The Baily Star

NOWN by the Tibetan name Ngagi Rinchen, he is respected in Bhutan as the "Precious Great Pandita" who brought immense knowledge of the Buddhist Tantras to the region. He is called a great saint, likened almost to a god, in a country where religion plays a very significant role. Buddhism pervades through the whole Bhutanese society. The Bhutanese people follow the Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism, which is uniquely their own, independent of any other Buddhist church. The Bhutanese are a deeply religious people and solemnly perform Buddhist religious rites on all occasions, mundane as well as spiritual. The national flag of Bhutan symbolizes the beautiful synthesis of the temporal and the spiritual in the country. The rectangular flag is divided diagonally into golden yellow in the upper half, signifying the secular power of the King, and orange in the lower part, representing the Buddhist religion. The white dragon across the diago-

nal line symbolizes Bhutan. Buddhism was brought to Bhutan in the eighth century by the Tantric Saint Padmasambhava, known in Bhutan as Guru Rimpoche or "Precious Master," and regarded as the Second Buddha. However, in the ninth and tenth centuries, amid the political turmoil prevailing in the Himalayan region, Buddhism almost disappeared from Bhutan. Around the beginning of the eleventh century, the discovery of religious objects and texts, hidden by Padmasambhava in Paro in western Bhutan and in Bumthang in eastern Bhutan, by Tertons or "discoverers of religious treasures" led to a revival of Buddhism in Bhutan. Buddhism expanded rapidly, but different religious schools sprang up and vied for supremacy over the lands. In the seventeenth century, Shabdrung ("at whose feet one submits") Ngawang Namgyel unified Bhutan under Drukpa authority. Drukpa or "the school of the Thunder Dragon" is the official religious Buddhist school of Bhutan.

Hereditary monarchy was established in Bhutan on 17 December 1907 when Ugyen AN ENDURING LINK BETWEEN TWO SAARC COUNTRIES

Bangladeshi Buddhist Saint is Revered in Bhutan

Tuhfa Zaman Ali writes from Thimphu

AN enduring cultural link between Bangladesh and Bhutan is provided by a Buddhist saint from Chittagong, Vanaratna or Ngagi Rinchen, who is held in great reverence throughout this. ancient Himalayan kingdom. Born in 1384, the great saint lived until 1486, for just over 100 years. His arrival in Bhutan is presumed to have taken place between the years 1426 and

first hereditary Druk Gyelpo ("Thunder Dragon King") by the high lamas and the lay chiefs or Bhutan. The royal family traces its ancestry from Terton Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), believed to be an incarnation of Padmasambhava, and they have consistently made conscious efforts to preserve the Bhutanese heritage and

uphold the Buddhist traditions. Many monasteries and temples have been built and renovated throughout the country under royal patronage, starting from the time of the first King to the present time. The Royal Grandmother Ashi Phuntsho Choegron founded the Kharbandi Monastery in 1967 on the last hillock of the

Himalayas before it meets the plains of Bengal, and in 1974. she built the magnificent Memorial Chorten ("Stupa") in the capital Thimphu in memory of her son, late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (father of the present King) to fulfil his wish to build a Chorten to represent the Mind of Buddha. The Queen Mother, Ashi Kesang

Wangchuck, commissioned the building of the Ka-Gong-Phur-Sum temple at Kurjey Lhakhang in Bumthang, and it was consecrated in June 1990.

Kurjey Lhakhang is very sacred to the Bhutanese as it is believed that Padmasambhava meditated there and left the imprint of his body on a rock.

In the same spirit, Yab Ugyen Dorji, father of the four Queens of Bhutan, has commissioned the construction of a temple near Punakha, about 70 kilometres north-east of Thimphu, at the place where Vanaratna had meditated. Yab Ugyen Dorji's elder brother is believed to be the sixth (and last) Shabdrung Sungtruel or "Speech incarnation" of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. The sang Chhoekor Monastery in Paro has also recently been restored under the patronage of Yab Ugyen Dorji.

Vanaratna, or Ngagi Rinchen, is believed to have been born in the town of Dampa or Sadnagara in Chittagong district is 1384.

The son of a King, he received the final monastic ordination from his teachers at the age of 20, became an ascetic and left his home. His travels took him to Sri Lanka, India and to Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. Vanaratna's sojourn in Bhutan is presumed to have been be-

near Punakha, Vanaratna is believed to have drawn a thousand Buddhas on a rock with a single magical gesture. He is also said to have had a vision or dream of Padmasambhava when he was meditating in a The popular belief in

1436. In a place called

Tonshinkha, or Tongshuma,

Bhutan is that Vanaratna, or Ngagi Rinchen, had a dream that the soul of his mother had been reborn as a frog because of her past sins. The frog was trapped under a huge rock, and his travel to Bhutan was in search of the frog so that he could set his mother's soul free. He hid his true identity and took work with a family as a shepherd. When he went out with the cattle, he would sit in a cave on the eastern banks of the River Pho and meditate.

Then, he would cross the river on an animals' skin, and return in the evening. His employers were greatly intrigued by this behaviour. One day he crossed the river upstream, went to the western bank and never came back. Vanaratna is believed to have found out where the frog was trapped, sliced the huge boulder into half, held it apart with his foot and brought out the frog. He then killed the frog so that he could release his mother's soul of all the pain.

The boulder, neatly sliced in half, still stands there. Three small chortens stand in front of it. And, right next to the boulder, on the banks of the River Pho, amid the greenery, not far from the King's winter Phuntso-pelri Palace, rises the beautiful Lhakhang or temple that the father of the Queens of Bhutan is building in memory of the Bangladeshi Buddhist saint Vanaratna, or Ngagi Rinchen. People have been visiting the site and paying homage to the saint for ages, but once the Lhakhang is completed it will

certainly attract more visitors. Lopon ("master") Pema-la, a tutor of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck when he was the crown prince, had written a poem about the many links that tie Bangladesh and Bhutan. He mentions numerous Buddhist Pandits who had visited the Himalayan areas, tween the years 1426 and and talks about Vanaratna



The boulder, sliced in half, by the Bangladeshi Buddhist saint, Vanaratna or Ngagi Rinchen near Punakha,

Yet from the same country of Bengal

Another prince incomparable in power and wealth Great scholar Vanaratna by name Came to Bhutan.

Staying at a sacred cave in Taktshang He had a vision of Guru Padmasambhava.

Having assumed the aspect of a yogin He worked for innumerable sentient beings.

The place where he visualised One Thousand Buddhas Is always remembered as Tongshuna at Kabje; Here, cleaving the rock by thunder-bolt, He helped his insect-reborn mother trapped within attain

Always there appeared In the Kingdom of Bengal Many Panditas and Mahasiddhas Who greatly worked for the benefit of all mankind.

In the holy country of Bengal Appeared numerous saints, learned and accomplished. In person or through transmission, with the Kingdom of

Sandalwood They established close religious links."

TTTH every change of W government in the country, we open our doors to leaders and functionaries of the ousted administration. They have plenty of time to kill; many need sympathetic shoulders to cry on; and some just want to become friends again with those who, until the other day, were just useful contacts.

Many of them still have the old habit of talking non-stop. quite forcefully, often detailing the mistakes and blunders of their own leadership, which led to the fall of the government. "Had I been in charge ... ", but the sentence is seldom finished.

In a way, "Had I been in charge..." should be a good topic for a conversation piece between The Daily Star and a former Number Two of the previous regime. After all, a real second-in-command is supposed to be always within the whispering distance from the big boss, a de facto Number One in the shadow. The question is, is there any genuine second-in-command in any regime - or, for that matter, in any political party in this country ? (If it is any consolation to anyone here. the same question can be raised about most democracies, especially in South Asia.)

If we cannot make a former Number Two join a conversation on "Had I been in charge..." how can we ever

satisfaction.

make a politician talk on the

second most fascinating (to

me, anyway) topic we have in

mind: "What is the worst polit-

mit his past mistakes since he

must remain free to make new

leading figures of the last gov-

ernment, it is said to be differ-

ent this time from previous

occasions. For a variety of rea-

sons, they are not particularly

Why should a politician ad-

When it comes to seeing

ical mistake of my life?"

ones?

visible, except, in the case of some, in the luxurious seclusion of the parliament or, as in a few cases, in the suffocating isolation of a court room. They need more time to come in from the cold. We can wait.

Y own love-hate relationship with IVI politician — almost any always followed three distinct hilarious moments and some professional satisfaction.

However, seldom does any of the phases produce genuine human contacts or any intellectual interaction. (My apologies if I use 'intellectual' in a totally wrong context.)

phases, the same politician undergoes total transforma-

a promise" when, being far removed from the corridor of power, he talks in idealistic

terms, listens to others with a

show of attention and, from

time to time, emphasises his

commitment to what he calls

constructive politics. He is

visible in newspaper offices

where he patiently cultivates

he manages to convey the im-

pression that he is much

closer to the leader - the the

leader, I mean — than most

people think and that he has

already been asked to prepare

his inputs for the next election

journalists. From time to time,

My own love-hate relationship with a politician

always followed three distinct phases. Each

one has its own charm and frustration, a few

hilarious moments and some professional

almost any politician — in this country has

Some Reflections on Our Politicians — and the Case of Three Envelopes

For one thing, he is concerned

Buddhist saint Vanaratna, or Ngagi Rinchen.

politician - in this country has phases. Each one has its own charm and frustration, a few

During the three different

He starts off as a "man with

follow more than one unpredictable course. In all fairness, I will concede that if the touch of power brings out the worst in some, if not most, politicians, a few may look upon their new challenge with a degree of humility, perhaps even with a realisation that this chance of doing some good for the country may not come again. A man in this rare category works hard, retains something of the idealism he once possessed as a political activist and clears his office files with reasonable speed. What's more, he himself reads most of the daily newspapers and weekly journals, without relying on his staff to provide him with a distorted summary of news and views from the daily press. (The distorted version of what appears in the daily press usually places exaggerated emphasis on praises showered on the minister,

In time, he may turn a seemingly unimportant and unglam-

manifesto of the party. But this "man of promise" can sometimes be most discontented.

The temple that the father of the Queens of Bhutan is building in memory of the Bangladeshi

about the growing in-fighting within the organisation, about the increasing alienation of the younger generation, to which he himself belongs even if he is past 40, by the elders and, last but not the least, about anti-party rumours circulated by a section of the hostile

In short, he is a good company and useful up to a point, but unreliable and as self-seeking as any young politician of today. Get to know him well, but trust him at your own risk.

During the second phase

when the "man with a

promise" turns into "man in power", the transformation can plays down constructive suggestions made by newspapers and blacks out direct criticism of any move made by the boss.)

ourous ministerial portfolio

S. M. ALI

A 'man in power' is more likely to be one whose vision of yesterday has turned into an ambition for tomorrow and he can no longer distinguish one from the other.

placed under his care, such as livestock and fisheries, rural co-operatives and environment, into a major triumph in development. But this success does not necessarily ensure his political survival. Above all, while he is there in the government, he remains in a mi-

A "man in power" is more likely to be one whose vision of yesterday has turned into an ambition for tomorrow and he can no longer distinguish one from the other. His concern over broad national issues lingers on for a while, but soon the range narrows down to such matters as his political future, proximity to the leader. the TV and press coverage and the attention he commands from the leader and his colleagues at cabinet meetings. If he is pleased with the distribution of portfolios in the cabinet

- he has probably got the ministry he wanted - he remains concerned about rumours of a next reshuffle and. worse still, about who, among his colleagues, is eyeing his portfolio. He knows he must protect his position, but he is anything but sure as to how he should go about it. He assumes that at some point, a private chat with the leader could serve a purpose, but he fears that it would reveal his own sense of insecurity. In the end, he becomes suspicious and even paranoid, with his attention getting increasingly focused on his political survival at the cost of his ministerial responsibilities.

The transformation casts its shadow over the dealings of our "man in power" with his former friends, the journalists. Depending on his mood and/ or his immediate concern, he

can be alternately aloof or arrogant, friendly or preoccupied. But he tries his best, often with little success, to give the impression that he remains in full command of the situation. From time to time, he invites a friend from the press for what he calls "a chat at home". He uses such occasions for picking up gossips, not ideas, or for delivering monologues, with the visitor serving as nothing other than a listening board. The exercise helps in bringing down the tension level of the minister.

In a matter of years, our "man in power" turns out to be nothing more than a shadow of the "man with a promise" that we knew in the past.

. . .

we say to the man who has just lost power. But, then, what kind of category shall we put him in? "A Man Out in the Cold"? Perhaps. Or, as one politician friend once suggested, "A Man in Peace with Himself'?

Perhaps, we should not look for a stereotype among those who are out of power. They come in all shapes and forms. Some are bitter and lonely, but some return to their original professions, if they had one, with a show of vigour, even complaining that their partners had neglected their obligations with almost criminal indifference, still using a bit of ministerial rhetoric. It is easier to return to the old profession if it is in teaching, legal practice, medicine or in accountancy.

But it can be awkward if it is in indenting trade or in running an industry that is included in the list of defaulters in bank loans.

Well, life in Bangladesh for all former "men in power" gets harder every day!

HENEVER there is a change of government in a crisis-torn country, the following story is repeated

by someone who has a good

sense of humour.

The outgoing head of the government was paying a farewell call on his successor.

After they had exchanged pleasantries, the new leader asked his predecessor if he had any advice to offer about running the administration.

"Oh, yes," said the old fox. "I have left three sealed envelopes in the iron safe. marked one, two and three.

When you face the first major crisis, open the envelope, marked one, and read my advice. You open the second envelope during the second crisis and the third one in the hext one."

The new head of government listened to all this with a

simple: "Blame your predecessor for all your problems."

The leader followed the advice. At a mass rally and later during a TV address, he put all the blame for the troubles facing the country on the previous administration. "Give me more time to solve the problems I have inherited..." he

The solution worked. People went back to work, the transport strike was over and the universities reopened.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the situation got out of control again. This time, the railway went on strike, newspapers brought up charges of corruption and trade circles circulated rumours of devaluation.

In despair, the leader brought out the second envelope, opened it and read the advice: "Announce a shake up of the administration and a major reshuffle of the cabinet."

The advice was scrupulously followed. It worked. At a mass rally, people cheered the leader who smiled and waved. It was like a second honey-

It turned out to be a short honeymoon. Within a few months, another crisis hit the country. The patience of the country seemed to be running

He starts off as a 'man with a promise' when, being far removed from the corridor of power, he talks in idealistic terms, listens to others with a show of attention and, from time to time, emphasises his commitment to what he calls constructive politics.

polite show of interest, as he (or she, as the case may be said goodbye to his predeces-

For a while, there was a honeymoon between the people and the new leader. Then, in a matter of months, problems cropped up. The leader was in despair. He went to the iron safe, brought out the envelope marked one, opened it and read the advice. It was

out, while the leader was left with no choice but to open the third - and the last - envelope and read the advice which his predecessor had written in hand. The advice was simple: "Prepare three envelopes for your successor."