

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

There are strong links, almost like interdependence, between environment and culture. So, a walk through a Japanese garden in a Shinto shrine in the ancient Japanese city of Kyoto, as we often did last month, is at once a deeply religious experience and an artistic pleasure. It is the environment, filled in by clean spring air, that makes all the difference.

Not surprisingly, therefore, at both Okayama where we held the international media workshop or environmental reporting and at Kyoto where we joined Mikhail Gorbachev at the launching of the International Green Cross, young artists were particularly visible, may be because of their appearance or the musical instruments they carried over their shoulders. Cassettes of their music were freely available, like posters on environment.

Finally, before the curtain came down on the Kyoto Conference, there was a spell-binding international concert that lasted nearly three hours. It was indeed a moving show, moving enough for Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachevs to go up to the stage and greet the cast. Gorbachev even sang two lines in Russian — "very badly" as a friend from Moscow, a confirmed critic of the Russian leader, said — earning some applause.

With an extremely poor representation from Asia, especially from our region, the concert was far from being as international as we would have liked it to be. But this was understandable. After all, the New York-based Global Forum which sponsored the conference and local Japanese organisers had more immediate priorities when it came to expenses than meeting a fat bill for an international concert.

The need for raising the representation from Asia and Africa in the International Green Cross at its policy-making level is another — and more urgent — matter. An engaging speaker, Avraham Soetendrop, a liberal Rabbi from the Hague had a point when, during the closing session, he somewhat jokingly referred to the average Green Cross participant as "white, male and blond" and wondered when he (or she) might turn into something different, to reflect the global character of the organisation.

But, then, this is very much up to governments and foundations in Asian countries to come forward to support the organisation that is very much in their interest to use, especially in the field of research on environment. In this respect, some kind of a lead has already come from Malaysia which made a specified modest donation towards meeting the expenses of the Kyoto conference. There was also a message from the country's Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Muhammad, which read out at the meeting chaired by Gorbachev, repeated the official Kuala Lumpur line that a Third World country must find a balance between development and protection of environment. There was also a message from President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines, whose sister, Senator Leticia Shahani, is a member of

the Board of Trustees of the new organisation. If all this is news to the government here, let it also make the relevant ministry sit up and decide to be part of the new movement. This would be in the best interest of Bangladesh which is faced with a whole range of formidable ecological challenges.

Next to musicians and artists, perhaps the most visible group of participants at the Kyoto meeting were leaders of various religions and faiths, easily identifiable due to their distinctive appearances, by robes, beards or caps. We passed them in the long corridor of the conference hall and paid our respects, with a bow, a salam or a namashkar. Some of them responded to our greetings with a gentle smile. A few stopped for quick exchanges, like Dada J P Vaswani, a Hindu guru from Poona in India, who touched my head to offer me his blessings, reciting a mantra in Sanskrit.

It is worth mentioning that the Media Workshop in Okayama started with a short prayer, in English, which was based on a verse from Holy Koran, presented by a noted Muslim scholar, Lukman Harun of Indonesia.

One part of the prayer — we all stood up in due solemnity — seemed particularly relevant to the occasion. It said, "O Lord, some places in the world are now afflicting, damages to the nature and environment are done consciously and unconsciously. We know that such damages are dangerous to human beings and all creatures... O Lord, we do believe that protecting the nature is one of our religious duties and one of our greatest tasks."

Towards the end of the conference in Kyoto came another prayer, this one offered by a leader of an Indian tribe in the United States, which too called for preservation of nature as one of our sacred obligations.

All these religious leaders were there to focus on the universality of all different faiths, to call for peace in the troubled world and to emphasise the shared concern in all scriptures for the preservation of environment. It was also part of the search for a change of values, a change in inner perceptions which scientists, parliamentarians and even Gorbachev talked about in their deeply moving speeches. But they were repeating self-evident truths. They were, in effect, preaching to the converted.

Having appreciated the importance of the exercise, we just wondered how the Kyoto message would be conveyed to the people who need it most, the fa-

natics and fundamentalists and to their victims. When and how would the Green Cross start the long haul?

While travelling abroad, we get to know Bangladeshis studying in the cities we visit, if there are any, either on scholarships or on their own meagre resources. Most of the time, we get positive reports of their performance.

In Okayama which has one of the oldest medical universities in Japan, we have nearly two dozen — we cannot recall the exact number — Bangladeshis



Okayama

studying for degree and doctorate courses. Thanks to an introduction from our family friend and occasional contributor to this paper, Mir Abdus Sattar, we spent a delightful evening with a couple, Mahmudul Huq Jinnah (no relative of the founder of Pakistan) and Ishrat Jahan Ruma, both working on their post-graduate courses on Japanese scholarships. Jinnah has quite a few local friends who owned cars. So, we started the evening visiting a number of shrines, under the expert guidance of one such Japanese friend, and ended up enjoying a typical Bangladeshi dinner, sitting on the floor, at the modest Japanese apartment of the charming couple.

Without appearing to boast about their own performance, the couple talked about good ratings earned by most

of Bangladeshi medical students in Okayama. The two feel sure that the university authorities are inclined to offer more scholarships to our boys and girls, mainly because those who are already there have done well, even in learning conversational Japanese in a matter of years.

What we liked most about the couple is its positive attitude towards life in general and to Japan in particular. We did not hear one negative comment made about the university, about its local friends or about living conditions in the 17th century city that faces an inland sea, Okayama's major attraction.

Driving back to the hotel, my wife, Nancy and I wondered if the couple's attitude to life had not been at least partly moulded by the environment in Okayama, by its shrines and gardens, lakes and cherry flowers, not to mention its sense of peace and beauty that pervade the crisp spring weather.

During a short stop-over in Manila, in our flight from Bangkok to Osaka, we paid our silent tributes to the memory of Alan Chalkley who had passed away at his home at the Philippine capital early last month. I had already sent a message of condolence to his wife, Betty Iddolono, when we had received the sad news from the Press Foundation of Asia (PFA), the organisation which Alan had served, faithfully and diligently, since its inception in mid-sixties.

Having served a number of national dailies in London — he was once the Chief Sub-editor of the Financial Times — this British journalist moved to Asia in the sixties and settled in nicely, earning his well-deserved place on the regional scene. As one of the founding fathers of PFA, he helped Amitabha Chowdhury and Tarzie Vittachi in the setting up of the Depthews Asia for which he wrote right until his death — and for this paper — when he was close to 70. Basically an economic commentator, his writing style was lucid, simple and straight-forward. This is what made Alan one of the best trainers we had in PFA, with his services often lent to newspapers in the region. In the days of my association with the Bangkok Post, I brought him as a consultant to design a financial weekly for our paper, an assignment he carried out with distinction. Editorially, the Financial Post was a success, but commercially it did not just get off the ground.

No tribute to Alan Chalkley would be complete without recognising his contribution to Development Journalism. True, Amit and Tarzie produced the concept, but it was Alan who translated it into reality, with a lot of help from Johnny Mercado, giving it the necessary editorial content. Any time we had to produce an article on development-oriented reporting, we would turn to Alan, with the knowledge and confidence that he would do a superb piece within the deadline. We cannot turn to this old friend any more. What a pity. What a loss for journalism in Asia.

With the Dawning of Europe, the Smile of the Etruscans

At a time when Europe is, not without difficulty, trying to build its unity, a sumptuous exhibition, presented in Paris before going on show in former East Berlin, reveals the part played in the birth of a European culture by a people that was long surrounded by a halo of mystery: the Etruscans.

by Pascale Teinac

They are shrouded in mystery as, for a long time, there were hesitations as to their origin and as their languages still remains unknown today, although it is written in a known alphabet, inherited from the Greeks.

the fascination exerted by the Etruscan civilisation has, in consequence, kept on growing. By presenting some 650 objects, coming from about a hundred European museums,



For the first time a sumptuous exhibition entitled "The Etruscans and Europe" was held in Paris which has allowed people to discover the most ancient and mysterious civilisation of Europe.

Since the discovery, in 1553, in Arezzo, in the heart of present-day Tuscany, of the famous chimera, a fabulous bronze animal, restored by Benvenuto Cellini, that the Medici keenly included in their collection of antiquities and which today holds pride of place in the archeological museum in Florence, a lot of progress has been made in knowledge of this peaceful, gay and beauty-loving people and

and some of which are ultra-precious and have never travelled, in "The Etruscans and Europe," the organisers of the exhibition, held at the Grand Palais in Paris, wanted to show in what way the heritage of Ancient Etruria contributed to the formation of the European culture, either directly from the most distant times, or indirectly through the intermediary of Rome. The Etruscans, who settled

in central Italy between the Tiber and the Arno, and whose civilisation, which, for a long time, was overshadowed by that of Rome, was, from the 9th to the 1st century B.C., one of the most brilliant in Ancient Italy, belonged to the Mediterranean world and to Central Europe at the same time.

As an intermediate civilisation between the advanced civilisations of the eastern Mediterranean and the northern regions which were still linked, for the most part, to the traditions of the prehistoric world, the great Italian specialist on the Etruscans, Massimo Pallottino, explains, "Etruria was able to receive the factors of progress coming from the East and transmit them (after having partly recreated them) to Europe. In a sense, it served as a grandiose 'relay station'."

What the Etruscans handed down to Europe was, above all, a certain joy in life, which is, moreover, mainly revealed by their tombs, where everything is prepared to ensure that the deceased has a pleasant life in the next world. Thus, the frescoes decorating several of the tombs in Tarquinia, of which some remarkable reproductions are presented in the exhibition, reveal dancers, musicians, joyous revellers and birds.

The Etruscans considerably developed the custom of holding banquets and their wine was reputed throughout antiquity, largely "exported" by Etruscan merchants to the French coast, Catalonia and Spain and to continental Europe by intermediaries.

Would you believe that the famous she-wolf in the Capitol, suckling Romulus and Remus, is not a Roman bronze but Etruscan? The Etruscans, whose territory was rich in minerals, were peerless bronze-workers, as attested by the superb sculptures presented in the exhibition, with tripods, chariots used in worship, thrones, animals, statues, characters used in worship which were sometimes so

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Music and Environment

Winter Turns to Saxophone to Convey his Message

Interviewed by NANCY WONG, just back from Japan

Among the many singers, musicians, dancers and artists who graced the Global Forum convention in Kyoto, Japan, one who stood out like a bright star in the galaxy was Paul Winter. He is leader of a band called the "Paul Winter Consort" consisting of six members playing the cello, piano, bass, flute and percussion will of whom compose modern music. Winter himself plays the saxophone — with such mastery that his audience is completely enraptured with the notes which flow out so sweetly and hauntingly.

One of the main issues on the Global Forum's agenda was preservation of the environment for future generations and artists from the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia performed, using their own special medium to reinforce this vital message. Paul Winter's unique compositions, "Wolf Eyes" and "Lullaby of the Humpback Whale" in which he incorporated the howling of the wolves and the poignant calls of the whales live, drew thunderous applause from his fascinated listeners.

A staunch environmentalist (since the '70s) and humanitarian, this talented musician has led his band for 25 years, played in 35 countries, devoting a fair share of his time doing benefits for causes championing the green earth movements. In fact, he has given half of the proceeds of his concerts in recent years to fund environmental or wild-life conservation groups. In recognition of his dedication to these causes, the World Wildlife Fund, the UN Environment Programme and the Humane Society of the United States have bestowed several awards on him. Music has been a way of life

for Winter since the age of six when he learned to play the piano and clarinet. So much did he love this mode of expression, he continued this path and organized dance bands in school and later, jazz bands in college at Northwestern, Chicago, USA. After completing his degree in English Literature, he decided to turn professional, concentrating on the saxophone. One of his earliest experiences of playing to foreign audiences was when he toured 23 countries in Latin America, on a goodwill programme sponsored by the State Department.

Since then, Winter has not looked back. He is founder of the Living Music Records whose albums have received five Grammy nominations. Explaining how he came to interpose the "natural voices" of animals in the wild with his own music of the saxophone, Winter told The Daily Star, "I heard the songs of the whales in 1968 in a lecture given by a marine biologist who made a study of these beautiful creatures and was so fascinated by their music that I was inspired to blend their songs with mine". The result? Exquisite sounds which reach out to one's inner being. Whaling used to be big business in the southernmost island of Japan, Kyushu. However, thanks to dedicated environmentalists like Winter, the Japanese have stopped killing them to a large extent and instead are making another big business out of "whale-watching"; as people have become aware of their natural grace and music "which moves the heavenly spheres."

Gentle in manner and soft-spoken in tone, Winter asserted that he derived much inspiration from the natural species. One such animal is the



Paul Winter

wolf, much maligned by man — one only needs to recall popular children's stories like Red Riding Hood and the "big bad wolf" and expressions like "wolf in sheep's clothing" to note this fact. The reality is that wolves have been around the earth for 30 million years and have been much misunderstood and mistreated by man, to the extent that they have become virtually extinct.

They are actually quite harmless unless provoked. In the United States, there used to be wolves in all the states, now there are only two which have them. The last wolf in Japan was killed in the last century. What a pity! Especially after one has heard the eerily beautiful music of their howls from Winter's live recording and his saxophone. Rare as wolves have be-

The Holiest Buddhist Shrine

Gamini Navaratne writes from Colombo

Buddhists worldwide are agitated about a dispute over control of their holiest shrine at Gaya in Bihar state, north India.

The Mahabodhi Temple was built during Emperor Asoka's reign more than 2,500 years ago. It stands next to the Bodhi (wisdom) tree under which Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and came to be known as the Buddha.

Last September, thousands of Buddhists set off from Nagpur, west India, to Gaya on a 6,000 Kms "march for religion" (dharma pada yatra) for the "liberation" of the temple. They planned to form a human chain around it.

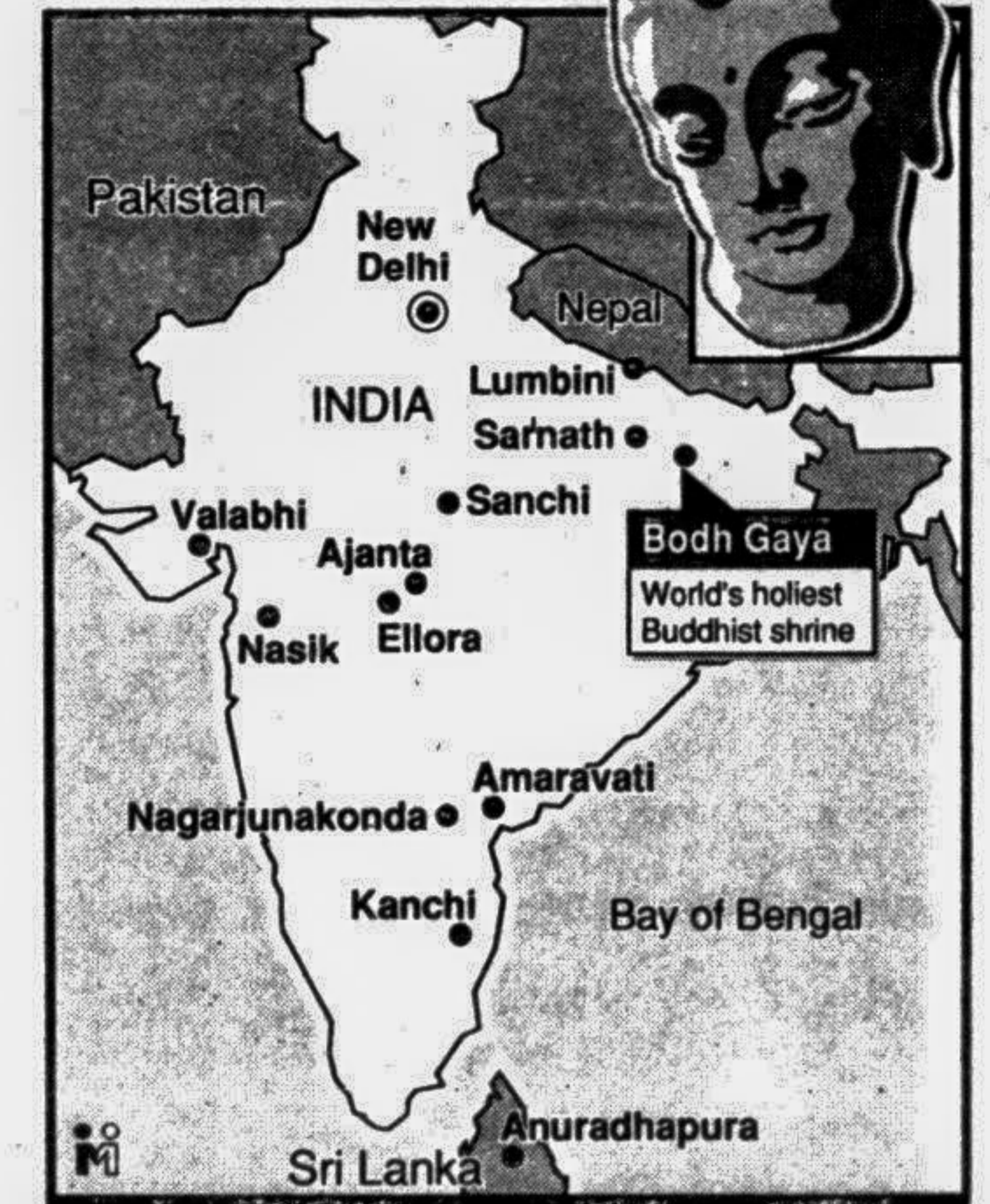
The march was led by a Japanese monk, 52-year old Nagarjuna Suroi Sassai, who has lived in India for 25 years. The marchers reached Gaya after 25 days.

Violence was avoided because Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav took precau-

Buddhists worldwide are demanding full control over the Mahabodhi Temple at Gaya in north India. The temple is the holiest of all Buddhist shrines. It stands beside the tree under which Buddha is supposed to have attained enlightenment.

Places of Buddhist worship

Buddha (the enlightened) founder of Buddhism, circa 563-483 BC



India has over 1,000 Buddhist shrines

come, how did Winter come to hear their howls? They tend to run in packs and feel the need to communicate with other packs, so they howl across the wilds. I went with some friends to the woods in Minnesota and we imitated their howls — with the hope of getting some response. To our immense delight, they answered back and I had the good fortune of meeting a wolf face to face and looking into his deep amber eyes glittering in the dark forest. I immediately felt re-connected to the earth of millions of years ago. Winter recalled. This moving experience was the inspiration for his splendid composition, "Wolf Eyes". Before long, he had the whole audience enthusiastically trying out wolf howls — and it turned out to be quite a symphony!

Imbued with the love of nature and the planet on which we live, Winter expresses his reverence for life by incorporating songs and sounds of other animals such as the dolphin and sea lion, both well known for their melodious music; as well as the glorious birds of the Amazon. His favourite country is Brazil, its people, music and culture serving as a magnet to him. Speaking of developing countries, he said: "Most have beautiful music and it is this as a whole which awakens the people of the world to the soul of its culture".

rain security precautions to prevent the marchers entering the temple en masse. Tempers were temporarily assuaged by his public assurance that the issue would soon be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

Suroi Sassai has said that if the Chief Minister does not keep his word, the agitation will be resumed. In this he has the support of countries with large Buddhist populations, particularly Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar (formerly Burma), Japan, Laos and Cambodia.

Besides the Mahabodhi Temple, in which Sri Lanka

has a vested interest because it helped to restore it, Thailand, Myanmar and Japanese temples have also been built in the sprawling shrine complex. Throughout the year thousands of pilgrims and foreign tourists visit this holiest Buddhist shrine in the world.

When Buddhism in India declined from about the 11th Century, the king of Gauda, Sasanka, whose rule extended to the Gaya region, had the Bodhi tree cut down, destroyed the monasteries in the area and ordered the removal of the Buddha image. After Sasanka died in 630

AD, the king of Magadh (the present Bihar state), re-erected the Bodhi tree and put up around it a railing of granite pillars, some of which survive today. He restored the Buddha images.

In later years the site was taken over by a succession of Hindu holymen who wanted to make it a Hindu place of worship, regarding the Buddha as the ninth in the Hindu pantheon of deities beginning with Shiva.

It was left to a Sri Lankan monk, Anagrika Dharmapala, to stake a claim for the hallowed shrine as well as other places of Buddhist worship in India. He led a Buddhist revival in India in the early 20th Century under the Mahabodhi Society, of which he was the founder.

After much litigation, the courts reached a compromise settlement to allow control of the shrine by five Hindu and four Buddhist representatives. This arrangement has continued to date. Now the Buddhists have begun to demand sole control.

There are estimated to be more than 1,000 Buddhist temples in India. Many are neglected. According to the latest census figures, India has 15 million Buddhists. Suroi Sassai claims this is a gross underestimate. He says the scattered Buddhist populations in the hill areas of the north-eastern states of Assam, Nagaland and Sikkim, have not been properly counted.

During an official trip last November, Sri Lanka's assassinated President Ranasinghe Premadasa, made a point of visiting Gaya. He promised to have a gilded fence built around the Bodhi tree, similar to that put around the sapling from it that was planted at Anuradhapura, in the north-central province of Sri Lanka, 2,300 years ago.

Now a gnarled old tree, it is also an object of veneration of Buddhist throughout the world. — GEMINI NEWS

GEMINI NAVARATNE is a senior Sri Lankan journalist and Editor of "Sandesha" news agency.

Mita being on professional tour abroad "WRITE TO MITA" column is held over for three weeks. Inconvenience caused to the esteemed readers is regretted.