-factor. Getting into the Security Council is not going to be easy.

Guha: It is not the Security Council per se. Forget the Security Council. India's ambition is to be what I call the United States of South Asia. But there are problems of recognition of this role. For instance, Bush has yet to visit India.

Haroon: The scenario would change in two minutes if there was peace between India and Pakistan and Pakistan supported India's application to become a permanent member of the Security Council. The only thing which is preventing India from assuming a larger status in world affairs is that it cannot solve problems in its own backyard.

Guha: The question is whether India's ambitions affect the situation in South Asia. There is a burning desire within the two main parties—the BJP and the Congress—to, in some way, play a larger role in world affairs. This actually goes back to Nehru. This is also a general problem with the Indian Foreign Service. They have over-developed egos because they were told from the beginning that they should get much greater attention.

Haroon: The attitude is very simple, asking why does China deserve the status and respect which India does not.

Guha: The argument among the political class in Delhi is "to be taken seriously we must be militarily strong and self-reliant in order to take on all kinds of threats, and particularly to withstand the pressure from Pakistan". That is the kind of logic that is driving them. There is a leader of public opinion who lives in my hometown of Bangalore. He is Narayanmurthy of Infosys, the company that is leading the IT revolution in India. Narayanmurthy would say, to be taken as seriously as China, grow, generate new technologies, use the opportunities in the world market. It is only then that India can be expected to be taken seriously. In effect, removing illiteracy, under-nourishment, creating good hospital systems and infrastructure is the key to being taken seriously.

Haroon: But China got its permanent seat before its global market operations. In hindsight, how strong was China when it first got its UN Security Council seat? What is it that India does not have that China had? It all really boils down to perception.

Simulated consensus

by **T Mathew**

The number of independently nuclear states in Asia has risen to four. Though the increment to the total nuclear capacity on the continent is marginal, the potential for a nuclear catastrophe remains high. The current destructive capacity of India and Pakistan is admittedly limited. But the permanent state of friction between the two countries, arising from the protracted dispute over Kashmir, increases the possibility of any one of the recurring conventional conflicts escalating into nuclear revanchism. Given the high density of subcontinental population, particularly in the large metropolises of both countries, even these two limited kiloton arsenals can unleash extraordinary havoc.

Polities built on hyper-real security anxieties deliberately shun mechanisms for verifying the popular consent for measures that purport to be in the interest of national defence. Consequently, through intermediary agents in the political, academic and information arenas, the belief is orchestrated that the nuclear talisman will exorcise its own nihilistic spectres. This conviction of the security establishment is deemed for all practical purposes to represent a national consensus. Rodham Narasimha, a leading exponent of India's current policy, claimed that the committee that prepared the Draft Nuclear Policy was composed of a broad cross-section of views and hence represented a national consensus. Since a consensus predisposed to policies already decided is forged by stealth in select committees, it is also simultaneously necessary to obstruct any discordant public campaign that disputes the legitimacy and rationale of the simulated consensus.

Through a process, eloquently described by the eminent historian and peace campaigner, EP Thompson, critics of this putative consensus are consigned to a recalcitrant, lunatic fringe that supposedly does not appreciate the gravitas of state. The police, the press, both 'sophisticated' and scurrilous, political parties, scientific luminaries and strategic analysts are commandeered to certify the imprudence of the dissenters and the illegitimacy of their belief, even if they are otherwise people of professional eminence and distinction. This is the state-inspired environment of hostility that confronts the incipient anti-nuclear movement in South Asia.

An obvious aspect of the current South Asian reality is that potential weapon-level nuclearisation is a very recent development. Inevitably, the movement against it is embryonic, more sporadic than continuous, and has yet to secure for itself a large enough domestic constituency to attain the critical mass that could even minimally inhibit nuclear gusto, let alone determine positive policy outcomes in its favour. By contrast, reflecting the long history of nuclear escalation in the NATO countries, the nuclear disarmament campaign has been tempered by more than fifty years of experience.

Oppenheimer and Einstein

In the years immediately following the second world war, campaigns against nuclear weapons were stronger in Europe than they were in the United States. By the mid-1950s, several groups had emerged in Britain, the most prominent being the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests, the H-Bomb National Campaign, and the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear Weapons, more famously known as the DAC. These early efforts prepared the ground for the emergence of arguably the most influential and well-publicised anti-nuclear group in the world—the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), established in 1958 on a platform of unilateral disarmament.

In the Netherlands the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (IKV), was active in the anti-nuclear campaign against NATO's nuclear plans. The Dutch protests had an impact in the Flemish part of Belgium, while West Germany, being a frontline state also witnessed fairly hectic anti-nuclear activity. In Europe, while the movement maintained a constant schedule of campaign activities, it peaked in two phases, first from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s and then from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. Both these cycles of resurgence coincided with crucial policy measures being considered by European governments concerning the upgradation of nuclear weapons, as part of the NATO's strategic plans.

In the US the anti-nuclear movement came into existence a few years later than it did in Europe. This was not simply due to the fact that the American mainland experienced no fighting during the second world war, unlike Europe, which was left to rebuild itself from the rubble. The political climate in the US placed too many hurdles in the way of open dissent against the sacred aspects of US strategic policy. Consequently, a distinctive feature of the US anti-bomb campaign was that it was first initiated by some of the most eminent scientists of the time, not all of whom were immune from persecution. Beginning with Robert Oppenheimer's disavowal of the atom bomb, and the petition by scientists, among them Albert Einstein, pleading against the use of nuclear knowledge for destructive ends, many leading scientists lobbied against weapons' production. In 1946, Albert Einstein and eight other scientists formed the Emergency

Committee of Atomic Scientists, to educate American people about the nature of nuclear weapons and nuclear war. Leo Szilard, the physicist and biophysicist, who had worked on the Manhattan Project, undertook extensive lecture tours on the perils of nuclear war.

The earliest organised initiatives from outside the scientific community came in the late 1950s with the founding of the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) by the War Resisters League. The tradition of distinguished scientists campaigning against nuclear proliferation gave rise, in 1958, to one of the most enduring and respected groups, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), founded by the 1954 chemistry Nobel laureate Linus Pauling along with the Norman Cousins. This period also saw the emergence of sectional and professional campaign groups advocating disarmament.

As in Europe, the peace movement saw renewed anti-nuclear activity and an expansion in the number of groups from the mid-1970s, signalling the increase in tension and in nuclear proliferation. This period saw the growth of more local level activity, such as the Clamshell Alliance, formed in 1976 in New London, Connecticut, which became a model for grassroots anti-nuclear groups across US, and the Livermore Action Group in 1982. Groups seeking a wider constituency continued to emerge. These included the Mobilization for Survival (MOBE) in 1978, and the US Comprehensive Test Ban Coalition in 1985.

Interiors of state

Viewed in terms of membership and activities, the nuclear disarmament movement has an impressive record of achievements. But viewed in terms of the actual numbers of nuclear weapons that were produced and the number of tests conducted the net results are rather more disappointing. In addition to the fact that till 1996 there had been a total of 2046 tests, the global tally of nuclear warheads has steadily increased from a few hundred in 1950 to 38,000 in 1968 reaching a peak of about 70,000 in the mid-80's, before declining to the current figure of about 36,000. In other words, after 50 years of sustained campaigning, the size of the arsenal is marginally smaller than it was 30 years ago.

Through the five decades of peace activism the US maintained a nuclear weapons production complex consisting of 19 sites occupying more than 3900 square miles. The complex has involved over its life several hundred facilities, and more than 900 uranium mines and mills. The complex includes 14 production reactors, eight separation and reprocessing plants, and 239 underground storage tanks for high-level waste.

Clearly, the anti-nuclear movement was very effective in mobilising people and co-ordinating their activities, but what was this mobilisation doing? The relationship between the movement and the nuclear establishment, in terms of its influence on testing, production and deployment appears to have been rather limited. Decisions were being taken from the insulated interiors of the state that did not pay any heed to the protest movement.

It is customary for groups within the movement to point to the various treaties that punctuated the Cold War as a sign of their influence. However, anti-nuclear activism merely provided a general backdrop against which the treaties were concluded. But even if the argument were to be conceded, in the context of the unremitting escalation between 1950 and 1987, the question that arises is, precisely what purpose did these treaties serve.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1963 was demonstrably inadequate to check the expansion of the global arsenal, and the current total of warheads is in excess of the 1963 level. The only other treaty of any significance during the Cold War was the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), which was concluded after two and a half years of talks, and consisted of an Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and an Interim Agreement on Strategic Offensive Arms. The ABM Treaty served many purposes internal to the nuclear establishments on both sides and contributed very little to the cause of nuclear risk reduction. If anything it accentuated the risk.

In effect, the ABM was a fait accompli, in that it reduced, on paper, the role of the defensive system that in practice was deemed to be unworkable. On the other hand, the Interim Agreement, while freezing strategic ballistic missile launchers at existing levels of deployment and construction, permitted an increase in Sea Launched Ballistic Missile launchers up to an agreed level, subject only to the condition that a corresponding number of older SLBM's or Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) be destroyed or dismantled. In short, SALT I simply upheld the theory of deterrence, which would have been undermined by the construction of a comprehensive defensive shield. A functioning and efficient shield would quite simply have rendered offensive weapons and its corollary, the theory of deterrence, redundant.

The redundance of deterrence clearly did not suit an entrenched and autonomous nuclear establishment, and hence the consistent effort to salvage the ABM treaty by linking all other subsequent treaty talks to strict adherence to the ABM. The only agreement that actually addressed the issue of reducing the offensive arsenal, though signed in 1979, was never ratified, and it was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty came into effect, ten years after talks on it had commenced.

In the circumstances, START can be clearly be ascribed to the end of necessity, and not to the compulsion for peace. If, therefore, the treaties prior to it are attributed to the influence of the peace movement, that does not add up to much of a success, since the treaties were the routine rituals of the Cold War, for the

most part clearing the board, eliminating obsolete weapons, and laying the rules for sustained production of offensive weapons. Talks and treaties were paying more attention to the technical details of strategic and defensive balance than to the peace movement, and was in effect rationalising the arsenals by clearing the board under agreed rules and conditions.

The unresponsive polity

Beneath the appearance of success lurked some memorable failures. Two instances, from the UK and the US respectively, where the peace movements were strongest, point to the specific issues on which the anti-nuclear campaign failed comprehensively. These failures were not uniquely because of the inadequacy of the movement. They were in large part due to the inadequacy of the so-called liberal state.

The UK example brings out the anomalies of liberal political theory, highlighting the conflict between interest groups in civil society and interest groups in the state and the inadequacy of the electoral mechanism to resolve the dispute in favour of civil politics. In Britain's 1964 general elections, the Labour Party, following sustained pressure from the CND, campaigned on a platform of cancelling the sitting government's plans to purchase Polaris nuclear submarines for upgrading missile delivery to the SLBM system. On coming to power, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson reneged on the electoral commitment, and proceeded with the purchase of the submarines from the USA. In the case of the US, the entire elected system simply refused to accede to a popularly expressed opinion. Senators Edward Kennedy and Mark Hartfield introduced, in March 1982, a nuclear freeze resolution. Despite the evident popular support for the freeze resolution the House of Representatives rejected the resolution by a narrow majority.

Clearly the anti-nuclear movement was a victim of politics in unresponsive polities in which they failed in general, barring very few exceptions, either to transform themselves into entrenched political forces, or to orient existing political forces toward their goals.

In contrast, movements that managed to either transform themselves into political parties or acquire a surrogate political partner achieved some limited success. In the UK, the movement suffered from the fatal flaw of being irrelevant to mainstream electoral politics and was therefore unable to inspire politics. In the US, though the movement by and large belonged to the mainstream, it was far too depoliticised to inspire politics. Consequently, neither was able to react in any coherent way to an unresponsive polity, some of whose security institutions ran on semi-clandestine lines.

Mobilising South Asia

Clearly, the western experience in anti-nuclear campaigning has some lessons for South Asia, despite the vast difference in context. These differences are important. Unlike in the Cold War campaign, where the two nuclearised zone were mutually inaccessible, in the case of India and Pakistan, peace activists in both countries can work in tandem, and there has been some limited though continuous contact between the respective anti-nuclear constituencies.

But this advantage notwithstanding, the two movements still have much to do by way of expanding their capacity for mass mobilisation. By way of a beginning the National Convention held in November 2000 in New Delhi has given rise to the national-level Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP). Likewise, in Pakistan, the multi-body Pakistan Peace Coalition has come into existence. Unless these two umbrella organisations create their respective, permanently mobilised, domestic disarmament constituencies, there is little point in cross-border inter-organisational co-operation.

But as the UK and US experience suggests, simply mobilising a mass of people serves no purpose, even in polities that are far more responsive to organised interest groups and electoral lobbies than South Asian states are. An environment of exaggerated threat perception is not conducive to responsive politics. As a result of the inability to command politics, the UK and US movements could do little to promote détente, let alone deter deployment. In a sense they were dropouts from politics. In the vast South Asian landscape, politics is the only truly mass medium and instrumentality. While independent sectional groups are essential to constrain the sectarian tendencies of political parties, they are by themselves incapable of mobilising the critical mass to inhibit trigger-happy technocrats.

In Pakistan, the anti-nuclear movement has to go one step further and invent a new mass politics, since to begin with there is currently very little independent politics, and to the extent that there is such a thing, it is constituted by the remains of the erstwhile major parties, all of which have in the past displayed a taste for making domestic politics an extension of bilateral geo-politics.

But the most important contribution of the western peace movements, and the one that is least applauded in the scramble to detect tangible achievements, is that it raised the ethical threshold of nuclear use, in an age that abandoned all ethics in the accumulation armament surpluses. The Western movement engineered a moral atmosphere against actual use in a nuclear balance built on overloaded offensive capacity set to go off at a moments notice. A subcontinental movement that can raise the ethical threshold to the same level and combine with a broad spectrum of political parties, will perhaps, achieve by way of non-nuclear deterrence, what five decades of activism and energy could not achieve in the Cold War.

This very uncivil society

They call it humanisation with a global face–or is it the other way around? From 16 to 21 January 2004, the World Social Forum (WSF) convenes in Bombay, the first departure from its home in Brazil. Can the model be successfully exported? Should it?

by ***Rahul Goswami***

There is an unmistakeable seduction that works to suck one into the global common good. Chief among the weapons of seduction is the lyricism of international mnemonics, which works like sacred chant and catechism: Porto Alegre, Seattle, Cancun, Mumbai, "another world is possible", "democratise the budget", "ethical globalisation", Miami, Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), World Social Forum, WTO, IMF, World Bank, World Economic Forum, civil society, marginalised groups, "giving a voice to the voiceless", "the indispensable nation", and so on.

There is the thrill of the parallel sessions to the state-sponsored summits, the feelgood oneness of the protest marches, the delightful fringe groups, the right-of-centrists, the benign Islamists, the occasionally pinko Hindutvavadis, the champagne socialists, the oddities of every flavour and hue. The party is a magnificent one. The euro-dollars flow. The presses clatter. Digital flashes record the moment onto gleaming Sony Memory Sticks™. It is the kandy-koloured kadillac, but now spray-painted with the tones of khaki and khadi. The mission is a globe-spanning one. The need is to create a network of networks and a movement of movements.

It is a valuable idea but there are dangers, which have been made clear by all variety of participants and observers ever since the eruption that was the first World Social Forum in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 2001. Is it all becoming too centralised? Speaking with too homogenous a voice? Being identified with too visible a set of locations? Moving towards a secretariat when all that it opposes also have secretariats, thus becoming the opposite of a network?

That 'other world' is mine

Are there emerging struggles for power within the WSF, undertones of political intrigue? The questions are endless and many come from within. Viewed antiseptically, the concept of civil society rests on the fundament of single-issue activism. Yet the World Social Forum and its habitués indicate the opposite is always true, and even were it not so before, the immutable logic of its slogan—"another world is possible"—makes it so now.

If we follow the argument that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter, then isn't one person's civil society group another's pressure group? Yes, of course. In fact, when it is said that civil society must be recognised as a new force in international politics, the implicit meaning is a certain kind of civil society, in other words a certain kind of political movement. Why should this be the case? Because a descriptive term is being misused as an ideological or moral one.

But this is getting ahead of the argument. Let us look at the charter of the World Social Forum. This document describes the forum as "a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives" and "an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism..."

There is a substantial amount of feelgood declamation that talks about a "plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context" and so on. If one decides to critically edit the intent and concentrate on the content however, the conclusion one arrives at is that the World Social Forum, by its own definition of itself, is prohibited from embarking on any meaningful action. "The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body", explains the charter. "No one, therefore, will be authorised... to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body... on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power..."

How open is this meeting place? At the 2001 Forum, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

which has been carrying on a long-standing armed struggle against the Colombian government and which is the main target of the US's massive Plan Colombia, were kept out. At the forum a year later, the Cuban delegation was not given an official status nor a prominent role (however, one gathers, their cigarillos were appreciated). The Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, battling ferocious US efforts at overthrowing his elected government, was not invited to WSF 2003. He decided to turn up nevertheless, to find himself shut out of from the official forum, despite his evident popularity among the participants.

The WSF's diversity has its limits, and they far too often resemble the hierarchical boardroom-like universe of the multinationals, the very ones who are spreading the globalisation the forum is disturbed by. The forum, does however, need to be just as global, as Candido Grzybowski, one of the key organisers of the WSF in Porto Alegre, said recently, "We cannot remain only in Porto Alegre. Asia is half of humanity, we need to be there and be in tune with the people there, their needs and their demands". Encouraged by the success of the Porto Alegre jamborees, the WSF organisers have been trying systematically to expand the forum's influence even further. They have recently organised an Argentina Social Forum meet in Buenos Aires, a European Social Forum in Florence, a Palestine Thematic Forum in Ramallah, an Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, and an African Social Forum in Addis Ababa. It is as part of this "internationalisation" process that the WSF bodies (the Brazilian Organising Committee and the International Council) decided to hold the next WSF gathering in India. "They see problems there we don't have", said Grzybowski of India. "And so the WSF in Mumbai will be looking at issues such as casteism and religious fundamentalism that we do not face a lot". He thinks that moving the WSF to India "will be like a laboratory—it is a risk, but it is important for the WSF to take that risk".

"Laboratory" and "risk" in the same sentence may well sound like a specialist fund manager debating whether to invest money in a biotech start-up. Moving to Asia however is critical in view of the aims of the WSF and its organisers. What after all are the reasons for these large assemblies of social movements, such as the WSF, the European Social Forum and their various transcontinental variations? They were specifically created as an alternative to meetings of global business and political elites, such as the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland. However, they are not simply an anti-summit hodgepodge of rallies and raucousness. They have specific functions.

"The fact is that we were brought to the WSF so we could listen—not so the rank-and-file could participate", says Hebe Bonafini, head of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an organisation of the mothers of those 'disappeared' by the Argentinean military dictatorship of 1976-83. The organisers aim to establish their credibility as leaders of the social movements. In this, once again, they blend into the behaviourism that defines the opposition. There is more, however—the similarity with the global business forums also suggests that these activists see themselves as equivalent to the global business leaders. 'Global' is a touchstone of a word in this universe —one hears a great deal of "global civil society" or "global governance" or "global partnerships". It is an evolving model, a work-in-progress, but one whose shape is beginning to reveal itself. The model implies that there are three main actors in global politics—global business, national governments, and transnational non-governmental groupings or organisations. Taken to its logical conclusion, the global governance model implies that this trinity should run the world together. The WSF in fact has also been cynically defined as a Greenpeace-Shell World Government.

As a supranational, non-governmental body that seeks to shape the global agenda, with no accountability to and far removed from those whose daily lives are affected, such a beast would be about as relevant to a just vision of governance as a winged sphinx is. Like the World Economic Forum, a WSF that is proceeding down an evolutionary path offers an informal, fluid and yet centralised networking environment for the globally influential—in this case, those in the 'non-profit' and 'movement' sectors. Such influence on the world stage can soon translate into a power that rivals or may even exceed that of nation-states. That is perhaps the meaning of the "risk" referred to earlier.

Monopolising the movement

The Research Unit for Political Economy, a Mumbai-based group concerned with analysing various aspects of the economic life of India and its institutions, devoted its latest issue to the WSF and its provenance. "No less than three World Social Forums have taken place; they are only the beginning. The World Social Forum is a 'permanent process', one that is to spread to new parts of the world..." noted the group. "If one could quantify discussion, unprecedented quantities have been generated by the first three meets. Yet, in stark contrast to the movement to which it traces its birth, the WSF has not yielded a single action against imperialism. However, in entangling many genuine forces fighting imperialism in its collective inaction, the WSF serves the purpose of imperialism".

Still, let us not be mealy-mouthed about the grandness of the vision that unfolds with each successive forum, each parade of multi-kulti world citizenry, each orgy of speechifying in the name of all those who are otherwise too occupied with survival to be there. Of all the new models that seek to establish a global authoritarianism (remember "with us or against us"?), the World Economic Forum's (WEF) can be said to be the most avant-garde. It is certainly not alone in its quest to "further economic growth and social progress",

which is the flip side of "another world is possible". Institutions from the World Bank to the European Union to the US military-industrial-media-government complex share the same pursuit. What sets the WEF apart is its deft use of the weapons of mass seduction. To borrow its own language, the WEF's membership meets in "a unique club atmosphere", and does so "to shape the global agenda" or to "mould solutions" with the aim of controlling socio-politico-economic processes to its own advantage. This is potentially dangerous stuff.

The Mumbai Resistance 2004 clearly thinks so, but has couched its views on the WSF in language that does much to indicate just how mainstream the Forum is seen to be by some grassroots organisations. The tone is polite but with an almost professorial irritation to it, as if from a senior member of the struggle against imperialism to a flashily-dressed upstart. "We find that the WSF, as it is structured - only for 'reflective thinking' without conclusions and plans for action - does not allow for the development of a clear anti-imperialist perspective", says a recent Mumbai Resistance (MR) update.

The MR's position is explained clearly; its logic vis-à-vis the universe of the Forum is laid out transparently, and above all its credentials as a coalition of groups that have fought and continue to fight the organs and executioners of world neoliberal government are evident. There is no waffling here, no recourse to a collegial atmosphere occasionally punctuated by pithy slogans. "Though the WSF claims through its charter to be against 'all forms of imperialism', it has in fact no clear understanding regarding this, nor are those in the leadership of WSF actually against imperialism in practice", states the MR manifesto. "Further the charter of the WSF itself restricts constituent organisations to non-violent forms of struggle. It specifically closes the door on all other forms of struggle. At a time when the growing aggression of the imperialists has forced the masses in numerous places to resort to more and more militant forms of struggle, such restrictions can only serve to divide the forces standing up against imperialism".

Who is the Mumbai Resistance? Among the list of "initiators", as they are called by the MR, is the International League for Peoples' Struggles, World Peoples' Resistance Movement, South Asia, Anti-Imperialist Camp (Austria), Bayan (Philippines), Confederation of Turkish Workers in Europe, Militant Movement (Greece) as non-Indian partners. Then there are the All India Peoples Resistance Forum, Bharat Jan Andolan, Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, and Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana among the Indian partners. The initiators seek to turbocharge the 'anti-imperialist' movement in India, using an Indian idiom and context, and spur international mobilisation against the growing concentration of capitalist forces across the globe and the ravages of their globalisation. The MR can see no other way out of the Western neoliberal dungeons in which we wander, apparently unfettered in the choices we may exercise in the shopping malls that showcase the baubles of globalisation, but certainly imprisoned thereby.

What these groups see, singly and together, is a cold futility in the processes that underlie the WSF and other allied fora. The "another world is possible" mantra does little to either light up or relieve the bleak landscape of the current international socio-economic structure. The remedy sought is a "total break from all controls, domination and subjugation by imperialism and the institutions of the world capitalist system - such as World Bank, IMF, WTO, TNCs". The MR is for socialism, revolution, proletariat, nationalism, class struggle and action versus capitalism, reform, bourgeoisie, imperialism, civil society and reflection. Its opposition is at work on several fronts, and in its repudiation of all these it is ruthless.

> And where the Prince commanded, now the shriek
> Of wind is flying through the court of state;
> 'Here', it proclaims, 'there dwelt a potentate,
> Who would not hear the sobbing of the weak.
>
> *- Tenth-century Arab poet al-Maarri*

Peter Waterman, author of *Globalisation, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms*, and a critical observer of the genesis and processes of the world of such fora, has described the MR as "a counter-hegemonic movement from the period of national-industrial-colonial capitalism. This was a machine-age capitalism, and it gave rise to mechanical interpretations of Marxism. MR belongs, more specifically, to the 'Marxist-Leninist' (Maoist) tendency..."

Regardless of tendency, and resisting the urge to 'locate' the MR in an ideological matrix, the truth is that the MR approach is immediately refreshing when compared to the soup-thick fug that is the sum and substance of the pronouncements which emanate from the WSF and its allied gatherings. Like ectoplasm issuing from the mouth of a medium, the resolutions and calls to arms (whose arms? against whom?) are fascinating, but all too often dissipate into nothingness. Compare this with the robustness of the MR line. It is "totally opposed to the privatisation and disinvestment policies of governments", it "unequivocally rejects the foreign debt accumulated by the anti-people rulers of the oppressed nations", it "opposes the massive attack on the working class throughout the world, taking place under the signboard of globalisation".

This is far from empty rhetoric, for it is backed by an impressive history of grassroots work. The Zapatistas of Mexico say that by asking questions we walk, and indeed the constituents of the MR bring with them a raft of questions. For them, human history and cultures have devised many different ways to allow individuals and communities to access a myriad of livelihoods, and

to share them or exchange them among themselves. This is an interdependent social construction, a world, that needs to contain and encourage many ways to access different sorts of livelihoods. But the forces in our world are a sometimes brutal, sometimes dangerously charming combination of states, armies, police, transnational corporations and media that deny the different livelihoods, one after another, with just as much regularity as we see free trade agreements signed, contingent credit lines renewed, sovereign currency crises engineered, and hear of hopelessly indebted farmers who hang themselves from trees.

For the real 'other world', turn left

It is a fundamental critique of the WSF that its organisers appear to be rushing the process, attempting to establish themselves as the leadership of a movement that has developed without their participation in the first place. That they are adopting such an approach instead of taking the grassroots route, which takes some time to build up, has been pointed out by several observers from within and without the anti-capitalist universe. In a series of letters made public on the Indymedia UK website, Professor MD Nanjundaswamy, president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), which is a farmer's union in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, made clear that the KRRS could not participate in the Asian Social Forum because it "expresses its dissatisfaction about the way in which ASF is being launched by NGOs little known by the people of India".

Tariq Ali, a longstanding editor of the *New Left Review* and author of more than a dozen books on history and politics, is not particularly critical of the WSF and its processes but sees the export of its model to Asia as ill-timed and probably unnecessary. "Just for the sake of moving to another continent, on this curious ground that this might trigger our social movements in India, I am not convinced by that argument", he has said in an interview. Ali does however favour "a regional social forum in Asia, like the one held in Hyderabad". Ali's view appears to be that the WSF, as a product of Latin America, is a tool best utilised there and that, "maybe in five to six years time it could shift, but at the moment I think it is a mistake—I don't think that there is that degree of mobilisation in India, from social movements or the Left, which is necessary to maintain such an enterprise". For the practioners of the parallel, as the MR will be in January 2004 in Mumbai, the issue is not at all whether the scope for mobilisation for the Forum is there, or about who stewards the movement. The issue is one that provokes the thousands of localised assaults against the world economy model in place today. The andolans, the sanghas, the morchas and the sanghatanas—whatever their size and scope and ambit—are raising their voices against the all-encompassing market and its deadly side-effects, against the merciless tide of economic globalisation, the monstrous dominance of financial capital, and the crushing weight of national debt.

Can the Forum and the fora it has spawned ever be truly representative of an internationalism of the future? Examine the architecture. The Forum itself is a 'mela' in which there are a few large, well-lit and noisy circus tents. The media and the pundits converge on the biggest and brightest of the tents because it is in here that the luminaries of the new world social order are holding forth, and in attendance are the celebrities who endorse the "another world is possible" tagline. Around this central glitter are scattered dozens upon dozens of seminars, workshops, plenaries and what-have-yous organised by social movements, political organisations, academic institutions and even individuals. The marginal events compete for visibility, for actual real estate, for translators, equipment, and their subject matter often overlaps with or even reproduces those of others. Yes, it is gloriously plural, but rampant pluralism does not make for a statement or a course of action that would necessarily engage the attention of a member of the Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha.

Nor would such a member swallow uncritically the notion that the rapid growth of NGOs /civil society is a social phenomenon. Earlier, financing by international financial institutions and governments went essentially to NGOs whose role was to accompany the dismantling of public utilities and services (NGOs active in the areas of medical care, education and garbage collection, for example). What is new today is that an increasing share of this financing goes to NGOs which the World Bank says are organisations that promote "social causes" and "social protest movements". This can of course be read as a euphemism for political action.

The mission of such civil society - a term that is impregnated heavily with moral symbolism, and which seems to have been designed to convey the gravitas that a pillar of the new internationalism must possess - is contained not only in the tagline of the WSF but also in the meditations of the funding organisations. A reading of the World Bank's *Report on Development: 2000/2001* provides an indication: "Social tensions and divisions can be eased by bringing political opponents together within the framework of formal and informal forums, and by channelling their energies through political processes, rather than leaving confrontation as the only form of release".

A face for globalisation or globalisation toppled, co-option or confrontation, the market or the working masses. Those are the issues that will define the difference between two sets of voices that will be heard in Bombay in January 2004. Building a civil society that can cope where nations have failed will be the continuing theme song of the World Social Forum, but the true anthem of the worldwide mass movement for social justice and equality is very likely to be heard elsewhere.

A lawless Subcontinent

A study of the abuse of human rights and the human spirit in "democratic India" reveals the extent of the problem of lawlessness by the state, which can only become much worse when all of South Asia is taken into account. This review regarding the state of respect for human rights in India, and four smaller sections on Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Pakistan, are carried here by arrangement with the Asian Human Rights Centre in New Delhi.

The creeping tendency towards rampant lawlessness in South Asia has accelerated in recent times to become an institutionalised practice. Given its vast size and large population the numbers involved may not seem as alarming as the violations they represent. On the one hand there is the question of justice for those already affected. On the other hand, there is the problem of restraining the organs of the state both legally and judicially so that the state itself does not transform into an overbearing, unaccountable leviathan. That process is underway in all the countries of the Subcontinent. This is all the more dangerous since the regions is afflicted by conflicts of a violent kind, which, if not resolved promptly and in appropriate ways, will degenerate into a self-perpetuating cycle of brutality that could become institutionalised.

Some of the longest running conflicts in post-war global history have been going on in South Asia. The duration of these conflicts has undeniably increased because of the attempt to resolve them through military solutions. This has not only increased the death toll across the board, it has also seen the emergence of legal mechanisms that confer extraordinary powers on the security organs of the state. This in turn has led to mounting repression of ordinary citizens unconnected with any act or movement that may be construed as a threat to the state. Sometimes this repression extends also to areas that are not even in the so-called conflict zones. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the state and its laws is further undermined leading to greater doses of opposition and repression. Unless this problem is urgently addressed, a Subcontinent already afflicted by numerous other maladies that require democratic political solutions can expect to find itself crippled by the lack of institutional mechanisms to deal with them.

While, constitutionally the state has been mandated to secure the rights of the citizen, its different organs have come to place their own security above the protection of the individual citizen. In South Asia, human rights has been sacrificed for defending the overriding interests of the state. Even as human rights acquires the status of an universal concern, specific national laws and practices have compromised not only the spirit of the constitutions from which they derive, but also made individuals extremely vulnerable to legal and extra-legal forms of coercion. A critical thematic examination of human rights issues in India, by far the largest country of South Asia with a billion-plus population, brings certain trends to the fore.

India, which has the distinction of being referred to as the largest democracy in the world also has the largest law, order and security apparatus in the region. Given the sheer size and weight of its state, India also has perhaps the largest number of legal provisions in place that need scrutiny from a human rights perspective. Indian law and police practices require urgent examination.

Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002

There is no doubt that states have legitimate reasons, right and duty to take all due measures to eliminate terrorism to protect their nationals, human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice. However, the counter-terrorism measures adopted in the post-September 11 period have often been taken without any respect for the due process of law. India's Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), rolled into law by calling a joint session of the Indian parliament on 26 March 2002 is a classic example. The highest numbers of detainees under the POTA are not from Jammu and Kashmir, the central focus of India's war against 'terror'. Instead, the majority of the detainees are from Jharkhand, the heartland of India's indigenous peoples, the adivasis. The detainees include children as young as 12 and people as old as 81.

The lack of procedural safeguards under POTA is well-known. The act does not contain a precise definition of terrorism, and provides for harsh punishments, including the death penalty, regardless of the

absence of the required higher standards of scrutiny. Furthermore, the provisions of POTA are already covered under the existing legislation, including a host of national security laws. According to India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), "existing laws are sufficient to deal with any eventuality, including terrorism, and there is no need for a draconian POTA". The latter empowers the state to hold the accused for a prolonged period of detention (180 days) without filing a chargesheet. The burden of proof lies on the accused and the prosecution can withhold the identity of witnesses. It also treats confessions made to police officers above a certain level admissible as evidence. The public prosecutor is empowered to deny bail and the judges have little discretion regarding the severity of sentencing.

After the government forced through POTA in March 2002, Union Home Minister LK Advani announced the formation of a Review Committee under Section 60 of the act, responding to criticisms about its potential for abuse. In the words of Advani, the committee would "take a comprehensive view of the use of the legislation in various states and give its findings and suggestions for removing shortcomings in the implementation of POTA". However, the various state governments have refused to provide necessary information to the Review Committee. Despite this lack of co-operation, the POTA Review Committee managed to refer 80 complaints to five states. The results were disappointing. All that happened was that the Review Committee received dismal responses from the concerned state governments. The ineffectiveness of the POTA Review Committee is reflected from the following facts:

1. POTA is in force in 10 states: Andhra, Delhi, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, UP, Himachal
2. Number of POTA detainee as of 21 October 2003: 185 in Jharkhand, 89 in Jammu and Kashmir, 69 in Gujarat, 38 in Delhi and 36 in Andhra Pradesh.
3. 80 complaints of misuse have been referred to five states.
4. Number of complaints received state-wise: 36 in Maharashtra, 35 in Tamil Nadu, 16 in Jammu and Kashmir, six in Delhi, three in Uttar Pradesh and two in Jharkhand.

Because of the increasing misuse of the POTA for settling political scores at the state level, as happened with its earlier avatar, the now lapsed Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) of 1985 (amended 1987), on 21 October 2003 the union cabinet approved the ordinance to amend POTA to confer more powers to the central and state review committees and to make their decisions binding on the central and state govern-

Nepalis and their army

NEPAL, WHICH has the reputation of having a relatively softer state than India's, has been in the throes of a civil war that is now eight years old and has seen some disturbing trends in the last few years. Alarmingly, despite the increased focus on human rights in recent times there is no let up in the number of killings. If anything the situation seems to be deteriorating.

A total of over 8,184 people have been killed since 13 February 1996 in the ongoing conflict between the Maoists and government of Nepal. About 1000 persons have been killed since the collapse of the cease-fire agreement on 27 August 2003. On 2 November 2003, Sushil Pyakurel, member of the NHRC of Nepal stated that, "Till date over 600 people have been arrested by the masked security personnel and they also put masks over the faces of those arrested". They are detained incommunicado and relatives are not even informed of their detention.

On 13 November 2003, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Torture, Theo van Boven, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Ambeyi Ligabo, and the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Leïla Zerroügui, expressed their concern over reports that dozens of individuals are being detained secretly in Nepal and are therefore at risk of suffering torture and other forms of ill-treatment. In the last two months, they have sent 31 urgent appeals, most of them jointly, to the government of Nepal regarding the alleged detention of 56 people in unknown locations. The National Human Rights Commission of Nepal has also received complaints of over 100 cases of abductions and subsequent disappearances. The security forces and the army ignore the notices issued by the NHRC.

The contempt of the judiciary by the Nepal's army is unprecedented. At least four army barracks—Bhairav Nath Gan, Chhauni Gan, Bhadrakali Gan and Jagadal Gan—had the audacity to decline the notices of the supreme court with impunity. On 13 November 2003, when a court official went to the Bhairav Nath Gan barrack to serve the show cause notice as to why one Surendra Khadgi was detained, officials at the barrack did not accept it. On an earlier occasion as well, the Bhairav Nath Gan had declined to receive the notice issued by the supreme court regarding a plea for release of another individual.

ments and the police officers investigating the cases. On 18 December 2003, parliament passed the Prevention of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill. Earlier, on 16 December 2003, the supreme court upheld the constitutional validity of the POTA.

Surprisingly, while considering the ordinance to amend POTA, the three-member Review Committee headed by AB Saharya, was not even consulted. Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley and Home Secretary N Gopalaswamy met Justice Saharya two days after the cabinet cleared the ordinance, and the proposed law was not even discussed at the meeting. Commenting on the ordinance to amend POTA, Justice Saharya stated, "I am involved in collection, scrutiny and evaluation of facts about POTA detenus right now. The ordinance does not come into play here". Non-cooperation from various states is one of the main problems. As Saharya puts it, "For me the most important job at hand is getting hold of material. Without them, how would I reach an objective conclusion? The power that the ordinance gives to the review committee would come into play at the stage of the final report, not now". Since the ordinance does not spell out the time being given to the states to respond to the review committee, there is no wonder as to why the limbo prolongs.

On 13 November 2003, the Central Review Committee sought a response from the government of Tamil Nadu about the arrest of the leader of the political party Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Vaiko and the editor of *Nakkeeran*, RR Gopal under POTA. MDMK is a member of the ruling alliance in New Delhi. Even the focus of the Review Committee were they are allowed to function has been questioned, however. As the Review Committee of the POTA serves its political masters in New Delhi against the repression of political allies, the amendment of the POTA appears to have meaning only for political leaders. Innocent victims, such as 14 year old Mayanti Raj Kumari, a student of Class VII do not register on the radar screen of the Review Committee. She was arrested on 9 July 2002 for allegedly waging war against the state (under Sections 121A and 122 of the Indian Penal Code) and POTA while returning from her school. She is presently detained in Ranchi jail and not in a juvenile home as required under the law regarding the arrest of minors. The Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) has details of the cases of seven children arrested under POTA.

The fate of torture

Although India signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture in 1997, it is yet to ratify the pact. The Indian National Human Rights Commission's annual reports illustrate the use of torture in the administration of criminal justice in India. According to the NHRC, it received complaints of 34 custodial deaths (in both police and judicial custody) in 1993-94. By 2000-2001, the number was up to 1037. These custodial deaths are in addition to disappearances, illegal detention, false implication, other police excesses and violations by armed forces. It does not help matters that the armed forces are outside the purview of the NHRC under section 19 of the Human Rights Protection Act, 1993. The practise of 'extracting confessions' to fulfil the concerned authorities' personal/professional agenda is not uncommon. There is no impartial mechanism for receiving complaints against torture as the complaints inevitably have to be made to the police authorities themselves. This only allows the police to bring pressure and harassment onto the victims, who are the de facto complainants.

Custodial deaths in India

Year	Numbers
1994-95	162
1995-96	444
1996-97	888
1997-98	1012
1998-99	1297
1999-2000	1,093
2000-2001	1037

The Convention against Torture requires impartial investigation. Unfortunately, in India the police force is not independent. Torture in India is not treated as per the requirements of the convention. Only two sections in the Penal Code (sections 330 V1) deal with punishment for use of force in obtaining confessions. However, if torture is to be dealt with effectively, it is essential that it be made an offence in terms of the convention, including provisions for adequate punishment against torture. The law against torture in India is extremely inadequate in terms of international understanding and jurisprudence. Indian citizens do not have the opportunity to find recourse in remedies that are available under international law due to the failure on the part of the Indian government to ratify the Convention against Torture. Indian practices with respect to torture do not come under international scrutiny. Since the country has also not signed the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, its citizens also do not have the right to make individual complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee. Torture remains unaccounted for and not prosecuted and the victims are trapped with the local system of unresponsive law. Nothing is more imperative than the need to mobilise an effective campaign in India for ratification of the convention.

Internationalising human rights

India has consistently refused invitation to the Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Recently, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food sought an invi-tation to visit India. The Permanent Mission of India reportedly advised the Special Rapporteur to focus on the sub-Saharan region, as there is no violation of the right to food in India.

In the first week of November 2003, the National Human Rights Commission of India, acting on a matter raised by a group of citizens, issued notice to the Uttar Pradesh government about the starvation deaths of at least 18 tribal children of the Ghasia community over the past 11 months at Naibasti village in Sonebhadra district of Uttar Pradesh. The Ghasias were hounded out of their ancestral villages with the nationalisation of forests, which forced them to migrate from their villages to Naibasti, some eight kilometres from the main township. The Ghasias had been deprived of their land holdings and were forced to survive on poor quality rice, wild mushrooms and grass. "The adults somehow survive the ill-effects of the poisonous food but most of the children succumb within two years", a petition by the People's Vigilance Committee said. The petition further pointed out that the community had not been provided with ration cards or mid-day meals nor had they been given alternative land holdings. Moreover, according to the petition, the children of Ghasias were not even covered under the recent immunisation drives launched by the Uttar Pradesh government.

The death penalty

A large number of laws in India prescribe the death penalty. These include the Indian Penal Code (which lists as many as 11 offences punishable by death), the Army Act of 1950, the Air Force Act of 1950 and the Navy Act of 1956, POTA 2002, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act of 1987, the Narcotics, Drugs & Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Act of 1988, and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.

The constitutional validity of the death penalty has been upheld by the Supreme Court of India in the Jagmohan Singh vs State of UP (October 1972) The court on that ocassion stated that the death penalty should be a narrow exception, not the rule, in sentencing. The court also explained that the law could not prescribe the death penalty for all persons committing certain crimes, but instead the circumstances of each offence would be considered. Indian courts have sought to apply the "rarest of

Mob rule in Bangladesh

ON 23 February 2003, the Bangladesh parliament passed the Joint Drive Indemnity Act, 2003 to provide immunity to the security forces from prosecution for their involvement in "any casualty, damage to life and property, violation of rights, physical or mental damage" between 16 October 2002 and 9 January 2003 during Operation Clean Heart. More than 11,000 persons were arrested in Operation Clean Heart, of which only about 2,400 were listed as alleged criminals. Approximately 44 people reportedly died during the operation, either in custody or immediately afterwards. A survey report of Odhikar, a rights group, based in Dhaka states the 56 people were killed by law enforcement personnel and 61 others died in police and jail custody in the first nine months of 2003.

The 1 October 2001 general elections in Bangladesh were marked by organised and systematic backlash against the Hindu minorities. None has been prosecuted for these atrocities. After the Bangladesh parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act, 2001 on 26 November 2002, the return of the confiscated properties has virtually been shelved. On 18 November 2003, 11 members of a Hindu family were burnt to death at Banshkhali, Chittagong. The police blamed the incidents on dacoits. Hindus are often terrorised with patronage of the dominant political parties to grab the lands of the Hindus. The Vested Properties Act brought into legislation after 1965 Indo-Pak war has been the main cause of displacement of millions of Hindus.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord of 1997 is in tatters. According to official statistics, 3,055 returnee indigenous Jumma refugee families out of 12,222 families are yet to get back their dwelling houses, *jhum* lands, *mouza* lands, and crematorium. Approximately 40 indigenous Jumma villages, six Buddhist temples of Chakmas and two Hari temples of Tripuras and one Buddhist orphanage are still in the possession of illegal plain settlers and army or Ansar forces in violation of the Article 17(b) of the CHT Accord. In late July 2003, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) of the government of Bangladesh directed the CHT affairs ministry to suspend rice rations to 65,000 indigenous Jumma refugees in violation of the agreements reached with the refugees. The order of the PMO however directed to give free rice rations to 26,000 illegal plain settlers' families, who are one of the causes of the conflict.

Indigenous Jummas of the CHT continue to face serious human rights violations. On 26 August 2003, Bangladesh army personnel and illegal plain settlers burnt down 10 indigenous Jumma villages under Mahalchari sub-district of Khagrachari district. Nine month old baby, Kiriton Chakma was strangulated to death in front of his grandmother, who was then raped by Bangladesh army personnel. The settlers and the army also raped 10 Jumma women including four girls.

In April 1996, the government of Bangladesh initiated the process of establishing the NHRC. Seven years later, the process of establishing NHRI has become another gravy train.

rare" doctrine, but in practise, the awarding of the death penalty indicates otherwise.

On 29 October 2003, a judgement of the Delhi High Court upheld the death penalty for Mohammad Afzal and Shaukat Hussain Guru for causing the death of nine persons during the attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001. The court imposed the death sentence on them under Section 121 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for "waging war against the country". The POTA court earlier had sentenced all four accused to death. The high court acquitted the remaining two accused. In a similar verdict on 7 November 2003, Additional Sessions Judge GP Thareja sentenced to death Sushil Kumar Sharma in the Naina Sahni murder case. The court ordered that Sharma be "hanged by the neck till dead". Sharma was also sentenced for the offence under Section 120 (B) (Conspiracy) read with Section 201 (Destruction of evidence) of IPC to seven years rigorous imprisonment with a fine of Rs 10,000.

On 15 November 2003, the Bangalore Rural District and Sessions Court awarded death sentence to four people—Krishna, Shivalinga, Manjunath and Ramesh (all between 20 and 25 years of age)—in connection with the murder of a lorry cleaner, which took place in December 1998. Unfortunately, many judgements delivered by the sessions courts awarding death penalty are not challenged before the high courts due to the high litigation costs which many detainees cannot afford.

Displacement of Indigenous Peoples

Displacement is one of the most serious problems faced by indigenous peoples, the so-called scheduled tribes of India. According the government's ministry of tribal affairs, "Since independence, tribals displaced by development projects or industries have not been rehabilitated to date. Research shows that the number of displaced tribals till 1990 is about 85.39 lakhs (55 percent of the total displaced population) of whom 64 percent are yet to be rehabilitated". According to the 1991 census, the population of scheduled tribes in India is 67.8 million, a little over 6 percent of the total population of the country. The fact that this percentage of the total population of India constitutes 55

Aung San's Burma

BURMA HAS been under protracted dictatorship despite the existence of a strong democracy movement and despite strong international pressure. Burmese pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has been in detention since 30 May 2003. Although, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) sought Suu Kyi's release in the June 2003 summit, India maintained silence. From 2 to 6 November 2003, India's vice president, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat visited Burma to solidify Indo-Burmese relations. India, which raises the lack of democracy on the western front vis-à-vis Pakistan, has maintained silence on the denial of democracy on its eastern front, Burma.

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has so far scuttled international initiatives for national reconciliation and restoration of democracy in Burma. It has managed to choreograph the pace of the so-called dialogues. In July 2003, the prime minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra proposed a road map for national reconciliation in Burma. In an attempt to scuttle the Thai roadmap, on 30 August 2003 the SPDC announced a seven-stage "road map to democracy". Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt stated that the first step would be the resumption of a national convention to establish a new constitution. It would comprise the same participants as when it was suspended in 1996 following the walk out of the National League for Democracy.

Although the ASEAN made a surprising departure from its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member-states to demand the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at the June 2003 summit at Phnom Penh, ASEAN leaders then tamely accepted Burma's claim that it is committed to democracy at the Bali summit in October 2003. In a joint statement, they welcomed the military generals' "seven-point road map" to democracy, even though it contains no time frame for implementation. They have also accepted the junta's explanation that by moving Suu Kyi from a secret prison to imprisonment in her home, it has made a major political concession to the jailed leader.

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights visited Burma from 2 to 8 November 2003 and met senior officials including the prime minister. The special rapporteur expressed his deep concern for those political prisoners who have been detained since 30 May 2003 as well as for all remaining political prisoners. In addition, the special rapporteur reiterated that any credible process towards political transition requires the lifting of all remaining restrictions on the freedoms of expression, movement, information, assembly and association and the repealing of the related "security" legislation.

The UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, Razali Ismail has so far failed to make any significant breakthrough despite the initiatives of the ASEAN. The military generals of Burma rely heavily on the support of China and India. Unless, China and India actively support the initiative of the United Nations, ASEAN and Thailand, Burmese military generals are unlikely to take any concrete initiative for national reconciliation and restoration of democracy in Burma.

Pakistan: Medieval justice

ON 12 December 2003, the anti-terror court in Bahawalpur, Punjab ruled that Mohammad Sajid who carried out an acid attack on Rabia Bibi in June 2003 ruled, "Acid drops will be thrown into his eyes in line with the Islamic laws". Although such strict rulings based on Islamic justice handed out by lower courts in Pakistan are often overturned by higher courts, the distinction between ordinary crimes and terrorist acts are blurred in Pakistan. As General Parvez Musharaf muzzles press freedom and freedom of association and assembly by arresting leaders such as Javed Hashmi, President of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy, the nexus of evil and medieval justice in the war against terror has become clear.

Several hundred Pakistanis have so far been handed over to US custody in violation of Pakistan's extradition law and international prohibition of extraditing anyone to a country where their rights may be abused. On 13 July 2003, Adil al-Jazeeri, an Algerian national and allegedly a leading member of Al-Qaeeda, was handed over to US agents by Pakistani authorities. He was reportedly arrested on 17 June 2003 by members of Pakistan's security services in the residential district of Hayatabad, Peshawar.

On 5 November 2003, the Islamabad senior civil judge issued notice to the United States and other respondents in a suit for damages of USD 10.4 million filed by Muhammad Sagheer, a Pakistani prisoner released from Guantanamo Bay in Cuba after more than a year. So long the US supports President Musharaf, he does not give a hoot for international law.

percent of total displaced people indicates of the massive victimisation of indigenous peoples.

An estimated 10 million indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities are on the verge of eviction pursuant to the order of Union Ministry of Environment and Forests in May 2002. This eviction order has brought the issue of "Nature without People" to the forefront. The order was issued in furtherance of an order of the Supreme Court of India on 23 November 2001. The supreme court in its order has restrained the central government from regularisation of alleged encroachments of forest lands in the country under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and ordered to frame a time bound programme for eviction of the alleged encroachers from the forest lands. This has happened despite the fact that the government has not resolved the ambiguities and claims on forests since independence.

Atrocities against the Dalits

About 300 million people are victims of caste discrimination. The minister of state for home affairs, ID Swami, informed parliament on 23 April 2002 that over 28,000 incidents of crimes, including murder and rape, were committed against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes across India during 2001. Swami further informed that close to 25,000 cases were reported regarding crimes against scheduled castes and as many as 3691 crimes were committed against scheduled tribes. The maximum number of cases—close to 5000—against scheduled castes was reported from the state of Rajasthan, while Madhya Pradesh topped the list in atrocities against scheduled tribes with 1643 cases. The statistics pertaining to the calendar year 2001 show that the states of Uttar Pradesh (7356 cases), Madhya Pradesh (4336 cases), Rajasthan (1996 cases), Gujarat (1760 cases), Andhra Pradesh (1288 cases) and Orissa (1125 cases), collectively accounted for over 82 percent of total number of 21,678 cases charge sheeted in the courts in the country.

These statistics constitute only the tip of the iceberg since most caste offences in rural areas are not registered. Nonetheless, the statistics provided by the government of India clearly establish that caste violence has been increasing. The ascending patterns are disturbing. In 1999, 34,799 cases were registered. This increased to 36,971 registered cases in 2000 and then to 39,157 in 2001.

The majority of states of India have failed to set up special courts under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. As of 2 February 2003, exclusive special courts have been set up only in Andhra Pradesh (12), Bihar (11), Chattisgarh (7), Gujarat (10), Karnataka (6), Madhya Pradesh (29), Rajasthan (17), Tamil Nadu (4), Uttar Pradesh (40) and Uttaranchal (1). The remaining states and union territories have notified the existing courts of sessions as special courts for the trial of offences under the 1989 act. As the courts in India are already over-burdened with 35,40,000 cases at the level of the high courts in 2002, according to the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, designation of the court of sessions as special courts helps little in terms of expediency and further adds to judicial delay in India.

Hamza Alavi: A Life

Hamza Alavi, the renowned Pakistani scholar and political activist passed away on 1 December 2003 in his native Karachi unremarked by too many. He belonged to the first generation of independent Pakistan's professionals. As an employee of the Reserve Bank of India, he moved on after Partition to help set up the State Bank of Pakistan before embarking on a career of political activism and academic study. He was one of the pioneers of South Asian social science, particularly the study of agrarian society. Here we reproduce in three segments extracts from an autobiographical sketch by Hamza Alavi titled 'Fragment of a Life', all of this before he began his academic career.

Political activism

Before I moved into an academic career in 1966, I spent ten years in London in political activism, writing, lecturing and giving seminars at universities. When I first came to London, I joined the London School of Economics (LSE) for a PhD on banking in Pakistan, which given my years of first-hand involvement in building it up, I could have written blindfolded. But I was sick of that subject. And I was disenchanted by empty academicism. I found myself attending sociology, social anthropology and political science seminars. I devoured a vast amount of literature. I was full of questions. What had happened to my country? I studied and wrote. In those days there was nothing much to read about Pakistan, to discover what had gone wrong. So one had to study, analyze and write! I founded and edited Pakistan Today (1957-62), a quarterly journal. Each issue would have an article that I wrote. We would bring out an issue as soon as there was a major development in Pakistan. After the Ayub coup we came out six times a year. Pakistan Today had a circulation of several hundred. The peak was about 1500 for our final issue which was wholly devoted to an article entitled The Burden of US Aid. The journal was sent to East and West Pakistan and clandestinely reproduced there or placed in libraries. The US Aid issue was reprinted as a booklet by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. It was also reprinted in the United States by a new left journal called New University Thought and as a booklet by the Detroit Radical Education Project (who also reprinted some of my later articles in booklet form). Tariq Ali acknowledged it as a source in his first book. We got letters from sympathisers in Europe and North America. When there was total silence in Pakistan itself, it was a worthwhile thing to do. A lot of my time was invested in it.

10 April, 1921 to 1 December, 2003

I became a political activist. My wife and I joined one or two like-minded friends, notably Tassaduq Ahmad from Dacca and his wife. We worked amongst Pakistani students and workers very successfully from 1955 to 1966. We founded a number of organisations designed for activity at different levels. The Pakistan Youth League was a broad liberal to socialist forum. We met fortnightly and about 150 to 200 would turn up. Besides ourselves, speakers included scholars on the left, like Stuart Hall, Tony Benn and Eric Hobsbawm. The Pakistani Socialist Society was a smaller group. At a broader political level, soon after the Ayub coup, we set up a Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Pakistan. At an international level we ran a group called The Forum which brought together socialists from Asia, Africa and Latin America for a dialogue. It fell apart when Khruschev intervened in the Belgian Congo and our common ground of free and open, non-sectarian, debate with mutual respect was gone. We were also active organising Pakistani workers through two Pakistan welfare associations, one based in the East

End of London (mainly Bengali) and the other in Slough (Punjabi).

I was a founding member of the Campaign against Racial Discrimination (CARD), a UK-based wide multi-racial organisation of Pakistanis, Indians, West Indians and White British, to fight the rising tide of racism. Some of us, so-called 'leaders' of black communities in Britain, had been invited by Martin Luther King at his London hotel to talk about racism in Britain, when he was on his way to receive his Nobel Prize. We met not only Martin Luther King. We also met each other. We realised that there was much to be gained from joining forces against racism in Britain. So we met again and launched CARD. David Pitt, a West Indian member of the Greater London Council, who was an 'establishment' figure in the Labour Party, was elected chairman. An Indian Maoist and a white American Trotskyite (both women) were elected joint secretaries. At CARD's first national convention I was elected vice-chairman. With David, I was a member of the National Council of the British Overseas Socialist Fellowship (our chairman was Fenner Brockway).

A decade of political activism was exhilarating. But I could not keep it up for much longer for a number of reasons. There were too many problems, some of them personal. So far we had managed on a small income that my wife had from Tanzania. But that could not go on. I needed a job, an academic job, simply to live. I had also to think of making the best use of my time. Our political activities had turned into full time welfare work for immigrants. One would get telephone calls from Indian and Pakistanis friends whenever there was a problem, usually at the airport. One had to intervene. It was more than I could cope with. I could not go on like that. I decided to leave political activism and turn to full time academic work. So in 1966, I joined the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

My first career

I had joined the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 1945 as a Research Officer on the recommendation of, indeed at the behest of my supervisor for PhD at the Gokhale Institute at Poona. Professor DR Gadgil had been asked by RBI to recommend candidates for their research department. He asked me if I wanted the job. When I told him that my aim in life was to make a career in the academic world he said: "Young man, you had better learn something about life before you start teaching". He pointed out that my starting salary with RBI would be far higher than that of a university lecturer. "You can come back to the academic world at any time on your own terms". So I joined the Reserve Bank in 1945.

When Partition was announced, Governor Chintaman Deshmukh called me and pointed out that since too few Muslim officers had opted for Pakistan, the State Bank of Pakistan would have great problems without trained officers. It is interesting that a Maharashtrian brahmin was so concerned whether the State Bank of Pakistan would be able to function properly or not. Why should he care? He pointed out that research was a luxury. The State Bank of Pakistan would need people who could do practical jobs. He suggested that I should get some training. So I was put on a programme of intensive training in the Exchange Control Department.

With Partition I came home to Karachi. Technically we were to remain under RBI until July when the State Bank would take over. But, as soon as I found myself in a position to do so, in March 1948, I decided to take over, de facto and set up a headquarters for Exchange Control at Karachi which would give us time to build up our organisation well before the D-Day.

Everything was in a state of chaos. We moved from crisis to crisis. Part of the problem was the clerical mentality of many of our senior colleagues. Most of the senior officers were twice my age. Their style of work and thinking had been shaped by their long experience of serving, virtually as clerks, under white masters. The first concern of these glorified clerks was personal survival. As long as they acted in accordance with their precious manuals no one could hang them. They were petty bureaucrats and lacked the imagination to see what was at stake. They blocked innovation at every stage, which took up a lot of our energy when we tried to get things done. They had neither the will nor the ability to take responsibility. Mercifully, there were one or two brilliant exceptions to them. Thanks to them we survived.

I flourished in that climate of successive crises. Looking back I realise that I had two assets. One was my ignorance. It was a blessing in disguise that I did not know the manuals backwards as my senior colleagues did. Those manuals were, in any case, out of date and had little relevance to our conditions. I realised that given our situation we will have to write our own manuals. I actually did just that in 1950 when I compiled the Exchange Control Manual for the guidance of banks. Some of us were able to see things from a fresh perspective. Every time that a problem landed on my desk, I would work out a logical solution based on 'first principles' and act on it. We were constantly innovating and improving on old, out-of-date systems.

The exchange control system was set up in India in 1939 by a man called Cayley, a true colonialist. The system that he built up discriminated blatantly against Indian interests. Cayley had groomed his successor, a Parsee called Jeejeebhai who carried on in the same way. In Pakistan I realised that we would have to change Cayley's system radically, to end discrimination

against our own banks and our own people. I had a great time discovering these and making changes. I was able to act with confidence as I enjoyed the full backing of our ministry of finance. I had great fun in a game of one-upmanship with Jeejeebhai, for technically I was still under him until July 1948. But I set up our own de facto independent head office, in advance of the formal change. Jack Kennan, a remarkable Englishman who soon joined us as my boss, backed what I was doing. We went in for innovations that the Reserve Bank of India would, belatedly, copy.

Stint in Dacca

After we concluded an agreement with India in 1951, we had to introduce exchange control with India. This raised new and difficult problems and fears. East Pakistan had a very large informal trade with India, in fish and firewood, chicken and eggs, which was handled by enormous numbers of very small people and carried by country craft. The government was afraid that any ham-fisted bureaucratic interference with that trade could create incalculable and terrible political repercussions. They needed someone who could be relied upon to take quick and sensible decisions on the spot and treat the small fishermen and farmers with understanding,

I had played a role in the negotiations with India. Immediately when they were concluded I had to prepare instructions for the banks (for which I had contingency drafts already). It was a Sunday morning. Governor Zahid Hussain summoned me to his office. Mumtaz Hussain, joint secretary finance, who was responsible for State Bank affairs in the ministry, was with him. I told them that the circulars were ready and were being printed. The banks would have them on Monday morning. Everything was under control. Zahid Hussain then told me that in that case I should catch the afternoon plane to Dacca and take up overall charge in East Pakistan. I was sent to Dacca at a few hours' notice. Zahid Hussain and Mumtaz Hussain told me about their worries about East Pakistan, of which I was already aware. Zahid Hussain gave me my marching orders saying that I would have complete responsibility and full powers in East Pakistan. "It will be entirely up to you", he said. Mumtaz Hussain was more emphatic, "Do what you think best. For god's sake do not refer anything to Karachi". They knew that references to Karachi would mean delay and possibly trouble. It was a heavy burden of power for me to carry. After all I was, as yet, only in my late twenties.

No one had gone before to East Pakistan with such a 'carte blanche'. It was to be expected that I would become the focus of attention. There were many interests who would want to exploit me. I would be courted and flattered. I had to be on my guard. Predictably, soon after I landed In Dacca, Ghulam Faruq, chairman of the Jute Board, accompanied by his close friend Mirza Ahmad Ispahani (who controlled 30 percent of the jute trade) called on me at my office to welcome me to East Pakistan. At first they indulged in predictable flattery. Ghulam Faruq was a powerful member of the bureaucracy, an old Indian Civil Service (ICS) man who later became a multi-millionaire industrialist! As chairman of the Jute Board, he said to me rather patronisingly: "Young man, I am sure you know nothing about jute. Look at me. I am a seasoned old official. I have spent my entire career in Bengal. I still do not know anything about jute. Luckily we have amongst us Mr Ispahani who knows everything there is to know about jute. Jute is in his blood. When I have any problem I consult him. It would be wise for you to do the same". Ispahani wanted to have the State Bank in his hands, just as he had all other relevant departments of government under his thumb. It was the beginning of a long struggle.

> I was sent to East Pakistan with the instruction, "Do what you think best. For god's sake do not refer anything to Karachi"

I was soon fighting a quixotic battle against two of the most powerful men in East Pakistan. It is a long story. I survived more by good luck than good sense. I seemed to win every round in our extra-ordinary contest. But it was a very tense period for me. I knew that if I made just one slip, they would have me hanged. Fortunately I had the backing of Governor Zahid Hussain though I do not think he knew just how the cards were stacked. It was all very stressful. For the first time I wondered about resigning from the bank. My wife in fact suggested it. Not unreasonably she had long complained that I was 'married to the bank'. Was this all worth it, she asked. While I was still thinking about resigning, I was appointed to the post of secretary to the Central Board at Karachi, one of five 'Principal Officers' of the Bank. It was sheer vanity that made me set aside thoughts of resigning. I wanted to hold that post, at least for a while. The promotion had come rather soon, though I was next in line for it. I half suspect that it was manipulated by powerful men to get me out of East Pakistan. I would not put it past them.

My health was deteriorating from overwork. In May 1953 I was finally allowed to go on leave. We went to Tanzania to spend time with my wife's family. It was there that, looking at everything in perspective and encouraged by my wife's brother who was like a father to her, I finally decided to resign from the State Bank. So ended my first career.

Is India really shining?

Not if you compare it to China, not if you study the indicators of public welfare, not if you look at centralisation...

by ***Mohan Guruswamy, Abhishek Kaul and Vishal Handa***

Recent reports from varied sources such as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and several rating agencies and merchant banks that the Indian economy is poised to register a growth rate that could be as high as 7 percent have given rise to a self-laudatory mood. A recent article "Can India overtake China?", in the prestigious US journal *Foreign Policy*, co-authored by Yasheng Huang and Tarun Khanna accounts for a good bit of the gloss on it. Both come with impressive credentials. Huang is an associate professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management, and Khanna is a professor at the Harvard Business School. But it is Huang who, by virtue of being an ethnic Chinese, gives the article its special credibility. While 7 percent is good, evidence suggests that the underlying basics of the Indian economy remain unchanged. Nothing makes this more explicit than a comparison with the economic and social indicators of China after the economic reforms. Far from catching up with China, India seems to be falling well behind.

We must not forget that 7 percent comes after a year of 4.6 percent, preceded by performances of 5.7 percent and 3.9 percent, which shows the average growth rate

to still be in a low trajectory. But even if we accept that India is indeed 'shining', how good is that shine? Is it a burnish that reveals the quality of the metal beneath or is it a thin coat of varnish that just puts a superficial gloss? To understand that we must go into how good the years after the so-called reforms have been. Very simply, the decade after the launch of the so-called reforms has not been very much better than the decade before it. Gross National Product (GNP) growth for the post-reform period (1992-01) crept up by a mere 0.2 percent to 5.9 percent. With a performance like that it would be extremely difficult to make a case that the economic reforms or liberalisation, call it what you will, have made much of an impact on the nation as a whole.

Of course some have benefited. As Sushma Swaraj, currently health and family welfare minister, famously told the lower house of the Indian parliament recently, there are no more queues for telephone and gas connections. But with India's teledensity a mere 3.2 per 100, and with just 58 million of the 180 million households with gas connections, clearly suggesting that most households with an annual income of less than INR 80, 000 are without cheap and subsidised energy, the country seems quite some way off from a satisfactory distribution of benefits. Nevertheless, no queues for phones, gas, and even for Maruti cars and Bajaj scooters and motorcycles is still good news. But certainly not enough to warrant an outpouring of self-congratulations for it is indices for infant mortality (69 per 1000), life expectancy (63 years), literacy (65 percent), as well as energy sufficiency (527 billion kilowatt hours) and energy consumption (a mere 379 kilowatt hours per capita) that make the living reality of India. Additionally, however well it might have done, the country has fallen well behind China and it will take some effort to catch up. (Tables 1(a), 1(b), 1(c) and 1(d)).

A comparison of the first ten years of the economic performances of India and China after reforms (from 1992 for India and from 1979 for China) is instructive. China entered the first decade of reforms as a fast developing and modernising country with an average decadal growth rate of 5.5 percent. But more important

Table 1(a): Demographic Indicators in 2001

	China	India
Population (million)	1272	1033
Birth Rate (per 1000)	15	25
Death Rate (per 1000)	7	9
Infant Mortality rate (per 1000)	32	69
Life Expectancy (years)	70	63

Source: *World Development Indicators 2003*

Table 1(b): Prosperity Indicators 2001

Availability per 1000	China	India
Telephones (landlines)	112	32
Cellular phones	66	4
Personal Computer	15.9	4.5
Television sets	293	78

Source: *World Development Indicators 2003*

Table 1(c): International poverty line (2000)

	Population below USD 1 a day	Population below USD 2 a day
China	16.1	47.3
India	34.7	79.9

Source: *World Development Indicators 2003*

Table 1(d): National poverty line

Country	Survey year	Rural (percent)	Urban (percent)	National (percent)
China	1998	4.6	<2	4.6
India	1999-00	30.2	24.7	28.6

Source: *World Development Indicators 2003,*

Table 2: Social indicators at pre-reform stage

	China in 1980	India in 1991
IMR (per 1000)	42	119
Life expectancy (years)	67	59.2
Adult Literacy (percent)	66	48.4

Sources: *India Health Report, UNESCO, World Development Indicators 2003,* Sen and Dreze, *India: Economic development and social opportunity*

Table 3: Growth rates (percent)

Pre reform period	China	India
Pre reform period	5.5	5.7
Post reform period (First 10 years)	10.1	5.9

Source: Calculated from *World Development Indicators 2003*

Table 4: GDP and population

	1978	2001	Growth rate
China			
Population	962.6	1272	1.22
GDP (USD billion)	141.06	1117	9.41
India			
Population	648	1033	2.05
GDP	155	492.5	5.15

Source: *World Development Indicators, National Accounts Statistics* (India) and *China Statistical Yearbook*

Table 5: FDI statistics for China		
Year	Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BOP, current USD, million)	Gross foreign direct investment (percent of GDP)
1990	3487	1.2
1991	4366	1.4
1992	11,155	3.6
1993	27,515	7.3
1994	33,787	6.6
1995	35,848	5.4
1996	40,179	5.1
1997	44,237	5.4
1998	43,750	5.3
1999	38,753	4.5
2000	38,399	4.3
Source: *World Development Indicators 2002*		

Table 6: FDI statistics for India		
Year	Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BOP, current USD, million)	Gross foreign direct investment (percent of GDP)
1990	162	0.0
1991	74	0.0
1992	277	0.1
1993	550	0.2
1994	973	0.3
1995	2143	0.6
1996	2425	0.7
1997	3576	0.9
1998	2635	0.7
1999	2168	0.5
2000	2315	0.6
Source: *World Development Indicators 2002*		

than this was the performance by 1980 of reducing infant mortality to 42 per 1000, elevating life expectancy to 67 years, and raising adult literacy to 66 percent. India by contrast had a better growth rate of 5.7 percent in the 1980s but came burdened with an infant mortality of 119 per 1000, life expectancy of 59.2 years, and adult literacy of 48.41 percent (Table 2). Many reasons have been advanced for China's stupendous performance. Few are as valid as what Amartya Sen wrote: "China's relative advantage over India is a product of its pre-reform (pre-1979) groundwork rather than its post-reform redirection".

Yet another comparison would be even more instructive. In 1978, at the inception of its reforms, China's per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (in constant 1995 USD) was USD 148, whereas that of India in the same year was USD 236. Seven years after it began its reforms, in 1986, China caught up with India in per capita GDP terms (USD 278 vs USD 273) and a decade after reforms in 1988 was comfortably ahead of India with a per capita GDP of USD 342 compared with India's USD 312. In the first post-reform decade the Chinese economy grew at a little over 10 percent while the Indian economy grew at 5.7 percent in the corresponding decade (Figure 1 and Table 3). Quite clearly the 1990s was India's lost decade.

But what did India achieve in the first decade of its reforms? In 1992, the first year of reforms, India's per capita GDP was USD 331. This grew to USD 477 in 2001. In the same period the Chinese per capita GDP surged from USD 426 to USD 878 in 2001. In the 1990s China grew at rates close to 10 percent while India grew at 5.9 percent. Quite clearly, far from beginning to catch up, India fell well behind.

China's GDP (1995 constant USD) has grown eight-fold since 1979 and stood at over USD 1 trillion in 2001. Chinese GDP was lower than that of India in absolute terms in 1978 but caught up with India in the very next year. The size of the Chinese economy now is twice that of India's. In 2001 India's GDP stood at a mere USD 492 billion with a population of 1.03 billion. While India seems to be catching up with China on the population front, China's GDP still remains a distant and difficult target (Table 4).

It is true that both countries have transformed themselves after they embarked on the path of economic reform. But the transformations were entirely different in nature. In 1980, the sectoral break-up of China's economy was as follows: agriculture 30 percent, industry 49 percent and services 21 percent. In 1990 that changed to agriculture 27 percent, industry 42 percent and services 31 percent. In 2000, that picture transformed further. Agriculture fell to 16 percent; industry grew further to 51 percent while services steadied at 33 percent. Note the growth in the share of industry now. This was primarily made possible by overseas foreign direct investment (FDI), which amounted to USD 290 billion (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, Beijing) during the decade (Tables 5 and 6).

Apart from the millions of new jobs created, the role of FDI in making China a major manufacturing centre in the world is seen in the share of FDI enterprises in total exports, which rose from under 2 percent to 45.5 percent in 1999. In India it was just 8 percent for the same year. The share of world trade in the GDP's of the two countries, not surprisingly, is also very different.

Table 7: Sectoral Break up of GDP (percent)

	1980	1990	2000
Agriculture			
China	30.1	27.1	15.9
India	42.8	31	28
Industry			
China	48.5	41.6	50.9
India	21.9	28	26
Services			
China	21.4	31.3	33.2
India	35.3	41	46

Sources: *China Statistical Yearbook: 2001*, India's *National Accounts Statistics* (various issues)

Table 8(a): Sectoral Growth rates in the 80s (percent)

	China	India
Agriculture	5.9	3.1
Industry	11.1	6.9
Services	13.5	6.9

Source: *World Development Indicators 2003*

Table 8(b): Sectoral Growth rates in the 90s (percent)

	China	India
Agriculture	4	3
Industry	13.1	6.1
Services	8.9	7.9

Source: *World Development Indicators 2003*

Table 9: Sector wise employment (percent)

	China	India
Agriculture	50	60.5
Industry	22	16.8
Services	28	22.7

Sources: *China Statistical Yearbook 2000*, K Sundaram, *Employment in the nineteen nineties: Further results from the NSS 55th round employment-unemployment survey, 1999-2000*, July 2001

Table 10: Population in productive cohort (million)

	2000	2020	2050
China	812	921	824
India	599	824	962

Sources: United Nations, World Bank

Table 11: Central Govt expenditure as percent of total expenditure

	China	India
1962	61.6	42.2
1970	58.9	41.1
1980	54.3	37.3
1990	32.6	39.4
2000	34.7	40.4

Source:*National Accounts statistics, China Statistical Yearbook*

Figure 1: Growth rate comparison of first 10 years of reforms

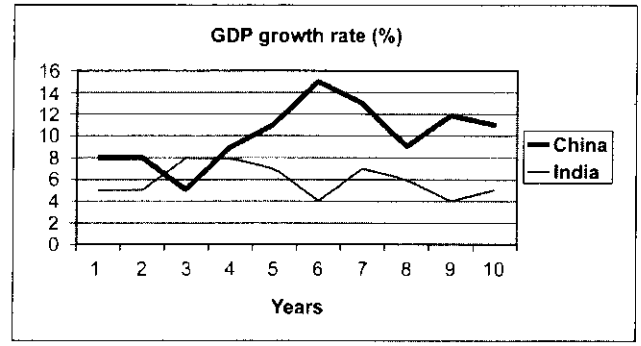
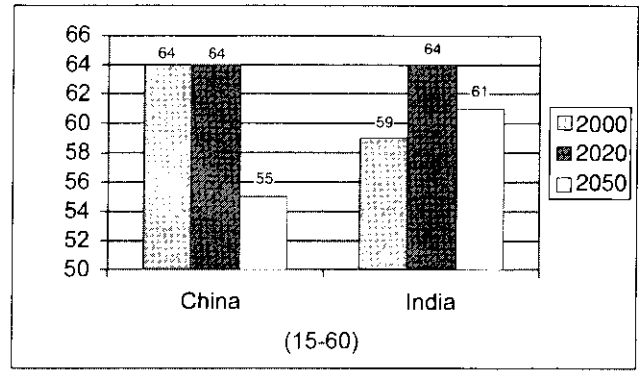


Figure 2: Population in productive cohort



While trade accounts for as much as half (49 percent) of China's GDP, it accounts for less than a third (29 percent) of India's GDP. Also, while China's enjoys a 3.7 percent share of total world trade, India's share in world trade is less than one per cent.

In recent days there has been much speculation as to whether the FDI gap between China and India is indeed as large as it is made out to be. Chinese (as well as the IMF's) FDI figures include what are classified in India as Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) investments in equity markets, loans etc, whereas in India FDI refers only to direct investment in industries. Even if these adjustments are made, however, FDI in China is still many times larger than that in India.

The emergence of China as the global base for manufacturing is also predicated on the surge in China's research and development (R&D) expenditure. The latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) science, technology and industry scoreboard has ranked China as the third largest R&D spender in the world, amounting to USD 60 billion (Purchasing Power Parity) in 2001. Though India ranked among the top ten spenders worldwide, it spent only a third (USD 19 billion) of what China invested in R&D in 2001. Such huge Chinese investments in furthering the base of knowledge suggests that India can only fall back further in terms of industrial growth rates and competitiveness.

Figure 3: Decentralisation in China

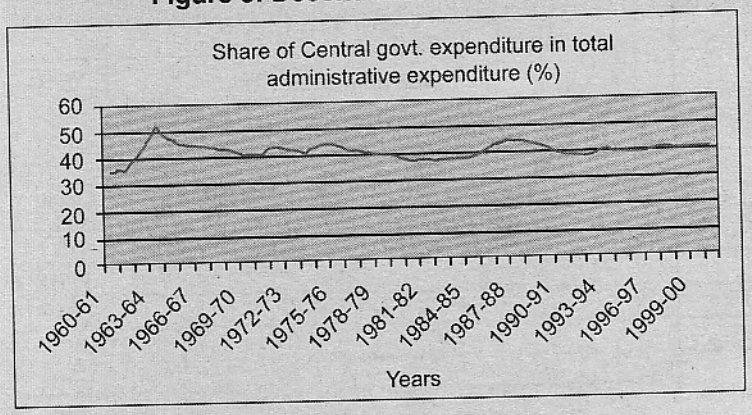
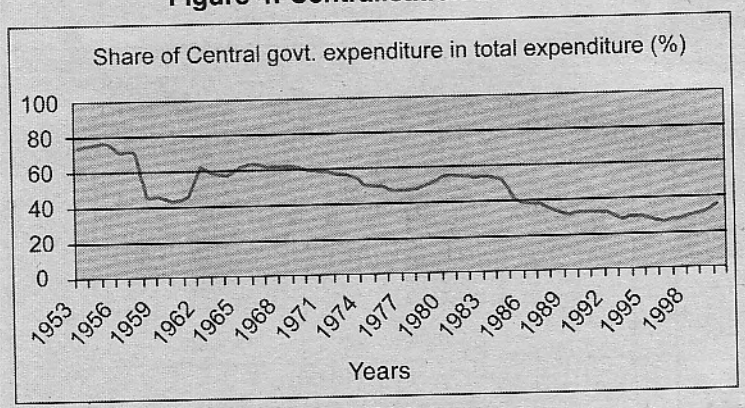


Figure 4: Centralisation in India



The Indian sectoral picture makes for a study in contrasts. The share of agriculture fell somewhat from 31 percent in 1990 to 28 percent in 2000. The share of industry too fell from 28 percent to 26 percent. Services grew from 41 percent to 46 percent. Software apart, the biggest contributing factor to the growth of India's services sector has been the growth of public administration, which has been bounding at an average rate of 32.5 percent each year from 1993-94 onwards. In 2001 alone, central, state and local governmental salaries together topped INR 167,715 crores. This kind of spending was not what Keynes had in mind when he advocated public spending to stimulate the economy (Tables 7, 8(a) and 8(b)).

The impact of these sectoral growth rates is reflected in the job creation patterns for the two nations. Today China's workforce is 705 million (1999). About half of this workforce, or 353 million, is employed in agriculture, 28 percent or 190 million in services, and 22 percent or 162 million in industry. By contrast India's total workforce is 397 million (1999). The major employer is still the agricultural sector with 60.5 percent or 240 million, industry is a relatively small at 16.8 percent or 67 million, services seem rising but employs only 22.7 percent or 90 million (of which government alone accounts for 19.4 million). Quite clearly, in terms of employment we are still an agrarian society (Table 9).

But there is something else to be understood. China's population in terms of age break-up is passing through a phase of great demographic advantage. The cohort in the productive phase (15-60 years) of the life cycle is at its peak. On the other hand, the dependency ratio in India is, relatively speaking, adverse (Figure 2). While 64 percent of China's population currently falls in the productive cohort, the corresponding figure for India is 59 percent. However in 20 years from now, while China's productive population will stagnate at 64 percent India's productive cohort will rise to 64 percent and hence catch up with China. The picture will further change by 2050 with India (61 percent) overtaking China (55 percent). Transformation is however not just limited to percentage terms but is more importantly also palpable in absolute terms as India would have become the most populous country in the world with 1.5 billion. Thus while at present China's productive population stands at a whopping 812 millions, and India's seemingly way behind at 599 million, by 2050 India's productive population will be a huge 962 million and China would be far behind at 824 million (Table 10). But whether India is able to convert this into economic advantage will have to be seen? For this, India will have to tool up to create a more productive and able workforce, stimulate investments and create a much bigger market for goods and services.

This favourable demographic trend is as much a window of opportunity as it presents a danger. If India grasps the opportunity, it can elevate the economy to a much higher level of prosperity. On the other hand if India fails in this, it will move into a period of unfavourable demographic distribution when the society will be saddled with a rapidly greying population that will act as a natural brake against fast economic growth. China has so far successfully seized this opportunity, but will India be able to?

On the face of it, China seems to be deploying about the same proportion of its GNP as India towards education and health. Yet it seems to be achieving better results. Quite clearly there are lessons to be learnt. While under the communist system supreme power may be centralised in a coterie of un-elected leadership, it is equally true that the management of the economy and services like education and healthcare are greatly decentralised. By contrast, India with a supposedly more representative political system has become highly centralised. Nothing reflects this better than the pattern of expenditure on salaries for government employees (Figures 3 and 4). The percentage share of central government salaries and expenses of the total under this head in China has been continuously declining and has come down from a high of 73.9 percent in 1953 to 28.9 percent in 1998. The corresponding trend in India

is discouraging, as it hovers at around 40 percent over the decades (Table 11). Quite evidently in China government is moving downwards to the tiers that have greater interaction with the people, whereas in India decentralisation is as distant a goal now as it was in the early years of the republic.

Yet another notable feature of the Chinese economic reforms and decentralisation has been the degree of autonomy conferred to the state owned enterprises (SOE's). In sharp contrast to this, Indian public sector undertakings (PSU's) have become adjuncts of administrative ministries with all entrepreneurial spirit crushed by mindless bureaucracy and uncertain politics.

From the inter-sectoral picture we have now it is quite clear that China is a fast industrialising country whereas India seems to be entering the post-industrial phase without having industrialised. This trend needs to be reversed by stimulating industrialisation, especially since it creates more jobs and has greater multiplier effects on the economy. This calls for far greater investments in infrastructure especially since civil projects such as roads, railways, dams, canals and building construction require not only large amounts of material such as steel and cement, but they will also employ large numbers of the least skilled workers. The uncontrolled growth of this segment of India's population poses the greatest economic challenge and their gainful employment is its only solution. Quite clearly, government must spend less on itself and more for the people.

The challenge ahead of India is not catching with China's growth rate, which inevitably must slow down. When nations compete, growth rates matter little if one is already well ahead in terms of robust social-sector indices. Can India do what China did to India in 1986 when it caught up with Indian per capita GDP rates within seven years of its initiating market reforms? Can India come abreast with it? To do that in 2020 India needs to grow at 11.6 percent and to do that long after most of us alive today are gone in 2050, India must grow at 8.9 percent every year. Catching up with growth rates is not good enough. If that were the game India is already doing much better than the United States, Europe and Japan. So if the RBI or IMF says that India will do 7 percent, that is very good. But that is just one swallow and it does not mean that India's season in the sun is at hand.

Sri Lanka
Ball and chain syndrome

by **Suhas Chakma**

The failure of the latest round of talks on 10 December between the warring political foes in Colombo dashed any hope for an early solution to the over-a-month-old political impasse. After the expiry of 15 December 2003 deadline set by the two leaders, no fresh deadline has been set. Earlier on 5 November, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who belongs to the opposition Peoples Alliance (PA), in a constitutional coup declared emergency in the country. Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe of the United National Party (UNP), which holds majority in the parliament, was on a visit to the United States and it was in his absence that on 4 November 2003, President Kumaratunga sacked the ministers for information, defence and home, suspended parliament for two weeks upto 19 November and ordered deployment of the troops at key installations.

President Kumaratunga has so far been able to sell her drastic measures on the grounds of the alleged threat to national security arising from the submission of the proposals for the Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 31 October. While most political analysts and Sri Lanka watchers bought her story, the question remains whether allowing the LTTE to put across its proposals constitutes what President Kumaratunga calls "making too many concessions", and warrants the imposition of emergency. The president's drastic action in reality has more to do with the UNP government's adventurism in submitting a motion for impeachment of the controversial Supreme Court Chief Justice Sarath N Silva. The move sought to arrest an impending judgement from the apex court as to who really is the 'boss' of the defence forces as well as the government of Sri Lanka. Since any impeachment motion against the president ultimately has to be referred to a referendum by the chief justice, many Peoples Allaince (PA) leaders saw the impeachment of the chief justice as the first step towards impeaching President Kumaratunga. The president has asked for the impeachment motion to be withdrawn.

> The LTTE proposals are all set to test the limits of permissibility of the right of self-determination within one constitutional framework

Old rivalry and biased judiciary

The rivalry between the president and the prime minister in Sri Lankan politics has been continuing for over a decade. But it has become even more apparent since the UNP came to power after the last general elections held in December 2001. While President Kumaratunga welcomed the start of negotiations with the LTTE, she gradually hardened her stand. Meanwhile, the government and the LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement in February 2002 and formal peace negotiations started in September 2002. The talks broke down in April 2003, in large part because of Kumaratunga's increasingly provocative actions, in league with sections of the armed forces. The last two rounds of talks were disrupted by naval incidents involving the seizure or sinking of LTTE vessels. To add to it, on 25 October 2003, Kumaratunga wrote to the Norwegian prime minister, Kjell Magne Bondvik requesting the recall of the head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), Major General Tryggve Tellefsen. The president also wrote to the armed forces chiefs on 24 October 2003 directing them not to follow any of the SLMM's instructions or advice.

Since the UNP came to power, President Kumaratunga has sought to maintain her direct control over key elements of the state apparatus, particularly the security forces. For long, the government and the president have been engaged in a feud over who decides top appointments. Kumaratunga's extention of the service of navy vice admiral, Daya Sandagiri and army commander, Lionel Balagalla—regarded as her supporters—beyond their due retirement dates and her overruling a proposal by interior minister, John Amaratunga for a similar extension for the present inspector general of police were significant. In an attempt to counter the president's move, the defence minister promulgated regulations to retire commissioned officers of the Sri Lanka Army at the age of 55, which, however, was promptly referred by the president to the supreme court under Article 129 of the constitution.

In September 2002, the UNP government sought to clip the power of the president by bringing the controversial 19th amendment to the constitution, which, among other things, sought to amend Articles 49 and 70 of the constitution to curtail the president's powers to dissolve parliament unilaterally after one year of the previous elections. About 20 odd members of parliament from Kumaratunga's own party reportedly sup-

ported the government's move. The amendment also empowered parliamentarians with "cross-voting rights" so that they could vote according to their conscience without being deprived of their seats for defying party discipline.

On this occasion, the supreme court led by Chief Justice Sarath N Silva came to the president's rescue and shot down the proposed 19th amendment. The court ruled the sections empowering MPs with cross voting rights as unconstitutional. As for the president's power to dissolve parliament, the bench ruled that apart from ensuring the support of a two-thirds majority in parliament for it, the nation at large has to endorse it in a country-wide referendum for the 19th amendment to become law. The court however added a caveat that no referendum was necessary if the present one-year period restricting the president from dissolving parliament was extended simply to a three-year period—a two-thirds majority alone would suffice for the purpose if the 19th amendment were on those lines. Since constitutional amendments could be made with two-thirds majority, the order of a referendum raised questions about the independence of judiciary.

The supreme court also struck down the proposed 18th Amendment which provided that "no legal suit or proceedings shall be instituted against the Constitutional Council (CC), its chairman, a member, the secretary or an officer of the council regarding any act done or omitted by them in performing or discharging any duty or function, conferred or assigned to them under the Constitution or any other law". It also sought to empower the Constitutional Council to make rules to set out procedure and guidance to be followed by it while performing duties and actions assigned under the constitution. The 17th amendment, which through which the Constitutional Council of Sri Lanka was constituted, provided for legal action to be taken against council members under the fundamental rights provisions in the constitution. The supreme court, however, upheld constitutional validity of such impunity under the Prevention of Terrorist Act (PTA) of 1979, and allowed the judiciary to function under the order of the attorney general and the defence minister.

During the hearing on the defence minister's regulations on retiring commissioned officers at the age of 55, the chief justice criticised the government's conduct and indirectly tried to cast aspersions on the government-LTTE ceasefire agreement. As the outcome of the verdict on the issue was clear, on 3 November, the ruling UNP announced its decision to place the motion for the impeachment of the chief justice. The motion was scheduled to be tabled in parliament on 6 November after the government parliamentary group sources claimed that, as required by the constitution, they already had the signatures from the required number of parliamentarians to move the impeachment. President Kumaratunga decided to strike back and suspend parliament. By suspending parliament, the president effectively stalled any impeachment proceedings against Justice Silva or herself.

On 4 November, the supreme court sent its determination on the defence minister's proposal for retirment of commissioned officers to the president. As expected, the supreme court held that the president shall exercise the executive power of the people including the defense of Sri Lanka, and that the minister of defence has no legal authority to amend the existing regulations under the Army, Navy and Air Force Acts. The power to frame regulations is vested only with the president, said the supreme court.

'Emergencies' of convenience

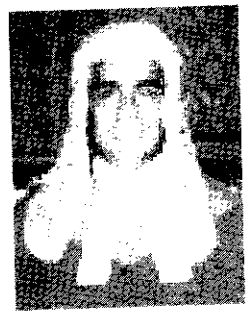
On 31 October 2003, the LTTE submitted its proposals which, among other things, calls for the establishment of an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) which some political commentators describe as "nothing but a restatement of the LTTE's demand for Tamil Eelam, or an independent Tamil state in north-east Sri Lanka". While questions have been raised about democratic pluralism, Article 2 of the proposals refers to the composition of the ISGA as nominated by the LTTE and government of Sri Lanka and members appointed by the Muslim community in the north-east. At the same time, the LTTE proposals include control over marine resources, which would mean access to the seas, the power to engage external economic relations, direct access to funds for the reconstruction of the northeast and full administrative powers for the Tamil-majority northeast.

The LTTE proposals are all set to test the limits of permissibility of the right of self-determination within one constitutional framework. On 1 November, the Sri Lankan government said the LTTE proposals "differ in fundamental respects" from its proposals made on 17 July 2003, which offered the LTTE a Provisional Administrative Structure, but specifically excluded control over land revenue, police and security. But in an attempt to restart the process, the government said it was "convinced that the way forward lies through direct discussion of the issues". Given the substantive divergence between the proposals of the government and the LTTE, the declaration of emergency by the president on the pretext of threat to national security must be described as nothing but an attempt to block the peace process.

Sri Lanka was under emergency between 1983-2001 until the UNP came to power in December 2001. Thousands of people have suffered under the emergency regulations. Although the emergency regulations were allowed to lapse in July 2001 due to the lack of support in parliament, the president issued regulations under the PTA providing that "any person who had been remanded...in terms of any other written law, and has also been connected with or reasonably suspected...with any unlawful activity within the meaning of the PTA, shall be deemed to have been remanded

Chief Justice Sarath Nanda Silva

ADMITTED AS an advocate of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka in June 1967, having served as the attorney-general as well as on the president's counsel in 1996, Justice Sarath Nanda Silva was appointed the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka by President Chandrika Kumaratunga on 16 September 1999 and has since then been the sharpest weapon in the armoury of the president and a thorn in the flesh of the UNP.



On 3 November 2003, the UNP government decided to move an impeachment motion against Justice Silva on the basis of a complaint filed by nine retired judges from the high court, district court and magistrate's court before the speaker, Joseph Michael Perera in March 2003 to redress their termination from the courts and victimisation by the chief justice.

The nine judges—Mahanama Thilakaratne (ex-high court judge), HW Liyanage, (ex-district judge), C Hegoda, (ex-district judge), DM Siriwardhana (ex-district judge), SP Bandaranayake (ex-district judge), DMTB Dissanayake, (ex-district judge), SW Surendran (ex-magistrate), LC Costa (ex-magistrate) and Hiran Ekanayake (ex-magistrate)—complained that some of them were terminated without any inquiry and others after pseudo inquiries that served prepared agendas. Justice Silva serves as the ex-officio Chairman of the Judicial Services Commission (JSC) which is in charge of appointments and disciplinary control of the district judges and magistrates and transfers of high court judges. The judges alleged that Justice Silva was "personally instrumental in getting rid of judges towards whom he was ill disposed as the Attorney General or influenced by political personalities". Some of the arbitrary acts said to have been committed by the chief justice include issuing circulars to judges threatening them with disciplinary action for not complying with his action on court hearings; resorting to disciplinary action against judges who have given judgments against the attorney general's department; taking action against judges based on complaints made to him by politicians close to him; and victimising judges who made judicial orders that did not find favour with him.

Justice Silva allegedly plays favourites in appointments to key positions, irrespective of seniority. In June 2001, a parliamentary opposition impeachment motion to remove him was restrained by the supreme court, which he heads. In August 2001, the International Bar Association (IBA) maintained that judges were removed by the chief justice without enquiry. Further, the IBA concluded that there was "an overwhelming need for an independent credible judicial system" in Sri Lanka. It detailed instances of lack of accountability, breach of natural justice and potential for undue interference and pointed out that institutions which should be protecting the rule of law, including the president, government and the chief justice, were acting to undermine it.

Justice Silva also "stunned" and "shocked" global civil society including then UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Param Cumaraswamy, by hearing a case against himself filed by trade unionist, Michael Anthony Fernando and later sentencing Fernando to jail for one year in February 2003. Fernando was treated like a hardened criminal while at the National Hospital for treatment and was tortured inside the prison bus by the jail guards while returning from hospital. Cumaraswamy said, "No one can be his/her own judge", adding that he did not know what crime Fernando had committed to warrant a year's imprisonment. Fernando was later released in October 2003 for "good behaviour".

In 2002, Victor Ivan's book *The Unfinished Struggle* exposed extensive misconduct and abuse of authority by Sarath Silva when he was the attorney general and as chief justice. However, Justice Silva has maintained a studied silence with regard to the revelations in the book. There has been no official denial of the allegations made in the book nor has the author been subjected to legal action.

under the PTA". In effect, all those who were detained under the emergency regulations were thus brought under the PTA.

Immediately after the declaration of the state of emergency on 5 November, President Kumaratunga asked the chairman of the government-owned media group, Lake House, Nalin Laduwahetty to leave, making it clear that she seeks to stifle freedom of expression and opinion.

Back in 1994, President Chandrika Kumaratunga had established a number of committees to look into matters relating to the media. The committees' aims included broad-basing of the Lake House newspaper group; reform of laws relating to the media and to media freedom; establishing a media training institute and improving conditions for media personnel. The reports of all these committees were handed over to the president by

the end of 1996. However, implementation of the recommendations set out in these reports has been slow.

On 9 December 2003, the president's spokesman, Harim Peiris said, "The president does not intend to and will not hand over defence responsibilities to anyone... Even if she wanted to, constitutionally she cannot". The judgment of the supreme court headed by Justice Silva on the defence minister's order on retirement age for commissioned officers has virtually ruled out any possibility for negotiation on matters related to the defence ministry. Prime Minister Wickremasinghe can neither meaningfully negotiate with the LTTE without total control over security forces nor can he accept Justice Silva's continuation in office by acceding to the president's demand for withdrawal of his impeachment motion. At the same time, President Kumaratunga does not have the necessary support in the parliament to ratify the emergency regulation by the parliament within 10 days as required under Article 155 of the constitution nor can the PA form a government. Therefore, the only option before the president would be to either back down for the sake of democracy and peace; or dissolve parliament and call for snap polls. As of now, despite the international community's concerns over the fragile peace process Prime Minister Wickremasinghe's government has virtually been crippled.

In reality, Sri Lanka is inexorably heading towards snap polls but the all-important question remains as to who will take the initiative. The president is unlikely to invite further international condemnation by calling snap polls. As she holds the constitutional authority to sack ministers and dismiss the government at any time one year after holding general elections on various pretexts, the prime minister may be constrained to take the controversial decision of calling for snap polls. However, the opinion of the international community may not influence Sri Lankan electoral politics. The right-wing Janata Vimukti Perumuna has already urged the president not to hand over home and defence ministries. Given such polarisation, not surprisingly, although both UNP and PA considered the holding of snap polls on many occasions since the December 2001 general elections, neither was confident of outright victory, let alone a two third majority.

The average Sri Lankan appears to be tired of successive elections and war, having voted for a presidential election in December 1999, general elections in October 2000, another round of general elections in December 2001 and local elections in March 2002. If snap polls are not held, Sri Lanka is unlikely to find permanent solutions either to the Tamil problem or the conflicts between the president and the prime minister. Any devolution of power to the LTTE will require a constitutional amendment, ie, a two third majority which the UNP does not enjoy. Justice Silva and company had already declared cross voting unconstitutional. In any event, President Kumaratunga would have opposed any deal signed by the UNP government as unacceptable for being a threat to territorial integrity.

The peace process with the LTTE has undoubtedly been influenced by the 'War on Terror' in the post-September 11 period and the lack of legitimacy of the LTTE and its methods at the international level. The LTTE has so far maintained a "judicious silence" and has refused to play the UNP ball game by blaming the southerners. As the southerners appear all set to fail the north and easterners once again, the question is whether LTTE will wait. There have been credible reports about forced conscriptions (including 80 child soldiers in October 2003 alone) by the LTTE, indicating its preparation for an impending war. But, neither the LTTE nor the Sri Lankan government is keen to take the blame for starting another war. As the LTTE seeks international legitimacy, peace will have to remain in suspended animation at least until the expiry of the current president's term at the end of 2005. Even if there were no snap polls and the LTTE and Sri Lankan government were to "talk" to each other, a final settlement with the LTTE will remain a mirage because of the inherent contradictions in Sri Lankan politics and a flawed constitution and biased judiciary.

An election at JNU

The elections for the students' union at Jawaharlal Nehru University pits Hindutva against the Congress against the Marxists against the Marxists Leninists. It is all very civilised, still, the feelings run deeper in South Delhi.

by ***Andrew Nash***

By the time the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) presidential candidate, Mukesh Kumar Mishra, rises to speak at the 18 October debate of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Student's Union (JNUSU), it is already 11 pm and the candidates of the Congress and Samajwadi (SP) parties' student wings have had their turn. The audience, a thousand students spilling out of a maroon tent on a patch of lawn between two hostels, includes several hundred party backers sitting in blocks chanting down one another or flailing Mukesh.

Once he starts, it quickly becomes clear that Mukesh is not a gripping orator, even though his height gives him a stage presence. To make matters worse for him, students affiliated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) launch into several rounds of jeering as he tries to find his stride. His voice suddenly becomes choppy; spectators see him gesture and move his mouth, but no sound comes out of the speakers. The audio system has failed partially, and comes back momentarily before going out completely. Election workers scurry about to investigate and repair, and a confused Mukesh retakes his seat on stage. The presidential debate on hold, the audience turns its attention back on itself.

"Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh! We shall fight we shall win!" shout supporters of the CPI (M) affiliated Students Federation of India (SFI), who stand face-to-face with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-allied ABVP. "*Vande Mataram bolo, Allah se kaam nahi chalega*", is their response. The two groups straddle the median of the tent—the SFI on the left, the ABVP on the right—while behind them smaller groups of student activists of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), (CPI-ML), the Congress Party, Samajwadi Party, and the Indian Justice Party heckle one another to the beat of drums. These last two groups are new arrivals on campus, the first looking for a boost from SP party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav's ascendancy to Uttar Pradesh chief ministership on 8 September, the second a dalit party. Both started campaigning on campus late this fall and conventional wisdom counts them out. Outside the tent, students mill about or head over to the nearby dhaba for tea. Up on the stage, election workers continue to fiddle with electrical equipment. Minutes pass.

Sunny Dutta, a JNU alumnus now working for the ABVP national organisation, stands at the side of the tent counselling ABVP members. The interruption in Mukesh's speech, he claims, is no accident. Dressed in an over-sized Chicago Blackhawks windbreaker, he relates in his refined phrases the plot he sees in the putative technical failure: the election committee, at the SFI's behest, is sabotaging the ABVP presidential candidate's speech. He knows, he says, that many election officials are former SFI activists, and says that, "if the debate doesn't happen, elections should be cancelled. There should be no student union this year". Back inside the tent, the SFI-ABVP shouting match grows tenser, and someone in the ABVP camp produces a camcorder to record taunts. Sunny surveys the scene as ABVP activists begin to taunt the election workers and observes, "Violence could be possible if the debate is not restarted".

As it happens, the situation remains under control. Despite an aggressive streak of student activism, JNU campaigns have remained free of the strong-arm tactics and big money that characterise many university elections in India. Students may shout, even push, but violence is rare at JNU. In its early days in the 1970s, the university was actually known for its theory-laden debates among 'leftists' than petty hooliganism.

After a nearly two-hour interruption, the sound system is up again. Mukesh retakes the mike and students drift back from the dhaba at the call of his amplified voice, which is swamped by occasional swells of audience jeers and ABVP applause. Following

Mukesh is the fourth speaker, Rohit, the incumbent student union president from SFI and the widely acknowledged front-runner in this year's poll. Rohit wears a maroon kurta, the same shade as the tent, and puts his oratorical gifts on display, sliding easily between English and Hindi, alternating gestures of clenched fists with pointed fingers. He wraps up at 1.20 am, and the final two candidates, from the Justice Party and CPI-ML-backed All India Students Association (AISA), get their turns at the mike. At two in the morning, the election committee stops accepting audience chits for the question-and-answer session, but the crowd remains large and attentive despite the late hour. At 4 am, candidates are making their final remarks, technically violating by several hours the ban on electioneering for Sunday, the mandated cool-off day before Monday's voting.

As students head back to their hostels in the chilly pre-dawn, the SFI is still the party to beat, but it's up in the air as to which organisation stands the best chance of knocking it off: ASIA, the 'uncompromising' 'left'; the NSUI, the Congress Party's student wing with a weak organisational base at JNU but strong off-campus support; or the ABVP, the Hindutva ideologues who captured the student union presidency by one vote in 2000.

Study and struggle

While the presidential debate marks the official climax to the annual campaign, activism and recruitment are year-round activities for all groups at the JNU campus. During the two weeks of admission to college in July-August, they set up shop at the administration building, guiding 'freshers' through lines and building personal connections that often lead to membership. Once classes start, groups organise meet-and-greets laden with ideology; in August this year, the ABVP sponsored a trivia contest with prizes like the book *The Concept of the Hindu Nation*. On 15 August, India's independence day, the SFI took out a torchlight procession to protest "imperialism" while the ABVP hosted a "patriotic song" rally. On 7 September, in protest against Ariel Sharon's state visit to India, the AISA burnt an effigy of the Israeli prime minister with a US flag emblazoned on the chest, and the 'left' united for a protest march downtown. After the NSUI's sweep in the Delhi University (DU) student union polls, earlier in September, in which 40,000 students cast ballots, the new cross-town office-bearers came to JNU to address an open-air gathering in a hostel parking lot. On the night of the presidential debate, Delhi University Students Union (DUSU) joint secretary, Ragini Nayak, whose 15,664 vote-margin of victory was the largest among the victorious NSUI candidates, returned to the JNU campus to mingle among Congress supporters.

29 posts are up for grabs every year in the JNU elections, four on the university-wide central panel and 25 councillor seats divided among the schools within the university. In 2002-03, the SFI held all four central panel seats while the councillor seats for the different schools were shared between the SFI, AISA and ABVP, with SFI leading in number. With five councillor seats, the School of Social Sciences is a bastion of the left—it is often a solid SFI panel, though in 2002-03 it gave AISA a seat – while the science schools tend to back the ABVP. The most hotly contested posts are those in the School of International Studies and the School of Languages, both of which are perceived as swing constituencies. While the elections are technically open to students without organisational backing, independents never receive a large share of the vote.

Despite an aggressive streak of student activism, JNU campaigns have remained free of the strong-arm tactics and big money that characterise many university elections in India.

In the weeks preceding the university elections, on-campus students elect hostel presidents and mess committees in fiercely fought contests making use of 'masked' party support. During the university elections, the standard procedure of parties is to distribute public statements at mealtimes that announce meetings in the evening "open to all members and sympathisers". The meetings, usually post-dinner, typically last 90 minutes, and, during the final week of the campaign, party organisers hand out bamboo torches to attendees as they exit, creating fire-lit cavalcades that wind through JNU's leafy campus in a show of organisational strength.

As is suggested by the presence of national political parties on campus, as well as the print media attention devoted to campaigns—the Delhi dailies carry news on DU and JNU elections almost every day in the run-up to the polls and plaster the winners on page one—university politics in India is a gateway to mainstream politics and by virtue of its physical proximity to the national power centre, JNU's elections attract more than average attention. JNU alumni's on the political scene include Sitaram Yechuri and Prakash Karat of the CPI-M politburo. KR Narayanan, president of India 1997 to 2002, also served as JNU's vice chancellor. Many JNU professors have formal or informal links to mainstream political bodies.

Even so, as elections approached this fall, a common refrain among older students and faculty members was that the 2003 campaign was a let-down from previous years: no serious campus issue captured students' imagination, they say, and the national political climate, barring revived agitations in Ayodhya, did not hold much potential for mobilisation like it had in years like 1990, when the ABVP made in-roads on campus following VP Singh's acceptance of the Mandal Com-

mission Report, or 2002, when the Gujarat carnage was still fresh in memory.

Ballot boxing in the national ring

In one sense, student groups are just an extension of mobilisations occurring throughout society, as well as reflections of the fractious character of Indian politics. The relationship between the Congress and the NSUI is illuminating on this point, since the Congress has had an electoral presence in virtually all parts of the country for some period of time since 1947 and the NSUI has served as an important feeder organisation. In August 1999, for instance, Sonia Gandhi called on students of the NSUI to prepare for "an ideological crusade" on the parent body's behalf. The CPI-M, in a November 2002 statement, maintained that the JNU NSUI "has pinned its hopes on the funds of its parent body and the patronage of the Congress state government". The endemic divisions plaguing many Congress states units also find parallel in the NSUI.

For its part, the ABVP shares with the RSS and VHP a vision of itself as an oftentimes unappreciated steward of Indian society. On its website, the ABVP declares that, "It would not be out of place to say that only a few people in this country appreciate the uniqueness of this organisation or realise its distinction from other organisation[s] or realise its distinction and understand its contribution to the national life". Despite the "few people" thinking this, its officially-counted ranks have nonetheless swelled, reaching 1,029,646 in 2000-01—the first year it stood above one million—from a membership base of 186,674 in 1986-87 and the paltry totals of the 50s and 60s. The ABVP also highlights its connections to extra-curricular politics, listing on its websites the names of 33 ABVP, RSS and BJP "martyrs" killed by Maoists in Andhra Pradesh between 1979 and 1997, even giving accounts of the murders, such as that of Gore Main, who "was killed by axing his limbs one by one". The ABVP also stands by the records of the BJP state and union governments, and highlights alumni in positions of power, such as Murli Manohar Joshi, the Union Human Resources Minister who served as the ABVP All India General Secretary in the early fifties and was recently charge-sheeted for his participation in the Babri Masjid's demolition.

While the NSUI and ABVP act as extensions of and recruitment bodies for the Congress and BJP, leftist student formations, despite links to parent bodies, must operate in a national political scene where the left carries little weight and an international climate in which communism is seen as being in retreat. One solution to an inhospitable external situation is consciously linking leftist student activities to anti-globalisation movements, which, despite encompassing non-leftist elements, are increasingly popular among young people globally in general, and particularly so among students in India, home to the first-ever Asian Social Forum in January 2003 and the scheduled host (in Bombay) of the 2004 World Social Forum in January. As the case of JNU shows, this tactic is somewhat successful, though the SFI's detractors, such as a writer in *The Pioneer* of Allahabad, argue that the student group, "cast originally in the Stalinist mode, is now finding it difficult to reconstruct itself in a less authoritarian form". Another approach, taken by SFI supporters and critics, is to stake the SFI's credibility (or lack thereof) on CPI-M-led governments in West Bengal, a somewhat odd strategy that leads students in Delhi or Maharashtra to cast ballots on the basis of policies of a government that runs over 1000 kilometres away in the east. SFI backers highlight land reform and investment in education as the policies to be proud of; detractors note recent moves in Calcutta to sell off public sector units and reports of cynical CPI-M vote-bank electoral strategies.

AISA's parent body, the CPI-ML, whose legislative presence is limited to an oppositional role in a few eastern states of India, has never held power at the state or union level, thus making it impervious to charges of maladministration, but making it equally difficult to excite potential supporters with reports of party electoral success and prospects of career advancement within the organisation. According to media reports published in the summer of 2001 referring to Indian intelligence sources, the CPI-ML is linked to the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia, an umbrella organisation of Naxalites including the CPI-ML People's War that allegedly maintains contacts with Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers and Nepal's Maoists. At any event, AISA supports the rhetoric of revolution if not its (violent) practice, and its mobilisation strategy, like the CPI-ML's, focuses on the recruitment of disaffected communists or fellow travellers who view the CPI-M and SFI as sell-outs. As a consciously ideologically-loaded and doctrinaire organisation, AISA's prospects for large-scale mobilisation rest on its ability to 'politicise' young people. In this context, the anti-globalisation movement presents both opportunities and pitfalls, on the one hand providing an avenue through which to capture young imaginations, on the other offering its ideological rivals an opportunity to (re)assert their 'leftist' credentials.

A leader from Siwan

A month before the JNU elections, Tapas Ranjan Saha, a CPI-ML party worker, conducts an evening information session on the differences within the Indian 'left'. Criticising the "outright opportunism" of the CPI-M, which has led a 'left'-front government in West Bengal for a quarter-century, Tapas says that the true Indian 'left' movement, the CPI-ML, faces two dangers, becoming the tail of another movement—the path of the Social Democrats—and indulging in unsustainable "left adventurism". The CPI-ML, he says, charts the middle path between these two options, while the CPI-

M makes unacceptable compromises, such as aligning itself with landlords. A student in the audience asks if the Indian 'left' should set aside its differences and unite against the forces of communalism and capitalism, and Tapas says that while this does happen to a limited extent in public protests, the CPI-M is too compromised to take strong stands on economic and foreign policies. The AISA has a smaller membership base at JNU than the SFI—Tapas addresses an assemblage of only 60 students, not all of whom will join AISA—but its members note Mao's dictum that a small communist movement can be successful if it succeeds in leading society.

Although AISA was founded in JNU only in 1990, its roots date to 1967, when disgruntled CPI-M members left the party to form the CPI-ML after the newly-elected CPI-M government of West Bengal declined to support the peasant uprising in Naxalbari in March of that year. Owing to the split that goes back 35 years, much of AISA's ire is reserved for the SFI, the dominant 'left' organisation on campus and student wing of the CPI-M. "The [SFI-led student] union has allowed the ABVP to actually get away with communal violence on campus and allowed the administration to pursue a privatisation agenda", says Kavita Krishnan, a JNU Students Union central panel officer from the mid-nineties who now serves as All-India AISA president. "I don't believe in the concept of an 'extreme left'. You're either a revolutionary or you're not".

"I don't believe in the concept of an 'extreme left'. You're either a revolutionary or you're not"

AISA's most successful leader at JNU was Chandrashekhar Prasad, a Bihar native who quit the National Defence Academy to study at JNU and became the students union vice president in 1993 and a two-term president in the following years. According to Kavita, Chandrashekhar-led unions took on important fights at JNU, leading universities across India against the concerted privatisation push in 1995, partially reversing a 1983 JNU policy limiting reservations, and leading protests against the rape of dalit women in Rajasthan and Orissa. Chandrashekhar left JNU in January 1997 to pursue CPI-ML party work back home in Siwan, a town midway between Patna and Gorakhpur, but his post-university party service was brief. At four in the afternoon on 31 March 1997, according to AISA, goons of the Rashtriya Janata Dal parliamentarian Shahabuddin assassinated him and another ML leader as they spoke from a three-wheeler at a Siwan intersection. No one has ever been convicted of the murders.

AISA has declined at JNU in recent years, losing every central panel race since Chandrashekhar left campus, a trend Kavita attributes to SFI's de-politicisation of the student body. "Students are told that protesting isn't a good idea—'you might go to jail'", she says, but there is hope in the AISA camp that this year will be different. Early evening on election night, 20 October, several ASIA members sit around a table near the counting station and revisit the campaign over tea. Kavita reviews the day and asserts that "AISA is definitely in the running", especially its general secretary candidate, Mona Das, who served as a councillor in the School of Social Sciences the previous year and "is expected to be strong because people saw her play an active role in the union".

Later that night, after preliminary totals have been announced in the School of International Studies races, showing an ASIA candidate likely to win a seat there, the leadership congregates around a table while party backers loiter inside the tent. The AISA leadership is more laid back than that of the other groups; a cigarette floats from the hands of presidential candidate Inteshar Ahmad to two others at the table, while Kavita leisurely converses about ideology, electoral calculations and brings up personal anecdotes. Standing quietly inside the tent are Murari, Vinay and Murtaza, students from Bihar who appear disoriented amidst the shouting and carnival atmosphere of election night. They lack the leadership's social ease. Murari, from Dharbanga in northwest Bihar, says that the SFI is "an elitist 'leftist' organisation" and that he joined AISA only in his second year at JNU after surveying the different groups on campus. "Their struggle is not divorced from the people's movements, for movements for tribals and dalits", he says. Vinay and Murtaza nod in agreement as a train of ABVP flag-bearers march by chanting slogans. Murari adds that he met Chandrashekhar during a visit to the JNU campus in the mid-nineties, and that he was impressed with the AISA leader's humble lifestyle.

One theme of AISA's campaign was that the SFI surrendered the student struggle by failing to fully support student protests against privatisation of a hostel mess and signing a compromise with the ABVP to refrain from violence following a confrontation provoked by the visit of Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Ashok Singhal on campus in August 2002. Mirroring the schism of their parent parties, AISA castigates the SFI's "culture of compromise". "People say that when they vote for us they split the 'left' vote and help the ABVP to win", says Arvind, an AISA backer and American studies student. "But our battle is against both opportunism and communal fascism. We don't compromise".

Comrades on campus

The other, larger communist force on campus, AISF-SFI, an alliance between the CPI's smaller All India Students Federation (AISF) and the SFI, sees things differently. "Every year AISA creates the impression that they'll sweep, and every year it doesn't happen", Ena Panda, the outgoing union general secretary and the 2003 SFI

candidate for vice president, says on election night while battling illness and exhaustion. "In 2000, when the ABVP presidential candidate won by one vote, AISA helped them out". The following year, the SFI bounced backed, garnering 54 percent of the vote in a four-party presidential election, though its vote share dropped to 44 percent in 2002. (The AISA's shares in the presidential elections of 2001 and 2002 were 8 and 13 percent, respectively.)

On Thursday, 9 October, the SFI hosts its first of three general body meetings for the upcoming elections. Students trickle in slowly, and some comrades at a central table pass the time by singing songs ridiculing the Shiv Sena, but only about 20 students seem to know the words. After opening remarks from SFI organisers, Albeena Shakeel, the highest-ever vote-getter in a JNU presidential election takes the stage. The speech is well delivered and wide-ranging, canvassing the SFI's work on campus, the national political scene, the upcoming Delhi state polls, and the situation in West Asia. Wearing glasses and a pink salwar kameez, Albeena stands to the side of the central table, gesturing with her right hand to emphasise points. She criticises the Congress for its "soft communalism" and the BJP for saffronisation of education, and praises the student body for its commitment to progressive politics. "The ABVP doesn't take political positions at JNU", she declares. "Why? They don't have the guts to". The audience continues to swell during her speech until it reaches the room's 300-person capacity, but the only disruptions are the occasional mobile phone ring and the roar of planes approaching the Indira Gandhi International Airport. Albeena concludes by noting that the Sangh Parivar is weak on campus, but that the university community is still under threat from it. "The RSS realised that it can't win through elections here. Now they have a new agenda: to close JNU". After Albeena finishes, another former JNUSU president speaks, following which the room fills with choruses of "lal salaam" as candidates appear at the room's front and then lead the assembled to the exits.

Eight days later, the SFI hosts its third pre-election meeting; CPI-M politburo member Sitaram Yechuri and left activist Sahiba Farooqui speak, and more women fill out the 350-person audience than on previous nights. One purpose of the high profile guest speakers is to draw in listeners who might otherwise fail to hear student candidates speak, and so before Yechuri and Farooqui make their addresses, general secretary candidate B Mahesh Sarma attempts to make himself known. He criticises the NDA government's economic policies and the predictions of a 7 percent economic growth in 2003 floated in newspapers in the preceding days—"growth is happening, but it's in an enclave. 80 percent of people are unaffected"—and pivots his feet back and forth, opening his body to all sides of the U-shaped audience. Mahesh hits the standard SFI talking points, privatisation and communalism, but his delivery style is awkward; he lacks Rohit's easy stage presence or Kavita's conversational range.

The SFI claims by far the largest membership total at JNU—1031 this year out of a student body of less than five thousand—but it also receives criticism that it mobilises students, particularly Bengalis, along ethnic lines, and that many of its voters care less about its ideology than about supporting a winning party. Before the 17 October SFI meeting, a group of prospective SFI female voters sit on a retaining wall outside the hostel cafeteria discussing university politics. "We Bengalis are clannish in our ways", one says. "It's nice to have someone we know in charge". Another ventures that about 60 percent of SFI's voters at JNU don't fully share the organisation's ideological positions, but this is an off-hand estimate. Still, she adds, "ideology is just an excuse, just a banner people run under". For its part, AISA notes that three former SFI-JNUSU presidents from the 1990s have left the CPI-M to join the Congress, abandoning the cause of the 'left'.

Regardless of why JNU students vote for the SFI, the fact remains that many consistently do, and that, at least in its public statements, SFI consistently takes a vocal stance on anti-imperialist, privatisation and communal themes. SFI voters know that they are voting for a communist formation, notwithstanding AISA's contentions about SFI making compromises. In the last year, in addition to leading protests against Singhal's visit and the US war in Iraq, the SFI-led union sponsored speeches by leading 'left' intellectuals and documentary screenings on topics ranging from Ayodhya and Palestine to the WTO negotiations. At a time when the left presence at university campuses throughout India is relatively weak, that JNU students have voted in SFI-led student unions for most of the university's 30-plus elections indicates that the JNU student body is either disproportionately left-leaning relative to the national Indian electorate, or that the JNU unit of the SFI is uniquely capable in mobilising swing voters—or perhaps both. As a disgruntled ABVP supporter notes, "JNU is a leftist school. After Kerala and West Bengal, it's a *qila* (fort) of the left".

Parivar matters

On election day, the maroon tent from the presidential debate reappears on the School of International Studies lawn. In the evening, inside the building, the election committee counts votes while, outside, close to 1000 students gather after hostel messes close at nine to feast on snacks from 'transplanted' dhabas. They congregate as ABVP, AISA, SFI and NSUI supporters. Election results will be released in stages over the next 24 hours, and even though voting is over, cadre are still leading rounds of chants, and ABVP supporters wind their way through the tent waving saffron flags.

As on the night of the presidential debate, the ABVP takes up position on the tent's far-right, and Sunny Dutta is back to direct activities. He speculates that fewer

students showed up for polling today than in previous elections, which he takes as a positive sign. "Whenever there's a low turn-out, the ABVP does well", he says. According to Sunny, younger students tend to vote ABVP, while the 'left' polls better among MPhil and PhD students. Inside the tent, some of Sunny's young voters hang out, playing with flags or huddling against the October chill.

Sunil, from Balia, UP, predicts that the SFI will win, "but I hope that the ABVP does well". When asked for comment, Shubonil, an SFI organiser, agrees with the likelihood of a Rohit victory, but offers a different spin than Sunny's on the ABVP's electoral calculations. "The ABVP is weak this year but they have a strong core. Their voters won't leave them, at most they just won't vote".

It was in 1989, the year the BJP won 89 seats in the lower house of the Indian parliament (Lok Sabha), the the ABVP opened shop at JNU. Throughout the 90s, the BJP increased its national political presence and the ABVP enjoyed similar success at JNU, claiming three of the top four posts in the 1996 student elections and, for the first time, the presidency in 2000. "The Ayodhya events of 1992 had a tremendous effect on campus", says Sunny, who was then a student in the history centre. "The growth of the ABVP at JNU was linked to it". Since its presidential victory three years ago, however, the ABVP has lost momentum, losing all university-wide elections and witnessing a drop in its presidential vote to 32 percent in 2001 and 26 percent in 2002.

On the backfoot, the ABVP launched its 2003 campaign at JNU by releasing a series of pamphlets attacking "the chameleon called the Indian left" for what it says is the communists' failure to recognise the essential unity of India. Its 14 October release, which announced a public meeting that evening, concludes:

"It is time for us to be aware of these "Paki Marxists and Paki Agents". If we really have to save India from the ISI we have to first finish off these 'Paki Agents' who are the internal terrorists of our country...Time has come for us to understand this nefarious design of the so called progressive Marxist in India in the garb of secularism... in reality what they preach, practice and sell is nothing but promoting the process of India's disintegration and pan-Islamisation through their Anti-National Politics".

Due to a delay in getting access to the women's hostel mess where the 14 October meeting is scheduled, Sunny, who says he authored this pamphlet, has to wait at the hostel's gate along with 20 other ABVP backers until security says the meeting can begin. During the wait, he discusses the AISA-SFI fight, calling it a ruse; the 'left' leadership is unified, he says, and it always issues a "fatwa" at the last minute to corral the cadre into a unified block. Moreover, the SFI is actually a front organisation of the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence unit, which has infiltrated JNU.

Attendance at the *Karyakarta Sammelan* (unlike other groups, the ABVP avoids saying 'General Body Meeting'), which begins an hour late, hovers around only 100, despite membership claims by ABVP leaders of ten times that number. While ABVP campaign literature is attack-oriented, the meeting's speakers focus instead on the Hindutva message and the upcoming elections. Yet, despite having finished second in polling the previous year, the leadership does not appear hopeful. "It doesn't matter if we win or lose—it's up to god—but if we win, you win", declares Gautam Chakrabarti, the joint secretary candidate.

The *Karyakarta Sammelan*, like other student meetings, is predominantly male in attendance, though it differs in other respects. Speakers focus less on national politics than on national 'cultural' questions. "Hindutva's time has not come for a millennium, but now it will run rampant, it will triumph", predicts the body-building general secretary candidate Ramesh Babu K. Barring presidential candidate Mukesh, the speakers are strong orators, their crisp, confident language matched by athletic swagger, in contrast to the pensiveness of many in the AISA and the mechanised excitement of the NSUI. The audience is quiet, if attentive, refraining from the chanting that characterises other parties' meetings. The audience does not raise questions or cheer at the announcement of candidates' names. Dialogue from a Hindi serial in a neighbouring room drifts in, and behind the speakers sits an inattentive security guard looking disinterestedly into the night. At the *Karyakarta Sammelan's* conclusion, despite a call for the audience to assemble outside for a torchlight parade, attendees drift off to a dhaba or head back to their hostels, even as shouting from an AISA procession can be heard in the distance.

According to Sunny, younger students tend to vote ABVP, while the 'left' polls better among MPhil and PhD students

When making hostel visits to shore up support, Mukesh predicts a major victory in the Monday poll—1200 votes for his campaign, 25 more than Rohit's total from the previous year. Mukesh says that the ABVP has performed poorly since its narrow 2000 presidential victory because of "leftist organisations' propaganda and polarisation", but that this year will be different. Along with him is Ramesh, who recently returned from Israel where he inspected the new West Bank security wall. A similar barrier on India's western border may be necessary, he says.

If it is true that some students vote for the SFI because it is perceived as the inevitable victor, some students back the ABVP just to protest the SFI. On election night, Rajnish, a Patna native studying Japanese, shrugs his shoulders and laughs when asked about his vote. "I

have no option. I don't like the 'left', so I support the ABVP". Samir, a friend of Rajnish's from Bhagalpur, huddles in a wool shawl and laments what he expects will be an ABVP defeat. "We've been unable to convince the girls on campus to vote for us. Most of them are from West Bengal and vote for the SFI".

'We're here to study'

Between the close of polls at five o'clock on election day and the post-dinner rallies, the maroon tent is nearly empty. Candidates steal a few hours of sleep before the all-nighter or meet in private to make assessments. A few party organisers, including Kavita and Sunny, sit with groups of a half-dozen cadre as dhaba workers unpack trays of food between the tent and the counters' building.

The NSUI has taken up position on the far left tonight in the tent, leaving AISA and SFI squeezed together in the middle. At 8.30 pm, no JNU students are on hand at the NSUI table, but a few national body representatives and Delhi University joint secretary Pankaj Kochar are sitting behind the table. Pankaj, who won his seat by an impressive 6,748 votes, slouches in a folding chair and says he does not want to discuss JNU politics. He came out tonight, he says, "to enjoy the election", but his insights are limited to predicting a resounding NSUI victory; his attendance appears required. Facing Pankaj in another chair is Kuntal Krishna, the NSUI national spokesperson, who is eager to talk, though he sticks to platitudes about progressivism and secularism, offering a circular analysis on the elections.

"Why should JNU students elect Prem Chand president?"

"Because Prem Chand is the NSUI unit president".

"But why should students support him?"

"Because he represents the ideology of NSUI".

Kuntal, whose maternal grandfather was a Congress minister in Bihar in the seventies, dismisses charges from critics that the organisation has no guiding ideology and slips back into a discussion of progressivism, which he says is "not indulging in anti-social activities, like terrorism". Behind Kuntal, Avantika Makan, national general secretary of NSUI and daughter of Delhi State Transport Minister Ajay Makan, concludes a mobile phone call, and the three of them briefly elaborate on NSUI's national activities. Avantika mentions a recent visit she made to Cotton College in Guwahati, and Krishna says that he has just returned from Allahabad University, where students voted in favour of the NSUI. All three say they plan to run for office as Congress candidates after completing their studies, and Pankaj casually mentions that he will stand for the DUSU presidency in 2004. Where will they be in twenty years? Kuntal and Avantika suggest perhaps the Lok Sabha; Pankaj goes as far as to suggest prime ministership!

The NSUI has not won a councillor or central panel seat in a JNU election for a dozen years, and it lacks the organisational base on campus of the three other major groups. But is has a stronger national organisation—NSUI student unions are in power in several universities in the states and since many JNU students previously studied at Delhi University in the north of the city, the NSUI's rout of the ABVP there is expected to bolster the organisation's profile here in the south Delhi campus. Also, political heavy-weights like Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit visited campus the Thursday before the election to rally support for the NSUI.

While the ABVP and 'left' groups rely, respectively, on rhetoric about "Paki Marxism" and "communal fascism", the NSUI paints itself as a clean-cut organisation eschewing extremism. Printed political art is banned at JNU, so groups produce gigantic hand-made creations; in the Teflas canteen, an ABVP placard denounces the rape of women in CPI-M-ruled West Bengal, while next to it a colourful AISA design shows a female figure in cubic repose above the World Social Forum motto "Another World is Possible". At the front of the canteen, on a wall visible from the student union door, is a poster with one of NSUI's central messages: "We are here to study, not to fight". On it, gangs of ABVP and SFI students square off with *lathis* (cane sticks), while below NSUI supporters sit on the ground clutching their heads.

Praveen Kumar Nayak, an NSUI councillor candidate in the School of Social Sciences, from Chattisgarh, epitomises the conscientious image his group tries to project. A first-year student from a Congress family, on election night he stands at the back left of the tent, shaking hands with supporters and conferring with other NSUI candidates. He has a businesslike air slightly incongruent with the night's blend of festivity and combativeness, his starched collared shift tucked neatly into pressed khaki pants, a Nokia mobile phone in his left hand put to use every few minutes for short, punchy conversations. "The NSUI has challenged the SFI, and now they're mentally threatened by us", Praveen says, but he's also mindful that weakening the SFI could help other rival parties. "Inteshar and Mona have worked hard", he concedes, referring to AISA's presidential and general secretary candidates. Ashik, a soft-spoken NSUI backer from Kerala, is more direct than Praveen. "SFI will win", he shrugs.

Prem Chand, NSUI's presidential candidate, sits cross-legged at the centre of two dozen supporters, slouched over in a shawl and chatting with a fellow candidate as the cadre chant about a predicted victory. The campaign is over now, and Prem is trying to manage expectations. "I didn't perform well in my [presidential debate] speech", he says. "The AISA and Samajwadi Party candidates' speeches were issue-related and ideological. I'm not a strong orator". In the next NSUI circle sits Batti Lal Bairwa, one of the former SFI-JNUSU presidents who joined the Congress. Batti, who hails from a dalit family in Rajasthan, says he grew disillusioned with the CPI-M because of its limited reach

throughout the country. "The Congress fights against saffronisation. The CPI-M talks about fighting saffronisation, but it can't fight it outside of three states".

A new day

At nine on Tuesday morning, sixteen hours after voting ended, the crowd has dispersed and Kavita and Sunny are reviewing the polling information thus far released at their respective tables. Behind them, a few dozen students wrapped in blankets sleep on the ground amidst a sea of tattered campaign fliers. There is no news yet of results from the central panel, but the councillor seat picture is coming into focus: SFI held three seats in the School of International Studies, the remaining two going to AISA and NSUI, and the School of Languages delivered all four of its seats to SFI. At 60 percent, voter turnout is within a percentage point of last year's.

Tuesday morning is partially occupied by the fallout from a late-night confrontation between SFI and NSUI supporters. Jayant, a first-year student with no ties to JNU's political formations, says that SFI and NSUI supporters hoisting flags pushed into each other during a shouting match around two-thirty, and the shoving led to a few punches being thrown; a female student left with a black eye. Jayant, who had been excited about the election, says that next year he won't vote, as "these groups aren't interested in ideology, they're interested in money and power". On Wednesday, 22 October, Madhumita Chakraborty, the NSUI unit convener, calls on members at a public meeting to "support the organisation" in the event that sexual harassment charges stemming from the incident are filled against NSUI rank-and-file. At week's end, the ABVP capitalises on the incident, declaring in a public release that, "the SFI determinedly upheld their legacy of lumpenism and grappled with the NSUI with all its ferocity".

> Will Hindutva acquire staying power at what is India's most left-leaning university? Will the national political scene and mainstream culture seep into this insulated university?

By five in the evening, although the vote total has not been finalised, the electoral trends are clear: Rohit, Ena and Murtaza Ali Athar, three SFI candidates for the central panel, are safely ahead, and the AISA general secretary candidate Mona Das will claim a seat in the next union. But the losers are not inconsolable. Prem Chand, the defeated Congress presidential candidate, stands on the NSUI table, rallying a group of supporters to the cry "March on Prem Chand!" and Ashok Sharma, the ABVP's spokesperson, says that this year's returns put his party in a strong position for 2004. "Next year we'll sweep the polls", he predicts. "There will be a divide in the 'left' and we'll sweep in. Mona Das' victory will help us out".

The returns hold mixed lessons for each of the parties. The SFI is satisfied that it maintained power, taking 16 councillor seats on top of its central panel majority, but, as a post-election statement puts it, "it will be our effort in the coming times to rectify our shortcomings and live up to the expectations of the student community". AISA perhaps gained the most, winning a central panel seat and two councillorships with its small base. However, other than Mona, its central panel candidates failed poorly. For the NSUI, it is disappointing to have claimed only one councillor seat, but the organisation's vote total gained significantly, finishing second in presidential polling after garnering only 8 percent in 2002. The ABVP, which saw its share of the central panel vote continue to drop, perhaps fared worst in the elections, but at least it can take solace in its grip on the 'safe' councillor seats in schools where the SFI presence is weak or absent.

The Friday after the elections, Diwali eve, Sunny Dutta, dressed in jeans and a black leather jacket, is back on campus to meet with ABVP students. The ABVP made a disappointing showing in the elections, he says, because of internal problems in the campus unit—a group of dissidents felt alienated and failed to bring out the vote. He praises Mona Das for her well-run campaign, and, appearing to change his opinion on covert left collusion, says that the message from this year's election is that students vote for people, not parties, hence why AISA's vote-take on the central panel ranged from 291 to 1064. He says that he will spend the next six months dividing his time between revitalising the JNU ABVP unit, building up the BJP's World Youth Council Against Terrorism, and organising non-political programmes with embassies in Delhi.

Praveen Nayak, the NSUI councillor candidate, is likewise optimistic about next year despite having polled only 127 votes this time around. "People at JNU have accepted that NSUI is an alternative to the extreme left and right", he says, and notes that a fellow NSUI councillor candidate in the School of Social Sciences lost by only 11 votes. "We weren't strong before the elections, but now we are".

Members of all parties note that Lok Sabha elections will occur next year, and look forward to the coat-tail effects of a successful campaign by their parent bodies. Intuitively, the ABVP and NSUI stand the most to gain, as neither the CPI-M nor the CPI-ML are likely to play a determining role in the 2004 national elections. If the ABVP recaptures the JNU presidential post after a four-year drought, it . If the NSUI wins, it would suggest that the national political scene characterised by a BJP-Congress divide has finally seeped into this insulated university.

Words struggling to break the shackle

If they snatch my ink and pen,
I should not complain,
For I have dipped my fingers
In the blood of my heart.
I should not complain
Even if they seal my tongue,
For every ring of my chain
Is a tongue ready to speak.
—*Faiz Ahmad Faiz (translated by Azfar Hussain)*

Kabuli voice

In Kabul, people have started talking. There are not just cursing the Taliban. Many of them are also loudly complaining about how bad things are in their locality, their city, their country. Afghans have begun to ask: why are the Americans hitting their children in bombardments. Sometimes eloquence can be a pose to hide one's fears and frustrations. More often, however, it reflects the warmth of confidence, which is what in the end melts the icy block of silence and un-democracy. For millennia, the image of normality in any human society has remained the same—people talking. And boy, are they talking across South Asia!

Bellicose army

Pakistanis are talking too, but more about the future than the glory, suffering, or the shame—real or imagined—of the past. The authoritarian regime of General Musharraf seems to have realised that unless it can deliver something dramatic—peace on the eastern front, development in the western region or social harmony in the south—its days are numbered, verdict of the rigged referendum (98 percent voters granting a five-year term to a self-appointed 'president' generalissimo) and the highly contentious provisions of the Legal Framework Order (LFO) notwithstanding.

Post-9/11, Pakistanis know that their sovereignty is not unconditional. Even an impressive arsenal of nuclear weapons and missiles has little meaning if it is not backed by popular support. Subservience to the generals of CentCom is the price that the defense forces of Pakistan pay for their bellicosity at home, where they prosecute people on such flimsy grounds as "causing humiliation to the country's armed forces". However, when the 'authorities' harass an Amir Mir for his views, voices in his defence are not intimidated by the prospect of retaliatory prosecution anymore.

The words of the Pakistani voices are not unidirectional. While running down India is still the main theme of the official discourse, even the chattering classes of Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore have begun to ask themselves: why is that Pakistan is one of the only two nations outside of sub-Saharan Africa—the other being Nepal—placed at the bottom rung of the Human Development Index? That one question will probably do what constitutionally proscribing military coups has failed to achieve: challenge the legitimacy of ambitious generals who undermine civil regimes, overthrow them on the slightest pretext, and then rule as if they were a breed apart from all others. The defense forces of Pakistan have lorded over the country for much of its history, but what the generals have to show for it is not very inspiring—dismemberment, backwardness, underdevelopment, and disillusionment of a nation of limitless potential.

Tibetan silence

On the other side of Himalaya, native Tibetans have not yet started talking. Silence is still the medium of their protest. The ones in exile do speak, but over the decades, they have developed their own stakes that are somewhat different from what Tibetans living in Tibet want for themselves. It is doubtful that what Richard Gere says is indeed in the larger interest of the Tibetan people. After years of suffering and struggle, HH Dalai Lama appears to have realised that the trail from Dharamshala to Lhasa passes through Beijing.

Sooner than later, the mandarins in Beijing are going to realise that their interests and the desire of His Holiness have begun to converge. The temporal ambitions of the post-communist regime in China and the material aspirations of entrepreneurial Tibetans of a new generation are not all that different—both of them perhaps wish to see Indo-Chinese trade grow manifold from the USD 7 billion annually at present and to be able to cash in on it. Re-establishment of the primacy of the Potala Palace in Tibet is sure to be mutually beneficial. It will not be very surprising if the railway brings optimism, along with goods and services. For now, all we hear from the activists are the fears of further Han-isation of Tibet, which is doubtless also true. But for Tibetans to begin to take charge of their own affairs—and stand up to the Han influx—Tibetans have to find their own voice and stop depending upon the noise created by western dharma lobbies and others with their own axes to grind against the Chinese.

Aung San

In Burma, renamed Myanmar by its superstitious generals, words remain in chains. But that will change too. How long can Rangoon continue to resist the pressure of world opinion and yet hope to engage in trade, get aid, and wish that the portion of the Asian Highway passing through its territory be built? Sanctions upon the military regime did not work, constructive engagement—with appropriate carrots and sticks—probably

will. The military rulers of Burma cannot keep Aung San in endless custody.

Dwikhandita

The morality police continue to prowl the streets of Dhaka, where Bangladeshi authorities once again banned celebrity-author Taslima Nasreen. Earlier, she survived the fatwa, a price on her head, and death threats, for *Lajja*—a powerful story indifferently told. Nasreen is sure to survive the present pillorying as well, but why is a society as tolerant as that of the Bengalis fearful of a book as pedestrian as *Dwikhandita* is said to be? A critic described the book as "a good casual read, but not literature", but even that did not deter the leftist government of West Bengal from banning it in that state too. The author must surely welcome the free publicity. I read *Lajja* in Nepali translation; perhaps the ban and consequent controversy will inspire the same translator to work on *Dwikhandita* too? Repressed voices have their own ways of sneaking out and spreading.

Train to Bihar

Parochial Asamiyas attacked Bihari migrants in the Indian Northeast and opened the wounds of the Nellie massacre of 1983. The shock troops of Laloo did not exactly cover themselves in glory either when in retaliation they attacked hapless Assamese passengers in trains passing through Bihar. The inability to express oneself verbally is perhaps one of the factors that drives societies to violence. Violence can only be countered by voices, not more violence.

The accursed state of Bihar was also the stage of a tragic act of silencing. Satyendra Dubey, a 31-year civil engineer working with the Golden Quadrangle Highway, a pet project of Atal Behari Vajpayee, was killed because he had dared to write to the prime minister to demand that the rampant corruption in the National Highway Authority project be investigated. Dubey had made the specific request that his name be kept secret, but people in the office of the prime minister made sure that it was exposed. I mourn the death of Satyendra (the deity of truth) Dubey, and am impressed by the iron resolve of his father, who says that all he wants is justice, not compensation for the death of his truth-seeking son. Hopefully, the spirit of Satyendra will continue to harass the conscience of the comfortable classes of India even as his father seeks justice. Voices of truth have an uncanny habit of rising over the artificial din of falsehood.

Amma with cape

In Madras, which is now Chennai, loyal acolytes of the Lady with Several Cupboards-Full of Silk Saris and Fancy Shoes struck again, when the Tamil Nadu Assembly exercised its privilege to prosecute and punish journalists. To send an unmistakable message that no one was above the whims of the Amma in Cape, the Tamil Nadu assembly chose to tackle the most respected of them all—*The Hindu* group. Happily, the boomerang has been even more powerful. In the wake of the Tamil Nadu state assembly versus *The Hindu* controversy, the press, the intelligentsia, and society at large seem to have come to a common conclusion, which is that whenever there is a conflict between the powers of the state (legislature, executive and the judiciary) and the fundamental rights of citizens, the latter must prevail.

Kathmandu's democracy

In Nepal, voices of reason continue to languish on the margins while the fight between the extremism of the left and the right occupy centre stage. Stung by criticism, the extra-legal regime presently ruling from the Singha Darbar secretariat has sought to retaliate with an insidious campaign against democratic politics and independent press. However, challenges before the military-backed non-representative regime appointed by the king are hardly slight. Over a decade of raucous democracy in the country has instilled a culture of asking questions. Even when no answers are presently forthcoming, the powers that would ignore the barrage of enquiry do it at their own peril.

Lankan general

It is the persistent questioning of the general population that has stopped President Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka from completely derailing the peace process initiated by her Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. President Kumaratunga was snubbed by the international community, too, when her international affairs advisor, Lakshman Kadirgamar, lost the race for the post of Secretary General of Commonwealth to current incumbent Don McKinnon of New Zealand. The questioning has become so persistent that even the army chief of Sri Lanka was forced to admit the inevitability of the peace process. "There was temporary suspension of the peace talks. They will resume as soon as a consensus is reached between the Sri Lankan president and the prime minister", Lieutenant General P L Balagalle reportedly proclaimed in Srinagar while on a visit to Kashmir. People's voices find expression in the strangest of places.

SAARC and freedom

When the heads (of state or government) of SAARC member states gather for a summit in Islamabad in the first week of January 2004, there is one decision they must take—they must vow to break the chains that shackle the voices of protest in their respective countries. In fact, they can go a little further than that and declare collectively that all South Asians are free to speak for and against any issue that involves one, several, or all the countries of the Subcontinent. But, you ask, would that not be asking a bit too much of a collective that is made up of presidents Kumaratunga and Musharraf, and prime ministers Thapa, Zia and Vajpayee? Perhaps.

How do you confront a century?

There's a funny thing about naming empires. There was the Roman Empire, the British Empire, the French Empire, even the Belgians had an empire. Those are the kinds of empires that we've grown up with. They are empires which identify a people and a place as the carriers of that empire.

Yet people seldom, today, refer to the US Empire. The US doesn't like to refer to itself this way. In 1941, Henry Luce wrote his famous essay in *Life* magazine about the American Century. Sixty years later, the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) advocates what it calls "American global leadership". The PNAC brings together the likes of Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and other key members of the Bush administration. They claim the next hundred years are 'ours'.

They're claiming not a place, but every place, for the next hundred years. So, the US empire is both intrinsically global and not actually, necessarily, about occupying territory per se. The implication, of course, is that whether you want it or not, you're all within the boundaries of the American Empire, whether you are in Pakistan or Botswana. Because you are all living in the Twentieth Century and now the Twenty-first Century. How do you confront a century?

Empire is not just about geography and history, it's about a relationship. Too often, we use a lazy notion of empire. We think of Roman legions, British ships, American troops chasing up and down. The important aspect about the imperial relationship are those who are willing to collaborate with empire. There are not just economic dependencies, but social and cultural ones.

In analysing 19th century British novels, the late Edward Said pointed out that underneath all the politeness of society, there is this substructure of domination and exploitation at work. Said reminds us to pay attention to what's there, but not spelt out. This is the architecture of the building. Don't just look at the interior décor.

Now the Bush administration has embraced imperialism as a policy. This is not a matter of any debate or dispute. If you read their most recent imperial edict, it's called the National Security Strategy of the United States, September, 2002 . It starts out by saying, "The United States possesses unprecedented and unequaled strength and influence in the world". Unprecedented and unequal. Strength and influence. It draws distinctions between these things that are important. In other words, we are capable of being imperialists.

Second, this is a time of opportunity for America. In other words, the US government plans to use its strength and influence to extend imperial control. The third part is the classic imperial rationale. The aim of this strategy, it says, is to help make the world not just safer but better. We're going to make the whole world better. How can you argue with that?

What do you say? But all empire builders make the same spurious claim.

Many of the people who are in power in the George W Bush administration, were also there in the first President Bush's administration. They produced in 1992 this infamous document called *Defense Planning Guidance 1992* . It was written for Cheney by Wolfowitz and others at the end of the Cold War to say, OK, we won. What do we do now?

Our first objective, it says, is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere. The strategy requires that we endeavour to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region. Cheney and friends are not just talking about dominating the world, they're saying we're not even going to let any power arise that can dominate a region of the world, especially a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. In other words, the route to power is through control of the resources that are in regions. We will not let any power gain control over those resources, even in their own region.

But there are inconsistencies, of course, because in the pursuit of empire, of political collaboration rather than just brute force, you have to work with the people who are in charge in all these other countries. Power often only recognises power. So what does the US do? It says, well, who's the most powerful institution in these countries? It's usually the military. What does the military want? More guns. So, we'll sell them some. Then the military will be our friends and that's the end of that. They won't want to fight us because we sell them guns.

So it should come as no surprise that consistently now, for over a decade, the US has been overwhelmingly the largest global supplier of weapons to the world. As a single state it is now responsible for over 45 percent of all the arms sales in the world. That leaves the other 192 countries in the world making up the rest. Now, you'd think selling weapons when you're trying to rule the world was a bad idea. But, empire has contradictions. You want to work with institutions that are powerful, you want a currency that you can deal with them in and so then you sell them guns. Sometimes those guns are turned against you, and you're stuck. Since the US has more weapons, it presumes it will prevail.

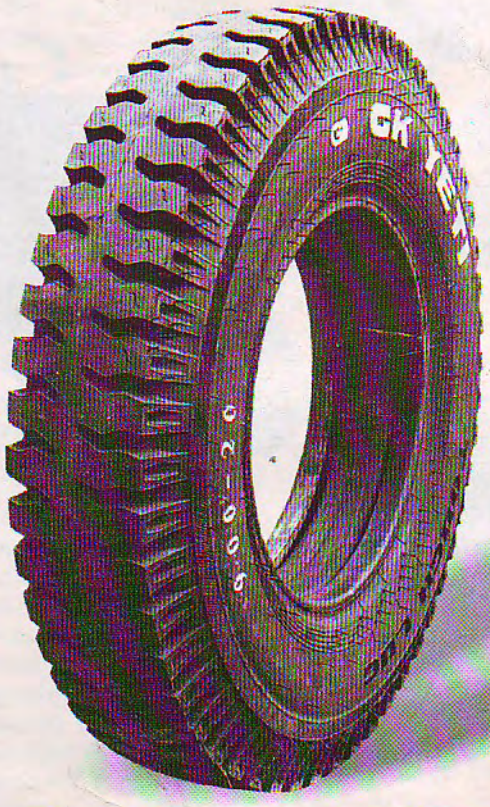
-Zia Mian

SEASONS GREETINGS

- Bolivia Colombia Haiti Peru Venezuela
- Georgia Kosovo Russia Spain Turkey United Kingdom Greece
- Afghanistan Bangladesh Burma Cambodia China East Timor India - Pakistan Sri Lanka Indonesia Kyrgyz Republic Nepal North Korea Philipines Solomon Islands Uzbekistan
- Iran Iraq Israel Jordon Kuwait Lebanon Yemen
- Algeria Tunisia Angola Burundi Central African Republic Chad Congo Democratic Republic of Congo Ghana Guinea Ivory Coast Kenya Liberia Nigeria Senegal Somalia South Africa Sudan Uganda Zimbabwe

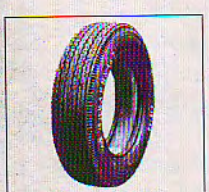
WARM WISHES?

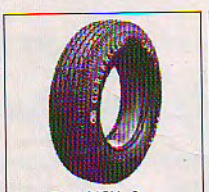
NEPAL'S NO. 1



MARK OF QUALITY

GORAKHKALI Tyres


Tyre: GORKHKALI
Size: 6.15-13-4PR
Uses: Car/Taxi


Tyre: CABY - 2
Size: 6.00-12-4PR
Uses: Car/Taxi


Tyre: GK GOLD
Size: 10.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck


Tyre: GK TYRE
Size: 9.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck


Tyre: GK YETI TOUCH LUG
Size: 9.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck


Tyre: GORKHKALI SEMI LUG
Size: 9.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck


Tyre: GORKHKALI RIB
Size: 6.50-16-8PR
Uses: Mini Bus/Jeep

GORAKHKALI RUBBER UDYOG LTD.

Marketing Office:
P.O.Box No.:1700, Kalimati, Kathmandu
Tel: 4274537, 4271102, 4276274
Fax: 00977-1-4270367
E-mail: grul@wlink.com.np

Plant & Head Office:
Majuwa, Deurali, Gorkha, Nepal
Tel: 065-540079
Fax: 00977-65-540080