

MY WORLD

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It may be nothing unusual for a journalist to pursue an idea for research for months and even for years. However, it is unique when he stays with the project for decades, expands the area of his study and turns it into a regional venture.

It is all the more significant when the subject of the study is hardly of the so-called popular interest. Instead, a little technical, it relates to the battle for survival of three nations in South Asia — India, Bangladesh and Nepal — or four, when Bhutan is included, as it eventually should be, in the project.

It is all about water or, to be more specific, about the river sharing arrangement among India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

The man who is behind the study — it is really his brainchild — is none other than the award-winning distinguished journalist, George Verghese of India.

Nearly two decades ago, I sat in the austere room of Verghese in the *Hindustan Times* in New Delhi where he then worked as its Chief Editor with distinction — another daily he served in the same position for years in the *Indian Express* — and I looked through his full-page magazine report outlining how the three countries — Nepal, Bangladesh and India — could work together to tackle their water problem on multi-lateral basis.

Last week, when George arrived in Dhaka for a seminar, we had a quiet dinner at the Parjatan hotel at Mahakhali and caught up with all the developments in my friend's water sharing project. George's persistence has indeed paid off.

Now a leading Research Professor of the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research — George resigned from the editorship of the *Indian Express* a few years ago — he was here to participate at a three-country meeting of leading Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) on the water problem in the region. The other two delegations — from Bangladesh and Nepal — were also of high-level professional calibre. Dhaka was represented by the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, led by its chairman, Quazi Khaliqzaman Ahmed and Nepal by B B Pradhan of the Institute of Integrated Development, Kathmandu.

What happens next is something for our reporting desk to find out.

THE involvement of George Verghese in the work on the river sharing system — his recent publication 'Waters of Hope' is acclaimed by experts on the subject — seems to overshadow his journalistic achievements. My friends in India regarded him as a good editor and regretted when he left the profession twice, first to join the Gandhi Foundation, I believe, in the seventies when we met a few times in the Indian capital and much later, to take up his present position at the Centre for Policy Research. This time, the departure of George who is now close to sixty, from the profession — but not from writing — may well be for a long

period.

Once an Indian friend told me, with a touch of envy, that every intellectual from Kerala, the home state of Verghese, has an abiding concern for social work, no matter what he (or she) may do for a living. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) spring up all over the province, step up research, promote education, identify new areas of voluntary work and, of course, carry the message of family planning to the remotest part of the state. These are exactly the fields where the performance of Kerala is just outstanding.

The high point of George's journalistic achievement is his winning the prestigious

Magsaysay Award for Journalism, again some time in the seventies — the exact year escapes my memory — for his spirited stand on press freedom. The issue was a clear-cut one, as far as Verghese was concerned, but one that earned New Delhi a lot of justified international criticisms, the annexation of the tiny state of Sikkim by India. Another Indian journalist who did a lot of work on this dismal affair, giving a blow-by-blow account of the taking over of the Himalayan kingdom in his book, was my fellow-Bengalee, Sunanda Dutta-Roy Chowdhury of the *Statesman*.

As an editor, Verghese was forthright, without



A reproduction from an international calendar on water for 1993 — artist, Faith Ringgold, titled 'Picnic at Giverny', a painting on quilt, a medium extensively used in Bangladesh. The calendar designed and produced by the US-based Global Forum, emphasises the importance of water in ecology.

being irresponsible, setting his own standards in balanced writing, thus often falling out with owners of his publications and the Indian authorities.

During our dinner here last week, we touched on one of his major disappointments, the failure, deliberate or otherwise, of successive governments in India to implement what is known as the 'Verghese Report' for the restructuring of the country's electronic media, especially Doordarshan. Then a nominated member of the Upper House, Verghese was assigned this job by the then Janata Government of Morarji Desai.

'Whatever happened to the Report, George?'

I asked my friend.

'It has been pushed under the carpet or collecting dust somewhere,' he replied in a sad tone.

SINCE we are hardly making any progress in giving English its rightful place in our educational, social and cultural life, perhaps the second best thing we can do is to introduce appropriate words and expressions from this western language into Bangla.

So, we now have *Gano Forum*, the name of a new political organisation set up here last week. Conservatives may well scream that Kamal Hossain has taken too much liberty with the language — or may be it was a consensus resolution — but they should be happy that 'Democratic Forum' may no longer be in vogue, with its meaning explained to our rural population, peasants in Barisal or the fishing folk in Sunamganj. On second thoughts, it might be a good thing to tell a cross-section of our impoverished millions in rural Bangladesh what democracy is all about.

It is interesting that names of major parties, such as the ruling party and the opposition, are either fully or partly in English.

In other parts of Asia, the trend is mixed. In a number of countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, the names of major parties are all in English. As one moves eastward, to China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan, the names are largely — the Liberal Democratic Party is an exception — in local languages.

During the days of Sukarno in Indonesia, the then President of the archipelago showed a fascination not only in using the local language but also in coining colourful, almost musical, acronyms. The most popular one being NASSACOM, the coalition of various parties, representing nationalist, socialist and communist groupings. Another one that one remembers rather vividly is GANEFO, the games of new emerging states, or something to that effect.

After all these years, one would certainly identify all kinds of mistakes and blunders committed by the founder-president of Indonesia. But it is hard to deny that he brought colour to his country, even when millions of his people stood on the brink of starvation.

Amenophis III, the "Sun Pharaoh"

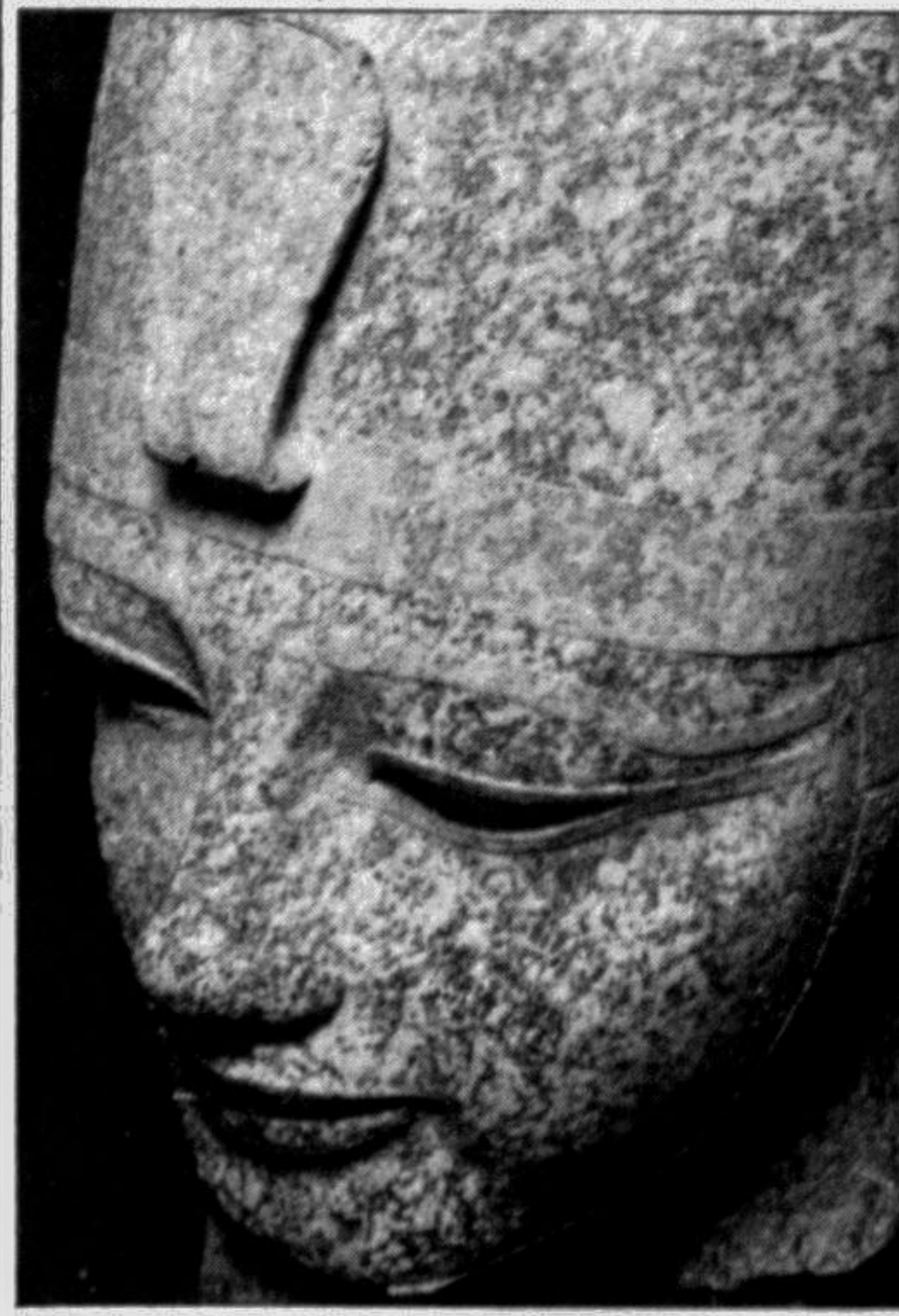
by Pascale Teinac

THE name does not appear usurped when one examines the long, peaceful and sumptuous reign of this Pharaoh, the ninth king of the 18th dynasty who lived in the 14th century BC. This somewhat mysterious Pharaoh was unfairly outshone by the renown of his son, Amenophis IV.

Akhenaton, the heretic Pharaoh who devoted himself to the single worship of the sun god Aton, or of his grandson Tutankhamen, whose tomb gave up so many treasures.

Amenophis III came to the throne at the age of 10 and ruled from 1391 to 1353 BC. It

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The colossal head of Amenophis III, the "Sun Pharaoh" exhibited in Grand Palais in Paris

Pakistan, in camps "Somewhere inside Afghanistan." Senior security official and other sources also do not reject the possibility of some Arab-managed training camps still operating in Afghanistan, since these camps definitely existed during the course of the war.

The most talked about, relatively speaking, sponsor of Arab training camps during the war was the late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, whose NGO called Maktaba-i-Khidmat (Services Office for Afghanistan) is still operational in Peshawar. A fiery orator, Sheikh Azzam was a key figure in the recruitment process. His sermons in Arabic exhorting Muslims to join the jihad were video-taped and distributed in many Muslim countries around the world. Senior Pakistani officials and other reliable sources confirm that the Services Office ran training camps for Arab fighters inside Afghanistan (initially in some areas of Pakistan as well) besides financing combat weapons to the Mujahideen during the war. Sheikh Azzam met a bloody end when a car bomb below him to bits a few years ago in Peshawar. The bomb was allegedly plotted by Hekmatyar's

non-fighter Arab now living in Peshawar. According to one fighter, some of his contemporaries even went to Bosnia but returned soon after because they found the Bosnian Muslims "too Europeanised to be able to understand fundamentalism."

The criteria for jihad, it appears, is quite clear. The enemy must be well-defined and the jihad must be for an Islamic system of government. This seems to be more important for these Arabs than the fact that by acting like mercenaries, they can be recruited for battle by any Muslim group such as the ones fighting in Central Asian Republics like Tajikistan.

There appears to be nothing to stop these fighters from becoming mercenaries given the mobility available to them. Al-Makkawal, for example, claims that he has been to nearly all the Muslim countries, the Central Asian states as well as the Kashmir valley ever since he first arrived in Pakistan on August 19, 1989. Unlike most other fighters, Makkawal is not averse to giving interviews because the Egyptian government for alleged anti-state activities after which the Pakistan government issued his extermination orders on October 19, 1992, for "forming a like-minded group of 10 to 12 disgruntled Egyptians who are now threatening to carry out terrorist operations against the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad." Makkawal rebuts these allegations, arguing that the venue of his struggle is Egypt and not Pakistan. "We are here only for training. After that, we will move on to the next stage," he says. He won't say what he means by the next stage.

There are, however, some indications of what Makkawal might be hinting at. The Herald's impression was that many among these Arab fighters were looking toward a stage where some sort of organised struggle for a true Islamic society might become possible. In the context of their struggle, effective organisation is one thing which they desperately need because at the moment they appear to be totally on their own. Their mobility, and the fact that a former ISI officer, Major Amir, remained the Director of Immigration at the Karachi Airport for as long as Mian Nawaz Sharif was in power, does indicate some sort of informal help from well-placed ISI mavericks. But this can, by no stretch of the imagination, be interpreted as organised support. Although some highly motivated and resourceful people like former ISI chief, General (ret'd) Hamid Gul, appear to be trying their best to transform their energies and potential into an organised force, so far nothing appears to have come of these efforts except for some dreamy names like the Islamic Military Group. And given the track record of most Islamic movements, it may be a long time before the fighters can inject some sense of uniformity or organisation into what they consider to be a legitimate struggle against western influences on the Islamic world.

— Aamer Ahmed Khan

Is a War Tribunal Enough to Try Crimes against Humanity?

HISTORY is repeating itself in the most frightening way. Everyday, thanks to CNN and BBC, we come across stories of mass murders, concentration camps, children without faces or limbs, mass graves and mass rapes in the bloody war of hatred in former Yugoslavia. The words and images haunt us with an eerie familiarity reminding us of World War II holocaust. The only difference is that this time the victims are Muslims instead of Jews and that the world sits by and watches even after promising so convincingly 40 years ago that it would never let such crimes be committed again.

Since 1946, the international community has formed conventions, international customary and treaty law that condemn these war crimes and demand punishment for the criminals. The Geneva Conventions, for example, accepted by Yugoslavia, state the duties of all belligerents to protect both the members of opposing forces and civilian populations. The conventions describe the duties of states to search for and prosecute all those who may have committed "grave breaches" of the convention by killing, torture (including rape), illegal deportation or illegal imprisonment.

ment. Needless to say that the warring factions, especially the Serb militia, have committed 'grave breaches' of every condition of the convention.

An international war tribunal akin to the Nuremberg war trial has been formed to prosecute those responsible for the gross crimes that have been committed every day in the name of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia and other former Yugoslav republics. A documentary film titled 'Crimes Against Humanity' presented by USIS in Dhaka recently, describes the functions of the tribunal and the way it will proceed to find and try the criminals. One of the most important features of the tribunal's proceedings is that defendants will be held individually responsible for the charges against them and will not be able to plead that they 'acted under orders' or that the alleged crimes were actually carried out by subordinates.

Children with severed limbs, women who have lost their sons and husbands, young girls who have been tortured and raped repeatedly and old men who have lost all meaning in life — these are the recurring images of this powerful and shocking film.

The stories recounted in the

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

film by the victims of war are horrible and terrifying. A woman whose brother was slaughtered by Serbs recalls how her village was attacked and people were shot or thrown into the fire in front of their families. Heart rendering accounts of young girls describes how they were selected and taken by Serb soldiers to be beaten and raped. A doctor barely able to hold back his tears remembers how he saw a group of little girls playing outside the hospital be blown into pieces by shell fire right before his eyes.

James O'Dea of Amnesty International comments in the documentary that one of the strategies adopted by the Serb militia has been the removal of key people from each village and town. The killings are therefore, often targeted and carried out in a systematic way. Others are more random and done to terrorize the victims into leaving — all this a part of the 'cleansing' process.

The film also touches upon the crimes of not letting humanitarian aid to reach the refugees, of hospitals being shelled and doctors being killed while trying to help the wounded — all gross breaches

of the Geneva Convention.

The psychological effects of people who have been ripped of their homes, family members and self respect have been devastating. In the documentary, a psychologist comments that the children relive everything, they are too frightened to eat or sleep and their drawings repeatedly depict the violence and destruction.

The main task for the tribunal is gathering evidence, something that is both difficult and time consuming. So far, however, evidence has been plenty. Testimonials from victims are pouring in everyday. The stories are similar enough to ensure credibility and all tell of the grossest violations of human rights.

Diane Anne Warburton, representing an EC commission investigating the rape of women by soldiers, said that the testimonials indicated a regular pattern of attack on villages and even the rapes were of a public nature. Women were separated from their families and then selected from groups to be raped and beaten. Many of the rape victims knew their assailants who were often members of the same neighbourhood. All of a sudden they had

changed into monsters killing, raping and burning mercilessly.

Physical evidence is also being gathered. Cherif Bassian, special rapporteur for the tribunal, who is responsible for compiling the testimony to be used at the trial, comments that physical proof of the crimes is very important in order to make a case against the criminals. So far many mass graves have been found with experts trying to trace the victims and film shots of emaciated prisoners in concentration camps have already been witnessed by the whole world.

UN and other Human Rights officials say that all sides in the 13 month-old Bosnian war are responsible for the atrocities, but at the same time admit that the crimes committed by Serb nationalist militia men and their leaders overwhelmingly outnumber any crimes committed by the Bosnian Muslims.

Here we come to a crucial question: If the tribunal is serious about prosecuting the criminals, does this mean that leaders such as Radovan Karadzic will be tried for endorsing the crimes? If it is justice that the tribunal aims to establish, then anyone responsible for the atrocities, be they heads of state or ordinary soldiers, should be held culpable.

So far the West has accomplished very little as far as justice is concerned. Even while elaborate peace plans and negotiations were going on, Mostar, a predominantly Muslim town, was continually being ravaged by Croat soldiers, food and medicine were not allowed to reach the 35,000 civilians many of whom were dying because of lack of food and treatment. The threat of NATO's air strikes seemed as empty as the promises of 'not tolerating such atrocities' made by world leaders at pompous conferences and UN assemblies. While the world was making grandiose statements about prosecuting human rights violations, little children were losing their limbs, even lives, and people were losing their reasons to live.

Now after painful deliberations, the Croats have conceded to allow UN relief teams into Mostar. The people refuse to let the relief workers leave the ravaged town, fearing a resurgence of brutality as soon as they are left alone. For the victims of this war, nothing can compensate for the loss of their lives, their loved ones, their homes and even their dignity. One wonders if an international tribunal is enough for the world to forgive itself for such injustice.

The Forsaken Warriors

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ceive them. Independent houses were rented for those fighters who had their families with them, while the rest were made to share a single house in groups.

The Herald was able to visit the houses of several of these fighters. The most striking thing about all their residences, without exception, is the modesty in which these people live. During their early days in Pakistan, as many as a dozen fighters were required to share one four-bedroom house, although after the war they scattered themselves out more thinly for security reasons. Sheikh Mohammed Yousaf Abbas, who now runs an NGO called the Services Office for Afghanistan, is a multi-millionaire many times over. But in his house in Hayatabad, the only room which is properly furnished is the one he uses as an office. The most common piece of furnishing that most of these houses have is a carpet on which they sit, eat, and sleep.

An Egyptian laughs at his government's allegation that he and those like him are mercenaries who are only fighting for money. "They are fools. There won't be more than a hundred houses in all of Pakistan better and more expensive than the ones that most of the sheikhs in Peshawar have back in their countries. Can money alone make them leave their lives of luxury and live in these conditions?" he argues. This argu-

ment also makes sense in the case of those highly qualified professionals who held highly remunerative jobs in the West before coming to Pakistan. Nor do most of the genuine fighters maintain fat bank accounts, as is commonly believed, in Peshawar. A majority of them receive their subsistence allowance through the Pakistani banks. A senior Pakistani banker confirmed that "Apart from a few cases, their bank accounts wouldn't pop your eyes."

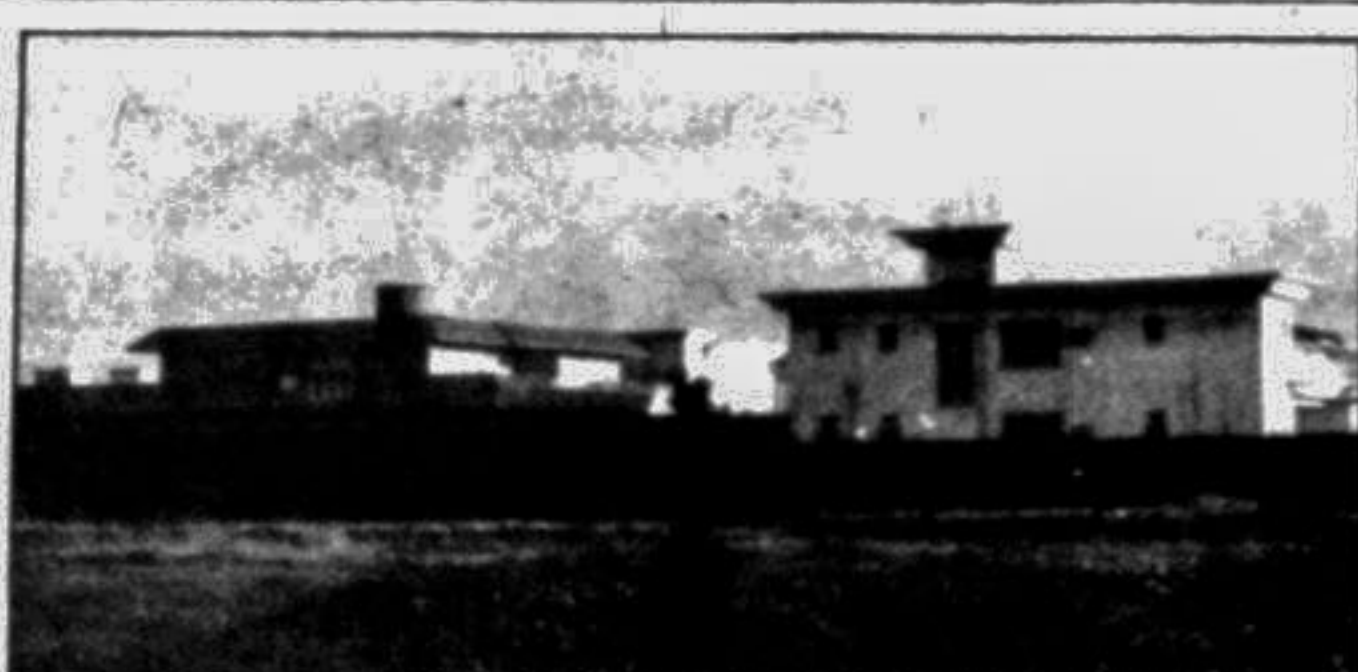
Thus settled in Peshawar, the fighters were then placed with different Afghan factions, mostly with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami, through an effort coordinated by the Jamaat and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. In an interview with this correspondent in 1991, when the Jamaat was yet to recover from its euphoria of having 'defeated the Soviets', the Jamaat's advisor on Afghanistan, Murad Ali Shah, had described their contribution to the jihad as fantastic. "They came here in thousands and were an extremely fearless and motivated lot. The impact of their experience will now be felt all over the Muslim world," a giddy Murad Ali Shah had claimed, swinging statistically from side to side, "I tell you, Egypt will be the first country to feel their impact."

Today, Murad Ali Shah's position on the Arab fighters has undergone a radical transformation. In an interview in June

this year, he dismissed them as a factor of no consequence. "What can a few hundred Arabs do? They are not the issue. The issue is the unity of the Muslim world. That is what the West is scared of," he said, completely forgetting what he had claimed earlier. This kind of 180-degree turn, in fact, typifies the events in the post-war life of these Arabs. The description of freedom fighter has been substituted with the word terrorist, and the world which was once stood united behind them is now condemning them just as unanimously.

For one, a large number of them realised to their surprise that once the war was over, they were unable to return to their own countries. A highly credible source among the relevant circles confirmed that a majority of the fighters returned soon after the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan. Some of them, who were working with the Hezb, decided to settle in Afghanistan. A source close to the Jalalabad administration estimates that some 200 of them may have settled in Jalalabad. Many more have probably settled in other Afghan towns. The ones that stayed back in Peshawar were either those who were not welcome in their own countries or those who remained active, with the cooperation of Pakistani intelligence agencies, even after the war officially came to an end.

Between these two categories, a majority falls into the



Hayatabad: Playing host to the fundamentalists.

first. Although it is impossible to determine their numbers, educated estimates from various sources do not put the figure at more than a few hundred. They are stuck in Peshawar primarily because their respective governments are too scared to welcome them back. "Afghanistan was a liberating experience for these Arabs," says one important official in the Frontier government. "The first thing that they came across was the Pakistani press, which, even under General Zia, appeared to them far more free than anything they had ever seen back home."

Despite the fact that Pakistan has lived under dictatorship for most of its history, the restrictions on individual freedom in some of the Arab countries would sound incredible even to the Pakistanis. Saudi newspapers, for example, are not allowed to carry any crime story, because officially crime does not exist in Saudi. In Egypt, any report on Mubarak's opposition which does not give it a terrorist colour is equated with treason. But having tasted freedom in a

Egyptian girl in Pakistan some years ago but when he tried to return home, his government refused to give him a visa. He has been living in Peshawar ever since. Ali admitted that he was in touch with the opposition movement in Sudan, saying that many of his comrades had been asked not to return by their sympathisers back home.

"It is basically the insecurity of their own governments which is keeping them here," says a Pakistani official. "I believe that their governments have nothing much to fear from them because, in most cases their experience in Afghanistan may not be of use in their own countries." This official argues that the conditions available to these fighters in Afghanistan, in terms of the terrain, arms supply, worldwide acceptance of the enemy, do not exist elsewhere in the Muslim world. "But, of course, they are bound to show more aggression now than they did before."

WHILE the western propaganda against the Arab fundamentalists is indiscriminate, western pressure on Pakistan to curb their activities is focused largely on a small section of these fighters who have remained active even after the war. The Herald was able to confirm that the Arab influx continued, though substantially reduced in number, well after the war was over. Some fundamentalists may be trickling into Peshawar even now. Several among these post-war fighters told the Herald that they had received military training after coming to

men who suspected him of helping anti-Hezb factions.

Sheikh Azzam's successor, Sheikh Mohammed Yousaf Abbas, in a brief interview with the Herald in June said that the camps had automatically closed down once the Afghan war was over. "The Muslims do not fight with guns. Our religion started with one man and spread all over the world because the Quran was in his heart," says Sheikh Abbas. However, Pakistani officials believe that there is no way of knowing whether or not the training camps once managed by the Services Office inside Afghanistan still exist. But the fact remains that Arabs continued to trickle into Peshawar in small numbers and most of them are still able to receive military training.

But of what use is military training to them now that the war is over? One such fighter revealed that a few of his friends who arrived in Pakistan some 18 months ago. Subsequently travelled to Algeria to help the Algerian fundamentalists who were denied power even after they won a general election. "They were very few, because the Algerian FIS is essentially struggling for democracy and that system of governments is unacceptable to most fundamentalists," says a