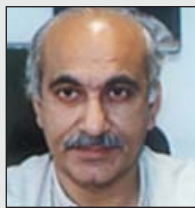


# The China syndrome



M.J. AKBAR

THE most startling tourist distraction in China is a map of India. Seeing is disbelieving. India gets a serious haircut, and it must be doubly disturbing to find the great locks of Lord Shiva shorn off the head of India. The Chinese have excised the Himalayas from India and either made it completely theirs or handed it over to independent or disputed states that become a buffer in Asia's most powerful neighbourhood. Start from northwest and head north-east. Jammu and Kashmir has been allotted an indeterminate status, except of course for that part on the eastern edge of the old kingdom that was gifted to Chou en Lai by Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1963 and now lies firmly embedded inside China. India is permitted to sneeze through a couple of passes in Himachal and Uttaranchal before Nepal sprawls independently midway. Sikkim, east of Nepal, is still shown as a sovereign state adjoining sovereign Bhutan. To the east of Bhutan begins the sweep that takes you into Arunachal Pradesh, the whole of which is shown as part of China, with Chinese names for its small cities and landmarks. The Chinese case for the wholesale absorption of Arunachal rests partly on some vague ethnic compatibility, although they do not extend this suggestion into calling Northeast Indians of Han descent.

They use a political yardstick to measure this map. Tawang paid a tribute to the Chinese emperors, so Ipso facto it is part of China. By this logic, Afghanistan should be included in the map of India, since the province paid tribute to the

Mughal emperors for hundreds of years, at about the same time that Tawang was purchasing peace with the Ming dynasty. The People's Republic of China loses its republican sheen when it comes to territory, and turns imperial even if it cannot always get imperious. This distinction between China and the People's Republic of China tends to escape general observation, but it glittered in the intellectual landscape of Brajesh Mishra, national security adviser and principal secretary to Prime

was always much more valuable than the yak-skin or whatever the Tibetan princes delivered to His Supreme Majesty. So each time a Tibetan princeling felt in need of some decent silk, he picked up a patch of goatskin and turned up at the palace. The mandarins caught on. The palace passed an order restricting the fealty of the Tibetans. Attitudes have not altered that much, which is why Beijing is puzzled at the new Tibetan intransigence. All that the Tibetans have to do is to sing the national

Heaven". He would not deign to include the barbarians that lay beyond this Multitude in the civilised world. And if foreigners were not barbarians they were fantasists. Even trade with such outsiders was unworthy of a Chinese. "The mind of the superior man dwells on righteousness; the mind of a little man dwells on profit," he believed. That may be true, but don't tell that to the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party in its present incarnation. But the Han adopted Confu-

successful military wall was the one that guarded the Byzantine city of Constantinople, which turned into the Islamic city of Istanbul. But that is because it was a double wall. The first wall was the sea. There was simply no space between the sea and the city wall for an invading army to rest and mobilise.

The Great Leap Forward in modern Shanghai is a flyer that literally takes a 15-kilometre leap from one end of the city to the other through a trajectory across a

Prosperity has been uneven; it always is. Half of China is a parasite on the other half. The *nouveaux riches* have become very *riche* indeed because the lowest end of pay in a slave factory is sometimes as low as a hundred dollars annually. But growth keeps the peace. And thereby hangs another economic tale. The Chinese sell the highest priced brands to those who can afford and illusion to the others. You cannot tell the difference.

You can take Shanghai out of the east, but can you take the east out of Shanghai? 'Hello DVD hello DVD hello DVD bag bag shirt shirt shirt cheap cheap cheap...' The ten-yuan market of fakes jostles competitively beside the legitimate shops. You can sip coffee and window-shop at Dunhill before taking ten steps into another world. In this bazaar, catfights screech through crowded alleys as saleswomen scratch and scramble to pull customers into their shanty shops. There are any number of theories about the Great Fakes of China, but nothing I hear from politicians, bureaucrats or economists is co-terminus with logic. My explanation is that the Chinese deliberately promote the Great Fakes in order to include the poor into the stratosphere of the brand-world at prices within their reach. That still does not explain how you can sell what looks exactly like a Mont Blanc pen for two dollars, even if not a single part of the fake pen has anything to do with the 200-dollar reality in any boutique. The miracle is that you cannot tell the difference, and the bloody pen writes pretty well too. The nib is made of metal and the point polished to smooth virtue. That goddam Mont Blanc crest, looking so utterly genuine, alone must cost more than a dollar. How did they assemble the whole thing for a dollar, which is what it must cost if you decide to sell it for two. The silk in the Versace tie is silken enough, the knot is neat: what more could you ask for from a necktie? Why pay a hundred dollars for a Hugo Boss shirt when you can get one for two and a half?

This is Fake Orgasm Economy. But, as any psychologist will tell you, fake orgasms have done more to preserve social harmony than genuine ones. That is the Great Chinese Secret.

If you see anyone in the next few days who has become non-chalantly generous, and insists on giving you a dream gift, he has probably been visiting China on the Prime Minister's aircraft. As for me, I am now deeply embarrassed by the genuine Mont Blanc in my pocket.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## BYLINE

**Notions of superiority are too deep to be affected by the egalitarian philosophy of Communism. What the communists have done of course is to declare that everyone is great by the simple virtue of being Chinese. Thus you can go from the Great Wall of China to the Great Hall of the People by making a Great Leap Forward...The Chinese sell the highest priced brands to those who can afford and illusion to the others. You cannot tell the difference.**

Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who led the negotiations that resulted in the first joint declaration between India and China in Beijing this week as well as the memorandum of understanding by which China informally recognised Sikkim as part of India. We only reiterated our assurance, first given in 1954 and repeated by Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao, that we accepted Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China. We did not say that Tibet was part of China. This may seem semantic, but the Dalai Lama has always argued that Tibet was never part of China and therefore cannot be claimed by the successor state of People's Republic of China.

However, there were enough Tibetan princes through so many centuries as you can count on one hand who came to Beijing bearing gifts as their tribute to the overlord. In fact, they came so often that the Chinese got a little tired of such frequent displays of loyalty. There had to be a reason, and there was. The custom was that anyone who brought a gift to the imperial court would get a royal present in return. The imperial gift

anthem and they are gifted a road, or an apartment building as reward.

The Chinese, I am pleased to report, are human. They can quadruple their Gross Domestic Product in 17 years, they can stuff the malls of America with their mass-produced goods, and they can build the Three Gorges Dam, but they still cannot manage the traffic. Health warning: Do not cross the street in China on a green light. Read again to get this instruction right. Wait for the light to become red, and then cross. Why? Let me explain.

You stand at a kerb, patiently, obediently waiting for permission from the lights to cross. Eventually green comes up. At precisely that very moment, every driver in the vicinity, including some at right angles to you, steps on his accelerator and turns his vehicle in your direction. It is not a matter of a straggler bus or a speeding car beating the turning lights. Traffic in China is completely indifferent to traffic management. But why cross the street on a red light then? Because when the lights are red you are at least careful, you know what you are getting into, hesitation comes naturally to your tense mind and you can take suitable physical precautions. Green makes you careless, with attendant consequences.

Size matters. This is a nation in love with both the prefix and the suffix. It must be at least Great if not the Greatest. There is nothing new about this. Confucius, in the sixth century before Christ, was certain that China constituted the entire world, and the various epithets he gave for his country included "The Middle Kingdom", "The Multitude of Great States" or, more prosaically, "All Under

Heaven" with great enthusiasm, and considered their emperor the link between man and heaven. Notions of superiority are too deep to be affected by the egalitarian philosophy of Communism. What the communists have done of course is to declare that everyone is great by the simple virtue of being Chinese. Thus you can go from the Great Wall of China to the Great Hall of the People by making a Great Leap Forward.

Only a fool would consider the Great Wall wren through thousands of miles of mountain unimpressive. But the most remarkable fact about it is not the effort in stone, but its proximity to Beijing. It is only an hour by highway from the city. It is as if the defence of China were synonymous with the defence of its capital city. The actual borders of China, even if you forget the claimed ones, lie thousands of miles beyond the wall. Conquerors and marauders, in other words, had licence to do what they wanted to the people beyond the wall; all that the ruling class wanted to ensure was its own protection and safety.

But the Chinese were not the only power to make a virtue of such a conceit. Why did the defence of India begin at Panipat, which is about as far from Delhi as the Great Wall is from Beijing? Which brings us to another question. Has a wall ever saved a capital? The wall did not save Beijing when it mattered. Only an army can save a nation, not stone or barbed wire. A wall provides only a notional sense of confidence, and may be counterproductive, for it can protect that invader as easily as it separates him from the defender. The Chinese gave the invader more depth through the Great Wall than they kept for themselves. The only really suc-

multi-storeyed sky. When I last visited Shanghai, in 1988, it looked like a cleaner version of Calcutta. Fifteen years later, only Calcutta looks like a cleaner version of Calcutta. Shanghai has become a Manhattan that begins in New York and ends in Washington. That, trust me, is not too wayward an exaggeration. Shanghai's boom starts from the sea and echoes for hundreds of miles along the Yangtze. Historically Shanghai has been a collection of the world's cities: a British quarter here, a French quarter there. It is now an American quarter everywhere. A Chinese friend remarked a little regretfully that modern China did not have any faith. A few days after that lunch I disagreed. Not only do the Chinese have faith, they have become fundamentalists. They are fundamentalist achievers. All the passion that we reserve for the Babri mosque or a Ram temple, the Chinese conserve for highrise apartments, highways, infrastructure, consumer goods and massive projects. We can sneer at the corruption in new China, but does it really suit a pot to call the kettle black?

The legacy of the first generation of modern China's leaders, Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai, was a disconnect between ambition and ability. They mixed high ambition with low achievement, but they did create a modern mind out of opium-eaters. Deng Ziaoping, master of the second generation, was a cat with a dream. He preserved a Communist party with the lure of collective wealth sponsored by state capital. You may count as many contradictions in that as you want, but it worked. Deng's message was: keep your head low, your eyes open and chase the boom.

### Lest we forget

## Major General MR Choudhury

An extraordinary health personality

STEFANO LAZARRI



Biographical Association, Cambridge (FIBA), American Biographical Institute, (FABI). Even after his death he has been posthumously honoured with an award by the Society of Medical Microbiologists in 2002.

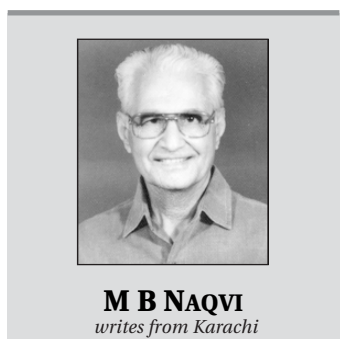
General M.R. Choudhury went on superannuation in 1992 after 40 years of successful career in the Army -- a record till unsurpassed by any one. Since then, he devoted his time in conducting research, teaching Microbiology and Laboratory Medicine in different institutions.

He was one of the outstanding microbiologists of his generation. He organised the Bangladesh Society for Microbiologists in 1976 and was its founder president. Under his able leadership, BSM over a short period of time succeeded in creating awareness about the importance of Microbiology in Bangladesh amongst those who matter. As a result, the University of Dhaka created a full-fledged Department of Microbiology. He passed away on June 24, 1999. WHO, mentioned in their obituary message: "The AIDS and human rights community in Bangladesh has lost its founder and a great leader. General was a great soldier in this battle and fought until the very end, as a soldier should do." The World Bank authorities paid rich tribute in the following words: "With his untimely death Bangladesh has lost a visionary leader, who had the right combination of scholarship, substance, integrity, team spirit and passion for doing something for the people..."

He was able to set an extraordinary example of an administrator, a scientist, an educationist, in one.

Dr Stefano Lazarrari is Coordinator, NCS, WHO, Geneva.

# A tonga hitched to a star



M B NAQVI writes from Karachi

MUSHARRAF'S Pakistan means to remain tight with the US in participating in its War on Terror and the campaign to stamp out WMDs if necessary by preemptive wars for regime changes. The way President Musharraf has urged the US President to stay engaged with, and in, South Asia and to go on working for peace between Pakistan and India -- hopefully the US will help resolve the 'core issue of Kashmir' to banish war from the region -- underscores several things. He regards the sole superpower to be either a force for justice and fairplay or one which will somehow not mind tilting the scales in Pakistan's favour (because it is an ally rendering yeoman's service). It also implies that this Pakistan largely shares American purposes in Afghanistan, Iraq -- where he is ready to send his troops if only a fig leaf of justification is found through UNSC, OIC, GCC or indeed any ostensible source -- and wherever it ventures next: North Korea, Iran or Syria.

True, no mentionable details have been discussed -- and agreed -- about the nuclear conundrum of South Asia. The \$600 million a year aid package binds Pakistan to stay a satellite for at least five years, with no moral right to criticise any aspect of American foreign policy. Why? because it is asking the US to remain busy in South Asia preventing a war that Pakistanis and Indians cannot avoid by the simple device of not fighting it and it has, in effect, repeated what it did in 1954 and 1981 for the sake of Amer-

ican military aid. That this policy of getting linked up to the US chariot by ignoring domestic public opinion is an old habit of Pakistan's ruling establishment. It bemoans the untrustworthiness of Americans loudly enough. But it responds warmly and with alacrity to any gestures, or orders for that matter as after 9/11, Uncle Sam makes in pursuit of a venture in or around Pakistan. It thinks nothing of undoing what it had laboured

cially the Army, now assures Bush that we stand for a moderate and modern Islam -- simply because the US government so desires. The Americans, knowing their Pakistanis, accept the proposition and go on to discuss details of how to achieve this objective by the same establishment, otherwise so obedient. The significance and number of words Bush uttered vis-à-vis the educational reform of Madrassas on the Camp David

billion over the next five years. Mr. Shaukat Aziz, who was propagating his intent soon to reach a stage where he will not have to borrow, should now, explain why this gift horse (of \$ 3 billion) is going to impact on the working of the economy.

Moreover it is necessary to look into the mouth of this (gift) horse. Its mouth is tightly shut; it shows no teeth. One remembers the US had resumed in 1981 its military aid

ing pure justice among various states -- as if it does not have its own national interests or preferences of realpolitik.

Insofar as anyone can see the US wants to cultivate India as a strategic partner -- and its refusal to consider selling F16 aircraft just shows how sensitive Bush is in not annoying the Indians. Washington has, to be sure, shown a partnership with Pakistan that does not weigh heavily on the Indian sensi-

## PLAIN WORDS

**The American choice of Musharraf to do business with -- while his being in uniform posed no problem -- underscores the traditional American role in Pakistan: always preferring military dictators to elected governments. If a general caricatures democracy or doctors the polls, that has been OK by Uncle Sam. Latter's influence and money favours and sustains dictators. This underlines the absence of popular power and pressure.**

hard to achieve for 25 long years.

It now endorses by its hard actions the unipolar world that has emerged. It has no problems with it or America's current -- and already near achieved in ME -- objectives, especially in Asia where the main action is. It has had a long standing and long winded friendship with China. What does it think or propose regarding the various ideas and schemes the Chinese like to promote? It has stayed mum. China definitely wants a bipolar world; it wants to see American role reduced in Asia. Does Islamabad ever do or say a thing that will promote any of these Chinese initiatives? It is happy to remain a US satellite.

It wouldn't matter if Pakistan's people had been like the Brits who share so much with the Americans, including latter's purposes. The establishment of this country has promoted a bogus Islamic hubris and jingoism -- Taliban, the Jihadist and sectarian terrorists -- that alternates with paranoia as well as self pity in pursuit of its stated purpose of making a true but imaginary Islamic republic progress. Having done this disservice to Pakistan, the establishment, espe-

and gave two packages, the second of which was also of \$ 600 million per annum. That aid too had two halves: military and economic. But this latter economic aid was not for the economy's development of its productive sectors; it was to be spent on military-related economic (infrastructure near the Afghan border) development. We have the same two halves in the proposed \$ 3 billion package that comes to the same \$ 600 million a year -- and damn the question of its purchasing power 20 years down the line. One would like to know what is proposed to be done with the \$ 300 million per year for the stated economic aid. Could it be that it too is military-related economic development?

Far and away, it is the strangest trait of a military government that finds it necessary to look to America for a solution of the Kashmir problem as well as to predicate Pakistan's security on American help in maintaining a 'proper' (better for Pakistan) balance in power vis-à-vis Indian capabilities. It does not seem odd to Pakistan's elites to go on appealing to right this balance as if the US were a super-world-government dispens-

ties. Some spares and cash is all it proposes giving as a consolation prize -- that too provided the Congress agrees where the Indians are valued more and quite naturally. The nature of US regard for Pakistan is tactical and Americans know how to "buy" Pakistan's cooperation when needed: a major military aid package, sans major military hardware, will do; Pakistani generals will gratefully accept whatever can be dishied out.

These generals cannot conceive of the fact that an independent and free people have to stand on their own two feet and pay for what defence may actually be necessary. Pakistan is the homeland of 15 crore people of a fairly large state. They should undertake missions they can achieve and have the defence force they can pay for their equipment. The state should exist primarily to promote economic development and political interests of its people who should be self-reliant, proud and peaceful. They have to earn respect and esteem of others by their achievements, chiefly cultural.

Bush Administration had pointedly invited the soldier-President to do business it had at hand and not a single civilian Minister was in the entourage. Both Bush and Musharraf have thus made a joint political statement: the so-called Federal Cabinet and Parliament are a non-government, real matters have to be dealt with by the real government: i.e. Gen. Musharraf and his bureaucrats. The presence of Shaukat Aziz is a special case and he is Musharraf's lobbyist for IFIs and American Treasury. The US too has in effect derecognised the so-called Real Democracy which is why the General is now using a new adjective 'sustainable' for his notion of democracy.

The American choice of Musharraf to do business with -- while his being in uniform posed no problem -- underscores the traditional American role in Pakistan: always preferring military dictators to elected governments. If a general caricatures democracy or doctors the polls, that has been OK by Uncle Sam. Latter's influence and money favours and sustains dictators. This underlines the absence of popular power and pressure. So long as the people remain as light weight, docile and dumb driven material only dictatorships, dependent on support of America, will rule Pakistan with or without a democratic façade.

What is instead happening is wholly irrational: it is admitted on all hands that Kashmir problem



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

## Excuse me, Michael Dutt!

Mr. Michael Madhusudan Dutt!  
Excuse me, Poet Michael Dutt!  
Excuse me for that,  
I mean for rhyming in a non-mother tongue  
Particularly when like you now I am not that young.  
You experimented with writing in English when young  
But good sense dawned soon on you  
And you started writing in mother tongue anew.  
To the realm of Saraswati, the beautiful goddess  
Of learning and poesy, you got a wonderful access  
And in the end you achieved a glorious success.

Doing tedious humdrum imperial job in Latin  
Marcus Aurelius switched on to Greek for writing in  
His *The Meditations*.  
Instead of German, his native tongue, Frederick the Great  
In San-souci loved in French to read and communicate.

Tagore got the Nobel prize for his English *Gitanjali*.  
Not for rhyming his devotional songs in Bengali.  
Oxford conferred on him the *doctorate honoris causa* in Latin  
But it was in Sanskrit Tagore's speech in reply was written.

We do not know why on a second thought what to do  
For writing *Asrar-e-khudi* Iqbal preferred Persian to Urdu.

Nobokov would have liked to write *Lolita* in Russian  
He, however, chose to write it in English, but not for fashion.  
May be that his mother tongue Russian lacks  
An apt expression for 'She is Lola in her slacks',  
Or an appropriate Russian line that rhymes  
With, "She is Lolita on the dotted lines".

Kierkegaard continued to write in Danish  
So did Juan Ramon Jimenez in Spanish.  
But Joseph Conrad wrote hardly anything in Polish.  
Known Irish writers wrote mostly in English.

Big names have been cited by a small fry.  
Let him enjoy his new fry  
That on one fine morning did suddenly appear  
And one sad afternoon it may suddenly disappear.  
It may be as transient as the twilight.  
I do, however, admire Michael Dutt's great insight,  
His return to his second nature and first language  
Abandoning the Queen's English, his second language.

In my case it is absolutely a new venture.  
One may call it a misadventure,  
An old man falling madly in love with one  
An incomparable companionable companion.  
A great fun indeed, I greatly enjoy the dalliance.  
A great companion, I greatly enjoy the misalliance.

Michael Dutt! Excuse me for that,  
I mean, for my rhyming in English.  
One may like to call it Benglish,  
The English as it is spoken in Bangladesh  
Not the Queen's English, but English nonetheless.

Excuse me, Michael Dutt!  
Excuse me for that,  
I mean for rhyming in a non-mother tongue,  
Particularly when I am now not all that young.

Muhammad Habibur Rahman is former Chief Justice and head of caretaker government

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.