

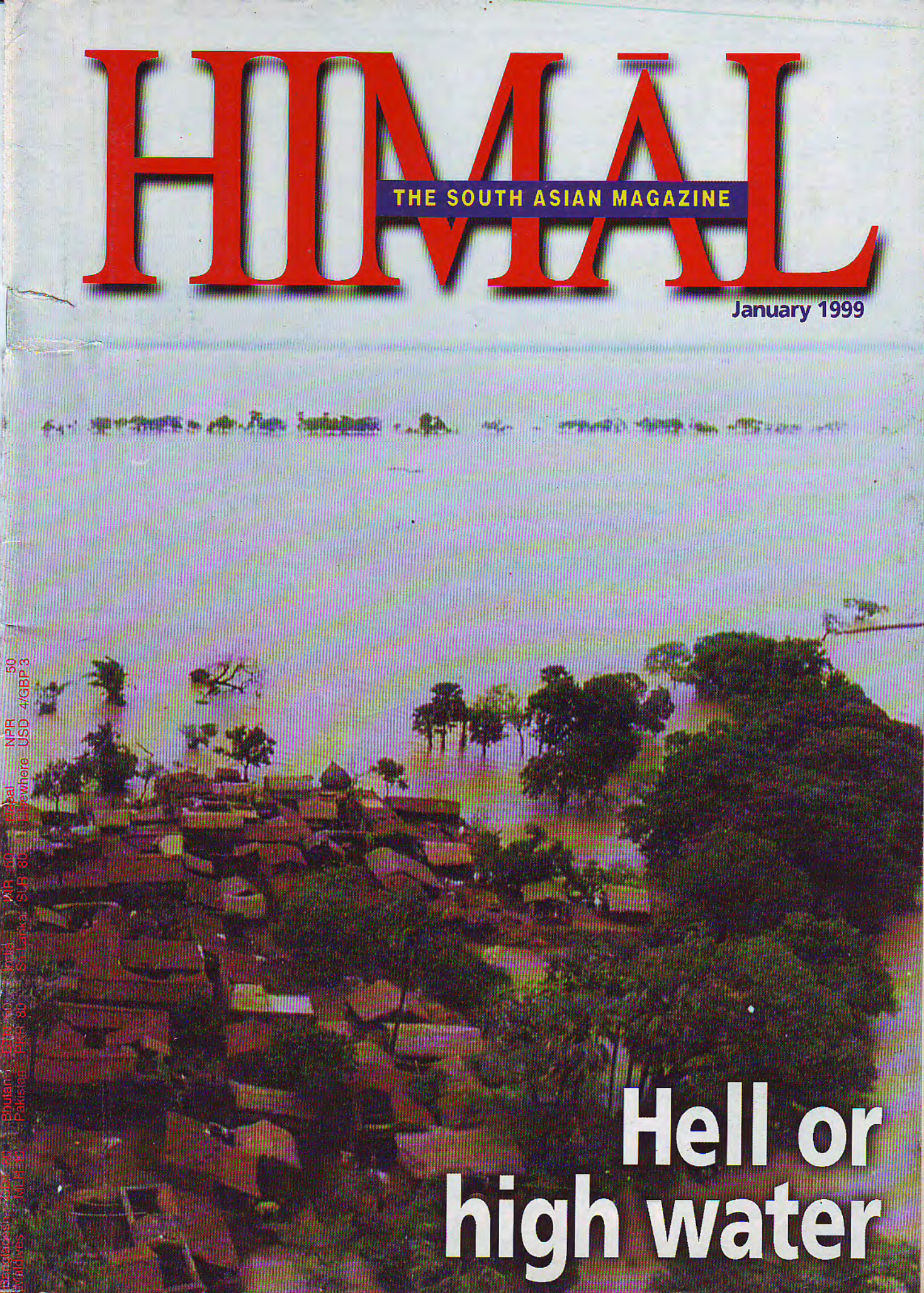
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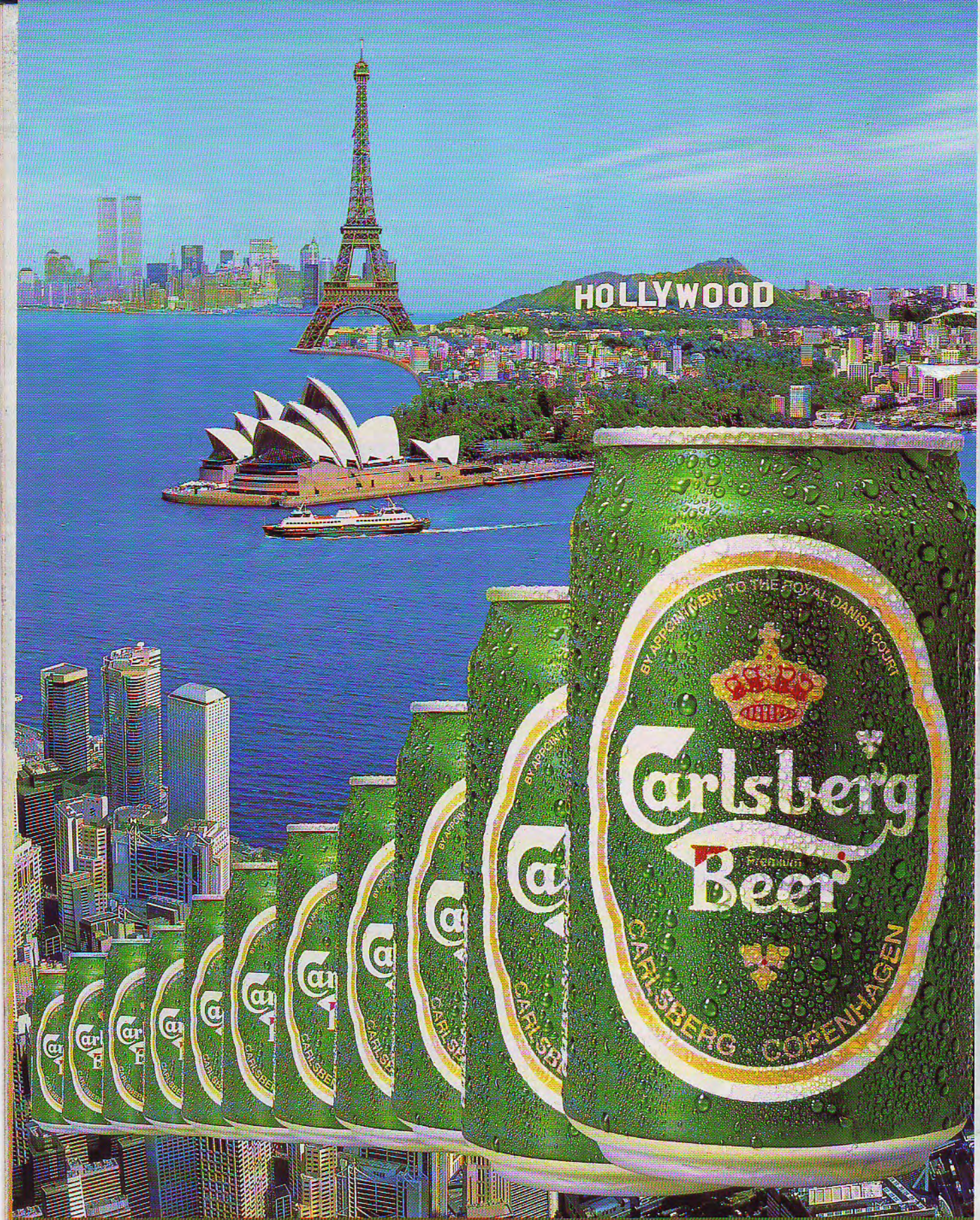
THE SOUTH ASIAN MAGAZINE

January 1999

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Hell or
high water





Probably the best beer in the world.

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Hell or high water



12

Five months since the monsoon ended, parts of northern Bihar are still under water. Embankments that are supposed to control floods, trap the water instead. When the rains arrive in June, the rivers will overflow again.

Embargo on embankments

Since complete flood control is not possible, interventions have to be cautious and informed.

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People's theatre

36

Ten years after the death of theatre activist Safdar Hashmi, there are ways to produce art and social commentary without having to be routed through Big Media.



Yeti does not exist: China

BEIJING, Dec 14 (AP) - The yeti, or abominable snowman of legend, does not exist, Chinese conservation officials have announced. The yeti, a creature of legend, has long been a subject of scientific interest. Some scientists agree with the yeti's existence, but most have concluded that the creature is a myth. The yeti is a creature of legend, and its existence is a matter of scientific debate.

After eleven years on the job, HIMAL's Abominably yours columnist is on extended leave, and she wants her readers to know that news reports of her non-existence are exaggerated.



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Visa lottery

In the last episode, we left Pakistani journalist Salman Rashid struggling to get an Indian visa (see HIMAL February 1998). We will keep readers informed of his visa saga as he struggles valiantly to try to visit Jalandhar in India. Watch this space.

THE FIRST time I applied for an Indian visa was in August 1997 to visit my ancestral home in Jalandhar in order to mark the 50th year of the great holocaust in which my grandparents and two aunts were lost in the town they had lived in all their lives. It was not policy to allow Pakistanis to travel in Indian Punjab because of the involvement of right-wing parties and the governments in Pakistan in the troubles there. I was refused without even being interviewed.

For my part I laid down my own pre-condition for travel to India: I would only cross our eastern border if, and only if, I am allowed to travel freely in Punjab. This resolve was unfortunately broken when my sister, who lives in Canada, called recently to say that she would be in Delhi in December and that I and my wife should pop across the border to meet up with her and the children. Now, this was a bargain compared to the long (and expensive) trip to Canada. So we drove up to Islamabad to stand in line outside the Indian High Commission.

Despite the freezing cold we arrived outside the High Commission at 5:00 a.m., where Shabnam (my wife) was 13th in the women's line and I 27th in the men's. Since we had been told that the High Commission handled about 100 applicants every workday, we knew we would get in to be

interviewed. Two hours later, a policeman came along to scribble on our palms our order of precedence in the line. This, they said, was to avoid a mad rush for the windows when they opened at nine. It may be worth mentioning that the police (Pakistanis) meant to keep order from the end of the line to the front for an appropriate unofficial incentive.

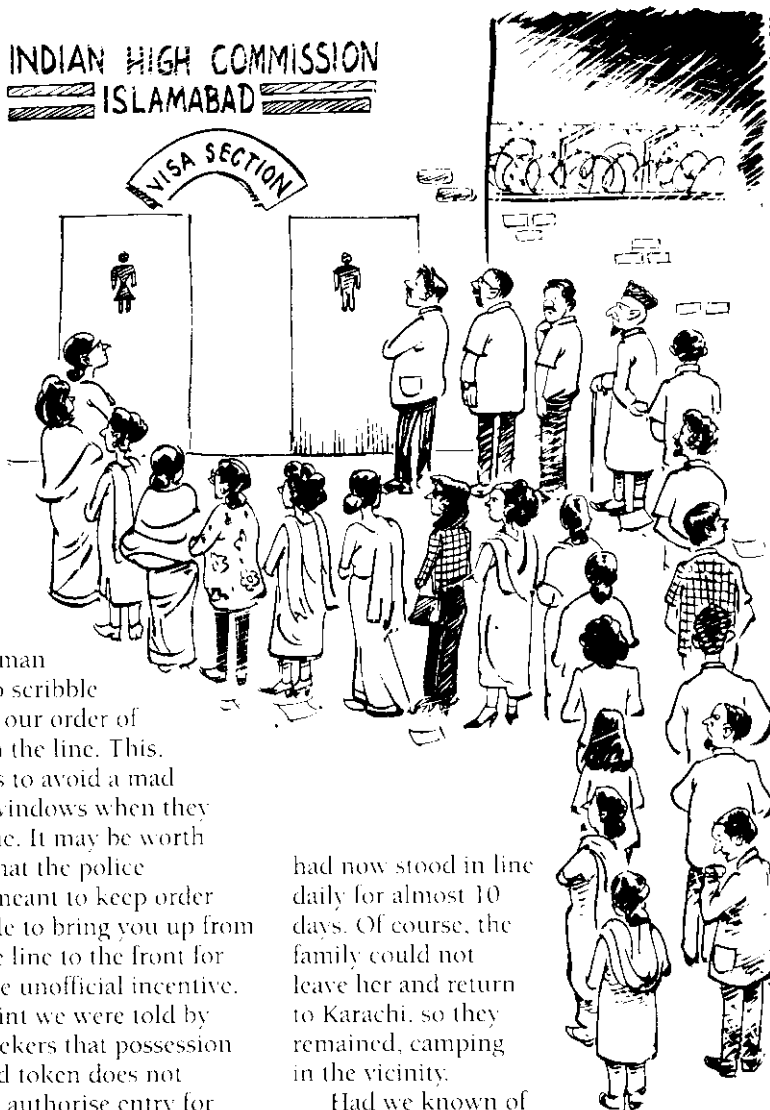
At this point we were told by fellow visa-seekers that possession of a numbered token does not automatically authorise entry for interview. After the lot had been dished out, a "lucky draw" was carried out and only the numbers thus called would be interviewed. We were aghast. What, I asked, was the point of coming before the crack of dawn to stand in line if it was simply to get a token and then wait for gambler's luck to smile upon you?

As we came to know later, there was a man who had been camping outside the Indian High Commission for over three weeks, diligently standing first in line very morning to collect his token only to be never called in. And there was a young woman from Karachi whose entire family had been granted visas. However, because she had arrived late from Karachi and being unable to apply with the others, she

had now stood in line daily for almost 10 days. Of course, the family could not leave her and return to Karachi, so they remained, camping in the vicinity.

Had we known of this imbecility of the lucky draw, we would never have come to stand in line. Even then we discussed between us if we wished to be humiliated by this brainless lottery scheme. The young woman from Karachi decided it for us when she said there was twice as much chance of our getting in because if one was called, the spouse automatically got in. So we stayed and presently the public address system announced the *kura andaji* (lucky draw). Our numbers were not called.

We, of the Third World, are used to braving biting cold or sweltering heat as we stand in visa lines outside Western diplomatic missions. But there, if one comes early, one gets in to be interviewed. Even if it hurts, being rejected after



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

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

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

John Collee
The London Observer



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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an interview at least justifies the whole business. Then one knows that one does not have to live up to whatever cock-eyed standards some bureaucrat had laid down. And if you're late and fail to get in, you come back another day an hour earlier, at least you know you stand a chance.

The Indian Foreign Service has, however, invented a method that defies all logic. Why, pray, do they have to go through the whole meaningless rigmarole of tokens, if finally it's the lucky draws that decide? Why can't they just give out as many tokens as they wish to handle in a single day? Somewhere, there is a diabolical bureaucratic mind churning out newer and ever more devastating methods of punishing Pakistani visa applicants. And for good reason too it seems: we are the enemy, the despised, unclean *mlechh*—the unfaithful who became unclean by converting to another faith.

While all this is happening, it is common knowledge that innumerable 'influential' visa seekers connected with officials within the mission do not have to stand in line. They come at appointed hours and walk away with decorated passports. And that is not the only discrimination. Our experience at the Indian High Commission also taught us that the line is only for the 'lower classes' who travel overland. Travellers with airline tickets come in the afternoon and beat the hassles of the line.

To match blow for blow, the Indian diplomat's Pakistani counterpart in New Delhi does no less. Our fellow visa-seekers had stories to tell of relatives who had, at some time or other, languished outside the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi for months. Most of the Indians seeking visas to Pakistan are Muslims supplicating to an entirely Muslim staff of a diplomatic mission of a country that is stridently Islamic. Are the applicants in Delhi being punished for the unpardonable act of not

having migrated to the Land of the Pure when it came into being?

The attitudes of the Indian and Pakistani diplomats seem even stranger when one considers all this talk of the Lahore-Delhi bus service that is due to commence in the middle of January 1999. One wonders if after acquiring the cherished visa, one will again be subjected to a lucky draw for a seat on this blessed vehicle!

I do not hesitate to censure our two countries as the two most immature nations in the world today. It is an irony that they spring from one of the oldest and most magnificent civilisations of the ancient world.

*Sabman Rashid
Lahore*

Appalled

I was much moved upon reading the cover article by Amitav Ghosh in the November issue of *Himal*. As a Delhiite who has lived in New Delhi since 1920, I have witnessed the birth and construction of most of this city. Ghosh's

article is about what would happen to Delhi should the atom bombs possessed by both India and Pakistan be used. It was horrific to know that the Secretariat buildings, North and South Blocks, which I saw the construction of, would melt like candle wax if the nuclear bomb is exploded. As frightening is the possibility that human beings will

become "projectiles" and "human canonballs".

Mahatma Gandhi, whom Indians still call the Father of the Nation, was against the possession of nuclear weapons. Surely, the Indian leaders who heap

flowers on his *samadhi* on the occasion of his birth and death anniversaries have long since buried his teachings.

*Mahindar Singh, IFS (retd)
New Delhi*

HIMAL

COUNTDOWN Insurgency of an Elite

By Amitav Ghosh



SRI LANKA

PICKING UP THE PEACES

IN HIS annual address marking Heroes' Day in late November LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran spoke of the need to solve the Sri Lankan conflict in a civilised manner. His statement assumes great significance coming as it did only a week after President Chandrika Kumaratunga had told leaders of the Tamil parliamentary parties that she was willing to negotiate with the LTTE.

Prabhakaran and Kumaratunga need to be commended, and supported, if their willingness to talk peace is genuine. But, unfortunately, neither peace offer can be viewed in isolation from the two leaders' strategies to promote their own interests. The LTTE and the government have a multiplicity of means through which they seek to achieve their own goals, offers to talk are one and military operations are another.

The international media gave considerable play to Prabhakaran's peace offer. And this should not be grudged, for it is certainly preferable that the LTTE should pile pressure on the Sri Lankan government through political means (words) rather than through its more accustomed military means (bombs). This change in tactics may herald the beginning of a real search for a lasting solution to the country's ethnic conflict.

But, to be realistic, a peaceful solution is still a while away. The government continues with its ban on the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, and has not let up in its efforts to have it outlawed internationally as well. It has denied legitimacy to the LTTE. Perhaps the time has come for the LTTE to consider setting up a full-fledged political organisation, on the lines of the IRA-Sinn Fein arrangement, if peace through political negotiations is to be a reality.

On the other hand, it does not help that the LTTE continues to demonstrate the least concern for other peoples living in the island. Any community that seeks justice cannot do so on the basis of totally ignoring the rights of others. Nor does it help that the Tigers also insist on a black-and-white portrayal of the conflict. In his speech Prabhakaran said, "So far not a single voice of rationality has been heard from the Sinhala nation against the war.

None so far has made a plea to put an end to the war and resolve the problem by peaceful means. From politicians to monks, from intellectuals to journalists, everyone calls for an intensification of the war. The Sinhala nation wants to continue the war to subjugate the Tamil nation."

Assertions of this kind demonise the Sinhalese people in the eyes of Tamils, especially those of the younger generation cocooned in the northeast and who do not know better. From the very beginning of the conflict in 1983, there have been many among the Sinhalese who have opposed the war and have stood for genuine power-sharing with the Tamils in the form of regional autonomy or federalism. They were not strong or numerous enough to stand up and halt the juggernaut of war. But in recent times the voice for peace in Sinhalese civil society has grown louder. In the past two months, not only the country's business leaders, but also an Alliance for Peace of more than 100 organisations are campaigning to end the war.

Evidence of the changing consciousness of the Sinhalese also emerged from the results of a public opinion survey carried out by the University of Colombo in which as many as 77 percent of the near-total-Sinhalese respondent group said that war could not bring about a solution to the ethnic conflict (*see HIMAL October 1998*). The task of the peace movement is to take more and more Sinhalese in the direction of accepting the basis of a political framework that could satisfy the Tamil people.

Without the backing of a large section of public opinion, however, the government cannot be expected to deliver to Tamils a genuinely federal framework that would do away with the rationale for the war. A parallel can be found in the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians—only after hundreds of thousands of Israelis were prepared to come out in the streets in support of the principle of "land for peace" did the government get the courage to reach a new level of agreement with the PLO. It is evident that a great deal of work needs to be done on both sides if peace talks between the LTTE and government are to yield a political settlement.

In the meantime, the government could take up Prabhakaran's proposal for talks with foreign mediation. There is a pressing need to humanise the take-no-prisoner war in which the ratio of those killed to those injured is about one to two compared to the usual one to nine.

The government could also take steps to lift the economic embargo on Jaffna, especially on kitchen fuels and fertiliser. Even government soldiers at the front have been saying that this blockade affects the civilian population much more than it does the LTTE. The Tamil Tigers get all they want from the government forces themselves, by overrunning army camps or by bribing soldiers, when they are not smuggling supplies from India.

For its part, the LTTE could agree not to launch specific and targeted attacks against civilian establishments. The suicide bombings of civilian targets have strengthened its terrorist image and made it easier for the government to delegitimise the LTTE in the eyes of the world. These actions not only make it difficult for ordinary Tamil civilians to defend the LTTE as an organisation fighting for the rights of Tamils in the country, but also make it difficult for the Sinhalese engaged in peace work.

The return to peace and normalcy will be a step-by-step process, not a once and for all event. ▲

-Jehan Perera

PAKISTAN

YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

AFTER COVERING a distance of some 3500 kilometres through the length and breadth of the country, a 'flag march' organised by the youth wing of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League reached Chaghai, the site of the Pakistani nuclear tests, on 16 December. The aim of the march was to get the nation to carry on celebrating what the government terms as its greatest achievement, although for all practical purposes the party has long been over.

For the last few months, the discourse has resolutely shifted to the ruthless world of economic realities. Even the Urdu press, known for its rancorous sloganeering over non-issues, has been writing endlessly about the imminent economic collapse. Interestingly, the only one who is not talking about money matters is Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the very man who won an unprecedented electoral victory in 1997 on an economic agenda which promised to turn the country into another Asian tiger.

This gloomy atmosphere is a far cry from the euphoric days that followed the tests in mid-1998. The government initiated a campaign of celebrations to mark Pakistan's becoming the seventh declared nuclear weapon state and claimed that Pakistan now belonged to a different club altogether.

Euphoria suddenly changed to rage with the US missile strike on Afghanistan and Sudan in August. People were once again on the streets. This time accusing the government of conniving with the US against the mujahideen in Afghanistan because the missiles had passed through Pakistani airspace and also because an American general was having dinner with Pakistan's army chief when the missiles were flying over Pakistan. Religious parties, which had been in the forefront of the nuclear celebrations, bombarded Sharif with death threats and *fatwas*.

But the prime minister was not to be cowed. He took the old and tested rabbit of religion out of his hat and in September announced the introduction of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment, although ostensibly aimed at making the *Qur'an* the supreme law of the



SUBHAS HAI

country, sought to concentrate the powers of the judiciary and the legislature in the hands of the executive.

The government's decision backfired almost instantly. Far from being appeased, several religious parties accused the government of using Islam as a smokescreen to hide its own failings and to prepare the ground for the ultimate 'sellout' that was to come in the shape of signing the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The government was able to get a truncated version of the bill passed from the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, where it enjoys a two-third majority, but has not yet presented it in the Senate, the upper house, where it lacks a similar majority.

Then in November, Sharif dismissed his

own government in Sindh province and imposed federal rule following the murder of Hakim Mohammed Saeed, the octogenarian former governor of Sindh. He sent in the army to try cases of terrorism, mainly against his former ally in the provincial government, the Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM), accusing it of the Hakim's murder and involvement in other murders, torture, extortion and various illegal activities.

All these games were played out against the backdrop of a worsening economic crisis created by the huge outstanding debt that Pakistan can no longer service. This debt is more than the country's annual GDP and servicing it takes away more than 50 percent of its export earnings—a situation that had been gravely aggravated by the stoppage of all foreign assistance following the nuclear tests and which had brought Pakistan to the brink of default on its debt liabilities.

Hopes were momentarily revived when Prime Minister Sharif and US president Bill Clinton met on 3 December. When the US lifted the sanctions a day before the meeting, spin doctors in Islamabad began to claim that relations between the superpower and its old ally would soon be on even keel just like the good old days. These claims were based on the assumption that the US would not be able to ignore a declared nuclear power. However, it soon became clear that the US was in no hurry to pull Pakistan out of its economic crisis. An IMF board meeting on Pakistan scheduled for December was postponed till January, further deteriorating the country's credit rating.

As Pakistan enters the new year as a declared nuclear weapon state, its security is tied more to its begging bowl than to its nuclear armaments. All eyes are on the meeting of the IMF board, whose resumption of loans are to work as the cornerstone of an international rescue package of USD 5.5 billion. In return, Islamabad is supposed to deliver on the promises it is believed to have made to the US over acceptance of non-proliferation instruments.

The aid money will provide but a breather to Pakistan's weak economy since it will be used up instantly in meeting the huge debt-servicing needs. At the same time, accepting the strict conditionalities that are likely to come attached to the aid package may prove politically expensive for the government. Agreeing to the IMF's structural adjustments will make life miserable for the common man

and signing the CTBT or agreeing to the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) will bring the religious lobby out on the streets again. Worst of all, the government will seem to be bargaining on national security the way it has defined and for which it has made the nation suffer so much.

The reality that sovereignty has more to do with economic conditions than with bombs and missiles has struck home. Without an immediate bailout from international financial institutions, Pakistan may fall into the default zone, which would destabilise the country to a dangerous level. Economic indicators already indicate a doomsday scenario. The State Bank of Pakistan, which claims to have only USD 500 million of hard currency reserves, owes more than USD 800 million on account of freight, dividends, insurance premiums and swap funds. Exports fell by 12.5 percent in the first five months of this financial year while imports have slumped by 20 percent, which means a fall in revenues and reduced economic activities.

As an analyst pointed out, to avoid a default, the government of Pakistan may have to accept a trade-off between its strategic goals and its economic survival. But time may be running out even for such a swap. ▲

-Zaigham Khan

INDIA • PAKISTAN

GOON CONTROL

BOMBAY AND Karachi, once acclaimed as the two most cosmopolitan and dynamic commercial centres of South Asia, have been reduced to clusters of warring, sectarian ghettos. Violent political goons, extortionists and hired killers have thrown a pall of mediocrity and gloom over the two cities that were glittering showpieces of vitality and progress.

Two sectarian organisations and their violent cadres are the main culprits responsible for the steep decline of Bombay (arbitrarily renamed Mumbai) and Karachi. Tightly controlled by their dictatorial chieftains, Bal Thackeray and Altaf Hussain; the Shiv Sena in Bombay and the MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement) in Karachi have used a mix of terror and parochial rhetoric over more than two decades to gain political dominance in South Asia's leading port cities. This dominance, although now diminishing, was made possible only due to

the connivance and encouragement of the major political parties and other important interests in India and Pakistan.

In Bombay, the Shiv Sena was set up in 1966 with the initial support and funding of the city's then-powerful textile mill-owners to counter the communist trade unions. The mill workers and their aspiring children, who were largely Marathi-speaking, were wooed by the Shiv Sena's fiery rhetoric about Bombay being taken over by outsiders, especially South Indians, and about the local Maharashtrians having become deprived people in their own homeland. These appeals also attracted the Maharashtrian middle class. By the 1980s, the outbursts against South Indians had been transformed by the Shiv Sena into a hate campaign against 'anti-national' Muslims, culminating in the mass killings of Muslims in Bombay in January 1993.

Over a period of 29 years, successive Congress governments displayed a soft corner for the Shiv Sena and no firm action was taken against the organisation and its leader, Bal Thackeray, for continuously making a mockery of the law. In March 1995, the Shiv Sena, in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party, was elected to power in the state of Maharashtra, of which Bombay is the capital.

Due to its massive mis-governance over the past four years, the Shiv Sena-BJP government has become increasingly unpopular. Having unleashed lawlessness, the Shiv Sena now finds itself unable to control a general breakdown of law and order, with freelance hitmen and extortionists stalking the streets of Bombay. The Bombay police force has become ineffective and undisciplined, having been infiltrated and politicised by the Shiv Sena.

In a vain attempt to divert attention from their misrule, the Shiv Sena and Thackeray are again cranking up their parochial hate campaigns which could once more lead to attacks on Muslims. Just in the past month of December, a controversy over *Fire*, a pioneering film about a lesbian relationship in an Indian family, has been twisted into a communal, Hindu-Muslim issue by the Shiv Sena.

In Karachi, the MQM huilt its support on the twin bases of targeted killings of opponents and hysterical cries about the discrimination faced by the Mohajir community of Urdu-speaking immigrants from

India who make up the largest segment of the city's population. A series of federal governments in Islamabad and provincial governments in Sindh have blown hot and cold in their responses to the MQM.

Draconian crackdowns in Karachi by the army or by the para-military Rangers—which have victimised innocents rather than the violent activists of the MQM—have been interspersed by political agreements to keep precarious coalition governments in Islamabad and in Sindh in power with the help of the MQM.

During the periods of truce, the MQM has continued with its murderous vendettas against prominent local figures in Karachi whom it considered hostile and against individual police officers who had acted against it in earlier crackdowns. (The last two crackdowns in Karachi were in 1992 and 1995.)

Upon his return to power in February 1997, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif found it expedient to reach agreement with the MQM to bolster a shaky coalition government in Sindh. The provincial coalition was led by Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). The agreement between the PML and the MQM unravelled soon after a revered philanthropist and former governor of Sindh, Hakim Mohammad Saeed, was assassinated in Karachi on 17 October 1998. Holding the



Two cities, same tale: Thackeray and Hussain.

MQM responsible for the killing, Sharif dismissed the provincial government and instituted federal rule in Sindh, of which Karachi is the largest city.

Another crackdown followed in Karachi in November and December of 1998, with special military courts trying alleged offenders and handing out death sentences. The cycle of violence and counter-violence continues in Karachi, wrecking yet another potential urban star of South Asia.

▲
-Jawid Laig

NEPAL

FUNGIBILITY OF AID

ADDRESSING A public ceremony in early December, Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala complained about the severe conditions imposed by donor agencies that often had debilitating effects on project implementation. Within a week, the World Bank announced its intention to pull out of the much-awaited and much-talked-about Melamchi water supply project which had been promoted for nearly a decade as the only solution to Kathmandu Valley's acute water scarcity. When soon after, a break-away faction of communists withdrew from the government necessitating a political realignment, the significance of the consecutive events wasn't lost to the cynics.

Donors continue to finance a substantial share of government expenditure. In fiscal year 1986/87, donors contributed about 54

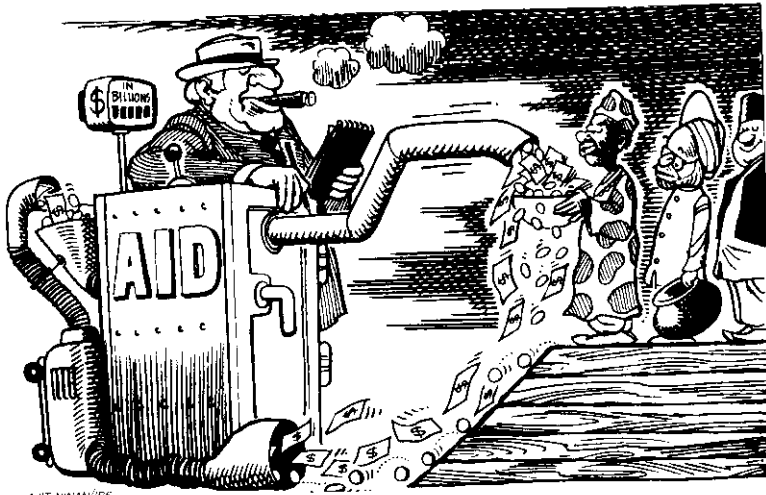
recipient nations—a fact seen in the often-stagnant per capita incomes in poor countries. The impact of aid on other indicators of poverty alleviation is no less disappointing. In *The World Bank Economic Review* (Volume 12, Number 1), Farhan Feyzioglu, Vinaya Swaroop and Min Zhu argue that "There is no significant impact of aid on infant mortality", and that "... data do not support any significant links between aid to the education sector and primary school enrollment". However, in an attempt at rationalisation, the study puts all the blame on the "fungibility of aid", which is the impact aid has in driving away the indigenous investment in the sector where aid-money is infused. The study then calls for a more direct and assertive role for the donors—after having analysed the failure of their investment policy, more of the same medicine is prescribed. Which is not surprising since two of the three researchers work for the Brettenwoods institutions—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The effect of this study, at least in Nepal, has been all too visible. Kathmandu-based representatives of donor agencies have twice drawn the attention of government to what they have called the anomalies in aid utilisation and implementation. There is little to quarrel with the issues raised. Accountability, transparency and continuity in the management of donor-funded projects are indeed necessary. But the blame for the absence of all these has to be shared equally by the donor agencies and the government since donor-assisted projects are so designed that the government can do little to expedite their implementation.

Ultimately, there is only one option left. If the impact of foreign assistance on growth as well equity is so negligible, perhaps it would make better sense to scale them down to a more manageable level. To keep the meddlers away, the government has to be selective in accepting aid and develop the confidence to say "no" more often than it does now. For as long as the door is wide open for all kinds of 'assistance', there will be no respite from belligerent benefactors brandishing weapons like the "fungibility factor" to have their way.

Prime Minister Koirala says that he is tired of going around with a begging bowl. His finance minister observes that donors take away most of their aid in the form of grossly inflated consultancy fees. If such a rethinking starts, perhaps a donor cut-back threat is exactly what the country needs. ▲

-C.K. Lal



percent of the development expenditure, a proportion which had gone up to 61 percent in 1995/96. Consequently, aid agencies have always had a definitive say in the development planning of the country. (Of late, they have even started intervening in the day-to-day management of projects by stalling transfers, approving pre-qualification of contractors and bypassing government channels by making direct payments.) Yet, they never want to share the blame for the failure of development aid to bring about the intended changes.

It is a sad reality that foreign aid has had marginal impact on the economic growth of



Position Announcement

DIRECTOR GENERAL AND DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development** Kathmandu, Nepal

ICIMOD was established in 1983 to promote an ecologically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) areas of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the People's Republic of China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. The Centre has an annual budget of US \$ 5 million and 25 international staff among 130 full time staff.

DIRECTOR GENERAL

Tasks: The Director General provides visionary, strategic and professional and managerial leadership and has overall responsibility for the effective and efficient management of the institution. This includes strategic planning, staff recruitment, public outreach, and fund raising. He also represents the Centre at key regional and international events. The position entails frequent travel throughout the HKH.

Qualifications: Substantial professional experience in organisational and institutional development as well as in policy advice and research management. Experience in the implementation of integrated sustainable development and environmental management programmes in mountain areas of developing countries, preferably in the HKH Region would be an advantage. The candidate should have an established record of institutional management at the highest level of leadership and motivation of a multidisciplinary and international staff of senior scientists and other development professionals and an ability to attract funding.

The successful candidate is expected to assume the position not later than 1 March 2000.

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES

Tasks: The Director of Programmes provides programmatic and scientific leadership to the overall programme of the Centre. This includes (i) the planning and implementation of the overall programme, (ii) ensuring the highest technical and professional standards in the Centre's research, publications, training programmes, and advisory services, (iii) ensuring integration and coordination of programme activities, (iv) acting as the focal point for a strong monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that programme activities achieve desired results and impacts, (v) interact with local, national, and international institutions and organisations to identify priorities for ICIMOD's work and develop collaborative programmes, and (vi) develop together with the Director General an overall strategy of the Centre and advise him/her on programme management.

Qualifications: Ph.D or equivalent in natural or social sciences with substantial professional experience and achievement in mountain development related research management and/or policy advisory services, of which a part will have preferably been undertaken in the HKH; experiences with sustainable development policy issues; demonstrated managerial experience; the capacity for intellectual leadership and skill in working with collaborators and donors; sensitivity to relationships in a multi-national and multi-disciplinary environment; and a successful track record in managing research and development activities.

The successful candidate is expected to assume the position not later than 1 July 2000.

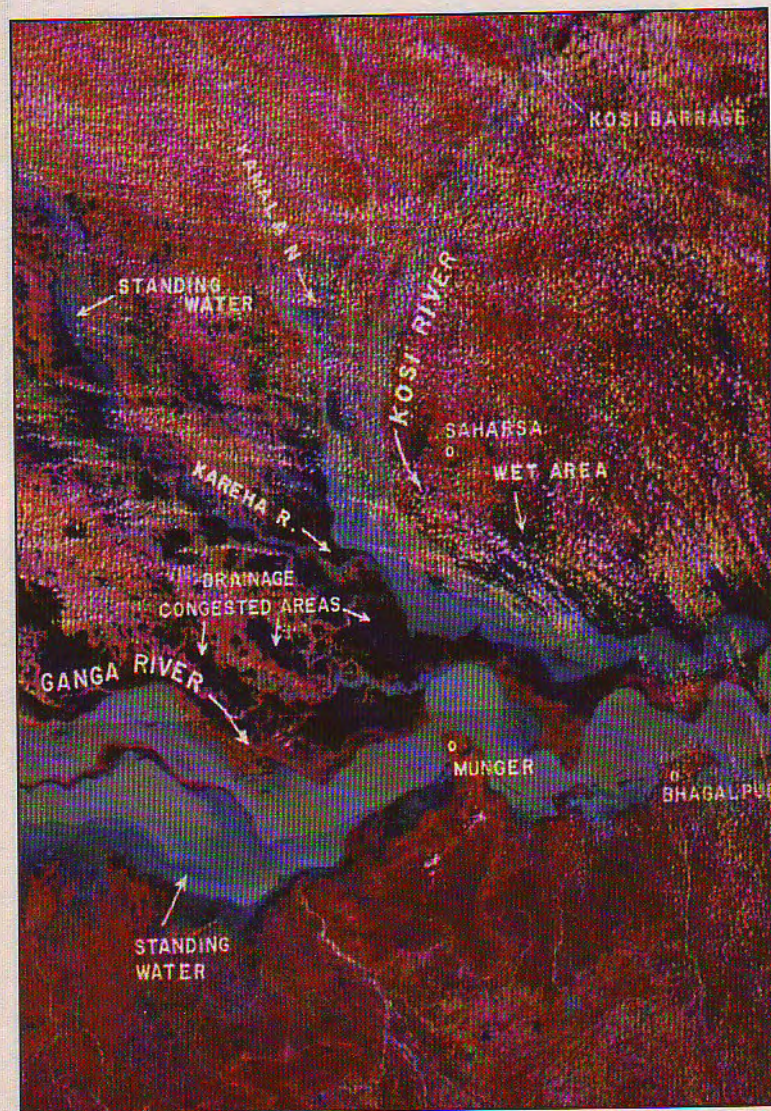
Candidates for both positions should be in excellent health and under 55 years in age. The detailed announcements for these challenging positions, including terms of employment are available at the Centre's Homepage: www.icimod.org.sg. Applications with names and addresses of three referees must be received at the following address **not later than 15 March 1999**.

Dr. Hans Gsanger
German Development Institute
Hallerstrasse 3, D – 10587 Berlin, Germany
Fax: 49-30-390 73 130
Email: hgsaenger@t-online.de

Above the danger mark

It is five months since the monsoon ended, but parts of northern Bihar are still under water. The embankments that are supposed to control floods, trap the water instead. When the next rains arrive in June, the rivers will overflow again and the annual ritual of calling for a high dam on the Kosi River in Nepal will begin once more.

by Dinesh Kumar Mishra



In 1928, writing about the floods in the Indian state of Orissa, the chairman of the Orissa Flood Committee, Addams Williams, noted that "...the problem in Orissa is not how to prevent floods, but how to pass them as quickly as possible to the sea. And the solution lies in removing all the obstacles which militate against this result...To continue as at present is merely to pile up a debt which will have to be paid, in distress and calamity at the end." True to his fears, the "debts" have indeed "piled up" in the following years and the time has come to pay back in terms of annual calamities. But the point of reference here is not Orissa, but the annual floods in Bihar.

When the British first came to India, they were essentially traders and had little to do with matters of irrigation or flood control. In fact, they learnt the technique in India, seeing the 14th-century Yamuna Canal built by Feroze Shah Tughlaq, and developed it to collect revenue and were quite successful at that. Where they failed was in trying to tame rivers. After their unsuccessful attempt to embank the Damodar river, the "sorrow of Bengal" as they called it, in the mid-19th century, the British vowed never to touch any river with a view to controlling it—a promise they kept till they left this country in 1947.

Their resolve, however, did not extend to zamindars and local rulers who used their own resources to try and control rivers. Many embankments thus sprang up along the rivers

Satellite image of North Bihar showing the Kosi and Ganga plains on 17 September 1987.



and these ultimately became a matter of great concern to the colonial rulers. For it needed only a breach to wash away any benefits the embankments might have brought over the years. The British were aware of the huge expense in relief and rehabilitation and so refrained from building any embankments. Instead, they tried to improve drainage and remove all hindrances in the path of the water on the assumption that it would improve the flood situation. They were also keeping a close watch on what was happening with the Hwang Ho (embanked in the 7th century BC) in China and the Mississippi (embanked in the 18th century) in the USA, and the stories of calamity that kept coming in year after year.

After the failure of the Damodar embankment scheme, questions were raised about the efficacy of embankments as a flood control measure. Embankments on a heavily silt-laden river not only prevent river water from spilling over, but also, by trapping the silt and sand within, slowly raise the river bed. This in turn necessitates an appropriate increase in the height of the embankments. But however high the embankments are, and there is a practical limit to this, rivers are never stable and breaches are always made.

Secondly, when the river is thus bounded in, the water which could have entered the river on its own gets caught outside the embankments and causes waterlogging there. The rise in water level within the embankments also increases seepage into the 'protected' areas.

Then there is the difficulty that arises where tributaries flow into the main river. As the embankments on the main river prevent entry of a tributary, a sluice gate becomes necessary. This sluice gate has to be kept closed during the rainy season because any sudden rise in the water level of the main river pushes the flood waters into the 'protected' area through the sluice gate. And when the sluice gates are kept closed, even for a short time during the rains, the tributary itself submerges the 'protected' areas.

The answer to this has been to embank the tributary too, which leads to another problem—the rain water gets locked between the embankments of the main river and that of the tributary. Since there is no place for this water to go, it can be taken out only by using lift pumps. The only other option is to wait for the water to evaporate.

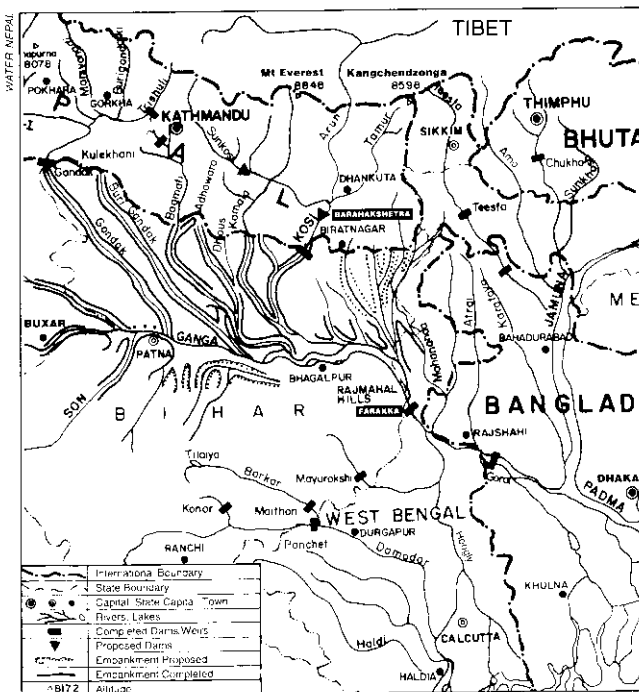
But, the main argument against embankments is that there has been no embankment built so far that will not breach.

Before the state started embanking the rivers in India in 1955, planners had detailed information about the failures of the Mississippi and Hwang Ho embankments. Strangely, it was the 'success' of these experiments that were cited as an example for the construction of embankments in Bihar, where, by embanking the Kosi river, the first initiatives at flood control were taken in independent India.

Bihar has been facing all the problems mentioned above and the situation is getting worse year after year. The state had a flood-prone area of 2.5 million hectares in the beginning of the plan period in 1952. This had grown to 6.89 million hectares in 1994 even as the length of the embankments along the Bihar rivers grew from 160 km in 1954 to 3465 km in 1998 at a cost of INR 7.46 billion (USD1=INR 42). As construction of embankments was the only intervention in the name of flood control in Bihar, it is clear that the investment has done more harm than good.

The record of the present government (initially with Laloo Prasad Yadav as chief minister and, since 1997, his wife Rabri Devi) is interesting. Since its taking office in 1990, virtually no addition has been made to the embankment length and all the money for flood control, amounting to INR 2.3 billion, has been used in the repair and maintenance of the embankments.

Even more interesting is the view of the state minister of water resources, Jagadanand



Singh, who says that embanking rivers is a wrong way to go about controlling floods and that his department has not participated in this 'sin'. If one gets the sense that here is finally one minister who has seen the light, one is terribly mistaken. The fact is that since most of the embankments were constructed by earlier governments, it has become convenient for the present one to blame the embankments for all the evils of floods, while giving the impression that it is against any further construction of embankments. Which is not what the annual reports of the water resources department have been saying. Since 1992, the reports have repeatedly mentioned that the government has plans ready to construct some 872 km of embankments, and that it is only lack of funds that is preventing it. Either the honourable minister does not know about the plans of his department, or he feels that his departmental reports are not worth reading.

Under these circumstances, the Bihar government finds an easy way out by publicising the idea of huge reservoir dams in Nepal. This

not only provides it with an issue with which to beat the centre for not taking interest in the flood problems

of Bihar, but also absolves itself of all responsibility for the floods and loss of life and property in the state.

Kosi and Kamla. There is permanent waterlogging in over 182,000 hectares of land to the east of the Eastern Kosi Embankment. The government claims that it has drained out water from 65,000 hectares but since two major sluices, one at Basua and the other at Belwara, are closed permanently, the effect of any drainage is nullified.

To the west of the Western Kosi Embankment, the situation is even worse. Travelling along the embankment, from Bheja to Ghonghepur, a distance of 31 km, all one can see is an ocean of water during the rainy season. It takes a drought like the one in 1992 for this area to produce some *kharif* (monsoon) crop. There is hardly a family from this area which does not contribute to the pool of persons sleeping on pavements in the major cities of the country, and there is hardly any able-bodied person from here who has not gone through this experience.

This area, between the Kosi and the Kamla embankments, technically, should be flood-free. But due to the problem of drainage, the flooding starts with the melting of snow in the mountains of Nepal, much before the rains. Some 94,000 hectares remain under

Destroyed railway embankment in Jhanjharpur, Bihar.



WHEN the state started trying to tame floods on the Kosi River in the late 1950s, 338 villages were trapped between two embankments that were built on either side of this mighty river that flows down from Nepal. The villages were supposed to have been resettled, but once the embankments were built, everyone forgot about them.

For the past 40 years, the Kosi has flooded annually and inundated these villages. The bureaucrats in Patna don't even remember that they ever promised the villagers anything, in fact it is doubtful if they even know that there are people living inside the embankments.

Arapatti, in the Mahishi block of Saharsa district, is one such village. If you ever want to visit, make sure you take the route via Baluaha, located at the 92 km mark on the Eastern Kosi Embankment, and cross the main river here, then walk through the sand passing through the villages of Kothia, Thuttha, Majirahi and Murla. This is the village of Mahishi Mouza and has been eroded seven times in the past 15 years. The agriculture is almost lost forever because of sand deposits, erosion, lack of irrigation and the extreme poverty of the peasants.

Manoj Choudhary of Arapatti remembers the floods of 1968

well: "It was around Durga Puja that it rained very heavily and the water level started rising within the embankments. My parents were moving all our belongings to higher and safer places but the flood level continued to rise. We moved whatever essential item we could move to safer places leaving behind the articles that were thought to be less important and saw them taken away by the river before our eyes.

When every thing was washed away, my father put me on his shoulders. My mother started crying, and we stood for hours on the highest point in the village. Fortunately, the water started receding suddenly and we came to know that we had been saved because the embankment had breached at four places near Jamalpur."

Since then, Manoj has learned to live with the annual floods inside the embankment, but is still traumatised by his childhood memories. When the floods are particularly bad, the only place that is high enough to be safe on is an embankment near Mahishi. There are no schools, no health posts. Says Manoj: "Come and stay with us here during the rains. I cannot explain to you what it is like. You have to live it yourself."

-Vijay Kumar ▲

"You have to live it yourself."



water virtually throughout the year, and of this, 34,000 hectares are reported to be beyond redemption.

From time to time, plans have been made to drain this water out but the schemes keep shuttling between the Planning Commission, the Ganga Flood Control Commission, the Ministry of Finance, and so on. These drainage schemes, however, serve no purpose since the river beds of both the Kamla and the Kosi have gone up and lie much above the countryside outside the embankments. Drainage is not going to be effective in such a case. The only solution is to do away with the embankments and allow the river to go ahead with its natural land-building process.

Bagmati. Another area 'protected' from floods is Bairgania in Sitamarhi district. This block is located between the Bagmati and the Lal Bakeya rivers and both the rivers are embanked on either side. The Lal Bakeya is a tributary of the Bagmati and the embankments of the two rivers meet near the village of Adauri, thus forming a garland of embankments for the Bairgania block. But the upper end of the embankments bordering Nepal is open and all the water rushing out of Nepali territory gets stuck in Bairgania and its links with the outside world are snapped during the monsoon and the area becomes inaccessible. The kharif crop is invariably lost and the *rabi* (winter) crop also becomes doubtful because of the wet conditions of the soil. Banks do not lend to the people of this area since it is forever flood affected, although technically, the block is free from floods located as it is outside the two embankments. (This scheme was imposed upon the block against the wishes of the people during the 1975-77 Emergency.)

Mahananda. In the Mahananda basin, where the Barandi, the Kari Kosi and the Mahananda rivers flow from north to south and join the Ganga flowing from the west to east, all the rivers are embanked. The result is there is a U-shaped embankment along the Barandi, the Ganga and the Kari Kosi and adjacent to it is another U-shaped embankment along the Kari Kosi, the Ganga and the Mahananda. Rain water gets trapped between these embankments as no arrangement for draining the water has been made and even if one exists, it does not function.

When water starts accumulating along the Ganga with the onset of monsoon, 'anti-social elements', as the government likes to call them, cut the Ganga embankments to save their lives. Villagers in Katihar district do this

regularly and are reportedly assisted by the local administration for the simple reason that the floods do not discriminate between an ordinary citizen and a government servant.

After the floods of 1987, people of Brindabari placed drums on the embankment to raise an alarm if anybody with a measuring tape or a Dumpy Level is seen on the embankment taking measurements to prepare estimates for plugging the breach. In Kadwa of Katihar district, the right embankment of the Mahananda was cut at three places in 1996, and till date, the government has not been allowed to close the gaps.

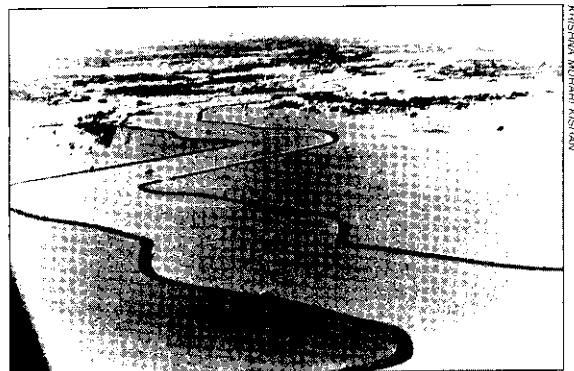
In Sitamarhi, the 'anti-social elements' have not allowed the government to plug the breaches in the Bagmati embankments so far, despite all allurements and/or threats. Their logic is simple. The river water will come out of these gaps slowly during the rainy season and the local folk know how to handle that. Their land will be cast with fresh silt which has a high fertility value. But more important, the water also will recede faster and a good *rabi* crop would be a certainty.

Surely there is something wrong with the official view that embankments are meant to benefit people when these very people cut them to save their lives. It calls for a debate on the entire flood issue in India because what is happening in Bihar, is being enacted in UP, West Bengal, Orissa and also Assam.

Dam it

The remedy suggested in the case of Bihar—damming the Kosi in Nepal—is unfortunately neither easily applicable nor is it likely to change things for the better. The high dam at Barahakshetra on the Kosi, where it issues from the hills into the plains, was first proposed in 1937 by Jimut Bahan Sen at the Patna Flood Conference. The British did not take the proposal seriously because the then chief engineer of Bihar, Capt G.E. Hall, felt that there was no reason for Nepal to do something that would benefit Bihar. Also, the cost of the proposed dam was enormous. And the British did not pursue the matter with Nepal.

In 1945, the Bihar government proposed



KRISHNA MOHARI KISHAN

A 'jacketed' Kosi flows between its embankments at Saharsa in Bihar. Note that the levees do not have any flood control functions.

embanking the Kosi but this too was turned down by the centre saying that the technique was outdated. Instead, in 1947, it proposed the dam in Nepal. Finally, after a lot of debate and consultations, the embanking of the Kosi was approved in 1953. The construction started in 1955 and the embankments were completed in 1958.

The ghost of the Barahakshetra dam, however, keeps haunting planners and engineers as also the politicians in Patna and Delhi. Engineers take refuge in this dam. Whenever there are heavy floods in Bihar, the non-existent dam comes to their rescue because when they had designed the embankments on the Kosi they had left a loophole that said the embankments would function best when the dam at Barahakshetra was built. The refrain of the politicians is the same when the state is flooded and they lament that the floods cannot be controlled without the Barahakshetra dam and that the matter is going to be taken up shortly with Nepal. Delegations are exchanged and by the end of November, everything is forgotten. This has been going on for the past 50 years.

This proposed dam is expected to produce 3300 MW of electricity, irrigate 1.2 million hectares of land in India and Nepal and protect low-lying areas in India from the Kosi floods (although the exact area that this dam is going to protect is not known).

The dam's proposed height of 290 metres can store a quantity of water that can cover all of North Bihar under a 30 cm sheet of water. The dam was estimated to cost INR 1 billion in 1947, INR 1.77 billion in 1952 and INR 40.74 billion in 1981. The present estimate is INR 300 billion—equal to 15 years' Bihar's budget.

It hoggles the mind that the Bihar government should offer Barahakshetra as the panacea to all its problems. Let's take a look at Bihar's track record. The state's water resources department is yet to complete a major or a medium-sized scheme where the cost escalation has been less than 10 times. In the case of the Western Kosi Canal (WKC), the cost escalation has been more than 40 times. This canal was originally estimated to cost INR 135 million in 1962. Current estimate runs at INR 5.7 billion and at that pace of revision, the final cost is anybody's guess. Extrapolate that to the final cost of the proposed dam, with its present estimate of INR 300 billion, and the figures become astoundingly high.

The WKC is not likely to be completed even in another 20 years because of a resource crunch. The Kosi Project, started in 1955, is yet to be completed according to the original plans. The government closed the project in 1985 calling it the end of Phase-1 and whatever work has been done since then has been termed Phase-2. It is the same story with the Gandak Project further to the west. If these projects are any guide, one really does not

This road is the only place still dry in Saharsa, Bihar.



Kasina-Pindari are two villages served by the Gandak Canals constructed in 1971-72. That marked the beginning of the problem. Since the area is in a depression, water starts accumulating as soon as the monsoon rains start in June. The drainage canals dug by the British have long gone, and rainwater has no outlet.

The irrigation canals that were brought here to usher the area into prosperity became a curse since they blocked natural drainage channels. The canal water never came to this area when it was needed in winter, but there was plenty of water when it was not needed in the monsoon.

Before the canal were brought to Kasina-Pindari, farmers grew two crops a year, and the paddy was lost in only unusually harsh flood years.

Satanja, a combination of seven different grains, (wheat, barley, gram, pea, *khesari*, oil seeds and lentil) was an annual certainty.

Today, paddy is a gamble and *satanja* is possible only if the farmer has a tubewell of his own or is prepared to pay the running cost of the pump at INR 30 per hour. It now makes more sense to go elsewhere to work than to farm the land. Most young adult males from these villages are in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana or Calcutta working in menial jobs.

In frustration, many villagers have destroyed the embankments and reclaimed the silted canals for cultivation. Politicians in Patna could not care less, even though these villages are the homes of at least three political heavyweights belonging to various parties, including the former chief minister of Bihar, Daroga Prasad Rai.

The farmers of Kasina-Pindari are fed up, and will cope with the annual floods as they always have. They have one wish: "Take back your canals from here, and leave us alone."

—Rameshwar Singh

"Take back your canals."



know when any project will be completed.

The issue of seismicity in the Himalayan zones is completely ignored when the Barahakshetra dam is mentioned. Back in 1954, it was announced in the Bihar assembly that the government had dropped the idea of getting the dam constructed because it was concerned about the safety and security of those living downstream. The danger of dams in the seismic-prone Himalayan region is yet to be settled as the debate on the Tehri dam proves. But it is a matter hardly discussed in the state where a damburst would decimate the population.

Even granted that all goes as planned, the Barahakshetra dam is not at all likely to solve the problem of Bihar's floods, although that would be the rationale for building it in the first place. The catchment area upto the Kosi at the proposed dam site is 59,550 sq km. Between the site and Kursela, where the river meets the Ganga, 13,676 sq km is added to the catchment area of the Kosi. This area is equal to two times that of the catchment area of the Kamla. In other words, a mass of water equivalent to two rivers the size of the Kamla will continue to flow below the dam even after it has been constructed.

This is exactly the amount of water that today gets caught outside the eastern and western embankments of the Kosi, causing severe waterlogging. Which means that there is not going to be any change in the present situation even after the construction of the

dam. And since all the water that reaches Barahakshetra cannot be held behind the dam, some water will always be released through the dam and that will continue to make the life of those living within the embankments miserable for all time to come. The safety of the embankments is threatened even by small discharges of these days, and if there is a heavy shower in the month of October, as it happened in 1968 and 1978, no dam can be effective.

This year's flooding in the Ganga and the Brahmaputra basins has brought the floods into the centrestage and because states other than Bihar are involved, there is a possibility of some serious action. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has already indicated his intentions to take up the matter with Nepal, and one can only hope that the issues raised here are given due consideration before a final decision is taken. Let the dam not be built just for the sake of building it, and let the pre-construction assessment be realistic. If the dam is to be built for producing power (the Second Bihar State Commission's breakdown for the dam's cost in 1994 showed that more than 60 percent was to be used for generating electricity), let the people know the purpose of the dam and let them not be fed false hope as the one they got in case of the Kosi embankments. ▲

Marooned Katihar, where the Mahananda and the Kosi floods mix.



KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

"What use is land if it can't feed you?"

SRIKISUN Singh, a man in his late forties, was grazing buffaloes on the crest of an irrigation canal by the side of the Siwan-Raghnathpur road in Bihar. I asked him if the Chandpur Minor Canal had made any difference to his life. He replied sardonically: "If the canal was useful, would I be grazing buffaloes?" How much land do you have, I asked. "What is the use of having land if it cannot feed you. My land has turned to water. It doesn't matter whether I have 20 acres or 20 yards."

Srikisun Singh then recalled how the entire village was happy when the canal was built in 1971: "Everyone thought it was the end of their poverty. I went to Bokaro to earn some money. I couldn't get a decent job, so after three years I thought I'd return to my village and make money selling paddy. At least there was a farm to go back to, I thought. On return I came to know that the canal was complete, but the paddy that I had harvested before going to Bokaro was the last harvest that this village had seen. I have not harvested any crop ever since, and the buffaloes that I

am grazing are not mine."

The villages of Amwari, Jajouri, Bahelia, Chakri, Kansar, Dudaha, Khujhawan and Jawanpura are located on the left bank of the Ghaghra river. But the state later built a canal that encircled the villages and the canal blocked the natural drainage channels.

Ever since 1972, the villages are inundated after the slightest rain. Some farmers still sow paddy in the area beyond the permanently waterlogged peripheries hoping that something might grow. But most years the crops are ruined, and if the paddy somehow survives till harvest time, it is destroyed by late monsoon floods.

Says Srikisun: "Our lands were the most fertile in the area and hence the costliest. But now we do not find any buyers for it. These fields used to yield a quintal of rice per *kattha*. Now, we survive on broken rice which we used to feed our cattle." ▲

-Bhuvaneshwar Singh

NO ONE GETS ANYT SOMEONE GETS EVE EVERYONE GETS SO

By the time the Ganga winds its way across the north Indian plains and enters Bangladesh in the dry season, there isn't much water left in it. In future there will be even less water.

This is not just an international problem between India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Increasingly, Delhi will have to deal with the conflicting water needs of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

Since India achieved independence from British rule in 1947, the Ganga and its tributaries in North Bihar have seen a surge in embankment building for flood control and irrigation. Far from controlling floods, these interventions have made drainage congestion and water logging worse. The resulting floods have spread human misery, and seriously affected the ecology of the plains. Social and environmental activists in Bihar have been left to pick up the pieces.

North Bihar's human and environmental crisis is a result of bad governance, promoted by inflexible technological choices. And it affects almost all aspects of public life, not just river management. But this is not acknowledged in discussions between Patna and the federal government in New Delhi. Both have tried to sidestep the issue by looking for a politically easier technical solution that will divert attention from their own past failings—a high dam upstream in the mountains of Nepal. But delays in build-



HING. RYTHING. METHING.

by Dipak Gyawali

ing such a dam could widen the contradictions between New Delhi and Bihar, and bring their dispute into the open.

Bihar today feels marginalised by its upstream and downstream riparian states in India. The dispute between Lucknow and Patna over a 1993 proposal to build a barrage across the Ganga at Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh persists. This has not received as much media attention as the celebrity status of the Cauvery dispute in which Tamil Nadu is at loggerheads with Karnataka. Or the Narmada controversy

in which the state machinery is in conflict with environmental activists and residents. But in Bihar, a future water dispute could affect significantly more people.

Both the Farakka Barrage built between 1961-74 near the point where the Ganga enters Bangladesh and the Damodar Valley Project cater to West Bengal's needs while saddling Bihar with social, environmental and perhaps political consequences. The signing of the Farakka Treaty between Delhi and Dhaka in December 1996 has added



KRISHNA MURARI/KNISMA/PHOTO COLLAGE

Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi tours flood-affected areas of her state in 1998.

to Bihar's fears of losing its rights over the waters of the Ganga.

The Bihar state government recently issued a White Paper with an annexed collection of letters and documents exchanged between officials of New Delhi and Patna. It highlights this fear of marginalisation and the potential for conflict that could have ramifications beyond Bihar (see excerpts on pg 30). The 62-page document from the government of Bihar's Department of Water Resources (BGDWR) in Patna is mostly in Hindi and was issued last year. The picture of dispute that emerges from this document, however, depicts a primarily state-level pursuit where the main actors are the bureaucracies in Patna and New Delhi.

The government of Bihar and its politicians are becoming sensitive to their rights over the diminishing dry season flow of the Ganga. Bihar's formal use of the waters of its rivers began only after India's independence in 1947, while the upstream state of Uttar Pradesh had been developing irrigation schemes on the Ganga and its

tributaries since the beginning of this century, with construction accelerated since independence. Because water has been diverted upstream for irrigation and urban industrial uses, the historical discharge of the Ganga that flows into Bihar has declined. Patna is concerned about its share of the water amidst plans for present and future projects in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. In addition, increased pollution from urban and industrial effluents released in upstream states would make even this reduced flow less fit for human use.

It came to the government of Bihar's notice through newspaper reports that UP was contemplating building a barrage on the Ganga, ostensibly to supply water to Kanpur. Bihar's concerns were conveyed to the government of India, but not only did it receive little sympathy but its request to be included in discussions on the Kanpur Barrage was denied. Bihar also complained that Delhi signed the Farakka Agreement with Bangladesh without taking it into confidence. From Bihar's point of view, upstream states were left free by Delhi to pursue their programmes of water use, while Bihar's concerns were ignored. Then suddenly, an international

The West Kosi Embankment turns into a refugee camp.

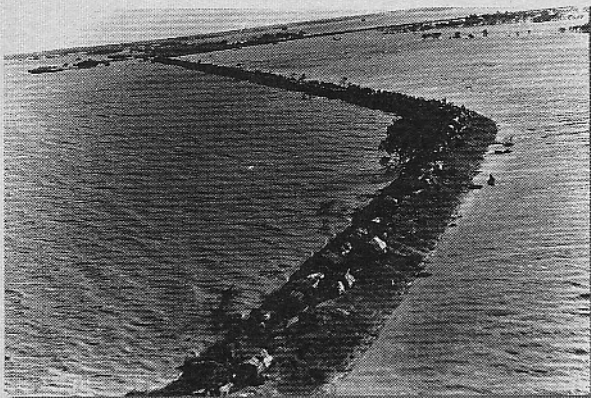


PHOTO: ANAND KISHAN

"If this is protection, we don't need it."

THE village of Ghonghepur at the southern tip of the West Kosi Embankment in Saharsa district of Bihar has been wallowing in stagnant water for the past 30 years. When the embankment was built in the late 1950s to protect the villages from the Kosi, it was supposed to be terminated at Bhanthi. For some technical reason that no one remembers anymore, the embankment was extended by four kilometres up to Ghonghepur and a disaster was delivered at the door-step of the village.

The embankment starts at the Nepal border and travels along the Kosi's west bank and ends at Ghonghepur, 126 km away. The embankment is open-ended and the Kosi is free to flow anywhere it likes from here on. For some years after the embankment was completed, things went well. But soon, the Kosi started back-spilling into Ghonghepur.

Villagers, who had got used to the flood-free monsoons suddenly were wading in knee-deep waters again. They asked the state government for help, and the government acted swiftly and sympathetically to build another embankment at right angles to the existing one to prevent the back waters of the Kosi from entering the villages. They called it a "T-Spur". The engineers were happy, the contractors were happy and the villagers were happy. Till the next monsoon.

The floodwaters of the Kamla River which meets the Kosi

further downstream were now blocked by the T-Spur. Villages that were earlier flooded by the spills of the Kosi, were now getting flooded by the Kamla waters. Huge tracts of farmlands which were supposed to benefit from the West Kosi Canal are now under water from June to January every year.

The only dry place around is the embankment, which ironically is the reason for the flooding. Every household has a sort of makeshift 'monsoon home' on the embankment where they can find shelter when the waters rise. Some families which have lost all, now live on the embankments permanently, shops have come up and the embankment itself is an elongated village with a vast sea on either side.

The slopes of the embankment are a grazing ground for cattle and a public toilet for the entire village. Most young people don't live here anymore, they have migrated to work in Punjab. Children don't go to school because of inaccessibility, the primary school in Bhanthi is deserted. The literacy rate in Gonghepur for men is 14 percent and 4.4 percent for women.

Raj Kumar Sada lives in Gonghepur. He says: "Ghonghepur is a village protected from floods and if this is protection, we don't need it."

-Dinesh Kumar Mishra ▲



obligation that required releasing stipulated flows downstream to Bangladesh and West Bengal was entered into without Bihar's consent even though the main burden of fulfilling the obligation would eventually fall on Bihar from its share of the Ganga.

It is clear that to arrive at the lean season flows that would be made available at Farakka in the 1996 agreement, the union government used the data provided by Bihar. However, the projections of water requirements by 2025 show that flows in the tributaries originating from Nepal will not be sufficient to meet the demand in the years to come, especially in February and March. The Bihar government's White Paper therefore suspects that there are ample reasons to believe that Bihar's water rights are being curtailed to meet India's international obligations as well as to allow uncontrolled diversions in upstream and downstream states. Upon reading news reports of an impending treaty with Bangladesh, the Bihar water resources minister and his department made repeated pleas to be included in the international talks at least on par with West Bengal which prepared the draft agreement. But the quick pace of events between Delhi, Calcutta and Dhaka led to a treaty with Bangladesh that ignored Patna altogether.

To assuage Bihar, the union minister for water resources visited Patna on 13 December 1996, the day after the signing of the 1996 Farakka Treaty with Bangladesh in New Delhi. He assured officials in Patna that the interests of Bihar would be protected in the implementation of the 1996 Indo-Bangladesh Agreement on the Ganga waters at Farakka. He also promised that a meeting between Bihar and union government officials would be convened in Delhi to discuss the grievances of the state. This meeting was eventually held in Delhi on 24 January 1997, but not before an agreement was signed on 9 January, 1997 between India and Nepal to initiate a joint Detailed Project Report study for the Kosi High Dam as well as the Sun Kosi-Kamla Diversion projects in Nepal. Comparing the dates, one sees that the Kathmandu meeting, and the agreement it produced, was an important strategic step taken by Delhi before entering into discussion to mollify Bihar.

In its 24 January meeting, Delhi told Patna that the Farakka Agreement had no intention to curtail the use of Ganga waters in upstream states. There were also promises that the discussions with Nepal, which were ongoing, would be accelerated since the Kosi High Dam

at Barahakshetra in Nepal would solve all the problems of low flow during the dry season. Delhi had no objections to the eight co-basin states of the Ganga jointly searching for a mutually agreed solution to share the dry season's low flow. The central government in Delhi would intervene in this process only if the states failed to agree. Except for minor issues of release of funds for projects, the bureaucrats in Patna were perfectly satisfied with Delhi's actions, especially those regarding discussions with Nepal on the Kosi High Dam.

Despite these assurances, there is lurking concern in Bihar that the Kosi High Dam may again be dropped from the central government's priorities. Leading up to the Ganga water treaty at Farakka, a plan to build a dam on the Sunkhosh in Bhutan to divert water to Farakka and meet the future shortfall was reported in the Indian press. Such a plan, according to the Bihar government's White Paper, will only solve the problem at Farakka, whereas building a high dam in Nepal will simultaneously solve Bihar's problems of dry season water availability, flood control in the state and electricity supplies. It also cited the need for flood cushioning in the Tehri Dam under construction on the Bhagirathi River in Uttar Pradesh as well as in other dams proposed on Ganga tributaries, such as the Pancheshwar on the Mahakali River on Nepal's western border with India. While Bihar's past experiences in this regard did not provide reasons for enthusiasm, Patna was prepared to give the benefit of doubt to Delhi's assurances that the Kosi High Dam project would be pursued more vigorously with Nepal.

At about the same time that the Bihar government was issuing its White Paper, grass-roots activists from its poorest and most-neglected regions were gathering at Nirmali near the Kosi River in early April 1997. The meeting was organised by the Barh Mukti Abhiyan (BMA, or Freedom from Flood Movement) and fundamentally challenged the concept of water resources development. Nirmali, situated in the Kosi's inland delta region, was a symbolic choice. It was at this exact spot 50 years earlier that the historic Nirmali Kosi Sufferers Conference was held, which provided the major political thrust in independent India for the Kosi Project. The conference was attended by luminaries such as Rajendra Prasad (subsequently president of India), C.H. Bhaba (then minister of works, mines and power of the interim government) and other eminent politicians, engineers and

public figures. The 1947 Nirmali Conference promised a 290-metre-high dam on the Kosi at Barahakshetra in Nepal with a storage capacity of 11 million acre-feet and a 1,200 MW power plant.

The 1953 floods, and the visit by a delegation of prominent Bihari politicians to Delhi to tell Jawaharlal Nehru that inaction on the Kosi was causing grave damage to the Congress Party's image in Bihar, resulted in a greater push for a modified Kosi project. This scheme, which was eventually implemented, consisted not of a storage dam but only a barrage at the Nepal border and embankments as well as ring bunds in the plains downstream. Thus, the institutional momentum set in motion by the 1947 Nirmali Conference in the heady days of post-independence India culminated in a programme of "jacketing" rivers by means of embankments in the plains of north Ganga. This "single mission" continues unchecked to this day, unquestioned from within the establishment. And the result

has been water logging and social degradation, which the embankment builders in Delhi and Patna

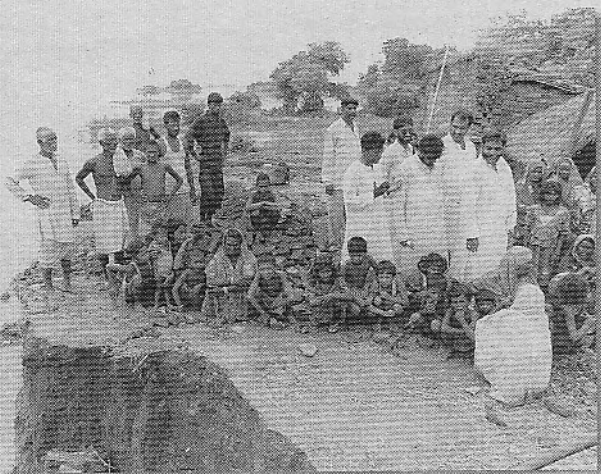
have been reluctant to concede.

Fifty years later, the BMA's 1997 Nirmali Conference exposed the social and environmental repercussion of embankment and irrigation projects that ensued from the 1947 conference. The six-point resolution passed by the 1997 meeting "vehemently opposes the construction of the proposed Barahakshetra high dam in Nepal", and calls for a people's evaluation of all the flood control and irrigation projects implemented so far.

From the vantage point of environmental and social activists, Bihar's water problem looks quite different from the state or central government. Their concern is not so much water rights over large rivers as the degradation or destruction of fertile farmlands, and the havoc wrought on many poor people as a result of wrong technological choice for harnessing water. Flood control embankments, barrages and canals for surface irrigation schemes are often insensitively designed and poorly managed. Activists also do not trust the ability of the bureaucracy or politicians to make things better.

In the case of the state organisations, the perception is tied to the culture of control and secrecy mediated by procedures. A procedural prescription (such as more surveys, embankments and discussions with Nepal)

Villagers watch officials on yet another flood inspection.



"How can you make the blind look, or the deaf listen?"

IT is August and the road between Samastipur and Darbhanga in Bihar has been closed because the flood waters have overtopped the road. The road leading to Samastipur beyond Laheriasarai is quiet, there is a sea of water on either side of the road. Many people from neighbouring villages which have been submerged have come and taken shelter along the road embankment. The huts are built of plastic sheets, jute mats, old saris, salvaged materials, bamboo, thatch. Three generations of one family is huddled inside one of these huts.

Raghuandan Yadav, 70, of Narayanpur and Lakhan Sahu, 60, of Taralahi say it all started when an embankment was built near the Bagmati River during the Emergency in the mid-1970s. Some people protested, but this was the Emergency and the protests were muted. The government proceeded with the embankment, and since then Narayanpur and Taralahi are chronically flooded. Before the embankment was built, the floodwaters would drain away soon after they flowed in. But now, the embankment acts as a dam and prevents flood waters from draining away.

Raghuandan says: "This year water has stayed unusually long. It started rising on 20 July and it has remained till mid-August and it looks like it will stay for another month. The tops of trees look like islands in an ocean. Many ministers, top officials, engineers pass through this road every day but none of them ever bother to look into why we are living here on this road. The entire district of Khagaria is under water. But how can make the blind look, or the deaf listen?"

A 100 metres up the road, besides the huts of new refugees, a funeral pyre is being prepared on the road to cremate a body. The villagers squat silently and watch. The road beyond is submerged and the water flows smoothly over the asphalt. Says Raghuandan: "This is what we are reduced to. It may be my turn next time to be cremated on the road. My children may not be able to afford the cost of cremation and may as well dump my body in the water. We cannot live in peace and this is the death we get."

An official "Bihar Government" car with tinted windows passes by flashing red lights. It does not stop.

-Dinesh Kumar Mishra



that may be perfectly legitimate to the state organisations is the source of the entire problem for the activists. This rift in perception needs to be probed for the lessons it provides for proper water management in Bihar, and elsewhere.

During the British Raj, there were serious doubts about the viability of large-scale surface irrigation schemes in the floodplains of northern Bihar of the type that have subsequently been pursued vigorously since independence. The plains are crisscrossed with meandering rivers and oxbow lakes. Because of the heavy load of sediment, which the rivers from Nepal carry naturally from high intensity rainfall over a geologically fragile Himalayan watershed, rivers change courses periodically capturing one channel and abandoning another. These flood plains also have high groundwater levels, implying that surface irrigation schemes would contribute to making the water table even higher, adding to water logging.

After independence, however, large-scale river regime modifications were carried out for flood control and irrigation. And 50 years later, activists in north Bihar are busy countering the negative social and environmental costs of these massive schemes and the heavy toll they are taking on the body politic of the state. These groups have to counter the enormous financial and political clout of the construction lobby from within the Bihar bureaucracy as well as the contractor fraternity, which have a high incentive in preserving the status quo.

Embankments are the foremost object of activist anger. They were designed and built along riverbanks to prevent a river from spilling onto adjacent land during high flows. Unfortunately, the monsoon's season gift is the dry season's poison. Embankments prevent drainage of water accumulated during monsoon rains outside the embanked area, as well as seepage through the mud levees when the flow is high. In addition, small streams and drainage channels cannot discharge into the "jacketed" river once the flood level in the river channel has subsided because their courses are blocked by the levees. In theory, sluice gates in the embankments should be able to solve this problem. In practice, they are ineffective because they jam or are placed in inappropriate areas. They also fail to drain because the river into which they are supposed to empty gets aggraded with sedimentation to a level where the riverbed is higher than the surrounding land which the sluice gate is

supposed to bail out.

When embankments, irrigation canals, roads and railways are built in the north Ganga plains, they often block the natural channels. The outcome is severe drainage congestion and water logging, and land that would have been flooded only for a week or two is inundated for months, making agriculture and even daily living impossible in an otherwise highly fertile area. The length of flood embankments in Bihar increased from 160 km in 1954 to 3454 km in 1988, but flood prone areas have also increased in this period, from 2.5 million hectares to 6.46 million hectares. For Bihar's barefoot activists, it is obvious that embankments do not protect their villages and land from floods. But for the water bureaucracy in Patna in its single-minded pursuit of embankment-building, this truth is too uncomfortable and is filtered out.

In tackling such contentious resource management issues, social sciences have generally taken one of two approaches—descrip-



KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

Family on raft in Sitamarhi, North Bihar.

tive (such as economics and demography) or interpretive (values, motivations and the meaning that human agents create in the conduct of social life).

One interpretive approach to studying and understanding society goes by the name of "Cultural Theory" which maintains that, depending upon the degree of openness, there are only five permutations of possible social environments. These give rise to five styles of organising:

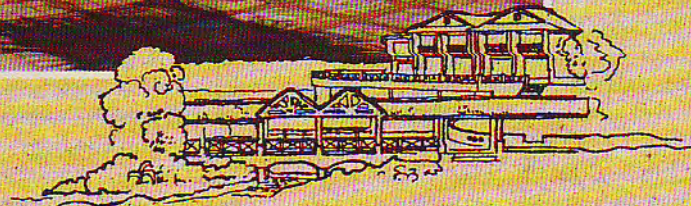
Hierarchy is characterised by unequal roles for unequal members and its overriding concern is control. The army, the water bureaucracy and the internal structure of large corporations are examples of this institutional style.

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Egalitarian communards lack internal role differentiation but are held together in bounded group loyalty and allegiance to an ethical cause. Resolution of disputes is difficult, schisms are frequent. Groups are held together only by alarmist causes that highlight threats from the outside. Social, environmental or religious campaigns are based on this style.

Individualism gives rise to a libertarian social context where all boundaries are provisional and subject to free negotiations. Networks are based on bargaining rather than on bounded group loyalty. This is the style of the market and its businessmen.

Fatalism of the conscripted means enduring the isolation of individualists without the freedom to organise one's own network and suffering the constraint of hierarchy without the support of loyal group affinity. Just coping with everyday living as best as fate allows is the only viable strategy. This is the lot of the peasantry of the Bihari plains.

The **hermit** who, unlike the fatalist, could exercise power but has voluntarily withdrawn from it, is at the centre of inaction. This is a world away from all the four styles that is without competition or transaction, a retreat neither open nor connected where new action could grow out of inaction. It is this environment of the deserts and caves, of exiles and hibernation, where future reformers are born.

The actions of the main players in the Ganga floods—the Bihar bureaucrats, politicians in Delhi and Patna, Nepal, and grassroots activists—can be analysed using the framework of Cultural Theory. The concerns of Bihar government described above come from the hierarchic solidarity. It is a perspective generated from the way governments and their machinery are organised. The grassroots social and environmental activists belong to the egalitarian brotherhood. There is fierce disagreement between the hierarchic functionaries and the egalitarian activists about fundamental values of governance, life-styles, technological choices, and approaches to resource use.

These disagreements and the social dynamism they are imbued with are not easy to explain in conventional terms such as Left vs Right, State A vs State B or Urban vs Rural. In each of these conventional categories there are alliances and counter alliances that cut across these divides. A better explanation is needed. For instance, why does a minister, a member of the legislature, or a member of the police

force take part in demolishing an embankment which they themselves may call an "anti-social act" which is the case in Bihar? What group affinity and peer pressure, or alternatively, what sense of injustice in the established order, makes these pillars of society engage in such a drastic course of action? This high drama that is emerging in the plains of north Bihar is an indication of two very different social solidarities on a collision course.

While hierarchs exercise power through established procedures, egalitarians are structured in such a manner that power is best exercised through criticism of the establishment. Cultural Theory would say that this is the only way they can exercise power, indeed the only way they can even exist without splitting. Their activities can flare up after a long period of dormancy if social or environmental inequity reaches the point where they become unbearable. An oft-heard criticism of activists and environmentalists is that they only criticise and do not come up with constructive suggestions. But this is not the job of the



Rice grains dry on a raft of leaves in Darbhanga.

egalitarians. Only when the hierarchs fail do egalitarians mushroom. Those who would want to blunt egalitarian critique would, therefore, do better if they started reforming the hierarchs.

In 1947, when eminent leaders gathered in Nirmali to promise flood control through high dams and embankments, the people of Bihar believed them. For decades they behaved as the classic "fatalist masses", not questioning and not reacting. But the promised security did not materialise whereas their insecurity and destitution increased. They reacted in anger. At the same time, the "single mission" embankment-building hierarchic dominance with its hype, hubris and closure to criticism grew near absolute. The situation

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Earthquakes be dammed

ONE of the great uncertainties about building high dams in the Himalaya for hydropower and flood control is the threat that they would pose to the plains in the event of a major earthquake. The grandeur of Himalayan peaks and their stupendous height deludes observers with an image of permanence. This is actually a gigantic pileup resulting from the collision of the Eurasian and Indian plates that began 50 million years ago. India continues to bulldoze under the Tibetan plateau, creating tremendous tectonic tension under the mountains. Most areas of the Himalaya where future dams are planned are rising or slipping at between 10-20 mm a year.

The major Himalayan rivers are older than the mountains and have their headwaters in the Tibetan plateau, behind the main chain. The rivers rose as the mountains were formed, cutting deep gorges and they store great amounts of potential energy—which is what makes them so ideal for power generation. As the mountains rose, they formed a monsoon trap giving the southern slopes one of the highest precipitation rates on the planet. The annual rains turn this steep and seismically unstable mountain range into a crumbling, shattering mass that erodes faster and washes down more sediment than any other mountain system.

It is the debris from the erosion of the young Himalaya that filled up the Tethys Sea and turned it into what is now the Gangetic plains. This process of mass wasting that deposits debris in the plains continues, so the notion that floods in northern India and Bangladesh can be 'controlled' is wishful thinking. The rainfall volume, sedimentation levels, and the size and frequency of earthquakes in the Himalaya far outstrip parameters laid out in engineering textbooks prepared for comparatively docile climates. Many of our specialists have been trained for technological solutions based on case studies that greatly underestimate the Himalayan dimensions of cloudburst, glacial lake outburst floods, and earthquakes in this part of the world.

The rock strata bent by the enormous forces beneath the Himalaya trigger thousands of small tremors every year. But every once in a while there is a major crack as the pressures are too much for the elasticity of the rocks, and the strata snap. When that happens, there is a magnitude Richter 8+ earthquake. Geologists now agree that there occurs a high intensity earthquake once every 100 years along any section of the Himalayan chain.

The stretch between Dehra Dun in India and Kathmandu in Nepal is one area where there has not been a magnitude 8 earthquake now for at least a century, and the big one is long overdue. This 'seismic gap' makes a major earthquake in the central Himalaya inevitable in the near future. "Such an earthquake can have a ground acceleration of more than 1g. What this means is that, if the ground is moving downwards, anything that is lying loose on its surface—a boulder for instance or a high dam and the massive volume of water behind it—will be left up in the air," write cultural theorists Michael Thompson and Dipak Gyawali in a recent paper.

The catastrophic impact of the failure of a dam like Tehri or Pancheswar with 20 cubic kilometres of impounded water on the downstream plains is unthinkable. But there are failures of natural dams caused by landslide blockage of rivers in the past that give us an indication of the scale of such a di-

saster. In 1893, a rockslide on a river in the Garhwal Himalaya burst, causing a huge flashflood and great loss of life all the way down to the plains. In 1970, debris flow on the Alkananda River created a 60-metre high dam on this tributary of the Ganga. When this burst, it caused a flashflood that thundered down all the way to the plains of Uttar Pradesh, destroying settlements, bridges and highways.

Some scientists believe that as long as the dangers are known, there are engineering measures that can be taken to make the catastrophic failure of a high dam less likely. But the question is how much is it going to cost and if the risk, however minimal, is acceptable. Thirty years after they happened, reports are filtering out now of dam bursts in south-central China that killed tens of thousands of people.

Besides the geological uncertainties, there are the geo-political complexities posed by a 300-metre high dam in a neighbouring country upstream. In an interview in the Kathmandu newspaper, *Jana Astha*, in 1996, minister Gajendra Narayan Singh had this to say: "If they (India) go against international norms (by not buying our electricity) we can destroy the dam. If we release all the waters, it will drown India." The fact that Singh belongs to the pro-Indian Nepal Sadbhavana Party may or may not have a bearing on his remarks.

Dam failures then become like nuclear war, you don't want to think about them. Designing earthquake-proof storage dams is a question of how much risk countries are prepared to take. The Great Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934 registered 8.4 on the Richter scale and virtually destroyed Kathmandu killing about 4,000 people—about one in every ten inhabitants. Kathmandu's population was a lot less then, and there were fewer lethally unstable concrete structures. If an earthquake of similar intensity were to occur today, the National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal estimates that as many as 40,000 people could be killed in Kathmandu Valley alone. And any dams in the vicinity could be severely damaged.

Earthquake prediction is still an imperfect science, but there are ways to reduce risks from earthquakes and their aftermath by preparedness. Provided basic data are correctly accumulated, earthquake zonation maps could be drawn up to show more vulnerable areas. Li Tianchi, a geologist and natural disaster expert with the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), is working on zonation. He says: "We can identify which areas are more sensitive to earthquakes and take measures accordingly. But so far in Nepal, Bhutan, India and Pakistan—nations south of the Himalaya—no such map exists."

In a candid report, Nepal's Department of Mines and Geology assesses the risks to high dams from earthquakes: "A high dam can cause colossal downstream consequences in case of failure by an earthquake. Assessment of the seismic risk should be carried out for such structures."

—Suman Pradhan

The gods must be angry: Town of Bhaktapur before and after the 8.4 magnitude Great Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934.



Liberate the Kosi: Bihar top cop Inspector Khan.

Bihar Inspector General of Police Ramchandra Khan is an unusual cop. He feels passionately about the Kosi River, and decades of bad plans to constrict its flow. Inspector Khan understands the cause at hand, and is raring to get justice delivered to the people of the Kosi. Khan comes from Jamalpur Parsia, situated in the middle of the Kosi embankments. Himal's Shanuj V.C talked to the IGP at his Patna office in the Home Department's Directorate of Prosecution.



• Why are you against embankments, the taming of Kosi?

The very perception of taming the Kosi river shows hankruptcy of river engineering. I am questioning the application of half-baked science and half-baked development schemes. When the Kosi Project was initiated in 1955, spearheaded by major political parties, approved by the central government, endorsed by Pandit Nehru and the first president of India [Rajendra Prasad], the perception was that it would completely contain the floods. They said it would usher in a green revolution in Saharsa, Darhanga and Purnea districts, that it would create conditions for industrialisation, create a network of communication, rail and road transport systems. Now after more than 40 years, what do you have, have you succeeded in taming the river? Why has a fertile area now transformed into unfertile land? I wouldn't call the project a failure, but a devastation, disaster, catastrophe. The plan has failed, the rehabilitation has failed, the development has failed. Corruption in Bihar has its genesis in the Kosi embankments.

Science has only devastated the river, narrowed its width to five to seven kilometres, whereas once, from east to west, the Kosi used to flow at a stretch of 200 kilometres. The engineers, planners

and scientists have destroyed the Kosi and turned it into dead water. The Kosi lands have now 20 lakh [2 million] trapped within the embankments, we have lost crops, fodder, fisheries and birds. Everything has been destroyed—marketplaces, temples, mosques, health centres, schools, everything. The children don't go to school, daughters find it difficult to get married, gloom is everywhere.

• What then is the solution you have to offer?

Engineers raise this question as a reply. The point is, let us redeem the width of the river, let us not refuse and deny the river its space. Kosi should get back its original route to the Ganga. I want the total liberation of Kosi, I want it to be released, I want to see the original river area. Since science has brought upon this calamity, the solution has to come from science. Flood is after all only surplus water, and the river a drainage system. Earlier we had the means and wisdom to live and cope with water, there were the tanks and ponds which could distribute the waters. Now look at the Ganga in Varanasi, only one side of it is embanked. Maybe a solution lies there.

• You have been known to treat Kosi as a living organism. Did you actually some years ago talk to the river in the presence of thousands of people?

In 1994-95, I entered the Kosi area and visited 60 villages. It was an emotional moment. Thousands of villagers followed me, even the Muslim women came out. I got talking to the Kosi, I read out poems to her, I did a *shruti* to the river, many wept. I said to the Kosi, "Come back to us. We don't want grace, just give us back your water." The Kosi was never a river of sorrow, it gave us birds, fish and cattle. It was our real mother. Now we have been uprooted, four to five generations of people living in the Kosi area. In the floods of 1986, my family lost around 5000 books and manuscripts, which had been collected over a period of 300 years.

• What is your future plan of action?

There should be a total re-examination of the Kosi Project. The science and planning that have gone into it till now have been inimical to the people. The people have been totally denied their human rights. In 1999, if our voice continues to be unheard, I will lead a mass-scale agitation, I won't leave the issue to politicians and fake NGOs. I will go to the Human Rights Commission, write to each MP saying that false science must go—lock, stock and barrel. We do not need your roads, your packages. I will not settle for anything less than the abrogation of the Kosi Project.



was ripe for the egalitarians to emerge, since trying to make changes in the margins without questioning the base was no longer enough.

This is not just a struggle between the water bureaucracy and the activists, with the fatalist masses providing the background for the struggle of hearts and minds. There is a fourth element: individualistic businessmen. They exercise power neither through the bureaucrats' procedures or the activists' critiques, nor through the resignation of the fatalist masses. Theirs is a dynamic exercise of power through active networking and deal-making.

Water development and management in the Himalaya-Ganga in the 1990s is no longer a one-style, single-actor domain. It is now a contested terrain, and all three groups are engaging in alliance-building and coalitions. Embankment contractors and elements of a rent-seeking water bureaucracy exhibit one alliance, pump suppliers and farmers as well as the rural development bureaucracy maintain another, while grassroots activists and judges of the judicial activism school or government auditors, for example, represent still another coalition. Nor are these alliances limited by political boundaries. North Bihar's contractors and pump suppliers have networks in Nepal, as have the social activists. Nepali contractors have worked on the construction of the Farakka Barrage, and Bihari activists cooperate with their Nepali counterparts in opposing the plans of their respective bureaucracies for embankments and high dams.

Being on the receiving end of technology choices made by others, whether at the scale of Bihar's peasant households, or at the level of states and nations, is an unenviable situation. It has immense potential for future conflict, especially when people become conscious of what they have lost or are about to forfeit. This one-way imposition will last only as long as people remain fatalistic. The fatalism of Bihar's peasants is now changing into the activism of its "Senas" and "Abhiyans".

Bangladesh, marginalised till 1971 as East Pakistan, was able to mount a campaign after independence against the unilateral Indian decision to build the Farakka Barrage. Nepal exhibited fatalism in the events leading up to the construction by India of the Tanakpur project on the Mahakali River on Nepal's western border with India. New Delhi's initial negotiating position on the Farakka was similarly categorical. Bangladesh was told that if it wanted more water, it would have to agree

to the Brahmaputra link canal. In this sense of marginality, New Delhi has not treated Bihar in the 1990s any different than it treated Nepal on the Tanakpur issue in the mid-1980s, or Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in the 1960s.

An important feature of marginality is the ease with which the marginalised fall victim to hype. The peasants of Bihar believed that the 1947 Nirmali conference would be the end to floods. It took the scepticism of activists to make them aware of their loss, and to fight for survival. Cornucopian dreams of being able to build the Ganga Barrage also allowed Bangladeshi hierarchs negotiating the 1996 Farakka Treaty to side-step the difficult issues



KRISSANA KALITA/REUTERS

of water rights, environmental and social problems, as well as the question of hydrological risks. Given increasing water use in the upstream reaches of Ganga, Bangladesh may have been wiser to consider in greater detail what happens to the 1996 agreement when the flow falls below 50,000 cusecs, as it probably will in most years.

The exchanges of notes between New Delhi and Patna about the proposed Kanpur Barrage show that "single mission" hierarchies in an uncontested terrain tend to further their mission by ignoring uncomfortable consequences of their actions. A potentially serious interstate dispute over water rights between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh was averted by Delhi's promise to provide irrigation, electricity, and flood control as well as navigation benefits from the Kosi High Dam in Nepal. Just as the rights issue at Farakka was earlier transferred to the cornucopian dreams of a Brahmaputra Link Canal in the earlier stages of negotiations with Bangladesh, the Kosi High Dam has become the new mantra of salvation in Bihar promising a cure for all its ills. Hence the statement by Bihar's water resources minister in the Bihar assembly: "The solution

The Kosi embankment being repaired in Saharsa, Bihar.



The Patna letters



KRISHNA MUMFARI, KISHAN

Since early 1993, Patna had been asking an unsympathetic central government for help in curbing the water appetite of upstream states. But even as talks were going on, Delhi, with the help of West Bengal, signed the Farakka Agreement with Bangladesh in December 1996. Excerpted below are the concerns of the Biharis in letters written by their Water Resources Minister, Jagadanand Singh, left, to the union minister for water resources in New Delhi:

(21 July 1994) Upstream JP's [Uttar Pradesh's] barrage project promoted with the concurrence of the Government of India (GOI) without examining its impact on lower riparian states such as Bihar and West Bengal, is regrettable. This project, as well as others on the various tributaries of the Ganga, places a question mark not only on Bihar's water rights but also on the ability of GOI to meet its international obligations.

(2 January 1995) ...it is my suggestion that water be released between January to March from the reservoir of the Tehri dam, which is under construction, to meet the requirements of water at the Farakka barrage site.

(30 June 1995) By helping create the Damodar Valley Project, we denied ourselves our water, alienated our lands and destroyed our forests so that West Bengal could be saved. Today, if there is talk of Karnali or Pancheshwar, then provisions should be made in them for flood cushion as well as lean season flow at Farakka.

(13 December 1996) It is an unpleasant surprise to find that Bihar...[is] excluded from international and interstate talks on sharing the Ganga. From newspapers we learn that India and Bangladesh are going to have an agreement on water allocation. While Bihar has been kept in the dark about this, West Bengal has been provided the opportunity for full participation. The Chief Minister of West Bengal was instructed by the Centre to help finalise the treaty and even to prepare its draft. From Doordarshan TV we learn that the Bangladeshi Prime Minister has come to India to finalise the treaty, and that India has agreed to provide Bangladesh a minimum of 34,500 cusecs of water.

(January 1997?) It seems that this international agreement was done in haste, alarmed that north Bihar's water use was increasing with growing rice (winter) and maize (pre-monsoon) crops. India government will be hard pressed to uphold this agreement without curtailing water use in its upstream states. Bihar government has made arrangements for the last four years to use the waters of the Kosi, Gandak, Mahananda, etc. for maize crops. Now the Central government is going to ask Bihar to contribute to fulfilling the terms of this new [Farakka] agreement.

to all our problems in Bihar is Kosi High Dam."

The assumption of hierarchs implicit in resolving all the three disputes surrounding the projects discussed above—Tanakpur, Farakka and Kanpur barrages—is that storage and augmentation solutions will be found in Nepal. If concerns in Bihar regarding upstream water uses and declining flow are even partially valid and if the political will to curb water wastage and profligacy is missing, the treaty on the Ganga at Farakka as it stands will not function without such augmentation measures. If water is withdrawn without any curb in upstream profligacy, according to the Bihar administration, the state will be left dry in the lean seasons.

Placing the blame then on "Nepali intransigence" for delays and shortfalls because the Kosi High Dam has not materialised will be much more politically palatable than introspection into one's own misuse and unequal resource allocation among states. Blaming the upper riparian is the ultimate cop-out.

The colossal challenges of water management in the Himalaya-Ganga in the decades ahead will depend to a large extent on the kind of statesmanship available to balance the interests of the regulatory bureaucracy, innovative market and cautionary activism. Each needs to be allowed space to manoeuvre. For the past 50 years, the engagement has been lopsided, mostly in favour of the authoritarian bureaucracy. Since the 1990s, the balance has shifted in favour of an alliance between the hierarchy and business in its latest incarnation of liberalism and privatisation.

Such an alliance is still unbalanced because it functions as a two-legged stool, hardly more stable than a one-legged one that exists when only the hierarchy dominates. Grassroots civil society is the third leg, which includes environmental and social activists, religious groups and other bodies that are motivated by callings other than financial profit or control. They provide the counterweight to check the authoritarian tendencies of the hierarchy and the rapacity of the free market. It may be uncomfortable for a hierarchy used to uncontested monopoly over decision-making and for a market expecting easy profits to engage creatively with social activists. But doing so will at least ensure that they get something, but not everything they want. The alternative is chronic confrontation, where no one gets anything. ▲

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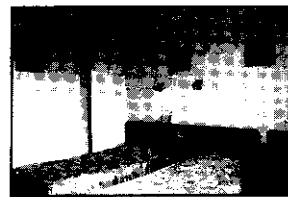
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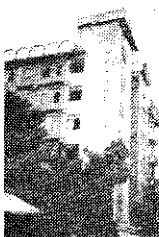
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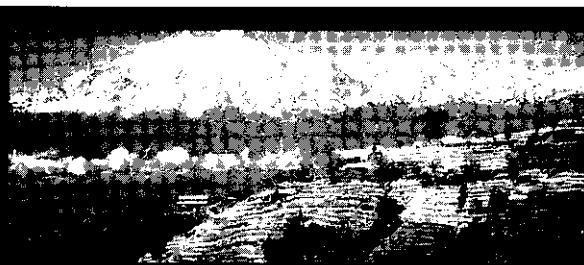
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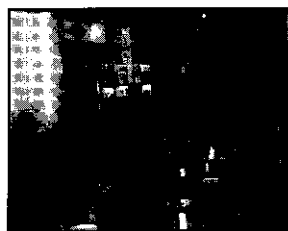
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Train to India

We asked for permission to cross the border on foot or by car, but were told that Indians and Pakistanis could not do this.

by Hajrah Mumtaz

Taking off from Lahore airport, if the plane veers westwards, on a clear day you can see the border fence between India and Pakistan stretching out below. It is quite an impressive sight, this wriggly black line cutting through the landscape—a clear divider, daring the world to challenge it. It is not a defensive sort of fence, nor is it impassive. By its very design, it stands true to its purpose of unrelenting animosity, almost shouting out the message: never shall we compromise. This fence maintains every iota of the belligerence, viciousness and mistrust that went into its construction.

And what you see from the sky is an uneven, jagged line, cutting the harmony of a continuous landscape into two disfigured halves. This is not the sort of wall you get in fairy tales, which divides the kingdom of the good witch from that of the bad, although I suppose many see it that way. This wall means business. It celebrates 50 years of hatred, bitterness and enmity.

At night, it looks even more dramatic. Flying through pitch blackness, suddenly the darkness is pierced by glaring bright lights, blazing coldly in defiance of all notions of friendship, tolerance, even logic and humanity. And as you cross over this symbol of eternal war, is there anyone whose heart is not sucked dry, emptied of all hope and light? For here is a monument erected in cold iron and barbed wire, commemorating the day when sanity went off on a tangent.

The first and only time I crossed

this divider, it was by train, going from Lahore Railway Station to India's Atari Railway Station. That was in January 1998, and the occasion was a wedding: the marriage of a Pakistani to an Indian. Time changes all things, and steals even the memory of that which used to be. Only a year ago, and yet almost another lifetime when we consider the events that have taken place since then, there was some semblance of tolerance between the two countries. It was at this time that my friends and I crossed over the fence, and learnt first-hand the underlying similarities as well as the hostilities between the two nations.

We had initially sought permission to cross the border on foot or by car, but were told that Indians and Pakistanis could not do this.

Once upon a time, anyone with a visa could simply walk across the border and catch a bus on the other side. No more. After a certain bout of riots, nationals of the two countries were barred, and so it has remained ever since, presumably because neither side wants to make life for those on the other end any easier.

Anyway, we decided to go by train. The bi-weekly train between Lahore and Atari is called the Samjhota Express, meaning the "friendship express".

Irony indeed, for everyone knows that what actually travels back and forth on the Samjhota Express is smuggled goods: American cigarettes, Russian items, Pakistani hot-pots, water-coolers bound for India and betel leaves, shawls, spices and cloth to Pakistan.

The ride across the border smacks more than slightly of the legendary Lilliputian wars. You can see the fence from the Wagah platform, tall and black and in two layers, with rolls and rolls of barbed wire in between. It's the dream of anyone who is addicted to spy and war novels.

The fence has high watch-towers with soldiers holding guns, and looks exactly like what a fence between two enemy states should look like. The train leaves Wagah at a slow pace, probably to inspire awe and terror.

The distance between Wagah and Atari, even at that speed, is only 15 minutes. As you near the fence, there are sign posts, telling you to Beware, Indian Territory lies ahead and even, unbelievably, Hello India, Goodbye Pakistan.

There is a padlocked gate across the railway tracks. The train reaches it and then stops. There is much breath-holding, and the gate is slowly unlocked and opened, held by a representative of each army.

The Pakistani army, which has been on the train since Wagah, gets off. The train moves forward slightly, into Indian territory. Slowly, the huge gates are closed and padlocked, and Indian soldiers get on the train.

As the train starts moving, it is accompanied on both sides by officers on horseback, riding alongside the train which is by now moving through a tunnel of barbed wire.

Five minutes later, Atari Railway Station comes into sight in an imaginary blare of trumpets.

After all this build-up, inexperienced travellers like myself cannot

help but vaguely expect the grass in the 'enemy' country to be purple. Or the sky green. But no, nothing of the sort.

What we have at the border are two stretches of land that are absolutely identical on both sides of the fence. The same villages, the same people, the same language, customs, dress, and way of thinking.

After all, are India and Pakistan actually so different? We have the same background, cultural or otherwise. I refuse to believe in the so-called Islamic/Arab culture that Pakistan is trying so desperately to adopt.

Same people

The similarities in our thinking are engraved so deeply that now we have unconscious mannerisms and habits that reveal our common brotherhood. It is apparent in little things that reveal our similar psyche: in the threats mothers use to discipline unruly children, in the curiosity each side has

for people belonging to the forbidden land beyond the fence, illustrated by small courtesies and incidents of helpfulness that are not uncommon between the ostensibly irreconcilable foes.

For us, this was exemplified by an interesting betrayal of our dormant friendship with the other side. The Pakistani train conductor, taking pity on us (for by the time we reached Atari we had already been travelling 10 hours under tough conditions, and looked it), handed us over to his Indian counterpart.

The Sikh official immediately took us under his wing. Telling us that on no account must we travel general class on the 10-hour Atari-Delhi leg of the journey, he kindly obtained for us the practically unobtainable sleeper tickets, through considerable effort.

So much is made of the so-called 'fact' that Pakistanis and Indians are, literally and ideologically, on opposite sides of the fence. But perhaps it is

not so much the people who are irreconcilable as the governments, and that too for political reasons. In the meantime, it is the people on both sides who suffer because money that could go into education, social welfare programmes, health and civic amenities, is spent in further bolstering an already swollen arsenal.

In 1984, George Orwell pointed out that for any government to maintain power, it is important to have an enemy which can be used alternatively as a scapegoat and as a red herring. That, in a nutshell, is one of the reasons for the enmity between the two countries.

Fifty years ago, there was far more actual hatred, for Partition was a violent and bloody affair. Now, much of the anger has died with the generation that experienced it, and what we have today are the effects of a continued rhetoric, cunningly and continuously rubbed in. ▲

So far, and yet so close

A Nepali delegate observes a rare get together of Indians and Pakistanis in Peshawar.

by Manesh Shrestha

The sight at the Atari-Wagah border between the Indian and Pakistani Punjab was unusual. Pakistani porters in red *kameez* and white *salwars* downloading loads of Afghani dry fruits from colourfully painted trucks, carrying them on their heads for a distance of about 50 metres of good road and passing them on to Indian porters in blue shirts and white dhotis, who loaded them on to trucks parked 50 metres off, again, good road away.

This was not trade between India and Pakistan but between India and Afghanistan, and Pakistan was only

being used in transit. All trade between India and Pakistan is done via Karachi and Bombay or Calcutta. In other words, if something had to be legally sent from Lahore to Amritsar, a distance of some 50 km, it would have to go to Karachi, from there to Bombay and then onwards to Amritsar.

I was standing along with others, on 20 November 1998, on the Pakistani side at Wagah waiting for the Indian delegates of the 4th Joint Convention of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD).

The Forum, formed during a meeting between a dozen Pakistanis and Indians in Lahore in September 1994, is a joint attempt to pull down the walls of prejudice and hate by bringing the people of the two neighbours together and building a movement of cross-border democracy.

The delegates had hoped that they would be among the first ones to cross over using the much-publicised Delhi-Lahore bus service, but in spite of the stated commitments of both governments, it had not started. Instead, the delegates had gathered at Amritsar and bussed it to the border.

The warmth between the two sides was evident as soon as the Indians stepped on Pakistani soil. The Indians were welcomed with big smiles and bigger hugs by the Pakistanis. It was hard to imagine that the governments of these peoples were

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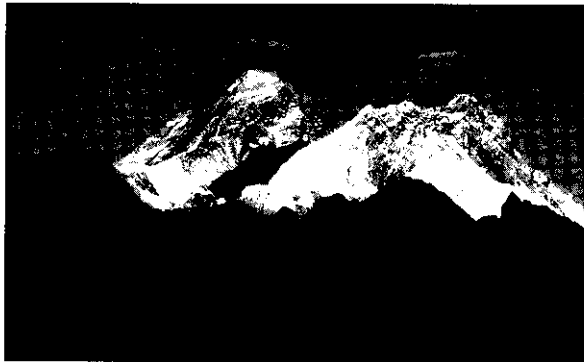
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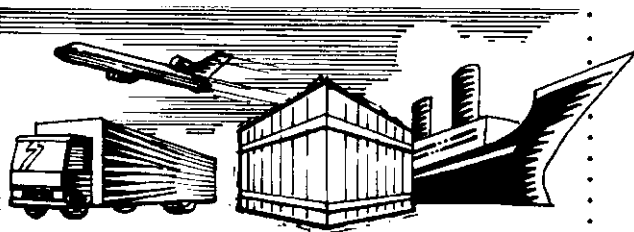
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enemies. A sense of achievement was evident on the Indian faces. This was not an ordinary border crossing. "The most memorable day in my life," exclaimed an Indian.

Altogether 114 Indians crossed over in two hours that afternoon. The Pakistani High Commission in Delhi had issued visas only at the last moment. A lot of clearances were needed, and more so because it was a large Indian contingent and they were crossing over at Wagah.

Paradoxically, it was the Indian authorities who made things difficult for their own citizens at the border. Said an Indian delegate, "We waited three hours on the Indian side for clearance. The Pakistani side finished the paperwork in 10 minutes."

If I was not aware of the history of the two countries, I would have found it difficult to understand what all the fuss was about. For me, Pakistan was only a more courteous India. (While haggling with shopkeepers for a bargain, one was embarrassed to be told, "*Kya mol kartay hai janab, aap hamara mehman hai*" (Why bargain, sir, you are our guest).)

They were surely the same people. When I spoke to the Pakistanis in the Hindustani that I had learnt from Bombay films and my travels in India, I was told I spoke very good Urdu. The food was similar, except that Pakistanis ate more meat.

Then there is the same history. The Indus Valley civilisation lies in today's Pakistan. Conquerors and plunderers of the Subcontinent came via the Khyber Pass on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. Buddhist art, from which Hindu iconography has horrified liberally, flourished in Taxila, Pakistan, before anywhere else in present-day India. Sher Shah Suri built a road from Peshawar to Calcutta which the British later called the Grand Trunk Road.

The Mughals ruled from Delhi but also had their palaces in Lahore (probably the most plundered city in South Asia). Ranjit Singh ruled from Lahore. Later the British came. And there was Partition.

While I went around with the Indian delegates people asked where

we were from. The Indians said they were from Delhi, Calcutta or Bombay, hardly ever India. And the Pakistanis would reply, "My heart wants me to see India. I have a relative in Haryana



I.A. Rehman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan welcomes former Indian navy chief Admiral L. Ramdas at Wagah and (below) an Indo-Pakistani panel in Peshawar.

(or UP, Punjab or Delhi). But you know, it's so difficult to get a visa."

In Peshawar, where the two-day meet was held, we experienced two days of Pakistani/Pakhtoon hospitality. The guests were treated like long-lost brothers. Pakistan was a homecoming to many. Said an Indian delegate, "Whenever someone asks me where I am from I say my mother is from Peshawar and my father from Lahore and I live in Delhi. Since I am close to my mother, I have always thought Peshawar to be my hometown. And this is the first time that I have been here."

A 77-year-old Indian man had come to Peshawar for the first time since 1948. Another said that he was going to Multan after the convention. His parents were from there. Though

he did not have any relatives there, he just wanted to see the place. It was also his first visit to Pakistan.

Usually Indians are given visas to specified cities only (and vice versa), but the delegates had granted permission to visit six cities and exempted from the daily reporting at the police station as is the rule in both countries.

The convention got much media coverage. Among other things, the Peshawar Declaration of the PIPFPD denounced the nuclear tests and on Kashmir demanded that the government of India pull back its troops from civilian areas and that the Pakistani government make efforts to stop armed activities of militants in the valley. More cultural exchanges between the two countries were called for. At dinner on the first day, given by the local chamber of commerce and industry, the hosts stressed the importance of trade ties.

Nothing underscored the flavour of the convention better than the dance performance by Karachi-based Seema Kirmani in honour of the Indian delegates. She had come for the convention, and it was her first time in the city. While watching her rendition of Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Where the Head is Held High", one wondered: Will they ever allow her to perform that in India?

After two days of the convention, the Indians dispersed to various cities. Some to meet relatives, some to see ancestral homes, some simply to get a taste of this 'forbidden' land. For many the convention had been the only way they could get a visa to Pakistan—a land so close, yet so far.

An incident has struck firmly in my mind. At Wagah, a Pakistani Ranger came to the Indian group I was with and, assuming we were Pakistanis, asked, "Are you expecting a woman from Jalandhar? There is someone looking for her relatives who were supposed to come from Saibal."

My friends shook their heads. A Pakistani woman from another group said, "You should have said yes. After all she has come from so far away just to catch a glimpse of her relatives and shout across the border." ▲

Pakistanis adrift

TWENTY-THREE PAKISTANI sailors with little food and fuel have been adrift in the Gulf of Mexico since November. After the ship's owners, Karachi's Tri-Star Shipping Lines, stopped paying the seamen's wages in March 1998, and later the ship's bills, the *Delta Pride* had docked for five months at the port of Tampico, Mexico. The captain of the ship, Maqsood Ahmed, had to use the ship documents, and the sailors' IDs, as collateral to purchase essential food and fuel on credit. When the captain finally decided to flee Tampico under cover of darkness in November, the ship had accumulated debts running into thousands of dollars.

The old ship straggled across 500 km of sea and reached Brownsville, Texas, where it was stopped offshore by the coast guard on account of its rundown look and missing documentation. Since then the US coast guard and shipping agents have been trying to resolve the mess. Meanwhile, Global Ship Services of New Orleans has provided USD 15,000 which has enabled the crew to restore electricity on the ship and also buy food to last until the third week of December. "Thanks to Global Ship Services and help

from some charities including the local Pakistani community, the Pakistani drifters are in a somewhat better condition now than they were when the Pakistani prime minister was vacationing in Florida a few weeks ago," says Mutahir Kazmi, chairman of the Chicago-based Pakistan Human Rights Watch. This was reference to the fact that at around the time that the *Delta Pride* was sneaking out of Tampico, Nawaz Sharif was sightseeing in Disneyland with his entourage of 126 officials.

Harry Lall of Global Ship Services says that it will take USD 300,000 to settle the Mexican debt, pay wages to the crew, reimburse Global Ship Services and conduct the necessary repairs to make the ship seaworthy again. Meanwhile, a Pakistani shipping agent in New Orleans is desperately seeking a buyer for the 225-metre *Delta Pride*. But the ship, bought for USD 3.2 million with a loan from Pakistan's Allied Bank, is not expected to fetch more than scrap value in its present condition. The owners cannot afford to bring the ship back or do not see any profit in it. They have simply abandoned the ship on the open seas.

The *Delta Pride* now lies off the

southern tip of Texas with no cargo, no manifest, no fuel, no marine and medical supplies, and unable to journey back to Pakistan. It is not that the Pakistani authorities are unaware of the tragic plight of the ship. Several US newspapers, national public radios and Internet newspapers have carried the story. SOS messages have been flashing on the Internet. According to Kazmi, an appeal had been sent to the Prime Minister Sharif by his organisation on 23 December but it was not even acknowledged. The appeal was emailed to Sharif's personal email address as also to the Pakistani ministry of information.

So far, the only official statement has come from the Pakistani consul general in Los Angeles, Aziz Uddin Ahmed, who told *The New York Times* that the government has asked Allied Bank to resolve the problem. That, it seems, is as far as the government is willing to go.

Commented a bitter Kazmi, "Cutting some corners during the prime minister's pleasure trip could easily have saved the 300,000 dollars that would have put the unfortunate crew members on a flight back home."

Kabaddi...kabaddi...kabaddi...

CAN YOU NAME a sport that does not require any form of equipment, yet requires a tremendous amount of teamwork? Kabaddi fulfills both criteria and, increasingly, more countries are taking an interest in this ancient South Asian sport which is aiming for Olympic status.

At the recent Bangkok Asian Games, two countries that are kabaddi newcomers, Japan and Thailand, participated in the event. Japan finished fifth behind Sri Lanka. But this came only after 10 years of hard work, said the manager for the Japanese national kabaddi team, Toshihiko Murakawa. "There are 30 teams at national level and they are all university students."

"We started only four months ago and the Asian Games is the first international tournament for us," said Tragoon Masvanich, team manager of Thailand Amateur Kabaddi Association. For now, kabaddi interest in Thailand is limited only to the national team since there are no other teams or clubs. Although the host country (of the 13th Asian Games) failed to clinch the gold medal, it was not short of fan support, which often outnumbered the number of Indian, Japanese or Pakistani supporters.

Kabaddi was first introduced

internationally in 1990 in the 11th Asian Games in Beijing and was part of the 12th Asian Games in Hiroshima too. At both outings, India emerged champions with Pakistan and Bangladesh following closely.

The game is played on a field roughly the size of a badminton court. Each team comprises seven players with three players in reserve. The match is divided into two halves of 20 minutes each with a short break in between for the teams to change sides.

The match begins when one side sends a player (a 'raider') to the opposing team's territory. The 'raider' has to chant the word "kabaddi" over and over again in one breath while trying to tag any of the players from the opposing team. The opposing team has to stop him from returning to his own court by surrounding him and/or making him run out of breath. When the 'raider' runs out of breath in the opponent team's area, he is declared out. If he manages to tag an opponent while keeping up with the chant, the tagged player is out. Any player who is forced out of the court by his opponents is either considered out or his team loses a point.

The question is: should kabaddi be included in the Olympics? G.A. Siddique, of the Indian kabaddi team, does not think

it is possible. "It is highly unlikely because a lot of Western countries do not have a liking for this game for whatever reason it is. Maybe it's because it's played on the ground, which is not hygienic. You can get bruises and cuts. But perhaps they can devise an artificial surface for this like astro turf."

A different view was expressed by Achintya Kumar Saha, secretary-general of the Asian Amateur Kabaddi Federation: "About 270 million people in India play this game. It is also played extensively in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Iran, China, and Japan. This is a large number of the world's population; therefore it should be included in the Olympics. But there is some form of discrimination. Sports like yachting, sailing, tennis and squash are played only by a few but are included in the Olympics."

The president of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah, thought it would depend on those in charge of the sport. "I think kabaddi is a very interesting sport with high techniques. But we need to be more international. We are now pushing for the Continent Games, like the African or Commonwealth Games. We have to take it slowly."

-Jacinta Leow

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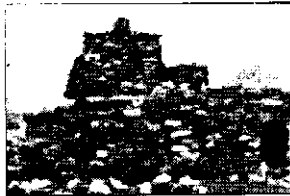
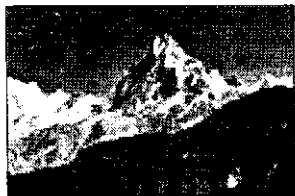
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SAFDAR HASHMI (1954-1989)

Theatre of the people

There are still ways to produce art and social commentary without having to be routed through the media monopolised by Big Business.

by Vijay Prashad

On 1 January 1999, theatre activist Safdar Hashmi will have been dead ten years. Time flies when the struggles are intense and what time there is, is spent less on grieving than on continuing the battle for which Safdar gave his life.

Since Safdar's death, the Indian political scene has been wracked by two watershed events, the destruction of the Bahri Masjid in 1992 and the nuclear tests in 1998. When the 16th-century mosque was torn down in 1992, it shattered a withered domestic compact on mutual respect for peoples. And when the Indian government conducted its second batch of nuclear tests, it significantly transformed India's foreign policy position, notably in terms of its principled stand in favour of the peaceful co-existence of nations. Both events came at the hands of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party of the Hindu Right.

For a period of five days between 28 December 1998 and 1 January 1999, activists from across India and elsewhere will meet in Delhi in memory of Safdar Hashmi to defend the following six axioms which are at the core of the cultural politics of those such as Safdar:

- The participatory nature of popular democracy.
- The plurality of Indian traditions, all of which have legitimate and equal political claims, all of which originate from lived contemporary experiences, rather than from a mythical ancient mind.

- Pacifism, peaceful coexistence and the solidarity of the Third World in the face of the new challenges of globalisation orchestrated by imperialist powers.

- The legitimacy of dissent, indeed, its indispensability and value in a democratic system.

- Secularism as an integral part of the politics of the Indian State; tolerance of diverse faiths as the foundation of civil society.

- The nuclear weapon as an illegitimate instrument of coercion, which engenders a political doctrine that is deeply antithetical to every basic value of Indian democracy.

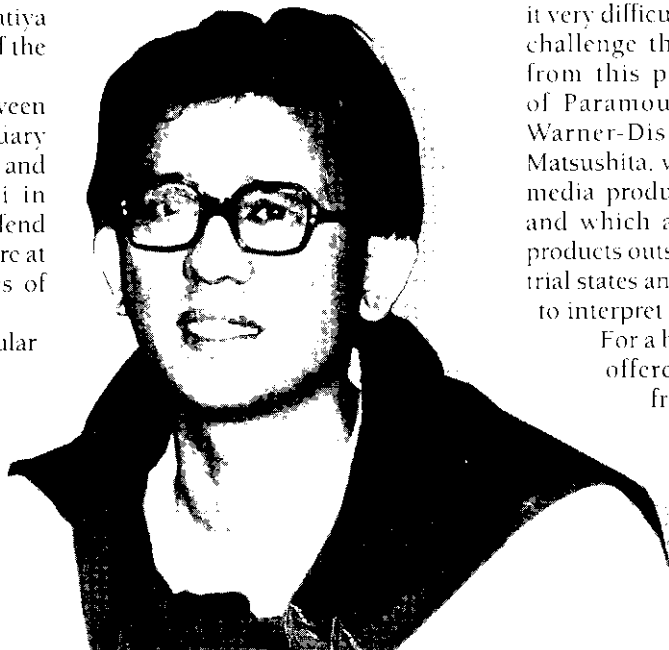
Media plutocracy

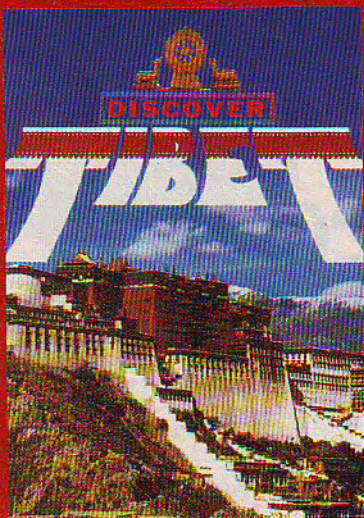
In 1948, Bertolt Brecht criticised the mode of drama which sought to

transform human beings into "a cowed, credulous, hypnotised mass" who become not only incapable of social thought and action, but who also believed that life takes place on the proscenium stage and that their own existence is unimportant. Brecht said, "How much longer are our souls, leaving our 'mere' bodies under cover of the darkness, to plunge into those dreamlike figures up on the stage, there to take part in the crescendos and climaxes which 'normal' life denies us?"

The situation has become worse in 1998, as the Entertainment Industry attempts to persuade the masses to be passive receptacles of whatever is fed them by the various media. Of course, not everyone is taken in by the ideas proffered by the big media monopolies, but they find it very difficult to find information to challenge the opinions that come from this plutocracy (comprised of Paramount, NewsCorp, Time Warner-Disney-Turner, MGM and Matsushita, which control almost all media production and distribution and which attempt to dump their products outside the advanced industrial states and provide singular ways to interpret the world's news).

For a brief instant the Internet offered some hope for the freedom of information, but now that fabled territory is also under threat by the Information Giants whose websites have more visitors than any other





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and who have made it their business to tar independent sites as liable to perpetuate hoaxes (or be the refuge of the Conspiracy Theorist). One need only keep in mind the ongoing anti-Trust actions against Microsoft and of the merger of America On-Line with Netscape.

In terms of a sense of empowerment, the masses certainly seem massified, paralysed by the sentiment of incapacity and worthlessness. However, there are still any number of popular attempts to produce art and social commentary without having to be routed through the media monopolised by big business. Graffiti art, xerox magazines and pamphlets, street-corner rap and the street cassette industry, body art (with tattoos and piercings) among others, provide some indication of the wide variety of ways people try to exert their views despite the closed gates of the Entertainment Industry. Occasionally, these forms are also appropriated by the monopolies, and they quickly lose the edge and energy of their roots. The appropriate example here is the transformation of street corner rap into the kind of nihilistic rap of the big record labels.

Socialist theatre is one avenue to combat the Entertainment Industry not just with socialist realism (which was only one of its forms), but also by offering a challenge to the idea that art is an escape from reality (a notion best summarised in the cultural criticism of T.S. Eliot). In 1918, Vsevolod Meyerhold, the constructivist, broke with the conventions of bourgeois theatre when he produced Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe* on the streets of Moscow to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution. The play's prologue noted that conventional theatre isolates the action on a stage and disregards the audience. "We, too, will show you life that's very real," wrote Mayakovsky, "but life transformed by the theatre into a spectacle most extraordinary."

Meyerhold (1874-1940) was a unique product of the revolution. An opponent of social realism, Meyerhold believed that actors must

keep their performances to a minimum so that the play might draw in the audience. He also used pantomime, acrobatics and other popular forms of play into the theatre to highlight the visual dimensions of the theatre so that the audience might actively provide meanings for events on the stage, rather than be fed all the meanings by the troupe on stage. He designed an interactive stage to move away from the tight frame of the proscenium arch and he eliminated the concept of the curtain, which he felt divided the audience from the players. Meyerhold's avant-garde stage design attempted to draw the audience into the play, a concept that he also developed on the streets.

Meyerhold's theatre was not only available to the people, it also attempted to grasp and politicise everyday popular trials. Watching the play, the audience could be stimulated



Hashmi performing.

to consider familiar experiences which might, in turn, lead to discussion of things hitherto obscured. The theatre became the means towards the politicisation of everyday phenomena as well as a place to celebrate the extraordinary struggles of heroic folks.

These are the values of the tradition of street theatre, which is less about drama on the street and more about the values of critical inquiry and struggle. Safdar Hashmi, India's most famous exponent of this art form, wrote that street theatre "is basically a militant political theatre of protest. Its function is to agitate the people and to mobilise them behind fighting organisations....Street theatre became inevitable when the workers began organising themselves into unions."

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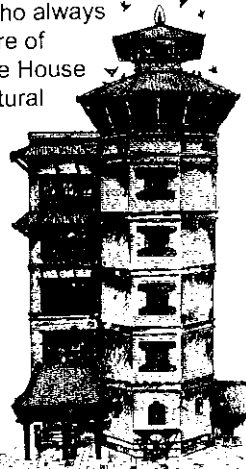
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Bored bourgeoisie

To call any kind of play performed in the open air "street theatre" is to denigrate its important heritage of social protest. "The very term 'traditional street theatre' is an anachronism," noted Safdar. "If street theatre has any definite tradition in India, it is the anti-imperialist tradition of our people forged during the freedom movement. In other parts of the world it is the peoples' struggle for a just social and economic order."

Safdar saw the plays of Jan Natya Manch (Janam, or the People's Theatre Troupe, with which he was closely associated) as "the manifestation of protest against the bourgeois concept of theatre, against the bourgeois appropriation of the proscenium theatre". The bourgeois artist takes refuge on the stage and uses its power as well as the design of the auditorium to lecture to a set of disconnected individuals who all sit in awe of the raised platform. Of course, Safdar argued, "this concept of interaction between isolated individuals and a work of art is in itself a bourgeois need and an offspring of a system founded on the philosophy of individual enterprise".

The issue is not where the play is performed (and street theatre is only a mode of ensuring that art is available to the people), but the principal issue is the "definite and unresolvable contradiction between the bourgeois individualist view of art and the people's collectivist view of art". One young Janam actor, Brijesh Sharma, noted candidly that "lives haven't been changed by our plays, but I think we have been helpful in the struggle, in consolidating people behind fighting organisations, in making them think of a better system for the future. I believe that culture is a catalyst in the slow process of change in our values and attitudes." Art must not principally mesmerise, but it must enjoin the spectator to develop a critical consciousness about things familiar.

The point of street theatre reminds us about the crucial issue of audience. Must the people's culture be brought

into the living rooms of a bored bourgeoisie for whom the folk themes are useful simply as a way to exoticise the masses rather than to render them human and filled with an emotion for social transformation? Or must it enthuse the working people to act against the structures that keep them fettered? If the latter, then street theatre cannot be inert productions for the voyeurism of the elite, but it must be part of dynamic social movements for transformation. "One must speak of a struggle for a new culture," wrote Antonio Gramsci as he sat in Mussolini's jail, "that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing."

The struggle shapes artists with a social "poetic aura", one that enables them to transform art itself. Street theatre develops popular culture not by denigrating those forms that might not be progressive, but by delving into the past in order to draw it into the future through a radical lens.

Tender comrade

Safdar Hashmi was the embodiment of those values which shaped his craft—that of cultural activist and street theatre artiste. He wrote books for children and criticism of the Indian stage, but he will be remembered best for his work with Janam, formed in 1973 as an outgrowth of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Janam (which means "rebirth" and works as an acronym for the troupe's name) came into its own with the performance of *Machine* to a trade union meeting of over 200,000 workers on 20 November 1978, and went from strength to strength with plays on the distress of small peasants (*Gaon Se Shahar Tak*), on clerical fascism (*Hatyare & Aphan Bhaichare Ke*), on unemployment (*Teen Crore*), on violence against women (*Aurat*) and on inflation (*DTC ki Dhandhli*).

Safdar's membership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) enabled him to forge art as part of the struggle in the party. There was no

question of the subsumption of art to the will of politics, since art was simply part of the political life of the masses. Art came from the struggles of the people rather than from the parlours of a detached bourgeoisie. All of Janam's plays reflect this.

On 1 January 1989, Safdar and Janam were performing one of their plays, *Halla Bol* (Raise Hell!), to offer solidarity to industrial workers on strike as well as to the CPM election campaign in the hinterland of Delhi. The play was about the government's role in the repression of the workers' organs in their economic struggle. During the show, a crowd of Congress supporters arrived at the scene, armed with guns and bamboo poles. The confrontation that ensued led to the murder of Safdar—evidence of the shallowness of liberal democracy in which a terrified bourgeoisie enacts its fear through terror.

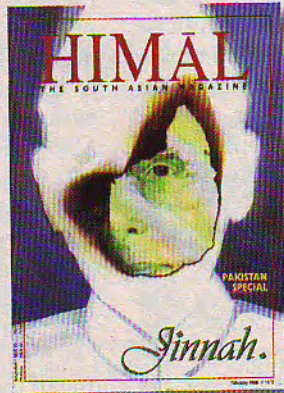
A tribute written eight years after his death by Safdar's mother ends with a prosaic call to remember the lives of people like Safdar: "Comrade, your name, your actions, your commitment will never be forgotten. Your courage brings strength to my arms today. Your love will envelop us, today and in the future. We will not give up hope. Though you no longer walk beside us, your laughter and your songs will rise again from our throats, and when we advance to new revolutionary goals, your example will be there before us, encouraging us to forge further ahead. Comrade, farewell." But, as Safdar's wife Moloyshree (a member of Janam) remarks, "Safdar's death was a tremendous blow, but it was also a source of inspiration. For Janam he is no cult figure—a word with negative implications. He himself had no time for such concepts. He saw himself as the people's artiste whose creative energies were unleashed by the forces of society. He identified himself with those who fought for a better world. He is part of our strength and convictions for the future." ▲

Have you missed any of these?



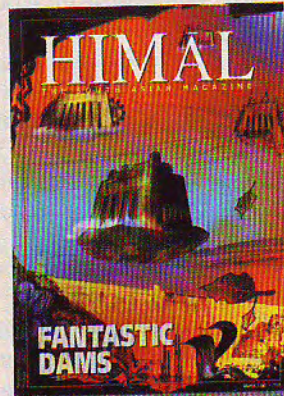
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Legend of Vasco da Gama
Communist mullah



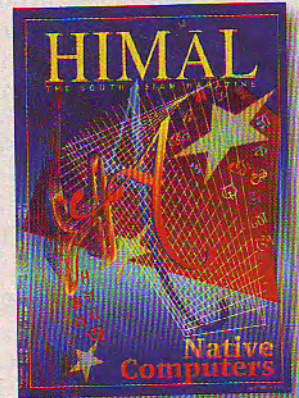
February

The 'conversion' of Jinnah
Secularism and Bangladesh
South Asia against Rushdie



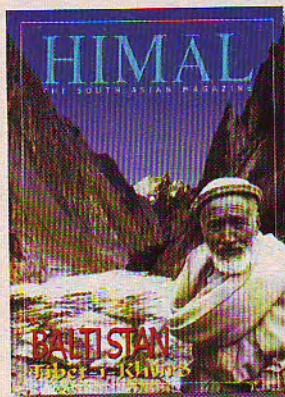
March

The dam debate
Academic SAARC
Insights of a Kashmiri poet



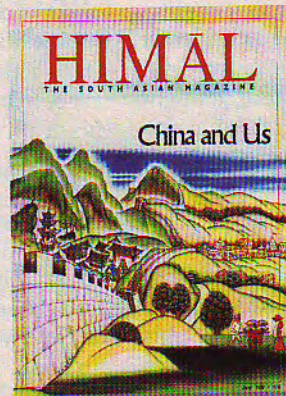
April

Native computers
UN's South Asian club
Governor Prabhakaran



May

Everything about Baltistan
Among the Naipauls
Cardboard swadeshi



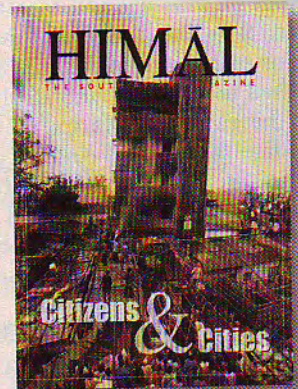
June

China and South Asia
Defiling Lumbini
Miss Beautiful Bangladesh



July

Best in anti-nuke writing
Censorship in Sri Lanka
Yeti on male remote control



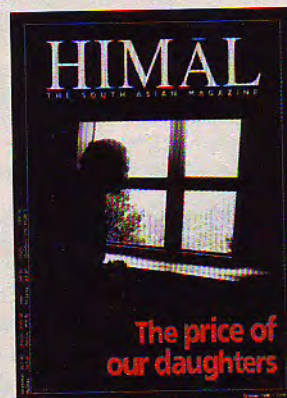
August

Exploding megacities
Vanishing volunteerism
Pakistani cinema



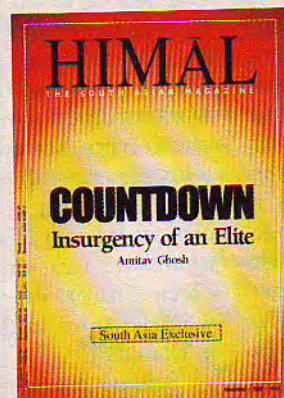
September

Unwell SAARC
Lessons from Ladakh
Sex and marriage in Nepal



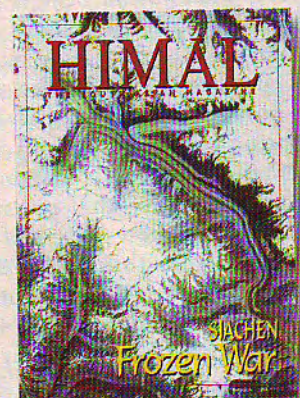
October

Sex trade myths
The Taliban and the Hazaras
Ethuan's refugee crisis



November

The bomb cult
The beauty pageant myth
Palk Strait fishermen



December

The Siachen war
Tamil cubs
The Indian-American

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India

(For Safdar Hashmi)

by Amitava Kumar

America, when will you send your eggs to India?
I'm sick of your insane demands.
-Allen Ginsberg, *America*

India I have given you all and now I'm a memory.
I'm a name for a playwright killed and a movement born on
January 1, 1989.
I can't stand my own countrymen's minds.
India when will we end the daily war?
Go fuck yourself with your nuclear bomb.
India, I'm not Sanjay Gandhi I don't give a damn about making
Marutis.
I will write poems about tyrants spilling blood in the streets.
India when will you be a playground for your children?
When will you celebrate Holi with red flags?
When will you remind the world of the dead in Bhopal?
When will you be worthy of a single landless peasant in Bihar?
India why are the songs of Bhikhari Thakur about lean days?
India when will you stop sending your engineers to America?
I'm sick of the world's insane demands.
When can I appear on Doordarshan and shatter H.K.L. Bhagat's
dark glasses with my smile?
India after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.
Your ministers are too much for me.
You made me want to be poor.
There must be some other way to settle this argument.
Gaddar is in a prison even at home it's sinister.
Are you being sinister or is this a practical joke of the Home
Ministry?
I'm trying to come to the point.
I refuse to give up my obsession.
India stop pushing I know what I'm doing.
India the gulmohar is blooming.
I haven't read the newspaper for months, every day somebody is
accused of wild corruption.
India I feel sentimental about Telengana.
India I became a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry.
I sing songs at town squares every chance I get.
I sit in tea-shops for days on end and talk to strangers about
bringing change.
When I go to a *basti* we raise the cry "Halla Bol..."
My mind is clear that they're going to make trouble.
You should join me in reading Marx and Premchand.
The priests say the old order was perfectly alright.
I will not repeat the old half-truths and outright falsehoods.
I have revolutionary dreams and songs about a new world.
India I still haven't told you what you did to Manto when he did not
leave for Pakistan in '47.
I'm addressing you.
Are you going to let your emotional life be run by television?
I'm obsessed by television.
I watch it every day.
Its eye watches me every evening as I step inside my home.
I watch it with friends in a room in A.K. Gopalan Bhavan.
It's always telling us about the greatness of this country.
Cricketers are great.
Movie stars are great.

Everybody's great but us.
It occurs to me that I am India.
I could not be talking to myself when I say this.

Alisha sings she is "Made in India."
What happened to Mukesh singing "Mera joota hai Japani, Yeh
patloon Inglistani, Sir pe laal topi Rusi, phir bhi dil hai
Hindustani?"
I'd better consider my national resources.
My national resources consist of ten glasses of tea our
nukkad-natak the fire in the stomach of my unemployed friends
the exhaustion on the faces of those productively employed
who after work put in four or more hours in rehearsals and
street-performances.
I say nothing about the factories closed down, the busted trade
unions, the millions who wake under the dying suns of
fluorescent pavement lights.
I have abolished bonded labour in Delhi, dowry deaths is the next
to go.
My ambition is to have Bertolt Brecht elected the head of each
gram-panchayat despite the fact that he doesn't belong to any
caste.

India how can I write an epic poem in your television soap opera?
I will continue like J.R.D. Tata my plays are as patriotic as his
factories more so they're also for the working class.
India I will perform a street-play Rs 50 apiece Rs 400,550 down
on your Apna Utsav festivals.
India put behind bars Bal Thackeray.
India save the Naxalites.
India Avtar Singh Pash must not die again.
India I am Shah Bano.
India when I was young my parents had organised mehflis in a
small garden with communist artists like Bisham Sahni and
Habib Tanvir they had performed with the Indian People's
Theatre Association and we started with *Machine* because in a
factory goons fired on striking workers who had wanted a
tea-shop and a cycle-stand Comrade Mohan Lal was reminded
of the martyr Bhagat Singh and Bishamji said that a new link
had at last been added to the freedom struggle the rhythm of
people's heartbeats had found expression once again.
India you don't really want to go to war.
India it's them bad Pakistanis.
Them Pakistanis them Pakistanis and them Chinese. And them
Pakistanis. The Pakistan wants to make eunuchs of us all. The
Pakistan's terrorist. She wants to take all our cricketers
hostage.
Her wants to destroy our temples. Her needs a *Qur'an*-quoting
Times of India. Her wants our HMT watch factories in Karachi.
Him military government running our corner bania-stores.
That not godly. Chi! Him convert our untouchables. Him need the
support of all Indian Muslims.
Ha! Her make us all victims of missile attacks. Help.
India this is quite serious.
India this is the message being repeated by our rulers.
India is this right?
We better get down to the job.
It's true I don't want to train in *shakhas* of right-wing vigilantes or
join mobs intent on demolishing mosques, I'm a Muslim and
unwelcome anyway.
India I'm putting my unyielding shoulder to the wheel.



This poem mimics "America" by Allen Ginsberg (right)

If Benazir had her way it would be the end of the line for

1. Nawaz and Family
2. *The Sunday Times*^a
3. Nawaz and Family
4. Farooq Leghari^b
5. Nawaz and Family
6. Saifur-Rehman^c
7. Nawaz and Family
8. Ghinwa Bhutto^d
9. Nawaz and Family
10. Swiss Courts
11. Nawaz and Family
12. *The Sunday Times*

If Nawaz had his way it would be the end of the line for

1. Benazir and Family
2. *Daily Observer*^e
3. Altaf Hussain^f
4. Benazir and Family
5. Farooq Leghari
6. Sajjad Ali Shah^g
7. Jehangir Karamat^h
8. Benazir and Family
9. Rehman Malikⁱ
10. Men with full head of hair
11. *Newsline*
12. Benazir and Family

"END OF THE LINE" IN NEWSLINE, KARACHI.

- a. UK paper which published reports of the Bhuttos' estate in Surrey, England.
- b. Former president
- c. Senator and Nawaz Sharif's Chief for Ehtesab (accountability) Commission.
- d. Widow of Benazir's brother, Murtaza Bhutto.
- e. UK paper which published stories of Sharif's alleged corruption
- f. London-based chief of the Mohajir party, MQM.
- g. Former chief justice of the Supreme Court.
- h. Former chief of army staff.
- i. Former chief of Federal Investigation Agency, living outside the country and said to be behind the *Observer* stories.

Charles Muir was a yoga instructor before he became America's most successful Tantra entrepreneurs. He runs the Maui-based company, Hawaiian Goddess, Inc., among the scores of upstart concerns cashing in on the hottest new wrinkle in America: "feel good industry" — the teachings of Tantra, the ancient and sexually inclined subset of Hinduism and Buddhism. Hawaiian Goddess will ring up \$50,000 in revenues on this weekend alone. Beyond "goddess worship" and "sacred sex" weekends, the Tantra industry has also spawned weeklong, \$350 a night vacation packages in places like Bali, Indonesia, and four-night \$1,750 courses in Arizona's posh Canyon Ranch spa. On top of that are rafts of cassettes, explicit how-to videos and best-selling books, plus scads of Web sites hawking Tantra courses, workshops and accessories.

Numerous colleges and universities also teach Tantra theory (often as part of their religious study programmes). Tantra made its first splash in America in 1981, though as a matter of some controversy. Its chief apostle was the Oregon commune leader known as Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh, an Indian who was eventually booted from the US for immigration fraud. He moved his free-love Tantra commune back to Pune in 1985, changed his name to Osho and died in 1990. But he proved prophetic when he told his followers in 1974: "The days of Tantra are coming. Sooner or later, Tantra will explode for the first time in the masses because for the first time the time is ripe to take sex naturally."

But Tantra's new wave of entrepreneurs see the mix of sex and New Age cachet as an irresistible selling point to Americans shedding their inhibitions and willing to treat their sex lives like their tennis games as something to be worked on, preferably with the help of a pro. In fact, in the wild scramble for a share of the growing Tantra market, practitioners are increasingly acting like start-ups in the early days of the personal computer industry, carving out niches that they flog with aggressive marketing, usually on the Internet.

Among those at the peak of the Tantric market are the Muirs, whose successful enterprise, touting a form of monogamous Tantra, have gotten them variously dubbed "The Ken and Barbie of Tantra" or "Mr and Mrs Tantra". In a move that sent shock waves through the Tantra world, however, and left some competitors gleeful, Mr and Mrs Tantra separated some 15 months ago after admitting their own personal relationship was far from monogamous. But the Muirs, through their workshops and accessory sales that they continue to operate together, still expect to ring up about \$600,000 in sales this year.

Others have tried to distinguish themselves from the Muirs by openly advocating "polyamory" — seeking of Tantric bliss through multiple partners, which is in fact a tenet of ancient Tantra. One of these is a Brooklyn, New

Our vote for unpolitically correct ad of the year award:

International Marriage for Girls
 Japanese workers in countryside want to marry with Nepali and Tibetan girls: Please send your profile (name, birthday, height, weight, education, job, race, family members, POB and home address, tel./fax No.) with two passport photos and five snap photos (full length, smile and big face) to: 4-1-9-202, Yutaka-cho, Shinagawa, Tokyo, 142-0042 Japan. Nicchu-Tsuko Ltd. Overseas Marriage Conciller SAIMIN. WATANABE (Fax No. 0081-3-37872857)

VOICES

York-born Joe Banks, 59, an Osho follower who goes by the name Swami Nostradamus Virato. A onetime computer salesman, he runs the Nepal Institute in Black Mountain, North Carolina, where he sometimes shocks students by showing up naked in the classroom while encouraging them to engage in open free sex with one another there. On one Web-site posting, he declares, "I do not judge marriage, but I must examine why it is that there is a need."

ASRA Q. NAOMI REPORTING FROM SANTA CRUZ,
CALIFORNIA IN *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

MQM's [Mutahidda Qaumi Movement] founder-leader Altaf Hussain nurtures a raw, youthful image of the army since his student days. As a trainee of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) he threw himself, body and soul, into his training course which he wished to complete with distinction.

He was doing well when one day he had an argument with his instructor—a Subedar-Major—and was duly pulled up by him. "You Hindustauras" the Subedar-Major said addressing him derisively, "are no good at all for military life" (or words to that effect). A reprimand or a 'rocket' like that would be nothing unusual for a chief instructor to give to one of his students. It is soon to be forgotten rather than carried through for the rest of one's life. It left an abiding impression, however, on the hyperactive and overly impressionable mind of young Altaf Hussain.

The appellation Hindustaura [Hindustanis] burnt deep into his psyche as an anathema and a curse. "Must we still carry the Indian stigma after all these years as loyal and patriotic citizens of Pakistan?" Altaf would often put it to himself and others while tracing the history of the MQM.

In the fullness of time, the youthful memories of his brush with military life, would develop into an abiding grievance and sense of hurt over his perceived discrimination against the Mohajirs—snubbed as ex-Indians. The MQM, amongst other more objective factors, owes its genesis to this single most motivating personal factor.

Even in his first public meeting at Nishtar Park in August 1984, Altaf Hussain's one forceful message to his mammoth audience was to trade in their TV and VCR sets for Kalashnikovs. The military (and militant) orientation of the MQM had been indisputably evident in the party's strict disciplinary code and organisational network.

No political party, before or since the emergence of MQM, could boast of the absolute command and control structure under the unquestioned leadership of Altaf Hussain.

BRIGADIER (RETD) A.R. SIDDIQUI IN "MQM CHIEF AND
THE ARMY" FROM *THE NATION*, PAKISTAN

For my buddies of the Class of 1971, St Joseph's Dhaka
and Section 11K, Karachi Grammar School (71).

It should feel like just another December day but
For some of us it makes 27 years with
A distant thought, much pain, it overwhelms even
now

Bengal I still remember your scents, the richness
and memories

Of the friends that one hoped to never leave so
soon in life

Yet today as the memory cells struggle to revive
Just the names of people, and the hushed
conversations in old Dacca where

We discussed the Beatles, ideals, preventing
oppression and

The passion for politics, and a love of the life we
shared

Spent catching never-ending numbers of "Puti" or
"Ruhi" fish,

Golden sunsets spent sitting on the shores of
Dhanmondi lake with

The peaceful haunting sounds of "Bansari" flutes
playing.

But the dreams of youth just could not last long
Like the Lychee seasons the sweetness came and
was gone

As Lives were invaded by murder and death
because

People who kill could not understand the concept
of such a peace and

Still offer strange excuses for having carried out
orders for "our" sake as if

The parting of ways with the humiliation of
surrender wasn't enough

Not forgetting that Pakistan was and is the
country of our love but

Since there is yet no turning back the clock on,
such a partition of the hearts

Past the quarter century mark of a much lesser
known Asian holocaust

A strange sadness forces this abstraction, this
writing again today

To commemorate the painful and blood-soaked
birth of Bangladesh

Because the memories of eating fresh "Cham Cham"
sweets in Savar

Mingle with the smell of death and gunpowder,
yes the gunpowder everywhere

And all the bridges we hoped to build between us
still nowhere

Waiting for a sincere apology to start the healing
of many heavy hearts.

RAS SIDDIQUI IN *CHOWK*
ONLINE MAGAZINE

THE HINDU TALIBAN

This whole business of fighting Fire with fire displays the ridiculousness of the Indian concept of secularism. Just a fortnight ago, that great sarcophagus of secularism, Khushwant Singh, attacked Arun Shourie for the latter ripping apart Marxist historians in the cover-up of Muslim brutality during the medieval era. Not a single fact was refuted, not a single case history denied. It was just plain abuse in the Sardarji's genre.

Now, of course, the Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena are paying these secularist fellows back in the same coin. And therein lies the tragedy for the true liberal in India. As a gay activist, journalist, and observer of the social scene, I have always taken a stand that we must allow everything to be published and he damned, if need be, in the bargain. Gods, prophets, holy cows everything must be analysed, dissected and exposed for what it is: a product of human creativity and thought.

But no! Was it not the same Khushwant Singh who proudly stated that he had advised Penguin not to publish Salman Rushdie and now cribs and cries when Arun Shourie writes his venomous verbiage? It was the same Khushwant Singh who upheld Husain's right to depict Saraswati in the nude, but condemned some prankster showing Husain in the nude.

The latest attacks on cinema houses showing Fire is just the latest in the un-Hindu nature of these hotheads. Hinduism, unlike Christianity and Islam, does not view homosexuality as a religious sin. *Vikruti evam prakriti* (diversity is what nature is all about), says the *Rig Veda* wisely.

But Leviticus in the *Old Testament* is very clear on homosexuality: "Thou shall not sleep with a man as thou


After airline staff were 'man'-handled by irate passengers in Delhi, Indian Airlines put out the following notice:

INCONVENIENCE TO PASSENGERS DUE TO FOG IS REGRETTED

This year the fog has been quite unprecedented. It is very dense in the mornings and evenings.

The persistent fog for the last one week has thrown our flight schedules out of gear. The inconvenience caused to the passengers is regretted.

Please bear with us during the foggy weather for delays and disruptions which are beyond the control of Indian Airlines.


इंडियन एयरलाइन्स
Indian Airlines
 Always At Your Service

sleep with a woman." The punishment is death in both the *Torah*, and in the *Qur'an*. The punishment for "the habits of the people of Lut" (homosexuality) is death by having a wall collapsed on you or be thrown from a great height. This punishment was actually carried out in Afghanistan in February this year. Hence, my suggestion is that the Shiv Sena activists are actually the Taliban who are falsely claiming to be Hindus.

The concept of *moksha* (salvation) in Hinduism is based on the tripod of *dharma* (social duty), *artha* (economic productivity) and *kama* (sexual activity). There is nowhere any mention of the sexual preference of the human being. Not only that, but Vatsyayan's *Kamasutra* has a complete chapter on male-male sex. Chapter Six, *Auparishtika*, talks about fellatio (oral sex) between two men in the frankest manner possible.

The temples at both Khajuraho and Konark have extensive panels on homosexuality, male and female, on the same level as heterosexual activity. The *Maithunas* (couplings) are shown in frank and innocuous intercourse. It was Morarji Desai who wanted them covered with bed-sheets because they were "against Indian culture".

The dialogue must be, therefore, on who is the 'real Hindu' and who is the real inheritor of this 'Indian culture'? My claim is that both the Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena are not 'real Hindus' at all, and the secularists must be prohibited from interfering in this argument. I particularly mean organisations like Sahmat and assorted journals pushing the sham secular line.

Let me point out that it was Sahmat which had an insidious panel on a rare version of the Ramayana showing Ram and Sita as siblings. It would have been equally brave on their part to show some unpalatable facts from Prophet Mohammed's life too. But do you see the method in their madness? Kathak dancer Sitara Devi, who was married to the movie mogul K. Asif, was so incensed by the panels, that she kept on shouting "Jai Sri Ram" in sheer disgust during those incendiary times.

But what is my stand on this issue? It is that each and everything must be allowed to be seen and heard by all who care to do so; even if it is not liked or approved by the majority! Therefore, Shahana Azmi's silly statement that "a small section of society must not be allowed to dictate their terms to the rest" is sheer crap. If a rapid survey were taken of those who have seen the film till now, she might be in for a shock; a majority just might be objecting to the depiction of lesbianism in the film. Does that mean a film or book must be banned if a majority objects? My argument is that even if a majority objects, then, too, it should not be or must not be banned.

Shabana and her lot are also playing a clever game. This is not a pluralistic society. This is a society where 80 percent of the people are Hindus and it remains pluralistic precisely because it is predominantly Hindu. And the very fact that it is Hindu-dominated is the very reason why we insist that the pluralism will be maintained and defended. And it will be defended by the Hindus.

This is the stand I took during the Salman Rushdie controversy and during the turbulent *tamasha* over the publishing of Ambedkar's *Riddles of Ram*. People like Khushwant Singh or Shabana Azmi or the secular brigade have lost the battle for freedom of expression if they didn't stand up for it when they needed to stand up and be counted.

It's time for Hindus, as Hindus, to stand up and expose the Talihan masquerading as Hindus.

ASHOK ROW KAVLIN "EXPOSE THE HINDU TALIBAN"
FROM REDIFF ON THE NET

THE FIVE OPPORTUNITIES

...when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared Amartya Sen to be "ours", what exactly was she referring to? What is Amartya Sen, if not the sum total of his thoughts? If he is to be "ours", then the government first has to consciously decide to own his thinking. Otherwise, it would seem that Sen is "ours" because he has that Nobel in his pocket, and not because he has some of the most profound and far-sighted thinking on poverty and development in his head. If that sounds sceptical, then there are good reasons for it too.

The current situation in Bangladesh gives a pretty poor reading. If the current state of affairs is a fair reflection of official priorities and policies that have been set and pursued over the past three decades, then one has to assume that Sen has basically been talking to his shadow.

In order to arrive at a free, just and equitable society, Sen has outlined "five opportunities" that need to be ensured. This is not a Utopian prescription, because the realism inherent in Sen's philosophy cannot be denied, least of all in Bangladesh. After all, it is the ground reality of Bengal in which Sen's thinking is rooted. But the Bangladesh situation is a far cry from what Sen envisages when he talks about the different ways to make rational social choice.

If political opportunity is taken as the first one, then Bangladesh can claim a degree of satisfaction. The print media certainly enjoys a great deal of freedom, ensuring good flow of information. But the Official Secrets Act and lack of a right to information law makes access to information extremely difficult. This effectively compromises the free flow of information. The re-establishment of democracy has ensured that there is a strong opposition and people have a right to take regular corrective actions through the ballot box. But rule of law is conspicuous by its absence, which has severely curtailed people's access to justice.

Market opportunities do not bring much good news, despite some reforms that have been undertaken this decade. The market remains dominated by business cartels and distorted by bureaucratic redtape. Management malpractice, trade unions and employees' associations effectively reduce consumer satisfaction while

protecting sectarian interests. The closed shop nature of the market acts as a powerful disincentive to free participation by the public.

Procedural opportunities are a plain misnomer here. Business ethics is desired by most, but practised by few. Corruption, in different forms, is the final arbiter. Element of predictability takes a leave even where major government procurement or procedures for bidding in the energy sector are concerned. Sen referred to the banking sector in South-east Asia as a victim of the lack of procedural opportunities. Here in Bangladesh, the entire economy is the victim.

Social opportunities are one area where Bangladesh is attempting to make some progress. But it is still haphazard, somewhat out of context with overall socio-economic development, and largely dictated by multilateral aid agencies. In the urban areas, the state has virtually abdicated its role as the provider of education and health services. In the countryside, target-specific social investment is attempting to improve key areas such as primary education, family planning, child survival, etc, but without placing those investments in the overall context of poverty alleviation.

In the area of protective freedom, Bangladesh should have been a world-leader. As a poverty-stricken and disaster-prone country, Bangladesh would be expected to have adequate social safety nets in place. But apart from famine-deterrent feeding and income-generation programmes, there is hardly any effort to improvise such protective measures. The government responds well at times of emergencies such as this year's floods, but for millions in the rural areas and urban slums, emergency is an everyday condition which does not hit the headlines.

Perhaps it would be necessary, in order to "own" Amartya Sen, to evaluate the current state of poverty and development in Bangladesh in light of his thoughts on social choice. What happens when the ground realities of Bangladesh, in terms of social, economic and political advancements and deprivation, are juxtaposed next to the country's performance in Sen's "five opportunities"?

The country's socio-economic data, despite claims of extraordinary development achievements throughout the past decade and half, are hardly flattering. Basic social indicators, such as nutrition, literacy, access to health care, mortality among women, infants and children, etc, are among some of the worst in the world.

All these add up to socio-economic deprivation on a gigantic scale. But the sheer oppressive nature of their socio-economic conditions may have forced the people to succumb to their fate, and quietly "accept" things. Expectations have been driven so low, that even subsistence level income is seen to produce quiet satisfaction with one's lot (the operative word here is "income", because the alternative is no income, and starvation).

This may explain why Bangladesh was adjudged the "happiest country in the world" in a recent survey. The survey judged people's satisfaction with their level of

income, and 70 percent of Bangladeshis were found to be happy. But the data show a different picture: the country's annual per capita income is \$ 260, half the population live below the poverty line, functional adult literacy is around 40 percent, malnutrition among children stands at 60 percent, three-quarters of the population do not or cannot utilise the health services and more than half the rural peasantry are effectively landless.

So, what is there to be "happy" about? Not much, but it appears the majority of the population have come to expect nothing from life expect the continuation of life itself, that is to eat enough to stay alive.

With such low expectations, the existence of widespread deprivations and denials of rights do not matter, so long as they are able to survive. This phenomenon is certainly an odd one: the higher the level of deprivation, the lower the level of expectations, and therefore the higher the level of acceptance. In other words, deprivation can lead to acceptance, provided it was pervasive enough to smother expectations.

Not surprisingly, Sen has homed in on this phenomenon, and warned against taking this "quiet acceptance" as the existence of justice or welfare. The alternative scenario to this is anger and rebellion. In fact, Sen suggested during his lecture at the National Museum that anger would not be such a bad thing even if it led to rebellion, because that would be one way to ensure social change.

Such change, however, need not come from anger, provided the decision-makers take a hard look at Sen's "five opportunities", because it is the absence of the freedoms and opportunities propounded by the Nobel laureate that is at the root of the ills afflicting present-day Bangladesh. On the other hand, once society creates the right opportunities in political, social, market, procedural and protective fields at the macro level, then it would become possible for the individual "chooser" to make a rational choice at the micro level.

SABIR MUSTAFA IN "THE OUTSIDE STORY:
SEARCHING FOR THE SEN FACTOR IN GOVERNANCE"
FROM *THE DAILY STAR*, DHAKA

COLONIAL PERIOD

The carving up of South Asia at the end of the colonial period into a number of modern nation-states has made the problem of immigration acute. Nationalism in South Asia has been reflexive. India is predominantly nationalist with reference to Pakistan or Bangladesh and not with reference to the US or the United Kingdom. Bangladesh defines its nationalism against India and Pakistan and not Japan or the UK. Reflexive nationalism in South Asia is a gross caricature of its predecessor; anti-colonial nationalism. It makes ethnic suppression and sufferings due to forced migration tolerable to the ethics of a nation. Hence, homelessness and migration in the area have to

be tackled regionally, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

In India, a few political parties have called for sealing the country's borders to check migration. Such a 'porous border' argument, while echoing the fears of the native population, remains impractical, costly, inhuman and contrary to the historically established patterns of migration in South Asia. The appropriate policy must be found elsewhere. Even problems related to intra-country displacement and migration need multilateral efforts. For, homelessness within often results in emigration abroad. Communal violence is a ready example: the exodus of Bengali Muslims in India from Bombay, Surat and Ahmedabad to West Bengal followed communal disturbances in these places in 1993; anti-Hindu disturbances in Bangladesh have led to displacement of a number of Hindu Bangladeshis; and riots in Sindh in Pakistan have, again, forced a large number of people to move.

Apart from the political problems, environmental factors like water management and flood control have also contributed to homelessness and consequent migration throughout South Asia. The flood action plan in Bangladesh clearly shows the relation between floods in Bangladesh and flood discharges, eco-agricultural regions and flood intensity zones outside the country's political borders.

Land alienation, depletion of natural resources, fencing-off areas for military purposes and finally drought, also prompt movements of people, already on the increase due to vagaries of crop pattern and different levels of commercial crop cultivation in different areas.

Once again, the pattern of homelessness, displacement, eviction and migration of the rural poor is uniform throughout South Asia. The pervasiveness of structural adjustment programmes in countries of South Asia which resulted in deterioration of social-cultural measures in the backdrop against which the various construction projects, consequent displacements and migration continue apace.

Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka—all these countries are witnessing frantic construction of dams, thermal plants, tourist resorts, airports, highways, transport and cargo terminals in a desperate effort at 'development'. Scarce water resources are greedily swallowed by tourism promotion plans and industrial expansion. Within India, the Narmada dam project is not alone in creating uncertainty in the lives of the poor people inhabiting the affected areas. Similar plans are afoot elsewhere in the region threatening to cause large-scale displacements of the native poor. In Nepal, communities like the Taru [Tharu], Chepang, Limbu, Sunuwar have lost their land as a result of such 'developmental' measures. The Nepal National Coordination Committee for the UN World Conference on Human Rights has shown in its report of 1993 how bonded labour, landlessness and migration remain connected. Everywhere, environmental activists are being considered the 'new terrorists', holding the process of

development to ransom. The search for security and livelihood by the rural and urban labouring people becomes increasingly desperate in this context.

Even though transborder population flux in post-colonial South Asia, as noted here, is a complex of many elements and many phases, violence has blurred the distinctions between elements, phases and incidents of migration. Thus, today's realities of South Asia remain laden with bitter memories of the past. Massive migrations of the late 1940s, associated with large-scale violence, have become subjects of collective memory; sometimes of national memory and all subsequent migrations have been haunted by their shadow.

Though legitimising framework of some liberal democratic institutions of the 'guest' country may have acted as attraction for incoming people across the border, violence has continued to be associated with population movements both at the point of origin and resettlement. If we take a brief look at the 12 important flows of rejected peoples and unwanted migrants in South Asia, we shall see that violence was the chief characteristic of the process.

These 12 flows are: (i) India-Pakistan refugee flows, 1947-48, involving nearly 15,000,000 Hindus and Muslims; (ii) exodus of Burmese Indians numbering about 1,000,000 during 1948-65; (iii) exodus of Sri Lankan Indians and Tamils to the tune of about 1,000,000 from 1954 which is still continuing; (iv) flight of almost 10,000,000 Bangladeshis to India in 1971; (v) 'stranded Pakistanis' in Bangladesh numbering nearly 300,000; (vi) flight of some 200,000 Burmese Muslims to Bangladesh in 1978; (vii) flight of about 100,000 Chakmas in 1981; (viii) nearly 3,000,000 Afghans fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan during 1978-93, of whom an estimated 2,000,000 have returned; (ix) flight of Tibetans to India from 1958 to 1963 numbering about 100,000; (x) exodus of nearly 60,000 Bhutanese of Nepali origin to Nepal in 1990-91; and the two controversial and unwanted population flows, (xi) from Bangladesh to Assam in India and (xii) the two-way flow between Nepal and India. Certainly these cases are different and distinct but violence remains their common denominator.

RANABIR SAMADDAR IN

THE MARGINAL NATION: TRANSBORDER MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH TO WEST BENGAL (SAGL, 1998)

NO YETI YET

After much mysteriousness and gossip, the South Tyrolean mountaineer, Reinhold Messner, launched his latest publication at this year's Frankfurt Book Fair. With profound conviction he told a press conference that there was no such thing as a wild apeman of the high snows. Take it from him, and contrary to popular myth, the Abominable Snowman, or Yeti, was no humanoid ape, but a large bear living at heights of between 12,000 and 18,000ft.

The pronouncement came as something of a shock to those who had been expecting Messner's new book to include a genuine photo of a Yeti mother and child, as early rumours had suggested. It was true, Messner confessed that he had come reluctantly to believe in the Yeti after a close encounter in 1986, but had now changed his mind. One night, while hiking in a remote forest of eastern Tibet, he had come face to face with a dark creature, he told reporters, an "indefinable, big, stinking exotic animal". He'd remained rooted to the spot and would probably have died of a heart attack if the creature had advanced further. Instead, it swung around and walked off, "on two legs", he said.

Shaken, the legendary and hairy mountaineer examined tracks left behind by the hirsute beast of legend, describing them as similar to those seen by Eric Shipton in 1951.

Since then, however, he had studied all known evidence very carefully and was convinced he knew the answer. "It's clearly a Tibetan bear," he says now, "similar to a grizzly but with longer hair." And he estimates there are about a thousand of them roaming Nepal and Tibet, mostly at night. They can grow up to 3.5 m in height, and sometimes walk of all fours, sometimes on hind legs alone.

"Its faeces is similar to those of humans," he explains, "because it eats the same food. That's because it follows humans and steals their food. It's easier."

The creature's preference for nocturnal peregrination is why it has proved so elusive over the years. And although legend has it that it brings bad luck to anyone who does see it, Messner is convinced that it will not attack people who keep out of the way.

"Messner—no Yeti—not yet he said"

REINHOLD MESSNER CORROBORATING OFFICIAL CHINESE PROCLAMATION THAT THE YETI DOES NOT EXIST BY AUBREY SAKLID IN "MESSNER—NO YETI—NOT YET HE SAID" FROM *HIGH MOUNTAIN SPORTS*.



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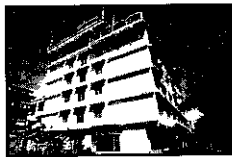
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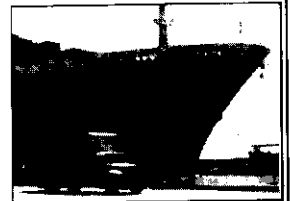


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Hollywood Everest

reviewed by Tarik Ali Khan

Following in the footsteps of *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Kundun*, the latest offering for Himalayan buffs is none other than *Everest*, the movie. This film, however, is one Himalayan narrative that is unlikely to be available at the local video shop, shot as it was for special eight-storey-high Imax and Omnimax screens.

Narrated by Hollywood actor Liam Neeson, the documentary follows a climbing team comprised of Ed Viesturs (USA), Araceli Segarra (Spain), Sumiyo Tsuzuki (Japan) and Jamling Norgay (India), the last being the son of Sherpa Tenzing Norgay (who, along with Edmund Hillary, was the first summiteer of Everest back in 1953).

Director David Breashears and producer Greg MacGillivray created a special 35-lb (16 kg) camera that could be operated in extreme temperatures and he carried up the mountain more easily than the standard Imax camera that weighs 80 lbs (36 kg).

Everest is now the top-grossing Imax film of all time, with over USD 58 million until November 1998 in box office revenues in the US alone. In May 1998, it even managed to join the list of top-10 grossing films, a 44-min documentary competing with regular film hits.

Shot in May 1996 during the disastrous storm that claimed eight lives, the film serves as a parallel narrative to John Krakauer's bestseller *Into Thin Air*. Krakauer's account tells the human story of ill-prepared tourists paying up to USD 65,000 to be led up the mountain. *Everest* too attempts to convey the human story, but with its spectacular footage, hardcore climbing talk and sponsorship by Polartec Climate Control Fabrics (translation: fleece jackets, etc.), it

comes across as a tribute to the Imax-sized egos of climbers.

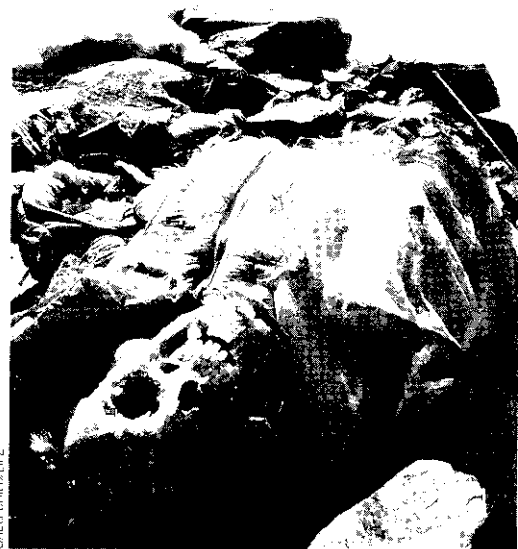
To be fair to Breashears and the IMAX team, they did drop their cameras to rescue climbers from other teams. The film alludes to the daring rescues by providing still shots of the descent and miraculous recovery of US climber Beck Weathers. But in spite of these moments of heroism, *Everest* is overshadowed by two narratives more common to Himalaya lore.

The first is pure Americana: *lone hero gets to the top no matter what*. Ed Viesturs, arguably America's top climber, is the driving force behind an expedition which actually succeeds after the disastrous storm subsides.

Even though the storm kills Rob Hall, one of Viestur's fellow super-climbers, he is undeterred. Earlier in the film, Ed's wife, Paula, boasts how a five-hour mountain bike ride through the mountains of California is nothing but a "warm-up" for Ed. Yawn.

The tragic account of Rob Hall, dying on the mountain as he speaks to his pregnant wife thousands of miles away in New Zealand, are overshadowed by Ed's drive to the top. In true Captain Kirk fashion, Ed chuffs to the summit without oxygen ("just for the challenge") in the wake of the storm's carnage, passing Rob Hall's frozen corpse along the way. Paula, anxiously waiting for him at Base Camp, is there with him on their honeymoon.

The second is *new age spirituality*, standard fare for the Himalaya buff. We get the usual servings of monks, prayer flags fluttering in the breeze, butter lamps being lit at Buddhist shrines in Kathmandu and the Tengboche Monastery near Mount Everest.



Death and valour on Everest.

Sagacious oriental monks reciting prayers for the success of the climb. Yawn again.

For the soundtrack, former Beatle George Harrison's new age songs from the 70s are set to strings (certainly one does enjoy the revamped "Here Comes the Sun" during the closing credits, blasting out from the 27 Imax speakers on 13,000 watts of digital sound). But after all the gringo bravado and new-age appetisers, the real star of *Everest* is Everest itself. Breashears manages to bring the privileged Imax viewers high-altitude scenes they will likely never see off the screen. The film explains how the Himalaya chain was formed, how avalanches occur, making it great stuff to take the kids to.

The mountain's sheer immensity, its sparkling glaciers and ice falls and the rich blue of the thin atmosphere bring us the timeless story of Chomolungma, the Mother Goddess of the Earth (as the Sherpas call it). But as for the human element, *Everest* comes across on film remarkably close to reality: a large mountain with, momentarily, some very small people climbing all over it. ▲

If you liked the Bomb, here is

Because Kalam's solution is a hammer, all problems have been reduced to nails.

Everyone has a legitimate right to frame their own vision about the world and society. But when a vision construed through personal predilection is presented as ideology, problems emerge. This is even more so when a missile scientist prescribes his worldview as a socio-political panacea. *India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium*, the book presented by Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam (of Pokharan II fame) with Y.S. Rajan, fits into this category. The author draws heavily upon the India 2020 Vision Report prepared under the aegis of TIFAC (Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council) between 1993 and 1996, in which Rajan was actively involved. The TIFAC report included eight themes: food, agriculture and processing, materials and the future, chemical industries and biological wealth, strategic industries, health care for all, and the enabling infrastructure, and these form the main chapters of the book.

India 2020 presents an image of an India that operates in the world arena from a position of strength, taking advantage of expressways, multi-modal transport networks, efficient navigation, modern factories, petroleum dumps, marshalling yards, nuclear power stations, and a secure population. The quest for this image is understandable had it not been for the militaristic path sought as the means to that end. For, the bottomline solution offered in order to reach the 'developed' stage is by acquiring competence in defence and related core areas.

With its subtle and oft-repeated assertions, the book attempts to demonstrate the indispensability of laboratory establishments not just in defence-related decisions but by exten-



**India 2020:
A Vision for the
New Millennium**
by A.P.J. Abdul Kalam
with Y.S. Rajan
Penguin Books,
New Delhi, 1998
pp xvi+312, INR 395
ISBN 0 670 88271 2

reviewed by Ajaya Dixit

sion in all aspects of civic life, society and the body politic. The nation-state remains sacrosanct, and under its rubric the vision is to homogenise the diverse and asymmetrical social and economic contexts into a 'market' of more than one billion citizens.

In Kalam's view, an array of military paraphernalia, including the Prithvi, Nag and Agni missile systems, will help maintain the necessary security shield for the newly acquired prosperity. "Possession and deployment of a large number of Prithvi Missiles can act as a deterrent and prevent a missile attack from our adversaries." This is plain posturing since the authors do not rule out war. The very next paragraph begins: "In case of war, the powerful explosive and high accuracy of the Prithvi Missile has enormous potential to bring life to a stand still in cities and urban areas to affect the morale of the enemy."

With a battery of missiles targeted at them, what will the adversaries do? They will do exactly the same, set up their own array. The outcome is the archetypal vicious circle. One takes the first step, the other mimics it, the first takes another step, the second copies that too, and so on. Where and

when will such madness end? Cities and citizens are synonymous, and to contemplate the implication of the language used in a text about a vision for the future ("bring life to a stand still", meaning annihilation) is appalling.

The section on water and rivers is the weakest in the book, the thrust of which is modern inland navigation. The recommendation to network rivers from regions with excess water to those with deficits in order to bring about water security is a poor caricature of the proposal to divert Himalayan rivers to link canals. The impending South Asian water crises is all about lack of data, inefficient uses, declining quality and inequity, all of which are mentioned in the book. But the argument runs that continued augmentation will automatically bring about the required changes.

In order to create wealth and ensure a national march "towards developed country status" by sharing the largesse ensuing from networking of rivers, the author advises citizens to transcend emotional and political issues involved (read high social and environmental costs). In South Asia those who have demonstrated magnanimity so far are individuals in the social and economic margins, the uneducated, the dispossessed, the tribals and the 'low caste' groups. The repeated sacrifice that is demanded of them is not coincidental, but instead an unavoidable outcome of the chosen path to modernity. The military-industrial culture would guzzle up more fresh water and further aggravate the problem.



the Book

Because the solution sought by Kalam is a hammer, all problems have been reduced to nails. All solutions exist in the laboratory and related institutions. Some case studies make fascinating reading. The DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) in Assam, which is devoted to preventing malaria and its treatment in order to keep the armed forces healthy, has also helped the ordinary citizen to be free of malaria, writes Kalam. DRDO has also developed a desalination process that can make brackish water potable and Rajasthan villagers are jubilant because their water problem has been solved.

Of course, Kalam does not mention what the cost of producing water thus was or whether the experiment has a wider use. The fact that specific innovations are needed is not in question, Kalam's seeking all solutions within the military-industrial complex is—especially when he himself recognises existing "systems of governance and social and political compulsions".

The section on energy presents a candid and realistic assessment of the problems, which include low-end use inefficiency, high transmission and distribution losses, high pilferage and the poor performance of State Electricity Boards (SEBs). As with the rest of his themes, however, Kalam's prescription for change—technological innovations—is flawed. For example, a one line reference to reform of the SEBs—reform to generate energy from within and make the supply utilities financially viable—overlooks the reality that such processes simply don't work because incentives for change are hamstrung by entrenched incentives for non-efficiency.

Kalam's citizens are atomised individuals guided only by a desire to consume, and who, he believes, will unquestioningly subscribe to his thesis. Consequently, the author advocates consumption through *extraction* (emphasis added) of the region's biological wealth, rather than harness it. If consumption were a universally accepted ideology, as Kalam implies, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would not have shed his clothes, started *dandi* marches, and achieved *swaraj*, and in recent times India would not have the Bahugunas, the Patkars, the Hazares, the Swami Bhai Antalas and others, who nurture the ethics of frugality.

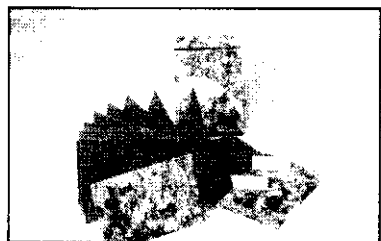
The formulation of *India 2020* overlooks the history of the introduction of modern technology to

South Asia, and how the process of colonisation damaged the spirit of communitarianism as well as indigenous wisdom and local institutions. Technology bereft of a social carrier tramples human values. India's modern development history has enough evidence of such trampling, which has caused immense pain and destitution to a large section of its population. Indiscriminate embankment building, which results in drainage congestion and water logging, for example, has totally ruined the lives of millions of farmers in North Bihar, but that is a fact largely ignored by the Indian mainstream.

Because the author, together with his team, could achieve so much in the laboratory—they made the Bomb, after all—Kalam contends that his model can be replicated in real life. Indeed, Kalam is in love with his new image, in several places in the book he quotes his own speeches. His theology, that the solution to all the ills that confront India is technological, is devoid of institutional and social counter balance. The assumption that technology is neutral and that the framework of a nation-state will take care of all issues related to society, institutions and governance is simplistic. Too simplistic, in fact, given that governance, and not technology, is the problem that India and the rest of South Asia face. ▲

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-1996 Ravalpindi resolution on children.

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India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) is an independent national grant-making organisation that seeks to provide sustenance to creativity, collaborative work, and critical reflection. IFA, under its arts research and documentation programme, supports research into a variety of artistic fields, extends funds for documentation of historical value, and also offers grants for research leading to artistic productions and publications.

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IFA has recently announced its Request for Proposals, outlining application requirements, for the latest round of grants to be made under the arts research and documentation programme. IFA's Request for Proposals (in English and some other Indian languages) are available on request by writing to:



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I F A

The last date for receiving completed applications is April 30, 1998. Indian nationals, registered non-profit Indian organisations, and persons resident in India for at least 5 years are eligible to apply.

Refugees without borders

Our brand of nationalism accepts borders as sacrosanct, yet these very borders work against settlement patterns in the region.

The struggle for equity and justice is a perennial struggle for all minorities. In so far as South Asia is concerned, the contributors to *States, Citizens and Outsiders: The Uprooted Peoples of South Asia* predict that it will remain so if the existing process of state formation continues. In their introduction, the editors write that the "history of these post-partition states of South Asia has been one of consolidating majoritarian elites producing persecuted minorities, of citizenship giving rise to statelessness, of borders resulting in illegal but not unnatural cross-border movements and of development policies uprooting millions".

This volume explores the processes by which South Asian states create refugees and migrants and then reduce them to hapless political pawns. The existing international protection regime is barely able to scratch the surface of the problem. What is lost is not only human lives but also human dignity.

The book begins with a chapter by Barun De, the doyen of Indian meta-history, who traces the history of population movements from Afghanistan to Burma and Xinjiang to Sri Lanka. This region has witnessed uninterrupted population shifts over centuries. At times it took the form of agricultural shifts, and at other times it was labour movements, movement for trade and even pilgrimage. But all such movements were stymied when Eurocentric concepts of refugees and migrants were imposed on the region.

The concept of nation-state



States, Citizens and Outsiders: The Uprooted Peoples of South Asia

edited by Tapan Bose and Rita Manchanda
South Asia Forum for Human Rights,
Kathmandu, 1997
pp 380. INR/NPR 550

reviewed by Paula Bannerjee

brought new forms of nationality, "each with a boundary". In the 19th and 20th centuries, uncharted terrains in Asia, Africa and Latin America were drawn into Eurocentric cartography. Borders became crucial and divisions were created between those who belonged and those who did not. In recent years the problem has been compounded by the growth of new forms of nationalism leading to the militarisation of state power, particularly in peripheral areas. This has contributed to the view that refugees "threatened borders" when actually their own persons were being threatened by state power.

These arguments are pushed further by Tapan Bose, who traces the birth of the concept of refugees to the genesis of territorial nation-states in 14th-century Europe. That is why the definition of refugees still has a European bias. The enterprise of nation-building adopted by South Asia also has its roots in Europe, and in a multi-ethnic region such a process has created ethno-nationalism leading to ethnic and religious problems. This has exacerbated the problems be-

tween those who were thought to belong and those who were not, resulting in the making of "refugees". In exploring ways by which refugees could have a more equitable life. Bose says that all the countries in the region should be made to come together and develop a uniform refugee law more humane than what exists today.

Ranabir Samaddar explores the possibility of a civil rights agenda for refugees. He contends that the states of South Asia tries to differentiate between political and economic migrants with the former being recognised as refugees. In the South Asian context such facile divisions are not possible since both groups are equally persecuted. Economic migrants are often victims of political persecution and are denied developmental aids. As a further explanation for the creation of refugees, Samaddar shows how borders make refugees in the South Asian region. Our brand of nationalism entails the acceptance of borders as unchangeable and sacrosanct and yet those very borders work against the settlement patterns of the region.

In the concluding chapter to the first section, Ravi Nair points out that both the governments of South Asia and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees have contributed to the politics of non-entree and the containment of refugees. They have thus failed to develop mechanisms by which the states could share the responsibility of rehabilitating and then protecting the refugees.

The thematic section is followed by five other sections, largely contain-

ing case studies of South Asian refugee groups including environmental refugees and internally displaced people. In a country paper on Bangladesh, Meghna Guhathakurta discusses the crucial issue of repatriation. She raises the vital question of when refugees should be repatriated. She discusses at length how the politics of the state forces population movement, especially when environmental and economic pressures act on the situation.

Following this macro study of the refugee situation in Bangladesh is a micro study of 'Biharis' in Bangladesh undertaken by Muhammad Nur Khan. He gives a poignant commentary on the plight of this Urdu-speaking group which supported Pakistan in the 1971 war but never found their way to, or their rightful place in, that

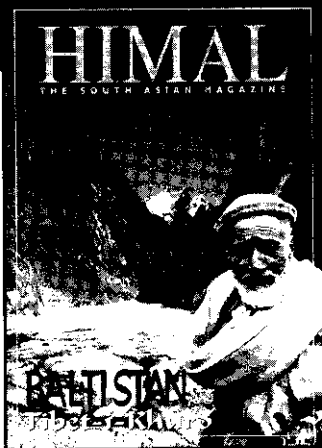
land. Once their support was no longer politically crucial, the Pakistani government showed total disregard for their fate.

Manchanda and C. Amal Raj continue the tale of woe of the 'Nowhere People', or the Sri Lankan and Burmese refugees in India, who are now hostage to national security lobbies.

In the section dealing with development-related displacement, Malika Basu deals with India. The magnitude of these displacements is huge and the victims are largely those who do not have a political voice. They are largely tribals and less than 25 percent are lucky enough to be relocated even if often in areas much less habitable than what they had to leave behind. The state views compensation to these people as dole or favours granted and not as their rightful claims.

Other forms of internal displacements are due to war or civil strife such as in the case of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The authors make the plea that non-*refoulement* principles should also be accepted for internally displaced people in South Asia.

This collection is a first of its kind. The writers have been able to transcend the statist perspective, and they not only tell us what has been done wrong but also give us the necessary corrective. The authors make a strong plea for the inclusion of the interests of voiceless people in policy making. By making population movements part of a non-statist political discourse, they have given a new direction to the subject. Even if part of their recommendations are accepted, it will contribute to the cause of peace in South Asia. ▲



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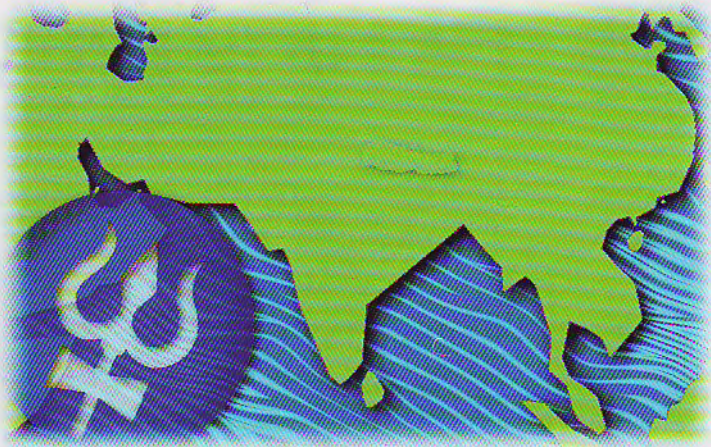
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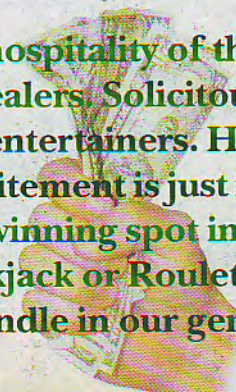
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