

HIMAL

S O U T H A S I A N

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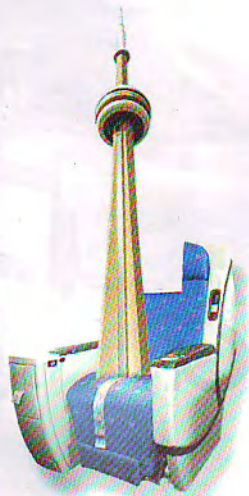
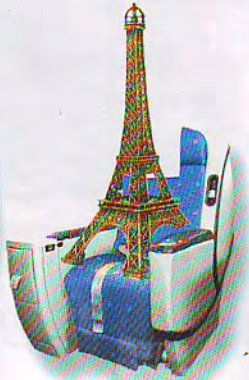
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Striving together

Designed by artist Venantius J Pinto, the cover of this issue shows a Chinese and Indian soldier at Nathula on 6 July, at the opening of the pass to commerce. The Himalayan clouds that form the backdrop represent the increasingly porous nature of the separation between Southasia and China. On the cover, these clouds replace the Himalayan ramparts, which have been the traditional imagery to describe the separation of the Subcontinent from Central and East Asia.

The sight of these two soldiers, standing together at 14,400 ft, is symbolic of the cooperative element in the relationship between India and China. But it has a hidden subtext as well, with the two soldiers engaged in their own game of one-upmanship. When the Chinese soldier realised that the Indian was taller than him, he used a stool to elevate his position and look more impressive than his counterpart. Not to be outdone, the Indian too found a stool for himself and regained his higher position. Even as the setting represented the kind of relationship China and Southasia must strive to build, the context reveals the



REUTERS

competitive streak that characterises the Sino-Indian equation. *Himal's* cover package seeks to understand both this complex maze of connections and the seeming contradictions, and explores the growing engagement between China and us.

Cover photograph by Gangtok photojournalist Ashit Rai.

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Cover: Venantius J Pinto

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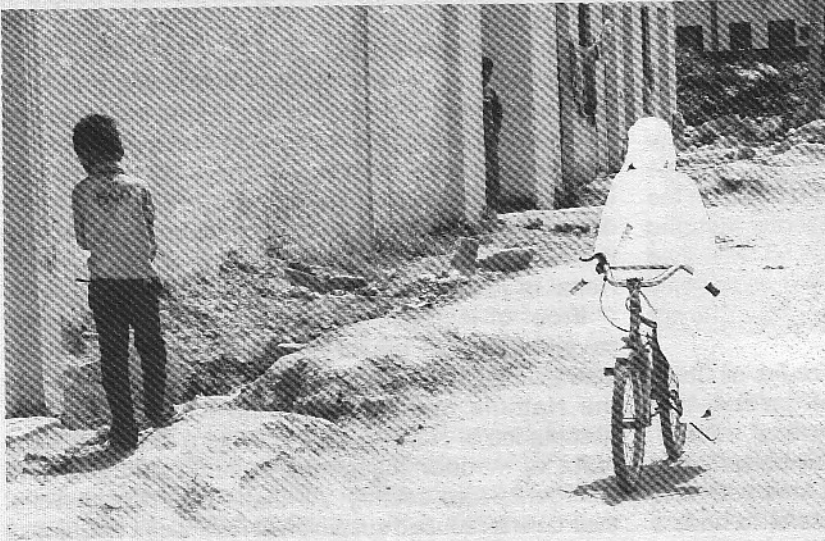
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The psyche of foeticide



This is in reference to Astri Ghosh's special report ("The missing daughters of Punjab", July 2006). The high incidence of female foeticide in Pakistan came as a great surprise to me. In informal meetings with social activists, gender experts and at seminars, I have often been told that this was not a major problem in Pakistan. The fact that dowry – considered one of the main reasons for getting rid of the girl child – is less prevalent among Muslims than Hindus made this contention logical. The prevalence of preconception selection of foetal sex, the large number of illegal abortions, and the existence of Safiya clinics tell us that the fairer sex is headed in the same direction in Pakistan as in India. The notion of 'honour' might be an important reason for the phenomena across the border.

While Ghosh must be lauded for highlighting the widespread nature of the problem, she has not adequately explored the causes for declining sex ratios and high rates of foeticide. Reports have made it clear that this is not linked to income or prosperity levels, but to a certain kind of psyche. Highly qualified and educated parents, doctors and women themselves are a part of the act. What are the

underlying factors giving rise to this kind of psyche?

If one trend spans across the diverse social structure in India, it is the patriarchal setup with a strong preference for a son. Sons are considered ritually and economically desirable, not just to

conduct the last rites of their parents but also to ensure continuation of the lineage and property, and as economic lifelines for their parents in their old age.

The traditional cultural values, which held the woman as the symbol of family honour and prestige, in fact works against them now. Women are associated instinctively with negative notions like insecurity, fear and tension. While dowry is an age-old phenomenon, recent changes in the Indian society in the aftermath of liberalisation have not helped matters. This has given a spurt to materialist aspirations, and one of the mechanisms to fulfil it is dowry, especially among urban, educated, middle-class families. This has made the girl a costly proposition and the son a profitable venture.

Dr Geeta Sinha
Social scientist
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'Southasia'



In an earlier issues of *Himal*, I had seen an awe-inspiring interpretation of the term 'Southasia'. I was going through the recent issues of the magazine but could not get that on hand. May I request of you those defining lines, which build a sense of bonding and aggregation while in most places we hear of disintegration and fractions!

S Shukla
Kathmandu

Thank you! Here it is, as also available on our website. Editors.

'Southasia' as one word: *Himal's* editorial stylebook favours 'Southasia' as one word. As a magazine seeking to restore some of the historical unity of our common living space – without wishing any violence on the existing nation states – we believe that the aloof geographical term 'South Asia' needs to be injected with some feeling. 'Southasia' does the trick for us, albeit the word is limited to English-language discourse. *Himāl's* editors will be using 'Southasia' in all our copy, except where context requires retention of the traditional spelling. We also respect the wishes of contributors who prefer to stay with 'South Asia'.

Send your compliments, questions and corrections – or anything else – to editorial@himalmag.com.

REGION

A tale of two civilisations

Civilisationally speaking, we should be talking about the relationship between China and 'Indic' Southasia, rather than between China and the individual countries of our region. But there will be some romantic idealism attached to that notion, because the reality lies in the separate bilateral relations nurtured by each of our capitals with Beijing. And so, when we speak of Southasia's China policy, we are necessarily referring to the sum of seven or eight different China policies.

At *Himal*, we do not propose a one-size-fits-all China policy for all Southasia, but we do see the benefit in comparing notes between Islamabad, Delhi, Kathmandu, Dhaka and Colombo – if not between the diplomats then between academics, analysts and business leaders. It would surely be useful to have a minimally coordinated approach, especially as Beijing



seems to have completely abandoned its ideology-export industry and become market-oriented and pragmatic in its dealings.

It becomes necessary to pay close attention to India's China strategy, as New Delhi's arrangements are bound to impact the rest of Southasia. In the era of economic globalisation, India sees itself as both a partner and competitor of China when it comes to world power status. The other capitals, in varying degrees, tend to highlight the importance of Beijing in their foreign policy radarscope, in an attempt to balance the overbearing presence of India in the neighbourhood. Pakistan's relationship with China also looms large because Islamabad is utilising the economic and geo-strategic openings to West Asia to increase its leverage with Beijing. The evolution of Gwadar port will be worth watching.

Himalayan paranoia

Even though the 2500 km Himalayan ridgeline marks the border between China and Southasia – from the Hengduan to the Karakoram – it is no longer the great strategic barrier of dated school textbooks. The reality of missile travel-time and the ability to push highways through the mountains indicates a need for us to set aside geopolitical blinders and to engage economically and socially with China and Tibet. The Karakoram Highway, and to a lesser extent the Kodari highway

linking Kathmandu to Lhasa, show the way to the future – something that New Delhi is experimenting gingerly with, as reflected in the opening of Nathula a couple of months ago.

A full 45 years after the PLA's incursions in Arunachal and Aksai Chin, it is heartening that New Delhi's generals and analysts are at long last shedding their paranoia about the 'vulnerable' Himalayan frontier. This obsession – born out of the long-ago military unpreparedness and resulting mortification – for decades made New Delhi rigid on all issues related to the Himalayan rimland, from the Indian Northeast to Nepal to Kashmir.

Proof of increasing Indian flexibility is found on several fronts: in talk of reopening the Stilwell Road connecting the Northeast to Burma and Yunnan, in the Nathula opening, and lately in New Delhi's acceptance of Nepal's right to invite a United Nations team to monitor the peace-building efforts in the insurgency-torn country. All these advances have at their core a reduced suspicion in New Delhi of Chinese intentions, which itself received a boost last year when

China officially recognised the incorporation of Sikkim into the Indian Union.

The engine of fast-paced growth arrived in Tibet this July in the form of the railway from Beijing via Golmud. The overall impact of this mechanistic incursion on the indigenous Tibetan culture will doubtless be drastic and tragic. At the same time, Tibet is also going to see increased economic activity. This, and the expanded exploitation of natural resources, will no doubt be supported by the advent of large numbers of Han Chinese from the mainland.

The economic growth of the high plateau will as a matter of course bring Tibet closer to Southasia, through new highways, air corridors and even railways. A large part of the Southasian engagement with China in the years to come will be in the form of engagement with the TAR. This is as it should be, because – civilisationally – while Tibet is of course its own society, it is more a part of Southasia than of the Chinese mainland.

Since it is not possible to contemplate a One China policy by all Southasian governments, might we suggest that at the very least the various countries evaluate their own attitudes – and those of their immediate neighbours – towards the People's Republic in these times of flux? This issue of *Himal*, with its focus on 'China-Southasia Bhai-Bhai', seeks to promote that capacity for evaluation.

Comrades at odds

The differences were bound to surface. As Nepali Maobaadis embark on the thorny road to mainstream politics after a decade-long stint as armed revolutionaries, ripples can be felt across the Naxalite realm in India. In a scathing critique of the Nepali rebel leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal (aka 'Prachanda'), Communist Party of India (Maoist) spokesperson 'Comrade Azad' has attacked the Nepali Maoists for deviating from the revolutionary goal of attaining 'People's Democracy'.

Azad accused the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) of collaborating with 'bourgeoisie' and revisionist parties, and giving up the ideal of an armed overthrow of the feudal state. The disagreement, coming from ideological co-travelers in two Southasian states, assumes critical importance in light of alarm about linkages between ultra-left groups in the region, something that Indian intelligence agencies in particular like to play up.

Left parties, of both parliamentary and revolutionary hues, have a history of bitter feuds and endless divisions. The current phase of ultra-leftist confrontation in Southasia may have been triggered by the Nepali Maobaadi decision to engage with other parties of Nepal. At a more fundamental level, it may also be about a clash of perceptions regarding global and country-specific situations, and the possibilities of revolution.

But mostly the Naxalite ire seems to stem from the leadership's fear of loss of power and prestige, when the much-romanticised Nepali Maobaadi decided to give up the class war. Just as the mainstream Left in India headed by the CPI (M) was worried that the success of the Maobaadi would give energy to the Naxalites, the latter are now worried about the message that Dahal's compromises will be sending to their flock.

The rift

A year ago this August, at a party plenum, the CPN (M) decided to enter multiparty politics. This decision stemmed from the realisation that neither a military takeover nor a one-party setup was possible in Nepal. The regional and global context, primarily the presence and attitude of India and the continuing frailty of the international communist movement, meant that any ultra-left regime would be difficult to sustain. Gyanendra's coup of 1 February 2005 provided the Maoists with an opportunity to join an opposition movement, led by mainstream parties, against an autocratic monarch. In the aftermath of the historic People's Movement, the Maoists are engaged in a process that can provide a rare example of an entrenched insurgency entering competitive politics.



Naxalite rally

PEOPLE'S MARCH

It is this tilt of the Maobaadis, and the various reasons that propelled the change, that now has the Naxalites across the border, so to speak, up in arms. Dahal's advice to the Naxalites to rethink their strategy and adopt the parliamentary path, clearly stated in an interview in *The Hindu* newspaper, seems to have raised the hackles of the Indian revolutionaries. Azad's riposte, which took some time coming, sought to question this understanding and the re-orientation of the Maobaadis.

The criticism hinges on several issues. The Naxalites believe that the Nepali Maoists should have continued with the task of expanding their base areas, and not compromised with reactionary parties; that the Maobaadis' tendency to let the 'sub-stage' of bourgeoisie democracy dominate the path of revolution was a mistake; that the Maobaadi should not be so desperate to engage with the UN as they have been; and that the quest for an armed overthrow is crucial because only complete destruction of the state and ruling classes can bring about real change.

Azad and his comrades argue that international conditions – the rise of anti-Americanism, the devastating impact of neo-liberal policies, and the spurt in people's movements have brightened the prospects for an armed insurrection. Caught in a somewhat different geopolitical context in Nepal – plus in a terrain where it was easy to conduct an insurgency but difficult to sustain it once it had achieved a certain scale – Dahal's assessment now seems to differ significantly from that of his Indian comrades.

Impossible revolution

A couple of weeks after Azad's outburst became public, the Naxalites and the Maobaadi released a joint statement expressing solidarity and asserting that their differences revolved around tactical, not fundamental, questions. Even that last-ditch attempt to maintain a shred of unity revealed the deep difference between the two groups.

The Naxalites may have spread to 160 districts in India; the Indian Home Ministry may have raised the alarm and instigated Manmohan Singh to categorise them as the country's largest internal security threat.

But the revolution is not about to happen in India. There can be a strong ethical case made for the inherent wrong in the use of violence for political ends. But from a purely pragmatic perspective as well – and we shudder at the reaction this simple statement is going to arouse – it would be prudent for the Naxalite leadership to realise the futility of the path.

The Indian Naxalite reach is confined to select areas, especially forests. Their capacity to overthrow state structures barely reaches divisional headquarters. Their base is confined to tribal populations and in a few areas to landless labourers; in the absence of support among either the peasantry or industrial workers, it is difficult to fathom how the revolution will come. The overwhelming might of the Indian State and states; the accommodative nature of India's democracy, with a proven ability to co-opt disenchanted groups; irreversible economic change and a powerful constituency that favours it; and the international politico-economic situation – all these make Naxalite rhetoric about the inevitability of revolution unconvincing.

The Naxalites are not only challenged in expanding their support base. Their programme and actions also leave room for scepticism. After all, the targets of their attacks are those groups ideologically closest

to them – primarily the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and the mainstream Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Naxalites do little to support grassroots people's movements, nor do they rush to protect the hard-won rights of such campaigns. Where, after all, are the Naxalites when it comes to India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or the Right to Information? It is also striking how they have carefully avoided political contest with rightwing Hindu fundamentalist outfits. Meanwhile, the Naxalite role in fighting imperialism is limited to publishing rhetorical statements.

If anyone has some learning to do, it is the Naxalites of India. The Nepali Maobaadi, to their credit, are trying to shed the bane of most ultra-left movements: dogma. Even as the transition in Nepal throws up its own challenges, the Naxalites and their sympathisers will hopefully realise that there is little to be gained from rocking the Nepali boat from the outside. Let the experiment of the Nepali Maobaadi continue, even as Naxalite groups of India seek their own 'safe landing'.

At a time when urban middle classes are romancing the United States and jumping on the consumerist bandwagon, what the people of India need is a broad, non-violent Left movement comprising different groups – not dreams of a revolution that is not to be.

INDIA | PAKISTAN

On the same side

In what has become an established tradition, at midnight on 14 August peace activists from India and Pakistan lit candles at Wagah as a mark of solidarity and a symbol of peace. At the same place a few days earlier, following a diplomatic tit-for-tat, an Indian



Pakistani ralliers in Wagah, 14 August

embassy official returned home after being expelled on spying charges. The Pakistani diplomat, for his part, took the flight back to Islamabad from Delhi after being declared persona non grata.

Step by step, we are seeing an unravelling of what is known as the 'composite dialogue' between India and Pakistan. The powder keg of populist nationalist politics is easily lit by terrorist acts, and when this happens and the media grabs onto the story, there is little that otherwise responsible diplomats and politicians on either side can do but go with the flow.

The Bombay blasts, which followed the Benaras temple bombing and the New Delhi market terror, have effectively brought public diplomacy between Islamabad and New Delhi to a halt. Conservative

commentators in both countries are suddenly in high demand on television shows and newspaper columns, and they question the logic of the peace process. We dare say that the Indian and Pakistani intelligentsia and diplomatic echelons had better brace themselves for more blasts. Because it seems that the militants responsible for brutalising the innocent will do everything to destroy the peace process. Let us not succumb to this all-too-obvious plan, and let terror get the upper hand.

In a very real sense, Pervez Musharraf and Manmohan Singh are on the same side when it comes to wanting peace with the other country, and not wanting the militants to wreck the peace process. Look at it this way: seen from a New Delhi perspective, President Musharraf has the right 'enemies' – as proven by the fact that the groups India has accused the president of harbouring have in fact been those that have attempted to assassinate him.

The realisation that both governments face a common challenge, from radical militant organisations, must begin to form a platform on which the peace process can be rebuilt. Dare we say that such a platform will be more powerful than a peace process predicated only upon the ethical demands of good-neighbourliness? Once this is accepted, India and Pakistan can help each other – not merely in terms of intelligence-sharing, but by creating space for the other to take the détente forward.

As things stand, the Indian establishment feels that Pervez Musharraf has not lived up to his word, by

allowing militants to use Pakistani soil for anti-Indian activities. While some New Delhi commentators argue that the top echelons of the Pakistani state, including President Musharraf himself, are complicit in the process, this is not the kind of hearsay on which South Block should base its all-important Pakistan-policy. More believable is the suggestion that the General is in a vulnerable position politically: opposition is mounting from a pro-democracy alliance; discontent in certain provinces is apparent; and the border with Afghanistan is in turmoil.

There is a strong sense in Pakistan – both within the government and in the media – that India has not responded adequately to the unprecedented flexibility shown by Islamabad, especially on the Kashmir issue. From giving up the demand for implementation of UN resolutions on Kashmir, to implicitly accepting the notion of soft borders, Islamabad has moved away from its maximalist position and offered several proposals to deal with the dispute. Moreover, despite the non-resolution of the Kashmir issue – which was earlier held up as a pre-condition for progress on talks – Pakistan has engaged with India on several other issues as outlined in the composite dialogue.

To give credit where it is due, India too has shown some degree of accommodation. Prime Minister Singh's formulation about making borders irrelevant, and constituting institutional arrangements between the two parts of Kashmir, are bold proposals and have created the right atmosphere. But it is also true that

senior officials in New Delhi feel that all they need to do is bide their time on Kashmir and the issue will lose steam. The reluctance of the Indian state to engage in substantial negotiations is taking its toll on the peace process.

It is important that Pakistan show concrete results in terms of curbing militant activities, but beyond that India has a responsibility to look at the situation more objectively than it has. New Delhi must take into account the domestic sentiment in Pakistan (which doubts Indian sincerity), and how that would limit President Musharraf's flexibility. In a situation where President Musharraf is receiving few concessions from the Indian side – or is seen to be getting nothing at all – he cannot succeed in his attempt to corner the very groups that Islamabad has nurtured for decades.

It is only when India engages in dialogue on concrete issues, and implements policies that reflect a softening of stance vis-à-vis Kashmir, that the general will have the credibility to convince the Pakistani political class of the utility of cracking down on militant outfits. And when that happens, the Indian government will have the space to carry on with the process, undaunted by occasional, venal terror attacks.

As we see it, rather than use the Bombay blasts – and doubtless more blasts to come – to scuttle talks, New Delhi should come forward with novel initiatives that will strengthen the General's hand to crack down on militant activities and camps in Pakistan. On this matter, the two sides are on the same side. ▲



'Sita Under the Full Moon'

BY VENANTIUS J PINTO

Under the soft light of a full moon not seen, Sita of Mithila, born of the earth, returns to the earth through a deep furrow that opens up in the fields. She has been consort to a moralistic king, trekked the Subcontinent and crossed great rivers in exile, been 'abducted' and in the course of time 'rejected'. The Sita handed down to us is a faithful spouse, chaste and fertile. She might have been that, too, and the symbolism has served the needs of the state and patriarchy over millennia. This abstract work proposes Sita as a woman with agency, supremely confidently in her singlehood, alone but hardly forlorn or forsaken. This 'Sita' tells the story of hundreds of millions of women who carry out their own acts of feminism large and small, every day, all the time, all over the areas that the Sita of legend trekked so long ago. Exposed, experienced, calculating, in the villages, they take in their hands the power to shape their lives.

This is part of a regular series of *Himal's* editorial commentary on artwork by Venantius J Pinto. Mixed Media. Print size: 11.5 x 15 inches. 1998.

INDIA | BANGLADESH

Farakka's impending fiasco



Expensive rocks offer no protection

The controversial Farakka Barrage in West Bengal, which diverts waters from the Ganga into its tributary, the Bhagirathi, is in danger of being outflanked. A recent report by West Bengal geologist and activist Kalyan Rudra on the "Shifting of the Ganga and Land Erosion in West Bengal" would indicate that the entire Farakka project has been a fiasco, though no government engineer or administrator would concede the point.

In the report, recently presented at a seminar in Calcutta, Rudra explores the history, geology, engineering, political neglect and social injustice behind the barrage. Farakka was built not for irrigation, as are most barrages, but with the intention of salvaging the navigational status of the Calcutta port, which had been threatened since early colonial times by heavy sedimentation.

The flushing objective of Farakka was never achieved, even as it managed to divert water, much to the chagrin of downstream Bangladesh. With the Calcutta port continuing to silt up, the cargo handling has been shifted to towns down the Bay of Bengal coast – Haldia, Kalpi and Sagar.

Back at Farakka, the

sediment trapped in the barrage pond has caused the water level to rise alarmingly. The Ganga annually carries about 700 million tonnes of sediment at Farakka, the report states, and a lot of it is settling upstream from the barrage. With its bed rising, the river looks all set to change its course, into an older, long-abandoned channel.

The changing of the course of the Ganga and its tributaries is, of course,

a natural phenomenon, particularly so on rivers that carry the largest silt load in the world, comparable only to the Hwang Ho River in China. It is the accumulation of the Himalayan silt on the riverbed that periodically changes rivers' courses. In the case of Farakka, however, the cause is manmade.

And the outflanking of the barrage by the Ganga (Padma in Bangladesh) would mean that a massive project, which promised so much to Calcutta and brought such heartburn to India-Bangladesh relations, would be for naught. This would obviously mean disaster for the surrounding region, but also that the river would run free once more into Bangladesh.

Scientist Rudra does not appear to have an immediate solution to what seems to be the inevitable endangerment of the Farakka project. Bank reinforcement, he writes, is

very costly, at the rate of one lakh rupees per metre of levee. Even though constant strengthening of the embankment does not provide a long-term solution, this is what the state and central governments continue to do. Embankments and revetments meant to deflect the current may provide temporary relief, says Rudra, but in the long term they aggravate the situation.

While seeming to write off the future of Farakka as a barrage, Rudra suggests that the only long-term solution in the place of such huge capital investments would be to focus on better preparedness for floods, and on scientific resettlement strategies to improve the lives of the thousands who have already been negatively impacted by erosion and floods. In sum, Rudra's plea is that the population – as well as the engineers and politicians – learn to live with the floods, rather than fight nature with boulders and cement.

INDIA | BURMA

Don't touch Moreh

The Indo-Myanmar Border Traders' Union (IMBTU) recently urged the Governor of Manipur, S S Sidhu, to halt a plan by New Delhi that will divert Indo-Burmese trade from Moreh, possibly to Champhai in Mizoram or Pangsha in Nagaland. The decision to change the trading hub was taken in mid-May during the second meeting of the India-Burma Joint Trade Committee.

Commerce between the two countries has actually decreased after Moreh, in Manipur, was established as the designated India-Burmese trading centre in 1995. In the decade that the Moreh crossing has been open, IMBTU officials say only INR 2 billion worth of goods has passed through this point.

Rather than move the trading post, IMBTU is urging New Delhi to allow third-country trading to take place at Moreh, as well as to increase the



Moreh: from

number and range of legally tradable goods. The group also believes a crossborder bus service would be useful. Unless a foreign trade office is established on the Indian side, says one local, "it will only be one-way traffic".

Moreh has of late been a site of stepped-up tension between locals and the paramilitary 24 Assam Rifles. In mid-July, accusations against the force of harassment and arbitrary arrest caused all trade to be halted for a week. There are also renewed demands for the transfer of a controversial Assam Rifles post commander.

Crossing the strait



Registering refugees in Tamil Nadu

As the conflict in Sri Lanka has escalated dramatically in recent months, the refugee exodus from the island to Tamil Nadu, which first began 23 years ago, has picked up once again. By mid-August, more than 6600 refugees had taken shelter in camps across the state. This reverses the trend of the past few years, when almost 15,000 refugees had returned

home to a Sri Lanka that had attained relative peace. Since April, almost 129,000 people have been displaced within Sri Lanka.

The ceasefire agreement between the Colombo government and the Tamil Tigers now exists only in name. To avoid getting caught in the crossfire, thousands of Tamils from Trincomalee and Mannar

districts have crossed the choppy waters of the Palk Strait. Arriving refugees are first registered at the Mantapam camp, 15 km from Rameswaram, and then given accommodation at one of the 103 camps administered by the Madras government.

The camps provide a sorry picture, often lacking basic water, sanitation and medical facilities. At Kattumannarkovil in Cuddalore District, the refugees have been given shelter in godowns, with

living spaces partitioned by gunny-sacks. A judicial order issued in 2003 prohibits children of refugees admission in Tamil Nadu's higher education institutions.

The new state government, headed by M Karunanidhi, has expressed commitment to improve camp conditions. For its part, the Colombo government claims it has set up its own relief camps, and is seeking to discourage the refugees from going across to India.

INDIA / PAKISTAN

The friendly enemy

A recent poll conducted by Gallup Pakistan (and commissioned by Delhi-based *Outlook* magazine for its Independence Day issue) made for shocking headlines, revealing that 53 percent of Pakistanis consider India to be the 'enemy'. Only 19 percent would dub it a 'friend'.

But that could be merely the programmed response to a leading question, for the other responses to the Gallup poll reveal a different picture altogether – one of revival of trust and camaraderie. For example, 60 percent of Pakistanis feel that relations between the two countries are better under Manmohan Singh of the Congress than under the Bharatiya Janata Party's Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Almost 55 percent believe that increased people-to-people contact, mostly provided by the new crossborder bus and train links, have improved the situation.

One major shift in comparison to a similar survey taken in 2003 has been opinion on converting the Line of Control into an international border. In 2003, only 29 percent said they would accept such a move; today that number is 41 percent. Obviously, Pakistanis increasingly believe that they can live with the 'enemy'.

INDIA / THE MALDIVES

Intimidated in Kerala

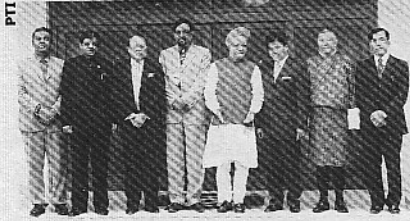
This summer Maldivians in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), the capital of Kerala, have feared reprisals from roving gangs after two Indian nationals suffered knife assaults in Male in mid-July. Reports surfaced in May suggesting that Indian labourers in the Maldives suffer regular abuse; this led to Maldivian families in Kerala suffering attacks on their houses and cars.

Although no injuries have been reported, the attacks went on for a week in a part of town known to be populated by Maldivians, causing police to begin regular patrols in the area. The Maldives consulate in Thiruvananthapuram has prepared a leaflet to be distributed to new immigrants, to better introduce them to the area.

Local police investigated members of the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena, who have previously led public demonstrations in response to reports of Indians being discriminated against in the Maldives. Also suspected of involvement are a group of hotel owners, upset at Maldivian residents who were drawing away business by taking in travelers from their home country as paying guests. Although the worst of the attacks have halted, Maldives expatriates claim that they remain soft targets for criminal elements in the city.



BIMSTEC up, SAFTA down



BIMSTEC began as an acronym of countries of the Bay of Bengal rimland that got together to integrate and energise the economies of South and Southeast Asia. As the membership grew, it was decided to keep the name but redefine the acronym – and so, today we have the ‘Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation’.

For some time, it has seemed as if BIMSTEC might be as moribund as its SAARC cousin. In an effort to inject some energy into the effort, the members met in

New Delhi in August, and announced a stepped-up timetable for establishing a free trade agreement (FTA) between the BIMSTEC members – which at latest count includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The attending ministers agreed that final negotiations for the FTA should be completed prior to the next BIMSTEC

summit, scheduled for early next year. A joint statement released after the New Delhi meeting emphasised the need to improve transportation links between the countries. A centre will be created in India to work as a focal point for strengthening cooperation in the energy sector. Member states also agreed to collaborate on better emergency preparedness in the case of natural disasters.

While good atmospherics were emanating from BIMSTEC, the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) being promoted by SAARC was coming unstuck. Southasian foreign ministers who met in Dhaka in early August left unresolved the dispute between India and Pakistan

that lies at the core of the SAFTA deadlock. New Delhi accuses Islamabad of having failed to implement key tariff reductions for goods imported by India, by issuing a notice in July limiting SAFTA tariff concessions.

In response, Islamabad’s Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri explained that while Pakistani imports from India have increased by about 400 percent, Pakistan has been unable to find entry into India’s market, even in areas where Pakistan has a competitive advantage. The ministers decided to refer the problem to a forum of SAARC ministers of commerce, where the problem is expected to remain as is where is. △

PAKISTAN

The flag and Bachchan

Karachi authorities have ordered the removal of billboards and posters depicting Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan superimposed on the Pakistani flag. The advertisements had been put up by a local entertainment company seeking to promote its new call-in quiz show,

“Aao Banain Carorpati”, which is similar to the Hindi-language “Kaun Banega Crorepati” hosted by Bachchan. The superstar is not affiliated with the new Pakistani show, however, which is scheduled to begin airing on 14 August, Pakistan’s Independence Day.

City officials were not completely unexcited by the crossborder juxtaposition. They noted that while they did not consider Bachchan an enemy, “his picture on our national flag was an objectionable act ... this place is reserved only for our own heroes.” △



DAILY TIMES

INDIA / PAKISTAN

IPI trouble

Oil secretaries from India, Pakistan and Iran met in New Delhi in early August to discuss pricing formulae for the gas that may eventually flow through the proposed USD 7 billion Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline. Though the meeting had been slated for a final agreement on pricing, in mid-July Tehran rejected New Delhi’s proposed price. Instead, Iranian officials announced that the gas would be sold at international rates, and that no concessions would be made for either Pakistan or India. This would set the price at around USD 7.20 per BTU (British Thermal Unit), far above India’s offer of USD 4.25.

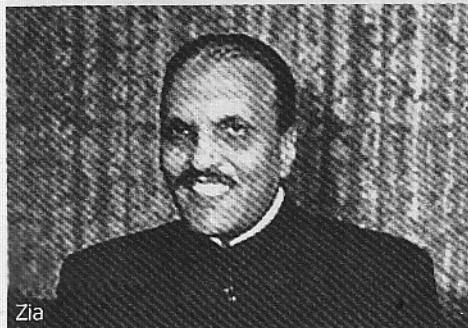
During the New Delhi meeting, Pakistan and India both publicly opposed Iran’s proposal – not only for the cost itself, but also because Iran wants to link the price to the international rate for crude oil, meaning that there would be neither a price floor nor ceiling.

Iran’s intransigence may actually have to do with two matters quite unconnected to pricing. First, after Manmohan Singh’s publicly-shared scepticism of the IPI project, Tehran may believe that the project is not going anywhere. Second, the Iranian authorities have been angered by India’s willingness to go along with a West-sponsored resolution in the International Atomic Energy Agency on their nuclear power programme.

Despite their inability to come to an agreement, all three sides reiterated the importance of the IPI project itself. A last-ditch effort to break the impasse is now underway, in which an international consultant will be trilaterally appointed to study the pricing issue. That report is due in mid-September, which may be the last we hear about the ‘magic pipeline’ – at least until India’s mounting energy woes force a rethink. △

Hudood stays

Pervez Musharraf has long assured activists that he would act against the anti-women Hudood Ordinance, which enforces punishments as dictated by Sharia Law. He even issued an executive order, and the Ministry of Justice stated its intention to remove all "legal



Zia

and procedural lacunae" from the statute.

But then, in a decision handed down in late July, the Islamabad

government decided that while the controversial Ordinance can be amended, its substance is acceptable "in principle". In other words, amputation and stoning-to-death will both remain officially sanctioned punishments for certain offences.

Eyewitness and evidence requirements are to be modified, however. A victim of rape, for instance, will no longer be asked to produce four eyewitnesses in court. While the government decided that *hadd*, or Koranic punishments, will remain in effect for certain offences, repentance will now have legal implications. A guilty party who 'repents' will no longer be subjected to *hadd* punishments.

The Hudood law was imposed by Zia ul-Haq in 1979 as part of his efforts to Islamicise the administration of Pakistan. It seems that his military successor in President Musharraf, though of a mind with the activists, is not willing to dare the conservative clergy. △

NEPAL / BHUTAN

A contentious breakthrough

Late July saw the first hard news story in 16 years with regard to the international community's response to the ongoing Bhutani refugee crisis. Coinciding with a visit to Nepal by a senior UNHCR official, the Kathmandu government finally agreed to allow an initial batch of "vulnerable" refugees to be resettled in Western countries, this time to Canada and the US. This group includes individuals who have been threatened, raped or trafficked, and for whom it has been deemed

unsafe to remain in the refugee camps in southeast Nepal.

UNHCR has never been allowed to arrange for refugee resettlement to Western countries because the Kathmandu government did not want it. Although approval has only been given for 16 individuals, it opens up greater possibilities for the future. Protests took place in both Kathmandu and the districts of Jhapa and Morang in the weeks following the announcement of

UNHCR's resettlement plan, however, leading local officials to ban refugees from demonstrating outside of the refugee camps.

Resettlement critics within the refugee community have blasted the plan, saying that moves towards resettlement will only give tacit approval to Thimphu's depopulation policy of the early 1990s, while at the same time putting in danger sections of the Bhutani population still living in Bhutan. They say Western governments in any case cannot be expected to take in too many individuals, the Lhotshampa not being as 'exotic' as some other refugees.

Some human rights defenders believe that the interests of the refugees must come first, above considerations of culpability of the Thimphu regime and regional geopolitics. "How long are they to be allowed to fester in the refugee camps," asked one, "when we all know that there is next to no possibility of a return to Bhutan." They believe that the preference shown by interviewed refugees for an unlikely return to Bhutan rather than resettlement in a Western country is the result of coercion and peer pressure in the refugee camps. △

INDIA / TIBET

Nathula's performance

Just a month after the highly publicised reopening of the Nathula pass linking Tibet and Sikkim, a Lhasa official has criticised the low level of trade at the point, blaming "unilateral" restrictions put in place by New Delhi.

With trade currently restricted to 15 Chinese and 29 Indian items, the Vice Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Hao Peng, complained that commerce through Tibet's Renqinggang market, 16 kilometres northeast of Nathula, is only USD 12,500 per week – "far less than we had expected". The Chinese side has not imposed any restriction on Nathula trade, except for contraband items, says Hao.

Part of the problem was undoubtedly caused by bureaucratic inertia on the Indian side. While New Delhi requires international traders to possess what is referred to as an Import-Export Code (IEC), such a number is available only to those included under India's national income tax laws, which do not cover Sikkimi residents.

After two weeks of impasse New Delhi finally exempted regional traders from IEC requirements, but capped the volume of trade they could engage in at just INR 25,000 per individual per day – prompting new complaints that the restriction continues to drag down Nathula's performance.

Once the bureaucratic glitches are ironed out, there is still the hope that Renqinggang will be boomtown. △



Come one, come all

Beijing appears set to relax the longstanding restrictive visa regime for foreign visitors to Tibet. While foreigners are currently required to apply for a special permit to enter the Tibet Autonomous Region, the new plans could allow tourists into the sensitive area with just a standard Chinese visa.

Beijing explains the move as part of its larger emphasis on opening up and improving the economy of Tibet. Observers, however, have noted that this move, along with the July re-opening of the Nathula pass and the Golmud-Lhasa train line, reveals Beijing's growing confidence in its hold over Tibet. Currently, Lhasa sees about 5000 tourists a day, most of them Han Chinese.

There is still only one international flight to Lhasa's spanking new Gonggar airport, a seasonal one from Kathmandu that flies past Mount Everest – Chomolungma to the Tibetans. With the easing of restrictions and likely rise of non-Han tourists, it is expected that Lhasa will be linked by air to Bangkok and Hong Kong, to begin with. Kathmandu's near-monopoly as an entry point would then be a thing of the past. ▲



Cola troubles, again



What tele-guru Ramdev started, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) seems intent on taking to its logical conclusion. While Ramdev suggested that the multinational colas were good as toilet cleaners, the Delhi-based CSE (publisher also of *Down to Earth* magazine) reported that in at least 12 states, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo soft drinks contained traces of pesticides up to 50 times higher than acceptable levels.

CSE said this confirmed the results of a similar study conducted three years ago, at which time the Indian Parliament had suggested that the government pass standards for the sodas in question. This has not yet taken place, nor has the government had an official response to the new findings.

But in other corners, reactions have been flying. Several Indian states passed complete or partial bans on the production and sale of soft drinks marketed by the Coca-Cola and PepsiCo companies, which control 80 percent of the USD 80 billion Indian soft drink market. The Bharatiya Janata Party and the leftist parties called for a national ban, reviving memories of 1977 when, right after the

Emergency, the Janata Dal government banned Coca-Cola (and promoted a 'desi' soda brand known as '77').

The Indian Supreme Court ordered Coca-Cola to divulge its century-old secret formula – long an integral part of the myth surrounding Coke. Bollywood star Shahrukh Khan, hired to promote Pepsi's brand through advertisements, has expressed his pique by noting simply that India is "a filthy country" – apparently for having gone after his sponsors. Things were evidently serious enough for George W Bush over in the White House to go to bat for the conglomerates.

At its New York headquarters, PepsiCo suddenly promoted India-born and -educated Indra Nooyi to be its CEO.

Oddly, the CSE findings have yet to cause a stir in India's neighbouring countries, even though the possibility of pesticide residue would seem to be as much of a probability there as in India. At last count, Pakistanis were continuing to down the colas at quite a clip, as were Bangladeshis, Nepalis and Sri Lankans.

For once, the worldwide competitors PepsiCo and Coca-Cola must be comparing notes on how to tackle the volatile Indian market – and its nemesis, the CSE! ▲

Frontier flare-up

What is incongruous about India-Bangladesh border clashes is how little news they make, even though it is the official security forces of two members of SAARC having a go at each other. And it seems to happen all the time.

But one of the most severe border clashes in years took place in early August, and it had more than 20,000 people on both sides evacuating to makeshift refugee camps. At least eight deaths were reported. Few agree on who initiated the skirmish, but the fighting between the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) started over the matter of ownership of a large borderland rice paddy in Sylhet, on the Assam border.

The firefight lasted all of 14 hours, with several hundred mortars and thousands of bullets fired. Both sides subsequently reinforced their troop levels. Days later, at a "fruitful" meeting between the opposing commanders – the second such 'flag meeting' in a little over a month – the two sides agreed to pull back their additional troops, abide by a 1974 border agreement, and generally pretend that nothing amiss had taken place.

When asked why the guns had spoken, and for so long, one BSF representative noted it was "accidental fire, whoever had done it first". Everyone seemed willing to accept the explanation, and calm returned to the India-Bangladesh frontier.

Eight dead. 20,000 displaced. Hundreds of mortars. Thousands of bullets expended. Only on the India-Bangladesh frontier would you still call this peace! ▲

The Naga talks move along

Even though a final resolution looks remote, the Naga peace negotiations have proceeded with hope – and the clear indication of outside help.

BY WASBIR HUSSAIN

The Indian government and a frontline Naga rebel group have now been engaged in peace talks for nine years, continuing an attempt to end one of Southasia's longest-running insurgencies. Since the August 1997 ceasefire between New Delhi and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland faction headed by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah (known as the NSCN-IM), the two sides have held around 50 rounds of negotiations. During talks in a plethora of European, South and Southeast Asian venues, the two sides have discussed the insurgent group's key demand of a separate Naga homeland. While New Delhi has tried to work out a solution within the ambit of the Indian Constitution, the NSCN-IM has pushed for the unification of all Naga-inhabited areas in India's Northeast into a single politico-administrative unit.

Every time the Indian negotiators and guerrilla chieftains met, time would be spent on charges and counter-charges of truce violation before the ceasefire was finally extended. The extension would invariably be for one additional year – except for once, this past January, when the NSCN-IM agreed to only a six-month extension, seeming to indicate looming roadblocks in the peace process. Because of this history, the initial news out of Bangkok on 30 July, that New Delhi and the NSCN-IM had agreed to make the nine-year-old ceasefire irrevocable and 'coterminous' with the peace talks (meaning they would end at the same time), caused a stir among jaded observers. An Indian newspaper reported from Bangkok that the two sides had agreed on a "broad framework", whereby they would jointly "analyse the Indian Constitution to decide which parts of it will apply, not apply or apply with modifications to the Nagas."

When the Bangkok talks ended the following day, however, the truce had been extended, again, by just another year. Nonetheless, Indian leaders were pleased with the very notion of the ceasefire being made coterminous with the peace talks having been introduced. Oscar Fernandes, Manmohan Singh's chief appointee on the negotiations, explained after the meeting that, "Such a suggestion of the truce being coterminous with the peace talks had come from the Nagas themselves. They have now withdrawn that offer, but a one-year extension is fine with us." Some senior NSCN-IM leaders appeared to have convinced

General Secretary Muivah not to go for the long ceasefire; but where the suggestion had originated in the first place, and that it found favour with both Muivah and New Delhi, was what was significant.

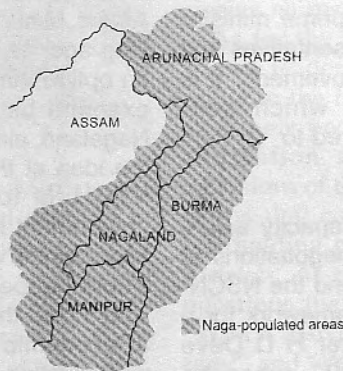
Kreddha connection

There is some speculation that the 'coterminous' formulation, along with some other apparent interventions in the past few years, has been the handiwork of a third party that is mediating or acting as a facilitator in the peace talks. It is thought that the idea actually began with one Michael C van Walt van Praag, the Dutch executive president of a Netherlands-based NGO known as Kreddha.

Kreddha is also said to be behind the 'broad framework' to define the relationship between the Nagas and the Indian government. This framework provides for demarcating subjects or 'competencies' to be managed separately by the Indian government, by either dispensation in Nagaland or jointly by both. The NSCN-IM is pushing for a separate Constitution, while New Delhi wants to work out a solution within the ambit of the existing Indian Constitution. Kreddha's involvement in the peace process has led to speculations as to whether the Indian government has relaxed its stance against third-party or international mediation on domestic issues.

But who is Praag, and what is Kreddha? The latter describes itself as committed to the "prevention and resolution of violent conflicts between population groups and states". The only Indian member on its council is Nirmala Deshpande, a former member of the Rajya Sabha and president of the Gandhian Harijan Sewak Sangh. Praag himself is a former general secretary of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), a global umbrella body of groups seeking self-determination. It was during his tenure in the 1990s that the UNPO passed a resolution condemning the Indian and Burmese governments for their military action against the NSCN-IM.

Kreddha's involvement in the Naga talks first came to light in December 2005, when Kraibo Chawang, the NSCN-IM's deputy information minister, told journalists that his group and New Delhi had agreed on "third-party mediation", and that Praag was going to be the



“pointsman”. The NSCN-IM's official stance was altered, however, when R H Raising, NSCN-IM's home minister, was quick to explain: “Michael Praag has been associated with the talks since 2001, but no decision has been taken officially yet to have him as a mediator. But I must tell you that he is a well-wisher of the Nagas and a good friend of both our group and the government of India.” Chawang had, perhaps, prematurely disclosed what had been meant to remain a secret.

New Delhi denied that Praag had any role in the peace talks, although it did take a full four days for authorities to react to the media coverage. Oscar Fernandes declared that “the question of appointing a mediator does not arise”, but he did not respond to the claim by Chawang (and backed by Raising) that Praag had been mediating unofficially since 2001. Chawang has been quoted as saying that Praag's “contribution towards salvaging the peace process has been acknowledged by both” the NSCN-IM and New Delhi.

What no one in the Indian establishment is commenting on is the relatively open admission by Kredha about its role in the negotiations. “Kredha is quietly and confidentially facilitating negotiations between the leaders of a major armed independence movement in a country in Asia and the government of that country,” the organisation noted on its website in January 2006. “[Kredha] has facilitated the first and all subsequent meetings between the prime minister of the country in question and his representatives and the leaders of the self-determination movement.” It is clear which country in Asia and which self-determination movement is being referred to.

No Naga unification

The circumstances and questions of capacity aside, that Kredha became involved in the negotiations at all was due to the fact that New Delhi and the NSCN-IM have been unable to agree on a framework for a possible solution. Then-Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's unorthodox initiative in 1996, when he handpicked opposition Congress leader Rajesh Pilot to cajole the NSCN-IM leaders into agreeing to a truce, is largely responsible for whatever progress the Naga peace process has made to date.

It is possible that the process that Gowda and Pilot set in place has now succeeded in convincing the NSCN-IM to reframe its demand and look for an arrangement that could bring the Naga areas in the region under a common administrative mechanism. This could also be why in recent years the NSCN-IM has pushed for the integration of the Naga-inhabited areas in India's Northeast into the state of Nagaland, and to bring the entire stretch under a single administrative unit. At that time, New Delhi would not have known the extent to which the political forces in Manipur, Assam or Arunachal Pradesh would go to prevent parts of their respective states from being

merged with a greater Nagaland.

It soon became clear, however, that altering the existing boundaries of the northeastern states was nearly impossible. The June 2001 uprising in Manipur against the extension of the Naga ceasefire to that state, for instance, ended with police killing 18 protestors. The Meiteis, Manipur's majority community, concluded that extension of the Naga truce outside the state of Nagaland could be the first step towards loss of territory to Nagaland. On 6 August 2004, weeks after suspected NSCN-IM rebels locked into a gun-battle with police in Assam's southern Karbi Anglong District, the state legislature adopted a resolution to block Assam's borders from being redrawn as part of a possible deal with the insurgents. The fighting followed attempts to evict some Naga families who had settled in Assam along the Nagaland border, allegedly with the backing of the NSCN-IM.

If the possibilities of either an independent homeland or a unified Nagaland are out of consideration, though, what can be a possible solution? There are still a few possibilities available. First, dual citizenship of the kind suggested by some for Kashmiris could be established for the Nagas, as well as greater devolution of powers, although this has been rejected in the past by the NSCN-IM. Second, Nagaland's administration could be brought under the External Affairs Ministry, something that New Delhi proposed long ago. Third, New Delhi could take a fresh look at an option that Indira Gandhi is said to have agreed to examine back in 1966 – a protectorate status for Nagaland, although the Naga National Council rejected the idea at that time. Finally, Swu, Muivah and other NSCN-IM top guns could simply be installed as government leaders to run the affairs of the Nagas in accordance with the Indian Constitution. Before this would happen, a deal would need to be struck that would give the Nagas maximum autonomy, some sort of economic independence, and provide for proper rehabilitation of NSCN cadres – essentially the model that New Delhi used to clinch the deal with the rebel Mizo National Front in Mizoram in 1986.

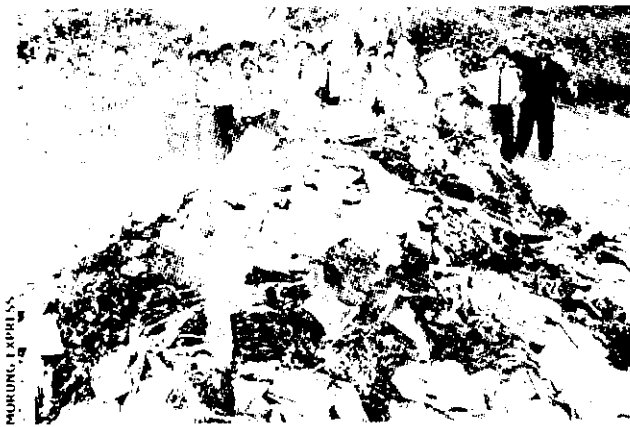
But the question arises as to whether any deal with the NSCN-IM is actually going to solve the Naga problem. Is the NSCN-IM, after all, the sole representative of the Nagas, reflective of Naga opinion in its totality? The other NSCN faction, the Khaplang group (NSCN-K), which entered into a truce with New Delhi in April 2001, also considers itself a major player in the Naga insurgency theatre. If the NSCN-K could have been easily ignored, as some suggest, influential groups like the Naga Hoho, the apex Naga tribal council, would not have worked so relentlessly to unify these two insurgent factions towards a permanent solution. The road to lasting peace in Naga country remains thorny, to say the least. The third-party facilitator, if in existence, would know that best.



Divergent memories in Manipur

Anger is building in the Naga hills of Manipur regarding the Meitei bias in the state's school curricula and textbooks.

BY DOLLY KIKON



content and the students' grievances.

In a letter to the BSEM, the All Naga Students Association of Manipur (ANSAM) pointed out that students in the hill districts of Manipur were being denied their rights on several fronts. It alleged that the Meitei Mayek language has been imposed on them by being made a compulsory school subject, and that Meitei culture and history – that of the Imphal Valley's majority population – are glorified while the histories of several other indigenous Manipuri communities receive no mention in syllabi.

As for the textbooks themselves, the BSEM Social Science reader for Class VIII dwells heavily on the way of life in the Imphal Valley. It acknowledges the hills and their peoples only in descriptions of shifting cultivation as a primitive method of farming, narrations of the spread of Christianity, or topographic charts that compare population, literacy levels and landholding between the Imphal Valley and the hill districts. At the end of chapters students are asked questions that could be considered loaded, such as: "Which district in Manipur has the highest literacy rate?" and "Why do hill districts in Manipur have low density of population?"

Imposing knowledge

The districts of the Manipur hills are some of the most neglected in the entire Northeast region. After 59 years of Independence, many of the villages here lack basic amenities such as electricity, roads, health care, functioning schools and safe drinking water. In addition, heightened security, militarisation and structural violence are part of everyday life. Questions such as those mentioned in the textbook contribute to a potentially dangerous conditioning of young minds. One can only imagine how the disparities suggested in that textbook play out in the minds of young children growing up in the Imphal Valley versus those in the hills of Manipur.

The Class VIII textbook celebrates the Meitei

On 9 August 2006 the Education Minister of Manipur, L Nandakumar, warned activists in the state's hill districts, the government of neighbouring Nagaland and the region's civil society to refrain from interfering in Manipur's affairs. He declared that he had "abstracted assurances" from Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh and other Union ministers that they would not interfere with an ongoing school-affiliation agitation in Manipur.

One month prior to Nandakumar's warning, students in the four Naga-majority hill districts of Manipur – Chandel, Senapati, Ukhrul and Tamenglong – made a bonfire out of the textbooks prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BSEM). They carried banners that read, 'We want common education', 'Welcome Nagaland Board' and 'Goodbye Manipur Board', and launched a campaign to affiliate the private schools in their districts with the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE). The protest was seen by many in the Imphal Valley as a move towards pressing for the unification of a Naga homeland. As such, the discussion has been diverted from the textbooks'

monarchy, which reigned oppressively from the Imphal Valley. Delving into colonial archives and feudal records to construct a version of Manipuri history such as this one is not conducive to the creation of a sense of shared heritage among the peoples of the valley and the hills, especially when social and political processes have left behind divergent memories and senses of belonging. The imposition of this valley-centric worldview has led to a distressing breakdown of relations already marked by hostility. Facile debates as to whether the Meitei Mayek language will be written in Meitei or Roman script continue, even as the hill people reject the idea of a shared future under valley-based educational structures.

Though command of an additional language may be any asset to a young individual, such an argument in this case ignores uneven histories of cultural assimilation. Several indigenous hill communities have for generations learned both Meitei and Hindi in school, while state agencies have ignored the importance of existing indigenous languages.

The Indian Constitution contains provisions for the rights of minority groups. Linguistic minorities have the right to conserve their languages and scripts, to administer their own educational institutions, and to have their language recognised by the state in which they reside. Such constitutional remedies are frequently cited by minority groups in the Northeast, and would seem to address the injustice that Manipuri hill people feel when confronted with the BSEM textbooks. But there is a stipulation in these provisions: the onus of guarding these rights rests with the state governments.

The Naga 'problem'

Thus far, those agitating against the BSEM textbooks have looked to neighbouring Nagaland and the central government for redress. Even if the demand for affiliation of hill schools is met, however, these academic institutions will continue to function under the injustices of the existing Indian educational structure. The only way out of this web of what can be called 'cultural imperialism' is to demand the transformation of the educational system itself.

The struggle for the recognition of an alternative Naga history is not new, but within India it has continuously been viewed with suspicion. It was in 1963 that an area was carved out of the colonial province of Assam to become the state of Nagaland; but communities that feel tied together as Naga through shared historical experience continue to inhabit parts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. In these states, attempts to produce alternative Naga histories have been dismissed in favour of 'acceptable' archival material – mostly colonial – in which the Nagas appear as perennial troublemakers, simpletons or *jhum* cultivators out to destroy the forests.

It is not that the Nagaland Board of School Education textbooks are any better: the way they treat Naga history and culture is just as poor. The Class VIII Social Science textbook developed by the Nagaland State Council of

Educational Research and Training for the NBSF, for instance, devotes hardly any space to the subject. Instead, the first eight sections are devoted to India's role in the modern world, the colonisation of the Subcontinent and the anti-colonial struggles. The part of the textbook devoted to Civics includes sections on subjects such as National Goals and Democracy of India, The Society in India, Economic Reconstruction, National Integration, Defence of the Country, India and the World, and World Problems – but nothing specific to the Northeast.

Only the History section of the reader manages to include a chapter on Naga society, and even this is extremely cursory, putting an overwhelming emphasis on qualities such as 'simple, honest and hard-working' when describing the Naga people's past. The condescending and reductionist stereotype promoted is once again that of the 'simpleton Naga'. Modernisation is equated with the coming of locks and keys – guards against the dishonesty that plagues Naga society today. The perceived ills of modernisation are blamed on the oppressed themselves. The present generations of Nagas, it is said, are not sufficiently hard-working. In other places, the textbook proffers that they are not in the same league as their 'simpleton' ancestors because they "lie, steal and are lazy".

In reality, the state of decline evoked by such prejudiced prose corresponds to the changes wrought in Naga society by five decades of militarisation. The public space has been brutalised by the systematic and perpetual policing of civic structures by the Indian state, and what is left is a polity and civil society characterised by violence. The role of the Indian government in this "decline" receives no mention in the chapter in question. Political questions are elided, and the text dwells instead on what it sees as the ramifications of the "ills" of the Naga people: AIDS, alcoholism and drug addiction. Remarkably, after all of this, the writers of the chapter still found it prudent to venture back to the civic and political questions of what might have caused this "decay", and once again equate what they see as a "moral ineptitude" of Naga society to the dangers of modern life.

Despite being one of India's most researched peoples, the Nagas are frequently represented as primitives, savages and naked hills-dwellers. Nonetheless, this group today espouses some of the most radical ideas in postcolonial India, rallying as they do around indigenous rights and the right to self-determination, and resisting the hegemony of the Indian educational system. The current education-based agitation in Manipur is a part of this process of questioning.

How the New Delhi authorities address these asymmetries will be important. If this most recent point of contention is not taken seriously and addressed quickly, there is every possibility that it will join the long list of agitations that surround the subject of identity politics in India's Northeast. Their importance forgotten, those issues are now used only as convenient reasons not to deal with pressing questions of justice.



The 'Forward Policy' and Southasia

Beijing hopes to penetrate the Southasian market, while at the same time use the opening to keep quiet its restive outlying provinces.

BY MAHENDRA P LAMA

China is everywhere in Southasia, both physically as an agent of globalisation, and conceptually as a growth model. While the focus has revolved around the possible conflict dynamic between India and China, Beijing's engagement with states and societies across the region presents a far more complex reality. Multi-layered, this linkage spans across border trade, joint ventures and macro-level investment to strategic alliances and political interaction.

It was not always this way. Beijing's engagement with Southasia can be understood only in the larger framework of the basic change in its approach to economic growth and international politics. In the last 50 years, China has transformed itself from an astute proponent of ideological outreach and a covert supporter of insurgency to a builder of modern

crossborder infrastructures and a wild market-grabber. It has gotten rid of the Maoist jacket, though Beijing is still reluctant to acknowledge its acceptance of the capitalist robe.

As China projects itself as a country on the move, it is trying hard to prove that democracy and development have no correlation. Southasians devour this ambiguity, as the Subcontinent itself is a reservoir of scattered thinking, ambiguous planning and policy measures of marginal utility. As China showed meteoric rise in terms of growth, global market influence and as an advocate of exclusive 'Asian values', a potentially powerful Southasia realised the wider utility of its mammoth neighbour.

For its part, Beijing's interests in Southasia can be linked to three abiding and powerful objectives, which form its 'forward policy' in this region. These include expansion of its military base and strategic access; economic and commercial penetration into the huge Southasian market and, through it, to West Asia; and managing its own potential internal instabilities.

Melting the ice

In the mid-1980s, China realised that national security could be ensured through *mulin zhengce*, better relations with neighbouring countries. For a country with 'diverse international regions', the end of the Cold War brought an opportunity to broaden its foreign policy options. It faced the enigmatic challenge of remaining "a regional power without a regional policy". This is where Communist Party of China leader Deng Xiaoping's advocacy of a comprehensive *zhoubian zhengce* (periphery policy) became both handy and far-reaching.

China started consciously designing a clear regional policy based on *wending zhoubian* (stabilising the periphery). Determinants like political system-ideology linkages (*buyi yishi xingtai he sheshui zhidu lun qingsu*) and superpower alliance (*yimei huaxian, yisu huaxian*), which had been the

fundamental basis and hallmark of its foreign relations, were increasingly abandoned.

These policies emanated partly from the realisation that the reforms and growth – key to halting and preventing domestic political turmoil – needed a larger playing field. Deng Xiaoping was convinced that if China was to emerge as an economic powerhouse and a flag-bearer in the emerging "new Asianism", it was critical to have a favourable international environment. Southasia, and more specifically India, has been central in this rapprochement game. With Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, much of the ice around the frigid and hibernating McMahon Line melted. New Delhi and Beijing started rethinking and renegotiating their respective positions.

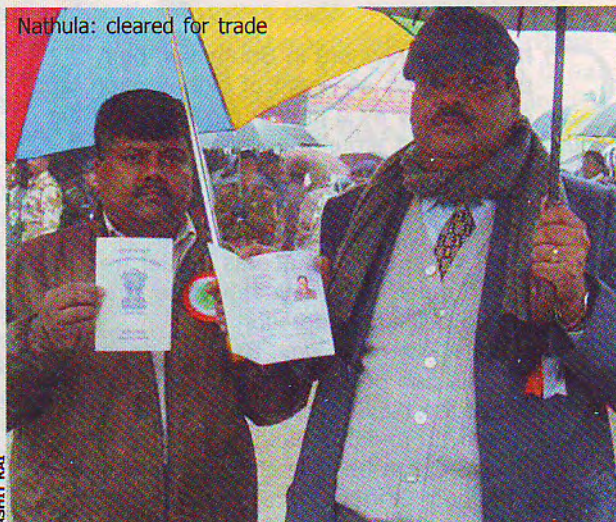
New China has been trying to woo Southasia in exactly the same manner that it has successfully built relations with other neighbouring regions. The model has three levels of engagement – the local, national and regional.

Crossborder integration

China has shown remarkable acumen in understanding the significance of local-level economic interaction. Beijing's extensive use of border trade as the main instrument of economic integration is reflected by some startling figures – half of the country's foreign trade of USD 1 trillion is conducted through its 120 inland towns and ports. The policy of encouraging local-level trade can be seen in China's dealings with Southasia as well. On the India-China border, the Lipulekh pass trade route connects Dharchula-Pithoragrah in Uttaranchal with Taklakot in the Purang County of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), while the Shipkila pass connects Namgya-Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh with Jiuba in Zada County in the TAR. Both of these trade routes, which opened in 1992, are in difficult and rugged terrains and are highly seasonal.

Though a significant section of policy echelons in India considers the recent reopening of the Nathula route in Sikkim as a mere symbolic border-trade venture, China, in the long-term, is looking at it as a vital economic entry point into the 1.3 billion-strong Indian market. In terms of feasibility, this is arguably the shortest route (roughly 590 km between Lhasa and Gangtok) to reach the ever-burgeoning middle class in the Indian mainland, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

The completion of the 1142 km railway from Golmud city in Qinghai province to Lhasa, and the refurbishing of overland access through the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, are also important developments. These could completely transform the physical accessibility to and from mainland China for Tibet, as well as the neighbouring provinces and countries bordering Tibet, which is where Southasia factors in. For India, the new transport infrastructure of this nature can open



ASHIT RAI

By 2003, Pakistan's balance of trade deficit with China had increased to USD 1.3 billion, Bangladesh's to USD 1.3 billion, Sri Lanka's to USD 484 million and Nepal's to USD 166 million.

access to other business centres in China's western, eastern and southeastern regions.

It would be incorrect to think that trade across Nathula or other border points will be confined to limited interactions among crossborder communities. This was the assumption in the border trade between Nepal and Tibet at Khasa, and between India and Burma at Moreh in Manipur. However, the actual volume, composition and direction of trade in these routes have far surpassed the local communities and local products. Restrictions have only encouraged the illegal and surreptitious aspects of trade, which has flowed regardless.

Besides the older Kathmandu-Kodari highway that passes through Khasa there are other important transit trade posts, either operational or in the offing, for overland trade between Nepal and China. These points include Rasuwa, Mustang, Olangchungola, Kimathanka, Lamabagar, Larke, Mugu and Yarinaka. Though agreements allow for a Free Trade Zone within 30 km of the Tatopani customs office, the Nepal-China trade through the Khasa route has acquired robust dimensions. Nepal's exports to Tibet increased from almost USD 2.4 million in 1991-92 to USD 7 million in 2000-01, and imports went from USD 16.2 million to USD 153.9 million during the same period.

China has a history of using other countries as bases for exporting its own goods. In the case of Southeast Asia, it has utilised Singapore as a centre from which to tap the markets of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and even Australia. Hong Kong is also used in this manner, to export Chinese goods to European and American markets. The proposal to use Nepal as a transit point for India-China trade is primarily raised in this context. The fact that most of the Chinese goods that come to Nepal find their ways into the Indian market only confirms this conviction. China is seeking a somewhat similar kind of access through the Karakoram Highway in Pakistan.

Decentralised communism

The fact that the impetus for such local-level initiatives is coming from a communist republic, traditionally associated with complete centralisation, is striking. China has departed from the conventional understanding of Maoism not only in its economic model but also in terms of political management. It has granted a level of autonomy to its provinces, allowing smaller units to engage with counterparts across borders.

There have been several visits by government officials and private-sector executives from Yunnan Province to the eastern states of India. Their agenda has been to establish trade and investment linkages with the vast, untapped market of eastern India. These delegates give the impression that they have been given a 'free hand' by their federal government to negotiate the larger process of the Kunming Initiative, which has been actively promoting the reopening of the Stilwell Road, built by US forces during the Second World War (*See Himal Sept-Oct 2005, "The Stilwell Road: Straight Ahead?"*).

This is certainly a successful sequel of the decentralising strategy China followed since 1979. The Party Central Committee had then allowed Guangdong and Fujian provinces to adopt "special policies and flexible measures", particularly with regard to investment and trade in the Special Economic Zones. The single-mindedness with which they are pursuing this initiative is reflective of Yunnan's involvement in other economic zones at the provincial level, such as the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

The Chinese decentralised approach stands in stark contrast to the centralised mechanism adopted by India. India has traditionally maintained foreign trade and investment as an exclusive domain of the Union government, wherein the relevant constituent states are only 'consulted'. An initiative like Kunming fits well into India's 'Look East' policy and its participation in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). However, these

China-Southasia Trade Volume

(Million USD)

Countries/Region	1990	1995	2000	2003
Afghanistan	24	49	27	27
Bangladesh	173	678	917	1368
Bhutan	0.03	0.2	2	2
India	270	1163	2834	7595
The Maldives	0.5	0.8	1	3
Nepal	47	54	205	127
Pakistan	575	1012	1126	2430
Sri Lanka	97	241	456	524
Southasia	1186	3197	5568	12077

Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook*, International Monetary Fund (IMF), April 2005

China can make a significant difference in either consolidating SAARC through substantive cooperation-integration action, or eroding its functioning through counteractive action against the traditionally established pivotal role of India.

cooperative mechanisms have not really kicked off because the notion of 'local engagement', and using trans-local actors, is something with which New Delhi has not yet come to terms.

It is clear that China has allowed levels of autonomy in trans-border contact, and is pushing for more open trade across its borders, in order to bring its own periphery provinces into the national mainstream. This is particularly true of the western region, which is comprised of nine provinces and autonomous regions – Gansu, Guizhou, Ningxia, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Tibet, Xinjiang and Yunnan, in addition to Chongqing Municipality. The west covers two-thirds of the nation's territory, has a population of nearly 23 percent of the national total, and possesses abundant natural resources – but lags significantly in growth. After eastern China's 14,000 km-long coastline brought fortunes to the country over the last two decades, it is now western China, with 3500 km of land frontiers that, it is hoped, will emerge the new economic frontier.

The accelerated growth and development in these politically volatile provinces and regions could do much to quell the political dissent that is always just below the surface. The Chinese government launched its 'develop-the-west' campaign in 2000. A number of preferential policies were offered to the western region, including capital input, investment environment, internal and external opening up, development of science and education, and human resources. Crossborder trade received a fillip under this policy.

Facts and figures

At a broader level, the economic interest of both Southasia as a whole and China deeply coincide. The Chinese side would gain tremendously both through market access to the region, and by importing specific commodities like pharmaceuticals, software, cotton, rubber, iron ore, bauxite, mica and even semi-finished engineering and chemical goods. For their part, if Southasian countries can gain access to even a miniscule share of the huge Chinese market, it would bring significant economic dividends.

The past decade has seen a spurt in the level of integration in terms of trade, investment, tourism and infrastructure projects. China's trade with Southasia has recorded over a tenfold jump, from USD 1.2 billion in 1990 to USD 12.1 billion in 2003 (see Table 1). Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively recorded an eightfold and fourfold increase in their trade with China during this period.

Even countries like Afghanistan and Bhutan are now having handsome trade exchanges with this country. The total volume of Sino-Indian trade increased from a mere USD 3.4 million in 1970 to USD 2.9 billion in 2000, and further to over USD 14 billion in 2005. The figure is expected to cross USD 20 billion by 2008.

Pakistan and China are presently negotiating a free trade agreement. However, except for India, which had a surplus of USD 907 million in 2003, most of the other countries face a huge and burgeoning deficit in their trade with China. By 2003, Pakistan's balance of trade deficit with China had increased to USD 1.3 billion, Bangladesh's to USD 1.3 billion, Sri Lanka's to USD 484 million and Nepal's to USD 166 million.

The two-way investment links between India and China are deepening as well. According to Beijing's Ministry of Commerce, there were 101 Indian investment projects in China by the end of 2003, with the total contracted investments amounting to USD 235 million. These are mostly in pharmaceuticals, information technology, agricultural items, automobile components, software and the like. Some of the Indian companies involved include Tata Exports (Shanghai), Lupin Laboratories (Guangzhou), State Bank of India (Shanghai), Aditya Birla Group, Dr Reddy's Laboratories and IT software companies such as Aptech, NIIT, Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys.

China ranks at just 24th in the list of countries in approved by New Delhi in 2003 for cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI). During the period between January 1991 and August 2003, India approved FDI of USD 231 million and a total of 97 Chinese proposals for foreign collaborations. These were mainly in the telecom, metallurgical, transportation, electrical equipment and financial sectors. The first project between India's Mideast Integrated Steel Limited and China Metallurgical Import Export Corporation was commissioned in Orissa in January 1993.

China has also made a conscious effort to build linkages with the smaller countries of the region. In 2004, Bangladesh received a total foreign investment of USD 660.8 million. China was ranked 13th in the list of countries in terms of cumulative FDI, while India was slightly ahead at the 11th position. In Nepal, China had the third-largest share (9.2 percent) among the industrial joint ventures set up between 1988-89 and 2002-03. This private entrepreneurial participation is an interesting

development, for China's economic interaction with Nepal was dominated by liberal economic assistance in the past. Beijing helped in several infrastructure projects, including the Sunkosi hydroelectric project, and the Prithvi and Kodari highways.

Pakistan has become an important hub for Chinese investment. The Chinese firm Meteorological Construction Corporation's investment of USD 73 million in zinc and lead exploration and a mineral-development project in Balochistan is indicative of China's quest for raw materials. Chinese bicycle-manufacturers rolled out over 150,000 bikes from its units located in Hyderabad, Lahore, Karachi and Gujrat in Pakistan. Very recently, a Chinese company decided to invest USD 300 million in Total Telecom, a local company, which will make it a very large player in Pakistani telecommunications, having an overwhelming stake in a leading cellular operator.

However, the biggest Chinese investment in the region is at the Gwadar deep-sea port on the Balochistan coast, 460 km from Karachi. Located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and outside the Strait of Hormuz, enjoying a high commercial and strategic importance, Gwadar is likely to be increasingly used for energy import. This is accompanied by the construction of the coastal highway to Karachi. Islamabad's recent decision to invest in connecting Gwadar port by rail so as to streamline cargo movement indicates the great expectations it has for Gwadar. Its presence in Gwadar provides China with easy access to the Persian Gulf. Along with its access to the Bay of Bengal through Burma, Gwadar has overhauled China's maritime security and given it total access from the mountains to the sea.

Deepening linkages

At the regional level, China's silent quest to enter SAARC has been partially fulfilled, with it recently having obtained observer status in the regional forum. This is another route that China hopes to use to effectively enter the Southasian market. China has never been a part of the subcontinental past, its political ethos or its cultural panorama, and may not fit into Southasia's complex socio-economic composition and political culture. Possibly to camouflage this oddity, the US, EU, Japan and Korea have also been given the same status in SAARC. However, it must be accepted that China is in a different league. It can make a significant difference in either consolidating SAARC through substantive cooperation-integration action, or eroding its functioning through counteractive action against the traditionally established pivotal role of India.

China's SAARC venture finds a striking parallel in its status in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, where it is



Rajiv and Deng, 1988

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doggedly presenting its case for full membership. The vital role it played in the Kuala Lumpur East Asia Summit in 2005 only shows that it aspires to thwart any attempt by other global entities to assert their power in the region.

In fact, China's traditional goal of enhancing national power remains intact in its Southasia mission as well. What has changed is its use of sophistication in diplomacy, diversity of means, and deployment of newer instruments and a variety of engagements. It is still anybody's guess as to whether the change in China's attitude towards India will be sustained on a protracted basis, especially in terms of resolving core boundary disputes, but there is no doubt that Beijing is giving it a serious try.

What is striking in all this is the seemingly irreversible nature of the growing economic engagement between China and Southasia. These economic ties cannot be withdrawn with the flick of a switch when tensions flare. China, which is concerned about its credibility as a friendly neighbour and responsible power, is expected to further build upon the developing relationship with India, rather than uproot it under the pretext of national security.

There is little doubt that the relationship between China and Southasia will play a key role in shaping the structure of the international system in the days to come. Deep linkages and Beijing's increasing presence in the region indicate the immense potential for cooperation. At the same time, geo-economic ties are accompanied by a level of political competition, especially in the Sino-Indian context. It is imperative that a mutually beneficial mechanism is created that overcomes the conflict dynamic. The engagement between China and Southasia must be navigated in a manner that benefits all participants – China and the individual countries of our region.

Pakistan and the 'alliance maze'

The emerging Beijing-Islamabad strategic alliance is part of a crosscutting web of relationships along the northern coast of the Arabian Sea, whose complexity is enhanced by Chinese inroads into the Pakistani economy.

BY EJAZ HAIDER

Since 1950, when Pakistan recognised China, ties between Islamabad and Beijing have steadily grown and now involve multiple strategic objectives. The economic ties between the two have continued to expand, and China has been one of most reliable and consistent exporters of military hardware to Pakistan. The two have cooperated in the nuclear field as well as in missileery. In fact, one of the reasons cited by India to justify its May 1998 nuclear tests at Pokhran was to offset the Sino-Pakistani strategic combination.

In the shifting landscape of global strategic alliances, the Pakistan-China relationship has become even more pivotal as a counter to opposing hubs of power, the most important being the emerging Indo-US strategic partnership. Both Islamabad and Beijing have a stake in curtailing the outreach of this combination of power, and China is today actively engaged in using its relationship with Pakistan to enhance its influence in the Persian Gulf as well as Central Asia.

Inland, the two countries have agreed to extend the Karakoram Highway (KKH), to connect it with the Central Asian republics. On the Balochistan coast, China is engaged in building up the Gwadar port, the overbearing strategic importance of which has been ignored even as analysts focus on the project's economic importance – the revenue as well as income from maintaining the port and supporting infrastructure. China has financed a significant portion of Phase I of the Gwadar construction and related road connections within Pakistan. In return, Islamabad has allowed sovereign guarantees to China regarding dispute resolution as part of the Bilateral Investment Treaty

and the acceptance of Chinese naval presence.

The arrangement on Gwadar allows China to sit atop one of the world's most important SLOCs, the acronym used by strategic analysts for 'sea-lanes of communication'. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, the Indian Navy has had an arrangement with its US counterpart to escort shipping through this SLOC from the Gulf of Aden to the Strait of Malacca, just east of the South China Sea. Being at Gwadar means China will only be 250 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, a key channel for the flow of world oil supplies and other commercial merchandise. Moreover, Beijing will gain direct access to the

Persian Gulf. In the final outcome, the KKH extension and Gwadar port construction allow China to diversify its oil-import routes, as well as make its presence felt in both the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

For Pakistan, this arrangement works towards buffering the Indo-US influence in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea waters. With India aspiring for a blue-water navy, it is to Pakistan's advantage to pull China into its territory to forestall any possible

Indian misadventure, including a possible blockade. Indeed, Pakistan plans to treat Gwadar as a 'sensitive defence area', and has made clear its intention of using the Chinese navy as a 'forward defence' against any maritime hostility.

The most direct impact of the Gwadar port will be on the United States. With its existing and projected interests in the Persian Gulf region, the US was looking to establish outright supremacy through its naval presence and the presence of amenable governments. Moreover, its maritime cooperation with India in the Arabian Sea was developed to achieve exactly what Pakistan and China are attempting through Gwadar – ie, to enhance their sphere of





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terror', and has received enormous military and economic support from Washington DC since 9/11. Islamabad enjoys the status of a major non-NATO ally, and the Pakistani political enclave remains highly susceptible to US pressure. There being little prospect of the 'war on terror' coming to an end, the US-Pakistan relationship is likely to remain intact for the near term. At the same time, however, anti-US sentiment among the Pakistani masses has grown, as have suspicions in the US with regard to Pakistan's behaviour as a dependable ally.

To add to this 'alliance maze' is the possibility that the counter to Gwadar may come from port facilities in Iran. The US, given its overt opposition to current Iranian policies and its attempt to generate a global sanctions regime against Teheran, is likely to be caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, it is adamant on increasing Iran's international isolation; on the other, it is desperate to undermine Gwadar and all that this port project represents. There is a suggestion that the US might use India to lead the initiative to revitalise the Iranian facilities while turning a blind eye to the development.

There are also issues to be confronted within the Pakistan-China relationship. On a government-to-government level, Sino-Pakistan interests are likely to remain aligned for the foreseeable future.

However, there is escalating bottom-up pressure being generated against Chinese trade interests within Pakistan. Bilateral trade is on the rise, amounting to USD 1 billion in the first quarter of 2006 alone, which is a manifold increase over the same period in 2005. Unlike the Sino-Indian relationship, however, the trade balance here remains heavily in favour of China. The two countries have also agreed on a free trade agreement (FTA), for which negotiations and implementation are proceeding concurrently. While the FTA is likely to further increase the overall trade volume, the balance will continue to benefit China, a matter causing consternation in Pakistani business circles.

There was already much resentment against the influx of Chinese goods in the Pakistani market, made possible through smuggling through the Karakoram Highway. Recent surveys have established that Chinese products worth between USD 1-3 billion are pouring into the country informally, and have replaced much of the informal trade in Indian goods. Interviews with small businesses suggest that the availability of smuggled Chinese goods has led to the closure of a number of cottage industries. The FTA, businessmen fear, will

influence to oversee the shipping activity and the 'great game' of oil flows from the Gulf.

It is clear that Washington DC is not happy with the Gwadar arrangement, and internal Pentagon memos point to the Chinese presence as a worrisome factor. Some reports even indicate a US hand in the troubles in Balochistan, linked to Washington DC's opposition to both the port project and proposed oil and gas pipelines from Iran. Pakistan has indicated that it is prepared to be at the centre of an energy grid that extends to China. There are already significant moves by India and the US acting in concert to help develop alternate port facilities in the Gulf in order to divert traffic from Gwadar.

Pakistani worries

An analysis of the complex structure of the alliances between the various countries opens up a number of possibilities for the future. While it is clear that Pakistan and China intend to challenge the Indo-US partnership in the region, economic and other forms of cooperation between China and India are also steadily growing. Trade ties between the two are reaching record highs. Moreover, the two economies are becoming increasingly complementary, and prospects for a lasting economic relationship are very bright. New Delhi and Beijing have also made moves to promote military cooperation in the form of joint exercises, some involving Russia as well. India is also a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, under which it is working with China on counter-terrorism exercises.

To add to the cross-connections, Pakistan is arguably the most active US ally in the 'war on

Recent surveys have established that Chinese products worth between USD 1-3 billion are pouring into the country informally, and have replaced much of the informal trade in Indian goods.

cause further devastation of small and medium enterprises in Pakistan. Thus, an increasing contradiction is becoming evident between the overall official vision of the Sino-Pakistani relationship and the commercial interests within Pakistan. Thus far, Islamabad had tried to maintain some balance by protecting key industries, but the FTA has removed that option. It is likely that the bottom-up pressure from Pakistani business could impact state-level ties with China.

Prioritising Pakistani stability

So what does the 'alliance maze' mean for the future? The most likely scenario is as follows: on a bilateral level, the Sino-Indian relationship will remain cordial in the short- to medium-term. However, China will continue to build stronger ties with Pakistan, and from time to time it will signal to New Delhi and Washington DC the importance it places on its relationship with Islamabad. In all likelihood, Pakistan and the US will continue to collaborate, albeit within an increasingly disparate framework. Islamabad would do well to draw its lines clearly, ensuring that US pressure does not undermine the Sino-Pakistani relationship. Meanwhile, India will enhance its influence in West Asia, even though it is unlikely that Iran would play on India's turf unless the US-Iran tensions subside. The overarching alliance structure will not conform to the bilateral arrangements. Amidst

these crosscutting relationships, it is safe to say that over the next decade the strategic balance of power in South Asia is likely to be defined by an Indo-US versus Sino-Pakistani alliance.

Given this, Islamabad should expect significant moves from the opposing camp to undermine its arrangement with Beijing. Targeting Pakistan's internal fault-lines would be one way of doing that. Involvement in the Balochistan crisis could serve this interest, and the lingering Waziristan conflict could also be used to keep Pakistan unstable. Direct harm to Chinese interests in Pakistan could also affect the arrangement, for while Beijing let pass the February killing of Chinese engineers in Hub, near Karachi, frequent recurrence of such events could jeopardise any lasting collaboration on strategic mega-projects.

For Pakistan, internal stability comes above all else. For one, peace in Balochistan is essential for the progress on the Gwadar front. At the same time, Islamabad will have to ensure that indigenous anti-state elements do not stall strategic collaboration with China, nor allow the West to point fingers at Pakistan for harbouring extremists. Finally, while the pro-China developments are beneficial, a diversified foreign policy still remains essential. Pakistan's role in the Muslim world and efforts to present Islamabad as a responsible nuclear power to allay Western fears must be invigorated concurrently.



**Oxfam
Hong Kong**

Programme Officer – Bangladesh

(A two-year contract position on renewable basis based in Bangladesh)

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The successful candidate MUST meet the following requirements:

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- At least 5 years of experience in managing development programmes in Bangladesh or in other South Asian countries, with a focus on gender and equity issues
- Experience working with international NGOs and support agencies
- Hands-on experience in appraisal, monitoring and evaluation of women-related programmes and projects
- Expertise in initiating new partnerships with local NGOs in Bangladesh and the South Asian region
- Strong training and facilitating skills, with familiarity with participatory tools and methods
- Able to travel extensively and work in remote areas
- Excellent verbal and written communication in English plus one of the local languages in the region
- A commitment to Oxfam's approach to development

This position will be based in Bangladesh without any expatriate package provided.

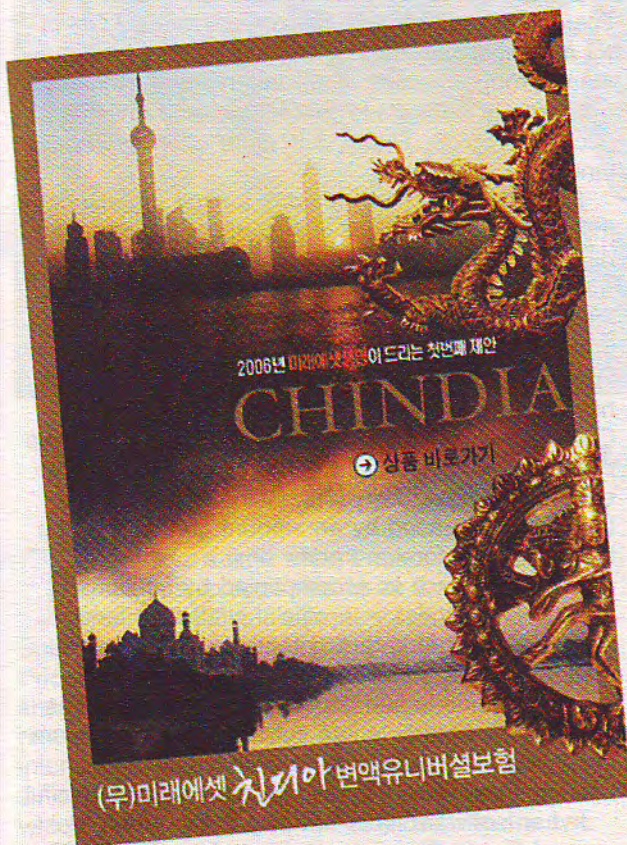
Closing date of applications: 10 September 2006. Please send your application letter, CV with current and expected salary and date of availability to Human Resources Manager, Oxfam Hong Kong, 17/F., China United Centre, 28 Marble Road, North Point, Hong Kong or by email to hr@oxfam.org.hk. (Applicants who are not invited for an interview within one month after the closing date may consider their applications unsuccessful).

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China, Southasia and India

The relationship between Southasia and China has necessarily to be seen through the prism of the relationship between India and China.

BY SIMON LONG



Advertisement for an insurance company

There was a time, not so long ago, when King Gyanendra was believed to have a 'China card'. By advertising his regime's willingness to cosy up to Beijing, it was argued, Nepal's other foreign partners – and especially Sinophobic India – would be scared into giving him an easy ride. Of course, it did not work out like that. Indian diplomats in fact like to boast of the "close dialogue" they maintained with China through Nepal's crisis earlier this year. The king played his China card but, as Rhoderick Chalmers of the International Crisis Group

put it, "it turned out to be the two of clubs."

The episode is typical of the ambiguity and misunderstanding with which China is perceived in Southasia. Does emerging China represent a commercial opportunity or an economic threat? Are the smaller countries of the region to perceive Beijing as an ally against the overweening ambitions of the regional hegemon, or as New Delhi's 'strategic partner'? There are three main reasons for the uncertainty: that the relationship is in flux; that China is a closed society and its policymaking is opaque; and that it can be both opportunity and threat, friend and enemy at different times, or even simultaneously.

The central thread in all this is the China-India relationship, which is having an ever-bigger influence on Beijing's bilateral ties with every other Southasian country. Diplomatic relations between Delhi and Beijing are better than at any time since the war in 1962. China's president, Hu Jintao, will travel to India before the end of 2006. Whatever the other stops on his itinerary, the visit will reinforce the message that China has no higher priority in Southasia than improving its relations with India. Some Indians are rather carried away by this – they propose that this might be the dawn of a new era of partnership and cooperation, an 'India-China nexus' that will change the world.

There are strong grounds for scepticism. First, Indian suspicion about China run deep, and the disagreement that caused the 1962 war still looms large. Usually labelled a 'border dispute', it is not some minor cartographic tiff. The size of the Chinese-controlled territory India claims in Ladakh is as large as Switzerland. China's claim to what is now the state of Arunachal Pradesh covers an area three times larger. Since 1988, working groups have been discussing the dispute. Their main aim has not been to reach agreement so much as to shelve the issue, allowing relations to improve in other areas.

New impetus was injected, however, when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited China in 2003.

In each of the past four years, China's total foreign trade has increased by an amount greater than the total of India's foreign trade.

Talks on the border were transferred to a much higher level. A settlement, involving 'swapping' claims and some minor face-saving border adjustments, still seems remote, due to the political difficulty of selling such a deal in India. New Delhi diplomats poo-hoo the notion that Hu's visit might herald a breakthrough on the border dispute, but an agreement is no longer inconceivable.

Blooming bonhomie

Chinese scholars say that their government's renewed interest in India was provoked by America's attempts to "use India to contain China". Kishore Mahbubani, a senior Singaporean diplomat who now heads the Lee Kwan Yew School for Public Policy, has made a similar point rather differently: that China is "buying political insurance now" from all its neighbours. It knows America will be alarmed by its emergence as a great power and, far-sightedly, wants them to shun any lurch into an anti-China alliance.

China's 'all-weather' friendship with Pakistan has always complicated relations with India, but Beijing has long stopped voicing explicit support for Islamabad's stance on Kashmir. It also shares India's concerns about Pakistan as a base for the export of violent jihad. Pervez Musharraf has recounted the telling-off he received in Beijing over the Pakistani-trained militants pitching up in China's western, partly Muslim, region of Xinjiang.

Yet some Indian analysts still talk of China's 'strategic encirclement' of India – ie, its attempts to make friends with all of India's neighbours, from Sri Lanka to Burma. Indian diplomats complain that China "does not want to accept us in the same league", pointing to Beijing's reluctance in welcoming India as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This is one reason why India sets such store both by its nuclear arsenal, and by its work-in-progress on civilian nuclear cooperation with the United States.

When India became a declared nuclear power in 1998, Vajpayee wrote to President Bill Clinton, citing as a reason for the move, "an overt nuclear weapons state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962". China, which had reacted calmly to India's bomb, was peeved at being used as justification. At the time, Chinese officials implied that they were ready if it was an arms race India wanted. Such nuclear sabre-rattling has died down in the new bonhomie that has flowered since.

As China's economy grows, however, it will probably want an army commensurate with its economic might. India may find it hard to believe

Chinese intentions are benign. India and China will also find themselves in competition for natural resources, especially energy, despite their agreement to 'cooperate' in acquiring such resources. They will also find themselves fighting for market share, despite the much-hyped 'complementarity' of their economies.

Hardware-software

Two-way merchandise trade between China and India, expected to be more than USD 20 billion this year, has increased tenfold since 1999. Just a few years ago, many Indian businesses viewed China as a competitive menace that was about to destroy them through the use of an undervalued exchange rate, free or subsidised real estate, and unlimited access to credit. Today, it is more often seen as a land of opportunity.

Nevertheless, there remains a huge imbalance in the trading relationship. This is not so much in the direction of trade – which, on India's figures, shows a small Chinese surplus – as in its relative importance. China is now India's second-most important trading partner, and its biggest source of imports – 7.3 percent of the total in 2005. India, however, accounts for less than one percent of China's overall trade. This is a symptom of the two countries' relative weight in the world economy. In each of the past four years, China's total foreign trade has increased by an amount greater than the total of India's foreign trade.

This imbalance is accompanied by continued Indian nervousness – in official circles, at least – about Beijing's long-term intentions. This is one reason for scepticism about some of the rosier claims for Sino-Indian economic cooperation. The idea that somehow Indian software skills can team up with Chinese hardware to produce a world-beating 'Chindia' combination so far seems fanciful.

Indian software firms have no option but to expand fast in China, because their multinational clients demand it. But they know that, in the long run, China is a big potential competitor. Correspondingly, among some Chinese policymakers, India's rise is being viewed with a certain edginess. They have noticed that the emergence of China as a lower-cost competitor was a proximate cause of Southeast Asia's financial crisis in 1997. Looking around for the source of such a threat to China's present dominance, India seems the obvious candidate. It is not, but it probably needs to be – as China grows richer and ages, and a young India grows up looking for work in the global economy.

Tackling China, regionally

REUTERS



Chinese soldier shows the way

BY ALKA ACHARYA

There was a time when the troubled Sino-Indian relationship appeared to be the dominant feature of China's presence in the Subcontinent. The tussle between India and the People's Republic went beyond bilateral affairs, to shape the direction of China's engagement with the rest of Southasia as well. Wary of Beijing's intentions, New Delhi has always been watchful of China's relationships with the smaller neighbours, which further intensified mistrust between the two Asian giants.

The noticeable improvement in the Sino-Indian relationship today stands in sharp contrast to India's dealings with its regional neighbours, which tend to be problem-prone and crisis-ridden. For the first time since 1962, a state of affairs currently prevails such that the India-China bond generates greater optimism than the Southasian relationships.

Indeed, Sino-Indian relations are on the upswing in all spheres – political, economic and cultural. The once-intractable border now appears less

formidable as a barrier to improved relations, and the two capitals have managed to overcome the diplomatic difficulties that surfaced in the wake of Pokhran II. Controversial issues remain, including misgivings about China's strategic objectives, especially with regard to its military ties with Pakistan, and yet a framework and mechanism for dealing with problems is in place and appears to be working. There is now ongoing dialogue at various levels.

But it is too early to describe the Sino-Indian relationship as vibrant. Today, it can be likened to an inverted pyramid: the broadest level of interaction is at the top, among a host of senior politicians, officials and members of government-sponsored delegations. The next level is made up of a few members of academia, media and think tanks, engaged in formulating a broader framework for collaboration and research. It is at the people-to-people level that the relationship is at its narrowest, with interactions between India and China

India cannot hope to match China's ascendancy if it cannot take the rest of Southasia along with it.

By substantially reconfiguring its foreign policy and addressing the concerns of its smaller neighbours, New Delhi can restrain or curb the tendency of the smaller states to pull China deeper into the Subcontinent's own strategic equations.

virtually non-existent.

Tourist exchanges between the world's two most populous nations are minimal. Chinese and Indians know very little about each other, and popular perceptions tend to be out of sync with evolved realities. For example, the views of even better-informed Indians on the People's Republic are limited to its economic rise on the one hand and, on the other, the belief that Beijing has designs on Indian territory.

Building regionalism

To derive maximum benefit from the relationship with China, India must study how Beijing itself has crafted effective economic regionalism within its East and Southeast Asian neighbourhood. Not only would a strong cooperation model in Southasia build up the regional economy for its own sake; this would also make it easier for Southasia and India as a whole to engage with China.

Southeast Asia provides an illuminating example of how strong trade links can benefit all countries involved. When China began opening up to the outside world, the first response of its smaller neighbours to the south and east was deep suspicion. In less than two decades, however, there has been a complete turnaround, with China engaged in flourishing partnerships. Beijing has effectively played the role of economic driver in the region, and a China-ASEAN free trade area is on the anvil, which would have an estimated GDP of about USD three trillion.

There is obviously an element of long-term calculation as Beijing sets about establishing a high degree of interdependence with the other economies of the Asian-Pacific region, but today there is unambiguous acceptance of China's central role in any regional economic formation. Almost half of China's total trade today is intra-regional, and where trade is not balanced the smaller neighbours have been 'conceded' trade surpluses. Such policies have given great impetus to regional economic growth, such that investments are starting to be made across borders.

In strong contrast to China, India has been unable to emerge as the principal moulder of the economic order of its own region. Besides the absence of stronger trade linkages between the countries of SAARC – and perhaps because of it – the region is rife with inter-state differences, mainly between India and each of the Southasian neighbours.

The China card

It was following the 1962 India-China border conflict,

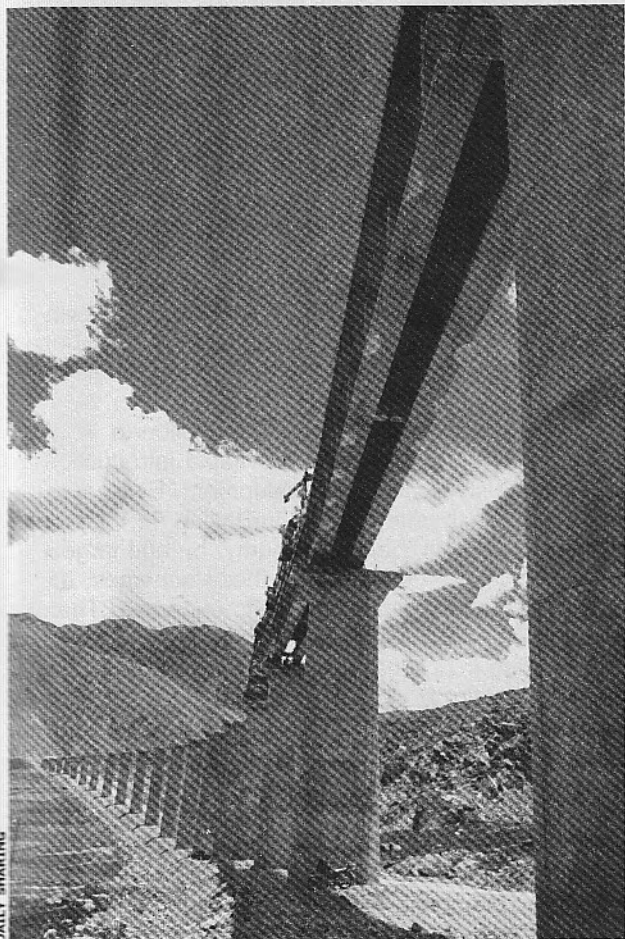
when the latter laid the foundations of its enduring entente with Pakistan, that Beijing came to be seen by other Southasian states as a useful countervailing power to big India. China was not averse to capitalising on the leverages this offered. Such a scenario is obviously not productive in the long term, because ultimately Southasian states have to devise ways of coping with the challenges to their security and development within a cooperative framework. For its part, since the mid-1990s Beijing has overtly adopted a more 'balanced' approach towards Southasia, especially with regard to the India-Pakistan scenario.

At the same time, there is no escaping that China's presence in the Subcontinent is impressive, the economic largesse distributed to India's smaller neighbours significant, and its cordial relations with all of them in sharp contrast to the troubled nature of India's corresponding relationships. In addition, there is the entire gamut of issues arising from China's strategic objectives vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean, which raise the stakes of its relations with the littoral states. Geographically, it seems incumbent upon India to play a major role within a cooperative, multilateral structure in the formulation of a regional framework of relationships.

Against this backdrop, dragging China into the quagmire of a tension-ridden SAARC – such as according it observer status in November 2005 – is not the best way to sort out problems internal to the Southasian region. India must set about putting the Southasian house in order by improving its relations within the region, and cooperative security must be firmly established as the sine qua non of further progress. By substantially reconfiguring its foreign policy and addressing the concerns of its smaller neighbours, New Delhi can restrain or curb the tendency of the smaller states to pull China deeper into the Subcontinent's own strategic equations.

The China-Southasia matrix is at an unprecedented juncture. China's political and economic presence in the region is bound to intensify. What is needed now is for that interaction to increase at a people-to-people level. If India and its neighbours want to gain from the newfound amity between the two giants, they must start working towards a more effective regional framework between themselves in Southasia. The engagement between an ascendant China and a Southasia that acts regionally has the potential to transform the lives of more than two billion people.

Cultural invasion by rail



DAILY BHARING

BY **TENZIN TSUNDUE**

Dhargyal is worried that his ancestral land has been dug up like a minefield, and that his nomadic family is desperately searching for temporary shelter for their yaks and sheep. Living in Dharamsala, home to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile, Dhargyal can neither go back to his remote Tibetan home, nor can he stop worrying.

Like Dhargyal's family, there are hundreds of Tibetan families who have lost their land to the recently opened train track that runs from Golmud in Qinghai to Lhasa. Even while Beijing trumpets the railway – the highest in the world – as an engineering feat and an economic boon in waiting, these families are either yet to be paid for their confiscated land, or are living in temporary shelters awaiting relocation.

A train line to the mainland would have been helpful if the Tibetans had been in a position to decide on it.

The construction of the new train track, which runs between Tibet's extreme northeast and its capital in the central-south, was finished in September last year, almost a year ahead of schedule. The first train pulled into the new station in Lhasa in mid-July. All along the 1140 km track, China Railway's Western Railway administration has acquired huge tracts of land from Tibetan farmers and nomads, cutting through the grasslands the Tibetans call the *Jangthang*. Because the Tibetan plateau is an active earthquake zone, the tracks could not simply be laid on a narrow stretch of land. Instead, huge mounds of earth with sloping sides needed to be built up in order to support the infrastructure, which meant the requirement of large tracts of land on both sides of the line. All in all, the breadth of land acquired for the line averages 100 metres.

In Yangpachen, around 90 km northwest of Lhasa where Dhargyal's family lives, the engineers made a mistake and had to re-route the railroad, thus abandoning many kilometres of trenches. The farmers complain that since the fragile soil composition has been disturbed the land can no longer be used for farming; the locals do not have the resources to level this costly mistake.

Nomads in Nagchu, Damxung and Yangpachen have also reported that along with the railroad have come mass deaths of animals under the elevated bridges. Although these bridges were built specifically as underpasses for the animals, the nomads say that the gaps between the pillars supporting the bridges are too small. Sheep, yaks, *chiru* (Tibetan antelope) and *kyang* (wild ass) traditionally graze in huge herds in these lands. But when these groups rush between the pillars, stampedes occur that end up killing scores of weak and young animals. What were designed as safe corridors have turned out to be death traps for wildlife and domesticated livestock alike.

Flooding Xizang

The 1 July launch of the railway line has brought with it the fear of many Tibetans in Tibet and Tibetan exiles that it will trigger a flood of Han

What law and iron-fisted suppression could not destroy over the past five decades is now about to fall prey to globalisation.

settlers from the Chinese mainland. There is an odd association here with the traditional stories about Genghis Khan, or the long-ago exploits of warlords in eastern Tibet who came marauding. As a result of the railway, Tibetans are talking not about such conquering fighters but rather about the flow of migrant workers from China, jobless college graduates for whom the train is a direct deliverance into a land of opportunity. Encouraging such aspirations, Beijing advertises Tibet as *Xizang*, meaning 'Western Treasure House'. In major Chinese urban centres, railway tickets are being sold for as little as USD 49, or USD 160 for luxury class. (In London, travel agencies offer the luxury rail trip into Tibet at a whopping USD 8000).

Major Tibetan cities like Lhasa, Golmud, Chamdo and Shigatse are already flooded by Han Chinese businesses and products. In 1997 Beijing attempted to resettle 80,000 Han citizens into a remote area in the northeastern Tibetan province of Amdo. At that time, the activism of Western pro-Tibet campaigns was able to get the World Bank to intervene, and force the withdrawal of the scheme due to a lack of funding. The railway will change the dynamic and make Han settlement difficult to contain. One Chinese development programme estimates that about 200 million Han will be resettled into Tibet by 2015. Tibet's indigenous population is said to be 4-6 million, depending on where you define its boundaries.

Already Tibetans are a minority in their own land vis-à-vis settlers and tourists alike. As the new 'miracle' trains roll into the Lhasa station, Tibetans in Tibet fear they will be submerged into insignificance. The official Chinese tourism department reported more than 1.2 million tourists visited Tibet last year, out of which 92 percent were Han. Conversely, in the 1980s almost the entirety of the small tourist influx was foreigners.

Constructing a railway that would connect Lhasa directly to Beijing was a dream of the Chinese Communist Party since the time of Mao Zedong. While discussing China's takeover of Tibet, Jung Chang, the latest authority on Mao, writes that when the Red Guard ran into difficulty penetrating into Tibet in 1950 due to its dramatic topography, Mao initiated a duplicitous strategy: promising autonomy to the young Dalai Lama, while simultaneously starting to build roads into Tibet. Once a network of roads was built, Beijing was able to send in the People's Liberation Army.

Railway lines that have been built into other parts, such as Inner Mongolia, Manchuria and East Turkistan (Xinjiang), have long shown the inevitability of an influx of Han citizens. Today, 85

percent of the population in Manchuria is Han. Mongolians hardly speak their own language anymore. The restive East Turkistan, meanwhile, remains under tight control of the People's Liberation Army.

Development bullying

The railway is a part of China's Western Development Programme, which is also intended to reach further into the Himalayan belt, thereby being able to facilitate direct trade between South and East Asia. Beijing has plans to extend the railway to southern Tibetan cities such as Shigatse, Gyantse, Nyingchi and Yadong. Two more railway networks from Chengdu and Yunnan in the Chinese south are also planned to connect to the Lhasa railway.

The new line from Golmud will function to 'homogenise' Tibet with the inevitable introduction of Chinese-style modern development. Even as such programmes are touted in Beijing for their potential to boost Tibet's economy, by and large Tibetans cannot participate in these schemes, as most lack technical and scientific expertise. The need to fill carpentry, plumbing, electrical or engineering jobs creates an excuse to import and employ additional Han settlers.

The railway may be symbolic of a new level of incursion, but what is really invading Tibet today is a consumerist culture, in the extreme forms of karaoke bars, alcoholism, prostitution, drug trafficking and widespread mining, besides an overload of tourism. This is a new way of life – driven by economic exercises and enforced by a rampant culture of market economy – in direct opposition to what may be considered basic Tibetan values. But with a facade of liberalism and development promising life's comforts, there is little resistance to the new invasion. What the Cultural Revolution could not destroy with communist brutality and indoctrination, what law and iron-fisted suppression could not destroy over the past five decades, is now about to fall prey to globalisation through the intermediary of the Chinese state and its programmed as well as inadvertent Hanification.

If Beijing truly wants to develop Tibet, it needs to listen to the needs of the Tibetans. Introducing and imposing their own definition of 'development' is nothing more than an act of bullying on the part of the Chinese government. This is what one needs to understand as the railway arrives in Lhasa and spreads its tentacles deeper still into Tibet: in the absence of the Tibetans' ability to decide what they want and do not want, the train tracks are but tools of cultural invasion.

North Nicosia



Thin green line

The best perspective on a conflict always comes from well outside the situation. Here is the story of an Indian journalist's time in Cyprus.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ANANYA VAJPEYI**

For the first four days of July this year, I was in Larnaka, on the island of Cyprus, observing a dialogue on interfaith issues between representatives of Asian and European countries. The group is called the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), to which none of the Southasian countries belongs. I also participated in a journalists' colloquium on media and interfaith issues hosted by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) to coincide with the ASEM dialogue. In what can perhaps be seen as

a reflection on the state of interfaith relations today, the ASEM dialogue collapsed, with the so-called Larnaka Declaration failing to achieve consensus among member states. Next year, the dialogue will be held in China, but it is not clear what document future participants will work from or build upon.

Even for an Indian, coming from a country rife with interfaith conflict, watching the Larnaka summit unfold and then fall apart was difficult. I was disturbed by the inability of states to manage or



mediate the differences, prejudices and disagreements between the communities of faith – some of which are responsible for much of the violence in our world today. The small group of journalists brought to Cyprus by ASEF, an organisation based in Singapore, had a rich and productive conversation in a closed-door meeting on the sidelines of the ASEM event. But the diplomats, ministers and religious leaders participating in the formal inter-governmental dialogue could not so much as draft a two-page statement reflecting some common ground on how to lessen conflict, promote democracy and protect civil liberties in many countries of Eurasia.

Cyprus itself is not exactly a model of Christian-Muslim communal integration. Malaysia, this year's co-host, has its own trouble dealing with the mismatch between a booming economy and a still-conservative society that treats women, non-Muslims and immigrant populations unequally. Next year's host, China, is a country that takes the maximum economic advantage of globalisation, but leaves much to be desired in terms of how it manages internal divisions of religion, class, language and ethnicity. A certain lack of strong leadership on interfaith issues from any of these countries was perhaps to be expected. But that they would fail to steer the ASEM dialogue to any conclusion at all came as something of a shock – especially to the invitee journalists, who found a way to argue without anger, and managed to hammer out a statement of their own that reflected the concerns of the group.

Clarity from without

Being on the deeply divided island of Cyprus, and that too at an international summit on interfaith issues, gave me occasion to reflect afresh on communal conflict in India. Cyprus is fractured into predominantly Greek and Turkish zones, with further

fine distinctions made between Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, settlers from the Turkish mainland, as well as a number of minority groups, including Latins and Armenians. The Greek-Turkish divide is projected backwards into Cyprus's history, which included phases of Byzantine and Ottoman rule, and forward into the fates of both Cyprus and Turkey as members or aspirant members of the European Union. Both past and future are contaminated by the current conflict, and Cypriots are unable to speak either of their history or of their emerging European identity without bitterness and blame.

Turkish troops occupy northern Cyprus. The Cypriot government retaliates against this occupation of more than a third of the island by threatening at every step to jeopardise Turkey's entry into the EU with its veto power. Meanwhile, Greek Cypriots clandestinely sell off their properties in occupied Cyprus and want nothing to do with either Turks or Turkish Cypriots. They reject the idea of co-existence, preferring instead to have the two communities be permanently segregated, referring to the state structure they would prefer as a "bi-zonal bi-communal federation". Though it was only in 1974 that the Turkish army arrived, no one seems to be able to remember a time when Cypriots of different faiths lived together rather than segregated, or when many were bi-lingual in Turkish and Greek.

Moreover, the demonisation among Greek Cypriots of all things Turkish – Ottoman rule, the Turkish language, mainland Turkey, Turkish Cypriot culture – is exacerbated by the general hostility, post-9/11, against Islam and its adherents. Those who practice Greek Orthodox Christianity now feel an irreconcilable difference between themselves and their Muslim countrymen, as well as with Muslim neighbours in the region. They seem to have forgotten that it was a rightwing junta in Athens that, together with the CIA, tried to stage a coup against the Cypriot government led by Archbishop Makarios in 1974, going so far as to attempt his assassination. The Turkish forces first arrived in Northern Cyprus in order to overturn the pro-Western puppet regime installed by the Greek junta. (It might be pertinent to recall, at this point, that the very word *xenophobia* is Greek.)

Conflict has a way of making sense when it involves one's own community, nation or other groups with which one identifies. It is only the quarrels of others that illuminate the pathology and pointlessness of conflict per se, as I discovered in Cyprus. The unending recriminations of Cypriots against one another, combined with the inability of either side to see things from the other's perspective, seemed completely irrational and

Though it was only in 1974 that the Turkish army arrived, no one seems to be able to remember a time when Cypriots of different faiths lived together rather than segregated, or when many were bi-lingual in Turkish and Greek.

counter-productive. But Indians, Pakistanis and Kashmiris – to name three of the many parties deadlocked in conflict on the Subcontinent for the past six decades – are just as absurd in the way they go about relating to one another and addressing (or, rather, failing to address) the issues that divide and agitate them.

It is obvious to an outsider that Greek Cypriots should embrace their Turkish compatriots; that Turkey should withdraw its armed forces from Cyprus; that Turkey and Cyprus should both enter the EU on amicable terms with one another, and abandon their mutual hostility in favour of larger European goals that exceed their conflicted bilateral relationship; that Greece should restrain itself from meddling in the affairs of Cyprus by tugging at the loyalties of Greek Cypriots; that the US should play a constructive role in promoting peace on the island, which stands at the gateway to the entire war-torn West Asia; that the UK, which retains sovereign bases on what ought to be Cypriot territory, should play a palliative rather than obstructive or indifferent role, and so on. Perfectly obvious.

Alas, the United Nations, especially under Kofi Annan, has hit a wall with every proposal to bring this internecine conflict to a sustainable resolution. But before we bemoan this fact, it would be good to remember that the UN is at least allowed to have a role in Cyprus. In Southasia we have not allowed the UN to intercede on Kashmir at all in the recent past, not even with plans that we might then accept or reject through elections, referenda or negotiations. Ever since the armed insurgency against India began in Kashmir around 1990, positions have simply hardened on each side. Even the militarisation of the entire Kashmir region and the escalation of the Indo-Pak stand-off to include nuclear preparedness have not been reason enough for any side to concede ground.

Turning from Cyprus to Southasia. Some 70,000 people have died in this war of, for, in, about Kashmir. Nearly 10,000 have gone missing. India can afford to keep losing soldiers, civilians and money – and indefinitely so, we're told. 'Afford' to? India may have the GDP and the defence budget to afford so much death, but which family can afford to forfeit the lives of its men, the sources of its livelihood, the honour of its women, the future of its children? Who can afford to be at war for 16, or 59 years? The Indian state can, perhaps; the Indian Army can, perhaps; but the people of India cannot, the people of Kashmir cannot, and neither can the people of Pakistan. The people cannot afford the sheer and prolonged suffering that is the Kashmir conflict. To an outsider, surely – a Cypriot, say, or a Turk – this would be crystal clear.

Bi-communal development

In Nicosia, the divided capital of Cyprus, I saw churches and mosques that have changed places

and come to occupy one another's space, depending on what side of the dividing Green Line they happen to be on. There are Arabic inscriptions under Gothic arches, the domes and vaulted ceilings are all mixed up, steeples and minarets confused. All of this makes for interesting architectural dissonance, but it struck me that some degree of violence hides in the very structure of these places of worship that testify to the triumph of one faith at the cost of the other. In India our anxiety is about the outright demolition of temples, mosques, gurudwaras, churches. But the kind of hostile takeover seen in Cyprus presents another form of erasure that is equally violent, or so I felt.

The Greek Cypriots belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. The Turkish Cypriots and settlers from the mainland are mostly Sunni Muslim, but rather secular in comparison to Sunnis elsewhere in West Asia. These two communities inhabit Nicosia together, but this perfectly circular city is divided into northern and southern halves. To take over the shrine of another faith, to surrender the holy space of one's own faith – these are not acts of acceptance or accommodation. When religions enter into conflict with one another through the vicissitudes of history, they seem to acquire an intransigence that is not in itself a feature of any faith as it is conceived or practiced. The paradox is that religions preach tolerance but often breed intolerance.

From the Ledra Museum Observatory in south Nicosia you can look across to the northern side; from the Ledra Palace Hotel checkpoint on the Green Line you can actually walk from south to north Nicosia. For the southern side you need a visa from the Republic of Cyprus; for the northern side, a separate visa is issued in the name of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the TRNC, an entity that lacks international recognition but continues nonetheless to exist, even flourish. Only Turkey recognises the TRNC. On a mountainside just north of Nicosia, the Turks have painted two enormous flags, one Turkish and one of the TRNC, both red and white, which are visible from just about anywhere in the city. Whatever the political merits of the Turkish presence in Northern Cyprus, this is a symbolic gesture that is plainly offensive.

The purpose of these observations is not to berate Cyprus – far from it. After all, Cyprus did host the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue this year, and if this event ended without consensus, the responsibility lies equally with participating countries, sponsors and future hosts. In fact, on its own soil Cyprus is undertaking a massive project of heritage restoration called Bi-Communal Development, with monies from the EU, UN, USAID and others. The project appears to be working well in both the south and the north, and many buildings of historical importance have already been restored under a scheme that benefits Christians and Muslims alike. My purpose, rather,

To take over the shrine of another faith, to surrender the holy space of one's own faith – these are not acts of acceptance or accommodation.

has been to think critically about India, to allow myself to be prodded to do so by the sights and sounds of Cyprus.

Naturally as I traversed the fractured city of Nicosia with its mosques-turned-churches and churches-turned-mosques, going back and forth across the Green Line, I thought about the razing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya back in 1992, and the catastrophic effect that one act of destruction had on the psyche of India as a whole – polarising Hindus and Muslims as never before, except perhaps during Partition. The sanctity of religious spaces and the integrity of political orders are both fragile, and this fragility must be acknowledged and respected. Communities and countries cannot mess with either sacred spaces or territorial borders without paying a terrible price, it seems, whether these be their own or those of others.

Like India, Cyprus too brings a great deal of its repressed hostility and hatred – in Cyprus's case, self-hate – to the politics of nomenclature. In Cyprus proper, place names have been Hellenised with a vengeance; in Northern Cyprus, Turkish versions of place names are revived or invented. To a foreigner this is bewildering – every town and city, apparently,

has a series of historical names dating from different periods and, in addition, three contemporary names: one Greek, one Turkish and one Anglicised. When the clash of identities becomes this cacophonous, all identity is lost, and one comes away from a place like Cyprus feeling that its signatures are confusion and prejudice, not two ancient and glorious cultures in a delicate and beautiful balance. Is this how visitors to India feel, especially if they happen to be present in the midst of one or another 'communal clash', riot, curfew or attack? Can one not then begin to understand the severe criticism of Indian civilisation, the sentiments of chastisement and disgust, expressed by a traveler with some insider status, like V S Naipaul or Pankaj Mishra?

Israel's recent aggression in Lebanon saw refugees pour into Cyprus in great numbers. As this small island gave temporary shelter to others in the neighbourhood who were fleeing the consequences of interfaith conflict, it might have paused to consider the fineness of the line it walks every day – between a tense and reluctant coexistence of cultures, and outright civil war. We in Southasia might do well to consider, likewise, where it is we draw the line.



Afghanistan National Development Strategy

The Afghan Compact, signed between the Government of Afghanistan and its international development partners in London at the end of January this year, provided a unique model of development partnership through which aid to Afghanistan will be linked and targeted towards the attainment of a number of benchmarks in the post-Bonn era. The National Development Strategy - Afghanistan's PRSP, will co-ordinate the development, consultation and implementation of sector strategies, oriented towards the achievement of these compact benchmarks and MDGs over the period 2006-2010.

Transitioning from interim to full ANDS now requires the formulation of fully costed multi-year sector strategies for inclusion within the 1386 National Budget, which commences 21 March 2007. National and provincial level consultations will follow, leading to the adoption of the final ANDS by the spring of 2008.

To advance this agenda, the Government of Afghanistan now requires the following full-time posts for the effective co-ordination of the ANDS

- Strategic Advisor to President's Chief Economic Advisor
- Special Assistant to the President's Chief Economic Advisor
- Senior Advisor to the ANDS Director
- Senior Sector Strategy Advisor
- Senior Public Finance and Expenditure Management Advisor
- Senior Human Resources Management/Capacity Development Advisor
- Advisor for Communications
- Advisor for Consultative Group mechanisms
- Advisor for National and Provincial Consultations
- Research and Data Management Advisor

Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (UNDP)

The Afghanistan Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund (\$64m 2006) is an ambitious venture managed by UNDP on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan. In seeking to bring enhanced support to the Ministry of Counter Narcotics and leadership to the implementation plans of the National Drug Control Strategy to achieve the objective of a sustainable reduction in poppy production in Afghanistan, the following senior position is currently available:

- Counter Narcotics Trust Fund Manager (UNDP)

Further information and details on how to apply can be found at:
www.undp.org.af/jobs



BritishRedCross

Community Mobilisation Manager

Maldives Recovery programme
Competitive Salary plus excellent benefits, 24 months (extendable)
Location: The Maldives, between Male' and Southern Atolls

As part of its response to the tsunami disaster, British Red Cross Society (BRCS) is looking for a Community Mobilisation Manager for the Maldives. The role will provide strategic, technical & practical inputs to the implementation and monitoring of the BRCS recovery programme to reach the expected outcomes for the target population and to ensure a smooth exit strategy for BRCS. Responsibilities also include ensuring that the community-based approach underpinning the programme remains a priority focus, ensuring that affected women and men have a say in decision-making and monitoring of the programme.

A graduate in a relevant subject, you will be experienced in community development and mobilisation including participatory methodologies and participatory monitoring of programme implementation. Experience in livelihoods and recovery programmes, preferably in the tsunami affected region, is also required. It is also desirable that you have implemented cash based responses.

This is an accompanied position.

For information on this and other British Red Cross positions please visit our website and apply online www.redcross.org.uk/vacancies

The British Red Cross is committed to implementing the People In Aid Code of Good Practice and is an equal opportunities employer.

Paradox of the Southasian welfare state

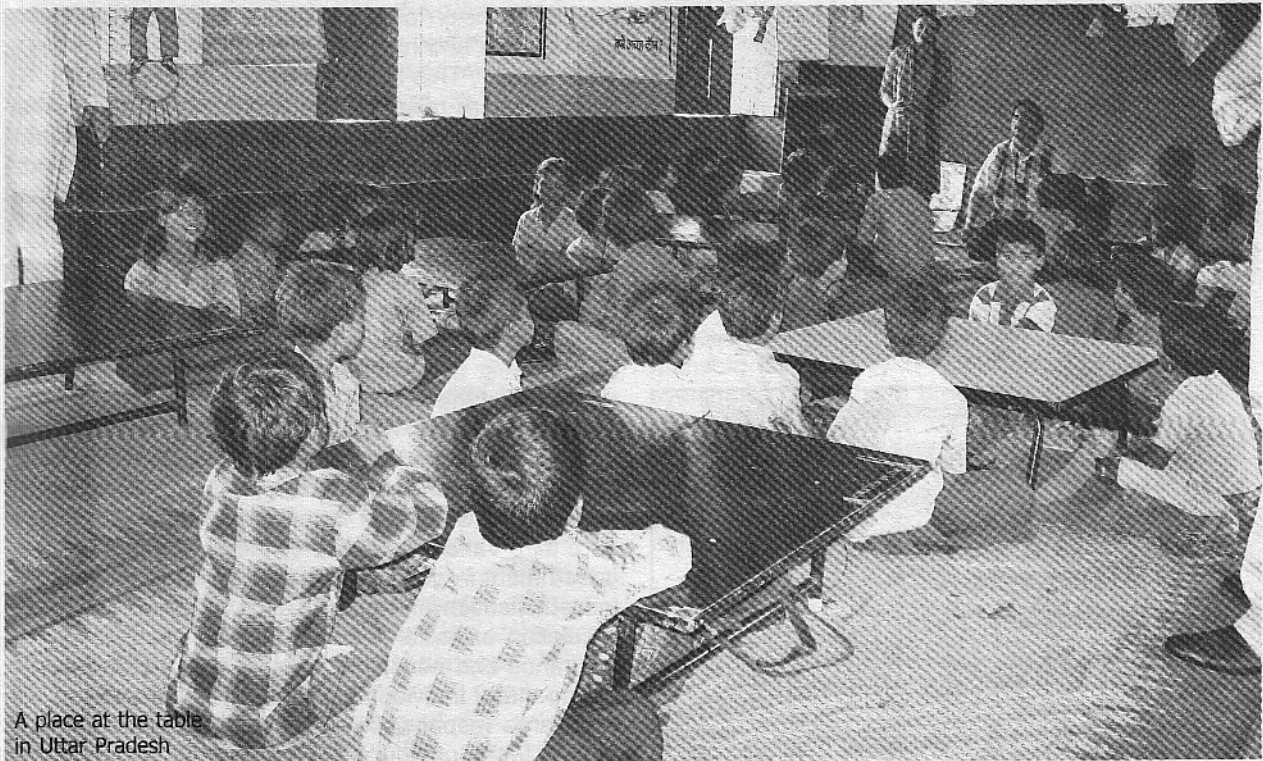
Southasian governments as a whole are already espousing a forward-looking state policy on welfare. The challenge now is to transform policy into action, while addressing the peculiar regional problem of social exclusion.

BY GABRIELE KÖHLER

A common image of Southasia today is that of an eminently dynamic region – ‘driving’ the world economy via its high growth rates, its innovations and even, in a relatively new phenomenon, its outward foreign investment. India in particular features on the covers of magazines and scholarly research publications alike, leading with a GDP growth rate of 8-9 percent, pulling in resources from around the world, an electronic outsourcing haven of the developed economies. In the Maldives, which has succeeded in placing itself as a premier tourist destination, GPD per capita has reached USD 2500. Bangladesh is holding ground in its export boom of the past decade, despite the phase-out of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, which it

had used creatively to enter global textile production chains.

Politically, too, Southasia can be seen as a vibrant region, in terms of its visions. The Southasian countries are strong supporters of the Millennium Declaration adopted in the United Nations General Assembly in 2000. The Millennium Development Goals – in which 191 state members of the UN have committed to achieving specific and time-bound results in education, health, HIV/Aids, gender equality and, most significantly, to improve the situation of women and children – now feature in the development plans of regional governments and are consistently used as a normative and policy point of reference by Southasian politicians.



A place at the table
in Uttar Pradesh

The Indian Supreme Court decision to guarantee a midday meal to all schoolchildren in the country has been interpreted as a *right to food* for children – and is possibly unique in the world.

The Southasia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has a Social Charter committed to a people-centred framework for social development. Southasian governments have forward-looking constitutions. All are committed to free primary education as a public good, and the majority – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka – feature a commitment to free primary health services. Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka provide public early childhood development support services. In India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, governments offer free school meals, and the Indian Supreme Court decision to guarantee a midday meal to all schoolchildren in the country has been interpreted as a *right to food* for children – and is possibly unique in the world. Pakistan's Constitution commits to provide food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief for citizens in need. These and other social policy elements suggest that Southasia is engaged in developing its own model of a 'welfare state'.

The hybrid Southasian welfare state

Much has been written and argued about welfare states, starting with the seminal work of Gosta Esping-Andersen (*The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton, 1990). He and others have defined taxonomies of the role of government, looking into European, American and Southeast Asian types. Building on that early work, one can unfold a 'cultural geography' of the role of the state and social policy. Styles differ, depending on a country's historically-shaped definitions of public goods, institutional and cultural history, and political programmes regarding the 'appropriate' role and size of government in the overall economy.

The European model of the welfare state is characterised by a broad range of publicly-provided goods – including all levels of education, some elements of health services, as well as economic infrastructure (free highways in some parts of Europe are a prime example) – combined with progressive taxation. The roots of this model lie in the agony and inequality of early industrialisation, which helped invent social democracy, added to the post-feudal, statist approach to industrialisation and notions of social justice embedded in Christianity and Judaism.

The neo-liberal, US-American approach on the other hand is characterised by a preference for the private provision of social goods accompanied by low taxation and high levels of voluntary philanthropy. This model is rooted in American history, where religious and economic refugees who had escaped authoritarian feudal regimes in Europe to arrive in early colonial America felt reticent about a strong state. It was their worries about a state that would again be imposing on citizens' lives, the economy and social organisation that created a preference for self-reliance and group support, and took focus away from state involvement or responsibility. It is this notion of the role of government, and the penchant for a 'small state', that shaped the World Bank's Washington Consensus of the 1980s, as well as its subsequent adaptations around the developing world.

When compared to the European and American models, the Southeast Asian model has been cast as a third variant, because of the strong role of government in guiding enterprises on the path to industrialisation and globalisation, coupled with the regulation of social services through compulsory insurance and pension schemes, and a politically strong state. Individuals and families are seen to take large responsibilities for social development, both in terms of work ethic and the high value placed

Table 1 Central government revenue as % of GDP (2004)

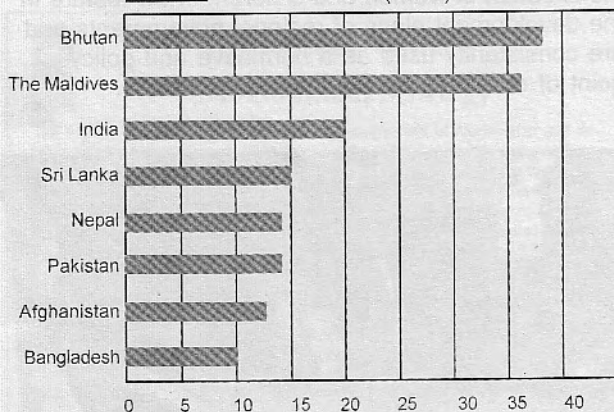
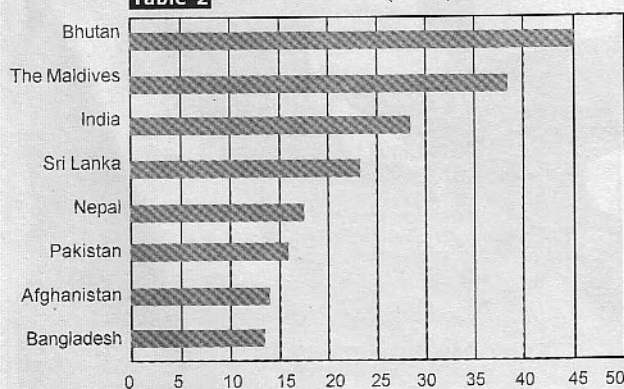


Table 2 Central government expenditure as % of GDP (2004)



on education, reinforcing the impact of public services offered by government. Philosophically, this Southeast Asian variant is often described as 'Confucian'.

It is interesting to compare these – very simplified – European, American and Southeast Asian models with that found in Southasia, and to explore whether the role of government in the Subcontinent might offer a fourth type. A first pointer to this possibility is the extensive array of public goods that Southasian states provide, such as the commitment to free basic social services. A second pointer comes from selected fiscal indicators. Six countries in Southasia are devoting more than 30 percent of government expenditure to health and education – certainly suggesting a welfare state approach (*see Table 3*). Moreover, in four countries – Bhutan, the Maldives, India and Sri Lanka – the share of government expenditure in GDP runs between 20-45 percent, and the share of government revenue to GDP lies between 15-35 percent (*see Tables 1 and 2*).

Sources of this welfare-state 'culture' in Southasia are multilayered. Postcolonial states like India and Sri Lanka were steeped in a notion of rights, entitlements and social justice, drawing on the independence movement, as well as influences in Soviet socialism and British Fabianism – both introduced by elites trained in Oxford and Cambridge. Sri Lanka was actually one of the earliest welfare states, introducing universal education and primary health care services in the 1940s. It has also been argued that Buddhism and Islam, with their principles of altruism and social responsibility – such as the *zakat* system, by which a certain percentage of an individual's earnings are given to the poor – have contributed to shaping Southasian welfarism. These factors suggest something of a hybrid welfare-state model: there is a strong commitment on the part of government to social policy, but in contrast to the tax-reliant European model and in tune with the lower levels of GDP, a larger share of the funding for social goods comes from loans and grants.

Undermined by social exclusion

The Southasian welfare state, then, could be expected to contribute to excellent outcomes in social policies that would positively and directly impact human development. Anyone who knows Southasia will, however, immediately interject: the Southasian welfare-state model, hybrid or not, has had a disappointing performance in terms of implementation, as any social indicators will show (*see box*). Is this due to slipshod delivery, or to systematic corruption and misappropriation of the welfare-state budgets? Is it due to internal and external policy pressure to downsize the state, and privatise and commercialise social services? What is the root cause of this 'Asian paradox' – good macroeconomic performance coupled with political will and commitment to mass welfare, coexisting

Southasia – a Subcontinent of children

More than a half-billion children – 584 million, to be precise – live in Southasia, the largest child and youth population in any region. Southasia's young make up one quarter of the world's children. Almost every second person here is under 18, with the exception of Sri Lanka and India, where they make up 30 and 40 percent of the population respectively.

The youthfulness of the Subcontinent's population is a gift, but it is also a daunting responsibility. And indeed, most of the region's countries are unlikely to meet the targets they have set for themselves to substantially improve the situation of children by 2015. Poverty and deprivation affects as many as 330 million children here. Child malnutrition stunts the growth of every second child. 67 out of 1000 children die before they turn one; another 92 out of 1000 succumb before they turn five. Maternal mortality levels are at the highest level in global comparison, with 560 in every 100,000 births resulting in the mother's death. In education, primary school enrolment is at 74 percent. As a result of decades of poor or unavailable schooling, in India only half of adult women can read; in Nepal, one-in-three; in Afghanistan, one-in-five.

The dire situation of Southasia's children – the most vulnerable group in any society, but even more palpably at risk in situations of gender discrimination and social exclusion – is perhaps the strongest normative underpinning for a genuinely transformative social policy. Credit is due to the governments in Southasia, who have recognised this in their many decisions on education, health, school meals. If the aspirations can be translated into unfettered action, this would serve to drastically and effectively change the situation of a half-billion children in Southasia – building on and building up a Southasian model of the welfare state, and altering the lives of millions of families.

with abject poverty, income disparity and under-performance in terms of health and education? This paradox can only be understood when one looks at the pervasive phenomenon of social exclusion.

Southasia remains a region struggling with manifold layers of social exclusion, defined as systematic or de facto processes of denial of access to entitlements, based on caste, clan, tribe, ethnicity, language and religion, factors that are often bundled with location.* Exclusion is experienced at all levels of society, at the community, inter- and intra-personal levels; it is also

*See for example the works of Janet Gardener and Ramya Subrahmanian, "Tackling Social Exclusion in Health and Education in Asia", DFID, Delhi, 2006; Emma Hooper and Agha Imran Hamid, "Scoping Study on Social Exclusion in Pakistan", Islamabad, 2003; Lynn Bennett, "Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal", World Bank/DFID, Kathmandu, 2006; Annie Namala, "Children and Caste-based Discrimination: Policy Concerns", UNICEF ROSA, Kathmandu, 2006.

deeply entrenched – as some say, for the past three millennia. In Southasia, gender disparities and income poverty cut across all the exclusionary factors and deepen social exclusion. In most of Southasia's social indicators on health and education, there are wide differences between boys and girls, and between the dominant population and those who are marginalised. One telling statistic: the life expectancy of a member of the Dalit caste in Nepal is a full 20 years less than the national average, 40 instead of 60 years.

How does social exclusion work? In health or education, professionals treat children differently depending on their social background. In some schools, Dalit children are made to sit separately or stand at the back of the classroom; they tend to be verbally abused, beaten or ridiculed with impunity more frequently than other children. Teachers miss school as they do not find it worth their effort to make their way to excluded communities. Some doctors are reluctant to touch low-caste patients, whom they consider to be polluting. Cooperatives refuse to buy milk from cows owned by Dalits. Village water points are segregated, and Dalit women cannot collect water at the 'upper-caste' end of the village. Ethnic or tribal groups living in concentrated regions are provided only sporadic services. Some exclusion is also internalised. 'Low-caste' women are taught by their mothers not to wear colourful clothes, nor to expect elaborate wedding ceremonies, as this would not be 'proper'. Dalit children do not enter the homes of Brahmins, and Dalit youth are hesitant to apply for employment in non-traditional occupations.

These exclusionary practices are not limited to caste societies. In other parts of Southasia, systems such as the *biraderi*, or old traditions in tribal communities, have similar effects. The paternal-side matriarchs in a household will often not allow their daughters-in-law to seek medical attention while pregnant or in childbirth – they did not have that luxury themselves, and it would take household resources from other purposes. All of these factors amplify gender-based exclusion and discrimination; they are doubly strong in their

impact on children of excluded communities, as well as for girl children, who experience discrimination not just extraneously in 'society' but also within their own family and immediate community, and who thus experience social exclusion in a compounded, oppressing manner.

Social exclusion undermines the Southasian 'welfare state' and its many social policy measures, and it does so on many levels. Addressing social exclusion therefore requires bold, as well as extensive, policy measures. It requires sufficient public resources to ensure the effectiveness of policies designed to enable social inclusion. It requires ensuring a connection between implementation of policies and legislation, and the fundraising and delivery capacity of central and state- or district-level bodies. It necessitates empowering the socially excluded directly or through civil society organisations, who could genuinely voice their interest. Finally, it requires measures to counter the visible and invisible processes through which elites weaken government decisions to address social exclusion – which in principle is banned in all of Southasia's constitutions – for example, by obstructing delivery or obscuring information on entitlements.

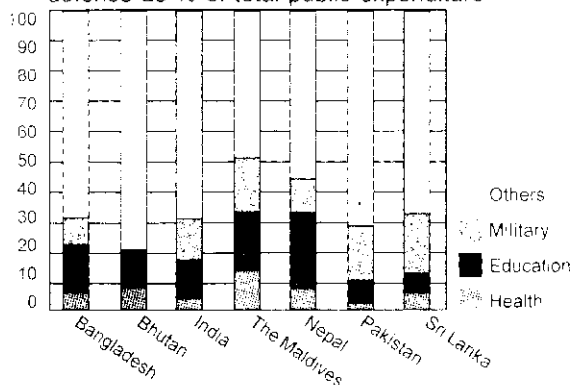
A call for transformative social policy

How then can social exclusion be addressed? Southasia itself is a laboratory of possible answers, offering a host of promising elements. They include political instruments such as reservations, quotas and other forms of political affirmative action. The recently reinstated House of Representatives in Nepal adopted several landmark decisions, one of which is a declaration of intent to reserve 33 percent of all government posts for women. In India, reservations for the 'scheduled tribes and castes' are part of the 1948 Constitution, and have seen periodic and heavily contested amendments throughout the course of India's history. The most recent decision to extend reservations for Other Backward Classes to central educational institutions, leading to a level of controversy, is a reminder of the commitments of the Indian state.

An interesting example comes from Bangladesh, where a large-scale government initiative was introduced to overcome persistent gender disparities in schools: every girl in secondary school is entitled to a government stipend designed to enable her to complete secondary education. Objectives include ensuring that the gap in girls' educations be closed, and delaying marriage. The scholarship is paid directly to the girl student, and continues as long as she passes her exams, attends at least 80 percent of school days, and does not become pregnant. Over time, this enlarged cadre of trained young women can become the women doctors and teachers needed to help the next generation of children go to school, in a country where girls are

Table 3

Public expenditure on health, education and defense as % of total public expenditure



meant to be taught by women teachers. This special measure has helped Bangladesh reach gender parity in education. On a smaller scale, with a similar intent of overcoming social exclusion, Nepal has a stipend for Dalit children to cover the transaction costs of schooling, and serve as an incentive.

There is similar potential in India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, adopted in 2005. Every rural household is entitled to 100 days of paid work per year – as a measure conceived to tackle rural poverty and distress migration. The work offered is basic labour on public works schemes, and would be attractive as a source of income to only the poorest of the poor. But it is an attempt to transform rural communities who are systematically excluded from learning and health by virtue of their extreme economic poverty. Its additional objective is to improve the accessibility and productivity levels of villages that would have positive externalities and virtuous multiplier effects, as more households in villages could buy basic provisions.

One welcome micro-initiative in Uttar Pradesh deserves mention too, as a special effort in the transformative sense, and would require policy decisions if it were scaled up to cover the entire country. One district in UP introduced low, blue-coloured tables in the hitherto furniture-less classrooms. The primary objective was to give children a writing surface and improve their posture and attentiveness. What it seems to be doing in effect, however, is to begin to change the entire dynamics in the classroom. Children feel acknowledged and respected, they literally have a place at the table, and this table is multi-caste; during classroom hours at least, there is a level of social equality. School is becoming enjoyable – for children and hence also for teachers.

Transformative social policy also needs to encompass fiscal budget principles. In India, the government monitors its expenditures for child-friendliness, combing through all budget lines to compile data on expenditure that relates to children. In Nepal, the '20/20 initiative', first introduced at the World Social Summit in Copenhagen, informs an effort by the Planning Commission to ensure that 20 percent of government expenditure is devoted to basic social services.

On the revenue side, India, Nepal and Pakistan have introduced special taxes – a cess – for education; in Sri Lanka, a cess finances the National Plan of Action for Children. India's cess, added to the value-added tax, is devoted to education, and has within one year quadrupled the amount of budget available at the national level for education. Other ideas are to introduce dedicated taxes to fund primary health services.

All this is not sufficient, however. Universalism and social inclusion cannot happen without participation. Questions of 'voice' and

empowerment need to become integral. First, participation is a right. Second, if users co-design social services, the related interventions are far more likely to truly meet needs and expectations. Third, users need to be able to assess and evaluate services, and ideally to have alternative choices. From a welfare state discussion, then, this would suggest several decisive factors for policy choices: consultations to generate inclusive, equitable and transformative policies, and interventions geared to overcoming social exclusion and ensuring every citizen's access to high-quality social services. This could conceivably entail forms of participation built into the processes, notably regarding 'delivery'.

Here too, one can discern an emerging model in Southasia. Without explicit reference to Gandhian notions of village democracy, several Southasian countries have introduced into social policymaking a considerable degree of decentralisation, transferring budget resources and decision-making authority to district levels. The intended outcome is better service delivery; since users determine priorities there is higher transparency, and local authorities and service-providers – teachers, health professionals – are directly accountable to their fellow residents (and voters) in each community.

Decentralisation could be seen as more than just a form of delivery, but rather as a school of policy on its own. Obviously, this can only function to the extent that socially excluded groups and individuals – women, members of the so-called low castes, tribals, young people – are enabled and empowered to speak and decide. Thus, decentralisation mechanisms need to be aware of and sensitive to processes of exclusionary participation, where consultations and participation are only token, because the disenfranchised do not have the means, the time or the confidence to shape decisions. Again, measures introduced by governments – such as quotas for women in community decision-making groups – can provide support, normatively and practically, to gradually ensure genuine inclusion. This is where special measures come in, and can over time have an empowering impact.

One might then posit that a Southasian model of the welfare state is emerging – hybrid in the way it funds social services, but potentially transformative in nature. It is a combination of the European model's principle to provide social goods universally, combined with three new strands. It is guided by an explicitly rights-based approach that transcends the top-down tendency observed in conventional welfare states by integrating genuine participation into decision making. It reinforces the principle of universal coverage with special efforts to address social exclusion, so that the disadvantaged can access quality services. It incorporates moves to change attitudes and behaviours. This model could give new meaning to the notion of Asian drivers.

Dalit intellectualising and the Other Backward Classes

Even as the Indian middle-class anger against reservations for Other Backward Classes subsides, one voice remains consistent. Is Chandrabhan Prasad opposed to OBC reservations because they do not 'deserve' it, or because he wants to prevent Dalits and OBCs from coming together?

BY SHIVAM VIJ

In April and May of this year, the Indian government announced the reservation of 27 percent of the seats in educational institutions run by the central government for Other Backward Classes (OBC), also known as the middle castes. This was an extension of what had already been taking place in institutions run by state governments, as well as in government employment at all levels. A group of New Delhi medical students, aided by corporates and the media, demonstrated for several days against the decision. The agitation – which consisted of a hunger strike, some marches and the offering of copious soundbites on live TV – was sustained on the basis of vague memories of similar protests that took place in 1991. During that year the implementation of reservations had first been sought, as originally recommended in 1980 by the B P Mandal Commission on Backward Classes.

The Pioneer newspaper's consulting editor, Chandrabhan Prasad, has often written in his path-breaking *Dalit Diary* column about how the Indian media ignores the issue of caste, and how rare it is for other publications to give him space to express the Dalit agenda. Ironically, during the agitation earlier this year, Prasad was all over the media – on TV, on the *Times of India's* edit page – opposing the move.



Prasad's contention was not only that the OBCs do not deserve reservations, but also that Dalits would be hurt by the legislation. "The anti-Mandal lobby gained in legitimacy simply because Mandal went the wrong way," he wrote. "It is in that sense that Mandal hurts even Dalits." But this only raises the question, in what sense exactly? Dalits already have reservations at all levels, and New Delhi has now been lobbied and convinced to extend

reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes to the private sector.

Prasad has always held that we are "in the era of Dalits vs Shudras", Shudras being OBCs and collectively referred to as the Bahujan. Although both have traditionally been oppressed, Dalits are considered as holding a place lower in the social and religious hierarchy. It is only recently that he has conceded that the large category of OBCs has within it a number of castes that are as economically and socially deprived as Dalits. His argument is that only these Most Backward Castes (MBCs) deserve reservation, not the "upper OBCs" who own land, and who need a "social revolution" rather than reservations. This contention – supported by neither facts and figures nor greater research, which has otherwise been Prasad's hallmark – has of late

turned vicious, with such statements as: "The upper OBCs have become a ruling social block, but without having produced a cultural elite ... [they] have become an embarrassment for the country and a problem for Dalits/Tribals and the most backward castes."

Prasad has pointed out that the only Dalit member of the Mandal Commission, L R Naik, wrote a dissent in the Commission's report, saying that OBCs consist of two social blocks – the landowning and the artisan castes – and that the latter is more backward and deserves separate recognition, lest the former corners the reservation benefits. Unlike Prasad, however, Naik did not outright oppose reservation for the 'upper' OBCs. In referring to Naik and his note of dissent, Prasad ignores the rest of the Mandal report, which takes three broad criteria – social, educational and economic – and examines each in great detail. (The entire list of criteria is available at www.ncbc.nic.in/html/guideline.htm.)

An important indicator of backwardness for the list is the representation of members of a caste in government employment and elected offices. In other words, be it the upper or lower OBCs, a caste is on the list only if it is not adequately 'represented'. If a caste is not represented in, say, educational institutions, despite being perceived as 'powerful', that is clearly an indicator that caste has in some way been a hindrance to that community's attempts to be part of the mainstream.

The entire logic of reservations is based on lack of representation. To take just one example, a survey by the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of



Mayawati

Developing Societies showed that just four percent of Delhi's journalists are OBCs. Neither does Prasad's subsequent assertion that OBCs "have a fair share in the media, cinema and urban assets as well" stand scrutiny. His assertion that ten of India's states are ruled by Shudra chief ministers is correct, but that is only because of demography. If political vote banks add up, and OBCs become politically powerful, does that necessarily imply that entire castes have been

uplifted? Does Mayawati, by becoming the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (she is all set to occupy the seat again in assembly elections scheduled for February 2007), obviate the need for Dalits to be brought into the mainstream via reservations and other means?

'Lords of the countryside'

One of the tasks of the National Commission of Backward Classes – which oversees OBC reservations at the central level – is to review, every decade, whether any caste is over- or under-represented. Furthermore, a 1993 Supreme Court of India judgment introduced a 'creamy layer' clause, whereby families that are prosperous are not eligible for reservations even if they belong to a reserved-category caste. Chandrabhan Prasad's argument against 'powerful', 'landowning' OBCs is, incidentally, the same as the Indian middle-class/upper-caste argument against reservations for Dalits – that a 'creamy layer' takes away the benefits.

The creation of an MBC list as separate from OBCs will undoubtedly fine-tune the logic of representation in implementation, as has been

An Indian caste primer

OBC: Other Backward Classes. This group of traditionally marginalised castes is recognised in the Indian Constitution as comprising "socially and educationally backward classes".

SC: Scheduled Castes. Gandhi called them Harijans but Ambedkar coined the term Dalit, meaning 'the broken and the oppressed'. SCs were traditionally relegated outside the Hindu-defined social structure. Although recognised by the government in 1937, specific mention was finally made in the Indian Constitution after Independence. Today, this group makes up roughly 16.5 percent of the Indian population.

ST: Scheduled Tribes. Also known as Adivasis and *Girijans*, STs make up hundreds of indigenous tribes, each of which has been officially recognised by the Centre and their respective state governments. Today this group makes up roughly 8 percent of the Indian population.

Shudra: Also known as Bahujan, the Shudras are the lowest ranked of the four *Varnas* of the Hindu caste system, and were historically labourers – often forced – for the other three Varnas. They have been classified as Other Backward Classes.

Dwija: Meaning 'one who is born twice', Dwijas are the three top Varnas in the Hindu social structure – the Kshatriya, Vaishya and Brahmin castes.

Mandal: In 1979, an official decision was made to convene a second commission on 'backward classes'. Chaired by retired judge B P Mandal, the commission submitted a groundbreaking report in December 1980. Finding that India's OBC population was around 52 percent of the country's total, the commission recommended that proportionate reservations be instituted in all public-sector institutions, national banks, universities and colleges, as well as private-sector institutions that have received public money. When the Supreme Court said that the total number of reserved seats in an institution should not exceed 50 percent, OBC reservations were fixed at 27 percent.

Prasad's argument against 'powerful', 'landowning' OBCs is, incidentally, the same as the Indian middle-class/upper-caste argument against reservations for Dalits – that a 'creamy layer' takes away the benefits.

happening in some states. Even as this article is being written, the Supreme Court has said that clubbing together MBCs and OBCs is a violation of Article 14 of India's Constitution, which discusses state and central services. There is a similar problem within the Scheduled Caste (SC) quotas, with some SC communities being over-represented. This is why the Andhra Pradesh state government, for one, has split the 15 percent reservation for SCs into four groups – six percent each for Malas and Madigas (the largest of AP's Dalit castes), and one percent each for the Rellis and Adi Andhras.

Social scientists Yogendra Yadav and Satish Deshpande, in their well-known alternative to the Mandal recommendations, have also stressed splitting the 27 percent reservation into two parts, for upper and lower OBCs. Chandrabhan Prasad, however, says that the upper OBCs do not deserve reservation *at all*. His insistent opposition on this count is perhaps not surprising. Dalits and Shudras all over India have been in conflict with each other, sometimes violently so.

Along with Prasad, intellectuals who opposed the move to reserve seats for OBCs included social scientists Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Andre Beteille. Mehta said that the OBCs were not an exploited community, and that the "script of oppression" they were reading was one simply borrowed from Dalits, who are the worst victims of OBC violence. It is important to keep in mind that exploitation, violence and oppression are not key factors in reservation – there is the law for that. Reservation is about representation: the idea of reservation is to build an India where all castes and communities are represented in all its walks of life. The idea is to end occupational stratification; empowerment becomes an obvious corollary.

As far as the politics of relative 'oppression' goes, Dalits may be outcastes but Shudras are the fourth of the *chaturvarna* order, mythology having it that they were born of Brahma's feet. Their occupation is that of labourers; the traditional texts of Manu declared that any Shudra caught listening to the Vedas would have molten lead poured into his ears. That, then, is the history of the Shudras: sidelined from education and learning, and forced into manual labour. What is so wrong with lowering the bar a bit to give the brightest a chance in the best of India's educational institutions?

The "lords of the countryside" that Prasad talks about are actually a handful of castes amongst thousands. There is an obvious need for fresh

population statistics about the various Other Backward Classes to determine who is 'cornering the benefits' of reservations. Despite boasting the world's largest census exercise, India does not have such statistics. This is due to the fact that a handful of sociologists managed to convince New Delhi authorities that counting OBC numbers in the 2001 census would only further caste identity, and thus the prevalence of caste. The last time OBCs were counted was in 1951, but for some reason the statistics were not made public. Beteille has made a similar argument against OBC reservations, as if the process could divide an already divided society. But even if these objections are taken into consideration, it is inimical for the Government of India to base its reservations policy on population without knowing that population's actual composition.

Dalit v Shudra

Many Dalit intellectuals or activists are unhappy about what they see as attempts to prevent Dalit-Bahujan unity. They have long tried to bring about an electoral alliance between Dalits, OBCs and Muslims, but have met with only limited success for several reasons, not the least of which are the very real differences between these groups. Fault-lines exist not only between Dalits and Shudras but within Dalits themselves, and there are contradictions within the 'backward' communities as well.

The support for unity comes from many quarters. This summer, the voices in favour of OBC reservations include the likes of longtime activists Udit Raj and Kancha Ilaiah – the former a Dalit, the latter a Shudra. Ilaiah has pointed out that there are cultural similarities between Dalits and Bahujans that need to be harnessed to bring them together. In a 2001 interview with journalist S Anand, Chandrabhan Prasad's response to this is bewildering: "I think there are more Brahmans who eat beef and pork than Shudras. I also think Shudras tend to have an increased intensity of religiosity than Brahmans. I think Shudras practice untouchability more vigorously than Brahmans today."

These sentiments have also turned personal. On Ilaiah himself, Prasad has noted:

Kancha Ilaiah is a Shudra scholar. He targets Dalits' sentiments. Tells them that Brahmans are the creators of the Chatur-Varna Order, that they developed the notion of untouchability. And therefore, they must be destroyed ... But, he never says that it is not the

Ilaiah talks of recovering pride in Dalit-Bahujan traditions of productive labour, as opposed to Brahmanical traditions of rote learning.

Brahman, it is the Brahmanical Order which has to be destroyed. He never says that upper Shudras are turning more Brahmanical than Brahmans themselves. He never tells what is the performance of Shudra governments in the South and elsewhere.

Ilaiah talks about the "Dalitisation" of Indian culture, an idea that seems far more radical than Prasad's magic potion of globalisation. Chandrabhan has claimed that Ilaiah is "drafting an intellectual trap to Shudraise the nation's culture. Dalits and Shudras differ culturally as much as Dalits and Brahmans do ... Dalits have a distinct culture. But we should not glorify it. Neither do we want Brahman/Shudra culture. We want European culture, which is the best." On the other hand, Ilaiah talks of recovering pride in Dalit-Bahujan traditions of productive labour, as opposed to Brahmanical traditions of rote learning.

This seems no less than a clash of civilisations – many civilisations – without a moderate, middle-of-the-road answer. But look at the issue this way: if Ilaiah's is a path of rapprochement and building alliances, and Prasad's is one of seeing OBCs as the Dalit's foremost enemy, how would the ramifications of these approaches differ? A doctrine of peace and integration would certainly be preferable to a prescription of permanent conflict.

An editorial in the Hyderabad-based paper *Dalit Voice* said that the Brahmanical hatred demonstrated in the anti-quota protests in April and May would help Dalit-Bahujan consolidation. Vidya Bhushan Rawat, an activist and follower of B R Ambedkar, wrote in *CounterCurrents*: "Dalit opportunists dance to the tune of their Brahmanical masters when they condemn reservation for the backward communities."

This is a view also taken by many others. And this is exactly why Prasad opposes reservations for OBCs: they have the potential to bring together Dalits and Shudras. This writer's contention is not so much that Dalits and OBCs should join hands – they inevitably will if they have to – or that the Dalit-OBC conflict is not a reality. Rather, it is that Mandal-recommended reservations for OBCs stand in good light irrespective of the kind of politics that Chandrabhan Prasad is subjecting them to. On the other hand, all who oppose reservations have been using Prasad's statements to bolster their arguments. Does Prasad realise that the middle-class opponents of reservations are no friends of Dalits or Dalit quotas either?

For Prasad, the question is not whether Dalit-Shudra unity is possible, but that, "even if it takes place somewhere, should be stopped ... [Shudras] will point to the social monster called Brahmans, rob

Dalits' support, come to power, and then turn to Dalits to oppress them." It is impossible to tell to what extent this is justified, but could such fears be the real reason behind Prasad's opposition to reservations for OBCs?

Prasad's response to the Dalit association with Brahmans is again bewildering: "Since Dalits and Brahmans are both social minorities, both have a common enemy in Shudras. Thus, for their own different reasons ... Dalits and Brahmans have no option but to come together politically in the near future." If Brahmans and Dalits can come together, why must OBCs be made into common enemies of both?

Prasad's chief problem with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), founded in Uttar Pradesh by the Dalit Sikh politician Kanshi Ram, is also that it should long ago have "dropped Bahujanwad, and must have spoken of a Dalit movement. After Mayawati was attacked by the Shudras, the BSP should have realised that Shudras are the Dalits' prime opponents in rural India." The greatest trouble with Prasad's views on OBCs is that Dalit electoral politics cannot move beyond its immediate base without alliances. Its stagnation would make it impotent. If Mayawati is wooing all castes for next February's elections in Uttar Pradesh, then surely the process must make political sense for the BSP? Prasad once wrote, "If any political movement of Dalits has to succeed, it must allow itself to be guided by *Dalit Diary*. Or else, chest-beating can go on." Fortunately or unfortunately, that is not true.

Mayawati today, for instance, delivers little more than pride to her voters, but that pride matters greatly to those at the receiving end of caste oppression. To move beyond that, however, she needs credible competition from another Dalit force. Such dynamism in caste politics would be absent if Dalit politicians closed the door to anyone wanting to join the Dalit alliance. Indeed, if both Shudra and *Dwijja*, the twice-born, were not to join the BSP alliance, there would be little caste churning.

Not that Dalit communities are particularly united amongst themselves. For instance, Chamars are more enthusiastic en masse voters of the BSP than other Dalit communities in UP, some of whom have some attraction towards the Congress and the BJP. But Chandrabhan Prasad gives little mind to such details. He considers globalisation, rather than political power, as the force into which Dalits should dive as though it were the flowing Ganga – and which would perforce leave behind a 'national embarrassment' called the "OBC elite".



The Muthuswami shrine

Faith, fetters and freedom

It took a tragedy to shake some people up to try and integrate traditional faith healing and modern clinical practices to help the mentally ill. But this is too little too late.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **S GAUTHAM**

Srivelayuthapalayampudur – the name of the village has more syllables than even someone with conversational ease in Tamil can manage. It lies in the shadow of the Palani hills in Tamil Nadu. At first glance it is no different from the myriad other villages that dot the landscape of rural India.

It is a fine mid-morning in January, a week before the *pongal* harvest. A schoolboy whips a discarded bicycle tire down an alley in the enduring

amusement of the hinterland. At the community well, young girls, their hair oiled and braided, skin seasoned with turmeric paste, dexterously balance heavy head-loads of water. A woman flattens spherical cakes of dung onto the walls of her home to dry in the scorching sun. A scared rooster scampers out of the way of an oxcart, returning with its modest harvest. Except for the dish antennae protruding out of a few roofs, this could be the timeless India of the imagination.

To a large extent, it may still be that India – not the modernising country, the nuclear power, which boasts the world's largest pool of scientific talent. There are no scouts here looking for call-centre operatives or software code-writers. The only outsiders in Srivelayuthalayampudur are those who arrive unannounced, asking simply for "the shrine".

The shrine is unlike the typical temples of southern India with their giant *gopurams* and intricately sculpted arches. Instead the Muthuswami shrine is built without embellishment, enclosing a simple courtyard over a grave. There is a single-storey structure with idols of local deities, and a complete absence of the major gods of the Hindu pantheon. This is the final resting place of a man who used to live in this village. His name was Muthuswami.

In the sweltering heat of a South Indian afternoon, the priest has gone home for his obligatory siesta. He will only return for the evening puja. The temple is open and unguarded, and the only people about are a half-dozen young men, all wrapped in *veshtis* – a single piece of homespun cotton, loosely knotted at the waist.

Each of them is shackled. There is a metal ring that wraps their feet, and a chain leads to cuffs on both hands. While their movement is impeded, the men are allowed to roam about the small campus. Despite this semblance of freedom, they can be pulled in at the whim of their minders.

Inside the courtyard, those minders, a small group of women, are cooking a simple lunch. As the pots blacken with soot, neem twigs stir the rice and curry, and the rising fumes dye the air with both colour and aroma of spice.

Singing Ravi

One of the young teenagers, Ravichandran, is keenly interested in the sudden presence of this writer, but unwilling to respond to overtures. His grandmother, Kanakambal, is nearby. "We will be here for as long as it takes, around four weeks or so," she says. "My grandson is the future hope of the family. I know that Muthuswami will cure him."

Kanakambal is keen to demonstrate that there is nothing wrong with her grandson. She asks Ravi to speak in English, but he is not interested. Instead, he wants to sing, which is what he proceeds to do. With an excellent school record, a few months back Ravi's family had enrolled him with much fanfare in a college near their village. Then, however, something changed.

"The boy was alright," Kanakambal explains. "He had just started college, but came unhinged when he was badly ragged

there. Now he is unable to do anything. We have to be here till the priests tell us it is all right to go – this is our last refuge."

For the rural adolescent, going off to college had meant leaving the comfort of his village home and the embracing insurance of his extended family. Instead, he was suddenly living in a hostel full of city slickers. Within three days, the warden had called Ravi's relatives, asking them to take him back. The young man had barely been stopped from jumping off the roof of the college building.

The family took him to what they call the Big Hospital, where, like many such places in India, resources were overstretched. In addition to a shortage of doctors, medicine and beds, the overworked staff had been inured by too many years of working under pressure to be of any real help. It took just one glimpse of the psychiatry ward, and Ravi's father whisked his son and family back home. Instead, they came to the temple of Muthuswami.

Here, Ravi spends most of his time singing. Unlike at other Hindu temples, the curing process at Muthuswami's happens with neither Brahminical rituals nor the chanting of prayers. In fact, priestly intervention is minimal. The patients take part in a morning puja, and spend the rest of the day helping out with routine duties. No patients are charged for the temple's services, although most leave a donation when they depart. Over the last six decades, hundreds of mentally ill people have come



Ravi and Selvam

Kanakambal with Selvam's mother



to seek cures at the Muthuswami shrine. For centuries, people in similar situations have been visiting temples, Sufi dargahs and churches across Southasia, looking for peace and an answer to their troubles.

Friday night séance

Some years back, the Muthuswami shrine also attracted another group of seekers – a team of Indian psychiatrists. They spent six months researching the clinical efficacy of the healing process, and published their findings in the *British Medical Journal* in 2002.

Professor Ramanathan Raguram first heard about the village in the spring of 2001. At that time, he was working in Bangalore at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, the country's premier research institute on mental illness. Raguram and his team found that the stories of the 'cure' available in Srivelayuthapalayampudur began about 60 years ago, around the time that Muthuswami died. For most of his life, Muthuswami had been considered a ne'er-do-well, who spent most of his time idling about the village. A few years before he died, however, a belief grew that his mere touch could cure people, particularly those who behaved 'funny'. After Muthuswami died, the stories about his 'gift' grew.

"There is power in this place", one of the long-term residents told the visiting doctors. "A great man is buried here and, though he is dead, his healing presence is felt all the time. Otherwise how do you explain that with so many mentally ill patients, the place is so calm and peaceful?"

According to the local folklore, Muthuswami's spirit eventually entered the body of his son, Palaniswami. Although Palaniswami himself says he cannot recall what happened that day, Ramani, the owner of the village's only teashop, was an eyewitness, and provides free beedis and biscuits to anyone who will listen to the story. According to Ramani, on that day the teenage Palaniswami first went into convulsions, and then blacked out. When he came to, he began speaking in his father's voice,

recalling details from the past that Palaniswami himself would not have known.

The 'spirit' said that it would visit every Friday. And so, the villagers built a small memorial, a *samadhi*, over Muthuswami's grave, which over the years has become the temple. At nine in the evening every Friday, 55-year-old Palaniswami arrives at his father's temple and squats on the floor. The large courtyard fills up with people. There is no music, no cacophony. Suddenly and without warning, Palaniswami goes into convulsions and collapses.

When he comes to, there is silence. According to those who have gathered, this is no longer Palaniswami but Muthuswami himself, come again to visit his kinsmen and solve their problems. Subjects then appear to be 'chosen' by the spirit at random; a chosen medium suddenly goes into convulsions, and the gathered people are then able to ask the spirit personal questions.

Temple respite

For millennia, Southasia has evolved a wide variety of approaches to mental healthcare. It is this wide mix that Raguram believes is the real strength of the Subcontinent's healing traditions. Having such a breadth of options, he says, allows the individual to negotiate illness with minimal influence by mental health professionals. "While we have always known that mentally ill people do seek traditional and non-formal modes of treatment," he says, "the 'establishment' has been prone to consider them irrational and unhelpful – not worthy of being bestowed with scientific scrutiny."

Raguram and his colleagues set out to address that oversight. For a period of six months, the team surveyed patients at the Muthuswami temple, identifying many with severe psychiatric illnesses, from depression to schizophrenia. They delved deeply into the backgrounds of both the patients' and those who cared for them, particularly focusing on individual experiences of the healing process. They attended the séances, followed patients back to their villages, and watched for any progress in those who stayed at the temple for longer periods of time. They also used a clinical psychiatric rating scale to test for any improvement. On average, the team found that the patients improved by around 20 percent – a figure comparable to patients given the latest medication in Western healthcare settings, and one that surprised the entire team.

Raguram believes that it is the experience of residing in the temple for a period of time, rather than the therapy offered by the healer, that brings relief. "What they actually got for certain was tender loving care, in an environment in tune with their own cultural beliefs," he says. In the report published by the *British Medical Journal*, he argues that the Muthuswami temple in fact provides the refuge suggested by the term 'asylum', but in its most positive sense. "Instead of the long, often lifetime's

stay in hospital, which became characteristic of asylum treatment, here a stay of only five weeks could bring notable improvement, indicating the value of a brief sojourn in a supportive environment.”

Selvam, a 22-year-old tailor from Dharmavaram, 300 km away, could not agree more. “I first came here four or five years ago, and stayed for five weeks. I used to be afraid of everything. I went home when I got better, but the attacks returned and so I have come again. I like the atmosphere here – I don’t feel that scared anymore.”

The healing traditions at shrines like Muthuswami should not be dismissed as quaint anachronisms. Rather, says Raguram, they should be seen as cultural anchors, constituting a vital community resource for the mentally ill. He is concerned that discomfort about one’s own cultural moorings, coupled with a lack of interest in exploring our traditional influences, has significantly hampered the psychiatric profession in Southasia.

But Raguram is quick to insist that these temples are not magical remedies. “I must emphasise that it was not our intention to demonstrate the effectiveness of temple healing practices, but to draw attention to the need for empirical validation of these practices.”

People, especially rural and low-income patients, are often brought here or arrive because of a loss of faith in the established system. The stigma attached to mental hospitals is also an important barrier. The mother of another patient at Muthuswami’s says, “Nobody should know that our daughter is unwell. If we take her to a doctor, everyone will come to know. People will avoid us, stop visiting our home. They will also think less of us. That’s why we brought her here. This is just like visiting a temple.”

As such, these temple-based centres have remained the preferred ports of call for a vast segment of the public. Without any official recognition, however, this remains a completely unregulated sector, a fact that in the past has led to both manipulation and even catastrophe.

Erwadi inferno

A few hundred kilometres to the south, where the narrowing tip of peninsular India tapers into the Indian Ocean, foam-flecked waves relentlessly lash the rocks that skirt the postcard-like serenity of the Sufi dargah in Erwadi. In the azure light of dawn, to the sound of the conch being blown for morning rituals, several hundred devotees throng to pay homage in a uniquely syncretic style of worship. In this shrine dedicated to a Muslim saint, the faithful use flowers, oil lamps and holy water in their prayers – a fluid adaptation of local symbols of worship, which explains the enduring popularity of Sufism in Southasia. This is the grave of Ebrahim Shah

Valiyullah, a 12th century Moroccan mystic. For 800 years, devotees have believed that the blessings of the saint, the heat on the sands, the holy water and the oil from the lamps can cure mental illness.

Wherever a shrine attracts large numbers, such as the Erwadi dargah, exploitation of the gullible is bound to happen. The *langar*, or community kitchen, provides free food for several hundred people every day. Add to this the innate charity of visiting pilgrims, and together there is an irresistible assurance of free food and a good potential income. Years back, enterprising individuals had set up around 15 illegal mental homes, charging fees to families and promising to send back their relatives when they recovered, or to simply take them off their hands for good. In fact, the patients were forced to beg at the shrine and eat for free at the communal kitchen. At night, some were shackled in shelters without even the most basic of facilities.

Early one morning in August 2001, a spark at one of these illegal operations spread into a massive inferno, quickly engulfing the brittle thatch structure. By the time it was put out, 28 patients, all of whom had been in chains, had been charred to death, and 47 more grievously burnt. This was an event to make headlines throughout the region.

Today, in the teeming bazaar outside the dargah, the usual suspects remain. Shamans and charlatans sell their own brands of *taveez*, or blessed talismans, which visitors queue up to buy. But ask around for directions to the illegal mental homes, and eager volunteers will hasten to tell you that those days are gone. The police now come and check every week to make sure that the mental homes remain closed.

Indeed, convulsed into action by the horror of the Erwadi tragedy, the older and more famous faith-healing centres across Tamil Nadu are now stringently policed. According to officials, all of the inhumane shackles are off. But the Muthuswami temple falls outside the radar. Here, the inmates are constrained – although, unlike at Erwadi, they are not made immobile. Nonetheless, the manacled at Muthuswami is a deeply disturbing sight.

“It is a discomforting experience, an affront to personal freedom,” Raguram agrees. “Was there some metaphorical significance? Crucially, it is family that puts on these chains – not a legal authority, as happens elsewhere in the world. Also, here the chaining is not an act of abandonment like in Erwadi. The family stays with the patient throughout, and cares for them. There are no easy answers, but places like Muthuswami are well worth exploring before enforcing a change, legally or otherwise.”

Past to future

The Erwadi tragedy galvanised a sleeping mental healthcare establishment. The government of India’s



Palaniswami

The healing traditions at shrines like Muthuswami should not be dismissed as quaint anachronisms.

district-level mental health programme swung into action – raiding illegal mental homes, closed them down and issuing warnings to faith-healing temples that chained their inmates. The response to official offers to transfer patients to state hospitals, however, was very weak. Many patients refused to move until they received ‘divine’ commands. If patients were forcibly ejected from one shrine, many would simply go another.

As early as 1999, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in India indicted the severe state of the country’s mental health sector. “The living conditions in many of these settings are deplorable, and violate an individual’s right to be treated humanely and live a life of dignity,” an NHRC report stated. “Despite all advances in treatment, the mentally ill in these hospitals are forced to live a life of incarceration.”

There is a yawning gap between the formal and traditional systems of mental healthcare, even though the needs of patients are constantly expanding. For the sakes of the patients and their families, a way must be found to bring these two approaches together.

In Gunasheelam, on the banks of the Kaveri River near Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu, is another famous healing

centre. This is the Sri Prasanna Venkatachalapaty temple, a place full of ritual, and managed by traditional and taciturn Ayyangar Brahmins. For many years the temple has followed a routine of holy baths, Vedic ritual, flogging and fetters as the cure for its mentally ill patients. But after Erwadi and the resulting ban, a group of psychiatrists from the town managed to convince the trustees that they could work together.

Pichumani Ayyangar, scion of a long line of hereditary priests at the temple and now its chief trustee, has been known in the past to be scornful of scientific enquiry into the temple’s healing processes. “This is a matter between God and devotee. What role does a doctor have to play?” he once demanded. But he has mellowed in recent years. Perhaps it was due to the Erwadi tragedy and government fiat, or some other cause, but the traditional cure in Gunasheelam is now tempered with the caution of a modern clinician.

The clinical intervention was the brainchild of a local psychiatrist, Dr G Gopalakrishnan, director of the Tiruchi-based Sowmanasya Hospital and Institute of Psychiatry. He approached the temple authorities in the aftermath of the Erwadi tragedy. “We explained to them that we wouldn’t interfere with the ritual process,” he explains. “They could continue with that as long as they also took the medicine we prescribed. They were quite amenable to that, and the patients are cooperative too.”

The floggings have stopped, and the patients have been built a clean, well-lit hostel. There are fulltime social workers and regular clinical visits. Every patient’s progress is monitored and they are administered recommended medicine, even as they follow the rest of the ritual therapy. Although the project is only two years old, the doctors believe that the non-hospital atmosphere is conducive to curing the patients. Traditional and modern healing practices are allowed to complement one another in Gunasheelam, in an approach that could be an important pointer to the future care of the mentally ill all over.

Mental healthcare in the Subcontinent is in crisis due to the huge population and significant gaps in the system. Community initiatives, however, are often planned without adequate understanding of what is offered by existing institutions and established practices. Today’s growing interest in complementary medicine should be seen less as a rejection of modern methods than as an embracing of the most basic of healing traditions: the importance of peace, time and tender care.

For the health of both systems, neither modern medicine nor traditional healing should be allowed to exist in a vacuum, blithely ignorant of the benefits of the other.



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The Narmada parikrama

BY HARTOSH SINGH BAL

Of all the paths to salvation, pilgrimage may well be the most democratic but it was never meant to be the easiest. In modern times, air-conditioned buses traverse the four *dhams*, and Central Reserve Police Force personnel patrol the road to Amarnath. But away from the political cauldron of Kashmir and the ersatz Hinduism of the Indo-Gangetic plains, an older tradition survives along the banks of the Narmada.

The river flows through the heart of peninsular India, in a landscape that was in place aeons before the Himalaya began their upsurge, long before the Ganga had even been conceived. Fed by the rain, it begins amidst steep hills, densely forested by sal, a landscape intensely familiar to the poet Kalidasa, who wrote: *Reva's streams spread dishevelled at Vindhya's rocky foothills, like ashen streaks on an elephant's flank.*

Of the river's 14 other names, Reva, 'the leaping one', is the best known. But for most of its route, the watercourse is just Narmada, the giver of delight. To its banks – where the south meets the north, and the tribal, the non-tribal – the Hindu philosopher Sankara journeyed to attain the realisation of *advaita*, or non-duality. A sadhu once told this writer, in an etymology that is certainly mistaken but still worth recording, that the name derives from *Nar* and *Mada* – man and woman.

The Hindu pilgrimage culminates in the *parikrama* (circumambulation) of the holy spot, whether it is a temple shrine, a sacred mountain or a lake. But tradition has granted only this one river such a status. Every other pilgrimage leads to the *parikrama*; here, each step is the *parikrama*.

The circumambulation may commence anywhere along the banks of the Narmada. Like any temple circumambulation, the pilgrim must keep the sacred shrine – here, the river – to his right while walking. A pilgrim never breaks the journey, stopping only for the four months of the monsoon. Barefoot, depending for food and shelter on the hospitality of

those who dwell by the river, the pilgrim will go over to the other bank only at the river's source at Amarkantak, in Madhya Pradesh, or where the river meets the Arabian Sea at Bharuch, in Gujarat. By the time the journey ends, at the same place where it began, a pilgrim will have walked 2700 km.

Navigating the sagar

Today, a vast majority of pilgrims have cut short the time necessary for this journey, taking buses where possible. Nonetheless, a few persist in the old ways. Less than one km from Amarkantak, where the Narmada is but a trickle, Chhote Lal Thakur says that he and his companions have been on the *parikrama* for 10 months. His son should now be two years old, he notes, but he has not spoken to his family since he began.

He has been shaped by the journey. He sports a long flowing beard, untouched since the day he set out, a slender frame stripped of spare flesh, and a calmness of manner that belies his 27 years. But he is surprised by a question. "No, no one stopped me. When Narmada *mai* calls, who would do so? If you want to write, you should write about the *Shulpan jhadi*," referring to the 'wielder of the trident', Shiva, and the surrounding forest.

This is territory of the Bhil tribe, on the border of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat – the most feared stretch of the entire *parikrama*. Some parts of the tale Chhote Lal relates about his journey with six fellow travelers could be from that of any medieval pilgrim. "On the very first day that we entered the *Shulpan jhadi*," he says, "the Bhils took away everything we had. We had already donned the sadhu's garb, knowing what awaited us. We told them that whatever we had, they were free to take. And it was true that once we crossed *Shulpan jhadi*, more was given to us than they took away."

He continues: "For eleven nights we walked naked through the wilderness, with fire our only solace in the cold. It may have been a *jhadi* once,

but now it is desiccated – nothing grows there. The poverty of the people was there for us to see. Yet each day, between the six of us the Bhils would give us one roti. *Mai ki kripa thi*, through the blessings of the river, we did not feel hungry.”

Chhote Lal says that, in this way, he and his group reached the edge of the *sagar*, the term that every pilgrim now uses for the immense reservoir created by the massive Sardar Sarovar Dam. “It is not possible to walk along the banks,” he recalls. “It took us four hours in a motorboat to cross the *sagar*.”

In just a few moments, several centuries have been spanned. In narrative after narrative, pilgrims speak of the canals that have sprung up as a result of the dam. A pilgrim is not supposed to ford the waters of the Narmada. On the other hand, pilgrims have already come to believe that the filled-in waters of a tributary – or a canal – are not really the river’s waters.

The dam, and others like it, have created a new set of displaced peoples – not willing ones such as the pilgrims, but those known simply as PAPs, or Project-Affected Persons. Over the years many, including this writer, have reported stories of displacement and death: the exodus of Harsud, a town sentenced to drown; the mock city of vast tin sheds near Barwani, constructed by farmers who believed that compensation would be awarded in proportion to the size of their dwellings; the 40 pilgrims who were swept away under a full moon, because auspicious occasions when people come to the riverbank are not the concern of the engineers who schedule the dams’ discharges.

“China”, the engineers invariably respond when asked, “now that is a country. That is how development should take place. They can move entire cities, displace millions. But here, even if we touch a town, people like you come around asking us questions.”

Ujjodo

It was impossible not to think of such things while standing with Chhote Lal by this tiny stream, the dispeller of duality, wondering about questions that had divided a nation. Meanwhile, the pilgrim’s companions had proceeded to bathe in a small tank by the river’s edge. My thoughts, his words, were

rudely interrupted by someone from a nearby ashram. “Everyone bathes in the stream,” he yelled, “*tum saale gandu especial ho*, stop dirtying the tank!”

A day later, I went to meet the mahant who runs that ashram. He sat cross-legged on a sofa, his arms folded over an enormous potbelly, watching the day’s cricket being summed up on the Hindi news channel Aaj Tak. At the end of the programme, after chiding his disciples for the over-enthusiasm they had displayed during the game, he turned to me.

He had come here, he said, as a pilgrim on the *parikrama*. He had taken up residence at this very place. By her grace, he recalled, as he meditated in the shade of a tree that still stands on the ashram’s compound, disciples began to seek him, contributing their land and wealth to the service of the *Mai*. First he had set up this ashram. Next came the school and hostel for tribal children. Now, the hospital that stands at the edge of town.

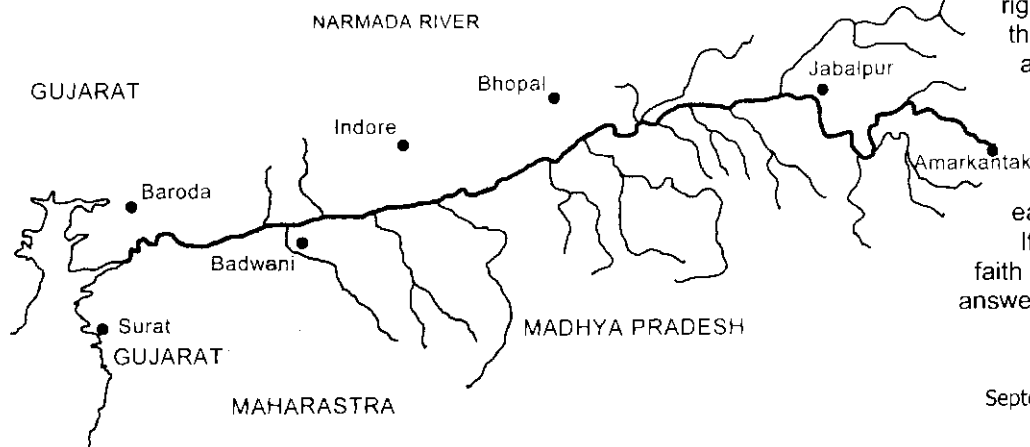
The man who had taken me to meet the mahant worked with the local municipality. He had sat silently through the audience and, as we emerged outside the ashram, he asked me to follow him. At the edge of the ashram he turned to follow an open sewer as it flowed past the hostel. We followed it to the banks of the river where, separated from the flowing water by a thin mud embankment, the effluvia of the sadhus bubbled in a cesspool, ready to overflow into the river. Unknown to the pilgrims, barely a few hundred metres from its very source, the river was as much shit as it was sacred.

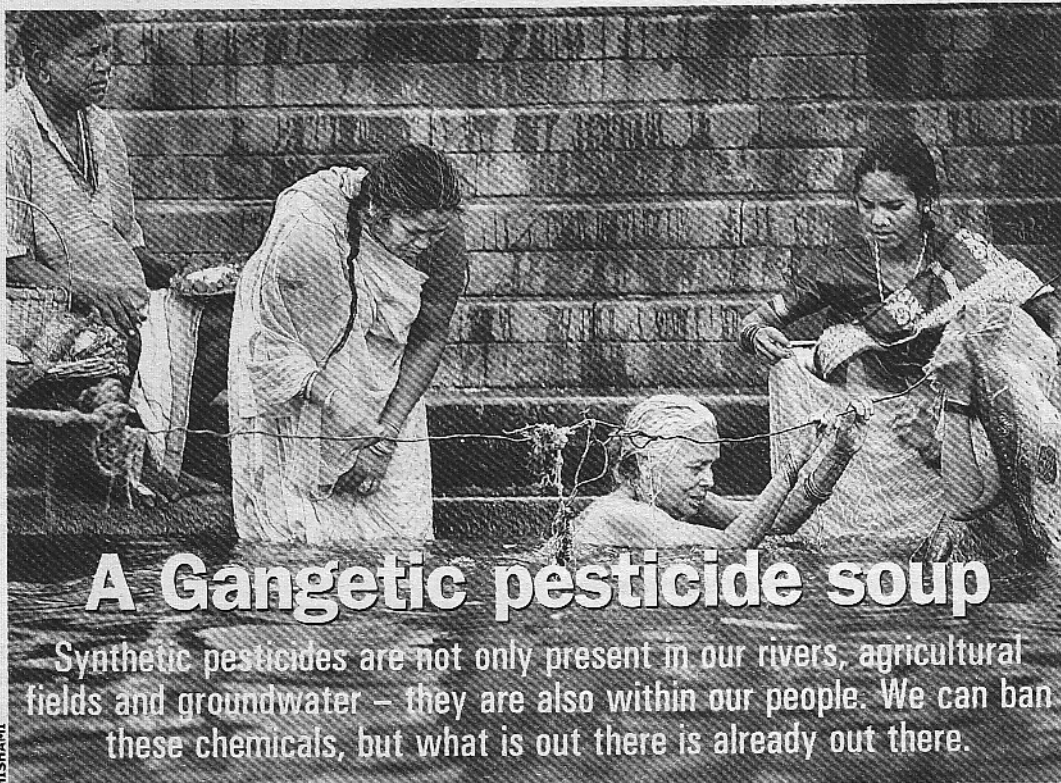
My companion, as was his wont, gave me an explanation that was born of the same tradition that enabled the pilgrimage. A sadhu, he began, accompanied by two of his disciples, reached a town late at night. The townspeople greeted the group in the prescribed manner, providing them with the best they could offer. As he left the town in the morning he blessed them by saying “*ujjodo*” (be uprooted), much to the shock of his disciples.

The next night they reached another town, where they were greeted by taunts. Children hurled stones at them; they slept in the open and went hungry. Leaving town in the morning, he turned and blessed the denizens, “*baso*” (settle and prosper). The astonished disciples could no longer keep silent, and asked him to explain his unusual behaviour. The sadhu smiled

and said, “If those who know right conduct are uprooted, they will travel the world taking along with them the manners we so require. The others, who do not know how to behave, let them stay in one place and suffer each other.”

It is an answer I have little faith in, but then I have no answers of my own.





A Gangetic pesticide soup

Synthetic pesticides are not only present in our rivers, agricultural fields and groundwater – they are also within our people. We can ban these chemicals, but what is out there is already out there.

MISHAMI

BY SAMIR KUMAR SINHA

A public uproar erupted in early August after a Delhi-based NGO found that Coca-Cola and PepsiCo soft drinks manufactured in India bore significant levels of pesticide. Following up on a similar report released in 2003, the Centre for Science and Environment alleged that these products, gathered from 12 Indian states, contained pesticide levels up to 50 times higher than what is allowed by official limits. Amidst the noise, it was forgotten that the deeper problem is with the water that the local bottlers use to make their colas. Therein lies the real – and alarming – story: the release and persistence of synthetic pesticides, which contaminate water, food and the entire environment.

As such, reports of pesticide residues in soft drinks should not be particularly surprising. Indeed, Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring* warned of the looming crisis that would result due to the widespread use of 'chlorinated' pesticides. Nonetheless, after decades of alarm bells, the rampant use of these chemicals continues. Worldwide, about one million people die or face chronic illnesses every year due to pesticide poisoning.

Synthetic pesticides began to be used in India in 1948, when DDT (Dichloro diphenyl trichloro ethane) was imported for malaria control and HCH (Hexa chloro

cyclo hexane) for locust control. These two now account for two-thirds of the total consumption of pesticides in the country. DDT and HCH became so popular that India began to produce them as early as 1952.

By 1958, the country's pesticide production capacity had reached 5000 metric tonnes. In that same year the first incident of pesticide poisoning took place, claiming the lives of over 100 people in Kerala who had consumed contaminated wheat flour. Since the advent of India's Green Revolution, the annual use of pesticides has increased dramatically – from 154 metric tonnes in 1954 to 88,000 metric tonnes in 2001. Though the Indian government did ban the use of DDT for agricultural use in 1989, up to 10,000 metric tonnes can still be used annually for health-related purposes, including spraying for disease-carrying insects.

Pesticide industries still foresee high growth potential in India, as the use of pesticides in agriculture is relatively low – just 0.54 kg per hectare, compared to 3.7 kg/ha in the US and 2.7 kg/ha in Europe. There are currently 179 pesticides registered for use in India; 30 others have been banned, while seven are restricted, including DDT. Within the space of 58 years, these chemicals have become omnipresent – from underground aquifers to the breast milk of Indian mothers.

While studying the groundwater aquifer in the Gangetic plain in UP's Unnao District, organochlorine concentrations were found as high as 2976.2 ppb in dug wells.

The poisoned Ganga

Although the inadvertent consumption of pesticides has decreased in India in recent years, forthcoming generations will nonetheless be forced to continue dealing with the effects of these non-biodegradable toxins. 'Organochlorines' are a group of commonly used pesticides that are extremely stable, and thus readily accumulate in water, soil and, ultimately, the food chain.

In soil, DDT's 'half-life' – the time it takes for half of the material to degrade – is about 15 years. In the human body, its half-life is about four years. In addition, these compounds can travel long distances through air and water; traces of pesticides have even been found in penguins in Antarctica. For these reasons, organochlorines are often considered the most damaging group of chemicals. They are known to cause dysfunction of the reproductive system, respiratory disease, immune suppression and cancer.

The Ganga plains are particularly prone to pesticide pollution, as the region harbours a dense human population coupled with 47 million hectares of agricultural land. Between 1993 and 2003, use of technical-grade pesticides in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar was around 75,000 and 11,000 metric tonnes respectively. According to a 1995 study, the concentration of DDT in the Ganga averaged around 13 parts per billion (ppb), but also spiked up to 143 ppb. This dramatically exceeds the limit of 1 ppb proposed by the World Health Organisation for drinking water.

The accumulative potential of these pollutants can be readily seen in the waterway's fish population. R K Sinha, a researcher at Patna University who has monitored pollution levels in the Ganga for the last two decades, has found DDT levels as high as 3700 ppb in fish upriver at Haridwar. Interestingly, pesticides are not used extensively upstream from Haridwar. During 1995-97, Anupma Kumari, also of Patna University, recorded DDT amounts in the Ganga of less than 1.7 ppb, but from 13.6 to almost 1666 ppb in Ganga fish. In addition, Kumari found high levels (53.6 ppb) of Endosulfan, another common pesticide that is significantly more toxic to mammals than is DDT.

A survey by the Bombay-based International Institute of Population Sciences found that 84 percent of households in Patna District and about 25 percent of those in Benaras use pesticides. According to the Malaria Control Office in Patna, more than 2190 metric tonnes of DDT was sprayed in Bihar between 1995-98 in an attempt to control the spread of *kalazar* (black fever) – one of the deadliest diseases in the state, transmitted through a type of sand fly. Bihar is also malaria-prone, and DDT spraying is the only practice used to control its vector.

"In India organochlorine pesticides were used extensively due to their low cost and broad spectrum of toxicity," explains K P Singh, of the Lucknow-based Industrial Toxicological Research Centre. While studying the groundwater aquifer in the Gangetic plain in UP's Unnao District, Singh recently found organochlorine concentrations as high as 2976.2 ppb in dug wells. He also found traces of a related pesticide known as Aldrin, formerly used on potatoes, at much higher levels than in other parts of India. Other studies have made similar findings in places along the Ganga, where the shallowness and high permeability of alluvial aquifers make them highly vulnerable to contamination.

Chemical weapons

When a group of scientists in Kanpur studied pesticide residue in samples of food from in and around the city, they found that Endosulfan and DDT exposures were within the acceptable range of daily intake. Other pesticides levels, however, were very high. In an average vegetarian diet, the daily intake of HCH exceeded allowable levels by 110 percent. For non-vegetarians, that number climbed to 118 percent. Exposure to Aldrin, meanwhile, exceeded acceptable amounts by 442 percent for vegetarians and 1500 for non-vegetarians.

In Lucknow, DDT and HCH residue was detected in 100 percent of the samples taken of human blood and fat tissue. In Haridwar, researchers found average HCH and DDT levels around 21 ppb in blood samples taken from male lay people. In agricultural workers who had been involved in spraying pesticides, those amounts were around three times higher than for the general population. In rural areas near Agra, 95 percent of breast milk samples were found contaminated with DDT, with HCH also present in significant amounts.

Chemical pesticides are now ubiquitous in the Indian environment. Even if all types were banned immediately, pesticides that have been released into the environment would remain active for decades to come. Immediate steps to further regulate pesticide use, as well as the forceful implementation of safe food and drinking water standards, are crucial. Every citizen needs to be able to determine the quantity of pesticides being ingested; making mandatory the disclosure of pesticide levels in various products may seem excessive to some, but it is a necessary step. The time has also come to turn away from modern 'chemical weapons', and deal with pests by use of traditional methods. Bio-pesticides and other biological controls are the only way to give coming generations a safe world in which to live. In the meantime, we have to wait for the life cycles of the pesticides already released to run their course.

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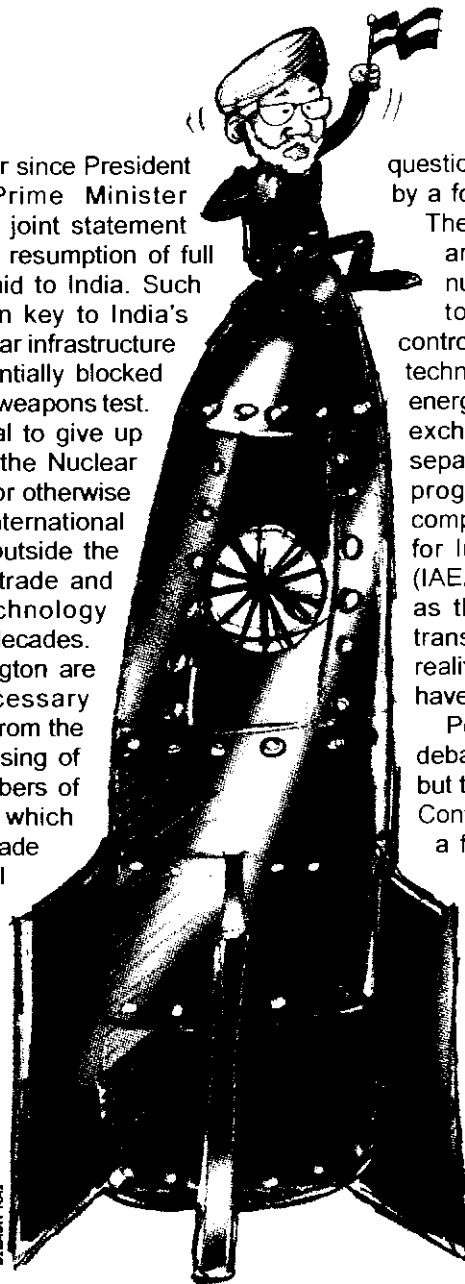
The price of power

Even as Washington lawmakers give their blessing to the historic – and illegal – Indo-US nuclear deal, few involved are addressing the most crucial issue: does India need nuclear power at all?

BY ZIA MIAN AND M V RAMANA

It has been just over one year since President George W Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a joint statement opening up the possibility of a resumption of full US and international nuclear aid to India. Such international support had been key to India's original development of its nuclear infrastructure and capabilities, and was essentially blocked after the country's 1974 nuclear weapons test. New Delhi's subsequent refusal to give up its nuclear weapons and sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or otherwise open its nuclear facilities to international inspection has kept it largely outside the system of regulated transfer, trade and monitoring of nuclear technology developed over the last three decades.

Both New Delhi and Washington are lobbying hard for the necessary legislative approval of the deal from the US Congress, and for the blessing of the 45 countries who are members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which controls almost all international trade in these technologies. The deal has already passed through two Congressional committees, as well as a vote by the full House of Representatives. With a final vote in the US Senate slated for September, in mid-August Prime Minister Singh went on the offensive against strident domestic criticism, emphasising that whatever restrictions the new US policy will have for Indian nuclear-weapons testing, "there is no



question of India being bound by a law passed by a foreign legislature."

The 2005 agreement requires the US to amend its own laws and policies on nuclear technology transfer, as well as to work for changes in international controls on the supply of nuclear fuel and technology so as to allow "full civil nuclear energy cooperation and trade with India". In exchange, New Delhi would identify and separate its civilian nuclear facilities and programmes from its nuclear weapons complex, and would volunteer the former for International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection and safeguarding. Yet, as they consider the deal and ways to transform its broad framework into legal reality, the political elites in each country have ignored some crucial issues.

Policy analysts in the US have fiercely debated the wisdom of the Indo-US deal, but the discussion has been rather narrow. Confined to proliferation-policy experts and a few interested members of Congress, the discussion has largely focused on the lack of details in the deal, the order of the various steps to be taken by the respective governments, and the potential consequences for US non-proliferation policy. The larger policy context of a long-standing effort to co-opt India as a US client, and thereby sustain and strengthen US power (especially with regard to China), has gone unchallenged. There is also little recognition of how the agreement could allow India to expand its

nuclear arsenal.

In India, the deal has incited a wider debate on questions of national security, sovereignty, development and democracy. But there has been little attention paid to whether India needs nuclear weapons at all, the costly failures of the Indian nuclear energy enterprise, and the possible harm that a continued expansion of the nuclear complex could mean to the Indian people.

Recruiting India

The nuclear deal has to be seen in the context of over a half-century of efforts to incorporate India into the US strategy in Asia. After the 1949 Chinese revolution, the US quickly came to believe that newly independent India was the only potential regional power that could compete with China for dominance in Asia. Despite repeated American efforts to use economic and military aid to promote this policy, however, Jawaharlal Nehru refused to have his country play this role. Nehru was adamant that a free India not be a pawn for the world's great powers, warning that this kind of alliance-building was bad for international relations and could lead to war.

Still, US hostility towards communist China led to some extraordinary ideas about nuclear cooperation. In the wake of China's first nuclear weapons test in 1964, senior officials in the US State Department and Pentagon considered the possibilities of "providing nuclear weapons under US custody" to India and preparing Indian forces to use them. At the same time, the US Atomic Energy Commission was considering helping India with "peaceful nuclear explosions", which, according to non-proliferation expert George Perkovich, would have involved the use of US nuclear devices under US control being exploded in India. These plans were abandoned amidst growing fears of the consequences of proliferation for US military and diplomatic power, and Washington DC turned instead to preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons.

The end of the Cold War prompted a rethinking of strategic possibilities. A now infamous 1992 draft strategic plan prepared for then-Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney declared: "Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defence strategy ... We must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." In other words, the geopolitical order was to be frozen as it was at that point, with the United States assured of maintaining its relative superiority around the world.

The first dramatic change in Indo-US relations came during the March 2000 visit by President Bill Clinton to India, less than two years after India's 1998 nuclear

tests. At the time, the governing coalition was dominated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose position is strongly anti-communist, aggressively pro-nuclear weapons, and opposed to the more traditional strategy of nonalignment. The joint statement issued during the Clinton visit declared: "India and the United States will be partners in peace, with a common interest in and complementary responsibility for ensuring regional and international security. We will engage in regular consultations on and work together for strategic stability in Asia and beyond."

For the United States, the search for this "strategic stability in Asia" is all about China. In 2000, Condoleezza Rice, now US Secretary of State, argued that China's rise posed an important challenge for the US, and that "China's success in controlling the balance of power depends in large part on America's reaction to the challenge ... India is an element in China's calculation, and it should be in America's, too. India is not a great power yet, but it has the potential to emerge as one." The first result of the policy was the "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership" initiative. Signed in January 2004, this agreement announced that the US would help India with its civilian space programmes, high-technology trade, missile-defence efforts, and civilian nuclear activities. The focus on these elements, named the 'trinity issues' in Indo-US diplomatic circles, is a reflection of the power wielded by the nuclear, military and space establishments in Indian policymaking.

The nuclear deal is but one of the building blocks promised in this larger arrangement. The "goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century," noted one US official. "We understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement." Ashley Tellis, an adviser to the State Department on the US-India nuclear deal, has further explained that: "If the United States is serious about advancing its geopolitical objectives in Asia, it would almost by definition help New Delhi develop its strategic capabilities such that India's nuclear weaponry and associated delivery systems could deter against the growing and utterly more capable nuclear forces Beijing is likely to possess by 2025."

Recruiting India may help to reduce the immediate costs to the US of exercising its military, political and economic power to limit the growth of China as a possible rival. More generally, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the US sees Asia as central to global politics, and desires strong regional clients there. The search for allies and friends became all the more important as the US found itself being criticised for its invasion and occupation of Iraq. On each of these counts, India is seen as a major prize, and support for its military build-up and its nuclear complex is the price

The larger policy context of a long-standing effort to co-opt India as a US client, and thereby sustain and strengthen US power (especially with regard to China), has gone unchallenged.

“India is an element in China’s calculation, and it should be in America’s, too. India is not a great power yet, but it has the potential to emerge as one.”

that the Bush administration seems willing to pay.

This goal, it seems, is to be pursued regardless of whether it will spur a spiral of distrust, political tension, or dangerous and costly military preparedness between the US and China, between China and India, and between India and Pakistan. Journalist and nuclear issues expert Mark Hibbs reported in late 2005 that Beijing wants any exemptions made for international nuclear cooperation and trade to be made available to others as well – ie, its ally, Pakistan. For its part, Islamabad has demanded from Washington DC (and been refused) the same deal as is being offered to New Delhi. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has observed that “nuclear non-proliferation and strategic stability in South Asia will be possible when the US fulfils the needs of both Pakistan and India for civil nuclear technology on an equal basis.” Aziz warned, “A selective and discriminatory approach will have serious implications for the security environment in South Asia.”

General Jahangir Karamat, a former Pakistan Army chief who served as ambassador to the US from 2004-2006, has argued that, “The balance of power in South Asia should not become so tilted in India’s favour, as a result of the US relationship with India, that Pakistan has to start taking extraordinary measures to ensure a capability for deterrence and defence.” Pushing through with this logic and this process will amount to a tragic distortion of values and priorities in both India and Pakistan, which together contain about one-in-three people on the planet, the majority of them very poor.

An errant debate

Even while the nuclear deal has incited a limited policy debate in the United States, it has elicited three broad positions among the political players in India. First, there are the nuclear hawks, who oppose the deal. They see the nuclear energy and nuclear weapons programmes as a more-or-less integrated complex. They view the deal, particularly the proposed separation of civilian and nuclear facilities, as imposing constraints on the creation of a large nuclear arsenal – an element that they believe is essential for India to be a ‘great power’.

The clearest expression of the hawkish position view has come from former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and others in the BJP. Vajpayee has argued that, “Separating the civilian from the military would be very difficult, if not impossible. It will also deny us any flexibility in determining the size of our nuclear deterrent.” The “flexibility” Vajpayee desires is the ability to use what would usually be classified as civilian facilities to increase the pace at which the nuclear

weapons programme could grow, as well as its eventual size.

The second position is that of Manmohan Singh and many other Congress party leaders. They see the deal as offering recognition of India as a nuclear-weapons state, pointing out that the July 2005 joint statement says that India will have “the same benefits and advantages as other leading countries with advanced nuclear technology, such as the United States”. More practically, they see it as a way to sustain and expand the nuclear energy programme, while not restricting the building of what they describe as a “minimum” nuclear weapons arsenal. While the term *minimum* is used to suggest that India is being restrained in its nuclear ambitions, the arsenal envisioned is by no means minimal.

A week after the nuclear deal was signed, Prime Minister Singh explained to the Indian Parliament that the agreement offers a way whereby “our indigenous nuclear power programme, based on domestic resources and national technological capabilities, would continue to grow,” with the expected international supply of nuclear fuel, technology and reactors serving to “enhance nuclear power production rapidly”. At the same time, he emphasised that “there is nothing in the joint statement that amounts to limiting or inhibiting our strategic nuclear weapons programme.”

A third position, and an effective source of opposition to the deal, comes from India’s Left parties. Although these parties have traditionally supported the nuclear energy programme, they opposed the 1998 Pokhran-II weapons test, and have pressed for India to play a larger role in global disarmament efforts, and to do more to reduce the nuclear dangers in the region. Their greatest concern is that the deal ties India too closely to US policies. Prabodh Panda, a Communist Party of India MP, said in Parliament that the agreement with Washington served to reduce India to a “junior partner of the US in fulfilling its global ambitions”. As the first sign of India surrendering its traditional role in representing the Third World and the non-aligned, the politicians opposed to the deal cite New Delhi’s vote for a US-led resolution against Iran at the September 2005 IAEA Board of Governors meeting, something that key US officials had made clear was a pre-condition for the nuclear deal.

Each of these three positions, which have by and large dominated the debate so far, are flawed. They share a belief in the success of India’s nuclear energy programme and the need to continue and expand this effort. The politicians of all hues fail to recognise that the very demand for lifting international restrictions on nuclear cooperation is a testament to the failures of India’s Department of Atomic Energy.

The second problem is the belief shared by the hawks and the government that nuclear weapons are a source of security. This position ignores the essential moral and legal questions of what it means to have and be prepared to use nuclear weapons. The only difference between these two camps is on the character

and number of the nuclear weapons to which they aspire, and on how many people in how many cities they are prepared to threaten to kill. The leftwing parties are more ambiguous: they support disarmament, but have not called for India to unilaterally give up its nuclear weapons arsenal and ambitions. Some of them even feel that Indian nuclear weapons may be needed to hedge against a more belligerent US exercise of power and influence.

Standing outside the political parties is a broad network of Indian social movements, which have become an increasingly important element in the country's political life. The most prominent of these is the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), an umbrella group of several hundred organisations and campaigns that support the rights of the poor, women, minorities, farmers and workers. According to an October 2005 statement, the NAPM has come out against the deal for three main reasons: they see it as having been concluded without any public debate; as strengthening an unaccountable, dangerous and costly Indian nuclear energy and nuclear weapons programme; and as undermining important non-proliferation and disarmament goals.

Broken energy promises

For India, a primary motivation for the deal has been the history of failure of its Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) to produce large quantities of nuclear electricity. In 1962, Homi Bhabha, the founder of India's nuclear programme, predicted that by 1987 nuclear energy would constitute up to 25,000 megawatts (MW) of the country's electricity-generation. His successor as head of the DAE, Vikram Sarabhai, predicted that by 2000 there would be 43,500 MW of nuclear power. Neither of these predictions came true.

In fact, despite more than 50 years of generous funding by the state, nuclear power currently amounts to only 3310 MW – barely three percent of India's installed electricity capacity. Nevertheless, the DAE is now promising 40,000 MW by 2030 and 275,000 MW by 2052. Indian nuclear capacity is expected to rise by more than 50 percent over the next few years, largely because of two 1000 MW reactors purchased from the Soviet Union in a 1988 deal, which are now being built by Russia. Even if more such agreements were made in the future, however, it is by no means clear that India's nuclear establishment will be able to keep its promises.

The Department has also failed to ensure sufficient supplies of uranium to fuel its nuclear reactors. As one Indian official explained in the immediate aftermath of the 2005 signing: "The truth is we were desperate. We have nuclear fuel to last only till the end of 2006. If this agreement had not come through, we might as well have closed down our nuclear reactors and, by extension, our nuclear programme." Because its nuclear reactors are not safeguarded, India has been kept from importing uranium by the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group, the countries that

manage international nuclear trade with a view to preventing proliferation.

Even at just 75 percent efficiency, India's domestically fuelled reactors require nearly 400 tons of uranium every year; the plutonium production reactors, which are earmarked for nuclear weapons purposes, consume another 30-35 tons annually. The writers of this essay estimate that current uranium production within India is less than 300 tons per year – well short of requirements – and that the current uranium stockpiles will be exhausted by 2007. The DAE's desperate efforts to open new uranium mines in the country have met with stiff resistance, primarily because of the detrimental health impacts of uranium mining and milling that have been recorded in the communities around existing mines.

Despite fifty years of determined government support and funding, the dismal state of India's nuclear energy complex offers proof of one of the basic assumptions underlying the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The NPT implicitly recognised that developing countries would need a great deal of help to successfully establish large nuclear energy programmes. As such, it calls for a trade-off: providing non-nuclear-weapon states access to international cooperation on nuclear energy, in return for a demonstrated commitment not to develop nuclear weapons. In both refusing to sign the NPT and in developing nuclear weapons, India had sacrificed the benefits of this international support since 1974. Now, through the nuclear deal, the United States has promised India all the help it needs for its civilian nuclear programme – all without being forced to sign the treaty, nor accepting any limit on its nuclear arsenal.

Most importantly, the July 2005 agreement promises to allow India access to the international uranium market. If the deal goes through, New Delhi will be able to purchase the uranium it needs to fuel the reactors it chooses to put under IAEA safeguards. This will free up its domestic uranium for its nuclear weapons programme and other military uses, and would allow a significant and rapid expansion in the country's nuclear arsenal. Currently, India is believed to have a stockpile of perhaps 40-50 nuclear weapons, with material stocks for as many more. In addition, according to an article published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in fall of 2005, plans are reportedly in place that would involve an expansion of India's arsenal to 300-400 weapons within a decade.

Realising these plans will require the production of much larger quantities of fissile material (that which powers the nuclear explosion), and at a much faster

In both refusing to sign the NPT and in developing nuclear weapons, India had sacrificed the benefits of international support since 1974.

It is difficult to see the deal as anything other than a fundamental rejection of the non-proliferation regime, as it abandons the assumption that access to nuclear fuel and technology must be under the NPT's terms.

pace than India has achieved so far. The production of such materials specifically for nuclear weapons is not constrained by the US deal, which would also open several possibilities for India to vastly increase its production, including by utilising its newly unallocated domestic uranium. There is also the possibility, as hinted at by some hawkish critics, that India's nuclear power reactors may become part of the weapons complex, leading to as much as an eightfold increase in the existing rate of plutonium production for explicitly weapons-related purposes.

Neither does the Indo-US agreement constrain India in its use of the weapons-useable materials produced so far. A major source of such material is the plutonium in the spent fuel of the un-safeguarded Indian power reactors. If this spent fuel is not put under safeguards as part of the deal, India would have enough plutonium from this source alone for an arsenal of approximately 1100 weapons – larger than that of all the nuclear-weapon states except the US and Russia.

India's DAE says it plans to use this plutonium as fuel in a series of new 'fast-breeder' reactors to make electricity. These reactors are designed to actually produce more plutonium than they consume, and so in time be self-sustaining in fuel. But the plutonium they produce is different from what they use as fuel – it is ideal for nuclear weapons. The first fast-breeder reactor is supposed to be ready around 2010. If it works as planned – and fast-breeders often do not – it will dramatically increase the production of weapons-grade plutonium in India.

Why nuclear electricity?

Both Indian and US supporters of the deal claim that the growth of nuclear energy generation capacity in India is a practical and even necessary way to maintain the country's current rate of economic growth. The evidence suggests otherwise.

According to the estimates of these writers and many others, the cost of producing nuclear electricity in India is higher than that of the non-nuclear alternatives. In addition, in studying the safety of nuclear reactors and other hazardous technologies, many experts have come to the conclusion that serious accidents are simply inevitable – the character of such complex systems makes accidents a 'normal' part of their operation. Given its high population density, a large nuclear reactor accident in India could cause tremendous damage.

There remains the problem that no country has resolved: the disposal of large amounts of waste that will remain radioactive for many tens of thousands of years. Thus, India would be better off giving up this costly and dangerous technology, and finding ways to

meet the needs of its people that do not threaten their future or their environment.

There are alternatives. For instance, it has been estimated that Indian industry could cut down as much as 20-30 percent of its total energy consumption, and that nearly 30,000 MW (more than the total planned nuclear capacity by 2020), could be saved through energy-conservation programmes. This would be significantly cheaper than building new generating capacity, especially additional nuclear capacity. Wind energy has already outstripped nuclear power, though it was started relatively late and has received much less funding support.

The real challenge facing India, however, is the growing divide between the energy-intensive pattern of development of its cities – with increasing demands for electricity and petroleum – and the continuing dependence on fuelwood and animal-dung energy by the majority who live in its villages, with negative implications for their health, productivity and general development. Nuclear energy, as a large, centralised and costly source of electricity, will do little to meet the basic energy needs of rural India: connecting these areas to a central power grid is expensive, involves high transmission losses, and is ultimately financially unsustainable. Instead, by working *with* the rural poor it could be possible at last to develop and provide the small-scale, local, sustainable and affordable energy systems that they need.

If approved by the US Congress, Indian Parliament and Nuclear Suppliers Group, the US-India nuclear deal will prove both costly and dangerous. It will feed a cascade of mistrust, insecurity and instability, diverting resources to a fateful military competition that will envelop China, India, Pakistan and the United States. More broadly, it is difficult to see the deal as anything other than a fundamental rejection of the non-proliferation regime, as it abandons the assumption that access to nuclear fuel and technology must be under the NPT's terms. In so doing, it undermines the aspirations of the vast majority of countries seeking global and regional nuclear disarmament.

The agreement, if implemented, will create the potential for the rapid build-up of a much larger Indian nuclear arsenal, will likely offer little real benefit to the country's poor, and will bail out a failing Indian nuclear energy programme that has had little regard either for the economics or the environmental and health consequences of its activities. It is not often that so much harm could be done to so many by so few.

This article is a revised version of an essay published in Arms Control Today, January/February 2006.

We the people, you the populace

Got to recognise

Who is the real builder?

Who is the true martyr?

Who is the right leader?

Who is an authentic poet?

Which is the genuine song?

– Shrawan Mukarung in *Utkhanan*

There are certain questions that 'mass' media never raise. What exactly is the definition of 'people' in the expression, "We, the people"? What constitutes 'public'? What makes for the 'populace'? What differentiates citizenry from consumers? Who decides on these definitions, for these everyday terms create conditions for fierce political contestations? The dynamism, stagnation, decay or destruction of a society depends, among other things, on definitions agreed upon by opinion leaders. Mythmakers are important, but no less crucial are the role of makers of meaning, for they are the ones who set the terms of public discourse.

In Shrawan Mukarung's Nepal, till recently it was sacrilegious to question the royal version of history that put the institution of monarchy over and above everything else. The poet got around official strictures against dissent by retrieving Bishe Nagarchi, a legendary Dalit who is believed to have counselled the King Prithvi Narayan Shah about appropriate ways of financing costly military campaigns.

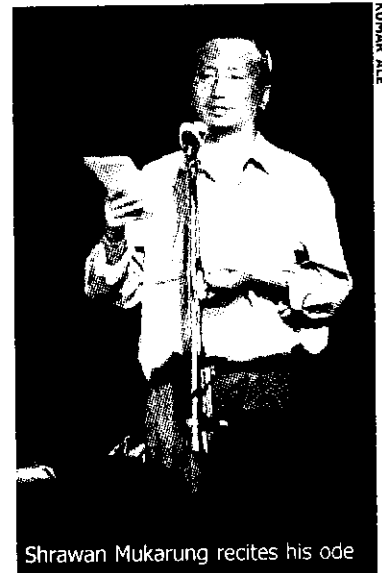
After years of struggle, the country of Bishe's - or perhaps his king's - dream was built by the beginning of 1775, the year Prithvi Narayan died. The victorious chieftain from the tiny principality of Gorkha took on the title *Bada Maharaj* - Great King - of Nepal. He bequeathed his kingdom to his descendents and bought the permanent loyalty of family priests and devoted courtiers by bestowing upon them generous land grants in the territories of vanquished rulers. That was the way of the

conquerors of the 18th century.

What makes the legend of Bishe poignant in retrospect is the manner in which his children would be dealt with by successive Shah kings and their all-powerful Rana retainers. Dalits would remain lowest of the low in the Hindu pecking order - their existence excluded from the present, their memory erased out of the past.

Shrawan's ode to Bishe Nagarchi captures the continuous agony of two centuries in its simplest form: the protagonist's rebellion expresses itself in feigned insanity. When King Gyanendra used the name of his ancestors to usurp state power through a phased coup between October 2002 and February 2005, this unassuming poet resurrected the forgotten Dalit counsellor of Prithvi Narayan to pierce the compositeness of the Grand Pretender. Shrawan's poems, as well as the songs of the troubadour Raamesh, were the anthems of awakening during the months of struggle that culminated in the April Uprising. They helped to dislodge Gyanendra the autocrat from of his flimsy perch.

As Nepal moves ahead haltingly on the road to democracy, poets and singers have gone out of the media spotlight. Political party activists and rebel leaders now monopolise the centre-stage, even as breathless journalists speculate about impending breakthroughs or looming disasters on an hourly basis. Most journalists, however, lack the patience to search for meaning. They are quite happy to let events speak for themselves; show, don't tell. The problem arises because events never speak for themselves; someone is always there to interpret them. The society that lacks committed creators of



Shrawan Mukarung recites his ode

KUMAR ALTE

Journalism is too important a discipline to be left in the hands of journalists.

meaning risks falling into the hands of wily manipulators of the market or the state.

Nepal and Gaya

Mythmakers must turn themselves into the makers of meaning, but the trend in Southasia generally and in India particularly is in the opposite direction. The youthful exuberance and occasional lapses of the Nepali press, free for all of 15 years, may be forgiven. But what of the waywardness of the century-old free media of India, whose ongoing degeneration is the real story of our times?

In a moving foreword to Kashmiri journalist Iftikhar Gilani's *My Days in Prison*, Siddharth Varadrajan describes the way the New Delhi press became a willing accomplice of the Indian establishment in the subversion of rule of law. Indeed, anyone who had witnessed the trial by media of the hapless scribe in June 2002 and has read the victim's experiences will find it hard to believe anything that the New Delhi media says these days on matters of import.

There is a dumbing down in progress in India's press, radio and television, which hardly does justice to the masses, the public, the populace. The benumbing fare dished out by India's television channels seems premised on the belief that the people deserve no better. The saddest part is that what is happening in India today is a glimpse of what will happen elsewhere in Southasia the day after tomorrow.

For the sheer audacity of some of the India news channels, one can refer to a staged confrontation between security forces and the Maobaadi rebels in Nepal's border district of Nawalparasi. A TV reporter bribed some soldiers and villagers into enacting the script, and the cameras rolled as the 'attack' was carried out. One terrified soldier believed it to be a real confrontation and fired, injuring a hapless villager. The journalist-producer used his connections and got the victim treated and compensated, and no one was the wiser.

Manoj Mishra, of Gaya in Bihar, was not as lucky. He was killed on 15 August, India's Independence Day, to feed television's need for a visual story. Police allege that some TV reporters provided

Manoj with diesel-soaked towels and a matchbox with which to immolate himself, assuring him that they would douse the flames as soon as they got the footage they required. But when the flames leapt up, no one came forward to help, and Manoj Mishra succumbed to the burns - an extreme representation of the ethics and interests of the commercial media.

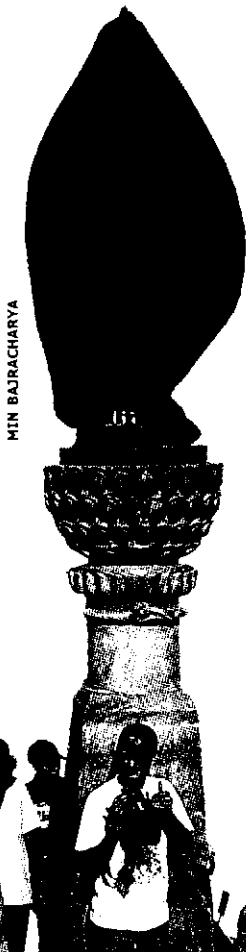
Missed message

When politics just reigns and the market rules with its velvet hand, profits set the social agenda. It would be naïve to expect a conscience-keeper's role from a media forced to fend for itself in the marketplace. Circumstances have made journalists handmaidens of the self-declared 'we, the people', who want to be revered, reassured and regaled at the cost of the suffering populace. The commercial press cannot be the interpreter that once kept the two in dialogue. In the media bazaar, journalists have become suppliers of services like entrepreneurs in any other industry. They have very little time, talent or inclination for deep reflection.

It has been quite a while since Indian censors stopped sending soldiers to the newsroom - something that happened recently in Nepal and is routine in some of the other countries of Southasia. The evolution of market mechanisms has made that unnecessary in a country where the size of a relatively affluent middle class is believed to be bigger than the population of Europe. Like in all consumer capitals of the world, all that a really powerful person needs to do is make a phone call to the chief executive of the media house presumed guilty of transgression. The rest is usually taken care of. Most media-persons know the sanctity of the line too well to contemplate crossing it.

There is only one way to get around this enormous challenge of commercialising media: bring the mythmakers back into the public domain. Journalism is too important a discipline to be left in the hands of journalists. This is something that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru knew quite well. But the presence of politicians alone will not be enough to change the tone and tenure of a scandal-obsessed press. Writers, songsters, thinkers and public intellectuals must also be brought back to the mainstream media. In their questions we shall find the answers of the most pressing problems of the day.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's statue in downtown Kathmandu under wraps, having been vandalised after the April People's Movement



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Taming of the Indian shrew

Feminist outrage and the demand for women's rights seem to have been shelved as we enter the Era of Gender Mainstreaming.

BY LAXMI MURTHY

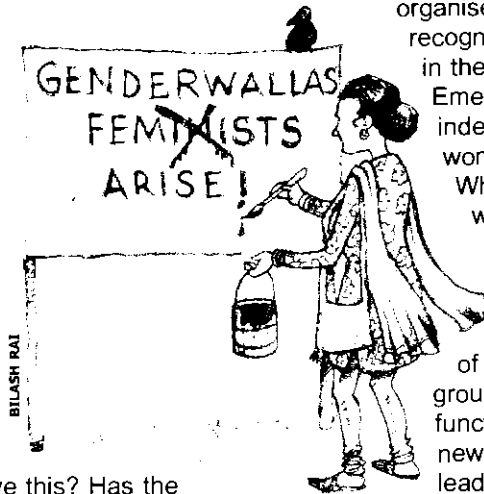
Vibrant, forceful, dynamic, strident. Many more terms can be used to depict the Indian women's movement, but these will suffice to describe some of the great transformative events of the second half of the 20th century – a period of exhilarating social upheaval. Although 'women's issues' are being picked up and debated everywhere, we find the voices of the movement somewhat muted today. There has definitely been a dumbing down of the cause. To what do we owe this? Has the mainstreaming of gender blunted the edge of the women's liberation movement? Can the movement be reclaimed?

In the 1970s, organisations of the New Left and mass-based organisations mobilised around issues of social injustice. Tribal landless labourers led movements against the exploitative practices of non-tribal local landowners, land alienation and extortion by moneylenders. Women were at the forefront of these struggles, and began to take direct action on issues that affected them specifically as women – liquor, for instance, and the physical violence and indebtedness associated with alcoholism.

Similarly, the Anti-Price Rise Movement in Maharashtra following the drought of the early 1970s brought women together under the banner of the United Women's Anti-Price Rise Front. This militant campaign saw thousands of housewives taking to the streets in protest, marching with *thalis* and rolling pins, challenging government dormancy and demanding action against black-marketeers.

All over the country, women participated actively in movements for social transformation. The Garhwal hills were home to the Chipko movement, initiated by rural women to prevent destruction of forests by contractors and government officials acting in collusion. Moving beyond the immediate objective of saving trees, Chipko came to symbolise women's relationships with the environment and their crucial role in maintaining ecological balance.

Although gender oppression and the need to



organise around it had long been recognised, it was only in the late 1970s, in the ferment following Indira Gandhi's Emergency of 1975-77, that independent activists firmly put women's liberation on the agenda. What became known as autonomous women's groups (AWGs) emerged in several cities of India in the early 1980s, so called because they were not affiliated with political parties and remained independent of the government. These feminist groups were loosely structured and functioned as collectives, incorporating newer and more democratic forms of leadership. Groups that sought to rid society of domination and hierarchy, it was thought, must also have evolved organisation that reflected egalitarian principles.

The Forum against Oppression of Women in Bombay, Stree Sangharsh and Saheli in Delhi, Stree Shakti Sanghatana in Hyderabad and Vimochana in Bangalore were some of the groups that emerged around this time. The slogan of the day, 'Personal is political', articulated the attempt to link oppression in individual women's lives with patriarchal structures in society. The idea was to fight these structures collectively.

Small groups, big noises

Removing the veil on violence against women was one of the most significant achievements of the feminist movement. In the 1970s, these activists broke the silence around wife-battering, domestic violence, marital rape, child incest and violence against lesbian women. For the first time, the dark side of the family was exposed, and the demand was made for intervention on matters hitherto regarded as 'private'. The autonomous women's movement also articulated women's rage against state repression, which found its most cruel manifestation in custodial rape. Activists also raised their voices against rape and murder by security forces – especially in the Northeast and Kashmir. The vulnerability of women during communal and caste conflict was a matter of huge concern, as was the targeting of women in the name of a community's 'honour'.

The same period saw vehement protest against

the subjection of women to contraceptive trials in the name of controlling overpopulation, and the demand was made for safer, non-invasive methods of contraception for both men and women. The AWGs fought laws of each religion that discriminated against women. Because this issue was left pending by the authorities, India still lacks a civil code based on the equality principle, and women remain at the mercy of iniquitous religious laws under the control of increasingly fundamentalist community leaders.

The lack of women's control over sexuality, reproduction and production was highlighted by groups that fought for the recognition of women's labour – both in paid employment and unpaid domestic work. The fundamental dispossession and marginalisation of women in the economic sphere was a major arena of struggle against patriarchy – reflected in interpersonal male-female relationships, the family, the community, and in actions of the state and international actors. Women clamoured for radical transformation, but the governments, the lending institutions and development agencies responded with sops.

The success of the movement in gaining women visibility and making their voices heard had a flip side that activists were ill-equipped to handle. Institutionalised funding, which lapped up 'women's issues' with a vengeance, led to a rapid depoliticisation, as the spontaneous anti-authoritarian campaigns of the women's movement became replaced by gender sensitisation, training and 'empowerment' of women. Even as women's groups realised that no amount of sensitisation and empowerment would change the basic material conditions of women unless patriarchal structures were transformed, the need to earn livelihoods – and the even more insidious need to be seen as making a difference in women's lives – led many an NGO to get swept up in the tide of 'empowerment' programs.

Micro-credit, macro-hype

Over the last decade, micro-credit has been promoted as a panacea to multiple ills: poverty, disease, illiteracy and women's subordinate status. NGOs in every corner have abandoned other welfare activities and enthusiastically climbed onto the bandwagon, setting up a plethora of self-help groups (SHGs). Go to any village in India and what you will find – besides dry wells, leaky hand pumps and skinny cattle – is the ubiquitous SHG.

But the time has come to raise disquieting issues. The 'happy' face of micro-credit is that women become a conduit for bringing credit to the family; the 'sad' face is that women are left eternally burdened, struggling to make this small loan viable and to ensure repayment. Women are often only able to ensure repayment by cutting down on their own consumption or seeking wage labour. Micro-credit does not generate employment – only self-employment, and that too on an unviable scale.

There are innumerable examples of subcontracting on exploitative terms, with scant respect for labour laws.

Ironically, in most micro-finance schemes, the women's own money is locked up even as they are forced to take out loans against their own savings at a higher interest. NGOs have become collecting agents for banks trying to increase their penetration of credit, which only creates more dependence. Back-to-back lending ensures that women are constantly in debt. It may be no coincidence that Andhra Pradesh, often quoted as a 'success story' of micro-credit, is also the Indian state with the highest number of suicides due to debt.

Agricultural and other subsidies are being taken away as a right, and credit given as a burden. Moreover, the cash orientation of micro-credit is premised on an analysis of exploitative usury arrangements, rather than an analysis of the breakdown of food security or the mutuality of village systems. We find that women often approached the moneylender for food security, market access or crisis expenditure, and that these needs are now being met by SHGs without addressing such fundamental questions as: Why is there food insecurity? Why do producers not have market access? Why do only girls' families have to spend on dowry?

That micro-credit will empower women and enable poverty alleviation is a myth propagated by international agencies to draw people into a market economy based on cash or credit. Promoters of micro-credit are steadily building markets in smaller towns and rural areas, a 'penetration' they lacked previously. In cahoots with international lending agencies, the state finds this a 'win-win' scheme that allows it to give up its responsibilities for the citizens' development and welfare. For at the core of the micro-credit approach lies the assumption that people are responsible to lift themselves out of poverty. There is a blindness to the structures of economy and society that conspire to keep people poor.

Micro-lending, after all, cannot change macro structures. To some extent, it can create space for rural women by providing them with more mobility and exposure, but this happens within a restricted framework and a pre-set agenda. Micro-credit does not transform, it shackles. Instead of mere 'access' – to credit – we need to speak about entitlement for women in the realms of land rights, purchase and control of assets. These are questions that only genuine movements for social change can address, but which are drowned amidst the cacophony of the development market.

Shaping women's 'choices'

The women's movement is placed in a peculiar position: it wants to spread the good word, but is unhappy with the way in which the word gets distorted. Co-option by market forces is another inevitable, though harder to resist, aspect of

mainstreaming. Thus we have 8 March, International Women's Day, stripped of its political content and sponsored by Ponds or Whirlpool. Celebrated is a woman's 'choice' between this body lotion and the next, one dishwasher over the other.

The question of women's 'choice' – often cited as a justification of sex selection and hazardous injectable contraceptives – is mired in a multitude of layers within which women in a patriarchal society make choices. When these conflicting interests are mediated through rights discourses and legislative interventions, the issue of choice loses some of its nuance.

While it would be misplaced to entirely deny agency to women who undergo sex determination tests, use hazardous hormonal contraceptives or put themselves through risky cosmetic surgery, it would be equally wrong to think of 'choice' in a vacuum. Much as the images and subliminal messages in advertising and marketing techniques drive consumer 'choices', social context, prejudice and norms shape the 'choices' women make.

Patriarchy leaves little room for autonomous decision-making by women. Women are constantly under pressure – both visible and invisible – to make decisions that do not threaten the prevailing social norm. Deviating from social norms brings with it a range of strictures – from social disapproval, ostracism and psychological torture to outright violence. Women with only female children, for instance, are often subjected to taunting and social boycotting, and are under threat of being deserted, divorced, battered and even murdered. Little wonder that women 'choose' to ensure that they have sons, or try to fit a specific notion of 'beauty'.

Mainstreamed movements

The past three decades have witnessed an increasing flow of resources from donor agencies and the United Nations system into gender issues. The eagerness with which 'gender' as a category has been picked up has inevitably contributed to the blunting of the early militancy of the women's liberation movement. With the UN system, governments, the market and rightwing fundamentalists wholeheartedly embracing the concept of gender equity, women's rights inevitably take a back seat. With more and more NGOs espousing the cause of 'gender', we find that civil society is expanding, only to leave us with a smaller political space. To talk of gender – a postmodern notion that attempts to go beyond the stark 'hierarchy of oppression' that 'patriarchy' denotes – is all very well, but whatever happened to the women's liberation movement? What happened to political feminism?

Through the medium of the development industry, the state and the market (in the guise of gender mainstreaming) have appropriated the jargon, slogans and symbols of the women's movement. One

example is the de-politicised notion of 'reproductive rights'. Women's groups have asserted that the debate on women's reproductive rights must account for the fact that reproduction is only one aspect of women's physiology and life, and cannot be viewed in isolation. They have argued that the understanding of patriarchy must encompass complex realities, because we live in societies where political, economic, cultural and social factors come together to influence women's health and determine understandings of fertility, sexuality and reproduction.

Donor assistance has had a deep, adverse impact on the women's health movement in the developing world. For women's groups trying to resist coercive population-control programs (that erroneously locate 'overpopulation' as the cause of inequity in resource distribution), donor assistance from international agencies with large financial interests in the pharmaceutical industry has dangerously skewed the agenda.

Donor agencies have been steadily working their way towards the manufacturing of consent on the theory of overpopulation, with scant attention to over-consumption in the industrialised world. To cite one example, preceding direct intervention in population-related activities, the US-based Ford Foundation has, since 1952, spent millions of dollars on biomedical and demographic research. They have funded the Population Reference Bureau, Population Council fellowships, the United Nations Demographic Centres, universities including the London School of Economics and the Johns Hopkins Institute, and scores of Population Research Centres in India and other parts of Southasia. The products of these efforts are well moulded in the ideology voiced by the donor agencies.

In today's climate of donor-driven NGOs, it is imperative to differentiate between NGOs and social movements. While institutionalised NGOs with vertical funding can effectively deliver services and even raise issues of concern, they cannot spark genuinely transformative social movements. And it is up to the movements to cut through the confusion created in countless workshops, consultations, seminars and summits on 'gender mainstreaming'. Unless we ask the right questions, however uncomfortable they might be, we will not get any answers.

If the state, donor agencies and the market are today entering and taking over a space carved out by the women's movement, this challenge must be met head-on, with clarity and courage. These questions are perhaps going to be debated at the Seventh National Conference of Women's Movements in Calcutta in September. The criticality, radical resistance and anger against injustice need to be voiced more loudly and more clearly. The vociferous and questioning women's movement needs to be reclaimed from the stakeholders meetings and genteel discussions of gender mainstreaming. ■

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The Indian government and big newspaper houses have long resisted foreign investment in media. But the Western media conglomerate camel already has its nose in the Bharatiya tent, and before long it will be inside up to its elbows! The latest inroad is by *The Independent* newspaper of London, which has a tie-up with the publishers of *Dainik Jagran* to bring in a 'facsimile copy' - meaning without any local content or advertising - to the Indian market starting in September. The Independent News and Media Plc owns a 20 percent stake in the company, and DJ the rest. This sideways foray into English publishing by Jagran is somewhat different from *Dainik Bhaskar*, however, which decided to invest heavily in bringing out the DNA daily in Bombay.

दैनिक जागरण

Dainik Jagran



Rather late, wouldn't you think? Better late than never, wouldn't you think? Whatever, in the middle of August, on India's 60th Independence Day, the state-owned

Doordarshan launched an Urdu TV channel - initially to have a daily transmission of seven hours, but to be extended to around-the-clock. Manmohan Singh, inaugurating the channel, asked why it had taken so long (since Independence) to get the Urdu channel going. "*Der aaye, durust aaye,*" he said, translated as, "It is late, but it is good." That remains to be seen, Mr Prime Minister! (Looked to see if 'Doordarshan' logo in Urdu was available, but apparently not).

Bangladeshi media analysts have long been exasperated by the way in which the Western and Indian media treat their country as the next staging ground of Osama's al-Qaeda. The latest cause for offence came from *The Washington Post*, whose 2 August piece by Selig S Harrison, "A New Hub for Terrorism", was lambasted by Mostafa Kamal Majumder in *The New Nation* as an article tainted with "vicious subjectivity". Wrote Majumder: "Newspapers publishing one-sided information and views are called leaflets in Bangladesh and carry little significance ... Selig S Harrison's oversimplification of politics really does not apply to Bangladesh."

Quotable quote from Sri Lanka, in an article on the Sri Lankan media by K Sivathamby as carried by the

website *Familweek*: "The picture of the [Sri Lankan] press is as gloomy as the political scene. But my point is that the political gloom is worsened by newspapers." *Chettria Patrakar* would wager that there would be no one to disagree with that assessment in the rest of the Southasia.

The Asian College of Journalism is the Madras-based school that is setting new standards in journalism education in Southasia. Siriyavan Anand is a Madras-based journalist and activist-publisher who is excited that four Dalit students - three men and a woman - have been admitted to the ACJ with full scholarships. The students are D Karthikeyan, G Priya Darshini, Chittibabu Padavala and Nageswar Rao. Writes Anand: "Significantly, there was no relaxation of criteria for the admission of these students. They wrote the entrance and attended the interview like all other students. The only concession is that the course fee (ranging from INR 1.25 to INR 2 lakhs) was waived totally for these students." Siriyavan reports that the ACJ hopes to institutionalise the fellowship from next year. Good for you, ACJ! Website: www.asianmedia.org.

Naeem Mohaimen, a writer alternating between Dhaka and New York, has a great blog (shobak.org), where he recently placed some interesting write-ups he had trolled in



relation to India's Independence Day, on 15 August. Try this selection by Mohaimen, from *The Telegraph* of Calcutta: "Every morning, Shamshad Hussain goes to his rooftop, just opposite Red Fort, to enjoy a cup of tea after the azaan, his ears catching strains of prayers from the nearby Jama Masjid. Today, he carried two cups - the second was for the sniper on the rooftop. 'I doubt anyone would know better the meaning of celebrating Independence Day in these times of terror,' he says, gazing at the freshly painted red and white domes of Red Fort, from where the prime minister will address the nation tomorrow."

When 68-year-old politician and publisher Sinnathamby Sivamaharajah of the Tamil-language daily *Namathu Eelanadu* was shot on the night of 20 August, the Reporters Without Borders organisation condemned the killing, saying: "The journalists and employees of Tamil news media continue to be eliminated at a horrific pace. The press is again the

victim of Sri Lanka's dirty war, and the government is partly to blame for this hellish cycle of violence." Sivamaharajah was a member of a pro-LTTE party, and it is thought that he was killed by pro-government Tamil paramilitaries.

Here is the list that *Chettria Patrakar* has culled, on the latest authority, of the Indian channels (they may be overseas-owned) banned in Bangladesh by government order of 24 July: ESPN, Star Sports, TEN Sports, Set Max, Zee Classic, Zee Action, Zee Trendz, Zee Premier, VH1, Zoom, HBO, Star One and Disney. And here, again on latest authority, are the channels blocked by Pakistan: AXN, National Geographic, Reality, Set Max, Sony, Sahara One, Balle Balle, ETC, Channel One, Now, MM, MM2, M NET, Series, Action, Super Sports (1-6), Fashion TV International, Zee TV, Zee Cinema, Zee Music, Zee Sports, Zee News, Zee Smile, STAR Utsav, STAR Care, STAR Gold, B4U Movies, B4U Music and E-Entertainment. So if you are an addict of any of these channels, you might think twice about traveling to Bangladesh or Pakistan.



When luminaries die in Southasian countries that are outside the interest threshold of the all-important New Delhi print and television media, they might as well have not died at all, for lack of any coverage of the passing. Indeed, with the all-pervasive Indian media acting as arbiter

of what is to be disseminated, when acclaimed poet Shamsur Rahman died in Dhaka on 17 August, few of us outside Bangladesh were any the wiser. Said one article, "Rahman was considered by many to be Bangladesh's greatest contemporary poet, with 60 poetry books to his name. His campaign for political and social justice made him an iconic figure among liberals, but he was criticised by conservative religious factions."

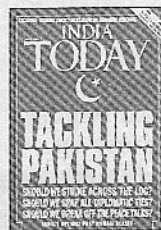
Sindh promulgates access to information ordinance, even while big India shudders at the thought of doing the same. We need not believe everything they say they will do, but Sindh Governor Ishratul Ibad on 9 August did promulgate the Sindh Freedom of Information Ordinance, "to ensure transparency and openness in the functioning of government departments". Quite appropriate that this happens in Sindh, on the other side of the border from Rajasthan state, which is where the momentum on



right to information was generated - among the more effective and sustained examples of grassroots activism Southasia has seen.

In India, however, at the time of writing, the landmark Right to Information Act passed by Parliament a year ago may end up amended and watered down to such an extent that it would be nearly meaningless. There appears to be an attempt by bureaucrats to disallow the public the right to see the notes jotted down by civil servants outlining the rationale for a particular decision. Activists close to the issue say that access to these notes is crucial. Looks like you win some (in Pakistan) and lose some (in India), though we still have to see whether the Sindh government is good to its word.

In the aftermath of the Bombay blasts on 11 July, the Indian media was quick to toe the intelligence line. While *India Today's* cover was titled 'Tackling Pakistan' - and listed striking across the LOC and attacking Pakistan among them - even the liberal weekly *Outlook* succumbed to the temptation. Its cover read 'Can we make Pakistan Pay?'. There was



no analysis of Pakistan's internal dynamics, or how the Indian intelligence agencies were seeking to hide their incompetence by using the Pakistan-bashing agenda, or the

discontent among Indian Muslims in the face of growing Hindu intolerance. Instead we witnessed how editorial slant was irresponsibly camouflaged as reportage, and 'Pakistan' was blamed. *Outlook* did try to make up by sending a reporter to do an in-depth cover on Pakistani polity and society for its following issue. But it is in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy that the media needs to be most responsible. Alas, New Delhi's free media failed its people yet again.

- Chettria Patrakar



Sangsad Bhawan pilgrimage

Rediscovering architect Louis I Kahn, along with his greatest work, the Dhaka Parliament building.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY OM THANVI

People visiting Dhaka from other cities of Southasia will often have wondered at the fascinating one-of-a-kind modernist edifice that is the Bangladesh Sangsad Bhawan, where Parliament sits. On a recent visit, I arrived with my camera and made a *parikrama* (circumambulation) like one does around a temple, and soaked in the magnificence of this architectural wonder.

The Sangsad Bhawan was built by Louis I Kahn, one of the greatest architects of the 20th century. Kahn was born in Estonia in 1901 to a Jewish family that migrated to the US in the early part of the last century. The young man paid for his architecture

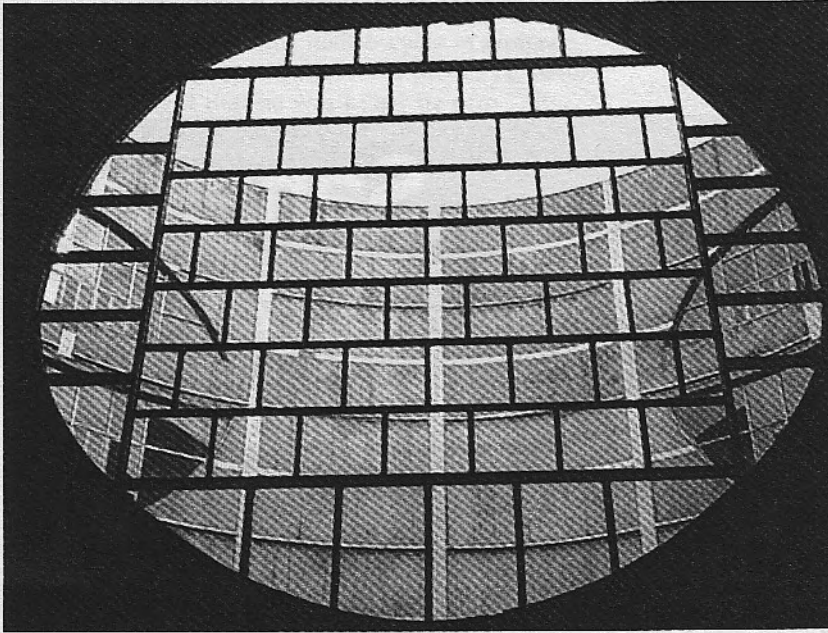
studies by playing the piano to accompany silent films in cinema halls. The dexterous pianist's hands were eventually designing groundbreaking buildings, which changed the direction of American architecture. But the best of Kahn's buildings were to be found not in the US but elsewhere. One of his more unusual creations is the Indian Institute of Management building in Ahmedabad. And unarguably his greatest work is the Parliament complex in Dhaka.

The building was conceptualised long before Bangladesh was born. It was a martial law regime of Pakistan that decided in 1959 to build the second seat of the National Parliament. Kahn made preliminary designs for

the Pakistani authorities, and was formally commissioned in 1962. Construction began in 1964, was interrupted by the 1971 War of Independence, and finally completed according to the original plans in 1982. By then Kahn was already gone - he died in 1974.

Much of Kahn's work reflects a deeply intuitive understanding that he associated with the East. In a postcard addressed to his young son from on board a PIA flight, Kahn wrote that for the West, architecture is about frames, whereas for the East it is an expression of joy.

Louis Kahn has been described as a 'mystic' architect. His buildings express the mysteries of light and shadow. Corroborating sculptor



Isamu Noguchi's description of Kahn as "a philosopher amongst architects", Pune-born architect B V Doshi places Kahn's work in the context of Indian metaphysics. He notes that the concepts of *shunya* (zero), void and silence were important to Kahn's thinking, and how attracted he was to the mysteries of light.

In Dhaka, one elderly man remembers Louis Kahn as having not just given the country a building, but an identity. The Bangladeshi architect Shamsul

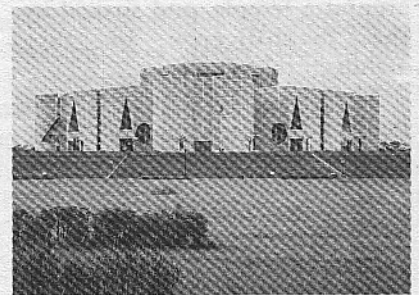
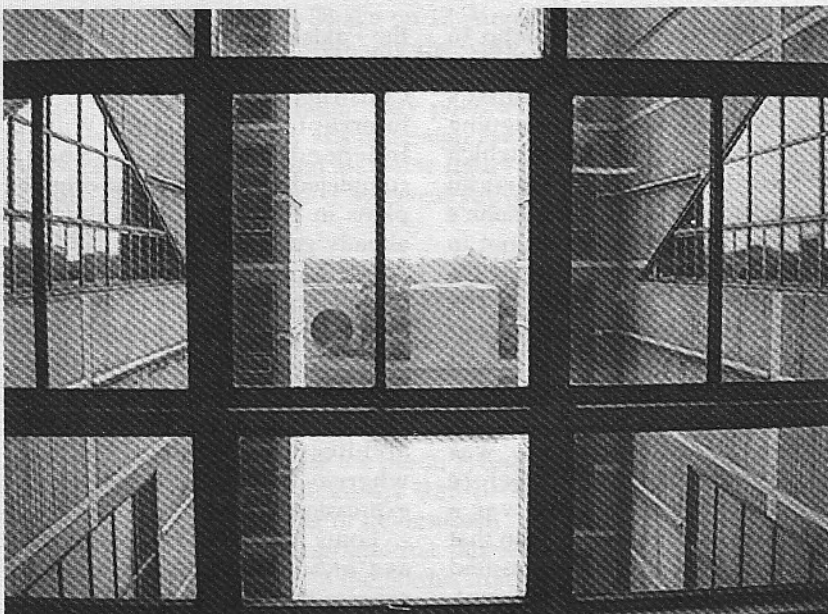
Waris, acknowledging the importance of Kahn's work to a new-born country's sense of selfhood, says: "This is the world's poorest country. He did not know how so much money would be arranged or how this building would be completed, but he made the impossible possible. At the age of 70 he would come alone all the way from the US. He came like Moses to us, and gave us a sense of our freedom."

Reading his works, it is clear that Kahn was not merely an architect;

he was a thinker and teacher of great depth. At times, he reflects a profound influence of the Indian contemplative and philosophical traditions - noting, for instance, that a building in itself is not architecture, it is only a ritual offering, *naivedya*. Being human, says Kahn, means to express oneself: expression is the motive behind living; art is the most powerful medium of expression, and science is only its servant. It is unlikely that one will attain perfect expression in one's chosen genre, but one must nonetheless ceaselessly try.

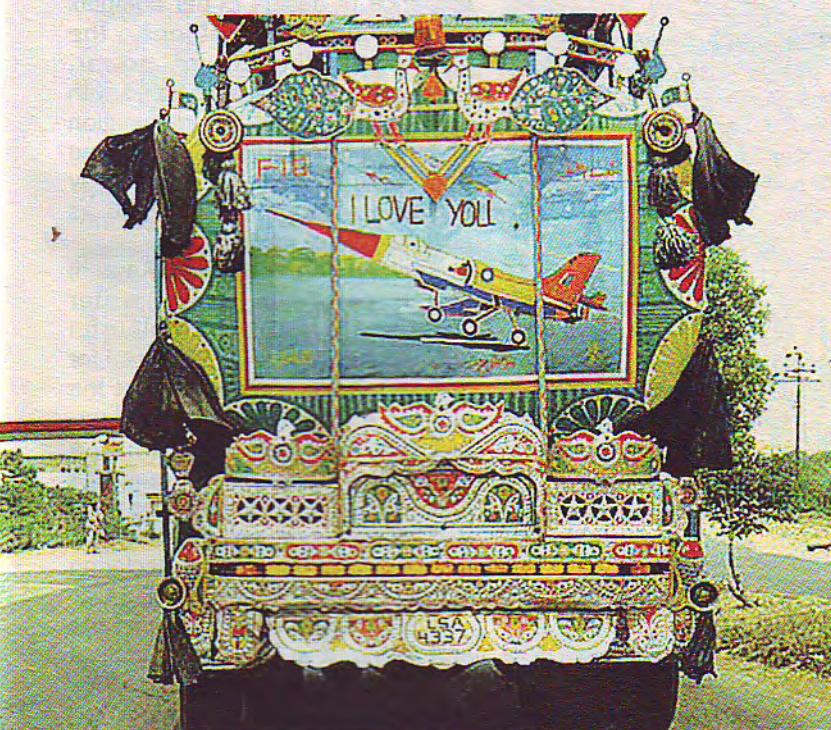
Who decides what the most perfect expression is? I do not know. But as I stood in front of the Sangsad Bhawan, I was awestruck and silenced. Lying amidst a 215 acre complex, surrounded by an artificial lake and as if floating in it, the building that Kahn built uses no brick, only cement. The building brings to my mind Chandigarh's Assembly House of Punjab and Haryana, built by Kahn-admirer Le Corbusier. But here in the Dhaka structure I find more symbolism, a building alive both visually and architecturally.

Both of the buildings Kahn built in Ahmedabad and Dhaka are replete with circular and curved windows, symbolising the two sources of light - the sun and moon. The play of light and shadow in both buildings, but especially in the Sangsad Bhawan is exquisite. In the building's main hall, where 350 representatives of the Bangladeshi people sit, the domed roof is a sieve of light. The windows, skylights and balconies of the building make it, almost literally, a lighthouse. What better expression is there, even if only symbolic, of a democracy? ▲



F-16, object of desire

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RINKU DUTTA



The falcons are poised to circle over Southasian skies. In a USD 5 billion deal that the US Congress has cleared, Pakistan can acquire up to 36 new Block 50/52 F-16 Fighting Falcons – the most advanced fighter aircraft flown by US forces – as well as 26 refurbished ones.

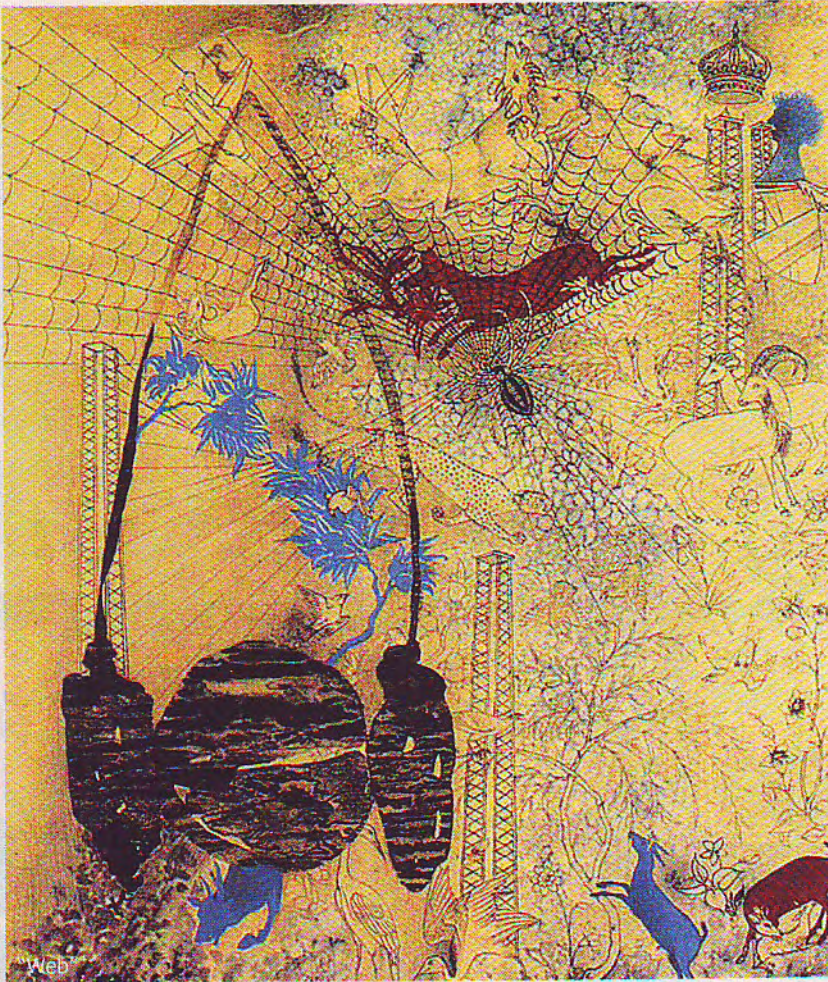
Here is "Pleasure Pillars", a miniature watercolor by Pakistan-born, New York-based artist Shazia Sikander. She has appropriated the fighter-bomber as a decorative motif in her modernist miniatures. An ominous black aircraft swoops over a ram-headed modern woman,

a bi-hearted hybrid of the hapless, beheaded Venus de Milo and her more curvaceous Eastern counterpart (an Ajanta Dancing Girl?). A fairy-falcon, rendered in an ethereal light green, is spraying gold onto the blue-and-yellow striped horn of the hybrid East-West Woman. At her feet, a leafy plant presents a full-blown 9-petaled flower, each petal a fighter-bomber.

With its cropped delta wings and long wing-body strakes, the design of the F-16 has a definite aesthetic appeal. Shazia uses fine line drawings of the fighter craft in "Web", a composition that encourages

reflection on the post-9/11 geopolitics of West Asia. Two F-16s are drawn into a spider's web that threatens a paradisiacal land of suckling fawns, flowering vines and flying birds. Creatures are entangled in the spider's net. A lion has his teeth and claws on the neck of a deer. A spotted leopard is on the prowl. Four oil derricks and an imperial crown suggest the political context of this work.

In terms of combat history, F-16s have been most effectively used in conflicts in West Asia. After the US Air Force, which has more than 2500 of the aircraft, the Israeli Air Force



F-16s were an integral part of the Operation Desert Fox bombing campaign. They were used again in the 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom invasion. This year, on 7 June, two Fighting Falcons carried out the air strike that killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of 'al-Qaeda in Iraq'. As the workhorse of the Israeli defence forces, F-16s played a key military role in Israeli attacks on Lebanon in July-August this year.

While Shazia Sikander is exploiting the symbolic content of fighter jets, including F-16s, and their elegance of design in her complex storytelling compositions, the growing mythology of power, conquest and glory associated with F-16s also informs the imagination of uncelebrated artisans decorating trucks and buses in Pakistan. They too have appropriated the F-16 as an ornamental motif.

Traveling recently from Karachi to Hyderabad, this writer was confronted by a colourful representation of an F-16 poised for takeoff, on the central panel of the back of a truck. The grand fighter-bomber did look somewhat a grasshopper, with dangly rear legs tottering on toy wheels. But the artist had left no opportunity for mistaking the identity of his subject, declaring in bold English: *F-16 I LOVE YOU*.

Clearly the F-16 fires both hearts and minds. It is a versatile, tactical jet fighter that can execute 9 g turns. Much simpler and lighter than its predecessors, the F-16 has advanced aerodynamics and avionics, including the first use of 'fly-by-wire' technology. The jet can fly great distances without having to refuel. A dog-fighter par excellence, the F-16's destructiveness has earned it the nickname 'Viper'.

In Karachi, billboards advertise an F-16 brand of dolphin-nosed, fighter-shaped ice cream. At this very moment, perhaps, little boys are succumbing to the appeal of vanilla, chocolate, mango, strawberry, orange-flavoured F-16s. From modern miniatures to truck art to ice cream advertisements, F-16s have transgressed and penetrated new and unexpected territories. ▲



(IAF) has the largest F-16 fleet at 382. In 1981, eight F-16s participated in a raid that destroyed Osiraq, an Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad. The next year, IAF F-16s engaged Syrian aircraft on

numerous encounters, ending victorious each time.

During the 1991 Gulf War, 250 F-16s made 13,500 sorties, accounting for 40 percent of all American bombing raids. In 1998,

UP badland ballad

BY Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta

A psara is an old Bombay cinema that has recently been converted into a multiplex. Garage-sized lifts bring us up to the fourth floor for Vishal Bhardwaj's new film *Omkara*, even as parts of the building are being stripped down and reinvented to make the glossy metallic surfaces of the new Indian bazaar. Outside the rain-drenched windows are the surrounding buildings, some of them close to a hundred years old, filled with the families of migrants who have built this city. Down below, on the narrow street, are lines of waiting taxis, their black-and-yellow roofs glistening in the monsoon showers. Many of the drivers have come to Bombay from rural Uttar Pradesh, seeking a better life.

Omkara transports the audience back to the heartland of western UP, where other young men wait restlessly for life to give them a chance. Some, tired of waiting, have been drawn into a life of crime. After all, in this unforgiving landscape, a gunshot fired from a barren hillside can prevent a wedding from taking place; the man who fired the shot can return calmly to a small-town hostel to play a game of marbles; and when a posse arrives to seek him out, just one call on the cellphone can end the matter.

Intertwining a Shakespearean plot with the stuff of spaghetti westerns, *Omkara* tells a powerfully Indian story. The rough, edgy dialogue rips through everyday niceties; the slow, sensuous poetry of the camera takes us through ancient landscapes; the narrative fades, dissolves and surges forward again, like a grand musical composition; the riveting performances make us forget that we are watching the stars of Bombay's commercial cinema.

The most memorable moment takes place in a hilltop temple where the local leader, Bhaisaab (Naseeruddin Shah), sits with his

Baahubali (chief aide) Omkara and two lieutenants, Langda and Kesu. They are all moving up in life. At the end of the puja comes the ritual of Omkara (Ajay Devgan) anointing the next Baahubali. Will it be the local man Langda (Saif Ali Khan), or the college-educated Kesu 'Firangi' (Viveik Oberoi)? Apart from its importance as a crucial plot turn, the medieval atmosphere of the scene suggests a kind of religious sanctity to lawlessness, and celebrates the rite of succession with drums, gunshots and frenzied dancing. Even while one man's forehead is anointed with vermilion paste, we are immediately shown the other, alone in his room, smashing the mirror and anointing his own forehead with blood. More blood, we know, will be spilled in the course of this story.

Love and violence

Bhardwaj adapts Shakespeare's *Othello* – from little details like character names, to unforgettable lines such as the parting taunt about a woman's loyalty, with which the father of Omkara's lover, Dolly, leaves Omkara. The Moor becomes the half-caste; the Duke's officers, a gang of outlaws; the handkerchief, an ornate *kamar-bandh*. Bhardwaj's film begins with a non-wedding, continues with plans being made for another wedding, and ends with another non-wedding. Between the two events unfolds a tale of violent passion in the Uttar Pradesh badlands.

Nothing is black-and-white in *Omkara*. Langda, like *Othello's* Iago, fills Omkara's mind with doubt, but it is Dolly's father's taunt that echoes in Omkara's mind, and it is Omkara who eventually commits the murder. *Othello's* Desdemona becomes *Omkara's* Dolly – an English name for an Indian rose. Dolly (Kareena Kapoor) is also literally treated as a doll –

the *gudiya* in the song that Omkara sings to wake her up; the *mishri ki pudiya* (packet of sugar), a Sita-figure accused of infidelity; but also a doll-woman alone in a doll's house, wilfully blind to the life her husband leads. In one song, a sweet, aching, elegiac lyric to the first flush of love, the camera follows Omkara and Dolly around the house – up and down the stairs, and out of the house in one continuous, sensuous sequence. In the final moments of the song, Dolly picks up the rifle and runs out to point it playfully at Omkara before they collapse, laughing, into the hay. We recall that the happiness of this home is built on a foundation of violence.



Ajay Devgan and Naseeruddin Shah

Finally, a word about the music. Bhardwaj, who began in cinema as a composer, weaves the score seamlessly into the narrative. The music ebbs and flows endlessly around the characters like the river in the background. A slow instrumental theme takes us through the opening credits. The first song courses along with Dolly's narration of her love for Omkara. Now the song, now Dolly's spoken narration, takes the audience through the progression of their love. The title song, "Omkara", is almost the opposite of the first – a rough chant, almost menacing – but no less powerful as background for this explosion of violence in the Indian heartland. ▲

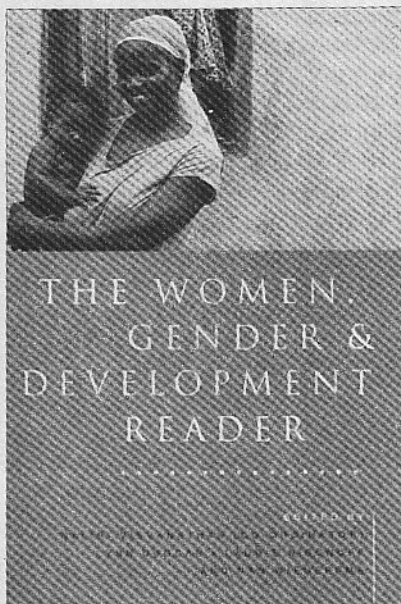
The heroines of dignified struggle

BY BARNITA BAGCHI

When, as part of her research, the feminist academic June Fernandez-Kelly got a job as a worker in a *maquiladora* (a factory in Mexico producing goods for US multinationals), she discovered how arduous the 'unskilled' job of sewing pockets onto garments actually was. Demanding perfect coordination of hands, eyes and legs, the task required great nimbleness – a trait associated with women, who are drawn in ever-larger numbers into this kind of low-wage production in the global economy. Fernandez-Kelly was expected to sew almost 400 pockets every hour, about 3000 every day, all for around USD 5 a day.

The excerpt of Fernandez-Kelly's work in *The Women, Gender and Development Reader* (WGDR) is insightful and richly detailed, as is much of the rest of the book. Both of the books under review were originally published in London, and have now been republished in Southasia by Zubaan. Included in WGDR are texts by such well-known Southasian social scientists and activists as Gita Sen, Bina Agarwal and Chandra Mohanty, as well as a host of additional, formative feminist essays.

Over recent decades, the academic world of gender and development studies has moved



The Women, Gender and Development Reader

edited by **Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Laurie Nisonoff and Nan Wiegiersma**
New Delhi:
Zubaan
2006

through several paradigms and models. The newest, it now appears, is the WCD (Women, Culture and Development) model. The frivolity of acronyms apart, this book demonstrates that, regardless of this paradigm shift, the earlier

models are far from obsolete. For example, Danish economist Ester Boserup's sterling contributions to the field during the 1970s still stand out. We continue to draw upon her demonstration of the strong and positive role that African women had historically played, even under patriarchal conditions, as agricultural subsistence producers. Or, her exposé of the ways in which European colonial law and economics marginalised such women.

There are also, however, distinct tensions in the field of gender and development. An influential group in this field works for international development agencies funded by wealthy countries of the North, where they also live. The work of such practitioners is limited by the murkiness of the politics of international aid, and the self-serving and exploitative interests of such countries. Equally, academics and activists based in the developing countries find that the women who are their subject are constantly squeezed from three directions: between conservative or fundamentalist interests; a state receding from welfarism; and the increasingly volatile nature of global markets, which now seek to mould women into docile subjects of the 'flexible', service-driven, 'feminised' new global economy. In the new

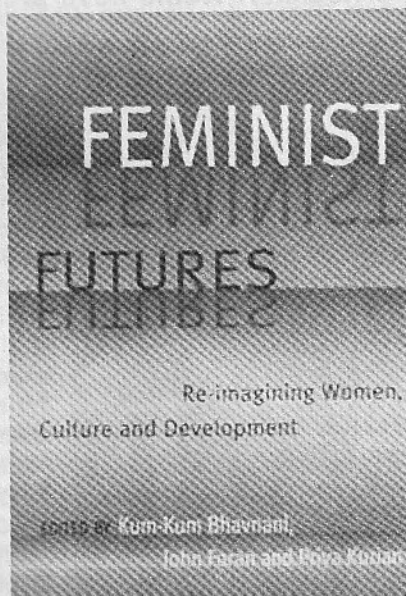
From the work of feminist economists we have learned that, even today, official statistics do not have an appropriate set of standards for measuring women's work.

Women workers are greatly in demand due to several stereotypes: their perceived conversational and 'courteous' skills, willingness to work flexible hours, and tendency to steer clear of aggressive unionisation.

marketplace of emerging service sectors, such as call-centres, women workers are greatly in demand due to several stereotypes: their perceived conversational and 'courteous' skills, willingness to work flexible hours, and tendency to steer clear of aggressive unionisation.

A complex narrative often emerges from women's encounters with these multiple forces, one that cannot be accounted for in terms of straight gains and losses. Fernandez-Kelly, for example, documents how her colleagues in the *maquiladora* were able to bond and exercise personal agency, for instance, in camaraderie amongst themselves, even when unionisation was taboo. The annals of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), formed to organise women in the informal sector in Gujarat, or those of women in Uttaranchal's environmental Chipko movement, belong to another order of agency altogether, and emerge as icons of women's activism in the field of development.

Particularly compelling in *WGDR* is a feminist reassessment of gender in the family and the household – of women's work. Past academic research has demonstrated that the family and household must be seen as sites of what can be described as 'cooperative conflict' – of negotiations and bargaining over resources. On the other hand, there is the dangerously wrongheaded view emphasised by mainstream economics – of the male head of the family as an altruist, who fairly speaks for the whole family and justly distributes familial resources. From the work of feminist economists we have learned that, even today, official statistics do not have an



Feminist Futures: Re-imagining women, culture and development
edited by Kum-Kum Bhavnani,
John Foran and Priya Kurian
New Delhi:
Zubaan
2006

appropriate set of standards for measuring women's work.

Structure of feelings

Feminist Futures is a refreshing book. At the intersection of studies of culture, feminism and critical development, it adapts a notion of culture that the Welsh Marxist Raymond Williams described as a "structure of feelings" – which, say the editors, "is meant to denote [a] blend of pattern and agency". There is in this model a simultaneous emphasis on ideology, and on human experience, feeling and agency. This emphasis on women's ability to take control of themselves is particularly important in the context of other schools of epistemology, such as certain brands of post-modernism, that completely write-out women's abilities to think and feel.

The book experiments with several genres. "Maria's Stories", for instance, are moving autobiographical narratives told by the Salvadorean activist Maria Ofelia Navarrete. Later, US sociology professor John Foran blends politics and aesthetics to meditate on the centrality of desire, love and dreams – of the *how's* and *might's* in revolutionary social change. In a short, spare article, Raka Ray invokes the ways in which Lakshmi, a 40-year-old female domestic worker in Calcutta, conceptualises a just society and developed culture. Other articles look at the popularity of the ancient Indian design philosophy of *Vastushastra*, the contradictions in recent Indian reproductive and child-health policy, and how 'cyber-connectivity' is giving birth to ways to further gender justice. An important component of *Feminist Futures* is also its conscious visualisation of issues of sexuality, including homosexuality, in the field of gender and development.

Reading these books together, one does not get a sense that earlier writings in the field have been superseded by later ones. Each of these fresh additions is welcome, but what stands out is the excellence of practitioners over the past three decades, who helped to bring younger scholars into what has become the enviably strong position of the gender and development terrain today. The best articles in these volumes testify to the importance of hard empirical observation, and of seeing political economy and culture as both complementary and indispensable in the study of gender and development. The heroines of academic works such as these are extraordinary women, who see dignified struggle as a quiet, non-grandiose, yet essential component of everyday life. ▲

Dispelling dangerous notions

Perhaps for the first time, a book in Hindi seeks to present the Kashmir question as a Kashmiri would have presented it.

BY IFTIKHAR GILANI

At the peak of a recent standoff, a senior Congress leader in New Delhi candidly admitted that the government cannot go too far with the People's Democratic Party (PDP), its local partner that is currently running the government in Jammu & Kashmir. His point was that the Congress could hardly go along with PDP demands such as self-rule and increased powers to the Srinagar government, nor openly highlight the human rights abuses by the security forces in Kashmir. This was because, said the Congress leader, the vast number of voters in India could not be ignored. After all, there are only six seats in the national Parliament from Jammu & Kashmir, and "we cannot sacrifice 500 seats in the rest of India for the sake of just six seats".

In June, when the India-Pakistan peace process was yet to be derailed by the Bombay blasts, it is said that Manmohan Singh himself had raised the issue of this popular attitude towards Kashmir during one of the regular Friday meetings of the Congress party's core governing group. He is said to have complained that Congress stalwarts had not worked hard enough to build public opinion in support of the peace process and the solutions he had envisaged.

Over the years, bald-faced lies have been told about Jammu & Kashmir, but the Indian public shows little concern over the misinformation and manipulation. While public outrage over the rigging of polls in Haryana in 1989 could force Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala to resign, the same public took the massive rigging of the 1987 assembly polls in Kashmir as a necessity born of 'national interest'.

J & K has always been treated differently by New Delhi – not by the gifting of political concessions but by the throttling of democratic voices and the restricting of political space of Kashmiris in the name of national security. The legacy of those brave politicians and citizens who faced the

1975 Emergency head-on has been soured by the maintenance of what is nothing less than a criminal silence on the happenings in Kashmir.

Journalists and writers too have been complicit in the dissemination of misinformation about Kashmir. Since the onset of the insurgency 17 years ago, over 800 books on the state have hit the bookstands nationally and internationally. Though well researched, most of these have been written in English, thus severely limiting their reach within India.

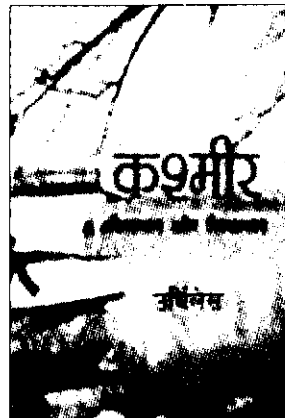
While this reviewer has come across books related to Kashmir in Hindi, most offer no more analysis than to wonder what Kashmiris are fighting for. Many spew Hindutva arguments and call for the abrogation of the special status accorded J & K by the Indian Constitution. Some even suggest the inundation of Kashmir by Hindus from the Indian heartland so as to reduce the Muslim population to a minority. Even the most liberal of Hindi

commentators tend to link Kashmiri unrest to global Islamic extremism.

Making a break?

Journalist Urmilesh has long been an iconoclast, probably the only Hindi-language media person to have reported on the Kargil War from Kargil, Drass and Batalik while the fighting was at its bloodiest. In *Kashmir: Virasat aur Siyasat* (Kashmir: Legacy and Politics), he accomplishes something just as important: he takes seriously the Kashmir issue by taking seriously the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. In writing this book in Hindi, he has perhaps for the first time presented to the North Indian public the Kashmir issue in its reality.

The book traces both the history of the unrest in J & K and the Kashmiri demand for autonomy, with special emphasis on pre- and post-Partition events and the slow but steady alienation of large sections of the state's citizenry. Urmilesh reminds



Kashmir: Virasat aur Siyasat (Kashmir: Legacy and Politics) by Urmilesh
New Delhi: Anamika

Since the onset of the insurgency 17 years ago, over 800 books on Kashmir have hit the bookstands nationally and internationally.

readers that J & K acceded to the Indian Union under conditions different from those of other states. J & K had a 780 km border with what was to be Pakistan, towards which all of its rivers and trade routes flowed. At the time of Independence, it shared a frontier of a mere 81 km with India. Perhaps more significantly, the majority of J & K's population was Muslim. Still, the state decided to join India, hoping that its interests would be better protected by secular India than by its Muslim neighbour.

After laying out this background, Urmilesh describes a long list of betrayals and acts of deceit, duplicity and perfidy. Jawaharlal Nehru had known, he writes, that Kashmir had come to India not because of Raja Hari Singh's accession but because of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's support. New Delhi's Kashmir policy had thus acted to support the Sheikh until 1953, when the very person responsible for J & K's membership in the Union was dismissed and arrested. Urmilesh reveals a long record of rigged elections, starting with that of 1952. He also mentions the erosion of the Indian Constitution's Article 370, which not only granted J & K special status but also, until the 1960s, the right to have a separate head of state. Urmilesh also describes the role played by Indira Gandhi's dismissal of the Farooq Abdullah government in 1984

in paving the way to militancy.

J & K is perhaps the only state where candidates filing for an elected post must take an oath of allegiance to India's integrity and Constitution. In other states, only representatives who have been elected take that oath, and that too only when the position is one in the Assembly or Parliament. The J & K chief minister may dare separatists to join the electoral fray if they want to show their strength, but in his heart he knows that – as in Pakistan-


Administered Kashmir, where candidates also have to take an oath of loyalty to Pakistan – candidates who refuse to take such an oath will either be rejected or not allowed to contest under a regime hostile to them. Urmilesh suggests that truly fair elections would help Kashmiri separatists to join the mainstream.

One hopes that efforts such as this book by Urmilesh – a thorough and critical account of the Kashmiri struggle, written in Hindi – will at long last help dispel

dangerous misunderstandings about J & K and Kashmiris. Such works will help readers in the North Indian heartland to comprehend the Kashmir question in its social and historical context. The achievement of such an understanding will go a long way in helping politicians and activists to find an amicable settlement to the Kashmir issue.





Urmilesh



UNESCO Publishing

The Sasia Story

The Sasia Story recounts Madanjeet Singh's lifelong search for economic stability and regional cooperation. It is the story of a young man's activism and fervour, as well as the trauma he suffers in the aftermath of partition and the gruesome fratricidal conflict between India and Pakistan. Madanjeet Singh is a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. In 2000, he set up the South Asia Foundation (SAF) to benefit disadvantaged and marginalized communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

First published by UNESCO in English, French and Spanish in cooperation with the European Commission and South Asia Foundation, The Sasia Story is translated into 24 Southasian languages and published in English by Penguin (India).

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On the way up

Xaying it right!

The citizens of the erstwhile Indian state of Assam have decided to challenge the rest of us by starting a campaign whereby our tongues will be twisted beyond company specifications, but it looks like we will remain where we started and not be pronouncing anything correctly. Not for your average Assamese gentleman/gentlelady will the conversion be as simple as from a Bombay to a Mumbai, a Madras to a Chennai, or a Calcutta to a Kolkata. No, first they will tell you that Assam is no longer Assam, it is to be 'Asom'. Fair enough. And 'Assamese' will be replaced by Asommiya (it used to be Assamiya, but let that be).

Now, Messrs Borbora, Bordoloi and Bezbaruah tell us that it is not so much the spelling as the pronunciation that they are after. Spell it any way you like, as long as you pronounce it properly, is the refrain. And how do you pronounce Asom? Something like *Akhhom*, in which you replace the middle consonant with a deep-throated aspirated attempt to reach into the lungs and exhale bits and pieces of diaphragm tissue. As long as you can say *Akhhom* in the process, the Akhhomiya do not really care how you spell it.



We're all Akhhomiya now

On a recent trip to Akhhom, I walked the Brahmaputra banks desperately seeking Sanjay. No one had heard of him. Okay, then, Sanjoy. No one had heard of Sanjoy either. Then it dawned on me. "Babuji, could you please point me in the direction of Mr Xonzoi?" I found my man, who then explained to me the fine nationalistic distinctions that separate Assam, Asom and Akhhom. I did ask him, or I think I did, why he was not called 'Khonkhoi'. But I forgot to ask Xonzoi why Asom was Akhhom and not Axom.

Akhhom is the crucible of eastern Southasian civilisation, and it is today leading the way to cultural revival, starting with correct pronunciation. This is laudable, and the rest of Southasia - including the Indian Union government, all PSUs, all

the security forces and all NGOs - please take note and make the required adjustment to your tongues.

One of the problems of Southasian integration that the SAARC organisation should take seriously is the matter of pronunciation. Like the Eminent Persons Group on Poverty Reduction, which has achieved such success in raising people's awareness about the status of their penury, might we suggest an Eminent Person's Group on Accents, Enunciation and the Rendition of Long Surnames?

Take the name Sembakuttiaratchi, a Lankan surname that carries with it a hallowed tradition of public-spirited service to fellow man, nay humankind. But should we not be fearful of a breakdown of hard-earned Southasian camaraderie if we cannot correctly pronounce the name of a fellow Southasian citizen? In the Lankan case the problem is of sheer distance between where a name starts and where it ends. This is a typically south-Southasian proclivity also continued north of the Palk Strait. As we know, the British colonials departed when they learnt that the freedom fighters were about to bring Trivandrum back to Thiruvananthapuram. As you will notice, Thiruvananthapuram stands tall today while the Brits have gone.

I want to get back to Akkhom, or Axom, however. At least in the case of Mr Sembakuttiaratchi down in Colombo, the rendition may be long but there is no subterfuge in the pronunciation. A diligent Balochi or Ladakhi who does his or her homework can break the name down to its component parts and have a fairly good go at semba-kutti-a-ratchi and he would not be far off. One can make a speech from the SAARC rostrum without making a mistake on that one, as with Katunayake, Bandaranayake or Dissanayake.

But fast-forward to the Indian Northeast, where our friends Xonzoi, Xonzib, Xiva and Xaraxwati are patiently waiting for this columnist to be done with his drivel. Before I am bonked on the head by these proud Axxommiya friends, let me have the last word: "Southasian camaraderie will not be supported by having sounds to which no script, Roman, Nagari or indigenous, can do justice. This is definitely a matter to be referred to the Eminent Person's Group on Accents, Enunciation and the Rendition of Long Surnames. Be xeeing you! Ouch!"

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