

People and Places

Ravaged by Flood, yet Nepalis Go Lively for Festivity

by Inam Ahmed, back from Nepal

In the beginning, there were only clouds, then suddenly burst into view golden streaks of water amazingly hanging down from the sky. For a while, the sense of space was lost and sky and the land intermingled in a perceptual confusion.

A little later, the vision cleared and I found the golden streaks to be rivers coming down the high mountains. The after sun reflects golden on the gushing water.

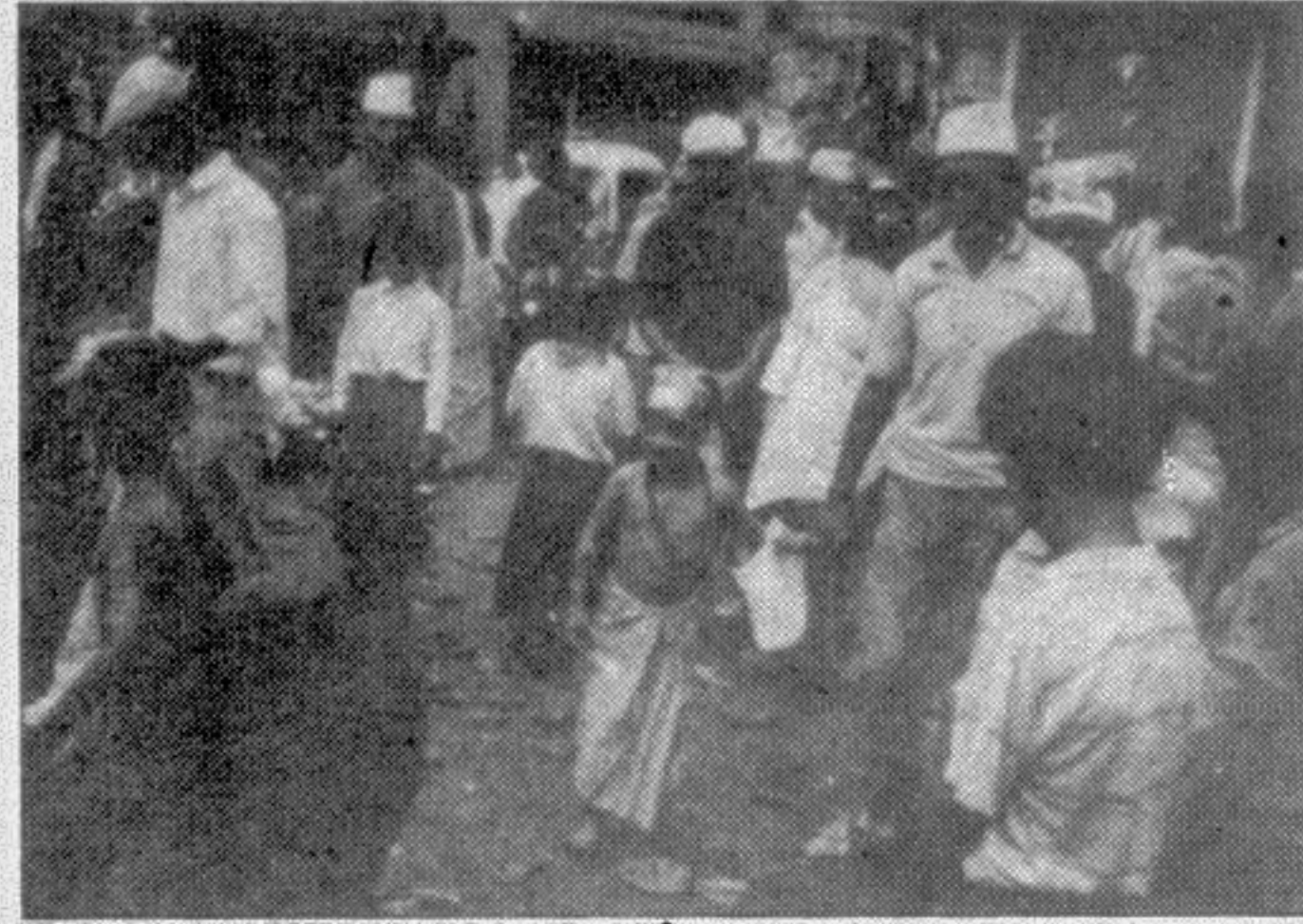
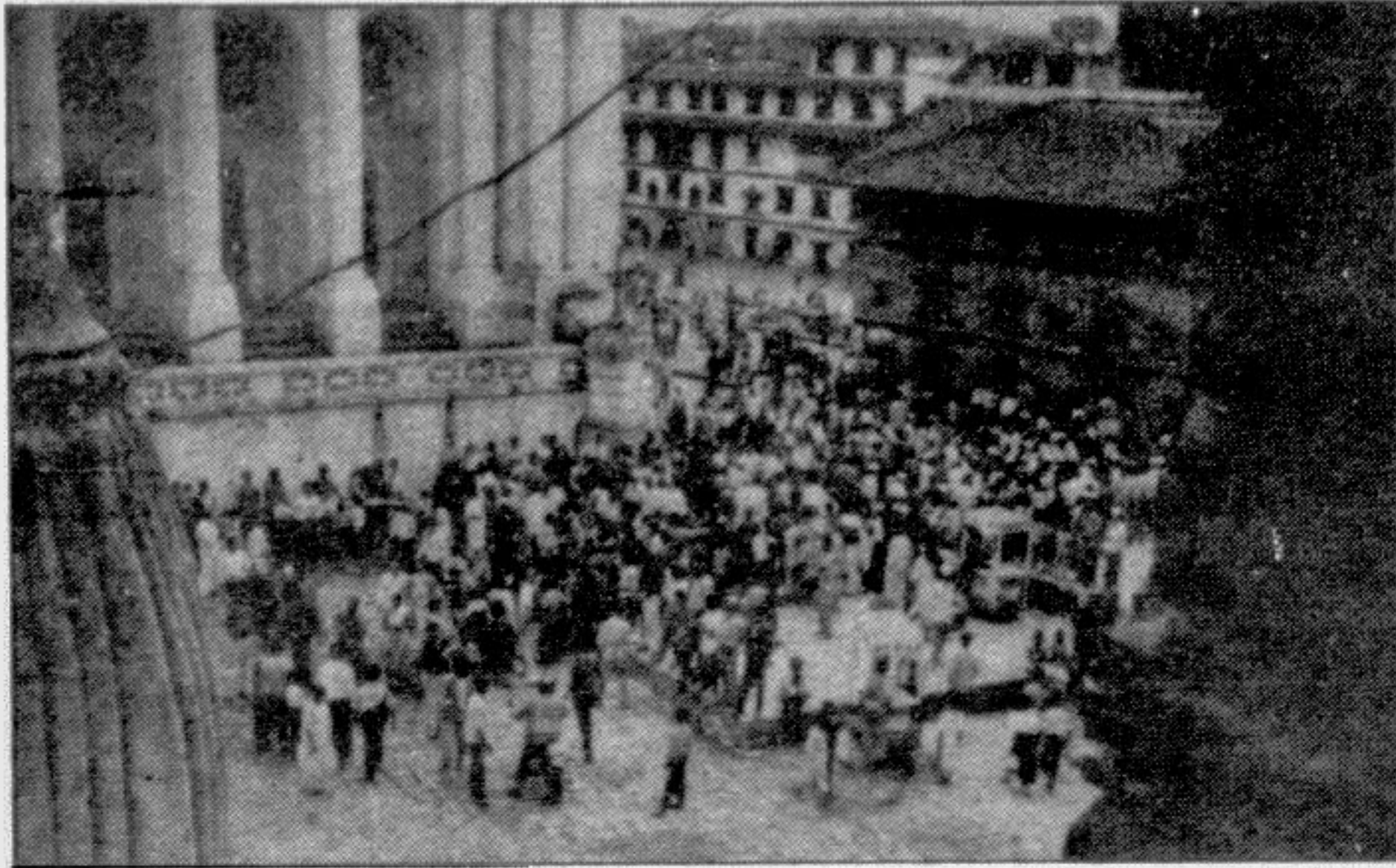
Then the aircraft passed over hills and the Tribhuban Airport popped into view. With a soft jerk, it was Kathmandu. Coming down the ladder, I saw an Indian Airlines aircraft unloading relief goods which immediately reminds that the country had just witnessed a devastating flood, probably the worst one in its history.

As the night descended, Kathmandu turned into a candlelight city with the loadshedding going on. Some major hydroelectricity projects were damaged in the flood. Long queues of motorists and bikers waited outside gas stations for hours to get their ration of petrol. People lined up with jerrycans for kerosene. Taxi fares doubled and tripled. The supply roads from India were snapped off. Other roads going out of the city were also cut off. As miseries mounted, people's daily query was "when will the roads be restored?"

Despite the flood and destruction, the Nepalis did not forget to observe their traditional festivals. It was the 'gai jatra' (cow journey) for the Nepalis on August 2. The grand festival started from the morning. Those people who had lost their near and dear ones like parents, brothers and sisters thronged the Kathmandu streets dressed in colourful and funny dresses. They had their faces painted like that of cows

and wore paper masks. They included children of hardly three years old to adults. There was the tiny tot in the lap of his uncle wearing a 'gerua dhott'. There was the group of four young boys all in the cow dresses.

Coming from all corners of the city, they converged at Darbar Marge Square. Number of 40 to 50 feet high temples surround the square. The deep tones of bells ringing from the temples fill the air with a kind of mysticism. In contrast to this, band parties played light and happy tunes on trumpets. People bring basketful of luchs, fruits and vegetables which they offer to those who have lost



The participants: Many of them lost their kins in the ravages of flood
Darbar Square: As lively as before



The boy lost his sister



The sacred cow: Centrepiece of festival



Unusual mask: Mark of festivity

death and went into a deep melancholic mood. The king then arranged a funfare and the queen's good mood returned back. From then on the festival takes place each year.

The philosophical side is that the day is observed to remember and pay homage to the dead. It reminds that man is mortal, but death is not to be feared. It is only those corrupt within, who fear death.

Writing about Kathmandu and not mentioning Thamel would be a crime for any outsider. Thamel is the tourist hangout in Kathmandu. It is in fact a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds.

It is a place of hotels, restaurants and shops, but it is more than that to the tourists. The shops literally bursting with decorative pieces including masks, wall hangings, statues and what nots.

Walking along the narrow streets of Thamel, you will be charmed by the mountain tune of a flute. Turning the corner, you will find the young man vending flutes. A few steps forward, more esoteric tunes of the mountains on the strings will enthrall your ears, a man selling an instrument looking a bit like sarengi, and then an Italian song in slow tempo from an Italian restaurant fills the air.

Another few steps, and a Nepali dressed in shabby clothes will approach you from the sides and while crossing will whisper into your ears, "Sir, need smoke, drugs?"

Well, all these and many more together is Thamel, a place that Nepalis seldom visit because of its notoriety for drugs, prostitution and sky-high prices of goods.

But thousands of tourists, mostly western, love this place and roam the streets in their eternal shorts and T-shirts with no apparent goals.

The people belong to the land

The United Nations has declared 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. There are 250 million indigenous people worldwide - four per cent of the population - living in more than 70 countries. They continue to be the poorest and the most disadvantaged groups in every society, with least health and educational facilities.

Unlike the rest of the world which believes that the land belongs to the people, the indigenous people believe that the people belong to the land. Their names - Hmong, Inuit, Kayapo, Maori, Saami - generally mean simply people and the name they give to their territories can be translated as our land.



Aborigines Want Their Land Back

ACROSS Australia the fight by more than 250,000 indigenous people continues as the nation's original settlers seek land rights and official government recognition that they are indeed the real owners of the planet's largest island and smallest continent. The fight, especially over the past decade, has been a bitter one.

Supporting the indigenous people against the majority of the non-indigenous population is the Australian Labour Government which has, since coming to power in 1983, granted more concessions than ever before, especially in handing back to the Aborigines vast tracts of what for years has been classed by them as tribal land.

Included in these politically motivated land grants are the massive Kakadu Reserve in the

After 205 years of European domination, Australia's indigenous people are not much closer to assimilation than they were when the First Fleet sailed into Sydney Harbour to found the convict colony in 1788. Increasingly, the Aborigines are claiming their land back from the government. In this Year of Indigenous People, they continue to face prejudice and live in appalling poverty.

Jeff Curran writes from Parramatta, Australia

Northern Territory and Australia's world famous monolith Ayers Rock, now known against the Aboriginal name of Uluru.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Robert Tickner has announced his support for a resurgence of Aboriginal place names to celebrate the Year of Indigenous People.

Tickner, in a national broadcast, said: "I am in full support

of the Geographical Names Board of New South Wales in the board's plan to undertake a national distribution of Aboriginal names to replace European names. It's the first step towards renaming Australian landmarks."

This concession followed in the wake of several apologies to Aboriginal leaders by Prime Minister Paul Keating for what he calls the murder and at-

tempted genocide of the indigenous people since British Captain Arthur Phillip unfurled the Union Jack at Sydney Cove on January 26, 1788. This set up the convict colony that formed the nucleus of a society which eventually shed the shackles of imprisonment to become the nation it is today.

Fuelling the flames of discontent felt by the dispossessed indigenous people is an Australian High Court judgement handed down on June 3, 1992, in the case of Mabo v. Queensland. The late Eddie Mabo and two fellow tribal members sought legal recognition of traditional ownership of Murray Island off the north Australian coast.

In a six-to-one judgement, the High Court ruled against the doctrine that Australia belonged to no one - terra nullus - at the time of European settlement, meaning that the British Crown did not have absolute control over it. The decision was hailed by the Aboriginal Northern Land Council chairman, Galarway Unupingu.

Yunupingu said: "The Mabo v Queensland High Court ruling means Aboriginal people can claim land anywhere in Australia on the basis of the land being permanently ours."

The council, says Yunupingu, is now pressing its case to claim the mineral rights to 500,000 square kilometres of

with China's 55 minorities.

The UN obediently banded the Dalai Lama on grounds of administrative difficulty, but the ban backfired when it was exposed in the world's media. Two thousand NGOs and countless journalists gave him a hero's welcome when he talked about human rights and universal responsibility at a huge fringe meeting. There was another walkout threat from a furious Beijing, and a muted protest from the UN.

The Dalai Lama dismissed the view that human rights are a cynical tool used by Western governments to limit the economic advance of Asian countries. He said: "It is the nature of all human beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity. I do not see any contradiction between the need for economic development and human rights. It is mainly the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes who oppose the universality of human rights... Claims to sovereignty are not a licence to mistreat one's citizens. It is not only our right but our duty to help our brothers and sisters if they are being brutally treated."

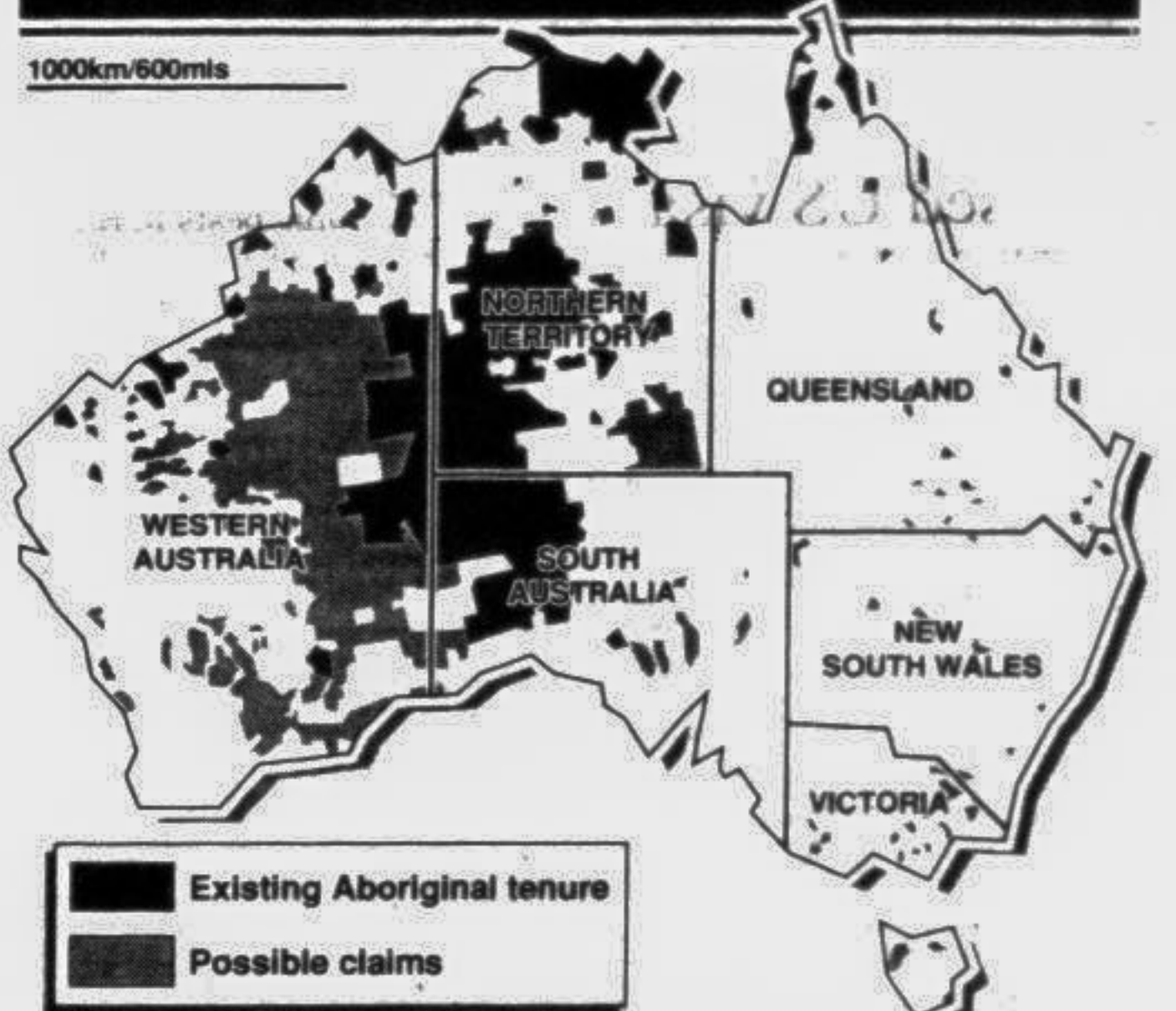
He called for a fairer distribution of the world's resources, and said the NGOs had a key role to play in the struggle for human rights.

The conference's declaration tamed called for redrafting of earlier proposals, and an International Decade of Indigenous Peoples - to accomplish what the year won't - and a UN forum to air their grievances. It pussyfooted by adding that indigenous rights should not infringe political unity or territorial integrity. Some observers saw this as a downgrading of human rights in favour of national sovereignty.

The United States, Iraq and Israel made strange bedfellows by claiming that foreign occupation and denial of self-determination were not necessarily a violation of human rights.

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Aboriginal land claims



In 1788 when Britain "discovered" Australia, 400,000 aborigines lived there. Today they number 257,000, form only one per cent of total population and claim 10 per cent of land.

Another victory for the indigenous people was the choice of Yunupingu's young brother Mandawuy as 1993 Australian of the Year, announced by Keating. Mandawuy, 35, is founder and leader of the rock band Yothu Yindi, now world famous for its fusion of Western rock and Aborigine, the oldest surviving cultural traditions on north Australian land.

Said Mandawuy: "Black and white can be interpreted this way: You have your black system here and you have your white system here. Somehow they have to find a way to meet

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Unofficial Groups Highlight Native Rights

The world's indigenous peoples continue to suffer from oppression, racism and legal theft. The peoples' claims to self-rule are seen as security threats by many countries. At the UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, China threatened to walk out if non-governmental organisations were allowed to have a hand in redrafting the Declaration of Human Rights. Gemini News Service reports on the disappointment and frustration felt by many at the conference who were hoping for greater gains for indigenous peoples.

by Marcus Harrison

INDIGENOUS peoples are the descendants of those who - like the Australian Aborigines - inhabited a country long before its conquest and colonisation. They usually retain their own customs. The term includes other minority

populations which came later, and were naturalised.

The peoples number more than 250 million and live in over 70 countries. They suffer from oppression, colonial racism and legal theft. For example, the annual value of medicines made from plants that the indigenous people have found exceeds \$43 billion, but they hardly ever share in the profits.

The Yanomani of Brazil and the Siberian minorities were evicted from their gold-rich lands. Indonesia invaded West Papua and stole tribal land for colonial resettlement, financed by the World Bank; the biggest mineral site in West Papua belongs to investors from Japan, the European Community and the United States.

Viktor Katshepo, speaking for West Papua in British parliament, said: "Indonesia stole our national resources, and our

human and political rights. We have protested to the United Nations, but they are more interested in member states than peoples."

The peoples' claims for self-rule are seen as threats to state security, and are often met with jail terms, forced labour, rape and murder. Their children are usually without education or health care, and often work in sweatshops, brothels or equally degrading industries.

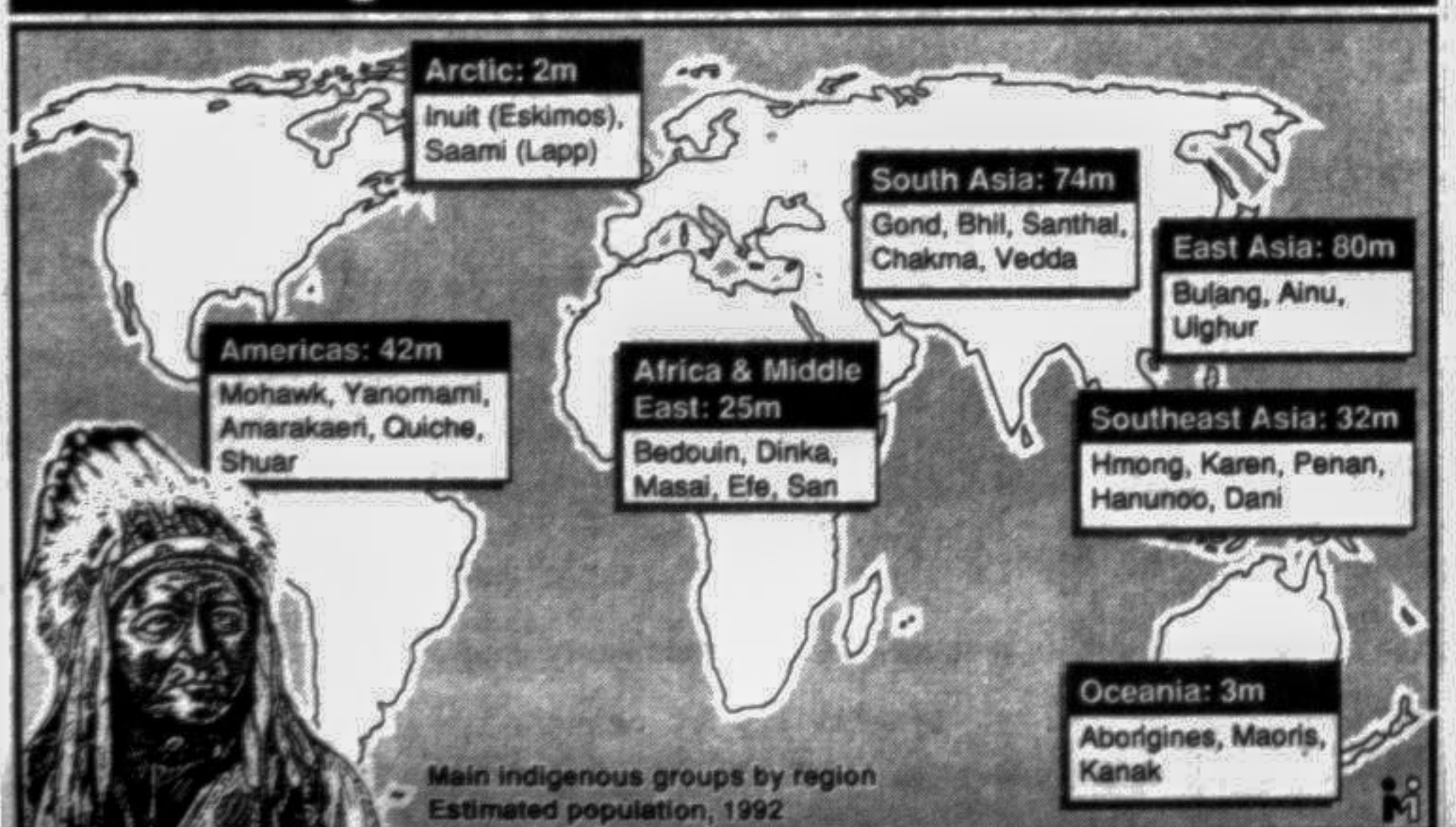
As state repression steadily became worse and the peoples became more vocal, the UN declared 1993 The Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted in 1948, and a new one was needed for indigenous rights. Proposals for self-rule, rights of economic development, return of stolen lands, and control of the peoples' own resources were now envisaged.

Indigenous rights were high on the agenda of the UN Conference of Human Rights in Vienna in June. The conference was meant to chart the progress since the end of the Cold War and the way forward. It was attended by about 2,100 delegates from 171 states, and 3,000 delegates from about 2,000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Some Asian countries led by China, stunned the delegates by flatly stating at the outset: "There are no absolute individual rights and freedoms. Nobody shall place his own rights above those of the state."

With Russia out of the way, China feared that it could be the main target for criticism from the NGOs, and threatened to walk out if they helped to draft the final declaration.

The indigenous world



The world has more than 250 million indigenous peoples living in 70 countries. In most countries they are a minority. But in Greenland they are 90% of population, in Papua New Guinea 77% and in Bolivia 70%.

No Indian Summer in Argentina

Argentina has one of the worst records for eradicating its indigenous population. The Indian frontier was seen as a dividing line between civilisation and barbarism. Argentinians never planned to integrate Indians into their society. Gemini News Service recounts the saga of death and destruction that followed the Spanish conquest of Latin America.

Frank Nowikowski writes from Buenos Aires

THE United Nations' celebration of 1993 as the Year of Indigenous Peoples means little for Argentina's Indians.

No South American country has eradicated its indigenous elements further than Argentina. In some countries the conquering Spaniards tried to integrate with indigenous cultures. But in the Rio de la Plata area - the embryonic Argentina - the Indian frontier was seen as a dividing line between civilisation and barbarism.

The first Spanish settlements on the Rio de la Plata were

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Americas' first peoples

