

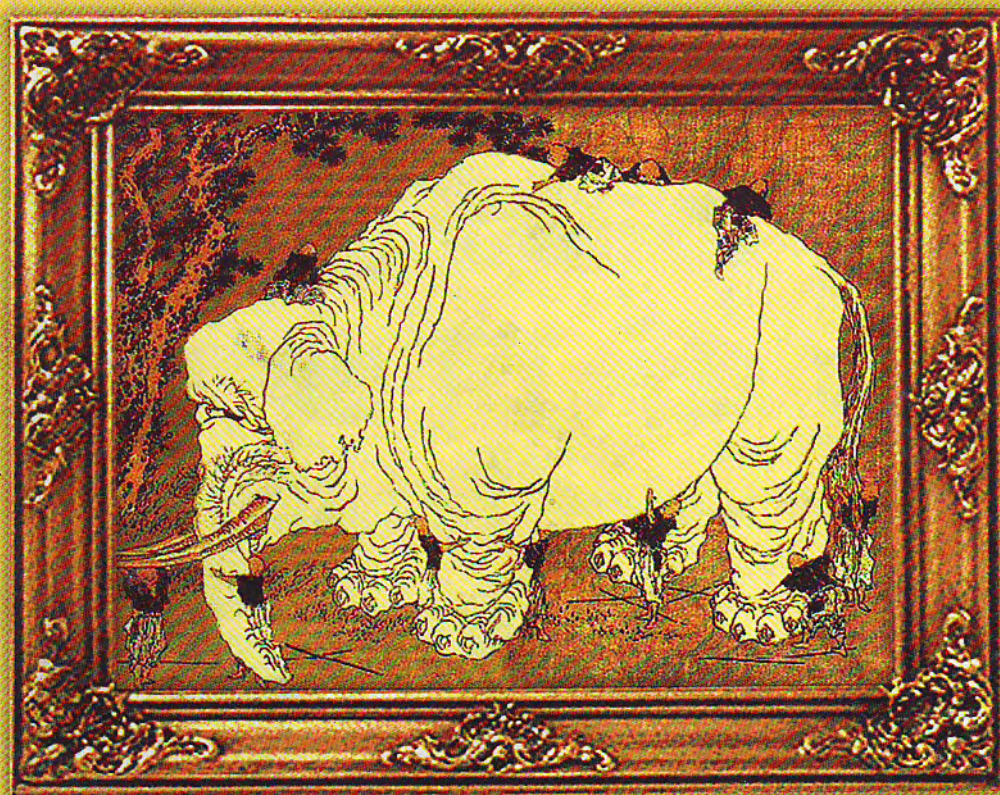
JULY 2003

HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN



Karachi and its illegals



Blind men of civil society

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THOMAS J. MATHEW

14

C O N T E N T S

COMMENTARY	5	Beyond the MFA doomsday scenario <i>by Dina M Siddiqi</i>	REVIEW	63
<i>India: The Nathu La switch</i>		Pakistan's budget: The economics of hypocrisy <i>by Shafqat Munir</i>	<i>Aid in developing Nepal</i> <i>by Jagannath Adhikari</i>	
<i>South Asia: A Subcontinental consensus</i> <i>by Ammara Durrani</i>		OPINION	<i>The profits of catastrophe</i> <i>by T Mathew</i>	
<i>Sri Lanka: The LTTE roadmap</i> <i>by Jehan Perera</i>		41		
<i>South Asia: Same-sex South Asia</i> <i>by MV Ramana</i>		Nepal's mysterious afflictions <i>by Anil Bhattarai</i>		
<i>Pakistan: Between two hegemons</i> <i>by Aasim Sajjad Akhtar</i>		The word of god for benighted Muslims <i>by Yoginder Sikand</i>		
ESSAY	14	PERSPECTIVE	RESPONSE	3
<i>Civilising civil society: Donors and democratic space in Nepal</i> <i>by Seira Tamang</i>		50	BRIEFS	36
REPORT	25	Political maps and cultural territories <i>by David Ludden</i>	MEDIAFILE	48
<i>Illegal lives in Karachi</i> <i>by Hasan Mansoor</i>		ANALYSIS	SOUTHASIASPHERE	54
		56	BOOKS RECEIVED	75
		<i>Penury in plenty</i> <i>by Indrajit Roy</i>	LASTPAGE	76

HIMAL

editors@himalmag.com

Editor

Kanak Mani Dixit

Associate Editor

Thomas J Mathew

Assistant Editor

Shruti Debi

Contributing Editors

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

Editorial Assistant

Andrew HM Nash

Design Team

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

Marketing

advertising@himalmedia.com

Subscription/Overseas Sales

Anil Karki
subscription@himalmedia.com

Nepal/Northeast India Sales

Sudan Bista
sales@himalmedia.com

Marketing Office, Karachi

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

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1987 to March of 1996, when it became
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Contributors to this issue

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

Ammara Durrani is an assistant editor with *The News International*, Karachi.

Anil Bhattarai researched social medicine in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He is with the Nepal South Asia Centre, Kathmandu.

CK Lal is a Kathmandu-based engineer and *Nepali Times* columnist.

David Ludden is professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently engaged in field research in Bangladesh.

Dina M Siddiqi is a cultural anthropologist based in Dhaka, working with a legal aid organisation.

Hasan Mansoor is a Karachi journalist.

Indrajit Roy is a development professional based in Allahabad.

Jagannath Adhikari is associated with Martin Chautari, an NGO based in Kathmandu.

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

MV Ramana is a physicist at Princeton University.

Seira Tamang is a political scientist at the Centre for Social Research and Development, Kathmandu.

Shafqat Munir researches at SDPI, Islamabad.

Yoginder Sikand is a researcher of Islamic history and a freelance writer based in Bangalore.

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North America	Barbara Bella & Associates, 500 Sansome Street, Suite 101, PO Box: 470758, San Francisco, CA 94147. Fax: +1-415-986 7860 email: Bba2@aol.com

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Apparent similarities

THANK YOU for responding in such impressive detail to my letter concerning Nasreen Rehman's article 'Singing the nation' (*Himal*, May 2003), and also for publishing Rehman's reply.

Rehman states that she is not familiar with my work, and I must confess that I was not familiar with hers until I read the article. However, if I were writing on a subject as specific as the national anthems of the Subcontinent, I would certainly have ensured that I was acquainted with her work, as well as other substantive material on the subject that had appeared in recent years prior to the publication of my own piece. Clearly, Rehman did not follow such a course, and without commenting on the adequacy or otherwise of her research, let me simply state that I now accept her word that she was unfamiliar with my work. My apologies to her for thinking that she was.

Unlike Rehman, however, the editors, as pointed out in their response to my letter, were familiar with my article, although they were apparently convinced that her essay was sufficiently different from mine to be published without any reference to the earlier piece. In support of this thesis, the editors quote five sentences from my essay and two from Rehman's to show that, despite a "superfi-

cial resemblance" in certain respects, the "thrust" of each essay is different.

I entirely agree that these pieces have "different perspectives" and indicated as much in my original communication. Nevertheless, I would argue that this has no real bearing on the issue of plagiarism, because, as is clear in a close reading of the two pieces, there also seem to be apparent similarities.

One could therefore go on endlessly in this vein, yet such an exercise would surely serve very little further purpose. If any good has come out of this matter, it is that readers now have two essays, both published in widely read Subcontinental journals, on what is obviously emerging as an interesting area for postcolonial theorising. That these essays seem to have so much overlap, given that they were written independently, is both surprising and heartening, whatever view one takes on the relative positioning of Rehman's article vis-à-vis mine. In this connection, let me once again end by thanking *Himal* for the serious and thoughtful attention it gave to my initial letter.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Delhi

note from the editors

RB NAIR'S letter to *Himal* included extracts from her January 2001 article in *Seminar* and Nasreen Rehman's May 2003 article in this magazine. In the interests of space, we



Vacancy Announcement

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development was established in 1983 in Kathmandu, Nepal, serving eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas and the global mountain community. As a mountain learning and knowledge Centre, ICIMOD seeks to develop and provide innovative solutions, in cooperation with over 300 regional and international partners, which foster action and change for overcoming mountain people's economic, social and physical vulnerability. This mission is carried out through acting as a multidisciplinary documentation Centre, a focal point for training and applied research activities and a consultative Centre in scientific and technical matters for the countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region at their request.

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Response

are not printing them. Readers who wish to compare the two articles can access Nair's piece at www.india-seminar.com and Rehman's piece at www.himalmag.com.

We will not entertain future comment on this issue in our print edition.

Missing manpower



WHILE AGREEING with Aruna Uprety's response to 'Neglect of the fallen womb' by Bijaya Subba et al (*Himal*, April 2003), I have something to add. Although the article's authors rightfully draw attention to an under-noticed medical affliction among rural women in Nepal, they do not contextualise the ailment in

Nepal's political economy. As such, the solution they proffer is the usual: awareness and the purchase of a wonder product, a pessary costing NPR 30.

The point is to avoid uterine prolapse. It cannot be avoided when entire villages are bereft of able-bodied men who have gone to Kathmandu or overseas in search of a better life. For labour-dependent households deprived of manpower, one option is to produce more working hands, which they do, notwithstanding UNFPA's efforts to the contrary.

Society cannot suffer the desertion of men from villages without 'side effects' – uterine prolapse and high female fertility, among others. Labour-exporting economies often defy their own logic.

Bela Malik, Kathmandu

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INDIA

THE NATHU LA SWITCH

THE RECENT visit by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to China has set the ink flowing in the South Asian media, particularly because it comes together with a definite thaw in the New Delhi-Islamabad relationship. Vajpayee's visit to Beijing was important in many respects. It was the first prime ministerial visit to China after India became a nuclear state, which means the meeting took place within the framework of a new power configuration, in a changed geopolitical context. At the same time, the agreement to allow trade across the Sikkim-Tibet border cleverly unravels a pesky knot that had bedevilled Sino-Indian relationships for much too long. By the simple act of agreeing on cross-border trade at one point – Nathu La – the two governments rendered moot the discussion on Indian recognition of China's annexation of Tibet and India's annexation of Sikkim.

The trade across the border, of course, can have a bilateral confidence building dimension all its own. To develop Tibet, China needs access to the sea promised by Highway 31, which leads down to Siliguri and on to the Calcutta port. Once this corridor generates economic dividends for both countries, the ghost of the 1962 border war between India and China may finally be exorcised. At the same time, it is possible that uncharted developments may soon overtake the Indian Northeast, especially if an energised economy dilutes the sanctity of the internal state security apparatus that has been built up in this region. Who knows, even faraway Calcutta's trade may see a revival of sorts as container trucks ply the distance to Lhasa via Siliguri and Yatung.

The immediate beneficiaries of the opening up of the Nathu La passage to Lhasa via the Chumbi valley in Tibet are the state of Sikkim and its Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling. At the same time, now that the Nathu La is open, it is incongruous to maintain the lock on the all-weather route up from Kalimpong via the alternate Jelep La. Not opening Jelep La may, however, be a calculated holding back, as the Indians give themselves time to see what the cost of freeing trade access for cheap Chinese goods,

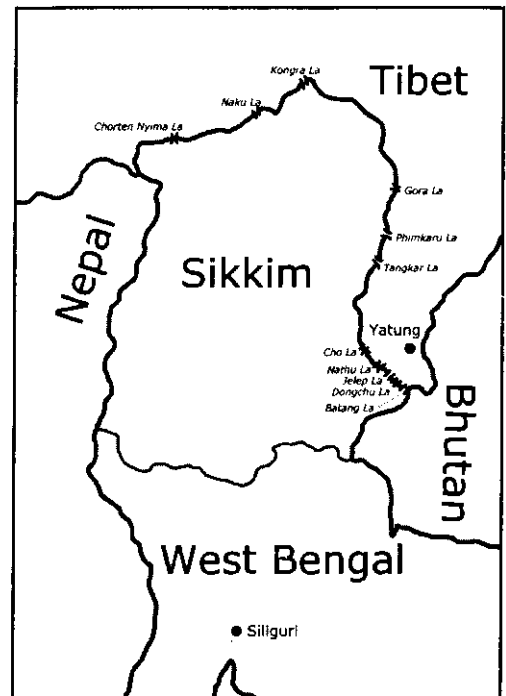
previously confined to the grey market, means for domestic producers vis-à-vis the Northeast market. However, if the numbers work out right and Jelep La is opened, Darjeeling district may expect to see a revival of its own fortunes. Unlike Sikkim, Darjeeling is not a recipient of central largesse and it has been going to seed over the decades, as the local economy stagnates.

The 1962 Sino-Indian war battered the Indian establishment's psyche, converting the Himalayan rim into a super-sensitive border region replete with travel restrictions. It also led to a surge in mountain road-building and the very presence of security forces led to a militarisation of regions and societies (especially in the Northeast) that had their own brewing internal conflicts and disputes with the centre.

Today, if New Delhi is less apprehensive about China, it could very well mean that Nathu La is only the beginning, to be followed by the opening up of Jelep La and a lot of the other *las* (passes) in the Tibetan-speaking Himalayan rim of South Asia. The long-standing antipathy in New Delhi for Kathmandu's desires for north-south roads within Nepal may also finally be overcome. The end result of this little switch on Nathu La could be the start of economic and human relationships across the northern frontier of South Asia.

As far as the Sino-Indian strategic relationship at the inter-state level is concerned, it was only in 1975 that the two neighbours began a rapprochement. Even so, all was never well with the relationship, one major cause being the significant military and economic assistance provided by China to Pakistan, including in the nuclear sphere. In order to justify the Pokhran II tests in 1998, Vajpayee told the lower house of the Indian parliament that India's nuclear weapons programme is not "Pakistan-specific". Defence Minister George Fernandes was more direct, when he famously described China as enemy number one.

Apparently, the Chinese have opted to let by-



goners be bygoners, and decided that the economic possibilities of political rapprochement are more important than how New Delhi perceives Beijing. But there is obviously more to the friendly and reciprocal overtures from both sides.

Careful calculations

Post-11 September and post-Iraq, the Chinese are far more conscious of the need to evolve their positions in an increasingly US-dominated world. It may have legitimate fears about encirclement, with the US presence in Central Asia and its 'proactive' policy in South Asia. The need to independently reach out to India, for reasons beyond the possibilities of economics and trade, seems understandable.

For its part, as the economic turtle to China's hare, India must feel the need to link its economy in some way to the runaway success of the People's Republic. The choice to work more closely towards regional security and stability in a spirit of mutual engagement rather than mutual containment is understandable. With mutual engagement, a détente with China and the resolution of the border disputes, India must have calculated that it would gain by putting pressure on the Sino-Pak special relationship to the extent that it is anti-India. In any case, for all concerned, it would be best not to challenge China in the nuclear arms race.

As far as the global superpower is concerned, both India and China seem to be quite willing for George W Bush to act out his fears and fantasies in West Asia. For China, there is the added benefit of deflecting any Islamic activism among the Uigyrus of Xinjiang, while the Indian state has simply decided to run with the liberalisation bandwagon at the instance of its English-speaking establishment and Hindu right-wing *swadeshis*, no longer interested in representing the 'downtrodden of the earth'. Significantly, Beijing and New Delhi both refrained from condemning the United States over the March invasion of Iraq.

In the whys and the wherefores of this trans-Asian rapprochement, let us be clear about what is important and who benefits. The economy of the People's Republic of China has annual growth rates that hover between seven and eight percent. In the field of information technology, to take one

example, China produces hardware, which tends to spread the income around. India produces software, which concentrates it at the top. India needs to catch up, and if this requires economic linkages with China, then so be it. Realising this, perhaps, Indian techies treated their Chinese counterparts to a power point presentation on the actualities and benefits of proposed cooperation.

It is hopefully this type of reading that got the realists and the idealists in South Block together to push the Nathu La deal through. The remaining border disputes are also de facto settled (the Arunachal frontier and Aksai Chin), and if they can similarly be put behind us, one could get started on the true tasks of Asian solidarity. This might, of course, translate into *less* South Asian cooperation, as India becomes more pre-occupied outside the region.

Whether this is a quick way for Vajpayee to become a statesman along the lines of Nehru, or whether this is a well thought out move that has the support of the defence, foreign affairs and internal affairs establishments will become apparent with time. But, in that things have not moved immediately into high gear, and that a degree of circum-spection characterises this thaw, there is hope that this is careful foreign policy and not the whim of an aging politician. ▽

SOUTH ASIA

A SUBCONTINENTAL CONSENSUS?

THIS SUMMER'S thaw in Pakistan-India relations has breathed new life into track two processes between the countries. The region's pacifists have risen with recharged spirits, with visits and exchanges following the recommendations that evolved in countless earlier seminar discussions. The most recent such visit was undertaken by a group of Indian parliamentarians led by veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar, an independent member of the Indian upper house. Organised by the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, the visit (to Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi) was in reciprocation to a journey in May by a delegation of Pakistani legislators led by Ishaq Khan Khakwani of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam).

Speaking in Karachi, in the last week of

India must have calculated that it would gain by putting pressure on the Sino-Pak special relationship to the extent that it is anti-India

June, Nayar and his compatriots sent out a strong message of peace and friendship to an appreciative audience. There is a "Subcontinental consensus", said Nayar, that war was not the answer to our problems. "We have to ask ourselves two questions: are we ready for peace; and are we ready for a commitment to peace?"

There are, however, two disturbing features in these latest visits. One, neither delegation included representatives of the right wing parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of India and the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal of Pakistan. And, two, despite the rhetoric of profuse fraternal affection, both delegations validated their respective governments' views on the 'hurdles' to peace. The Pakistanis and Indians, thus, stood by their respective government positions on the "core issue" debate, the one insisting it was Kashmir, the other pointing to cross-border terrorism.

Track two diplomacy between Pakistan and India, a phenomenon linked with civil society's growing consciousness of and confidence in itself, has developed since the late 1980s. Through escalations of tension, as manifest in the 1998 nuclear tests, the 1999 Kargil conflict and the exchange of nuclear threats in the summer of 2001, practitioners of this track of diplomacy have tenaciously held on to informal talks. The Neemrana dialogues, which began in 1991 with American support, have facilitated exchanges between educators, ex-military men, ex-bureaucrats, artistes, businessmen, parliamentarians and members of the media.

While the sincerity of these conflict resolution practitioners has never been in doubt, the Pakistan-India track two runs the risk of being only occasionally relevant to track one, which refers to the official diplomatic exchange between the governments of the two states. The tension, apparent in the most recent exchange of legislators, between representing a state and representing an ideal arises from the typical limitations of track-two diplomacy. Notwithstanding these limitations, it is imperative that track two representatives resolve the tension with the state if their efforts are to bear the fruit of peace. Ordinarily, this would begin with influencing the minds and agendas of the ruling establishments in each country, but if we accept that the national power elites have an entrenched interest in sustaining a slow-

burn conflict, that is easier recommended than done.

Peaceful survival

There has been, however, a curious development which gives some hope to the peace constituency in Pakistan and India. In the post-11 September global reality, where right-wingers once again find themselves in a strong position, every aggressive word and deed by a state actor can easily be justified in the name of national security. We could rationally have expected, going by past behaviour, that this would embolden the ruling establishments to drop the peace-and-reform mantra. Strangely though, Pervez Musharraf and Atal Behari Vajpayee seem to be taking great pains to sustain dialogue and reinstate the track one peace process. The two gentlemen could not possibly have taken the 'going down in history' sentiment so much to heart. What, then, is the reason behind this fresh track one resolve for peace?

After General Musharraf's October 1999 coup, the military in Pakistan learned that despite its continued control over the country's power structure, it could not afford a repetition of military rule in the style of Zia ul-Haq. General Musharraf, therefore, embarked on an ambitious facelift for his role. In the name of reforms, he adopted most, if not all, of the socio-economic and political agendas that had hitherto been the ideological property of the civil democratic parties. He nurtured, for the sake of the outside world, the image of a 'liberal' soldier.

In India, the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party at the helm of the current coalition government also seems to have begun a careful rethink of its image and policies after the 1998 nuclear tests. Apart from the inherent challenges posed by the partners in its coalition government, the BJP realised that if it wished to lead India onto the free-market bandwagon, it would have to live up to the republic's secular-democratic ideals.

Thus it was that the hard-boiled and the hard-nosed in Islamabad and New Delhi, who so far had invested in perpetuating the conflict, initiated a careful shift in their political paradigms, spurred primarily by global political and economic pressures. This development should have been a kind

The hard-boiled and the hard-nosed are making peace because of political and economic globalisation

of a wake-up call for the secular democrats of the two countries, for it signified the onset of an increasingly concentrated political space in which contending forces claim a similar political agenda. But the liberals conceded the space, and now right-wingers, who are using it for political survival rather than promoting it out of a genuine desire for peace, have taken up their agenda.

A common perception is that pressure from the West, more precisely the United States, is the strongest factor in the evolving Sucontinental equation. This cannot be entirely correct in the light of the political survival argument. If indeed it is for political survival that the banner of peace is being held up in Islamabad and New Delhi, the pacifists who are being edged out of the political space must carefully consider two points. First, how has 11 September empowered the very actors that have waged a war of hatred for the past half-century or so? Second, given their newfound empowerment and legitimisation, why have these elements decided to tread the path towards peace?

These questions may sound retrogressive in the midst of the euphoria in the editorials and opinion pages. But they have to be raised keeping in mind the future of political liberalism, secularism and democracy in the two countries *after* a peace deal has been clinched by those very people and institutions that have fought against it for decades.

Difficult though it may be, the pacifists need to break the shackles of 'ground realities' and move the dialogue beyond the official line on the 'constraints' on peace. In the negotiable space that is politics, the liberals of both countries must reclaim the initiative for peace in order to ensure their own political survival for the sake of the people. In Pakistan, the argument goes: if it takes a general rather than a civilian government to clinch this deal, why fight it? But what that would entail for the future of democracy in Pakistan is anybody's guess. To a journalist's question in Islamabad, Nayar said: "Let us face it, whatever agreement India is to make with Pakistan, it has to be with General Musharraf".

What the pragmatic approach of a right wing party such as the BJP might mean for the future of secular politics in India again is a line of questioning that Indian liberals and pacifists seem loath to pursue.

This, then, is the crux of the dilemma for

the liberals in Pakistan and India. Having laid down the groundwork through decades of perseverance, they risk being unable to claim their efforts in the open political arena. Or they risk derailing the peace process by challenging the legitimacy of those that at the moment seem to be taking it forward. It may be that there is now a realisation of the utilitarian gains of peace; the question that no one seems to want to answer is what are the costs of such a peace. Considering that the leadership of the BJP refused even to meet the Pakistani delegation, perhaps Nayar should have asked whether the right wing establishments that have embraced peace today will be committed to the process if tomorrow peace is no longer politically or economically expedient.

There may be a lesson lurking outside the Subcontinent: while Tony Blair's "new" Labour gave him the blessings to wage war in West Asia, Pakistani and Indian liberals have given their blessings to their adversaries for the greater good that peace would bring!

—Ammara Durrani

SRI LANKA

THE LTTE ROADMAP

THE NORWEGIAN facilitators' late-June announcement that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was willing to re-enter peace talks with the government, which LTTE chief spokesman Dr Anton Balasingham confirmed in London, came as welcome news. The London meeting between the LTTE and the facilitators was the first in nearly a month, and the timing of the announcement, coming during a prime ministerial state visit to the United Kingdom, helped to bolster Ranil Wickremesinghe's credibility.

As the LTTE's chief political negotiator, it appears that Balasingham can act with relative autonomy to help or to hinder the peace process. On this occasion, as on several others, he chose to help. However, accompanying this softening of stance was a call from Balasingham to redefine the peace talk agenda. He would rather address crucial issues relating to the harsh realities of the people in the underdeveloped north and east than pursue guidelines, milestones

and roadmaps for what he described as an imaginary solution. Balasingham's statements since the LTTE suspended participation in peace talks on 21 April have uniformly called for a radically "new, innovative" approach to the peace process.

The demand for a radically new and innovative approach indicates uneasiness in the ranks of the LTTE with the manner in which the peace process has progressed. What seems to be most frustrating for the LTTE is its inability to administer the north and east in the manner promised by the federal system to which it publicly committed itself at the peace talks in Oslo last year. After a year and a half of ceasefire, the powers of governance remain legally vested with the Colombo government, making federal-based power sharing seem a distant dream. The LTTE's ability to deliver material benefits to the north and east remains negligible due to a combination of factors.

International expectations

When it signed the ceasefire agreement with the government in February 2002, the LTTE may have anticipated rapid progress toward its domination of life in the north and east, either by means of an interim administration or through the joint committees that were established at the peace talks. But this has not happened, and legally, the central government remains the mainstay of governance in that region.

Balasingham's most recent insistence on a radically new and innovative approach to the peace process is an indication of the LTTE's thinking on the problem. In rejecting the conflict-resolution mechanism of guidelines, milestones and roadmaps that pave the way for a future solution, the LTTE is insisting on an immediate handover of ground-level control. However, it is unlikely that the LTTE will succeed in altering the model of the peace process so long as the international community is actively involved. The guidelines, milestones and roadmaps procedure, which gained expression in the final statement issued at the LTTE-boycotted Tokyo donor conference on 10 June, is in fact being followed in the ongoing internationally mediated peace processes elsewhere, most prominently in West Asia. In insisting on a different route to peace, the LTTE may consciously be seeking to distance itself from the internationalisation of the peace process, in

which not just Norway, but also the United States, Japan, India and the European Union have taken great interest.

There is no question that the ground situation in the north and east, and the improvement of people's lives there, should take priority. But the ground situation comprises economic issues, as much as it does issues of security of life and other human rights. In this context, the recent spate of assassinations in the north and east, as well as in other parts of Sri Lanka, represents an abnormal situation and comes as a harsh reminder of the brutality of the as-yet unresolved conflict.

Resistance is futile

The desire of the LTTE to slow the internationalisation of the peace process stems from an apprehension that it is losing ground with the international community, which is an accurate assessment of the evolving situation. International players will naturally seek to ensure that democratic values, human rights and pluralism are contained in any solution, interim or otherwise. The international community, looking at local problems from afar, is less concerned with the particularities of a country's history, and with the animosities and past practices of various parties, than with the generalities of human rights and good governance on the ground in the present.

The LTTE's human rights violations, most notably those against its political opponents, but including taxation and its conscription of children, have cost it much international sympathy. The Norwegian facilitators are under pressure from the international community to find a way to stop human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. The remedy for this is not to try to reduce the role of the international community in the peace process, but for the LTTE to adjust its own behaviour to be in conformity with acceptable standards. As an organisation that seeks politico-administrative power in the north and east, the LTTE needs to demonstrate that it can be trusted to govern in a manner that respects human rights and basic democratic freedoms, such as the right to life and expression of ethnic and political pluralism.

Taking the peace process forward is not simply a matter of talking about sharing the



Balasingham: Back to the table.

The LTTE desires to reduce international influence on the peace process

powers of governance. It is also about a discourse in which the use of coercion and violence is invalid and outlawed. There is no doubt that the rapid and positive progress in the peace process up to now has been, in large measure, due to the intervention of the international community. Indeed, resistance to the internationalisation of the peace process in the post-11 September world is likely to be both counter-productive and futile. When even Hamas in the Occupied Territories of West Asia has fallen in line with international desires and suspended attacks against Israel, it will be near impossible for Sri Lankans to resist the tide of the times.

On the positive side, there is an abundance of international goodwill and financial support for Sri Lanka's peace process, as was manifest at the Tokyo donor conference. If this support is to be tapped constructively, the LTTE's struggle for power has to be subordinated to the guidelines of human rights and milestones of good governance in the roadmap to a federal solution. ▽

—Jehan Perera

SOUTH ASIA

SAME-SEX SOUTH ASIA

JUNE WAS a watershed month for homosexual rights in the West. On 10 June, a court in the province of Ontario, Canada, declared same-sex marriages legal. Since the federal government has not appealed the decision, Canada in effect has become the third country in the world, after Belgium and the Netherlands, to legalise same-sex marriages, and hundreds of same-sex Canadian couples have already taken advantage of the ruling. Two weeks later, on 26 June, the US supreme court struck down laws banning sodomy, which are still on the books in 13 states, ruling that the state cannot make "private sexual conduct a crime". And four days after that, the British government made public a plan to give lesbian and gay couples the same rights as their married heterosexual counterparts.

The homosexual community in South Asia, especially in India, has been making

news as well. On 29 June, the city of Calcutta hosted the first-ever gay pride march in the Subcontinent. Though small in the number of participants, it was an important start, and there are other indications that the community is making its presence felt. The Indian Council of Medical Research is debating the adoption of guidelines that would allow lesbians and single mothers to use reproductive technology to conceive babies. The BBC reports that *The Boyfriend*, a recently-published Indian novel dealing with love between an openly gay man and a young boy who feels unable to pursue his homosexual instincts, "has raised hopes within the country's largely invisible gay community of the chances of coming out of the closet". And in Nepal in May, the Blue Diamond Society, an NGO working to promote homosexual rights, held a beauty pageant for homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals in Kathmandu's National Theatre.

These developments notwithstanding, homosexuals in South Asia are a rather persecuted lot. Even in the big cities, where conditions have improved over the last couple of decades, and where there is now some limited semblance of social life for members of the community, especially for those who are wealthy and have access to clubs and the Internet – there are significant hurdles in the path. Homosexuals are still subject to many forms of discrimination, in particular housing and employment. In Bombay, "people have been kicked out after their sexuality was revealed", says a gay activist who set up an Internet service called GHAR (Gay Housing Assistance Resource).

If gay men have a difficult time, the strongly patriarchal nature of South Asian societies ensures even worse treatment for lesbians. The oppression and discrimination they face has been rationalised on the basis of claims about gender, culture, tradition, values and morals. One noteworthy recent instance of anti-lesbian activity was the Shiv Sena's campaign to stop screenings of the 1999 film *Fire*, a work centred on a lesbian relationship, combined with virulent attacks against its director Deepa Mehta and the actors who played its protagonists, Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das.

As in the case of *Fire*, the growth of religious extremism and militant movements has negatively impacted the status of gay men and lesbians. Religious national-

Self-appointed bearers of morality deny any historical basis for same-sex love in South Asia

ists have often opposed public discussion and artistic displays of or about the community. The self-appointed bearers of their own narrow conceptions of what constitutes morality, these movements have tried to deny any historical basis to same-sex love in South Asia. (Those who mistakenly believe that our region has no historical tradition of homosexual love should read *Same Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai.) The Jamaat-e-Islami even recommends capital punishment for those convicted of same-sex romantic involvement.

Conditions in rural areas are particularly difficult. The relative anonymity provided by cities and the social spaces – clubs, parks and so on – are not available in rural areas. Here again class, caste and gender make a difference. Gay men among the rural elite, such as those from landlord families, often use their social positions to engage in forcible sex with poorer or lower caste males. Such instances often lead even progressive groups to condemn homosexuality. One should note, however, that such acts are instances of violent exploitation based on social and economic power tantamount to rape – and are condemnable for that reason. They do not offer any reason to oppose homosexuality *per se*.

What makes all these forms of social discrimination particularly odious is that gay men and lesbians lack legal protection in all South Asian countries. For example, after independence India adopted the British penal code dating to the 19th century, and few changes have occurred in the intervening years. Section 377 of the code relates to homosexuality: "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine". The situation in Pakistan is much worse. Apart from civil law derived from the British penal code, there is also a religious law calling for up to 100 lashes or death by stoning. In Sri Lanka, sex between men is punishable by 12 years in jail, while the existence of lesbianism is not even acknowledged in the penal code. Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal all have similarly repressive laws on homosexuality.

These laws are not implemented often;



Azmi and Das in Fire.

ie, there are not many instances of homosexuals actually being imprisoned for their sexual preferences. But they are frequently used to harass, blackmail and extort bribes. And because same-sex love is legally unacceptable, many gay men and lesbians marry members of the opposite sex – with consequent deception, frustration and misery for all concerned.

Thus, the laws, which should be meant to protect people rather than to discriminate against them, especially those regarding sexuality, must change. The scrapping of South Asia's anti-homosexuality laws is important – often the law must change before social mores do. Legal protection is probably the only way that South Asia's homosexual community can be guaranteed social rights, rights against exploitation and, importantly, health rights. ▽

–MV Ramana

PAKISTAN

BETWEEN TWO HEGEMONS

THE LATE-June Bush-Musharraf Camp David show seems to have been widely accepted as a great success, at least in the corporate media's projection of things. That being said, if a nationwide poll were conducted in Pakistan, it is likely that most Pakistanis would judge the meeting as eyewash, because history has taught us that ordinary Pakistanis are always the losers



Not for Pakistan.

in such games. Nevertheless, the public relations exercise was executed more or less effectively – General Musharraf has received the green light from those who matter to carry on with his unique form of “sustainable democracy” in Pakistan.

One interesting issue stood out in the Camp David discussions. George W Bush minced no words when he said that Musharraf had pushed hard for the delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan, originally sold in 1988-89. Musharraf seems to link the delivery of the fighter jets to ensuring Pakistan’s “sovereign equality” vis-à-vis India – getting the jets would be no less than US acknowledgement that Pakistan’s stance on India is legitimate and acceptable. It is therefore quite symbolic that Bush unambiguously asserted that the USD three billion package offered to Pakistan does not include the F-16s.

Despite the best efforts of the US State Department over the past two years to convince us that there is no more valuable partner in the ‘war on terror’ than Pakistan, the simple reality is that keeping India happy is a far greater priority for the US than pleasing Pakistan. The latter is important insofar as it remains stable and cooperative, but the big fish in the Subcontinent is, and always has been, someone else. It is now only a matter of historical interest that during the cold war India maintained a principled stance of non-alignment, and that between Moscow and Washington, India was closer to the former. Now that bipolarity in international affairs is a thing of the past, India has moved a lot closer to the US, and will likely to continue to do so.

This leaves the Pakistani establishment in a fix. For many years, the US Central Intelligence Agency funded non-state actors based in Pakistan to wage a ‘holy’ war against the Russians in Afghanistan. But now, with the monster on the loose and Pakistan’s military establishment having built its own empire from the embers of the 1980s Afghan war, the US takes a different view of things and wants the religious right curbed. At least, that is what one is made to believe. In reality, it probably suits the US just fine that the mullahs in Pakistan are responsible for the occasional tumult, just as the US is fairly comfortable with mullahs in most Muslim-majority countries around the world. This is because it is important for the US establishment to maintain the threat perception of extremist Islam so as to continue its imperial march.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, at least on the surface, the US will continue to exert pressure on Pakistan to curtail the religious right’s activities. As such, Pakistan’s bargaining position is weak in comparison to India’s. The Indian establishment – just as complicit in perpetuating the conflict over Kashmir as the Pakistani establishment – is therefore quite content to go about its business and forge ever-closer economic ties with the US. The losers in this saga are the people of the Subcontinent, and they will continue to lose until and unless some other force comes to the fore.

The tautology here is that only the collective will of the people of the region can create such a new force. As such, the prospect probably seems remote to most people for a variety of reasons, including oppressive social constraints, and the rapidity with which corporate and consumer cultures are penetrating society. We consequently face the immense task of constructing a dynamic political vision out of the circumstances of the day. Even so, it is worth noting that the global hegemon and South Asia’s elites are feeling the weight of the immense contradictions in their evolving relationship, which are now making the boat rock.

Capital offence

It is important to remember that, as always, a significant portion of the USD three billion aid package to Pakistan will line the pockets of generals and brigadiers. This makes perfect sense for a number of reasons. Washington is well aware that sooner or

later it will have to do something about the military's domination of politics in Pakistan – it is now increasingly difficult to justify military-style “sustainable democracy” when the number of countries across the world where the military runs the state is down to a handful. The natural dynamics of global capitalism ensure that the US will assist the military in consolidating its corporate empire within Pakistan so that when a military retreat from the political sphere is the only way forward, its top brass will be content with the riches it has acquired, and will continue to acquire in the future. Even so, the military – being the military – will not go quietly, and it is up to the Pakistani people to power the movement that expels it from the affairs of the state.

Meanwhile, the Indian establishment will exploit the existing situation to the greatest extent possible to fortify its claims to regional hegemony, something already underway with its economic take-off facilitated by foreign capital. But fortunately, the march of the Indian capitalists is not unimpeded. In India, the tradition of resistance is far more developed than it is in Pakistan, and so capital's swoop is facing a legitimate challenge.

However, as in Pakistan, in India there seems to be a widening gulf between those who see the most important issue before the Indian polity as the struggle between secular and non-secular forces, and those who see the inroads being made by capitalism and imperialism into the country as the primary concern of the present day. The problem is that the Bharatiya Janata Party represents all of the truly regressive trends that prevail in India at the moment. However, the Congress has proven to be – and will likely remain – a willing partner of international financial institutions and the global financial elite. There is therefore no significant difference in the politics of India's leading political powerhouses, even while one represents the religious right, and the other secularism.

As elsewhere in the world, the parochialism espoused in the politics of South Asia's religious right is a reactionary outcome of a number of objective conditions. That is not to say that such trends have not existed in the region till now; in fact, certain communities in South Asia have a long history and culture in which such trends are definitive. Nonetheless, the manner in

which such trends have become almost all encompassing is misrepresentative of South Asia's traditions. Inorganic trends in society are by definition the outcome of interventions from without. And so ultimately, if the Sub-continent does face the spectre of sectarianism and parochialism, there should be no doubt that capitalism has everything to do with it. Whether it is General Musharraf, Benazir Bhutto, LK Advani or Sonia Gandhi who meets with George W Bush, the discussion and result will be almost identical. We must acknowledge this fact, and then mould a new reality unclouded by our own narrow concerns of self-interest. The real problem facing South Asia is not our supposedly obsolete and warped perception of the world, but rather neo-colonialism. And it is time that we did something about it. ▽

–Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

The US is much more concerned about keeping India happy than pleasing Pakistan



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Civilising civil society

Donors and democratic space in Nepal

by Seira Tamang

Civil society as a concept has had a long and distinguished, if somewhat rarefied, existence among political philosophers. In recent decades, having undergone some alchemic transformations at the hands of development theorists, it has surfaced among the people with more rhetorical allure than it has ever had in the past. In this more seductive guise its ecumenical progress has been very sumptuous. At the hands of development publicists it has now become a tidy blueprint to explain what is amiss in 'underdeveloped countries' and what awaits them if they only make their societies more civil. But as with all nostrums, this demotic concept of civil society cannot afford to look too closely at its own constitutive axioms. Reconciling its numerous and fundamental inconsistencies is a potentially self-negating act. Given the evident inadequacies of the concept, what is surprising is that the development priesthood has managed to secure for it such widespread acceptance across the global South.

It is customary, for instance, in Nepal, as in other 'less-developed' countries in the present time, to predicate viable democracy largely on the emergence of a vibrant and active 'civil society'. In the cannon of development, a concomitant assumption is that such a civil society can be financed into existence. But this constant reiteration that civil society is the solution to all of Nepal's ills does little to clarify the nature and potential of democratic space in Nepal. Instead, civil society and other associated terms in donor liturgy – "democracy", "development", "empowerment", "gender" – are deployed in simplified, sanitised and circumscribed forms. As the anthropologist Saubhagya Shah points out, shorn of their "particular political and economic histories, these privileged discourses get circulated as transparent and free-floating normative orders". Across the world, civil society has been accorded a single uniform connotation that does not admit of the different political possibilities that its pedigree affords.

Situating civil society

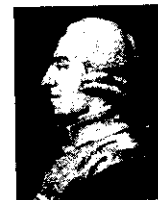
Civil society's conceptual ancestry is long and

diverse, spanning a range of theorists such as Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Adam Smith and Alexis de Tocqueville. Though its lines of descent are complex and its interpretations numerous, conceptions of civil society can be broadly divided into two categories, the liberal and the Marxist – with their respective neo/post permutations. It is generally agreed that what constitutes civil society is based on some form of coordinated activity beyond the individual and household and beyond the confines of the state. It is thought to be an arena of associational culture that implies a sense of

collective action. Broadly, civil society serves as a sort of bridge between the realms of society (defined as an aggregate of individuals and households living together within a more or less ordered community) and the state (defined as a set of government norms and institutions for the purposes of structuring and controlling a given territory).

The state-society bridge which constitutes civil society may be built from the direction of society towards the state, in which case it serves as a way of imposing and enforcing social norms on the workings of the state. Or, the civil society bridge may be built from the direction of the state towards society, in which case it creates a hegemony of the kind theorised by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. This civil society architecture normalises state domination over society by creating the appearance of a state that is an organic social product. In either case, civil society legitimises the state. The difference between these two constructions is a normative one that distinguishes between a legitimisation that rests on an actual integration of social values into state functioning and a legitimisation that is built on the effective exercise of state ideology and control over society.

The liberal approach is derived from de Tocqueville's work on democracy in 19th century America. Tocqueville emphasised the beneficial effects of civil associations for the creation and maintenance of democracy, and in the liberal view it is civil society which imposes and enforces social norms on the workings of the state. It is the key to the limited state. This idea of civil





society was further elaborated and given an empirical foundation in Robert Putnam's research on democracy in Italy. His work, which has been particularly popular and influential among policy-makers, stresses the necessity of a vibrant organisational culture as a prerequisite for a stable democracy with horizontal group solidarities which cut across vertical ties of kinship and patronage. The most recent work within this tradition to have earned the accolades of the multilateral community is Ashutosh Varshney's book, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, a study of Hindu-Muslim violence in India, in which he reiterates the role of horizontal solidarities in thwarting civil conflict.

In the neo- or post-Marxist variants, civil society is seen as being inextricably linked with the state and political organisations, with the latter sustaining its power through the indirect domination of the former. Importantly, in this view, civil society – though an arena of oppression characterised by internal divisions and power inequalities – is also the site of struggle and resistance against authoritarianism.

The orthodox development view of civil society in Nepal, as in the rest of South Asia, subscribes to the liberal/neoliberal approach. Much of the analyses focuses on the need to promote practices and strategies to strengthen a vaguely defined civil society. This is not surprising since the concept of "civil society" was introduced in Nepal via the world of development, which tacitly accepts the liberal perspective. As many commentators have observed, the rise to prominence of civil society is symmetrically aligned to the global dominance of the neoliberal ideology. This is in contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, when the idea of civil society formed the rallying cry for critics of authoritarian regimes in Latin America and East Europe.

The East European collapse inspired sanguine prophecies about "the third wave of democratisation" and expressions of faith in "people power". In a climate overwhelmingly conducive to the export of democracy, external forces were thought to be capable of aiding its institutionalisation in countries emerging into freedom, if domestic forces were not equal to the task. Under this benign supervisory regime, international and western NGOs were assigned the role of facilitating transnational advocacy networks, which in turn would strengthen local NGO capacity to alter and shape domestic politics and eventually change state behaviour.

Concurrently, civil society underwent a de facto definitional amendment. Though, theoretically, it was acknowledged that civil society is constituted by diverse forms of associational life, in practice it came to be more or less restricted in meaning to NGOs and emphasis was almost exclusively directed towards amplifying their role and potential. The policy of "strengthening civil society" in the pursuit of economic and political liberalisation was central to the New Policy Agenda adopted in the late 1990s by multilateral and bilateral organisations such as the World Bank,

the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Development Bank and the US Agency for International Development's initiative for "sustainable democracy".

Since then, the quest for strengthening civil societies has gained momentum. In addition to the Bretton-Woods and United Nations institutions, bilateral donor agencies and international non-government bodies have all enthusiastically embraced the NGO as the instrument of democratic development. This is in fact an institutional corollary of the ideological premises of the Washington Consensus, whose strenuous objections to the state as an economic agent have been influential in conferring on NGOs their pre-eminent role in creating a depoliticised democratic environment in which citizens are primarily civilised consumers of goods and services provided by an inherently efficient private sector. The NGO therefore has both a civic and economic role.

As political utopias are explicitly forbidden and the state is compelled to withdraw from direct participation in production and distribution, NGOs are regarded as ideal service delivery mechanisms working towards the ends of development. In more recent times, the ambit of this function has been enlarged and, in addition to dispensing the traditional package of services, NGOs have been given the mandate of delivering democracy and civil society as part of their development mission. NGOs therefore are civil society organisations par excellence. In this role they serve as founders of "civic culture", which is the bastion from which to combat non-democratic forces threatening the state. While the overt emphasis is on the contribution of 'civic organisations' to the process of democratisation, the freedoms of a democratic society are also deemed to include the freedom of choice in the market place. This enthusiasm for democracy is sometimes indistinguishable from free market ebullience and the democratisation process also entails donor support to civil society explicitly for cultivating the ethic of private enterprise.

The liberal rhetoric of civil society

Civil society as it exists in the development lexicon has the appearance of lacking in conceptual, definitional and purposive clarity. From being a determinant of democracy, civil society often becomes an end in itself, redefined tautologically to mean those institutions, ie NGOs, which partake of the features of a prefabricated construct of civil society that in principle is constituted by a limited and sometimes contradictory range of sentiments and dispositions about development and democracy. In a general climate in which the instrument is mistaken for its purpose, the proliferation of NGOs is taken to be an index of democratic evolution. However, what undermines these claims to democratic virtue and distinction is the specific sociology of the financial and institutional environment in which they operate. In par-

ticular, the relationship between domestic civil society organisations and their international financial patrons has important implications for democracy.

Nepal's own 1990 democratic revolution, which saw the end of the repressive Panchayat regime, opened up political space for autonomous organisations at precisely the time in which much foreign aid assistance was channeled into – among other things – the construction of a civil society. In the aftermath of the political change, existing organisations grew in strength and overall there was an exponential growth in the number of NGOs operating in the country. While appreciating both the changing forms that INGOs and NGOs have taken over the years and the specifically political spaces that NGOs in Nepal have gained since 1990, it is however important to recognise the manner in which civic actors have been shaped – knowingly, and unknowingly – by international forces.

The widespread currency of the term “civil society” in Nepal can be traced to the mid- to late-1990s. Not a few INGO-funded books on the topic were published during this time along with many articles in various newspapers and magazines. Much of this output, continuing today, follows the liberal civil society agenda in all its “development” approaches and aims to curtail the excesses of the state. For example, Govind Dhakal, an exponent of this train of thought, in an article titled, “Foundation of an autonomous civil society and the environment of the citizens in Nepal”, argued that the “quest for the foundation of an autonomous civil society can only be realised when centralised power and authority is well decentralised to the development actors in various forms”. More recently, Alfred Diebold, the Nepal Resident Representative of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Germany, which has sponsored much of the literature on civil society, stated, “In developing countries, the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society have a primary responsibility for addressing the concerns of the poor and powerless and lend support to the politics of transformation”. The language appears to have changed, but the development agenda is still clear.

The predominant notion of civil society used in Nepal is of groups working together in association for a better normative life that liberal democracy represents. The routine literature on the subject, as a rule, is prescriptive in tone, with accompanying laments on the lack of civil society associations. Nepal is of course no different from other countries in which the generic use of “civil society” occurs and, consistent with the international trend, the term is vaguely defined. In fact it is often equated with the non-state sphere as a whole so that there appears to be no difference between society and civil society. The danger in eroding the distinction between society, an altogether inadequate descriptive term, and civil society, which is a potentially useful analytical category, has been highlighted by Prahlad Dhakal, who provides examples of the comical usages

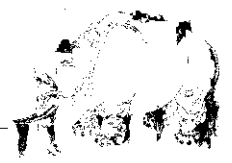
of the latter term in Nepal. Thus, civil society not only buys tomatoes and cauliflower, it also steals domestic water meters and indulges in similar other patently anti-democratic misdemeanours.

It is not just civil society literature on civil society that falls short of any analytically meaningful contribution. Even academic analyses of the term in Nepal – many of which, incidentally, have been sponsored or co-sponsored by donors – are as, if not more, conceptually ungainly and deceptive in their formulations. The radical connotations of the term, as expounded by both Marx and Gramsci, are simplified to such a degree that their very different conceptions of the role of civil society and the implications this has for the manner in which democratic struggles can be visualised become sterile and effete. Typically, for instance, Gramsci's idea of “hegemony” and civil society is sanitised to fit a liberal conclusion. According to a 1996 document co-produced by the Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies (NEFAS) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung,

Gramsci, therefore, underlined the importance of human ideas and efforts in changing the course of history and altering the process of development. Participation of the masses in decision-making and applying the methods of mediation can be expected to achieve pluralistic consensus and enable the social, economic and political systems in adjusting to the needs and aspirations of people as well as to link human consciousness with the maintenance or peaceful change of the system.

For Gramsci, civil society is an accessory of the state in-so-far as it is the sphere in which the capitalist state executes its project of hegemony. In this view, civil society is the instrument through which the state obtains approval for its policies and programmes and generalises its acceptance in society. This is in stark contrast to the liberal idea of a pluralistic consensus and dominant systems changing in accordance to the needs of people, as suggested by the foregoing quotation. In a more recent reworking of the liberal formula in Nepal, the value of both Marx's and Gramsci's thoughts have been unequivocally consigned to the past. In opposition to their views is “the modern version of civil society” which constitutes a space in which ideals of democracy and human rights are unproblematically realised.

For the most part, there is a lack of conceptual clarity, intellectual rigour and even the most rudimentary theoretical foundations in most of these analyses, as is epitomised by this statement from the NEFAS-FES publication: “The common tendency of civil society to escape from both the paternalistic values of communism and laissez faire value of capitalism underlies its salience as both overlook voluntary, non-profit, and non-monetised functions of the society”. What this means is not exactly clear to any serious student of civil soci-



ety. Despite this lack of clarity, the proprietors of civil society do not brook any departure from their slipshod definitions.

Thus, in the introductory overview of a 1998 book based on several seminars throughout the country, titled "The Role of Civil Society and Democratisation in Nepal", the editor laments somewhat paternalistically that in the seminar on civil society and gender, "in spite of explaining to the participants the concept of civil society in relation to democratisation and the importance of the gender perspective in achieving [the aim of civil society], the discussion, more often than not, strayed from the major theme and concentrated heavily on the sad plight of women in a male dominated society like Nepal". This wilful disregard of women's concerns about their lived realities and the imposition of explanatory categories from above, hints at the disempowering manner in which ostensibly "democratising" principles or objectives are actually applied in Nepal's development world. Clearly, society to be civil must also be obedient to the strictures of civil society patrons.

Unreal foundations

The inability of academics and analysts to move beyond 'trendy' jargon and received wisdom of grossly inadequate explanatory competence is evident from the manner in which civil society is, in general discourse, equated with NGOs. It is equally obvious from the critique of NGOs, made from different perspectives, in both academic and general parlance. While some observers herald NGOs as alternatives to the state, NGO culture has also been variously called "dollar farming", "begging and cheating bowl", "slave of the foreigners", "preventing revolution" and as family entrepreneurial endeavours. (Such arguments are also familiar in Bangladesh, which like Nepal is a highly donor-affected country.) Yet, these sorts of critiques are oblivious to the consequences of NGOs for the manner in which civil society and its democratic promise can be realised.

The issue is not just that narratives of civil society are often merely prescriptive and not even remotely relevant to the real dynamics of how civil society actually functions in the Nepali context. Nor is it simply that the use of the term "civil society" as an alternative to "NGOs" avoids the stigma that attaches to the latter. The issue in Nepal – as in other places – is also related to the fact that despite their conceptual confusion and limited value in explaining Nepal's past or future, such imported concepts command public and official importance because of the manner in which they are linked, pushed and advocated by the world of development and donors for various politico-economic reasons, and also because of a basic unwillingness on the part of intellectuals and development professionals alike to

interrogate the terms of the discourse.

In her article, 'Selling Civil Society: Western Aid and the Nongovernmental Organisation Sector in Russia', Sarah Henderson argues that the rhetoric of a vibrant civil society for political and economic democratisation, in whichever form, does not actually comprehend or question the manner in which these high ideals actually play themselves out in reality. To begin with, the relationship between democratic stability and civic groups is predicated on the assumption that internally civic groups inspire habits of cooperation, solidarity, public-spiritedness and trust. Externally, these networks then aggregate interests and articulate demands to ensure government accountability to its citizens. Civic associations socialise participants into the norms of generalised reciprocity and trust, the merits of group action and the recognition that mutual dependence is the key to public welfare. All these are considered essential for social solidarity and the social capital that permits effective cooperation between individuals as well as between citizens and the state. Horizontal civic

networks are seen to promote the democratic polity by inculcating a culture of cooperation, thereby enhancing the capacity of citizens to mobilise for public causes.

However, the validity of such liberal arguments about civil society is undermined by the entirely unrealistic foundational assumption that all civil society organisations are implicitly working towards common objectives latently assumed to be democratic in some form or another. Not all organisations falling under the rubric of civil society are necessarily working towards the promotion of democratisation. In Nepal, for example, the World Hindu Federation is as much a part of civil society as ABC Nepal, an anti-trafficking organisation. In the same vein, civil society does not consist of only noble causes and well-intentioned actors. As an analyst has pointed out, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, as a representative of the aspirations of ordinary Serbs, can rightfully lay as great a claim to being an exemplar of civil society as Vaclav Havel.

It is also quite clear that various associational group are structured very differently. Many if not most of Nepal's most well known NGOs are organisationally different from trade unions and neighbourhood organisations. In general, NGOs in Nepal are susceptible to authoritarian tendencies, with low potential for genuinely democratic membership-participation. Many NGOs are not democratically structured internally. And competition between organisations with conflicting aims and ideological goals is scarcely conducive to the spirit of cooperation that civil society is expected to foster.

An active and diverse civil society's capacity to play

In a general climate in which the instrument is mistaken for its purpose, the proliferation of NGOs is taken to be an index of democratic evolution

a valuable role in the evolution of democracy is often neutralised by the fact that the proliferation of interest groups can have detrimental effects by stifling the functioning of representative institutions and distorting policy outcomes in favour of the better organised blocs and syndicates. This usually implies, in a majority of instances, the most affluent and well-connected organisations, including those able and willing to use extra-legal procedures to ensure outcomes to their advantage.

Financing democracy

Most importantly, as Henderson points out, arguments extolling civic associations do not take into account the manner in which international influence affects the two key components of civic theory: horizontal ties and the norm of reciprocity. Indeed, in the case of Nepal, the role of international foreign aid is almost always forgotten or sidelined. For example, in recent reports on the Maoist conflict, the preliminary, and usually perfunctory, introductions to Nepal at large, including, ironically, the number of years that foreign aid has been active in Nepal, make no mention of any possible connection between the present political, social and economic malaise and active donor complicity in fabricating it historically and currently.

This is all the more remarkable since many of these reports concede the "structural dependence of Nepal on foreign assistance". In the words of one report by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), this dependence signifies "the potential for aid to have a significant influence – either positive or negative" in greater measure than in "many other contexts". Another DFID-sponsored report, while pointing to the possible role of development aid in contributing to the Maoist conflict can only see that contribution in terms of "raised and unfulfilled expectations" and "inequity in the distribution of resources".

Reinserting the role of foreign donors within the Nepali context demands a more thorough analysis and one that may unfortunately not be easily forthcoming since it complicates the easy and accepted recipe – "add foreign assistance and stir" – for building up civil society. To begin with, as many observers in Nepal are aware, groups that have received aid are not any more likely to develop networks of accountability to citizens as well to the state, both of which are crucial from the perspective of governance. Critics have noted the manner in which NGOs are not publicly accountable, transparent or subject to monitoring except perhaps to supervisory and monitoring constituencies and stakeholders in the North.

Neither are they more likely to be part of more dense

networks of association involving other civil groups. Instead these groups, with all their organisational facilities, glossy publications etc, are professionally quite detached and removed from the domestic social constituencies they claim to represent or work on behalf of. Their use of global language is indicative of the ways in which they and other NGOs are closer to their transnational partners than "the people" that they claim to represent. Western financial patrons, on whom they are dependent, constitute their primary constituency, and it is often claimed that for many, villages are not the area of operation. All of this has resulted in altering priorities from domestic needs to those that reflect the priorities and agendas of foreign assistance programmes.

Studies in Russia and other post-communist countries have uncovered the manner in which, while enabling groups to aggregate interests, foreign aid does little to help groups to internally develop abilities to instil habits of cooperation, solidarity, public spiritedness and trust. To the contrary, research specifically shows how foreign aid has been decisive in fostering internal rivalries, jealousies, and overall divisiveness in the women's movement in Russia. In Nepal, the failure of women's groups to establish viable networks among themselves – from the politics surrounding anti-trafficking endeavours, the collapse of the Women's Pressure Group formed to pressure the government to act on behalf of women on burning issues and current peace initiatives – illustrates not only the political rivalries involved but also the economic benefits at stake in a *bikas*-driven land of associational groups. The splintering of well known organisations – INHURED International broke into two distinct factions each claiming to be the "real INHURED"; founding members of the Centre for Women and Development left to form another women's organisation while some members of the Women Development Centre took others to court over accusations of financial irregularities – provides some food for thought along these lines.

Clearly, of the funded civic groups in Nepal, few are engaged in activities that might be associated with "civicness".

This sensitivity of civic groups to the external dynamic is easily explained. The economic benefits to be gained from a funder clearly outweigh any incentive that the domestic market could ever provide. Therefore, regardless of good intentions to build a civic community, the need to sustain their own funding source propels them to focus on producing results that satisfy the funder, rather than necessarily making a substantial community impact. Likewise, the material gains from

Rather than building networks and developing publics, civic groups consciously retain small memberships, withhold and stash information, and engage in uncooperative and even competitive behaviour



grants provide incentives for groups to engage in activities that militate against the ethos of building social capital. Organisations often hoard information, duplicate each other's projects, and squabble among themselves. The fear of jeopardising their own funding possibilities results in the unwillingness to share grant ideas.

As a consequence, rather than building networks and developing publics, groups consciously retain small memberships, withhold and stash information, and engage in uncooperative and even competitive behaviour with other civic groups. Overall, given the incentive structures of the grant game, apart from nominal claims to the contrary, it is actually irrational in a financial sense for groups to behave in ways that might build networks and horizontal ties with members of the community or with local business. Superficial criticisms against "dollar farming" tend to miss the systemic nature of such behaviour. This obviously, is not to suggest that all Nepali civic activists are financially driven, selfish amoral actors but to point out the manner in which the "funding game" structures this sort of behaviour.

Doubtless the equipment and training given by donors has increased the organisational capacity of recipient groups. It has been argued, in the context of Russia, that as a consequence donors appear to be most effective in building the capacity of groups to perform civil society's external functions of advocacy and interest articulation. This is applicable to the Nepali context where the positive contributions of NGOs have been enumerated in an ActionAid document as: organisation and leadership, increased awareness, reaching poor and disadvantaged people and areas, expanding access to basic services, giving voice to disadvantaged people, internationalisation of issues and government policy change.

While all this may be true, it is secondary in relation to the more crucial determinant of how these groups perform civil society's internal functions of developing networks of communication and trust. Aid has done little to improve this dimension of civic group activity. Instead, the attempt to finance civil societies into existence has led to the emergence of a vertical, hierarchical, and isolated civic community that partakes of the very features of social organisation that are profoundly anti-democratic. In Nepal, a DFID-sponsored report of 2000 refers to aid having "sustained Kathmandu elite patronage systems", and reinforced local client relationships.

Even well meaning attempts to rectify these mistakes fail to get to the real source of the problem. Consider the recommendations made in a 2002 Finnish report on donor and recipient Southern civil society organisations, *Voices from the Southern Civil Societies*. The report called for, among other things, more institutional and open funding, the promotion of self-sufficiency, longer-term perspectives from donors, support for

networks, support for national umbrella civil society organisations, training and technical assistance, and constituency building and advocacy. All of this eventually comes back to increasing organisational capacity. These reformist recommendations fail altogether to address questions of how cooperation, solidarity, public spiritedness and trust are to be created, and how the aggregation and accumulation of demands can be made in practice, given this environment.

This concern is all the more serious because it involves the question of long-term sustainability in a climate of excessive reliance on donors, who themselves are constrained by the need to show quick, short-term products at the expense of long-term goals if they are to remain in the funding market. Compounding the matter further is the overall inability to measure the 'success' of democracy promotion programmes. Donor urgencies combine with the lack of an appropriate index of measurement to produce doubtful claims about the progress of democracy.

To cite one instance of this, a Washington DC development-consulting firm, with a USD 26 million contract from USAID to promote local government democracy in Poland, reported "increased participation in local government decision making". But the claim is unverifiable because of the absence of a baseline to show how public participation had risen over the project's lifetime and whether the increases, if any, could be linked directly to the project's activities as opposed to other wider changes taking place in the country. A commentator in *The Washington Post* noted that all one opinion survey revealed was that "one in six citizens had attended municipal budget presentations and one in four citizens had met with their local representatives at some point during the previous year". This is too tenuous a basis on which to rest claims about the success of financed democratisation.

Civil society in the image of society

Existing social and economic relations of power, as well as the resistance to it, inflect civil society as a historically constituted and socially produced entity. In Nepal, historical privileges have enabled certain caste and class groups, by virtue of their education, to seize the opportunities offered by the development world. What has not been sufficiently analysed is the effect that the emergence of a distinct civic elite within the NGO community has for the nature of the putative democratic space being created in the country. A related question that has also escaped serious attention is the extent to which foreign assistance has reinforced the structured inequalities of caste, ethnicity, gender and religious belief. The problem with the liberal framework, with its dogmatic faith in the formal terms of political democracy, participation and rights, is that it simply assumes the equal capacity of all, irrespective of economic and social disparities, to involve themselves equally in its processes. As the political theorist Neera

Chandoke argues, it is simply a "primitive form of conceptualisation".

Civil society conceptualised in real time, as distinct from a purely normative vision of the future imposed on the present, is a sphere of social reproduction and association that has many tiers and scales of organisations. It is also internally more heterogeneous and conflict-prone than liberal theory, fixated on the idea of a *sui generis* civic convergence abetted by hard currency, is willing to concede. Thus, it has been found that small neighbourhood groups, which emerge from the locality, are distinct in character from large macro-level organisations which tend to be more hierarchical. This latter tendency is visible in the Kathmandu-based formal organisations, which are first-level recipients with an established funding track record. The cycle of financing is therefore circular and self-referential, legitimising the continuous transfer of resources to these "proven" organisations whose fund-worthiness rests on the fact that they already receive funds. The process is not very different from the pattern of credit flows in the financial market, leading to significant entry barriers.

According to a 1997 ActionAid report, an estimated 100 NGOs absorb 80 percent of total funds routed into the NGO sector. This estimate excludes "special"/"mega NGOs" such as the Family Planning Association, the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation and the Nepal Red Cross society. This has accentuated the already significant inequalities between the Kathmandu-based organisations and regional groups in Nepal. (It is also useful to remember that aid is simultaneously widening the gap between rich and poor directly or indirectly through high salaries for employees in donor-supported projects.) A donor-funded report on conflict and development, pointed out that one of the "unintended, collateral effects" of aid has been "an excessive focus on some regions and on capital intensive projects, strengthening patronage systems and regional cleavages, in particular between the Kathmandu valley and the rest of the country".

The secrets of development

Aside from geographical inequalities, much has been said about the culpability of the Nepali intelligentsia for the "failure of development" – on issues of co-optation, lack of independent research and the unwillingness to critique the development orthodoxy. But more fundamentally the involvement of the intelligentsia in the world of development raises the question of their role in the development of "civil society". In a non-colonised country where English is paradoxically both powerful and marginal, the development elite with their bilingual skills and stature as "authentic Nepalis" serve as gatekeepers of information to their non-Nepali speaking bosses and colleagues. The primacy of the English language in working with donors has allowed certain elites to have privileged access to resources.

According to a DFID report,

Society's caste employment and income inequalities are indeed strikingly reflected in many agency structures, which are dominated by the Brahmin and Chhetri castes and the Newari group. In spite of the emphasis given to rural employment, the management of programmes is still overwhelmingly placed in the hands of a 'gatekeeper' group.

A European Union 'Conflict Prevention Assessment Mission' report restated the same assessment.

The problems of politicisation, caste and ethnic inequality are the context of civil society activity. For donors, civil society is a very small group of English speaking elite operating in Kathmandu. There has been little attempt to reach out to the regional partners or capitals to plumb deeper into the social strata of Nepalese society, for partners or informants.

Having made this candid admission the report immediately goes on to put a positive gloss on the group, suggesting without a trace of irony that the "small numbers of socially concerned English speaking elites in Kathmandu" have had a "great burden" put upon them. Such are the sociologies of democratic partnership.

Donor responsibility for reproducing existing inequalities within the civic sphere is seldom discussed in the context of conflict. An issue of considerable importance in this regard is how much information the Nepali elite "sieve" before presenting donors "facts" and "realities" which then guide funding decisions. This question has particular resonance for *janajati* and dalit groups, especially in the affect this has on their ability to have their concerns heard and acted upon. The censoring of information and the implications this has for the right to information and the capacity to be fully informed agents are key democratic issues.

There have been demands that donors listen more closely to what NGOs are saying. But this demand makes sense only if there is some idea of what exactly NGOs are saying, which also means identifying the type, form and extent of information being screened from donor decision-makers. A foreign director of an INGO, a few months after his arrival in the country, expressed his bewilderment at the extent to which he was actively excluded from information in his office by the Nepali-speaking staff. On being queried, towards the end of his four-year tenure, whether he still felt frustrated and excluded, he cheerfully confessed to having cultivated an attitude of resignation about this aspect of heading an organisation in Nepal.

Reports produced by donors are also not immune to this tendency of filtering out information. The Finnish report cited above, which sought to understand the nature of civil society in the South through self-analysis, obviously relied on selected associational groups



to participate in honest reflection of their experiences. As is clear from the Nepal section of report and as related by one of its main authors, the reluctance of certain selected authors to critically and honestly undertake this exercise greatly undermined the effectiveness of the project. Since self-serving analyses also inform donor perspectives, this has a clear impact on how they can conceptualise their roles, responsibilities and programmes vis-à-vis recipients. This is of course not to argue that donors make ill-advised and inappropriate decisions only because they have been misled or inadequately informed by Nepali staff. It is simply to highlight the increasing power and influence of this newly coalescing elite to influence decision-making in intended and un-intended ways.

This "sieving" process tends to take place in a distinctive sociological environment. Nepalis working at all levels of "civil society", but especially higher up in donor INGOs and their more powerful partner NGOs form informal and personal ties. The explicit use of familial forms of address such as "dai", "bhai" and "didi" is a commonly observed trend and suggests the personalised, kin and client-based atmosphere of the development workplace. This can have fairly obvious implications for transparent functioning, ranging from the nepotistic to the sinister. In one case, involving professional differences between an INGO and NGO, a senior manager at the NGO as a Chhetri sought and gained informal meetings with a senior Chhetri manager in the INGO, and pleaded on the basis of specifically kinship ties for help to prevent the INGO from making public some unflattering information about the NGO.

In another instance, allegations of gross malpractice verging on criminal misdemeanour, including charges of violence, occurring in an organisation did not receive the attention it merited. The Nepali elite of international donor organisations promoting rights, at a clarificatory meeting to discuss the issue, could not bring themselves to even entertain the possibility of the allegations having any substance, as they claimed they "knew didi" well. This was in contrast to the attitude of their foreign counterparts also present at the meeting, who at least acknowledged the need for further inquiry. Here again fictive kinship relations formed the backdrop to their adamant stance.

The use of unofficial channels is not uncommon the world over. However, such practices do pose problems when viewing civil society not only as an associational sphere, but also as a public sphere from which to voice public concerns. The active involvement of these elite in the screening, repressing and censoring of information crucial to civic engagement highlights the tenuousness of claims to democratic ideals professed by such organisations. For people to be politically engaged and active, a space that provides the conditions of freedom must exist, and this must include the freedom of information and the freedom from debilitating hierarchies.

Brand certification

Despite the rhetoric of "partnership", donors broadly dictate the nature of the relationship with recipient groups, who willingly accept the terms thus dictated. Rhetorically at least, foreign assistance is also an affirmation by donors of their own moral concerns. If the bona fides of this rhetorical affirmation are accepted at face value, and if dictated partnerships are the established norm, the question that arises is why donors cannot do anything about the moral lapses on the part of partner NGOs that they tacitly condone through continued financial support. Primarily this is because in their role as intermediary financiers of democracy they are not themselves free agents. Theoretically they are responsible only to those they are mandated to service. But in practice they walk a thin grey line, as they are answerable to the institutional sources of their own funding.

Fostering democracy is a perilous venture since the pursuit of its lofty goals is conducted within the sometimes-contradictory rules of two different systems of practice. It must fulfil the procedural requirements of the formal bureaucracies from which funds emerge. One of the most demanding of these requirements is that funds allocated for a fiscal year must be spent on assisting credible organisations within the prescribed time if minimally the same volume of financial allocation is to be made available in the forthcoming year. In a sense, to prolong the future they have to whitewash the present.

In the Nepali context, this was obviously evident in the case of donor institutions desisting from a comprehensive inquiry into the possibility of gross ethical malpractices occurring in a Nepali organisation they were funding. An attendant development was the request by a high ranking embassy official that the status of the allegations be clarified as soon as possible as he was under pressure from certain groups in his home country to give the green light for resuming the flow of funds to the institution in question. This request provides an insight into the bureaucratic logic of funding. Recipients are the *raison d'être* for donors and are thus indispensable if mobilisation of funds is to be maintained at existing levels.

Since funders are perpetually seeking fundable activity, there is a robust competition among donors in Nepal for "good NGOs" they can support. In these circumstances, despite the apparent urge to create the "good society" based on civil norms of public conduct, the ethics of the situation at hand are relegated to the background by the incessant and unyielding drive to spend funds in order to raise more funds. The relentless circularity of the funding process and the relative scarcity of "good NGOs" combine to produce a situation tailor-made for pragmatic compromises that vitiate the professed agenda of bringing democracy to people who are denied the benefits of a rule-based regime.

It also provides an insight into a similar circular

process of NGO brand-certification. This is a peculiar dynamic in which country offices of donor institutions take on the task of certifying the credibility, competence and reputation of local NGOs. These NGOs are seen to conform to international parameters, and therefore the recognition accorded to them is a specie of development rating. This is typically the process by which funding agencies legitimise their own choice of partner organisations by limiting the available choice to a short list of organisations whose credentials they have themselves rated. In effect, because of the inexorable need to disburse funds, the aid establishment has assisted in the building of national and global reputations of certain associational groups in Nepal. Since "good NGOs" are allegedly hard to come by, and since a handful of such organisations in Kathmandu have managed to monopolise international endorsement and certification, the options available to donor establishments are finally very limited.

This cartelisation of credibility and international endorsement, in which donor agencies actively participate, has several visible consequences. Donors now are faced with the *need* to fund these organisations for the sake of the prestige of being associated with them, since that is what their own funders want them to do. This is the paradox of institutional kinship in Nepal. Internationally-reputed icons have been built by global funds, only to emerge later as national totems. In this latter capacity, buttressed by global reputation, they appear to have become particularly immune to any criticism – criticism that has emerged from the field, where their true work and worth is easily gauged. These criticisms are well known and acknowledged within informal Kathmandu networks, but do little to either modify project operations or donor attitudes.

This exemplifies not only the growing internal institutional impediments to building civic society through aid, but also the manner in which international assistance to associational groups facilitates barriers to open, democratic fields of discussion and critiques as well as mechanisms of accountability and transparency. This argument thus goes beyond the issue of the increasing autonomy of NGOs from "civil society", and the contradiction between increasing NGO independence from parent states and their growing dependence on patron states. In the context of donor dependence on "reputed" NGOs, it also raises questions about whether "dependence" on donor states need necessarily in turn promote accountability.

One large NGO recently turned down a NPR 6,250,000 grant from an INGO and ended all relations with it on the ground that it did not feel comfortable working with a "partner" which had compromised on the ethics of confidentiality and collaboration. Reading between the lines, it would appear that the INGO

had raised ethical questions about the behaviour of the NGO staff towards target groups. Turning down such a large grant indicates not only the extent to which this organisation felt uncomfortable with the sorts of questions raised by the INGO but also the extent of alternative funding sources available to it. The NGO's diversified donor base obviously gave it significant leverage over each of its individual donors. A senior Nepali manager of an INGO still working in partnership with this NGO, and trying to reform the institution from within, wryly acknowledged that attempting to push the NGO to change too much would probably result in his INGO "being thrown out as well" – ie expelled from the "partnership".

Given this complex relationship of mutual dependence, the question by now needs to be reversed. It is not simply whether foreign aid can really assist the emergence of democratic foundations. Rather it is whether it actually assists the rise of undemocratic associations and practices. According to the sociologist Chaitanya Mishra, in Nepal,

In Nepal, an estimated 100 groups absorb 80 percent of total funds routed into the NGO sector

[t]here are a few fairly "large" NGOs that are relatively independent NGOs that are relatively independent of any particular international donor/development agency as well as particular governments. Such NGOs do enjoy some leeway

in defining their own identity as well as in formulating policies and programmes relatively independently of international donor/development agencies, INGOs and government.

Mishra's positive formulation of this independence misses the potential negative impact it can have with such organisations being essentially unaccountable.

But donor circumspection does not always stem from the need to placate truculent "partners". Less controversial than many other issues, but just as significant in terms of consequences for public debate is the "grey" literature generated by Nepali intellectuals for donors but voluntarily withheld from general circulation. As a result, a great deal of information generated about Nepal remains outside the purview of discussion since donors decide what is suitable for public disclosure. Furthermore, the practice of writing reports to reflect donor requirements is not unusual. A veteran consultant, in personal communication, divulged how in more than one professional relationship with donors, his research on dalits or janajatis has been judged too inflammatory for public consumption, forcing him to terminate contracts and publish his studies elsewhere.

In other cases, reports have been heavily edited, and where 'sensitive work' is involved there is the practice of signing confidentiality clauses, of having one internal document and another external one for public dis-



tribution – the latter usually being a bland summary. Donor speeches on the merits of their own countries' public sphere and the weakness of politically underdeveloped countries such as Nepal are laced with well-meaning counsel not only on the participatory foundations of democracy but also on the free flow of information as a precondition for influencing social and political decisions. And yet, through numerous devices, both subtle and brisk, donors actively impede precisely that flow when it comes to protecting their own complex institutional interests.

Clearly, there is a dual dynamic to why donor rhetoric on democracy does not quite live up to its promise. On the one hand, the procedural rules governing the international financing of democracy promotes an indulgent attitude to the civic deficit among domestic partners in the civil society enterprise. On the other hand, at a more fundamental level, the metropolitan principals of the project are themselves not immune to the profoundly anti-democratic impulses of the global neo-liberal establishment, whose hegemonic interventions, informed by delusions about the universal virtue of western techniques of economic and political management, are often explicitly geared to the imposition of an elite-dominated, regimented democracy among politically backward people ignorant of the benefits of free enterprise.

In this respect, recent donor analyses of the Maoist conflict are revealing. It suggests a will to intervene in "civil society" stemming from a desire not just to use them for development purposes in areas no longer seen to be safe for direct donor intervention but to see which "constituencies in civil society need strengthening", while simultaneously being aware of the dangers of "politicising marginalised groups and generally raising unrealistic expectation in the population (a sense of rights not balanced by a sense of responsibility) leading to frustration". The anti-politics agendas of what has been called the "anti-politics machine" could not have been more explicit, and is all the more striking as it comes after many years of sullen silence in an atmosphere not exactly conducive to rampant donor intervention.

The problem of ensuring that participatory citizenship does not excite expectations that cannot be met within the limitations of neoliberal prescriptions is obviously one that exercises the institutions of aid. Hence the frequent references to the "unrealistic expectations" that are raised by routine political activity. There is a self-exonerating purpose to this incrimination of politics. Civil discontent, and presumably insurgency, is the outcome of irresponsible politics, and not irresponsible policies. Bluntly put, popular expectations must not exceed the limits of what aid economists have decided is good for the people. As NGOs administer the sacraments of redemption, politics must abstain from raising any expectations that a neoliberal policy regime cannot fulfil.

On 5 July 2002, the World Bank Country Director for Nepal, Ken Ohashi, expounded this position publicly and very forcefully in an article in *The Kathmandu Post* titled "Ask for a Better Budget, will you?", outlining the features of a good budget system for Nepal, the challenges for the Nepali government, and the role that citizens needed to play. Quoting from a World Bank Public Expenditure Review, Ohashi said, "[f]or any technical solutions to work effectively, the behaviour of political leadership and political parties needs to change significantly. The key challenge in this regard is how to redirect the involvement and energies of the political leaders and political parties in a more constructive way to facilitate the development process and public resource management". He then went on to say,

I have often heard that with the restoration of democracy in 1990, public expectations soared beyond any reasonable chance of achievement. Politicians have simply pandered to these expectations by promising everything people wanted and more, without any regard to what HMG [His Majesty's Government] can afford. I believe that much could have been done to manage expectation through transparency, information and a dose of realism.

The article concludes with the advice, "It is also time the citizens of Nepal demand more sensible budget decisions and more responsible budget implementation. Ultimately, lazy citizens will only get a lazy government".

Ohashi's call for "the people" to ask for a better budget, is very much in line with donor suggestions to strengthen "civil society". The World Bank as an institution does not as a rule historicise its arguments. Besides it has a severely underdeveloped theory of the state. So it is only to be expected that Ohashi's generous advice contains no hint of the complex manner in which state and society relations have historically been structured, the structural inequalities which continue to inform current relations, and the role played by organisations like his own in facilitating, or inhibiting the growth of accountability in state institutions. But precisely because he cannot afford to situate any of his suggestions in the lived realities of Nepali people, Ohashi is compelled to make technocratic and breath-taking recommendations that people's expectations should be "managed".

The irony of his argument is that on the evidence of past experience there is little to suggest that the expectations and wants of the people are high on the list of priorities of the political class. If there has been any pandering it is substantially to the demands of international organisations and not to the needs of the people. There is of course, the additional matter of how not to be a "lazy citizen" and to demand "more sensible budget decisions and more responsible budget implementation" without entertaining too many expectations that

the government might forgetfully pander to. Voluntary mass austerity is evidently the key to a responsible polity and an efficient economy. (Just incidentally, my own attempt to provide a critique of Ohashi's article came to nothing, as my letter to the editor of *The Kathmandu Post* was not entertained on the ground that very few foreigners of his stature write for the paper. They did not want to run the risk of offending him and thereby foreclosing the possibility of further contributions from him. The World Bank will surely be happy to note that its advice about not pandering to expectations has registered in influential quarters.)

Reflecting the same attitude, Western embassies, prominent democracy advocates, acquiesced in the king's dismissal of the parliamentary prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4 October 2002 and his replacement by a royal appointee. Donors and ambassadors routinely and stridently demand adherence to stringent standards of "rule of law". And yet these same institutions and offices cheerfully endorsed the unilateral political decision because they were purportedly "for the good of the country" and "the welfare of the people". This is particularly ironic given the recommendations of a donor report on conflict and development, completed before the royal takeover, which emphasised the necessity of "reinforcing the rule of democratic law". However, as in the case of Kenya, where donors knowingly endorsed unfair elections twice, allowing Daniel Arap Moi to remain in power, it is clear that aid institutions are more interested in preventing the breakdown of the political and economic order, in securing which they are not averse to approving the suppression of political mobilisation.

From the interventions of both Ohashi and the embassies, and from the strategic suggestions outlined in donor conflict reports and the generally programmatic manner in which the term "civil society" is employed in the country, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that their intent is to "civilise" Nepali civil society and citizens in a very specific and defined manner.

The scholar Hakan Seckinelgin draws attention to the dual process involved in US funding of civil society organisations. One is by funding those civil society organisations "that can be identified on the basis of an organisational understanding of civil life underpinned by the American context". Donors, knowingly or not, tend to gravitate to 'partners' who share their ideological bent. The other is the reformulation of civil society that takes place. The application of Western liberal codes of conduct and behaviour changes pre-existing social relations, motivating a very specific form of associational links along neoliberal understandings. It has

been argued that in the current global context, aid needs to be considered as a relation of government, which has the power to reorder the relationship between people and things to achieve desired aims.

As Sarah Henderson points out in the Russian case, "funders are... expressions and facilitators of US interests as well as the monetary engine behind civic organisations" and "funding efforts, presumably designed to bring about stabilisation in Russia, must also reflect US interests and concerns and be justified to an increasingly conservative Congress in terms of US national security and political commercial interest". A recent article in *The Guardian* by Naomi Klein confirms this view. According to it, the head of USAID has attacked NGOs in Afghanistan and Iraq, funded by his organisation, for not sufficiently promoting the fact that

they were giving out donations from the US government. USAID also has told several NGOs that have been awarded humanitarian contracts that they cannot speak to the media.

An issue often left out of consideration in analysing this kind of conduct is the geopolitical security calculation, which in Nepal constitutes an increasingly important component of the metaphor of civil society organisations used by international

institutions as a part of the 'civilising process'. A very specific form of civil society is required to legitimise both the post-1990 Nepali neoliberal state and the global order. There are few aspects of Nepal's new political system that have not been shaped by donor input and political aid, by funding the liberal proponents of procedural democracy in civil society at the expense of real democracy. This does not just influence the rules of the games. It also constitutes part of the strategy by which a state that continues the same exploitative economic system can be newly legitimised via the agenda of "civil society".

All this is part of the new democracy strategy by which international political interventions can occur overtly and with domestic and international support. Given that opposition to authoritarian rule had emerged from civil society in many countries, the imperative has become, in the words of the critic W Robinson, "to penetrate civil society and from therein assure control over popular mobilisation". He goes on to say, "The composition and balance of power in civil society in a given Third World country is now just as important to US and transnational interests as who control the governments of those countries. This is a shift from social control 'from above' to social control 'from below'".

In the context of the Maoist movement, this imperative has particular and disturbing resonance. ▽

In a country where English is both powerful and marginal, the development elite with their bilingual skills and stature as "authentic Nepalis" serve as gatekeepers of information to their non-Nepali speaking bosses and colleagues

Illegal lives

Karachi's two million immigrants face a government crackdown



Bengali immigrants protest outside the Karachi press club.

by *Hasan Mansoor*

When Pakistan launched its National Alien Registration Authority (NARA) in January 2002 to address the perceived problem of illegal immigration, an estimated 3.3 million non-citizens were residing unlawfully in the country, close to two million in the southern city of Karachi alone. NARA received a mandate of three years to document illegal residents in Pakistan, specifically those in Karachi, and to issue work permits to non-citizens "who will get themselves registered". But, perhaps not surprisingly, 18 months into its mission and halfway to its deadline

of December 2004, NARA has registered only 35,000 people, just one percent of the estimated total.

The reasons for NARA's poor performance to date are numerous, though many relate to difficulties inherent in differentiating 'real' Pakistanis from non-citizen 'impostors'. Immigrants and their children have blended into Karachi's bustling urban life, and many have secured government-issued National Identity Cards (NICs), often with the help of other non-citizens elected (illegally) to local administrative bodies. More broadly, they have created their own patronage networks

and ensconced themselves into Karachi's existing ones, gaining access to jobs, political connections and social services that make them as much residents of the city as any native-born citizen.

Owing to the scale and diversity of the immigrant population, estimates of its size and composition remain rough. In Karachi, the largest segment – about 1.3 million – hails from Bangladesh, while totals from Africa, Burma and India reach into the hundreds of thousands. Most Bangladeshi migrants travel overland to Pakistan via India, where they are sometimes able to

make arrangements in advance for work in Karachi, where supposedly pays are higher than anywhere else in South Asia. Karachi is also home to 80,000 Afghans, who are counted as refugees rather than as aliens on the assumption that they will return to their native country once conditions improve.

In a sprawling city of 12 million-plus people, Karachi's non-citizen residents represent about 15 percent of the total population, and because many of them have secured voting rights, they constitute a significant electoral block. A report prepared by NARA's Karachi office states that at least 80 unnaturalised immigrants have been elected to a cluster of 20 union councils in the city, six of which are led by non-citizens, though local government officials put the number of elected immigrants at closer to 130. Another three dozen such candidates are believed to have gained office in the interior of Sindh. And while about half of the non-citizen population in Karachi is concentrated in the city's western district, it has spread effectively throughout the entire metropolis, often in small squatter settlements, making identification of 'illegals' all the more difficult.

On the whole, NARA officials' efforts to register immigrants appear thwarted at nearly every turn, sometimes violently. Non-citizen residents in the Karachi localities of Machchar colony, Ibrahim Hyderi and Mauripur recently turned back visiting NARA officials with force, and NARA's efforts outside of the metropolis enjoy no greater success. Attempts to register international migrants in the southern cities of Nooriabad and Thatta, in Sindh, and Hub, in Balochistan, have failed, casualties of patronage networks and organised resistance to the campaign. "The problem is that aliens have got powers to resist and help their other fellows to become Pakistanis", an officer explains, noting that he and his colleagues are ill-equipped to overcome such tactics. NARA also suffers from more banal organisational woes, in par-

ticular cash shortage that prevents it from acquiring a fleet of vehicles or expanding its staff beyond its present four-dozen employees.

Patronage politics

Owing to its size and uncertain legal status, Karachi's non-citizen community has enmeshed itself in the patronage networks of politicians and political parties, trading votes for political protection. The millions of non-citizen residents living in Karachi have proven to be a valuable vote bank for political parties, particularly for those with weak roots in the metropolis.

Mazhar Shaikh, an additional director general of NARA, expresses dismay at the nearly impossible task of registering non-citizen residents, the fault for which he says

'They are Pakistanis in all respects, by all conditions universally accepted for citizenship'

rests in large measure with their political connections. "A number of them have become elected *nazims* [mayors] and councillors, who stop their community members from getting registered". He says that once elected, these officials push through NIC applications for other non-citizens to help them evade detection by NARA. Shaikh says that he has notified the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), which issues NICs, about the difficulties NARA faces with identity card evasion tactics. A solution is yet to be found. "A joint line of action is under consideration", says Shaikh, adding that the powers of some councillors to attest NIC applications may be suspended while discreet investigations are carried out. For its part, NADRA says that it is reviewing candidate filings in an attempt to root out politicians who lack citizenship.

Ejaz Shafi, a former MP who lost an election last year standing from

Karachi as a candidate of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), has championed the cause of Bangladeshi migrants for more than a decade. In return he has received support from the thousands of immigrants for whom he has helped secure NICs and space on voter rolls. Though he lost last year's race to a candidate of the religious parties alliance, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, Shafi received strong support from the estimated 20,000 Bangla-speakers in his constituency. As a strong supporter of the community, he refuses to use the term 'alien' to designate persons of Bangladeshi origin living in Pakistan. "They are Pakistanis in all respects, by all conditions universally accepted for citizenship", he says.

Other parties, such as cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf, Allama Tahir-ul-Qadri's Pakistan Awami Tehrik, and former president Farooq Leghari's Millat Party, have made concerted attempts to cultivate Bangla-speaking voters. Many political aspirants seek support from residents of Machchar colony, a squatter settlement inhabited by 50,000 Bangla-speakers on land owned by the Karachi Port Trust (KPT). The KPT has made several attempts to evict residents, but each time influential politicians come to the aid of the slum-dwellers. "When I was an MP from this area, I did not allow the KPT to evacuate them", Shafi says, adding that he suggested instead that the port reclaim land from the upscale Clifton locality.

However, not all political parties cultivate the foreign-born vote – indeed, some doubt the calculations on immigrant electoral strength, and others have tapped into local resentment of the large Bengali community to mobilise support. A leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), an offshoot of a partition-era north Indian organisation of Urdu-speakers, argues that patronage networks have not worked to the advantage of immigrants, as despite being included on voter rolls, the government "cau-

tiously sliced them out of Karachi's population" when it came to distributing resources. However, this has not stopped parties from pandering to non-citizens at election time, he says, and he accuses several of illegally registering non-citizens as voters. "Even rightwing Jamaat-i-Islami activists have put many Afghan voters on rolls in the city's central district to harm the MQM", he says. Another political mobiliser, this one from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), perhaps the most powerful political force in Sindh, says that his group does not register non-citizens, as doing so would harm the interests of Pakistanis.

Controversy surrounding immigrants extends to the job market, where local resentment is perhaps more acute than in the field of politics. For non-citizens who find work, it is typically as domestic servants, as low-wage employees in the garment or fishing industries, or in jobs such as sugarcane pressing. Because they are usually willing to work for less pay than native-born Pakistanis, they attract the ire of locals as well as muffled praise from employers, who tend to be exploitative.

Many ethnic and nationalist political organisations, as well as labour groups, regularly carry out campaigns against immigrant employment on the ground that recent arrivals damage the economic prospects of the native-born. Along with the MQM, the Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM) opposes the growing presence of non-citizen workers in Sindh's economy. The parties' election manifestoes accuse immigrants of depressing local wages, and promise improved job prospects for native-born (Urdu-speaking) Pakistanis once they are able to prevent migrants from participating in the economy. "These aliens are a burden on Sindh", JSQM chairman Bashir Qureshi says, adding that it is the government's responsibility to solve the problem.

Searching for 'solutions'

The MQM's Kunwar Khalid Younus argues that the government should

settle the illegal immigration problem once and for all. "What we need is just the political will to do that", he says. As far back as 1993, intelligence agencies considered competing proposals to 'solve' the problem, one being a massive repatriation scheme, primarily of Bangladeshis. This was deemed impractical, however, as for its part, Pakistan refuses to take in the 'Biharis' – the nearly 300,000 Urdu-speakers who have languished in 66 Bangladeshi urban refugee camps since the early 1970s. In any event, the 'exporting' countries are unlikely to cooperate with Islamabad's repatriation schemes; in August 1996, Dhaka refused to accept 70 Bangladeshis deported from Karachi because they carried Pakistani NICs and passports.

What 'solutions', if any, can be found to the non-citizen resident

'We often spend much less to get forged Pakistani documents'

question is a matter of pressing concern in Islamabad. In addition to launching NARA and debating the repatriation scheme, Islamabad has investigated other methods of regulating immigrants' existence and bringing them within the scope of the law. There is a process by which non-citizens can secure legal residence and work status, but its costs are prohibitively expensive for most immigrants: until recently, PKR 10,000 (USD 180) and PKR 1000, respectively, for registration and work permit cards. Even after reductions to PKR 2500 and PKR 500, most non-citizens lack the finances to take advantage of these options, particularly when becoming 'legal' is not viewed as a pressing concern. "We often spend much less than this to get [forged] Pakistani documents", a Bangladeshi migrant living in Federal B Area explains. For citizens of Bangladesh and Burma, there is also the option of formally applying for Pakistani citizenship under Rule 13/A of the Citizenship Act,

though Islamabad has approved less than 1000 of such naturalisation applications till now.

Another idea is to provide migrants with transit back to their countries of origin on non-citizen Pakistani passports. A committee convened by the federal government, which included two Bangla speakers as ex-officio members, recommended the issuing of so-called 'white passports' to migrants from Bangladesh and Burma so that they may visit their countries of origin and migrate back, if so inclined. But to receive a white passport, migrants would first have to register with NARA and fill out Form E-I under the Citizenship Act, a step most non-citizen residents are hesitant to take. However, this plan possesses the advantage of offering an avenue for migrants to return to their birth countries, if they so desire, and some NGOs have expressed interest in facilitating such a process and providing financial support to returnees.

While many Bangla speakers in Pakistan arrived relatively recently, there is also the challenge of adjudicating the citizenship claims of Bengalis whose residence dates to the 24 years between the 1947 partition and Bangladeshi independence. The same federal committee that issued the recommendation about white passports also proposed granting Pakistani citizenship to Bengalis – not Bangladeshis – living in (West) Pakistan before the Bengali nationalist capture of Dhaka on 16 December 1971. After Bangladesh's war of independence, fewer than 25,000 Bengalis opted to remain in Pakistan, according to NARA director general Shaikh, while most of the rest migrated to the former eastern wing. A 1978 amendment to the Citizenship Act nullified the Pakistani citizenship of those domiciled in erstwhile East Pakistan. Bengalis remaining in Pakistan were required to submit a Form E-I to the home department of their province of residence and apply for citizenship, although according to the Sindh home de-

partment, no Bengalis submitted such forms in that province after the war. Many of these people have led a precarious legal existence for the past three decades.

The government committee also held meetings with Bengali community representatives and, in response to concerns that they lack documentary proof of residence, proposed that local police officials be empowered to recommend the granting of citizenship after verification. Critics, however, say that this proposal would only lead to massive corruption among police officers. Another widely shared concern among non-citizen residents is the suspicion that the entire government registration process is merely a plot to launch deportation proceedings once particulars are known to authorities. Interior ministry officials dismiss this claim, and note that none of the 35,000 migrants registered to date have been deported. "On the contrary, we are trying to resolve their civic and social problems, including extending them educational, health and other facilities", says one official. He also discloses that the government committee has been asked to review other countries' immigration and citizenship policies in order to suggest improvements in Pakistan's system.

13 kg of bad publicity

Debates about the role of ethnic-minority non-citizens in Pakistani society and politics, and the proposed methods of dealing with the concerns of and about them, are also coloured by anxieties about the supposedly dangerous and illegal practices of some elements of the immigrant population. Statements from Pakistan's interior ministry indicate that there is increased official concern about non-citizen residents' involvement with religious schools accused of fuelling sectarian hatred, and with criminal activities ranging from burglaries and murder to international drug trafficking. A recent interior ministry socio-economic survey showed that non-citi-

zens are concentrated in 22 localities of Karachi, many in 'sensitive' places near sea, oil and power installations and army cantonments, prompting the police to recommend mass evictions in these areas.

Concerns about links to religious violence are heightened given Karachi's experience with sectarian violence. NARA research shows that the migrant community is making concentrated use of 29 government schools and nine hospitals, and operates 44 *madrasas*, about five percent of the city's 869 Islamic schools. Regarding those schools, authorities say that, despite it being a small proportion of the city's total, they are nevertheless worried about an influx of students into these largely unregulated institutions.

Today, most foreign students in the *madrasas* come from Afghan, Burmese or Bangladeshi backgrounds, although until two years ago there were also large numbers of African and Southeast Asian students. With the opening of the US military campaign in Afghanistan in October 2001, however, overseas enrolment in Karachi's *madrasas* plummeted, and now foreign-born students represent only four percent of the 264,169 *madrasa* student total for Sindh, 85 percent of which is concentrated in Karachi, according to a recent police report.

The already precarious position of foreign-born residents in Karachi vis-à-vis the police is further complicated by military and law enforcement efforts associated with the US 'war on terror'. The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), with the help of Pakistani authorities, is closely monitoring mobile phone conversations in Pakistan, and has arrested hundreds of foreigners suspected of links to Al Qaeda and other militant outfits. The FBI conducts operations in the country with the blessings and assistance of Pakistani officials, who have toed the US line since September 2001. Among the several thousand people arrested to date in these operations, officials say that about 700 are non-Pakistanis, mostly Afghans and

Arabs, but there are also some Africans, Bangladeshis and Burmese.

The police also highlight migrants' participation in local crime, in particular their connections to robbery, kidnapping, narcotics smuggling, human trafficking and murder. "We have evidence of their involvement in serious offences, and we have recommended that the government take the issue seriously", the inspector general of Sindh police, Syed Kamal Shah, alleges. According to a police report, non-citizens are implicated in a widespread network of trafficking girls from Bangladesh and Pakistan to the United Arab Emirates. Police also suspect that immigrants have worked as hired killers in Karachi's recent spate of high-profile murders.

These concerns came to the surface in late spring with the high-profile arrests of three Bengali drug smugglers. On 21 May, Bangladeshi airport authorities arrested three women travelling on Pakistani passports for possession of 13 kilograms of heroin valued at USD 2.25 million, one of the largest drug hauls ever in Dhaka. Pakistani authorities had tipped off their Bangladeshi counterparts, who discovered the contraband in paste tubes hidden in the women's luggage. A preliminary investigation into the case by Pakistani officials uncovered that the traffickers were Karachi-based Bengalis who had bribed officials to receive documents attesting Pakistani citizenship. According to Pakistani authorities, travel on forged or falsely issued Pakistani documents is quite common, though it is 'real' Pakistani citizens who receive a bad reputation for such practices. Several Afghans have also been caught committing similar crimes, though Bengalis are believed to be more frequent offenders.

The Dhaka drug bust, extensively covered in the Pakistani media, led to hand wringing and accusation-levelling in Karachi. An official of the PPP cites the heroin arrests as evidence of the negative consequences of migrants partici-

pating in the political process. Others point to the implications of the incident for the entire bureaucracy. A thorough investigation into the Dhaka case, if and when it occurs, could raise troubling questions about the efficiency and integrity of NARA, which issues NICs and prepares voting registers, as well as other departments in the internal affairs ministry, such as the passport-issuing authority. Precisely how long corrupt practices have been occurring, and the extent to which bribery permeates the system, are difficult to assess, although anecdotal evidence paints a worrying picture.

The heroin arrests prompted great interest at least in part because they touched on another widely held concern about non-citizen residents – their alleged widespread drug use. According to a United Nations Development Programme

report, drug abuse among immigrants in Pakistan is rampant, and because of needle-sharing authorities suspect that HIV is on the rise in the community. Even so, such drug use is both a cause of concern and a

Proposed solutions include formalising non-citizens' work status, naturalisation, and mass deportation

symptom of their perilous condition, as many take up the expensive indulgence to alleviate the psychological stress and general frustration of leading a quasi-legal existence.

Yet, whether it concerns illegal activities or dangerous habits, official and popular scrutiny of Bangla speakers is greater than that of na-

tive-born, Urdu-speaking Pakistanis, and there are concerns that allegations of criminal activity are being exaggerated to malign the community. An October 2001 report in the *Dawn* of Karachi on immigrants in Pakistan states, quoting police sources, that "the over-all involvement of Bengalis in crime is negligible", and that "contrary to a general perception", at most 200 Bengalis are involved in crime in Karachi. This appears to contradict some of NARA's positions, such as the claim that non-citizen residents are "adding to the crime rate". Given that persons who lack clear legal status will likely seek to avoid activities provoking the interest of law enforcement officials, there appear to be grounds for doubting some of NARA's more sweeping charges of mass criminality in the migrant community. ▽

Beyond the doomsday scenario

Bangladeshi garment workers prepare for a post-MFA world

by *Dina M Siddiqi*

The realisation that the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), in place since 1974, will be phased out by the end of 2004 has produced something close to national panic in Bangladesh. Many people seem convinced that when the garment industry is no longer cushioned from the vagaries of the 'free market', its prospects for survival will be slim, at best.

Governments renegotiate the quantity of trade in this category every year as per the MFA, which sets developed country import quotas on textiles and garments manufactured in developing countries. In 1994, as a result of the Uruguay Round of the Gen-

eral Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the precursor of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), member countries agreed to phase out the MFA over 10 years, in accordance with official GATT-WTO goals of eliminating quota systems and protectionist markets. One of the mem-

ber countries is Bangladesh, whose economy's reliance on export earnings from the apparel industry is overwhelming.

It is difficult to predict what will happen in Bangladesh once the apparel industry loses its fixed and protected export market. The greatest fear is that hundreds of thousands of workers, mostly female, will be retrenched as a consequence. Available evidence, however, does not corroborate predictions of such drastic change, at least according to many industry pundits. They point out that quotas on several items have already been phased out without any substantial ef-



fect on overall earnings. Rather, large-scale retrenchment in the last two years resulted from other factors, such as the global economic slowdown following 11 September 2001. On the other side of the argument are those who note that the present quota system for most Bangladeshi export items is also scheduled for phasing out in 2004. They are convinced that a large number of factories will not be able to compete in the global market, making the prospect of mass unemployment imminent.

Whatever the prognosis, the plight of garment workers has suddenly become a matter of great concern, even to those who previously exhibited little interest in their well being. Factory owners, social activists who might otherwise have little to say on labouring women, and trade unionists alike are now highlighting the need to prepare for the end of 2004. While there is little apparent concern about what the numbers or statistical trends have to say, Dhaka is abuzz with talk about "1.5 million workers losing their jobs overnight".

One can only speculate on the various interests involved in such suppositions. Factory owners appear to be using this as an opportunity to push the government to implement a long-standing set of demands – the provision of a central bonded warehousing facility, lowered duties on certain import items and improved port facilities, among other things. Indeed, the recently proposed national budget clearly took the concerns of this sector into consideration with its offer of substantial tax reductions for the industry.

A number of prominent trade unionists are enjoying a rare moment in the sun, having become regular speakers at the many seminars and symposiums on the subject. Lastly, many concerned citizens worry about the social consequences of having so many young, unemployed women on the streets of the capital. Indeed, an underlying anxiety about uncontrolled

working class sexuality seems to be a common thread running through discussions on the topic.

Rarely brought up in these discussions, though, are some aspects of market access and productivity that have a direct relation to maintaining the garment industry in good health. After all, the future viability of the industry depends to a great extent on its ability to gain access to more diverse markets and to increase labour productivity.

Dangerous sympathy

In response to a question on image and marketability, factory owners at a recent roundtable on the impact of the MFA phase-out noted that they

International calls for uniform wages act as an alibi for justifying Northern protectionist trade policies

find considerable sympathy abroad for Bangladeshi workers. They take this to be a wholly positive development, given past boycotts and the general demonising of the garment industry. However, it should not be taken for granted that this sympathy always translates into actions that help workers. For one thing, today a growing number of consumers 'with a conscience' in the North are unwilling to buy clothes made with 'sweatshop labour'. These consumers, along with student activists and labour organisers, form the core supporters of the movement to establish universal labour standards. Unfortunately, it is all too clear that the demand for uniform wages frequently acts as an alibi for justifying Northern protectionist trade policies. Double standards invariably operate in the discourse on ethics in the labour market, placing poor countries at a distinct disadvantage.

Some of the images of the exploitation of women workers in circulation are irresponsible, to say the

least. A college textbook published several years ago claims that in the slums of Bangladesh, there is a saying that "if you're lucky, you'll be a prostitute; if you're unlucky, you'll be a garment worker". An investigative journalist hired by a US trade union coined this saying; the conflicting interests at stake here, given the politics of international trade, are not difficult to grasp. This is exactly the kind of rhetoric that generates sympathy for Bangladeshi workers from politically correct Northern consumers. The consequences of such attention and sympathy have been disastrous at times, as the boycotts of earlier decades painfully demonstrated.

But, the reality is that Bangladeshi garment factories remain notorious for their sweatshop-like conditions. Without doubt, there are serious violations of labour rights in the garment sector. Labour exploitation is alive and well in many factories. However, a blanket condemnation (or celebration) of the industry does not do justice to the complexity or diversity of working conditions in the sector. There are substantial differences in working conditions between large, well-established factories and small, barely viable ones, and between those in the Export Processing Zones – investment-friendly areas near Dhaka, in Chittagong, and as yet in the implementation stage at Comilla and Ishurdi – and those outside.

Equally important, a distinction must be made between those situations where questions of labour rights are embedded in larger structural issues of poverty and those that entail gross violations of human rights. It is critical to intervene in the discourse on global labour standards and bring out this distinction in all its fine points. That is one way to prevent the labour issue from being appropriated by the agendas of Northern capitalists and labour unions.

At the same roundtable, the question of alternative occupations for retrenched garment workers was

raised, with the suggestion that perhaps sex work was the only viable option for many women. Invariably, a widely viewed programme on a private TV channel that had suggested as much came up for discussion as 'evidence' of this trend. No doubt the show in question was produced out of sympathy for the plight of unemployed garment workers. Yet, by highlighting a dubious but unquestioned link between poor women and sex work, the programme appears to have done more damage than good. Rather than generating serious concern for retrenched workers, or unpacking the pernicious effects of globalisation and structural adjustment on an uneven playing field, the show succeeded only in tapping into a generalised middle class anxiety. This kind of sympathy is always in danger of slipping into voyeurism, leading to a different kind of exploitation of the labouring woman.

Workers/human rights

The factory owners present at the roundtable expressed unanimous admiration for the diligence and intelligence (quick "pick-up time") of their female employees. The praise notwithstanding, Bangladeshi garment workers have one of the lowest labour productivity levels in the world. Apart from lack of education and opportunities for skill accumulation, there are invisible social dimensions that affect productivity. Often with women, but not necessarily restricted to women, it is sexual harassment.

A study of the garment industry by the writer earlier this year showed that worker efficiency is closely related to the specific conditions of employment associated with globalisation which create 'enabling' environments for employers and others to get away with sexual harassment, simultaneously making it harder for employees to press for redress. In other words, extreme job insecurity in the garment industry promotes rampant sexual coercion and blackmail from superiors.

Since workers can be dismissed at the whim of superiors, women – especially if they are financially insecure – often have no choice but to quietly accept harassment and to leave if conditions become intolerable.

A quarter of respondents reported being sexually harassed at least once. 30 percent of all garment workers and 50 percent of workers employed in the Export Processing Zones reported having heard of sexual assaults or rapes in their workplace. Given the stigma attached to making such incidents public, one can assume there was considerable under-reporting. The smaller factories were the worst of

Micro-credit is not the panacea for all problems in all places

fenders, while very large, well-established factories appeared to afford relatively more protection.

Gauging the impact of sexual harassment on worker productivity, the results of the study were striking. Almost half of the workers reported that sexual harassment impairs their productivity directly. It is not only individual workers who feel the impact. If a woman has been humiliated, sexually or otherwise, and no public action is taken, the atmosphere of fear and resentment infects all workers. Experiences of sexual harassment also generate forms of resistance that effectively lower productivity. In the absence of any mechanism to correct an abusive situation, workers frequently resort to actions such as intentionally slowing down their output per hour or feigning illness. For many workers, this kind of oblique resistance may be the only means of expressing their anger or helplessness. Talking back or seeking help from superiors usually makes things much worse.

The underlying factors that increase worker vulnerability to

sexual harassment can be rectified quite easily. Providing workers with appropriate documentation, and eliminating the informal system of hiring and firing workers would be a critical first step. This does not require new legislation but rather the enforcement of existing labour laws. Needless to say, the increased efficiency argument should not be the primary motive for implementing labour laws.

Free trade versus fair

The prospect of social and economic upheaval after 2004 looms large, partly because of the memories from the large-scale retrenchment of garment workers at the end of 2001. At that time, an umbrella group of NGOs established a micro-credit programme to help unemployed garment workers attain self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, despite its reputation in international development circles, micro-credit is not the panacea for all problems in all places. The programme was misplaced and doomed to fail.

The best way to ensure the social and economic security of garment workers is to enable them to keep their jobs. This is not an easy task in the new global order, given the minimal bargaining power that Bangladesh has. Intervening in the global discourse on ethics and ensuring the rights of workers in the workplace can make some difference. Equally important are recent efforts to make international trade fair, rather than free – which it never has been. The Fair Trade Initiative pioneered by Oxfam and others, for instance, seeks to close the immense gap between the manufacturing price and the selling price of goods produced in poor countries. Some people are quick to dismiss the venture as utopian, since it strikes at the heart of the capitalist system of pricing and profits. In response, one can only say that without visions of utopia, meaningful social change would never be possible anywhere in the world. △

Pakistan's budget 2003-04

The economics of hypocrisy

Pakistan's government releases a budget addressing the concerns of its core constituency – the World Bank and the IMF.

by *Shafqat Munir*

Pakistan's finance minister, Shaukat Aziz, when presenting the new fiscal year budget in June, made tall claims about the country's improved economic outlook. This budget, Aziz's fourth since being appointed finance minister by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999, is the first he has presented under the military-led civilian government of Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali. Yet, despite the arrival of an elected civilian government since Aziz released last year's budget, essentially nothing has changed in his economic planning. The budget for 2003-04 is merely a continuation of economic policies aimed at achieving targets set by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In his 7 June budget speech, Aziz offered an ambiguous appraisal of Pakistan's fiscal health, on the one hand describing a rosy recovery process, and on the other enumerating five major challenges that appeared to contradict his claims of sound economic growth and poverty reduction. These challenges are: accelerating economic growth in sectors with job creation capacity, a step deemed essential for poverty reduction; making larger investments in human development, an objective that has received increased budget support; recovering losses in public sector corporations, which would increase the capacity to invest in human capital and development; making improvements in physical infrastructure such as wa-

ter storage, canals, roads and ports in order to more fully realise the economy's potential; and attracting greater private sector investment, a point on which some limited success has already been achieved.

Judging by the finance minister's five points, the ostensible cornerstones of the government's economic improvement plan are in-



Shaukat Aziz points the way.

creasing growth and employment and furthering human and infrastructure development. If this does not materialise, then Aziz's claims in his budget speech will prove falsely hopeful. Sadly, there is good reason to doubt that the finance minister's optimistic words will translate into real-life improvements for the people of Pakistan. First, the new budget essentially continues policies of the past several years, in

which period the poverty rate of Pakistan touched 32 percent, according to official data, and nearly 40 percent according to independent sources and international agencies. This is up from a 1993-94 World Bank poverty estimate of 29 percent. Second, the budget no longer even reflects the interests of Pakistanis, howsoever defined by the government. Policy planners have, with the curiously titled Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), settled on a new strategy to placate international lenders.

Debt bondage

Trapped in debt by the World Bank and the IMF, along with other lending countries and institutions, Pakistan appears fated to accept whatever conditions the overseas institutions chooses to impose. The country is currently making use of USD two billion in World Bank money for poverty reduction and simultaneously accepting funds from an IMF programme, the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), to the tune of USD 1.4 billion. Ironically, by the much-touted terms of good governance, Pakistan should not receive these funds, as the country's politics hardly conforms to international standards of competent and fair administration. Even so, these lending bodies now require Pakistan to draw upon their policy guidelines to prepare and implement a poverty reduction strategy with long-term objectives.

Launched globally in 2000,

PRSPs are (supposedly) developed by national governments in cooperation with the World Bank, the IMF and local interest groups to "describe a country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs". To date, 26 countries, mostly from Africa, have published PRSPs, and another 45, including Pakistan, have Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (I-PRSPs). Sri Lanka, which presented its PRSP on 23 April 2003, is the only South Asian country to have done so, with Pakistan expected to follow suit with its final plan later this year. The purpose of the plan is to establish a framework for long-term planning, and to "provide the crucial link between national public actions, donor support, and the development outcomes needed to meet the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals]".

Some analysts argue that structural adjustment policies and, more specifically, sectoral adjustment loans, have been the single most important policy-influencing tool of bilateral and multilateral donors in the post-war era. Contained in such documents as PRSPs, they have come to dominate the economic policy contexts of a large majority of poor countries, and are likely to continue to do so as the debt trap intensifies. In most PRSPs, 10 basic conditions are placed on prospective countries for them to gain access to loans, three of the most important being sound sectoral policy, deregulation and good governance.

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, a civil society analyst, says that the problem with structural adjustment policies is their history of destructive effects in countries where they have been introduced. The primary thrust of these policies is reducing subsidies and budget deficits, increasing revenues and privatisation, and encouraging trade liberalisation. To meet these terms, governments, instead of increasing revenues by taxing high-income individuals and industries, place the financial bur-

den on the common man, increasing the incidence of poverty. In Pakistan, particularly since Musharraf came to power in 1999, direct and indirect taxation and price increases have adversely affected Pakistan's lower-middle and poorer classes. PRSP policies are also an indirect threat to food security in that they reduce government support for the food supply. Yet, despite the clearly harmful effects of these policies, and their detachment from realistic assessments of countries' situations, international financial institutions have continued to advance them. At the policy level, this results in severely misguided and counter-productive strategies.

The PRSP process began in Pakistan three years ago. The country's I-PRSP, adopted in November 2001, contains goals similar to those pre-

Structural adjustment policies are the most important tool of bilateral and multilateral donors

sented in Aziz's 7 June budget speech. In May 2003, a PRSP draft was completed, with final approval expected by year's end. No doubt, the stated aims of the PRSP – economic growth, reduced poverty, improved administration – are worthy goals, but the methods prescribed by the plan are unlikely to achieve them. The government has not devised a practical, time-bound programme to increase economic growth or to raise standards of living. To do so would first require a plan to improve the lives of the country's agricultural labourers, who, at 48 percent of the workforce, represent the largest section of the employed population. An increase in agricultural sector prosperity would, for instance, do much to roll back poverty, given that the sector represents one-quarter of the country's GDP and sustains two-thirds of its people. But despite its

importance, agriculture has continuously received little government support, a trend continued in this year's budget.

A multidimensional condition

Under the PRSP guidelines, the government has committed itself to raise pro-poor budgetary allocations by at least 0.2 percent of the GDP per annum. Based on these projections, by fiscal year 2005-06 the allocation for poverty reduction will reach PKR 246.5 billion (USD 4.42 billion). The government claims that the PRSP will broaden and deepen development by facilitating high rates of economic growth, thereby improving employment prospects and strengthening the social safety net.

The 2003-04 budget proposes PKR 185 billion (USD 3.3 billion) for poverty reduction, as compared to PKR 161 billion (USD 2.9 billion) for the outgoing year, a net increase of almost 15 percent, at least on paper. Ideally, this money will be used to improve the education, health care, population planning, water supply and sanitation, rural development and housing sectors. An allocation of this size for poverty reduction is actually quite substantial for a country with an economy and growth rates described as modest, at best. Even so, the impressive figures found in glossy budget documents may prove to be hollow numbers.

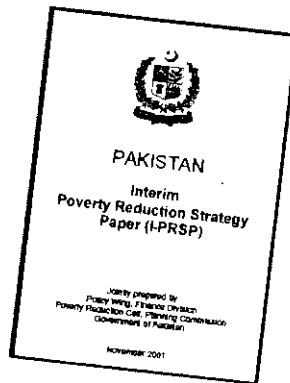
In evaluating this year's poverty reduction budget, it deserves mention that, of the PKR 161 billion earmarked last year, 60 percent of the assigned funds went unspent. Doubts have even been raised about whether the money committed on paper actually existed in the first place, and concerns naturally follow about whether a 15 percent increase in this year's budget will translate into an actual increase in spending. The government, apparently in an attempt to convince people that poverty will be aggressively targeted, has re-christened the Public Sector Development Programme as the Poverty Reduction Programme. But, leaving aside name changes and theoretical bud-

getary allocations for improving citizens' welfare, it is clear that Pakistanis are falling deeper into the poverty trap of diminished social services.

Poverty is defined as a multidimensional condition coupling low or non-existent income with lack of access to basic services such as education, health care and employment opportunities. But measurements of poverty are faulty in that they usually take into consideration only income levels, according to Dr Mushtaq A Khan of the Centre for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution of the Planning Commission of Pakistan. So, even while economic growth may lift the mean income level, large income differentials can simultaneously increase inequality, and both processes affect conditions of poverty. "In the case of Pakistan, it seems that poverty is more sensitive to the inequality. With increases in the GDP growth rate, the average nominal income increases in the economy, which has a positive impact on poverty. But this positive impact is washed out due to the negative impact of worsening income inequality and vice versa", explains Dr Khan.

Statistical measures of physical well-being offer a grim picture of poverty in Pakistan. According to official data, over 70 million people, more than half of all Pakistanis, do not have access to health facilities. The doctor-population ratio is 1:2000, while that for nurses is 1:4000 and that for hospital beds is 1:1500. There are only 455 rural health centres, despite the fact that two-thirds of all Pakistanis live in rural areas. Mortality rates for infants, children and mothers are high by South Asian and world standards. The gender ratio of newborns, at 108 males to 100 females, is disturbing, and roughly 40 percent of all under-five children are malnourished. Unsafe drinking water and air pollution contribute to health problems, and an estimated six million children aged between five and nine are out of school.

For the remaining 14 million who do attend classes, the quality of education is poor, with about 55 percent of children above the age of 10 illiterate. Only 63 percent of people have access to water supply, the safety of which in any event is not regulated. Only two in five people have access to sanitation facilities, and air pollution levels in Lahore and Karachi are 20 times the World Health Organisation's standards.



Pakistan's fiscal roadmap, the I-PRSP, is a product of World Bank-IMF consultation.

Plight of the worker

Pakistan's growth rate, touted in the I-PRSP as a strong pillar of the country's economy, is actually lower today than it was in the last decade. Following an average growth rate of four percent in the 1990s, the nearly four years of Musharraf's tenure have witnessed a decline to 3.6 percent, owing to low levels of investment and savings. Because of connections between investment and employment, a decline in these categories worsens poverty, which, in turn, is directly linked to human rights, labour rights and environmental stan-

dards, none of which have demonstrated significant improvements despite the adoption of the five-pillar I-PRSP.

The country's generally bleak economic planning is exacerbated by disastrous shifts in employment trends and policies. Unemployment in Pakistan has continued to increase, with the official rate now standing at 7.8, and, according to the 'Economic Survey 2002-03', about 3.3 million people are out of work. Such conditions have resulted in increases in related social maladies, including crime and suicide. Moreover, the situation of those employed or underemployed is worsening due to the introduction of a contract labour system and regressive labour laws promulgated by the Musharraf government and ratified by Prime Minister Jamali's.

Among the most notable of the recent changes in labour law is the Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO) of 2002, which replaced an IRO dating from 1969, and has effectively snatched away basic protections from workers and contravened International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions that Pakistan has ratified. In the new IRO, agricultural workers, representing half of the Pakistani labour force, have lost the right to form trade unions, the very institutions meant to protect and advance workers' rights. Taken together with the large portion of the labour force employed in the informal sector, where trade unions do not exist in any event, nearly the entire labour force is no longer allowed to organise. Altogether, only three percent of Pakistan's labour force is currently unionised.

Experience from around the world shows that labour unions are among the most important of civil society groups helping to create rights-based conditions, though their prospects in Pakistan are not encouraging. The lack of organising rights in agriculture becomes all the more serious when one considers government plans to introduce corporate farming in the country, even though this flies in the face of PRSP

goals of improving workers' conditions. The effect of these policies is a two-fold attack on agricultural workers, at once corporatising the livelihoods of nearly 30 million people and simultaneously stripping them of their right to organise in the face of liberalisation.

Another regressive provision in the IRO 2002 is the abolishment of National Industrial Relations Commission (NIRC) relief to sacked/re-trenched workers. Until now, such workers could file a case with the NIRC and remain in the job until adjudication of their claims. Now, workers' rights have been all but eliminated, as employers can fire at will without worry about NIRC action. And, despite false claims that government labour courts were strengthened in the tripartite conference of July 2001, in reality the situation has worsened, especially with the recent elimination of labour appellate tribunals.

All of these measures are pro-employer and anti-worker. Instead of pursuing a policy of threatening citizens' livelihoods and increasing poverty, the government should facilitate an employment structure promoting opportunities for employment and social protection for workers.

Participatory dictatorship

While the government claims to have proceeded through the PRSP process in a consultative manner, obvious shortcomings and condemnation from civil society contradict this position. Fury over the PRSP process has extended to parliament, where, after a briefing by civil society groups on 23 June, opposition parliamentarians objected to the inclusion of certain components of the I-PRSP in the new budget without debate in or approval by parliament. Casting doubts on the government's entire poverty reduction scheme, they demanded a transparent evaluation of all PRSP policies and implementation proposals.

Understandably, the large donor institutions take a different view of Pakistan's PRSP process. World

Bank country director in Pakistan, John W Wall, a leading supporter of the PRSP process, attended the 23 June meeting and stated, "The core principles of PRSP should be country driven, result oriented, participatory, comprehensive and long term in perspective". In addition to these vague commitments, Wall also recommended taking the three key steps of "understanding poverty



Today, nearly the entire labour force is no longer allowed to organise

and factors that determine it, choosing public actions impacting poverty, and identifying indicators of progress and monitoring in a participatory manner".

It is, of course, hypocrisy on the part of the World Bank and other donors to speak in terms of participatory and transparent approaches even as they cut deals with a military government that does not 'consult with stakeholders', at least if

stakeholders are defined as the people it governs. In clear contradiction of Wall's sermon, the government has consistently refused to bring PRSP policies up for parliamentary debate. Moreover, the opposition and treasury benches were not consulted during the development of the I-PRSP or its final version, exposing the claim that people's representatives have been taken into confidence. Donors peddling such policies always prefer dealing with dictators in Pakistan instead of democratic governments. And, as they dictate to a dictator, they bestow on him internationally credibility he may not have in the country.

The secretive manner in which the government conducted PRSP negotiations with donors, and the fact that its contents have not been brought up for debate in parliament, much less before the general public, suggest that the Musharraf-Jamali regime is pursuing economic policies that it knows will not survive scrutiny. Reviews of Pakistan's PRSP strategy, or its policy components, unambiguously demonstrate that the people's interests have been subverted to the whims and power-point guidelines of international lenders. Pakistan's experiment with participatory dictatorship, far from improving the lives of its people, has proven to be a bankrupt experience. △

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Queens, princesses and refugees

IN END-June, it seems that all was forgiven and forgotten between Nepal and Bhutan. The Bhutanese senior queen *Ashi Tsering Pema Wangchuk* and her college-going photogenic daughters *Chimi Yangzam* and *Kesang Choden* arrived in Kathmandu to the week-long delight of the paparazzi, hugging HIV+ children, visiting Lumbini, and – most importantly – being wined and dined by Nepal's royalty. Crown Prince Paras and his wife Himani suddenly surged to the limelight as hosts to the Bhutanese ladies. One moment that made particularly big waves was Paras bending to a low handshake in a manner that has never before been captured by Nepali photo-journalists.



THE KATHMANDU POST

took a sudden turn for the worse a month ago when the Nepali government agreed to a Bhutanese proposal that would essentially render a majority of them stateless (See *Himal*, June 2003).

The Ministerial Joint Committee of the two countries decided to accept the Bhutanese proposal to an absurd categorisation of the refugees (as bona fide Bhutanese,

All of this would be a most satisfying reinstatement of cordiality between the two Himalayan neighbours, except for one niggling detail that surfaced every time one saw the three Ashis of Bhutan in front page spreads. And that was the presence of the 106,223 refugees from Bhutan, whose future suddenly

as voluntary émigrés, as non-Bhutanese and criminal Bhutanese). The verification exercise in one of the camps has slotted more than 70 percent of the refugees in that camp in the second category; this means that these refugees have been rendered stateless unless the Bhutanese or Nepali governments, out of magna-

Mountains of literature

IT IS a comfortable cliché that the Himalayan region is home to hundreds of endangered species and scores of undocumented languages. But it is not common knowledge that the field of Himalayan studies is home to a similarly diverse array of scholarly journals. This overview offers a few words on some of the major journals of Himalayan studies in the year that commemorates the 50th anniversary of one of the most celebrated Himalayan feats – Norgay and Hillary's ascent of Everest.

Ancient Nepal (Prâcin Nepâl) is a large format yellow journal devoted to Himalayan prehistory and field archaeology and has been published by the Department of Archaeology in Kathmandu since October 1967. Many recent foreign archaeological expeditions to Nepal have published their initial findings in *Ancient Nepal*, and recent editions include accounts of work in Upper Mustang and Kohla (an old Gurung settlement). While the price is right,

the distribution is not, and very few bookshops in Nepal or India carry the journal. Buy it when you see one, it is a rare find.

One of the longest running, most varied and impressively regular journals available in Nepal is *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. The home of this journal, started in 1973, is the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies in Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University. Foreign scholars as well as domestic academics are encouraged to write for *Contributions*, and all articles are peer reviewed. Truly multidisciplinary, the journal's strengths these days include anthropology, sociology and linguistics. Articles may be in Nepali or English, and offprints are provided to writers whose papers are accepted.

Along with *Ancient Nepal* and *Contributions*, the longest running journal in the field is *Kailash: Journal of Himalayan Studies*, published on crisp Nepali paper by Ratna Pustak Bhandar since 1973. The journal was conceived to be a forum for scholars of a younger generation from both the East and the West to have their material published and critically discussed, and to this day



Kailash continues to publish the findings of original research projects. Originally published four times a year, *Kailash* is these days rather infrequent, and is available only in Nepal. The first few editions have now been digitised and are available online free at www.digitalthimalaya.com/kailash/.

The *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre (JNRC)* has been published in Nepal by the German publisher Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH Wiesbaden since 1977, and contains scores of excellent articles on the cultures and heritage of Nepal. The original aim – a noble one – was to republish in English the most significant articles on Nepal written in

nimity, assign them citizenship.

In pulling out all the stops to fete the ladies, the royal palace seemed surreally unaware of how this was going down in the public. For an increasingly politicised monarchy, Narayanhiti, it seems, would have been more aware of the sensitivity of public relations operations.

Speculation in Kathmandu had it that the Bhutanese queen was in town with her daughters as a back-door diplomat, and is thought to have purveyed the message that Bhutan would take back up to 70 percent of the refugees that are in the process of being rendered stateless. This jives well with earlier suggestions from unnamed sources in Kathmandu's foreign ministry holding that they had informal reassurances to this effect from Thimpu.

The Bhutanese refugees are understandably hesitant to take such unofficial communication at face



THE KATHMANDU POST

value after 13 long years of prevarication on their status from Bhutan and the circumstances in which they were made to leave. They can hardly be pleased, sweltering in camps in

the hot, moist plains of Mörang and Jhapa, with the chumminess between Nepali and Bhutanese royalty. ▲

German and Nepali which would otherwise go unnoticed by many scholars of the region. To this day, a new edition of the *JNRC* emerges every year or so, and can be picked up in Kathmandu or Europe.

The Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies (formerly the US Nepal Studies Association) started a bulletin in the winter of 1980, which matured into the *Himalayan Research Bulletin* (*HRB*). This journal, edited out of Portland, Oregon, is an interdisciplinary publication of scholarship relating to Nepal and the adjacent Himalayan areas. The *HRB* is an excellent way to stay in touch with conferences, events, new publications and even old friends (an updated address and contact list is included every few editions). While this biannual journal is available through subscription only, the dedicated website, www.himalayan.pdx.edu/, has information on the contents of past and future issues.

The *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* (*EBHR*) was established in 1991 with the aim of providing an open forum for scholars in the humanities, natural and applied

sciences specialising in Himalayan studies. This biannual journal has a quirky editorial arrangement: it is edited in strict rotation by teams from the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. While notes on conferences and book reviews are welcome, a particular strength of the *EBHR* is the longer monograph-style articles, which are heavily footnoted and well referenced. The journal is pocket-sized and orange, and the occasional volume can be found in Kathmandu bookshops.

While *Studies in Nepali History and Society* (*SINHAS*) was conceived only in 1996, the journal has already made an international name for itself as a discerning and high-quality publication. *SINHAS* aims to enhance understanding of cultural politics and social conditions in Nepal through a commitment to historical analysis, attention to Nepali scholarship and a willingness to explore new terrain. *SINHAS* is published in Kathmandu by Mandala Book Point and abstracts can be read

online at www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/AS/sinhas/

The *Journal of Bhutanese Studies* dates to 1999, when an editorial board at the Centre for Bhutan Studies in Thimpu realised the need for an interdisciplinary journal relating to Bhutanese issues. The biannual journal can be purchased by contacting the editors or read online free at the website www.bhutan-studies.com.

The Royal Nepal Academy does not have the best track record with continuity when it comes to journals. A few years ago the *Journal of Nepalese Studies* was launched, but this never got further than a few irregular volumes, and was quickly replaced by the *Journal of Nepalese Literature, Art and Culture*. This biannual journal can be bought from the sales counter of the academy in Kathmandu.

The *Tibet Journal* is a quarterly publication of the *Library of Tibetan Works and Archives* (*LTBA*) in Dharamsala, India. The journal's focus is on scholarly and general interest articles on Tibetan culture and civilisation by Tibetans and non-Tibetans. This long-standing publica-

tion is edited by an international team of senior Tibet scholars, and many seminal articles have graced its pages. The *Tibet Journal* is available in many libraries and bookshops in Kathmandu, as well as directly from the publisher.

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, Sikkim, has recently relaunched its flagship publication, the *Bulletin of Tibetology*. First published in 1964, the journal is actively soliciting articles on Tibetan studies with a particular view to Sikkim and the surrounding areas. A website, www.tibetology.com, is under construction.

Tom Lehrer once sung of chemical elements: "these are the only ones of which the news has come to Harvard, and there may be many others, but they haven't been discovered". This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but a team at the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (www.thdl.org) is compiling one. Readers are encouraged to send information on any major Himalayan journals to mt272@cornell.edu ▽

Mark Turin, Ithaca, USA

Mughal magical realism

FOR A continental sub-unit boasting myriad traditional art forms, contemporary South Asia could do more to produce works of art that explore modern social and political issues through indigenous mediums. At least one craftsman of the Subcontinent has taken a stab at that challenge – Saira Wasim, a miniature painter of the Mughal style, who works out of Lahore. There is much in the South Asia of today in dire need of artistic examination, and Wasim has cast her stroke wide, using her art to vent anger against religious extremism, nuclear jingoism and female repression.

Trained at the National College of Arts, Lahore, Wasim says that, in miniature painting, "issues which are big conflicts in society are touched on in a very sensitive, dec-

Water

THE WORLD Water Forum is the periodic and moving confluence of global water interests. It is organised by the World Water Council (WWC), the official organiser and self-designated think-tank on global water policy, based in France.

Members of the WWC make up a who-is-who of development, including all the major states, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, development finance institutions, private corporations, inter-governmental agencies, research institutes and, of course, the inevitable sprinkling of NGOs blessed with selective advantage.

This was the third forum that WWC organised since the first one in Marrakesh in 1997 and the second one in The Hague in 2000. Having set the course of global water policy to synch with the profit calculus of powerful international interests, Japan was thought to be the place to agree upon a plan of action for the Third World Water Forum or 3WWF. Sadly, Japan disappointed everyone.

orative and colourful way". She has adapted the traditional Mughal style to incorporate iconography ranging from the Italian renaissance to South Asian truck art. Her pictures are overtly political, although also playful in their recurring employment of circus themes. Appeals to peaceful co-existence are laced with a distinct touch of irony, even caustic humour. In 'Friendship', Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf, both garbed in Tudor attire, shake hands in a military viewing stand as India's ex-foreign minister Jaswant Singh looks on approvingly. Behind Musharraf scowls a jester, while to the general's right a pint-sized military officer and a worried-faced Santa Claus offer salutes. Symmetry is maintained on Vajpayee's side with a clown in meek supplication and a female juggler tossing balls. The medieval circus-cum-military parade is completed with oxen bearing missiles below the stand. While at one



The Europeans were irked at the Japanese for all sorts of organisational reasons. Of course, they were also peeved by the failure of the process to deliver results. The Americans, frankly, were quite unconcerned. But the corporations were there to attend to life's stern duties. So they prioritised and spent large sums of money at the forum on image enhancement exercises, in addition to pulling policy strings from behind the scenes.

Most participants from the third world were absorbed in the glitter-

level this is a plea for harmony, at another level, in Wasim's words, it is the depiction of "political leaders neglecting their duties" in childlike play.

Musharraf appears in many of Wasim's creations, sometimes alongside other world leaders like Vajpayee and George W Bush, and at other times alone with a stoic lion and his military retinue. In 'Haligoli', for instance, Pakistani military officials in flip-flops clutch missiles and rifles on rocking horses (and one rocking lion, reserved for Musharraf), while mullahs stare down on the scene from above and figures on flying toy trucks streak across the sky. 'Friends Again', part of a series commenting on US-Pakistani military cooperation since September 2001, shows Bush and Musharraf cuddling in an elevated box while Ronald McDonald and a Pakistani soldier stand at the forefront of a celebrating crowd. In perhaps Wasim's most irreverent

ing melee of events at parallel sessions in Osaka, Shiga and Kyoto cities. Few knew what was going on. Fewer bothered to find out. That was not what they had come there for. Beside, the mood at the cafés was more inviting. The sushi was good, the onsens were cultural. It all came off rather well. Tradition must have saved the hosts for, despite everything, the summit went through the necessary motions, like a venerable geisha at a tea ceremony where all the guest are not equally endowed with aesthetic refinement. The obtuse process at the forum completed the usual confusion so essential to the ambience of summits and other international meets where fog facilitates thinking.

The American war on Iraq added to the water-borne misery at the 3WWF. Radical NGOs managed to get their protests noticed, but for the rest there was no cheer. The political declaration disappointed all. The companies did not get the policy guarantees that their profits require and the bureaucrats did not make much headway with their ambitious advances. The third

world did not lose much, nor did it gain anything. Same story, different place.

On second thought, there was one small gain for the third world. Amidst all the gloom, the Kazasaburi made significant progress. The Kazasaburi is a wonderful technology. Glossy publications and slick multimedia information kits assure you that it is an innovative device. And a cheap device. Uses only locally available material. Local people can quickly acquire the skills needed to construct new Kazasaburis. It is also practically magical. It can, unleash development without foreign assistance once beneficiary communities are put through a brief spell of building capacity.

Kzasaburi has the potential to supply all the water needs of far-flung rural communities. It can provide enough water to sustain both people and livestock in a good size African village. The water is filtered, hygienic, safe, and there will always be plenty to pot and drink. The success of Kazasaburi has been proven in pilot projects and field tests.

A Japanese NGO is credited with

inventing the Kazasaburi. This accomplishment earned it the financial support of the Japanese government. With predictable Japanese zeal and efficiency, Kazasaburi was taken to a few remote African villages by a team of volunteers. They were dedicated volunteers, as only the Japanese can be. Staff back in Japan provided them backup and coordination support. Participatory community development groups in partnership with a networking organisation helped the Japanese innovators take the Kazasaburi to villagers who till then were drinking water from depleted soak pits, spreading disease and dying soon thereafter.

And since it succeeded so well in its objective of bringing clean drinking water to remote African communities, Kazasaburi was unveiled with great pomp at the Third World Water Forum.

Information on the Kazasaburi was shared with participants from all over the world through multimedia presentations on the huge screen in the NGO area, including a broadcast quality video documen-



blending of symbols, 'The Kiss' depicts Musharraf typing at a keyboard as American and British cherubs dote on him; his computer screen is filled with red hearts. In the background, partially hidden by half-drawn curtains, missiles soar into the sky in ordered columns.



Wasim says that because women in Pakistan fear speaking out on public issues for fear of religious censure, she uses art as a medium to express her anger at political and social conditions. She has explored victimisation and brutalisation as themes in her art since childhood,



she says, and some of her less overtly political art, such as pieces depicting infants in lily-pad ponds and surrealistic war zones, explores human innocence. She revisits themes of corruption, both religious and political, in much of her work, and figures embodying disgraced ideals – politicians, soldiers, mullahs – appear in most of her pieces. "Due to this hatred against humanity in our society, there is so much corruption, and many social and political problems", she laments. Samples of Wasim's work can be viewed at www.absolutearts.com/portfolios/s/sairawasim/ △

tary showing Japanese volunteers busy planning, travelling, visiting, helping, guiding, sharing and, in the end, jubilantly celebrating with thankful African communities.

Three different sessions had inputs on the Kazasaburi, besides the one session that was entirely devoted to it. There were confidential whispers that the Kazasaburi was being considered for a place among the 'Top-10 Water Actions' supervised by WWC.

Eventually, Kazasaburi won the

day. People of the third world should have a sigh of relief to learn that it will be made available to the poor in the poor countries through the benevolence of efficient and munificent Japan.

But no matter what the World Water Forum thought of it, I cannot make my friend Malik Aslam the plumber – 39, father of five, who works 10 hours a day for USD two – understand why he was not invited while grateful community representatives from remote African vil-

lagers and Kazasaburi's innovators were brought to the summit to say their thanks in front of all. You see, Malik Aslam has been sinking the Kazasaburi for the last 20 years, just as his father did before him and his father in his own time. Only he has always called it a hand pump. He can understand why the Japanese innovators call it a Kazasaburi, but he cannot understand why they call it an innovation, let alone a Japanese innovation. ^Δ

Khalid Hussain, Multan

The final century

I AM 51 and do not understand what it really means to be old. What does the word old mean to those whose lives are too short to have experienced the things that makes the rest of us know that we are growing old? Do we then not grow old because we do not experience Big Macs, and all the rest of it that arrived on us one day without warning and divulged to us just how old we are?

Nowadays I work a lot with a project involving the 'extreme' poor (also known in some quarters as 'hard core poor') and though I do not agree with much that goes on, I understand what it means to become old and yet not be able to grow old. Because most do not. They cannot grow old. They look with terror and fall into a stupor at the endless hungry sunsets they must see. Hunger is a new definition of everything. But there is no language yet to say what it means.

In a village where I try not to get too involved, a woman invites me to watch her family watch her feeble husband die. A few kids cling to her or loiter nearby. If her husband dies she will become destitute. As a destitute she will qualify for aid and assistance. Even the dying man knows that and in a dialect I do not understand he mumbles on. In any case it hardly matters what he says. What does a father dying in his youth before the eyes of wife and children mumble that you and I can understand. Perhaps it is easier to understand the wife. I think the woman promises that she will be a widow by the next morning. She will qualify. And she looks at me with pleading eyes, I the boss from the city in a dirty Pajero.

How can I imagine what I cannot understand, unlike her, who imagines because she does not understand? She cannot know that I, the boss from the city in a dirty Pajero, cannot persuade an inert, blinking bureaucracy that there is a woman waiting for some money with just as much resignation as she once waited for her husband's death.

Yet this can't mean anything for this man who has no history, barring the family he will leave behind to live on a destitute's pension that his death

may bring them. Who can understand the absence of his past, the cloying of his hunger and the irrelevance of his death from unrecorded causes? He will neither be mourned nor missed. How can he be when the seeds of his loins are waiting for his death. The only slim chance that they can live a little longer depends on his passing. He has no history except that once, on the death bed, he has seen a man who understands the semiotics of age and youth, who is being implored by his wife to push along that pension she will soon be eligible for.

He is just a man who will die before his time because he has no control over his life in an age when his misery multiplies regardless of whether the prices rise or fall in distant share markets. He is not part of history because he has not heard of Wall Street, that mighty orgasm of the market civilisation, now slightly on the wane after a premature climax. He doesn't know he does not exist except in his world, where nothing can be imagined because everything is far too real and always the same. Reality has collapsed him into a man waiting for his wife to be a widow, and in the sameness of his daily life no one gave him any markers to measure out his age. His is the kind of niche market that no one has any time for. So why did they even bother to make him in the first place?

I walk out and immediately the power of their imagination overwhelms me. I am the *bhai saheb*, the *mian bhai*, believed by the dying to be the deliverance of their kin, the one who will sweep away the remains of their family into the world from where I came in a huge vehicle that reeks of the city and pity and mercy. And wisdom.

In this circular world of hunger, I am the deliverance of their imagination. Here there is no poetry, only a blind and barely animate faith. Meanwhile, inside the hut the man lay dying and he is the wretched cause of that faith, because what takes him away tomorrow, if his wife has got the timing right, will one day take all the rest away.

I hear this is the final century. Why am I filled with relief? I, the boss from the city in the dirty Pajero. ^Δ

Afsan Chowdhury, Dhaka

Contagious diseases hit several districts **Mysterious disease affects school children**

Eight fall prey in Bajhang **Unknown disease reaches epidemic proportion**

Unknown disease kills 32 in Makwanpur **Schools closed as viral influenza breaks out in Dolakha**

Unidentified disease claims two in Doti *Unknown disease infects over 300 in Ramechhap*

1 killed as mystery disease grips Terai districts

Unidentified disease killed 29!

Four die of mysterious disease in Udayapur

Many suffer from unknown disease

20 afflicted with mysterious disease

Diseases flare up

Diseases rampant in Parsa

Mystery disease grips entire village

Mysterious afflictions

Why have some unidentified ailments begun to take a toll in rural Nepal?

by Anil Bhattarai

It is the season of distress yet again. News reports filter in partial images from different locales: heat strokes in and mass exodus from Andhra Pradesh, malaria and encephalitis deaths in Assam, and 'monsoon-induced' diarrhoea, influenza epidemics and measles outbreaks in many of Nepal's districts.

The list of 'medical' afflictions for this calendar year was long already, and now with the arrival of the monsoon it seems to be unending. Cough, cold, headache, high fever, jaundice, dysentery, diarrhoea, vomiting, flu, heat, dehydration, measles, typhoid, and acute respiratory infection are here, and presumably there is more to come. *The Kathmandu Post* on 5 March 2003, reported that jaundice, detected in a few persons sometime earlier, had broken out on an epidemic scale in Manthali, headquarters of Ramechhap district of Nepal.

News coming in from the so-called 'remote' districts has been grim. There have been several reports of children, women and the elderly falling prey to some 'mys-

tery' disease or the other. Such is the regularity with which this kind of news has appeared that the death of large numbers of people is no longer scandalous. We have been seeing them year after year in the same form and magnitude, with occasional variations in detail and presentation, sometimes on the front page or, more often, tucked away in the corner of the 'region' page. The irony is that this spate of reports only partially represents what is really happening in Nepal, and that is voluminous enough to inure the reader to the repetitive daily rituals of death, often attributed to various unspecified diseases.

In the first week of February 2003, for example, six people, four of them children from the Chepang community, died of measles in Makwanpur district's interior villages, south of Kathmandu valley. Several hundreds, mainly children, were taken ill but eventually recovered. In the same village, reports say, almost all of the children have severely low body weight. According

to a report published by a Kathmandu-based NGO working among the Chepang community for several years, in some villages members of this community have among the lowest life expectancies in Nepal – less than 30 years, which is half the national average. Of course, the same reports also tell us, tangentially though, that the people so affected by disease and death have been living in a state of chronic hunger for years in this area. It is a different matter that journalists blame “lack of health services and inadequate drug supply” for the deaths.

News of pretty much the same kind continued unabated in the months following the February reports. Between March and June 2003, 38 of Nepal’s 75 districts had continuous bouts of epidemics of different varieties and proportions. This much can be gleaned from a cursory survey of the reports published in two national dailies. There is no reason to assume that the rest of the districts have been spared such calamity. Anybody even remotely familiar with the terrain in Nepal can immediately see that if an epidemic has arrived, say, in Jumla, then the adjacent districts of Mugu, Kalikot, Dolpa, Jajarkot and Dailekh will also be affected. Therefore, if they have not figured in the news, the most that must have happened was that the reports from these other districts either did not reach the editor’s desk or these reports were found to be just too repetitive to be published regularly.

On 17 March, *The Kathmandu Post* published another news report. This time 21 people had died of yet another “mystery disease” in Kalikot, a mountainous district in Nepal’s Far Western region (‘far to the west’ from Kathmandu). The disease had apparently been prevalent in the area for the previous two months. The numbers ran to several hundreds in villages spread over a wide and rugged terrain. What were the symptoms? “In the beginning, people suffer from severe fever and feel dizzy”, an assistant health worker and chief of the district public health office, was quoted as saying. In January, in Gela village of the same district, seven people had succumbed to this disease. In the months that followed, 14 more died of this “mystery” ailment. By 18 March, the number of reported deaths had climbed to 26. What happened to those remaining hundreds who were taken ill? We do not know.

And then there is influenza. It is everywhere. From east to west and north to south, the flu has forced the closure of schools and affected what is often loosely called ‘normal life’. In some places it obliged health

personnel to scurry around, medical kits in hand, “to bring the runaway disease under control”. District after district and village after village came down with high fever, cough, cold and running noses. Some unfortunates never recovered, as has happened many times in the past.

It killed people in Udayapur to the east, Dadeldhura in the west and Dolakha of the central region. Tens of thousands fell ill all over Nepal. Who did it kill? Prise open the can of worms and some clues are to be found there. In some of Dadeldhura’s far-flung villages, of those who died, many were dalits. Though the Kalikot deaths were blamed on a “mystery disease”, the symptoms sound identical to those of influenza.

There is no slack in the ‘discovery’ of new tuberculosis cases either. And this despite claims of a more than 95 percent success rate in the Department of Health’s much acclaimed Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) programme. Malaria is also not to be forgotten. In fact, it is unlikely to let itself be forgotten. Malaria is back with a vengeance, even in the middle hills, from where it was once mistakenly thought to have been banished forever. And the fact that these are reports coming from villages distant from Kathmandu (and therefore deemed ‘remote’) is an indication that the sick are also those excluded from the socio-economic mainstream.

Naturally culpable

If the news reports are taken at face value then nature is of course the invariable culprit. There is a ten-

dency to blame every calamity that overtakes people on the seasonal vagaries of nature. The temperature is temperamental. The precipitation is too precipitate. Clouds burst, rivers flood and lands slide of their own accord. It is a world of chaos. The ‘monsoon’, ‘change of weather’, ‘floods’, ‘rise in temperature’, ‘drop in temperature’ are among the many causes ritually invoked to explain away society’s own role in the diseases and the deaths. But epidemics talk. They speak quite bluntly about how society functions: who lives and who dies in which society, where and when.

They also tell us about the faith that reporters and their informants have in the miraculous power of medicines, health services and health personnel to set things right – an unquestioned, self-evident truth propagated for several decades of development in Nepal. Why else would the affected residents and locally stationed paramedics both blame inadequate supply of drugs and

19 die of common cold in Jajarkot

By Tularam Pandey

KALIKOT, May 13

At least 19 people were killed due to the outbreak of common cold in three wards of the remote Ramnakote Village Development Committee (VDC) for the last four weeks, according to locals. However, the district public health office said that only 13 people were killed during the same period.

Ran Bahadur Sijwal, a local from the affected VDC, told *The Kathmandu Post* that most of those who died of the disease were children, aged between one month to two years. He said that he had already demanded the local administration dispatch a team of medicines to the affected villages.

Rabindra Sijwal, an assistant health worker at Area Sub-Health Post, said that common cold, severe fever, headache and problem in respiratory were the symptoms of the disease. He said that teams of medicines had already been sent to the affected villages.

In yet another report from the neighbouring VDCs of Syuna and Badalkot, around 400 people, most of them children, were suffering from a similar disease over the last few weeks.

Those denied adequate nutrition have a habit of dying when a heat wave or influenza strikes

medical personnel for the epidemic running out of control?

Why did the disease strike in the first place? The assistant health worker of Kalikot sees it as an "ordinary common cold" resulting from seasonal change. One does not need to be an expert, however, to stop and ponder how this ordinary common cold could have killed so many people in Kalikot when it is just a few days of nuisance for people in the capital city. Something much more serious than some passing mystery of nature must have been involved here.

Journalists are occasionally perceptive. So, these news reports, by telling us about where people live, the water they drink, the food they eat (or did not get to eat), and their distance from emergency health services, also tell us why certain people – like the dalits of Dadeldhura – die of a 'common cold', while so many others who contract it escape unscathed. Lack of medicines or medical personnel does not tell the entire story.

So we piece together the picture from other reports that tell us, to cite one instance, that Kalikot, among many other districts, has been perennially suffering from food scarcity, out-migration, lack of clean drinking water and lack of access to basic health services for most of its population. Kalikot district, according to the *Nepal Human Development Report 1998*, is also the third from the bottom in human development progress. This in a country that is 30th from the bottom in global human development. Little wonder that average life expectancy there in 1996 was just 42 years, that is to say, two-thirds of the national average.

Measles struck hundreds of small kids in remote villages of Bajhang district. Three died. But measles does not kill anybody and everybody so routinely and randomly. And then we learn, again from other unconnected reports, that just incidentally Bajhang also happens to be one of several western districts reeling under famine-like conditions for the last several months, and is among the two districts at the bottom of the human development index. It then comes as a surprise that only three children died. Those killed were dalits. "Dalits are not aware of the danger of this disease", says the reporter of a Kathmandu newspaper. Back in February, Mohan Mainali of the Centre for Investigative Journalism did a report on famine in Bajhang. From it we can deduce with reasonable certainty that it was not lack of awareness about the disease that killed people. It was just a lack of food.

Such news is not peculiar to Nepal. What are the "starvation deaths" in Andhra Pradesh if not a variant of what is happening in these districts of Nepal? At least, there a spade is called a spade. The deaths are not attributed to killer diseases, but to starvation. Those denied adequate nutrition for extended periods of time

have a habit of dying when a heat wave or influenza strikes. While the elderly and the children are left to eke out whatever living they can, the more able-bodied head out to the nearest metropolis in search of wages. It is the same old drama, with a script that is improvised now and then to suit the context in different parts of South Asia.

These deaths in Nepal are not peculiar to this season or to this year. They appear in the news every year, as events caused by each season, mechanically recorded as deaths due to natural factors. Occasionally there is a recognition that these are preventable deaths, but typically the solutions are way off the mark. On 7 August 2001, in a letter to the editor of *The Kathmandu Post*, one correspondent from Kathmandu implored the health ministry to wake up and deal with the potential death of people from "preventable diseases". "Due to inadequate medical supply, and negligence of health workers, the death toll could rise" and "our government is hardly doing anything to contain the epidemic". It went on to say that "the Ministry of Health cannot turn a blind eye to this health hazard". What was missed in the letter was that these

**These deaths occur
year after year because
they are not amenable
to prevention by health
ministry intervention**

deaths occur year after year because they are not amenable to prevention by health ministry intervention. At its fundamental core this is not a health ministry issue.

Asking different questions

Instead of looking to the health ministry to solve the problem, more purpose will be served by asking some uncomfortable questions about the economy, the polity and the development apparatus that thrives on poverty. What is it about the Kathmandu-centric resource-guzzling state that districts like Kalikot, Bajhang or Bajura must be arrested in a perpetual peripheral existence? Why are people in many districts not getting enough to eat and why is nobody doing anything about it? The answer to these questions will provide the explanation for why "killer diseases" and "behavioural inadequacies" always come to the rescue when such deaths become a rural routine.

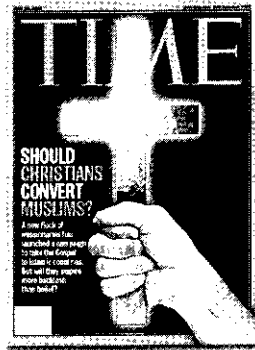
Come next monsoon, we will again see a repeat of this year's morning news – of people dying of the same mystery diseases, with the seasonal patterns replicated in all their fine detail. The health personnel will be kept on alert to deal with reports coming in from all the remote corners. Experts will trot out the prescribed seasonal cause and the reporters will again discover to their utter disgust that drugs and medical personnel are in short supply. Those who live in unfortunate places die in unfortunate ways and all the institutions of good governance have not been able to work out the specifics of their life and death. ▽

The word of god for benighted Muslims

'Missionary' activity is stepped up in order to 'save' the Ishmaelites

by Yoginder Sikand

As a thinly-veiled mouthpiece of the American establishment, *Time* magazine is strictly outside the purview of my regular reading. I must, however, confess that I was tempted into breaking my vow of abstinence last month. The 30 June 2003 issue of the magazine carried too provocative a cover to resist. It pictured an upheld fist clenching a cross, nudging against a slogan asking a cryptic query: "Should Christians Convert Muslims?" Now, inter-religious polemics have ceased to interest me lately, tired as I am of loud-mouthed fanatics peddling their wares. However, since the niggling issue of relations between Muslims and others continues to exercise a fascination for me, I shed my scruples about the venerable *Time*, and clicked on its web-page to go through the cover story.



The gist of the story, based on reports filed by correspondents in North America and West Asia, was, to put it in a nutshell, this: Western, largely American, Christian evangelist fundamentalists appear to be convinced that the time has now come to wage an all-out spiritual war against Islam. Islam, as many of them see it, is a satan-inspired programme of terrorism that bodes ill for all humankind, and represents the greatest challenge to Christianity and Christendom. As an American evangelist, identified simply as "Barbara", puts it, Islam is in itself the ultimate "weapon of mass destruction". Gripped by a fanatic zeal to spread their faith to "benighted" Muslims, the story speaks of scores of Christian evangelists following close on the heels of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, offering 'aid', both material as well as 'spiritual', with the latter, predictably, being tied to the former. The report, quoting the Massachusetts-based Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary, suggests that there are today more than 27,000 Christian missionaries working in Muslim countries, almost double the number two decades ago.

The events of September 2001, *Time* tells us, seem to have galvanised the American Christian right wing to take its evangelical duty of 'saving' the Muslims more seriously. There can be no doubt that growing unrest in many Muslim countries, and the threat that the West perceives from this, is a, if not, the, major factor in stirring the missionary zeal of the evangelicals. As in clas-

sical colonial times, in these days of American global neo-colonialism, a symbiotic relationship appears to bind the imperial ambitions of the American military establishment with the missionary fervour of the proselytising Christian right wing. Evangelical fundamentalists today enjoy the warm endorsement of the American president. In turn, they faithfully serve American goals abroad, propagating an extremely conservative, ultra-reactionary theology, based on the deeply rooted conviction of the ultimate superiority of the

American 'way of life', on the one hand, and the firm belief that all religions other than (their own edition of) Christianity are wholly false, if not downright 'satanic'.

Little wonder, then, that evangelists are often the most fanatic defenders of American foreign policy, from zealously supporting Israel to excitedly welcoming the invasion of Iraq, seeing in all this both a triumph over the 'forces of evil' represented by Islam, as well as an opportunity to proclaim their 'good news'. If Bush proclaims, in the war against terrorism, that those "not with us are against us", so too the evangelicals announce: in the war against the 'powers of darkness', if you are not one of us – if you choose to remain Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or anything other than Christian – then you are a minion of the devil.

Personally, I have no problem at all with anyone wishing to change her or his faith, or even with anyone eager to advertise the virtues of their faith over all others. As an opponent of 'inherited religiosity', the fact that one is doomed to follow or identify with a certain religion simply because one is born into it, I believe that change of religious affiliation is really a very basic human right. In that sense, then, the passion that fires Christian evangelicals to spread the 'good word' is unexceptionable. That said, however, I must hasten to add that any sort of proselytisation that disguises itself and conceals its ultimate goals is thoroughly condemnable. To use what some might consider a rather 'un-Islamic' metaphor, it is as unethical as palming off bootleg arrack as French wine. And yet, that is precisely what, as the *Time* story suggests, many evangelicals do. In order to escape strict visa regulations, they often travel to and reside in Muslim countries in the guise of businessmen or altruistic social workers. A good part

of their time and money is spent on 'development' work, which is generally a cover for pursuing their missionary goals. The *Time* story speaks of missionaries even going to the extent of distributing toys to unsuspecting children and using that as a means to get their message across. They are careful to keep their real identities concealed, and some even attempt to pass off as Muslims to dupe their potential converts.

Christian evangelists face an uphill task making themselves acceptable to the communities they work with, who often see them, and generally with some truth, as propagating and imposing alien cultural norms along with their faith. Since many, and not just Muslims alone, regard the evangelists as propagandists for 'Western' culture, the evangelical project has come up against major hurdles. As a way around this barrier, a growing number of evangelists working in Muslim countries are today experimenting with what is in evangelical circles fashionably called "inculturation" or "contextualisation". Put simply, what this means is that the evangelist seeks to disguise his message in the cultural forms of the population he targets. By doing so, Christianity is made to appear culturally familiar and therefore more easily acceptable. In India, for instance, numerous evangelists are now engaged in articulating a 'Hindu' Christianity: Mother Mary abandons her long, flowing gown for a rich silk sari, Jesus is painted brown and the Om appears alongside the cross atop the steeple of the church, which is now made to look like a temple. *Time* tells us of similar experiments being made by evangelists in Muslim lands. Some evangelists disguise themselves as Sufis and hope to be able to pass off as Muslim mystics; others set up what they call "Jesus mosques"; and yet others go to the extent of publicly reciting the Muslim creed: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His prophet"!

Connaught Place cartoons

In the course of my travels, which have taken me across large parts of India, I have had numerous encounters with fiery evangelicals on the lookout for unsuspecting victims. Some years ago one could find them loitering around in Connaught Place, New Delhi, passing around pamphlets and glossy tracts, proclaiming the end of the world and the impending dawn of the day of judgment. This literature was specially designed to catch the unsuspecting eye, keenly aware of the Indian penchant for vibrant colours. It was filled with brightly coloured cartoons of a bearded stern Jesus perched atop a fluffy cloud brandishing a sinister-looking sword; swarms of red-cheeked, white-faced, distinctly European-looking angels astride galloping horses, their manes blowing wildly in the wind; hordes of men and women wearing crosses around their necks being lifted up to heaven on angelic wings; and a large swathe of humanity, dark-faced and ghoulish most of them, going up in a ball of flame and smoke in hell. In all, more amusing than instructive. Even more amusing, were

the missionaries' reactions to the way in which I responded to their earnest entreaties. I would first be greeted by a well-fed face displaying a strained plastic smile. "Are you in distress?", he would ask, somewhat disconcertingly, and then, without caring to hear my tale of woe, would look up to heaven with half-closed eyes and a beatific smile and whisper: "Oh Lord Jesus in heaven, help this brother cross the river of woe". Then, a bundle of colourful leaflets would be thrust into my hands, the way virtuous missionaries dole out chocolates to starving village children. Hurriedly glancing through the mass of propaganda material, I would curl them into a ball and toss them into the nearest rubbish heap. The angelic smile on the cherubic face would then curl up into a snarl, and all at once a pair of angry, stone-cold eyes would pierce me. "Hey man! That's no way to enter the kingdom of heaven!"

If *Time* is to be believed and if Western evangelists are really now investing heavily in targeting the Muslim world for 'spiritual warfare' or 'crusade' as they still call it, it is very likely that India, with its vast Muslim population, figures prominently on their map. Personally, I must admit to knowing little about their activities among the Indian Muslims. I have heard of several groups engaged in such work, but I have not really got down to seriously studying them. I do, however, know that many of them, like their counterparts working among the Hindus, are often money-raking ventures, set up by enterprising evangelists with access to generous donors in the West. For purposes of illustration, let me describe two such groups, both based in Bangalore, in south India, about which I know something. Although they may not be representative of the evangelical camp in general, they do offer insights into the ways in which the evangelists seek to spearhead their contemporary 'crusade'.

The first of these is called the Dar ul-Nejath, an Arabic term meaning 'the House of Salvation'. Headed by a Dr Fazal Sheikh, probably a Muslim convert to Christianity, this is a branch of the global organisation, Call of Hope: Mission to Muslims. In order to 'reach out' with the 'good news' of the Bible to Muslims, it has set up what it calls the Muslim Masihi Fellowship. In order to present the Christian message to Muslims, the Dar ul-Nejath undertakes an impressive range of activities. These include 'outreach' work, involving door-to-door visits to Muslim homes by Christian missionaries, as well as a comprehensive correspondence course in Islam and Christianity. It also conducts an advanced level course on Islam, in association with the evangelical body, Christian Light of Life Bible College, Austria, to train Christian missionaries in the art of polemics, arming them with knowledge of Islam so that they can present the Christian message to their prospective Muslim converts in a manner more intelligible to them. Plans are afoot now to have a regular three-week residential advanced-level course on Islam and Christianity at Bangalore. Initial work has already

started in the form of classes in "Islamic theology and Christian Evangelism", with the help of the Bangalore-based Asia Evangelical Bible College and Seminary.

The Dar ul-Nejath claims to have a number of "honorary evangelists" (whatever that may mean, presumably unpaid workers) who are engaged in missionary work among the Muslims of Bangalore. In a circular issued some years ago, it says, "This ministry has reached out [to] each and every corner of Bangalore district and the surrounding areas of other districts". Within Bangalore city, it runs several centres. In order to attract young Muslims, it has set up a special Muslim school named Madrasat ul-asihi, in which a Reverend Dr Fazal Masih teaches Urdu and the Bible to destitute Muslim children. The name of the school is itself striking: seeking to pass off as an innocuous Muslim-style *madrassa*. It has also a small medical centre, St Peter's Clinic, which is visited mainly by poor Muslim patients. Even in this apparently purely humanitarian effort, the ultimate goal of conversion is paramount, for as the circular says, "through that [the medical centre] it is easy to make friends and share the gospel".

The second Bangalore-based Christian evangelical organisation specially working among Muslims that I have come across goes by the benign and unexceptionable name of Helping Hands International. Among its declared aims are the setting up of children's homes, schools and craft centres, conducting agricultural training programmes and engaging in relief and medical projects. Yet, behind these noble ventures the ultimate goal remains one of "evangelism and Church-planting among Muslims". In a letter addressed to "the Heads of Evangelical Mission and Bible Teaching Institutions", dated 27 March 1996, the organisation's executive secretary, GM Dhanaraj, remarks that the "Ishmaelites" (the children of Isma'il, meaning Muslims) are, for the Christian missionaries, "the most unreached people of India". Of India's vast Muslim population, 98 percent, he notes with profound regret, has as yet not been brought into contact with the Christian message, so much so that "there is not even one Christian evangelist to work for one lakh Ishmaelites". Note the paternalistic concern for the hapless 'Ishmaelites'. Muslims are not even allowed to call themselves as they wish. Almost none of them would recognise themselves by the 'Ishmaelite' label that is forced on them! As the biblical story has it, the Arabs are descended from Isma'il, who the Bible describes (contrary to the Qur'an) as the son of Hagar, slave-woman of Abraham, with all the negative connotations that go with this status. All Muslims are then collapsed together as Arabs, and all Arabs as offspring of a mere slave. Given their base origins, they beg, or so we are led to believe, to be deliv-

ered from the shackles of their bondage by saviours sent by the Christian lord.

Having taken serious note of this lamentable state of affairs, Helping Hands International has, in its magnanimity, Dhanaraj suggests, taken upon itself the onerous task of "working for the salvation of the Ishmaelites", a euphemism, of course, for attempting to convert Muslims to Christianity. The "motto" of his organisation, he reveals, is "tell Jesus about Ishmaelites and tell Ishmaelites about Jesus". In pursuance of this goal, the organisation claims to have spread its activities to eight states and two union territories of India. It has put before itself the ambitious task of opening its centres in all the states and union territories of the country. In order to do this, Dhanaraj writes, the organisation has launched a training programme for Christian missionaries who will later be dispatched to engage in proselytising work among Muslims all over India. The main training programme is of a year's duration, but there are also several short-term courses to choose from. These are conducted at two locations - Bangalore, for volunteers from south India, and Nagpur, for those from the north. Volunteers are often sponsored by various churches and upon finishing their training they go back to their "mission fields" to put into practice what they have learnt. The training programmes are divided into several levels. The basic

Evangelists are among the most fanatic defenders of American foreign policy, from zealously supporting Israel to excitedly welcoming the invasion of Iraq

level course entails three days of lectures, followed by six months of practical work. The purpose of the latter is "to meet one Ishmaelite for one day everyday for one hour and tell [him] about Jesus". This is to be supplemented by the use and dissemination of suitable literature provided by the centre. The advanced level and research level training programmes are similar in nature, though more intensive.

To assist the trainees, the organisation has a very well-stocked library called by the Arabic term *al-Noor* ('the Light'), which, apparently, has "a vast collection of books from all over the world on more than 50 different subjects", including, and especially, on "Evangelism Among Ishmaelites", "Reaching out to the Ishmaelites" and testimonies of Muslim converts to Christianity. In addition, it has a large collection of audio and video cassettes on similar topics. Besides its numerous training programmes for Christian missionaries working among Muslims, Helping Hands International has set up what it has christened the Ishmaelite Salvation Association (ISA) - a cleverly chosen acronym meaning Jesus in Arabic and Urdu. Till date ISA has published 37 gospel pamphlets, 18 books and one comprehensive correspondence course, all, of course, tailored to the ultimate aim of converting Muslims to Christianity. In an effort to sensitise Christian missions to the need for greater evangelical effort among Mus-

lins in particular, it has, according to a leaflet setting out the various services it offers, organised numerous lectures on 'how to evangelise Ishmaelites'. Apparently, much intensive research and careful planning has gone into all this, for it says that these lectures consist of no less than "three different sets of teachings on 21 subjects". These lectures have been delivered at various "Bible Colleges, Theological Seminaries and Missionary Training Societies in different parts of the world". So far the ISA claims to have conducted almost 200 "challenging" seminars on the above themes at various places under its suggestively titled MECCA programme, or the 'Middle East Culture and Christian Approach'.

Having at its command such "expertise", the ISA provides free consultation to missionary groups keen on "Ishmaelite Evangelism", "follow-up ministry", "discipleship" and "church-planting" among "Ishmaelites". It offers to impart advice and training on "how to share the gospel" with Muslims, particularly such vulnerable groups as students, patients, prisoners and women. The ISA has, or so it claims, gifted preachers who can give excellent speeches in gospel meetings and "open crusades", and makes available their services to Christian churches who wish to engage in conversion activity among Muslims. Like many

other Christian organisations, the ISA too runs various social service projects whose final aim is, of course, to assist in conversions and to prevent those who have already converted from "relapsing". These services for "Poor Ishmaelite Children" are said to include boys' homes, girls' hostels, training courses in carpentry, agriculture, tailoring and so on, as well as temporary shelter, jobs and medical assistance to "Ex-Ishmaelite families". These facilities are currently provided by six centres of the ISA, under the Siraj (Social, Industrial, Rehabilitational, Agricultural and Job) programme.

As I said at the outset, I have no problem at all with those who want to change the religion into which they were born. Nor have I any quarrels with those who see themselves as being anointed with the divine responsibility of communicating what they take to be the 'truth' to others. That said, however, I have the most serious differences with right-wing evangelist 'crusaders' for whom all those outside their narrowly inscribed circle of chosen followers are doomed to eternal perdition. There is a surfeit of such paranoid megalomaniacs in the country – among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others – to deserve any more! If this is the road to salvation, then I, at least, would rather remain among the damned! △



The Mountain Forum promotes global action toward equitable and ecologically sustainable mountain development. This is achieved through information sharing, mutual support and advocacy. In order to achieve these objectives the Mountain Forum uses modern and traditional communications, supports networking and capacity building and encourages members to be proactive in advocating sustainable development of mountain areas.

The International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is the hosting organization for the Mountain Forum Secretariat. The Centre is seeking to recruit qualified persons for the following vacant regional and local level positions.

- Information Services Program Officer**
Master's degree or equivalent in a field related to communications and/or information technology with excellent communication skills in written and spoken English, minimum 2 years' international/multi-cultural work experience, and 2 years' experience participating in online discussions.
- Information Services Program Assistant**
Bachelor's degree or equivalent in a field related to communications, sustainable development, or information technology with outstanding communication skills in written English, 1 year of international/multi-cultural work experience, and excellent computer/internet skills.
- Administration Program Officer**
Master's degree or equivalent in a field related to sustainable development in mountain regions with minimum 2 years' work experience in development projects; good organizational networking skills and fund-raising experience for non-profit organizations preferred.

Further information on the vacancies, including Terms of Reference for the positions, can be found at www.icimod.org or can be requested from the address below. Applications with complete curriculum vitae together with the names and contact addresses of three referees should be sent to the following address by 31 July, 2003.

secretariat@mtnforum.org.

Alternately they may be sent by regular post to:

Mountain Forum Secretariat, c/o ICIMOD, GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, NEPAL
Tel: +977 (1) 5525 313, ext.675: Fax: +977 (1) 5524 509

IT BECOMES increasingly clear that peace in the Sub-continent requires the leaders and the public to understand physical geography, the where and whyfores of the placement of rivers, valleys, settlements and cities. That understanding will provide all that we need for better cohabitation, when we know that meteorology forecasts should go beyond national boundaries, that rivers do not end when they reach a country's border, nor that a river begins where one's territory begins. Here is a poem titled "Geography Lesson", which could serve to provide this perspective to South Asia's power elite. It is by Zulfikar Ghose, writing in 'Jets from Orange' (Macmillan & Co, London, 1967).

Geography Lesson

When the jet sprang into the sky,
it was clear why the city
had developed the way it had,
seeing it scaled six inches to the mile.
There seemed an inevitability
about what on ground had looked haphazard,
unplanned and without style
when the jet sprang into the sky.



When the jet reached ten thousand feet,
it was clear why the country
had cities where rivers ran
and why the valleys were populated.
The logic of geography –
that land and water attracted man –
was clearly delineated
when the jet reached ten thousand feet.

When the jet rose six miles high,
it was clear that the earth was round
and that it had more sea than land.
But it was difficult to understand
that men on earth found
causes to hate each other, to build
walls across and to kill.

From that height, it was not clear why.

YOU, I, we would all like to know what the new chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) looks like, lest we bump into him in a dark gully on a cloudy monsoon night. Luckily, the 16 March issue of *The Hindu* has provided us with a picture of CD Sahay, who took over from Vicky Sood on 31 March 2003 (Vicky? The name of a snoop? How unearthly.) The newspaper reports, "Mr Sahay will bring to his new responsibility 28 years of experience as an intelligence officer. Since joining the RAW cadre in 1975, he has been posted in many neighbouring countries". Aha! At the very least, this is a very transparent process of announcing the new head of India's chief of external intelligence. Chhetria Patrakar will ferret out the identities and (hopefully) mugshots of



CD: Sahay

superspooks of the other afore-mentioned neighbouring countries, and bring them to the notice of *Himal* readers, in case they happen to bump into one in the dark gullies of the future.

THE KATHMANDU *Post* reports: "Sumitra Dangal, the first woman Safa tempo driver of the country also

First woman tempo driver for women's empowerment

claims to be the first all-round driver on the roads in South Asia at a press meet organised by the Women Upliftment and Group Development, Nepal, today". The fact that Ms Dangal is indeed the first Nepali woman to be a driver of the battery-operated, indigenously produced Safas is great. Greater still, she seems to be an "all round" driver, comfortable behind the wheel of a trolley bus, a mini bus or a tractor. But, even better, she now desires to provide heavy vehicle training to Nepali women. And hear her on her plans: "Stating that she would like Nepal to be known as the country of professional women drivers rather than a country steeped in poverty, she has urged that the government cooperate in her objective to conduct heavy vehicle training for women". Bravo!

Mizo 'hand' in Bangla creation

PICK UP a copy of *The Telegraph's* Northeast edition, and little nuggets jump out at you, which may well pass you by were you to peruse the national English language dailies out of New Delhi. Look at this 2 June story titled, "Mizo 'hand' in Bangla creation". Excerpts:

Bangladesh's history may have taken a slightly different turn had the Mizo National Front (MNF) carried out its decision to execute former President and dictator Ziaur Rahman. The MNF was in hiding in the then East Pakistan and was mulling over the pros and cons of the war of liberation, as it would have entailed installation of a pro-India government and elimination of all camps. The MNF was allowed to set up camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan with the active support of Islamabad. The outfit's sympathies lay with West Pakistan.

Apparently, Ziaur Rahman had been captured by MNF cadres near Rangamati after he had led the revolt against the Pakistan Army as a young major in the 18 East Bengal Regiment at Chittagong. As MNF leader and Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga told *The Telegraph*, "Our boys were quite insistent that he should be put to death as he was fighting the Pakistan army, which happened to be our friend. But we later set him free". Former MNF activists Vanlalngaiia, current spokesman of the Mizoram BJP, said, "Since he was opposed to the Pakistan regime, it was quite natural for our boys to assume he was our enemy". According to Tawnluia, then chief of the Mizo underground army at the CHT and currently vice president of the MNF, "A friend of

India had to be our enemy and subsequently it was decided to put him before a firing squad without the knowledge of the high command".

However, other considerations came to the fore due to which it was decided to release the major who went on to become president of Bangladesh after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Said Tawnluia, "Strategies had to keep on changing while waging a guerrilla war and that too against the Indian army. We realised that Pakistan was losing the war and some kind of assistance would be needed from the Bangladesh government if our camps were to survive". This seems to have saved Ziaur Rahman's life, until the assassin's bullet found him as president of the country on 30 May 1981.

Nellie finds peace 20 years after darkest hour

HERE IS another significant bit of South Asian history that can only be had from the Northeast press. It has been two decades since the massacre at Nellie during Indira Gandhi's last stint as prime minister. On 18 February 1983, nearly 1800 people were butchered at Nellie in Nagaon district, Assam. (Other larger carnages have since followed, including the New Delhi killings of Sikhs in 1984 and the Gujarat pogroms of last year. But these are likely to have larger place in the public memory than the poor Bengali Muslim peasantry of Assam.) Reports *The Telegraph*, "Thankfully, Nellie is now at peace with itself... The wounds have healed and the scars are fading. Twenty years after the worst communal carnage in Assam soaked Nellie in blood, people in the sleepy hamlet seem to have buried the past to set an example in communal harmony". Unfortunately, the actual reporting of the story, by Samir K Purkayastha, does not bear out this optimism. It seems from the quotes from the villagers that the Hindus and Muslims of Nellie are keener to evade questions on the issues of the massacre rather than facing them. For example, Karim... "Karim pretends not to hear on being asked to comment on the Centres' decision to repeal the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act. But he is excited when conversations veer to a hospital project". Says Rothindralal, "Politicians had triggered the carnage and the residents just let the hatred dominate their conscience. I hope politicians won't play their dirty tricks here again?"

But politicians are politicians, who is to say they will not, Rothindralal?

IF YOU'RE looking for job security, no matter what a coalition government or a greying man in military uniform promises you, do not accept an appointment as a foreign minister in South Asia. The scheduled half-yearly foreign ministers' meets of SAARC, something of a Rotary Club for Subcon diplomats, is a gathering known for its irregular pauses and unfamiliar faces. Since March 1999, the ministers have only convened three times, and the worry that they may not remember



Ministers pose at the 2001 meeting (from left to right): Jigmi Y Thinley (Bhutan), Jaswant Singh (India), Murari Raj Sharma (Nepal's UN delegate), RS Mahat (Nepal's finance minister), L Kardigamar (Sri Lanka), Abdul Sattar (Pakistan), R Rahman (Bangladesh), Fathulla Jameel (Maldives).

each other after multi-year gaps is compounded by the ongoing Subcon-wide job shuffle. From the 21st ministers' meeting in March 1999, to their 23rd session in August 2002, only one emissary, Fathullah Jameel of the Maldives, managed to keep his post. On the unstable India-Pakistan diplomatic front, Jaswant Singh and Abdul Sattar, FMs in January 2002, had to clear way for Yashwant Sinha and Inamul Haq by the August assembly. In the year since then, Sinha has remained put, but Islamabad's representative, Khurshid M Kasuri, will be a fresh face at the 24th meeting, assuming he isn't rotated out beforehand. All this makes one wonder how the ministers can have much success, quoting their website, at "formulating policies, reviewing progress, deciding on new areas of cooperation, establishing additional mechanisms as deemed necessary and deciding on other matters of general interest to the Association" if they're constantly glimpsing at each other's name tags.

IT IS a difficult and potentially libellous proposition for the media to comment on matters before courts when all facts are not available, but the circumstances surrounding the trial and acquittal of the 21 accused of massacring 12 people in an Ahmedabad bakery on 1 March 2002 warrant public discussion. The trial, conducted in a fast-track court in Baroda, concluded on 27 June with not-guilty verdicts on all charges after half of the 70 eyewitnesses refused to identify the assailants. The most troubling episode of the trial came on 17 May when the teenaged daughter of the bakery owner (killed in the attack) declined to identify the murderers, and then was escorted from the court by an legislator of the Bharatiya Janata Party – the very group widely accused of aiding and abetting the killers.

The 21 individuals acquitted in Baroda might very well have been innocent of the charges against them, but the circumstances of the trial raise troubling doubts about the ability and willingness of the Indian legal system to dispense justice in a fair and principled manner. Civil society groups have called on concerned individuals to petition the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India to demand "a free investigation into the Gujarat pogrom followed by a fair trial of the accused". Interested parties can reach the NHRC by fax at (91) 11-23340016 or by email at chairnhrc@nic.in.

–Chhetria Patrakar

Political maps and cultural territories

The earliest boundary between India and Bangladesh separated peoples of the hills and plains.

by David Ludden

The international boundary between India and Bangladesh came into being in 1947, but some of its segments have much older histories. The oldest segment lies below the mountains of Meghalaya and forms the northern border of the Sunamganj Zila of Bangladesh. This boundary runs east and west, cutting across many short rivers, whose names elude most maps, one being the Dhamalia river, which falls from Pandua, in India, and empties into the Surma River, near the town of Sunamganj, in Bangladesh. Borderlands of Mughal Bengal had once spanned the basins of the Dhamalia and other parallel rivers draining the mountains into plains below, but a definite geographical divide emerged in 1790, in the Sylhet district of British Bengal, in the form of a boundary line that served explicitly to restrict and regulate mobility between two political territories, defined as the homelands of two distinct cultures in the mountains and plains, respectively.

The rationale for inventing this boundary was an early precursor of the "two nation theory", which eventually informed the partition of British India. At the same time, the birth of this boundary indicates that international borders are not homogenous, despite their appearance on maps as continuous lines. In addition,

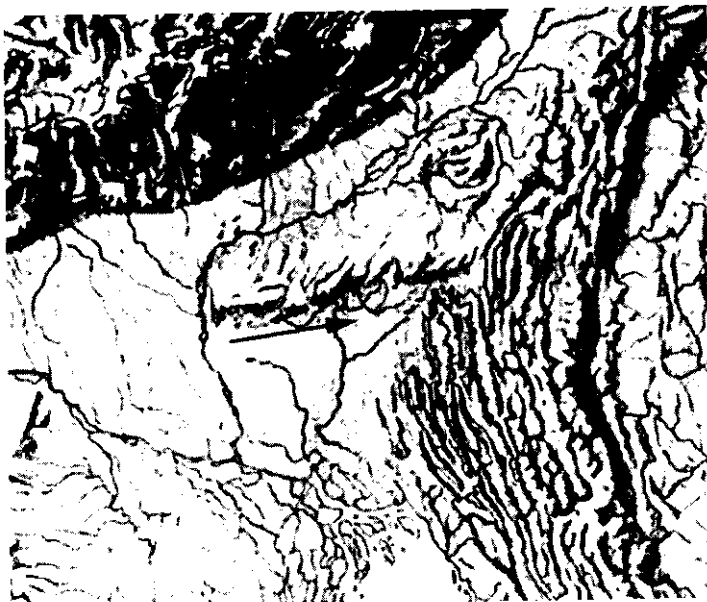
the local history of this boundary evokes many others in the old borderlands of mountains and plains spanning India's northeast and Bangladesh, where state borders today have meanings quite distinct from the meanings enshrined in international law and in national sentiments.

Once an open terrain

National boundaries are now sacrosanct symbols of sovereignty, but people who move across them routinely experience these same boundaries as mere obstacles to mobility. This experience reflects a much older reality than national maps, because for most of human history, states had little power to regulate mobility across borders. For many centuries, social and cultural boundaries marked the supremacy of specific groups in particular places, without imposing restrictions on geographical mobility. Pre-modern territorial boundaries resembled island shores or edges of forest clearings more than gated city walls.

Inscriptions record the first boundaries in the basin of the Surma and Kushiara rivers, which flow through the Sylhet region (which now includes Sylhet, Sunamganj, Maulvi Bazar, and Habiganj zilas in Bangladesh), after they emerge from the Barak river in Cachar, in present-day Assam. In the first millennium CE, Kamarupa kings granted land to brahmins around the Surma and Kushiara, in places then called *Srihatta* and *Khanda Kamarupa*. These names indicated domains of royal patronage for Hindu elites whose religious rituals marked their local boundaries. Even today, in Cachar, rituals around the temple of Kapiliswar mark such boundaries. Here, high-caste Hindus worship Siva as Kapiliswar, while others venerate the site but not the deity. This ritual boundary suggests that an older settlement of Khasis had been incorporated by immigrant settlers for whom Hindu territory emerged as a physical space controlled by brahmins, their patrons, and their subordinates. Hindu boundaries thus emerged as frontiers, limits and edges of Hindu ritual and social order.

Over many centuries, numerous groups drew boundaries in similar ways in and around the Surma and Kushiara, forming disparate territories of social order. Because populations were



The delta leading up to the Meghalaya hills.

small and land abundant, people had ample space to construct new territories, each with its own boundaries, its own elites and systems of subordination. A patchwork of territories had emerged by 1303, when Shah Jalal conquered local rajas and established Islam in Sylhet, creating a new Muslim cultural boundary. When the traveller Ibn Batuta met Shah Jalal, in 1346, the Sylhet landscape held diverse territories of Khasis, Garos, Hindus, Muslims and others.

Taming the wild

In 1612, Mughal armies created the first system of state authority in the region called the Sylhet Sarkar. This was the northeastern frontier of Bangla Suba (province), with boundaries marked by the power of a Mughal commander (*faujdar*) and by state rituals in which people paid homage and taxes to Mughal emperors. Thus, the Mughals created a boundary that was new for the people in this area.

Mughal authority also accentuated an existing boundary between settled farming communities and outsiders living in the jungle. From ancient times, 'civilised' groups gave 'jungle people' derogatory names to denote a wild nature. Such labelling valorised the subordination and expulsion of jungle people, but at the same time marked their autonomy within their own territories. Permanent farms, villages, towns, and cities became landmarks of civilisation, around which, jungles marked the frontiers of expansive agrarian societies. States advanced their supremacy by promoting agriculture, clearing jungle, and conquering, assimilating, and expelling jungle people.

The Mughals pursued this mission extensively, because farms, not jungle, provided state revenue, and farmers, not jungle people, bowed to Mughal authority. Boundaries of state authority fell at the jungle edge. Clearing jungles to make farms became a quintessential imperial project. In the 18th century, Nawab Murshid Quli Khan and his successors accelerated progress in northeastern Bengal by granting large tracts of jungle to men who would clear forest to make farms. Local farmers thus became pioneers pushing farms and state power together into the jungle, where jungle people often fought back, making agricultural expansion a violent process that progressed most rapidly where state power was most concentrated.

Because land was abundant, however, people on the margins of state power could move away to remain independent. Like many groups today designated "tribes", Khasi people (also called "Khasia" in Bangla) lived in such spaces of mobility, and from ancient times, had scattered among river basins to engage in shifting rice cultivation. Ancient Khasis pioneered rice farming in Vietnam's Red River delta; and when conquered

there by Vietnamese, had moved up the Red River, into Yunnan (China), across Burma into Assam, Bengal and the Ganga river basin. Also in ancient times, Gangetic agrarian societies and states began expanding eastward, and each expansionist wave forced 'jungle people' such as the Khasis to submit, fight, assimilate, and move.

Bengali societies evolved on the eastern frontiers of Gangetic expansion, in landscapes inhabited by numerous non-Bengali peoples, who hunted, farmed, and fished in the jungles without settling down permanently. The people living in jungle habitats had distinctive languages, religions, and social practices, including matrilineal kinship, which marked them as primitive aliens for agrarian folk who invested in permanent cultivation, under state authority. Over the centuries, as agrarian states expanded across the lowlands, many Khasis and other jungle inhabitants moved up into forest highlands and mountains, where they formed independent domains.

During the Moghul period, because land was abundant, people on the margins of state power could still move away to remain independent

Empire in cowry country

When the English East India Company took Bengal from the nawabs, in 1757, the old northeastern frontiers of Mughal Bengal posed many problems. Khasis held most land north of the Surma and ruled mountains above. Jaintia Khasi rajas held mountains and lowlands north and east of Sylhet town. Cachar rajas held the lower Barak valley. Tripura rajas ruled southern uplands and adjacent plains. In the lowlands, the English increased taxation as much as they could, but Sylhet district remained poor revenue territory, covered with forest.

The old Mughal northeastern frontier also posed a peculiar monetary problem, because cowry shells were the only coin. For centuries, these tiny shells from the Maldives were the cheapest coin all around the Indian Ocean region, and Bengal was a famous cowry market. But in Bengal, only the northeast had no metallic coins in its markets, only cowries. People here imported almost nothing from downstream, except cowries, which merchants brought upriver on boats that returned downstream with rice, fish and mountain products. By 1780, limestone was the most important mountain product, and it came only from quarries in the high northern mountains, in what is today Meghalaya. Khasi rajas around Pandua controlled quarries from which limestone came down the Dhamalia on boats to Sunamganj, a market town on the Surma built in the 18th century and named for its limestone trade.

Cowry currency thus described a monetary boundary. The Mughals and Nawabs would spend all their Sylhet revenues inside this boundary, but the English needed to convert cowries into rupees to serve wider imperial ambitions. In 1780, the English Collector in

Sylhet sought to accomplish this conversion, without exporting cowries, by using the East India Company's cowry revenue to finance his private business ventures. He used state tax revenues to buy limestone in Pandua, which he sold downstream for rupees that he then used to remit the Sylhet revenues to the Company treasury in Calcutta. He focused on limestone, shipped from Pandua to Sunamganj, and then downriver to Dhaka and Calcutta.

In the 1780s, mountain trades boomed in mountains and lowlands, between Pandua to Sunamganj, where, at the time, most land, in the Collector's words, was "covered with an impenetrable jungle and so infested by elephants, tigers, and other wild beasts that ... clearing and cultivation [was] attended with great difficulty and expense". Elephants provided most income for the few forest zamindars, who paid the English revenue. Khasi rajas in the mountains exercised sporadic authority in the jungles below, and the English could no more conquer the mountain Khasis than could the Mughals, for, as the Collector said, "you might as well attack the inhabitants of the moon".

In the 1780s, natural calamity made the jungles between Pandua and Sunamganj more attractive for lowland farmers and investors. Massive floods in 1784 and 1787 disrupted life drastically in the plains and mountains, and famines ensued. More investors focused their attention on land above the flood line, covered with jungle, even as merchant activity expanded along routes to the mountains. Pressed for funds to finance imperial wars, the English became more willing to use force to increase tax revenues. As a result, a motley, violent and chaotic mixture of British imperialism and Bengali enterprise invaded the land north of the Surma, where prime land for new farms lay in forests filled with people who never submitted to the Mughals, nawabs or British.

Conflict in the borderlands

In the 1780s, various kinds of boundaries defined localities north of the Surma. Ethnic boundaries surrounded Khasi settlements. State boundaries marked land where people paid taxes. Social boundaries enclosed farming communities. All these mingled inside the old *jagir* of Omaid Rezah, where generations of Khasis and Bengalis had formed mixed settlements of people called Bengali Khasis, who lived in forests, owned farmland, and traded and married among mountains Khasis as well as among Bengali communities.

North of the Surma, Omaid Rezah's authority declined rapidly in the 1780s. The English demanded more tax than he could pay and then divided his *jagir* among his heirs and creditors. Merchant power also increased in his old *jagir*. New farmers and investors moved into the forest. The English gave and took away

land rights according to people's ability to pay taxes. In this context, serious conflict ensued.

Tension erupted first around Pandua, where the English maintained a small force to protect merchants. In 1783, Khasi mountain warriors seized Pandua and the passes around. Sporadic warfare continued for seven years, between Company armies and Khasi rajas around Pandua. In 1788, conflict began in lowland forest villages north of Sunamganj, during flood-induced famines. In early 1789, two lowland Bengali Khasi warrior rajas, Ganga Singh and Aboo Singh, captured numerous villages and controlled several river routes. In the summer, rebel Khasis and Bengali Khasis controlled "137 Bengalee villages", Ganga Singh escaped to the hills, and Aboo Singh attacked the Pandua fort, killing its commander.

The English then launched a war on two fronts: in mountains around Pandua and in jungles behind Sunamganj. By early 1790, Company troops had conquered most people below the mountains, and open warfare ended soon after a British commander ordered the massacre of Bengali Khasis around Ganga Singh's home village. But by then, the Company had lost Pandua irretrievably to mountain Khasi rajas.

In November 1791, the 35th Sepoy Battalion left Sylhet, its mission only half-accomplished. The new state boundary drawn between British Bengal and mountain Khasi domains became a reality based on Khasi victories in the mountains and British victories below. The new border ran along the base of the mountains and bisected the route from Sunamganj to Pandua. It marked the northern limit of British Bengal, which only then extended indisputably to the mountains, and equally indisputably, did not include Pandua.

A new kind of boundary

Marking boundaries firmly was not normal imperial practice at the time, so it required extensive justification, recorded in official correspondence. First and foremost, the boundary secured Company territory against threats to British authority posed by unregulated mobility between mountains and lowlands. The English drew this boundary to restrict mobility by defining the northern mountains as independent Khasi territory. Henceforth, mountain Khasis officially became aliens in the plains, where all the land became Bengali territory.

As per the official culture of the Company's governance, the new boundary separated the "races" of Khasis and Bengalis. It imposed restrictions on "intercourse and intermarriages" that produced what one official called the "degenerate Race called Bengalee Cosseahs". As one collector explained, problems addressed by the boundary did not arise from the inher-

In 1789, 4000 Sylhet taxpayers owned land under Company law; in 1795, the number was 26,000

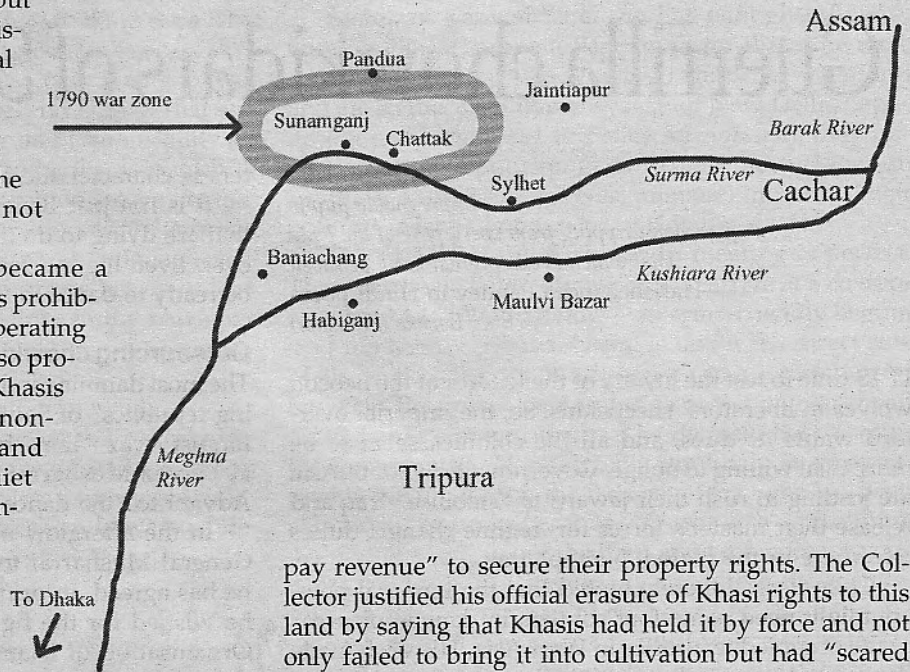
ent character of the Khasi 'race', but rather from Khasia and Bengali miscegenation; hence, from interracial alliances that threatened the Company's territorial order by mixing lowland popular culture with the wild, unruly culture of the mountains, where people did not respect state authority.

The new state border also became a boundary of 'free trade'. Collectors prohibited European merchants from operating inside Khasi territory; and they also prohibited the northern mountain Khasis from trading in Sylhet, while non-Khasi merchants from Jaintia and Cachar were "considered as quiet and inoffensive", and thus continued to be allowed free access to markets in Company territory, contingent on good behaviour.

In addition, the border defined eligibility to own landed property in ethnic terms. The English prohibited Khasis from owning land on the grounds that their land had been acquired illegally, and on the assumption that Khasis could never abandon mountain methods for establishing property rights, deemed alien in the plains. Collectors then expropriated the lowland Khasi landed property rights, already established under Company law, to make way for Bengalis. The land market thrived as land buyers acquired state-defined land rights to support the laborious process of clearing jungle and creating new farms.

The impact of the new border thus fell most heavily on Khasis below the mountains. Before 1790, shifting cultivation, permanent farms, hunting, trading and fighting were carried out in the open borderlands spanning mountains and plains, in mixed Khasia and Bengali environs. After 1790, these mixes faded away under the impact of British authority and new waves of Bengali colonisation. Government auctions of Khasi land began in 1792, and a year later, the collector reported that he had completed sales of all land expropriated from rebellious Khasi and Bengali villagers, except a "trifling remainder of Cosseah land."

Clearing jungles to make farms took a long time, however. High taxes slowed the process and encouraged the new colonists to establish estates that were, so that the landowners could get enough land cleared quickly by tenants to pay taxes and reap some profit. Extensive forest zamindar estates remained covered with forests. Expanses of open jungle also remained outside the reach of private property, leaving Khasis some room to manoeuvre. New small estates multiplied quickly, however. By 1797, land formerly owned by Bengali Khasis had been occupied by Bengalis "very willing and eager to enter into regular engagements to



pay revenue" to secure their property rights. The Collector justified his official erasure of Khasi rights to this land by saying that Khasis had held it by force and not only failed to bring it into cultivation but had "scared away farmers", until the Company "secured the area and confined Cosseahs to the hills".

The old Mughal northeastern frontiers witnessed a rapid increase in privately owned landed property. In 1789, 4000 Sylhet taxpayers had owned land under Company law; in 1795, the number was 26,000, and a year later, it rose to 27,000. Landed estates were mostly very small, and they were so numerous that by 1800, about 25 percent of the population of Sylhet district may have lived in landowning families, in villages that averaged a mere 67 people and four landed estates (*taluks*), each representing about 18 people, few more than one landowning family, its dependents and servants.

The 1790 northern boundary of the Bengal Presidency, north of the Surma River, gave an old Bengali boundary a new geographical form. Inside the boundaries of Bengal, the state defined local elites, who owned bounded plots of landed property. The state's external boundary became a part of everyday life in villages, where social boundaries marked the Khasis' subordinate, outsider status.

Thus, local histories impart to the former imperial boundary that now separates Bangladesh and India meanings quite distinct from those that emerged after 1947. This boundary defined Bengalis and Khasias as peoples with separate histories, homelands, and cultural identities, which mingle in the local history of the borderlands. Here, each defines the other, and the memory of Bengali Khasis north of the Surma indicates a distinctive borderland cultural past outside the reach of the national imagination.

Note: An extensively documented version of this essay is forthcoming in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

Guerrilla chowkidars of South Asia

*Planet-like head
Impregnable pupils
Aggression dripping from every pore of the body
That which is exceptional must be saved*
—Harishchandra Pandey in Hindi poem
Sher Bachao (Abhiyan)

IT IS time to test the loyalty of the toadies of the neocon wolves in liberators' sheepskins. So, the imperial overlord wants its dues, and all the colonies seem to be more than willing to oblige. Governments in South Asia are jostling to rush their jawans to "stabilise" Iraq and release their master's forces for 'regime change' duties elsewhere in the region, perhaps Iran.

Colin Powell merely hinted that the imperial powers might need some foot soldiers in dangerous areas of the occupied territories in West Asia. His wish made Bangladeshi generals salivate. Ever since the restoration of civilian rule, the Dhaka brass is loath to let any opportunity of overseas sentry duty pass.

In Nepal, the greed for guard duty is so strong that when a proposal was put up in the cabinet recently to consider the American request, it seems no one even cared to point out the perils of aligning with an army of occupation. Of late, the Royal Nepal Army has earned a name for itself in peacekeeping duties for the United Nations. But its history of fighting for imperial powers goes back far. Even though its country was never a formal colony, doing duty for imperialists is a tradition with the Nepali soldiery.

The first Rana, Jang Bahadur, led the Gorkha contingent that helped the East India Company suppress the 'sepoy mutiny' of 1857 in Awadh. Chandra Shumshere backed England with man and money in the first world war. Baber Shumshere led Nepali troops to Afghanistan to aid the British in the battle at Waziristan. Juddha Shumshere put eight battalions of his fiercest fighters at the disposal of Allied commanders right at the outset of the second world war.

These rulers were handsomely rewarded for their services. Jang Bahadur got the opportunity to ransack Lucknow and an additional gift of some land from the territory of the vanquished nawab of Awadh (the 'naya muluk'). Chandra preferred cash – he settled for an annual payment of one million rupees to be paid in perpetuity.

After the second world war, the award was doubled. The vulgar Rana palaces of Kathmandu valley – now curiously being restored as heritage sites – are built largely from the blood money of Gorkha soldiers sent abroad to die for the benefit of their feudal lords. A promptness in sending its serfs to serve foreign mas-

ters is characteristic of the Kathmandu ruling class.

It is not just Bangladeshi and Nepali ruling elites that are dying to do the imperial bidding in Iraq, however. Even the 'nuclear powers' of South Asia seem to be ready to dance to the tunes of Don Rumsfeld.

Outsourcing chowkidars

The most damning indictment of "two great self-respecting republics" of South Asia has come from *Dawn* columnist Ayaz Amir – he has likened the poses of General Pervez Musharraf and "lohpurush" (iron man) LK Advani to "the dance of the courtesans".

In the afterglow of his Camp David performance, General Musharraf told ABC channel on 26 June that he has agreed, in principle, to send troops to Iraq. But he wished for the fig leaf of the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Pakistani civil society does not seem to favour sending troops to fight Muslims in a Muslim country. And, Musharraf is slowly but surely falling prey to the 'Gorbachev effect' – wildly feted in the West for actions intensely hated at home.

Barring firebrands such as P Sainath and Praful Bidwai, most "opinion leaders" of *Bharat mahaan* are waving the star spangled banner, with saffron flags firmly in place as backdrop. The New Delhi elite seems ready to ignore the sensibilities of Indian Muslims, dump the ideology of national sovereignty and forget about morality in its foreign policy – all for the sake of crumbs from the table of imperial plunder. Sensing the hunger of his guest, Tony Blair met Advani, the Indian deputy prime minister, in London. Subsequently, he announced in the House of Commons that "19 or 20 countries" may join the peacekeeping operations in Iraq. My guess is that at least 4 or 5 of those servile countries will be from South Asia.

Patrol duty in and around Basra and Baghdad is anything but peacekeeping. If the experience of British troops over the last few months is anything to go by, the mission in Mesopotamia is more likely to be counterinsurgency operations in a newly acquired colony. No wonder, the US Marines desperately want to subcontract the dirty work. This is one outsourcing no trade union in the United States will complain about. Hence, the intensive body shopping by the errand persons of the Pentagon.

The proclivity of the American propaganda machine to "sex up" information while being extremely frugal with the facts is not unknown to Tony Blair, but he must have felt the full force of its implications when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan categorically denied all media rumours about the UN role in Iraq. After his

talks with the British prime minister in London on 26 June, the day General Musharraf was looking for a UN fig leaf on ABC, Annan said in no uncertain terms, "Until the [Security] Council gives us a new mandate, we are not really talking of a UN force, and I doubt that we will have the capacity to take over that responsibility at this stage". He pointed out that it was the responsibility of the "occupying powers" to provide security to the Iraqi people. With Annan unwilling to supply encouragement, Musharraf must look for another fig leaf, and Advani needs to fortify his justifications before ordering Indian soldiers to join guard duty in the new empire in Mesopotamia.

The SAGUFA uniform

It is obviously time to get serious about this peacekeeping-slash-occupation duty at the regional level since we all so seem to want it. One matter to discuss would be what uniform a South Asian force would wear while serving on the doab of the Euphrates and the Tigris. As South Asian countries respond to the bidding of Uncle Sam, it would make sense to stitch a new uniform (suitable for imperial guard duty) rather than go for a borrowed *langoti* of the UN (or OIC or GCC) flag. A completely South Asian outfit inspired by our shared culture of serving colonial masters with rare distinction would probably inspire more confidence (in the occupying powers, if not the Iraqi populace).

There can be no better agenda for the SAARC foreign secretary-level meeting on 9-10 July in rain-drenched Kathmandu. After all, harping on the non-existent regional trade *ad nauseum* is not leading SAFTA or SAPTA anywhere. All peacekeeping forces and occupying forces must have acronyms (ref UNGOMAP, UNMOGIP, UNTSO, UNIFIL, ONUC), so that should be the first order of business. Participants of the planned Kathmandu conclave have the requisite clout in their respective countries to carry through an innovative scheme such as the formation of a South Asian Guerrilla Unified Force for Action in the Gulf, SAGUFA for short.

After General Musharraf, foreign secretary Riaz Khokar is the second most important person in Pakistan – refer to how he upstaged Premier Jamali in the selection of Islamabad's envoy to New Delhi. All through Musharraf's tour of duty (of pledging his continued obedience to the neocon cabal) in the US and the UK, it was the careful Khokar who accompanied the general, not his straightforward boss, the foreign minister, Khurshed Mehmood Kasuri. If Khokar pledges his support to the formation of SAGUFA, the all-powerful Rawalpindi generals are sure to nurture the project as their

own baby.

Secretary Kanwal Sibal too has enough influence with his Bhartiya Janata Party minister that if he were convinced of it, SAGUFA would go ahead, new uniform and all. In the 'steel frame' system of New Delhi, babus do not just have a say in policy formulation; they formulate national policies. Even though they seldom do anything more than nod 'yes, minister' in public, their political masters know who wields the *danda*.

The timing of the Kathmandu meeting is perfect. There can be no better atmosphere to arrive at a consensus about SAGUFA than now – an army-friendly begum is at the helm in Dhaka, Nepal is under the direct rule of its supreme-commander-in-chief monarch, and hawkish President Kumaratunga is the civilian head of Sri Lanka's armed forces. The de facto host, former foreign secretary Narendra Bikram Shah, is an apparatchik holdover from the Panchayat era, who has been able to do the undoable thus far – come to a resolution

of the Bhutanese refugees issue by essentially rendering them stateless at the behest of Thimpu.

With the foreign secretaries making the pitch, the others are sure to fall in line and we are as good as home on SAGUFA. Funds for the new outfit, you say? That would be the least of its problems. An advance for promised guard duty in Iraq should not be too hard to manage. Counterinsurgency operations there cost the American treasury over USD three billion every month. That is exactly the sum George Bush has promised

his man in Islamabad – spread over the next five years and attached with some very stout strings – for handing over the entire Afghanistan border to the American occupation forces headquartered in Kabul. Hiring the services of SAGUFA is sure to come much cheaper.

However, the foreign secretaries of the South Asian countries must put one condition on the deployment of SAGUFA – they must insist that the combined troops of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will head for Baghdad via Rangoon. Whenever a unified South Asian command becomes a reality, its first duty must be to free Burma from the clutches of the abominable generals.

SAGUFA can then develop other agendas for, once started, the fund-raising must be constant so that our jawans continue to earn per diem and hardship allowances. An important assignment for the new regional legion could perhaps be supervision of the US presidential elections next year. Only a combined force of all South Asian countries can ensure that no chads are left hanging in the 2004 elections to haunt the world for the four years after it.

△
– CK Lal



On Her Majesty's service, yet again?

Penury in plenty

As a result of the failure of the public distribution system, four districts in Orissa have become notorious for starvation deaths.

by *Indrajit Roy*

In India, a country that fulfils 99.9 percent of its net availability of food through domestic production, and even exports food grain, some districts, in the state of Orissa, have become chronically prone to famine. Officially, of course 'famine' is a loaded term in a country that touts the claim that "no one dies of starvation any longer". Unofficially, it is clear that people die every year in Orissa because of food deficit.

Located on the eastern coast of India, Orissa has a population of 36.7 million, of which 47.2 percent lives beneath what is known as the 'poverty line'. This line used to be configured with reference to calorie intake (now, the international standard is income, judged by the measure of one dollar per day). In India, 'below poverty line' (BPL) still often refers to populations consuming less than 2100 calories a day in urban areas and 2400 calories a day in rural areas. As per this standard, the rural poverty ratio for Orissa, at 48 percent, is the higher than all other states in India. The government's human development index for Orissa reflects this dismal scenario, with a value of 0.404 (where the best is 0.638) and a rank of 11 out of the 15 states for which these indices have been prepared.

Chronic hunger and malnutrition are inextricably linked with the polity and socio-economic rubric of Orissa. That these are assumed to be a consequence of recurring drought derives from the fact that agriculture provides direct and indirect employment to about 64 percent of the workforce and contributes 28.5 percent of the Net State Domestic Product. Of the 6.4 million hectares that is cultivated, only 35 percent is served by irrigation facilities, the rest being rain-fed.

Rice, cultivated during the summer season – ie between June and September (known in most of South Asia as the *khari* season) grows on 4.2 million hectares – only one-third of which is irrigated. The state receives 80 percent of its rainfall in the monsoon months between June and September. Drought, thus, is a characteristic of the paddy season.

The contiguous patch of the districts of Bolangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi and Kandhamal in western and central Orissa has been identified as a chronic drought-prone zone. Anticipated crop-loss during the drought in 2002 in neighbouring districts such as Rayagada was as high as 85.2 percent, in Ganjam 91.1 percent and in Gajapati 92.6 percent.

While shortfall in food production may have to do with natural factors, the human misery that results from food shortage has much to do with social, economic and political factors that the state has so far been unable to sufficiently address. Rain plays a significant part in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Indian farmers, but not necessarily in the "drought-prone zone" of Orissa, where whether it has rained or not, a large number of people are not able to procure the fruits of the soil for consumption.

Doing right, going wrong

Orissa being particularly prone to natural disasters, including drought and cyclones, the state administration has evolved a set of codes that enable the government to respond to distress. The Orissa Relief Code (ORC) establishes that the antecedent responsibility to deal with drought lies with the state. It codifies procedures to guide administrative implementation of relief. Identifying the state government as 'lifeguard' in times of drought, the ORC holds the State Board of Revenue responsible for coordinating relief administration. It also recommends the involvement of people's representatives in planning and development of relief-response programmes. The code also emphasises the need to maintain continuity between short-term relief measures and longer-term welfare and development policy. For example, food-for-work schemes that provide employment and food in the event of drought should be programmed so that they contribute to the creation and/or improvement of community assets and infrastructure. Further, the code calls for provision of institutional credit and agricultural support to affected families.

However, the ORC, relying on an outdated food-shortage definition of famine and linking it to drought, does not recognise the possibility of famine in Orissa. Thus, according to it, famine is a "state of extreme paucity of food due to complete failure of crops consecutively for more than one year and acute distress to animals and birds on account thereof". Given that the Indian state has provisioned the speedy transfer of food from surplus to deficit areas and has facilitated improvement in food production, the ORC asserts that

With the development of quick transport and com-

munication facilities and with improvements in the food production situation in the country, the conditions of famine could not be said to appear on any local failure of rains. Hence at present the question of declaration of any area as 'Famine-affected' does not arise.

That famine is not simply a function of drought, constraint in production or even deficits in supply has been increasingly recognised, following the work of economist Amartya Sen. In his 1981 *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Sen linked famines to entitlements, debunking the notion that famines were caused by food shortage. Subsequently, famine has been convincingly related not to entitlements but to accessibility – the access to food as determined by economic, political and social relations. Now, typically, food security determinants are classified as those pertaining to adequacy of food availability, stability of food supply and access to food. Of these, the United Nations recognises that "the most important aspect of food security is household access to food". Stability of household access presupposes enhanced access due to realisation of entitlements.

Equity and distribution concerns of the government in India are addressed by taking recourse to promoting "rapid growth of agriculture", as stated in the government's, 'The National Agriculture Policy' of 2000. While the national agricultural policy (NAP) does outline some frameworks for consolidation and redistribution of land, tenancy reforms and entitling landless labourers to usufruct of trees and pastures, it does not spell out how the growths achieved in Indian agriculture be made more broad-based.

Since independence in 1947, India has made significant progress in food production and attaining food security. As per government figures, from 45.3 in 1950-51, incidence of poverty as reflected in the percentage of the population living below the poverty line, the poverty rate declined to 26 percent in 1999-2000. Recurring droughts and famine that ravaged the countryside till the middle of the last century have become far more sporadic, as well as their im-

pact limited. In a large part, this is owed to the concerted effort to introduce technological innovations to agriculture in the 1960s, during what is known as the 'green revolution'. But, for all the great strides that the country has taken, India is still unable to control widespread malnutrition. 88 percent of all pregnant women aged 15-49 are anaemic (data from 1975-91). 33 percent of all infants are of low-birth weight (1990). The maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births is 440 (1997), the under-five mortality rate is 111 (1996), and the infant mortality rate per 1000 live births is 73 (1996).

The experience of many Indian districts and communities, including those of western and central Orissa, has been that food availability does not always translate into access. Here, while drought does exacerbate conditions of famine, it is not a prerequisite for famine. Obviously, the ORC, preoccupied as it is with measur-

MONTH	ALLOTMENT		LIFTING		OFFTAKE	
	Kandhamal Rayagada		Kandhamal Rayagada		Kandhamal Rayagada	
I. BPL (RURAL) RICE (IN MT)						
April	1663.4	1973	1373.7	1185.8	1303.7	1374.8
May	1663.4	1973	1690.6	1307.1	2039.9	1633.3
June	1663.4	1973	1627.9	2106.2	1489.1	1793.4
July	1663.4	NA	854.5	NA	1536.9	NA
August	1663.4	NA	1577.4	NA	1656.6	NA
II. BPL (URBAN) RICE (IN MT)						
April	49	808	42.1	NA	30.6	NA
May	49	808	21.7	62.7	22.9	NA
June	49	808	14.5	234.2	15.9	210.8
July	49	NA	4	NA	15.9	NA
August	49	NA	4	NA	8.1	NA
III. ANTYODAYA RICE (IN MT)						
April	266.5	469.8	266.5	469.8	236.8	363.5
May	266.5	469.8	266.5	469.8	390.3	527.9
June	266.5	469.8	266.5	469.8	256.5	507.3
July	266.5	NA	266.5	NA	254.4	NA
August	266.5	NA	266.5	NA	263	NA
IV. ANNA PURNA RICE (IN MT)						
April	0	0	0	0	5	0
May	0	0	0	0	15.5	0
June	23.3	14.6	11.2	14.6	5.3	10.7
July	0	NA	11.2	NA	9.5	NA
August	33.5	NA	33.5	NA	10.1	NA
V. LEVY SUGAR (IN MT)						
April	234.9	284.1	126.9	20	91.6	24.5
May	234.9	284.1	131.5	39	137.6	26.2
June	234.9	284.1	79.1	0	89.8	0.3
July	234.9	NA	109	NA	101.6	NA
August	234.9	NA	00	NA	91.5	NA
VI. KEROSENE OIL (IN KL)						
April	576	804	523.5	552	507.1	589.1
May	576	804	547.0	593.7	549	569.4
June	576	804	510.5	608	499.1	603.4
July	576	804	533.5	NA	533.8	NA
August	576	804	572.0	NA	579.8	NA

SOURCE: NOTES FOR DISTRICT REVIEW, RAYAGADA DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, AND NOTES FOR DISTRICT REVIEW, KANDHAMAL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, GOVERNMENT OF ORISSA.

ing drought in terms of rainfall data and extent of crop-loss, fails to capture the daily scourge that stalks communities in western and central Orissa. Similarly, the primary concern of the NAP is promoting growth for exports. Thus, there is little in either policy instrument that offers scope for making a sustainable impact on food security and tackling famine that is not induced by drought.

Problem of plenty

Amartya Sen and the economist Jean Dreze, in the co-authored *Hunger and Public Action* (1989), distinguish two contrasting strategies to enable improvements in what they call the 'quality of life' of poor people: one, the strategy of growth-mediated security that promotes economic growth and translates expansion of private incomes to public support; and two, the strategy of support-led security, as resulting directly from public support in employment provision, health and education care. India's elaborate public distribution system (PDS) is one such attempt at direct public support to eliminate hunger.

Public distribution is one of the four forms of intervention by the Indian government in the food grain market, the other three being public procurement, storage and buffer stock operations and legal controls on hoarding. In her work, *Weakening Welfare: Distribution of Food in India*, agricultural economist Madhura Swaminathan has highlighted the objectives of the PDS as rationing during scarcity, price-stability, check on private trade, and welfare of the poor by providing basic food to the vulnerable at reasonable prices. Thus, the PDS is a rationing mechanism that entitles households to specified quantities of selected commodities at subsidised prices.

The six essential commodities that are supplied nationally are rice, wheat, sugar, edible oils, kerosene and coal. Rationing was introduced in Bombay in 1939. It was abolished on the recommendation of the Second Foodgrain Policy Committee in 1947 but reintroduced with the onset of 'planning' in 1947. While there was a decline in public distribution through most of the 1950s, it is important to note that till 1970, the quantity of grain procured was less than what was distributed through the PDS. (This implies the dependence of PDS on imports of food grain, primarily under the US Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act 1954, as amended, better known as the PL-480 regime.) The end of the 1970s, however, saw the growth of comfortable buffer stocks, providing the basis for large-scale expansion of the PDS and also food-for-work type employment/welfare programmes. The PDS continues to be the most flexible instrument for moderating short-term effects of supply or production shortfalls, given the vagaries that still characterise Indian agriculture.

Swaminathan also highlights some of the key characteristics of the PDS since the country embarked upon

structural adjustment in the early 1990s. With the revamp, the targeted PDS (TPDS) was introduced in 1996, which places emphasis on specific areas, with preference to population in 'difficult areas'. The objectives of the TPDS are improving access of income-poor consumers to the PDS, increasing the range of commodities supplied by fair-price shops (FPS – retail outlets under the PDS), and providing selected commodities at prices lower than in the general PDS.

Targeting has also drawn a distinction between BPL and above poverty line (APL) consumers, while a separate system for those in economic transition between the categories is being envisaged. For the BPL category, prices are fixed at a percentage of the economic cost (the sum of the acquisition and the distribution costs) accruing to the Food Corporation of India (FCI), while prices for the APL category are fixed at par with the economic cost. While, the issue price of rice and wheat for the BPL category remained constant till 1999-2000, after which it was increased, the issue price of rice and wheat for the APL category increased till 2000-01, after which it registered a sharp decline.

With structural adjustment, clearly, the principle of universal coverage has been abandoned. Entitlements of food grain have been reduced. And, there

has also been an increase in food prices that reflects reduction in implicit food subsidies. In the early 1990s, for instance, the cumulative increase in the price of food grain sold through PDS was higher than corresponding increase in other general price indices.

A third characteristic is a decline in the quantity distributed. Food grain allocation fell from 20.8 million tonnes in 1991 to 14 million tonnes in 1994. That this has coincided with an increase in stocks of food grain at the national level is ironic. The food grain stock has been increasing since January 1998, and grew rapidly after January 1999. While the minimum buffer stock norm was 16.8 million tonnes till January 2002, in that month, the actual stock was 58 million tonnes. Certain supply-side and demand-side factors contribute to this problem of plenty. On the supply side, the Minimum Support Price (MSP), a policy instrument to prevent farmers from resorting to distress sales, has maintained a steady increase for both wheat and paddy, given the critical role of the rural landed classes in the electoral process. On the demand side, the primary reason for the increasing stocks is poor 'offtake' of grains from the government under the TPDS.

The targeting of the PDS at specific consumers, lowering the quantity allocated to a household, and increasing the prices, has played havoc with the system, so that now even though food grain allocations to the states have remained more or less constant after 1994, the offtake for both wheat and rice has registered a steady decline. In 2000-01, the offtake in the case of wheat fell to 32 percent of the allocated quantity, com-

News of when "ration" will be available does not always get around

pared with 86 percent in 1991-92. Similarly, the offtake in the case of rice fell to 48 percent in 2000-01 from 90 percent in 1991-92.

In view of both public outrage and fiscal considerations, the Supreme Court of India issued a significant interim order on 28 November 2001 directing state governments to implement eight food-related schemes sponsored by the central government effectively. This included schemes focussing on old age pension, family benefits in the event of the death of the head, maternal health, school-feeding programmes, and direct food provisioning free for the aged destitute (the Annapurna scheme) and at subsidised prices for other poor households (the Antyodaya Anna Yojana and the TPDS for BPL households).

Antyodaya was introduced to provide food security to the poorest of the poor. The selection of families for this scheme is done by the *gram sabha*, a unit of village level government. Antyodaya cardholders are entitled to 25 kgs of grains each month at the price of INR two per kg for wheat and INR three per kg for rice. The Annapurna scheme, introduced in 2000 to provide food security to elderly citizens who have no income of their own and no one to take care of them, entitles beneficiaries to 10 kgs of food grains (rice or wheat) per month. The beneficiaries are to be identified by the gram Panchayat – an elected body, which is the institution for self-governance in the village. As per the court's directions, all state governments were required to make these schemes effective by 1 January 2002.

A comparison of micro-level data from each of these three schemes enables a better understanding as to which demand and supply side factors predominate in the public distribution system, and how the system fails the 'targeted' poor, as it has been doing in parts of Orissa.

Micro-deficits and macro-surplus

As in other parts of India, public distribution in Orissa functions through the network of procurement agents, millers and FPS. Commodities are 'allocated' from the FCI's central pool to each district by the state Civil Supplies Department. They are then 'lifted' by contractors employed by the para-statal Civil Supplies Corporation and transported to 'storage points', to be further sold on wholesale basis to FPS, which are retail outlets at the local level.

Studies in the districts of Kandhamal and Rayagada reflect the problems with associating famine exclusively with drought, as the ORC continues to do even as people continue to die of hunger-related diseases. In Kandhamal, which has a population of 647,912, 118,544 ration cards in circulation and 257 FPS, the offtake of Antyodaya rice was almost always lesser than allotment between April and August 2002. The only exception

was the month of May for rural BPL households. A reverse trend may be observed in regard to Annapurna rice, which is free, where only in June and August, the offtake was less than lifting. Rayagada, which has a population of 823,019 and 186,605 ration cards in circulation under different schemes, is serviced by 168 FPS (including urban cooperatives and private persons). There too only in the case of Antyodaya rice (in May and June) was the offtake less than the amount lifted. Annapurna allotments for the months of May and June were not received by the district administration.

In the case of sugar, the offtake of levy sugar in Rayagada was less than 10 percent of allotment, indicating extremely poor demand by communities for the same. In Kandhamal, the demand for levy sugar was higher, with the offtake being over 50 percent of the allotment in May 2002. Similarly, the offtake of kerosene is consistently less than lifting, with only one exception in Kandhamal in August 2002.

The under-utilisation of allotments, as reflected in the offtake being less than lifting, is a manifestation of a number of trends. On the one hand, erratic and irregular provisioning due to the inadequate management of the supply chain implies that grain does not reach retail/distribution outlets at the community level in the first place. The case of Annapurna allotments in Rayagada is a case in point. On the other hand, even if distribution outlets are fully stocked, there are other constraints. This area being sparsely inhabited, communities are located at quite a distance from one another, and often from FPS. The undulating and hilly terrain adds to the time and effort of covering the distance to a FPS. Added to that are considerations of the cost of transportation (whether on foot or on automobile). Rayagada's district administration formally admits of poor demand for levy sugar by BPL families in the district. This is due to two reasons. First, the zonal sugar depot is located in the adjacent district's headquarter, at Jeypore, over 50 kms from Rayagada town, making it difficult for Rayagada's poor to claim their entitlement. Second, and as a consequence of the first, storage agents are reluctant to lift the sugar and transport it to Rayagada, which adversely affects supply. Where individuals (whether men or women) do manage to travel these distances, it is at the loss of up to one day's wages. Social and economic affordability is most crucial for determining community-level access to food.

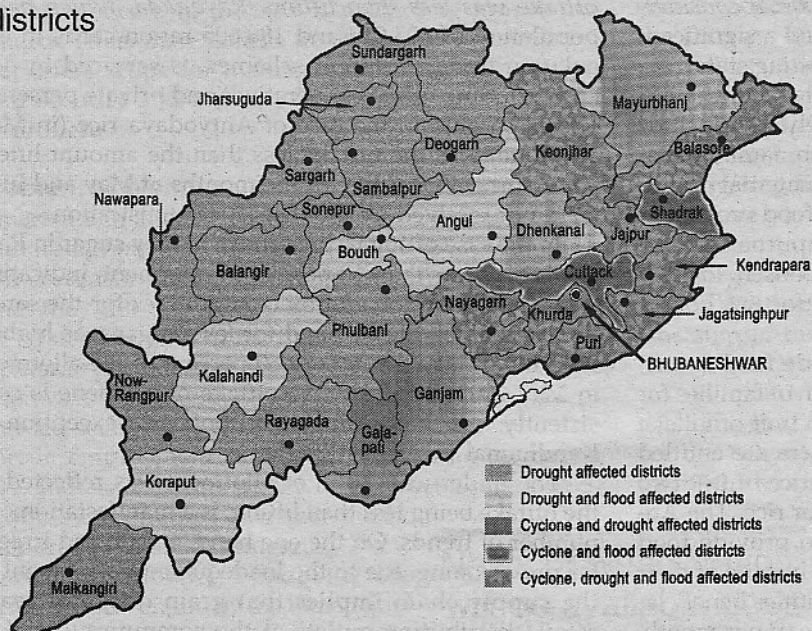
Besides, there are other structural factors that hamper the process. 'Ration' at the retail centre is available for only a few days in a given month, and information about which days it will be available does not always

DISTRICT	PROPORTION OF DALITS	PROPORTION OF TRIBALS	PROPORTION OF WOMEN
Kandhamal	18.2	51.5	50.2
Rayagada	14.3	56	50.7

SOURCE: FOR DATA ON DALITS AND TRIBALS, ECONOMIC SURVEY 1995-96, GOVERNMENT OF ORISSA
FOR DATA ON WOMEN, CENSUS OF INDIA 2001 (PROVISIONAL), MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Orissa

Cyclone (1999), drought (2000) and flood (2001) affected districts



get around. While caste is not as pervasive in the western Orissa context as it is in the coastal plains, hierarchies based on other ascribed status, such as kinship and tribal affiliation, determine settlement patterns. Information is radiated outwards to the periphery and therefore awareness is inversely related to distance from the core. Thus, by the time information reaches households at the peripheries, the stock at the outlet is usually sold out. Further, even if households have information, and can easily access an outlet, many do not command adequate fluid cash to purchase commodities at one single time.

A survey of the occupational classification of the main workforce reveals that agricultural labourers (defined as those who are employed on farms other than their own) comprise a relatively high percentage of the population: nearly 46 percent in Rayagada and over 36 percent in Kandhamal, compared to 35 percent for all Orissa. Disaggregating data for rural areas, this figure is even higher – 49.8 percent for Rayagada and 37.5 percent for Kandhamal. Considering that both districts have tribal majorities, it is tempting to link landlessness in the majority of tribal households with exploitation by elites – mostly *dikkus* (non-tribal settlers), but sometimes superior tribal clans as well. Landless households have no option but to work as wage labourers on the lands of their more prosperous co-villagers. Moreover, females outnumber males in both districts, thereby occupying a significant space in labour markets. In both these districts, where the sex ratio is skewed in favour of women, women workers outnumber their male counterparts as agricultural labourers,

though the reverse is true in the overall employment scenario. As feminist political activist Brinda Karat points out, it may also be anticipated that because of gender-discriminatory minimum wage stipulations, they earn less than their male counterparts. Tellingly, work participation ratios for dalit and tribal women are higher than for other women in Orissa, as they are for all of India.

The purchasing power of households (determined by income) is a critical determinant of the offtake being adequate or otherwise. Incomes in western and central Orissa are adversely affected by a number of factors: patterns of landholding being one such. In Kalahandi district, over 50 percent of all workers are employed mainly as agricultural labourers. Here, communities hazard that 20 percent of the population controls 80 percent of the land. There has been only sluggish progress towards industrialisation, which had the potential to absorb landless households (even if the socio-economic benefits of such industrialisation may be uncertain).

Land record transactions in Kalahandi indicate a concentration of low-lying and hence better-irrigated (*behal*) land with large landowners; public land encroachment, again by the larger landowners; provision of credit by local *sahukars* (moneylenders) conditional to mortgage of land and labour; and seasonal constraints on productive capacity. All these factors contribute to low income generation in the district. The influence wielded by feudal elements based in Bhawanipatna, capital of the erstwhile princely state of Kalahandi and currently its district headquarters, may be gauged from their success in thwarting the laying of rail tracks through their 'fortress'. Both literally and metaphorically, Bhawanipatna was kept insulated from development practice and ideology in spite of its location on the Raipur-Vishakapatnam highway. Development projects such as the Upper Indravati dam-construction project have not guaranteed sustainable employment options, and real wages continue to be low due to both supply factors and continuing patron-client relations. These 'extended entitlements', referring to informal advantages enjoyed or claimed by certain groups or individuals in society or households, and legitimised by society, often infringe on the legal entitlements of others.

Even the impact of modernisation has been dubious. With the green revolution popularising the long grain variety of rice, and market linkages making the profit-motive paramount, agricultural production in western, central and southern Orissa has turned away from traditional pulses, oilseeds, millets and *citka* (a

hardy variety of rice). These are more resistant to drought, as was made evident in the 2001 drought in Bolangir district, but have poor prospects in the market. As a consequence, vulnerable households find it difficult to not only make the investments that paddy needs, but are also unable to cope with crop-loss when it occurs.

Thus, a condition of shortages amidst plenty continues to plague communities, which cannot command food surpluses, and are unable to realise their entitlements. In Kandhamal, in April and May the offtake of Annapurna rice (supplied free) was higher than allotments (which were nil), indicating that communities would certainly access commodities provided they had the opportunity, terrain and time notwithstanding. Of course, that will be difficult in instances where supply itself is affected, as in Rayagada. Meanwhile, certain communities continue to not have the requisite purchasing power, even when products are 'available' at subsidised prices. The relatively high proportion of agricultural labourers in the main workforce in all these districts may be a significant factor here. Clearly, though, the increase in the FCI's buffer stocks has been unaccompanied by the empowering of the people to cash in their entitlements, resulting in declining offtakes, and contributing to the country's already high buffer-stock and buffer carrying cost.

Relationships of security

The finance ministry's *Economic Survey* recommends that the burden of subsidy on the central budget should be curtailed (something that Sen supports, arguing that the MSP have merely benefited rich farmers), and that the reduction in food subsidies be made effective through targeting (this being typical of the adjustment package that is seen in Mexico, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Zambia and Tunisia). High MSPs comprising between 45 percent and 75 percent of economic costs to the FCI contribute to fiscal deficit by inflating the food bill. As has been the experience, they are directly proportional to increased procurement, and large buffer stocks, which means high buffer-carrying costs. A high buffer-carrying cost has adverse implications for the fiscal scenario of the economy. Buffer carrying cost comprised 42 percent of total costs (economic cost plus buffer carrying cost) accruing to FCI in 2000-01 – an increase of 12 percent from 1991-92.

That said, food subsidy in India averages only 0.3 percent of GDP, and

eliminating food subsidies will not substantially impact the fiscal deficit. Moreover, it still does not solve the problem of poverty-amidst-plenty, which has come to characterise not only western and central Orissa, but also areas in western and central India, such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, southern Uttar Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand. There may be some merit in the argument that the PDS is too narrow and static a perspective on poverty alleviation, that its contribution to poverty alleviation is an exaggeration considering that the Spearman's rank correlation between PDS and poverty rankings across Indian states is very low. The argument also holds that being a supply-side measure, the PDS does not contribute to any real improvement of economic conditions. It is not a 'safety net' either, because no scheme for income-generation is associated with it.

At the same time, reviewing the resource-allocation regime to re-channel "available resources from support measures towards asset-formation in the rural sector", as the NAP says, may not be the solution either. As the *Food Insecurity Atlas* maintains, "non-food factors also play an important role in causing food insecurity". Therefore, we must look beyond constructed dichotomies between support-led and growth-mediated approaches, both of which are essentially state-managed.

WORKERS			
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS ¹			
WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS ²			
<i>Kandhamal: Total Population- 647,912; Rural Population- 603,819</i>			
Combined	306,047	110,190 (36) [35]	64,047 (58.1)
Rural	293,086	109,989 (37.5)	63,974 (58.1)
<i>Rayagada: Total Population- 823,019; Rural Population-707,645</i>			
Combined	395,703	181,953 (45.9) [41]	106,622 (58.5)
Rural	359,002	178,953 (49.8)	104,878 (58.6)
<i>Kalahandi: Total Population- 1,334,372; Rural Population- 1,234,095</i>			
Combined	620,518	312,220 (50.3) [41]	173,014 (55.4)
Rural	589,372	309,487 (52.5)	171,861(55.5)
<i>Bolangir: Total Population- 1,335,760; Rural Population- 1,181,531</i>			
Combined	561,140	225,873 (40.2) [31]	119,884 (53.07)
Rural	516,778	224,718 (43.4)	119,542 (53.1)
<i>Nuapada: Total Population- 530,524; Rural Population- 500,494</i>			
Combined	245,006	109,729 (44.7) [31]	64,496 (58.7)
Rural	234,671	108,566 (46.2)	63,789
<i>Gajapati: Total Population- 518,448; Rural Population- 465,675</i>			
Combined	275,702	124,654 (45.2) [35]	76,049 (61)
Rural	257,597	122,619 (47.6)	74,942 (61.1)
<i>Ganjam: Total Population- 3,136,937; Rural Population- 2,598,746</i>			
Combined	1,305,588	501,806 (38.4) [33]	299,215 (59.6)
Rural	1,140,596	489,947 (42.9)	292,905 (59.7)
ORISSA: TOTAL POPULATION- 36,706,920; RURAL POPULATION- 31,210,602			
COMBINED	14,272,764	5,001,075 (35) [29]	2,420,553 (48.4)
RURAL	12,587,554	4,923,637 (39.1)	2,390,685 (48.5)

SOURCE: DISTRICT-WISE MAIN WORKFORCE IN ORISSA, CENSUS OF INDIA-2001, MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
¹ FIGURES IN ROUND BRACKETS: PERCENTAGE OF MAIN WORKFORCE LABOUR FOR 2001. FIGURES IN SQUARE BRACKETS: PERCENTAGE OF MAIN WORKFORCE LABOUR IN 1991.
² FIGURES IN PARENTHESES AS PERCENTAGES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

Obviously, 'public action' in the last two decades has not helped vulnerable households in Kalahandi, where the proportion of agricultural labourers has increased from 41 percent in 1991 to 50.3 percent in 2001, and where, in relative as well as absolute terms, more people have inadequate purchasing power. It is high time that approaches sustained by local communities are encouraged. Some examples of these are the community 'food and water security systems', including grain banks managed by self-help groups, information empowerment by village-level institutions, and strategies of income generation.

The lack of food, the prevalence of starvation, hunger and near-famine conditions coinciding with food surpluses is a political-economic issue that requires political-economic analysis. Contrary to expectation, this is not something that local communities are incapable of. Already, struggles against bonded labour (for extended entitlements), and for appropriate wages (legal entitlement) have been waged, often successfully, both

in western Orissa (Bolangir, bordering Kalahandi and Kandhamal on the northwest) and elsewhere in India. Such political struggle for economic rights may also be a struggle for dalits and tribals in districts such as Kandhamal and Rayagada of cultural identity, moulded in their image and mirroring their aspirations while harnessing egalitarian traditions with respect to class, caste and gender.

As demands are made for the 'right to food' and the 'right to work' to be incorporated as fundamental rights in the

Indian constitution, the Indian state will need to craft appropriate programmes that address core 'access' issues in food (in)security. One way to do this is by supporting community-level initiatives and opening the space of negotiation and contest. At any rate, the 'developmental' state has responsibilities towards ensuring the well-being of its citizens, including ensuring basic human dignity, which so far in western and central Orissa it has chronically failed to do. △

In Kalahandi, 20 percent of the population owns 80 percent of the land

Call for entries

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Kathmandu, 25-28 September, 2003

Film South Asia, only festival of non-fiction films on South Asian subjects, calls for entries for the fourth edition of the festival being held in Kathmandu from 25 to 28 September 2003.

Film South Asia, organised by Himal Association in Kathmandu, has established itself as the premier event to showcase the latest in South Asian non-fiction filmmaking. It is also a platform for filmmakers from all over the region to gather and appreciate each others' works and share ideas.

Regulations

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For additional information and entry form for Film South Asia visit the Himal Association website www.himalassociation.org

For more information contact: Manesh Shrestha, Festival Director, PO Box 166, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: 977-1-5542544, Fax: 977-1-5541196, email: fsa@himalassociation.org, smanesh@wlink.com.np,

Film South Asia '03 is supported by Jan Virjman Fund, Netherlands and Himal South Asian magazine.

Aid in developing Nepal

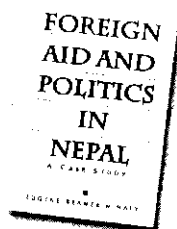
It is a moot point whether Nepal consumes aid or aid consumes Nepal. Hard research on the aid economy of Nepal is negligible. Barring the routine claims of multilateral and bilateral donors, and the shrewd suspicions of independent sceptics, there is no empirically rigorous and analytically sophisticated assessment that can furnish a conclusive answer to a question that ought to have been answered decades ago. So long as donor slogans remain the only source of development wisdom, the shrewd suspicions will persist. In the meanwhile, both believers and sceptics alike will have to be content with the existing meagre stock of literature, including the 2002 reprint of Eugene Mihaly's 1965 title, *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal*.

This relative absence of detailed empirically grounded inquiry itself merits scrutiny, as an exercise in the sociology of institutional academics. It remains one of the most persistent and debilitating paradoxes of intellectual activity in the country that the anthropology of Nepal is as over-developed as its economy and the study of it is underdeveloped. While Nepal's social organism has been so intrusively and exhaustively scrutinised, the extraordinary role of foreign bodies in the polity and economy of the kingdom remains a quasi-mystical trend that is left largely untouched. Perhaps it is a sign of the overwhelming power of hard currency that aid manages to insulate itself from systematic academic study.

It is a measure of the Kathmandu intelligentsia's lack of interest in scrutinising the processes of aid that it took three and a half decades between the first edition of *Foreign Aid and Politics* and its second edition. In the interim there have been few other works to complement it. Strictly speaking, the only reason the book qualifies to be called a second edition is the introductory chapter by

the sociologist Sudhindra Sharma, which is a broad survey of aid flows and priorities. Contrary to the view that there is a paucity of research on the 'assistance' economy, Sharma argues, in the context of what exactly aid has achieved, that inadequate research is not an issue.

However, his introduction itself seems to point, in at least two instances, to a very different conclusion. According to Sharma, it is difficult to be conclusive about the total volume of aid Nepal receives because of the wide variance in the es-



Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study

by Eugene Bramer Mihaly
Himal Books, Kathmandu, 2002 (second edition).
pp ix+237, ISBN 99933 43 40 4

reviewed by
Jagannath Adhikari

timates given by different sources. He cites the wide discrepancy between government of Nepal's *Economic Survey* for the year 1999, which indicates total assistance of USD 251.4 million and UNDP's *Development Cooperation Report* which estimates it at USD 416 million for the same year. Likewise, whereas the UNDP figures show a total of 21 international NGOs (INGOs) disbursing about USD 24.1 million in aid in 1999, the Social Welfare Council lists 96 INGOs providing funds to the tune of USD 19.8 million in the year 2001.

In five decades of aid depen-

dence if nobody can tell us anything about the precise quantum of aid flows into Nepal, other than quoting the discrepant figures offered by various official sources, it clearly points to a dearth of independent economic research into donor activity. Further evidence of this dearth is to be found in the list of references appended to the introductory chapter. The 47 entries in the list of references may or may not exhaust the sum total of all the material on aid in Nepal, but they presumably represent the most relevant studies for producing an overview of aid.

Even the most cursory evaluation of this list shows that of the 47 entries, 11 are so-called official documents. Three of them are government reports while the remaining eight are bilateral and multi-lateral donor documents (one each of DFID and USAID and three each of the UNDP and World Bank). Of the 19 monographs, including the book under review, six are on aid in general as it applies globally and are not specific to Nepal. The remaining 13 Nepal-specific monographs are uneven in quality and not all of them are specifically aid-related. Some are anthropological reflections on Nepal, while others are sector-specific studies into which aid, as the preeminent reality of the country, inevitably enters. Most significantly, though aid is so inescapably an economic enterprise, very few are on the macro-economics of the phenomenon. The remaining 17 references are either reports by various organisations and institutions or articles in journals and edited volumes. This partial enumeration of references, if it represents the best and most relevant, clearly does not do adequate justice to the totality of aid in Nepal.

So long as this absence of longitudinal and in-depth studies persists, aid in Nepal will always operate in a climate of controversy. In fact almost all claims and counterclaims have been controversial. Critics have generally been very dismissive about the effectiveness of foreign aid. They point to the fact that even though Nepal has received, between 1950-

2001, foreign aid totaling slightly over USD 5 billion, the country's development indicators are abysmally poor not only in relation to the quantum of money but also in comparison with other countries. In 2001, Nepal, ranked 129 on the UNDP's Human Development Index, was 33rd from the bottom in a list of 162 countries. In 2002 Nepal's position had slipped to 31 from the bottom in a list of 173 countries.

Criticisms of aid-driven development have gone beyond just questioning the developmental efficiency of donor activity. They go so far as to posit rather more malign attributes to the aid establishment than just its inherent tendency towards the dissipation of funds. It is, for instance, often argued that aid has stifled the domestic capacity for capital formation and resource mobilisation, that it has promoted institutional corruption and organisational cronyism in the civil, political and administrative spheres and accentuated economic disparities in society.

Moreover, aid, like globalisation, is deemed to be responsible for promoting external control and strangulating local enterprises through purchase of donor country products as part of the conditionality. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that the loan component of foreign aid has increased over time and part of it at least is wasted in unproductive expenditure. This increases the burden on the national exchequer and hence on poor people as there is a proportionate decline in allocations for welfare programmes reduced as increasing proportions of the annual budget is diverted to debt servicing.

Clearly, though aid remains an under-researched area, it provokes a degree of debate among the intelligentsia. For this reason, the reissue of Mihaly's book is timely, not only for the discussion it can provoke, but also for situating it in a comparative historical perspective, particularly where the politics of aid is concerned. Mihaly analyses aid and the factors affecting its magnitude, nature and flows from various coun-

tries between the 1950s and the mid-1960s and concludes that it failed to achieve the development goals visualised then.

The issues raised in the course of the book are pertinent even today. His analysis of the political and administrative culture that impeded development then may well hold true in contemporary Nepal. Mihaly also argues that the assumptions underlying US aid were not relevant to Nepal's context, which led to the failure of development initiatives. One major assumption at that time was that if popular expectations of material prosperity were not fulfilled, social unrest and communism would follow.

To the contrary, Mihaly found Nepalis had no rising expectations as most of them were too preoccupied with meeting their most basic needs of survival. This point is important since in contemporary discussion it is customary to attribute the rise of the Maoist movement to thwarted expectations. In other words the argument that propelled funding in the 1960s has resurfaced four decades later. Mihaly debunked the argument then. It remains to be seen if the disciplines which involve field research, notably sociology and anthropology, will set out to verify the contemporary validity of this hypothesis.

By far the most interesting aspect of the book in terms of its current relevance is the author's analysis of domestic politics as it related to the dynamics of aid. Thus, while the East-West Highway provided the infrastructural basis for unifying Nepal and expanded economic opportunities, Mihaly suggests that it was primarily intended by King Mahendra to facilitate the repression of political movements seeking participation in a democratic polity. He argues that donor countries silently acquiesced in the suppression of parliamentary democracy for fear of giving communism a fillip.

Mihaly also explores the nature of the complex aid relationship between India and Nepal in the context of India's overbearing attitude

and Nepal's excessively sensitive reaction. In this context he cites the absurd case of the Indian government assisting in the construction of the Tribhuvan Highway, and the Nepali officialdom launching a quixotic project to construct Kanti Rajpath, across more or less the same territory that the former covered. This provides not only an insight into the prickly nature of equations between the two countries but also the squandering of resources that resulted from it. But while he explores these nuances of internal impediments Mihaly has relatively fewer criticisms of donors and foreign project technicians involved in developing Nepal.

Of course Mihaly's perspective is not the final word on the question and this is quite clear from Sudhendra Sharma's critical introduction, in which he departs from Mihaly's conclusions on two significant counts. Sharma joins issue with him on the question of rising expectations and argues that the Maoist insurgency is a product of escalating expectations that were not fulfilled. That is for the present a matter of opinion and until established by empirical research must remain a speculative hypothesis.

The other point on which Sharma departs from Mihaly's argument is on the question of Nepal's institutional and political readiness to handle aid efficiently. Sharma believes that the circumstances of today's Nepal are very different from what it was 40 years ago. Therefore Nepal is today in a position to utilise aid effectively. This is a matter of conjecture since there is little in the institutional environment that inspires such confidence. The fact that such divergent arguments have been voiced through the medium of this book bodes well for the state of the public sphere, and for that reason may inspire the kind of independent research that will make up for the very noticeable lack of fundamental studies on the macroeconomics of aid in Nepal. ▽

The profits of catastrophe

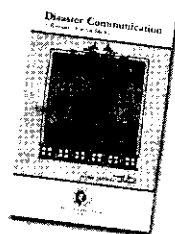
As the title of Indian journalist AP Sainath's book, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*, suggests, disasters are lucrative for the relief bureaucracy and its retinue of supply contractors and distribution agencies. The financial scope that disasters offer for the diversion of public funds into private accounts through various administrative channels is the single biggest impediment to the adoption, in South Asia, of disaster prevention and vulnerability reduction perspectives. The stubbornness of the prevailing orthodoxy, which swears by the inevitability of disaster and hence emphasises the indispensability of relief, can in fact be attributed more to the profits of catastrophe than to ignorance of alternative views.

One of the purposes of *Disaster Communication: A Resource Kit for Media* is to discuss in detail the available alternatives to this official vision of disaster management. Its first chapter is devoted to an extensive analysis of the differences between the prevailing approach and the alternative approach. The former is piecemeal and post-facto because it can, by definition, swing into action only after disaster has taken place on a scale sufficient to draw attention and funds to itself. By contrast the latter is a comprehensive strategy that looks to a community-based prevention and mitigation programme, in which development has a central role to play in reducing the vulnerability of marginal groups to adverse circumstances.

Through a series of empirical illustrations the chapter makes a convincing case for redefining disaster as the necessary prelude to dealing with it effectively. It demonstrates how resource differentials determine the extent to which families are affected by such events as cyclones and droughts. Barring those who are compelled by partisan financial considerations to believe otherwise,

there is unlikely to be any objection from anyone else to the view that disaster is a function of underdevelopment, and that the magnitude of destruction and loss is a reflection of just how many people are unable to withstand the stress it unleashes.

After having made this point very successfully the book loses its way. The problem with the book begins a little before it reaches the second chapter. While "risk", "disaster", and "vulnerability" are defined to give it a functional relevance to the holistic, community-based approach, the authors omit to provide a definition of what a 'community' is, let alone one that is consistently unambiguous both



Disaster Communication: A Resource Kit for Media

by Amjad Bharti
Duryog Nivaran, Islamabad, 2002.
pp 260. ISBN 969 8702 00 8

reviewed by
T Mathew

practically and theoretically. The idea of 'community' is amoebic since the same group of people often constitute multiple communities with different and sometimes contradictory interests. Unless defined in a very precise way, the alternative approach can flounder in the very community through which it looks to salvage disaster management. For instance, the typical village 'community' is caste and class differentiated and the lowest in the community are those most vulnerable. Tak-

ing this into account, does the alternative approach redefine community to mean only those most adversely affected? If so, how is it then to overcome the obstacles placed by the exploitative relationships in the existing 'village community'? If not, then how will it bring the oppressive institutions of the existing community to reorient itself into taking an interest in the welfare of the very people who they have themselves reduced to poverty?

The other serious problem in the early and more persuasive part of the book is that it abstains from going into the real reason why the traditional attitude to disaster management persists in public policy. Not all of it can be explained by ignorance, which is what the book aims to dispel. If the line departments of the government have a financial incentive in sticking to a discredited paradigm, will providing a strategy for effective communication make any difference to the future of people who will continue to be affected by disaster under a rent-seeking regime? Until that question is answered, the possibility of an effective strategy is precluded since some way has to be found to undermine the pecuniary enticements that sustain the orthodoxy.

In the course of the next four chapters, which elaborate on the role of the media in disaster communication, the book meanders through an arcane information and communication theory that is distinctly counterproductive if the aim of the book is to improve the South Asian media's coverage of disasters. Chapters three, four and five are devoted to a miscellany of themes which do not necessarily go well together. There are cub reporter guidelines on the structure of a succinct report, journalism school abstractions about 'objective' reportage which are in real life often subverted by editorial diktats to the contrary, simplified capsules on how stories happen in the media, and prescriptions on how disaster should ideally be reported. All of this is interspersed with excellent

material on the precise dynamics of disaster news as it is currently disseminated.

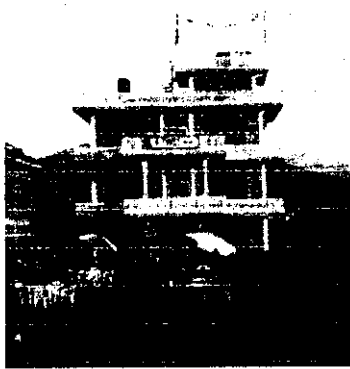
Had this media section of the book abandoned communication theory in favour of more of this kind of a sociology of the media, the book would have made excellent progress in finding and prescribing ways in which an effective disaster communication system can eventually be established outside and against the current set of vested interests in the bureaucracy and the media. To work out such a system it is necessary to dissect the anatomy of the mass media and identify its limitations for the purposes of disaster communication. That, unfortunately, the book fails to do. It is a matter of some curiosity as to why a book that has in it all the potential for collating and packaging a critique of the mass media, ends up dissipating itself in the process of trying to look sophisticated. This is the

main weakness of the book; its authors know right from wrong, but do not seem to know to whom the truth must be revealed. Is it the lay public, is it the experienced journalist, the cub reporter, the development professional, the policy maker? It has something for everyone, but not enough for each.

But there is a saving grace. The tepid critique of the mass media and the implicit faith in its potential to address problems of disaster are more than compensated for by excellent documentary material to illustrate various media responses and motivations throughout the world. It does appear that a more uniformly empirical critique, at which the authors of the book clearly excel, would have served a useful purpose in equipping publicists of the alternative approach with additional information. This is so obviously the function of the last section of the book, which is a

disaster dictionary-cum-statistical abstract of disasters in South Asia.

The amount of information packed in this book, though scattered randomly, is a clear enough indication that it is publications like this, rather than the mass media, which are to be relied on as the first source of information, the dissemination of which will call for the establishment of co-ordinating mechanisms for bringing together existing modes of mass communication that do not belong to the mass media industry (locality, town and village networks of information that exist but which are not co-ordinated). Reliance on the mass media is a guaranteed assurance of failure. The only things that the mass media takes up are well funded pulse polio, hepatitis B and AIDS awareness campaigns. Notice that all of them are preventive campaigns to avoid disaster. Money makes all things happen.



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Women for Afghan Women
 edited by Sunita Mehta
 Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2002
 pp xiii+236, USD 13.95
 ISBN 1 4039 6017 8

Edited by feminist Sunita Mehta, *Women for Afghan Women* is a collection of 25 prose and poetry pieces, including 10 essays by Afghan women, exploring gender issues in Afghanistan and in the Afghan diaspora. With contributions on religion and history, as well as on issues such as health care and military intervention, the volume seeks to provide a study of various themes with women as the focal point. Most of the volume's contributions are by writers who attended the inaugural conference of Women for Afghan Women, an NGO co-founded by Mehta, in New York City in November 2001.



Travel Writing and the Empire
 edited by Sachidananda Mohanty
 Katha, New Delhi, 2003
 pp xxi+185, INR 250
 ISBN 81 87649 36 4

Travel writing during the British colonial era, writes Sachidananda Mohanty, "even when carried out under the guise of a more honorific study and research, often concealed a set of aims, objectives and agenda ulterior in motive". Such writing, as well as travel writing in the postcolonial world, has frequently been a "self-assuring" exercise for visiting writers and one of internalising subjugation for native residents. In this collection, 10 essayists approach travel writing in the context of imperialism, from foreign writers who "went native" to constructions of foreign travel in India's vernacular languages and the "colonial rhetoric" of present-day travel promotion.



India and South Asia: A Short History
 by David Ludden
 Oneworld, Oxford, 2003
 pp xii+306, USD 20.95
 ISBN 1 85168 237 6

While chronologically organised along a political-event timeline, this social history of the Subcontinent is primarily concerned with the formation of collective identity, examined here principally through a 'constructivist' approach. Noting that most contemporary historians no longer view South Asia as possessing a singular narrative of its past, but rather "many histories, with indefinite, contested origins and with countless separate trajectories", Ludden describes and analyses the region's history with frequent reference to the region's varied geography, climate, cultural influences and human activities. Written

for the lay reader as part of the Oneworld 'Short History' series, the work includes country profiles of the seven modern nation-states of South Asia as well as a bibliography of more detailed historical reference works.



Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy
 By C Raja Mohan
 Viking, New Delhi, 2003
 pp xxii+321, INR 450
 ISBN 0 67 004963 8

This book is an attempt at defining India's position in the post-cold war world, describing the country's principal foreign policy concerns, and analysing its current approaches to and future opportunities for international engagement. C Raja Mohan, *The Hindu's* strategic affairs editor, argues that India has been slowly breaking with its Nehruvian foreign policy tradition since the mid-1980s, a process mostly completed in the strategic outlook of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, which has taken an aggressive stand on nuclear weapons development and pursued close military ties with the US. In chapters dealing with India's foreign policy after non-alignment, its relations with Russia and the West, its regional concerns vis-à-vis China and Pakistan, and "diplomacy for the Second Republic", Mohan argues that India has newfound confidence in its approach to global affairs, having transited from a foreign policy based on idealism to one grounded in pragmatism.



Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power
 by Niall Ferguson
 Basic Books, New York, 2002
 pp xxix+392, USD 35
 ISBN 0 465 02328 2

Setting out not to write a conventional history of the British empire, but instead a history of "Anglobalization", Niall Ferguson examines the 400-year Anglo-American project of spreading capitalism, colonising and settling foreign territories, internationalising the English language, propagating Protestantism, and developing and exporting parliamentary structures. While admitting some of British imperialism's faults, Ferguson takes a relatively positive view of its role as a historical agent bringing change in the world, and argues that the US "empire in denial" should seek to emulate the "achievements" of its British predecessor.

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

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

The itch behind the ear

Ever since humans evolved into... humans, there has been only one conclusion to draw when they raise their hands to their ears. They are scratching their ears. But visual cues are all mixed up in these modern times. Now, when people seem to be scratching or massaging their ears, chances are they are conversing on their mobiles. Cellphones have become progressively smaller, so that they are invisible as the hand covers the ear.

But Nepal is a country where people still by and large scratch their ears, and, more importantly, behind their ears. Actually, this phenomenon that seems peculiar (but may not be) to the to the general region of the central Himalayan mid-hills is a physiological quirk that has gone unnoticed and unremarked by geneticists and scientists.

In Nepal, the condition is endemic. A bodily posture that is abjectly obsequious, head slightly bent, the eyes shiftily looking downwards, only occasionally willing to meet those of the protagonist. Then, and let us have this in slow motion, the right hand begins to move upwards, reaching up past the chest and cheek. The forefinger extends and reaches for a spot behind the right ear, a little above the earlobe. And there, the subject will begin a continuous scratching, head held slightly to the side all along.

This is not overall a posture and specific gesture of humility, but one of mediocrity married to inadequacy. It says to you, "What to do, we are Nepali? This is the best we can do. *Kyarney?*" It also can mean a host of other similarly confessional and embarrassed sentiments, such as:

"Sorry Mamu, I messed up the test because I went to the *mela*".

"Yes boss, I faked the sick leave to go to my sister's wedding".

"Yes Mr Commissioner, I rigged the tendering process".

"Your Majesty, I just could not run this cabinet".

"Err, God, we sure have screwed up this country".

But mostly, the scratch-behind-the-ear gesture is utilised to express this sentiment: "This is Nepal, so second rate was good enough, I thought".

And so when conferences are organised, papers are researched, classes are taught, development

projects are implemented, the nth five-year-plan is drafted, and columns are written for the last pages of magazines that have a needlessly superior sense of self, the tendency is to take refuge *ab initio* in the expectation of not making top grade. "Because we happen to be Nepali, never colonised yes, but backward nonetheless, please do not have expectations of us being world class".

This tendency to use mediocrity as a means to get ahead in the world does not interest us at this juncture, but *what is with the scratching?*! What is it that generates a desire in the average Nepali to reach behind his right ear and begin to scrape? Specifically, is this a cultural trait or physiological reaction to nerve-related stimuli behind the right earlobe?

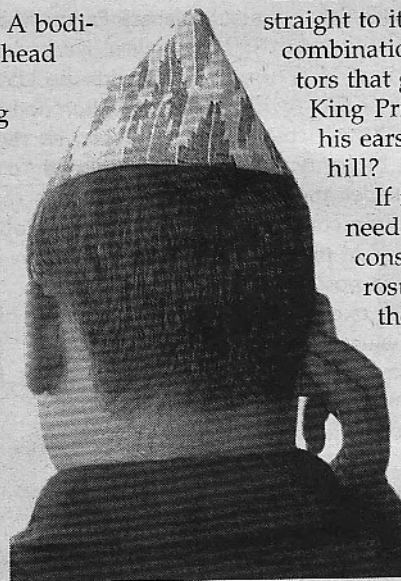
If it is a cultural trait, then behavioralists must go straight to its origins, trying to seek the particular combination of historical and sociological factors that generated this habit. Do we know if King Prithvi Narayan Shah scratched behind his ears when he was defeated on Kirtipur hill?

If it is a physiological proclivity, then the need of the minute is to create a task force consisting of the ablest South Asian neurosurgeons and neurologists to dig into the skull behind the right ear to locate the source of all this scratching.

It could not just be that all Nepalis are dirty behind the ears, for we have documentary proof that Nepalis take baths. It is most likely that there are indeed some nerve endings in this part of the scalp that help those who scratch get over feelings of inadequacy by giving

them the momentary ability to overcome embarrassment. It is logical to conclude that the way for the nation to proceed in its development drive now is for surgeons to neutralise the offending spot. Having thus done away with the need to exhibit abject subservience, Nepalis of all walks, castes, creeds, ethnicities and regions will once again stand tall, talk back to authority and donors, and begin to lift their country out of its continuously sorry state.

Meanwhile, do note that mediocrity is not a Nepali monopoly in South Asia. Every SAARC country's population, particularly its political classes, exhibits similar tendencies of accepting that second rate is good enough. It would be important to know which part of the body *they* scratch.



S. PATA

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