USHA RAI

Hindu 7/10

In tandem with nature

IN the mid-1980's on a visit to China, I met a mayor who would cycle to work, use the official car only to do office errands, then return home on her bicycle. There were no airs about this mayor. She was one of the Chinese tide of humanity that used the humble mode of transport despite her political status.

More recently I met Ms. Satu Hassi, Finland's Minister for Environment and Development Cooperation. She belongs to the Green League and has won the "Biker of the Year" award in 1999, the year she became the minister. She cycles to her Ministry every day. She goes to Parliament on her trusty cycle and even to the Prime Minister's office when she needs to consult him. Ms. Hassi's Helsinki home is six kilometres from her office. "I don't like being isolated from people by being in a big car," she says.

Ms. Hassi cycles not just to stay healthy and because she enjoys it, but because she wants to set an example and not just preach about keeping the environment clean. How amazingly different she is from our own ministers cocooned in the comfort of their cars and trailed by a fleet of escort vehicles.

Tall and slim, Ms. Hassi practises *astanga yoga*, learnt from a *guru* from Mysore, and sounds more like a Green Peace activist than a Minister from a developed country.

On a working visit to India last month-end, Ms. Hassi met the Environment and Forest Minister, the Minister for Non-Conventional Energy, the Minister for Power and the Minister for Social Justice and participated in a seminar on "Our shared responsibilities towards global ecological commons", organised by the Centre for Study of Development Studies, and another seminar on "Technologies for a better environment".

After her visit, greater cooperation has been worked out between India and Finland in environment technology – cleaning rivers of sewage, waste and effluents from factories, renewable energy, bioenergy and wind energy. However, Ms. Hassi feels renewable energy technology needs to be further developed to bring down the price of solar and wind energy.

Despite its low population density, just 15 persons per sq. km. as against Belgium's 350 per sq. km., Finland has its fair share of environment problems, says Ms. Hassi. Pollution of lakes was a major problem and these pollutants were from fertilisers from the fields and effluents from industry. To tackle the problem, alternative methods of agriculture were explored. Use of fertilisers was curtailed to meet just the required quantities and a 10-metre gap was made mandatory between agriculture fields and the waterline.

Another hot domestic issue of Finland's environment agenda is conservation of its biodiversity. Though three-fourths of the land area is forests, a special effort has to be made to preserve flora and fauna like mushrooms and insects. This could be because of the extensive commercial exploitation of the forests. Ms. Hassi, however, maintains there is not much difference between the commercially exploited forest and those regenerated by man.

Satu Hassi ... setting an example.

Satu Hassi cycles to work every day, practises yoga and is Finland's Minister for Environment and Development Cooperation.

Surrounded by lakes and waterways, climate change concerns most Finns. The per capita emission of green house gases has to be reduced. The emissions of an average Finn are now 11 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually which needs to be reduced to one-tenth if they were to live within their environmental spaces, she says.

There are just two representatives of the Green League in the five-party coalition Cabinet and it has not been easy pushing environmental causes. Whenever there is conflict on the economic versus environmental benefits of a project, "we are the only ones who opt for the environment", she says.

The Finnish political culture is now a participatory culture. The Green League has now made reforms in land use. The public has to be informed of all new land use plans that affect their lives.

Similar to the Sardar Sarovar controversy in India, in Finland there has been major disagreement for 50 years on construction of the Vuotos Dam in Upper Finland over 240 sq. km. for hydro power. All the Environment Ministers have opposed the dam since 1983 and the debate continues. In the 1980s, the Government decided to stop the dam. In 1991 the Government rescinded its earlier order and decided to go ahead with construction. Hassie's Ministry and some NGOs appealed against construction of the dam at the courts and won. Now the company that was to construct the dam has appealed to a higher court.

"We have our successes but we are not living in paradise," says the Minister.

However, on the use of compressed natural gas (CNG) for public transport, there has not been the kind of ugly controversy and politics as in India. Taxation laws in Finland were modified to encourage buses that ran on gas and as the number of such buses increased, the air quality improved. This is despite the sulphur content in diesel being one of the lowest in the world. However, the Government has not even discussed with the Finnish Minister, technology cooperation on this vital issue of a clean transport technology.

Ms. Hassi is indeed a remarkable person. She was the first woman to be employed as an engineer in a private company in Finland. But people could not accept her in that position. Male chauvinism made her quit and join the Tampere University of Technology as a researcher. But there too she felt frustrated because engineers were not taking about their environmental responsibilities. This has changed now.

Leaving University she took to writing – a book of poems, a novel, two non-fiction books and an insightful treatise on women's perspective on technology. "The gap between power and technology is a symptom of the wider gap between love and power," she says.

Ms. Hassi looks at technology in a holistic manner – its impact on people, human relations and the environment. For years, technology was used to enslave nature. This attitude of using technology to conquer instead of serving as a benevolent mother has led to technology being so harmful.

When coal and fossil technology was being developed no one asked about its impact on nature and people. If these questions were asked early enough, then technology would have developed differently. There would have been greater stress on renewable energy.

Quite obviously this is one minister who is in harmony with nature and technology. ●

GREEN TALK

Guardians in danger

Poachers and extremists are making life difficult for the men who guard our forest wealth. Apart from setting up a forest police force, the Government should look after the foresters and their families says USHA RAI.

THE forests in India, despite constant denudation, are still lovely, dark and deep and home to a host of wild species. Our streams and rivers teem with crocodiles, gharials and a large variety of fish, turtles and dolphins. But the men who guard this abundant natural wealth are becoming an endangered species, thanks to poachers, extremists and dacoits.

From 1996 to 2001, an estimated 118 forest personnel have been killed. Recently, Bipin Chandra Pandey, deputy ranger, Bijrani range of Corbett National Park, was killed by dacoits hiding in the forests. This gang was wearing caps and uniforms stolen from the Wildlife Trust of India. When challenged, there was an exchange of gunfire and Pandey was killed. On September 4, in the adjoining Rajaji Park, Govind Ram, forest guard, was chasing poachers. There was an exchange of fire and he slipped into a river and drowned.

Poachers after the tusks of elephants, rhino horn, the skin and bones of tigers or leopards, *katha* and sandalwood trees or just a chunk of venison are becoming bolder and more desperate. In Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, extremist groups have been seeking shelter in protected areas and killing forest watchers and guards who carry old, unwieldy rifles and guns and unable to counter the modern array of guns and ammunition of militant groups.

The largest number of forest officials — 34 — was killed on duty in Uttar Pradesh over five years. In Assam and West Bengal, it was 18 and 16 respectively. While lakhs of rupees are given as compensation to relatives of victims of rail and air accidents, the forest guard who puts his life on line gets virtually nothing. There is no insurance cover for the large number of daily wagers now working in our protected areas. States have a smaller insurance cover of Rs. 80,000 for all subordinate staff up to the rank of a range officer. But in Bihar, Assam, other States of the North East and Orissa where even salaries are not paid for eight to nine months at a stretch, it is foolish to hope for insurance. For senior staff this insurance cover varies from Rs. 1.25 lakhs to Rs. 1.50 lakhs.

Several forest guards have been killed in the numerous attempts to catch the sandalwood smuggler Veerappan. But the most shocking incident was the beheading of district forest officer V. Sreenivasan by Veerappan in 1991. Two labourers and a forest guard were also killed. The gutsy Karnataka officer was awarded the Shaurya Chakra. Another recipient was A. K. Sharma, a range forest officer of Gujarat who was attacked by villagers with knives and killed.

Robin Kumar, assistant conservator of forests, Gaya division, was shot when he tried to stop the illicit felling of *katha* trees from which an important ingredient of *paan* is extracted.

Mr. Kazmi, deputy director, Palamau Tiger Reserve in Bihar, was lucky to have escaped when extremists blew up the jeep he was travelling. Mr. Kazmi had just got off the jeep and asked the driver and wireless attendant to get food packets for the patrol party that was on election duty, when it exploded. A case was lodged but to date no one has been arrested. Terrorism is one of the methods employed to extract money, say senior forest officials working in the area. Even as remnants of the bodies were being collected by the Indo Tibetan Border Police, the extremists opened fire again.

The Centre is now trying to increase the insurance cover for field officers from Rs. 2 lakhs to Rs. 2.5 lakhs, and is talking to insurance companies. The scheme would cost the Government Rs. 2 crores a year. Forest department jobs are given to the dependants of personnel killed on duty, provided he or she qualifies for the post. But these compassionate appointments, as they are called, are for class three staff only — jobs that do not come under the purview of the Public Service Commission. A more practical solution would be to give the last salary drawn by the field personnel as life pension for the family.

For some years now there has been talk about appointing armed commando units but nothing has happened. No longer can just one or two personnel guard forest posts. Even if armed, when attacked in large numbers by the timber or poaching mafia, there is danger of their rifles being snatched. At strategic entry points into the forest, these forest guards are on duty every day. What is needed is re-organisation of foresters into viable units through a forest police system. There is need for forest police pickets, armed with proper guns and ammunition and vehicles, so that the vandals are apprehended.

But the forest officers, who have wielded extensive power all these years, are reluctant to share power with people lower down the cadre so that responses to emergencies are swifter. In Palamau (Bihar), Etawah (Uttar Pradesh) and Bhind (Madhya Pradesh), personnel carry weapons but there is no forest armoury where they can be deposited. So the weapons are deposited with the police armoury. In Assam, a forest protection battalion has been created but it functions in traditional forest style. Recently, a forest protection force, similar to a para military force, has been created in Jammu and Kashmir and recruitment has just begun.

While the Government vacillates on setting up forest police forces, the Wildlife Trust of India, as a part of its Van Rakshak Project, has provided accident insurance cover to 50,000 frontline staff on duty. Launched on March 30, it covers employees of the rank of forest officer and below and includes temporary staff on duty for three years. The employee is insured against death and permanent disability for Rs. 1,00,000.

The widow of Ram Singh, a forest guard of Corbett National Park, who drowned while crossing a mountain stream after a tiger census operation, was given the first cheque of Rs. 1 lakh in August. The second cheque is to be given to a dependent of Paramvir Khati who was trampled by a wild elephant in the Mahananda wildlife sanctuary of West Bengal in April. The Worldwide Fund for Nature, India too provided five-year insurance cover for the forest personnel of the Palamau Tiger Reserve.

But the onus of looking after the foresters and their families is primarily that of the Government. ●

75 YEARS of EXCELLENCE

TEFL supplement in association with the BBC World Service

Learning English

The Guardian Weekly

October 2001

Usha Rai reports on India's plans to open its first English teaching centre in Vietnam

Indian English ready for export

India is set to compete with the likes of the United States, Britain and Australia as an ELT-exporting nation once government funding is secured to open the first Indian-run language centre in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Plans for the $100,000 centre are being finalised by the Hyderabad-based Central Institute for English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), India's premier ELT provider, after receiving enthusiastic backing from India's human resource development minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, last month. A provisional opening date of January 2002 has been set.

CIEFL has been offering English language training since 1997 to professionals, diplomats, journalists, bureaucrats and corporate executives from Southeast and Central Asia, North, Central and West Africa, and South America. Course fees range from $500 to $1,500 a month, including accommodation and a two-week tour of the country at the end of the three-month course.

Dr Pramod Talgeri, CIEFL's vice-chancellor, says: "Students come to Hyderabad with almost no knowledge of English, undergo our courses in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for 90 days and go back with a certain proficiency. An interesting, new world scenario is developing where a businessman from Malawi may communicate with his counterpart in Kyrgyzstan through Indian English, which he might have learnt in Hyderabad."

English today is no longer British, says Dr Talgeri. "There are many non-native varieties of English in the world, and among them Indian English is extremely user-friendly. It is intelligible, communicative and therefore acceptable in most countries."

Dr Talgeri pioneered functional English courses for foreign students at the Hyderabad centre four years ago. Following the 1997 mid-air collision of two planes near Delhi, caused by a non-English speaking pilot who could not understand the Indian air traffic controller's instructions, Dr Talgeri sought permission from the human resource development ministry in Delhi, which oversees education and culture and under which CIEFL functions, to teach English to foreign professionals.

Dr Talgeri visited Kyrgyzstan and other countries and signed contracts for short-term English courses in banking, international trade and software programming. CIEFL also offers a course on English for diplomats and parliamentarians.

In addition to classroom training, the students are exposed to "workplace" communication in English in banks, pharmaceutical companies and air traffic control towers. The courses, Dr Talgeri says, have won India foreign exchange as well as goodwill.

Two years ago these programmes expanded into the project to "export English" to Hanoi. CIEFL responded to a request from the Vietnamese government to provide in-country training by sending individual teachers to Hanoi, who set up classrooms in the Indian embassy there. Dr Talgeri is convinced that there is now sufficient demand to set up a permanent presence in Hanoi.

He is confident about the CIEFL's ability to "export" English not just to Vietnam but elsewhere. He says that English has become international because it is no longer linked to British cultural traditions. CIEFL is also in talks with the Sri Lankan government about setting up a centre there. This will be run for three to five years by Indian trainers before handing it over to local staff.

By taking a proactive step of "exporting" Indian English, Dr Talgeri says, "we are legitimising the processes of Indian ownership of English and demystifying the aura of exaggerated superiority of British English among Indians themselves. English is no longer British, and it no longer belongs to the high cultural gentry alone. Any person can use it as an instrument for communication. Being able to communicate in English is like being able to ride a bicycle."

Vietnam prepares to learn Indian English Photograph: Hoang Dinh Nam/AFP

On India's potential share of the global ELT market, he believes that there are enormous possibilities for spreading Indian English throughout the non-Western world. In the future Dr Talgeri hopes that government-sponsored ELT centres will be established in 150 countries.

Upamanyu Chatterji is a well-known writer in English and an official at the human resource development ministry, which is sponsoring the Hanoi project. He doesn't understand why there should be so much fuss about CIEFL teaching English in Vietnam or elsewhere. "We are not teaching Milton or Keats. It is neither Oxbridge nor Queen's English. What is being taught is simple, functional English.

"If Indian English courses are gaining popularity, it could be because they are not as expensive as those being run by the British Council," he adds.

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US education providers brace for tighter student visa controls

Max de Lotbinière

Reports that one of the 19 suspected hijackers involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks may have passed himself off as a would-be English language learner to obtain a student visa to enter the United States have raised tensions between education providers and US law makers who believe that lax student visa controls have offered terrorists an open door.

The Washington Post and other media reported this month that Hani Hanjour, suspected of hijacking American Airlines flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon, had obtained a student visa to study at a campus-based English language programme in Oakland, California.

Mike Palm, spokesman for ELS, which runs the Oakland programme, confirmed that Hanjour had applied to start a course at last November, but had never turned up for enrolment. However, he claimed that, according to FBI investigations, Hanjour had not used his student visa to enter the country, but had entered legally on another kind of visa.

Days before the revelations, Senator Dianne Feinstein had asked Congress to impose a six-month ban on student visas as part of anti-terrorism measures. This sparked an angry response from education providers, who said that a moratorium would cripple many institutions and do little to improve security. The senator was persuaded to drop her demand when educators agreed to adopt an unpopular student tracking system.

The system, known by its acronym Cipris (Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students), is designed to keep track of students once they enter the US. A pilot programme involving 21 institutions has been operated by the Immigration & Naturalisation Service (INS) since 1997. The INS was ordered to come up with a tracking system after it was revealed that one of the suspects in 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre had been issued with a student visa.

But while the internet-based Cipris system can alert immigration authorities immediately if students fail to enrol or drop out, schools and colleges have objected to using it because they say it stigmatises all the 500,000 foreign students in the US. Students are also charged a $95 fee to be entered on Cipris, an added and unwelcome expense in the competitive international education market.

In challenging Senator Feinstein's moratorium, educators pointed out that foreign students represent less than 2% of the foreign citizens who enter the US each year on temporary visas, but they now acknowledge that they cannot maintain their opposition to student tracking.

"We recognise the futility of continuing to advocate our position" against the project, Victor Johnson, director of public policy for Nafsa, an association of international educators, told the Los Angeles Times. "We just felt it was not appropriate in the aftermath of September 11."

Meanwhile organisations representing English language programmes in the US say that bookings by foreign students for courses have dropped by 20% since the attacks.

ELT Diary

Max de Lotbinière

Taking the Strine

Australia's English language education industry claims that its campaign to increase student enrolments from Europe is paying off. Statistics released this month by English Australia, the country's largest EFL association, show that overall student numbers grew by 10% in the past year, but enrolments from European students were up by 41%. Alyson Moore, chairwoman of English Australia, says Australia's share of the western European market is now stands between 30% and 40% and that the sector as a whole injected almost $225m into the Australian economy last year.

Bilingual target

China's education ministry predicts that up to 10% of all university and college courses in the country will be taught in English as part of drive to build a bilingual workforce. The policy is part of wide-ranging preparations for China's full membership of the World Trade Organisation, due to be ratified by 2002. However, officials admit that the current shortage of English language teachers will need to be addressed before the new targets can be met. They says more teachers will be sent abroad for ELT training, with the first group leaving at the end of 2001.

Thai students win

A Thai court ruled this month that a prestigious university in Bangkok has no right to force its graduate students to write their master's and PhD theses in English. Students at Mahidol University argued that the English-only requirement unfairly prolonged their studies, and that theses in English did not benefit Thais.

France in TV deal

The French education minister, Jack Lang, has signed an agreement with the BBC allowing schoolteachers to use English-language satellite TV programmes in class. As well as documentaries and dramas they will also be able to tune into the popular soap opera, EastEnders, set among cockney-speaking Londoners.

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Sponsored terror

THE UNITED States Government's stern warning to Pakistan over the continuing acts of violence engaged in by the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba reflects a sense of outrage which is widely shared by the international community. What had stirred up concern in Washington was the Lashkar issuing direct threats against the Indian Prime Minister. While the US Government has condemned these threats and other terrorist acts committed by the Lashkar in recent weeks, it remains to be seen as to what kind of impact this will have on this group and its sponsors in Islamabad. Even if the move to declare Lashkar-e-Tayyeba as a terrorist organisation is implemented — as indicated by the National Security Council official in Washington — it would not prevent other outfits such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed, from engaging in outrageous acts against the Indian State and its civilian population. While the earlier US decision to blacklist Harkat-ul-Ansar as a terrorist outfit had a positive impact in alienating this outfit, it has not really stopped other equally fanatic groups from stepping into that space.

It might be far more effective if Pakistan is squarely held responsible for patronising and instigating the extremist outfits operating from its territory. These groups operate openly, protected by the military-regime's umbrella. They train, arm and indoctrinate young men and turn them into dogmatic *jehadis* in well-established camps in Pakistan. The story (as told to *The New York Times*) of an 18-year-old Lashkar cadre who had reportedly participated in the Chhitisinghpura massacre in Kashmir, indicates the depth of virulence propagated by these organisations, making them a potential threat to pluralist societies and democratic governments all over the world.

Islamabad is pursuing its own brand of 'two track' policy. While it wants a dialogue with India, it has kept up the level of violence. The US and the global community must categorically tell Pakistan that this cloak-and-dagger approach is a violation of every ethic and code of international relations. India too should make it clear that any violence or threat of violence against our institutions, citizens, or Government functionaries will not be tolerated and no meaningful dialogue can take place under these circumstances. Atal Bihari Vajpayee has pointed at Islamabad's direct involvement in the terrorist attacks and the threat to his life. Now that the cease-fire has been extended and the people in Jammu and Kashmir are realising the value and dignity of partial normalcy, the global community too must realise as to how far can peace talks be successfully held under the shadow of the gun.

Young wounds

FOR A new born state, the new year has brought in a pall of gloom. First, three people died due to police firing on the day of Eid in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, leaving the entire city tense and ready to explode. And on Sunday, the Hatia DSP, U.S. Jha, died after suffering head injuries during clashes with the protestors. Now, the Jharkhand Police Association has threatened to take to the streets if those responsible for the DSP's death are not booked. Incidentally, the DSP was accused by members of the minority community of having ordered unprovoked firing on people who were peacefully protesting against the death of a girl. She was crushed under a Bihar Military Police vehicle which sped away, leaving her to die on the street.

Either way, the situation is tense, and the BJP-led coalition Government would do well to exercise a mix of caution and statesmanship so that the violence does not spread to other parts of the state. There have been no reports of sectarian conflict in the recent past from this area. Laloo Prasad Yadav and Rabri Devi may have become totally discredited when it comes to basic reforms, but surely, under the RJD Government, not a single instance of sectarian flare-up was allowed in 'undivided' Bihar. In fact, during the violence which spread all over the country after the demolition of the Babri masjid, Bihar remained staunchly secular and peaceful. In that sense, Babulal Marandi has a few lessons to learn from the RJD warhorse who lives at 1, Anne Marg in Patna.

In the first instance, the Jharkhand police and the local administration goofed up in dealing with an outraged crowd. Certainly, people have the right to protest. Besides, firing is the last resort for any civilised law enforcement agency and that too *not* above the waist and only in emergency situations. Obviously, the police here, as in other parts of the country, still suffer from a colonial syndrome. The violence which erupted was also targeted at the police, of which the DSP was a victim. Quite possibly, lumpen elements had joined the fray. But the truth is that the people were angry because the Government was seen to be using coercive tactics. This is clearly a people versus police conflict, and giving it a dubious twist could lead to dangerous consequences. The BJP-led Government will do well to initiate a dialogue with all concerned so that peace returns to the troubled capital and wounds are healed.

Piecemeal peace

THE REPORTED willingness of ULFA commander-in-chief Paresh Barua to hold 'meaningful and scientific talks' with the Union Government to resolve the problem of militancy in Assam leaves enough room for scepticism. For one, such a statement may be part of the disinformation campaign to create confusion in official circles. Also, given the pre-conditions laid by the ULFA supremo, no Government worth its salt is likely to accept them. Mr Barua has ruled out the possibility of surrender to facilitate talks. He expects the Government to propose such talks. Finally, he wants the Mahanta Government to go before talks are initiated. How then does one explain the olive branch offered by the ULFA leader?

There was a time when ULFA militants enjoyed considerable support. But its campaign of mindless violence has exposed its dubious gameplan. Whatever little sympathy the ULFA had, it evaporated after its stand that the Pakistani infiltrators in Kargil were 'freedom fighters'. The recent killings suggest that its firepower is intact. But its new strategy of ethnic cleansing has created a rift within the organisation. If Mr Barua actually wants to be receptive to peace talks, he may be able to take other leaders along. It is true that the militant wing of ULFA calls the shots. But to suggest that a split down the line is imminent on the basis of the versions put out by a few surrendered ULFA militants would be unrealistic.

Even though the Mahanta Government has made peace overtures in the past, it is yet to come up with concrete plans to bring the ULFA and other militants to the negotiating table. Former Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia too followed a similar track. While he tried to initiate tripartite talks, his efforts failed because he was only trying to solve the problem on the cheap by dividing the organisation. The experience of the North-east suggests that talks with one group while excluding others is hardly the best way to bring about peace. The ongoing talks with Naga groups have created a momentum. There is need to work out a detailed strategy to bring the various militant groups to the negotiating table. Sadly, the Centre and state Governments are still working in fits and starts.

THINK IT OVER...

There are three classes which need sanctuary more than others — birds, wild flowers, and Prime Ministers
— STANLEY BALDWIN

The day is not far when children will only get to see Indian birds in books

Where have all the birds gone?

BY USHA RAI

WHILE INDIA'S human population is growing at an astounding pace, the country's animal and bird life is shrinking. In fact, the two issues are connected. The tremendous pressure of the human population on forests and protected areas is leading to their decimation and decline. Wildlife in India is rapidly disappearing. The extensive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides is taking its toll. A few months ago, wildlife lovers were appalled by the large number of tigers and leopards that died both in zoos and in the wild because of poaching and poisoning.

Now there are reports coming from different parts of the country about the death of large birds like vultures, peacocks and the *saras* cranes, country cousins of the endangered Siberian cranes. The vultures, nature's most efficient scavengers, are on the verge of extinction. According to the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), the decline in the vulture population is 'catastrophic'. A survey conducted by the society has revealed a 90 per cent decline in their population. In a number of places and sanctuaries, including some well-known protected zones like the Corbett, Keoladeo, Gir, Simlipal (Orissa), Buxa and Jaldapara (West Bengal), vultures have been wiped out.

The peacock is India's national bird and its exotic colours and sensuous mating dance have sent poets into rhapsody. But peacock deaths are being reported from different parts of the country. In the Morena district of Madhya Pradesh, 40 peacocks died recently. From all accounts, it was because the *bajra* they consumed had high levels of mercury salts.

Earlier this year, seven sick peacocks were brought for treatment to Friendicos, the non-Government organisation that looks after stray and abandoned animals. They died within 24 hours. In the last year-and-a-half, Friendicos has handled some 300 raptors brought to them in a distraught state. Extensive use of insecticides and even mosquito repellents — remember the fogging machines of the Municipal Corporation — is causing sickness and paralysis in the birds.

Following the vultures and the peacocks on the death trail are the *saras* cranes. At Lordia Dam near Pali, about 120 km from Jodhpur, forest officials found 13 dead *saras* cranes. These large, grey and maroon birds have been so much a part of the Indian landscape that one took them for granted. So close are they to people and human habitats that some years ago, a national magazine carried a moving photo feature of a *saras* crane that had left its family and adopted human parents in Khajuraho. Ornithologist Lav Kumar Khachher, who runs nature camps for children at Vashisht, Manali and in the Pirotan Islands of Gujarat, says the population of *saras* cranes is nowhere near what it was 20 years ago.

While at one end of the spectrum pesticides and insecticides are taking their toll, simultaneously, unrestricted grazing and direct human pressure is reducing the habitats of birds. Tall trees are dying and are being replaced by quick growing flowering trees that do not provide a good perch for birds like vultures and eagles. Wilderness areas, ideal for birds that nest on the ground, are also disappearing.

"Vultures play a vital role in cleaning the environment and their loss could have serious implications for the welfare of the people and other animals within India," Dr David Houston, Ornithology Group, Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences, Glasgow University, has pointed out. In fact, every species of animal, bird and insect has a role to play in nature's intricate ecosystem.

The disappearance of insects affects the food chain of many smaller birds. Khachher says that all bird species especially those that feed on insects like the drongos, thrushes, chats and warblers are on the decline. The disappearance of the insectivorous birds is more visible in areas of intensive farming where pesticides and chemical fertilisers are used.

Even the population of sparrows, which drove one crazy with nest-building inside homes, seems to be dwindling in urban areas. In some neighbourhoods in the metros, the sparrows have totally vanished. This is an ominous sign. Imagine a childhood without sparrows. If humans are slowly dying because of poison (pollutants) in the air, the birds are dying rapidly because of poison in their food. At one time, organic farming was a fad, but no longer. Indeed, there is overuse of pesticides and fertilisers by farmers desperate for a good crop, including cash-crops. In the long run, it is bound to spell an ecological disaster for both humans and wildlife.

The disappearance of birds is slow and it is going unnoticed. Only the BNHS seems concerned about the fate of avian fauna. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), India, is facing a resource crunch and seems to be watching the crisis in utter helplessness.

The agriculture policy talks of bio-pesticides and organic manure. But the ground reality is that even the seeds are being treated with mercury to ensure germination. This damages the kidneys of birds and animals feeding on them.

While the crisis assumes dangerous proportions, the Ministry of Environment and Forests seems clueless. According to S.C. Sharma, Additional Inspector General in charge of wildlife, pesticide and fertiliser poisoning has acquired catastrophic dimensions. First, it was Madhya Pradesh where the peacocks died of mercury poisoning. Now it is Rajasthan where the *saras* cranes have succumbed to agricultural pesticides.

Sharma says his Ministry can only 'request' the Agriculture Ministry to stop spraying chemical pesticides and fertilisers within a five-kilometre radius of protected areas. In other areas, he advocates testing treated *bajra* and seeds before release.

The disappearance of these large birds is a warning of ecological doom. India has a rich fauna of 81,000 species. We have 1,228 species of birds, of which 29 are on the endangered list. These include the Great Indian Bustard, the Siberian crane, the black-necked crane, the hooded crane, the Cheer pheasant and the falcons. The pink-headed duck and the mountain quail have already become extinct. Now, the vultures are likely to be included in the list of endangered birds.

In the case of the vultures, studies now indicate that it could be a virus that is killing the birds. It was in 1996 in Bharatpur that BNHS researchers first noticed vultures sitting with their necks hanging limp during the hottest part of the day. Within a month, the vultures become lethargic and started dying.

They do not die en masse but sporadically, often in remote areas and on tall trees. Hence, the dead birds are often not noticed. However, absence of food or the loss of habitat is not the cause of the vulture's decline. With the help of the Poultry Diagnostic and Research Centre of Venkateshwar Hatcheries, a premier research centre for avian disease, and the National Institute of Virology, BNHS is trying to get a clue to the mystery disease.

The good news is that if the cause of the sickness can be identified, vultures can recover quickly. Studies elsewhere in the world have shown that vultures are highly suitable for conservation management. The use of feeding stations to support wild populations and captive breeding programmes to allow reintroduction of vultures back into areas where they have become extinct have been tried successfully abroad.

Let the Agriculture Ministry and the Environment Ministry put their heads together to save our birds instead of thinking up plans for re-introducing them as conservation efforts. Or else, our children who learn their first lessons drawing eclectic pictures of birds in their little notebooks will one day ask: Tell us teacher, where have all the birds gone?

Time to pull those socks up

If Indian industry is to compete with the Chinese, the Government should have the courage to change the rules of the game, writes JAYSHREE SENGUPTA

PLATFORM

IT COULD be the sudden influx of Chinese goods in the Indian market. It could be a whole range of other factors. But if one is to go by two recent business confidence surveys, the message is loud and clear: Indian industry's outlook about future business prospects has, suddenly turned gloomy.

It could be that some crucial economic fundamentals — such as the pace of industrial recovery and agricultural growth — are also showing signs of slowing down. Industrial growth has fallen from 8.4 per cent in October 1999 to 5.7 per cent this year. Agricultural growth has come down from last year's 4.9 per cent to 2.5 per cent in 2000. It is in the area of manufacturing that growth has been the slowest. Even the number of categories of products manufactured is falling.

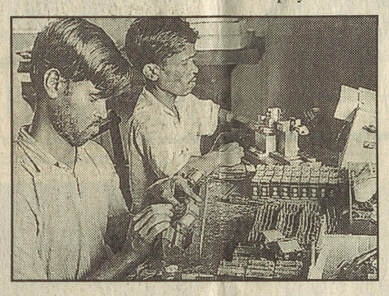
With imports coming in fast and furious, private sector investment will have even less incentive in increasing manufacturing capacity. This in turn will affect future growth.

To beat the competition, there is a growing demand for raising tariff walls or applying non-tariff barriers to which even the Prime Minister has responded. Many manufacturers of consumer goods are turning into retailers of imported goods. But in the long run, Indian manufacturers will have to face even stiffer competition, and not just from China but the rest of the world when the quota restrictions are removed in a few months' time.

Why is the cost difference so great between Indian and Chinese goods? Are the large scale State-owned units of China able to produce goods so cheaply? Or is it better infrastructure that makes the difference? It could be due to all this and much more. For Indian manufacturers to meet the challenge from China and other South East Asian countries, many changes will be needed in the current laws. A sea change is also required in the attitudes of people towards work. Indian industry will just have to wake up to competition from all sides and match up with the quality and price of imports.

One way to go about raising competitiveness is to change the old set-up — reservation for the small scale sector and inflexible labour laws. The draft Competition Policy (November 2000) does try to address some of these issues and calls for a flexible labour policy and dereservation of the small scale sector. It proposes many important changes, such as changing the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act 1951, which has been used for 50 years to determine the location of industries across different regions.

It also calls for a review of trade policy which includes tariffs, quotas, subsidies and dumping action, domestic content regulations and export restraints. Many of these are not in sync with the WTO rules. Competition could indeed be enhanced if the physical and



fiscal barriers to domestic trade within the country ended soon. These barriers increase costs and lead to delays. A uniform value added tax system would provide some sort of solution.

But dereservation may not automatically attract foreign and domestic investment. With dereservation, many of the 3 million small units with 17 million people employed in them will have to close down. The Competition Policy has kept mum about where the resultant unemployed will be absorbed. Perhaps it will lead to a total restructuring of small units in order to make them viable. Many will have to integrate with the large scale sector as in China. The big firms can outsource their parts from the small scale sector leading to large cost reduction.

More flexible labour laws will, however, benefit only the organised sector. They alone are affected by the laws and can have a trimmer, more manageable labour force. But unless Indian industry also invests in regular training for skill upgradation, housing and schooling for children of factory workers, the productivity of labour will not rise to match the higher productivity of other countries. Instead, labour will continue demanding higher wages every year. This will ultimately erode competitiveness.

In China, it is cheap subsidised housing, schooling and free creche facilities for pre-school children that enable both men and women to work long hours (10 to 12 hours) at relatively low wages. It also has an educated and skilled labour force. Thus, they are able to make products with fewer defects — leading to cost advantage.

China also has an unemployment benefit scheme for the jobless in urban and rural areas. Firing labour, thus, becomes easier for cost reduction. For raising overall efficiency of the manufacturing sector, other factors like easier credit, better marketing channels and an aggressive thrust to export are also important.

If it is the economies of scale that is seen to be responsible for low-priced products, then mergers and acquisitions of small and medium firms should be encouraged. Often mergers can be used for the mutual benefit of two medium-sized firms. The spate of mergers and acquisitions also attract foreign investment.

The Competition Bill, which addresses this important area of mergers and acquisitions, is, however, mired in controversy. The Bill seems to be more concerned with curbing the abuse of power from a dominant position attained through a merger. Thus, it aims at the appointment of a Competition Commission which will supervise and regulate all types of agreements between enterprises. This will be debated strongly.

The next few months should be a trying time for Indian industry. It will have to restructure the old institutional framework. Any drastic changes in policy for higher competitiveness are unlikely to be passed soon. The Government will have to help by stepping up infrastructure development.

Something about Saurav

SOUMYA BHATTACHARYA

OFF TRACK

MY NEW Year resolution is to be politically incorrect. Which means saying whatever you want to without caring who will think what about it. My last New Year resolution (to stop chewing my finger nails) lasted 45 minutes. This year, it's early days yet, but I am trying.

So let me be parochial and provincial and narrow-minded and stand by the Bengal Tiger. Which, it appears, has changed its stripes during the course of 2000. Saurav Ganguly is now just about as indispensable to the Indian team as a third umpire is in a cricket match. And, despite the one-match ban he received for over-appealing and sledging, he remains, in my book, 'Indian cricket's face for 2001'.

I know I am a 'Bangali' (or worse still, a 'Bong') and, because of that, am blind to these facts: Saurav was unsportsmanlike, immature and what he did was not quite cricket. But then, when was cricket quite all about cricket?

And who are people like Tony Greig and Ian Chappell to act as models of rectitude and high priests of sportsmanlike conduct? Chappell and Greig both made art forms out of over-appealing. Greig, during England's tour of India in 1976, was far from the benevolent-looking, bowler-hatted, genial giant that he seems to be on TV these days.

And Chappell, aided by his little brother Greg and friend and wicket-keeper Rodney Marsh, used to sledge as much as he used to slog. Going by what Chappell's opponents had to say in those days, he must have thought that no fielding innings was complete unless he had said his quota of swear words at the batsmen.

Only, when they did it, it used to be called 'killer instinct'.

Now, it is cricket in the times of the stump vision camera or leg guard microphone. Saurav can't even get away with screaming 'Howzatt' a couple of more times than usual. He is in a real bind. If he just lets things be and hangs around at mid-off or mid-on, he gets branded as insipid and not motivated or motivating enough. If he appears aggressive and really keen to get on with the business, he gets branded as, well, aggressive and a spoilt brat.

Poor Saurav. My battle instincts are really roused. I know that is because I am a 'Bangali' and Saurav is also a 'Bangali'. But when I am told all this — as I often am — should I grin a little shamefacedly and try and mumble something like an apology? Not any more.

Cricketers like Vinod Kambli have the unabashed backing of pundits like Sunil Gavaskar, Ravi Shastri and Sanjay Manjrekar. It must be a fantastic coincidence that all three of them, like Kambli, are from Mumbai.

So I stand by the Bengal Tiger; the Prince of Calcutta has become king at last. Give him a free rein. And a free reign.

Earlier, I used to be a Tendulkar man. This was really safe because so is the rest of the cricketing world. But something struck me in that in-between period of one year melting into another: just how many matches has Tendulkar won for India last year? And how many has Saurav? Considering that India hasn't really won that many in the past 12 months, that one won't be too difficult to figure out. Not even for those who pay routine obeisance to the Little Master and think that Saurav is a 'Bangali *babu*' who has become captain of India by default.

Saurav Ganguly is not just next to God on the off-side. He is also the most articulate captain India has had in a very long time. On his eloquent days, Mohammed Azharuddin had an extra grunt for the media.

At media meets, Tendulkar looked as if he were a photocopy of his last press conference. From what we have seen, Saurav seems far more intelligent and self-assured.

It's my day (sorry, year) for being politically incorrect. So let us give the guy a break, shall we?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Case for dissatisfaction

THIS REFERS to the article *Stains on the uniform* (December 27). What is not recognised by the mandarins of the Ministry of Defence is that incidents like the Samba spy trial are the ones that bring discredit to the armed forces and also act as a disincentive for youngsters to join the defence services. There is similar dissatisfaction in the IAF and the navy too.

One has only to recall the manner in which IAF authorities tried to crush the dissatisfaction of air force personnel because of the disparity in pay of flying branch and non-flying branch officers. There is also the case of the dismissal of Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat. Most importantly, the services have neglected ex-servicemen. It was said that ex-servicemen could retain the membership of the Defence Services Officers Institute (DSOI) for three years after retirement. But now they have to declare that they will not claim membership of the DSOI upon retirement. So, is it any wonder that the MoD is not getting suitable officers for the services?

BIPIN BAVEJA
Delhi

Contradicting signals

WHY IS the Home Minister making provocative speeches to ignite communal passions? L.K. Advani has blamed the CBI and other authorities. In the process, he wishes to escape from the clutches of the law for instigating communal violence. What is the Defence Minister doing to end cross-border terrorism, infiltration and a Kargil-type situation from recurring? Instead, he is rushing to Kolkata-Madras-Hyderabad to defend the NDA Government from its persistent crises. Where is the NDA Government leading us?

There is no logic in leaders appealing to the Muslims to forget the incident of Babri masjid when the same fundamentalists cannot forget centuries-old 'crimes' committed by Mughal invaders. As long as the fundamentalists nurse communal sentiments and keep their wisdom in cold storage, the prospect of India disintegrating is a real threat.

NAROOR BALACHANDRAN
Mumbai

Perceived distortions

THE AYODHYA dispute has not been brushed away from national politics. It is just that the context that gave rise to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement has changed and made the issue less emotive. A Ram temple to replace the existing makeshift shrine may be a dream of many Hindus, but the cause is insufficient to become a national obsession.

Ayodhya was never a religious movement. It was primarily the political expression of mainstream Hindu disaffection at the perceived distortions of Nehruvian secularism on the one hand, and caste manipulation, on the other. It created a community of politicians who sought political power to put the stamp of assertive modernity on the nation. The issue was identity and statecraft, not religion.

The Prime Minister painted the temple as a *fait accompli* which awaited juridical legitimacy. He defiantly asserted his Hindutva in Parliament and defended Advani and Joshi resolutely. In the process, he has managed to keep his coalition government intact.

SUKANTI BANERJEE
Delhi

Immortal voice

MALLIKA-A TARANNUM Noor Jehan was a prominent Indian film actress before Partition. She began her film career in the Thirties with films like *Aladdin*, *Ghar Jamai*, *Anjuman* and *Top Ka Gola*.

She became really popular after her appearance in K.B. Lal's *Lal Haveli*. After this, one hit followed another — *Dil*, *Bhaijaan*, *Zeenat* and Mehboob Khan's *Anmol Ghadi*.

She used to sing all her songs in her own voice. Now she is no more but her melodious songs are still alive for music lovers.

M.P. AGARWAL
Muzaffarnagar

Netaji in Siberia

REGARDING THE news story *Netaji was in Russia in 1946* (December 23), Dr Purabi Roy has deposed before the Netaji Inquiry Commission about the presence of Netaji Subhas Bose in the Soviet Union. This is based on facts from Soviet documents which Dr Roy came across during her research in Moscow. So her deposition cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Corroborating evidence can also be obtained from Russia and elsewhere — specially from World War II records in London and Washington — to prove that Netaji was in a Soviet labour camp till 1949, something which India was fully aware of.

I came to know of this last year from Ram Rahul who had visited the Soviet Union several times. He told me that according to Gafurov, who headed the Soviet Institute of Oriental and African studies, Netaji had crossed over to the Soviet Union in 1945 via Manchuria. As a 'collaborator' of the Axis Powers, he would have been executed. But Josef Stalin wanted to use Netaji as a bargaining chip in his future dealings with Britain and India. Thus, he ordered Netaji's detention in a labour camp in Siberia. According to Gafurov, India's ambassador to the USSR was permitted to have a glimpse of Netaji in the camp on the condition that no word was exchanged with him. The ambassador must have reported the matter to the Government of India.

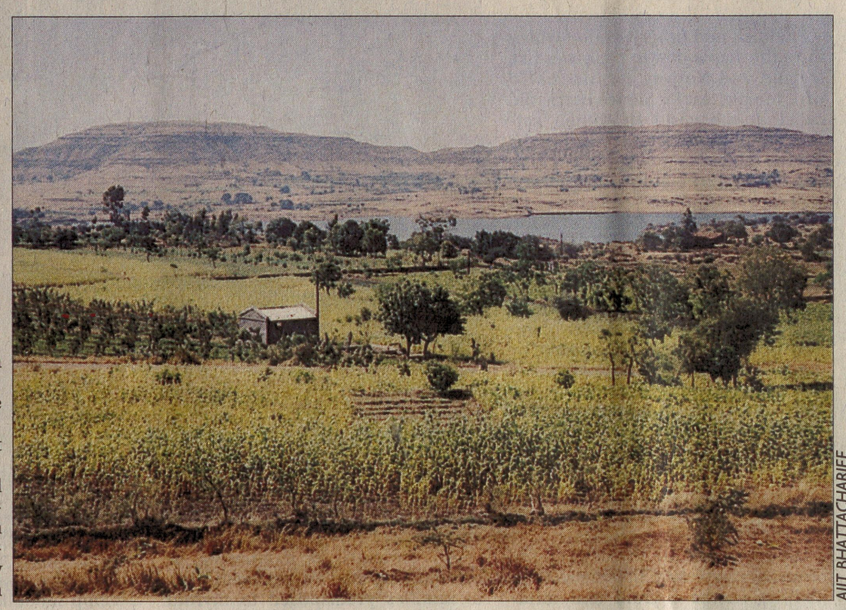
RAI SINGH Delhi

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Oasis in a parched land

A village in a drought-prone district of Maharashtra has achieved a remarkable transformation – from dry, parched lands to green fields all around. The story behind this change.



AJIT BHATTACHARJEE

Green fields everywhere ... the work of the pani panchayats.

MAHUR village (Purandhar block of Pune district) is an oasis in this parched, drought-prone district of Maharashtra. From the top of a hillock, green fields can be seen for miles around. At the base of the hillock is a small irrigation tank into which rainwater is harvested. This almost perennially full waterbody is the lifeline of the village and the principle of equity in water distribution its sustenance.

In a country where rural people – failing to get returns from their agricultural lands – are migrating to the big cities in search of jobs, in the 30-odd villages where Vilasrao Salunkhe's *pani panchayats* are in operation, reverse migration has begun. Farms that were barely yielding 50 kgs of *bajra* and *jawar* per acre and an annual income Rs. 2,500-4,000 now yield Rs. 10,000-1,00,000. In addition to traditional cereals, farmers grow wheat, onions, vegetables, a variety of flowers like marigolds and lilies, fruits and a cash crop which is not a water guzzler. The villagers practise organic farming and employ people from adjoining villages.

The man who pioneered these radical technological and social innovations, that repair and restore degraded water sheds and guarantee each family within the community an equal share of the water harvested, is an engineer with his own factory. In 1972, after the terrible drought that affected some 4,00,000 people in Maharashtra, Salunkhe realised the need to intervene.

There was no water available for agriculture. Drinking water was scarce and tankers supplied water only for basic needs. Travelling extensively, he saw villagers breaking stones for road construction in a desperate bid to earn a subsistence allowance from the government.

He realised that environmental regeneration and watershed development with community participation was the only solution. Rainfall in this region fluctuated between 250 mm and 500 mm. At first, tried out his idea on a 16-hectare plot on the hillside of Naigaon village. The land belonged to the temple trust but was barren and uncultivable. Salunkhe took the land from the trust on a 50-year lease and built a hut where he and his family lived and worked with the community.

Conserving soil and harvesting water was given top priority. A series of contour bunds was raised to trap water and check soil erosion. At the base of the hill, which he saw as a micro watershed, a percolation tank that could hold a million cubic feet of water was constructed.

A well was dug below and water pumped from there up the hill slope to irrigate the fields. Trees were planted in rocky areas; fruit trees in the more fertile areas and grass and shrubs on lands not being cultivated. Slowly production increased. As against two to four bags of grain a year, 100 quintals was harvested and enough employment was generated forthe surival of five households and their cattle. Half an acre of irrigated land could provide a man's food needs for a year.

The Naigaon experiment was ready for duplication in other parts of the State. Water was a common property resource with all villagers having equal rights and access to it. So the five basic principles of the *pani panchayats* or *Gram Gaurav Prathistan* were evolved, and they are in operation till today.

* Irrigation schemes are undertaken for groups of farmers, rather than for individuals. Water is allocated on the basis of the number of family members rather than in proportion to land holding. A family of five is given water rights to irrigate one hectare.

* Cropping is restricted to seasonal crops with low water requirement. Crops that require perennial irrigation and large amounts of water, like sugarcane, banana and turmeric, cannot be cultivated in the *pani panchayat* areas.

* Water rights are not attached to land rights. If land is sold, water rights revert back to the farmers' collective.

* All members of community, including the landless, have right to water.

* The beneficiaries of the panchayat have to bear 20 per cent of the cost of scheme. They have to plan, administer and manage the scheme and distribute water in an equitable manner.

With farmers paying 20 per cent of the cost of lift irrigation, the Government provided another 50 per cent and the remaining 30 per cent was provided by the *pani panchayat* as an interest-free loan.

The half-a-dozen landless people of Mahur, who have joined the scheme, have taken land on lease from landholders and put their quota of water to good use. They have prospered and now some have bought land too.

In the early 1980s, when the cloth mill where the villagers worked closed down, they came together to form their water panchayat. Ten to 15 per cent of the villagers who already had irrigated land did not join the scheme. People living on the hilltop where water could not be reached also stayed away.

"Where the cost of development does not ensure returns, villagers have not joined in," says Lakshman Khedar, who works closely with Salunkhe to ensure that the scheme stays on line. Though the region receives close to 1100 mm of rain annually, there was no storage facility, villagers recall.

Today, it is wonderful to see the prosperity of Ramachandra Sripathi Chavan, one of Mahur's early beneficiaries of the *pani panchayat* scheme. The old mud hut in which he lived till the 1980s now serves as the godown for his crop of onions. A solid two-roomed cement house with galvanised iron sheets on the roof is his new abode. A television set has been given pride of place.

Of the four acres of land that he and his brother own, two acres are now irrigated through lift irrigation. Earlier he was dependent on the rains and grew just *bajra* and *jawar*. He was able to harvest just 5-6 quintals in a year and earned just Rs. 2,500. Today he grows a mix of crops and his income has soared.

Others from the village recount similar success stories. Niranjan Ganpat Rao Chavan and his brother have 12 acres of land. Now under the *pani panchayat* scheme 4.5 acres is irrigated. Earlier, he grew groundnuts in the rainy season and bajra, *jawar* and rice earning Rs. 5,000-6,000 a year. Now he grows *mogra*, marigold and lilies in addition to wheat and vegetables and earn Rs. 70,000 an acre of irrigated land. Niranjan who worked in Pune returned in 1987, as did Satyawan Gole.

Balasahib Chavan and his brother own 11 acres of land of which three acres are under the pani *panchayat*. Balasahib, who studied till Std. XII, is the village *patkari*, the man who operates the lift irrigation scheme, bills the villagers, collects payment and ensures that each member of the panchayat gets his due share of water. The pumps operate round the clock and Balasahib ensures that each acre gets water for three hours continuously. Though there is load shedding in the area, it is not as bad as in Uttar Pradesh, the villagers pointed out.

Balasahib was trained in motor repair at Sashwath before taking charge in Mahur. He gets a salary of Rs. 1,500 as *patkari*. Every member of the panchayat contributes Rs. 1,000 a year towards maintenance. Balasahib who earned Rs. 8,000-9,000 a year from his land now earns Rs. 2 lakhs a year. What is more, he has a special status in the village.

Bharat Gole has four acres of land of which one acre is irrigated. His was wasteland and, before he joined the panchayat, the returns was barely Rs. 1,000 a year. Now he earns Rs. 15,000 annually.

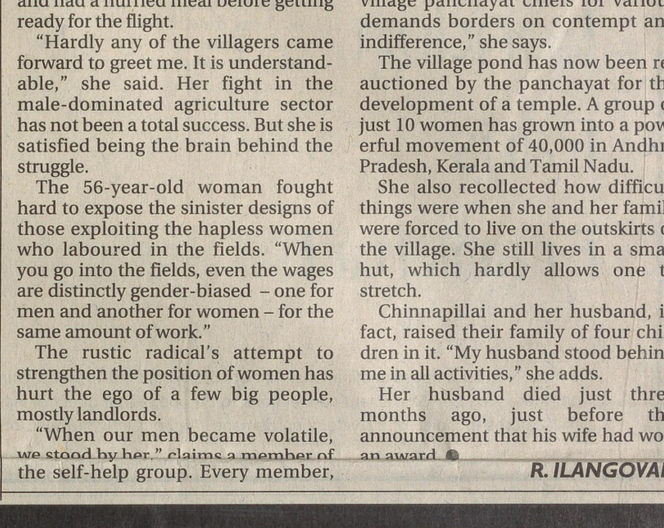
In Mahur, grazing is restricted to certain areas. Everyone in the village has one or two buffaloes or cows. Some milk is kept aside for the family's needs and the rest is sold to help supplement family income. With increased grass and water in the area, milk yields have increased.

While it is remarkable that the project has been sustained for a quarter of a century despite the strict terms of sharing and equity, it has not been replicated as extensively as it should have.

According to Salunkhe, the 50 per cent Government subsidy for water harvesting has stopped. This means the farmers have to pay more as their share for lift irrigation. Water harvesting was also possible only in those areas where the landscape provided the slopes required for contour bunding and water collection. ●

PERSONALITY

Rustic radical



K. GANESAN

Fighting for rural women ... Chinnapillai.

TO the villagers of Pullucheri in Madurai district, Chinnapillai is still a farm worker. Winning the prestigious Stri Sakthi Purashkar from the Prime Minister, for her contribution to rural women's empowerment, has not changed anything.

The diminutive Dalit grandmother slipped into her village and stayed there for four days before she left to receive the award. No one, except her sons, friends and relatives, had the courtesy to call on her. She bathed, as usual, under the common village tap and had a hurried meal before getting ready for the flight.

"Hardly any of the villagers came forward to greet me. It is understandable," she said. Her fight in the male-dominated agriculture sector has not been a total success. But she is satisfied being the brain behind the struggle.

The 56-year-old woman fought hard to expose the sinister designs of those exploiting the hapless women who laboured in the fields. "When you go into the fields, even the wages are distinctly gender-biased – one for men and another for women – for the same amount of work."

The rustic radical's attempt to strengthen the position of women has hurt the ego of a few big people, mostly landlords.

"When our men became volatile, we stood by her," claims a member of the self-help group. Every member, irrespective of caste and creed, has contributed to the success of this group. "There is no caste among the women," she says.

But the fact remains that when the idea of consolidatio was mooted, everyone except Chinnapillai, sulked. To the men, the concept of a Dalit woman, heading a self-help group, was alien and repulsive.

Sparks flew when the group won a claim over the fishing rights in the village common pond. The exclusive preserve of village power centres was intruded upon. But the women prevailed.

"Even today, the response from the village panchayat chiefs for various demands borders on contempt and indifference," she says.

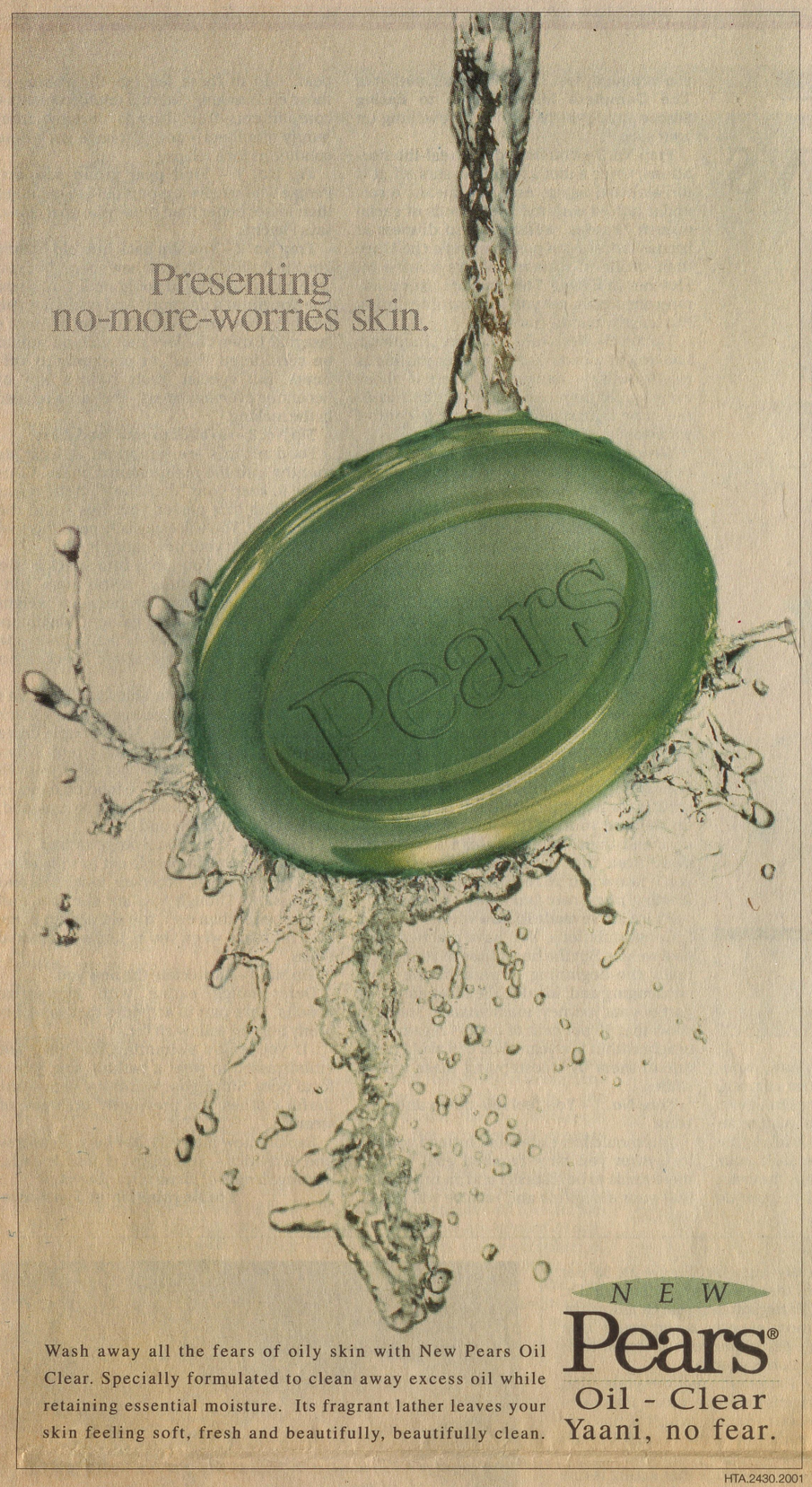
The village pond has now been re-auctioned by the panchayat for the development of a temple. A group of just 10 women has grown into a powerful movement of 40,000 in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

She also recollected how difficult things were when she and her family were forced to live on the outskirts of the village. She still lives in a small hut, which hardly allows one to stretch.

Chinnapillai and her husband, in fact, raised their family of four children in it. "My husband stood behind me in all activities," she adds.

Her husband died just three months ago, just before the announcement that his wife had won an award. ●

R. ILANGOVAN



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GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Portraits of trees

As problems like deforestation and declining forest cover hold centre-stage comes a timely reminder of the wealth of trees.

IT was a joy to see the glossy, neatly produced book, **Trees of India** by the husband and wife team of Pallava Bagla and Subhadra Menon. I have known them for several years as wildlife lovers and environmentalists. While Pallava, who has established himself as a leading science journalist, turned photographer for this project, Subhadra, with a doctorate in tree ecology, painstakingly researched and wrote about popular trees in India like mango, *chinar*, coconut, teak, *jamun* and *amalthas*, to name a few.

The wealth of trees in India, their colours and fragrances are the envy of many. Fortunately, despite the steady decline in forest cover, we still have 19 per cent of our land area under forests, 12 per cent good forests. So this book is extremely timely.

There are stories woven around many of our ancient trees and this is what Subhadra seeks to capture in her simple, graphic text. She has profiled 60 well-known trees – where they are found, a description so that the layman can identify them and their medicinal properties. Each tree has been listed with its common Hindi and English names as well as Latin and botanical names. India has 15,000 flowering plants, of which 2500 are trees.

For Pallava, the desire to do a book on trees began on the banks of the Narmada in 1984. As an activist of Kalpavriksh, he went to the Narmada Valley to study and document the impact of the dam on the people and the region. Slightly upstream of the dam, he saw villagers cutting down a huge Arjuna tree. It would have been submerged, so the villagers decided to chop it and make some money.

Having done his Masters in botany, Pallava decided to document the trees of India. He enjoyed photography, so the first picture for the book – the Arjuna tree being axed – was shot in 1984.

As the idea grew, he wanted to photograph a beautiful *jamun* tree he had seen in Delhi's Sarita Vihar. But when he got there, he found it had been cut down to set up a sports complex.

To capture the many splendoured green aura of India, Pallava travelled from Ladakh in the North to Car Nicobar in the South. A rare specimen of a coconut tree with a branch on its tall trunk was an oddity, attracting tourists. For the tree biographers, it was an important picture for the book.

The English yew or *taxus baccata* is found in Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and the North East. It is a tall tree like the pine and has red berries. It is in great demand since it is used in the manufacture of drugs to treat cancer. Pallava went upto the Myanmar border looking for the perfect tree in the perfect setting for his book.

In fact, a major challenge for the photographer was finding the right trees at the right time and place (in terms of light) for a good picture. Since trees lose their individuality in the forests, he had to search for a tree standing in splendid isolation. Though trees are stationary, they are often difficult to capture on film. The slightest breeze at the canopy can ruffle the leaves and cause a shake in a perfect frame. Pallava's pictures are not the artistic pictures of a Raghu Rai or an S. Paul, but they are excellent portraits of trees, their flowers and fruits. He captures them in their vibrant colours and stately grace.

A representation of tree worship.

With Subhadra, you journey through India's tree culture. In the Golden Temple at Amritsar, there are two beautiful ber trees called *dukh bahnjani beri* or "trees that rid you of sorrow". The tamarind or *imli* tree near Tansen's tomb in Gwalior is said to have magical properties. Those who eat its leaves find their voice to be as melodious as Tansen's. The *amla* tree's green berries are not only rich in Vitamin C but the tree is also worshipped as a symbol of fertility.

On the inner Ring Road in Delhi, is the *samadhi* of Pir Baba. Close by is a tamarind tree on which are strung pitchers by those whose wishes have been fulfilled. This hallowed spot at which the pilgrims to Ajmer stop is, therefore, called *Matka* Pir Baba.

Given India's religious and cultural ethos, common beliefs surrounding trees are legion, says Subhadra. The *ashoka* dispels sorrow, the *neem* bestows happiness, the *mandar* gladdens the sun. Women unable to conceive must pray to the *pipal*. The *pipal* also plays a significant role in the thread ceremony of Brahmin children.

History abounds in references to trees. Emperor Ashoka planted shade giving trees on highways; the Greek Megasthenes describes with awe the splendid parks surrounding Chandragupta Maurya's palace; Chinese traveller Husan Tsang describes the dense jungles that lined the Ganga for miles on end.

According to a legend, the Kadambas, a ruling dynasty of southern India, got their name because their founder sprang up under the *kadamba* tree from a drop of sweat from Shiva's brow.

In Indian mythology, trees are imbued with human feelings. So trees could grieve when they scattered flowers like teardrops at the abandonment of Sita by Rama. Trees, it is said, can respond to love – so the concept of *dohada*, the power of a young girl to make a plant bloom out of its normal season.

This magic and mystery has been woven into the text of the book and it is appararent in the stunning pictures. For Subhadra and Pallava, the tough, sturdy *kejri* trees of Rajasthan are the survival trees of India. In Central India, the *mahua* is the survival tree of the tribals. Its flowers, fruits and bark are all used.

PALLAVA BAGLA

Indian laburnum.

The flowering of the bamboo is an unusual phenomenon and when the bamboo flowers, it dies. In Punjab, Pallava wanted to document the two trees on which freedom fighters had been hanged, but he could not find them.

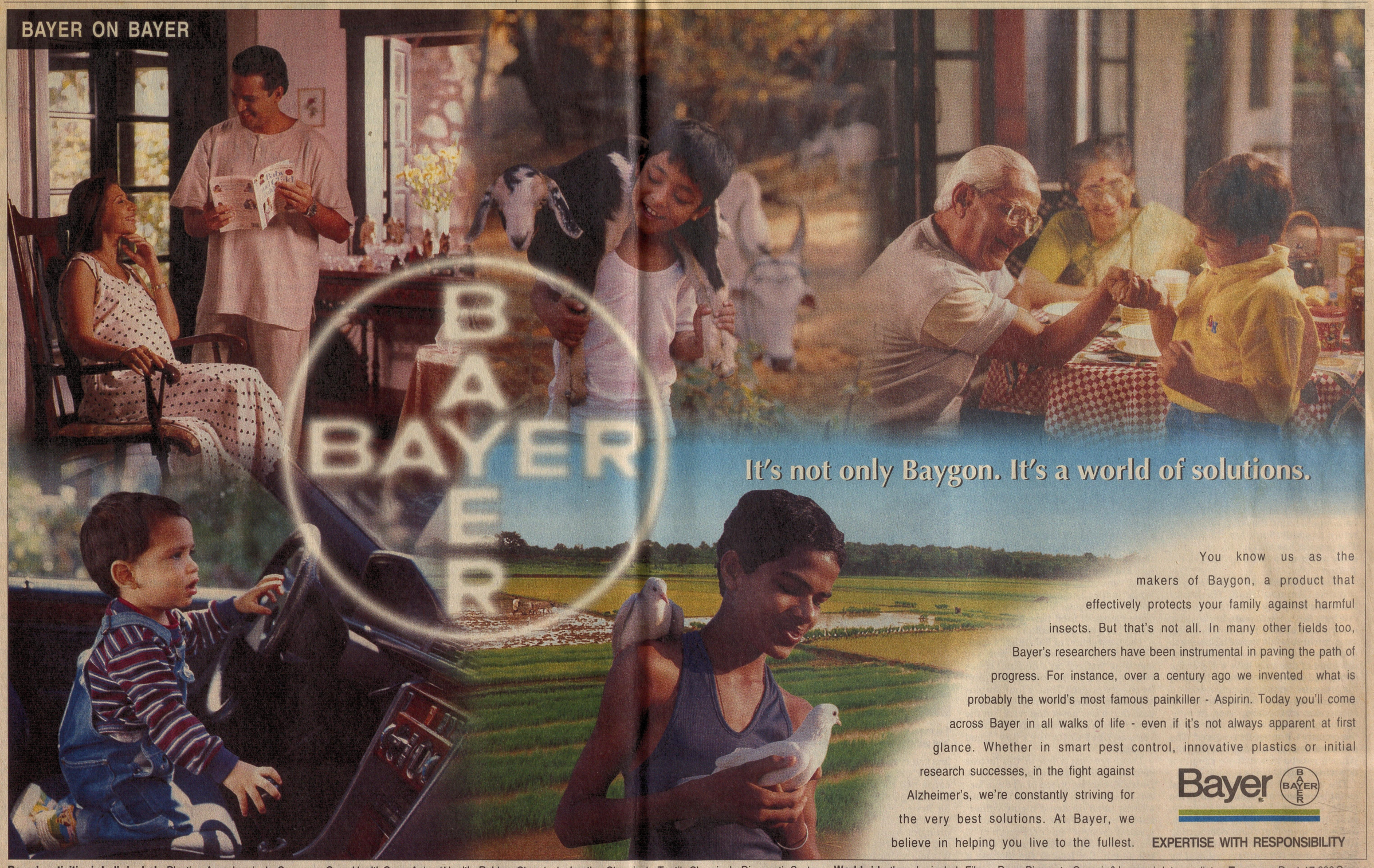
The biggest *bargad* or banyan tree of the country, found in Kolkata, forms the inside cover of the book. Like a black and white etching, it is spread like the *bargad* over four pages.

There is invaluable information in the text. The *alstonia scholaris*, popularly known as Devil's tree or *Shaitan*, with its dark green leaves that look like the palm of a hand is found in western India. It is said to be the abode of evil spirits, hence the name. *Ditta* bark, a commercial name for the tree's medicinally valuable bark, is useful against worm infections, besides being a good astringent. The botanical name *scholaris* comes from its use as a source of timber for blackboards. There are several other such nuggets of information.

India is ranked 13 in the Food and Agriculture Organisation's list of the top 20 countries engaged in the production of industrial roundwood. Some 25 million cubic metres or two per cent of the world production is from India.

We also have an important gene pool of wild trees and native species that are constantly being misused and denuded because of a weak system of intellectual property rights. It is imperative that these trends are halted by conscious human action and intervention, says Subhadra.

This is indeed an invaluable book brought out by Timeless Books. It has a moving note, almost like a foreword, from the publisher about the strength he derived from the trees in his loneliest moments. ●



BIL/59

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Taking ecology to the seas

From helping turtles escape trawler nets to making maximum use of waste material from fish catch, the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology safeguards marine wealth.

A FEW years ago, I visited Orissa to see the turtles nesting on the beaches of Gahirmatha, Rushikulya and Ekkakulnnai. Then, unlike now, very few turtles came to nest. What I saw, however, was a graveyard. The mangled remains of turtles caught in the fishing nets of the big trawlers were sprinkled across the sands and stray dogs were making a meal of them. For a nature lover, it was a heart-rending sight.

Last month on a visit to the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) at Kochi, I was delighted to see the turtle excluder device (TED) designed by the Institute. The TED is now seen as vital for responsible fishing. Fishermen, who wanted to catch all that they could in one clean scoop of the sea bed, were unhappy with the bigger TEDs which allowed shrimps and smaller fish also to escape with the turtles. After trial and error, an 800 by 1000 mm oval-grid TED has been designed. It is a top exiting single-grid hard TED meant for use in small mechanised trawlers in Indian waters. Five vertical grid bars of 8 mm diameter steel rods are welded inside of the frame with a spacing of 150 mm. The TED frame is fixed at an angle of 45° inside the TED extension cylinder made of poly-ethyelene netting. TED extension is provided with an exit of standard dimensions on the upper side with a cover or flap. An accelerator funnel is incorporated in the design for reducing the shrimp loss.

When this device was tried out at Visakhapatnam, 90 per cent of the turtles were able to escape. In February, at the invitation of Orissa Fisheries Directorate, CIFT scientists demonstrated the fabrication and operation of TED to local fishermen, net makers, entrepreneurs, environmentalists and others. Trawler fishermen had expressed concern about the large-scale loss of shrimp and fish because of TEDs. The new devices with exit cover codend, reduced the loss of shrimp to 0.62 per cent and overall loss of total catch to 1.2 per cent. All the Olive Ridley turtles which entered the nets during the operations, off Agaranasi, Paradeep, escaped. Some of them weighed 50 kg. The Marine Products Export Development Authority has ordered 600 TEDs.

In a small trawler, the TED can handle one to nine tonnes of fish. The trawler, cruising at three nautical miles an hour, catches the fish. Before the use of TEDs, shrimp trawlers were killing around 11,000 sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico and along the South Atlantic coast annually. Now with the use of TEDs and an effective conservation strategy, there is hope of saving the turtle population for posterity. In Gahirmatha, which is one of the world's bigger nesting sites for the Olive Ridley, environmentalists and the Wildlife Institute of India have been pleading for the use of TEDs for some years now. Fortunately, the ecological concerns voiced in India found support in the United States which threatened to stop shrimp imports from India unless the fishing boats used TEDs.

Use of devices like the TEDs has not affected total catch.

According to Dr. K. Devadasan, director of the CIFT, of the $1100 million (Rs. 46300 million) marine exports from India, shrimp accounted for 72 per cent. Now that a fairly efficient TED is available, an all out effort has to be made to ensure that fishermen use it every time they set out.

In its own quiet way, CIFT has been safeguarding the ecological concerns of the nation through development of TEDs and utilisation of fish waste. Dr. Devadasan said that development of responsible fish harvesting techniques and viable post-harvest methods was the focus of the Institute's research in 1999-2000. The most significant achievement was the design and construction of a 15.5m fuel-efficient steel fishing vessel, Sagarkripa.

With the help of the Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad, the Institute has been using satellite imagery to locate potential fishing zones. Fishing boats, made from treated rubber wood and other less expensive woods, were manufactured. Eco-friendly fishing methods such as V-form otter board and by-catch reduction device were popularised.

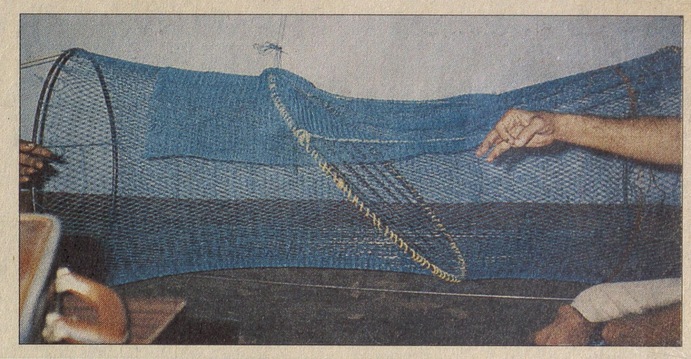
The fishing industry brings Rs. 6,000 crores of foreign exchange into the country and half the catch is from Kerala alone. The southern coastline is a highly productive area. Earlier, prawn and shrimp formed the bulk of fish exports. Now other fish are being caught and value additions made.

The octopus, found in abundance on the east coast, is processed and exported, jellyfish is semi-dried and exported to the Far East. Squid and turtle fish are considered delicates in Japan. Shark, caught off the coast of Saurashtra, is like a coconut tree – every part of it is used.

Waste from the fish catches is now being put to good use. More than 100,000 tonnes of prawn and other crustacean shell waste is available annually from the processing centres. CIFT has developed a process for preparation of chitin from this shell waste. Incorporated in the diet of broiler chicks, chitin increases the weight of the chicks by 10 to 12 per cent. Chitin is also used for the production of glucosamine hydrochloride used in antibiotics and baby food formulations.

From prawn shell waste, a chemical called chitosan has been produced. This is used as a water and wine-clarifying agent and also in preparation of cosmetics and pharmaceutical products. Micro-fine chitosan powder, impregnated in gauze and films, helps treatment of chronic wounds and external ulcers. It also minimises bleeding in neurosurgery. From fishery wastes, chitin film is prepared to serve as artificial skin over wounds and burns. This artificial skin prevents moisture loss from burns as well as microbial invasion.

Till recently, shark bone was used in limited quantities to make necklaces and buttons. Now the cartilaginous bone is used in medicines for treatment of arterosclerosis and blood vessel thrombosis. Processed shark bone is in demand in Europe, the U.S. and Australia. CIFT has developed a process for extracting the shark fin rays used in soups in many foreign countries.



Top: Showing the device to the fishermen.

Left: It actually works ... Olive Ridley turtles make their way out.

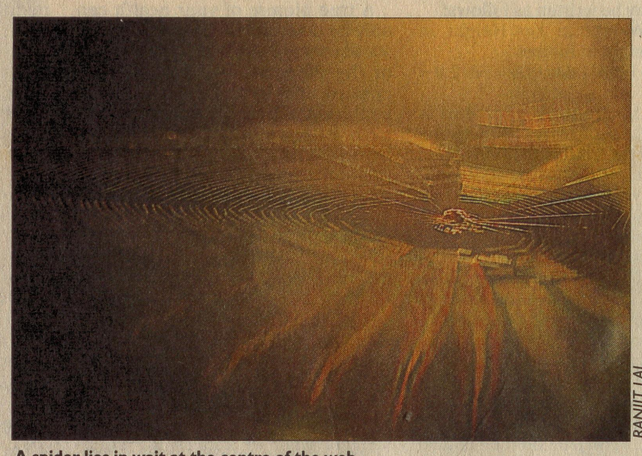
Till now cat guts were used as absorbable sutures during surgery. Now CIFT has processed fish guts as surgical sutures. Fish gut sutures are not only cheaper but can also be better utilised. It has been found suitable for eye and other micro-surgery.

CIFT has also entered the fish packaging business in a big way. Based on consultancies from the industry, it has developed packaging for fish curry, dried fish (sans smell), fried mussel ... For cutlets made from fish meat, it has developed thermoform containers. The fish processing division is helping industry can and export tuna, mackrel, clams, smoked fish, sardines, oysters and mussel. The environment-friendly CIFT is now working on biodegradable plastic packaging. ●

ENVIRONMENT

A diabolical trap

Man is trying to produce silk as versatile as the one that a spider spins. So do not destroy any cobweb that you see, says RANJIT LAL. Sit back and watch a masterpiece of architecture at work.



RANJIT LAL

A spider lies in wait at the centre of the web.

WE scream whenever we walk into one, we brandish the broom ruthlessly in our homes so that not a trace of them remains anywhere, and filmmakers have traditionally used them to convey moods of suspense, evil and mystery. In doing all this, we are showing gross disrespect to one of nature's most fantastic products – spider's silk.

Just think. A web with pencil-thin strands can stop a Boeing 747 dead in its tracks. Strands thinner than your hair are more than five times stronger than steel wire of similar diameter, and can stretch by over 30 per cent without snapping. Nothing we have produced – nylon, Kevlar or anything else – comes even close. Of course, we already have our greedy eyes fixed on what mass production of spider's silk could do for us. Bulletproof jackets, everlasting shoes, improved surgical sutures, bridge suspension cables, seat belts, bumpers for cars, parachute cords, artificial tendons and ligaments – the list grows as do the dreams.

Architects are studying web geometry and trying to figure out how webs absorb huge impacts and even when partially destroyed, do not collapse. And already, the silk producing genes have been patented.

Scientists are busy trying to synthesise the stuff – without much success – and are using bioengineering gene splicing techniques to produce it, using bizarre ideas. They are trying, for example, to make silk with the help of the milk of transgenic goats.

The spider silk genes have been spliced into cells taken from the udders (which are said to be somewhat similar to the spider's spinnerets!) and worked so well here that scientists could produce high quality silk through cell culture.

Now the gene has been put back into a species of goat and the challenge will be to extract the pure silk protein from the milk and spin it into fabric in much the same way as artificial fabrics are made from petrochemical solutions. But so far, spiders run the best, and the most efficient, silk factories.

Spider's silk is actually a protein substance, chemically and molecularly oriented to give it maximum strength and elasticity. Squeezed out of the spider's spinnerets – the openings of the silk glands – in liquid form (rather like toothpaste is squeezed out of a tube), it solidifies on contact with the air. The more the spider stretches it, the stronger it gets. The silk glands may occupy the entire floor of the spider's body and are of various kinds, each producing a special quality of silk.

Seven types of silk glands have been identified, though no single spider possess all types. Thus, there are special glands that produce silk for wrapping up prey, for setting up the framework of the web (the "walking lines"), for safety lines, for egg sacs and, of course, for producing the sticky trap threads. Up to four pairs of spinnerets release the silk, and some spiders are equipped with a special plate (called the cribellum) just in front of the spinnerets, which contain a row of openings through which many strands of extremely fine silk are produced. This is used, together with special hoods on the legs to produce those zigzag "hackled bands" on the web that serve as visual warnings to birds.

While cobwebs in the attic may be unsightly, an orb web pearled with dew at dawn is every nature lover's (and photographer's) delight. So how is this masterpiece of architectural engineering constructed? The spider follows a fixed routine – not using rational logical intelligence, we are told – but following instincts that may be 200 million years old, and adjusting its instinctive blueprint to ground reality.

The first line to be laid down is the most important; it is the topmost bridge line from which the whole web will be suspended. The spider crawls up to a suitable perch and unravels a thread of silk that catches the breeze. It drifts away and, hopefully, snags and sticks on a twig or branch a little distance away. (If not, the spider fixes one end of the silk on the initial post, climbs down unraveling the line as it goes, making sure it does not snag on anything, then climbs up another suitable post and anchors the bridge line at a suitable spot).

After fixing the thread, the spider runs along this first light line, relaying a tough frame line behind it. Then back it trundles along this bridge line, spinning yet another thread behind which dangles in a loop beneath the first bridge line.

Once this is affixed at both ends, it crawls to the lowest point of the loop, attaches another line here, and lowers itself along it to the ground or some firm anchoring point. Then the cord is pulled tight and anchored, thus completing a basic Y shaped frame that comprises the primary radii of the web and whose centre is the hub.

In much the same way as this "first fork" was made, the spider spins more radial spokes and frame threads, laying them across the triangles of the first fork. Using this frame as scaffolding, it radiates outwards from the hub, spinning more radial threads. Now, from the hub, it spins a spiral scaffolding till it nearly reaches the edge of the frame. All this has been done using non-sticky silk.

Now the spider turns around and stars spiralling inwards again, laying the deadly sticky thread behind, tautening it at the points of attachments to the spokes and releasing it with a twang which breaks up the glue into tiny beads – deadly for any insect that touches it. The spiral laid earlier is consumed as the spider proceeds inwards. A "free zone" is left near the hub, between the sticky spirals and the centre. Here the spider will lie in wait, its body held away from the web and legs coated with a film of oil – just in case.

The spider takes under an hour to spin the web and does so every evening, consuming the old web in order to conserve protein.

Not all spiders spin orb webs. Some collectively erect massive hammock and sheet webs into which crawling and jumping insects trip and get hopelessly entangled. (These use non-sticky thread). Invisible for the most, these webs are best appreciated on dew-laden mornings. Some spiders have of course, dispensed with web-building altogether. Gladiator and ogre-faced spiders throw sticky silken nets over unsuspecting prey as they pass beneath them; the deadly bolas spider swings a deadly blob of glue suspended on a silk thread at a passing moth and snares it. To improve their chances, it is thought that these spiders wear and spread perfumes that are irresistible to their victims.

One day, no doubt, we too will produce silk as good as spiders do. But till then at least, if you do walk into a web, do not scream and hack it to shreds with your stick. Back off, sit down, and watch this diabolical trap at work. ●

A web pearled with dew in the early morning.

REVIEW

The debate rages on ...

A NEW biography of Indira Gandhi is likely to re-ignite the debate on whether she was a democrat or an authoritarian and whether the present ruling elite in India is a product of the process of "political debasement" that her critics believe began under her. Questions about her commitment to secularism, about her "real" motives for clamping the Emergency and about her "self-destructive" role in Punjab are bound to be raised again as her admirers and critics look back at her years in the light of the biography.

Katherine Frank is an American academic who now lives in England and her credentials for tackling the life of India's first woman Prime Minister seem to be no more profound than her empathy for strong women. This is her fourth biography–the previous three being also of women – Emily Bronte, Mary Kingsley and Lucie Duff Gordon.

Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi is, in large parts, a one-dimensional portrait of one of independent India's most complex political leaders. It portrays her as a crusader, though with a touch of ruthlessness when painted into a corner, who paid with her life as she sought to build on the Nehruvian vision of a modern secular India. Her excesses – the imposition of the Emergency, indulging Sanjay Gandhi – are explained either as knee-jerk responses to situations thrust upon her or in emotional terms.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Indira Gandhi ... democrat or autocrat?

On the Emergency, Frank clearly suggests that she was forced into it by a combination of circumstances, wrong advice and her own conviction that the JP movement was pushing the country into chaos and anarchy. And, to stress the point that Indira Gandhi was a democrat at heart, she points to the 1977 elections which, she insists, Mrs. Gandhi ordered in defiance of Sanjay Gandhi and the rest of the coterie."For Indira, the Emergency had been a means to an end. But she was no Bhutto or Mujib. For all her failings and despite her irrational belief that only she could lead and control the country, on some level she remained committed to democracy. She was guilty of hubris but not megalomania," Frank writes.

This sums up Frank's approach – yes, the lady had her downside, she bore grudges, indulged Sanjay Gandhi to excess and suffered from other human failings but, in the end, what counted was her commitment to freeing India from poverty and sectarian prejudices.

Much of what went wrong with the emergency is laid at the door of Sanjay Gandhi with Indira Gandhi herself emerging a victim of her son's excesses. There is a dramatic moment, minutes after the decision to impose the emergency was taken, which highlights her helplessness. The incident was narrated to Frank by Siddhartha Shankar Ray and, according to him, the prime Minister was shocked to learn that Sanjay and Bansi Lal had decided to cut power supply to newspapers and close the courts though this was not envisaged in the emergency provisions. On Ray's suggestion, she spoke to Sanjay and "when she returned ... her eyes were red and she had obviously been crying.

She said: 'Siddhartha, it's alright; there will be electricity and no courts will be closed.' Ray took her at her word and finally departed for home – falsely reassured."

On the Punjab issue too, Indira Gandhi is shown as going along with the dirty tricks department of Sanjay and Zail Singh creating a "Frankestein" in Bhindranwale, though Frank does blame her for relying on the "inexperienced and far from diplomatic Rajiv, Arun Nehru and Arun Singh" for advice as the crisis in Punjab deepened. But it is a piece of Frank's softly, softly approach to her subject that even here it seems as though she is a victim of wrong advice rather than a partner in the "crime" that finally consumed her.

On Kashmir, Frank is a little more critical of her but, largely, it is an uncritical work – a journalistic account based on existing biographies with very little original research. It is a hugely apolitical project focussed more on Indira Gandhi's persona – often cluttered with avoidable details of her household – than on her political agenda and offers no fresh insight into what made her tick.

For Indian readers, there are few surprises, though it has some little known sidelights about her pre-marital relations with Feroze Gandhi, her disastrous stint at Oxford where she failed repeatedly, her plans to leave India and settle down in London after Nehru's death and her difficulties with Maneka. Her poor health as a young girl – she spent several months at a Swiss sanatorium for tuberculosis – is discussed at length and it might interest a lay reader to learn that her relations with Nehru came under some strain in his last days as she felt oppressed and claustrophobic under his shadow.

In Britain, the book has provoked a minor controversy following an extremely idolatory review in *The Guardian*. It has provoked a strong reaction from Indira Gandhi's critics who have lashed out at attempts to portray her as "Mother India" but, interestingly, there is a consensus that India's current political masters are "lesser figures" compared to her.

The disagreement is on whether they are also in some way her "true heirs", as one critic put it, accusing her of encouraging a climate which would inevitably lead to the sort of political opportunism that characterises the Vajpayee coalition. "The appalling circumstances of Indira Gandhi's assassination should not blind us to the fact that she debased Indian politics," he wrote in a rejoinder to *The Guardian*.

Geoffrey Moorhouse, a well known British journalist, in his review had said that Nehrus were "dedicated to the notion of a secular state in which creed or caste would dominate anyone else; where the religious card that had beggared and bloodied the country's history ... could no longer be played." India, he argued, was now in "very different hands and all who care about that country must tremble for the future of its secular democracy."

Moorehouse has been accused of trotting out an "apology" for Indira Gandhi and ignoring the fact that she "could not tolerate rival parties winning state level elections and (mis)used article 356 of the constitution to impose president's rule."

The initial reaction to the biography confirms the enduring interest in Indira Gandhi and the strong passions she still arouses among her admirers and detractors alike. It would be interesting to see how the book is received in India though Frank seems to have bought insurance against a negative reaction by producing a list of acknowldgement that reads like a "who's who" of Indian academia and the media – the main sources of book reviews. ●

HASAN SUROOR

Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi, *Katherine Frank,HarperCollins, £19.99.*

ART

Antenna of change

In its transition from officially sanctioned instrument of education and entertainment to drawing room status symbol, the TV has assumed a magical aura. It is this process of cultural transformation that Samar Jodha has sought to capture, writes RANJIT HOSKOTE.

SAMAR JODHA'S recent suite of photographs, "Through the Looking Glass", is an intriguing and unconventional exercise in portraiture. Exhibited at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Mumbai recently, these images do not convey the idiosyncrasies or hint at the veiled mysteries of human sitters. For Jodha's subjects are a family of television sets, widely dispersed across a range of home settings, public spaces and workplace situations throughout India. Jodha's television sets are inanimate objects only in a technical sense; they speak eloquently of the social history to which they have borne witness and in which they have featured as active participants.

Jodha does not isolate the television set from its ambience as an artefact, but reveals it within the frame of its relationship to its owners, their aspirations, their life-world. The TV has become a treasured possession and a domestic fixture since its introduction into India, in 1959, as an officially sanctioned instrument of education and entertainment; but it has transformed itself radically since. By the 1970s, it had become the focus of middle-class living rooms in metropolitan India, a status symbol to be displayed proudly, a luxury that became a necessity; in rural Bharat, it was a window to the larger world. By the 1990s, especially after the advent of multi-channel satellite television, that difference narrowed and vanished, as the TV made a transition from State-driven education device to channel-driven entertainment venue, equalising urbanite and *kisan*, at least in terms of access to a cultural post-modernity.

In the process, the TV has become an all-hypnotising eye, sucking its viewers into a vortex of dreams; more than any other technological device, among the many that impress the denizens of a backward economy, it has assumed a magical, even divine aura. This is the process of cultural transformation that Jodha captures in "Through the Looking Glass". In his photographs, we see the TV as a friendly neighbourhood presence, standing in the midst of the photographs, calendars and assorted impedimenta of a village community centre; we see it occupying the position of a testimonial among the flamboyant memorabilia of a film-producer's career; we see it placed among the peacock feathers, Barbie dolls, electronic clocks, ancestral portraits and framed university degrees that signify prestige or achievement in various social milieux.

The inward theme of "Through the Looking Glass" is consumerism. Under cover of the documentary mode, Jodha discreetly investigates the signs of arrival: the television set takes its place in a lineage of technological advancements that served as tokens of economic worth and social legitimation, including the car, the refrigerator, the air-conditioner, the transistor radio and the washing machine. Had it merely registered the possession of such white goods as status symbols, the photograph would have been no more than a document; what it does, however, is to convey the unintended tales carried by the manner of their display in the living spaces of their owners. And yet, he does not mock the aspiration or scorn the taste of the owners; his condensed narratives are empathetic rather than judgmental.

SAMAR JODHA

"A tourist guide's home" ... an estimate of people's lives by looking at their houses.

Jodha's approach to his material is characteristic of a new generation of Indian photographers, linked more by affinity of perspective rather than by strict chronology, which has come into its own during the last decade. In his early thirties, Jodha is among the younger members of this group, whose work marks a major shift away from the philosophical and image-making concerns that have so far preoccupied post-colonial Indian photography. While their immediate predecessors remain committed, in the main, to a High Modernist aesthetic centered on what I would term the *emphatic image*, Jodha's generation tends towards what I would term the *empathetic image*.

Crucial to the work of the earlier generation of Indian photographers is the model of the photographer as an artist consciously acting on, and therefore heightening, ordinary experience into transcendental awareness through a combination of visionary attention and expert technique. By contrast, the photographers of Jodha's generation are sceptical of the self-image of photographer as *auteur*-creator or inspired seer. Their work marks a shift from the photograph as formal art-work to the photograph as interactive switchpoint in a sociology of dialogue between image-maker and subject. The focus of the new tendency is the semiotics of the everyday: the signs and gestures of self-representation, of identity and desire, that are embedded in the informal routines of ordinary life rather than the self-consciously stylised protocols of festivity or ceremonial. Jodha retrieves these elements, which have become invisible from long familiarity, and draws low-key epiphanies from them.

The operative model for such photography is that of the anthropologist's log; the photographer reveals the patterns of experience by maintaining an attitude of receptivity to the clues that social environments offer. Thus, Jodha's portraiture of the television set allows him to explore the double life of the TV, both as an agent of change in an economy of knowledge and empowerment, as well as a sign of change in an economy of desire wrought by the liberalisation of the Indian economy since the early 1990s.

Jodha himself leads an engaging double life between rival mandates. On the one hand, he enjoys a successful career as a commercial photographer, taking on assignments for clients like American Express, the Taj Group of Hotels, Indian Airlines, and Harley Davidson; moreover, his book, **Jaipur: The Last Destination**, has attracted favourable attention. On the other hand, he has undertaken social communication projects for voluntary agencies, placing his lens at the service of the aged destitute, orphaned and runaway children, leprosy patients and spastics. He has also conducted special documentation projects on institutions like the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, the National Museum, New Delhi, and the Sanskriti Museum of Everyday Art, New Delhi. Beyond these, Jodha expresses his private concerns, without having to conform to the parameters of assignments and causes, through what he describes as his personal projects. Drawn from the fabric of his other photographic activities but conveying his specific preoccupations, these include "Reality Chic", an exploration of street fashion and its sociology, and "Through the Looking Glass".

Jodha has laid aside his public persona while stepping into the interiors where he has gathered images for "Through the Looking Glass". He has not entered these spaces in the mode of the design-magazine photographer, whose work emphasises harmony and coordination. Nor has he announced himself as the social-communication photographer, who must accentuate the discordant and pitiful, loss and malaise. Instead, he has, very simply, yet very subtly, played the witness who records the textures of normal life: even when the chief condition of that normality is the kaleidoscopy of chaos (as in a roadside *dhaba*) or a crisis so permanent as to have been internalised by the ethos (as in a village hospital).

As the constant factor in this documentary experiment, the TV invites us into the frame, suggesting a connection to personal fantasies and social possibilities from radically different universes of meaning. And then it vanishes, merging with the background, leaving us free to dwell on other, equally powerful devices and presences held in the frame: windows of escape imagined in small towns and inner-city areas, small transcendences conceived during long afternoons of boredom at a hotel reception desk or eventless days in hospital. They promise the security of home, the elsewhereness of fantasy: these kitsch calendar icons, gods, muscular heroes and tinsel nymphs; these laminated tourism-department posters, with their mountain landscapes, pegged on lime-washed walls.

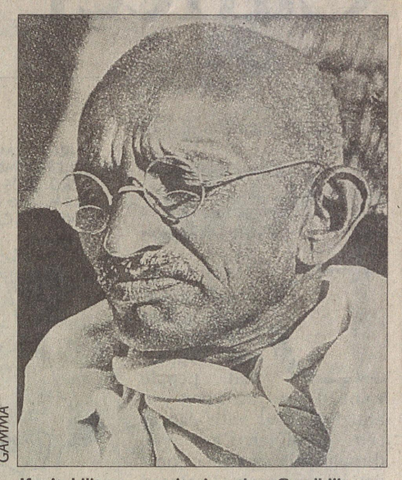
It is from these details that, unobtrusively, the environmental variables surface: piquant visual accents such as the image of Shrinathji above a doorway, the crucifix on a hospital wall, the muezzins minaret in a poster, and the colourful Vajrayana Bodhisattva presiding over a calendar. Jodha's captions are laconic: of all these indices of religious persuasion, income group, ethnic assertion or regional matrix, they indicate only that of class (or more correctly, social location). Garment Exporters Workshop, we read, or Office Assistants Home; the captions tell us of invisible landlords, civil servants and tourist guides, and we arrive at an estimate of their lives from a glimpse of their material possessions. Even our conception of class undergoes an alteration, as we see how the taste and accomplishments of a class vary with the locality.

Ostensibly presented as a comparative anthropology of desires, Jodha's investigation gradually develops into something else, something quite fascinating: a rudimentary poetics of contemporary regional style. I would conclude, however, with a caveat: if this is indeed Jodha's project, his witnessing has been too subtle, for he leaves far too great a burden of inference to the viewer. These images communicate themselves as still-life evidence of aspiration; they may perhaps benefit from a sign of agency, that human presence which remains elusive, always beyond reach in "Through the Looking Glass". For his next strategic move, Jodha could well consider a more argumentative mode of witnessing, one that would tease out the relationship between objects and their owners, and so strengthen his examination of Indian popular culture. ●

The peace Nobel ...

Continued from page II

there are tomes of evidence to show that Gandhiji brought peace through non-violence during the transfer of power from Britain to India and Pakistan, and at extreme danger to his person. There are two reasons why Gandhiji's candidature was regarded as unsuitable. First, prior to 1936, the Norwegian Nobel Committee had no eyes beyond the "North" and was colonial-minded in its selection of awardees. This should come as no surprise to any perceptive student of history. Second, and again unsurprisingly, the Nobel Committee then had a very particular understanding of "peace" and this has to be assimilated in conjunction with both the then composition of its committee members and the interests of the nation awarding the prize.



GAMMA

If suitability was a criterion, then Gandhiji brought peace between two belligerent religious communities and two nations that were just born.

What is amazing is that in 1936, for the first time, a person from the "South" was awarded the prize: Carlos Saavedra Lamas, Foreign Minister of Argentina and President of the League of Nations, was awarded the Peace Prize for his role as an "arbitrator in the dispute between Paraguay and Bolivia in 1935". The dispute was the Chaco War (1932-35) between these nations, a "bloody struggle that ended the prolonged civilian rule in Bolivia unleashed a number of social forces and generated a period of intense questioning that culminated in revolutionary upheaval in 1952". In short, Lamas was awarded the prize for bringing peace between two belligerents. By the same token, Gandhiji qualified both in 1947 and 1948. Yet, he wasn't awarded the prize. Why?

The Nobel Committee's adviser, historian Jens Arup Seip, wrote a report which was "favourable and yet not explicitly supportive". The basis for this duality, according to Tonnesson, is that there was ambiguity about Gandhiji's non-violent role in the Partition, "should Gandhi be selected for being a symbol of non-violence, and what political effects could be expected if the Peace Prize was awarded to the most prominent Indian leader". Again, let us examine the record. Gandhiji's opposition to Partition was no secret: it was known that he was convinced that "the British had no right to impose partition on an India temporarily gone mad", and that "no one did more than Gandhiji to warn against the dangers of its partition on a religious basis, or did more to quench the flames of hatred and violence which followed it".

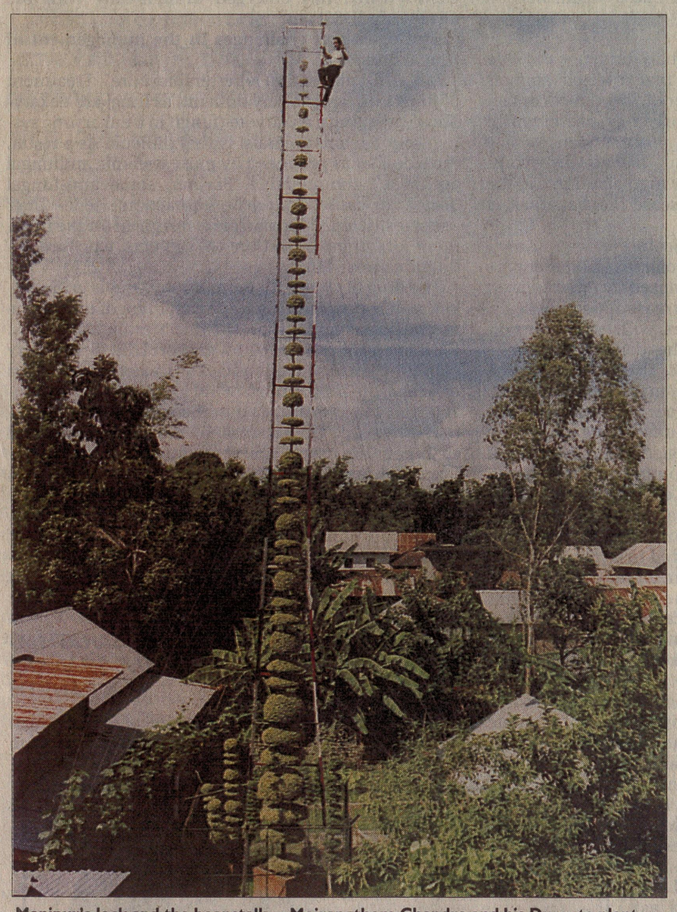
The Norwegian Nobel Committee cannot have been unaware of these widely read reports in newspapers the world over. Is it possible that the historians who advised against his candidature were simply overwhelmed by the propaganda against Gandhiji by the wartime leadership both in Britain and America during World War II (1939-1945)?

The wartime British leadership viewed Gandhiji with hatred because of his leadership of the Quit India campaign, declared on August 8, 1942. This movement, as described by Francis Hitchens, was a "spontaneous revolution" directed not so much against British soldiers and civilians as against the symbols of foreign rule. This is what hurt the leadership in Britain and America the most. This was the time when the jewel needed to be ensconced in the crown, if war supplies were to continue from India and victory won, no matter at what price. Gandhiji could not be allowed an international profile which would in any way threaten this situation. It must be underscored that Norway was on the side of the Allies against the Axis, an alliance that was not without its powerful influences and pressures, which invariably are undocumented.

The question of precedent is easily answered in the same manner as suitability. Could Gandhiji have been awarded the prize posthumously? Gandhiji was assassinated on January 30, 1948, two days before the closing date for nominations for the Peace Prize in 1948. So, Gandhiji was nominated and made it to the short list, but Gandhiji was not alive. Yet, the prize, given its changing criteria, could be awarded posthumously. The question about who should receive the prize money, should Gandhiji be awarded the prize, is a valid one. The Director of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, August Schou, inquired into the practical consequences and the results were negative. But a cursory examination of the list of recipients of the Peace Prize shows a possible solution, given that a number of organisations as awardees, among them the Friends Service Council (London) and American Friends Service Committee (U.S.) in 1947; the International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, 1944; the Nansen International Office for Refugees, Geneva, 1938.

Gandhiji founded four remarkable organisations devoted to the cause of rejuvenating rural India for economic, social, spiritual, political, educational and social betterment. All these promoted non-violence, peace, and communal harmony in India. They were public trusts. The organisations were: Gandhi Seva Sangh (founded 1923), Harijan Seva Sangh (founded 1933), All-India Village Industries Association (founded 1934), and Talimi Sangh (founded 1937). Why were not these considered?

Could it be that, since they were instituted in the "South", they were supposedly not transparent in their functioning, or not achieving the goals for which they were instituted? Again, candid answers in favour of Gandhian institutions were available through independent channels in the public domain. Is it possible that those connected with the Norwegian Nobel Committee, in India and elsewhere, could give the Indian people some candid answers to the many whys in the case of Gandhiji and the Nobel Peace Prize? ●



Manipur's Jack and the beanstalk ... Moirangthem Chandra and his Duranta plant.

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Nature's records

A look at the long and short of the natural world.

QUIZ competitions and record books are the order of the day. But the **Limca Book of Records** in the market for over a decade now, is unique. It chronicles not just the tallest, the fattest, the shortest and the fastest, but also the most unusual endeavours by man, bird and beast in India. Nature, in all its splendour, has also been creating records which we very often taken for granted.

Did you know that the largest hollow tree stands in the Golconda fort near Hyderabad? Known as the monkey-bread tree, this African-origin Baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*), has a 36 sq.ft. hollow and can comfortably accommodate a dozen people. This 700-year-old tree, locally known as the *Hathino ka jhad*, is 29 metres wide at the base. Seven concrete steps, quite obviously made by man, lead to its base. Testing the girth of the tree, 27 people once stuffed themselves into the hollow.

Indian herbs with their immense medicinal value are in great demand all over the world but most of them have not even been patented. It is therefore heartening to hear that Gargi Banerji, who received the prestigious £50,000 (Rs. 35 lakhs) Whitley Prize for protecting 1,000 species of medicinal and aromatic plants in the Himalayas, is planning to set up a herb orphanage with the money. The cold mountain deserts of Lahaul and Spiti, heights ranging from 8,000 to 18,000 ft., are home to 7,500 plants used in drugs for treating asthma and cancer. Many of these plants are on the verge of extinction. In addition to setting up the herb orphanage, Gargi will teach locals to harvest the plants in a sustainable manner.

India's tallest trees, the fir (*Abies pindrow*) and the deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), grow to a height of 76m or 250 ft. However, the world record is held by the eucalyptus regnans of Australia. It grows to 98m or 250 ft. The tallest India orchid, *Galcola falconeri*, has deep yellow flowers and, would you believe it, is 5m high. Orchids of the genus *Taenophyllum* do not have leaves but depend on their green roots to produce food. The world record for orchids, however, is held by Malaysia's *Grammatophyllum speciosum* that grows to a height of 7.6m.

Tourists to Jaipur visit the Amer fort, the Hawa mahal, the Palace of the wind, and other well documented tourist spots. But they would do well to stop by at the house of K.K. Agarwal, whose collection of succulents is well known. He has cultivated the Victorian water lily from seeds and last September, the leaf of the water lily, a hybrid of *V. crusonia* and *V. amazonica*, was 52.5 inches in diameter and still growing. The leaves are so big that they serve as tables on which meals can be served. Agarwal has nurtured 24 varieties of water lilies and a special hybrid, the flower of which changes colour from pink to white.

K. K. AGRAWAL

More than a table for two ... The Victorian water lily.

The banyan tree, as everyone knows, has the biggest spread. But these trees too compete for record-breaking dimensions. The tree with the largest canopy was discovered by accident in 1988 by photographers Regret Iyer and K. S. Ramakrishna of Bangalore. In Thimmamma village, Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh, is the record-holding banyan tree whose canopy covers 2.1 hectares. The tree, which is believed to be over 600 years old, has 1,100 odd prop roots. To prevent vandals getting at it, guards are posted round the clock.

Environmentalists are concerned about the excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides by those seeking bumper crops and giant plants. Padma and Balaji Dakojus of Bangalore with their green fingers have nurtured cosmos and dahlia to heights of 14.10 ft. and 13.9 ft. without using either. The French marigold bush plants grew 5 feet tall and covered 105 sq.ft.. Their Bethlehem lotus that traditionally flowers on one night once a year, flowered several times in 1995 and had 42 flowers on June 1, 1995. Their 9.2 ft. African marigold is a world record. The Dakojus provide a practical example of how wonders can be done with plants without using fertilizers and pesticides.

Moirangthem Okendra of Imphal, Manipur, Manipur, is a topiary artist, cutting plants and hedges to desired shapes and heights in his "Hedge to Heaven" Garden. Starting in 1983 with the ordinary hedge plant Duranta in a pot, he trimmed it into umbrella shapes, one above the other. Today, after 17 years, it is 61 feet tall. With a 44-step step ladder he reaches the topmost canopy and continues the magnificent umbrella formations, cutting, trimming and reaching for the heavens.

While Okendra has created a record in Manipur with his topiary artwork, in Dharwad, Karnataka, P. S. Mungi has grown a hedge cactus (*Cereus genus*), 50 ft high and is still growing. Though planted just 10 years ago, this hardy, erect cactus produces cream coloured funnel shaped flowers in summer. Iron angles and the wall of Munji's house support India's tallest cactus. The world record is held by the *Saguaro cereus gigantecus* of the United States and Mexico that grows to a height of 59 feet.

Water harvesting is the credo of the day. Chewang Norphel, better known as the glacier man, harvests water in Ladakh by diverting the flow of a river or a steam through pipes down a shady mountain incline. At intervals, stone embankments are made to impede the flow and form shallow pools. In winter this water freezes into glaciers. In summer the glacier melt is used for irrigating fields. The largest glacier, made by Norphel's efforts, is 1,000 ft. long, 150 ft. wide and has a depth of 4 ft.

While man struggles to save water for his innumerable needs, the camel effectively stores its quota in its body. A dromedary, a fleet-footed, one humped camel used for riding in Rajasthan, may go without drinking water for 10 months. During this period it feeds on succulent desert plants. It can function perfectly even if it loses water amounting to 30 per cent of its body weight. Humans can survive a maximum loss of 20 per cent in cold climates and 12 per cent in hot climates. A dromedary can drink up to 160 litres at a time enabling it to regain its body weight with a single drink. In cold weather a dromedary can walk up to 1,040 km or 650 miles without drinking water.

Malika Seth and the 1,00,000 bees.

Most of us are terrified of being stung by bees and wasps. But Malika Seth was only eight years old when she created a record by covering herself with 25,000 bees. On May 23 last year, at 13, she improved her record by covering herself with a mantle of 1,00,000 bees. Just her face, hands and one foot could be seen when she gave a demonstration of her prowess at Kishanpura village, Kurukshetra.

K. P. Vinodan of Pinaryi, Kerala, was able to coax 35,000 bees to cover him and stay on him for 25 hours in July 1999. The demonstration was in a glass case to protect onlookers. The world record is held by Danielle Goulet of Australia. In 1988 he was covered with a mantle of 1,41,000 bees.

To conclude, there is the heart warming story of Janwarwale Jadai who shares his home, his earthly possessions and life's savings with a menagerie of animals and even lizards in Narsinghgarh, Madhya Pradesh. After retiring as a lab assistant, he has put his saving of Rs. 2 lakhs into a trust for animals. Dumkata, the tailess monkey and Kallu, the black-faced langur, share a cage with him while two cobras and a score of rats share the broken cage near the house. Learning from him, the inmates also play surrogate parents to orphaned animals who come to Jadia in search of a home. Daddy, the monkey, raised a kitten. An orphaned baby donkey was suckled by a bitch. Another monkey raised five pups. He realised how loyal animals can be when a monkey he had raised and given to a friend crossed the Yamuna to come back to him.

Help comes for 74-year-old Janwarwale Jadia from all quarters. The civic authorities did their bit by laying a pipeline to his ramshackle hut to ensure a regular supply of water. ●

Page XI: The Frogmouth

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Palace coup in Patna?

LALOO YADAV is in trouble again. The law seems to have caught up with him once again. But what is significant on this occasion is that his opponents believe that his present difficulties can serve their purpose more effectively than before. The reason is that the present-day politicians seem adept at using every trick in the law books to serve their political ends. In UP the other day, a narrow technicality was exploited to withdraw cases against some of the accused in the Babri masjid demolition case. In Bihar and Jharkhand now, the law may again prove handy for conducting a palace coup in Patna. The agency involved in both the cases is the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the police organisation controlled by the Union government.

Mr Yadav, of course, has much to answer for in completely disregarding the developmental needs of the state of which he was chief minister for a decade, thereby alienating significant sections who rejoice in his discomfiture. He is also an accused in the infamous fodder scam in which the Bihar treasury was deprived of crores of rupees. There is no escape for him, therefore, from a criminal trial and punishment if he is convicted. But while the wheels of justice grind at a stately pace, nothing seems to prevent his political foes from trying to make the best use of the opportunity provided by his incarceration outside Bihar — in this case in BJP-ruled Jharkhand.

Over the last few years, the NDA has tried in different ways to eject Mr Yadav from power. It found, however, that the RJD chief was canny enough to remain one step ahead of his foes even when he was in a jail near Patna. His mere presence in Bihar was seen to be enough to keep his flock together. Whether the CBI gets the RJD leader remanded in custody in Jharkhand this time, and whether this will immobilise him politically to the benefit of his opponents, is a matter of conjecture. But there is little doubt about the intentions of the ambitious RJD dissidents, led by Ranjan Yadav, who are converging on Patna and Ranchi to monitor the developments. At hand to offer assistance in ousting the Rabri Devi government are the NDA leaders. What is undeniable, however, amidst all this flurry of activity is that politics in Bihar continues to revolve round Laloo Yadav.

A larger playing field

THE MULTITUDE of post-Tehelka problems which the Vajpayee government has had to face do not seem to have dampened its ardour for economic reforms. In fact, the difficulties may have persuaded it to be even more energetic, as its latest decisions show. Opening up the economy further in order to attract foreign investment has always been considered an integral part of the reform process. Perhaps it had become necessary to liberalise more in the face of a decline in FDI on account of the global slowdown and to expand the field to defence production, telecom, among other things. It is also necessary to give a boost to the current slack private domestic investment. Otherwise, the rate of growth would fall further.

It is well-known that foreign investment will bring in foreign capital as well as technology. There is intense competition between the developing countries for FDI and many are ahead of India in dismantling controls for foreigners. Even so, 84 per cent of FDI in the past has been directed to the industrial countries rather than to the developing ones. Among the latter, only 10 destinations have remained important. For India to become one of the favoured few, a few more crucial steps will have to be taken, especially in strengthening the regulatory framework for domestic financial markets and making the tax system more neutral between domestic and foreign investors. More FDI flows will also depend on other parameters. They range from the level of corruption in the country to transparency in administrative procedures, the human development index and, most importantly, infrastructure and good corporate governance. If these areas are not addressed, there is no guarantee that foreign investors will choose India over other destinations.

If there is more FDI, however, there will be considerable benefit in terms of technology upgradation, skill formation and gains in efficiency. In the telecom sector, FDI can help in building the infrastructure through which internet connectivity can rise, facilitating education and commerce. Similarly, in airports and rapid transport systems, there would be major improvements. In the pharmaceutical industry, too, the gains would be considerable, especially because India has a large pool of trained specialists in this discipline. Yet, much depends on the perception of the prospective investors — on how they actually visualise the safety of their investments in India compared to the other countries.

Enemy number one

IT'S NOT only the American promise of arms supplies to Taiwan or surveillance flights by US planes that Beijing has to worry about. If the contents of a resolution before the US Congress are indicative of the thinking in the White House, then Tibet is next in line for a proactive US policy. According to the resolution, Washington should extend support for the Dalai Lama's participation in UN meetings, call for the "release" of the Panchen Lama and set up an American mission in Lhasa. The objective of these initiatives is to encourage "economic development, cultural preservation, health care, education and environmental sustainability for Tibetans inside Tibet".

There is no denying, of course, that the virtual colonisation of Tibet by Beijing, accompanied by the destruction of precious sites and artifacts of Tibetan history during the Cultural Revolution, represent one of the tragic episodes of modern history. India's role in accepting Chinese control over Tibet has not been a particularly glorious one. But the renewed American interest in Tibetan culture, environment, etc. does not seem to be inspired by altruistic motives alone. These are issues on which the US is not known to have evinced keen interest unless they coincide with some aspect of American policy. For instance, the repudiation of the Kyoto agreement on global warming or the permission given to oil companies to drill in the arctic wastelands of Alaska does not suggest that environmental issues are close to the Republican heart.

What may really be behind the American move is to include Tibet in an overall policy in which China appears to have replaced the former Soviet Union as Washington's main adversary. The missile shield is already recognised as directed more against China than the 'rogue' States of North Korea and Iran while the assurances to Taiwan are a negation of the 'one-China' policy, pursued since Nixon's visit to Beijing. If Tibet is now also in focus, it is presumably because it is a subject which can arouse more positive responses than either the missile shield or Taiwan.

THINK IT OVER. . .

The innocent and the beautiful, have no enemy but time

W.B. YEATS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mama's boy

IT IS pathetic to find actor Fardeen Khan in such a bad mess. It is a shame that these role models whom our younger generation wishes to emulate are so weak that they need cocaine for late night shoots. Our gallant young soldiers in Kargil never asked for cocaine. They should be our heroes, not these filmy types.

The film industry would do well to send their spoilt siblings for army training for a year before they are unleashed on the screen for quick box office cash.

R.M. KHOSLA
Delhi

Hit-and-run witnesses

INCIDENTS SUCH as the Jessica Lal case taking a new turn (May 4) is neither the first of its kind nor is it going to be the last. An eyewitness and complainant in the murder case, Shyan Munshi, has turned hostile refusing to identify the main accused, Manu Sharma, who happens to belong to an influential family of politicians. On the heels of Munshi's retraction, the second eyewitness too turned hostile which leaves the third and final witness, Karan Rajput, who might follow suit.

A similar fate awaits the BMW hit-and-run case in which Sanjeev Nanda, belonging to an influential family, mowed down six persons in a drunken fit. The prime eyewitness in this case retracted so shamelessly as to substitute a truck for the BMW. Is there no law in the land under which such blatant liars can be punished for perjury?

TARLOK SINGH
Delhi

Friends and enemies

BRAHMA CHELLANEY is right when he says that successive Indian Prime Ministers have wasted the gains of Pakistan's dismemberment (*Too hard for a soft State*, May 2). No amount of mollycoddling Sheikh Hasina will change the hard fact in the eyes of Bangladeshis — India is the big bully and always at fault.

We may still be singing hosannas to our sacrifices for the liberation of Bangladesh, but even in 1980 when I went to live in Dhaka, there was no one willing to acknowledge it.

S.C. SHARMA
Delhi

II

BY DISMEMBERING Pakistan, we have not made that country weaker. In fact, it is far stronger today, with the shedding of its liability, East Pakistan. So, we have two enemies now instead of one, one on either side, which is certainly far worse. Chellaney says our establishment is quick to absolve aggressors. We were quick to acquit Nawaz Sharif and the Taliban, and now Sheikh Hasina. There is an explanation for this trend: long conditioning of our genes to slavish habits.

M.S.N. MENON
Delhi

Website correction

THE NEWS report *Cyber attack — Pak defaces ministry of external affairs site*, mentions that the site address of MEA is meadev.nic.in. It is actually meadev.gov.in and the site is hoisted by NIIT and not by the National Informatics Centre (NIC). However, except for the MEA and Railways, most government sites are hoisted by NIC.

PRASITHLAL R.
NIC computer cell, MEA, Delhi

With India joining the billionaire's club, it's time women assert their biological choices

The right to choose

BY USHA RAI

Female freedom and family values

AFTER THE tremendous setback suffered by the country's family planning programme during the emergency, the government has been extremely cautious about every step taken on the population stabilisation front. That is why we did not even have a population policy till last year. Though one of the first countries to launch a national family planning programme in the Fifties, the contraceptive choice is still limited to the condom, the oral pill, the IUCD (intra-uterine contraceptive device). Sterilisation is an option only for those who have completed their family.

Smaller developing countries like Indonesia and Bangladesh, despite their stricter Muslim regimen, have been more progressive and offer implants and injectables among the array of contraceptive choices. In India, women's groups have made such a hue and cry about them that the government has steered clear of introducing them in its welfare services.

Recently, the Supreme Court set aside a writ petition against the use of the injectable *net en* (Norsiterat) and there is hope it may be introduced soon. But like a scalded cat the government is still being extremely cautious. After a spate of meetings with the Indian Council of Medical Research and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the government has decided to involve 12 medical colleges in a pilot study of *net en*.

While it is true that in a country where basic health facilities are lacking, it is difficult to push the injectables, which requires monitoring and counselling of those using them, with India's population having crossed a billion, can the government just sit back twiddling its thumbs? Should it not play a more proactive role?

More and more women are resorting to abortions when they find they are pregnant. It is estimated that 11 million abortions occur in India annually killing 20,000 women. Modern technologies like ultrasound are being used in small towns and villages to determine the sex of the unborn child and get rid of it if it is female. So why are we being so queasy about the latest technologies and contraceptives to have spacing between children? Is it not better than foeticide?

While the government is still edging along cautiously on injectables, several private doctors and NGOs like DKT in Mumbai, Janani in Patna and the Family Planning Association of India are marketing and prescribing injectables. Just one NGO has motivated 50,000 women in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and the North-east to try out the injectables. In Mumbai, the Muslim women opt for injectables to prevent conception rather than resort to sterilisation.

DKT is marketing injectables in Mumbai for over five years. Others have tried it and rejected it because it did not agree with them. The important thing is they had a choice. Yasmin Sheikh, 28, mother of two, who has been on *net en* for five years is a remarkably confident woman. Yasmin, who lives in Park Side, Vikroli West, has induced other young women in her locality to opt for injectables.

Just seven or eight years when her mother died, she had to stop attending the *madrasa* to look after her younger brother. Married at 15, for two years she was on the pill. At 18, she had her son. After that she had two abortions. She had a daughter five years after her son. Ever since, on the advice of her family doctor, she has been on injectables. Earlier, she was thin and had heavy bleeding. Now she is 50 kg and her periods are regular. Yasmin has the support of her husband and family elders.

Asked why she did not go in for sterilisation if her family was complete, Yasmin said no one in her family had undergone a sterilisation and they did not approve of one. Asked how long she would be on injectables, she replied, "As long as I can tolerate them. If I go in for sterilisation, it will be with the concurrence of my family."

Nirmala, 35, and mother of four, has been on *net en* for two years now. Sterilisation is taboo in her house too. Soon after being put on *net en*, Nirmala said her periods were irregular, her stomach felt distended and she had a stomachache. She bled for a whole month but could do nothing about it because she was in the village. On her return to Mumbai, her doctor gave her medicine to ease the pain and control the bleeding. Nirmala has decided to continue with the injectable till a better contraceptive is available. She prefers injectables to pills, which have to be taken every day.

Rita Gupta, 23, was not as upbeat about the injectable as Yasmin. Mother of one child after a caesarian operation, Rita had an induced abortion to avert a second child. She had three shots of *net en* in six months. Initially, she had heavy bleeding and the chronic pain in her back had increased. With medicines the heavy bleeding has been arrested but the back pain persists.

Sanjeevani Gawde, 28, has been on injectables since 1995, within two months of its introduction in Mumbai. She saw the DKT poster at her doctor's clinic, inquired about the product, then went in for it. According to Sujata, DKT's social worker for the Vikroli area, Sanjeevani, had only one child when she went in for the injectables. After two years on the injectable, she stopped it to see if her fertility had been affected. She got pregnant, had a clean up job, and went back to the injectable. Sanjeevani is a remarkable women because she personally tested the contraceptive.

Behrampada is a predominantly Muslim area of Bandra, and families live cheek by jowl. Seven doctors in the area dispense injectables along with other contraceptives. Injectables have been introduced and women were in their second and third doses of *net en* when this correspondent met them. Praveen Abdul Salam Sheikh, 25, mother of a boy and girl aged five and three, however, had six doses of *net en*. Except for amenorrhoea (stoppage of periods), she found the injectable quite suitable. She was thinking of delaying her next shot of *net en* but the social worker asked her to get in touch with her doctor. Praveen's daughter was only six months when she got pregnant. Earlier, she was on pills but had problems.

Praveen's neighbour was stopped by her mother-in-law from using the injectables when she had 'spotting'. Spotting is a side-effect of injectables and even if it is negligible women stop using the contraceptive because they cannot do *pooja* or *namaz* when they have spotting. Counselling women that spotting is different from menstruation does encourage some women to continue with the contraceptive. There were five other Muslim women from Behrampada (between 20 to 30) who were on *net en*.

The side-effects of injectables are intermittent. In 25 per cent cases, there is amenorrhoea. There are more chances of amenorrhoea in *depo provera*, which is a quarterly injectable than in *net en*, a bi-monthly injectable. The women tend to worry that they have got pregnant when they have amenorrohoea. Counselling is vital at this stage or the women give up injectables, says Sanjay Mehta, who runs a nursing home in Ghatkopar and offers women who have had babies a choice of IUCD, the pill and the injectables. He has been selling *depo provera* for less than a year.

Though DKT has been supplying *net en* at a subsidised rate of Rs 50 a shot, doctors charge Rs 100 a shot. For subsequent consultations they charge Rs 20 a visit. The price of *depo* is Rs 100 a shot. Fifty per cent of the women drop out because, coming from a poor section of society, they find the price too high. Their husbands earn Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 a month. They prefer *Mala D*, which costs just Rs 2 a month. If the injectables were cheaper, there would be greater acceptability; for if a woman on the pill misses a single dose she gets pregnant and has to go in for medical termination of pregnancy. Injectables are a surer method of staving off conception.

FLOTSAM & JETSAM | *Bhaichand Patel*

Maneka's dilemma

MANEKA Gandhi has gone off to London to tackle Katherine Frank on her home turf. Frank has said some uncharitable things about her late husband, Sanjay, in her biography of Indira Gandhi and the widow is suing the author for libel.

As someone reasonably familiar with the English legal system, I am sorry to say it is not likely to work. Frank has been rather clever. She has been careful not to say anything defamatory about people who are still alive. Under English law, you can say whatever you want about the deceased, true or false. The dead have no reputation to protect. Wild statements can be made about them with virtual impunity.

There is a lot in the book that Maneka has good reason to be upset about. She may want to argue that her image and reputation has been tarnished by the false accusations against her late husband. Unfortunately, it's an argument that does not sit well with the English judges when it comes to libel.

Still, Maneka may wish to give it a go. In that case, she will have to face a two-year nightmare of massive expenses. The Parsi solicitor in London she has chosen is not going to reduce his fees because Sanjay was half Parsi. She will need the services of a Queen's counsel for the high court pleadings. They wear those flaming red gowns and impressive white wigs. They don't come cheap. Add to that Frank's and her publisher's legal costs which will have to be paid by Maneka in case she loses.

It seems a futile exercise that will just draw more attention to the book. She may be advised otherwise by her London lawyers. After all, it must have been some posh law firm out there that must have told the Hinduja brothers that it was all right to proceed to India. All three of them at the same time!

Meanwhile, back in Delhi, Frank's book is selling like hot cakes. The juicy bits about the late Prime Minister's personal life have been the talk of the town. But it's all kindergarten stuff compared to what one day will surely be written about the personal lives of our current crop of leaders. I suspect our resident biographers are already waiting for them to go off to some place a little warmer.

As far as I can see, a good many of our *netas* are fooling around. Some politicians do have lovers housed in Defence Colony or somewhere. We talk about these goings on all the time at parties. Media chaps pass the information around covertly like school boys exchanging girlie magazines behind the teacher's back.

Do these peccadilloes of our elected leaders bother me? Not in the least. People who do not wish their bad behaviour written about should have enough sense to eschew bad behaviour. Still, a public figure's drunkenness, infidelity or general debauchery should be his own business if it has no bearing on his professional ability and competence. There are limits to what should appear in the newspapers.

Any politician who preaches family values should be fair game if he flaunts his mistresses or beats up his wife. Hypocrisy should not be tolerated. A public figure's dishonesty or sycophancy are reasonable subjects for a journalist's word processor. A minister should not be caught with his pants down in the company of a foreign intelligence agent.

I know a pretty socialite who is married and has been having an affair with a politician for some years. His wife is never in Delhi. One evening I asked her how she managed to go about it without her husband finding out. After all, she was driven around everywhere. Wasn't she afraid that some day the driver will spill the beans to her husband?

Her stratagem is simple, she told me. She would ask the driver to take her to a five star hotel on the pretext of a leisurely ladies' lunch. The driver would be sent off to take his lunch. That's not the end of the story. She said she had a very happy marriage. Go figure.

Rosa the rebel

THE NEHRU clan has been rather lucky with names. Indira Nehru married Feroze Gandhi and ended with an even more distinguished surname, one associated with the father of the nation. Gandhi is an unusual Parsi surname. What if she had married someone called Feroze Sodawaterwala? Would someone by the name of Indira Sodawaterwala have ended up as Prime Minister? I doubt it. At one time, soon after her father died, she toyed with the idea of changing her name to Indira Nehru-Gandhi. Fortunately, wiser counsel prevailed.

Let's take Sonia Gandhi. Sonia is a common name in the West which also happens to be popular among north Indians. What if her parents had named her, say, Isabella? A nice Italian name. Would an Isabella Gandhi have been acceptable as India's leader of the opposition? Perhaps not.

Down south, we have an up and coming politician named Stalin. He had Leftist parents and had the misfortune of being born on the day Joseph Stalin died. It is so bizarre that it may actually work in his favour at election time. A politician by the name of Churchill is not doing too badly in Goa.

At least S.A. Dange, the communist leader who also organised Mumbai's mill workers, was on the right track. He named his daughter Rosa after Rosa Luxemburg, the fiery German socialist of the Thirties. Dange also had in mind Pasionaria, after La Pasionara, but Rosa has a better ring to it and sounds Indian.

During the Spanish civil war, the legendary La Pasionara urged the women of the country to fight the fascists with knives and boiling oil. She raised that memorable war cry of the republic, "It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees." Much more rousing than our *desi* equivalent, "*Swaraj* is my birthright and I shall have it."

Indians in the US favour names like Rita, Anita and Sheela for their daughters. They are Indian and international at the same time. Easy for non-Indians to remember and good for integration. You get teased in school if your name happens to be Priti. Sameer and Siddharth are also popular for NRI boys. They get shortened to Sam and Sid. A surname like Dikshit can create difficulties abroad if you get my drift.

PLATFORM | *A.G. Noorani*

China's wrongs, India's lapses

INDIA'S OMISSION to secure accord on its border with China, when the moment was opportune, had lasting consequences. The error persisted longer than many realise. It was not limited to Nehru's rejection of the then MEA's secretary-general Girja Shankar Bajpai's advice (1951-52) that India should secure affirmation of the McMahon Line and the rest of the frontier with Tibet in the negotiations with China. Nehru preferred ambassador K.M. Panikkar's advice to make a unilateral declaration and "treat the border as a preclosed issue", as S. Gopal puts it.

The India-China agreement on Tibet was signed on April 29, 1954. Nehru issued to the MEA, on July 1, this directive. "All our old maps dealing with this frontier should be carefully examined and, where necessary, withdrawn. New maps should be printed showing our northern and North-eastern frontier without any reference to any 'line'. These new maps should also not state there is any undemarcated territory... this frontier should be considered a firm and definite one which is not open to discussion with anybody. We should have check posts in such places as might be considered disputed areas."

India, thus, unilaterally revised its official map. The legend "boundary undefined" in the western (Kashmir) and middle sectors (UP) in the official 'Survey of India' maps of 1948 and 1950 were dropped in the new map of 1954. A firm, clear line was shown, instead. Accordingly, when in response to Nehru's demarche on the maps on December 14, 1958, Zhou En-lai squarely raised the border issue on January 23, 1959 on the Aksai Chin, Nehru's letter, on March 22, 1959, cited a vague, irrelevant treaty of 1842 to assert that the boundary was a settled issue.

Ironically, on as many as six occasions in August-September 1959, Nehru conceded that Aksai Chin was disputed territory. "There has never been any delimitation there in that area and it has been a challenged area."

Having offered Nehru, on January 23, 1959, "to take a more or less realistic attitude towards the McMahon Line", Zhou proposed in Delhi in April 1960 that both sides "should take into account the national feelings of the two peoples towards the Himalayas and the Karakoram Mountains"; the McMahon Line was conceded to India and the Aksai Chin claimed for China. Nehru demurred.

The minutes of Khruschev's talks in Beijing with China's leaders, on October 2, 1959, published last year, reveal that Mao told him: "You'll see later that the McMahon Line with India will be maintained and the border conflict will end... We will solve the border question with India through negotiations." Zhou added: "We suggested to Nehru that we negotiate this year on January 22. Then he didn't agree. Now he does." Hence Zhou's disappointment in April 1960. Having accepted the McMahon Line in the boundary agreement of January 28, 1960 with Burma — to which also it extended — he could hardly refuse its recognition vis-à-vis India.

'This frontier should be considered a firm, definite one not open to discussion with anybody'

Diplomatically, instead of negotiating the boundary dispute realistically, India proposed provisional measures. Militarily, it adopted in 1961 the 'Forward Policy' with disastrous consequences. In all these 40 years, not once has India asked for negotiations on the substance of the dispute. It persists in its quest for interim measures. Delineation of the LoC is the latest in a long wasteful series.

It is only fair to recall that the opposition of the day was even more hardline than Nehru. Socialists, the Jan Sangh, the Swatantra and several others clamoured for a harder line. Such behaviour still persists.

A mass of archival material has appeared which puts paid to the myths of old. Neither Nehru nor any of his successors cared to forge a national consensus based on the realities. A boundary treaty can rest only on a compromise and compromises incur criticism.

China, while touchy about Japanese textbooks, remains utterly insensitive to Indian hurt at China's recourse to massive use of force in October 1962. The Forward Policy did not justify that. But no Indian government cares to educate public opinion on the historical truths about the Aksai Chin or the crass follies of 1961-62. New Delhi had only to publish the Henderson-Brooks Report as a step in that direction. It has steadfastly refused to do so.

Meanwhile, Neville Maxwell has, in an article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 14), revealed that he has a copy of the report. "Its main section, excluding recommendations and many annexures, covers nearly 200 foolscap pages... detailed and far ranging." He has quoted extracts and hinted that his book *India's China War* (1970) was based on the report, as some had suspected.

Will New Delhi wait for the day he posts it on a website? Jaswant Singh should follow his analysis to its logical conclusion. China's wrongs do not excuse India's lapses. The time has come to negotiate a settlement with China. Forging a national consensus and educating public opinion are preconditions to that goal. Publication of the Henderson-Brooks Report cannot be put off any longer.

The dispute is pre-eminently susceptible to a solution. Each side has its vital, non-negotiable interest under its secure control. India has the McMahon Line. China has the Aksai Chin road. The rest is a matter of give and take in a package deal at the highest level.

The first part of this article, Jaswant's three errors, *appeared yesterday*

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Skins and bones

The key to saving the country's wildlife is in rehabilitating trappers and tribals.

A FEW years ago, a news channel team, *a la* Tehelka style, filmed the purchase of a pair of three or four month old bear cubs from a trader in Agra for a paltry Rs. 12,000. The trader was obviously a middleman. The cubs had been trapped in the jungles of Central India. The trader had more cubs and was looking for buyers.

Pallava Bagla, who had done the story for "News Track", was in Lahore recently and was horrified when he was offered the skin of a snow leopard at the Kashmir Art Gallery on the Mall. Snow leopards are rare and endangered. Those lucky enough to see one cannot forget the beauty of this magnificent animal. At the emporium, the skin was available for Rs. 15,000 (Pakistani). These incidents in two different countries tell you the sorry state of wildlife all over the world. Poaching is rampant. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of flora and fauna (CITES) regulations are being flagrantly violated as species are smuggled across international borders to markets in South East Asia where they fetch large sums of money.

The Government as well as the various NGOs working for wildlife conservation in the country have failed. With forests thinning and wildlife habitats shrinking, animals are fighting for survival and poachers are adding to their woes. The new millennium has been particularly bad for wildlife. There have been a number of seizures of skins from different parts of North India and West Bengal. In fact on December 6, 1999, 50 leopard skins were seized from Ghaziabad. In January 2000, the huge seizure of skins from a home/factory in Khaga, Fatehpur district, Uttar Pradesh, sent shock waves. In addition to 70 leopard skins, 221 black buck skins and five tiger skins, there were 150 kg of tiger bones and 18,000 claws, largely leopard. In May 2000, 50 leopard skins were seized from Haldwani. In the third week of April this year, in simultaneous raids in Lucknow and Kanpur, 24 leopard skins and a tiger skin were seized in addition to some money and a gun. Two Nepalis and two Indians were on their way to Nepal when they were caught. One person has been arrested.

There was yet another seizure in Delhi recently but all the 10 skins (five leopard and five tiger) were licenced and belonged to a retired forest officer. He had passed away and his family was was apprehended while trying to sell the skins. The skins had been with the officer before the ban on hunting came into effect in the early 1970s.

An officer with the World Wide Fund for Nature, Mr. Abrar Ahmed, investigating the bird trade in the country, says the *modus operandi* of those dealing in animals, animal skins and parts is the same as that of those trafficking in birds. Until you deal strictly with those involved in procurement and trade at different levels, there can be no end to poaching, he says. Operations are carried out at three levels. At the highest level are the posh traders who operate out of Srinagar, Crawford Market in Mumbai or the emporia of Lahore and Kathmandu. Backed with money power they can subcontract the responsibility of procuring skins from all over the country. These traders have neither religious nor ethical qualms about killing wildlife or indulging in its trade.

The second category know exactly where and how they can procure skins and animal parts and where and to whom they can sell them for a good price. This middle-man, between the money-eyed trader and the person who kills the animal or procures the skin from the wilds, is the most dangerous, according to Mr. Ahmed.

The actual procurers are the forest dwellers and tribals. Hunting and trapping has been their only source of livelihood for years, he says. There are at least 15 to 20 tribes known as animal catchers.

Those who catch bears are known as *kalanders*. They know the breeding season of the bears and when the cubs will be old enough to come out from the dens where they have been in hiding since birth. Ten cubs may be trapped from a forest area in just one season.

If for some reason vigilance on bear trapping or catching increases, these trappers try leopard cubs instead. They may get a paltry Rs. 30 for a bear cub. If leopard and bear cubs cannot be got, they try scorpions, owls or some lesser cat.

The middle man collects the *maal* and markets it to the right person. If 24 leopard skins were seized in Kanpur and Lucknow this April, at least 12 trappers were active at the field level, says Ahmed. The consignment was being smuggled across the border to Nepal, when it was seized.

The traditional trappers and wildlife catchers need to be rehabilitated. Some other avenue of livelihood has to be found for them if they are to stop trapping and hunting. Such tribes include the Mirshikars, the Bawarias, the Pardis, Mongia, Dey, Kalvelia, Kanjar, Bahelias, Nari Korava and Hakki Pukki. The Doms, who for centuries have cremated the dead, have now taken to hunting and trapping. The Lambadis of Andhra Pradesh, who are so poor that they do not consider it a crime to sell their children, are also good at trapping birds and animals. Not too long ago a trader sold a pair of the rare, brush tailed porcupines to a zoo for Rs. 20,000. He had obviously got them from one of the traditional trappers of wildlife.

There is little hope of saving India's wildlife if we cannot rehabilitate traditional trappers and hunters, says Ahmed. This is vital and so far there has not even been any documentation on these tribes, their numbers or how they are surviving.

The first category in the poaching ring, the big traders with big money, are difficult to nab. They can evade arrest. They have to be ruthlessly dealt with, says Ahmed. The expression he uses is "hang them". Middle men who act as conduits, have contacts and are also difficult to catch and punish. They know people in the police as well as the customs. They know the law and the loopholes. So far, those caught have invariably managed to escape punishment. It is not till all categories in the poaching ring are dealt with that poaching can be stopped. ●

NEWSTRACK

The media to their rescue ... Pallava Bagla and sloth bear cubs Madhu and Inderjit.

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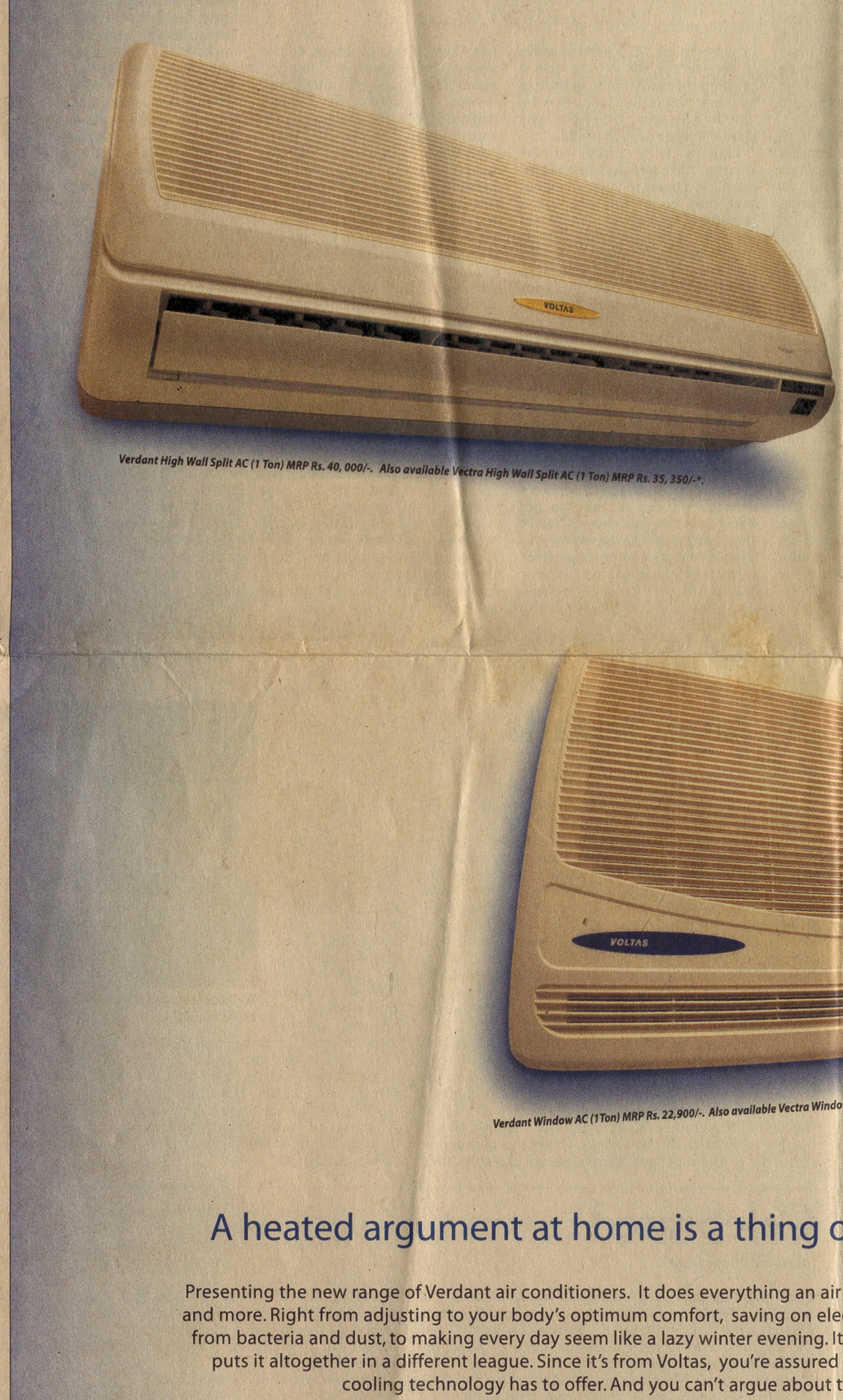

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And the singer sings ...

Continued from page I

thought so too. It got Haripal to sign a contract. This, he says, was for three years, with the option of a two-year extension. And then the company went into a lockout.

"I was stuck. Even though there was a lockout, I was under contract. I could not perform for anyone else." Two years later, the company in that *avatar*, he says, closed down. Just when he was to have got a gold disc to honour his record sales. "All I had got was around Rs. 10,000."

Rangabati, Rangabati...
You are like a full moon in a damaged
house...

"I don't know when the cassette came out. All I know is I was told the company had closed down and all my royalties stopped." Meanwhile, companies changed hands. Owners came and went.

Since Haripal was not aware that a newly released edition of his cassette existed, we went to the *bazaar*. There we found one of the many versions of the cassette that have made the rounds for two decades. The cover does say INDRECO. And "Manufactured and Marketed by the Gramophone Company of India." Packed in July 1999. All of which could still mean nothing. Many pirated versions use the names of big companies. Unless, of course, a revived company was putting out the cassette again.

"Who knows? I certainly do not. Maybe somebody there does not know the history. And what can I do anyway?"

However, the recording quality is quite good. And there is one strange feature to the tape. The voices on it are unmistakable. So is the music, advertised as "Sambalpuree Folk Songs". But nowhere do the names of Jitendria Haripal and Krishna Patel appear on it. That hurts the musician more than anything else. "I cannot get into these fights, you know, I would just be grateful if whoever did this made a just settlement with me. We too, are entitled to a fair deal, no?"

The discovery leaves him dejected but not bitter. "All I want is a fair amount. That which is due to us should come to us.

"We are not cut out to do business, I think. I tried the Cuttack companies, but they finished us. Western Orissa artistes can never get a good deal in coastal Orissa. I once tried financing my other music on my own cassette. The company I went to in Cuttack used sub-standard tape. So that venture collapsed. I lost all my money."

As "Rangabati" rankles, he shifts ground. "I consider myself a student to this day, when I am 50. Maybe because I never got to learn formally. The intolerance we faced as Doms was humiliating. We shrank from the contempt of others. This was, and is, our culture. What you call Sambalpuri culture. But being dalits, that is how we were treated."

The school drop out is a music scholar. "Sambalpuri *geet* is as old as society. One thing, always remember. Everywhere in the world, folk songs are older than classical tradition. Not just older, but much, much older. I believe all folk music in the world is related. There is some common content, some kinship. In India, those links are deep.

"Sambalpuri has three kinds of *geet* (song). Of these, *prem* (love) and *mausam* (season) *geet* are deeply related. *Mausam geet* is 'seasonal' in a wide sense. It includes natural seasons, weddings, harvest, sowing, and the like. After all, when we go to the fields and out into nature, we sing of our lovers. *Prem* and *mausam geet* are far more prolific in Sambalpuri than the third type, *bhajan*.

"I am not just a Sambalpuri singer. My hobby is to listen to folk music from everywhere. Listen..." And he demonstrates the tradition he is talking about. The slum comes alive with Haripal's vibrant voice. With snatches from the songs of the Bauls of Bengal. Of Chattisgarhi love songs. Effortlessly, he makes us see what he is talking about. The common elements of Sambalpuri, Bhojpuri and Oriya. Then of Baul, Chattisgarhi and Dhakia Bengali music. He explores the links of some elements of these to Nepali folk as well. It is impossible to see "Rangabati" as an accident now. This is a versatile musician with a deep understanding of his art.

But it was that song which made him famous. His greatest memory is of the day a crowd that recognised him at Batapur railway station. It refused to let the train move. Not unless Haripal sang "Rangabati". "Finally, the train driver told me that I had better sing a few lines if we wanted the train to move!"

But that day is past. Haripal's family troupe still tours but makes little money. And disaster still strikes. "The rains here two years ago destroyed us," says Chandrika, Haripal's daughter. "We lost all our instruments. Ever since, we have had to hire instruments or borrow them." The troupe gets engagements, but does not make much. "There are all the accompanying artistes to be paid," she says. By the time that is done, Haripal might not be left with Rs. 3,000 from a performance.

Haripal also feels he has been sidelined by the culture establishment. "I was to represent the country at the Festival of India in Moscow. At the last minute I was dropped. This has happened to me many times. Even at the Independence Day Golden Jubilee celebrations in Delhi. They take my song, they do not take me."

Some, though, are sympathetic. "He's a very good artiste, with mass appeal," says AIR's Syantanu Rath. He plays down – as does Haripal himself – the singer's alcohol problems. Those were brought on after the series of reverses and losses he faced. "Haripal is moody and temperamental. Hardly a new thing in a recording artiste."

Rangabati, Rangabati...
My heart is full with jasmine fragrance...
Of my heart is throbbing for you...

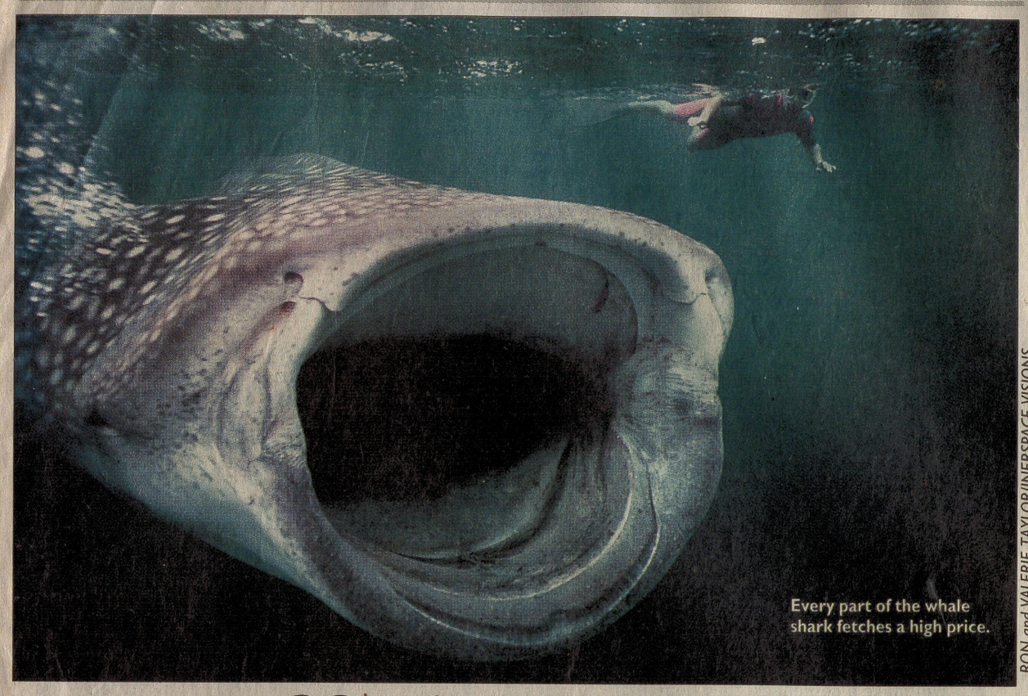
Later, all the way down the road to Malkangiri, we found the tea shops still had the song. "Rangabati" is not forgotten. Haripal is, though.

"Do you think if we find out who is in charge, they might show some respect?" he asks about the tape. Life has seldom shown him much of that commodity. So he is not sure. "I do not want to fight anybody. There should be some justice. This is my art. This is my life and love..."

Rangabati, Rangabati...
dear, please don't harass me. ●

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI



RON and VALERIE TAYLOR/INERSPACE VISIONS

Every part of the whale shark fetches a high price.

Off the hook?

When a few countries banned whale shark fishing, the demand for stock from Indian waters shot up. Has it meant the end of the road for the giant fish?

GENTLE GIANTS OF THE SEA

GENTLE giant of the sea, the whale shark, has finally been included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act. The largest living fish, varying in size from 8 to 12m, it is also the first fish to get protection under the act. But there are so many wild species under the protective umbrella of various legislation, that the question one needs to ask is how will the Government ensure that the wanton killing of the whale shark ends with its listing? Equally important, ways and means have to be found to rehabilitate fishermen living around Veraval in Gujarat who have thrived on catching the whale fish.

While giving full marks to the Environment and Forest Ministry for the move, pressure has to be maintained to ensure that protection is not limited to what is said on a scrap of paper. We have tigers, lion and bears on the protected list, but look at what is happening to them.

Additional IG–Wildlife in the Environment and Forest Ministry, Mr. S. C. Sharma, however, is hopeful that the slaughter will be contained. He is planning a meeting at Veraval with the Coast Guard and officials. The Director-General, Foreign Trade, has also been asked to put whale shark meat on the negative list. In 1997, 120 tons of frozen shark meat were exported to the United States, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland and Spain.

Once whale shark meat is on the negative list, exports are expected to come down. Experience, however, shows that when legal measures are applied, the killing as well as the export goes underground. This has happened in the case of snake skin, ivory and umpteen other wildlife products. However, there is of course the possibility of the whale shark being passed off as the meat of some other fish.

In fact in April 2000 the Government sought to provide the whale shark protection under CITES at a meeting in Nairobi. But the lobby of countries consuming whale shark meat, headed by Japan, was too powerful. However, well known wildlife enthusiast Mr. Ranjitsinh, is hopeful.

Is it possible to rehabilitate the large number of fisherfolk of the region as promoters of eco-tourism? The idea has immense possibilities but Veraval and the surrounding coastline where a large number of these giant fish can be sighted will have to be turned into a marine park or sanctuary. So people coming to Gujarat to see the Gir lions can also include in their travel plans a visit to the home of the whale fish.

In fact as a species of fish, the whale shark comes under the purview of the Food Processing Ministry. But after the killing of some 700 whale sharks last year, the ministry felt compelled to offer protection, says Mr. Sharma. But championing the cause of this endangered giant fish have been film maker Mike Pandey and Fahmeeda Hanfee, who did an excellent report for the World Wide Fund for Nature on trade in whale shark off the coast of Gujarat. For three years Pandey tracked the giants, off the coast of Gujarat, and produced a wonderful film "Shores of Silence" – Whale sharks in India" that won him the Green Oscar last year.

This January, Fahmeeda's report was published and the details of slaughter and the export figures were alarming. It was from 1996-1997 that the first survey was carried out by TRAFFIC-India (Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce) along the coast – West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Gujarat. It revealed the large scale fishing of whale sharks for their meat, fins, liver, skin and cartilage.

Just how mammoth a task is confronting the agencies protecting the fish can be guaged from the report. In 1992, Gujarat had 46 registered exporters of fish, 1,426 fishing vessels, 41 freezing plants, 43 cold storage facilities and 16 other cold storage facilities. The State has 1,40,208 fishermen (subsistence and commercial) of whom 52,388 are full-time. Of the over two lakh fishing vessels, 4,283 are motorised traditional crafts.

Fahmeeda says sharks grow slowly, mature late, have a small number of young and live for many years. Shark stocks are vulnerable to over-fishing.

Whale sharks are found largely on the west coast through a few have been reported east too. Most of the catches occur between March and June though seasonal occurrences have been reported in other months too. This piece of information should be useful in alerting the protective agencies on when they should increase vigilance.

Once a whale shark is sighted, the fishermen shoot a large hook/harpoon weighing 8 to 10 kg at its mouth. This gets attached to the lip or the shoulder of the shark, above the gills. Simultaneously another fisherman inserts a hook attached to a bamboo pole into its pectoral fin. The normally docile fish becomes agitated and dives, swimming away from the boat and dragging it along. The engine of the boat is switched off and the boat is allowed to be towed along for a while. Then the engine is restarted and runs at full speed. This continuous effort lasts for six to seven hours till the fish is exhausted and towed to the shore/landing centre. The fish is cut in large chunks even while afloat. The liver is removed for oil extraction and consumed locally. The meat is distributed to agents and middlemen for processing and export.

TRAFFIC India's survey revealed that between 1999-2000, 600 whale sharks were caught, the smallest catch two metres long and 0.5 tons and the largest 14.5 metres (12 tons). In December 2000, 145 whale sharks were caught – such high catches are normally not recorded in winter. The fishermen told Fehmeeda that they had found a school of about 300 to 500 whale sharks in the area and had headed for it.

Whale shark fishing proved to be a boon to the fishermen of Gujarat from the late 1980s. Other fish catch off the coast of Saurashtra was declining and the Philippines, Taiwan, the Maldives and the U.S. had banned their whale shark fishery, presumably to sustain and conserve their stocks. Overseas demand for supplies from India shot up and exporters realised it was good business.

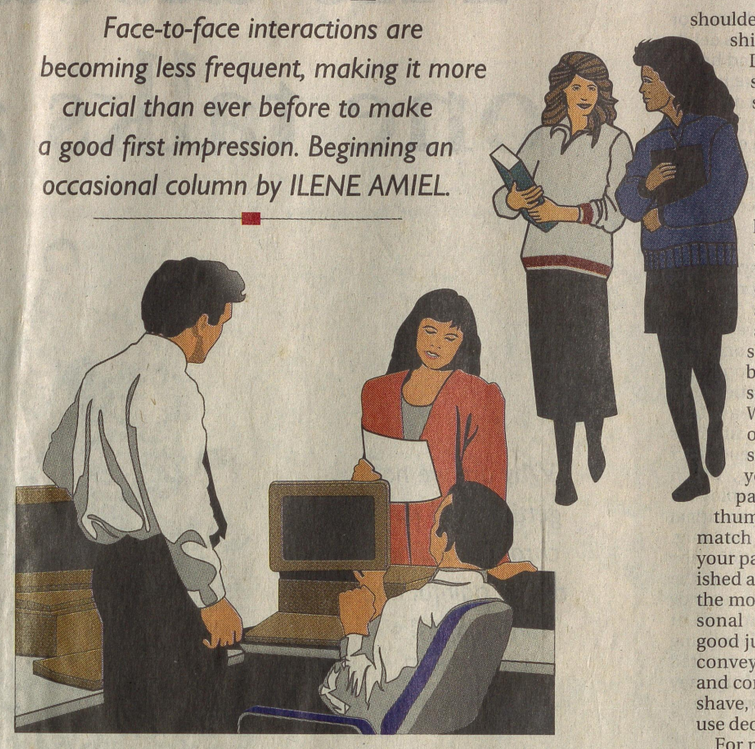
While exporters in India sell fresh, frozen meat at Rs. 40 and Rs. 70 a kg, in Taiwan it sells for $15 (Rs. 750) per kg. Every part of the whale shark (from cartilage to leather) fetches a high price. Depending on the size, a set of four fins alone fetch Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 30,000, depending on the size.

To break up this well organised fishing industry will indeed be a challenge. ●

IMAGE

First impressions count

Face-to-face interactions are becoming less frequent, making it more crucial than ever before to make a good first impression. Beginning an occasional column by ILENE AMIEL.



WHY is appearance so important? Shouldn't we be judged by who we are on the inside and what we have done with our lives? I wish it was that simple but it isn't.

Social psychologists studying the impact of image have determined that someone meeting you for the first time will make up to 10 decisions or judgments about you within the first 30 seconds. These include your economic and educational levels, trustworthiness, social position, level of sophistication, economic heritage, social heritage, success and moral character.

When meeting someone new, we have limited information about them and look for clues to fill in the blanks. The "clues" that are used to base these opinions on are appearance, voice and words. A research study by Professor Albert Mehrabin entitled "Silent Messages" has proven convincingly that visual images matter a great deal. He found that the impact we make on each other depends – 55 per cent on our appearance, 38 per cent on our voice and seven per cent on what we say.

Imagine the following scenario in which you are going to meet someone new. You walk in, extend your hand to greet him/her, smile and shake hands. While you are introducing yourself, the other person is instantly deciding whether or not they like and trust you. This is human nature; people all over the world from different cultures act the same way. Some people might not be conscious of these thoughts but most people remember their initial impression of others. To be successful in almost any area, you must be sure these decisions about you are favourable. If the impression that you made on someone was negative, it could take up to seven more in-person meetings to *change* their perception of you. Have you ever heard the expression, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression?"

In the 21st Century, face-to-face interactions are becoming less frequent and brief. Phones, e-mail, computers, faxes and Federal Express have replaced the old fashioned way of communicating in person. Therefore, it is even more crucial than ever before to make a good first impression.

To make a good first impression, consider the three key elements. The handshake, eye contact and your appearance. How would you describe you handshake? Is it firm, bone crushing or like a jellyfish? Eye contact – do you look directly at the other person's face or downwards? Your appearance – are you always dressed and groomed impeccably? If you are becoming aware that there are some areas that need improvement, you are off to a good start. I have found that the difference between being dressed and well dressed lies in the details. This includes all areas of fit and grooming. The best place to begin checking to see how well dressed you are is at the top.

For men, begin by examining your hair. Is the cut/style flattering and upto date? Did you put the right amount of oil in your hair or too much? Do your clothes fit properly? Do the shoulders on your suit jacket fit properly? If the shoulders are wider than your own, it may be the wrong size. When buying suits or sports jackets, start by finding a jacket with shoulders that fit properly. Does your shirt fit well or is it too baggy? Does it look like it belongs to someone larger in size? Is your shirt tucked in your pants? One of the biggest image killer is the untucked shirt. This creates a sloppy look. How about your pants? Are your pants too tight? If you see horizonal folds in the fabric, then the answer is yes. Are they clean and pressed with a crease? Are your pants too short? When standing, you should not be able to see your sock colour or the top of the back of your shoes. Does your socks reach at least mid calf? When crossing your legs, others should not be able to see the skin on your legs. Have you coordinated your socks, pants and shoes? The rule of thumb is that your socks should match either your shoe colour or your pant colour. Are your shoes polished and in good condition? Finally, the most important part of your personal image – cleanliness. Using good judgment in personal hygiene conveys that you respect yourself and consequently others. It is best to shave, shower, brush your teeth and use deodorant every day.

For most women, your hair is considered your crowning glory. Make sure to keep hair cut, styled and neat at all times. Makeup should be used in moderation and not overpower the face beneath. You should always choose clothing in colours that are flattering and complimentary to your complexion. Sometimes the colours that we choose are not flattering to our colouring. Your clothing should always fit properly. Careful consideration should be used when buying trendy clothing. Clothing styles and colours change every season. When building a wardrobe, it is always better to choose traditional colours to start.

Women need to be aware of the appropriate skirt length. Since hemlines move up two inches when you sit, you must make sure the dress/skirt is only one to two inches above your knee. When skirts are too short, it is distracting and diminishes your credibility. Shoes should always be the same colour as your hemline or darker. They should never be a lighter colour because it draws attention to your feet. Shoes need to be polished and in good condition *at all times.*

Finally, everyone should own a full-length mirror. It is the best investment to ensure that you always make a great first and last impression. ●

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Where BPL mobile means ...

Continued from page I

dalits whose cards he holds. But he is slightly more educated and cannier than his dalit neighbours. He points out that he has returned the cards, which is true. He panicked when award-winning young journalist Jagadish Suna broke the story on the distress mortgaging of BPL cards amongst the poor of Bolangir. Suna's reports literally brought back Chelgoud's card to its real owner.

That is a scene from a single village. One that is repeated across many here in Bolangir and in Nuapada district next door. Several people have mortgaged or sold their BPL cards, driven by acute distress. In Kharlakot village in Boden block of Nuapada, we found five such cases in less than half an hour. In a couple of cases, the younger family members had sold the card and migrated, abandoning their parents. Purnachandra Chinda had sold the card for Rs. 50 and left months ago. His ageing mother has not heard from him since.

In the same village is Ranjit Jagat whose wife died of hunger five months ago. "I cannot afford to even perform her tenth day ritual," he says. He has lost his BPL card, too. "I mortgaged it for Rs. 20 to get her an injection," he says. Jagat's daughter-in-law mortgaged her wedding saree for Rs. 80. That enabled her husband to go to Raipur to look for work. She has gone too and the old man is now alone.

There is no work available here for the few younger ones who have stayed. Nor are they finding any nearby.

The agricultural crisis is biting deep in the Kalahandi-Bolangir region.

Chelgoud Karuan in Bolangir mortgaged his Below Poverty Line (BPL) card for Rs. 500.

That crisis also shows up in the new twists to migrations out of here. This is a high migration region even in "normal" years. This year, many newcomers joined the thousands going to the brick kilns of Vizianagaram and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. That is apart from the tens of thousands going to other destinations. Quite a few of these were first-time migrants from groups normally outside this cycle.

"The census in 2001 was meaningless for this region," says ex-MLA Kapil Narain Tiwari in Khariar, Nuapada. "The crisis in agriculture has greatly deepened poverty and spurred new migrations. So a huge chunk of the population was out when the enumeration took place. That is going to reduce the census numbers to a farce."

Many are also back much sooner than anticipated – but after the census. The numbers going out to the usual destinations were too large. The flood of hungry workers brought about a steep fall in labour wages in Vizianagaram and Hyderabad. The slow down of construction in many other cities made things worse. The migrants are returning with not much to do here either.

In both Nuapada and neighbouring Chattisgarh, there are efforts on to generate employment through food for work programmes. Some officers have done the best they could in this situation. For instance, Nuapada Collector Bishnupad Sethi is respected in his district. But the problem is so huge that the expenditures are marginal to it. Besides, there is the usual slew of contractor-led rip-offs eating into the efforts. At several worksites, people were being paid far less than the stated minimum of Rs. 40. And besides, as Tiwari points out, "Many of the Kalahandi region's problems begin in Bhubaneswar and beyond."

In the Sunabeda plateau of Nuapada, many cannot buy their rations. The Orissa Forest Corporation which is the sole collection authority for the (*Tendu*) *Kendu* leaf, has not paid them their dues for months. Meanwhile, the forest department has banned *kendu* leaf collection in much of the area. The place's status as sanctuary is in dispute. Yet, even the collector's pleas on behalf of the adivasis who live here have been ignored.

In Chattisgarh, no visitor can escape the irony. The drive in from the airport to Raipur takes you past gigantic stocks of foodgrain in open yards of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). Quite a bit of this is exposed to the elements in just sacks. The black polythene meant to protect them cannot cover the huge stockpiles here. And there have been thunderstorms damaging the exposed grain. A visit to villages not far away shows rising hunger.

In Saraipalli in Chattisgarh, Sub-Divisional Magistrate Amrit Xalxo is overseeing the repair of tanks. He is also trying to construct troughs in each village for livestock.

Water for cattle is going to be a big problem right through this summer. Though confident things are coming under control, the SDM says: "Migrations must have doubled this year. Many of the migrants are now coming back."

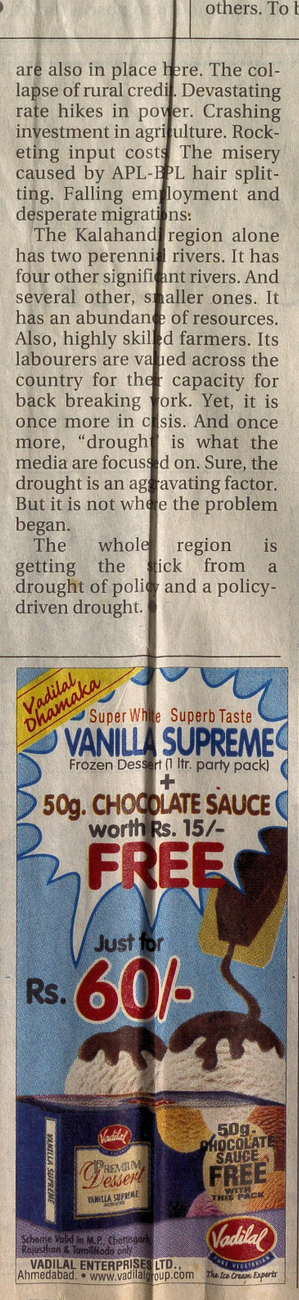
Distress sales of produce are on in a big way, too. Here and in western Orissa. "At the time of harvest," says Jamodei Jagat in Boden, "we sold paddy at Rs. 6 to Rs. 7 per *maan* (roughly 2.5 kg). Now we buy the rice at Rs. 12 or Rs. 13 per *maan*."

At the Sindhekela market in Bolangir, *tarbooj* is being sold at rates as low as 50 paise per melon. Alongside, are women also willing to sell rice at far less than what it cost them to produce it. The *mali* community that grows vegetables has taken a beating with power "reforms". Earlier, they paid Rs. 60 to Rs. 70 per acre for electricity for irrigation. Now they have to fork out Rs. 860. There is enough water nearby for the *malis* of Birunpadar in Nuapada to pump up. But vegetable prices have crashed and power rates have shot up.

Most of the factors on display in Rajasthan or Andhra Pradesh are also in place here. The collapse of rural credit. Devastating rate hikes in power. Crashing investment in agriculture. Rocketing input costs. The misery caused by APL-BPL hair splitting. Falling employment and desperate migrations.

The Kalahandi region alone has two perennial rivers. It has four other significant rivers. And several other, smaller ones. It has an abundance of resources. Also, highly skilled farmers. Its labourers are valued across the country for their capacity for back breaking work. Yet, it is once more in crisis. And once more, "drought" is what the media are focussed on. Sure, the drought is an aggravating factor. But it is not where the problem began.

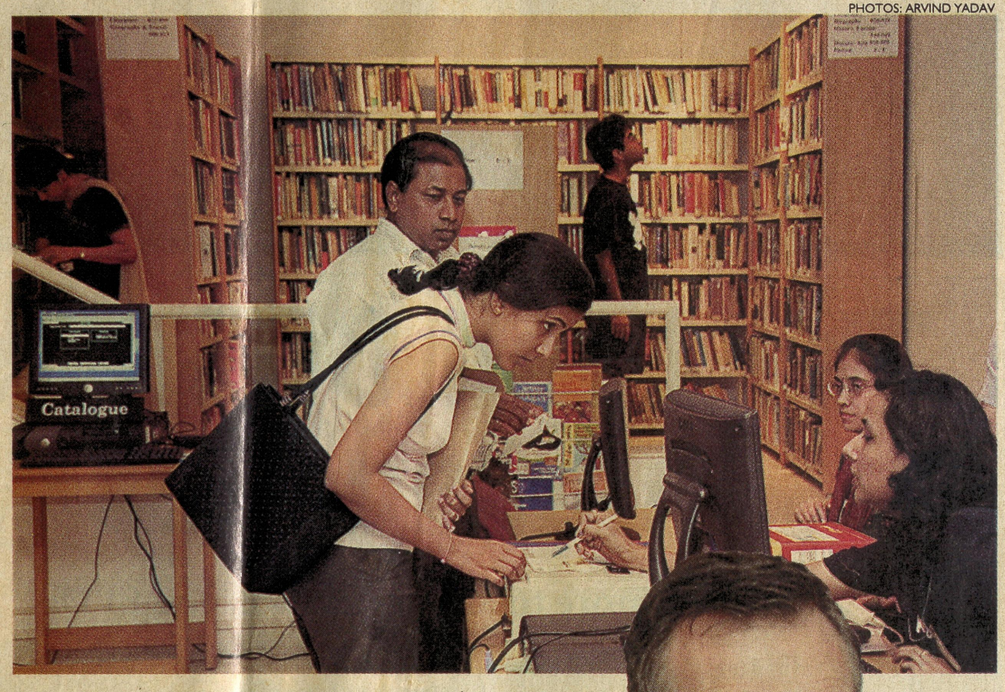
The whole region is getting the stick from a drought of policy and a policy-driven drought. ●



BCL Gets With-IT

Though you can still hang around there, the British Council Library has changed: it's shedding weight, getting e-wise

PHOTOS: ARVIND YADAV



The British Council Library in New Delhi (left and top); BCL (India) chief Marsden (right)

There can't be too many people who went to Delhi University and didn't grow up with BCL. Whether it was long, lazy winter afternoons, summer days spent rereading the classics or a harried search for that elusive last minute reference when March and the exam season came around – the British Council Library was the place to be.

In addition to the routine stuff, it had other, more human aspects and most regular BCL goers will have some quirky memory of the place. It was just the right place to meet on that first date if you wanted to impress someone with your intellectual persona, as also the ideal haven when you wanted to avoid the rest of the world.

The BCL to most of us, isn't just your run of the mill library, but an institution in its own right. Everyone from the University student looking for a particular source, or just the normal bookworm looking to spend a quiet afternoon, will affectionately recall long hours spent at the library. "I became a member the day I joined college," says Arundhati Verma, a student of English Literature at Delhi University. For the most, things have remained the same at BCL, but things are about to change dramatically.

By the end of the year, the BCL will turn electronic. With even three-year-olds comfortable with the mouse nowadays, the Council has started work on restructuring the library to meet the challenges of an Info-savvy age. Besides the already present services for members to do various things online – study, improve their English, join video-conferenced debates or simply borrow a book, the library will soon offer 'Uknowledge' – an electronic library – as an additional part of the membership.

"We are changing because society is changing," says Edmund Marsden, Regional Director (South Asia) and Director (India), British Council. "People want more international contact, easier access to the best information and affordable learning opportunities."

The first Library in India opened only nine years after the Council's establishment in 1948 at the behest of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Its influence and rise has been so widespread, that the Council dubbed its Indian operation the largest.

But that was before the decision, earlier this year, to shut down the Patna and Lucknow branches, reportedly due to dwindling membership. Now, it is doing all it can to upgrade the services of the remaining 11 libraries left in the country – in the four main metros, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Pune, Thiruvananthapuram, Bangalore, Bhopal and Hyderabad – seven of which are run in partnership with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. "The library will act as a multimedia centre where all information needs will be assessed and met from a range of sources: books, journals – in print and online – CDs and increasingly through the Internet," says Marsden.

Though there are nearly a 100,000 visitors to the library all over India, the Council is desperate to up the figure and end the conventional image that most people have of libraries as being stuffy. To this end, it is also focussing attention on the requirements of the urban youth. Something in which it has been largely successful. "The British Council offers good reference and research material in a congenial environment," says Garima, a college student and BCL regular, "and the latest offering of online services is what I would call real value addition." Another advantage is the spacious children's section where parents can safely leave their kids to toys, CDs and of course, books.

"In all these years, the British Council aimed to become a reliable source of information for all types of members. The very fact that people in India lay great emphasis on communication has made us reach out for new means to provide the latest in information technology," says Mardsen. In fact, the burgeoning demand for more books on IT has also prompted this exercise, he adds.

While there are many who welcome this change, several are critical. "The British Council Library has a reputation, an old-world charm with a hint of nostalgia, and I would like it to stay that way," says Shubha Srivastava, a HR executive and once regular. While Srivastava is muted in her censure, Nishant Bhatia, a freelance journalist, is a vocal critic about the services offered by the Library. "The library has few books printed outside the UK and even the topics are limited." He believes that unless the BCL first makes an effort to offer more choice, the introduction of Internet-based services would be quite useless. Bhatia also flays the children's section introduced a few years ago. "It's a nuisance. The kids make too much noise."

While not everyone can be kept satisfied, the Council is trying to attract visitors through various programmes it offers at its premises. A major attraction for students is the frequent education fairs, aimed at those aspiring to pursue higher studies in the UK. The Council, which works closely with UK and Indian universities, also organises joint courses in their Edulink programme – offering affordable, work-related distant learning programmes. At present, the Council offers 700 scholarships and bursaries for Indians each year, including the prestigious Foreign and Commonwealth Office Chevening awards. Apart from this, the Council also offers an English-language teaching centre run by specially trained teachers from Britain, who offer intensive courses for young learners during the school vacations.

In the coming months too, one can look forward to the best in British art, in addition to interaction with several novelists, dramatists, poets and translators including V S Naipaul, Farrukh Dhondy and playwright Liz Lochhead. "The exhibitions and plays offered by the BCL all these years have kept me hooked on and now I feel happy to see even my grandchildren visiting it regularly," says Suhasini Sharma.

Despite its new avatar, the British Council will continue to be best known for what it really is – an invaluable treasure-trove of books. Books, that can, as always, be borrowed and enjoyed at leisure from the privacy of your home.

All Is Not Lost Yet

Dumped by her relatives, Munni Devi, 105, has found a better family, the community

■ USHA RAI

In the twilight years of one's life when the bones creak, vision is blurred and hearing impaired, "happiness is in being with the family." But increasingly more and more old people are being pushed out of their homes to live in an old age home or on their own. Munni Devi, 105, one of the oldest women of Lucknow and undoubtedly one of the bravest, may not have the joys of living with her family, but the bigger family – the community – has taken her under its wings.

Munni Devi's hair is a mop of white, her smile toothless, face wrinkled, the left hand shakes with Parkinson's. She has a slight stoop and uses a stick for support, all signs of her age. But she is an amazingly alert person and till recently was fetching water from a hand pump, 200 yards away from her house. Age has not dimmed her love for cooking a special meal for her favourite great grandson. Her regular companion is a pup who she picked up when he was just about able to open his eyes.

What is remarkable about Munni Devi is not just her age but her spirit. When HelpAge India's Mobile Unit (MMU) began dispensing medicines in Triveniganj, Sahadatganj some three years ago, Munni Devi was brought for medicines to ease the pain in her joints. She was so weak that she could barely walk, recalls Safia, the social worker accompanying the MMU. The multivitamins, the soothing balms and above all the love and affection have done a lot to revive her physically and emotionally. On October 2 1999, Munni Devi felt strong enough to participate in a walk organised to raise awareness about senior citizens and their problems.

Whenever there is a function in Sahadatganj, Munni Devi is invited as the oldest person in the area. When there is a marriage, she is given the first sari and blouse and at *mundans*, the tonsuring ceremony, she gets a packet of *mithai* and some money as *shagun*. The importance given to her as senior citizen has added to her zest for life. She now feels she is an intrinsic part of the community.

Thanks to the support of the community and her daughter's daughter-in-law, Uma Vishvakarma, who lives in the other room of her dilapidated two-room house, there is now a tap in her courtyard and the meals are provided by Uma. Her eldest son lives in her ancestral home in another part of Sahadatganj and has stopped visiting her.

There are 1000,000 centenarians in India. In Delhi under the 'Adopt a Gran' Scheme, where financial support of Rs 450 a month is provided to women over 60 and living on their own, there are a dozen who are over a 100. In India where people do not really keep a record of their date of birth and malnourishment and poverty, make people look older, it is difficult to establish a person's age. In the case of Munni Devi, it is B P Mishra, 67, her neighbour, who helped establish her age. Mr Mishra's mother, who died in 1961 when she was 61 years old, was a few years younger than Munni Devi.

Asked her age, Munni Devi says quite blithely – 140 years! Maybe the years have rolled by so slowly that she feels she is 140. Her mind, however, is quite clear. "I got married when I was 17 or 18 years of age. The price of wheat was Rs 16 for a sack and gold was Rs 40 a *tola*." She recalls use of the *mundda rupaiya*, the eight anna silver coin and the four anna silver coin. She lived in a joint family of 60 people in Bawan Mandi of Sahadatganj. This was an area of jewellers and Munni Devi recalls there was plenty of silverware in her home. Like grains in a sack there was silver in the house. However, she is not clear of where and how this immense wealth disappeared.

She refers to her husband as her "budhao" (old man) from whom she had three sons and three daughters of which only one son is alive today. She recalls going to the Lal Kuan area of Lucknow with four friends to meet Gandhiji. Her father, who would not let her step out of the house, was at work when she bunked home.

Her treasure-trove is an old tin trunk which she has had since her wedding. She opened this with a small key hanging around her neck on a string. It contained all her earthly possessions – two or three saris given by her grandson, some bright yellow plastic bangles in a small jewellery bag and two *thalis*. She has other saris too given by the community for various errands like cleaning the rice at weddings. All of them are new and she would like to give them to others when she is invited for a wedding or some other function.

Munni Devi's day still begins at 4 a.m. when she gets up and peels the seeds of the watermelon (*Kharbuja*). Perhaps that is what that keeps her fingers nimble.

There are a number of old people who live on their own and are not dependent on anyone. They don't even want to talk of their families because they fear, in doing so, they will be dishonouring them. In Dehra Dun a 75-year-old widow, staying in her son's outhouse, was almost burnt alive by him this January when she was curled up under her quilt. Most of her belongings, including her bank passbook and ration card were charred. The YWCA, where she spends a lot of time making paper bags, took up her case and now the old woman is back in her outhouse, trying hard to forget the horrible incident.

In Saharanpur, an 80-year-old woman was dropped off by car at Manav Mandir, an old people's home. The doctor who dropped her at the home said he had picked her off the streets. The woman was distraught. Questioning by the social worker revealed that the man who had dropped her was her son.

In Dehra Dun, a senior army officer was trying to find an old peoples home for his parents, in their eighties. He said his wife did not get along with his parents and wanted them out. Though the old man had worked in the railways he had not saved for his old age. "He must have spent it on your medical education," the officer was told. The officer was not able to garner any support.

Parry Nutraceuticals

PARRY'S HEALTHY TIPS

Care for your feet

Problems with our feet can be the first sign of more serious medical conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, and nerve and circulatory disorders. Fungal and bacterial conditions, including athlete's foot, is a common problem because our feet, which spend a lot of time in shoes, is perfect for fungus to grow. This can cause dry skin, redness, blisters, itching, and peeling. Keep your feet – especially the area between your toes – clean and dry. Change your shoes and socks or stockings often to help keep your feet dry. Dust your

feet daily with foot powder. For dry skin use moisturising cream or lotion.

Corns and calluses are caused by friction and pressure when the bony parts of your feet rub against your shoes. If you have them, see your doctor as treating them yourself may be harmful specially if you have diabetes. Better fitting shoes can sometimes solve the problem.

Warts are skin growths caused by viruses which can sometimes be painful and, if untreated, may spread. A doctor can suggest medicines, burn or freeze the wart off, or take the wart off with surgery. Bunions develop when the joints in your big toe no longer fit together as they should and become swollen and tender. It could be hereditary. If a bunion is not severe, wearing shoes cut wide at the instep and toes, taping the foot, or wearing pads that cushion the bunion may help the pain.

Ingrown toenails – which can happen if you don't cut your nails properly – are very common in the large toes. A doctor can remove the part of the nail that is cutting into the skin. This allows the area to heal. Ingrown toenails can often be avoided by cutting the toenail straight across and level with the top of the toe.

Hammertoe is caused by a shortening of the tendons that control toe movements. The toe knuckle is usually enlarged, drawing the toe back. Over time, the joint enlarges and stiffens as it rubs against shoes. This may affect your balance. Wearing shoes and stockings with plenty of toe room is a treatment for hammertoe.

Spurs are calcium growths that develop on the bones of your feet and are caused by muscle strain in the feet. Standing for long periods of time, wearing badly fitting shoes, or being overweight can make spurs worse. Treatments for spurs include using foot supports, heel pads, and heel cups.

To prevent any foot trouble practice good foot care. Check your feet regularly. It also helps to keep blood circulating to your feet as much as possible. Do this by putting your feet up when you are sitting or lying down, stretching if you've had to sit for a long while, walking, having a gentle foot massage, or taking a warm foot bath. Try to avoid pressure from shoes that don't fit right. Try not to expose your feet to cold temperatures. Don't sit for long periods of time (especially with your legs crossed). Don't smoke.

Wearing comfortable shoes that fit well can prevent many foot ailments. The size of your feet changes as you grow older so always have your feet measured before buying shoes. The best time to measure your feet is at the end of the day when your feet are largest.

Where there is a will...

Quitting smoking can be quite traumatic and difficult for the addicted. Willpower is what is needed most importantly. Apart from that here are a few tips which could help those who are planning to quit but don't know where to start and how.

- Set a target date and let everyone know so that they can support you in the good deed.
- If you don't already have a healthy eating lifestyle begin one with snacks of raw vegetables and drinking eight glasses of water a day.
- Exercise can help quit smoking as you gain more energy. It also prevents you from putting on more weight.
- Do things you enjoy doing most as these will be helpful distractions especially in the first few weeks of quitting.
- Alcohol, coffee and other drinks containing caffeine make your desire for nicotine stronger. So stay away from them.
- Whenever the urge to smoke is too strong, take a few deep, slow breaths and drink water. Also stay away from smoky areas.
- Withdrawal symptoms last for only a week or two and this will be the hardest period because your body will not be getting the nicotine it desires. Be strong to fight the urge.

Now quitting smoking need not be an 'impossible dream'. It can be the realization of a long-sought goal.

Did you know ...

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Compiled by **Seema Kumar**

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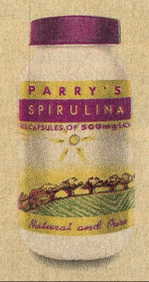

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ROUNDABOUT

HUGH and COLLEEN GANTZER

Quest in the heart of Aryavarta

TWO days ago we were in the Himalayas. Now we are in the pollen-dusted dusk of Lucknow. And, in between, we have been in Aryavarta.

Or rather, we have been traversing the last substantial settlement of the Aryans. No one is quite certain where their original home was. It could have been the place they named Ariana, now called Iran. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak maintained that "**the ancestors of the Vedic Rishis lived in an Arctic home in inter-glacial times**". Regardless of where they came from, however, they did settle in the lush Indo-Gangetic plain.

There, a thousand years Before Christ, these nomadic herdsmen transformed themselves into farmers, merged their culture with that of the earlier, Indo-Saraswati, people, and enriched the roots of Indian civilisation. Their complex mores were based largely on an oral tradition. Scholars and folklorists kept alive their legendary culture, refurbishing the old stories to suit the spirit of the times. The archetypal image of a teller of religious tales is that of a man sitting on a low, wooden, stool atop a platform built around a spreading tree, his rapt audience squatting on the ground below.

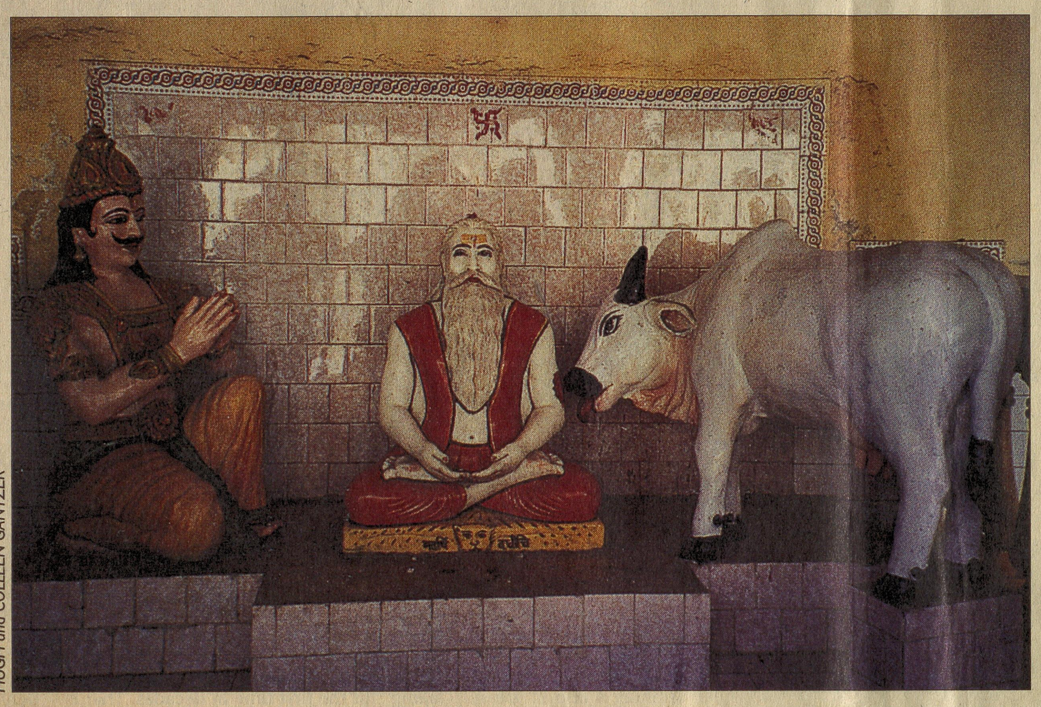
This was exactly what we saw when we drove into the settlement of Mishrikh.

Pandit Vijay Kant Sharma sat on a low, wooden, stool atop a platform, his skilled story-teller's voice weaving shimmering nets of magic around his audience. We stood at the edge of the crowd, ensnared by his tale.

"In days of yore," said Pandit Sharma, "all this land was covered by thick jungles." He opened his arms and our imaginations spread dark forests all around us. "And because it was so peaceful, 88,000 *munis* and *rishis* lived here and, to sanctify their religious ablutions, they had brought water from three and a half crore holy springs from the three worlds and mixed them together in this sacred Mishrik Talab." All faces turned to the tank behind the tree, regarding it with newly discovered reverence. The *pandit* paused to allow his words to sink in, then continued. "Alas!" he said, "these seers were distraught to learn that the demon Vratasur was plotting to destroy all the inhabitants of the worlds of gods and men."

Pandit Sharma looked around, nodding to himself at the enormity of it all. Then, in a low voice, he added a parenthesis: "As everyone knows, Vratasur had been made invincible by Lord Shiva."

His listeners nodded in agreement, apprehension written on their faces.



HUGH and COLLEEN GANTZER

An unusual group of idols ... Lord Indra worships Dadichi.

"But," added Sharma, "Maharish Dadichi, who lived here, had also been granted a similar boon. He would not die unless he wanted to, and his bones were indestructible."

Fabulous worlds were taking shape in our minds: worlds far removed from the rustic ambience of fields and farms and cattle lowing in the meadows.

"So," continued Sharma, "when the terrified inhabitants of the two worlds appealed to Lord Shiva, they were told that if the bones of Dadichi were made into weapons then, alone, would Vratasura be vanquished. But Dadichi's bones could not be used until he was dead; and he could die only of his own free will." Dadichi, himself, solved this critical dilemma.

In an act of supreme sacrifice, he sat in contemplation, renounced his right to live and permitted the earth, Privthi, to assume the form of the divine cow Sura, and lick the flesh off his bones. From Dadichi's skeleton, they fashioned Gandiva, Pinak and Sarang, the bows of Arjun, Shiva and Krishna respectively, and Vajra, the thunderbolt of Indra. With these indestructible arms, the once invincible Vratasur was destroyed.

We climbed up to the temple, ascended its three terraces and came to a most unusual group of idols. Dadichi was seated in the cross-legged, lotus, pose. Kneeling on his right was a crowned and reverential Lord Indra. Dadichi's left arm was bleeding because the holy cow Sura had started licking the flesh off his bones. Said our guide: "This is the only time when a human has been depicted as being worshipped by a god."

The purists in us could have faulted the tale for its variations from the classic version, but then even the most revered scriptures of the most rigid faiths evolve through interpretation. We accepted this as the current Mishrikh edition of an ancient story.

Not far from Mishrikh is the unremarkable town of Namisharanya. But it, too, is the location of a legend that, in many ways, runs parallel to the Mishrikh one. Here, as well, there was once a great forest inhabited by contemplative seers who were being harassed by evil beings. They also appealed for succour. The relief, however, was more than they had bargained for.

'The images in a people's legends are exaggerated versions of everyday experiences ... But these legends were reflections of a "Star Wars" world of conflicts ... From what real-life experience had they been drawn? Where, in our vast Universe, had the real Aryavarta existed? Or is it dangerous to think about the origins of beliefs?'

The Chakra Talab, in the environs of Namisharanya, is a circular tank with *ghats* leading down to it. Or, rather, it is two concentric tanks, the small tank separated by a low wall from the one around it. Men and women waded waist-deep through the perimeter pond. The single-celled temple, just above the *ghats*, is dedicated to the mother goddess Lalita. The black idol of the goddess seems to be "self-formed", a rock less than a metre high, embedded in the wall of the temple and draped in red and gold robes. She has large silver eyes.

Not far away is the Hanuman Garh. Here, too, the idol is self-formed and has silver eyes. It is appreciably taller than a human. The shrine has, clearly, been built around this natural rock formation regularly painted with vermilion. The tales associated with these deities are fascinating.

The idol of Lalita with silver eyes.

When the disturbed seers appealed to Lord Brahma, he released his *chakra*. But, after driving away the evil creatures, it began to bore into the earth. At first the hermits were happy because it had made a pond for them; but then, as it continued to burrow into six and a half of the seven layers of the earth, they were dismayed. "How can we bathe in such a deep pond?" they asked. Lord Brahma, however, replied that once he had released his discus, only Lalita could stop it. The *rishis* invoked her and she stilled the whirling *chakra*.

We were not aware that Lord Brahma has a discus but, then again, this might be a local variation of his attributes.

The unusual feature of the Hanuman idol in the Hanuman Garh, is that it faces south. The *pujari* said that it was from this spot that Hanuman flew to Sri Lanka, which is far to the south, soaring across the whole length of India with incredible speed.

We are sitting in our room, now, thinking about those wonderful tales. Something worries us. The images in a people's legends are exaggerated versions of their everyday experiences. Crones become witches, snakes are transmogrified into dragons, fleet-footed steeds become flying horses. And so the legends of rustic people should reflect their rusticity. But these legends were reflections of a "Star Wars" world of conflicts between fabulous races, organic weapons, missiles and air-borne warriors. From what real-life experience had they been drawn? Where, in our vast Universe, had the real Aryavarta existed? Or is it dangerous to think about the origins of beliefs? ●

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Endangered organisation

IT is with some anguish that I write this column. As a journalist covering environment, I have witnessed the birth and growth of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) India over the last 30-odd years. I have seen the fervour, the dedication and the commitment of the people who manned the organisation in its early years when it had neither resources nor a proper roof over its head.

The causes they took up at times snowballed into national issues whether it was the saving the tiger, the great Indian bustard, the Olive Ridley turtle or wetlands like those at Bharatpur, Rajasthan, and the Chilka Lake in Orissa. WWF-N created awareness and interest in nature, its immense beauty, wildlife and the shrinking habitat of wild species. WWF-India was always there to champion a cause.

Today, though the organisation is housed in a magnificent building in the most happening area of the Capital and has many people working for it, the spirit, the spunk seems to have evaporated.

Trustees who do not seem to care for the fate of the organisation, a lack of funds and murky politics – both in the national organisation and in its equation with the International – have crippled WWF-N. When I left mainstream newspapers in the late 1990s, it was to join WWF-India and its programme for saving the tiger. Though the money was meagre, the work excited me. I wanted to see what it was to be on the other side – to be part of a nongovernmental organisation.

The Tiger Conservation Programme (TCP) supported with funding from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and backed in a big way by WWF-International was doing wonderfully. With the support of local NGOs, it was able to check the poisoning of tigers by villagers who resented the feline killing their cattle. Awards were given to field staff and others who were fighting to save the tiger, its prey species and their habitat. TCP extended its support to more and more protected areas and there was greater cooperation and understanding of the problems in the field.

But personality clashes, a certain bureaucratic style of functioning which slowed down efficiency and an unsavoury controversy over the maps put out by WWF-International damaged what was a great programme for the tiger. The then director of the programme, Dr. M.K. Ranjitsinh, who had earlier been in charge of wildlife in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and I, looking after communication, left the organisation. There was anger and despair that the whims and ego of people in power in WWF-N were getting precedence over the tiger – in trying to save it thousands of people, across the world had contributed their savings. The impetus and energy of the project suddenly evaporated. The post of director, TCP, has still not been filled.

AP

Like its mascot, the panda, the Worldwide Fund for Nature – WWF-N(India) – needs to be "saved".

There was similar ham-handed handling of other departments and people left en masse. In fact, there has been a steady migration of talent from WWF-N – and the exodus continues. While some, like Dr. S.M. Nair, who headed the education wing of the WWF-N, and Sharad Gaur, one of its oldest hands, have joined the Centre for Environment Education, others like Vivek Menon and Ashok Kumar, moved out even earlier, and are today doing great work with the Wildlife Trust of India.

Fehmida Hanfee, who did some excellent work on whale sharks and was with Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce (TRAFFIC) India in WWF-N, has moved on to the Tata Energy Research Institute. The Centre for Environment Law, set up with great fanfare in the early 1990s, is also in shambles.

The Indira Gandhi National Conservation Centre exists only in name. Forestry and wildlife were separate units. Now they have merged with the tiger. The education division, the backbone of WWF-N, had 50 people all over the country at one stage. Now there are just two in the head office. The number of nature clubs has dropped from over 3,000 to half that number.

There is no librarian in the Delhi office and now even children wanting to use the excellent library have to pay a fee, though a small one of Rs. 25, for three months. Most old hands have left in frustration. All of them were committed people who worked for a pittance.

I write this column in sorrow for an institution that I admired and that had tremendous potential and not because I have left the WWF-N. Funds are drying up as the controversies mount and slowly the giant panda (the WWF logo) is wilting. Like its wild, endangered mascot, WWF-N (India) needs to be revived. The national organisation is supposed to be independent but how independent can a starving organisation be?

Seven and a half per cent of the money given for programmes goes into the WWF-N India kitty as a management fee. But, quite obviously, this is not enough to run a large NGO with offices all over the country. Money meant for conservation is not being spent on programmes as quickly as it should.

It sits in the bank collecting interest, which can be used for running the WWF-N show. The Netherlands has stopped funding for capacity building and WWF-U.S. has put all funding to the TCP on hold.

The India Canada Environment Facility (ICEF), which had provided Rs. 3.5 crores to start education programmes in seven States, has withdrawn. After a quarrel with the new managers of the programme in India, the ICEF has stopped the second tranche of assistance. The work on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-assisted Rs. 1.5 crore Centre for Conservation Education is also very slow.

With the exit of the former secretary-general, Mr. Samar Singh, a bureaucrat from Madhya Pradesh, and a younger Godrej – Jamshed Godrej – stepping in as president in place of the late S.P. Godrej, there was hope of rejuvenating WWF-N (India). But, alas, that has not happened. Meeta Vyas, new secretary-general and CEO, parachuted from the United States. If things were bad during the tenure of Mr. Samar Singh, they are worse now.

The board of trustees has not met for a year though it is officially supposed to meet four times in a year. Though it has several industrialists on it – A.K. Mahindra, Ms. Babli Brar, Vikram Lal, in addition to Mr. Godrej – they do not seem to have the time to steer this wonderful organisation. Valmik Thapar and Madhav Gadgil, eminent people from the field, were brought in as trustees but withdrew very quickly. In fact, the attitude of the trustees seems to be "what can I get from the organisation rather than what can I give it?" Only during the tenure of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan as president was there growth in WWF-N. With his tremendous clout, he was able to start new programmes and attract funding for the organisation. The WWF-N magazine has been reduced to a bi-monthly newsletter. The work of the different departments is projected in the newsletter by the departments concerned having to pay for it.

Apart from the TCP and the Education Programme, TRAFFIC-India, housed in WWF-N, was doing good work in catching poachers and trying to check the illegal trade in animals, animal skins and parts and birds. Pleased with its work, TRAFFIC-International was eager to upgrade it to TRAFFIC-South Asia, which meant it would have gone out of the hands of WWF-N India. When the head of TRAFFIC-India, Manoj Mishra, a forest officer from Madhya Pradesh deputed to WWF-N, sought an extension of his term, it was not granted. TRAFFIC-International retaliated by suspending the operation of TRAFFIC-India from June 30. Whenever there is a crisis in WWF-N(India), the heavy weights in International fly down to soothe ruffled feathers. In this case too, Chris Hails is expected. However, even WWF-International's efforts are neither systematic nor sustained.

Will the Board of Trustees rise to the occasion and save the endangered India office before it is too late and the years of public goodwill for WWF-N evaporate. ●

Romancing the desert

Continued from page II

build for textural effect with whatever takes my fancy, is a synthesis of drawing, sculpture and painting. It offers the directness and spontaneity of drawing or a calligraphic brush stroke, the resistance and strength of sculpture and the colour intensity of painting".

Why then is there such an inescapable sense of *deja vu* about so many of the portrait studies? Is it that we ourselves have been conditioned so entirely by the gaze of the camera either in innumerable tales of sand and sex purveyed by the cinema, or in tourist style posters and literature that we can no longer see the people of the Thar as ordinary, or even extraordinary human beings? This is a difficult question to answer.

Gupta has spent so many years working on his desert project, the depth and sincerity that he bring to such work cannot be doubted. He is also a poet.

The gorgeously arrayed images are offset by stark white, matte gold, or plain black pages, on which his thoughts are inscribed. Opposite a partly veiled image of a woman wrapped in diaphanous blue clothing, against a hot sand coloured wall for instance, he writes: *Scorching/desert sun,/your dark monsoon tresses/bring a cooling shower/ my parched body.*

This type of verse, nouvelle Haiku, as it must be termed, goes down well with a certain kind of audience. It does not ask for much by way of comprehension or imagination. It is like one of those kindergarten primers, where everything is spelt out and visually co-ordinated so that you can proceed step by step from. "This is my ball ... my ball is blue ... Have you seen my blue ball ... I like my blue ball ..." and so on.

What is equally surprising is that he reserves his adulation for both sexes, alike. There are lusciously coy studies of bare bodied priests, standing at their temple doors, their muscles gilded and glowing in the amber light that Gupta favours, with a "come hither" invitation in their eyes and stance that provides the only bit of ambiguity in this otherwise conventional collection.

It cannot be accidental either that the initial studies of the noble poor gradually morph into the noble rich, desert gives way to the palace and the temple, the rough textured clothing becomes the brilliantly coloured gossamer cloths of any ad or glossy poster, advertising "immortal Rajasthan". No matter how far he travels, exotic India is alive and well. It should appeal to a new generation of Indians, resident in the West, who like to display choice examples of their distant land in carefully packaged containers.

The Back

Should any of this matter? Is it not enough that the Maharaja of Jodhpur, resplendent in his multi-colour turban, has given Gupta the royal seal of approval, or that Aman Nath has celebrated Gupta's vision in chiselled prose, evoking for us the ancient geographical sea that has left its trace behind on the contours of the Thar desert? It should.

There is something very disturbing about these effete images that pander to our already debased visual sensibility. Far from bringing us a greater perception of the desert in all its bleak and every changing contours, Gupta has spread it out like a *dhurrie* at a well chosen vantage point, where we may feast our eyes upon the objects that he places upon it.

The faces that he beams against this canvas might well be g
their chiselled bones a
but on closer inspect
and hands of many o
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THE TIMES OF INDIA

NO. 304. VOL.CLXIV

A Thought for Today

It (December 13 attack) was clearly aimed at wiping out the country's top political leadership.

— L K ADVANI

Republic on Parade

January 26 is still over a month away. But in the wake of the attack on Parliament, perhaps it's time to start giving some serious thought to the forthcoming Republic Day festivities. Every year, the nation's political and military brass turn up in full force to watch the by-now utterly predictable demonstration of state power. For much of the citizenry though, the parade is no longer a joyous celebration, but has become an inconvenience to be endured. Long-suffering Delhiites routinely complain about rehearsals and security arrangements being an unmitigated nuisance. Traffic diversions become commonplace; commuters get into jams and snarls as easily as their vehicles. Some commentators have also pointed to the irony of a republic commemorating its national day through a military parade — which may be the done thing in a authoritarian state, but is surely inappropriate in the case of a democracy. These columns have advocated privatising the parade; others have spoken of scrapping it altogether. The arguments are typically aimed at the parade's nuisance value. But it would be ostrich-like to ignore the fact that those rows of VIPs sitting in close quarters along one narrow stretch are a terrorist's dream come true. So far, no untoward incident has ever occurred — and we sincerely hope that none ever will. But what would happen if, say, five suicide bombers were to congregate on to the VIP enclosures at the same time?

Should we then not hold the parade this year? No, we must — even though some would argue that a cancellation would send out a powerful signal to the rest of the world about how seriously we take the terrorist threat. The flip side, though, is that this nation simply cannot afford to let terrorists dictate its agenda — to do so would amount to handing them a moral victory right away. When Parliament functioned in a normal manner on December 14, it clearly demonstrated the nation's resolve not to flinch in the face of terror. The terrorist's objective is to effect a breakdown of normal life. Proceeding with business as usual is the most fitting rebuff to his nefarious intentions. Still, it might not be a bad idea to learn from the US, where president George W Bush and vice-president Dick Cheney have stopped appearing in public together. Indeed, Mr Cheney has been kept in 'secure locations' for so long that jokes have sprung up about his sightings being as rare as those of the Loch Ness monster. Forget governments, even leading corporates and sports clubs have the sense not to send all their stars on the same airplane flight. Especially not after February 6, 1958, when a generation of Manchester United footballers was tragically decimated in a plane crash. Let us, by all means, go ahead with the parade and other official observances. But can't we make it part of the standard security drill that the entire government — and opposition — leadership should not be bunched together? Putting all one's eggs — good or bad as they may be — in one basket has never been a good idea.

Jettisoning Jehad

While these columns have advocated international support to General Musharraf in the immediate interest of Pakistan's stability, it might be politic to look at other groups that are attempting to cash in on the vacuum left by the marginalisation of Pakistan's main political parties. Ironic as it might seem, these groups include orthodox Islamic parties, who were till recently vocal supporters of the current military regime. Indeed, these groups went against the regime when they organised country-wide anti-US demonstrations. And yet, ground realities suggest that they have departed from, rather than espoused, the sectarian and orthodox views which they have been traditionally identified with. This shift in discourse — which marks a new phase in their evolution — began immediately after the attacks on the US. The Jamaat-e-Islami president, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, for instance, articulated his response to the attacks on the US in geo-political terms. On the day of the attack, Mr Ahmad was quick to condemn the "blatant act of terrorism", though he did debunk reports that jehadi terrorist groups were behind the strikes, by talking of a "zionist hand" which was working to tarnish the image of Islam and derail the West Asian peace process. As the US campaign in Afghanistan got underway, Mr Ahmad steered clear of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis favoured by other Muslim groups such as the Taliban, the Al-Qaida and the Baathist party of Saddam Hussein. Instead, he attacked president Musharraf for compromising Pakistan's national security by choosing to support "unjust" US foreign interventions responsible for the growth of anti-American sentiments.

With elections less than a year away, the Jamaat is obviously trying to position itself as a civilian centrist alternative. The Jamaat leadership realise that given the growing "anti-jehadi" sentiment in Pakistan — with fundamentalists being blamed for the situation the country finds itself in today — their survival depends upon not only their ability to reach out to non-Islamist sections of the population, but also on forging political alliances. Till now, political parties in Pakistan have allied with the Jamaat only because it reportedly exercises some influence over sections of the military establishment, which no political leader in Pakistan can afford to antagonise. However, the Jamaat's leaders have never been able to translate this leverage into substantive political gains. So much so that at the height of its popularity, the party was never able to win more than 5-6 per cent of the total vote share. Indeed, even now, when its political adversaries are on the back-foot, the attempted image makeover of the Jamaat may still not bring it the political legitimacy it so desperately seeks. For no political party in Pakistan today can hope to ally itself with any political formation which couches its appeal purely in anti-US terms. Besides there is its sectarian track record to contend with: Is it possible that an extremist right-wing party like the Jamaat will actually change? Given the nature of the power equations within the Jamaat and its political patrons outside, it may be asking too much of the voters to accept the Jamaat at face value. However, if the Jamaat's leadership is interested in taking a long-term political view, they would do well to emulate their Indian ideological counterpart — the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh — which floated a number of political parties to not only help it gain legitimacy but to also 'mainstream' its radical political agenda.

Lord of the Myths

Two films, both with big budgets, great special effects, and a story to tell. One, set in the magical world of boy wizards. Another, a 1,200-page epic trilogy set in the world of elves, trolls, dwarfs, hobbits, orcs, and of course wizards. One, a four-part series written at the end of the 1990s. Another written by an Oxford professor J R R Tolkein in the 1930s. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* has already made over $200 million in its release just in the US. *The Lord of the Rings*, the first of a three-part movie series shot in New Zealand at the cost of $300 million, looks set to break similar box office records when it opens this week in the US. So what does the New World see in these epics where broomsticks fly and spells are meant to be broken? Perhaps the answer lies in the eternal urge to create a history. For the '70s generation, *Star Wars* provided it. Taking elements from myths found in *The Golden Bough*, Sufi legends, *Beowulf*, and *The Bible*, George Lucas gave to a new generation a new history. This was their secular *Mahabharata*, their *Ramayana*. In *No Brow*, culture critic John Seabrook calls Lucas the first of the great content robber barons — "the first wholesale appropriator of world culture, which he sold back to the world as *Star Wars*". Two decades have passed since then, so it was only natural that a new generation would yearn for its own new myths, its own stories. And there's nothing as refreshing as a new world narrative. As Tolkein wrote: "The world was young, the mountains green/ No stain yet on the Moon was seen/ No words were laid on stream or stone/ When Durin woke and walked alone/ He walked the nameless hills and dells/ He drank from yet untasted wells". It was precisely this sense of awe, of mystery of the unknown which pervaded *Star Wars*. To quote Lucas again: "It seemed to me that there was no longer a lot of mythology in our society — the kind of stories we tell ourselves and our children, which is the way our heritage is passed down. I wanted to find a new form. And I thought, space". Compare the dreary world below the stairs in Harry Potter's aunt's home with the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Or even better, compare the world of animated monsters and digital dinosaurs with the story of hobbit Frodo Baggins and his mission to guard and destroy a ring that has the power to bring evil upon Middle-earth, and see why the mundane gives way to the marvellous.

Wedding Bells Toll

Very Few Live Happily Ever After

By USHA RAI

THE rate of dowry deaths is extremely high in India and the demand for dowry and violence related to it is increasing across the subcontinent. Most marriages are 'arranged' in these countries and if a family is unable to provide dowry, the girl, even if educated, is likely to remain single. Countries in the region have enacted legislations to prevent dowry-related violence against women. But the practice — and its repercussions — continues.

In Pakistan, girls from feudal families are 'married' to the Koran to avert division of family property; in Bangladesh, higher education is seen as inimical to marriage prospects; in Sri Lanka, property laws that benefit daughters are tacitly subverted; in Nepal, the move to give daughters equal rights to parental property is seen by many as a double-edged sword; and in India, dowry violence is spiralling concomitantly with affluence and consumerism.

The consumer boom has exacerbated the problem. In addition to cash, there is a persistent demand for cars, scooters, television sets and other consumer durables. This greed is all-pervasive and is, in fact, more prevalent among the educated affluent than among the rural, illiterate poor.

In India, there seems to be a co-relation between increasing prosperity and the incidence of dowry deaths. One dowry death per day is reported in Hubli, an upcoming industrial town in Karnataka. Five years ago, in Bangalore, two dowry deaths a day were reported. Today, the number has gone up to three daily.

In Sri Lanka, where women enjoy property and inheritance rights, dowry is viewed as bride wealth or a woman's separate property, according to Savitri Goonesekere, a Sri Lankan legal expert. The custom of obtaining dowry prior to marriage has become common in the three largest communities of the island. Traditionally, if land was given as dowry, the deeds were in the name of the woman. Recent social trends, however, indicate that parents are under pressure to transfer the daughter's dowry to her husband.

While bride wealth or *kaikuli* has legal sanction under the Muslim law, there is no legal provision for dowry under the personal laws of the Sinhala and Tamil communities or the country's general personal law, which covers all communities. Muslim law also permits *mehr* or a cash gift to the bride from the bridegroom. While the amount given as *mehr* is diminishing, the amount sought as dowry is on the increase.

But unlike other countries of this region, there are very few reports of inadequate dowry leading to violence in Sri Lanka. However, activists maintain that lack of clear evidence of dowry-related violence against women is not a sign that the problem doesn't exist in Sri Lanka.

In Pakistan where, under Islamic law, a woman is entitled to one-eighth of her parental property as dowry, many girls from feudal families are 'married' to the Koran in an attempt to prevent division of family property. In the developed areas of Pakistan, dowry demands are so high among the middle class that many girls remain single. Despite Islam's decree that marriages should be observed in the simplest way and minimum dowry should be given, lavish weddings and large dowries are common.

Activists of the Pakistan Women Lawyers' Association maintain that it is impossible to come up with statistics about the number of girls who have ostensibly died of 'stove bursts'. Data also cannot be collected because a large number of dowry deaths occur in rural areas where the women have neither the knowledge of nor access to help. In Bangladesh too, there is such a great demand for dowry that many poor families are unable to get their daughters married. In Satkira district alone, it is estimated that nearly 50,000 girls from poor families have no hope of getting married because of the inability to meet dowry demands.

IN BRIEF

- The consumer boom has exacerbated the problem of dowry-related violence in South Asia
- The degree of greed is greater among the educated affluent than the illiterate poor
- In India, the conviction rate for dowry-related violence is very low

Even an educated girl finds it difficult to get a groom who is as well qualified as she is. In fact, many parents who encouraged their older (still single) daughters to pursue higher studies now regret this and have ensured that younger daughters are not 'educated too much'.

Dowry-related violence is increasing in Bangladesh. From 1990 to 1997, 2,026 women were dowry victims, according to the Bangladeshi women and child affairs ministry. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association says that 203 women were killed and 34 tortured for dowry by their in-laws in 2000, the year a law was passed that provides life sentence for woman and child battering.

If statistics can tell the story of Asian women brutalised for not meeting the dowry demands of greedy in-laws, India's situation is particularly grim. The number of dowry harassment cases — officially recorded fatalities — shot up from 1,912 in 1987 to 4,006 in 1989 and 6,222 in 2000. Many go unrecorded or are categorised as 'accidents' or 'stove bursts'. Despite all the noise women's organisations are making about dowry deaths, the conviction rate for this crime is just three per cent.

Educated and high profile women figure as frequently among victims as unlettered rustics. Aparna had an MBA degree but she committed suicide, unable to bear the harassment for more dowry and Sujatha, another victim, was a gold medallist in medicine. In India, police and officers of the Indian Administrative Service demand more dowry because of their stature in society. Lawyers and judges are known to give dowry even though they know it is not correct to do so.

The reality is that dowry, condemned publicly, is condoned and practised privately by large sections of society. Dowry cases drag on in the courts for several years, despite all countries in this region updating their laws to prevent dowry, violence against women, public display of dowry and wedding extravaganzas. The girl's parents invariably lose the will or the resources to fight the case. A lot of cases are dismissed on grounds of insufficient evidence. There are appeals by the accused to higher courts. A final verdict rarely comes in the lifetime of the complainant. Satyarani Chadha, whose daughter was killed for dowry in 1979, obtained a conviction order from a Delhi court after a 21-year-long battle. Few complainants have that kind of tenacity.

Quite obviously, existing laws are not implemented. Medical reports get manipulated by corrupt functionaries at the behest of the accused, evidence collection is lackadaisical, not thorough enough for public prosecution. The result: Justice gets lost in the highways of the legal system.

(Exclusive to TOI from Women's Feature Service)

Conquer Fear For A Meaningful Life

By SIDDHARTHA SINGH THAKUR

WE seldom think about the fundamental questions of life. We have been conditioned in a way that we do not realise the importance of comprehending certain truths, vital to human existence. An individual fails to grasp the significance of primary factors that govern human behaviour. The philosopher J Krishnamurti said all human actions emerging from an unaware state of mind is governed by fear. It is the manifestation of an unaware state of consciousness. According to him, this awareness is the actual understanding of all mental and physical processes, conditioning, formulations and responses.

How will we gain a truer understanding of the complexities of life? Our education system has failed to inculcate in us the ability to ponder over such issues. It has failed to educate and enlighten us in the true sense. The education mechanism which is widely followed accentuates and propagates deep-seated primal conditioning. It does not encourage initiative in an individual. True initiative helps an individual to be free from imitation. An individual imitates others because he or she is afraid of standing apart from the crowd. Such an education system breeds insecurity and fear. This fear has many manifestations. It seeks expression in violence and rapaciousness, lust and avarice, intolerance and narrow-mindedness. It is necessary for us to free ourselves from fear. Fear smothers intelligence and sensitivity. First, fear has to be understood and then uprooted.

THE SPEAKING TREE
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Mere accumulation of knowledge must not be the purpose of an individual seeking education. Borrowed knowledge fails to provide answers to the most significant questions. This knowledge may have a functional utility but it is of no importance to human existence. One must possess the ability to think and find answers. This is the sign of true intelligence.

This civilisation is facing a crisis of unprecedented proportion. This crisis has actually emanated from the suffering that each individual on this planet is undergoing. The mitigation of this suffering can begin solely on an individual level. However, we have been conditioned to think in larger terms. We see ourselves as components of larger groups such as societies, religions and nations. The individual has been subsumed into a larger mass. It is believed that there is safety in numbers. A crowd has a certain collective consciousness. It acts instinctively and this guiding instinct is always archetypal and primal in nature. Every individual has fear gnawing at his or her heart. This vulnerability accentuates the need for self-preservation. It is precisely this that makes individuals seek solace and security in organised religions and creeds and nations. This all-pervasive fear propagates the formation of social coalitions. This fear is the source and the cause of all violence. The primary purpose of education is to free an individual from fear so that he or she becomes truly sensitive.

Freedom from the bondages of conditioning and deep-seated primeval instincts must be the endeavour of life. The effort to see fear for what it is must come from an individual. Any attempt to seek solutions through political, economic or any other means is bound to fail. These ad hoc solutions fail to reach the roots of a problem. Rather, they aggravate the maladies they propose to cure. A deeper understanding of these complexities is possible when the mind is completely free from ideas because ideas distort reality. The elimination of fear is the first step towards the truth. If this civilisation is to survive then all illusions have to be eliminated.

Existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus asserted that an individual leads a meaningless existence in an absurd and useless universe. Each man is responsible for and is the sole judge of his own actions. Sartre said that each human being is in a way free to choose his or her own *raison d'etre* or justification of existence. All self-aware individuals have the ability to grasp their existence and freedom and they must not allow their choices to be constrained by anything, not even by reason or morality. A human being can attain true happiness merely through true awareness. The human being is programmed by society to be unhappy. The desire, ambition and inability to accept the truth is the real cause of all sorrow. One of this century's greatest masters Osho or Bhagwan Rajneesh said we have been conditioned to think that happiness can be attained. The truth is, that happiness is our very nature.

Sacred Space

Think Before You Act

One should commence a work after understanding the country and the consequences.

Chanakyasutra

✣

International relations can be improved and the danger of wars significantly reduced by producing generations of leaders who have acquired some feeling of understanding for other people's cultures, why they operate as they do, why they think as they do, and why they react as they do.

William Fulbright

✣

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

George Bernard Shaw

✣

"I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I intended to be".

Douglas Adams

✣

Perhaps it is not possible both to act wisely and also to write wisely about conduct because action needs will power, which no book can teach; or else because the wisest men of all are those who never give away their secrets".

Gilbert Highet

✣

We suffer people to tell us about our shortcomings, we condone punishment, we patiently endure a good deal on their account; but we are impatient when we are urged to discard them.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

✣

I do not regret being cut off from the understanding of other men. I am compensated for it in being rendered independent of opinions and prejudices of others.

Albert Einstein

Salaam Suseela

By BRINDA KARAT

SUSEELA Gopalan, who died after a painful battle with cancer, never lost courage till the end. I met the revolutionary leader and one of the leading figures of post-independence women's movements as she lay critically ill in a Thiruvananthapuram hospital.

She opened her eyes. Do you know who this is, they asked? Miraculously she smiled, Yes, Brinda. She had smiled too that day, 26 years ago when I first met her. I had just got married. She drew me aside and said, communist women bring their politics into their homes, and then with a mischievous smile added, unlike some communist men. Later, elaborating she reiterated her understanding that women in politics have to consciously assert their own ideas, beliefs and independent identities as even within the most progressive political theories and practices, stereotyped ideas of women's roles don't automatically disappear. She was always quick to add that in her own life her role as a wife and a mother was never in conflict with her political work as she had a most egalitarian relationship with her husband.

Married to the legendary communist leader A K Gopalan, she grew as a mass leader in her own right. Involved in many struggles and organisations of the oppressed, she fulfilled the predictions made by veterans of the movement when as a young girl of 14 she addressed her first meeting of coir workers in an Alleppey village in Kerala. Elected as an MP twice and then as minister of industries in Kerala, Suseela saw her role in electoral politics and later as a minister as a means to strengthen the peoples' struggles.

As an MP in the early eighties she played a leading role along with Geeta Mukherjee and Pramila Dandavate in pushing through important reforms in laws concerning women. Among her many achievements as a minister in the state government she pioneered important benefits for women workers in the unorganised sector. Suseela's vision of women's emancipatory movements, informed by her own vast experience of work among the labouring classes, stressed the crucial need for linking class and caste analysis with gender. She was equally strong in her struggle against male supremacist practices. It was during her period as the founding general secretary of AIDWA, that the organisation gave special importance to issues like family violence.

Mentor and guide to many of us, unstinting in her support to developing the next generation of leadership, she was a leader beloved to thousands of women.

For me personally, my extremely close association with Suseela through two decades of work in AIDWA, her vision, her experience, her guidance have been so crucial. And as I sat at her bedside, holding the hand of my leader, I also remembered the tremendous fun we had together, her hilarious jokes, our laughter ringing through the room, Suseela wiping away the tears of mirth and saying, "now let's get back to work".

LETTERS

Maximum Restraint

The Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) calls on the Indian government to exercise maximum restraint in the wake of the deplorable December 13 attacks on Parliament, the symbol of our democracy. While every effort must be made to trace those responsible and to bring them to justice through the due process of law, there is no warrant whatsoever to carry out military actions across the border against Pakistan. Acts of war carried out officially by armies and states are not a justified or sober response to acts of terrorism carried out by individuals or groups. Such a reaction only pits nations and peoples against one another when the need today is to avoid precisely such escalation of tensions and hostilities in South Asia, especially after the unjustified US assault on Afghanistan. In a situation where both countries possess nuclear weapons such military escalation is fraught with unacceptable risks.

The CNDP also expresses its deep dismay at the Indian government's silence regarding the US announcement of a six-month notice period after which it will withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Such US action will guarantee the advent of a new and more dangerous nuclear and conventional arms race since it aims to give the US an ever-expanding 'advantage' over its nuclear rivals, as well as future military dominance over space itself. The longer the Indian government remains silent the more suspicion there will be that New Delhi might rescind its previous support to the ABM Treaty, thereby suggesting a willingness to sacrifice both principle and prudence in order to appease Washington.

Admiral L Ramdas, Achin Vanaik, Prabir Purkayastha and others

An Eye-opener

May I congratulate Mr Rahul Chhabra for his eye-opening news report 'Bullets & peanuts for police' (Dec 20). Such revealing comparisons encapsulate the contradiction that India is. It is at times such as these that newspapers are at their informative best and perform the role that they should be performing.

My heart goes out to the families of those policemen who lost their lives in the ruthless attack on Parliament. Who will look after them? Their plight is in direct contrast to their political masters, who day after day, shirk their legislative responsibilities. This costs the nation very dearly. Is anyone listening?

spaul7@hotmail.com

An Outrageous Act

The 'Al-Coffins' expose' has put the nation to shame. The episode has in fact proven that we have literally buried our collective consciences. It is most disgusting to note that someone in our defence establishment may well have "cooked his food on a funeral pyre".

This outrageous act of corruption will never be forgotten. The defence minister has dismissed the CAG's report as hearsay, and the CAG as an institution "which only finds faults". Of course the CAG was a reliable institution till Bofors was around and not after.

Our defence minister has not expressed any regret or remorse, he has instead adopted a cavalier approach to the sordid affair. Governance in this country has touched ground zero.

R K Malhotra, New Delhi

Letters to this column should be addressed to **Letters** c/o Edit page Editor, The Times of India, 7, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002.
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From timesofindia.com

In Opposition

Opposition parties in India are only hindering the nation's progress. They only know how to criticise the government and score points. In fact they are becoming a threat to our national security by blocking legislations like POTO. The Congress's Raj was disastrous for the country and now by adopting a policy of opportunism they are further complicating matters for the country. I hope the people of India realise this before it is too late.

yogeshjog@hotmail.com

Q & A \ Lt Gen Hamid Gul

ISI Disapproved

*RAWALPINDI: **Lt Gen Hamid Gul (Retd)**, former ISI chief, is believed to be one of the key architects of Pakistan's pro-Taliban policy. It is for this reason that Gul — after Musharraf did a somersault from being pro-Taliban to anti-Taliban — has become one of the president's most vocal critics. After taking premature retirement from the army, Gul launched a political party, Tehrik-i-Ittehad (Movement for Unity), whose ostensible aim is to help unite Pakistan's various political parties. He spoke to **Rashme Sehgal**:*

What impact will the US intervention in Afghanistan have on Pakistan?

The purpose of the American action was not to settle the issue of Osama and the Taliban but to gain a foothold in the eastern flank of the Gulf right up to the mouth of the Caspian sea. The Americans already have a presence in west Asia. The area to the east has been the focus of their strategies for quite some time now.

Look at the overall scenario. The Taliban was not in their control. They have alienated Iran. Pakistan was drifting towards China and the Pakistani government's decision to give China a road up to its coast was perceived by the US as an act of Pakistani brinkmanship. Whichever country controls the energy resources of the Caspian region and the Middle East will control the 21st century.

Uday Shankar

"Clearly, China is US's new enemy; and China is biding time... Twenty years down the line, its economy is going to be worth $16 trillion per year. The US economy will be worth only $8.3 trillion"

The Americans do not trust India. India has lived under the banner of socialism for 50 years. That's why India cannot go into the strategic embrace of the US. Jaswant Singh is trying his best to do otherwise (garner American support) but he is only taking the Indian populace for a ride. India will be used as a pawn just like Pakistan is being used as a pawn. Corporate US wants to use the Indian workforce, exploiting Indian poverty for its own 200 to 300 million corporate middle class. But corporate US will soon lose interest in India.

How do you think China is defending its interests in this context?

Clearly, China is US's new enemy; and China is biding time. China is broadly committed to the notion that it wouldn't like to be drawn into any premature conflict. For the next 20 years, it is focusing on its economy. Twenty years down the line, its economy is going to be worth $16 trillion per year. The US economy will be worth only $8.3 trillion. That's when China will begin to play a new role.

The US is a crestline power which can only go downhill now. The US is trying to stay on top for as long as possible but China can upset this in the next 15 years.

You've often said that there's more to 9/11 than meets the eye.

I've studied the 9/11 incidents in great detail. Four aircraft change route in the most dense air traffic environment in the world and nothing happens? One of them goes on to travel 27 minutes from where it originated and air traffic control does not detect it. There was not a single transponder signal, no button was pressed raising an alarm, there was no hijack and no scuffle. On Flight 93, a scuffle was supposed to have taken place but no evidence has been found to support this theory. No passenger lists have been issued; there's no evidence. Already, three Arab nationals accused of being involved in this crime have filed cases of defamation saying their names have been falsely implicated.

Between the first strike and last strike, there was a time gap of one hour. Within ten minutes of a strike, the American president gives a red alert which has been so designed that if a missile takes off from Moscow, with a flight time of 18 minutes, it can be intercepted. On September 11, the American Air Force response time was 75 minutes. And here too, the Andrews Air Base sent one F-16 plane against these assailants. My question is, was the American Air Force on holiday then?

I can understand that the Trade towers were unprotected but what about the Pentagon? It is the most protected piece of real estate in the world. It has a warning system called Identification Friend and Foe, in which an intruder 16 miles away, is asked to identify himself failing which he is automatically shot down. Who switched off the Pentagon's warning system? Was the White House warning system also switched off? It is the biggest intelligence failure in history. Not only have no heads rolled in the CIA but Bush recently went to CIA headquarters and patted the CIA boss on his back.

Why would the Americans want to do this?

They want to destroy the Muslim renaissance. It is definitely a clash of civilisations with the Americans acting hand-in-glove with Israel. The Muslim world is in the doldrums and the war in Afghanistan has had a deep impact on the domestic psyche as well. Members of the international coalition including India should be asking the US why they have held no enquiry on this entire incident so far. The US has destroyed an honourable nation like Afghanistan. Five Al-Qaida networks have been raided so far but that the US has not found a scrap of evidence against them. Can you believe that six months' training on light aircraft will enable these people to acquire the level of efficiency they displayed using big aircraft? All this is in the realm of fiction.

You said that the US has not released any evidence to establish a link between 9/11 and Osama bin Laden. But the US has now released videotapes which show that Osama was involved in the 9/11 plot.

The tapes are a complete fake. If the US had captured those tapes one month ago, what prevented them from releasing this evidence earlier? The voices are hardly audible and hence are unrecognisable. It's clearly a doctored job. This is not just my opinion — people around the globe feel the same.

Obviously Pakistan doesn't want to admit its own contribution to the rise of the Taliban and Osama.

The US played a key hand in building up both the Taliban and Osama. All those details are well known. The US is talking about the need to have a broad based governance in Afghanistan but what about their own country? The US popular vote went to Al Gore and Bush was elected on the basis of a mere technicality.

But Pakistan has aligned itself with the US over the Afghanistan issue.

President Musharraf should ask himself why the nation is not rejoicing over this grand victory. The man-on-the-street wonders how he (Musharraf) gave up his country's sovereignty so easily. Afghanistan is once again reverting to crime, war lordism, gun-running, poppy growing and ethnic feuding as it has done in the past.