

SIACHEN PEACE PARK

A Proposal

Introduction

The Himalaya, born 70 million years ago, stretch for 2500 km across eight countries, cover 3.4 million km², and are home to 30 million indigenous peoples. They are the water tower for millions of people, providing the source of the Indus, Ganges, Jumna, Brahmaputra, Hwang Ho, Yangtze Kiang and others.

The Siachen glacier, on the eastern edge of the Karakorams, is 77 km. long, 2-8 km. wide, the longest in the world outside the Polar regions. It is redolent of the Romance of Exploration: Moorcroft, Younghusband, the Workman-Bullocks, Dainelli, Neve, Longstaff, Visser, Khan Sahib Afraz Gul.

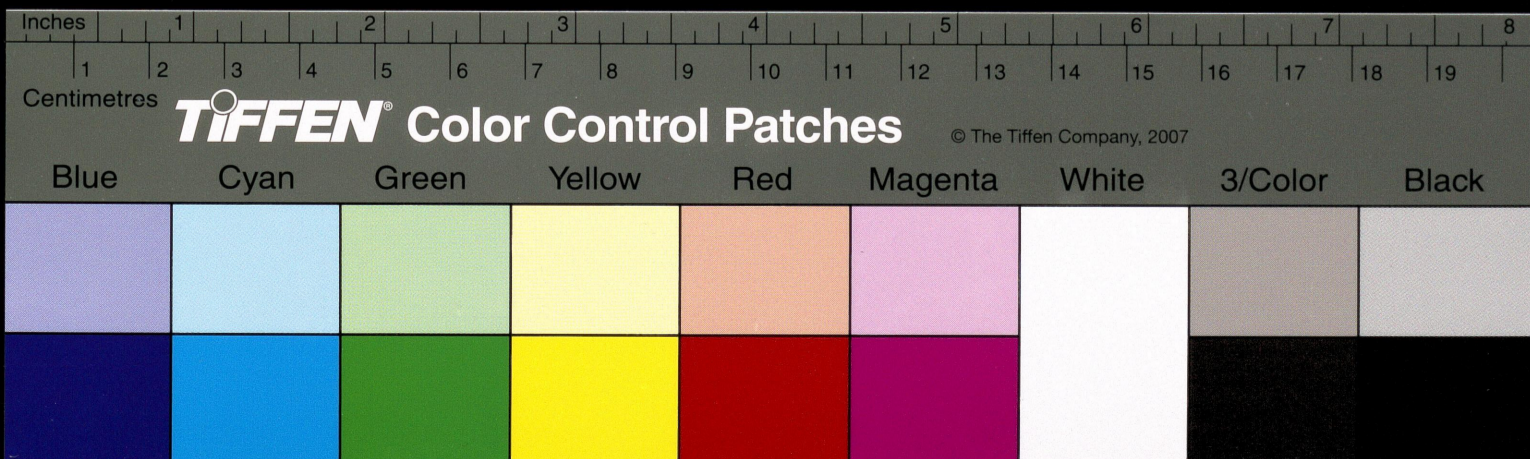
An uninhabited area, it was given no attention in the negotiations between India and Pakistan in 1949 (Cease fire Line); 1965 (Tashkent Agreement); 1972 (Shimla Agreement and the Line of Control).

Then began the war of mountaineering expeditions. Pakistan authorised several expeditions since 1950 (access is easier from the Pakistan side), but did not establish any permanent posts. Indian Army mountaineering expeditions went in 1978, 1980, 1981.

In 1984, Pakistan authorised a Japanese expedition to the Rimo peaks via the Siachen, and sent soldiers to the area; India stopped this expedition and in April 1984, sent troops to establish and maintain control; there was severe fighting and positions have been more or less frozen since then.

For 18 long years, the armies of India and Pakistan (several thousand troops) have faced each other in a surreal, undeclared war; the longest running conflict of our times in which regular armed forces are taking part. The Indian Base Camp is at 12,000 ft with posts at up to 22,000 ft. Of the 3500 dead and 10,000 injured, only 3% have been due to enemy action; the remainder have been victims of the elements: cold of minus 50 degrees Centigrade; blizzards with winds up to 300 km. an hour; avalanches and crevasses; the mountaineers dreaded edema. Soldiers have to be rotated as they cannot spend more than 30 days at high altitudes.

Everything has to be flown in by helicopter or airdropped: personnel, food, fuel, tents, equipment, ammunition, weapons. Artillery, such as the Bofors multibarrelled rocket launchers, have to be dismantled and flown in, then reassembled. The rarefied atmosphere and winds make mockery of ballistic data. As Gen. Hoon wrote: "It must be hitting something. We are definitely within range but the problem is there is a ridge separating the two base camps."



The Indian army now has the highest battleground, the highest helipad (19,000 ft.), the highest dropping zone (22,000 ft.), the highest public phone booth - and the highest cemetery in the world.

The cost of this operation is about Rs. 5 crores a day. This is about 50 times higher than the costs to Pakistan, which has easier access by road, with a much lower base camp (9000 ft.) and with posts at lower altitudes (up to 15,000 ft.). Though less expensive than India's operation, it is yet a heavy expenditure. For both countries, this is an intolerable drain. They are not rich countries, with a fifth of the world's population but a half of the world's poor.

Pollution and Environmental Degradation

It is not easy to imagine the pollution and degradation caused by thousands of men living up there, with every item of necessity being flown in. Cans, drums, fuel containers, tetrapacks for fruit juices, aluminium packaging: these can neither be burnt, nor destroyed nor taken back. Imagine the human waste: amounting to over 1000 kgs. a day; it is packed in metal drums and dropped into crevasses - up to 4000 drums a year. This, together with hundreds of tons of garbage, will then be our legacy to future generations when the glacier finally reaches the end of its journey.

Heavy guns and equipment are flown in, but as a senior army officer remarked: Nothing will ever be flown back.

The ibex are all gone. The wild roses - the area was famous for its wild roses: 'Sia' means rose in the Balti language - have been cut for tent pegs or for decoration.

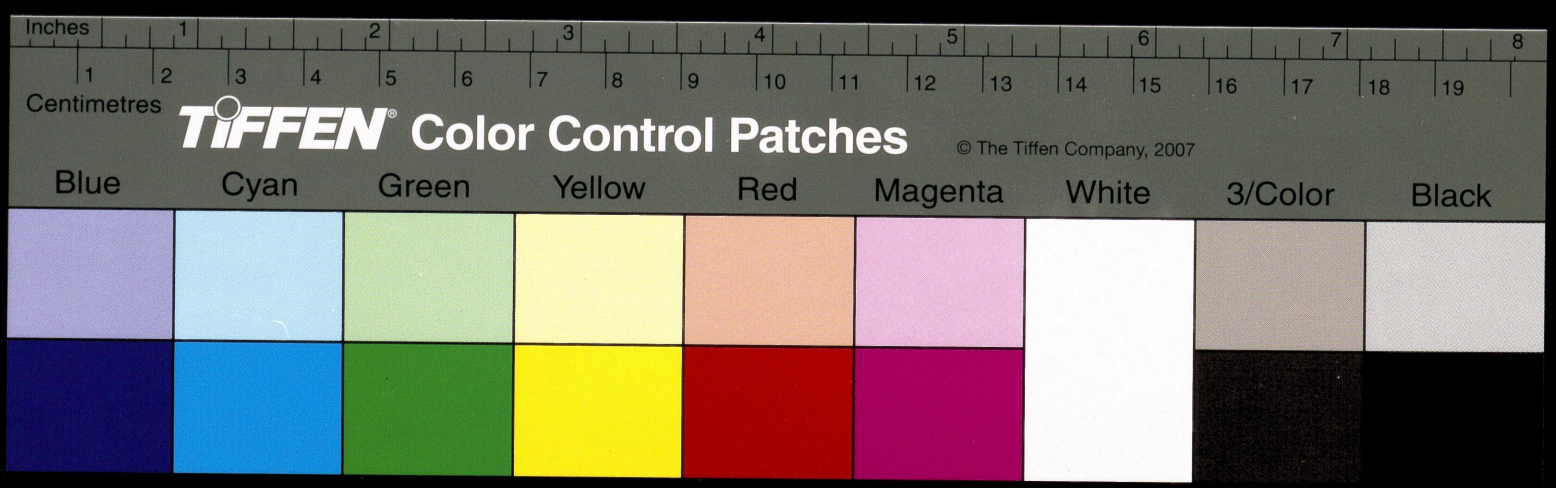
Do we want to destroy one of the Himalaya's most majestic areas before leaving it to future generations?

Do we want to turn the Abode of the Gods into a nightmare landscape?

Search for a Solution

It is clear that both sides are anxious to end this surreal stand-off. There have been many discussions between the two countries, aimed at resolving it. Even in 1984 and 1985, immediately after the posting of troops, there were flag meetings between sector commanders. Since then there have been several meetings (1986, 1989, 1992, 1997) between senior officials - Foreign Secretaries, Defence Secretaries, senior military personnel - and between the Prime Minister and the President.

In 1989 there was an understanding to resolve the dispute 'based on redeployment of forces.....and to ensure durable peace in the Siachen area.'



established, largely through the efforts of an individual: Anton Rupert, an 84 year old tobacco millionaire, 'a realist who believes in miracles'. Two Peace Parks have already been set up. The first is the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, about the size of Switzerland, formed by merging two adjacent parks in South Africa and Botswana; it was opened in May 2000. The second is the transfrontier park agreed to in November 2000, by South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. This is about the size of Portugal and includes the famous Kruger National Park. There are plans for about six other transfrontier parks including the Limpopo Valley Peace Park between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

In India, there is the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary on both sides of the India-Bhutan border, while suggestions have been made for Peace Parks on the frontiers with Nepal and Bhutan. There is cooperation between the protected areas of China, Nepal and India around Kangchenjunga. India and Pakistan already have several National Parks and Reserves in the Himalayan regions: in India there is the Great Himalayan, the Hemis, the Keibul Lamjao, the Kishtwar, the Namdapha, the Nanda Devi, the Nokrek, the Rajaji, the Valley of Flowers, the Pin Valley: while in Pakistan there is the Khunjerab National Park and the large Central Karakoram National Park, which would be adjacent to the proposed Siachen Peace Park.

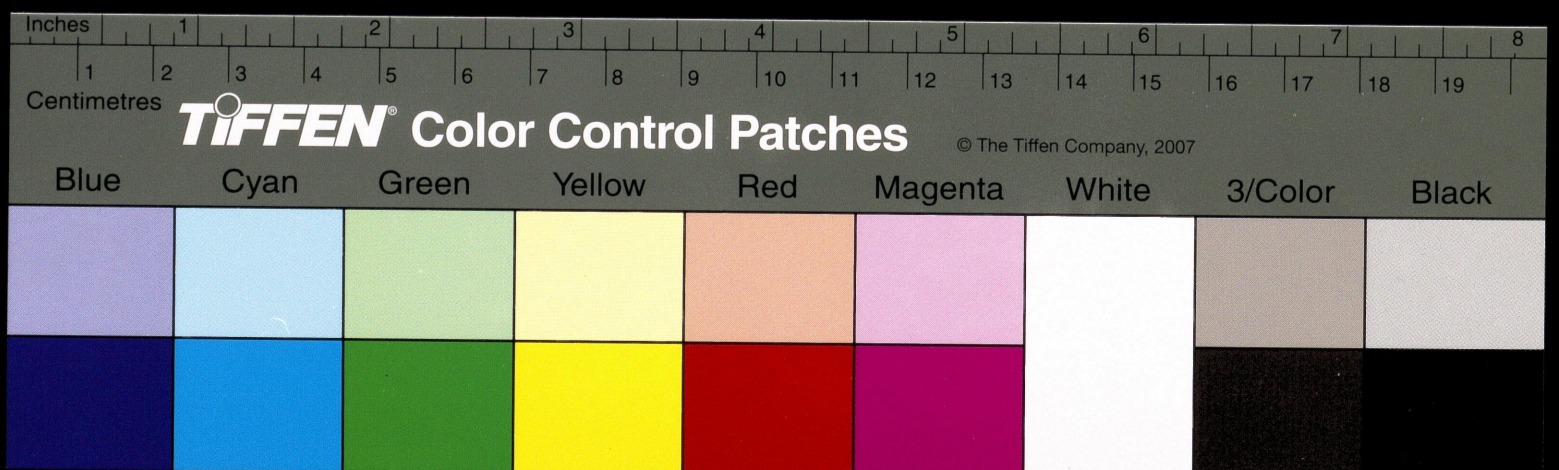
The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has considered the possibility of transfrontier conservation zones. It is perhaps significant that the longest glacier in the Alps, the Aletsch, was classified as a World Heritage Site last December.

Once the principle of a Park is accepted, measures guaranteeing security to both India and Pakistan and ensuring the proper the management of the Siachen Peace Park could be worked out between the two countries. There is a variety of administrative frameworks used for different situations; the Siachen Peace Park could work out its own. There are internationally accepted Guidelines for the management of transfrontier parks while the World Conservation Union has elaborated a Draft Code for Transboundary Protected Areas in Times of Peace and Armed Conflict.

This year is the International Year of the Mountains. It would be a magnificent gift to the world for India and Pakistan to decide to establish the Siachen Peace Park. The ibex and the snow leopard would return, the roses would bloom again.

1 February 2002.

Aamir Ali.



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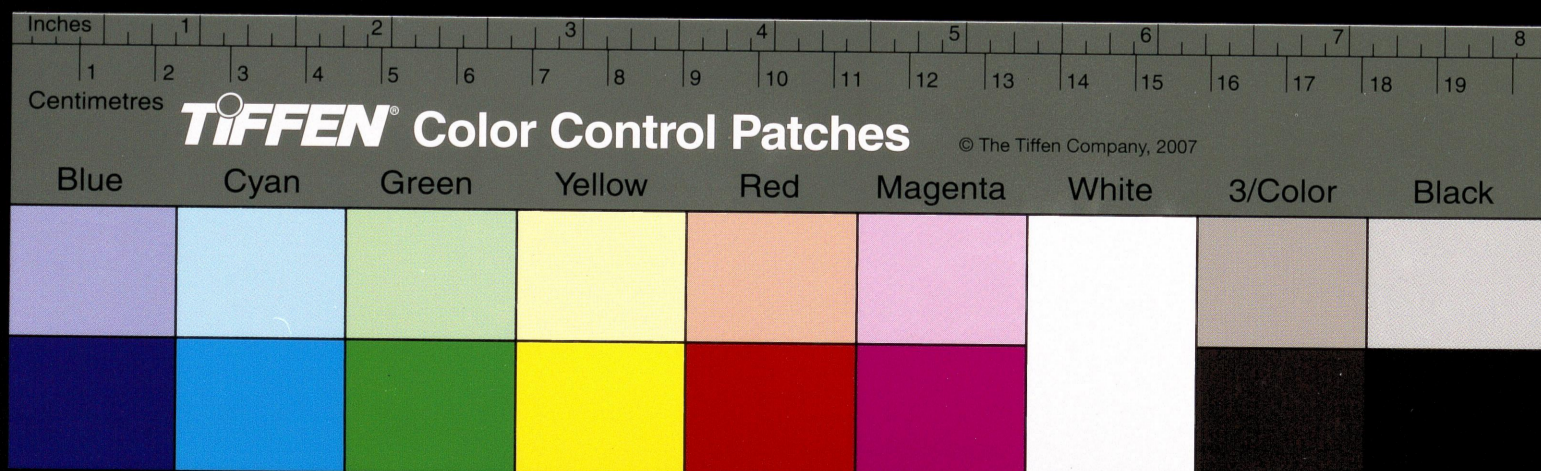
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In November 1992, it was reported that high level officials had come to an agreement that 'envisaged the mutual withdrawal of troops and the creation of "zones of complete disengagement"..... and the delineation of this area of 'peace and tranquility.'

Alas, mutual suspicion was too strong, and none of these agreements, if that's what they were, were carried out.

Does this mean that this situation is eternal?.

A Siachen Peace Park

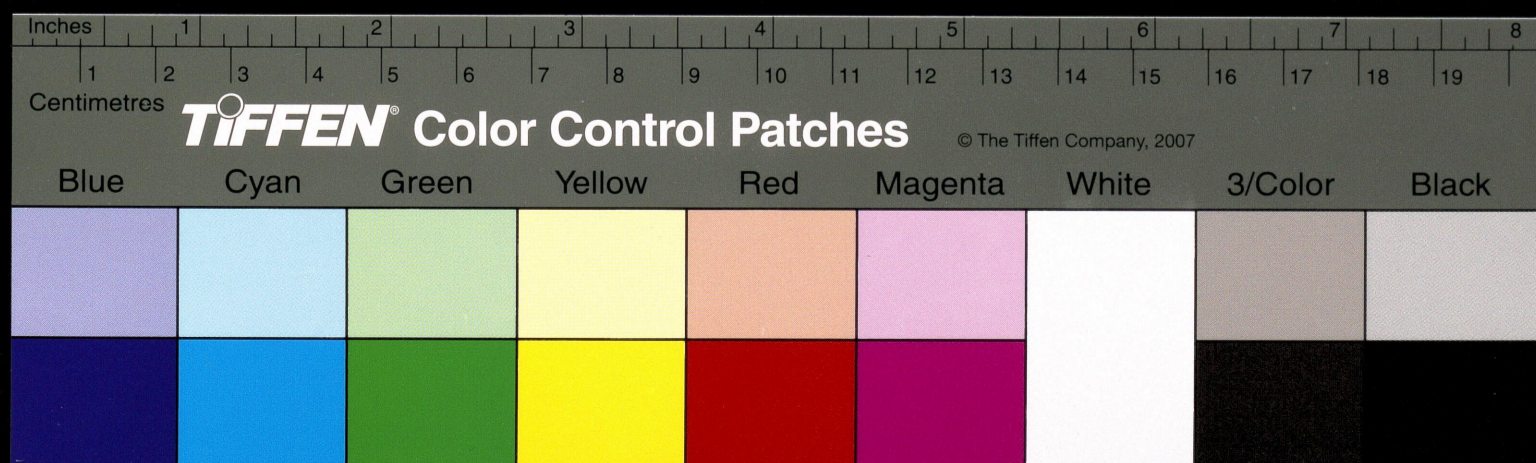
One solution would be to establish a Transfrontier Peace Park covering the whole Siachen area. This would preserve a spectacular mountain region; it would defuse an armed confrontation; it would save thousands of lives and billions of rupees; and, most important, it would enable both sides to withdraw their forces in conditions of dignity and honour. With modern technology, surveillance and monitoring to prevent 'cheating' would be possible.

The concept of a transfrontier park is not new; such parks have been established in all parts of the world over the last 70 years. Today there are some 169 such parks; they include 666 protected areas in 113 countries. Several of them are specifically designated as Peace Parks, intended to provide a peaceful solution to a conflict or potential conflict, or to the rehabilitation of an area after a conflict.. In Asia, there are 108 protected areas constituting 30 transfrontier parks: 5 of them cover 3 countries.

There has been a dramatic increase in transfrontier parks in recent years. In 1988 there were 59 such parks as against 169 today; in Asia there were only 7 while today there are 30

As examples, there is La Amistad Peace Park between Costa Rica and Nicaragua; a Peace Park on both sides of the Evros River between Greece and Turkey; there are transfrontier parks between Czechoslovakia and Poland; between Indonesia and Malaysia. In December 1999, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Croatia agreed to establish a cross-border nature reserve, while in February 2000, Albania, Greece and Macedonia announced the establishment of the Prespa Park. Incidentally, the Demilitarised Zone between North and South Korea has become a nature reserve by being left alone. Several other possibilities are being explored: Laos/Cambodia/Thailand; Bosnia/Montenegro; Papua New Guinea/Indonesia. The Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan signed in October 1994 covered nature reserves and protected areas, stating that the establishment of cross-border protected areas would promote conservation and the peace process. The treaty that resolved the territorial dispute between Peru and Ecuador included provisions for a Peace Park in the disputed Cordillera del Condor.. The Wye Accord between Palestine and Israel includes provisions for the setting up of protected areas.

Of particular interest are the Peace Parks being established in southern Africa, a region that has been troubled by much fighting in recent decades. A Peace Parks Foundation was



Saving Siachen from pollution

THE HIGHEST battleground, the highest helipad at about 19,000 feet, the highest dropping zone at nearly 22,000 feet, the highest public phone booth, and also the highest cemetery in the world. Welcome to the Siachen glacier on the eastern edge of the Karakoram range. With a length of nearly 80 km. and a width ranging from two km. to eight km., this glacier is the longest in the world outside the polar region.

Siachen has long been the bone of contention between India and Pakistan.

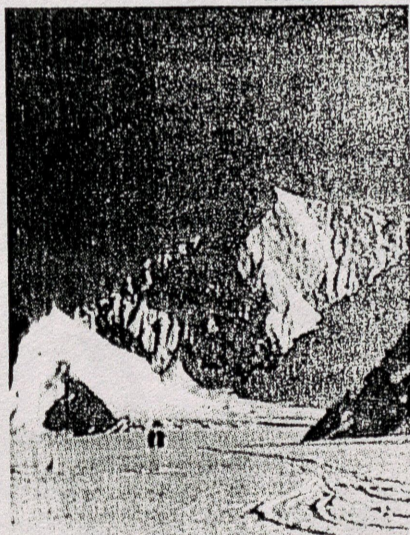
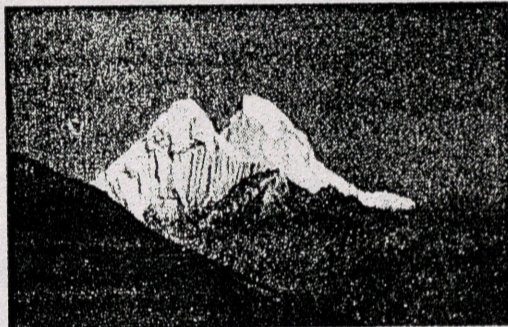
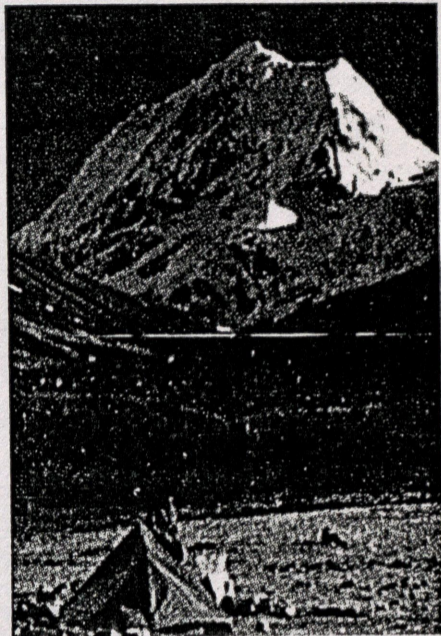
Although it remained unmentioned in the ceasefire line of 1949, the Tashkent Agreement of 1965, and the Shimla Agreement of 1972, the two countries tried to prove their supremacy on the region through several expeditions.

In 1984, India stopped a Japanese

expedition to Siachen that was permitted by Pakistan, and set up its military base there.

While accolades poured in for the undaunted bravery of the jawans, the grim reality of environmental hazards remained hidden.

Aamir Ali, Chairman, Association of Civil Servants, Geneva, who has been on several expeditions to the Himalayas, is a relentless crusader against pollution in this region.



generated there. It is packed in metal drums and dropped into crevices, in nearly 4,000 drums a year.

The glaciers into which these drums are dumped give birth to the Indus, the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Brahmaputra, the Hwang Ho, the Yangtze, and other smaller rivers.

Talking about this, he asks: "Do we want to leave destroyed this majestic area of the Himalayas for our future generations?"

"Everything from cans, drums, fuel containers, tetra-packs, and aluminium packets are found there. These can neither be burnt nor destroyed," he says.

Perhaps what aids pollution largely in Siachen is human waste.

Everyday, 10,000 kg. of human waste is

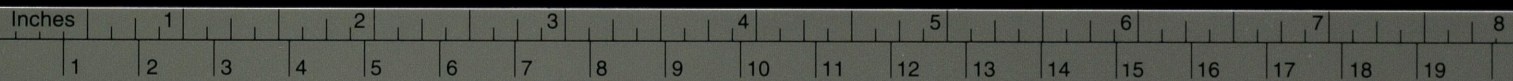
"What might happen with these non-biodegradable drums years later is easily understandable," Ali says.

According to him, converting Siachen into a trans-frontier peace park, where India and Pakistan will not wield any control, is the answer to the pollution hazards.

This will be the best gift the subcontinent can offer to the world in the International Year of Mountains.

By K.Satyamurty

ur family a refreshingly delicious time.



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