

# Asia's Elephants Threatened by Growing Human Population

by Praveen Bhalla

While worldwide attention has been focused on the African elephant, mainly from poachers for ivory, its Asian cousin is struggling for survival in the face of encroaching human settlements. A WWF-funded report recently published by the IUCN/Species Survival Commission Asian Elephant Specialist Group reveals that "the surviving population of between 30,000 and 55,000 in the wild is only a tenth of that of the African elephant..."

The report, compiled by Dr Charles Santiapillai and Mr Peter Jackson, warns that the Asian elephant is in grave danger. The pressures on land for agriculture and human settlement to meet the needs of the growing human population in Asia has led to serious habitat loss. This reduces the elephants' range, fragmenting and isolating the populations throughout the 13 countries where they live. About 20,000 of the wild Asian elephants live in India alone, while the rest are scattered through Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. In addition, about 16,000 tame elephants, employed mainly in the timber industry, are to be found in Burma, India, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Asian elephants are forest animals, so that conservation of this shady habitat is crucial to their survival. Their range of movement depends on the availability of water, trees and grass. Where these are abundant, throughout the year, they may move over relatively small distances, but elsewhere, they may migrate hundreds of kilometres in search of food. (Each animal consumes up to 150kg of vegetation a day). Their broad habitat requirements therefore make them particularly vulnerable.

Where forests have been cleared for human settlement,

the elephants, deprived of their source of food, and with their traditional migration routes severed, invade crops and may endanger human life. In India, for instance, they kill up to 200 people a year; and throughout the continent, they destroy millions of dollars worth of crops such as oil palm, rubber, cereals and sugar cane. The Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AESG) has recognized the necessity of playing a delicate balancing act between the dual and often conflicting needs of preserving the elephants' habitats and, at the same time, allowing for the growing demand for agricultural land and settlement. While it is recognized that not all Asia's elephants can be saved, the report suggests that losses can be minimized if economic development plans take into account the needs of

elephants, and conservationists' plans consider the needs of local populations.

The AESG's Action Plan seeks to minimize the human/elephant conflict. Among its main recommendations, it proposes the establishment of large Managed Elephant Ranges (MERs) to complement protected reserves which will both provide sanctuary and allow movements of the herds. The principle behind these ranges is to give priority to the needs of the elephant while allowing for "compatible human activity", such as sustained-yield forestry, slow-rotation shifting cultivation, controlled livestock grazing and subsistence hunting. Where MERs are not feasible, forested migration corridors between protected areas are recommended. Migration is important not only to provide access

to food and water throughout the year, but to prevent the isolation of small populations which could be threatened by inbreeding.

One possible deterrent measure proposed by the AESG report against elephant invasion of crops is the creation of a kilometre-wide belt of land inhospitable to elephants to separate them from surrounding farmers. Crops unpalatable to the animal, such as tea and oil seeds, could be grown there. Barriers such as trenches, canals or non-lethal electric fences may also be necessary. Mr Jackson points out that such fences are now widely used in Malaysia to protect oil palm plantations which suffered damage estimated at \$100,000,000 (US\$752,600) over a period of ten years.

In some cases, elephants may need to be translocated from areas earmarked for development or where they have become a menace. In some countries, like Indonesia, where new settlements of people in less populated islands have created problems for elephants, the herds have either been driven to reserves or captured and trained for work. Mr Jackson cites Sri Lanka where the network of elephant reserves has been increased by establishing them in the catchment areas of new dams around which forest conservation is necessary.

Captive breeding is recommended for countries like Burma where elephants are being captured for the timber industry thereby severely depleting the wild herds. The main problems with this, points out Mr Jackson, is that females are unable to work for some time when raising their young and it takes about ten years for the young to mature sufficiently to be able to work.

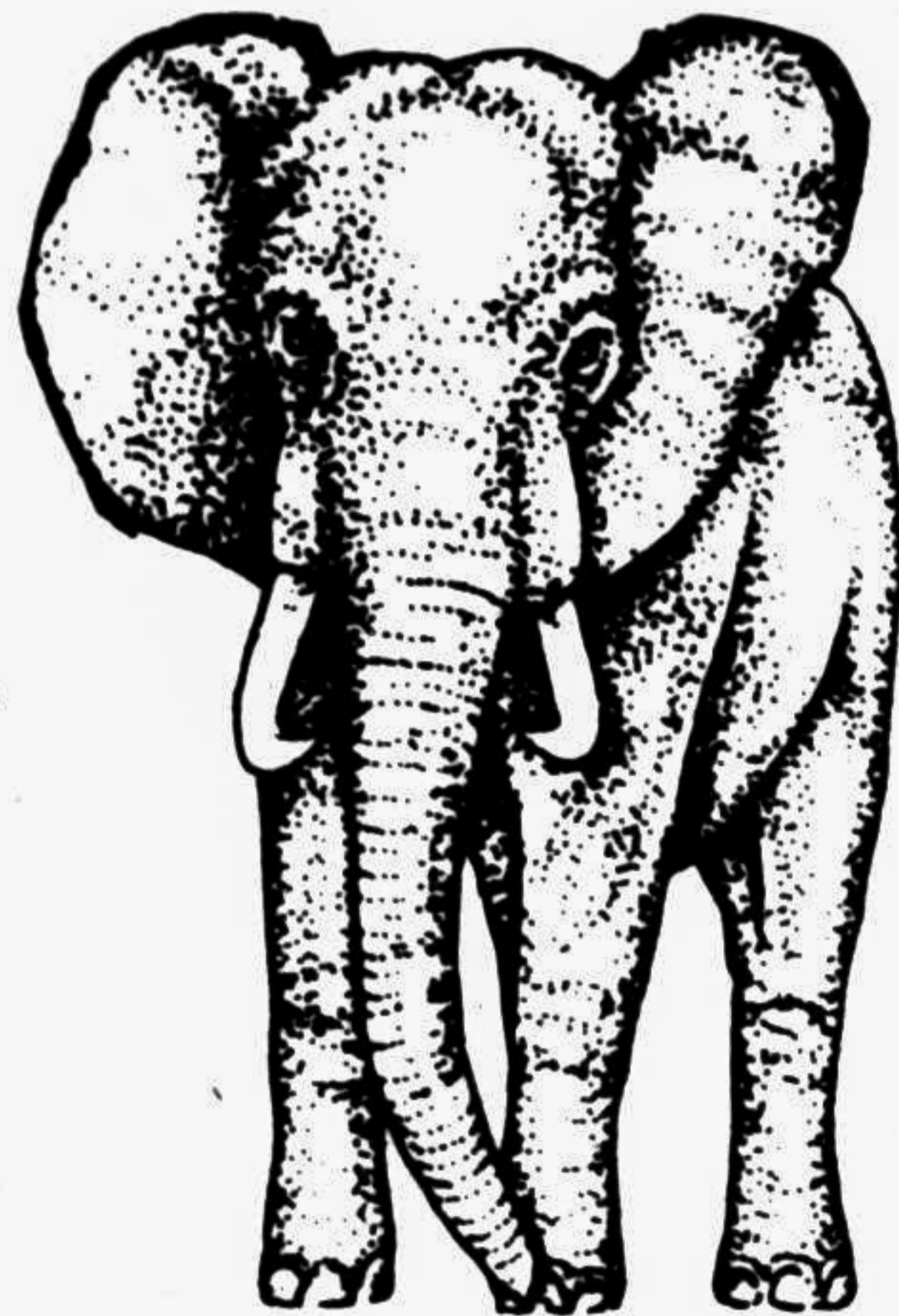
The Asian elephant has not been so threatened by poaching as the African species, because only the males (and not all of them) have ivory tusks. However, the AESG report mentions recent evidence to suggest poaching of the animals in Burma for their hides, which are apparently traded to China through northern Thailand. The report urges Asian governments to enforce the CITES' regulation of Trade in Asian elephant ivory and hide. In addition, it identifies important areas in Asia with significant elephant populations, and advocates scientific research to establish the area of habitat required by viable elephant populations. It has recommended high priority areas for action, such as the establishment of standardized elephant census techniques; study of the implications of imbalanced sex ratios (an excess of males can lead to increased crop raiding); and evaluation of habitat quality and the effectiveness of corridors between reserves.

An important step has been the establishment of an Asian Elephant Conservation Centre at the Indian Institute for Science in Bangalore, India. The Centre is developing an Asian elephant database and a directory of specialists. It is also preparing a Population Viability Analysis of Asian elephant populations to assist the countries concerned with planning management strategies.

There are strong reasons for conserving elephants in Asia. As the AESG report points out, they are a "flagship species" in that, given their broad habitat requirements, any conservation programme for these animals will automatically protect a number of other species living with them. Their conservation will thus "ensure the maintenance of biological diversity and ecological integrity on a large-scale".

From the economic point of view, their strength and skill in moving logs has made them indispensable to the logging industry in countries like Burma and Thailand where difficult terrain renders the use of heavy vehicles impossible. For the general public, the cultural and religious significance of the elephant gives it a special place in the hearts of the people. Not only is this endearing, gentle creature an object of admiration and affection in zoos and circuses, and the main attraction in brightly adorned processions, it has been worshipped for centuries by Hindus in the form of the elephant-headed God, Ganesha, the God of Wisdom and Good Fortune, and the Remover of Obstacles. For Buddhists too, it is a revered animal. There is thus hope that, given the political commitment and social will, the Asian elephant will survive.

— WWF Features



## Across-the-Divide Matches are Taking Off

Romance and marriage across the cultural and ethnic divide are taking off as never before in Britain. A survey of population trends shows that after the white population, the next highest proportion of any ethnic group born in Britain consists of those of mixed origin. One match that caused a stir in high society was that of a Jamaican Rastafarian and the daughter of multi-millionaire publisher Viscount Cowdray. Gemini News Service reports on an encouraging breakdown of barriers.

by Kofi Akumanyi

I am black, my wife is white and our daughter Annie is brown. That's the way of the world. One day all will be the same colour. Melting pot, you know."

West Indian Rastafarian Palma Xona Taylor was talking about his three-year marriage to former journalist and Oxford graduate Roseanne Pearson.

She is the youngest daughter of the 81-year-old Viscount Cowdray, whose family owns the 1.7 billion Pound group of companies. He is a musician, divorced father-of-four, and a humble London Underground train driver's son.

The controversial mixed marriage three years ago caused a stir in British high society, and highlighted an incontrovertible fact that romance and matrimony across the cultural and ethnic divide are taking off as never before in Britain.

Roseanne's parents did not agree to the match and Roseanne eloped to marry in Jamaica. In a recent British newspaper article, she said: "Palma and I liked the look of each other, and we each liked what the other had to say. What started as a friendship grew into love. It is as simple as that."

Well, not that simple, but things have come a long way since the student prince Seretse Khama, later President of Botswana, married the British woman Ruth Williams in London in 1948, creating international controversy.

Today many inter-racial partnerships among the famous provide role models for British youth. Among black personalities, heavyweight boxer Frank Bruno, Olympic athlete Kriss Akabusi, and singer Patti Boulaye all have white partners, while the marriage of comedian Lenny Henry to comedienne Dawn French is among the best known of all.

Until recently, dating and marriage bureaux for the country's minority communities were a novelty; people were simply more inclined to take

partners from their own racial backgrounds.

Those daring to breach this norm were often socially ostracized and condemned to an unhappy life.

Now, in recognition of Britain's modern multicultural identity, a number of developments are helping to break down the barriers.

Not least among these are the government policy of promoting racial equality in all spheres of national life, and multicultural education, which acts as an effective machinery to forge harmony and understanding between schoolchildren from very different backgrounds.

Perhaps the single most important factor are the simple bonds of friendship developed at school among the young, with some blossoming into permanent relationships.

The evidence of this may be gleaned from Population

Trends, the journal of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) published in London. This reveals that after the white population, the next highest proportion of any ethnic group born in Britain consists of those of mixed origin.

The survey estimated the effective minority racial population of Britain at 2.58 million or 4.7 per cent. It noted that while families of Caribbean origin tended to contain fewer dependent children than average among the ethnic minorities, those from Pakistan and Bangladesh contained more.

The institution of marriage itself faces many problems in western countries, not least the high cost of weddings and the alarming increase in divorces. A Wedding and Home magazine survey recently revealed that the average cost of a wedding in Britain this year, for instance, would be 7,300.



"HISTORY". Print. Proshanta Karmakar Buddha.

## Theatre's 'Rakkhusi'

# A Dynamic Stage Play

An Appreciation by Obaidul Haq

A stage play may not be as artistically satisfying as a short story on which it is based. Much is likely to be lost, and, in fact, is often lost in the process of transformation. Yet, the possibility of the new form emerging better than the original cannot also be totally ruled out. It all depends on the ability of the person who undertakes the job of changing one form of literary work to another.

The stage version of 'Rakkhusi' (The Demoness), a short story by Poet Nazrul Islam, is a case in point now being played at the Baily Road Mahila Samity Auditorium and the Guide House Auditorium. The production is extremely absorbing and is delighting a rapidly growing number of theatre-goers.

It redounds to the credit of the renowned playwright Professor Momtazuddin Ahmed that he has discovered in the sort story enough material for a full-length stage play. He has enlarged this short story, which takes no more than ten to fifteen minutes to read at a normal speed, to more than a 2-hour play and yet remains faithful to the great poet. It is, to say the least, a remarkable feat almost like seeing "a world in a grain of sand/And heaven in a flower."

The short story, Rakkhusi, has a single character called Bindi a Bagdi woman, who tells her sweet and sad story in it in the form of monologue. But in the play of the same title the playwright has introduced more than twenty characters, major and minor (all centering round Bindi, the central character), who are not only witnesses to but are also participants in the developments of the play. They do their parts against the social background of the time so that Bindi's verbal narration in the story becomes a visual experience of events in her life all through the play. As in the short story, Bindi dominates the play till the curtain finally falls with the other players coming and going to establish her superiority and extra-ordinariness. It is her story, the story of her frenzied love, her affection, her hopes, her dreams, her

frustration. Too strong-willed, she turns down her father's advice to marry well-to-do Banwari, elopes with Manikratan, the youngman of her choice, raises a family of three children, nourishes the hope that her marital relationship with her henpecked husband will last for even according to her own design for life. But she gets the rudest shock of her life when under the influence of conspirators her docile husband, Manik, unbelievable musters courage to beat her up, grab her money and walk out on her to marry a bitchy and wily widow called

Malati. It is an insult to her love which she cannot bear. It is a betrayal of faith destroying her fondly cherished dream of a happy family which she cannot forgive. So she kills Manik in the innocent belief that her foolish husband, otherwise a good man, has to be protected from the wiles and wickedness of Malati and the conspiracy of her jealous adversaries. She is jailed for murder and when at long last she comes out of prison she is derided as a wild woman and dubbed a Rakkhusi, a ferocious fiend. Bindi, the daring damsel,

the loving wife, the affectionate mother, the domineering matriarch presents a moving spectacle of one who has punished herself more by punishing her misguided husband.

She is looked upon as a symbol of suffering womanhood and rebellion because of which she may be said to have attained a sort of martyrdom. She has been depicted by both the story writer and the playwright as such a tragic character that a tear of sympathy is invariably shed by a reader of the story as well as by a spectator of the play. When the play ends, the audience departs with a heavy heart for Bindi, who, thanks to the play, will long linger in our memory and also in our literature as a helpless victim of a cruel and soulless society.

Because of Bindi, Rakkhusi, otherwise uttered as a curse, has become an endearing term and also as a synonym of protest and rebellion.

By their scintillating performance the players have very significantly contributed to the phenomenal success of the play. Afroza Banu will long be remembered for her painstaking and subtle portrayal of a multi-dimensional character, which by all standards of critical judgement is unique in our literature. Instead of merely playing the role, she lives the character. Keramat Mowla as Karali has displayed how powerful an actor he is. In a somewhat different type of character of Satyanarayan popular performer Afzal Sharif has convincingly exhibited his acting ability. Rezaul Karim Raju as Manik, K.S. Feroz as Banwari, Ahsanul Haq Mintu as Gobra, Munira Begum Memi as Malati and others have put up creditable performances.

'Rakkhusi' is yet another glittering jewel in the crown of Momtazuddin Ahmed, the playwright and director. He is to be thanked once again for presenting an excellent, exciting, dynamic and thoroughly enjoyable play.

\* RAKKHUSI, an adaptation of Kazi Nazrul Islam's story of the same title, by Momtaz-uddin Ahmed, is Theatre's 7th production.



Afzal Sharif and Munira Begum Memi in a scene from 'Rakkhusi', Theatre's 7th production.

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chali.

Subbanna also started Akshara Prakashana (AP), a publishing house, which has brought out over 200 titles from notable Indian and foreign writers in Kannada, the official language of Karnataka state.

The Ninasam has provided a forum for creative interaction of literature and theatre personalities in quest for the accessible and meaningful art forms right in the countryside. With the gulf between the

## Theatre Champion

town and the village widening due to resources and opportunities moving towards urban centres, the success story of Heggodu has begun assuming importance.

Art critic I. Chandramouli says: "Here is a village which caters to its own cultural needs and, in fact, creates a surplus to be shared." Adds Ashit Sen, another theatre critic: "It (Heggodu) should

make politicians and planners question their distorted model of development."

Until Subbanna received the Magasaysay Award, very few artists, connoisseurs and critics in India knew, or even had heard of, the crusade Subbanna had been carrying on for decades.

Subbanna says the Magasaysay Award is a recognition of Heggodu community's

building a life of its own against the background and within the framework of one country.

Says Subbanna: "It is a miniature model of our dreams of a new India and Ninasam is a positive move in this direction."

Ninasam is not a political. "But it is not just political," says Subbanna. "It is an integrated communication which encompasses the political and social life itself."

— GEMINI NEWS

## WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I am suffering from back-pain (lumbago) for last one year. I cannot sit for long due to back pain. But I do not feel pain if I walk or lie down in the bed. I have undergone treatment by several experts of physical medicine and neurosurgeon but no tangible result came in. I could not get rid of my back pain.

Will you kindly suggest any means through which I can get rid of this awful pain? I am now running 50.

Z. Alam, 44/B Azimpur Estate, Dhaka.

Dear Mr. Alam,

Modern medicine has yet to find a cure for back pain. Countless people all over the world suffer and learn to cope somehow. Since you have taken treatment from experts there is not much that I can suggest. But you have not mentioned exercise and weight loss. If you are overweight that you could get in touch with a good nutritionist who could help you sometimes. The bone structure is not designed to take more than a certain amount of weight. Regular exercise prescribed by the doctor has also helped many people. Best of luck.

Dear Mita,

Recently I tend to get very tense at the slightest pretext. Your example, if the maid misbehaves or there is no water or my son is late from school, I cannot control myself and behave in ways that I later regret. My husband and children are patient but sometimes they get annoyed and the situation gets worse. What can I do to control my tensions? It is bothering me a lot. I am a career woman also.

Salma, Malibagh, Dhaka.

Dear Salma,

You will have to go to the cause of your problem before looking for solutions. Some amount of tension while coping with day to day situation is normal. For the modern woman juggling family and professional demand can create stress and tension. When this situation takes a form and hampers family life then it is time to look for reasons. First, since when has this started? Go over the events of the past few months very carefully, and see if you can pinpoint the cause. Take your husband and family's help. The reason could also be physiological. Consult a doctor; most of all don't let it get you down.

Dear Mita,

Women in our culture continue to remain as second class citizens. Inspite of all the fuss being made with "Women in Development", nothing substantial has been achieved. The poor peasant women continues to live a life of grinding poverty and social restrictions. The same is the case with urban poor women who are mostly divorced, abandoned or widowed with children to look after. The rich, educated women

are apparently better off but even they are not free and independent. They are forced to conform to a set of norms and rules set by men. What do you have to say to that?

Selina Jahan, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Dear Selina,

I agree with most of what you said. Women unfortunately are still in a subordinate position and far from equal to men. But we cannot say that nothing has been achieved, some bold and innovative initiatives have changed the lives of thousand of peasant and urban poor women. What is important is to change the society's attitude towards women and their role in the society. It is our individual effort that will improve the situation of women someday. And hopefully it is not too far away.

Dear Mita,

Many years ago my husband had an affair. It is in the past now and we both decided to bury it. Since then things have been smooth and I can say we have a good marriage. Yet the memory still haunts me like a nightmare. I have tried very hard to forget but cannot. What should I do?

Anonymous, Chittagong.

Dear Anonymous,

Infidelity leaves scars which takes a long time to heal. It is too emotional an issue where it is difficult to be rational. Yet you will have to get over it and go on with your life. Remember, life is forward looking, you have to go ahead and not backwards. If you both have reconciled and come together again then please don't let the ghosts from the past spoil it. Think about all the positive aspects of his character — would you rather be with him or without him?

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.