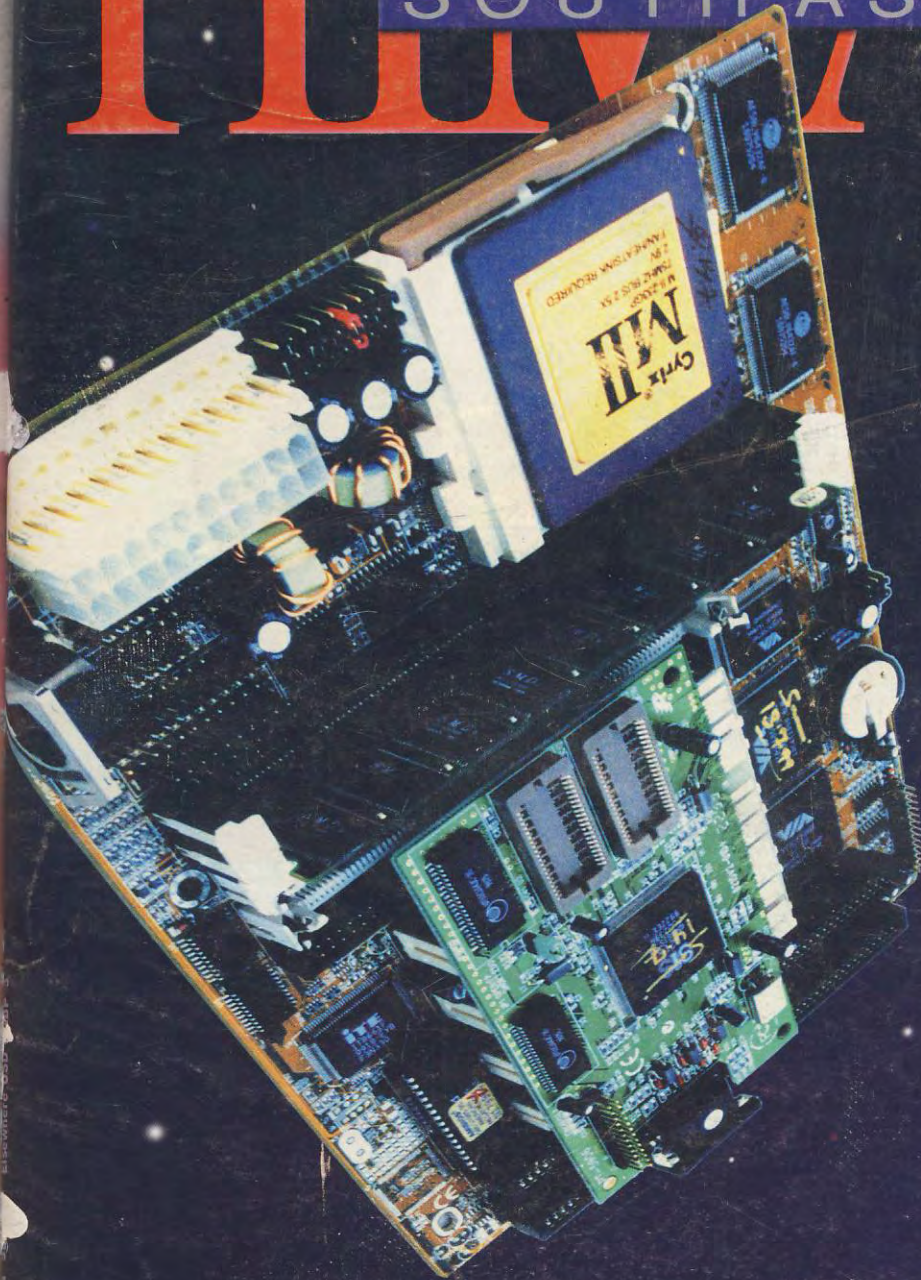


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SOUTH ASIAN

November 1999



2001

A CYBER ODYSSEY

by Arthur C Clarke

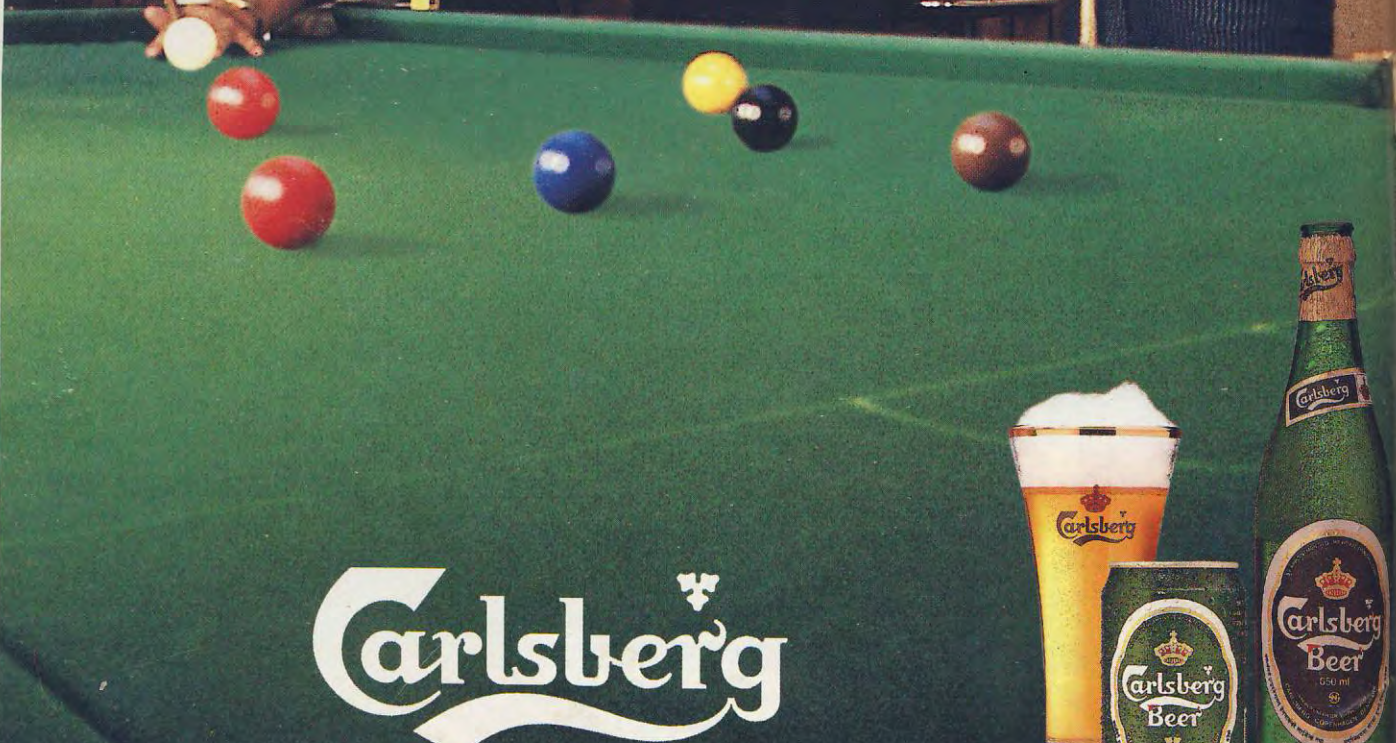
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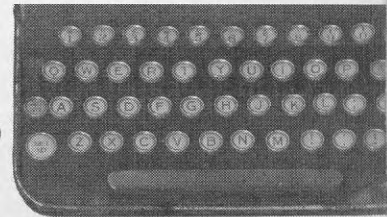
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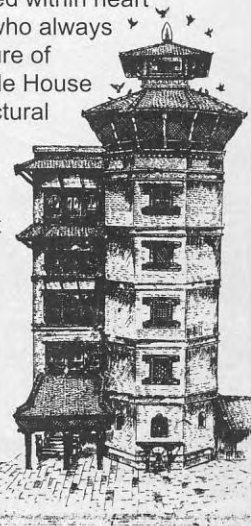
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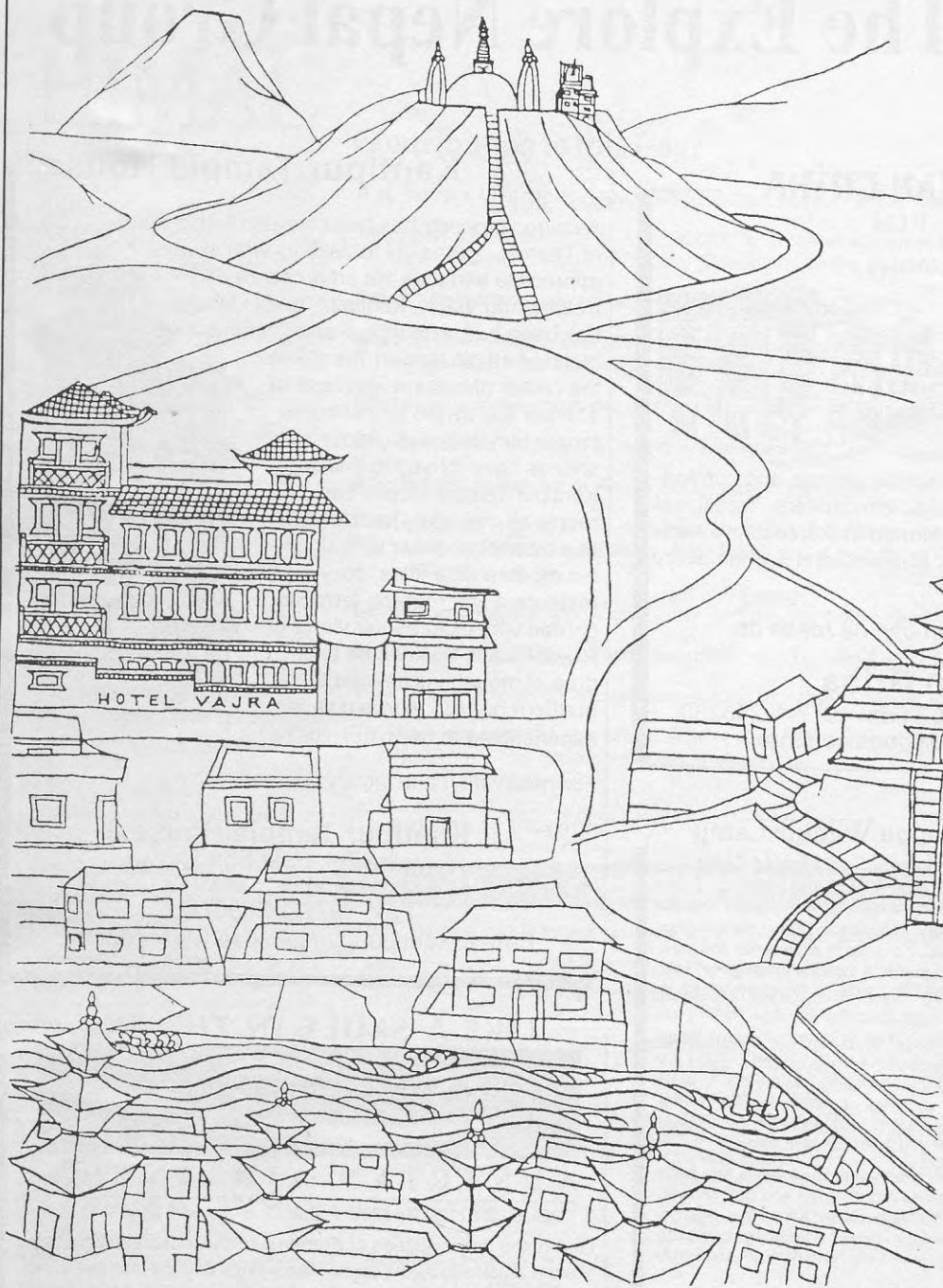
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John Collee
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SOUTH ASIA

SABOTAGED SUMMIT

THE INDIAN government led by the hard-line Bharatiya Janata Party has put a spoke in the wheel of SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation), by forcing a postponement of the summit, scheduled for 26-28 November in Kathmandu. In doing so, New Delhi has seriously weakened the only regional co-operation body of South Asia, and wantonly antagonised its neighbours. Ironically, it may end up harming its own interests.

India's motives in opposing the summit were wholly Pakistan-specific and devoid of any universal considerations or political principle. It asked for an indefinite deferment of the meeting of the seven heads of government because the military *coup d'etat* in Pakistan has caused "concern and disquiet" in "the region and beyond", and that this would not make for a "productive" meeting—a concern not shared by the other six SAARC member-states.

In the 14 years of its existence, SAARC has dealt with many non-democratic leaders, including Gen Ziaur Rehman of Bangladesh, who was especially enthusiastic on regional co-operation and had energetically campaigned for setting up the regional organisation. His successor, Gen H.M. Ershad, presided over the first SAARC summit in 1985. Pakistan's military ruler Gen Zia-ul Haq was also an active participant in that summit and other SAARC conferences. As has been the King of Bhutan, no democrat himself.

India's rationale for opposing the summit thus involves double standards. New Delhi is loath to deal with Gen Musharraf—not because it refuses in principle to have any truck with military rulers or dictators—but because that would interfere with its present priorities. India has for decades happily dealt with non-democracies, from Sukarno and Suharto's Indonesia to Idi Amin's Uganda. But today, India is keen to put Islamabad on the defensive, and persuade that India alone in South Asia is a stable, 'responsible', democracy and

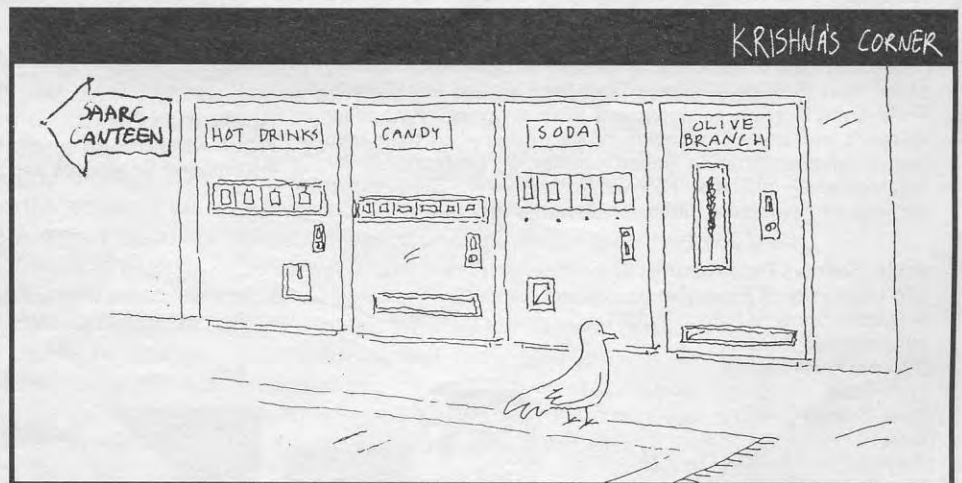
hence a pre-eminent strategic ally for the only remaining World Power.

India has not pronounced directly on the military coup and subsequent developments in Pakistan. It has refused to talk to the Musharraf government except on the condition that it stops aiding what New Delhi describes as "cross-border terrorism" in Kashmir. It has spurned Islamabad's overtures for reconciliation largely because it thinks it can exploit Washington's concerns over Osama bin Laden and Pakistan's Taliban links in order to build an exclusive relationship with the US.

This is part of India's larger agenda to take the heat off itself for having crossed the nuclear threshold. India craves for recognition as a major Asian power and as (potentially) a world power that can be trusted by, above all, the United States, a country with which New Delhi seeks a junior ally's status.

India was worried that Musharraf might use the Kathmandu venue to make a reasonable offer of reconciliation or a new *détente*, with negotiations on all disputed issues, including Kashmir. India first tried to rope in other states to scuttle the summit as news reports out of Delhi clearly indicated. Each of the seven SAARC members enjoys veto power, and even if one drops out, no meeting can take place. Sri Lanka was requested to ask for postponement on the ground that presidential elections are due in the country on 21 December. But Colombo refused to oblige. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga did not wish to lower her extrovert profile, nor risk spoiling friendly relations with Pakistan. (Musharraf himself had been dismissed while returning from a visit to Sri Lanka.)

Sri Lanka opposed deferment stating that "Recent developments in Pakistan do not provide for SAARC to involve itself in the internal



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affairs of the member-state... A deviation for whatever reason from the path of collective endeavour" would "have serious and damaging consequences for the progress, prosperity, peace and security of South Asia".

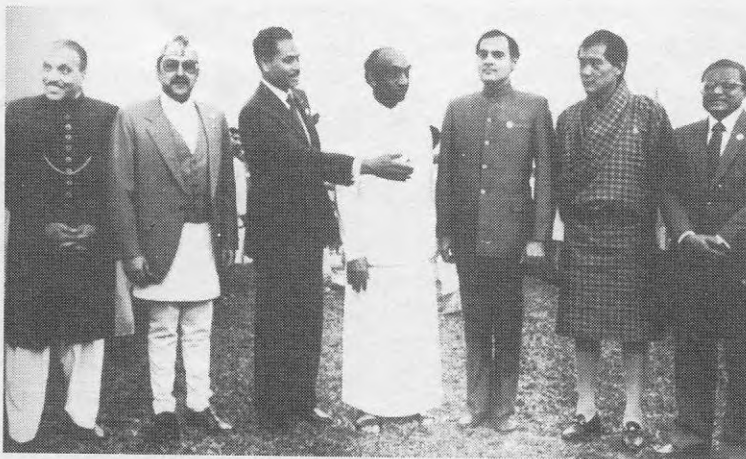
Sri Lanka is currently chair of SAARC. The other key state is Nepal, the designated summit host. It too was keen that the summit take place. Part of the reason was strictly domestic: the main ruling Congress party is faction-ridden and the government reckons that a high-profile regional event, with its pomp and glory, can contribute to its own stability. The rivals within Nepali Congress, as well as the opposition, would be reluctant to cause trouble just when the SAARC heads are scheduled to meet.

This is not the first time that New Delhi has manipulated SAARC for purely sectarian reasons. In 1991, it scuppered the Colombo summit. It did not wish to attend simply because that would have meant dealing with President Premadasa, who had strongly criticised India's military intervention in that country and was seen in New Delhi as 'hostile'.

The extensive preparations made in Colombo were suddenly rendered useless when the King of Bhutan declared his inability to attend. Bhutan, long a British Indian protectorate, has traditionally aligned its foreign policy to India's. This time too, after finding Chairman Kumaratunga unwilling, New Delhi tried to enlist Bhutan and Bangladesh, but ultimately decided to come out in the open itself and demand postponement of the Kathmandu summit.

Already, India's—and Pakistan's—image within SAARC had taken a beating, especially after the nuclear tests of May last year. Their neighbours feel vulnerable to their rivalry: they would now be in the nuclear firing line for no fault of theirs. Now, India is bound to invite the charge that it sabotaged a worthy regional effort for petty and narrow considerations and sacrificed SAARC at the altar of tactical gamesmanship, which is incompatible with regional cooperation.

SAARC is an arrangement that is beneficial to all concerned, provided all promote it sincerely. Freer trade within the region alone would help member-states save upwards of USD 5 billion—which is more than the entire



Two dictators, two absolute kings, one absolute president and two elected heads of state/government. First SAARC Summit, 1985.

flow of foreign direct investment into South Asia. There are other, huge, so far-untapped opportunities for cooperation.

India stands to gain perhaps the most. By sabotaging the SAARC Summit, India has only cut off its nose to spite its own face—all for the dubious 'benefit' of a junior partnership with the US.

—Praful Bidwai

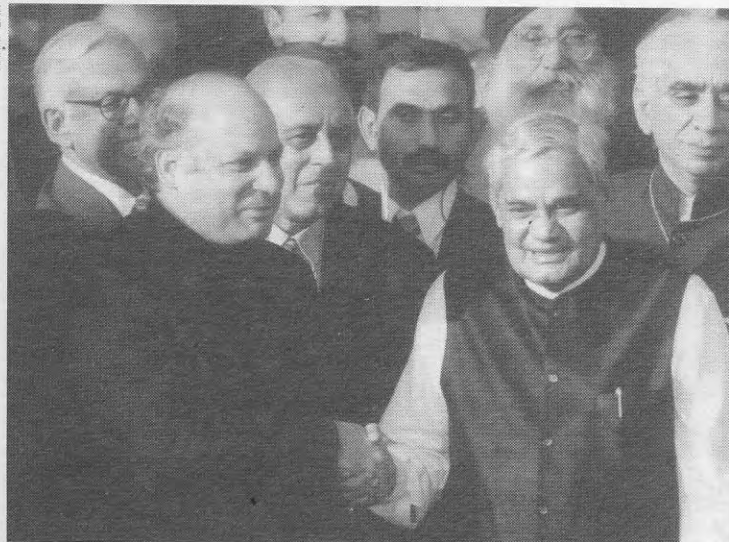
INDIA • PAKISTAN

DEBASING DEATH

BY BALLOT and bullet, the Indian and Pakistani states have committed themselves to the forces of the Right by late 1999. In India, an election returns a vast alliance dominated by the Hindu Right, while in Pakistan, the generals resort to a *coup d'état* against a corrupt, but democratically elected regime.

Some may find in these instances the natural condition of Third World States, fraught with the trials of poverty and corruption, and assume such is the fate of the poor nations of the world. Nothing can be further from the truth. Despite the frequency of instability in South Asia, both India and Pakistan have produced regimes capable of resilience and stability, although not always on the side of social justice. Between justice and the status quo, regimes in South Asia have tried to govern with some measure of balance, even if they have generally favoured the latter to the former. Nevertheless, land reforms and industrial growth, laws on behalf of oppressed peoples and extensions of the franchise, among other things, reveal to us that there is no 'natural' condition of instability in South Asia.

RAHAT DAR



Hi, bye.

Current events in the region must be seen not in terms of the 'natural' failure of Third World states, but in the light of the watershed of May 1998. The nuclear tests threw diplomatic and moral caution to the winds. After the 11 May 1998 tests, Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani warned Islamabad to "roll back its anti-India policy, especially with regard to Kashmir". Less than three weeks later, Pakistan conducted its own tests and its army chief, and now also the country's Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf, noted that "Pakistan is talking to India on an equal basis. We are not talking to India from a weak position".

When Nawaz Sharif and Atal Behari Vajpayee met at the SAARC summit in Sri Lanka in late July 1998, Pakistan came to demand that the two countries discuss nothing else but Kashmir. 'Bus Diplomacy' and the Lahore Declaration yielded little in terms of confidence-building measures for the two sides. Given the decision to test nuclear devices, editor of the Indian fortnightly *Frontline*, N. Ram argues in his new book, *Riding the Nuclear Tiger*, that "the leading share of responsibility for the failure of the Lahore exercise to achieve real progress towards resolving the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff rests with the BJP-led government".

Soon after the May tests, Nawaz Sharif had accused India of threatening Pakistan with "nuclear blackmail with a view to impose a military solution in Kashmir". He said, "The international community must seriously address the issue of Jammu and Kashmir so that the risk of nuclear conflict is averted in South Asia."

In January 1999, Musharraf announced on the Siachen battleground that Pakistan's defence had become "impregnable", a reference

to its nuclear capability. India's conventional weapons advantage in the Subcontinent was rendered useless by the Pakistani tests. Sharif and his generals indulged in an adventure that would horrify the world with the prospect of nuclear war and therefore draw the 'international community' into deliberations over Kashmir. The Kargil conflict of May-July 1999 was a direct result of the instability of a nuclearised Subcontinent.

In October, a coup occurs in Pakistan even as the BJP-led alliance comes to power in India. Both use the Kargil conflict, itself a direct result of nuclear instability, to win legitimacy. The bravery of Indian and (Pakistani troops) atop the mountains reflects no glory on the shamefulness of the foreign policies of the Hindu Right, and the reactive, and immoral Sharif government. If individual soldiers gain honour through courage, there is no distinction gained by political leaders for goading both countries into worthless wars. Even the honour earned by soldiers is not one that enhances our meagre humanism: we pay tribute to soldiers because they die as servants of a formally democratic polity to which we belong, not because of the awful deeds that they have to perform.

In 1907, Charles Péguy wrote that "the modern world has succeeded in debasing what is perhaps the most difficult thing in the world to debase, because this thing has in it, as if in its very texture, a particular kind of dignity, a singular incapacity to be debased: it debases death." Written before the Holocaust, the Bengal Famine, and the Atom Bomb, this statement is prescient.

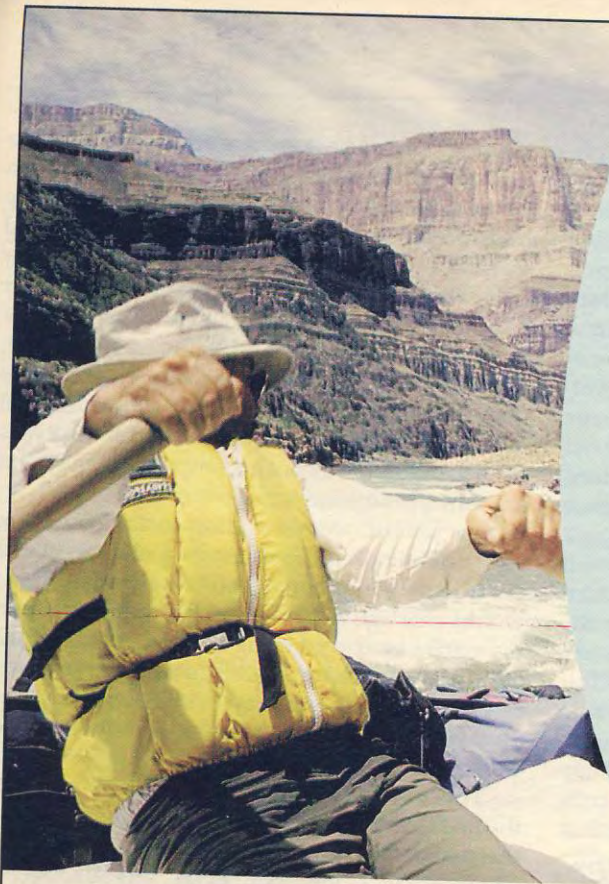
To be sure, our societies are debasing death, by the administrative deployment of nuclear devices or else by the political reduction of the death of a soldier into the gain of a franchise. The tragedy of South Asia is, therefore, not the 'natural' failure of Third World States, but the ghastly choices enacted by regimes that grasp power above morality.

—Vijay Prashad ▲

PAKISTAN

MILITARY DEMOCRACY?

THE COMMONWEALTH team that visited Pakistan at the end of October to make an on-the-spot assessment of the official, political



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and public opinion in the country, will have found that the military takeover of 12 October was greeted largely with relief. Sent by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) in order to take a decision on whether to suspend Pakistan's Commonwealth membership, the team was unable to obtain any time-frame for the restoration of an elected civilian government. However, they did obtain a firm commitment that the new chief executive will achieve certain benchmarks of progress on "the desired objectives", which include building institutions and carrying out reforms that can promote "true democracy" in Pakistan.

It is this expressed desire, if implemented, that will soften the unconstitutionality of Gen Pervez Musharraf's position, especially in the eyes of the world. An endorsement has already been received, as expected from the oil-rich Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, usually the first stop of any new Pakistani ruler, civil or military; Gen Musharraf has proved no exception. The support from the Gulf is sought not only

Those who hail the military takeover forget that the military's involvement has been the major factor in Pakistan's chronic political instability.

for financial reasons, but also because Saudi Arabia is considered to be the custodian of Islam, and its approval confers an additional legitimacy to a new set-up.

Musharraf has termed his takeover as "not a coup but a counter-coup", a reference to Nawaz Sharif's attempt to have the army chief removed, first through elements within the army (whom Musharraf promptly forced into retirement on learning of it), and then by abruptly dismissing him while he was on an official visit to Sri Lanka.

Over in Washington DC, the Clinton administration was caught on the wrong foot by this 'counter-coup', since it had practically backed Musharraf's removal, and his replacement as Chief of Army Staff (COAS) by a Sharif clansman, Gen Khawaja Ziauddin Butt. Sharif had appointed Butt as head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) on the same day Musharraf was appointed COAS last October, and without consulting the latter. Indeed, Musharraf's appointment may well have been a stop-gap arrangement as far as Sharif was concerned, before replacing him with Butt.

Relations between the COAS and the prime minister were thus strained right from the be-

ginning. Kargil only increased these rifts, particularly following Sharif's face-saving dash to the US, where he contended that the army had moved in without consulting him, and therefore was solely responsible for this potentially disastrous (given the nuclear capability of both) clash with India. The army chief publicly denied the prime minister's version. Hence, the military take-over following Sharif's dismissal of Musharraf and the army's refusal to accept Butt's command (ostensibly on technical grounds), was not accompanied by a great amount of surprise in Pakistan.

For several weeks leading to the coup, the political buzz had been about a change at the helm. It was not considered likely that Sharif would manage to complete his tenure despite his parliamentary strength. The events of 12 October merely ended the suspense, and re-emphasised the military's supremacy; it has always been a force, visible or invisible, in the country's politics.

Those who hail the military takeover forget the fact that the military's involvement has been the major factor in Pakistan's chronic political instability. For one, there is the huge budget it consumes. Funds meant for the social sector get diverted, contributing to economic instability, which in turn exacerbates the political situation. All the talk of accountability would be a lot more convincing if the armed forces were to be also made answerable.

Military budgets have never been allowed to come up for discussion in Parliament, and the amounts are passed without any breakdown of the heads of expenditures. It is unlikely that a change in this procedure shall follow now. Secondly, the military's repeated interventions in times of political crisis, ostensibly to provide security, are among the factors that have prevented the democratic process from taking root. In neighbouring India, by contrast, the democratic process is not without its hiccups, but has been allowed to evolve without the reality or threat of military intervention.

Pakistan's new self-appointed chief executive may be very sincere in his mission—he has even reached out to religious minorities and promised to uphold fundamental rights—but he has also made it clear that his orders cannot be challenged in any court of law. And the agenda he has set for himself is no short-term one. He may be called successful only if he does what no other ruler in Pakistan has been able to achieve: allow the implementation of the rule of law, and break the back of feudalism that has such a stranglehold on the polity.

He might also ask the people what they

want—not in the form of a one-sided referendum, but through public debates and open discussions held without fear or favour. He might find his attention drawn to issues that concern people the most: lack of housing, education, food, and jobs. Regional peace and friendly ties with neighbours, most importantly India, should also be on the cards. And the way to improve matters is to continue the down-sizing of the army, a process that Sharif had started, and to divert that “peace dividend” into the social sector.

What kind of democracy is likely to be demanded by a nation with more than its fair share of illiterate, hungry and shelterless people? Constant neglect is more likely to push them into the jaws of ‘Talibanisation’, and to the further development of a mentality that welcomes messiah-like saviours, rather than seek political empowerment. How did matters reach the point where the toppling of a democratically elected government by the military caused no grief? Sharif’s departure saw no protests, not because of a great love for military rule or dictatorship, but because his government had, like its predecessors, taken on the traits of dictatorship.

Democracy in Pakistan has obviously been a sham, where people have not been given access to decision-making or allowed their due share in resources. The elected representatives have neither represented the people, nor have been representative of them. But this is no reason to give up on the system. On the contrary, it is time to make even greater efforts to strengthen it. As they say, only more democracy can save democracy. ▲

SRI LANKA

SHE’S EARLY

POLITICAL CIRCLES in Colombo couldn’t resist the joke. “This time she’s early,” they chuckled when Sri Lanka’s notoriously unpunctual president, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, proclaimed that she was calling snap presidential elections almost a year ahead of schedule. As is customary in the island in the sun, the date, 21 December, was picked in consultation with astrologers. The star-gazers deemed the day auspicious for Kumaratunga, 52, who is standing for re-election to a post she solemnly pledged to abolish five years ago.

Although her opponents are rubbing that in her face, and have been doing so for some

time now, the main opposition United National Party (UNP) is not likely to abolish the all-powerful executive presidency if they can grab the plum they created in 1978. Given that Kumaratunga has only a single-vote majority in Parliament—although she is comfortable in the legislature with the backing of the minority Tamil parties in the opposition—the executive presidency provides the stability that would otherwise have been impossible.

In fact, Kumaratunga called for the early presidential election fearing a parliamentary coup. An acute consciousness of the Bandaranaike dynasty’s experience with such “conspiracies”, makes her sensitive to the dangers. Announcing the snap election to her ministers a few days before the scheduled 1 November budget presentation, she spoke darkly of the lurking risks. “There are Buddharakkhitas, Somaramas and C.P. de Silvas in our midst,” she said.

The president was alluding to the Buddhist monks who conspired and killed her father, prime minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1959, and to the senior leader who defected from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and toppled the government of her mother, Sirima Bandaranaike. De Silva had declared he wanted to “live a free man in a free society”, but prime minister Bandaranaike, whose alignment with the Marxists led to his defection, wailed, “I’ve been stabbed in the back.”

The daughter, of course, chooses to forget that she herself, with her film-star husband (later assassinated) Vijaya Kumaratunga, defected from the SLFP and formed their own party. So did her brother Anura. The Kumaratungas did return to the SLFP fold, though Anura (now with the UNP), who had regarded himself as the logical dynastic successor to the SLFP leadership, is quite free with the assertion that his sister had done to him what C.P. de Silva had done to their mother.

All this obviously suggests that Sri Lanka’s politics is all too familial. We’ve had the Senanayake dynasties with the first two prime ministers of Independent Ceylon being father and son, Don Stephen and Dudley Shelton. In fact, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike quit the UNP and founded the SLFP in the early post-Independence period, fearing that the “Old Man”, as D.S. Senan-



Don Stephen Senanayake and Sirima Bandaranaike.

ayake was popularly known, was going to cheat him of the prime ministership. Although he wasn't in the GOP—as the UNP is also known in the tradition of the Republican Party of the United States—to see it happen, history did prove that D.S. had struck a deal with Lord Soulbury, the then British governor-general, to hand over the mantle to his son, Dudley.

Getting back to the present, Kumaratunga feared that there were moves afoot to defeat the budget for the year 2000, and force the dissolution of Parliament. Ranil Wickremesinghe of the UNP, a nephew of J.R. Jayewardene (JRJ) who founded the executive presidency (to continue the familial story), had in a fashion confirmed that there was something cooking with the cryptic remark, "We were waiting for the budget to appear so that the government would disappear". So the president did what surely would have earned her the plaudits of the "old fox" JRJ, and abolished the budget!

Announcing the early presidential poll, Kumaratunga said that the scheduled budget presentation and debate would therefore not be possible, and a vote on account would be presented to Parliament to take care of recurrent expenditure early next year. That was as shrewd a tactic as JRJ's elimination of her mother from the political scene soon after his ascension to power in 1977. He had taken away her civic rights for "abuse of power" and ensured that she couldn't run against him when he stood for re-election in 1982.

Kumaratunga has been known to hate JRJ, but it was his third amendment to the 1978 constitution that enabled her to call the election before her term ended. The strategy was to not only pre-empt a possible budget defeat, but also to cash in on her perception, shared within the ruling People's Alliance (PA), that she is stronger than her party. If she wins, it would make the parliamentary election that must follow in next year, that much easier for the PA. The last time around, Kumaratunga had scraped home at the parliamentary poll, and then followed it with a comfortable 62 percent majority in the presidential election, the biggest victory in the history of Sri Lanka's executive presidency.

But it's not going to be that easy this time round, what with a string of broken promises nagging the government, including that of ending the war in the North and abolishing the office to which she now aspires for a second time. The serious reversals suffered by the Sri Lankan army in the North in November could make it even tougher. Many analysts speculate that no candidate will get over 50 percent of the vote in the December election. That will force

the counting of second preferences. But not many voters are likely to exercise this right in a ballot that provides for three preferences. Quite apart from expressing preferences, a large number of voters, disgusted with both the PA and the UNP, are likely to spoil their votes.

With half a dozen candidates likely to run, though only two will really matter, the going will be exciting. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP—People's Liberation Front), responsible for two armed insurrections in 1971 and 1988/89, and now in the mainstream, will be the third force. They are sure to show some muscle that will stand them in good stead in next year's parliamentary elections, which will be worked according to what Kumaratunga calls the "bizarre" proportional representation (PR) system. Despite her condemnation of PR, she included it in the draft new constitution that she presented to Parliament.

The big imponderable is what the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will be up to. In 1994, they killed Gamini Dissanayake, the UNP's candidate for president, and 52 others at an election meeting in Colombo. That helped Chandrika coast to victory by a large margin. The Tigers are expected to show their hand when their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, makes his customary speech at the end of "Martyr's Week" in end November. The chances are that he will say that the result of the election, where both major contenders oppose his demand for a separate Tamil State, is irrelevant. But if a non-LTTE Tamil candidate does run (this will be known after nominations close on 16 November), it will surely be with a nod from the Tigers. Otherwise such a runner risks assassination in the dangerous world of Sri Lankan politics. ▲

SOUTH ASIA

SAF IN THE TIME OF CRICKET

IF YOU didn't know, the eighth edition of the South Asian Federation (SAF) Games was held in Kathmandu in October-November; and as expected, there were no earth-shattering performances. All that seemed of relevance was that Nepal's capital got spruced-up, with flyovers springing up, traffic islands suddenly greening, and a brand new sports complex got built with the Chinese government's help. A word of praise here for Nepali spectators, they

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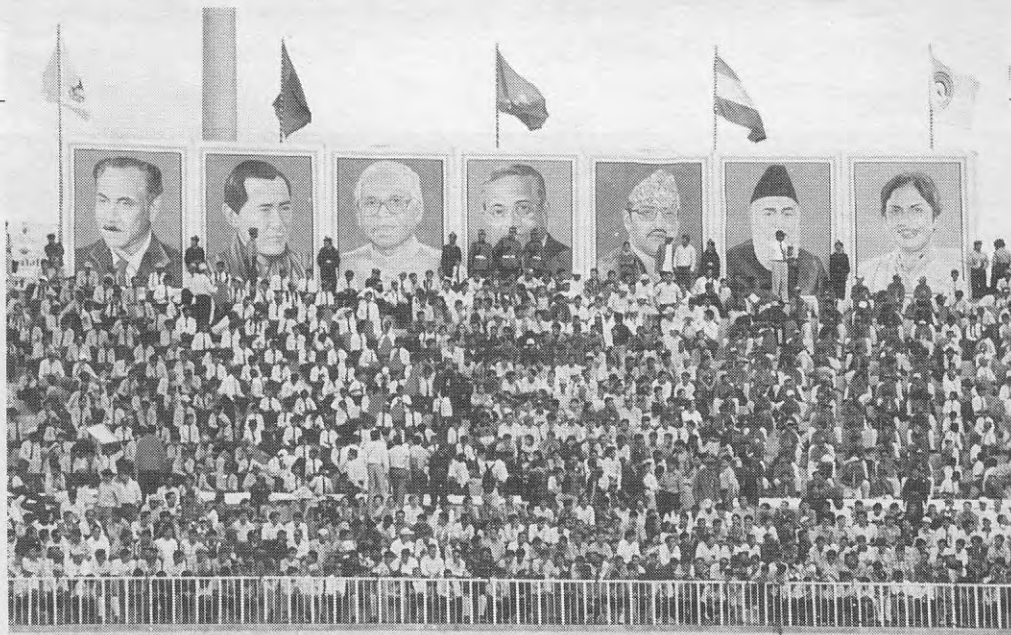
seem to be the only ones interested in SAF, perhaps because the Games' began in Kathmandu 15 years ago, in 1984, or even because Nepalis do not have a high-profile cricket team to worship.

SAF doesn't have cricket in its itinerary. And for this reason, naturally, most of the Subcontinent does not really care about the Games. Anyway, the athletes and most other sportspeople of our region reckon nowhere in world or Asian ratings. So why, one may ask, have SAF at all if it's not a spectator event, and if it does not produce world-class performances?

The Games should go on. If only to give due respect to the hundreds toiling in each of our infrastructure-poor countries, in that pursuit of excellence against frustrating odds. SAF is a venue to highlight the real, archetypal South Asian non-cricket sportsman, who lives in an unattractive world where the fruits of labour are not always achieved. SAF is a show-piece event of sporting contingents populated by politician sports managers. For, we all know that each of the major sports bodies of our countries are infested with sport-illiterate hedonistic political agents who belch the luncheon beer, even as they may jeeringly watch that grand old lady of South Asian athletics, P.T. Usha, making younger, fresher sprinters chase her shadow.

Thirty-five-year-old Pillavukandi Thekparambil Usha is a symbol of all that has gone wrong and right with the Games and South Asian sports in general. If her younger rivals are still not good enough to stop her from winning, at least a silver, it should mean that South Asian athletics have not really progressed from the days when Usha began her career as a 16 year old. The symbol of Usha holds promise because it reflects upon a grandness of purpose and a perseverance that are worth emulating.

The best thing that has happened to SAF in recent times are the Sri Lankan athletes. Some of them, like the chiselled Damayanti Darsha, are at the brink of breaking into the world league. Darsha finished her 100 metres run in Kathmandu at 11.19 seconds. No Asian woman yet has run faster, but it was not counted as



Heads of state and heads of spectators at the SAF Games.

a record since there was no wind-gauge meter in Kathmandu. What the Sri Lankan athletes have done is to upstage the Indians, a task not easy given the condition of sports that prevails in the region; India is infrastructurally less poor than other South Asian sporting nations. Besides, the laws of probability alone support India because it has so many more athletes in competition.

The Games should also go on if only for the smaller countries (with fewer players and poorer infrastructures) to vie to end the Indian supremacy, and for Indian players to be given a run for their expertise. This kind of competition will ultimately lead to giving SAF that vital edge of competitiveness, which can lead to the region's sportspersons attaining Asian and world standards. The boost that Nepali sports received as a result of SAF, itself is indicative of how the Games are not to be scoffed at.

But all said, SAF suffers from an acute lack of glamour. To that extent, the Games represent the anonymous and sombre small-town South Asia. To put some dash and verve into the proceedings, the SAF governing body could seriously think of adding cricket to the list of disciplines. Instead of lamenting about how cricket is digging the grave of other sports in the region, the bat and ball game's popularity could be exploited by cottoning on to it and adapting it to SAF's requirements in the one-day format. Anything that can be done to make people passionate about SAF, should be tried out.

The next Games is to be held in Peshawar in 2001. While the Pakhtun city is sure to get a face-lift in the run-up to SAF, that should not be the only positive. Let South Asia's sports too get a leg-up, with cricket's help. ▲

2001

A Cyber Odyssey

Arthur Clarke's optimistic guide to
surviving the Information Age.



The advent of the computer has given us an invaluable, though often exasperating, assistant in tasks that once seemed could be performed only by human beings. It is hard to believe that only 50 years ago, the then chairman of IBM famously declared that the world market for computers was about six. Well, I now have more in my house alone, each incomparably more powerful than the room-sized mainframes of the 1950s. Ironically, about the last thing they ever do is 'compute, in the classical sense of the word. Rather they download

e-mail, process text, access CD-ROMs, look at new images from Mars on the JPL web site, play video games, and explore the infinite universe of the Mandelbrot Set. It's a humbling thought that every item in that last sentence would have been totally meaningless just a few decades ago.

To understand how today's information technology would have seemed like magic as late as the 1960s, consider this: would anyone back then have believed in the possibility of a text in which the print could be changed instantly from the largest to the smallest point-size, the typeface itself could

Arthur Clarke and Frankenstein

Science fiction wizard Arthur Clarke has the knack of anticipating many of the technological developments that have transformed life in the second half of this century. His writings over the past 60 years—covering more than 80 books and 500 articles and short stories—have helped humanity find the way at a time of bewildering change. Clarke has also discussed the social and cultural implications of some of these technological advances, especially in communications.

In 1945, while in his late 20s, he was the first to propose the concept of using a network of communication satellites in geo-synchronous orbit for global television and telecommunications. His vision became a reality in the mid-1960s, and within a generation it had become impossible to imagine life without communication satellites which circle 22,300 miles above the planet in what is now called the Clarke Orbit.

Trained in physics and mathematics, Clarke's greatest contribution perhaps has been to discuss science and technology—through his writings and television appearances—in non-technical language accessible to millions. His books of science fiction and science fact have inspired generations of astronauts, scientists and technological innovators. Among them is Tim Berners-Lee, the British computer engineer who invented the World Wide Web, whose early inspiration was the Clarke science fiction story, *Dial F for Frankenstein*.

Clarke, who will be 82 in December, has lived in Sri Lanka since 1956. The accompanying article, summarising his views on the communications and information technologies, is based on the recently published *Greetings, Carbon-Based Bipeds* (St Martin's Press, New York), a collection of essays written by Clarke between 1934 and 1998. Sri Lankan writer, Nalaka Gunawardene, who has worked with Clarke for over a decade, including in the compilation of the book mentioned above, helped in the preparation of this article.

be altered equally quickly from roman to italic to you name it—and any word or phrase could be located in seconds? Yet we now take these for granted as we insert Microsoft's latest silver disk into our computers. A disk that can contain not one book, but an entire library. (The greens should give Bill Gates an award for saving more trees than anyone else in history. On second thoughts, some of those manuals...!)

Predicting the future is an impossible task and this is equally true of information technologies. All we can do is extrapolate from what is currently known, and outline

the limits of the possible, bearing in mind that these limits are often exceeded by unanticipated technological developments. The history of communications is littered with failures of imagination and failures of nerve. I am fond of reciting the story of a mayor from a small town in the US who, when confronted with an early demonstration of the telephone, became wildly enthusiastic. He thought it was a marvellous device and ventured a stunning prediction. "I can see the time," he said, "when every city will have one."

Science fiction has rendered the inval-

able service of providing an 'early warning system' to humanity. Even so, it seems to me that technological reality can bring with it implications that can surprise even the most imaginative of us. In 1964, when I was writing *2001: A Space Odyssey* with Stanley Kubrick, people thought I was really taking things a little too far by proposing a computer capable of such a high level of artificial intelligence as HAL. In retrospect, I have to say that my most obvious error was underestimating the extent to which miniaturisation would overtake the computer industry. Our challenge, then, is to strike a balance between fantastic future scenarios and current realities.

On the occasion of the World Telecommunications Day, 17 May 1983, I was honoured by an invitation to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. The sentiments I expressed in that speech are, to me, even more valid today as we stand on the threshold of the next millennium.

The communications revolution – or perhaps that should be evolution – carries with it a promise that is, at the same instant, both exciting and frightening. Which of these alternative 'futures' we realise will depend on how responsibly the human race is able to face its obligations to its fellows.

As I said before the United Nations:

Communications satellites have created a world without distance and have already had a profound effect on international business, news-gathering and tourism – one of the most important industries of many developing countries. Yet their real impact has scarcely begun: by the end of the century, they will have transformed the planet, sweeping away much that is evil, and, unfortunately, not a few things that are good.

The slogan "A telephone in every village" should remind you of that American mayor so don't laugh. It can be achieved now that millions of kilometres of increasingly scarce copper wire can be replaced by a handful of satellites in stationary orbit. And on the ground we need only a simple, rugged handset with a solar-powered transceiver and antenna, which could be mass produced for tens rather than hundreds of dollars.

I suggested that the "Telephone in the Village" would be one of the most effective social stimulants in history, because of its implications for health, weather forecasting, market advice, social integration and human welfare. Each new telephone installation would

probably pay for itself, in hard cash, within a few months. I would like to see a cost-effectiveness study of rural satellite telephone systems for the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. But the financial benefits, important though they are, might be insignificant compared with the social ones.

However, long before the global network of fixed telephones is established, there will be a parallel development, which will eventually bypass it completely – though perhaps not until well into the 21st century. It has already started, with cellular networks, portable radiophones and paging devices, and will lead ultimately to our old science fiction friend – the wristwatch telephone.

The proliferation of these communications technologies will have a profound effect not only on how individuals communicate with each other, but also on how swiftly and effectively news is gathered and disseminated. International news gatherers will no longer be at the mercy of censors or inefficient (sometimes non-existent) postal and telegraph services. It means, quite simply, the end of closed societies.

Consider what this means. No government will be able to conceal, at least for very long, evidence of crimes or atrocities – even from its own people. The very existence of a myriad of new information channels, operating in real time and across all frontiers, will be a powerful influence on civilised behaviour. What I am saying, in fact, is that the debate about the free flow of information which has been going on for so many years, will soon be settled – by engineers, not politicians. (Just as physicists, not generals, have now determined the nature of war.)

Information starvation

When I first offered these thoughts more than 15 years ago, I could not have foreseen how vividly – or how quickly – my words would be illustrated by actual developments. During the momentous years since, the world has watched and listened as the communist world crumbled, along with its harshest symbol, the Berlin Wall. Millions, if not billions, around the world watched the Gulf War from the comfort of their homes. From sporting events to celebrity weddings and funerals, global television broadcasts regularly bring together a substantial proportion of humankind across

time zones and boundaries.

Just as satellite television swept across the globe in the 1980s, the Internet—until recently, a network used mostly by academics and military personnel—began to spread rapidly in the 1990s. It is now on its way to becoming a truly global information medium, heralding a new age of interactivity and mass media convergence. And just as some governments and guardians of public morals perceived satellite television as a threat to their cultural diversity and national sovereignty, some are already up in arms against the Internet.

While I share the concerns of those who are anxious to preserve individual cultural heritage, I lose patience with some of the complaints levelled by the patronising 'worthies' at the effects of such media. Because some of us suffer from the scourge of information pollution, we find it difficult to imagine its even deadlier opposite: information starvation. I get very annoyed when I hear arguments, usually from those who have been educated beyond their intelligence, about the virtues of keeping happy, backward peoples in ignorance. Such an attitude is like that of a well-fed man preaching the benefits of fasting to a starving beggar.

We have to admit that electronic cultural imperialism has the potential to sweep away much that is good, as well as much that is bad. Yet it can only accelerate changes that are, in any case, inevitable. And on the credit side, the new media will preserve for future generations the customs, performing arts and ceremonies of our time, in a way never possible in any earlier age. Of course, there are a great many present-day customs that should not be preserved, except as a warning to future generations. Slavery, torture, racial and religious persecution, treatment of women as chattel, mutilation of children because of ancient superstition, cruelty to animals—the list is endless and no country can proclaim total innocence.

I would, therefore, argue that our response to the new communications technologies and the new information media should be a mix of pragmatism and caution. It would be futile—even stupid—to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that these rapid developments do not affect us. We should instead explore ways of how we can turn (perceived or real) threats and challenges into opportunities. To use one of

my favourite phrases, *we must exploit the inevitable.*

There are many who are genuinely alarmed by the immense amounts of information available to us through the ever-expanding Internet. To them, I can offer little consolation other than to suggest that they put themselves in the place of their ancestors at the time of the invention of the printing press. "My God," they cried. "Now there could be as many as a thousand books. How will we ever read them all?" Strangely, as history has shown, our species survived that earlier deluge of information, and some say, even advanced because of it.

Information overload

I am not so much concerned with the proliferation of information as the purpose for which it is used. Technology carries with it a responsibility that we are obliged to consider. Seeking information from the Internet is rather like a parched man endeavouring to quench his thirst by putting his head into Niagara Falls. The Information Age has opened many doors for our eager minds to explore. Now the question is not so much "What information do I want?" as "What information do I not want?"

Never before in our history have we been able to enjoy such a tremendous amount of that simple human freedom—choice. We are now faced with the responsibility of discernment. Just as our ancestors quickly realised that no one was going to force them to read the entire library of a thousand books, we are now overcoming the initial alarm at the sheer weight of available information—and coming to understand that it is not the information itself that determines our future, only the use we can make of it.

The next millennium will be, I am sure, more amazing than the last. As a species, we are 'hard-wired' to explore our environment and our imagination. We should never underestimate the capacity of our own ingenuity to take us by surprise. New technologies offer new avenues of exploration. I must confess that I had never considered myself incomplete without the ability to enjoy the world's great composers while sitting on my favourite beach—until someone in the Sony Corporation came up with the Walkman.

However, we should not lose sight of the ancient truth that "quantity is the enemy of

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quality", and temper our enthusiasm with consideration for the larger un-endowed humanity. There are still those in the world who have never seen a Walkman—and probably never will. I must hope that we are reaching the point in our technological evolution whereby we are able to commit more of our time to solving the problems of inequality that still plague the poorer peoples of the earth.

As the century that saw the birth of both electronics and optronics draws to a close, it would seem that virtually everything we would wish to do in the field of communications is now technically possible. The only limitations are financial, legal or political. In time, I am sure, most of these will disappear, leaving us with only the limitations of our own morality. There will always be those who seek to abuse technology to their own ends, but I can only hope that they will remain, as throughout history, in the minority. In any event, the surest answer to such profiteers is for society to remove the need on which their survival depends.

I have often described myself as an optimist. I used to believe that the human race had a 51 percent chance of survival. Since the end of the Cold War, I have revised this estimate to between 60 and 70 percent. I have great faith in optimism as a philosophy, if only because it offers us the opportunity of self-fulfilling prophecy. The Information Age offers much to mankind, and I would like to think that we will rise to the challenges it presents. But it is vital to remember that information—in the sense of raw data—is not knowledge, that knowledge is not wisdom, and that wisdom is not foresight. But information is the first essential step to all of these.



QWERTYUIOP

It is difficult to think of anything we won't be able to do in information technologies and communications in the near future—when all our current hardware is linked together with orbiting constellations of communications satellites. Of course, as memory and bandwidths continue to increase, we will be able to do the same functions faster and better, but some fundamental bottlenecks will need to be sorted out.

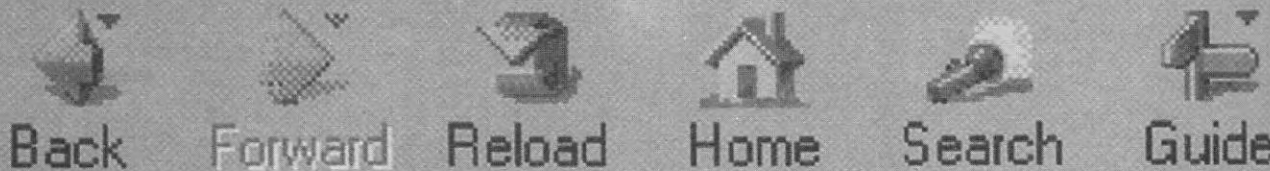
For instance, although the typewriter (remember them?) has now joined T. rex, QWERTYUIOP still lives: is it not a scandal that a keyboard layout deliberately designed to prevent skilled humans from overtaking the clumsy mechanical systems of one hundred years ago has survived into the age of electronics?

Voice recognition systems that are now coming into use enable users to bypass the keyboard and dictate inputs directly. But they have their own limitations: while they are very valuable for those working alone, imagine the chaos that a whole office-ful of talkers could produce. Besides, the software has to cope with a diversity of accents in which the same language is spoken—and they don't do a very good job of it. (I cannot resist quoting from my own first attempts to train one of the best current systems, Dragon Speaking Naturally. When I said, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party," the programme revealed its impressive vocabulary with a startling display of political incorrectness: "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of apartheid.")

Better and more sensitive voice recognition systems will iron out these difficulties and make us less dependent on keyboards and typing ability to relate to information technologies. However, it seems obvious that the ultimate input-output device would bypass all the body's sense organs and pass its signals directly into the brain.

Exactly how this would be done I leave to biotechnicians to decide, but in *3001: The Final Odyssey* I tried to describe the operation of the "Braincap". One feature that might delay its general adoption is that the wearer would probably have to be completely bald to use the tightly fitting helmet. So wig-making could become the really big business of the fourth millennium.

—Arthur Clarke



The mother of all

It was during an uncharacteristically sultry summer afternoon attending a session of a Salzburg seminar four years ago that I got my first taste of the Internet. There at the foot of the Alps, I got on 'the Net' and (having skipped dinner) stayed on till three in the morning. Then I called and woke my wife up in Karachi and told her: "I think I have discovered what I was born for."

Before that day I had read a lot about the Net, but no amount of reading could have prepared me for the power of that first experience. The Internet is many things to many people. To some it is nothing less than a gift from the heavens. To others it is only a scourge, a source of pornography and politically incorrect propaganda. I belong firmly in the first category. Since that day in Salzburg, the Internet for me has been a voyage of discovery. And I think I have understood it for what it is. A new media. The new media. The mother of all media.

At its most fundamental, the Internet is about empowerment—of people who have been exploited and suppressed. Empowerment of the ones who have been 'educated' but left unwise and ill-informed. Empowerment of children who can be so much more than their teachers could ever imagine. Empowerment of a nation that sees only disillusionment and despair as its destiny.

The Internet is about the organic collective knowledge of humanity, its accumulation, organisation and dissemination. The greatest libraries in the world are in the process of changing their nature. From being mere repositories of information to becoming the hyper-linked, cross-referenced bodies of knowledge that researchers could have only dreamt about till now.

The Internet allows instantaneous global publica-

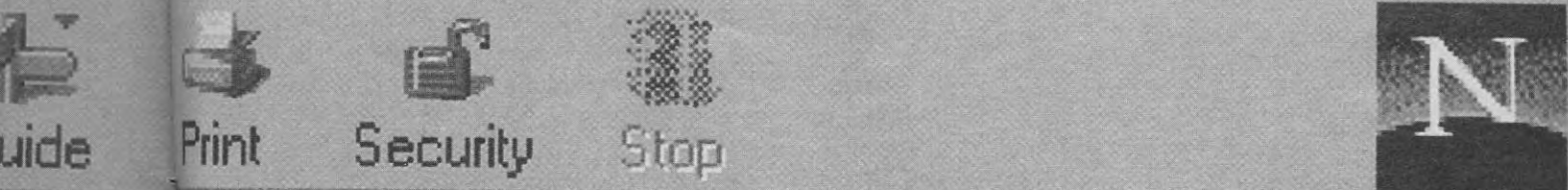
tion at low cost. It permits teams of workers and researchers to collaborate from across the oceans. It allows for databases to be linked to other relevant information, all of which can be searched to find exactly the bits you are interested in. It allows for news to be customised for individual users, reducing the information overload that many of us now suffer from. It allows you to spread the word to each corner of the globe about the goods or services you offer.

So, in the less than two years since coming into existence, my relatively small Karachi-based company was servicing clients in Norway and Argentina. But on the Net they were as far from me as someone on the other side of town.

As anyone who understands trends in technology will tell you, the Net is on the verge of integrating traditional electronic media, with all the advantages to education, communication, commerce and entertainment that a truly integrated global network can provide. Universities now offer degrees 'on-line' and many radio stations are now available on the Net where you can listen to a favourite programme at a time convenient to you. Television is not far behind.

But Pakistan is a country bound by myths and insecurities. It is frightening that not so long ago many in our state apparatus considered the email messages sent by MQM (the party that claims to represent Pakistani Muhajirs) from outside Pakistan sufficient cause to ban the Internet in the country. Not only do these people not understand the importance of the technology, they also insist on using the proverbial hair on the elephant's tail to describe this 'monster' that apparently confronts us.

With an estimated 200 million-plus users around the world and growing exponentially, it is irrelevant if Pakistan does, or does not, play a part in making the



the Internet far outweigh its faults, says Altamash Kamal.

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Internet what it is bound to become—a global community of the information rich. We essentially missed out on the Industrial Revolution, and that was unfortunate. If we lose out on the Information Revolution, it would be nothing short of a national disaster.

As a Pakistani, I would want us to take the role that is rightfully ours and exploit it to leapfrog into the Information Age. So what can be done? Here are a few prerequisites:

Successive governments in Pakistan have regarded telecommunications as a cash cow rather than something that has now become as fundamental for the society as education and healthcare. Other countries have realised that the most effective role the government can play in order to develop the communication sector is to define and implement a progressive regulatory framework and then get out of the way to let market forces develop and nurture the sector.

Pakistan has to learn from these experiences. There are enough models available to show how to set up vibrant privatised telecom sectors, but we seem to have taken up something close to the worst of them. The fate of the Internet is directly tied to the availability of a cheap and reliable telecommunications infrastructure. So the first thing the present (military) government can do is to drastically revise the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This piece of legislation, hurriedly passed in the last days of the Benazir Bhutto government, casts into permanence the inefficient and over-priced state monopoly in this sector. It also binds and gags the usually more efficient and responsive private sector by placing unreasonable and non-competitive operational and economic restrictions on it. All this in the name of securing a good price for, if and when, the behemoth is privatised.

The regulatory framework needs to be streamlined and unnecessary restrictions done away with. They only serve to hinder development and prevent investment. The private sector should be allowed direct international connectivity independent of the state monopoly so that Internet costs in particular can be more affordable. Cheap and widespread availability of the Internet, especially in educational institutions, should be made a national priority. This should be integrated into efforts to increase exports of software and other information-based services, for which the Net is essential.

Current restrictions on the transmission of voice and video over the Internet and other data connections are not only unenforceable, they also hinder the rapid proliferation of a very useful and cost-effective means of communication. These restrictions must go. Similarly, the restriction of sending encrypted data over the Internet, which is again largely ignored by the users, has to be removed if the medium's full communications and economic potential is to be exploited.

A lot more can be done, but these steps would be a very good start. There is a lot of trash on the Internet, just like there is in all media. Society will over time learn to cope with it and regulate it. As a nation, the basic point that we have to understand is that the benefits the Net brings far outweigh its faults by a few million to one. As we enter the 21st century, one can only hope that the few visionaries one finds in Islamabad will eventually prevail. And the Internet, designed to survive nuclear war, will also manage to survive misguided policies that are currently preventing it from playing its destined role.



Exiled to Cyberia

What is it we are communicating, asks Kunda Dixit. Is the information useful and usable?



Like the fashion business, the Third World development debate seems to go through fads and styles. Mantras come, and mantras go. The latest buzzword is "knowledge". The world is now a Knowledge Society, we are told, and the global gap between know and know-not is growing, therefore the only way to give the poor the chance to catch up is to pump in more knowledge with computers and through the Internet.

The discovery of "knowledge" by today's development merchants is a bit like the 'discovery' of America by Columbus. There is also a danger that like "trickle down", "basic needs approach", "community participation", "gender and development", or "export-led growth", the wisdom of the ages is now going to be reduced to another jargon. And like all the extinct buzzwords that preceded it, "knowledge" too is in danger of becoming threadbare with overuse and misuse. It too will end up in that dusty shelf where all past development clichés are stored, while development-wallahs will move on to another catch-all formula that promises panacea.

Blaming underdevelopment entirely on lack of knowledge has two other dangers. It may make us overlook the fundamental economic factors that keep the poor poor, widening disparities between and within nations. It is a hen-or-egg question: are people poor because they lack knowledge, or do they lack knowledge because they are poor and cannot afford school books, radio batteries, telephones, or Internet service provider fees? Blaming it all on knowledge, or the lack thereof, is to avoid solving the structural problems that lead to inequity. Perhaps the trick is to make Knowledge affordable, and more importantly, relevant.

Secondly, the knowledge hype may tempt us to regard only formal modern knowledge systems as worthy of attention. Mainstream economics tends to regard knowledge of the seasons, the different uses of roots and fruits, and evolved traditional wisdom as dispensable. When indigenous knowledge of genetic resources are finally recognised as being valuable, someone other than its traditional user patents it and profits from it. Ironical, isn't it, that the 'information poor' may actually be sitting on

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is not wisdom, because atomic bombs fail an important test: they do not make the world a better place.

There is a similar lesson for the Information Age: the Internet does not necessarily spread knowledge. And even if it does distribute information widely and cheaply, what results is not necessarily greater wisdom. The latest scientific information on tuberculosis is all over the worldwide web: how to prevent it, which therapies work, the antibiotics that bacilli have become resistant to. But this information needs to get where it is needed as cheaply as possible, it needs to be relevant to the needs of the people it is meant for, and the information must be packaged so that it is easily understood. To be useful, information must help people communicate, participate and allow them and their rulers to make informed choices. Only when information makes sense, does it become knowledge. Otherwise information remains merely the background radiation of aimless kilobytes whizzing about in the darkness at the speed of light.

Recognition of the power of knowledge may be as old as civilisation, but what is different now, at the cusp of the

third millennium after Christ, is the speed and capacity to move that information. At present, this speed and capacity are concentrated in the same countries in which wealth and power are concentrated. And the gap shows signs of getting wider.

Look at the prices. The average annual household income in Finland (one of the most-wired nations on Earth) is USD 85,000, the cost of unlimited Internet access in Finland is at the most USD 120 a year, and in many cases it comes free with the phone connection. A Pentium III PC in Finland costs USD 1300. Now, compare this to Nepal, where a senior civil servant earns USD 2500 a year, the cost of unlimited Internet access is USD 600 a year (add to that annual phone bills of at least USD 550) and a Pentium III PC costs USD 1500.

Any surprise, then, that one in every three Americans uses the Internet, only one in every 10,000 people in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh do? India's teledensity is 1.5 percent and narrow bandwidth in most places does not allow Internet use; only 13 percent of Nepal's population has access to electricity; and Sri Lanka has 3.3 personal computers for every 1000 people com-

a gold mine of information stored in the DNA of the plants they use daily. When seafaring traders from Sulawesi are lured away to the cities, an entire vocabulary of words and phrases to describe 25 different kinds of ocean winds disappears forever. How do you put a dollar and cent cost to lost words? Across the Himalayan mountains, the traditional knowledge for making, maintaining and managing water mills is vanishing because the power of falling water has been replaced by the power of diesel. Much more than tradition is lost when an indigenous design for water paddles is replaced by mass-produced spark plugs.

Knowledge, therefore, is not new. We have known knowledge for four millennia. The scriptures said: "Knowledge is a sword, and wisdom is a shield." The texts drew a distinction between the two: how wisdom only comes about when knowledge is assimilated, internalised, when it changes existing behaviour patterns and makes things better. The wisdom of a monk meditating on a mountaintop is not much use because no one knows what is in his head. The knowledge to build a nuclear warhead



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pared to 400 per thousand in Switzerland.

Knowledge, like technology, is not value-free. This era may well herald 'the end of geography', but for whom? Useful questions to ask about the Knowledge Revolution: Whose knowledge? Who produces, controls and owns the information content of knowledge? Who benefits? Will the knowledge improve people's lives?

Another buzzword is "leapfrogging": bypassing obsolete and expensive copper cable for digital wireless signals, using the Internet for distance learning, e-commerce. Leapfrogging is a neat idea, but it makes sense only if the existing technology that you are leaping from is already used to its full potential. You can then skip a step to another level where the same thing can be done more efficiently.

Nanoseconds

Leapfrogging with hardware is the easy part, all you need is the money to buy the equipment and most of it will pay for itself. It is when you have to use that hardware to upgrade the quality, relevance and effectiveness of "content" so that it improves peoples' lives that leapfrogging gets tougher. We have to stop and ask ourselves: what is it we are transmitting, does it make any difference at all that it gets there a couple of nanoseconds faster, is the information useful and usable?

The other question is whether the people who really need that information can afford it, or have access to it. As Chandrababu Naidu has shown in Andhra Pradesh, good policies and clear vision need to be shared with people and their support cultivated—that popular consensus can only be created through two-way information. Naidu is known as an Internet geek, but he will use any medium that gives him the reach: phones, radio, television, the press. And as a politician of the Information Age, he knows there is no substitute to face-to-face interaction.

South Asian countries that have completely squandered the potential of radio for knowledge dissemination have no right to go on about leapfrogging into the Knowledge Society. South Asia's born-again digitalists may look at unglamorous AM radio with contempt, but no other medium today comes close to matching the reach, the accessibility and the affordability of short-



wave radio. If there is one medium that could do all the things we want new information and communications technologies to do (to spread knowledge to the disadvantaged and to improve their living conditions), radio is it.

And yet, what have we done with radio? We have used it shamelessly as a public address system for government propaganda, we have insulted hundreds of millions of radio listeners throughout the Subcontinent by making shortwave and medium broadcasts violently boring. Radio, in fact, has become the symbol of official neglect and proof of an unspoken strategy to deny the weak a voice. In their decades-long neglect of radio as a source of information and knowledge, all South Asian states are equally culpable.

Sim-Earth

Now, it is possible that South Asia's digital elite will use the same argument that Nehruvian industrialists used in the 1950s—that by talking about AM radio we are trying to keep our people in the age of bullock carts. To begin with, what is wrong with bullock carts? Secondly, if your information superhighway is full of potholes you are probably better off in a bullock cart.

And why is it that our officialdom only deregulates the newest information and communication technologies? Murdoch's television channels are not under government control, private cable operators have a free-for-all, there is competition among cell phone operators, there is a choice of internet service providers, FM radio has been privatised, and some South Asian governments are even letting go of that cash cow: state telecom monopolies. But not AM radio. Here, in the one medium which can be

the carrier of information and knowledge to the mass public, the iron hand of government is as strong as ever. Why?

Or take education. How is the Internet going to help us leapfrog in education if we have made such a mess of our existing school systems? Before sticking a computer into a school, how about building a roof over it, or more importantly, staff it with some competent faculty? Why aren't there girls in the classrooms? Why are the kids dropping out after one year? And what of a curriculum that is still designed to churn out clerks for a colonial civil service? Where is the electricity, the phone line, the text books? Why is the single teacher in a village school who simultaneously teaches grades four, five and six mostly absent? Go on, convince me that the Internet is going to change this quickly.

The hype surrounding the Internet and the merging of computing with communications leads many to believe that this also a real revolution in the way human beings think and live. New information and communications technologies with global satellite-based links have accelerated communication, and given us new hardware. These have speeded up decision-making and opened up a vast storehouse of information, but the process by which important political and economic choices are made are still the same. Computers and cell-phones have allowed some lucky ones (mostly the kind of South Asians who have access to this magazine) to skip a few steps, but value-systems have not changed, decision-making is still the same. The corporate-political structures that govern the Knowledge Revolution are the same ones that governed the Industrial Revolution.

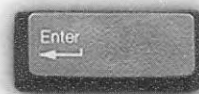
E-commerce is turning the Internet into a global mall. It could potentially transform political and economic relations, and e-commerce may be the engine that will finally and truly pull economic globalisation into the age of information. But even here, its main impact is felt in good, old-fashioned consumerism. E-commerce allows access to a digital mail-order catalogue with online payment and global home delivery. As Bill Gates says in his book *Business@The Speed of Thought*: "Information technology and business are becoming increasingly interwoven. I don't think anybody can talk meaningfully about one without talking about the other."

Gates' vision of the world is one where a digital central nervous system will have billions of ganglia of sellers and buyers. A marketplace where pulp from the hardwood trees of the Amazon end up as books in Amazon.com. All this (and the contents of Michael Dertouzos' *What Will Be: How the New World of Information Will Change Our Lives*) may make many of us want to follow the advice of the hippie-era ballad: "Stop the world and let me off."

Limitless growth and wasteful materialism that is already threatening the ecology of our home planet (not a virtual reality Sim-Earth, but the real Earth that our children will actually, physically breathe and live in). There is no reason why e-consumerism could not foul things up even more, because the economic model is the same.

The Knowledge Revolution is driven by the information marketplace, the world of technology futures, the global currency casinos, IT shares. This global free market is under no one's control, and it is seriously widening not only the economic but also the knowledge gap between and within nations. New technologies rarely invest in the social capital that is needed to enable those who are lagging behind to catch up. It is supposed to happen automatically, but it never ever does.

New CPU exteriors are now being crafted by the same people who design automobiles. They look nice, but they should not distract us from the purpose of all this technology. It is a communication tool, and it is an education tool. Knowledge for all is the goal. Fidel Castro boiled it down to the bottom line when he asked delegates at a UNESCO conference in Havana in July: "If only two percent of Latin America has the Net, we must invent something else... If peasants can't read or write, how can we reach them?" Try radio, Fidel. ▲



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As sure as taking it there yourself

No backbone

To catch even the tail end of the Information Revolution South Asia needs a telecom backbone, says Deepali Nandwani.

Queep inside Savai Madhopur, a dusty Uttar Pradesh village, is located a small, almost incongruous tin shed. You would miss it if it weren't for the dozen or so people patiently waiting for their turn to use the telephone, the only one within a 35-km radius. Thirteen-year-old Arúna Sinha, one of the three daughters of a government clerk, operates what amounts to the impoverished area's sole basic telephone service.

The public telephone booth was set up by Japanese company Koshika Telecom, which has a tie-up with Usha Telecom, an Indian conglomerate that has a licence to establish basic telecommunication services in the northern parts of India. Across Uttar Pradesh, the Usha-Koshika group is building a network of telecom kiosks that offers villagers a link with the outside world.

A telecommunication revolution? You wouldn't think so if you glanced at India's teledensity, which averages 15 telephone lines per 1000 people. Pakistan's telephone to people ratio is about 9 per 1000, Sri Lanka's 6 per 1000, Bangladesh and Nepal about 2 and Bhutan just one. Compare this with the world average of 190 per 1000 people. Or even take China as a benchmark, which has 130 telephones per 1000 people, or South Korea with 115.

"Let us not even talk about an information technology revolution in Asia, particularly South Asia," says N. Sheshagiri, director

general of India's National Informatics Centre, the Delhi-based policy-making body set up by the government. "The problem lies with creaky infrastructure and skewed government policies. We have begun talking about an Internet revolution sweeping the region, we are talking about a Knowledge Society. But we don't even have the basic infrastructure in place to deal with the revolution. The governments of the countries in the region haven't even begun formulating any kind of telecommunication policy, except maybe India."

Telecom wiz

India first woke up to the need to improve its telecommunication infrastructure in 1984, when Prime Minister *Rajiv Gandhi* campaigned to usher in the technology era. He brought in telecom wiz Sam Pitroda, who was then in the United States. Pitroda did achieve a breakthrough and managed to link a few thousand villages, small towns and cities with a good telecom network.

In fact, at that time approaches were also launched to South Asian neighbours with India agreeing to provide its expertise and technology at subsidised rates to develop their telecommunication backbone. Since then, every government has sworn to complete *Rajiv Gandhi's* unfinished task, although they might not quite couch it in those terms, they have largely limited the plans to their party election manifesto.

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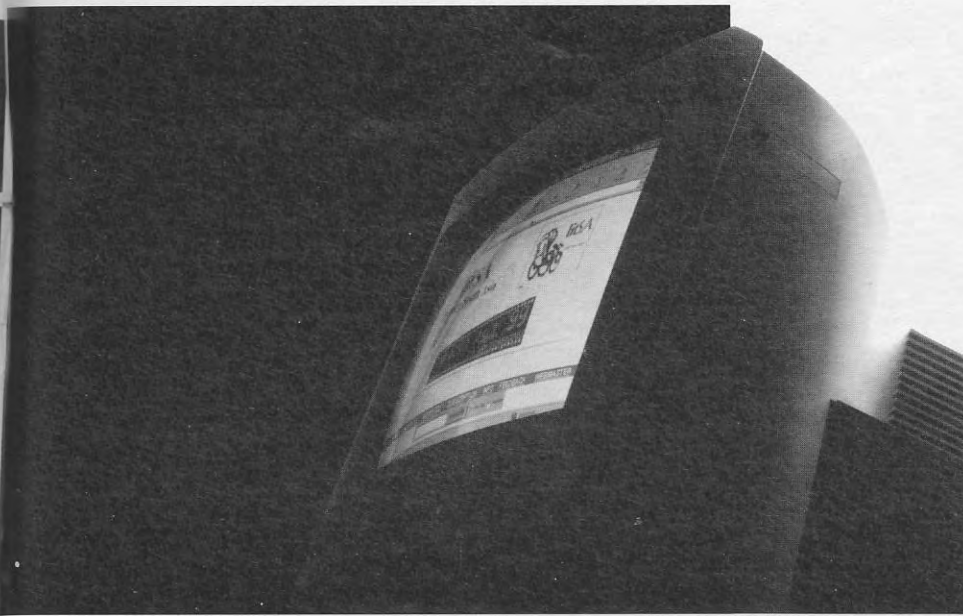
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Hundreds of thousands of villages across India lack even a single phone. The situation elsewhere in South Asia is not much different. India's private Internet Service Providers claim that if the information age brought by the Internet revolution is to really transform the economy, the region needs fibre optic lines and high-speed data pathways. Says Vijay Mukhi, president of the Internet Users Association of India, "Normal phone lines are like rutted country roads, incapable of taking the huge amounts of digital traffic that the new services will generate. But the government is not even aware of the problem. Look at the basic telecommunication services in the region, there is only one operator in most South Asian countries. Monopoly has made the government sanguine since the consumers have so little choice."

India has converted barely 20,000 km of its phone lines into fibre optic lines and that too only in highly demanding metros like Bombay, Bangalore and, to a certain extent, Delhi. Pakistan's record is 4000 km of fibre optic lines, Bangladesh has 1500 km, Nepal 1200 km and Bhutan 70 km. Claims Arun Seth, Managing Director of British Telecom for South Asia: "I was recently in Lahore. I realised that there are so few public telephone booths in the city. There are people, poor people in Pakistan, who can't afford a phone and have to walk miles to make a call."

Information technology is a lot more than telephones. The information revolution

has been brought about by a marriage of telephones with computers, which simultaneously drove down the cost of communicating and drove up the amount of information—voice, text and data—that could be exchanged.

If South Asia is already lagging behind in teledensity, things are even worse in terms of personal computer 'penetration' (see *table overleaf*). Further, in South Asia, most PCs also tend to be outmoded. It is not surprising that South Asia is regarded as the back benches when it comes to information technology. "India still has an advantage. It would have sunk below the horizon, but for its success in cornering a share of the global software market," says Vijay Bhatkar, chairman of Dishnet, a private Indian ISP.

All South Asian countries have the same problems: lack of a sound telecom structure and the right stimulation to help the telecom market to grow. And what bugs the growing tribe of software and Internet companies in the Subcontinent is that governments just don't see it as a priority.

In India, the National Task Force on Information Technology, led by Rajya Sabha member and present foreign minister Jaswant Singh, submitted its report on 22 May 1999. Its recommendations include suggestions on how the government can 'de-bottleneck' the path of IT development. Says Sheshagiri, a member of the task force: "We have recommended construction of the state-of-art fibre optic network linking 15

Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Bhutan	Maldives	Comparable for Thailand
<i>(All figures/1000 people)</i>							
<i>Main telephone lines</i>							
3	15	5	18	14	10	63	70
<i>PC's</i>							
1	1.5	0.5	1.2	3.3	-	12.3	16.7
<i>Internet hosts</i>							
0.0	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.33	-	0.34	2.11
<i>Radios</i>							
48	105	-	195	65	-	-	204
<i>TVs</i>							
7	64	4	24	82	19	39	167

(Source: ITU, World Bank, UNDP)

cities with a capacity to carry 1000 times more audio, video and data traffic than the current lines. In two years, it will give India the backbone for the Net." The report has been gathering dust in a bureaucratic shelf since it was submitted.

In Pakistan, telecommunication infrastructure development is nowhere on the agenda. Pakistan's national telecommunication department meets once in three months, while Bangladesh has no separate telecom department. "The Asian crisis and the lack of domestic banking system and capital markets have made it impossible to finance most telecom projects. Therefore, there is a need for a new policy that would address the viability of this sector and restart capital flow into it," feels the chairman of BPL Telecom, Rajeev Chandrasekhar.

The need to build a telecom backbone is vital for more than one reason: domestic economic slowdown for one. In India, economic growth depends too much on the manufacturing sector. Says Chandrasekhar, "It needs to have the service sector growth if it has to do well. Moreover, our information technology strategy could be against the wall because of lack of telecom infrastructure."

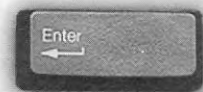
In August, India came up with a national policy on telecom that gave private players a fresh lease of life. It permitted basic and cellular service operators to migrate from the existing system of fixed licence fees to a revenue-sharing regime and offered them a six-month licence fee waiver. The new policy is expected to give a boost to the ailing telecom industry that has been beset by a severe financial crisis due to low revenue generation. Says former finance secretary and currently planning commission member Montek Singh Ahluwalia, "The

new policy takes India forward. But there are several loopholes and gaps. For instance, it does not allow 'voice over Internet', a very important technological development which is likely to revolutionise telecommunications. Telecommunications is an area where technology is changing so fast and costs are falling so rapidly that the policy may have to evolve continuously to keep pace with the development."

Ahluwalia cites the example of the East Asian tigers which have opened the doors wide open for the information revolution. Those countries know that the only way they can stay ahead in the economic race is by exploiting the information revolution. Mukhi, of the Internet Users' Association, agrees: "China, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia. All these countries are opening their arms to modern technology. It's only South Asia, which has such a huge potential, that insists on following archaic policies."

India needs an investment of USD 12 billion in the next one year to develop its basic telecommunication infrastructure. Pakistan needs at least six billion, while Bangladesh requires about 4.5 billion dollars. Here, we are not even talking fibre optic. "The dream that instead of sluggish downloads, technologies converging on the Net will offer home shopping, superfast access, movies, will remain just that, a dream. We are nowhere close to an IT revolution," says Mukhi.

According to the Indian IT task force report, the solution could be to let multinationals invest in infrastructure-building and offer them liberalised terms in the form of tax waivers and no fixed tariff rates. With no other ideas being offered at the moment, that seems to be the only way to catch the tail end of the Information Technology revolution. But proposing a way out is one thing and implementing it quite another. ▲

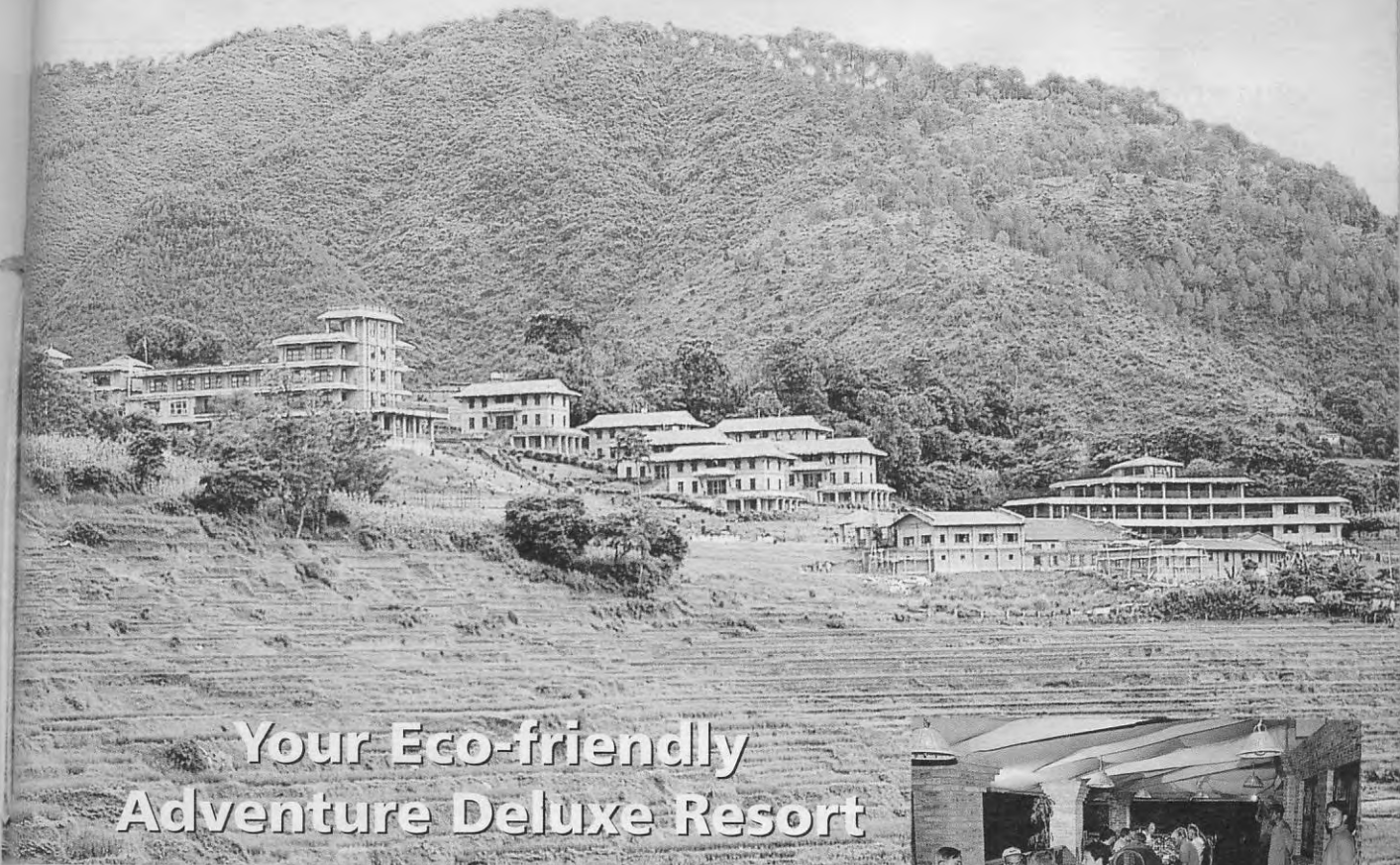


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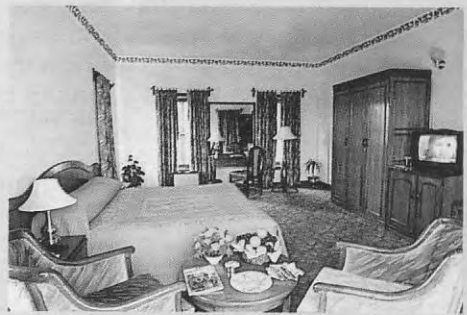


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CORRUPTION, SORRUPTION. Let us change the subject. I am quite taken aback by continuous talk of greased palms in South Asia, and here is Transparency International once again taking South Asia to task. India and Pakistan have been ranked as among the most corrupt countries of the world the second time in a row. Then there is the **Bribe Taker Index**, where too we did not show up too well. Question: Can TI take us into the more productive discussions on the sociology of corruption and bribe-taking? When will TI headquarters in Berlin and its national chapters lead us into clear-headed debates on the whys of corruption? Why is petty corruption to be condoned (as Chhetria Patrakar believes) until such time that governments cannot find a way to pay their bureaucrats decent wages, and why is TI not willing to name names when it comes to the rich and corrupt in business, bureaucracy and politics? Specifically, what is TI's take on the Bofors imbroglio; who makes hay when the Sri Lankan army goes in for attack helicopters; who are the main commission agents who muddy the national waters in Nepal, etc, etc? And what is more heinous, to give bribes or to take 'em? TI should stop pussy-footing around and be more real and less fashionable. Fake activism is for the corrupt.

■
MARK TULLY to help save steam engine," and am I glad. If there is something of the cumulative South Asian past that needs to be kept burning, it is the furnace inside the steam engines. Just as I feel for the younger generations who have not had tea in *mitti-ka-cups* (and fling them down on the adjacent tracks as the train speeds on), so do I feel their loss for never having smelt the burning coal during their journeys. Railgadis are supposed to go **chuk chuk chuk**, except that they (powered by electricity or diesel) no longer do. One suggestion for Tully-Saheb—rather than try to save some relics in the odd Railway Museum or through the munificence of tourism (such as in the Delhi-Jaipur run), should we not try to concentrate on keeping one legitimate line (preferably *choti* line) running entirely on steam. There are still such lines available running parallel to the Indo-Nepal border, for one. I think the lines should be subsidised so that the public agrees to the idea.

■
OKAY, RELUCTANT coup-maker Generalissimo-Sahab, we will concede that you were trying to save the nation rather than your own skin when you decided to deplane and take charge of Pakistan (although I still cannot fathom how it is that your plane had only seven minutes of fuel left before touching down, will have to check up on what PIA's flight safety manual has to say on that, give me some time). But General Ji, heavens, why rush to visit the Saudis as the first thing



you do? I am sure it was the need for money to keep the country going, but what of the impression you create? The Saudis cannot even stomach your posing with your Pekinese, as that is presumably 'un-Islamic', so how can Pakistan progress by hitching its wagon to **political Neanderthals** that so many of the Gulf regimes indeed are. To that extent, much better for Pakistan to stay within the South Asian fold and retain its South Asian-ness. We are messy, but we are real.

■
DESPITE SOME feeble hopes to the contrary, dark, ominous signals are emanating out of Hindustan as far as secular academia is concerned, with the BJP well ensconced it seems for years to come. Just look at two recent news items: it is proposed that the CBSE plus-two syllabus will have the study of **Marxism** removed from it. It is foolish to think that studying Marxism makes one a Marxist. Let someone mark that. Meanwhile, a *pracharak* (propagator) of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, K.G. Rastogi, has been appointed as the president of India's nominee in a committee the task of which is to select 60 (sixty!) professors and readers to the prestigious and totally important National Council for Educational Research and Training. And note that in his autobiographical work, *Aap Beeti* (according to *The Asian Age* of 25 October), Mr. Rastogi discloses how he took out his gun and shot a Muslim woman when she was about to be raped by Hindu attackers, presumably to protect her dignity. *The Asian Age* writes, "At no point, it appears, [did] the thought of turning his gun on the attackers cross Mr. Rastogi's head."

■
S. RAGHUNATH, columnist in *The Assam Tribune*, reports on a high-level British trade delegation that recently visited Assam to study the investment prospects, and hailed Guwahati as a "**technopolis**", citing numerous hi-tech industries coming up on the state capital's outskirts. Mr. Raghunath then goes on to suggest certain other prefixes to 'polis' as far as his beloved city is concerned: Garbopolis, for which credit in full measure goes to the City Corporation; Smokopolis, so much so that the average Guwahatian will instantly choke if he is given a dose of air with oxygen in it; Potopolis, in a city whose roads urban experts have declared to be "potholes interspersed by occasional patches of bitumen tar"; Mosquopolis, for a city where at last count there were a zillion young mosquitoes residing, and the figure must have hit the zillion mark by now; Slumopolis, for the 213 "declared slums" in the city and double that undeclared; and Hoardopolis, because the mighty Brahmaputra cannot even be seen through the maze of hoardings advertising everything from vests and briefs to anti-perspirant cologne. If it is any consolation, to the good citizens of Guwahati, there

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are a couple of hundred other cities in the Subcontinent which could also lay claim to each of these titles. So don't be too pleased with yourself, Mr. Raghunath.

HERE IS another news item which would also apply to all our metropolises: "School children fail to study amid noise of **pressure horns**," reports *The News* from Rawalpindi. Apparently the bus and truck traffic on the Rawalpindi-Islamabad route has been diverted so that now the howling conductors and uncaring drivers make their racket right outside the windows of the 2500 students at the FG Public Secondary School. The use of pressure horns, meant for highway use, within congested urban neighbourhoods is a malady that is prevalent South Asia-wide and a problem that none of our planners, urban or otherwise, seem to be in a position to do anything about.

TURNING ONCE more to what cities may be called, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced on 7 October that Tangail would be made a "**cultural city**" in line with her government's vision to develop each city of Bangladesh as a specialised centre. So, said the prime minister, "We are already working to develop Chittagong as an economic city, Khulna as an industrial city, and Mymensing as an educational city." If only it were that easy, but I am sure that the prime minister understands it is not.

OH YES, in that same report in *The Bangladesh Observer*, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina listed a number of programmes which were part of her government's endeavours for eradicating poverty and enhancing standard of living of the poor. As the *Observer* reported, "The Prime Minister... listed a number of programmes including Ashrayan Prokalpa, Ideal Village, Housing Fund, **Go Back Home**, Old Age Allowance, Special Grant for Husband Abandoned and Distressed Women, Employment, and a large number of projects in the social sector." Wow, things are happening in Bangladesh.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE General Pervez Musharraf, in a visit to Lahore, reports the official APP news agency, stopped at every **traffic light** and received ovations whenever he did so. I like that. I will like it even better when he is still doing this a year from now, for indications are that [the Delhi-born] General Sahab expects to remain at the helm of affairs in Islamabad for some time to come.

AS LONG as all of us seem to have no objection to regress to pre-feudal, sexist, child-baiting times, and as long as open-eyed papers like *The Deccan Herald* have

no objection in carrying such advertisements, let me then toot the horn of **Swastik Associates** (may they slip on a banana peel on train platform while the engine approaches, meanwhile), which wants to hold a Mr. Miss Xtravaganza '99 and wants "male/female kids (2 to 12 years only) for a fashion show cum modelling contest". Send them a fax at (+91-80-5369261) and give the associates at Swastik a piece of your mind!

TILL NOW, no one worth his banyan had paid attention to the need to collect buffalo semen, as if this product of quintessentially South Asian livestock was somehow not as important as similarly flavoured products of assorted bulls, yaks, camels and, yes, sheep. Now, this lacuna is on the way to being removed with the organisation in Karnal of a national seminar on "Sustainable development of buffaloes for milk, meat and draft". The shortage of quality bulls was one of the major constraints in genetic improvement of buffaloes, observed the seminarians, and noted that the preservation of **buffalo semen** should be standardised for its effective application in artificial insemination programmes

under field conditions. May I request now the holding of a seminar on sustainable development of goats so that this other neglected South Asian creature may be addressed, not forgetting the importance of preservation of goat semen for effective application in artificial insemination programmes under field conditions.

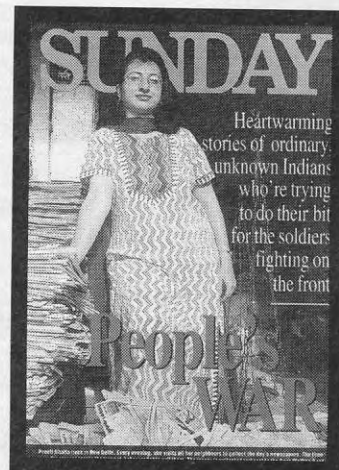
THERE IS a letter in *The News*, from Waseef Roheel of Islamabad, that the Pakistan postal department consider issuing a stamp to mark the bicentennial of the martyrdom of Tipu Sultan at the Third Battle of Seringapatnam. I think this is a **good idea**, for it would have Pakistan also laying claim to what is unfortunately considered only a historical legacy of post-1947 India. The resistance to this idea, of course, will come from the blinkered in both Pakistan and India.

Without even bothering to inform the public, the Ananda Bazar Patrika group of Calcutta has summarily shut down the *Sunday* weekly. Way to go.

-Chhetria Patrakar

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Return of the khaki

Pakistan's military coup truncated a democratic process that would have thrown out Nawaz Sharif as decisively as Benazir Bhutto was rejected in the last election.

by *Zia Mian and A.H. Nayyar*

The late Eqbal Ahmad once wrote, "It has all been said before. Yet those who should, do not listen. And, as in talking to the deaf, one is compelled to repeat in louder, more agitated tones: The army may bring temporary relief. But the problem is eminently political; it shall not yield to military solution." There is little more that needs to be said about the situation in Pakistan after the 12 October coup by Gen Pervez Musharraf. But, unfortunately, more will have to be said, loudly—for too many people, memories have become short, and the

needs of the moment have silenced the warnings of conscience, history and political sense.

To understand the origin and character of the present coup requires going back to the beginning of Pakistan. The decade following Partition and Independence was one of enormous political instability and opportunism. There were seven prime ministers and four governor-generals between 1947 and 1958. (In this, it closely resembled the 1990s, which has seen seven prime ministers and three presidents.) In mid-1958, Gen Ayub

Khan, then head of the army and defence minister, wrote in his diary: "I am receiving very depressing reports of economic distress and maladministration through political interference, frustration and complete lack of faith by the people in political leaders... The general belief is that none of these men have the honesty of purpose, integrity and patriotism to root out the evils of the country, which will require drastic action."

The action came on 7 October 1958, when president Iskander Mirza abrogated the constitution

and appointed Gen Ayub Khan Chief Martial Law Administrator. Ayub Khan addressed the nation on radio the following day, describing the move as "a drastic and extreme step taken with great reluctance" and that "there was no alternative to it except the disintegration and complete ruination of the country". The situation was one of "total administrative, economic, political and moral chaos" brought about "by self-seekers, who in the garb of political leaders, have ravaged the country".

Ayub Khan's 1958 text could have served as Gen Pervez Musharraf's speech to the nation on 17 October this year. Claiming, like Ayub Khan, that the military had to take over to save the country, Gen Musharraf said: "There is dependency and hopelessness surrounding us with no light visible anywhere around... We have reached a stage where our economy has crumbled, our credibility is lost, state institutions lie demolished."

On seizing power, both Ayub Khan and Pervez Musharraf claimed to have a clear mission. Ayub Khan claimed: "Martial law will not be retained a minute longer than is necessary, it will not be lifted before the purpose for which it has been imposed is fulfilled." For his part, Musharraf declared: "The armed forces have no intention to stay in charge longer than is absolutely necessary to pave the way for true democracy to flourish." He did not explain what "true democracy" meant, or how he planned to create it, or whether anyone but he could recognise it as such.

Despite the claims that the coup was a response to current circumstances, the present set of coup-makers have borrowed abundantly from their predecessors. The tragic history of these earlier efforts seems to have been forgotten. Musharraf has announced that he would have three civilian advisers in his National Security Council. The people who have been picked are known for having co-operated with military governments in the

past. Most notable among them, Sharifuddin Pirzada, named as the senior civilian adviser to Gen Musharraf, has faithfully served every military government, including that of Ayub Khan.

Repeating history

Along with the reaching back to Ayub Khan, there are also some notable borrowings from the July 1977 coup by Gen Zia-ul Haq. Although without the desperate search for legitimacy which led Zia to call his takeover "Operation Fairplay", Musharraf has copied Gen Zia's subtle innovation of saying that he was not abrogating the constitution, merely suspending it. Like Zia, he has also kept the president, at least for a while. Time will tell whether the general, like his predecessors, will settle in for the long haul.

This phenomenon of borrowing from the past to shape a response at a time of acute crisis has been described most vividly by Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, where he observed:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past... And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.

The response given to Ayub Khan's coup by the media and Pakistani intellectuals forewarned of the response to Gen Musharraf's. Recalls Altaf Gauhar, Ayub Khan's minister for information and broadcasting: "Academics, scholars and writers, particularly in West

Pakistan, welcomed Ayub's arrival on the scene and the press gave him considerable support" (*Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, OUP, 1996). Gauhar notes tellingly: "The media surrender was so complete the government did not have to resort to any kind of censorship. Not one newspaper uttered a word of criticism against the imposition of martial law. Indeed, most newspapers acclaimed the advent of military rule as a blessing and many of the press barons became willing tools of the regime." In such a situation, it is easy to announce, as Musharraf has done, that the press shall remain free.

The media and the larger intelligentsia were not the only ones approving of the new order. Musharraf's seizure of power was welcomed with a general sense of relief in the country. Nawaz Sharif's government was seen as having emerged as a problem facing the country, rather than a mechanism for solving its problems. At a time of growing poverty, he was squandering resources on grandiose infrastructure projects, and on building palaces for himself and his family. He amused himself playing cricket in front of the cameras, while the country watched aghast as poor people burnt themselves to death in public as a way to voice, and escape, the agonies of their lives.

It was not just the possibility of respite from these Mughalesque displays that made so many welcome Sharif's exit. Like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto before him, Sharif's absolutist sense of power had driven him to ensure that no one, and no institution, should be able to challenge his authority. He picked a puppet president, ignored the cabinet, railroaded his political party, and amended the constitution in a way that ruled out a parliamentary challenge. On a larger canvas, he bought, brow-beat and terrorised the judiciary and the press. Until stopped short by the coup, the army too had been under similar pressure.

A lot has been said about the re-

lationship between the seeds of the putsch and the war in the Kargil area of Kashmir, earlier this year. It is clear now that the action was planned by the army, and the civilian government invited on board later. Sharif went along with it, lured by the promise of glory. His was also an attempt at recreating the halo that had been assiduously created after the nuclear tests, but which had since worn off as far as the public was concerned. When the adventure in Kargil failed miserably, Sharif blamed the military, and the military blamed him.

Now that it is freed from all political restraint, the military may try more adventures like Kargil; as much was said by Musharraf before the coup. It is significant that the unilateral pull-back of armed forces, which Musharraf announced as a gesture of good faith, has been restricted to the international border, and does not extend to the line of control that divides Kashmir. This suggests that Pakistan's military rulers shall continue their support for the mujahideen groups fighting in Kashmir. Despite Musharraf's exhortation that Islam "teaches tolerance not hatred, brotherhood not enmity, peace not violence", to keep the mujahideen pliant, the rulers will have to turn a blind eye to the international holy warriors, their training camps, their schools, and their politics.

Money and the military

The Pakistani military's obsession with India helps focus on a largely unremarked motive for the coup. The terrible state of the country's economy had made it increasingly difficult to maintain the military budget, and had certainly restricted the kind of increases that military planners wanted to stick with their strategy of keeping up with India. The nuclear tests of last year were only a way station on a longer and more expensive commitment to the development of a real nuclear arsenal. And this arsenal is not to come at the cost of conventional

forces. Pakistan's new foreign minister, Abdul Sattar, recently argued that the country needed both nuclear weapons on mobile ballistic missiles and large conventional forces.

Not surprisingly, Musharraf has declared that reviving the economy is the critical task ahead of his team. A tall order by any standard, and one that the military is unlikely to find being obeyed. The military budget, over USD 3 billion, is about the same size as the budget deficit this year. The only bigger drain on state

Pakistan's elite is small and everyone has relatives, even generals; the rich and powerful will simply corrupt or marginalise the honest few left in the military and the bureaucracy who try too hard.

revenue is debt servicing, which cannot be wished away, and which is growing rapidly. Having cut development spending to the point where it was all dependent on foreign aid, the state needs to generate and collect more revenue if the military is to get as much as it wants. It is already clear as to where the money will not be spent; there was not even a passing mention of increased spending on education or health, or any social sector for that matter, in the general's 17 October speech.

On the revenue side, things look grim. Unlike the times of Ayub Khan and Zia-ul Haq, there is no Cold

War to lure the American dollar to Pakistan. The famous bank defaulters, the rich and powerful who borrowed heroically with no intention of repaying it, are the target of much public resentment. But, even if the money is recovered from them, it will go back to the banks which lent it, not to the public exchequer.

The claim to end corruption and bring about accountability can be nothing more than a hollow slogan with very little scope for implementation. Every previous government, military and civilian, has claimed this mission, and failed. The reason is simple: Pakistan's elite is small and everyone has relatives, even generals; the rich and powerful will simply corrupt or marginalise the honest few left in the military and the bureaucracy who try too hard.

The only means available to increase state resources are more taxation, enforced austerity and increased exports. This amounts to further squeezing of the poor and the salaried through indirect taxation, driving down wages, and increasing unemployment by reducing the size of state corporations. Poverty and inequality have both been growing in Pakistan in recent years, and with its economy in recession, such measures will worsen existing suffering. Authoritarian governments are more effective at this than democracies, and for this reason have generally been viewed sympathetically by the World Bank, the IMF, and many other investors, domestic and international.

It is worth recalling that a primary goal of Ayub Khan's military government was economic growth—among other things, of the military. The military was devouring over 40 percent of government spending, and the military wanted to spend even more as it tried to catch up with India. This led to anti-communist military alliances with the United States in the search for economic and military aid, and the determined pursuit of economic growth. Steered by supposed ex-

perts from Harvard University and their local clones, including the late Mahbub-ul Haq, growth was pursued regardless of the consequences.

The outcome was enormous regional disparity, with East Pakistan suffering most acutely, and growing social inequality. Ayub's decade of development famously left 22 families owning two-thirds of Pakistan's industry, and nearly all of the insurance and banking sectors, while for the rest, wages fell, public health and other social sectors were neglected. The suppressed tensions exploded with the mass protests in 1969 that brought down the dictatorship, and paved the way for civil war and genocide in Bangladesh.

Systemic challenge

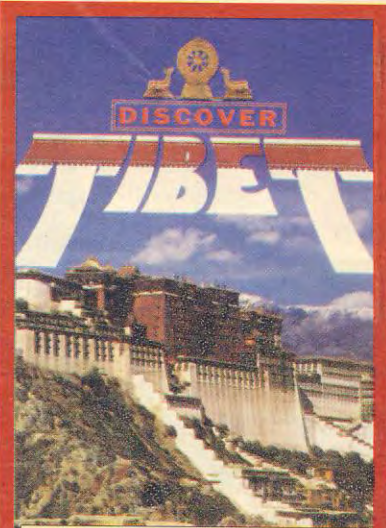
The problems identified with Nawaz Sharif, and before him Benazir Bhutto and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto even earlier, and with Gen Pervez Musharraf, and the military rulers before him, Zia-ul Haq and Ayub Khan, point to deep systemic problems in Pakistan. The most significant among these is not the venality, corruption and ineptitude of Pakistan's political class, or the reckless ambitions and simple-mindedness of its military leaders, it is rather the absence of organised public opinion strong enough to discipline either. Put another way, the fundamental problem is the enduring inability of Pakistan's people to organise collective action to define and protect their own interests.

Musharraf's coup has hastened a creeping double disillusionment that lessens the chances of creating such opinion and organising such collective action. The coup truncated a democratic process that would certainly have thrown Nawaz Sharif out of office as decisively as Benazir Bhutto had been rejected in the last election. The next election may have created political confusion, coalition government and instability, but it would have reinforced the feeling in Pakistan that the citizens would not tolerate

the gross abuses of power they had suffered at the hands of both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. The sharp political lesson, that the people matter, to have been learnt by political leaders and the electorate has now been wasted. Instead, for many there shall be only a memory of democratic politics as the system that failed. Now, democracy shall have even fewer defenders in Pakistan.

By putting the old partnership of the military and bureaucracy that has ruled Pakistan for half its history back on centre-stage, the coup has also exposed the weakened and tottering structures of the state to new stresses. State institutions have been eroded by earlier efforts and failures at government, and by the unprincipled compliance of every public servant with the politicians that entire class claims to despise. The problems are so grave and the state's capacity to govern so poor that the longer the military and bureaucracy try to rule without consent the greater will be their failure and their loss of legitimacy. The call for reform of the system shall grow even less convincing.

The real dangers will emerge when decisions are made and policies carried through regardless of public consequence. Dissent will grow. The present liberal face of the putschists shall then change. They shall resort to coercion or shall have to step aside, with few, if any, of the problems solved. If the military regime become ruthless, there shall be a desperate need for a new source of public legitimacy. Like all other governments in crisis in Pakistan, the military are likely to resort to the cover of Islam. The difference this time is that waiting in the wings are the armies of god.



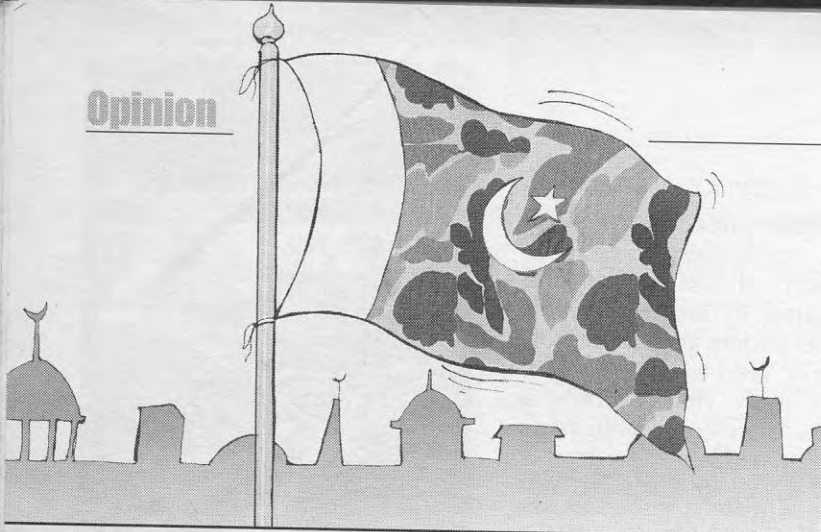
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Even generals have
to be accountable,
and should depart
if they cannot perform.

by *Kazim Saeed*

The emperor's new fatigues

It is an insufferable irony. A nation anticipates that decentralised participatory rule will be delivered by those whose professional ethos is centralised authority and the uncritical pursuit of orders from above. Rather than by taking to the streets in protest, the people of Pakistan voted with their television sets by watching Gen Pervez Musharraf deliver his first speeches.

It is a trying, debilitating time for Pakistani democrats, for democracy is too serious a business to be left to the generals. The labours of love for democracy have to commence right away, and three crucial responsibilities stand out.

Firstly, the democrat has to admit that the coup cannot be condemned as an outright outrage. The unpalatable reality is that during the past 11 years of democracy, the ballast of internal stability that democracy needs to flower had been worn perilously thin. No matter how much optimism one feigned, Pakistan's precarious democracy had little hope of blossoming into a mature system for peacefully negotiating conflicts of interest and of opinion. The 12 October coup was not necessarily a blessing in disguise, but it has to be accepted that it has brought a politically enervating period in Pakistani history to a close. Of course, most Pakistanis have already taken this view for the time being. Even so, Gen Musharraf has to be made to deserve every single moment of this suspension of the constitution.

The second item on the democrat's agenda, therefore, has to be the development of performance parameters for the general. Each item on his sweeping seven-point plan is a complicated task with multiple dependencies on other tasks. The plan involves a refurbishment of Pakistan's political and institutional structure, and the general has been consistently unwilling to give a time-frame for achieving the gargantuan tasks he has set himself. His only argument for this unwillingness has been that he wants to finish his work and would not like to go back on his word about a time-frame.

Such quasi-messianic patriarchalism is familiar to

Pakistanis as elevator music on the way to politically divisive and repressive military rule. The last military regime came in promising elections in 90 days, and left only by accident after 11 years. In continually consolidating its power, it bequeathed upon the country a polity seething with sectarian and ethnic violence and a flourishing culture of guns. There is no denying that the generals have mercilessly clung on to the marionette strings of the country's politics during democratic rule too.

In Pakistan, it has been hard enough to trust rulers who have the sword of re-election hanging over them. Blindly trusting the word of a military ruler with oversized plans and without any mechanism of accountability is a folly Pakistanis can do without. The story of the good and righteous general who unwittingly develops a bloodthirsty addiction for power is nearly a folk-tale in Pakistan. Righteous democrats need to do Gen Musharraf a favour by saving him from being trapped into this rich lore. Notwithstanding all his persuasions that his military coup is really a democratic revolution, the emperor's new fatigues have to be given a more-than-vigilant scrutiny.

The test of Musharraf's ability to see a horizon to his rule, can be found in economic targets because they are the most conveniently quantifiable. If the general does not even announce measurable targets on the economic front, those who are interested in democracy need to formulate and announce targets for the general. To take an example, he has already announced investment as a pillar of his vision for economic revival. Let him name a target level of investment growth or else he should be *given* a target. Similar targets need to be set for the general in the other arenas of work he is undertaking. If these targets are not met in a reasonable period of time, his departure needs to be sought blessed with the country's deepest gratitude. If Gen Musharraf is interested in 'true democracy', he should place himself in the crucible of accountable performance.

The third crucial responsibility of the committed

democrat is to contemplate the challenge of developing democracy through military means. Once short-term military management of the country has been accepted for the sake of stable democracy, the contradiction in centralised rule developing into decentralised democratic rule becomes stark. The political structure that has come into place under Gen Musharraf's military-technocratic junta is based on a benevolent monarchic framework rather than on a democratic choice of leadership.

The transformation of this structure into a democratic system is the greatest political challenge of the country. For example, a strengthening of the federation — one of the general's seven tasks — and its subsequent health under democratic rule cannot be guaranteed by military power alone. Pakistan's provinces cannot be taught to live with each other in harmony under du-

ress. They have to learn this through an organic process. How a military government can requisition this process is as unclear as it is unlikely. The intellectual capacities of those interested in Pakistan have to be focused on this process. The means for reform have to be as carefully considered as the goals of reform.

The three responsibilities of the Pakistani democrat — short-term acceptance of the military regime, setting performance parameters to keep General Musharraf accountable, and understanding how democracy is pursued through military means — are difficult and multi-dimensional. With so many beneficiaries of democracy willing to support the military regime indefinitely, this era of Pakistani history is perhaps the greatest test of the inventiveness and perseverance of the true democrat. ▲

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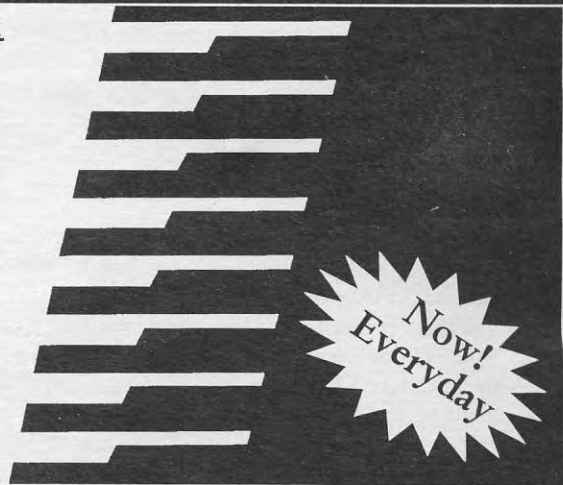
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Dangerous support

THE FIRST speeches of almost all of Pakistan's elected, dictatorial or caretaker leaders, have differed little in intent from that of General Musharraf's this week. They all talk about critical junctures, accountability of the past, moral authority and direction, and the like. After about a couple of years, the expectations with every new government go sour and the government begins to lose its popularity amongst the public. This happened with Nawaz Sharif's government as well which had a mandate which is never likely to be repeated gain.

What the reaction of the so-called liberal and pro-democracy elements in Pakistan towards General Pervez Musharraf reveals, is that this important section does not consider democracy to be a process which takes time, often generations, but rather, a mechanism which puts in place instant solutions irrespective of how they are to take place. While they talk about 'institutions' and institution building, they are not concerned with how these interventions take place, or who builds institutions in their own preferred manner. Most importantly, the process of building democratic institutions in a country which has had military rule for almost half of its 52 years, is not considered important enough.

Call it opportunism or a lack of hope, or one last bet, but the public in Pakistan has overlooked a number of important facts that have taken place in recent times. Firstly, all the attacks against Nawaz Sharif since his ouster, have labelled his a one-man autocratic government which seems to be one of the stronger charges labelled against the former Prime Minister. Yet, while these people welcome General Pervez Musharraf as their saviour, they conveniently ignore the fact that military rule is always one-man rule and potentially far worse than any form of autocratic democracy. Besides, democracy does always have the military as a potential watchdog, its checks and balances, if things get out of hand; the question of replacing the military does not arise, and one must await events of extraordinary proportion to do so. The war of independence of East Pakistan with the secession of Bangladesh and an air crash clouded in mysterious circumstances, were the events which culminated in the end of martial rule twice in the past.

Second, our good liberal friends endorse the measures taken by general Musharraf to initiate the process of accountability of Nawaz Sharif and his cronies, yet they conveniently overlook the fact that the orders of the Chief Executive cannot be challenged by any court in Pakistan. Moreover, his dismissal of the government itself and the abeyance of the Constitution are both illegal. Who will hold the army accountable?

Thirdly, all the ground that had been taken by the liberal lobby after the Pakistan army's fiasco in Kargil, in terms of discussing the role of the military in Pakistan's economy, has certainly been lost. After Kargil, many of us questioned the amount budgeted to the military each year, and there was a possibility that the voices

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of democracy may have put some pressure on the military to reveal its accounts. Clearly, that opportunity has been lost for good. Linked with this, was the possibility of peace in South Asia, with the BJP and Nawaz governments talking peace and moving towards economic and trade relations to start with. This too, has been put aside for the moment.

All those liberals who are banking on the military are the very same ones who backed the World Bank's Moeen Quraishi when he was a caretaker Prime Minister for three months in 1993. This time, they are openly stating that they want the military to stay for some time, two years at least, so that it can cleanse the democratic stables of their undemocratic components. They are relieved that the Chief of the Army Staff does not wear a beard and speak the language of General Zia or the Taliban. But this precisely is the problem. By supporting this intrusion by the military in Pakistan's politics, next time round they may get the worst end of the stick. It is this liberal and supposedly pro-democratic element which has probably done Pakistan its biggest disservice. Had they been an active and effective lobby in the first place, things would not have come to the stage where they have. Pakistan's greatest tragedy regarding democracy is not that the military has taken over, but that we allowed democracy to degenerate to the level it did, and for this to happen in the first place.

S. AKBAR ZAIDI IN "A BENEVOLENT DICTATORSHIP" FROM
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY.

Chicken tikka masala

EACH DAY at Noon Products in Southall, west London, 10 tonnes of chicken tikka masala are produced for supermarkets across Britain. For Waitrose it's called chicken tikka makhni, for Somerfield it's chicken masala, and for Sainsbury's it's chicken tikka makhnawalla. But, according to company chairman GK Noon, they are all variations of the chicken tikka masala, Britain's most popular dish. Like the flock wallpapered restaurant that created it, the chicken tikka masala, or CTM as it is fondly referred to in the industry, is a peculiarly British invention. Around 14 percent of the 2 million people visiting an Indian restaurant every week

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TODAY, DURBAN

order this most un-Indian of Indian dishes. Demand is such, in fact, that restaurants in India are now being forced to put the hybrid dish on their menus. So the anglicisation of the world's palate chomps ever onwards, sprinkling ironies as it goes.

In spite of its popularity, the origins of the fastest selling British dish remain obscure, lying somewhere between the first wave of Indian immigration in the 1950s and CTM's introduction as a ready meal to Waitrose in 1983. Legend has it that one day in the mid 1970s an English customer went into an Indian restaurant and ordered chicken tikka (tikka means small pieces) and when it was served to him, he peered at the marinated and grilled chicken with a look of consternation and asked: "What, no sauce?"

The bemused but eager to oblige waiter asked his boss what to do. The canny restaurateur saw his chance and seized it. He took the chicken tikka back into the kitchen, poured over some tomato puree, a dash of cream and, not to make it entirely tasteless, a dash of fenugreek, the herb that gives curry powder its distinctive pong.

The dish that entered the kitchen at £4 returned to the customer's table as a chef's special at £6. A classic win-win situation. The customer got his sauce and the restaurant made more money.

"I know at least half a dozen people who claim to have invented the dish," says Peter Grove, publisher of *The Real Curry Restaurant Guide*. He refuses to name them, however, for fear of encouraging their rampant myth-making. "They all know each other and come from the Bangladeshi community in the east end of London." This group of pioneers, Grove believes, hit upon the idea of mixing small, dry chicken pieces with a tomato sauce in the early 1960s, to cater for the British delight in gravy. "Their stories match each other right down to the original base for the masala mix: Campbell's Cream of Tomato Soup."

The timing of this discovery can be narrowed down to a period somewhere between the 1959 introduction of the tandoor, the clay-lined oven needed to cook the chicken, and the dish's boom in the takeaway restaurants of the 1970s. But, say purists, trying to track down an originator is a misguided enterprise: the dish is a composite that has evolved over years of slap-dashery and culinary erosion; it has little integrity as a single dish.

"Chicken tikka is not a recipe, it is a generic name," says Namita Panjabi, owner of Veeraswamy, Britain's oldest surviving Indian restaurant which was founded in 1927 in the west end of London and first introduced the tandoor. "It does not refer to a dish or a taste, it just means spices. Go to 100 different restaurants and you will find 100 different recipes."

Nonetheless, Panjabi testifies to a 1959 menu hanging on her restaurant wall, offering an early incarnation of tandoori chicken, the genuinely Indian base out of which the masala dish grew. "I should imagine that, by the early 1960s, restaurateurs were beginning to catch on to the new way of cooking it," she says.

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AD IN THE KATHMANDU POST

Shrabani Basu, food historian and author of *Curry in the Crown*, concurs, aligning the dish's inception to the rise of the Bangladeshi curry house in the 1960s. "It is impossible to pin it down to one person, but the era is likely to have been then."

In spite of the sneers, the dish's lack of authenticity has not damaged its blazing path through the British food industry. By the 1970s, the explosion in curry houses saw it spreading from London up to the Midlands to become the staple item on every takeaway menu in the land; by the early 80s, it was gaining popularity as a boil in the bag supermarket dish.

"I sold my first CTMs to supermarkets in 1983 from a company I was running in the States," says G.K. Noon. "It wasn't until 1989 that the first British supply chain started up, when Birds Eye put in an order and started distributing them throughout the supermarket chains."

By June 1999, CTM had received the ultimate gong in market saturation/blandification: Burger King launched a Masala Burger, at 99p a go. But, say some tandoori experts, this doesn't mean it should be dismissed out of hand.

"I can't see anything wrong with the fact the most popular dish in Indian restaurants isn't actually from the Indian Subcontinent at all," says George Dorgan, editor of the trade journal *Tandoori*. "Food always has to evolve and this is a classic case. "What I have noticed, however, is that while CTM remains popular, the newer restaurants with more modern menus are beginning to diversify their culinary offerings and regional specialities are emerging more."

IQBAL WAHHAB AND EMMA BROCKES IN "SPICE...THE FINAL FRONTIER", IN *THE GUARDIAN*.

Chomsky-speak

Has the Indian government adopted neoliberal economics? There's a tremendous amount of discussion, in the press and everywhere, about neoliberalism and structural adjustment. That's the main topic everybody wants to talk about.

They discuss it as if it's something new, but it's pretty much what India has been subjected to for 300 years. When it's pointed out to them, they tend to recognise it,

because they know their own history. That knowledge contributes to popular resistance to neoliberalism, which is why India hasn't accepted the harshest forms of it.

How far neoliberalism will get in India is an open question. For example, the government is trying to 'liberalise' the media—which means, basically, sell them off to the likes of Rupert Murdoch. The media in India are mostly owned by the rich (as they are virtually everywhere), but they're resisting the attempt to turn them into subsidiaries of a half dozen international mega-corporations.

Although they're pretty right-wing, they'd rather have their own system of control internally than be taken over by outsiders. They've managed to maintain some sort of cultural autonomy...at least so far. There's some diversity in the Indian media...that's very significant. It's much better to have your own right-wing media than Murdoch's.

As mentioned earlier, the same isn't true of India's small advertising industry—it's been mostly bought up by big, mostly American (maybe all American) multinationals. What they push—of course—is foreign products. That undermines domestic production and is harmful to the Indian economy, but many privileged people like it. Somebody always benefits from these programmes.

Intellectual property rights are also a big issue. The new international patent rules are very strict and may well destroy the Indian pharmaceutical industry, which has kept drugs quite cheap. The Indian companies are likely to become subsidiaries of foreign firms, and prices will go up. (The Indian Parliament actually voted the proposed patent rules down, but the government is apparently going to try to institute them anyway.)

There used to be only *process patents*, which permit people to figure out smarter ways to make products. The World Trade Organisation has introduced *product patents*; they allow companies to patent not only a process, but also the product that's the result of the process. Product patents discourage innovation, are very inefficient and undermine markets, but that's irrelevant—they empower the rich and help big multinationals exercise control over the future of pharmaceuticals and biotechnology.

Countries like the US, England and Japan would never have tolerated anything remotely like product patents, or foreign control of their press, during their

development. But they're now imposing this sort of 'market discipline' on the Third World, as they did throughout the colonial period. That's one reason India is India, and not the US.

Another example is recruitment of scientists. Foreign firms pay salaries way beyond what Indian researchers are used to, and set up research institutes with facilities Indian scientists can't dream of getting anywhere else. As a result, foreign firms can skim off the best scientists.

The scientists may be happy, and the companies are happy. But it's not necessarily good for India, which once had some of the most advanced agricultural research in the world.

An Indian farmer used to have a place he could go to and say, *There's some funny pest in my fields. Can you take a look at it?* Now that's being bought up by foreign firms, and will therefore be oriented towards export crops for specialised markets, and subsidised foreign imports that will undercut domestic production.

There's nothing new about this. It's part of a long history of 'experiments' carried out by the powerful of the world. The first major one in India was what the British called the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which rearranged all the land holdings in Bengal.

When the British Parliament looked into this 30 or 40 years later, they conceded that it was a disaster for the Bengalis. But they also pointed out that it enriched the British, and created a landlord class in Bengal, subordinated to British interests, that could control the population.

NOAM CHOMSKY INTERVIEWED BY DAVID BARSAMIAN IN
THE COMMON GOOD (ODONIAN PRESS, 1998).

Muhajir muddle

The Census of Pakistan (1951) recorded 7,226,600 Muhajirs, the term it used to denote 'person[s] who had entered Pakistan on account of Partition or for fear of disturbances connected therewith', thus including those who had chosen to make the migration in those uncertain circumstances and those who were immediately forced to by the acute violence. As has already been noted by a number of scholars, the word 'Muhajir' was consciously employed by the Pakistani state in reference to the migration undertaken by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in order to imbue the migrations with a religious meaning, and to impart to the emplaced population their receiving role as Ansars.

The Muhajirs had a categorical visibility in this Census, with tabulations of their 'Proportion in the population', their 'Economic Categories', and an enumeration of their 'Birthplaces and Places of Origin'. The fact that Muhajirs had come from many different parts of what was now India was almost a source of pride. Most maps depicted only outlines of the two disconnected entities of East and West Pakistan, with numbers indicating how many people came from which part of In-

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dia. The maps seem to cartographically reassert the claim that Pakistan was predicated on its ability to represent, not just the Muslims of the Muslim majority provinces that fell within its territorial borders, but the Muslims of the entire Subcontinent, a single Muslim nation. In moving from a non-territorially defined nation to a territorially limited one, the refugees/Muhajirs were thus the key to imagining the completion of the claim to nationhood. It is significant, then, that there were no maps included showing the outward movement of people, or tables with numbers for Muslims who remained outside Pakistan's territorial borders.

While most of the refugees were recorded as accommodated in Punjab and Bahawalpur (5,281,200 or 73 percent), and only about 616,900 (or 8.5 percent) in Karachi, Karachi underwent a dramatic change—from a caste Hindu population that, according to the 1941 census, formed 47.6 of the city, to only 0.4 percent in 1951, with Muhajirs now forming 55 percent of Karachi's quickly growing population; 50.4 percent had Urdu as their 'Mother tongue'.

While most of the Muhajirs who went to Punjab are no longer recognised by that name, it is these Urdu-speaking Muhajirs who came to Karachi and other centres of Sind who have retained their identity as such. In most scholarly writings on Pakistan, this category of identity is taken as unproblematic given the attention directed to state-centred struggles for political power in which the MQM [the Muhajir Quami Movement, now called the Muttahida Quami Movement] has been a relatively recent player. Instead, taking the history of the emergence of MQM as a given, I want to focus on the category of identity itself by turning to Oskar Verkaiak's ethnography of the Muhajirs of Karachi, *A People of Migrants: Ethnicity, State and Religion in Karachi* (1994). Based on 70 interviews conducted between August 1993 and January 1994 and archival research in Dawn's library, he examines the cultural 'webs of significance' that make the Muhajir identity. On the other hand, he argues that he cannot capitalise 'muhajir' identity as equal to 'Sindhis, Punjabis, British, etc'. This raises the question of whether Verkaiak simply thinks that some identities are culturally constructed, while others are not, or that there is something else that is significantly different about *muhajirs*. Though Verkaiak himself does not recognise this bind, his ambiguity towards Muhajirs does point to the liminality of Muhajir identity—the difference between Sindhis/Punjabis and Muhajirs is that the former are territorially defined identities, while Muhajirs are not.

This becomes even clearer as Verkaiak describes the political and cultural world of Muhajirs in their uneasy and shifting location between pro-state and anti-state identification. In Muhajir narratives the phase of separation is imagined as a precondition for nationalist identification, as can be seen in the author Jeelani Chandpuri's statement: "Only they were Pakistanis who came here as Pakistanis and who wanted to live as Pakistanis." Altaf Husain, the leader of the MQM is even more eloquent on the subject:

Don't you know that Hindustan's minority-province Muslims sacrificed two million lives? We are the heirs of those two million Muslims... The story of their looted homes and valuables, is our story. We have a right to Pakistan, and it is a right of blood, we gave blood for it.

Further, their liminality, or 'uprootedness', is asserted as a precondition for national identification when Altaf Husain notes that they are a "group without a province, and whose only association is with Pakistan", where "province" signifies a prior territorially rooted identity. Given the properties of liminality, this "uprootedness" also becomes a precondition for the absence of national identification. Verkaiak comments that the meaning of the word Muhajir had changed: "Once it had meant 'welcome'"; now it means: "You are not from here". Marked by their 'Indian heritage', Verkaiak recounts how in 1988, with the first taste of electoral power, MQM members of the National Assembly went to the inaugural session in Islamabad in their tight North Indian pajamas. It created a stir in the press and Muhajirs were immediately dubbed as bearers of a "pajama culture". Verkaiak pays attention to the symbolism of clothes in the assertion of nationalism, and reads the stir over pajamas as a consequence of the salwar kameez being declared, first, the Awami dress by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and then, the national dress by General Zia-ul Haq.

Indian-Pakistani, Pakistani-not-Indian, not-Pakistani-Indian, not-Pakistani-not-Indian—the predicament of the Muhajir identity is most movingly summed up by one of Verkaiak's informants: "It was horrible. He was so nostalgic before he died. He had expected to be a Pakistani but he realised he would die as a muhajir, still a migrant."

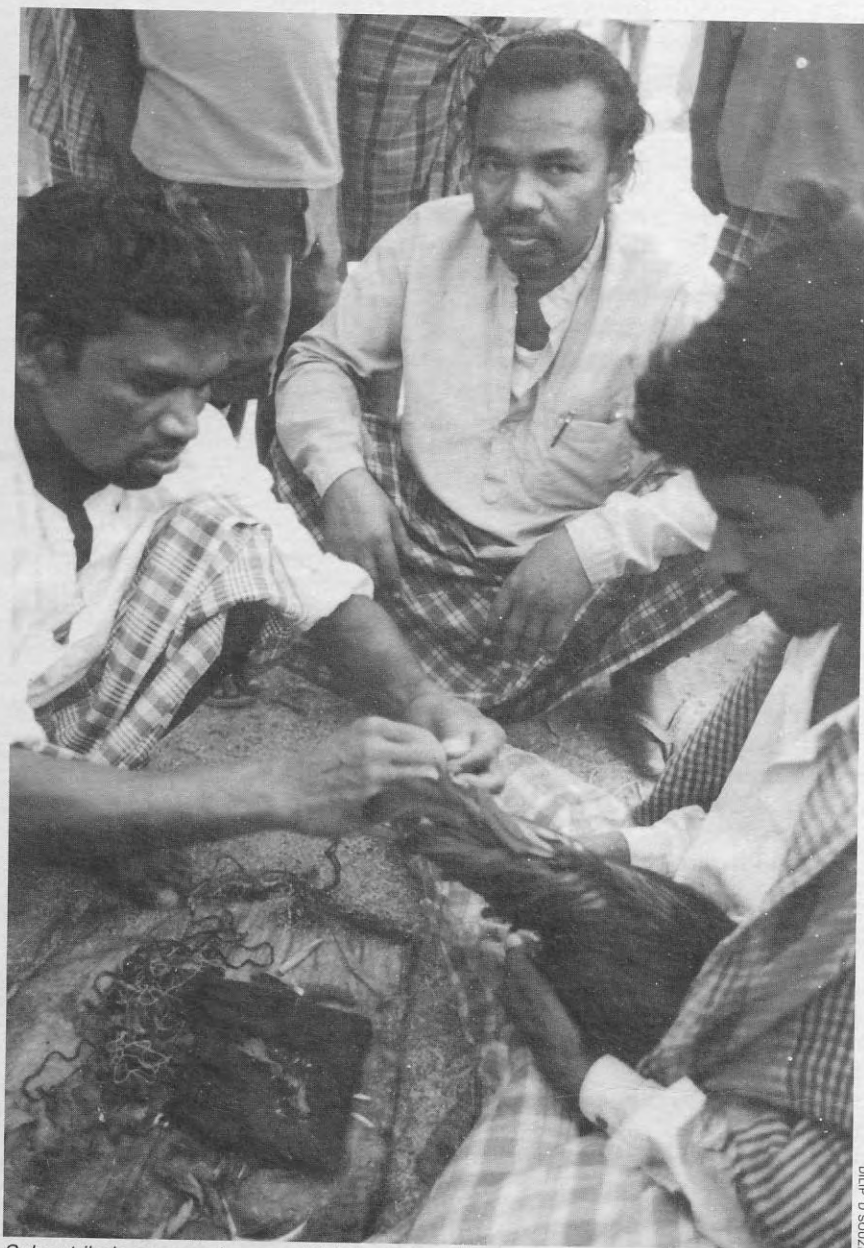
VAZIRA FAZILA-YACOOBALI IN "A RITE OF PASSAGE: THE PARTITION OF HISTORY AND THE DAWN OF PAKISTAN" FROM *INTERVENTIONS: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES*, VOL 1, NO 2.

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Guilty, until proven g

If the Pardhi tribespeople are genetically criminals, then those who see them so are genetically colonised.

by Dilip D'Souza



Sabar tribals prepare for a cockfight in Purulia district, West Bengal.

In 1932, a British army officer, Lieutenant-General Sir George MacMunn, wrote a book called *The Underworld of India*. In this not-quite-scholarly treatise, MacMunn rambles at length about all that he found dark and dreaded while on his tour of duty in India. In particular, he has a chapter titled "Criminal Tribes and Classes", where he says of India's 'criminal' tribes: "[T]hey are absolutely the scum, the flotsam and jetsam of Indian life, of no more regard than the beasts of the field."

Sprinkled through the rest of the chapter are several other references to such tribes, all about as derogatory. The Chantichors ("Bundle-stealers") are all "feckless and unstable"; the Harnis have a "gift for humbugging the world"; the Ramoshis were employed by the British as watchmen, but such a watchman "is always an incorrigible pander, being prepared to produce ladies of the flimsiest virtue at the shortest notice"; Vanjari women are "bright and comely [with] well-moulded breasts", and are "adept no doubt in venery". In fact, MacMunn makes it a point to comment on the women of nearly every tribe he mentions: all are invariably "comely" yet "hopelessly immoral". (MacMunn also has an astonishing tendency to refer to women as "baggages".)

Read 70 years later, the general's language seems quaint at best. It is hard to imagine a writer of serious pretensions today describing a whole people in the terms he uses. Yet that is what MacMunn does;

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because that is indeed how criminal tribes were viewed in colonial India.

Congenital criminals

In 1871, the British passed the "Criminal Tribes Act", which notified about 150 tribes around India as 'criminal', giving the police wide powers to monitor their movements and arrest them. The effect of this law was simple: just being born into one of these tribes made you a criminal. This was not seen as particularly odd; there was even a notion that it was just the way things were meant to be in a caste-ridden India. As T.V. Stephens, a British official of the time, said, while introducing the bill that became the Act: "...people from time immemorial have been pursuing the caste system defined job-positions: weaving, carpentry and such were hereditary jobs. So there must have been hereditary criminals also who pursued their forefathers' profession."

Why did the British feel the need for such an Act? Arguably, it was part of an entire model of how law and order was to be preserved in

the colony. To the British, India must have seemed a hair-raisingly anarchic and volatile place. Nineteenth-century England's rather more settled society meant that the police there had begun focusing on protecting private property; in India, simply keeping public order was work enough and became the prime job description of the police. Strife and conflict were everywhere in this vast country; there were tensions entirely different from anything the British had known at home. There was little hope of being able to contain them all.

Consciously or not, a strategy evolved, of concentrating the limited resources and efforts of the police on selected, visible targets. There were groups who were known for committing crimes, and there was also the campaign the British had waged from the 1830s onwards to suppress the thuggee cult. The idea must have been a seductive one: that certain people were congenital criminals and needed to be policed harshly. The police used that idea to build a broad perception about crime, and how it had to be tackled was by singling out such groups. In *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India 1850-1950*, the Cambridge University historian Rajnarayan Chandavarkar explains: "[The police had] necessarily to rely upon a general consensus about which groups in society were especially prone to criminal activity and might constitute, therefore, the proper objects of policing. ...[B]y enacting this principle of selection [of particular groups], the colonial state was able to create criminal tribes and castes."

Criminal tribes, then, became a convenient target, a scapegoat — and this is said without meaning to imply that they were en-

tirely free of crime. By acting against them, the state could keep up at least a pretence of law enforcement — even if other, more serious crimes took place and were left unpunished. Writes Chandavarkar: "While in reality crime went largely unreported and unrecorded, police reports and memoirs...described in painstaking detail crimes of savage brutality or extraordinary guile and cunning or those which reflected exotic customs and elaborate rituals. [T]his was particularly the case with...the criminal tribes and castes, whose supposed criminality was represented as an inheritance and a profession, inextricably connected to their lineage and genealogy."

Subsistence thieving

In those lurid police records were born a certain view of certain tribes that made it easy to brand them criminal. It appears repeatedly in the Gazettes, the remarkably detailed accounts by British officials of happenings in the districts. For instance, Volume XII of the 1880 Bombay Presidency Gazette has these notes about Pardhis, groups of whom this writer has been spending time with in the rural areas of Maharashtra: "[T]hey are still fond of hunting and poaching and have not got rid of their turn for thieving... The Phase Pardhi [a sub-tribe] is nearly always ragged and dirty, walking with a sneaking gait."

Unfortunately, views like that have long outlived the British administration in India. This is true even though a newly independent India repealed the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952. They were no longer to be called "criminal", but "denotified tribes". Nevertheless, nearly half a century later, they are still routinely called "criminal". Other than activists and scholars, virtually nobody refers to them as DNTs. Not even policemen. The term is known, as is its Hindi equivalent *vimukta jati*, but "criminal" is what they get called. And criminal is what they are seen to be.

A typical example is in a report in Calcutta's *The Telegraph* (31 July,



Hut in a Sabar hamlet, Purulia.

DILIP D'SOUZA

1998). Commenting on a series of robberies by Pardhis in the state of Madhya Pradesh, it says the tribe is "identified as having criminal antecedents", that they are "listed as [a] criminal ethnic group". Which is an error of course, because such listing lapsed when the CT Act was repealed in 1952. Besides, the chief minister of the state is quoted complaining that his state's "projects to provide these people with education did not have any impact on their criminal instincts".

When the highest elected official in a state refers to the "criminal instincts" of these tribals, when newspapers write easily of their "criminal antecedents", there seems little hope that they will ever be seen as ordinary human beings. Sure enough, nearly everyone I have spoken to about Pardhis – policemen, industrialists, students, professors, villagers – has assumed that they have a propensity for crime. That assumed propensity is the starting



Members of a Pardhi family, Maharashtra.

point for discussion.

Of course, some DNTs do indulge in crime, and their crimes range from stealing pomegranates from fields to burglaries in which people get murdered. A retired police constable in Satara district, Maharashtra, showed several lists of Pardhis (gangs), each centred on one family engaging in banditry that wander the district. He knew the particular methods of each toli, what their beats were. The police station in Phaltan, a large town in Satara, had pictures of several Pardhis wanted for crimes in the area, some of whose names were in the lists the retired constable showed me.

But there are contexts to, and reasons for, such crime. They deserve consideration. Take what anthropologist Stephen Fuchs wrote in *The Aboriginal Tribes of India* (1973): "[A]

number of [such tribes] are passionately nomadic, and since foodgathering and hunting in the jungle, in the traditional manner, is often impossible, they have switched over to the rather dangerous... life of 'foraging' in the fields, villages and towns... This has gained them a bad reputation and in the British times some of them were branded [criminal] and held under close police supervision. Since Independence this stigma has been taken from them, but the watch over them by the police has not much relaxed... They are forced by the prevailing adverse circumstances to practise subsistence thieving."

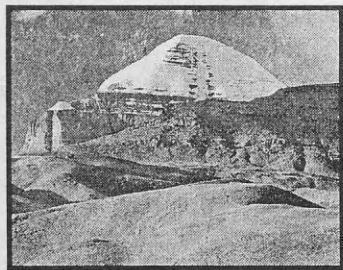
Pardhi predicament

If there are Pardhis who commit crimes, at least part of the blame lies in the fact that life "in the traditional manner" is no longer an option. Societal attitudes that leave them with no choice, are also a factor. Time and again, the writer has met Pardhis who recount how the local schools do not allow their children to attend classes. If they do manage to stay in school and graduate, jobs are hard to get. After a meeting near Phaltan where several speakers urged Pardhis to educate their children, and especially their girls, one woman pointed to her grown daughter. "I struggled so she could graduate from school," she said. "But now nobody will give her a job because she is a Pardhi. What's the use of all this talk of education?"

And yet there are Pardhis who manage to rise despite the prejudice. I spent an afternoon last June with a 24-year-old Pardhi who is a respected school teacher in the town of Dahivadi (also Satara District). In another family, both daughters are educated, one son is in the army and the other is a wireman with the state electricity board. Among the other Pardhis I met, several men find work as labourers, either in fields or on construction sites in cities. Others are hired by farmers to guard their fields (on the age-old theory that you need a thief to catch a thief). Some are raising crops on land al-

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lotted by the government under various schemes. In West Bengal, I met the Sabars who raise river fish for sale; others breed roosters for the regular cockfights in the area.

Even so, the police continue to round up DNTs every time there is a crime—petty or major. This applies in cities as well as in rural areas; in fact the first time this writer heard about Pardhis was when two were arrested for a burglary in a Bombay suburb. And rounding up can only mean a sound thrashing at the police station.

Consider this incident, that of a Pardhi called Pinya Hari Kale who was picked up in Baramati, Maharashtra, on 8 June, 1998. Since the arrest of a Pardhi merely on suspicion is quite normal, his wife, Chan-

drasena, was not particularly perturbed when he did not return home that night. As she told the Bombay High Court in a petition, she “expected him to be detained and released”.

Instead, he died. The police claimed that Kale “fell down” while trying to escape the constables and succumbed to injuries, a claim corroborated by the post-mortem. A second post-mortem, at Chandrasena's insistence, found that Kale had died “due to multiple blunt injuries with evidence of head injury”. A subsequent Criminal Investigation Department (CID) inquiry concluded that three constables and a sub-inspector had beaten Kale “with sticks and belt”, leading to his death early on 9 June. The CID has filed

complaints against all four men who have been suspended while further investigation takes place.

What happened to Kale is not something out of ordinary in the experience of the denotified tribes. Police harassment occurs, and tend to be condoned, solely because these tribes are seen as criminal.

There are, nevertheless, some signs of hope. In the immediate instance, the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG) (see box) informed the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) about the Kale case. The human rights body ruling on 22 December 1998 directed that, because there was a “strong prima facie evidence”, the State of Maharashtra ought to pay Kale's family INR 200,000 (c. USD 4500) in compensation. It also directed the State to consider action against the magistrate and the doctor who conducted the first post-mortem, for “doctoring the inquest report to suit the offenders”.

Cases like this one may be the first signs of a small turn in the tide. In awarding compensation and recommending punishment, the NHRC implicitly recognised the rights of such tribes, and the injustice they live under daily. But it still does not amount to much yet. In particular, we need to see if the policemen are really punished. But it is a step away from the widespread attitudes these tribes have always had to face.

Historian Chandavarkar writes that even though they were the focus of much police action, “the criminal tribes were scarcely, by the late 19th century, a potent threat to social order”. In the late 20th century, much the same applies to these “flotsam and jetsam of Indian life”. ▲

(This article is part of Dilip D'Souza's study of India's Denotified and Nomadic Tribes on a National Foundation for India Fellowship for 1998-99. He is now working on a book on the subject.)

DNT-RAG

* It is difficult to say exactly how many people from the DNTs there are in India. But most observers believe their number to be between 20 and 30 million. Census takers are often reluctant to work among DNTs because of their perceived criminality; this makes their numbers harder to gauge. Each state in the country has its share of denotified tribes. Some of these tribes are small, like the Sabars of West Bengal, while others are much larger—like the Pardhis, who are found from Punjab all the way south to Karnataka.

* The Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG) was founded after a conference in Baroda in March 1998. Mahasweta Devi, the Bengali writer-activist, was invited to speak of her work with the Kheria Sabar ‘ex-criminal’ tribe in West Bengal. DNT-RAG was started by Mahasweta Devi, together with two others: Laxman Gaikwad, an award-winning author and activist from Maharashtra, himself a member of the Uchlya denotified tribe; G.N. Devy, professor of English, well-known writer and head of the Bhasha Research Centre in Baroda, which conducts research in tribal languages.

Since then, DNT-RAG has worked on getting justice for the families of Pinya Kale and Budhan Sabar (a DNT similarly killed in West Bengal); and were able to get the killers of Bhikabhai Bajania (a member of Gujarat's Bajania tribe) in Ahmedabad arrested. The group has also set up four community development centres for these tribes in Gujarat, Bengal and Maharashtra.

As part of its ongoing activism, DNT-RAG compiled and submitted to the NHRC a comprehensive report on the status of the DNTs. DNT-RAG also publishes the journal *Budhan* (named for Budhan Sabar) every two months, which carries news and research reports about the DNTs.

Direct inquiries to: DNT-RAG, 6 United Avenue, Near Dinesh Mill, Baroda 390007, Gujarat, India. Telephone: (+91-265) 331968/351487. Fax: (+91-265) 331130. Annual subscription to *Budhan*: INR 110 in India, USD 100 outside.

The Netaji files

by *Sujoy Dhar*

Fifty-four years after his mysterious disappearance in an air crash in Taiwan in 1945, controversy continues over the 'death' of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Generation after generation of Bengalis have dismissed Bose's death in the said air crash citing lack of corroborative evidence. But for all their emotional attachment to one of the most enduring icons of Indian patriotism, and (let it not be forgotten) Bengali pride, few had ever given thought to righting a historical wrong done to this legendary freedom fighter. This concerns his unclear status as a war criminal for leading the Indian National Army (INA) against the British during World War II.

In March this year, responding to demands made by participants at a convention on Bose that the government act towards getting the British government to remove his name from the roll of war criminals, Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani said that, as per information received from London, Bose had never been declared a war criminal. This prompted Oslo-based Bengali economist and Subhas Chandra Bose researcher, Amalendu Guha, to seek clarification from the chairman of the International Court of Justice on whether charges of war crime brought against Bose by the British government during World War II had later been withdrawn. (The Nuremberg trial documents refer to Bose as an Indian nationalist opposing Gandhi, and as one who had declared sympathy for Germany in World War II and had accepted an invitation to go to Germany.)

The response from the International Court only added to the confusion. The Court said it had no evidence of war criminal charges against Subhas Chandra Bose. "In the archives of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal which

were deposited with the International Court of Justice, no trace could be found of charges against Subhas Chandra Bose," wrote a Court official. But he also added that further research had produced some references to Bose in the so-called ministries case (*USA vs Ernst von Weizsacker et al*) before the US Military Tribunal IV, which was created by Ordinance No 7 of the military government, Germany, United States zone. According to the official, the Court does not possess the archives of those tribunals, only the published record of their proceedings.

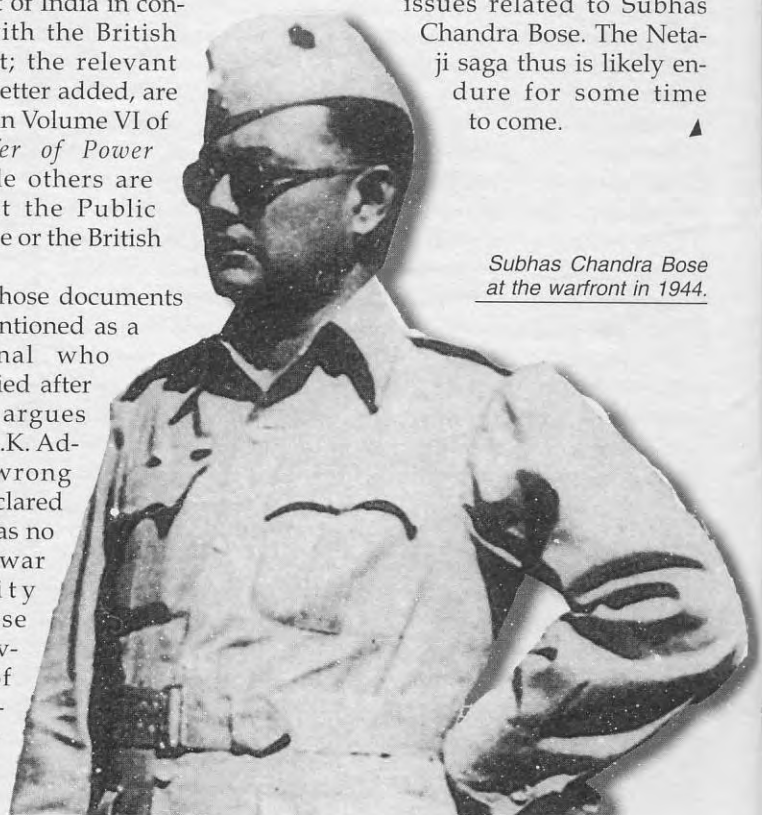
Guha had earlier written to British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the reply from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had said that the question of Subhas Chandra Bose and other members of the INA, was considered in 1945 by the Government of India in consultation with the British government; the relevant papers, the letter added, are to be found in Volume VI of *The Transfer of Power* series, while others are available at the Public Record Office or the British Library.

"But in those documents Netaji is mentioned as a war criminal who would be tried after the War," argues Guha. "Mr L.K. Advani was wrong when he declared that there was no charges of war criminality against Bose from the Government of India because the independent gov-

ernment in 1947 inherited all liabilities from the former royal British government."

"Ironically, the British Prime Minister did not hesitate to reply to my letter on the issue while the highest authority in India never cared to respond. This shows how the Indian official circle and certain principal political parties treat Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his contribution for the country's freedom struggle," says the professor. "It is sad that Netaji, who was recognised by Gandhiji as the Patriot of Patriots and lives in the hearts of millions of Indians as the greatest freedom fighter, should be still branded as a war criminal officially and the government does nothing to revoke the tag."

The matter is hardly closed. More will be heard on this front, promises Ashok Ghosh—general secretary of the West Bengal unit of Forward Bloc, the party founded by Bose—when the question is raised yet again in the Netaji Inquiry Commission, set up by the central government to probe into all issues related to Subhas Chandra Bose. The Netaji saga thus is likely endure for some time to come. ▲



Subhas Chandra Bose at the warfront in 1944.

'The Muslim Buddhist'

Akhtar Hameed Khan (1914-1999)

by *Tarik Ali Khan*

The death of Akhtar Hameed Khan came as an ominous portent on the eve of Pakistan's military takeover. While the rest of the country waited anxiously to see how Pakistan would deal with its latest democratic failure, the rural development guru was quietly laid to rest in the arid soil of Orangi, the periurban Karachi settlement where he had tirelessly worked for nearly two decades to instill the spirit of self-help.

Pakistan's policy-makers may have ignored Khan's calls for simplicity, renunciation and self-reliance, but his work has made a difference in the lives of the countless many in Bangladesh and Pakistan and inspired development scholars both in the Subcontinent and the West.

(An interview with Akhtar Hameed Khan and a companion article by Tarik Ali Khan on him and his work in Orangi appeared in the August 1998 issue of *Himal*.)

"Khan Sahib", as he was known, was born to a Pathan family from Agra in 1914. After receiving an MA from Agra University in 1934, he joined the Indian Civil Service and served as a probationer at Cambridge University. However he soon became disillusioned with life as a colonial civil servant. He had participated in the central planning that contributed to the 1943 Bengal famine and the decay of the British Empire was as apparent to him as the growing poverty of the Subcontinent. He chose to make a genuine renunciation and explore the life of the common man. He resigned from the ICS in 1945 and began to work as a locksmith.

Renunciation was an important theme in his life. Greatly influenced in his early life by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the 19th-century reformer who founded the Aligarh Muslim University and encouraged the Muslim *shurfa* (middle class) to synthesise Western knowledge and Islamic thought, Khan's later influences in-

cluded Tolstoy, the Sufi mystics and the Buddha. He liked to refer to himself as a "Muslim Buddhist". "Why did Buddha give up his princehood to become a wandering mendicant?" he once mused. "Because the way to discover the meaning of life is through controlling your instincts, controlling greed, hatred and delusion."

After two years of locksmithery, he taught at the Jamia Millia University in Delhi, before migrating to East Pakistan in 1950 where he was appointed principal of Comilla College. He later became

the director of US-sponsored village agricultural and industrial development (V-AID) projects.

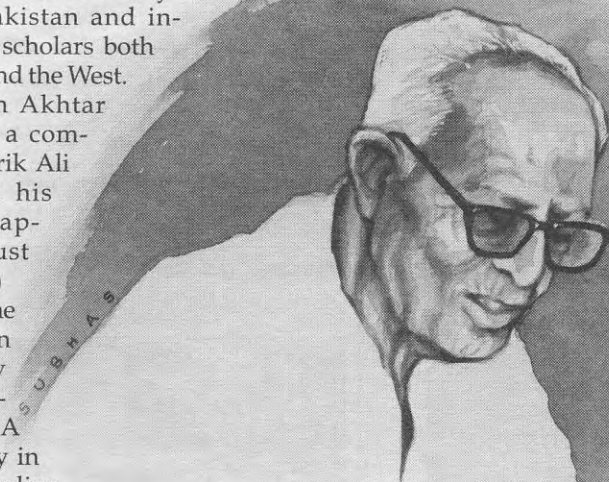
He spent a year at Michigan State University and returned as the training director of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development in Comilla.

Working at the lowest level of government and with the backing of Prime Minister Ayub Khan and the Americans, Khan focussed on improving rural infrastructure: link roads and irrigation channels. Various development fads

like community development and V-AID came and went, and all the while

Comilla blossomed. Its training centres, rural works projects, and peasants' cooperatives soon became models of organised development. But despite, or because of, its success, Khan was branded a CIA agent by local enemies who were none too happy with his growing influence in the area.

In 1969, he left Comilla to teach at Michigan State University. He returned to Pakistan in the late 1970s and became adviser to Comilla-style pilot projects at Daudzai near Peshawar, and to the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in the Pakistan's Northern Areas. Over the years he became a visiting professor at Princeton, Harvard and Oxford and was also awarded the Magsaysay Award in addition to Pakistan's highest



dra Bose
in 1944.

honours. It was Orangi, however, that was to be the culmination of Khan's life's work.

In 1980, when he began walking the 7000 acres of the barren Sindh landscape that has now become Karachi's largest illegal settlement, he noted the absence of basic sanitation and other facilities. But, at the same time, he also noticed the industriousness of the migrant settlers—Pathans from the Northwest and Biharis and other 'Muhajirs' from India. He was convinced that change would come not through grants or subsidies, but by harnessing the migrants' spirit of enterprise.

Today, the stench of human waste has disappeared from Orangi. Over 5000 sewerage lines and secondary drains have been laid down and 80,000 pour-flush toilets constructed to service the settlement's 95,000 homes. With the sewage taken care of, 750 schools were set up (vastly outnumbering government schools in the area) and nearly 700 clinics established. All this done by Orangi residents with technical and organisational guidance from Khan's brainchild, the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP).

The results have been dramatic. Between 1982 and 1991, Orangi's infant mortality rate dropped from 130 to 34 per 1000 (Pakistan's average is 95 per 1000). The OPP's action research approach soon brought more initiatives: micro-credit, social forestry, low-cost housing construction, and health and family planning. These initiatives may not be new in the world of 'development'. However, it was Khan Sahib's insistence that the people themselves must see the value of each initia-

tive (and be willing to pay for it) that ensured real sustainability.

Khan Sahib referred to the dependence on foreign aid as the *langar khana* (free kitchen) mentality. He once called local development consultants "cheats" and international development consultants "even bigger cheats". He insisted that Pakistan needed a hard programme of development, one that demanded self-sufficiency without donor aid.

Towards the end of his life, Khan Sahib remained disillusioned with Pakistan's leadership and the constraints he faced in pursuing the two things he loved most: scholarship and social work. "I have to avoid controversy at every turn," he would explain. "But the advice of the Sufis is not to care for one's surroundings. The world is within you." Khan Sahib's admirers and friends will long remember his large frame clothed in a simple khadi kurta. They will remember his booming voice quoting instructively from the *Qur'an* in Arabic, Sufi poetry in Persian and the Buddhist sutras in Pali. And they will perhaps reflect on the passing of Akhtar Hameed Khan as the passing of an era. ▲

I believe that if you can accept the fact that you will be parted from your beloved ones and lose what you consider precious, then you have conquered the self. You can't be touched by pain anymore. You can work without thinking of awards or rewards. The pain of living will be diminished and, accepting that reality, you can go ahead. You can live a truly free life.

—Akhtar Hameed Khan



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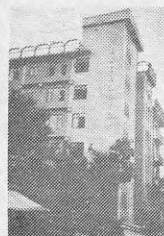
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The Jury from Film South Asia '99 (l to r):
Gautam Ghose, Neloufer de Mel and Salman Shahid.

The jury experience

by **Salman Shahid**

Is there a particular measure with which a film jury determines the quality of films that they view? Most probably, in certain film festivals, there is. Festivals that have been happening for some time now and have matured, probably, have a code for viewing and determining the merit of the wares that they scrutinise. This code might not be overtly stated, but could be discernible as a pattern in the kind of films it has viewed and honoured through the years. But as soon as one talks of a code, it smacks of a certain kind of dogmatism, or almost a pre-conception of what is wrong and what is right, that the jury would bring with it to the screenings.

Happily, Film South Asia (FSA), the biennial festival of South Asian documentaries in venue Kathmandu, is too young to be constrained in any such fashion. It is robustly teething, and has a youthful exuberance. My own experience as a jury member in both the first (in 1997) and the recently held second Film South Asia, has shown that above all, it is the films themselves that determine the method of rating them. Change a few of the set of films, and the response of the jury changes overall. In fact, the body of the 50 or so films play upon one's senses as a single unit. At least at a certain level.

Of course, the responses are also determined by the preferences and the prejudices of each member of the jury. One can only hope that these are not archaic, or do not stake any of the qualities of film-making because of certain other factors, simply because it is fashionable to do so, and so forth. The jury holds in abeyance its decision till the last moment of the festival. Despite a large number of good films viewed, they can only give a few prizes to any number of hopefuls.

The jury knows that now the moment has arrived when they themselves will be judged. The entrants themselves have their own set of preferences and prejudices. They are, if anything, no less competent than the jury to whom they have graciously offered the bounty of their effort for judgement. In the same way that different films combine to influence the jury as a single unit, the jury also perceives the films as a single unit. Change any one member of the jury, and its performance changes. An activist will always focus more on films of social relevance, an aesthete on form, and so on. My own view of the films I saw were influenced by the films as well as by the other jury members. I'm sure the others responded in the same manner to these stimuli.

There were 45 films for competition this year. The bulk, as always, from the vast and diverse cultural mosaic that is India. The others, from the adjoining and not very dissimilar worlds of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. These films represented over a billion people of South Asia.

There are only three top awards to be given at FSA using the criteria of "general excellence". However, there are always films that are worthy of attention and do not fall in any of the top award categories. A tradition has, therefore, emerged of honouring some of these films. In Film South Asia '97, the Bangladeshi *Mukhtir Gaan* was awarded a "Special Mention". This year the brilliant five-minuter animation *Do Flowers Fly* would have been overlooked without a "Special Mention". Then there was *The Forgotten Army* about Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA), astounding in its sweep and incredible in how the

producers had managed to unearth heretofore unseen archival material related to the INA's emergence in Singapore and its heroic confrontation of the Allied forces. The film was awarded a Grand Jury Prize.

As if that were not enough, the first and second prizes were shared by two films each. The third 'best' was *Buddha Weeps in Jadugada*, an investigative report on the despoliation, as well as economic and human misery caused by uranium mining and related waste in Bihar. I was quite amazed to later learn that the film was made using ordinary home video equipment, and transferred to Beta for the purposes of the Festival. The film was also one of the few shown in competition whose commentary was in the local vernacular, and not in English.

Pure Chutney shared the second prize with *Three Women and a Camera*. The former deals with the Indian diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago—the question of identities in a mixed society; the problems related to clinging to one's cultural ethos in a hybrid world, and the tragedy of being uprooted from one's soil because of the colonial holocaust. *Three Women and a Camera*, on the other hand, is a meticulous exposition of the way three women photographers related to different periods of contemporary Indian history, and had wittingly allied themselves with the various epochs of the women's movement, which in turn moulded their art. Unlike *Pure Chutney's* romping, casual style of storytelling, *Three Women* has been executed with extreme cinematographic care, echoing formalistic concerns, ideals and questions that the three extremely gifted and eloquent protagonists of the film posed for themselves.

The first prize went to *Thin Air* and *No One Believes the Professor*. *Thin Air* is remarkable for numerous reasons. Like *Three Women*, it deals with three lives. Three magicians' lives. The distinguishing feature between *Thin Air* and *Three Women* is that the protagonists of the former are victims of a fate that they cannot possibly contrive to re-fashion. They are not eloquent in the manner that the three women are. They are the victims, not the masters of their fate. When they speak, we discover the folly of their words. When they act, we discover the folly of their motives. They do not even have the relief of sighing into retirement, instead they gasp for life towards the end of their years. Denuded even of their own image of their elevated art and their self-respect.

The premise of *No One Believes the Professor* is almost similar. He also lives in his delusions. A man who oscillates between sanity and insanity, the Professor has not even confronted his delusions. Instead, he has elaborated them into a fine madness. The remarkable thing about the film is that it has found in its protagonist, a metaphor, which transcends his and our own earthbound existence. And remarkably, his insanity is what is enlightening, transcendental and spiritually edifying. The director keeps us constantly aware of the

fact that what he has before us is documentary evidence. This is done through the use of hand-held camera, unsteady shots, jump cuts and his own voluble (recorded) promptings and intercessions. But the Professor has made such a fiction of his life that his very presence defies the formalities of documentary, stretching the genre to the limits and almost seeming to defy the division between fictional works and documentary.

There were also other works of excellence at the Festival. FSA happily has another method of rewarding some of these: by inclusion into a travelling exhibition. A total of 15 films travelled through South Asia, Europe and North America after the first Festival. A similar number will take a wider route this year and throughout the next.

The travelling festival is a window on South Asia as well as a tribute to the development of the documentary genre in our part of the world. I wish the travelling festival a happy and auspicious voyage. I am sure it will present the case of South Asia more truthfully than the self-serving official handouts of the various governments of this region. ▲

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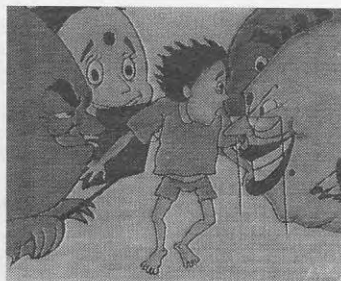


Jury citation from Film South Asia '99

Special Jury Mention

Do Flowers Fly (directed by Prosenjit Ganguly)

For its skill and imagination in encapsulating in a very short film the negative consequences of forms of education that are tiresome rather than helpful to the student.



Grand Jury Award

The Forgotten Army (directed by Kabir Khan)

For recapturing an important moment in the struggle for Indian independence from the British colonial yoke. For bringing to light heretofore unknown archival material of the war waged by the Indian National Army on the Eastern Front, humanely portrayed through the reminiscences of certain INA veterans.



Third Prize

The Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda (directed by Shriprakash)

For a bold and unrelenting treatment of an alarming subject of contemporary times; for a good example of the genre of investigative documentary; for telling the twin stories, one, of the nuclear menace, the other, of its dire effects on a vulnerable minority fringe people, the Adivasis.



Second Prize

Pure Chutney (directed by Sanjeev Chatterjee)

For exploring a complex theme of identity within the Indian diaspora in the Americas, the intertwining of colonialism and its legacies of racism and communalism in their contemporary articulation; for creating interest in the larger and pertinent issues of collective identities.



Three Women and a Camera (directed by Sabeena Godihoke)

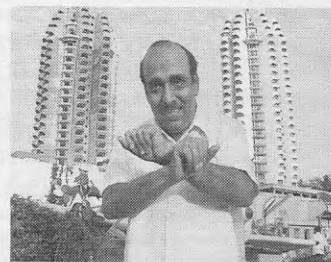
For portraying through the lives and work of three women photographers a social history that spans generations and different political eras; for being a well structured film; for asking important questions for the feminist movement.



First Prize

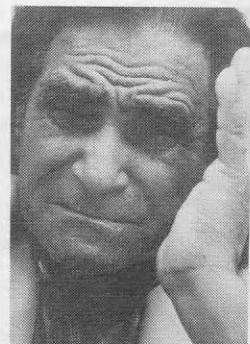
Thin Air (directed by Ashim Ahluwalia)

For documenting, through the lives of three magicians, a changing world, from a generation that has an uncompromising faith in their art to the present-day commodification of entertainment and pleasure, and the pride of the artists in their respective positions; for its treatment of a subtle subject, often providing the viewer with a "truth" unknown to the subjects themselves.



No One Believes the Professor (directed by Farjad Nabi)

For finding a metaphor in the person of the Professor that was both eccentrically imagined and real; for showing the life of a deeply individualistic man refusing the collectivity of his changing society; for a dramatic and poignant treatment of the real, unreal and surreal in a style.



Announcing Travelling Film South Asia

Film South Asia '99, the second edition of the festival of South Asian documentaries, was successfully held in Kathmandu from 30 September-3 October 1999. Altogether 52 films from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were screened at FSA '99, drawing filmmakers and media activists from all over the Subcontinent as well as a connoisseur Kathmandu audience.

The films at FSA '99 proved that over the last two years there has been a surge in the quality and variety of documentaries being made in the region. The organisers, Himal Association and Himal magazine, are therefore proud to announce the start of yet another Travelling Film South Asia (TFSA).

As with FSA '97, a selection of 15 outstanding films from the festival will now start their journey all over the Subcontinent and the world, showcasing the best of South Asian documentary-making and giving audiences an opportunity to sample the enormous range and variety available. The 15 films (see list below) have been chosen with the help of the festival's three-member jury and include six that received awards at FSA '99. TFSA will begin its rounds in December 1999 and continue through mid-2000.

Over the course of 1998, the last travelling festival went to more than 30 venues, from New Delhi to New York, Bangalore to Berkeley to Bonn. The organisers expect the present TFSA to touch down in more cities, and we encourage groups interested in hosting the travelling fest to contact us. Due to the advances in projection systems linked to VHS, the logistics of organising film festivals have now become relatively simple, and the festival secretariat helps with an efficient package of tapes and information materials. We organise the travelling festival in the belief that it plays an important role in expanding the audience for the South Asian documentary film.

HOSTING TFSA:

The TFSA package comes with VHS tapes, TFSA posters, festival catalogues, images for display, and other support material. The films will all be available in high-quality VHS tapes to be screened through projection systems. We suggest that the 15 films, which vary significantly in length, be screened over three consecutive afternoons-evenings, but a more flexible schedule may also be considered.

The festival will only travel to cities where host organisations are willing to take up full responsibility for publicity, screenings and all associated logistics. The host organisations will also have to take the responsibility of couriering the tapes to the next venue in their part of the world.

Costs: There is no charge levied on exhibitors within South Asia. Beyond the region, an all-inclusive charge of USD 600 per venue is levied by the TFSA organisers in order to defray all festival-related costs (anything left over will go to the organisation of Film South Asia '01, to be held in September 2001). Please note that the films in the TFSA package may only be screened non-commercially. This means that admission tickets may be sold (if at all) only to help defray exhibition costs.

The following is the list of films selected for the Travelling Film South Asia, and includes brief description of films as well as name(s) of director(s), year of production, length and country/region. All films are in English or subtitled in English.

1. **Don't Pass Me By**—Eclectic profiles of 'macho' locals, and tourists who come to blow their minds and muscles at the Nepali resort town of Pokhara. Sarah Kapoor, Christina Lamey and Kristi Vuorinen. 1999. 40 min. Nepal.
2. **Duhshomoy** (A Mother's Lament)—Recreation of events surrounding the pick-up of a 16-year-old garment factory worker by the Dhaka police, who is allegedly gang raped and sent to prison for 'safe custody', where she dies under mysterious circumstances. Yasmine Kabir. 1999. 26 min. Bangladesh.
3. **Fishers of Men**—Adivasis of the Chottanagpur plateau have been converting into Christians for over a century but of late Hindu activists have launched campaigns to bring them 'back'. Ranjan Kamath and Padmavathi Rao. 1997. 117 min. Madhya Pradesh/India.
4. **The Forgotten Army**—An expedition with some veterans of Subash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army to retrace their historic march and the events that took place between 1942 and 1945. Winner of Grand Jury Prize at FSA '99. Kabir Khan. 1997. 105 min. Pre-1947 India.
5. **Jibon** (Life)—In Guwahati, a mother perseveres as her 12-year-old school-going son comes down with Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy, which has no cure. An impossible situation confronted with unflinching hope. Altaf Mazid. 1998. 56 min. Assam/India.
6. **A Letter to Samten**—Narrated through a 'personal letter' to the main protagonist by the filmmaker in an attempt to understand Bhutanese life left behind by history in India. Alex Gabbay. 1999. 25 min. Darjeeling District/India.
7. **Listening to Shadows**—An exploration of the worlds of the sighted and the blind, a dialogue between the filmmaker and his visually impaired friend. Koushik Sarkar. 1998. 26 min. Gujarat/India.
8. **Mukthir Kotha** (Words of Freedom)—Bangladeshi villagers recall the liberation war of 1971, their memories jogged by a documentary on the war, *Mukthir Gaan*. Tareque and Catherine Masud. 1999. 80 min. Bangladesh.
9. **No One Believes the Professor**—A surreal voyage with Orpheus Augustus Marcks, a.k.a. Professor Sahib: a Lahori poet, actor, philosopher, athlete, who walks the fine line between genius and divine madness. Joint Winner of the Best Film Award in FSA '99. Farjad Nabi. 1999. 25 min. Punjab/Pakistan.
10. **Pure Chutney**—A US-based Indian writer interacts with the South Asian diaspora in Trinidad, its "preoccupation with India" and explores that complex matter of identity. Joint Winner of the Second Best Film Award at FSA '99. Sanjeev Chatterjee. 1998. 42 min. Trinidad and Tobago.
11. **Ragi: Kana: Ko Bonga Buru** (Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda)—The state needs uranium to be mined, but the consequences of negligence are tragic for a vulnerable rural population in the Bihar plateau. Winner of the Third Best Film Award at FSA '99. Shripakash. 1999. 76 min. Bihar/India.
12. **Skin Deep**—With six first-person narratives, the film traces the eternal search for ideal femininity and how it permeates the self-image of contemporary Indian women. Reena Mohan. 1998. 83 min. India.
13. **Thin Air**—With humour and compassion, sometimes darkly comic and unsettling, three Bombay magicians are shown as they desperately try to make an imprint on the world. Joint Winner of the Best Film Award at FSA '99. Ashim Ahluwalia. 1998. 42 min. Maharashtra/India.
14. **Three Women and a Camera**—One retired and two working women photographers seek to contextualise their work as photographers, as women, and products of their times. Joint Winner of the Second Best Film Award at FSA '99. Sabeena Gadihoke. 1998. 56 min. India.
15. **Voices of Dissent: A Dance of Passion**—Dancing in Pakistan means different things to a classically trained female dancer, a male Kathak dancer, a popular film actress and a mullah. NoorKhan S. Bawa. 1999. 22 min. Pakistan.

For more details about Travelling Film South Asia, including travel schedule, please contact Festival Director Manesh Shrestha at fax + 977-1-541196 or email fsa@mos.com.np

More information on Film South Asia '99, including full listing, jury report, press releases, etc, is available at website <www.himalmag.com/fsa>. The next Film South Asia festival will be held in Kathmandu in September 2001.



DINA'S HOME

by Balaji Venkateswaran

Dina's home is on a hill. A Victorian home, built at the turn of this century and remodelled twice, two storeys high, its window-sills covered with herbs and flowering plants, its shingled roof ending in carved eaves. The windows are large, the hallways bright. The light reflected off the shimmering water of the ocean comes in silver strands through the windows. The curtains are opened wide, because she thinks there should be light in a home, especially this one where the residents come to escape the stygian despair of their lives.

She stands at a window and stares at the seagulls flying across the backdrop of a setting sun; far to the north she can see the Pacific fog rolling inland like a smoke-screen on a movie set.

She is crying silently. One of the residents has just died. Every time someone dies she cries like she did the first time. The sudden shock of finding a woman whom she had fed just a few moments ago lying in bed with a beatific smile had almost made her throw up and run down the hill in fear. Chuck too must have had a happy smile frozen on his face when he let the book he was reading fall on his chest and closed his eyes.

They all die smiling, it must be the light, this glorious light of the western skies that helps them conjure visions of heaven just moments before the light go out of their own eyes. And every time she cries with renewed grief.

'How can you still cry after so many years?' Anna the nurse asks, standing behind Dina at the door. 'I can't cry any more, not a drop more. They come, stay for a while and then they go. Mechanically. Inevitably. An assembly line of dying humans.'

'They don't all die,' Dina answers, wiping her tears, still facing the window, 'I didn't!'

She remembers well the darkness. The darkness that enveloped her so tightly that she almost suffocated and succumbed to its sinister charms. And she has Sasha to thank for her redemption. Old crazy Sasha who had picked her up from under a freeway one evening, taken her home, bathed her, fed her, put her in a hospital and got her cured. He left her his house when he died in a

psychiatric hospital a few months later.

She never figured out why he saved her. Perhaps because he was crazy long before they actually diagnosed it. So am I also crazy? she wonders. Especially when she is letting a little bit of her heart break every time someone in her home dies.

She sits on her bed and stares at the bedspread hung on the wall in front of her. A tableau of scenes from the Mahabharata painted on it in rich shades of red and green and gold and blue and silver. The sage and charioteer, the warrior and the wreck, the chakravayuh spinning its labyrinths, an incongruous peacock dancing in the corner, the infinite yards of fabric that saves a woman's honour. One thing about the painting that still never ceases to amaze her—its brightness. After all these years it has lost none of its lustre and its resplendent hues.

It reminds her of her family. It is the sole surviving piece from the things she had brought with her from India many years ago. At first it hung in her dorm, then served as a cover for her escapades; yet later it was the blanket without which she could never go anywhere. Now, washed off the filth it had acquired during her years in darkness, it was back on the wall, a reminder of her family, the one she left many years ago and never went back to visit.

Now they are a blur: a father whose voice she has forgotten, a mother whose features have dissolved over time, a brother unrecognisable, a stranger. How heart-broken they must be especially from not knowing what became of her. One owes it to one's family to at least tell them where you are.

She is gripped by shame and remorse. For having abandoned them like old clothes. At first she was enjoying herself far too much to think of them; later when she had the time and sanity to do so, she was too ashamed to pick up the phone and call them. What could she tell them? That she had tested their tolerance and faith in her to the limits? And that she had failed? So miserably that she had to be placed under medical care for a month during which her arms and legs shook violently in uncontrollable spasms, her mouth dry, her tongue like a lizard. She had



come perilously close to breaking loose from the restraining straps that pinned her to the hospital bed, almost running back to the underbelly of the city to Mark. Whose bloated body they fished out of the Bay the next morning. Later, with a depressing detachment she'd identified his blackened face in her narcotic-induced stupefaction at the coroner's office.

Mr Jackson is bawling piteously upon discovering that Chuck had died. 'It ain't yet no time for him to go'n die,' he cried. 'He still had a good year or two left.'

Dina put her hand on his shoulder and said, 'A week ago the doctor had told me that he was in a pretty bad shape. At least he died happy.'

'What does that damn doctor know?' Mr Jackson retorted through his tears. 'He don't know nothin' about what us folks goin' through. An' Chuck, he was recovering fast, like nobody else ah've seen. So why him? Why now?'

He buried his face in his hands and let Dina cradle him in her arms. It was he who had philosophically spoken about Chuck a month ago, 'Who says he's dyin'? He ain't dyin' or nothin'. He's waitin' for God!'

Now he was weeping at the loss of a friend of whom he had grown rather fond over the last six months. He suddenly yanked himself out of her arms and cried hoarsely with fear, rage and hurt, 'He may be blond, like the colour of the halo 'round yuh head, but he wuz mah brother, understand? He didn't deserve this! Ah don't deserve this!' He retreated into the next room and banged the door shut.

She doesn't know what to say to him. She decides to let him be for a while. Perhaps he'll go back to his canvas and paint. She thinks the colours he uses are therapeutic, the act of painting a catharsis. He has produced dozens of paintings, of scenes he has only imagined, of events he's never witnessed seething out of his inherited humiliation. Like everyone else at Dina's home, he came in with a history and with the memory of his ancestors as well. His favourite painting depicts a man wearing a joker's costume, three layers oversized lips painted on his face, standing on the stage of a rural carnival, laughingly wiping away the yellow and white of the eggs that people are throwing at his face. Mr Jackson claims that man is his great-grandfather, and that the scene actually took place in rural Mississippi. He was a star attraction there for the white folks. The act of throwing eggs at his face and winning a goat for the maximum number of hits was a challenge immediately taken up.

Mr Jackson had cried when he had finished the painting. It now hangs in the hallway, and everyone who enters Dina's home is caught by its pathos. Dina can hear the sound of a canvas frame being slammed on the easel in the next room. The painting will keep him occupied and calm him down. Satisfied, she goes over to the phone to make arrangements for Chuck's funeral.

Tonight, she remembers her early years: her parents, always the most liberal of people, had no misgivings about sending her to America by herself at a time when very few—if any—single women ventured out of the

hometown. Even in India she had always tested the limits of her parents' liberalness: the boyfriend she flaunted during her college days, a cigarette between her lips; her hair like an angry halo, flared trousers that she stitched at a men's tailor. She was 'an Indian version of a hippie,' a distressed professor once remarked. The men in college, always thrilled to be around her, praised her, 'You're so bindaas, yaar, you put us all to shame!' The women, crinkling their noses even as they grudged her her bright eyes and confidence, called her names.

And yet, when she came to America she felt as though the limits had been stretched just that much beyond her reach. She enthusiastically took up the challenge even as she continued to do brilliantly in academics. It was Charles who first introduced her to the world of college parties, the weekends that drowned the angst of a youth trying to escape the draft in endless drinking sessions. Then it was Petri, John, Hank, Michel, Dan.... She's even forgotten their names.

With every step she took she was sure that her parents would understand, sure that she hadn't reached the limit. Her parents, after all, were the most compassionate people she knew. She felt superior to the other Indian students at the university. She was experiencing a culture that was undergoing a transition; she was witness to a revolution that she knew would change the way the world thought; whereas they were content with burying themselves in books, keeping to themselves and secretly envying her. And the few Indian women she did encounter were utter bores, often provincial and supremely content with the domestic middle-class nirvana they had found. 'You're tethered like stupid, unimaginative cattle,' she'd told one woman once and let out a peal of tinkling laughter at her rage.

And then she met Mark. She left her dorm one day with him, hardly knowing where his beaten-up jalopy would take them. He had taught her to experience ecstasy, to float in unknown worlds from which they could look down upon their earthly existence and laugh it off as a bad dream. It was the mesmerising power of his hooded eyes, his long, uncombed hair, the string of beads around his neck, and the absolutely divine timbre of his whispery voice that had convinced her to leave. She did not have the time to tell her parents or her friends. All she left was a scribbled note on her room-mate's desk that read, 'Going in search of heaven. Don't know when I'll be back. Don't stay up for me.'

They lived in his car, worked odd jobs, sometimes joined groups of people and drove for hours without knowing where they were going, simply following their instincts or the sunset. Incense constantly burned in the car, and they thought they smelt heavenly when the smell of incense mingled with smell of the countryside, their sweat and other bodily odours.

When they chanced upon San Francisco during their aimless peregrinations, Mark said they had finally found heaven. They found lodgings in a house filled with incense smoke, where every room was crammed with people who seemed to be in search of something. They greeted them with open arms. They said her eyes were lovely, her smile soft and vulnerable, that her skin had a texture they had

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never felt before and that it glowed in the dark. They took to her more than they took to Mark, but he never seemed to notice. As they sat on the floor of their commune, his roving eyes studied them all detachedly. Months later, when they fished out his body from the Bay, she had begun to feel the same sense of detachment, her eyes had acquired the same glaze.

She does not remember much of that period in her life. Perhaps it is her instinctively defensive memory that has erased large chunks of her life leaving the rest like a badly-edited film. All she remembers is being perpetually in a daze, sometimes coming home after a night of partying, sometimes lying curled up on the pavement with Mark, shivering under the Mahabharata painting.

After his death she was more often on the pavement than under a roof. That is, until crazy Sasha found her under a freeway overpass where she had been lying dazed for two days, too cold and hungry to move.

Crazy Sasha, crazy Alexander Rostov. She smiles sadly whenever she thinks of him. She does not remember much about him, because no sooner had she emerged from her dazed state than they ran him to a sanatorium and had him certified as a lunatic. It was his daughter who had done that: angry that he had left his home and modest savings to a woman he had picked up from the street. 'I always knew my father was crazy, but I didn't know he was stark raving mad!' Sasha's daughter once spat on Dina's face.

No matter what everyone else says about him, no matter what the medical records show, to Dina he was not crazy. Before he died, when she went to the hospital and told him what she intended doing with the house he left her, he had smiled happily, brought her close to him and said, 'There can be nothing better you can do for me than to open it up to those who need it the most.'

A crazy man does not talk like that.

Dina, now greying and plump, walks around the house most of the time in a kaftan, one of the dozens a

woman who had returned from India gave her years ago. As she goes from room to room, walking down the hallways, the floors creaking, her kaftan flapping like an elephant's ears, she notices how quiet it is tonight. She's lost count of the number of times she's done these rounds after the death of a resident: literally hundreds, she thinks. Even though she started out bravely, full of vigour and

enthusiasm and compassion after Sasha's death, it was a struggle to deal with the passing of people who took refuge in her home. The first residents had all sorts of ailment of the body and the mind. Some came to get rid of addictions, some came because they had nowhere else to go. But of late, no matter where they come from, most of them have AIDS and come in knowing they don't have long. Once there, many discover talents they had never imagined they had. Mr Jackson has sold his paintings all over the country, and all his earnings go into the fund for the home. Then there was Ronald who could pull out rabbits from behind people's ears.

And Melissa, who played the harpsichord (that a neighbouring music store had loaned her) so divinely that while she was alive a number of residents recovered completely; those who didn't, went at peace with themselves



and the world.

A few of them do miraculously become healthy enough to leave. They usually come back to help Dina maintain the home. Nothing gives her more pleasure than seeing some of the former inmates again. But just as she feels vindicated with every person who regains health and leaves, she feels like she has lost one more piece of her sanity with every corpse that is taken away from her home.

She knocks softly on every door and opens it just wide enough to enter. She sits at every bed and talks to the person in it; she says smiles really do cure them better than all the medicines in the world. They have all taken to bed early tonight.

'We want to die like Chuck,' they tell her, 'comfortably and in bed.'

Mr Jackson doesn't speak to her. He turns his face



away when she enters the room.

'You probably think I was responsible for his death,' she tells him. 'But what could I have done? He was sick when he came in. Terribly, terribly sick. It's a miracle that he survived that long.'

Mr Jackson still does not respond.

She sighs and pats him on the forehead. 'I suppose you won't even show me your newest painting. But that's okay. Because I'll see it tomorrow when you're feeling better.'

In the next room Juanita is muttering agitatedly. 'I wonder what became of my son,' she says.

'Did Chuck remind you of him?'

'No,' the woman says. 'But death reminds you of people you haven't remembered in a long time.' After a pause, she shakes her head and says, 'I think he's dead too.'

Dina looks at her for a moment. 'I can do nothing to replace your son,' she says. 'But we'll do our best as long as you live.' She puts her hand under the woman and hugs her. The woman clings to her like a baby. Dina runs her hand over her head and soothes her. It is only after a few minutes, when the woman has released her grip, does Dina leave her bed and go to her next resident, the woman who shares the room with Juanita.

Dina listens to the fragile sound of the santoor as she gets ready for another day. The clear notes sound like birds at sunrise. She dusts her room, waters the plants and sits by the window meditatively listening to the music. Then she and Anna prepare breakfast for all of them. She tries hard not to think of Chuck.

Groceries today after the funeral, she reminds herself. And Juanita's laundry too. She's run out of fresh clothes. Also medicines for Claire. Don't forget the prescription on the table in the living room.

Dr Mehra, who volunteers his time at her home, will be here soon on his rounds. When a local newspaper did a story on her after she'd thrown the doors of her home open, Dr Mehra was among the first people to step forward to help out. He comes in every morning and checks on everyone in the home regardless of whether they need medical attention or not. She looks forward to his visits because he also reminds her of home and her family and makes her feel as though she is spending time with them.

Stocky Dr Mehra rolls in with a jovial greeting. 'How are you beautiful people doing today?' he bellows down the hallway.

His laughter is infectious. Seeing him she already feels a little better. Yet he sits with Dina in her room and tells her what he's told her so many times before. 'You know what we say. The soul has discarded one garment to don another. Believe me when I say this: that because of you Chuck died happy.' He holds her hand in his and pats her on the shoulder. 'Just think of what they'd do without you.'

When he goes into Mr Jackson's room he says while he's taking his pulse, 'I hear you've got another masterpiece for us.'

Mr Jackson smiles, he's already feeling better. 'The sadder ah get, the better it comes out,' he says.

Dr Mehra looks at it and hoots playfully. 'You know, this should hang at the Smithsonian. Or better still at the Louvre.'

'You've got to be kiddin' Dr M. Ah'm no Picasso or nothin'. All ah do is splash some of them paint on the canvas and you say they're masterpieces.' He is delighted.

Dr Mehra puts his bag away and says, 'You're now so much better that pretty soon you'll be back on a construction site.'

He pats the man's head and moves on to the next room.

'If it ain't for Dina's Home Ah'd be a dead man,' he calls out. Dina's at the door, listening. He turns to her and says, 'Thank you dear. And sorry for bein' such a baby last night.'

Mr Jackson's child-like smile fills the room. Dina suddenly realises what is it that keeps her going. She smiles even as she knows that a coffin will be delivered within the next hour or two.

Dina cleans Chuck's limp body with a sponge. She does not let Anna help her with this. She wants to do this herself, to prepare him the way she has prepared all the others before him. She knows Anna neither approves of this nor thinks she does a particularly good job, but this is one thing Dina insists on doing.

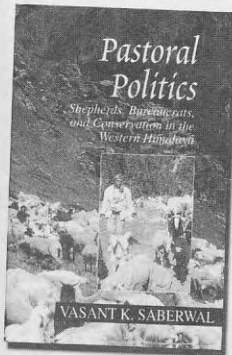
She applies the sponge gently in feather-touch strokes so as not to displace the stiff muscles even a little bit or tear at the rough skin. After death the skin always becomes translucent and she can count the number of veins in his body. After she's wiped his body with a fresh towel she puts him into his best clothes: his only suit, the one in which he came home, once filthy and smelling of urine. Now, dry-cleaned and hardly used, the suit is bright and gives him dignity. He looks more like a professor than the plumber he was. She struggles with the tie. Even after all these years she has to try it out several times before she can get a perfect knot. Ultimately she ties it on her own neck and then puts it on him.

Satisfied at last, she opens the door. Chuck is ready. They seal the coffin and the last enduring image she sees of him, is his smile. The glorious, beatific smile.

A black man, whose wiry greying hair sits uneasily on his head like a rag picked up from a dumpster, staggers up the stairs, supporting himself on the bannisters with every step. His face is wrinkled like a bulldog's, large warts on his nose, his shaggy beard could house a family of bees. He must have heard that there is an opening in the home. When he crosses the threshold and blinks at the darkness inside Dina appears from the shadows. She smiles.

'Welcome home!' she exclaims softly with the same trepidation and joy with which she greeted her first resident. The man blinks confusedly for a moment. Then staggers into her big arms and weeps like a child.

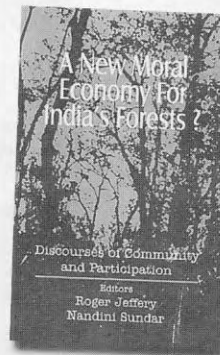
Books Received



Pastoral Politics

by Vasant K. Saberwal
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999
pp xviii+246
INR 475

The book contends that there is an alarmist rhetoric on grazing-induced degradation in the Western Himalaya. Establishes an absence of empirical evidence to support the claims that shepherd land-use practices have a degrading impact.



A New Moral Economy for India's Forests?

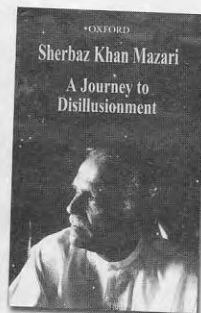
Edited by Roger Jeffery and Nandini Sundar
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999
pp 304
INR 425 (cloth)/INR 265 (paper)

Addresses various conceptual and empirical problems associated with the approaches to joint forest management prevalent in India. The editors argue that a 'new moral economy' is in the process of being evolved.

Sherbaz Khan Mazari: A Journey to Disillusionment

by Sirdar Sherbaz Khan Mazari
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1999
pp xxxii+646
PKR 795

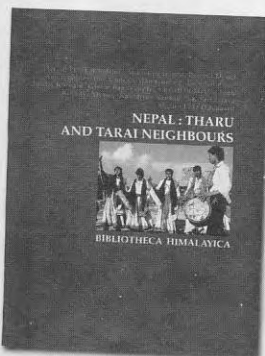
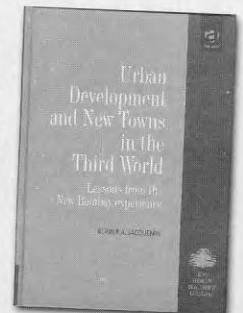
The memoirs of a leading Pakistani opposition figure during the Bhutto and Zia eras, and in part, a history of Pakistan. Reveals much about Gen Zia's long rule and his relations with the opposition.



Urban Development and New Towns in the Third World: Lessons from the New Bombay Experience

by Alain R.A. Jacquemin
Ashgate Publishing Ltd, UK, 1999
pp xvii+313
price not mentioned

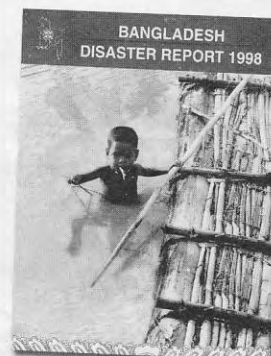
First independent evaluation of the New Bombay model, a town based on specific planning and financial strategy. Analyses the processes of physical and economic growth, social development, and the planning's consequences for the urban poor.



Nepal: Tharu and Tarai Neighbours

Bibliotheca Himalayica
Series III, Volume 16
Edited by Harald O. Skar
EMR Publishers, Kathmandu, 1999
pp 263
price not mentioned

Discusses ethnic questions in Nepal, focusing on the lowland region of Tarai. First section concerns national and minority issues, as seen from the outside, while the second deals with ethnic distribution and ethnic identity.



Bangladesh Disaster Report 1998

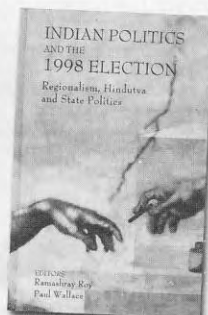
Disaster Forum Bangladesh
pp 252
price not mentioned

An account of the natural disasters that visited Bangladesh in 1998, based on governmental, autonomous, and newspaper sources.

Indian Politics and the 1998 Election: Regionalism, Hindutva and State Politics

Edited by Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999
pp 375
INR 450

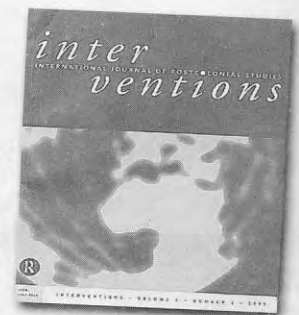
A critical analysis of the 1998 Indian general election in terms of changes in the party system and on the bases of social support.



Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies

Volume 1, Number 2
Edited by Robert Young
Routledge, London, 1999
pp 175

Collection of essays reconsidering Partition, looking not at the 'why' the politics of Partition played itself out the way it did, but with 'how' its legacy has been dealt with since by Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.



Abominably yours



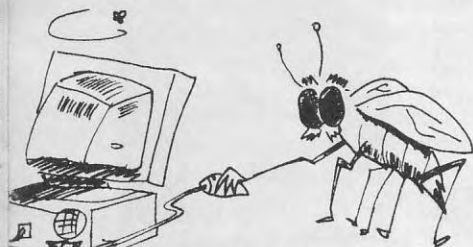
Today we will take questions from all of you out there who have been waiting to ask me everything you've always wanted to know about computers, but were afraid of making asses of yourselves. Many of us are intimidated by geekspeak, there is no reason to be. This forum gives simple jargon-free answers to your deepest spiritual questions about the Information Insurgency. You can beat cyberphobia if you try! OK, let's start. You, at the back in the orange shirt.

Q: I am thinking of integrating a broadband multimedia feature that comes with MPEG Layer 3 compression software. Should I go for a Variable Bit Rate or stick with my present CBR?

A: My advice would be to try the variable bit, but maybe the CBR thingy should do too.

Q: I have been trying to install an Intel Shiva VPN for Windows 9x and Windows NT. Rather than using the Shiva certificate manager, I installed a Remote Authentication Dial-in User Service server connected to my Netware Network Directory Services tree. What I want someone to tell me is can I do this directly, or do I have to know my location on the NDS tree and uninstall the Microsoft adapter to log on?

A: This is a trick question, right? Shiva, the certificate manager, can't climb a tree so there is no question of him getting near any windows.



MY BUG HAS A COMPUTER!

Q: My hard disk doesn't defrag.

A: That's not a question.

Q: Why doesn't my hard disk defrag?

A: Have you tried persuading it with the business end of a pneumatic drill?

Q: Last week I bought a PC with an Intel Celeron 450 MHz processor with 128 K cache, 64 SDRAM, EV500 17" screen (15.9" viewable), and integrated Intel 752 video card with 4 MB, a 6.8GB 5400 RPM 10/1000 Ethernet with Wake UP on LAN, S.M.A.R.T. II Ultra ATA Hard Drive, 40x CD-ROM Drive, Iomega Internal Zip Drive. I took it out on a test drive as soon as I got home and it crashed. Can I, legally, strangle my dealer with my bare hands?

A: What's the size of your monitor again?



Q: 17" screen (15.9" viewable).

A: Strangle him.

Q: Whenever I download a zipped application and double-click on it, an error message shows up saying "Self-extractor Header Corrupt". Why is this happening?

A: Don't take this personally, but I would think twice in future before allowing some corrupt guy to

double-click on your zipper. And while you are at it, maybe you should also have your header examined.

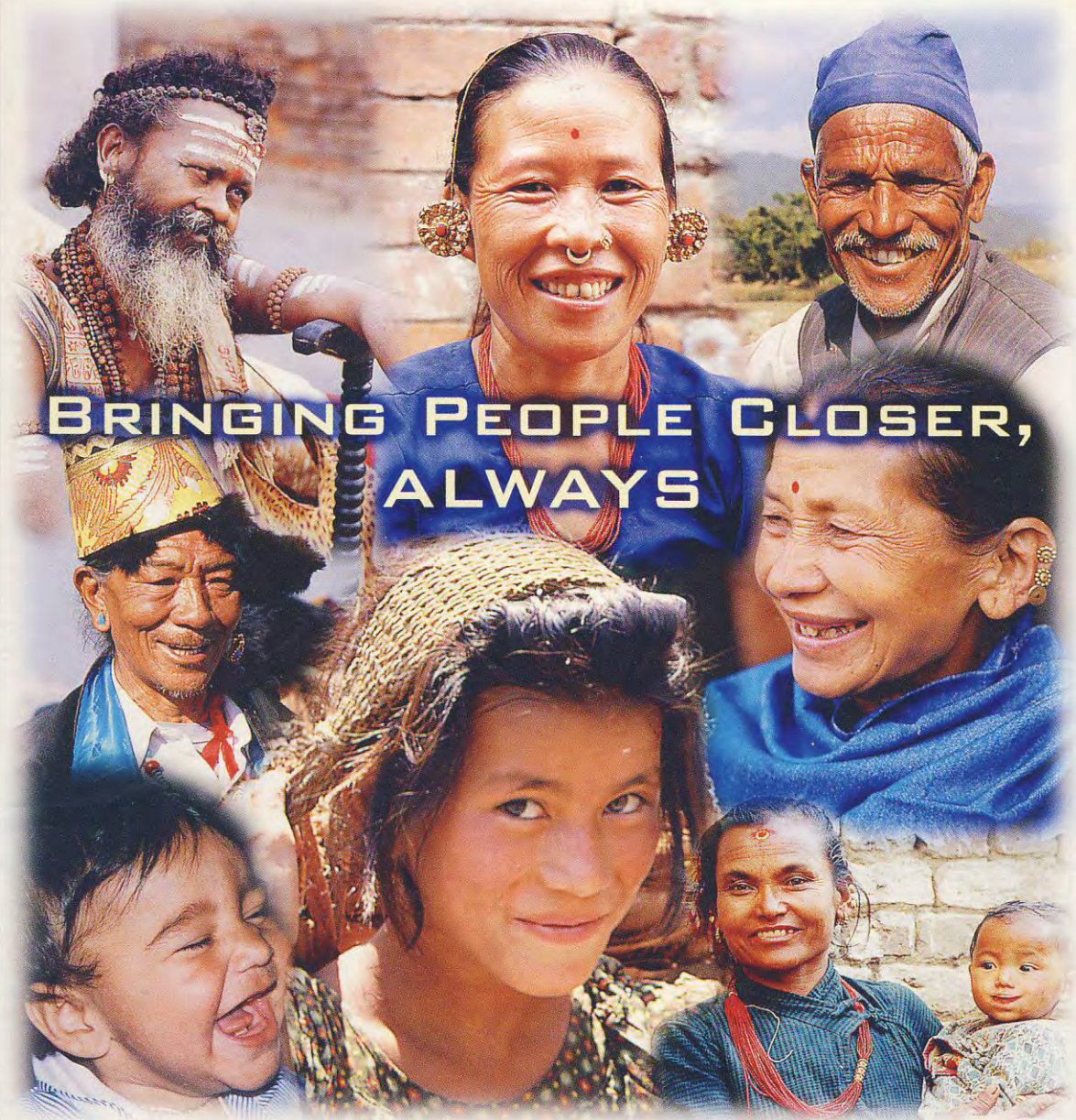
Q: My hotmail was recently hacked by someone using a "hAx0r d00d" website on The Anonymiser using a dialog box which left an IP address, Java applet and a cookie. Can I use ActiveX control next time I have an attack?

A: [Hearty laughter] Hahahahahahahahaha. Make sure the cookie is not too hot. Hahaha.

Q: I have got to Level Three of Kargil Karnage II. The gorgeous graphics have eye-popping realism. But try as I might, I cannot fend off intruders from Tiger Peak, is there a way I can launch tactical nukes without having to suffer Fallout Penalty in the Post-apocalyptic Realm?

A: Hey, that's like saying you want to make an omelette without breaking an egg. But in answer to your question, and (let me toot my own trumpet here) as someone who has got to Level Five, let me warn you that a post-nuke level is not all that great. You have to save your people from a plague breakout, there are new mutant Fundas prowling around, and what's worse the media is not on your side. For a preview of Kargil Kombat II, which deals with using military, economic and diplomatic methods to lead your people to superpower status and world domination, visit the web site: www.totalwar.boom





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