



# On The Oriental Trail

The author, on a lecture tour of Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, gives his random impressions of these three countries.

by Manoj Das

THE sun had just set. The giant Tristar was making an elaborate dip for landing. My friend had written: "This time we will receive you at our new international airport, Changi. It is wonderful."

It was. As in some of the most modern airports in the West, we passed through a cosy corridor and a most impressive array of duty-free shops before reaching Immigration, embellished with fountains and lights in floral patterns.

## The Lion's Abode

According to legend, it was a seafaring Indian prince who first set foot on this charming island when he was shipwrecked by a storm. He named it Simhapura—the Lion's Abode. Sir Stamford Raffles "discovered" the same island millenniums later, in 1819.

Twenty-five years ago, I stopped off in Singapore on my way back from the Afro-Asian Students' Conference in Bandung. We had passed a resolution to ask Britain to leave Singapore alone. No sooner had I stepped out of the small Garuda aircraft when a policeman in mufti separated me from the other passengers and tried to guide me towards an exclusive entrance. I protested. Another officer joined him. All my papers were confiscated and my movement restricted.

There had been a bloody racial riot prior to my visit. The atmosphere around the various ethnic groups was rife with mutual distrust. "The Lion's Abode, with the British lion gone, would become a den for jackals of darkness," commented an old Singaporean.

But the people of post-independent Singapore have made their city-state a human abode with a vengeance. What was just a strip of reclaimed land from the sea two years ago is now a fascinating promenade: the drive from the airport into the city, with elegant flowers lining the road on both sides.

Of the several other changes made last year, the latest and the most pleasant for me was the election of C. V. Devan Nair as the Republic's new President. This renowned trade unionist and Ciceronian orator is an ardent lover of philosophy and literature, and is an Aurobindo scholar

## 'Physically Beautiful People'

Of Singapore's 25-lakh population, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri-Lankans constitute a little over 6 per cent. They were brought by the British in the 19th century to work on their rubber plantations. The Indians have consolidated their positions in commerce, in the administration and in the cultural life of Singapore. A popular book, JoAm Craig's *Culture Shock*, describes the Singapore Indians as "a physically beautiful people". It further observes that "they have a lively sense of humor, and their personalities are generally warm and vibrant".

The Singapore Indians are, naturally, elated at Devan Nair's elevation, but what Devan Nair and his compatriots dream of engendering is a new spirit of nationalism for the



Faces Of Singapore



PRESIDENT DEVAN NAIR of Singapore (extreme left) with fishermen and Tom Bavin (extreme right).

KUALA LUMPUR—a glimpse.



CHARMING SRI LANKA.



Singaporeans that will embrace all the communities without ironing out their distinct cultural traits.

The degree of understanding already achieved is a matter of pride for the builders of this new nation. Although the Chinese constitute nearly 77 per cent of the population, Malay is the national language and English the language of administration. Chinese and Tamil are the two other official languages. Students are required to learn two of these four, with English as the first or second language.

"I must admit that race is hardly a factor in the way of talent getting recognised," said a veteran war-time reporter, now retired. A considerable chunk of current Singapore writing is done by young people of Indian origin.

The next day I am at the University. The cluster of aesthetic buildings overlook blue hills and are surrounded by acres of well-manicured lawns. No posters or graffiti deface the walls. I did not see any of the professors or students smoking. The students are not supposed to smoke on the campus; the professors refrain from smoking out of courtesy to their students.

I was in one of the cleanest cities of the world. Compulsory deployment of anti-pollution devices, fines up to 300 dollars for littering the streets or smoking in a government office,

**SINGAPORE SUMO.** Plaster figures of giant Japanese Sumo wrestlers share a hill with a Chinese pagoda at the Tiger Balm Gardens of Singapore.

**A PRIZE CATCH.** This 25-lb grass-eating carp has been imported from South China to a pig and fish farm in Malaya for breeding purposes.



a lift, a bus or a theatre have paid rich dividends. Traffic rules are strictly enforced. An interesting sight outside the main city zone in the morning is drivers asking pedestrians if they want a lift. This is because it is forbidden for a car to enter the main zone before 10 am without three passengers—a precaution against traffic jams. Some people get choosy and wait for a spacious car with air-conditioning to take them into the city!

### Changing Everyday

One is constantly shocked, and pleasantly surprised, by the changes in the city. "Am I in the right street?" asked someone. What had confused him were the tall trees which had been transplanted, fully grown, during the week.

Race-oriented slums, a dominant feature of the old Singapore, have disappeared. The multi-storey buildings that have replaced them are also multi-racial dwellings.

"This area is called Red Hill," my Chinese friend tells me. He goes on to explain the legend behind it: Long ago, fishermen in this area were killed by swordfish when they entered the water. The king did his best to put an end to the menace, but failed. A young man took up the challenge. He threw hundreds of banana trees into the water. The swordfish drove their sharp jaws

into them and got stuck. It was easy to kill them after that.

But the king was worried. The young man was intelligent, and might one day covet the throne. He had him murdered, but the innocent's blood flowed on in an unceasing stream, staining the region.

The little patch of red earth that is still visible is certain to be covered by concrete and well-designed lawns in another year or so. Will the ancient legend be remembered thereafter?

**L**ONG but pleasant is the drive to Kuala Lumpur—miles of rubber plantations, punctuated by sleepy little towns. The road is smooth, the landscape picturesque. Over 70 per cent of the country is covered by tropical rain forests.

The small roadside bazaars teem with durian—the fascinating and costly fruit, rambutan and mangosteen, apart from pineapples and bananas. Houses have photographs of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the constitutional monarch, and his consort.

The monarch is elected for five years from among the hereditary rulers of the 12 ancient feudal States: Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor, Kelantan, Trengganu and Pahang. Apart from these, Malaysia includes Saba and Sarawak, two regions of north-western Borneo.

By mid-day we reach Malacca, the historical city. We see the old Portuguese church on a hill. It was here, in 1552, that the body of St Francis Xavier had been enshrined. Later, it was decided to shift the body to Goa where he had earlier lived.

It is evening, and we are in Kuala Lumpur (literally, "Mouth of the Muddy River").

Of the total population of about 13 million, Indians constitute 10 per cent; proportionately greater than the number in Singapore, and mostly Tamils, too. But except in commerce, their presence is hardly felt in any of the other fields.

No doubt the religio-political situation is responsible to a great extent. The country has an official religion—Islam. The ruler of each State is also the religious head. The national language is Malay, and it is the only language which can be used for official purposes.

I met an old scholar, Durai Raja Singam, an authority on Ananda Kumaraswamy. His latest book,

Patna Urban Cooperative Bank for the period 1972-73 and 1973-74 and also the file concerned with the criminal case before the institution of the case. Please send them."

When the Secretary replied that the file was with a Legal Officer, Dr Mishra got Chief Minister Ghafoor to order the file to be sent to him. The file was ultimately sent to Dr Mishra on February 25, 1975 and it remained with him for more than two and a half months, until he became the Chief Minister of Bihar ousting Ghafoor.

### Judicial Confession

**M.A. Haideri** in his judicial confession has disclosed that during the period when the campaign for removing Ghafoor was in full swing Nawal Kishore Sinha and he, himself, approached Dr Mishra and paid him Rs 50,000 so as to hush up the criminal case. Dr Mishra, then advised him to invest a further amount of Rs 50,000 towards the politicking to oust Ghafoor.

As Chief Minister, Dr Mishra passed the following order on May 16, 1975 over-ruling the order of Abdul Ghafoor relating to the criminal prosecution against Nawal Kishore Sinha and others:

"On perusal of the file it appears that there is no allegation of defalcation against the Chairman and the members of the Board of the bank. Stern action should be taken for realisation of loans from the loanes and if there are difficulties in realisation from the loanes, surcharge proceedings should be initiated against the Board of Directors. The normal condition be restored in the Bank after calling the Annual General Meeting and holding the election."

Although Nawal Kishore Sinha and the others escaped prosecution thanks to this order, they still faced the difficulty of the realisation of loans from the loanes. This problem arose as the loans, mostly advanced under fictitious names, had been misappropriated by Nawal Kishore Sinha and others. Nawal Kishore Sinha once again approached Dr Mishra to pull him out of this mess as well. And, once again, Dr Mishra issued the following directive to the Cooperative Minister:

"Please issue order for restoring the normal condition in the Bank after holding Annual General Meeting."

This order dated May 14, 1975 was pasted over Dr Mishra's previous order dated May 16, 1975, and the date of despatch, May 16, 1975, of the file given in the margin of the note sheet was interpolated and made May 14, 1975 by overwriting.

Subsequently, in the course of an investigation, the Officers of the Chief Minister's Secretariat, viz B.K. Dubey, IAS, Secretary to CM, Ram Paras Singh, Assistant Secretary and Jagdish Choudhary, Assistant Secretary stated that the said file had never passed through any official of the CM. Dr Mishra, handled it personally. And ultra-violet photography exposed the hidden order, dated May 16, 1975, and the overwriting of the date of despatch. At no time during the investigation did Dr Mishra account for or explain these actions.

Meanwhile officials of the Cooperative Department decided that as the CM, Dr Mishra, had not categorically vetoed the launching of the criminal case it should be filed against N.K. Sinha



**NAWAL KISHORE SINHA.** He escaped prosecution.

and others. The Cooperative Minister Md Hussain Azad agreed. But, on June 30, 1975 Dr Mishra issued an order against the necessity of instituting a criminal case. As a result, in June-July 1975, there ensued a stormy session in the Assembly over the Urban Bank. And, the Speaker Pt Harinath Mishra referred the allegations to the Estimates Committee of the House for enquiry.

### Not Content

Not content with forestalling any action against Nawal Kishore Sinha and others, Dr Mishra tried to rehabilitate

the bank by pumping another 15 lakhs from the State Exchequer. On November 1, 1975 he passed an order to this effect. But, this order was vehemently opposed by K.B. Saxena, IAS, Registrar, Cooperative Societies.

Thereafter, the Reserve Bank of India, vide letter dated April 14, 1976, cancelled the banking licence of this infamous bank in the Cooperative Sector and asked the Cooperative Department, Government of Bihar, to liquidate this bank. Accordingly the Registrar of Cooperatives, Bihar, liquidated the bank on April 19, 1976. However, the matter did not end here.

The Report of the Estimates Committee of the Bihar State Assembly, submitted in 1976, on the Patna Urban Cooperative Bank, recommended criminal prosecution against Nawal Kishore Sinha and the others. The Report was discussed in the Assembly and the House forced the Government to agree to institute cases against Nawal Kishore Sinha and the other officials of the bank.

In view of this, the Cooperative Department once again prepared to institute criminal cases against the Urban Bank officials and the matter went to the CM, Dr Mishra, once more.

Now, Dr Mishra called a meeting at his residence at midnight in the first week of August 1976. This meeting was attended by Md Hussain Azad, Cooperative Minister, Sita Ram Gope, Joint Registrar, Cooperative Societies and Upendra Sharma, SP, CID (Cooperative Cell). Further to this, 23 criminal cases were instituted on the written statement of Sita Ram Gope. Nawal Kishore Sinha, though, escaped prosecution.

In the course of the investigation of these cases Upendra Sharma SP, CID (Cooperative Cell) wrote in File No 11 PC-21/76 on October 8, 1976 that, as there was *prima facie* strong evidence in all the cases, against Nawal Kishore Sinha he should be made the principal accused. The DIG, CID, S.B. Sahay approved this suggestion on October 12, 1976 and added Nawal Kishore Sinha must be made accused in all the cases, IG A.P. Mishra agreed as well and the file was sent to the Cooperative Department. Upendra Sharma then prepared a draft FIR against Nawal Kishore Sinha which was to be lodged at the local police station.

In a separate letter to the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, T. Nand Kumar IAS, Liquidator of Urban Bank, wrote for permission to lodge a FIR against Nawal Kishore Sinha for



**SHIVANANDAN PASWAN, Lok Dal MLA.** He fears the muzzling of the case.

the offences of embezzlement, forgery, cheating, etc. And, Vinod Kumar, IAS, Commissioner, Cooperative Department sent the relevant files to the Cooperative Minister, who agreed to institute criminal cases against Nawal Kishore Sinha. The File No RCS-Cell 19/76 then went to the CM on January 2, 1977.

### Another Order

One month after this, on February 2, 1977 Dr Mishra issued an order on a separate buff-sheet to Mr Vinod Kumar, Commissioner, Cooperative Department with a copy to DIG, CID, that all the 23 criminal cases be withdrawn. This buff-sheet is in the Cooperative Department's File No. 12-Legal-31/77. (Under judicial confession, K.P. Gupta and M.A. Haideri were to reveal that Dr Mishra passed this order after accepting a bribe of Rs 50,000 from K.P. Gupta.)

The fall of Dr Mishra's Ministry, shortly afterwards, led to establishment of President's Rule in Bihar. And, the entire matter was re-examined by the Cooperative Department *de novo*. On May 16, 1977, Governor Jagannath Kaushal granted permission to prosecute Nawal Kishore Sinha and the others and accordingly a criminal case vide Kadam Kuan Police Station Case No 97(5)77 was instituted.

M.A. Haideri, Manager of the Patna Urban Cooperative Bank and A.K. Singh, Cashier-cum-PA to the Chairman, made judicial confessions in the course of investigation. A large number of documents as disclosed in the confessional statements were then recovered from the Cooperative Department, Bihar, the Agro-Industries Corporation, the Irrigation Department, the Water Development Corporation,

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