

HIMAL

S O U T H A S I A N



India-Amrika bhai bhai

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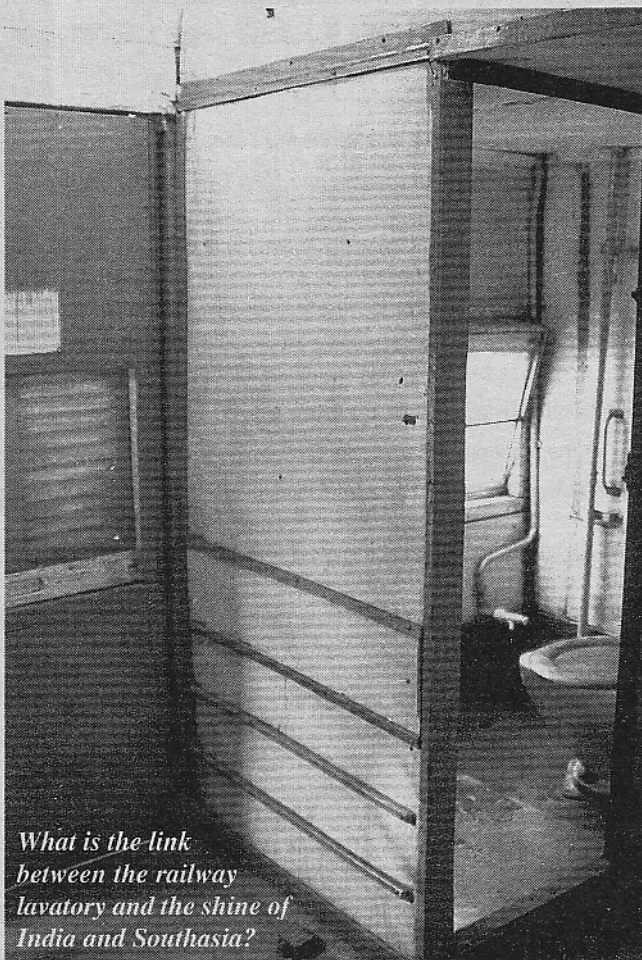
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What is the link between the railway lavatory and the shine of India and Southasia?

Southasia Un- Shining

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Bravery documentary awards

I AM amused by some of the suggestions in Nupur Basu's article 'Jury out on the Jury' (*Himal* November 2003) that jury members should take note of the "difficult circumstances" in which documentaries have been made as a criteria in judging films. The allegation that the Jury members at Film South Asia '03 have been 'apolitical' because they have not given away prizes to films that Basu (and others) think is 'political' is absurd and ultimately ruinous for documentary filmmaking. Basu seems to consider documentary films as not an art form but an extension of activism and brave journalism. While bravery is certainly commendable, the yardstick for judging documentaries should also extend to matters concerning style and treatment. Aesthetic choices are never standard and will always differ and we will have to live with that. And of course, style and treatment like content is also a political choice.

This is not a defence of Film South Asia, as I have never attended one and my recent film *Tales of the Night Fairies* was not even chosen to be part of the 2003 Festival. Moreover, I do not even know what films have won the prizes. I am responding to the suggestion that documentaries should be judged by the context and not the text, the intention and not the execution - at least, not necessarily!

For many years, Bombay films never went to international film festivals but they carried on with an élan that we documentary filmmakers should emulate. Making documentaries should be about the fun of making it and sharing it with others whether inside or outside festivals. It should be about building constituencies, spaces and audiences and about a varied practice embracing a multitude of styles and formal concerns. Documentaries such as *Bowling for Columbine* by Roger Moore, like the earlier *Roger and Me*, would have been equally inspiring had it not won so many awards. In fact, documentary filmmaking will have arrived - like the Bombay film - when festivals and prizes cease to matter.

Till then, let us remember that no jury in the world makes everyone happy, just as no film in the world makes everybody happy. Of course, there is space to institute Bravery Awards but that is a different matter altogether!

Shohini Ghosh

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Back then

I WOULD like to add something to what is carried in the article 'Special editions and rubber barons' (*Himal* May 2003), even though this response comes nearly a year later. I know of *Madhyamam* (the newspaper mentioned) because I happened to live in the Malabar region (north Kerala) for some time. It would be interesting to note the articles in *Madhyamam* during the war against the Taliban. One would not be surprised if you happen to come across pro-Taliban articles in this paper. Also, every family in this region has someone in the gulf countries and it makes commercial sense to write anti-war articles. In a way, the so-called peace initiative of the paper was only to appease the minds of the Muslim readers. I happened to hear a speech by a Member of Parliament from that region in a college there. The Taliban had been ousted then. The speech was not only pro-Taliban, but the MP went on to support the spreading of anthrax in the United States. I was left angered and wondering. Thinking of the Taliban ouster as a 'holy war' between Christians and Muslims was absurd. In a way the paper is biased when it comes to "American war".

When the author writes that *Madhyamam* is a reformist paper, he is absolutely right. The paper does bring into light the backwardness of the region and does take steps to root out some of the outmoded beliefs and customs of the region.

Praveen (via email)

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Southasia Shining...

INDIA MAKES up the larger part of Southasia by land-mass and population, and so if India were shining one could make the argument that so would Southasia. But this would only make sense if India's brilliant glow were spread over its one billion-plus population, in which case the economic and social revival in its thousand manifestations would also extend across the Sub-continent and outlying regions.

The gentlemen who rule from New Delhi at the moment would like us to believe in the run-up to the general elections of April-May that India is indeed resplendent, sending off rays of light, sparkling like the diadem catching a shaft of the bright early summer sun. The reality is that India shimmers only for the upper middle classes, the few score million, enjoying the post-modern, post-protectionist consumerist boom. The point that the Indian sun shines for but a few does not demand a debate, although we are aghast at Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party's inability get the point across. Mrs Gandhi has not been able to challenge the hype and get the message across that over 400 million Indians are underemployed, under-productive, underfed, underclad, undersheltered and undereducated. The academics are crying themselves hoarse, but this is political terrain.

The rest of the Southasian elite would gladly go along with the feelgood vibes emanating from the Jamuna banks, given that their societies are even less egalitarian than India's. And the interests of the Anglophone urban superelites are actually tied together as part of the charmed Southasian circle that is at ease with each other in gymkhanas from Dhaka to Quetta. So when New Delhi claims that India sizzles, the well-to-do in Karachi and Kathmandu are dazzled. And everyone fervently believes in the trickle down which will at some point of time touch the masses. Those who remind of starvation deaths, suicide-prone farmers, labourers pawning blood and kidney, mothers selling children to slave labour, are merely trying to spoil the fun.

These economic upper classes ride the crest of unrepresentative polities, whether democracy or dictatorship. And they meet each other at airport departure lounges all the time, exclaiming at 'what a small world it is'. In reality, it is not that the world is undersized, but that the Anglophones of Southasia are a very small group. Among them, there is no more than two

degrees of separation — between the NGO chieftan of Islamabad and the senior bureaucrat in Dhaka and the executive of the Indian multinational in Bombay. Going by this criterion, Southasia is actually already one country.

Vernacular Southasia

Those who live secure lives in Baridara or Bonani (Dhaka), Qutub Enclave (Haryana), Sector V (Islamabad) or Cinnamon Gardens (Colombo), in faux Greco-Roman towers coming up all over with polished marble-floor lobbies and airconditioning to keep out the evening chill, can really feel the rays of shining India touching their face. But then reality strikes looking down just about anywhere, for there are shanties in the shadow of the high-rise without running water, whose occupants defecate in the open nullah over there. Just outside the grand Greco-Roman gates, the dusty road has no footpath and the cobbler has his shop on the street. The child labourer (tribal? dalit? *Gorkha?*) scurries about serving the customers at the chaiwallah's stall.

Much is made of the Great Indian Middle Class, without ever defining what where lies the 'middle', are we talking rural or urban, how wide a band are we including within the spectrum, and are we not all wanting to call ourselves middle because we really know that we are upper. The real middle class properly defined as filling the center of the demographic spectrum, surprise, does not speak English and makes up the bulk of the urban and small-town populace, far from rejoicing today suffers in the miasma of unfulfilled expectations. Unlike for the absolute poor, whose hopes from society are at nil and survival the mantra, the frustrations for the millions of the true middle class come with the chagrin of seeing others 'make it'. That is where the violent revolutions of future Southasia are made.

If there was one group that could have brought Southasia together, it would have been the Anglophones, because they essentially are of the same nation. When India and Pakistan go to war as they do, the generals on both sides speak to BBC Television with the identical English accent. Yet, other than the members of the India Pakistan People's Forum crying in the wilderness, Anglophone Southasia prefers to remain above the muck of politics, speaking liberal language

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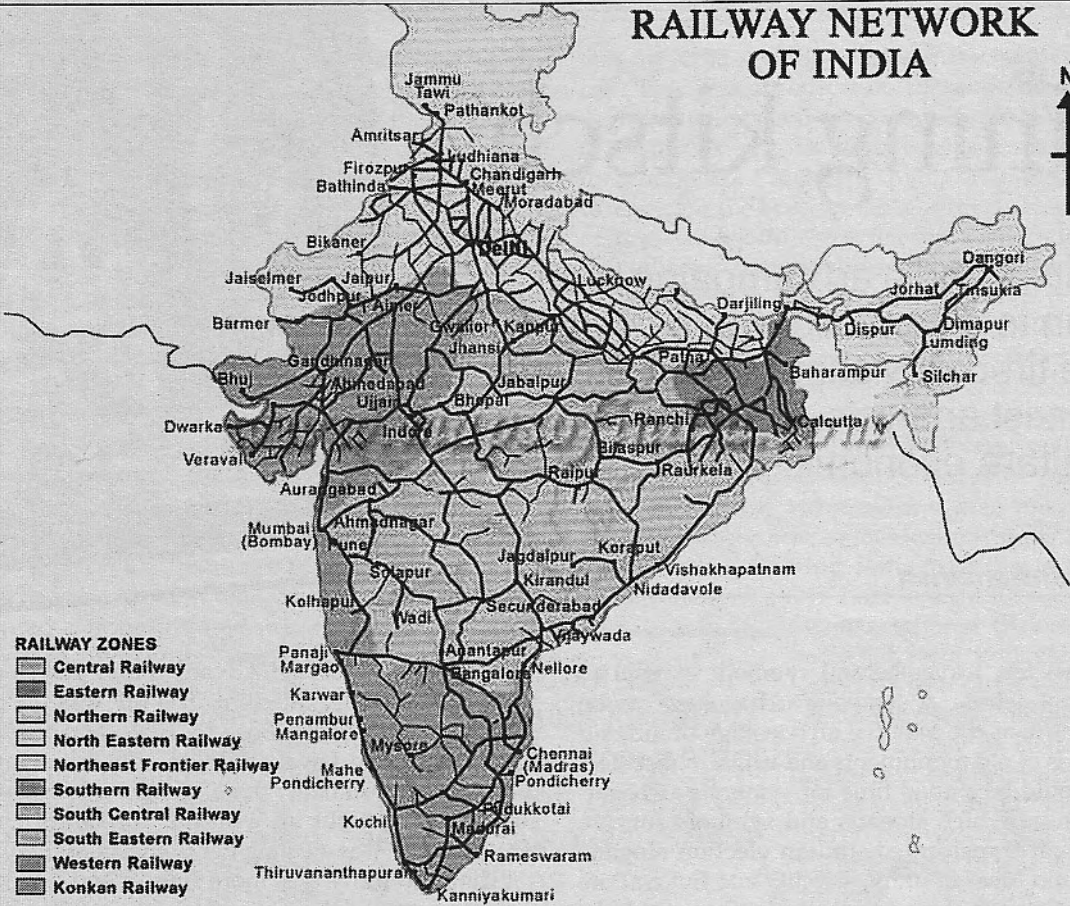
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RAILWAY NETWORK OF INDIA



without doing anything concrete on the ground either to bring about peace or a more egalitarian society.

The India Shining campaign is aimed at this Anglophone India which basks, not Vernacular India. The original ad campaign was conceptualised in English and developed in English by the agency Grey Worldwide India, whose creative director defends the commercials on almost every English talk-show beamed via satellite. Only lately and lamely has the GOI been trying to convert the line into other languages, Bharat Udaya....

The rest of Southasia's Anglophones also like the India Shining campaign, because you can always ride the coattails of the Indian upper classes. That much trickle down and across, then is.

Railway loo

Bagdogra is the town next to Siliguri in the 'chicken's neck' that separates the Indian Northeast from the mainland. It is part of the historically depressed region of northern India, which extends in one sweep from lower Assam through the Duars, West Bengal, across the expanse of Bihar and over to Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Everything about the chicken's neck reeks of underdevelopment, but not Bagdogra Airport, which is all sparkle and chrome, catering to the classes who have discovered flight.

Just a few miles away from the aerodrome, is the

important railway junction of New Jalpaiguri which remains saddled with its colonial era sheds and platforms, but with post-colonial squalor that is the lot of the railway traveller. With the deep pockets of Southasia migrating to air travel, the railways as the most cost-effective and egalitarian of transportation systems, are losing out.

Once on the train out of New Jalpaiguri, this one happens to be the Kanchenjunga Express bound for Guwahati, a visit to the toilet vestibule indicates once again the continuing and expanding class divide. The lavatory pan of Indian Railways hasn't changed in a century, and the excreta drops directly into the tracks and sleepers whizzing past below.

The entire grand network of the Indian Railways, the largest in the world at 81,511 kilometres, is one massive latrine network where train travellers (First Class, Airconditioned First and Second, Second Class) dump their 'night-soil'. Toilets were first introduced into the Indian Railways upper classes in 1891 and 1907 in the lower classes. Since then, into 2004, those who live along the tracks, rural and urban, have continued to suffer the indignity of being at the receiving end.

Until the movers and shakers of India (and Southasia) are sensitive enough to ensure that their railways begin to have on-board collection and disposal of sewage slurry, India (and Southasia) will never get the glow that is being claimed. △

Shining kitsch

The Shining India ad campaign is an invitation to a semiotic war, a blitz aimed at those tired of Malthusian predictions and Marxist analysis. Positive thinking over welfare economics.

by Shiv Vishwanathan

Every society leaves behind symbolic as well as material debris. A symbolic archaeology can be as fruitful as the material archaeology of moving around debris of old monuments and ruins. In fact election time would be a good time for symbolic archaeology to examine which slogans and symbols survive and which get transformed. Indian election slogans revolve around ideas of unity, stability and innovation. They are meditations of how parts fit into a bigger whole. Thus, we had the great slogans of *garibi hatao, roti kapda aur makan, jai jawan jai kisan*, or Rajiv Gandhi's 'India in the 21st century'. Each was a statement of how India was to be united; each a commitment to a nation-state project. Most of the 50 years of Indian independence were dominated by the Congress Party living off its nationalist symbols like the Nehru cap, the Gandhian *charkha*, Sardar Patel's integrity or decisiveness, the large dams as temples of modern India, or the Green Revolution. The question is how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) enters this symbolic space. It is a parvenu. It realises its own symbols would not take it too far — the lotus is hardly the *Ashok Chakra* or the *khadi* in terms of emotive power. It has to indulge in the politics of brand management. True, it does not have the Sumantra Ghosals or David Ogilvy by its side but it knows it has to fight a semiotic war to redefine nation, state, history, economics and geography.

The semiotic war that the BJP fought was conducted at four levels. First were the present Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani's rath-yatras (the age of 'Toyota chariots') that were generalised events. They galvanised the party more than the people. It used modern mediums to capture old symbolic domains. The second battle was conducted by appropriating Congress Party symbolism. If the Congress gobbled up nationalism, what would be left for the BJP? What it generated therefore were acts of mimicry where Vajpayee was projected as

a Nehruvian avatar and Advani as his Patel clone. The shades were subtly different. The BJP was the party of patriots, from Subash Bose to Tilak, and from Lajpat Rai to Patel, and Jawaharlal was only a variant on the theme. It was brilliantly done. Congress president Sonia Gandhi was caught up with the 'foreign origin' issue while the BJP was stealing her domestic symbolic ware.

The third move was more sinister and fought out in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots. One had to create symbolic legitimisation for the riots and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi managed that through a set of symbolic binaries - secular versus religious, inside versus outside, Delhi versus Gujarat, English language versus regional papers, the Westernised elite versus Gujarati people. The secular press, including NDTV, played into the internalisation of these appositions and created a constituency for Modi. The ordinary Gujarati felt he had been misunderstood by Delhi. As Modi put it in "their" collective voice, "What does Delhi think, that 50 lakh Gujarati's are murderers and rapists?" Semiotically he was home with his cosy communalism hiding its genocidal Janus face. He thanked the English language press especially NDTV for letting him romp home during the elections. But Advani, along with Arun Jaitley (Union Minister for Law, Justice & Company Affairs) and Pramod Mahajan (the BJP General Secretary) realised that these old controversies and symbols alone would not do. The BJP had to look more global, more youthful, more achievement-oriented. BJP politics had to promise consumption accessible to more. It had to be user friendly — not the party which kept mobilising the past, but the party which was an invitation to the future. Talking about *Bharat* was a loser's strategy. It struck a whining note of those left behind or left out. Also *Jai Shree Ram* was hardly a visiting card to be handed out to the new generation. One had to fuse time and space, and especially generations, in a new





way. It was the Congress that was to have the handicap of history. The campaign could not be conducted negatively — it was not enough to show that the Congress combination of socialist realism and dynastic rule led to a stifling of both history and the future. It was not enough to hint that Omar Abdullah (son of National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah), Sachin Pilot (son of late Congress leader Rajesh Pilot) and Jyotiraditya Scindia (son of late Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia), the polished new Turks of the Congress were also dynasts still suffering Oedipally from Congress rule.

The BJP needed a new myth, a picture of India as a new set of coalitions in virtual reality. It could not be a summons to religion, caste, tradition or language. One needed a language which was open-ended but not secular; that was hospitable, but offering a notion of values and productivity; that smelt not of envy but of success; that was an invitation but worked like a summons; that represented a fraternity and not a club where everyone wanted membership. A notion of India that made one feel good, which smacked not of corruption, disasters and nepotism but of untrammelled success — not local success but global success. Only four things talked this language — cricket, Bollywood, the Diaspora and the IT/IIT industry. Each was unapologetically Indian but globally resonant. A notion of unity that was not civilisational but material, a combined supermarket of dreams and values.

Something that Doordarshan could screen and MTV would not be embarrassed about. Semiotic wars are not easy, and the BJP had got it right again. It was called shining India. It was a new friendly hypothesis on India. It had the makings of a surrogate myth.

Doomsday brigade

There are two things we must try to understand. Firstly, the psychology of the myth and the psychological tactics of those opposed to the myth. Subsequently, we can explore the language, symbolism and impact of the myth. The myth as technique was an attempt to create a 'feel good' feeling. It had shades of Norman Vincent Peale:

"Formulate and stamp indelibly on your mind a mental picture of yourself as succeeding. Hold this picture tenaciously. Never permit it to fade. Your mind will seek to develop the picture... Do not build up obstacles in your imagination".

The power of positive thinking goes a long way for a nation. Indian social science, with the exception of MN Srinivas, has been a doomsday brigade. But here

was an India seeking to escape the captivity of its old self. This was a generation that was tired of Malthusian predictions and Marxist analysis. It was also tired of the burden of colonialism having to carry its inferiority around like a sack. The myths of inferiority and inefficiency are the brown man's burden. Here was a generation that felt different, felt optimistic, felt mobile, felt that advertisements expressed real aspirations and that management books provided the true techniques to achieve dreams pragmatically. This was a generation that felt no burdens of nationalism unless it was the furious amiability of the cricket match or the ascetic repressiveness of socialism. 'Feel good' was slang for desire, for the contentment that went with desire fulfilled. This was a generation that like Martin Luther King said 'I had a dream' and then unapologetically showed that the attic of the dream was the contents of a supermarket. Shining India was the Indian middle class' Valentine's Day card to itself. If you cannot love

your neighbour (Pakistan) you can at least love yourself. A whole nation wrote out a character certificate for itself. Suddenly whether it was hockey or History, Indians wanted to see themselves winning. Being mobile, middle class and a superpower was a delightful way of feeling good. It was sentimental a bit like a Rasna (the synthetic soft-drink) advertisement saying 'I love you India'.

Unfortunately few analysed the ingredients of the psychology of the advertisement blitz. They did not

see in it the makings of a media myth. They did not realise that you cannot fight myth with fact. Positivism is of little use in the world of advertising.

Consider two brilliant efforts by two outstanding individuals. One was a piece by economist Jean Dreze (Professor at the Centre for Development Economics, Delhi School of Economics); the other, an equally eloquent one, by political researcher P Sainath in *Frontline*. When you are talking poverty or hunger, you cannot find a better debating duo. Dreze begins by invoking Darrell Huffs classic *How to Lie with Statistics*, and shows that when it comes to manipulating statistics the BJP has out-huffed itself. Dreze takes each little statistical morsel and shows it to be untrue. Whether it is the birth rate, or the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) production, Internet statistics, or even tiger conservation statistics — the BJP has it wrong. What then? You do not confront a Valentine's Day card with a Human Development Report. Dreze's brilliant essay appears misplaced, like a guy at the wrong party. When he says India's rank in the international scale of human development indices fell last year from 124 to 127 one nods respectfully and waits to read *Stardust* or *Sports Star*. When the nation behaves like a page three

Talking about *Bharat* was a loser's strategy. It struck a whining note of those left behind or left out. Also *Jai Shree Ram* was hardly a visiting card to be handed out to the new generation.

column, the last thing you would like is a newspaper editorial. Dreze is losing a semiotic war. There might be lies, lies and statistics in a Drezean world but it takes more than that to beat a Goebellian advertisement campaign.

Enter Sainath. He whips it up faster. Sheer genius at the secular upper-cut in a piece called 'The feel good factory'. Sainath knows the poor and poverty and he hits out brilliantly, covering drought, farmer suicides, per capita food availability. But an accountant's ledger or an economist's eye do not refute shining India. Does shining India cease to exist because it shines a bit less in some eyes? To counter shining India with Dreze and Sainath is like summoning Amartya Sen to defeat Norman Vincent Peale. Both may write about well-being but come the crunch, give me positive thinking over welfare economics. The answer to a myth is not facts alone. It is another myth with a more overpowering poetics.

Something similar happened earlier during the Green Revolution debates when hundreds of economists sought to prove their mettle by laying out statistics on how more people went below the poverty line during the period. The *Economic and Political Weekly* is the graveyard of these articles and yet the Green Revolution stands sublime. If you are a cynic you can say the poverty market is competing with the feel good market. We are fighting a different battle where Sen and Dreze are irrelevant. It is a propaganda war about a millennial dream. Millennialism always creates a vision of well-being and a torrent of prospective consumer goods. Facts cannot defeat millennialism. Also, for every Dreze there is an equally professional economist like Surjit Bhalla. You cannot do it a la Marx. He countered Philosophy of poverty with the poverty of philosophy. Any ad-executive can do better copy.

One must try and get to the bottom of the grammar of the advertisement copy. These are not great advertisements to be retailed in anthologies of advertising but they are effective because they tap deep into a middle class primordial dream of a good report card and a grand celebration. It is like all of India getting a first division. The world is applauding them. The text is simple: "Our foreign exchange reserves have raced past the USD 100 billion mark. It is a moment that makes every Indian stand proud and tall. It is a figure that inspires the world to applaud our resolve. From a timid economy and a weak rupee, we now have the fourth largest Forex reserves". Breathe it in, breath out. Now, does it not feel better than *sare jahan se accha*? Who needs Iqbal when Moody's Index sounds so much better?

Look at the pictures. They remind you of calendars and calendar art, or those pictures children do for homework charts with photographs of leaders, vegetables, fruits that are sold on streets. It is like a civics class project. There are little cut-out pictures of Vajpayee or Advani, even Murli Manohar Joshi, and strewn around are cut-outs of planes, helicopters, DNA helices, globes, skyscrapers and radio astronomy laboratories in the

background. It is kitsch and that is the reigning art of our times. If you cannot experience the authentic, then celebrate the souvenirs. Yet it is not just the BJP. It is also the message of Abdul Kalam. It has the same combination of bad poetry and the myth of development. Just read these three Haikus of development invented in advertising time:

"Roads are lengthening
Distances are shortening
Bazaars are buzzing"

Or

"Schools are bustling
Children are sparkling
Future is inspiring".

Or

The school citizen's song

"By choosing to study further
I widen my knowledge
By taking a loan for my education
I share the burden with my parents"

Read it aloud. Bad poetry always feels better read aloud.

This beats socialist realism or what Mayakovsky wrote in his lesser moments. Can you feel Elliot or FR Leavis squirming? But look again. It is a social science as development poetics. Instead of the book of Mao or Gaddafi, we have the advertisement. These are liberal, not megalomaniacal stuff that Stalin or Kim il Sung produced. This is social science sentimentality, a 'family of man' scrap book. Farmers smiling, children laughing, a healthy child, a girl riding a bicycle - UNICEF stuff. It is a magic of juxtapositions. Vajpayee next to all the children. Even statistics is a kind of Kitsch. What do you make of this?

"Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)
with 128 US patents creates
an Indian record"

"India overtaking China as a global leader in
mint oil production"

Potent stuff. The World Social Forum should have done a mirror inversion of it. But it was not playful enough. An advertisement world, where instead of the United Colours of Benetton we have the uniting symbols of India. Too bad if BJP's shining India and Sahara Parivar get the same ideas. It seems to work. That is all a myth needs to do. Shining India. It does not even need Brasso (metal polish) at least till the next elections. ▽



Selling the brand

The official version is that the campaign called "India Shining" began seven months ago. But it clearly picked up after January, continuing even after the Lok Sabha was dissolved and poll dates announced. The campaign was finally called off following a ban by the vigilant Election Commission.

Two public interest litigations are pending before the Delhi High Court, charging that the campaign by the ruling party was using public money to project its image ahead of the elections. The government counsel contended that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was within its rights to inform people about its achievements.

The Bharatiya Janata Party spin master Pramod Mahajan claimed that the campaign has cost only INR 65 crore, while people in the advertising world think it would have been at least double that.

This has become one of the largest ad campaigns ever in Indian media history. The media monitoring agency Tam reported that the India Shining ad was the second most-frequently telecast 'brand' on television in December- January, with commercials

being aired on Doordarshan and private channels 9472 times. State-owned Doordarshan got the lion's share of India Shining commercials, 75 percent in terms of airtime, while 29 private channels shared the rest.

In the print media, the more popular newspapers were targeted with full and half-page colour advertisements on most days in January-February. Placed by various government ministries, the tag line in all of the ad copy read: "Achievements of the NDA government". Claiming everything from increased girl child enrollment in schools to more telephone connections, mobile phones and software exports, these advertisements as a rule featured Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee along with the man from the concerned ministry.

For the first 15 days of January, the India shining campaign ranked fourth among the top brands in terms of insertions in newspapers. There were as many as 392 India Shining insertions in over 450 newspapers, including vernacular papers and regional editions of national papers. ▽

- *Suhasini Siddharth, New Delhi*

P

Vacancy Announcement, Executive Director Panos Institute South Asia, Kathmandu, Nepal

Panos South Asia (PSA) is part of a family of Panos Institutes worldwide that encourage and facilitate public discourse and debate on a wide range of issues. Panos works through the media to bring neglected subjects to the forefront of developmental and environmental discussions so that voices that are often not heard can find a forum. PSA is an autonomous institution governed by a Board of Directors from South Asia and has offices in Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. The Institute requires an Executive Director to head its Regional Office in Kathmandu, Nepal. The position will fall vacant in June 2004.

The director of PSA will need to combine an excellent overall understanding of the development challenges facing the region, a strong level of understanding of international developments as they affect the region and an excellent knowledge and understanding of media and communications in the region. S/he will need to be able to demonstrate leadership and vision in taking the work of the Institute

forward in the region in its newly established self-governing status. S/he will need to have the capacity to build partnerships and create spaces for independent debate, and at the same time to balance Panos' mission of informing and stimulating public debate without dominating or determining the outcomes of that debate.

The candidate should be a national of a country from but not confined to South Asia, and have: a good first degree in a relevant subject; the ability to develop a vision and forward-looking strategies for the organisation and be able to translate them into action; a minimum of 8 years work experience in progressively responsible positions, including region-wide and international exposure; a strong South Asian perspective; a high level of familiarity with information and communications technologies and the information environment in South Asia, including broadcast and the print media; good management experience, including personnel management, fundraising, budgeting and financial control.

Deadline for applications

Applications along with a brief 2-page CV may be sent up to **April 16, 2004** marked to the Office Manager, Panos South Asia, PO Box 13651, near Patan Dhoka, Kathmandu, Nepal. Phones: ++977 - 1 - 5520985, 5531447. Fax: ++977 - 1 - 5523846.

Email is the preferred option for receiving applications. These may be sent as marked above to psa@panos.org.np.

Please do not send documents over 200 kb.

For a full job description on the post see Panos South Asia website: <http://www.panos.org.np>

PEACE PROCESS AND THE LTTE SPLIT

THE SUDDEN and unexpected split in the LTTE in the first week of March took everyone by surprise. For this went against the strong ideological unity of the LTTE organisation and of the larger Tamil nationalist movement. The response of the LTTE leadership was to relieve its former eastern commander, Colonel Karuna Amman of his post, describing him a traitor to the cause of Tamil people and the Tamil Eelam national leadership. Meanwhile, the LTTE has appointed a new commander, Ramesh, for the east. Karuna's reaction has been equally confrontational, setting up a new Eastern Tamil party and ordering members of the Tamil Eelam administration in the area to leave. It is reported that Jaffna Tamil university staff and businessmen in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts have also been asked to leave.

At present, Karuna's position in the east appears secure, even though his top ranking deputies have left him for the LTTE. The cadres he trained and for whom he was the leader continue to be loyal to him. But they would also be deeply troubled by their leader's rebellion against all they stood for

Rebel Karuna.



in the past two decades. When Karuna decided to renounce his allegiance to the LTTE leader Prabhakaran, he took on an enormous challenge with regard to his own cadres. What would continue to keep his cadres loyal to him would be the continuing support of the civilian population. There is the risk of alienating the eastern people who thus far appear to be supportive of the breakaway leadership. But the question is for how long.

In explanation, Karuna has given two important reasons for rejecting the LTTE leadership based in the north. The first is the unequal treatment meted out to the eastern cadre. He has complained about the recent appointment of 30 northern cadres to supervisory positions in the organisation without a single easterner being given a senior appointment. On the other hand, eastern cadres are taken to the north to man front line sentry points and sacrifice their lives for the sake of the northern people.

The second reason given by Karuna is the lack of consultation regarding drastic actions taken in the east, in particular the political assassinations carried out in the east at the behest of the northern command. Recently, when two members of political parties not affiliated to the LTTE were assassinated in the east, it was the eastern command that had to bear the anger and anguish of the families and communities as the victims were eastern Tamils.

Going back in time, it would be clear that from its inception in the middle of the last century, Tamil nationalism has been dominated by its northern component. Jaffna is regarded as the capital of Tamil civilisation on the island with its intellectual elite being the opinion-makers who most forcefully represent the Tamil position on various nationalist issues. By way of contrast, the east has been the more agrarian and less populated part of the country, with correspondingly weaker intellectual and financial resources. In the past two decades, especially after the LTTE obtained its ascendancy in the Tamil nationalist movement, the eastern position on issues was seen as no different from that of the northern one.

Karuna's claims of inequitable treatment of the east have struck a sympathetic chord with the easterners. However, in more recent days, Karuna appears to be broadening the line of his ideological attack on his former organisation. Initially, he paid deference to

LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, likening him to a god to whom he remained obedient. However, he is now speaking harshly about the leader himself, and casting doubts on the achievements of the entire Tamil militant struggle.

It is one thing to articulate eastern grievances on the ground. It is quite another to question the rationale of the Tamil militancy, in which Karuna himself has played an important part. From a Tamil nationalist perspective it makes more sense for the Tamil people to be united under a single leadership rather than to be divided. In fact, all those Tamil nationalists who do not have to bear the brunt of living under the LTTE's direct rule, whether in Colombo or abroad, would wish the LTTE to be strong and undivided. It is the Tamil people of the east alone, who bore the brunt of the LTTE's north-centric rule, who would seem to wish to take up a different position.

Organisational fallout

Karuna's act of rebellion not only weakens the LTTE's military machine but also calls into question the whole notion of a monolithic Tamil nation of which the LTTE is the sole representative. The social and economic difference between the northern (Jaffna) Tamils and eastern (Batticaloa) Tamils, in particular, was always known, and scientifically so through anthropological studies of earlier times. But, the ethnic conflict that pitted the Tamils against the Sinhalese seemed to have subordinated this difference, especially within the monolithic structures of the LTTE. The war that devastated the north and east alike served also to foster a common Tamil identity that finally appeared to reach its zenith in the notion of the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people.

The LTTE's reaction to Karuna's act of rebellion was in keeping with its past practices of dealing with dissent in its own ranks and also within the larger Tamil community. Such persons were either physically eliminated or severely demoted. Perhaps, the LTTE calculated that a strong initial reaction would cause Karuna's support to evaporate. But so far this has not been the case. The LTTE's confrontational attitude has been supplemented by the disappointment of the larger Tamil community at the sudden turn of events when the Tamil nationalist cause seemed to be going from strength to strength along with the

peace process. Sections of the Tamil mainstream media and Tamil expatriates have made common cause with the LTTE against Karuna and the breakaway group. They see a possible fatal weakening of the Tamil nationalist cause occurring as a result of the present rift. This raises the temptation for that perennial quick fix solution promoted by Sinhalese nationalists, and even the state apparatus, which is the military solution.

But if two decades of ethnic war are to teach any lessons to the people living in Sri Lanka, it is that military force and propaganda do not suffice to guarantee victory over groups that champion an ethnic or nationalist cause. The LTTE itself was once a very small group. Karuna controls a very large group, numbering as many as 6000 fighters. The LTTE could not be suppressed by either military force or by propaganda. Neither is it likely that Karuna can be suppressed, so long as he has the support of the eastern Tamil people. In the event of his being able to maintain his support base, the main threat to him would be the possibility of assassination.

Although the LTTE has been described as one of the most deadly and powerful militant organisations in the world, this has been in terms of its opposition to the Sri Lankan state. On the other hand, if the LTTE were to seek to use its military strength against the breakaway group in the east, it is likely to get bogged down in the quagmire of protracted war. The absence of contiguous Tamil territory that joins the north and east, will make the LTTE's task of keeping its supply lines intact formidable.

What next

The manner in which the LTTE and Karuna attempt to resolve their problem will have repercussions on the ceasefire, the peace process and the entire country. Consequently the attention of the national and international community needs to be focused on

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Ramesh will replace Karuna as leader of the Ampara-Batticaloa division.



the conflict resolution process in the north-east. There is a temptation to see a hidden hand, possibly emanating from India, as being behind the breakaway group. While there may have been external support extended to the Karuna group, the reality of eastern grievances cannot be glossed over.

The best option for the LTTE at this time is to act in the spirit of the present peace process, which demands that they take on the characteristics of a political organisation that copes peacefully with pluralism. An acknowledgement of the genuine grievances of the eastern LTTE cadre and the eastern Tamil population would be a constructive first step. Some of the grievances that have been very well articulated by Karuna have their origins in the pre-LTTE period. There needs to be a dialogue on these matters, rather than a cover up, by both the LTTE and Tamil opinion formers.

Those who are concerned with the Tamil nationalist cause would wish to repair

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the split in the LTTE. But it is important that the rift be healed through dialogue and compromise that recognises the genuine grievances of the eastern people, and seeks a just solution to them. If violence is used, for whatever purpose, it can cause irreparable damage to the peace process. An LTTE that seeks to resort to a military solution to re-unite itself will send the wrong message to its own cadres about their sincerity to take the peace process forward with the government. It will also frighten the rest of the country about the LTTE's lack of sincerity in solving problems

through negotiations and the compromise that negotiations necessarily entail.

During the past two decades civil society groups engaged in a great deal of educational work on the pluralism in Sri Lankan society as a whole, and the need for political restructuring on the lines of a federal solution. In times to come, civil society groups will have an important role to play in promoting a greater dialogue in the wider society on the pluralism within the North-East that needs to find expression in appropriate political structures. They should increase their level of engagement with the actors in Tamil society, including the LTTE and the Karuna group.

Obtaining consensus in plural societies

is a rare occurrence and requires wise and patient leadership, such as demonstrated by Nelson Mandela in South Africa. The most appropriate feature of political life in a plural and multi-ethnic society is dialogue and compromise. This feature will become more pronounced in Sri Lankan society after the April general elections. In the most likely result of a hung Parliament, the post-election scenario is one of multiple parties on the one hand, and the LTTE and the breakaway Karuna group on the other, needing to work with each other to take forward the peace process. ▽

—Jehan Perera

A CORNER OF PAKISTAN

IT IS possible that there will be an unprecedented social upheaval in Pakistan in the not too distant future. This upheaval will not necessarily be organised or guided by political ideology - it would be the outcome of desperation that follows when human beings are pushed to the brink, and feel they have nothing left to lose. Or perhaps the blatant oppression that is the most prominent feature of Pakistan's social and political discourse will continue to mute any and all reaction, as has been the case for the best part of two decades. Either way, whatever little can be said and done about the outrageous abuse of power that defines the country's political and social landscape would be a small step in the right direction.

At the very least it is important that those who purport to be committed to the welfare of the people be embarrassed into taking a stand where no one else is willing. One place where any action at all could have a massive impact is in the remote coastal fishing region of Badin, approximately 200 kilometres west of Karachi. It is in Badin where the Rangers paramilitary forces - notorious for major abuses in Karachi against landless tenants on Okara military farms and many others - are engaged in perhaps their most incredible and flagrant subversion of all by directly targeting the livelihoods of thousands of indigenous fisherfolk just to make a quick buck.

The Rangers have taken advantage of long-standing colonial laws which deprive local communities of their historical fishing

rights to institutionalise a contract system of fishing through which they are able to generate massive profits reaching at least PKR 1.5 million per day. Having appointed a contractor of their choice to whom they then provide 'protection', Rangers forces intimidate local fisherfolk into selling their catch to this contractor at a fixed rate, well below the market average. For example, small shrimp are bought from the locals at a price of PKR 10 per kilogram, and then sold in the Karachi market at an average of PKR 120 per kilogram. The contractor transports the catch to the Karachi market at his own expense, and sells at his will.

It has been reported that the Rangers have agreed to receive a fixed sum for the full year of PKR 37.5 million, and the contractor keeps whatever he earns on top of this figure.

There is more. Assuming an income of PKR 500 million per year, the contractor will hand over a large part of this money in individual bribes to Rangers high-ups also, to ensure that the entire Rangers hierarchy gets a share of the booty. Even then, this is the tip of the iceberg considering that the estimate of PKR 1.5 million per day is a conservative one, and the fact that this sort of extortion is commonplace in other parts of the district, and not just the few coastal areas where this particular investigation was centred. Despite the overwhelmingly blatant nature of the extortion, there has been virtually no action from the part of the administration. The Sindhi press, well known for its willingness to take on the establishment, has embellished the story as much as it possibly can, but to no avail.

It is not as if this problem is a new one, and that a time lag can and should be expected in addressing it. In fact, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government of Benazir Bhutto in 1990 explicitly ordered a probe into the issue, including a directive to immediately stop any abuse of power on the part of the Rangers forces if such an abuse was uncovered. Needless to say, the directive remained a dead letter. As such, political and social activists in Badin express deep-seated hopelessness when confronted with the issue, claiming that there are no genuine efforts being made on the part of the administration to challenge the Rangers, or on the part of political parties to mount some form of principled resistance to force the Rangers to retreat.

The next hardship

The Badin episode is but a microcosm of the tragedy that Pakistan faces. It would not be inaccurate to say that there has been no era comparable to the present one in which more systematic abuse of power has taken place, yet there seems to be little that can be done to stem the authoritarianism tide. In Badin, as in many other parts of the country, apolitical donor-funded welfare organisations have occupied much of the social space that used to be the domain of the volunteer political activist who gave up his time, energy, and resources to meaningfully resist oppression and strive towards genuine change. This was difficult work, as activists in Badin testify to even now, but it was backed up by principled politics, and it was supported by a mobilised and politicised society at large. Today it would appear that most ordinary working-class people in the country have accepted their fate. In the regions where relief organisations operate, communities await the next hand-out. In others, they simply wait for the next hardship.

The most damning indication of any society's decline is when people lose hope, when cynicism overcomes not only middle-class armchair critics (who are cynics by definition), but even those working-class people who are most affected by exploitative social relations. The situation in Pakistan at present is one in which the genuine losers of the prevailing social contract typically have nothing left to lose and are willing to resist, in whatever small way. Unfortunately, there are very few who are willing to build upon this local resistance in systematic ways, without which it is virtually impossible to foresee a long-term, people-oriented dispensation taking shape. Today the fishing communities of Badin are struggling against the Rangers, refusing to buckle down and accept a damned fate. But there does not seem to be any support being generated to give impetus to struggles of such communities. Few believe it is even worth trying



There are no genuine efforts being made on the part of the administration or on the part of political parties to mount some form of principled resistance to force the Rangers to retreat.

The Sindhi press, well known for its willingness to take on the establishment, has embellished the story as much as it possibly can, but to no avail.

to defy the authority of Rangers forces.

It is an indictment of nationalist politics in the country that no Sindhi nationalist party has attempted to take up the issue. Even on this front, class interests remain too prominent to allow nationalist party leaders to adopt an uncomplicated and principled position on a straightforward people's issue. But despite all of these bleak realities, as mentioned at the outset, sooner rather than later, something has got to give. It

goes against all accepted notions that have developed over time about human society that change will not eventually take place in a society in which virtually all standards of legitimacy have been eroded.

What we need to recognise is that perhaps it will only be the slightest of shoves that will precipitate such change, that perhaps only raising our voices against the tyranny of Rangers forces in Badin will spark a series of chain reactions that eventually lead to freedom for the fishing communities of the coastal areas. But it would appear that the chances of much happening are fairly slim, because so little is being done to challenge status quo by 'those who matter'. But it is necessary to revive belief once again that things can be changed. The world over, a new generation of people have been reinvigorated with the belief that oppression can be challenged.

The Pakistani Rangers force.



Young people in particular are once again rediscovering the courage to embark upon the long and hard task of building a viable challenge to oppression. It is most definitely going to be a long haul. Over a decade has passed since the 'end of history' theses became the vogue in the intellectual centres of the world, a period in which the fishing communities of Badin struggled to stay afloat. A decade is long enough for the forces of decadence and exploitation to thrive unchallenged.

—Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

FEELING GOOD? FEELING TERRIBLE!

'INDIA SHINING' and 'feel good factor' are the slogans of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), as they prepare for the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian parliament) elections in April-May 2004. 'India shining' had been coined following the recent upswing in the economy which registered 8.5 growth rates in last quarter of 2003. BJP's success in three out of the four state assembly elections (Rajasthan, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh) too drummed up this 'feel good factor'. The party says that it is going to the people on issues like development, a stable coalition government and the leadership of Prime Minister AB Vajpayee. The question, however, is whether these poll planks would be able to generate a pro-incumbency wave in favour of the BJP-led NDA.

The main opposition party, the Congress, has stepped up its attack on the BJP's publicity blitz by launching the 'India Cheated' campaign. The party accuses the BJP of trying to 'cover up its glaring failures' and believes that BJP's 'feel good balloon' would be punctured at the Lok Sabha polls. To re-enforce their case, the Congress is highlighting the first time negative employment growth that the country has seen during the NDA years with unemployment crossing the ten million mark. The Congress also debunks claims of high GDP growth rates, maintaining that during the NDA's five-year rule, the growth rate was just five percent, and it was only in the last quarter of 2003 that it read 8.5 percent. The Congress is confident that the BJP reached its peak in

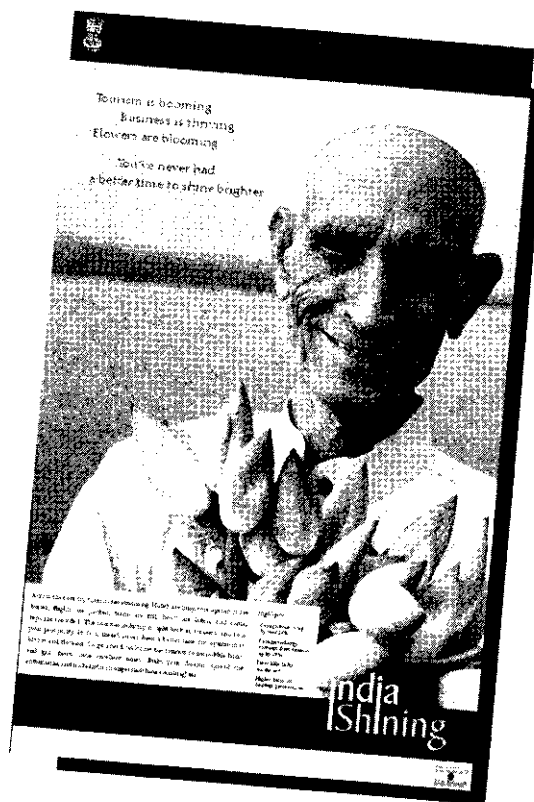
1999 and that the anti-incumbency factor is strong this time around to unseat them from power.

Looking at India's electoral history, it is seen that overarching political planks have generated waves in favour of one or other political party for two decades since the 1970s. In 1971, the Congress gained a landslide victory on 'liberation of Bangladesh' as its poll plank. It was the 'anti-Emergency' wave that decimated the Congress in the 1977 elections. This was followed by the 'Bring Indira back' slogan which swept the polls for the Congress in the 1979 national elections. In 1984, it was the assassination of Indira Gandhi that generated a sympathy wave for the Congress. The beginnings of coalition politics too rested on the issue of 'Bofors', with the National Front coming to power in 1989 under VP Singh's prime ministership with its campaign against the Congress. The 1992 elections rode on BJP's 'rath yatra' campaign on Ayodhya for sometime but swung last minute in favour of the Congress in the aftermath of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.

The election scene has drastically changed since the 1996 Lok Sabha polls. Even though it was firing on all cylinders, the BJP could not gain absolute majority in the House and collapsed within 13 days of coming to power. A ragtag Third Front government chugged on for two subsequent years. The general elections in 1998 again gave BJP a truncated majority and this time it was able to run a government for 13 months with help of its coalition partners. However, Jayalalitha's exit from the BJP-led coalition forced another general election in 1999 which again threw the same verdict. This time around the BJP toned down its political agenda and evolved a 'common minimum programme' for the coalition and has managed thereafter to run its full course in power.

A larger picture thus emerges - that poll planks which use to swing elections one way or the other are having less of an impact since the 1996 general elections. Instead of 'waves', it is better electoral management and formidable alliances that become decisive factors for the success of political parties in Indian elections.

With the political monsoon having once again arrived, one can expect the standard line-up of issues to be dragged out of the electoral closet for airing. Corruption is one



such issue that dominates during electioneering. The ruling government tries to sell its clean image, while the opposition rakes up corrupt deeds of the party in power. For now it would be safe to suggest that the issue as such has lost its ability to move the masses. The second favourite is the spectre of terrorism. Earlier the issue was raised in the context of Punjab and now it is done with reference to Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. Surprisingly, left extremist violence which has been there since independence has never become a national poll plank in the country. In the context of terrorism, hatred against Pakistan is whipped up for its role in 'aiding and abetting cross-border terrorism' against India. Pakistan-bashing is an easy key to turn to generate popular and momentary support of the man on the street.

Construction of the 'Ram Mandir' at Ayodhya is another issue that gets milked at every political festivity. The BJP had a phenomenal rise in the mid-eighties due to this single issue. However, after its cadre destroyed the 'Babri Masjid' on 6 December 1992, the party has been unable to generate much political euphoria by 'selling' god. Even though the BJP makes political noises

Poll planks which use to swing elections one way or the other are having less of an impact since the 1996 polls.



about the construction of the temple calling it the party's top political agenda, the issue no more remains an electoral trump-card for the party, which is why today it is so willing to draw a contrast between the BJP agenda and the agenda of the ruling National Democratic Alliance.

Then there are some minority-related poll planks which are drummed up by the BJP to mobilise 'majority' votes. Enforcement of the uniform civil code, bringing the anti-conversion bill, ban on cow slaughter, ban on polygamy, and abrogation of minority character to the Aligarh Muslim University are some issues that come up time and again during election-time. While the BJP canvasses by trying to get the 'majority' votes, the Congress campaigns against it to lure the 'minority' votes. However, none of these issues seem to have the punch left in them to electrify the masses.

The election this time is unique because no political party has any ace up its sleeve to turn the election around in its favour.

There are also some patriotic planks such as the foreign origin of Congress president Sonia Gandhi that is raised to evoke national pride. Similarly the abrogation of article 370 of the constitution (which gives special treatment to Jammu and Kashmir) is raised to whip up patriotic emotions. At times, illegal migration from Bangla-

desh is raised to warn of the dangers to the country's demographic profile.

This time, the newfound rapprochement with Pakistan has toned down many poll planks which once formed the BJP's core propaganda package. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's promise to President Pervez Musharraf has led to a scaling down of anti-Pakistan rhetoric by the BJP, including on cross-border terrorism and Kashmir. Some believe that the prime

minister's commitment to Pakistan has taken out the sails from the BJP's boat. Electorates this time may miss out Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani's carefully crafted anti-Pakistan utterances, which have been the highlights of his campaigns during the past several years. The NDA is saying that it would campaign this time lauding the achievements of its rule. Kashmir, which used to be the war cry of the BJP, is sold as a state returning to normalcy due to the Centre's policies. The coalition is lauding its achievements of holding talks with the separatist groups of Kashmir and hints it is even ready to talk to the militants. The NDA is also endorsing Srinagar's Mufti Sayeed government's healing-touch policy of freeing and rehabilitating the militants.

Coming back to the theme to electioneering this time around as set by the BJP, it remains to be seen whether 'India Shining' or 'India Cheated' will do the trick. The BJP argues that India is on a roll, its economy is growing, industrialisation is taking place, agriculture is giving good returns and every one is feeling 'good'. Those who emphasise 'India cheated' argue that the people still lack basic amenities and the country remains water-and-power-starved. More than a quarter of the populace continues to live below the poverty line, unemployment is on the rise, prices of essential commodities are rocketing, social tension has increased and atrocities against women and minorities are on rise.

Overall, the safer poll conclusion to make at this stage would be that India is cheated by its own politicians who have contributed nothing than gloom and pessimism everywhere. The debate remains inconclusive. The election this time is unique because no political party has any ace up its sleeve to turn the election around in its favour. This perhaps is the first election where both political parties and the electorate knows that it is not going to poll planks but political alignments that would decide who rules India. ▽

—Syed Ali Mujtaba

Between jhatka and halal Gujarat after two years of "normalcy"

For the Muslim victims of communal violence in Gujarat the violence has not ended – it is the difference between immediate hacking (jhatka) and slow death (halal).

by **Satish Deshpande**

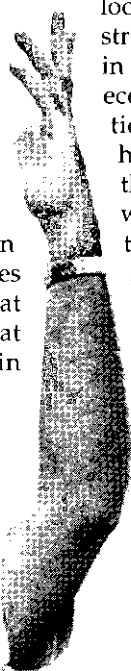
In their famous conversation about words, Humpty Dumpty confides to Alice that while verbs are short-tempered and proud, 'you can do anything with adjectives'. He also insists that whenever he makes a word do a lot of work, he always pays it extra.

By this token the adjective 'normal' must have been paid an astronomical bonus for the truly stupendous amount of work that it has done in Gujarat over the past two years. Although his claims were met with disbelief at the time, Chief Minister Narendra Modi has been retrospectively vindicated in his insistence that, except for the first 72 hours of the 'action-reaction' sequence, post-Godhra Gujarat has been, well, normal. Indeed, we ought to be grateful to him for drawing attention to Gujarat's most significant contribution to the national ethos since Mahatma Gandhi – the establishment of a new notion of normalcy.

An important term in social theory, the word 'normal' has three main meanings in everyday language – a common or usual state of affairs that carries the additional connotation of being ordinary or unremarkable; a healthy condition, the opposite of diseased or pathological; and finally, the sense derived from its root-word 'norm' indicating an ideal state that is worthy of emulation. These meanings suggest that 'normal' is a boundary-marking word whose job is to separate the mundane from the extraordinary, the healthy from the sick, and the legitimate from the delinquent. Although every society and every age needs such boundaries, their actual location keeps changing according to the balance of social power in each context. The political potency of the word derives from its ability to link a populist-majoritarian fact (that which is most common) with a moral-ethical ideal (that which is most right). What we have witnessed in Gujarat is an unprecedented attempt to normalise communal oppression by representing it as popular practice and proper precept.

We must not flinch from acknowledging the success of this attempt. The spread of Hindu communal violence in Gujarat has broken many barriers: a hitherto urban phenomenon has spilled over into rural areas; adivasis and dalits have participated actively; and the upper middle-classes have been directly involved, both as victims and especially as perpetrators. Disturbing reports, since confirmed repeatedly, about the presence of women and even children among the mobs make these India's first 'family-outing' riots. The depth, intensity and sheer scale of public participation – as many as 40 cities and towns in the state were under curfew simultaneously – had shocked even people like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Pravin Togadia.

If the making-common aspect of normalisation was spectacular, the making-ordinary and making-legitimate aspects have been even more stunning. Gujarat's recent history contains many acts of symbolic erasure like the destruction of the poet Wali Gujarati's *mazaar* in Ahmedabad. But it is only here that the municipality – an institution steeped in the dull details of everyday life – managed to pave the spot overnight to make it look 'normal' by morning. Every riot involves destruction of property and sources of livelihood; but in Gujarat, this was followed up with a systematic economic boycott designed to continue this destruction silently and 'peacefully', thus annihilating hope for the future. All riots uproot people from their homes and communities; but in Gujarat, this was backed by sustained public pressure to ensure that the refugees would never return, or would do so only under stringent 'conditions' enforcing second-class citizenship. In short, all riots – even state-sponsored pogroms like the anti-Sikh riots of Delhi – are supposed to *end*, to yield to an 'after' that is fundamentally and not just formally different. Gujarat is our first riot that has refused to end: for its victims, the difference between the 'abnormal' madness of 2002 and the 'normal' malevolence of 2004 is only the difference between *jhatka* and *halaal*.



Retail repression

Except during the Partition, mainstream political discourse in India has always, albeit after the fact, described communal riots as isolated incidents of momentary madness sharply separated from normal everyday life. Of course this is untrue, because riots cannot be conceived immaculately, but this fiction has suited most parties – the dominant sections, the ‘silent majority’, and sometimes even the victims. More importantly, the moral illegitimacy of riots has never been in doubt, even though the guilty have rarely been punished. Attempts to justify riots have never flatly denied wrongdoing, but have concentrated on constructing a history of prior provocations in order to present the riots as defensive action.

In its ‘laboratory state’ that is Gujarat, Hindutva has developed a prototype of everyday communalism that breaks decisively with this pattern by seeking to integrate riots with normal life, shrinking and eventually erasing the zones of delinquency in which they used to be segregated. Above all, it seeks to legitimise the oppression of Muslims to the point where it seems so natural that justifications will be superfluous. The model here is that of a nation at war, when all patriots are expected to be unthinking warriors and all questions are anti-national. But war is an abnormal condition, so this example does not capture the full significance of the Gujarat model. A closer approximation might be caste, where the oppressive hierarchy is so deeply embedded in tradition that it becomes part of ordinary common sense, requiring no explicit justification precisely because it is what we ‘already know’. In fact, activists working in Gujarat have pointed to the birth of a new form of untouchability with respect to Muslims. The ultimate goal of the Gujarat model is to make riots redundant – to replace the spectacular, wholesale violence waged by trishul-wielding mobs with the unobtrusive, retail repression enforced by the mundane compulsions of daily custom. In the new normalcy, Muslims are to be ghettoised as a caste of right-less non-persons forever dependent on ‘the goodwill of the majority’.

If this chilling vision were thought to be exaggerated or still a distant dream, one needs only to look at the calm and confident manner in which long-established precedents have been flouted in Gujarat. Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) has been used exclusively against Muslims (and one lone Sikh) but not against Hindu rioters; differential amounts of compensation have been paid to Hindu and Muslim victims in similar circumstances; and the legal machinery of the state is itself obstructing due process and abetting the accused in evading justice. It takes courage to grasp the enormity of what Hindutva proposes, and especially to acknowledge its asymmetry with Muslim fanaticism. Given the demographic and socio-cultural profile of India, Muslim hate organisations can never hope to normalise themselves; they will forever remain in the

delinquent fringe. Barbaric acts attributed to Muslim fanatics – like the burning of the train in Godhra – will always remain just that, extraordinarily vicious crimes. Hate campaigns launched by Muslims can never be converted into electoral chariots bearing their sponsors to the most powerful positions in public life.

Spilt milk

But – and this is where hope has often been sought – it is not as though Gujarat has been easy to replicate in the rest of India. Despite the initial euphoria of the 2003 state elections which gave ‘Milosevic’ Modi an overwhelming victory including as much as 55 percent of the popular vote, the Sangh Parivar met with rebuffs in subsequent elections in Himachal Pradesh and elsewhere. Even in the recent round of state elections where it has been unexpectedly successful, the BJP was forced to foreground issues other than Hindutva. And by comparison with past versions, its current campaign for the general election of April-May 2004 seems remarkably subdued. There has been no routine recourse to the tried and trusted Ayodhya issue; in fact, ‘development’ appears to be the uncharacteristic centrepiece of the campaign, at least so far. Does this mean then, as many are urging, that it is time to ‘get over Gujarat’ and move on?

It is true, of course, that in political terms Gujarat 2002 represents ‘spilt milk’ that is pointless to go on crying over, especially given the comprehensiveness of the Hindu right-wing victory in that particular battle. It may even be true that Gujarat is the exception proving the rule that, in the final analysis, rabid Hindu communalism does not make electoral sense on the subcontinental canvas of Indian democracy. But to think thus is to underestimate the importance of the decisive break that the events of 2002 have made with the history of our present. Moreover, by seeking solace on these terms, we become hostages of ephemeral caste equations, erratic electoral ‘waves’ and other political contingencies that determine the outcome of elections in India.

For the particular events which constituted the riots of 2002 were unprecedented only in scale, not so much in content. We had, alas, seen it all before – the burning, looting and killing, the rapes, the slaughter of children and even the unborn. But despite the repeated occurrence of such horrors, the political universe which produced them remained inhabitable because it had always – *always* – disowned these events retroactively. Howsoever hypocritical it may have been, the dominant ethos did eventually place such events in moral quarantine, thereby preventing them from infecting the body politic. Modi and his minions have achieved something significant – they have overturned this history by masterminding India’s first riot with both mass participation and zero remorse. In Gujarat today, two long years later, neither the proverbial common man nor the politician, bureaucrat or policeman – in short, none of those responsible – feels the need, even strategically or



cynically, to admit that something wrong has happened. This immediately places enormous strain on the social fabric because it demonstrates that, contrary to the conventional wisdom fostered thus far in post-Partition India, planned ethnic cleansing is in fact achievable.

From the perspective of the Hindu right, the crucial fact about the 2002 riots is that they have facilitated the BJP's electoral victory in Gujarat *without causing losses elsewhere*. None of the BJP's recent defeats – in Himachal Pradesh, the Delhi municipal and assembly elections, etc. were directly attributable to Gujarat; the indications are that this issue was largely irrelevant to the outcome. It is equally plausible that the BJP's victories (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh) too are unrelated to Gujarat, but this cannot be a source of much hope for the secular-progressive camp. For it only proves that while Modi-style pogroms may not always win elections, they will not lose them either. The uncertainty of benefits may dissuade the pragmatic or passive communalist, but their costlessness can only encourage the committed kind. To men like Modi, Togadia, Singhal or Advani – true believers prepared to pay a high price to achieve their aims – this is clearly a worthwhile bargain. Such people will only be dissuaded by the prospect of heavy losses.

Are there any factors in the contemporary political scene that can raise the cost of communal violence? Can such forces be built by collective action? These are the key questions of the moment.

Globalised Gujarat

There is a widely held view that 'globalisation' will somehow tame Hindutva through world opinion and/or the world market. The geopolitical history of the unipolar world in the last two decades provides sufficient evidence of the fragility of this argument. Moreover, there is the experience of Gujarat itself, as the BJP leadership conclusively demonstrated, that it is possible to manage appearances by saying one thing abroad and its opposite at home. In any case, Sangh Parivar doublespeak is now a well rehearsed routine. As for the world market, it is doubtful whether it has had any impact on Gujarat. (The discomfiture of local industrialists may have had more effect, though its long term implications are difficult to gauge.) In reality, most global markets are thoroughly cartelised with only a few

powerful players, and their alleged tendency towards political moderation has been extremely unreliable to say the least. So, where containing communalism is concerned, globalisation may at best provide some contingent inputs; it cannot form the basis of a deliberate strategy. Whatever their specific content, such strategies will perforce have to rely on domestic factors.

That is why it is imperative to breach the cloak of impunity which Narendra Modi has almost succeeded in throwing over the post-Godhra events of 2002. The contrast with the Godhra incident is striking: the wheels of justice do seem to be moving in that context, despite the considerable doubt that forensic reports have cast on the original thesis of a Muslim mob having set fire to Coach No. S6 from the outside. On the other hand, with the large-scale destruction of incriminating evidence – including gruesome instances of state police burying the bodies of victims with large quantities of salt in order to accelerate decomposition – the subversion of justice in the post-Godhra riots is nearly complete. Last hopes are pinned on the small proportion of cases taken up by the Supreme Court, and on the staying power of embattled NGOs, local activists, and above all, the survivors themselves.

What else can be done to interrupt the march of Hindutva, or at the very least, to force it to pay a higher price for its successes? Can we afford to rely solely on the vagaries of electoral arithmetic? Two years later, it is difficult to be optimistic. The voices of Gujarat's victims and its dissenters proved no match for the menacing growl of Modi's amplified election speeches as he laid claim to 'Gujarati *asmita*' (Gujarati pride) and threatened to bring down the wrath of 'five crore Gujaratis' (50 million) on his opponents. If the familiar forms of our progressive politics are all ultimately founded on faith in 'the people', then Gujarat 2002 forces us to confront the darkest of all questions: What is to be done when 'the people' turn regressive? How does one confront a normalised pathology, a banalised evil?

A question first asked of Western Europe in the second quarter of the 20th century now faces Southasia in the first quarter of the 21st century. Whatever the shape of the answers that will be forged collectively, it is certain that they will need not only hardworking adjectives but also angry verbs. △



The violent minority and silent majority of Gujarat do not constitute separate and distinct social fragments. The silence of a sizeable part of the silent majority is not the speechless shock of numbed bystanders. It is the conspiratorial silence of willing spectators, remote witnesses to a Roman holiday, whose public silence is a private roar of approval that is clearly audible to the architects of the violence. There are those who cannot speak and those who will not speak. How else are we to explain the seeming paradoxes of the riots in Ahmedabad? We have seen educated girls and boys from middle and upper middle class families who do not actually participate in the killings but follow in the wake to loot Muslim establishments. We have seen couples on two wheelers bring home consumer durables scavenged from the debris of retail outlets. The cell-phone wielding rioters are not isolated elements who have taken control in a social vacuum. *Himal, May 2002*

The importance of not forgetting

A report tracing the different forms of violence being meted out to Gujarat's Muslims over the last two years, starting with the carnage of February 2002. What has been the pain, and what has been the response of activists and support organisations?

by **Biraj Swain and Somnath Vatsa**

What is poetry that does not save nations or peoples? At best, it is a collusion with official lies.

-Cheslaw Milosz

When the world seems to be inexorably hurtling towards some kind of multi-dimensional disaster, when the all-consuming passion of humanity appears equally divided between amassing of material comforts and hatred of the 'other', there seems to be little point in arguing for the saving grace of poetry.

Perhaps, after one of the worst massacres in human history, Gujarat is still lucky to have its fair share of committed activists working relentlessly towards peace and justice. A state ripped down the middle by none other than the state itself is celebrating poetry because there are people who have the courage and conviction to stand up for democratic values and human dignity after facing perhaps one of the worst instances of organised violence in modern India, *the night of long knives*. That night did not end with February and March of 2002.

Twenty-four months have passed, and injustice continues and so does partisan treatment and de-recognition of Muslims as legitimate citizens of the land. The ghastly communal violence of Gujarat, which started in February 2002, is still manifesting itself in the plight and faces of the more than 200,000 internally displaced Muslims. The scar on the psyche of the community runs deep, having been so effectively marginalised, terrorised, stigmatised, ghettoised and immobilised. The government and establishment have been gloriously ineffective in reaching out to the victims with a healing touch. Relief and rehabilitation has been a far cry; compensa-

tion has been embarrassingly inadequate. As if apathy was not bad enough, the state-engineered violence against the minorities continues - the basic 'right to life with dignity' has in a way been taken away from the entire community.

Can there be a rights discourse when the state is indulging in subversion of the rights of its own citizens?

Civic amenities, law and the minorities

It should not be shocking that victimisation is a common everyday occurrence. The Ahmedabad Electricity Corporation's refusal to provide electricity connections to the houses and business establishments of the victimised Muslims, demanding innumerable proofs where people have nothing but charred remains of their property. For a state which claims 24 hours uninterrupted power supply, the Gujarat Electricity Board continues to inflict power cuts on Signal Falia (an area besides the Godhra railway station) and Godhra town on some pretext or other. That these areas are dominated by the Muslims should not be seen as coincidence.

The Godhra investigation has resulted in nearly 100 arrests, of which 53 are extremely poor people. It seems 'action-taken' is a bid to satisfy the numbers game as the shoddy and biased investigations have come under the scanner of the apex court of India. The draconian provisions of POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002, updated version of 'TADA') have also been imposed upon them, with disastrous consequences such as further impoverishment and social ostracisation of the victims' families. Maulana Umarji, the alleged chief conspirator of the Godhra incident, who is in fact a



social activist and leader of the community, has been targeted in order to terrorise the community into silence and submission.

The alacrity which is so all-pervasive in the investigative conduct seems to be in short supply when it comes to dealing with the numerous cases of mass murders in the post-Godhra violence, memorialised by names such as Best Bakery, Sardarpura, Chamanpura, Naroda Patia... In these cases, one is suddenly confronted with the sudden unavailability of public prosecutors, disappearance of witnesses, an 'overstretched' crime branch, and selective amnesia regarding invocation of POTA. Given all this, the state surely deserves credit that only 2107 of the 4252 cases of violence against the minority community have been summarily disposed off.

Every time a public mishap has happened, from the Akshardham temple massacre in September 2002 to former Gujarat Home Minister Haren Pandya's murder in March 2003, the state government has been more than eager to introduce the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) conspiracy angle. In fact, even before preliminary investigations start, the police, under obvious instructions from the State Home Ministry, have been keen to flash some Urdu script sourced to the accused. They colour any and every incident with the conspiracy brush and end up drawing an ISI linkage no matter what. However, the non-invocation of POTA for any of the accused of the mass-murders that followed Godhra point to a deliberate government scheme. In Gujarat today, you can still find the accused sipping chai and relishing golas (syrup-flavoured ice) under the 'ever-vigilant eyes' of the police.



These are times even worse than a state of emergency, because under the veneer of normalcy some of the worst crimes against humanity are being committed by none other than the state. This is also the view of Harsh Mander, social activist and country director of the group ActionAid India. The hype that surround the celebration of 'Vibrant Gujarat', 'Nav Ratri' and 'Patang Utsav' (kite festival) only showcase 'wooden' pride meant to hide official cynicism.

In the last one year alone, 240 persons belonging to the minority community have been booked under POTA for allegations such as waging war against the country, conspiring to kill important leaders of the ruling party, and participating in ISI's plans of destabilisation. Of the 240 POTA accused in Gujarat, 239 are Muslims and the remaining one is a Sikh. The modus operandi is to illegally detain individuals, torture them, threaten them with the use of POTA and extort a 'confession'. The accompanying box provides details of four such cases in the past one year, illustrating the systematic method of creating a 'terrorist' in Gujarat.

The case details indicate that from end-November 2002 onwards the Detection of Crime Branch (DCB), having its office at the Gaikwad Haveli police station in Ahmedabad, has 'detected' around 120 'terrorists'. The entries in the column on offences reveal a remarkable similarity of charges in all the four cases — criminal conspiracy, waging war against the state and, of course, offences under POTA. The Column 4 entries indicate that most of the accused were first detained illegally prior to their official arrest. An independent investigation reveals that almost all 'terrorists' were

S.N.	FIR No. Date and Police station	Number of accused	Date of Official Arrest	Days of illegal detention prior to arrest	Offence
(1)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1.	DCB I FIR No.23/2002; 30 th Nov. 2002 at Gaikewad Haveli Police Station	24	1.10.2002	11 arrested. 6 of them detained for 4 to 6 days	120B/121/121A/122. IPC + ...
2.	DCB I FIR No. 6/2003; 4 th April, 2003 at Gaikwad Haveli Police Station	82	4.3.2003 onwards	44 arrested. Detained between 15 to 30 days	120B/121 121A/122.IPC + POTA
3.	DCB I FIR No. 11/2003; 5 th Nov. 2003 at Gaikwad Haveli Police Station	8	4.11.2003	4 arrested. Two Detained for 3 months	120B/121/121A/122..IPC + POTA
4.*	DCB I FIR No. 16/2003; 11 Dec. 2003 at Gaikwad Haveli Police Station	5	11.12.2003	5 detained between 2 to 5 days.	120B/121/121A/122..IPC + POTA

FIR and Date	Name of Accused	Offence
ICR No. 627/2003 14.8.2003	Nafisa Ali Sodhi Reporter/Editor Indian Express.	Sec. 153 A (a) and 114 of IPC
ICR No. 159/2003 14.8.2003	Nafisa Ali Sodhi Publisher/Editor of Divya Bhaskar	Sec. 153 A (a) and 114 of IPC
ICR No. 229/2003; 12.9.2003	Prabal Pratap Singh, Sr.Sp. Cor. AajTak Dhimant Purohit, Sp. Cor. AajTak. Uday Shankar, News Director, AajTak.	Sec. 124-A of IPC.

Section 153A constitutes the offence of promoting hatred and enmity between different sections.

Section 124A constitutes the offence of sedition

tortured and terrorised during the period of illegal detention to extract confessions. It was also found that the women relatives of the accused were illegally detained to pressurise the male members to 'confess'. Almost none of the arrested persons had a criminal record and most belonged to educated middle-class Muslim families of Ahmedabad. All the first information reports (FIRs) have almost the same recitation, including the allegation:

"The accused being aggrieved by the killings of Muslims in the post-Godhra riots have decided to take *revenge* by killing important members of the ruling party and trying to destabilise the state".

The price of return

Muslims are not the only ones being targeted systematically. Activists and members of the media who speak out against the abuse of power are also being targeted. Three cases would suffice to illustrate this (see accompanying box).

The aim of the state from all such actions is a single-minded effort to generate suspicion between the Hindus and Muslims, by projecting the former as vulnerable targets for Islamic 'terrorists' and the ISI; and to ultimately extract political mileage by playing the role of the sole saviour. Illegal detentions, misuse of POTA and intimidation of social activists are not mere abuse of the criminal law system, but are in complete violation of the basic tenets of democracy and against the rights guaranteed under the articles 14, 21, 22 and 39A of the Indian Constitution all amounting to an undeclared 'emergency' with suspension of the fundamental rights of a section of the citizenry.

The state also selectively targets Muslim moderates, peace activists and social workers at the forefront of relief and rehabilitation efforts. They are being harassed, threatened and sometimes arrested on alleged 'hawala' money-laundering links. Overall, the government strat-

egy is to try and effectively silence moderates and progressives among both Hindus and Muslims.

Rashidabano Yusufkhan Pathan, a resident of Shahpur, was witness to the brutal attack on her husband whose only crime was that he raised his voice against the police inaction when a riotous mob went on rampage. The police took him away and thrashed him in front of his wife. He died later the same day. Not only were Rashidabano's attempts to register the FIR thwarted, there were attempts to gag her subsequently through threats. After a year and half of attempting to be heard, Rashidabano finally did get a chance to depose in front of the Nanavati and Shah Commission, set up to inquire into Godhra and its aftermath. However, even the honourable members of the Commission, instead of recording her deposition verbatim tried to delete the most crucial parts of her testimony regarding police actions.

In the rural Gujarat region of Himmatnagar, Muslims driven out of their villages during the riots are being forced into a 'compromise' by withdrawing their cases — the price of return. The gram panchayats, the much-touted symbol of grassroots democracy, are also being bullied to be made part of the conspiracy. The victims have felt safest when they have wilfully resisted the attempts of state incursion. "We did not allow the state to enter and that is why there is peace... everywhere the state came, it came with the Hindu fundamentalists like the Bajrang Dal or the

Vishwa Hindu Parishad who indulged in loot and murder. We took a conscious decision to keep the state out, that is why there is peace here in spite of Popatpura being surrounded by 14 Hindu villages", says Yasmeen, a 30 year old mother of three, whose father and brother were arrested under false charges of rioting in Godhra town.

The Muslim ghetto

The Muslim ghetto

A series of state government orders following the violence, issued as a result of public pressure, have set guidelines for compensation for injury and loss of life, property, employment or livelihood. By and large, however, victims received paltry sums as compensation for their losses — ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand rupees. 60-year-old R Bibi, former resident of Naroda Patia, says that the government demanded proof that her son was killed before she could receive compensation: "They want proof, where am I going to go to get proof? My life was taken away when they shot



my son. Everything has been taken away and now they want evidence, where will I get the body from? I was not even able to see his body”.

Of the dozens of people interviewed, none had been compensated for injury or loss of employment or livelihood. Independent non-governmental groups estimate that as a result of the large-scale destruction of homes, properties and businesses in Gujarat, the Muslim community has suffered an economic loss totalling INR 3,800 crores (USD 760 million). The prolonged closure of shops, industries, and commercial establishments in Gujarat has also hurt the economy as a whole and added to soaring unemployment rates.

Muslims in Gujarat, already among the poorest communities in the state, have been further economically marginalised through ongoing economic boycotts instituted by Hindu nationalist leaders with the support of local officials. Many remain unable to farm their fields, sell their wares, return to their businesses, operate commercial vehicles, or retain their jobs, including in the public sector. Muslims cannot work, reside, or send their children to schools in Hindu dominated localities. As the segregation continues, hopes for community dialogue or reconciliation have dissipated. All this has contributed to the community's 'ghettoisation'.

In Pavagadh, a taluka in Panchmahals district, 22 families have been displaced, their property and land impounded. They have been forced to go live in a nearby town. The same is the case in Popatpura taluka, whose Muslims have been forced to live elsewhere after being repeatedly thwarted in their attempts to return to Vejalpur village, four kilometres from Godhra township. From Mehsana to Ahmedabad, Sabarkantha to Panchmahals - the story is same.

Teesta Setalvad, the well-known activist responsible for getting the Best Bakery case re-opened, is getting threatening calls and so is her associate Raiskhan Pathan. Sishu Milap, an NGO working with street and working children in Vadodara, has stopped getting government grants because of its association with the Vadodara branch of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL). SAHR WARU, a group working with the rape victims of the carnage, trying to rehabilitate them with livelihood options and providing protection at the trial stage, is subjected middle-of-the-night checks from the Intelligence Bureau.

Democratic space

Mukul Sinha, trade-unionist and senior advocate in the Gujarat High Court, highlights his association with the enquiry commission: "While the Nanavati and Shah Commission had been written off as partisan and the entire exercise an eye-wash, we have persisted with

them. In choosing to continue as the cross-examiner in the Commission, we managed to facilitate the fearful witnesses to come and depose in front of the Commission. When I have that quantum of evidence but I do not produce them because I believe the Commission is partisan then I am choosing not to utilise the democratic space provided by the process of an enquiry commission". On the cross examination of the witnesses in Godhra during the hearing of the Commission, Sinha says, "We need to be aware of the fact that this Commission report is not just for this carnage but has historical importance and when we produce evidence and such powerful evidence, and if the Commission ignores them, then it will be at the peril of its own credibility. All the evidence is being recorded and we owe it to the times that this be done".

Salim Sheikh, resident of Naroda Patia and an important witness, was brought forward by Aman Pathiks (community volunteers, many of whom are the victims of the carnage itself) to depose in front of the Nanavati Commission. On coming to know about this, the Crime Branch of the Gujarat Police picked-up Sheikh's son on the night before deposition which was to be on 26 August 2003. Meanwhile, they summoned Salim to the Kagdapeeth Police Station on 27 August at 10:30 am, coinciding with the time of the hearing. However, Salim was at the Commission of Enquiry venue at 10:30 am defying the Gujarat Police orders. This is the power of the witness protection programme of Aman Pathiks, where even spending time with them gives the targeted persons hope and courage to defy the police.

Many civil rights groups and other support organisations are working on witness protection programmes, which will be very important when the

trials begin and the witnesses come forward to give evidence. Mukul Sinha is waiting for the Ahmedabad trials to begin so that the laboriously protected witnesses can come out and depose at the trial stage. That is the only way to prevent another 'Best Bakery'.

Not only has state inaction in Gujarat served as a severe test case of the criminal justice system of India as a whole, it has resulted in judicial and civil liberties communities the world over to focus attention on Gujarat. Such international attention and the Supreme Court of India's orders, even though late, can only bring fruitful results, says Achyut Yagnik, social activist and director of SETU, an NGO working on rehabilitating earthquake victims. "When a Human Rights Watch comes out with a report on the subversion of justice in Gujarat or Amnesty International writes about the massive illegal detention of members of the minority community, it ensures that the public memory and attention, which is criminally short, gets re-focussed on the

“When we started work, we realised the quantum of destitution, the depth of communal hatred, the absolute misery of the families who had their loved ones booked under POTA”.

silent and sophisticated victimisation of the Muslims”.

Fifteen months after the Gujarat carnage, in July 2003, the US-based Human Rights Watch came out with a seventy-page detailed report on the plight of Gujarat's Muslims. Amnesty International, headquartered in London, also published a report on the illegal detention of Muslims. The two organisations have been constantly putting out appeals and updates on the situation in Gujarat. However, one wonders why the United Nations mechanisms were not invoked during the pogrom and why they are still not being invoked. For example, why were the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Convention Against Torture (CAT) not sought to be applied? Even though India has not ratified CAT, Gujarat would have been good reason to put pressure for ratification. To repeat, it is surprising that the United Nations system as a whole has remained so conspicuous by its absence in the Gujarat massacres and their continuing fallout.

Justice needs to be seen to be done in Gujarat, for not only was the violence suffered by the victims here, it was seen by countless millions in their living rooms through live broadcasts — in Shillong, Kanpur, Cuttack, Kochi, Nasik and New Delhi. Those affected therefore are not limited to the geographical spaces of Gujarat, but also to the mind space of 'India', the larger subcontinent, and the world.

Aman Samudaya

In any rights discourse, the government is the most important reference point. Even for the inalienable first generation civil and political rights, the state is the sole guarantor, and it cannot abdicate the moral and legal responsibility and the trust that has been vested in it by the citizens. The state is a multi-headed institution, manifesting itself through different units, and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), fortunately, is one of them. The NHRC has done an exemplary job in the context of Gujarat. Not only have they given a very scathing report on the state's role in Gujarat but they have also moved the Supreme Court in both the Best Bakery and the Bilkees Banu cases. In fact, the Commission's recommendation of handing over ten cases of mass-murder to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for investigation and trial outside Gujarat is finally proceeding ahead with the recent Supreme Court indictments against the Gujarat government. The appointment of the lawyer Harish Salve as the *Amicus Curiae* (friend-of-the-court) on the riots cases can be directly attributed to the stand taken by NHRC chairman, Justice AS Anand.

Despite valiant efforts by civil society groups and

the NHRC, the question remains whether there can be any hope when the state itself becomes the prime violator of rights. Yes, feels Mukul Sinha, "but it requires concerted effort, planning and strategising". One such initiative for strategising is the Citizen's Initiative, a conglomerate of 38 NGOs and activists who came together during the carnage. After innumerable debates, they were the first ones to declare the incidents following the Godhra train killings as 'pogroms' and 'genocide'.

Aman Samudaya was one Citizen's Initiative effort to spread the word of peace, reconciliation, hope and to provide the much-needed healing touch to people devastated by the riots. Spread over the most ravaged parts of Ahmedabad, Naroda Patiya, Naroda Gam, Vatva, Juhapura, Berhampura, Gomtipur, Bapu Nagar, Darya Khan Gummat, the Aman Samudaya has grown from a project to a movement, an effective attempt to challenge the fascism exhibited by the state. The Aman Samudaya has taken a decided political stance, and been a passionate votary of peace and religious harmony in a state where concepts like governance, constitution and citizen's rights would seem to have been cremated.

The conspiracy of silence, the abnormality of maintaining the business-as-usual attitude, has been

taken on frontally by the Aman Samudaya. Working with the victims in relief camps, providing the traumatised women and children much-needed psycho-social counselling, livelihood support to the ravaged families, legal support to the citizens whose right to life has been violated by the state, accompanying the victims to different fora to make their voices of anguish heard — the Aman Pathiks have done it all. They have pitched in to rebuild lives, hope and trust. (Aman = Peace)



Aman Pathiks Sulekha Gupta, Rasheeda Pathan, Laxman Kheinia, Sajid Kureshi receive award from Sonia Gandhi.

"After witnessing the relentless state fascism, we took a conscious decision of focusing on building peace cadres, building Aman Parivaars, creating democratic and humanitarian spaces", says Amarjyoti Naik, team-leader of the Aman Samudaya. "We operate on the premise that this is a campaign of the people and, rightfully, it should be owned by the people. No intervention will be sustainable if peace does not prevail. Organisations will continue providing relief and rehabilitation and Hindu nationalists will continue indulging in violence with impunity, destroying what has been achieved. Such interventions are not sustainable without peace and security and that will not take off without justice. Justice needs to prevail for lives to be lived, hence all such attempts of subversion of justice, including by the state, have to be challenged".

The Aman Samudaya not only rebuilds houses of

the Muslims, it has also supported the Hindus, Dalits and Chamar 'outcastes' when they are confronted with challenges, such as when they lost their dwellings to the fierce monsoon of 2003. It mobilised residents when an eviction-cum-resettlement drive was undertaken by the Ahmedabad Municipality Corporation on the banks of the Sabarmati river for the much touted River Front Development Project, a beautification drive for the rich and the mighty being carried out without a thought spared for the slum-dwellers. Members of both Hindu and Muslim communities have come together to form the Rehthaan Aadhikaar Manch (Right to Shelter Campaign). When development and economic well-being take priority, people suo moto disown the communal card, says social activist and Jesuit priest Cedric Prakash of 'Prashant', a centre for human rights, justice and peace which works with the minority community members and the slum dwellers in Ahmedabad.

While the Ahmedabad chapter of Aman Samudaya was thus engaged in building peace cadre and commu-

nity mobilisation, the Godhra chapter was started in April 2003. "Godhra was a mine-field of state terrorism. When we entered, we thought our primary job would be to tackle the systematic communal propaganda, but we soon realised the levels of destitution, the depth of mistrust, the absolute misery of the families who had their loved ones booked under POTA. The level of desperation hit us. We were not prepared for such hopelessness", says Bahadur, Programme Manager, of Godhra Aman Samudaya. Aman Samudaya started work among the psychologically polarised population, seeking to provide the much-needed healing touch through relief, rehabilitation and legal aid. It also then took up individual cases, and made socio-economic profiles of each of the POTA accused families. After eight months of intervention, the business community of Godhra is now bearing the economic cost of the riots and is working hand in hand to ward off future incidents that could once again tear the town apart.

Conscious inertia

'Godhra Gaurav' is another initiative involved in activities ranging from providing relief to the families pushed into destitution because the prime bread-winners are behind bars under POTA, to doing detailed village surveys to identify needy families, celebrating

Raksha Bandhan between Muslims and Hindus, and carrying out a campaign of peaceful protests. A body of 17 activist groups, Godhra Gaurav brings out rallies where people come in large numbers to be counted for peace. A calculation with figures from the income tax, sales tax and revenue department revealed that not less than USD 125,000 of business was being lost daily in Godhra town. "This study of the daily cost of riot was a major factor in bringing people together", say Sujaat Vali and Nimesh Shah, leading peace activists and members of Godhra Gaurav.

Popatpura, the Muslim village of 200-plus families surrounded by 14 Hindu villages that has managed to survive harmoniously, has become a refuge for many Muslims driven out from other villages. Popatpura has

a space called the Aman Chowraha (peace and justice centre), which all the villagers treat as 'supreme court', a place to resolve disputes in lieu of even the Godhra Sessions Court and the Gujarat High Court.

ANHAD, Act Now for Harmony and Democracy, has also been

active in combating communalism through cultural programmes, intensive political training of local activists, and peace festivals. It is a body formed by activists Shabnam Hashmi and Harsh Mander, along with singer Shubha Mudgal and academician Biju Mathew. "We need to act now before its too late, because if we lose our civil and political rights, there would not be any democracy left to defend", says Hashmi. The fusion band Indian Ocean, prominent theatre activists Haren Gandhi and Soumya Joshi have also joined forces with the ever-increasing efforts for challenging the conscious inertia of the disinterested middle class.

Rohit Prajapati, trade unionist and leading member of the Vadodara PUCL, speaks of the need to stop the working class movement from being sabotaged by Hindu nationalists and associated organisations. Spelling out the dangers of majoritarian nationalism, which could take on the colours of fascism in no time, Prajapati says, "The Gujarat government's labour policies hurt the interests of the Hindu workforce as well, even though the Modi government was elected on the Hindutva mandate. We try to expose the lack of commitment of this government even to the Hindu public. We will continue to raise the question of increasing unemployment and the rising penury among the working classes of all communities at a time when both the



These are times even worse than a state of emergency, because under the veneer of normalcy some of the worst crimes against humanity are being committed by none other than the state.

federal and the state governments are claiming economic prosperity”.

Indeed, the much-touted economic development has only meant jobless growth. In the changing political economy, the balance of social forces has been altered with the traditional working classes being reduced to the pauperised informal sector category. This trend, tied to the corresponding rise of a wealthy middle class which constitutes the base of Hindutva, will continue to give rise to may more ‘Gujarats’ in the future, here and elsewhere. Hence, there is an important need to recognise the convergence of the two agendas: the neo-liberal paradigm with its thrust on integration into an essentially unequal capitalist world system whose aim is to dispense with the ‘bottom 30 percent’, and the agenda of Hindutva which has no place for the diversities and the pluralities of India and certainly not for shudras, ati-shudras (extreme outcastes’), Muslims and women.

Power of confession

The Gujarat Harmony Project, an initiative of the organisation CARE, has been working extensively on the issue of creating lost livelihoods. It has been providing micro-finance support through group-lending schemes through its partner Samarth, where it encourages the groups to include members from both the communities. Similarly, Meera Malek and Rafiq Zakaria’s Centre for Development Education has been working with Hindu and Muslim youth. Interestingly, some of the former have confessed their guilt in the killings and the arson and looting that followed. Such confessional sessions have resulted in bringing the youth of both the communities together.

When Martin Macwan of Navsarjan takes out a rally for assertion of Dalit human rights through the villages of Gujarat, he gives a clarion call for the downtrodden to refuse the ill-treatment and the structural violence that they are subjected to through the brahminical ideology of karma and caste. He calls out for resisting every symbol of such violence and exploitation, like *Ram Patra* (separate cups for Dalits in which tea is served in local shops and houses) and accepting all symbols of equality like the *Bhim Patra* (the plate/saucer in which a Dalit generally drinks tea). Also in such rallies he spells out the contribution of Muslims towards the Dalit struggle – “Muslims were the first teachers of the Dalits in the pre-independence

era. Even BR Ambedkar has been taught by a Muslim teacher”. Concurrs activist Shakeel Ahmed, “Dalits converted to Islam to put an end to the indignities that the Brahminical order was imposing on them”. Ahmed is chief administrator of Islamic Relief Committee, which has been working for the rehabilitation of the Muslim victims of the Gujarat carnage.

However, with such seemingly natural reasons for alliance existing between the Dalits and the Muslims, the fact that Dalits have been used in large numbers to participate in the Gujarat pogroms is baffling, to say the least. It seems concerted efforts will be

required to reverse the process of ‘brahminisation’ of Dalits and their progressively being used as canon fodder by ‘Hindu Rashtra’ fanatics. The trend of tribals in many states voting for the Hindu nationalist party is also a signal of dangerous trends.

Majoritarian nationalism is nothing but the underbelly of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism and the violence it engenders is neither the pathology, nor the anti-thesis of nationalism. Rather it is the dark side that refuses to go away. Trade-unionist and peace activist Ashim Roy says of this dangerous agenda of nationalism: “It is the congenital trait of the Sangh Parivar to think, prepare and plan communal violence. The evidence is so incontrovertible that the riots and the

Sangh Parivar appear like Siamese twins. It is in these riots, when people suffer and die, that the Sangh Parivar celebrates. In the frenzy of burning and destruction, the macabre logic of violence, the raping of women and the mutilation of bodies, the ideals of the democracy die and the Hindu nation arrives”.

It is this idea of the Hindu nation, which has to be combated. But while strategising the battle plan, like always, it is important to recognise the strength of the enemy. One has to be careful of engaging the masses in a discourse where the terms are decided by the Hindu nationalists. Thus far, the mainstream secular activists and political workers have abjectly failed in their attempts to set the terms of the debate. In fact, the complete absence of political opposition in Gujarat is appalling. The Congress party has capsized and resigned to reactionary politics. Its leadership is devoid of original thinking. The party’s dilemma is understandable, with the 1975 state of emergency and the 1984 riots still fresh in the memory of many. And



The discourse on democracy has to be in terms which recognise and respect the sentiments of the masses.



less said the better about the Bharatiya Janata Party's allies in the National Democratic Alliance. But what about the Left parties? The discourse from their side has been mostly in terms of rebuttals, refutations and reactions. We must recognise that the communal players have had a head-start over the secularists.

The secularists also need to recognise that the message of democracy need not be conveyed in an irreligious or irreverent manner - because no human rights action can happen by stripping the intervention off humanity. If you cannot give Siddharth/Iqbal a secure job or a better future, then it would be naïve to expect him to give up Ram/Allah! Hence the discourse on democracy has to be in terms which recognise and respect the sentiments of the masses. Hence, the need is to highlight syncretism in religious traditions, even visible in Gujarat if one looks for it.

One of the problems with multi-level struggles required of the NGOs of present-day Gujarat is that their focus on target groups and focus-issues results in micro-interventions. For example, an NGO working on mother and child health with tribal women would only restrict itself to that sphere and not to the patriarchy prevailing in the tribal community, which is what has resulted in poor health indicators. Similarly, many groups with focus on action-based intervention such as rehabilitation, and job creation will not challenge the structural violence of the brahminical order. It has taken killing of the scale of Gujarat 2002 to bring all the groups together.

Collective conscience

Says trade unionist Rohit Prajapati: "When the dice is so heavily loaded against the victims and almost the entire legal fraternity at the local level, right from the public prosecutor, police investigator to the MLA, are involved, the only way justice could be meted out is if the media plays a bigger role. The media needs to own-up the story. It needs to be the democratic watchdog and create public pressure and maintain it through regular follow-ups".

**The Congress party
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Prajapati sees no alternative to public pressure. He feels that if the media tempo could be maintained, then judges, bureaucrats, politicians would all be forced to be more circumspect when dealing with the horrors of communal violence. While the Best Bakery case did manage to get media attention and stir the national psyche, there are many more cases in rural Godhra (such as in Pawagarh, Kinjiri, Lunawada), and Ramol in suburban Ahmedabad which have gone unreported and unnoticed. Under such circumstances, it is important to travel to the interiors, capture unheard voices of victims of violence so that others can go about building alliances, working out a single strategy and fighting to create a 'collective conscience' which will never forget the gravity of the injustice meted out in Gujarat 2002.

Moreover, the media should go even deeper and further in focusing on the real stories. The recent riots in Dariyapur and Viramgam, which happened on the basis of mere rumours, would not have happened if the rumours had not been debunked by the media through independent fact-finding. The journalists should also look into the incidents of 'secondary victimisation' through illegal detention of the youth of the community. The battle at hand is enormous, but the press tends to respond with conspicuous silence in exposing polarisation attempts by the candidates from the ruling party who are contesting the upcoming general elections.

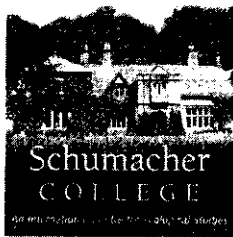
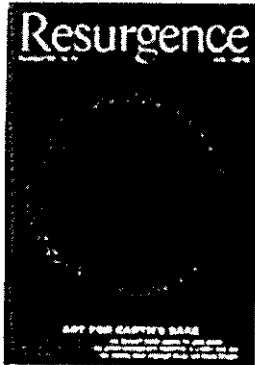
This must be considered tantamount to colluding with those with the communal agenda. Abnormal situations require extraordinary, super-human and persistent responses, and thus far the media has not shown itself to be entirely reliable.

Remembering

In such times when hope does tend to become a dead letter, making the victims re-visit their pain and remember the details of the violence may be considered harsh and inhumane. While time would attempt the healing, on the other hand, it is important to remember not to forget, even at a price to the emotional wellbeing of the victims and the larger population. Remove the painful details and you create a permanent wedge between 'Best Bakery' and justice. It is these details that the perpetrators fear most, and so to maintain the social pressure, the activists must do all they can to aid the victims to remember the details of atrocity. The memory of the victims will be the first weapon in the battle that is ahead, which is to start the trials for all riot-related cases, barring none. Time, which heals, is also the time which denies justice. Time can trivialise pain and cleanse the guilty. That will not be allowed to happen in Gujarat.

"The anaesthetised middle class and t

The thinker **Satish Kumar** on the divide between the two Indias - the affluent urbs and the other that is "based on land and livelihood, people and forests".



In 1962, Satish Kumar walked on foot on a personal peace march from India, through Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, onward through the Soviet Union and Europe, arriving in the United States in 1964. His first mission, inspired by the writings of Mahatma Gandhi had been a walk across India at the age of 18 as part of the Bhoodan land reform movement of Vinoba Bhave.

In 1974, Kumar became editor of *Resurgence*, the journal of ecology, environment, new economics, and spiritual values. He came close to the economist EF Schumacher, after whose death he helped found Schumacher College, an international centre for ecological studies. Satish Kumar was interviewed by journalist **Rahul Goswami** while attending a conference on 'Gandhi, Health and the Environment', in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district.

From the perspective of green philosophy, how do you view the developments in India since the liberalisation of the economy in 1991?

The 1991 liberalisation was a natural consequence of the policies of the Indian government. They had the choice of either going towards a more decentralised local economy, more people-oriented and ecologically sustainable, or they had to join the world's trend of the industrialised-globalised-liberalised economy. That actually is a contradiction in terms, for it is anything but liberal, very centralised and very top heavy.

Nehru and the Congress party did not work towards a decentralised green economy, and Manmohan Singh was the natural consequence. There was a stagnation of the economy because of the half-hearted centralised model, the way out of that stagnation should have been a more local Gandhian economy.

The pre-1991 policy was not a good one, but the middle classes benefited quickly and directly from liberalisation that followed. They became better consumers, better equipped to destroy quickly that

which they were destroying slowly. Television has now become very degraded, with shoddy consumer goods that are tempting, attracting the middle classes to buy, buy, buy. This is the opposite of what a sustainable and participatory economy should be.

Amidst the tendency to look at one-dimensional growth – 'GDP as a measure and indice of development' - do you believe it would have been possible to follow the route to 'gram swarajya'?

Yes, if they had had the political will. That would have helped more directly and immediately the 50 to 60 per cent of our population which is in a way still stagnant. Liberalisation has created stagnation at a lower level. If we had chosen a more green economy, agriculture, craft and local economies would have flourished, but the middle classes would not have imported goods. They would have been challenged to make things within, with their own genius and ingenuity. If the will was there it would have been a real liberalisation and a real improvement. Instead we have a division in India - 50 per cent have gone downhill even in terms of

the destruction of creativity"

movement in economy. There is more trade and income, but limited to a small acquisitive group.

Do you have hope in the urban population?

The urban elite have become very callous. They do not want to see the other India and close their eyes to what exists at their doorstep. They are selfish and blinkered and see nothing but their consumerism. They now understand only that progress means consumerism and the commodification of everything.

People are not strong enough in the marketplace because big companies are better equipped technologically, scientifically and financially; they wield more manipulative power and they will buy because they can pay more. Land, forests, rivers and water will be all commodified. We have an anaesthetised middle class that allows this to happen.

Where would a resurgence emerge from?

It has to come from the village, the tribal, and the small farmer.

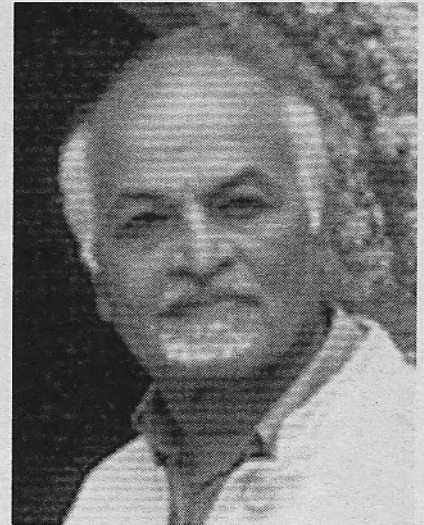
But they have to struggle just to even get heard.

There are some good spokespersons - Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy, Aruna Roy, Vandana Shiva. They can communicate the agony, the pain and the sorrow of rural India and the victims. In India there are two forces now. One is represented by the consumerist middle class. The other is based on land and livelihood, people and forests, and all they need is to be organised. The problem is that they are fighting a million mutinies without connecting with each other. The power of their resistance is not felt because they are too busy working in just their own areas. Something has to happen to make them more united.

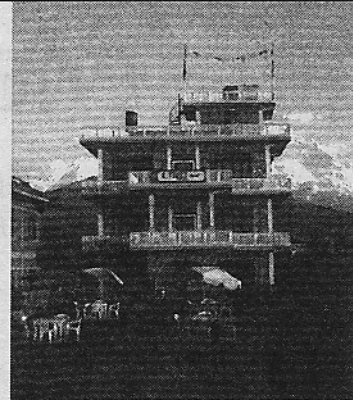
Creativity is a very basic urge in the human psyche and soul, and the industrial and consumer culture destroys it. This is the root of this disenchantment. Like Kabir's poem - "*Chalti chakki dekh kar, diya Kabira roye / Dui paatan ke beech mein, sabit bacha na koye* (Looking at the grinding stones, Kabir laments that in the motion of the wheels, nothing stays intact)" - people are finding the grind of life and pace, this rush, too much to bear.

Human life depends on nature and its beauty and purity. Now we buy bottled water which is stale - machine-made and processed. Everything is

The middle classes became better consumers from the liberalisation policy -- better equipped to destroy quickly that which they were destroying slowly.



processed and over-processed. People are finding the end of creativity and the end of good life - which means good food, clean pure natural food, and natural water and air. People realise we are cutting the branch upon which we are sitting. The reason for all this is the destruction of creativity. ▽



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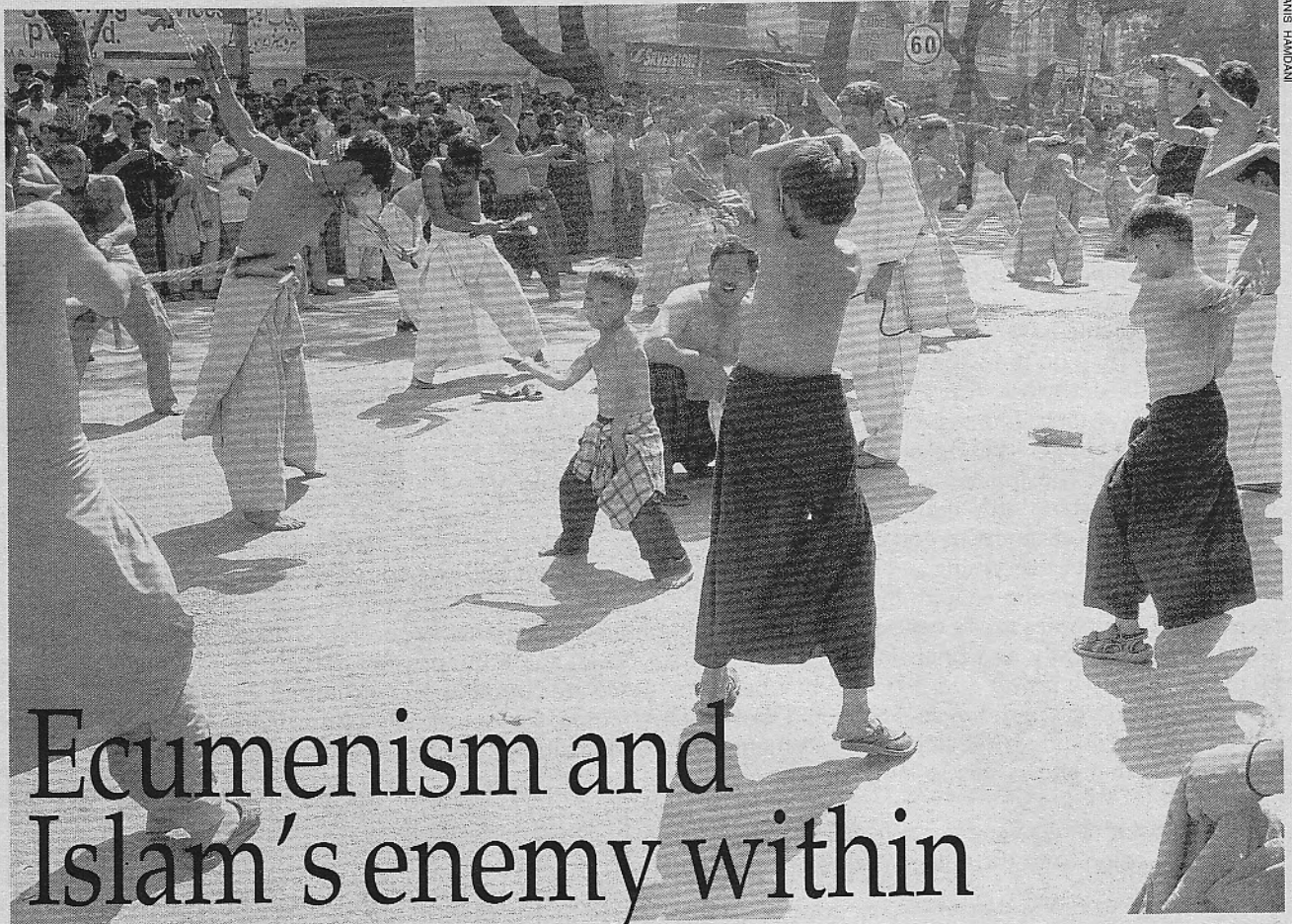


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ANIS HAMIDANI

Ecumenism and Islam's enemy within

How many more Karbalas and Quettas are we to see amongst competing Islamic sects, while the rest of the world sees a united, militant front?

by *Yoginder Sikand*

The massacre in the first week of March of hundreds of Shia mourners at Karbala, Iraq, and the blasts at an Imambara in Quetta, Pakistan, resulting in the death of dozens of Shias on the day of Ashura, are gruesome reminders of the simmering sectarian conflict that has raged for centuries among Muslims, making a complete mockery of the rhetoric of Muslim unity. The much bandied-about slogan of Islamic brotherhood based on the notion of the pan-Islamic ummah falls flat in the face of continued Muslim sectarian rivalry. Contrary to what Islamists, Muslim apologists as well as detractors of Islam would have us believe, the Muslims of the world are just about as fiercely divided as any other religious community.

The Shia-Sunni dispute is only one, albeit the most prominent, division that has run through almost the entire history of Islam. In addition to the Shia-Sunni divide are the innumerable divisions that characterise the broadly defined Shia and Sunni communities.

Among the Shias, the main sectarian groups are the Ithna Asharis and the Ismailis. The latter have two main divisions, the Nizaris and the Mustailians. The Mustailians, in turn, are divided into the Daudis, the Sulaimanis, the Alavis and the Atba-i Malak. Likewise, among the Sunnis, who form the majority of the Muslim population, there are several factions. In Southasia, the Sunnis are divided into what are popularly known as the Deobandis, the Barelvīs, the Ahl-i Hadith (see *Himal* February 2004) and the followers of the cults of local sufis who are not affiliated to any formal organisation. In addition to these, there are various Islamist groups.

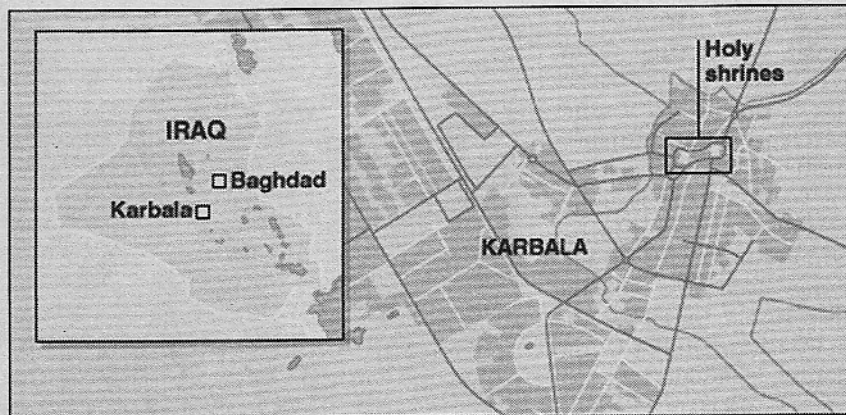
Each of these many different Muslim groups claims to represent the single 'authentic' Islamic tradition, branding all others as having gone astray. Most of them insist that all other groups that claim to be Muslim are actually heretics, firmly outside the pale of Islam. When faced with the reality of fierce intra-Muslim divisions,

many Muslims are quick to explain this away as a hidden 'conspiracy' by the 'enemies of Islam' to destroy Islam and Muslim unity. While there can be no doubt of the fact that groups opposed to Islam have indeed taken advantage of intra-Muslim divisions, the argument of an externally-inspired 'conspiracy' cannot explain the origins of these divisions, and nor can it account for the continuing appeal of sectarianism among vast numbers of Muslims, particularly the *ulema*.

Even a cursory glance at early Muslim history reveals the existence and powerful influence of intra-Muslim sectarianism, starting soon after the death of the Prophet. No sooner had the Prophet left this world than Muslims began fighting among themselves. Lust for power and wealth was a determining factor behind most of these conflicts, which were then provided with suitable theological support. Indeed, one could argue, sectarian divisions among the Muslims have had little to do with religion per se, and at root represent conflicting claims for power and pelf. This is, however, not to deny the importance of sectarian doctrinal developments in themselves, and the role that they have played in further instigating intra-Muslim conflict.

According to a *hadith* (saying attributed to the Prophet), Muhammad had predicted that after his death the Muslim ummah would be divided into 73 mutually bickering sects. Of these only one would be destined to enter heaven, and all the rest would be punished with damnation in hell. When asked by his companions which this sect (*firqa al-najiyya*) would be, the Prophet is said to have identified it as the group that abided by the *Quran* and his own practice (*sunnah*). Now, each of the 73 or more sects that exist today asserts that it alone represents the 'authentic' Islamic tradition, and that it alone abides by the *Quran* and the Prophetic practice. Every Muslim group claims to be the one saved sect, and implicitly or directly argues that the other groups are by definition aberrant, not really Muslim, and hence destined to doom in hell. This firm conviction of having a monopoly over religious truth inculcates an self-righteousness that dismisses all other claims, whether of non-Muslim religious communities or of other Muslim groups.

One is not in a position to pronounce on the legitimacy of the hadith that predicts the splintering of the ummah into 73 factions. Like many other hadith reports, it might well have been concocted after the Prophet's death and then attributed to him in order to legitimise the reality of intra-Muslim sectarianism. However, this is not a matter of mere academic value, for it continues to be frequently quoted in the writings of Muslim polemicists of different sects in order to stress



their claims to representing the 'authentic' Islamic tradition. It is also continuously used to justify the preaching of hatred against other Muslim sects.

One of seventy-three

A recent personal experience would be more illustrative. Some months ago this writer attended a massive Barelvi gathering in Bombay, where there were impassioned speeches delivered by numerous Barelvi *ulema* thundering against various other Muslim groups. The writer asked a Barelvi scholar present what he thought about the fiery diatribes of the *ulema* against other Muslim sects, coming especially at a time when Muslims in India were being hounded by Hindutva fanatics. Was it not important for the *ulema* to help promote Muslim unity instead? The *alim* (scholar) turned and answered without batting an eyelid, "The Prophet had predicted more than 1400 years ago that the Muslims would be divided into 73 sects, all but one of which would go to hell. Now, if we try and promote unity between the sects that would be going against the saying of the Prophet himself. And that would be a very grave crime indeed!"

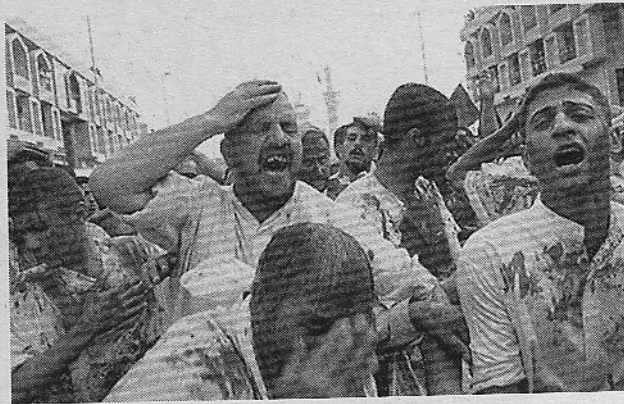
Another instance is equally illustrative. Last year, this writer met an *alim* teaching at a madrasa affiliated to the Ahl-i Hadith, a sect known for its strict literalism and hostility towards all other Muslim groups. This *alim* is considered to be a great champion of the cause of the Ahl-i Hadith, his principal achievement being having penned numerous tracts to prove that the Deobandis, the Barelvis and the Jamat-i Islami, all fellow Sunni groups, have allegedly strayed from the path of 'true' Islam, and hence, for all practical purposes, are not Muslim at all. On being asked why he was making matters even more difficult for Muslims by fanning intra-Muslim conflict, he handed this writer a bunch of pamphlets and said, "Read them and you will know why I am doing this". He continued, "Islam says that our sole purpose must pronounce the truth (*haq baat*), no matter what the cost...and the truth is what I have written in these books about the other groups that call themselves Muslims. They have actually wilfully or otherwise distorted Islam and are far from the path of

the Prophet...we have to speak out against them, no matter what the consequences. The truth must be clearly distinguished from error".

To say it like it is, much of the responsibility for fanning intra-Muslim sectarian strife rests with the traditional ulema of the madrassas. Unlike Christianity, Islam has no place for an official priesthood that can lay down the official doctrine. In principle Islam has no intermediaries between man and God, the relation being direct and unmediated. While this makes religious leadership in Islam more democratic in theory, it also means that the ulema of different Muslim groups are free to stake their own competing claims to represent 'true' Islam, branding other Muslim groups as deviant. This fuels intra-Muslim disputes that can often take a violent turn. It also means that the ulema of the different sects can easily use the absence of a central religious authority that lays down the official doctrine in order to promote sectarian rivalry to advance their own vested interests. By dismissing other Muslim sects as aberrant they put forward their own claims of being the authorities of the sole 'authentic' Islam.

As centres for the training of would-be ulema, the traditional madrassas have emerged as the major bastions of narrow sectarianism (on madrassas of Pakistan, see *Himal* February 2004). Each madrassa is affiliated to a particular sect or school of thought. One of the principal aims of the madrassa is to promote the version of Islam of the particular sect it is associated with, and to dismiss competing versions. Hence, most madrassas include in their syllabi what they call *ikhhtilafiyat* or the dismissal of other Muslim groups as deviant. Much of the focus of the *fatwas* (religious decree) and the literature that the ulema of the different sects produce is also geared to branding other Muslim groups as virtually 'un-Islamic'.

In this way, the 'enemy' within comes to be seen as even more menacing than the 'enemy' without. The internal 'enemy' appears as constantly on the prowl to



The Muslims of the world are just about as fiercely divided as any other religious community. Lust for power and wealth, determining factors behind most of these conflicts, were then provided with suitable theological support.



Quetta, 2004

lead the followers of the sole 'true' sect astray. Some years ago, this writer met a student at a madrassa in Uttar Pradesh, who engaged in heated debate, seeking to prove that the beliefs of his own sect were true, angrily dismissing other Muslim groups as infidels. He insisted that his mission in life was to "serve the cause of Islam, by warning Muslims

against the enemies of the faith". On being asked who he thought the "enemies of Islam" were, instead of "Hindutva fanatics" or "Zionists" or "American imperialists", the reply was, that the non-Muslims were enemies, but not the most dangerous foes. The student said, "Muslims know that these people are non-Muslims, and therefore, by definition, are enemies of Islam, so there is no need to preach against them. What Muslims do not know is that other groups that call themselves Muslims are not really Muslim at all". He rattled off the names of various Muslim sects, both Shia and Sunni. "They are wolves in sheep's clothing", he angrily declaimed. "They take the name of Islam simply to mislead the Muslims and cause them to stray from the faith...they are even worse than the non-Muslims. Non-Muslims oppose Islam because they are ignorant about it, but these people, while they know the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, deliberately distort Islam and do the work of the devil".

The theological dimension

In the curriculum of the madrassas there are numerous texts taught to the students that are geared specifically to the refutation (*radd*) of various other Muslim groups, declaring them to be outside the Muslim fold. This perhaps explains why many ulema have been averse to moves to promote intra-Muslim dialogue at the doctrinal level. There have been no serious attempts, in India at least, to bring the ulema of different sects together to sort out their doctrinal differences. Groups like the Muslim Personal Law Board and the Milli Council do have representatives from different Muslim sects, but while seek-

ing to promote common Muslim interests, they have consciously stayed away from addressing the theological dimensions of the sectarian problem. While they do issue statements from time to time decrying sectarian strife and calling for Muslim unity, they have not sought to seriously engage with the fundamental question of theological differences that underlie sectarian divisions.

At the global level, while several ulema have played an important role in engaging in inter-religious dialogue, particularly with Christian theologians, few have been seriously concerned with promoting dialogue at the theological, as opposed to the political, level between the different Muslim sects. There is simply no Islamic counterpart of the Christian ecumenical movement that in recent years has made bold moves to promote understanding and cooperation among different Christian groups. Moves to promote Muslim unity often take the form of appeals for Muslims to come together to present a common front against those who are branded as 'enemies of Islam', and who are accused of fanning intra-Muslim differences to serve their own purposes. Such negative appeals, while having powerful emotional value, do little to overcome internal Muslim differences in the long run. The sense of unity that the image of a common 'enemy' promotes is necessarily

short-lived, for such unity lacks the foundation based on positive principles. As Pakistan's case so well illustrates — once the external 'enemy' (in this case the 'Hindus') is overcome, the 'enemy' within once again emerges as a powerful vehicle for mobilisation of religious sentiments.

The Muslims of Southasia would do well to consider the example of the Christian ecumenical movement. Christian theologians active in the movement remain committed to their own different interpretations of their faith. And yet that has not deterred them from reaching out in a spirit of positive appreciation to other Christian groups who have traditionally been considered their rivals. It is not the fear or hatred of a religious 'other' that drives them to promote Christian unity. Rather, it is a spirit of openness and love and commitment to their common (although divergently understood) faith that impels many involved in the ecumenical movement. Considering the way the ulema function, however, one fears that many more Karbalas and Quettas will happen before they finally wake up to seriously confront the issue of intra-Muslim strife and the urgent need for Muslim ecumenism. Meanwhile, however, the world might well have left them far behind. △



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Inside the nuclear closet



Abdul Qadeer Khan, regarded as the 'Father of Pakistan's A-Bomb', was accused then pardoned by President Musharraf for his role in trafficking nuclear technology. But what sort of man is Qadeer, and what does his story reveal about the United States' role in Pakistan's nuclear proliferation?

by *Pervez Hoodbhoy*

The president of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, is in a self-congratulatory mood these days, savouring the praise heaped upon him by US President George Bush, Secretary of State, Collin Powell, and the under-secretary of state for arms control, John Bolton. After surviving two recent assassination attempts and overseeing a high-level summit meeting with India, the great survivor of Pakistani politics acts as if the worst is behind him. By way of celebration, he announced new long-range missile tests for March 2004, and a two-stage Shaheen II missile system has already been tested at the time of going to press.

The primary reason for General Musharraf's current satisfaction is the way his treatment of Pakistan's hugely popular nuclear hero, Abdul Qadeer Khan — forcing him to apologise on public television for his illicit nuclear trafficking, yet also pardoning him for the offence — allowed him to please Washington without causing a massive uproar. Many in the Pakistani press had warned that any attempt to punish Qadeer, advertised for near two decades as the architect of Pakistan's and the Islamic world's nuclear bomb, would provoke rampaging mobs to demand an end to Musharraf's pro-US rule. As it turned out, Washington was thrilled with the general's rebuke of the wayward scientist, while a disillusioned and disempowered Pakistani public grumbled but did not take to the streets.

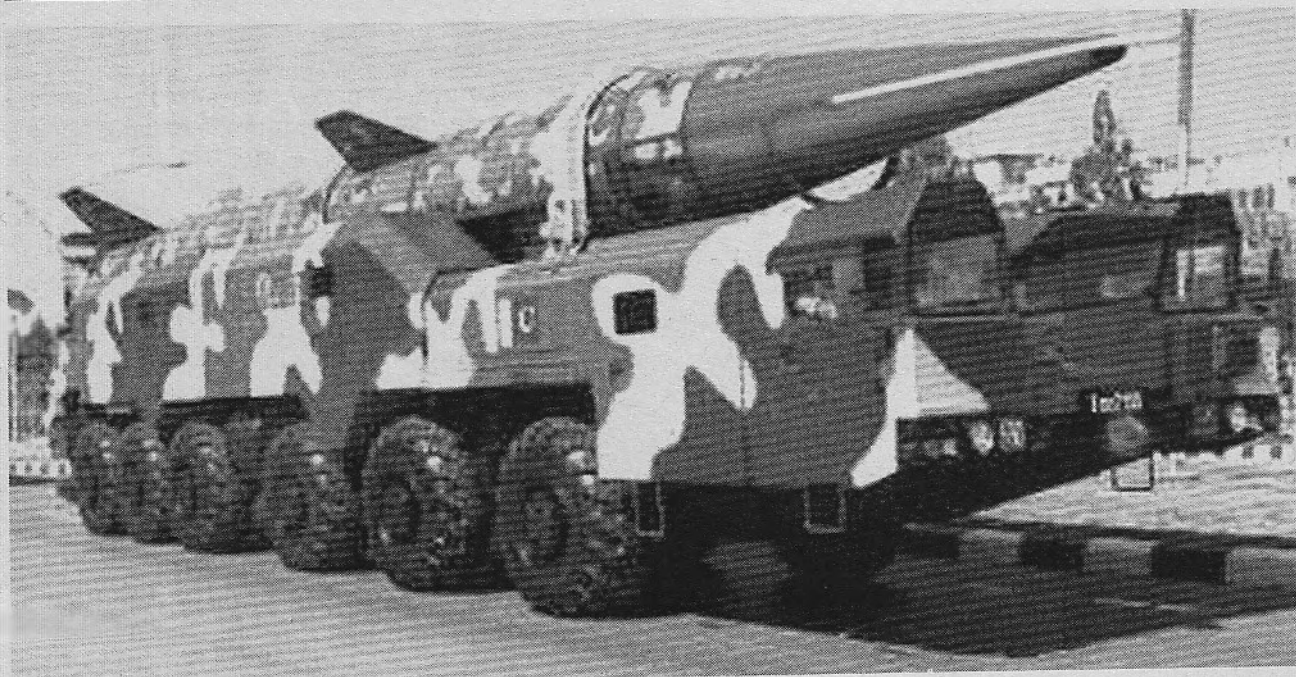
But neither Musharraf's satisfaction nor America's approbation is likely to last long. For while Qadeer took sole responsibility for the trafficking in his televised

confession, the sheer scale of Pakistan's secret exports raises at least two difficult questions that go far beyond him and a handful of his colleagues. First, Iranian and Libyan revelations since December 2003 have confirmed that this was the most extensive nuclear smuggling episode in history. Not only did it involve the illicit export of centrifuge designs and parts used to enrich uranium into fuel for nuclear reactors, or as fissile material for weapons (an export reluctantly admitted by the Pakistani government itself); but it also included complete centrifuges, together with a shipment to Libya of 1.5 tons of uranium hexafluoride gas. Could Qadeer and his cohorts have moved such large pieces of equipment, and travelled extensively outside Pakistan, without the knowledge of the military? The ultra-high level of security in Pakistan's nuclear installations makes this unbelievable and points to deeper level of complicity.

Second, documents handed over by Libya to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — now being evaluated by US experts — reveal that the country had received old Chinese designs for a workable nuclear bomb that had been passed to Pakistan in the late 1970s. Here lies a puzzle, and the possibility of some embarrassment for the Pakistani establishment because, although Qadeer is widely advertised as the "father of the Pakistani bomb", knowledgeable people are aware that he had nothing to do with the design and manufacture of the bomb.

As a metallurgist, Abdul Qadeer Khan's expertise was exclusively in producing weapons-grade uranium

Iranian and Libyan revelations since December 2003 have confirmed that this was the most extensive nuclear smuggling episode in history.



hexafluoride gas using the centrifuge process. The rest of the work of creating a nuclear weapon — including metallisation, bomb design, manufacture, and testing — was entirely the responsibility of an unfriendly rival organisation, the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission. How then did Qadeer happen to possess nuclear weapon design information when, in fact, the real work of weapons design was being done elsewhere?

An empire of patronage

General Musharraf has claimed that Qadeer's export of centrifuge technology was unknown to successive governments. Yet for over a decade, Qadeer openly advertised his nuclear wares. Each year (including in 2003, when the proliferation controversy had already become intense) colourful banners used to festoon Islamabad, advertising workshops on 'Vibrations in rapidly rotating machinery' and 'Advanced materials'. These workshops, sponsored by the AQ Khan Research Laboratories (also known as the Kahuta Research Laboratories), had obvious and immediate utility for those interested in centrifuge technology, essential for producing bomb-grade uranium.

In earlier years, Qadeer and his collaborators had published a number of papers detailing critical issues regarding the balancing of centrifuges and magnetic bearings. These dealt with technical means for enabling centrifuge rotors to spin close to the speed of sound without disintegrating. The relevance of such work to

the development of weapons-grade uranium was already evident even to non-specialist observers. But to make the blatant absolutely certain in the minds of prospective customers, Kahuta issued glossy sales brochures aimed at 'classified organisations'. These advertised such nuclear products as complete ultracentrifuge machines, high frequency inverters, equipment for handling corrosive uranium hexafluoride gas, as well as hand-held ground-to-air missiles.

In the light of such persistent, egregious advertising of forbidden nuclear and other wares, can successive governments of the sovereign nation really have been — as General Musharraf claims — so ignorant?

The United States government, both for its past and present policies towards Pakistan and for its role in nuclear proliferation generally, also should be required to answer some questions.

For all who cared to see, as even his admirers admit, Abdul Qadeer Khan was corrupt. Despite a salary of less than USD 3,000 a month, Qadeer had bought the choicest real estate, owned restaurants and colleges, purchased a hotel in Timbuktu which he named after his wife, and claimed ownership of a psychiatric hospital. His belief that his historic contribution elevated him above the country's laws and environmental regulations even led him illegally to build a magnificent mansion along the pristine Rawal Lake, the source of Rawalpindi's drinking water.

But Qadeer's projection of paternity of Pakistan's supreme status symbol did not come for free. He had to buy the loyalty of journalists, military men, and scientists. His biographers and other sycophants were amply rewarded. Many of this writer's colleagues in the



Petrol tanker with portrait of Ijaz Ghauri, Pakistan's foremost nuclear scientist. Sindh, Pakistan

physics department of Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam University would receive cheques for substantial amounts merely by sending him an obsequious note and asking for money.

Qadeer was not so generous with this writer. With a physics colleague, Abdul Nayyar, this writer had challenged in court Qadeer's bid to steal their university's land in 1996. Though the duo eventually won, Qadeer had this writer placed on the Exit Control List -- forbidden to leave Pakistan until cleared of various charges of being 'anti-national'. These charges included selling the secrets of the Kanupp (Karachi) reactor to the United States and India — a wildly ridiculous charge given that Kanupp is under the full-scope safeguards of the IAEA.

What does the wind know?

It is said that General Musharraf has a strong personal dislike of Qadeer, and it is unlikely that he approved his shady dealings. Yet when he removed Qadeer as head of the enrichment facility in late 2000, allegedly under US pressure, Musharraf did not order a thorough investigation; nor, more recently, did he show much gratitude to the two countries which had exposed the international crime ring. Indeed, in the marathon press conference where he announced his acceptance of Qadeer's petition for mercy, Musharraf excoriated Iran and Libya for surrendering to the IAEA and meekly handing over documents on their nuclear programmes that implicated Pakistan ("Our Muslim brothers did not ask us before giving our names"). When asked if the state would appropriate Qadeer's illicitly acquired wealth, Musharraf replied that this was not necessary — this even though Musharraf has been incarcerating political rivals for many years on charges of corruption that may be true but are yet to be proved in court.

But Pervez Musharraf is not the only one with some

explaining to do in this murky affair. The United States government, both for its past and present policies towards Pakistan and for its role in nuclear proliferation generally, also should be required to answer some questions. American policy on nuclear proliferation towards both Pakistan and Israel has historically been driven by expediency. As these two countries set about building nuclear weapons decades ago, the US chose to look the other way. While Pakistan fought America's war-by-proxy against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the president of the United States certified year after year that Pakistan was not attempting to build a nuclear weapon, thus allowing Pakistan to continue building the bomb. But after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the US imposed sanctions on Pakistan, accusing it of a nuclear arms programme.

Such expediency — to put it in mildest terms — continues to guide US actions today. CIA director George J Tenet claims that his agency had penetrated deep into the nuclear technology smuggling ring in recent years. This should not have been difficult, given Qadeer's shameless advertising of his wares. But, still, why did the Americans fail to stop him?

If Tenet's claim is correct, then we must conclude that the US knew, but did not attempt to stop, centrifuge and bomb designs from being further copied, and centrifuge parts being manufactured and distributed to other interested parties. In effect, this has made the difficult job of containing the spread of nuclear weapons much harder. It is not clear why the CIA chose to move so slowly and with such apparent indecision and one must come to the conclusion that there has been US complicity as well in nuclear proliferation.

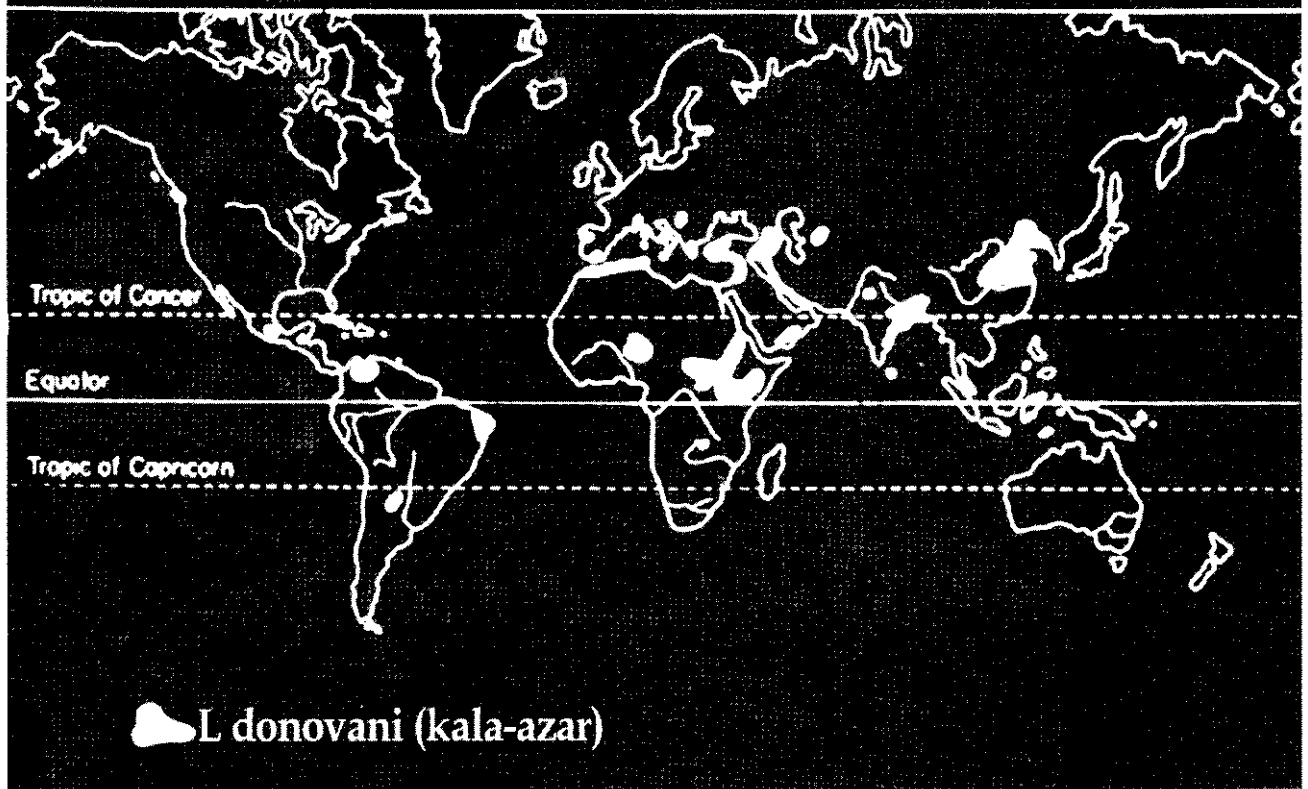
The more recent United States indulgence of General Musharraf has a clearer explanation. The Americans want Pakistan to help eliminate the al-Qaida and Taliban threat. Colin Powell's statement that Pakistan has done "quite a bit to roll up the (nuclear) network" must be read in the light of this urgent priority. But can Pakistan deliver on either account?

In Pakistan, as elsewhere, nuclear organisations are clothed in layers of secrecy, which raises questions about Powell's optimism. It is also an open question as to whether Pakistani government assurances, even if they are sincere, can prevent all in the country's nuclear establishment from following in Qadeer's footsteps. Only two years ago, as is well-known, senior members of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission were ready to play their role in the jihad against America. In a fit of Islamic solidarity they went to Afghanistan and met with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. It is difficult to believe that they were the only ones so inclined. ▽

The poor man's disease

The history and the present reality of a dastardly disease that hits the poorest in the poorest regions of Southasia.

by Dr César Chelala



Perhaps the lesser known of the infectious disease of Southasia, and the most neglected, is Kala-azar. The name stands for "Black Sickness," because of the darkened colour assumed by the skin of some patients. Kala-azar is the Mogul period vernacular name of visceral *Leishmaniasis*, a disease fatal if not treated, that annually affects 500,000 people in 69 countries and has a population at risk of 350 million people. 90 percent of cases occur in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sudan.

Cause, symptoms, and distribution

The *leishmaniasis* are different illnesses caused by infection with a parasite called a protozoan, a single-celled organism considered to be the most simple in the animal kingdom. There are three forms of *leishmaniasis* - the cutaneous, the muco cutaneous and the third form

that affects several organs and is called visceral *leishmaniasis* or Kala-azar. The last form of this disease is the one prevalent in India and Nepal.

The symptoms of Kala-azar include highly undulating fever, weight loss, fatigue, abdominal pain, cough and diarrhoea. Among the clinical signs are a dark colour of the skin, and enlargement of the spleen, liver and lymph nodes.

Kala-azar is normally present in areas of drought, famine and densely populated villages with poor or no sanitation and is not uniformly distributed in the affected areas. Among those most commonly affected are older children and young adults of both sexes with male preponderance. As a result of migration patterns, in recent years foci of Kala-azar are also present in cities where the poor live in densely populated ghettos in sub-standard conditions.

Early history

Kala-azar made its first documented attack on humans in Jessore District - now part of Bangladesh - in 1824, where it started in the village of Mohamedpur. The disease presented itself with typical signs and symptoms: darkened skin and wasted bodies with protruding abdominal veins. The weakened patients usually ended their lives amidst serious bouts of dysentery or pneumonia. In three years, it is estimated that this epidemic caused the death of 750,000 people.

Kala-azar had the characteristics of a communicable disease, and apparently spread through traffic routes. A few years after it was initially detected, the disease had expanded rapidly by roads and water through the entire Ganga plain, leaving death and destruction in its wake. A British civil surgeon working in India in the 1870s wrote of villages "in which not a healthy person was to be met with, while repeated relapses of fever, daily deaths, loss of their children, increasing depopulation of their villages and the absence of hope for better times, has so demoralised the population that they neglected to avail themselves of medical and other aid, unless brought actually to their homes".

The disease also appeared in Assam, carried by British steamers serving the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers. Kala-azar ravaged the region, and for the next 25 years Kala-azar killed almost a fourth of the population in some parts. With what author Robert S Desowitz calls "remarkable epidemiological insight", the people of Assam called the new infection *sarkari bemari*, 'the government disease', since they associated it with the British presence and the changes they brought to the country. With the extension of the disease from Assam to Tamil Nadu, Kala-azar established permanent residency in the subcontinent.

Clues

As happens with many epidemics of infectious diseases, and for reasons not totally known, Kala-azar seems to have a specific cycle of activity, which is estimated to be between 15 to 20 years. With the beginning of the new century the epidemic in the Ganga plain waned, but did not completely disappear. Until 1900, the disease remained a mystery as to its causative agent or the mechanism of its transmission. It took 80 years since it was first documented to find the agent causing the disease.

A British soldier stationed in Calcutta in 1900 who contracted the disease was an invaluable link to the understanding of its origin. The soldier died in England,



The Leishman-Donovan duo



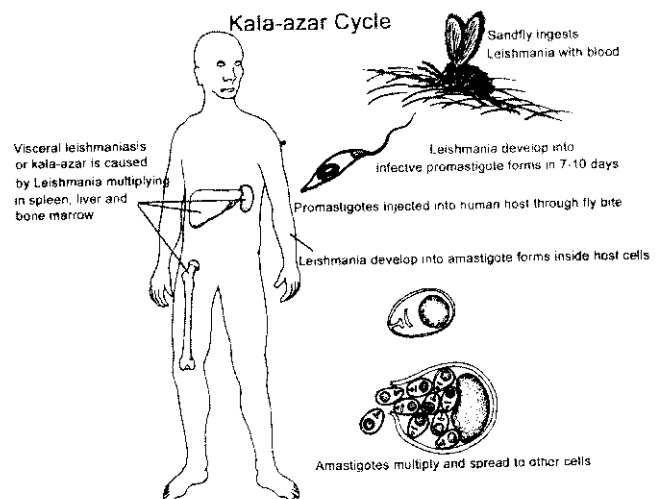
where his body was autopsied by William Boog Leishman, who had previously worked for the India Medical Service. For years, Leishman had been trying to find the causative organism of Kala-azar. He took a piece of the spleen from the soldier's body and stained the samples. To his surprise he found a new set of bodies which were later called 'Leishman bodies' and which

he thought were the cause of the disease. The first person to confirm the finding was Charles Donovan in Madras.

In 1904, the organisms responsible for the disease were recognised as being protozoan in nature, were given the name 'Leishman-Donovan bodies' and received the taxonomic designation of *Leishmania donovani*. That it was an infectious disease was demonstrated by its spread from household to household, and from village to neighbouring villages. But the question as to how it was transmitted and which the responsible agents were, still remained. After several false starts, researchers were able to find some clues - geography, of all disciplines, proved useful.

Major John Sinton, a renowned specialist on malaria, became intrigued by Kala-azar. Working at the Central Research Institute's Medical Entomology Section at Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, Sinton found an interesting trail. Sinton probably reasoned that epidemics happen over time, and so they have a history, but they also happen at particular places, so they must have a geographical spread pattern. On examination of the spread pattern he saw that the disease had a restricted distribution in the eastern half of India, from Madras to Assam. When he compared the distribution pattern of the blood-sucking insects with that of the Kala-azar, the map of one species of insects closely

90 percent
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coincided with that of Kala-azar - *Phlebotomus argentipes*, the silvery sandfly.

Based on these findings, Sinton published a series of papers in 1924 and 1925 proposing the theory that the sandfly was the vector (the carrier) of the Kala-azar parasite, *Leishmania donovani*. Sinton thought that once infected in a person, the sandfly passes the infectious agent to other persons in whom the protozoan will set up residence and cause the disease.

Testing for proof

Further evidence to accept his hypothesis was needed, however. Robert Knowles and scientists at the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine fed laboratory-bred sandflies to Kala-azar patients. They then dissected the flies and searched for the presence of *Leishmania donovani*. They were able to find them in the gut, and later in the throat, of flies that had been fed on the patients earlier.

But crucial proof was necessary. Because the sandfly vector becomes infected when feeding on the blood of an infected individual or an animal reservoir host, an infected sandfly had to bite a person, and that person had to come down with Kala-azar to prove that it truly was carrying the infectious agent and that this agent was the cause of the disease.

An Indian physician, CS Swaminath, provided that final proof. Working with Henry Edward Shortt, a professor at the University of London's School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, they obtained the collaboration of six volunteers from the hill district of

Assam and placed infected flies on them. Three of the volunteers contracted the disease. The finding confirmed that the disease is transmitted from person to person using the sandfly *Phlebotomus argentipes* as the vector of *Leishmania donovani* and that this infectious agent was responsible for Kala-azar. This was a significant moment in the history of the disease.

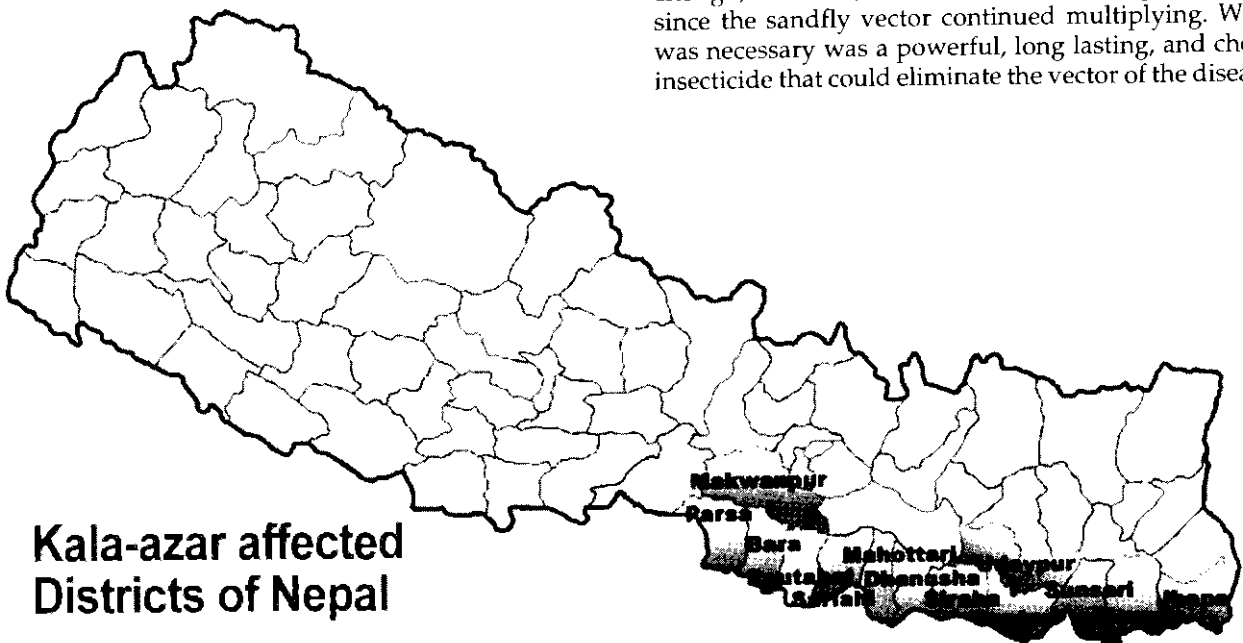
Search for a Cure

Parallel to the evolution of the disease was the search for a cure. Just as geography had helped in finding its vector, history (and cosmetics) helped in finding the first effective treatment for Kala-azar. That treatment, however, had some important secondary effects.

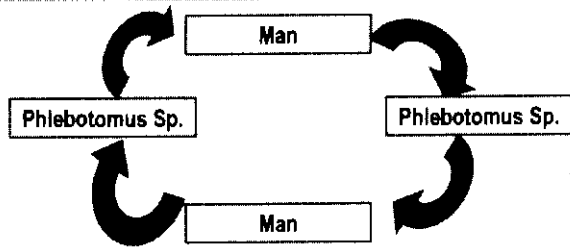
The women of ancient Egypt were known for their concern for looking beautiful and for taking good care of their bodies. They used a cosmetic paste that contained oxides and sulphides of the heavy metal antimony, which had accidentally proved effective in treating some skin disorders close to the eyes of women using that paste. Centuries later, the success in using arsenical and antimonial compounds against syphilis and African sleeping sickness called attention to the potential effectiveness of therapy with these heavy metals for treating Kala-azar patients.

The initial antimony compounds used were extremely toxic and not very effective. In 1935, a new antimony product, pentavalent antimonium (Pentostam) was developed, which was the first effective drug against this disease. This was not enough, however, to eliminate the threat posed by it, since the sandfly vector continued multiplying. What was necessary was a powerful, long lasting, and cheap insecticide that could eliminate the vector of the disease.

The treatment of the disease cannot ignore that globalisation and trade, combined with increasing socio-economic disparities has led to increased international migration.



Kala-azar Transmission



Visceral leishmaniasis (Kala-azar) as it occurs in India and Nepal
(No animal host is known)

Effect of spraying with insecticide

It was discovered in the 1940s that using DDT (dichlorodiphenyl trichloroethylene) to combat malaria had another unsuspected effect. DDT was not only able to kill the anopheline mosquito that was a vector for the most common types of malaria but was also able to act against the sandfly vector for Kala-azar. Actually, because of the characteristics of the sandfly, the insecticide was more effective against them than against the anophelines vectors of malaria. The explanation for this difference is that sandflies (which actually do not fly but just hop from place to place) sit on the walls longer and at lower height than the anophelines, and can thus be more easily reached by the sprayed DDT.

The DDT used in India by the National Malaria Eradication Programme in the 1940s ravaged the sandfly population and interrupted the transmission of Kala-azar. By the mid-1950s no new cases of Kala-azar were being recorded and in the mid-1960s Kala-azar had become an almost forgotten disease in the country. However, when the national anti-malaria campaign was interrupted in India, Kala-azar reappeared in 1970 in the village of Vaishali, in Bihar.

Vaishali, where the Buddha had his last enlightenment, now also had the dubious distinction of being the place where Kala-azar reclaimed its territory. In the late 1970s Kala-azar travelled downstream and appeared in Bangladesh, and shortly afterwards entered part of the Tarai, the agricultural plains of Nepal bordering India, where it became endemic. The Tarai covers 17 percent of the total land area of the country, where 48 percent of Nepal's total population presently lives. Kala-azar is now present in 13 districts in Nepal, bordering Bihar in India.

The treatment of the disease cannot ignore that globalisation and trade, combined with increasing socio-economic disparities has led to increased international migration. India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan are an example of countries with porous borders and frequent migration of population. Migrants are particularly vulnerable populations, and their movement across borders entails risks for the propagation of communicable diseases and infections such as HIV/

AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and Kala-azar. This makes it even more imperative to find ways to control the spread of those diseases.

Asymptomatic or sub-clinical infections

An important finding from the point of view of preventing Kala-azar is that most infections remain asymptomatic or sub-clinical. It is estimated that asymptomatic infections outnumber those that are symptomatic by an estimated ratio of 10:1, or even higher. Due to the high number of persons who remain asymptomatic, but can still infect other people, effective control of the infection is very difficult.

Panduka Wijeyaratne, resident advisor for the Environmental Health Project in Nepal (funded by USAID) is an expert on Kala-azar. For the past several years, this project has carried out a series of actions aimed at reducing the threat of this disease. He has been working with *leishmaniasis* for the last 20 years and for 10 years had a network of several countries working on this problem.

Wijeyaratne told this writer that, "What we have already seen is only the tip of the iceberg, because below are all these asymptomatic cases, some of which will become symptomatic, particularly among the poor". Wijeyaratne adds, "Kala-azar is a controllable, treatable disease that affects those most neglected and dispossessed".

Diagnosis

In Nepal, most cases of Kala-azar had been diagnosed based on the clinical picture and relatively non-specific tests such as the total white blood cell count or by a test called the aldehyde test. The most specific one is demonstration of parasites, usually carried out by taking an aspirate from the spleen or bone marrow and examining the smear under a microscope.

A new test recently developed is called k39. The test requires only one drop of finger-prick blood and replaces the traditional diagnosis by biopsy of the liver or spleen or by puncture of the bone marrow or a lymph gland. Nepal at present has the diagnostic Kit-39 for Kala-azar. This new test offers interesting possibilities for eventually eliminating the disease, since it will be much easier to diagnose those affected — even if asymptomatic — and start the treatment of the disease earlier.

Control of the disease

Both effective treatment and prevention are the cornerstones of control of this disease, but there have been three serious complicating circumstances. Firstly, was the finding that co-infection with HIV was becoming more frequent, making treatment even more difficult. Secondly, there was the increasing resistance to pentavalent antimony (Pentostam), which had been the best weapon against the disease for more than half a century. Finally, there was the matter of population movements across borders.

A significant recent development has been the identification of the drug *miltefosine* as the first oral agent against the disease. Presently, clinical trials of this drug are being conducted in Nepal, and if *miltefosine* proves its effectiveness it will be a tremendous step forward in the fight against the disease, since it will replace the painful and highly inconvenient treatments presently used.

Another recent development has been the agreement between Nepal and India's National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme. Through this agreement, both India and Nepal will share information and resources as part of cross-border collaboration efforts, which will increase dramatically the effectiveness and efficiency of efforts for controlling the disease.

Impact of the disease

Although the number of cases of Kala-azar in Nepal is estimated at approximately 2,000 per year, this number does not take into account the number of asymptomatic cases, nor gives an indication of how serious an epidemic of this disease can become if the risk factors are allowed to increase. In addition, the disease has a tremendous economic impact on the affected families, particularly since a sick person in the family means that sooner or later other members are also going to be affected, including those responsible for the family's economic support.

This writer visited the village of Juri, a heavily endemic area in the Janakpur District and met a man in his early forties (he ignores his real age), Ram Sewak, from the Danuwar, a low socio-economic caste. Ram Sewak revealed that of the 35 persons in his extended family, 17 had had Kala-azar. His own wife had died of the disease; he had had to sell his plot of land to pay for her care and had been left destitute. Unable to take care of his children, a boy of 10 and a girl of eight, he had sent them to live with a maternal uncle. He now does not have a home and does whatever work he can find. There were several similarly tragic stories in Janakpur, the result of the predations of Kala-azar.

Kala-azar is a good example of a bad situation, a disease that affects those of low socio-economic level in households where hygiene and sanitation are poor, circumstances that favour the spreading and multiplication of the sandfly vector of the disease. What can be done to improve the situation?

Perhaps the best approach is to try to diminish the risk factors/situations associated with the disease. The sandfly is attracted to livestock, breeds in animal waste, and is present in wall cracks, and damp floors in the homes. Children should avoid sleeping on the ground floor, and wall cracks should be repaired. Bed nets and spraying houses with insecticide have proven to be



Kala-azar patient (child) at Jaleswar District Hospital, Nepal.

effective measures to avoid the disease. At the same time, there should be a campaign at the community level to reduce sandfly breeding sites using local materials, and education both at the community level and with health staff at all levels aimed at improving case recognition, surveillance and reporting.

Kala-azar affects those of low socio-economic level in households where hygiene and sanitation are poor.

Can Kala-azar be controlled?

An important element in the fight against this disease is to have the political will to carry out the necessary actions, something that frequent political changes make difficult. Another person, Vijay Kumar Singh, senior physician at Janakpur Zonal Hospital, was eager to communicate his experience in dealing with Kala-azar for over 20 years and seeing over a thousand patients. He said that one of the reasons not enough attention was paid to the disease, was the fact that it affected the

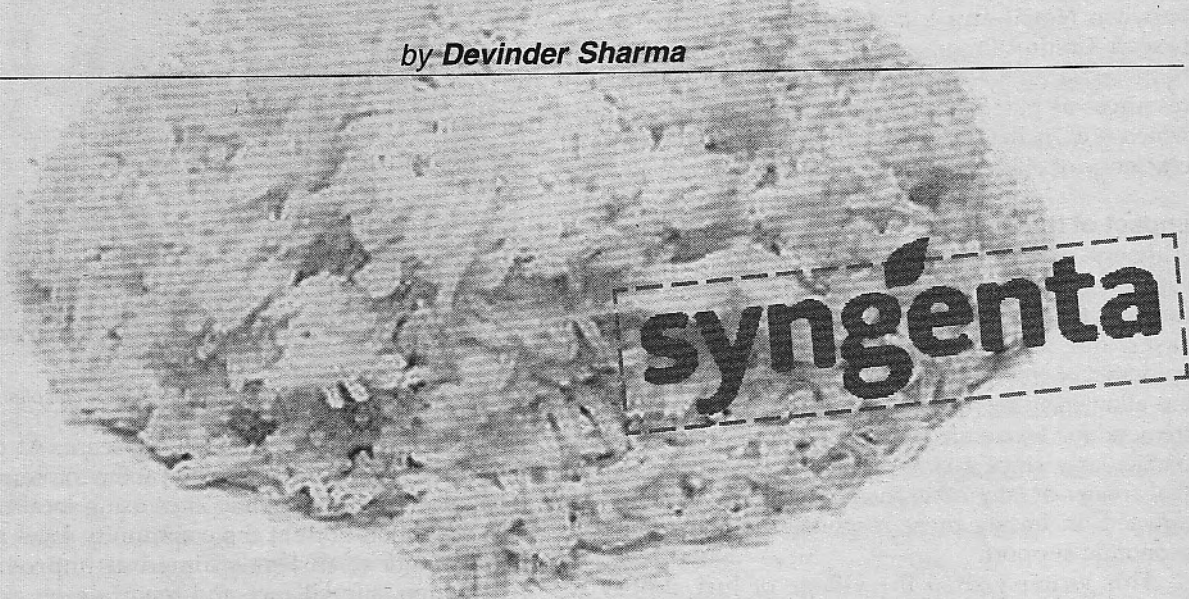
lower socio-economic classes, the voiceless ones. Ishwor Prasad Upadhyaya, at the Primary Health Care Centre at Gausala, Mahottari District, had no doubts, "Kala-azar is a poor man's disease".

On being asked if Kala-azar could be controlled and eventually eliminated, Vijay Kumar Singh said: "Yes, it can... But we need at least 10 years of sustained effort. What is necessary is a complementary set of activities including early detection at community level, prompt treatment, regular follow up and completion of treatment, as well as close synchronisation of activities between India and Nepal, and continuing political will". As things stand now, all the elements are in place to effectively control this dreadful disease. ▽

Rice and sovereignty

The grain that sustains more than half of the world's population may soon be owned and controlled by a private company.

by *Devinder Sharma*



The launch of a high-yielding dwarf rice variety by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) on 28 November 1966 marked the beginning of Asia's struggle for freedom from hunger. Perhaps drawn by the promise of the 'miracle rice' – the IR8 rice variety – the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) dedicated 1966 as the International Rice Year. Thirty-eight years later as the United Nations dedicates the year 2004 to the world's most important staple food once again, celebrating it as the International Year of Rice, the starchy grain has undergone complete metamorphosis.

In 1966, the miracle rice seeds that ushered in the green revolution belonged to the species *Oryza sativa* (the biological name for rice). Since the time the indica variety of wild rice was known to be growing in the northern and southern slopes of the Himalaya – some 15,000 years ago – rice has been regarded as probably God's greatest gift to humankind. Staple food for more than half the world's population, rice has come to be a part of the Asian culture itself. Nearly 91 percent of the world's rice is produced in Asia (nine of the top ten rice-producing countries are from Asia) and 92 percent of the produce is eaten in Asia. Rice is the principal food of three of the world's four most populous nations: the People's Republic of China, India and Indonesia. Rice is what sustains more than 2.5 billion people in these three countries alone. For centuries, rice has been

the sociology, tradition and lifeline for the majority world.

That was an era associated with *Oryza sativa* – a period when rice was freely available for farmers, consumers and the scientists. Whether it were the 200,000 plant accessions of rice that were known to be cultivated some 200 years ago, or the handful of dwarf and high-yielding rice varieties and its numerous national variants the world over that have led the march against hunger in the recent past, rice was a realm of nature.

As the world begins to commemorate the International Year of Rice 2004, a leading multinational agribusiness giant, Syngenta, has already claimed ownership of rice. In other words, the biological inheritance of the world's major food crop is now in the hands of a Swiss multinational. The journey of rice, beginning with the emergence of wild rice some 130 million years ago, crossing the Himalaya, passing through southern China, hopping to Japan, travelling to Africa, traded to the Middle East and the Mediterranean and shipped to Mexico and America, has finally ended at the banks of river Rhine in Basel, Switzerland – under the monopoly control of Syngenta.

Over the years, agribusiness giants kept assuring a worried scientific community that crops like rice, wheat and other cereals are of no commercial interest to them. Their focus was, they said, on such cash crops as

strawberries, cut flowers, tomatoes with the potential of big profits. This prompted universities, which developed such technologies in the first place, to license these to the private corporations. Knowing well that patenting alone will determine who wields power over farming and the world food system, a tug of war began between the multinationals over who controls the rice plant genome – the raw sequences in the genetic code (a gene is an ordered string of DNA nucleotides that we inherit from our parents whereas genome refers to the entire constitution of our genetic material or make-up).

The tussle over the monopoly control of rice extends to its 12 chromosomes. These chromosomes contain 430 million base pairs of DNA, and are expected to have about 50,000 genes. Syngenta, in collaboration with Myriad Genetics Inc of the United States, has beaten the other food biotechnology giant Monsanto in the game by sequencing more than 99.5 per cent of the rice genome. Syngenta has made it clear that it will restrict access to the genomic map and expects proprietary control over any research carried out with the information.

Top executives of Syngenta have already told *The New York Times* that while companies would not seek to patent the entire genome, they would try to patent individual valuable genes. They categorically stated that Syngenta and Myriad were well on their way to locating many of those. First it was Monsanto which made international headlines in April 2000 by announcing to share its working draft (rough version, 60 per cent) of the genome map with international researchers sequencing the rice genome under a publicly funded International Rice Genome Sequencing Project (IRGSP), and now it is Syngenta making clear its efforts to seek patents on genes with visible commercial output – the race is on to draw proprietary control over something that is actually part of nature and a human heritage.

There are conflicting reports of the latest tally of patents over rice genes. Some researchers say that more than 900 genes have already been patented. Earlier, the Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) had compiled a list of 609 patents on rice genes drawn till September 2000, 56 per cent of which were owned by private companies and research institutes in Western countries. On top of the list was the American giant Du Pont with 95 patents, followed by Mitsui, Japan, with 45 patents. In the next three years, especially after the mapping of the rice genome by Syngenta, a majority of the patents would surely be in the lap of a handful of multinational agribusiness companies.

The daylight robbery of genetic wealth – appropriately termed biopiracy – is happening with the

connivance of top scientists, international organisations and the policy makers. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which governs the 16 international agricultural research centres for public goods, has actually welcomed the recent developments in rice. The Rockefeller Foundation, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and even the FAO and UNDP have refrained from standing up against the nefarious designs of private companies in the name of research and development. In fact, CGIAR has even gone a step ahead by taking Syngenta on its board – thereby ensuring that the company gets free access to the world's biggest rice germplasm collections that it holds.

Golden Rice

In fact, Syngenta subsequently has gained exclusive rights on the controversial Golden Rice technology (a vitamin-A-fortified strain of rice that could stave off progressive blindness from vitamin deficiency in as many as 250,000 poor children globally a year) in exchange for help with Intellectual Property Rights issues and the different testing of the rice for a humanitarian project. This happened even as the international community was negotiating an agreement to see that the 70-odd patents that were coming in the way of free transfer and application of the technology were removed. Ingo Potrykus, university professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology who developed the Golden Rice, was in a desperate haste to see that his name is enshrined in history as the saviour of the malnourished. Greenovation, a spin-off company from the University of Freiberg in Germany, was therefore founded in 1999 to out-license university research to life science companies.

The patent was applied for a year later, naming Ingo Potrykus and his colleague Beyer as the inventors, facilitating an agreement with Zeneca, now Syngenta. For the Swiss company, the IPR over Golden Rice provides a human face to its manipulative gene control designs. The company has already announced that the technology will be free for farmers in the developing countries with annual incomes of less than USD 10,000 – a wonderful exercise in public relations knowing well that Golden Rice has little utility and relevance for developing countries.

The quest for control over rice does not end with patenting of its genes. In 2002, stung by criticism, Syngenta India had to pull out from the controversial research collaboration with the Indira Gandhi Agricultural University (IGAU) at Raipur, Chattisgarh.

CGIAR has even gone a step ahead by taking Syngenta on its board – thereby ensuring that the company gets free access to the world's biggest rice germplasm collections that it holds.

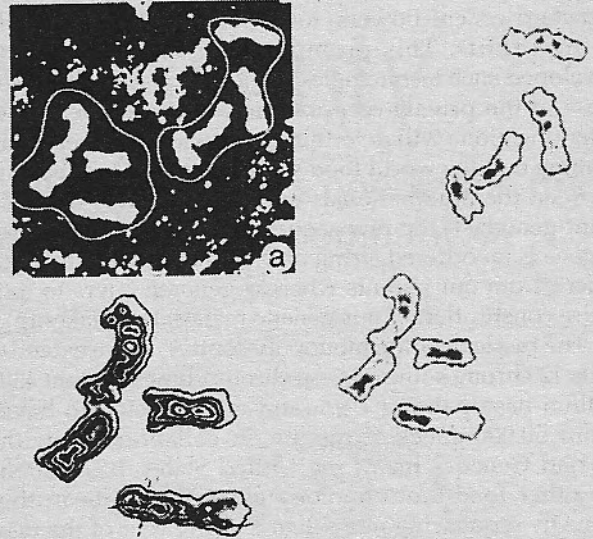


Monsanto Laboratory of the Life Sciences at the Washington University in Saint Louis

The collaboration would have given the company commercial rights to over 19,000 strains of local rice cultivars held by the university. These rice varieties were painstakingly gathered by the agricultural scientist RH Richharia in the 1970s. In exchange, the university would have received an undisclosed amount of money and royalties. Environmentalists and some scientists had opposed the deal on the ground that Richharia's collection was national wealth and not the private property of the university and that opening the database to a multinational company was a 'sell-out'. "We are very disappointed to see the misleading and false accusations that were made (against the collaboration)", a company official was quoted as saying. What is however relatively unknown is the fact that the Richharia rice collections were not the only plant species that the company had an eye for. It has reportedly gone to numerous agricultural universities in India, signing agreements that enable the company commercial rights over the hybrid rice varieties in lieu of five percent royalties from sales.

Patrick Mulvany of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) is a distinguished researcher who has closely followed the biodiversity trail. "Not just national collections, but also CGIAR genebanks (which contain over 600,000 plant accessions) will come under increasing pressure from multinationals in the next year or two, to exchange the genetic resources in genebanks under public control for traitorous pieces of silver", he warns. Also, 'Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture' is defined in Article 2 of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (2001) as "any genetic material of plant origin of actual or potential value for food and agriculture" - it should be quite clear from this that IPRs are NOT to be allowed on these genetic resources.

However, the eminent Commission on Intellectual



Sequential steps of image analysis for rice chromosome.

Property Rights (CIPR), set up by the UK government (2001), has already jumped the gun and has interpreted Article 12.3(d) which states that "recipients shall not claim any intellectual property or other rights...in the form received from the Multilateral System (MLS)," as meaning that patents can be taken out on genes derived from the seeds kept under the rules of the MLS (those 35 genera of food crops, including rice, wheat, maize and potatoes, and 29 forages covered by the MLS in its Annex 1). Mulvany explains: "The crucial words 'in the form received' mean that material received cannot be patented as such, but they do allow patents to be taken out on modifications (however defined) to that material".

In simple words, even the CIPR has failed to foresee the underlying threat to food sovereignty. Not realising that such an interpretation will lead to scientific apartheid against the people of developing countries. After all, with the product and process patents coming into vogue in agriculture, the dice is loaded against public-sector agricultural research. As a result of private control over genes and biological processes, farm research in the public sector will be rendered redundant. It has already happened in the rich industrialised countries where universities have increasingly gone private or are surviving on private funds. Rice research will be the biggest casualty, and with a few private companies vying for the crumbs, rice is essentially in the grip of Syngenta.

The International Year of Rice 2004 is in reality a celebration of the private control of one of the mankind's most precious heritage - rice plant. It is a toast to acknowledge the emergence of Switzerland on the world's rice map. *Oryza sativa*, therefore for all practical purposes will become *Oryza syngenta*. △

Notorious fizz

The multinational colas swamp the public consciousness with their advertising blitz, but a parliamentary committee has been doing its job in India.

by **Sudhendar Sharma**

In New Delhi a new advertisement featuring three of the leading Bollywood actors was perfectly timed to take the fizz out of the eagerly awaited report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on pesticide residues in (and safety standards for) soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages. No surprise, therefore, like the escape of impregnated carbon dioxide from the cola bottle, that the historic findings of the report had evaporated from public memory within a week of the report's release!

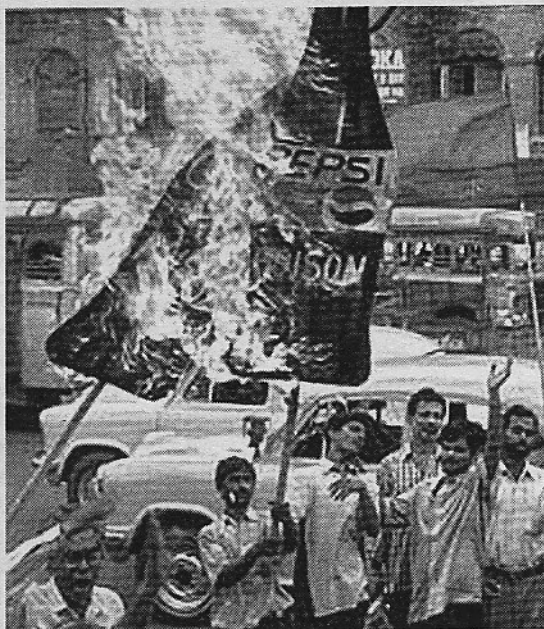
Tabled simultaneously in both houses of the Parliament on 4 February 2004, the JPC report put an official stamp on the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment's claims that indeed soft drinks contained pesticide residues. Though the findings were nothing less than historic, they could not make a dent in the face of the publicity blitz unleashed by the cola multinationals, which have comforted the public with the belief that the drinks are safe.

The 'clean chit' provided to the multinationals by none other than the country's health minister, Sushma Swaraj, prior to the setting up of the JPC, had already worked in their favour. While the 15-member JPC sat to examine all the relevant facts in setting up a comprehensive public health

agenda, the cola companies were busy building up their ad campaign out of a formidable war chest with which to buy the most popular Bollywood stars.

The JPC had little option but to hold the Ministry of Health respon-

Do the companies even pay for the water that is pumped to fill some 7000 million bottles of soft drinks every year? Apparently not.



Protestors are not amused.



sible for the spread of misinformation, but by that time, the damage had already been done. For the INR 6,000 crore (close to USD 1330 million) soft drinks industry that is growing at an impressive rate of 7-8 percent annually, the six months spent by the JPC in filing its report was a period to let loose the blitz, with not a second to be lost. And, it did not miss any minute of this opportunity! When it comes to business in fluid products, to begin with, six months actually translates into no less than 3000 million bottles of soft drinks pushed down the throats of unsuspecting public.

The JPC was shocked to find that the burgeoning soft drinks industry was unregulated. It is exempted from industrial license under the Industries Act of 1951 and gets the convenience of a one-time operating license under the 1955 Food Products Order (FPO). All that the industry has to comply with for unrestricted operations is the requirement of a no-objection-certificate from the state government and clearance from the state Pollution Control Board.

Finally, what was not done in decades got accomplished in days. Within 20 days of the CSE expose in August 2003, the Ministry of Health had brought in a draft notification to cover soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages under

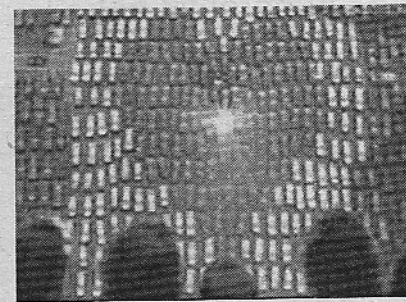
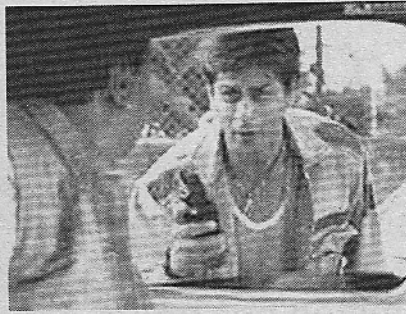
the same standards as that for packaged drinking water. The JPC observed the Government's over-enthusiasm with scepticism, noting that the ministry has not taken the opinion of the statutory Central Committee on Food Standards.

The Committee further wondered at the Government's wisdom of clubbing soft drinks with fruit juices when the maximum residue levels (MRL) fixed in the case of raw fruits and vegetables were much higher under the existing provisions of the 1954 Prevention of Food Adulteration Act (PFA). Observing gross negligence, the JPC recommended that MRL be fixed for all the pesticides registered in the country. Shockingly, the MRL of only 71 of the 181 registered pesticides has been fixed under 1954 PFA Act.

The JPC had been particularly concerned about water quality, as it constitutes 86 to 92 percent of any soft drink. Surprisingly, neither is water defined properly nor any standards laid down under EPA, FPO or the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). Given the fact that prone-to-contamination groundwater is the source at the cola factories across the country, quality of water assumes greater significance. The Committee was concerned about the use of ground water by cola companies.

Ground reality

Do the companies even pay for the water that is pumped to fill some 7000 million bottles of soft drinks every year? Apparently not. Though the companies have taken the mandatory permission to pump groundwater at their factory premises across the country, the actual water withdrawal has been free everywhere. The shocked and dismayed JPC questioned the Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, about the ground reality. "So far, as we know, the Government is charging no money for this purpose", came the rather lame reply. When asked how it was that the cola majors had free access to groundwater, and that too at the cost of public health, citing



Heart-throbs Shahrukh, Saif and Preity are suckers for Pepsi.

Given the fact that prone-to-contamination groundwater is the source at the cola factories across the country, quality of water assumes greater significance.

the legal position of groundwater being bundled together with land ownership, the Ministry of Water Resources expressed its inability to levy charges.

In light of the Kerala High Court judgement in the case of Plachimada plant of Coca Cola, the JPC questioned the stand taken by the bureaucrat at the Ministry of Water Resources. The court has directed no uncertain terms that the use of groundwater is free only in case the same is used for domestic or agricultural purpose by the owner. In case of its commercial use, the court observed, the panchayat and the state are bound to protect groundwater from exploitation. The committee, meanwhile, took strong exception to the ineffective functioning of the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA), constituted on the directions of the Supreme Court to regulate groundwater exploitation.

In many ways, the JPC report reads like a charge-sheet on the functioning of the concerned ministries of the government. However, the report makes significant recommendations to improve the situation. They include the setting up of stringent standards for pesticide residues in soft drinks, regulating groundwater extraction for commercial purposes, the inclusion of water within the definition of 'food', and developing coordinated action by research institutions in the public domain. The JPC has thus unleashed an agenda that is aimed at providing safe food and water to the masses.

Though the JPC report has brought public health onto the centre stage, it is not yet clear if its recommendations would translate into concrete action. With about eight different ministries dealing with a plethora of laws and regulations on food products — law enforcement is at best cosmetic and loose. Shockingly, a significant public-health issue that impacts the life of millions is not an electoral issue for the April-May general elections in India. △

NHRC of Nepal amidst the ruins

Government attitude is threatening an institution which has shown some degree of seriousness towards ensuring protection of human rights. There ought to be a rethink.

by *Suhas Chakma*

At the eighth annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions concluded in Kathmandu on 18 February 2004, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nepal stood tall amongst many of its peers from the region because of its interventions for promotion and protection of human rights in the ongoing-armed conflicts between the Maoists and the government of Nepal. Over 8,000 people have been killed, about a thousand have disappeared, thousands have been orphaned and widowed, and hundreds of thousands have been internally displaced since the Maoists began their 'people's war' in 1996.

As the conflict continues to intensify by the day since the collapse of the peace talks between the Maoists and the government on 27 August 2003, human rights institutional mechanisms notably the Supreme Court of Nepal (SC) and the NHRC have been facing contempt from the government and its security forces. The workload in 19 hilly district courts dropped drastically with less than 50 cases recorded in a year according to a recent report of the government's Judicial Council. Maoists have their own form of crude justice and threaten government judges. The Supreme Court has also failed to inspect the Appellate and District Courts in the country during 2002 and 2003 "owing

to bad law and order situation" though it is required to inspect the subordinate courts every year as per the Judicial Administration Act of 1991 and SC regulations. The police and army often refuse to accept court orders to produce detainees, and re-arrest detainees immediately after the courts order their release. There would seem to be little difference between the security forces and the Maoists when it comes to observance of the law.

Since 2000, an estimated 662 persons have disappeared at the hands of the security forces while 114 cases of disappearances have been attributed to the Maoists.

The NHRC, established by the government and with the mandate to promote and protect human rights, has faced a similar fate. The government of Nepal even refuses to acknowledge the reports of the NHRC or take appropriate action against those who are found guilty after proper investigation by the NHRC. Further, even as the NHRC called for investigations of abuse by the United Nations human rights

institutional mechanisms in late 2003, the government responded by establishing the National Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights under the prime minister's office to the detriment of a body already crippled by the lack of adequate financial resources.

All of this comes despite the fact that the NHRC has consistently maintained impartiality while dealing with abuses by the security forces and the Maoists. At the height of the conflict prior to the ceasefire, in January 2003 the NHRC investigated human rights violations in 35 districts of Nepal. On 22 October 2002 it apprised then Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand of human rights violations in the country including illegal detention, extrajudicial killings and use of excessive force in arrest and search operations. On 23 October 2002, the NHRC condemned the Maoists for attacking unarmed citizens, development infrastructure, cultural heritages, health posts, recruitment of child soldiers and indulging in extortion, appropriation of people's houses and looting foodstuff and medicines. The Maoists were also found to be indulging in extortion and murder of teachers in order to disrupt education.

However, the troubles for the NHRC started when the government apparently took offence to its investigation into the massacre of 17 Maoist cadres and two civilians in

The NHRC's quarters in Kathmandu



cold blood in the district of Ramechhap on 17 August 2003 while the third rounds of talks between the Maoists and the government was underway. An investigation committee of the NHRC, consisting of credible Nepali citizens included exhumation of the bodies, leading to the conclusion that the unarmed victims had been killed at close range, with hands tied behind the back. The investigating committee termed the killings as a violation of international humanitarian law, in particular Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, the Army Act, the Police Act and the Armed Police Act.

The NHRC's subsequent investigation into the killing of students at Sarada Higher Secondary School at Mudbhara Village under Doti District on 13 October 2003 found that students and teachers who were forced to take part in a cultural

programme by Maoists were indiscriminately shot at by the security forces. Altogether, the NHRC has written to the government about 20 cases when there has been evidence of excessive and unlawful use of force by the security forces, which under the concept of 'unified command' function under the direction of the Royal Nepal Army.

With only the Supreme Court (in Kathmandu) willing to accept habeas corpus petitions against disappearances, and filing a case before the courts being beyond the ability and logistical capability of most Nepalis outside of Kathmandu, the NHRC remains the only other hope in terms of the institution capable of at least receiving complaints of human rights violations. Since 2000, the NHRC has received a total of 808 complaints of disappearances involving 739 males and 69 females. An estimated 662 persons have disappeared at the hands of

the security forces while 114 cases of disappearances have been attributed to the Maoists. The army claims that they "cannot divulge the details of some of the abducted persons for security reasons".

Amidst the ruin of all institutions associated with a modern state, the NHRC of Nepal is one that has to be kept strong for the sake of the people's protection. In order to ensure that this institution is not reduced to another government mouth-piece, any National Human Rights Action Plan for Nepal, which is in the final stage of preparation, must include strengthening of the NHRC with human and financial resources. That's the least that a government could do to preserve some semblance of seriousness in addressing human rights violations. ▽

Good books and bad books



BOOKS HAVE been in the news in India recently, for no fault of theirs. First came the attack by the Sambhaji Brigade on the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute of Pune in January 2004, ostensibly over the 'denigration' of Shivaji by a historian who was only setting out the different ways in which people have looked at that historical hero. Naturally, those whom he had thanked for having helped him were bad people who therefore became targets. Then rewards were announced, in Mumbai and in Kolkata, for blackening respectively, the faces of the writers Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen. Hordes of avid bibliophiles everywhere, incensed beyond endurance by bad books...

Finally came the World Book Fair which opened in New Delhi on 14 February 2004, organised as usual by the National Book Trust (NBT). It began, according to the report published in *The Hindu* the next day, "amid [the] chanting of Vedic mantras [and the] rendition of Saraswati Vandana". This is, as we know, how public events commence all over the globe, so the use of the word 'World' in relation to this book fair was entirely justified.

It was only to be expected that the speakers at all the major functions in the book fair should be associated with the Sangh Parivar, which, through the BJP-led coalition at the Centre, controls the National Book Trust. This year, though, there was a change in the usual

arrangements: individual publishers who wished to hold book release functions or 'meet the author' events were required to obtain the prior permission of the fair's organisers. The Chairman of the NBT, BK Sharma, said that this was not aimed at censorship but represented sound management and was meant to prevent possible disorder. It was only 'unavoidable circumstances' which kept the organisers from allotting space for the release of Taslima Nasreen's most-recent book *Dwikhandito*, at which the writer herself was to have been present. None but the organisers of such a large event can understand the immense problems involved, the great responsibility that weighs on their shoulders.

A book represents, in now unfashionable terms, 'superstructure' or 'ideology'. It may contain the truth as those who follow "religions of the book" believe their particular books to represent, or it may contain lies. With obvious exceptions, the reader is free to evaluate a book. What is important is that in every modern society, books are a symbol of the freedom of expression that is guaranteed to every member of such a society. In the Indian Constitution, this freedom is set out in Article 19 (1) (a); although specific exceptions are listed which keep it from being absolute.

Maharashtra, ruled by a Congress-led coalition, banned James Laine's book on *Shivaji*; and West Bengal, ruled by the CPI(M), banned Taslima Nasreen's *Dwikhandito*. In both cases, the stated reason was that the books hurt the 'sentiments' of some people and therefore had the potential to cause trouble. Thus 'law and order' were given primacy over freedom of expression. It does not speak well for the governments of either that they considered themselves unable to tackle the law and order problems which *may* have arisen, choosing instead the easy way out of simply banning the offending works.

We do not know if it occurred to the two administrations that they had, in the process, trampled over a fundamental right granted by



The Bhandarkar Institute: outer and inner remains.

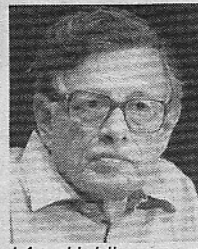
the Indian Constitution. One is led here to think of other administrations, those which included people who had shaped the Constitution. Did they ban the writings such as those of Golwalkar and Savarkar, which not only caused but were *intended* to cause hurt to the sentiments of millions of Indians and which recommended the denial to these Indians even the rights of ordinary citizens? Of course they did not. Perhaps some secretly agreed with the maniacs while others saw no harm in letting them rant on. Whichever way we choose to look at it, freedom of expression was not denied even to those who spouted poison.

One is led here to think also of what many stalwarts of the Sangh Parivar have been permitted to say, without let or hindrance, in their writing, in their public speeches, and in audio and video cassettes. The likes of Narendra Modi, Pravin Togadia and Ashok Singhal, and, in a comparatively restrained though no less obvious way, Deputy Prime Minister Lal Kishenchand Advani himself, have freely painted India's Muslims as Pakistani agents, as Pakistanis, and as terrorists, not to speak of several references involving what is more directly called obscenity. Of the many provisions in the Indian Penal Code which prescribe punishments for such acts, one need mention only those which pertain to public tranquillity (chapter VII), religion (chapter XV) and criminal intimidation (chapter XXII). Today's leaders are not governed by those very laws which they are pledged to uphold: nor, of course, are their 'kin'.

Literally silencing opponents is one use to which political power has been put. The other side of the coin is the spreading of one's own vicious ideas, their imposition on the nation, most particularly on its children. Both run counter to the law of the land, but why should those people bother who have political power in their grasp and who never made much of the law of the land anyway? Their own agenda is primary, and they use the laws only when they can be used against others: otherwise they bend them or ignore them entirely. The law is only a tool: it has nothing to do with natural justice or with principles.

Political power and the law can be misused to impose on people books that are packed full of lies. Further, people can be compelled to believe what these books

Bad Authors!



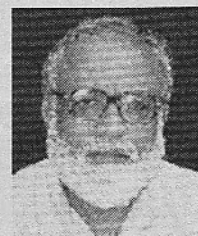
Irfan Habib



Bipin Chandra



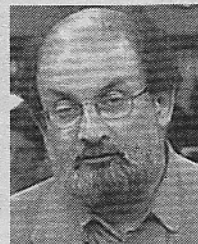
Romila Thapar



Anil Sadgopal



James Laine



Salman Rushdie

contain because books which contain alternative viewpoints can be made unavailable, again misusing the same set of laws. Modern societies are liberal in that they grant great freedom to their citizens as individuals, imposing restrictions only when the exercise of this freedom impinges on the freedoms of other citizens. Books, especially those that are used in school education, are perhaps the finest example of how India, in the last decade or so, is being led back from liberal modernity to a mediaeval suppression of individual freedoms, in large part through the obnoxious and cynical promotion of superstition.

Anil Sadgopal, Arjun Dev, Bipan Chandra, DN Jha, Irfan Habib, Nalini Taneja, Romila Thapar and Teesta Setalvad are some of the people who have written, with cogent arguments and extensive documentation, about the Sangh Parivar's organised effort to give a particular slant to text books meant for school children. The preponderance of historians is explained by the fact that it is chiefly the land's history which the Sangh Parivar has sought to re-write, in such a way that it might 'prove' the ancient and eternal superiority of its ahistorical and sociologically nonsensical construct of 'Hindu' culture and civilisation - a superiority which it says was marred by the coming (always as invaders, naturally, for there could have been no simple traders among them) of evil people who followed other faiths. To regain that superiority non-Hindus must be disenfranchised, suppressed, thrown out - or simply annihilated.

My fear is that the World Book Fair of 2004 may mark the co-option of the National Book Trust, in the way in which the National Council of Educational Research and Training was long ago co-opted, into the service of the Sangh Parivar. If this happens, not just school books but *all* books will sing the glories of Hindutva; and there will be nothing else to read.

I saw recently a book which documents how, in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, many banned books - not just Nabokov's *Lolita* but also, strangely, the works of Jane Austen - were read in secret by girls and young women with the encouragement of their brave teacher. Perhaps the time is not far when I shall have to hide when I read Tolstoy or Heming-way - or Charlie Brown. ▽

Mukul Dube

Mainstream (India)

Para ninda, Para charcha

The chat-behind-the-back has emerged as a 'political right' of the ordinary people, a way to defy authority and try and keep it in check.

[Note: With this issue, we begin an irregular series on writings from the 'langauge' journals of Southasia. This first instalment is from the Bangla journal Ekak Matra, published in its edition Vol.4, No.4, January-February, 2004. Translation by the writer.]

IF THE prevalent notion of democracy, notwithstanding its refractions and ambiguities in practice, ultimately boils down to the rule by the elected representatives of the people, it cannot but be an exercise in communication. To be precise, it is supposed to rest on a two way-process of exchange of messages and ideas, both substantive and symbolic, between the rulers and the ruled. Both sides are supposed to benefit from the communicative exercise. The rulers benefit because through this process they not only keep in touch with the people whom they would periodically face in the elections but also because, by being informed of various demands and grievances of the people, they find a sense of direction in governance. On the other hand, through the same exercise the ruled come to realise that they do have a role in governance, at least an indirect part in determining the policies being formulated and implemented. The process also enables the ordinary people to get rid of the 'illusion of omnipotence' about the rulers — the idea that that the rulers have the unlimited capacity to provide them with whatever they want. However, the question is do the rulers of the third world (including as it should Southasia) care to treat democracy as a communicative exercise? If not, what option is left to the ordinary people in terms of their political communication — of communicating about the polity and politicians in general and the rulers in particular?

My concern here is to defend and justify a specific kind of practice — chat-behind-the-back — of the ordinary people, by which the ruled make critical evaluation of the leaders. In Bangla, this practice is known as *para ninda, para charcha*, with a widely-used acronym *PNPC*. We shall subsequently point out that the chat-behind-the-back is different from gossip. But before we mention its characteristics let us explain why it earns the status of 'unofficial' political right of the ordinary people.

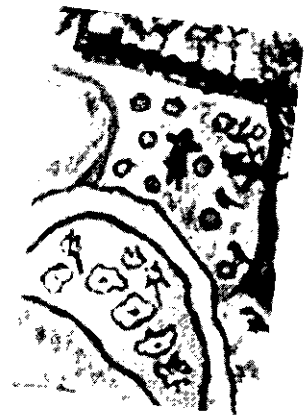
Communication: rulers' zone of silence

There is hardly any doubt that a yawning gap exists between the privileged and powerful rulers and the ordinary people. This is not only true in the cases of authoritarian and dictatorial rulers but also in the cases of those who swear by democracy. Take the case of India, the world's largest democracy. Have the Indian rulers taken a pause and thought of making democracy a communicative exercise? The 'communication' which they generally indulge in tends to be of two kinds. The first, mostly on the eve of elections, rests on slogans and rhetoric relating to achievements, backed up by impossible-to-fulfil promises of after being elected. The second is seen in 'normal times': top-down information dissemination — from the rulers to the ruled — with little scope for feedback from those down below.

To take a specific example, ordinary Indians today are being subject to an extraordinary publicity-blotz of the 'India Shining' campaign, apparently by the Government of India, but in effect, by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The advertisements and commercials that

The leaders remain so hidden from us that we have little scope to vent our feelings directly.

are part of the INR 500 crore-campaign (over USD 110 million) are full of distortions, myths, false claims and clever manipulation of facts about India's march towards development. What does it signify? This publicity-blotz, coinciding with the coming of the parliamentary elections starting in April, reveals a *government-in-hurry* to let people know what it has done so far. That only proves that regular rulers-to-ruled communication has been missing. It is important to note that the tendency to put ordinary people in *detention incommunicado* is true of the rulers of all shapes and sizes — irrespective of their ideological affiliations. Thus, when the Congress Party criticises those in power for "misleading people by the false feel-good mood" through this campaign it tends to forget a piece of recent history. When in power it was responsible for dealing the severest blow to the Indian democracy — by imposing the Emergency in the 1970s. During the Emergency one of the most favourite slogans of then Indian government was "work more, talk less". It was a classic



case of the rulers becoming the *guardians* of 'juvenile' citizens and telling them to keep their mouth shut on issues of governance. The obvious toll: democracy as communicative exercise!

If communication remains the blind spot of the rulers, its source lies in their ingrained attitude of treating power in terms of a zero-sum game. Thus, in their perception, power is something they should possess in totality; otherwise, they consider themselves powerless. Whatever may be the specificities of the polity of, say for instance, the Southasian countries — in terms of Nepal's experiment with cohabitation of monarchy and democracy, Bangladesh's rotation with military rule and party rule, Pakistan's 'mix' of democracy and military rule, and Sri Lanka's contention with the presidential and the parliamentary systems — the rulers display a splendid, if dangerous, commonality in defying the status of democracy as a communicative exercise. Interestingly, if this is the scenario in countries which have adopted democracy in one way or other, one can well imagine what the scenario is in countries like Bhutan, or for that matter in Burma or Malaysia. In Malaysia, the leading figure of the opposition has been thrown into jail and beaten black and blue — in the name of protecting "Asian Values". Dissent is a dirty word for the ruling class in such countries. And the best formula identified by such rulers to stall, stunt and uproot dissent is to resort to, at best, one-way information flow, and at worst, silence.

Weapon of the ruled

The fact, however, remains that despite the rulers' hostility to communication, the supposedly inactive and indifferent ordinary citizens continue to communicate. Indeed, the chat-behind-the-back is part of the everyday life communication of the ordinary people. It is important to differentiate this 'subversive' practice from what is generally known as gossip. The chat-behind-the-back (PNPC) is of a different genre even if on certain occasions it can come close to gossip. Gossip involves much more trivia than chat-behind-the-back which has greater depth and spread. To indulge in PNPC, one needs to possess some facts and data. There may be some degree of exaggeration, distortion and simplification and even speculation in it but it has greater degree of critical insights than what gossip, which relies overwhelmingly on imagined situation and free-floating speculation, could muster. Last but not the least, chat-behind-the-back is, generally speaking, more oriented to the public conduct of the rulers and less on their private conduct while in the case of gossip the reverse is true. What is most interesting is that while chat-behind-the-back relies more on issues of public concern, it remains a 'private' practice or act.

In Southasian countries rulers display a splendid, if dangerous, commonality in defying the status of democracy as a communicative exercise.

Chat-behind-the-back can vary in terms of intensity and focus of criticism. Thus, when one argues that a particular leader is useless there is sharp focus on him/her, and the intensity of the criticism is greater. But when one argues that the leader has not been able to do much because his/her party has been the main constraint, the focus is more diffused and the intensity of criticism is relatively less. Even if the fact remains that one cannot take into consideration the innumerable instances of PNPC in countries of Southasia, one can hazard a guess to point out that in most cases they are of the first category. The reason is the sense of insecurity and the feeling of frustration of ordinary people, which make the rulers aliens in their own land. The leaders, notwithstanding their occasional visibility through a cavalcade of cars and army of security personnel, remain so hidden from us that we have little scope to vent our feelings directly. The countries we live in are far different from those of Scandinavia in which the top-rung

leaders could be found mingling with ordinary mortals in shopping malls, cinema and opera houses. Nor do we have a Hyde Park-like space where we can publicly criticise our leaders in little gatherings. In the absence of so many opportunities, the only option left is chat-behind-the-back. It also remains the people's answer to the reluctance of our rulers to grant the third-generation human rights — the Right to Information

and the Right to Communicate.

Purifying politics

There are some sceptical pundits who raise doubts about the relevance of the rights to information and communication. Their logic runs something like this: because the ordinary people are not conscious enough of the political and democratic rights they have little need for them. But one can raise a counter-question: on how many occasions have the rulers cared to provide these rights to the people to come to the conclusion that the people themselves are absolutely unable to appreciate them? On the contrary, on various occasions in these countries it is the people at large who have shown their political acumen and respect for civil and political rights. Thus, it was the ordinary Indians who were instrumental in throwing out the government which promulgated the Emergency, through the parliamentary elections of 1977. True, such occasions do not come frequently. It is also true that, what should be the ways in which the ordinary people would express their opinions in adverse political situations is a question that defies easy, simplistic answers.

It is difficult to organise referendums in Southasian countries in the Scandinavian style, to hear the people's true voice; even if they are held, as in the case of military-ruled Pakistan, the result is a mere sham. When it

comes to elections, all over Southasia, the rulers take exceptional care to put hurdles to prevent voting from being free and fair. This must be the reason why Bangladesh has introduced the system of "caretaker government" in conducting elections. This is also the reason why the Election Commission in India takes so much trouble in supervising the code of conduct for political parties. The same reason induces the visit of foreign observers during the elections in Southasian countries. However, no system is totally secure especially when the ruling class does not want it to be so.

If politics is fundamentally a process of conflict resolution or conflict management, it must encourage deliberations, discussions and debates on various issues of common concern. When it is not encouraged by the powers that be, that signals a possible end of politics. But then 'politics' has an exceptional survival instinct. Even when the establishment plays the game of depoliticisation, politics — in the form of disagreement and dissent — continues to survive in multiple centres and in multiple forms, not necessarily making itself audible and visible. The chat-behind-the-back of rulers might be construed as largely the inaudible and invisible version of politics even if it has a public character, being a process that involves group/s of people.

How is politics purified by PNPC? By reversal of the existing scenario, even if for a short duration. To explain, by this process the 'powerless' ordinary people become the 'shooters' and the leaders become the 'target' of attack. What is even more interesting is that this process 'freezes' the leaders; they cannot react because they are not physically present. This precludes any kind of protest and resistance on their part. Even the leaders prone to using violence to establish their rule meet the same fate in being 'frozen'. As a result, the ordinary people become 'empowered' for the time being; they also become, even unknowingly, the custodians of hidden reflexivity.

Where have the analysts gone?

One major concern is the lack of focus on PNPC by the leading political analysts. It is interesting that even if analyses of political communication have proliferated in recent times, and scholars have been theorising everyday-life interactions such as gossip, the chat-behind-the-back as an important element of political communication has not been given serious thought. It is understandable that it might not be of great interest to the Western scholars who treat it in terms of 'manipulative' or 'distorted' communication. Being guided by the 'ultimate' goal of the expansion of West-centric rationality and application, they believe, based on the reality of their situation, that the freedom of expression has already secured institutional recognition. In their view

of things, what is at best needed is to protect this freedom from the onslaught of capital.

For some scholars, as for American sociologist Michael Schudson "conversation is not the soul of democracy", because such "spontaneous" practice has nothing to do with the "refined, formal and purposive" process of problem-solution such as politics. What remains out of the sight of Western scholarship is the 'reality of falsehood' in countries such as ours, in which bureaucrat-ism goes on in the name of people-centrism; centralisation in the name of decentralisation; underdevelopment in the name of development; manipulation of rules in the name of maintaining law and order; regimentation in the name of free flow of ideas. What is particularly surprising is that the scholars from the non-Western world have largely followed the line of their Western counterparts in being indifferent to *behind-the-back-ism* in politics even if the surrounding lived reality is so different. The reason for this might be found in the

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fact that most Third World scholars, being educated in the Western mode and methods, find it more convenient and satisfying to blindly follow their Occidental gurus, rather than taking the trouble of exploring more appropriate issues and relevant methods that are truer reflections of their 'own' reality.

The new 'ism'

But while the analysts may remain indifferent to it, chat-behind-the-back goes on undeterred in buses, trains, offices, college and university-campuses and even in friendly gatherings. Not only that, its utility in the life of the people is making PNPC a transnational and global practice in the new millennium. Thanks to the spectacular progress of information technology (IT) chat-behind-the-back about the rulers is having a kind of reach with a pace that was unthinkable even a few years back. Thus, sitting in India one relies on the Internet to carry on chat-behind-the-back with friends from the other countries of Southasia. The result: so many Southasian leaders become the 'frozen' targets of attack. The range of targets gets even broader with even the world strongman, George W Bush, being made the feckless target. All said and done, and despite the neglect of the scholar, chat-behind-the-back has earned the status of a 'political right' by default. In displaying tremendous apathy in granting the designated democratic rights to the ordinary people the rulers have themselves enhanced its significance. This is the paradox, or is it irony? ▽

Dipankar Sinha

Funeral feasts for the priests

*Do be sure
To be secure of fate
Before you embrace
The subtle curvature
Of time and space.*

—Nadeem Rahman in *History*

UNCLE SAM is more engaged with Southasia today than ever before. Before taking even routine decisions, Hamid Karzai looks towards Washington for a nod of approval. General Musharraf swears his loyalty at every opportunity—he went to the extent of dismantling a Pakistani idol, and his own “hero”, Abdul Qadeer Khan—to remain in the good books of the Pentagon. Together, Karzai and Musharraf have taken it upon themselves to let Americans have a free run of the Hindukush region on the pretext of a combined hunt for Osama bin Laden.

In the Nepali Himalaya, US military personnel are getting ample opportunities for some on-the-ground experience of tropical mountain warfare. The Maobadis may not like it, but the government in Kathmandu is only too happy to let the Eagle land in any part of the kingdom in lieu of the advice of a few counter-insurgency consultants who have parachuted in, plus some military hardware.

Saffron Bharat is so pleased with the neo-cons in Washington that it is ready to soft-peddle on the issue of ‘outsourcing’ (shifting white-collar jobs from the US to the Subcontinent, among others), which remains a major concern of the cyber-coolie outfits operating from the Bangalore-Bombay-New Delhi triangle. Likewise, the Dhaka elite may complain in private about the conservative policies of Washington towards even a moderate Islamic state like Bangladesh, but in public they do not utter anything that might jeopardise their garment export quotas. Meanwhile, in Colombo, policy wonks fall over each other in their endeavour to get closer to the visiting dignitaries from American think tanks. Given the clamour for American approval all over Southasia, you would think that the region does not deserve more than a mere nod from the minders US foreign policy. The reality, however, is quite the opposite. The Americans are cultivating Southasians with an ardour never before seen.

In February, the Asia Foundation (TAF) hosted a roundtable in Dhaka where representatives of civil society from India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in addition to Bangladesh, discussed the role of the United States in Southasia. Based on the proceedings of the roundtable, TAF plans to prepare a detailed report and submit it to

the new administration in Washington. The Fulbright Commission is organising a similar meet this month in Colombo where livewire thinkers from the region are expected to assemble and hear former US Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth before making their own recommendations for increased US engagement in the region. Hello? What’s happening here? A hunter preaching to his prey that being hunted is in their own best interest?

Yes Sir!

Even though it is more than half-a-century since the last colonials left Southasia, our collective ‘yes sir’ disposition remains intact. The culture of conformism manifests itself in three ways. First, we accept the official version without questioning it—the authority is always right. Second, experts are revered as modern *avatars* of interpreters of scriptures, they are our new priests. To question an expert—whatever be the merit of his or her expertise—is tantamount to sacrilege. Third, even the wayward opinion of one *sahib*—meaning someone from the First World, regardless of gender or nationality, but of the right colour of skin—is equivalent to at least five

reasoned analyses presented by people of our own kind in English or the vernacular. Outside players desirous of influencing Southasian policies press all the three buttons to keep opinion makers here under their control.

After the ceaseless bombing of Kandahar and the repeated blitzkrieg over Baghdad, no government in the world is going to consider it worth its

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while to question the intentions of the Pentagon top brass. After all, Osama bin Laden was not found in Kabul and no trace of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) were found anywhere in Iraq. But the ‘War on Terror’ declared upon the world by the first hyperpower in history continues regardless. Whatever the neo-con cabal in Washington decides, it becomes the official viewpoint of nearly every government in the world. In the short term at least, the United States need not fear the unfavourable outcome of any election. If Brazil and Spain can be made to see the merit of silence and acquiescence, polls in Sri Lanka and India are unlikely to challenge the what is beginning to look like the forthcoming US dominance of Southasia.

To keep the desi experts kowtowing, the Americans have been courting the Southasian media and its intelligentsia in a massive way. Sponsored articles are written to justify the inevitability of free market, merits of US unilateralism, and the benevolence of the Washington

Consensus. News reports are slanted to show US adventures in positive light. Dial-a-quote academicians in each of the Southasian capitals and the regional metros fall over each other to endorse whatever position the American government is taking.

As recently as the early eighties, it used to be academically fashionable to oppose US policies. But a lot of dreams died in the debris of the Soviet Union. This demise of the CCCP became an important factor in establishing the intellectual hegemony of Boston Brahmins who shuttle between the Ivy League and Wall Street with practiced ease. However, there is another factor often overlooked by the analysts of the Global South: nearly 75 percent of think tanks in the United States, most of them engaged in promoting the neo-con agenda, began operating after the 1980s. The act of 'manufacturing consent' spread out of the business kulak archipelago in Manhattan to engulf the entire world.

Most of these think tanks—funded by foundations, churches, financial institutions, MNCs, INGOs, and even the US government itself—claim neutrality. Rather than openly advancing their point of view, they goad 'native' intellectuals into endorsing their agenda through a deceptively simple modus operandi—put them together, wear out their resistance by feeding them an endless stream of propaganda prepared by friendly academicians, and then end up with vague conclusions that could be interpreted in any way you want. Most of the regulars of the seminar circuit know the trick, but they play along regardless. Not to do so would lead to intellectual irrelevance, because competing forums are conspicuous by their absence.

But, no ...

It is the Southasians who should themselves be taking the initiative to formulate a regional consensus about what we want from the new US administration not taking the floor at American-organised talk fests. If Southasian intellectuals were to prepare a wish-list on their own accord to submit to the incoming occupant of White House, it would probably include, but will not be limited to, the following suggestions:

- The US role in South Asia needs to be proactive and not reactive as it has always been. Being proactive also implies connecting with people, not just the metro elite.
- The US should support democratic movements in all the countries of Southasia, including Afghanistan, Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan and inside big India. Mouthung platitudes for human rights alone is pointless, for respect for human rights and adherence to democratic norms is inextricably linked.
- Rather than incessantly harping on free-market principles, the US should broaden the access of Southasian products into its market and, for example, facilitate the export of garments and carpets from Bangladesh and Nepal.
- The US should shift its focus from strengthening the military to the institutionalisation of democracy in

the countries of Southasia.

- The US should increase development aid, which is at an almost inconsequential amount at present, to the countries of Southasia. The 'root cause theory of terrorism' is not as vacuous as it has been made to look by the phalanx of neo-con commentators currently flooding the media.
- Freer movement of Southasians into the United States needs to be ensured without jeopardising the host's immigration policies.
- Hunger, health and education are the real challenges of Southasia, not Pakistani missiles, Indian nukes and Bangladeshi Islamists. The US must correct its priorities.

Now, these recommendations are unlikely to emerge from any seminar, workshop or roundtable sponsored by the American foundation. Southasians need to develop their own mechanism to produce knowledge and undercut, if not challenge, the US hegemony. Technology can be transferred, capital investment can be lured, men and material can be brought from elsewhere, and even management can emerge gradually. But it needs vision, and long-term commitment to manufacture knowledge. Ultimately, it is neither money nor the military might that decides the winner. All conflicts are basically ideological, and to resolve them, manufacturing knowledge, not consent, is of paramount importance.

The concept of Southasian foundations funding think tanks in the region is not as far-fetched as it sounds in the first instance. There are enough Southasians in the North who stand to benefit from better ties between their region of birth and their countries of adoption. Software billionaires of Bangalore, garment tsars of Dhaka, tea tycoons of Colombo, and manpower moguls of Karachi, all can easily fund policy analyses institutes that sustain and support independent research in areas of common interest to all. Unless there is a future for all of us, there will be no future for any of us, and the sooner we realise it the better. Competing for Washington DC patronage individually is not going to lead Southasian nations anywhere.

Even at the micro level, countries of Southasia have neglected policy studies for far too long. It is very convenient to attribute it to financial constraints, but one suspects that poverty of thought is perhaps the main cause of our poor record in policy research. The money doled out to individual parachute consultants even by countries like Bhutan and Nepal can fund independent multi-disciplinary researches by a dozen indigenous scholars.

Fate favours the prepared. As long as we need Karl Inderfurth to chart the course of future US-Southasia relations, there is no way we can grow out of the highly unequal patron-client relationship. There has been enough blaming 'the government' for all our woes. It is time the business, the civil society, the academia, and the media stood up and accepted their complicity is fashioning a role of subservience for Southasians to suit the US worldview, and agreed to making amends. ▽

—CK Lal

Himalayan paranoia

The schizophrenia in certain bureaucratic echelons of the Government of India and its associated academia must be palpable. The entire line of the Himalayan frontier has been ultra-sensitive terrain ever since the 1962 debacle, whence meddlesome foreigners – even scholarly innocents – were thrown out for daring just to even be there.

And yet February saw Indian Air Force Mirage and Mig fighters happily escorting US Air Force F-15 Eagles over the Western Himalaya. No worries about what the Yank pilots might see over the side, even though airline passengers at Cochin and Varanasi airports are routinely asked to desist from photography at the pain of being dumped on the tarmac.

How the world hath changed. The regional superpower decides, better late than never, to cosy up to the global superpower. And there is no better way to show appreciation than take the Yanks up for a spin over terrain that for decades the hosts claimed was their most vulnerable and closely-guarded frontier region. So *Bharat-rakshak* IAF engages in “fighter ops” with USAF, titled Cope India '04. The last time the two superpowers engaged in joint exercises was Exercise Shiksha in 1963, right after the Chinese adventure.

“The purpose of Cope India '04 is to conduct a bilateral training ground with the Indian Air Force in order to enhance US and India relationships and promote regional security and stability in the Asian Pacific area,” said Col Greg Neubeck, 3rd Operations Group deputy commander and US Forces deployed commander for the exercise. “The most immediate result will be the increased understanding of each other’s capabilities and how the two Air Forces may work together as a combined and integrated Air Force team.”

Ummm. So the idea is to promote regional security not only over the subcontinent but farther afield. And what might the F-16s and Migs do together once they get to understand each other’s capabilities?

Actually, this willingness to allow the Eagles to fly carefree ‘somewhere over northern frontier’ may

well be a good thing. It means that New Delhi is getting over its paranoia over the Himalayan rimland. This is a good thing. When India breathes easy, and is unruffled by alien sonic booms over its glaciers, that means it is more likely to be your friendly neighbourhood giant than the cantankerous geezer with a chip on his shoulder the size of Siachen.

An India which for decades stymied Nepal’s efforts to build north-south hill highways for fear of Chinese tanks rolling down to the Ganga maidaan is now actually asking the Nepali government for transit passage to the Tibetan plateau. Does New Delhi know something we do not know? No, New

Delhi is getting to know what we have always known. That the Himalaya is no longer the geo-strategic barrier it was since the time of Chingis, and presents itself today as a rimland of opportunity.

Opening up Nathu La via Sikkim, the hope is that Siliguri and Calcutta will corner

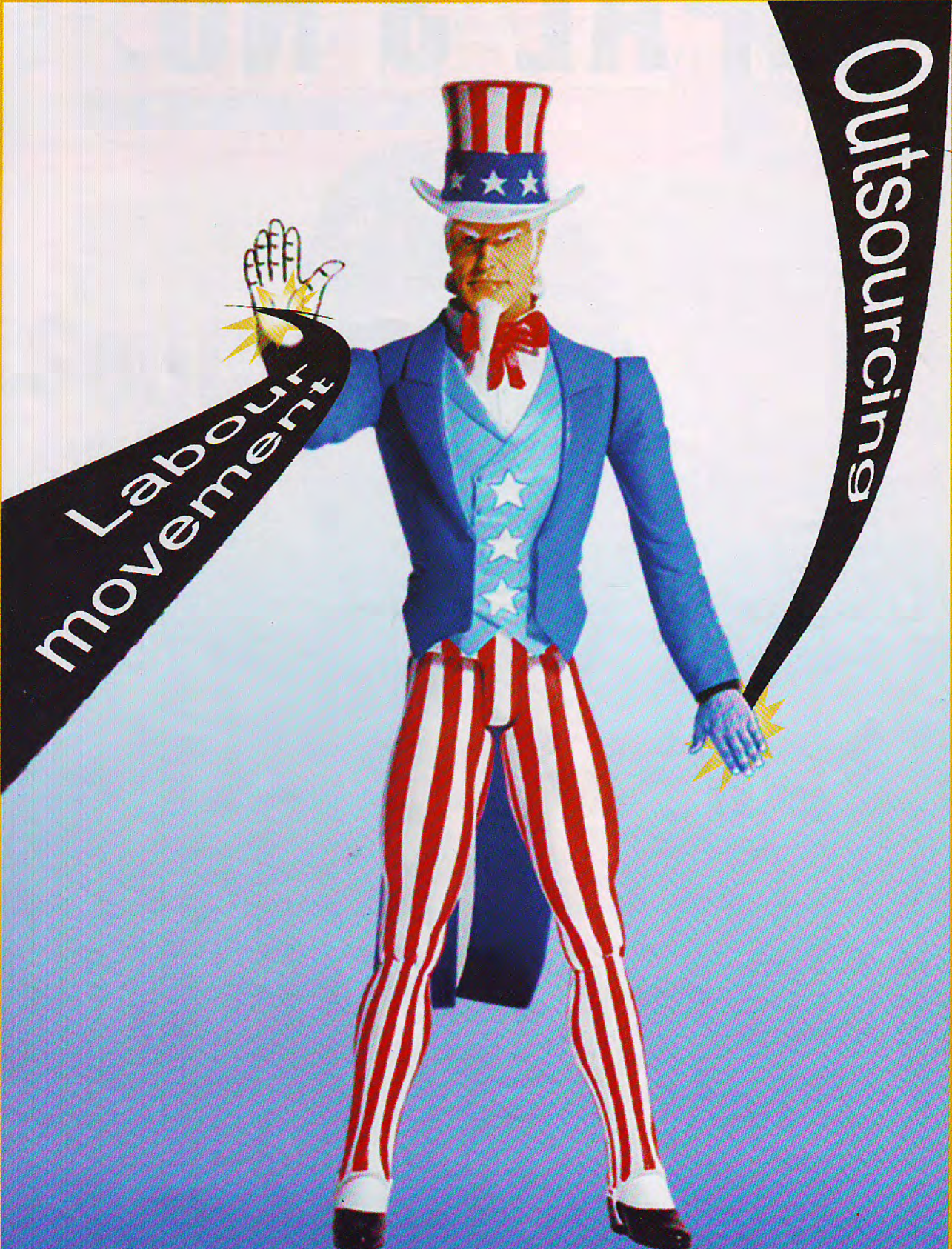
trade with Lhasa and eastern Tibet. Seeking transport and transit rights through Nepal to the Changthang plateau of western Tibet seems aimed at the economic surge that the high plateau will see with the expansion westward of highways and (later) railways.

A confident regional power is always better than a nervous giant who can easily turn into a bully. The waning of Himalayan paranoia may be an early indication of the ground shifting in New Delhi’s geo-strategic thinking. Less conspiracy-seeking. More thought and perspective. In which case, should we let the Eagles soar, even if it be over Southasian skies?

Ummm.

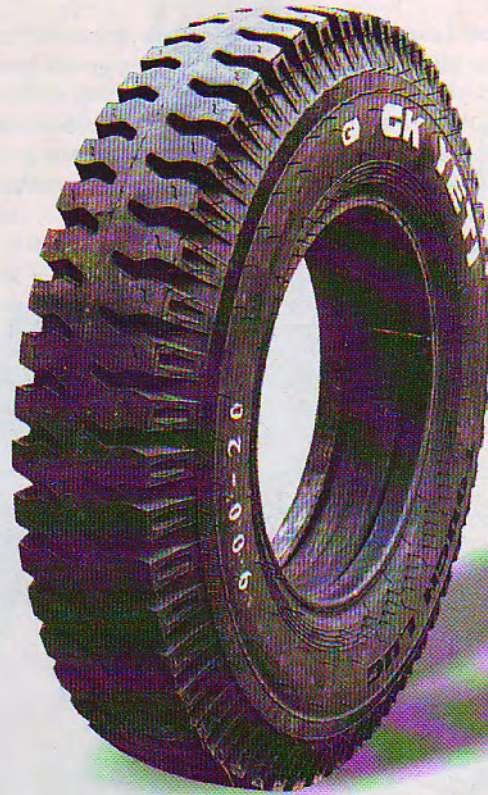


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