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# MADRAS

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## MUSINGS

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# Chennai's major problems

*To be discussed at December workshop*

(By A Special Correspondent)

- Traffic congestion
- Clogged waterways
- Slums and sanitation

These are the major problems facing Chennai. The other urban infrastructure

unwise land use, a threatened environment, increasing pollution, non-conservation of natural resources and built heritage, in-migration and poverty, illiteracy, and a lack of information at all levels are the other



Improving the waterways of the City is one of the thrust areas recommended by the consultative groups who studied the City's problems and made recommendations to the Sustainable Chennai Project. The Government has also revived interest in Chennai's waterways and has been holding discussions with a team of Japanese experts. But can a canal in such a sorry state ever be saved? V S RAGHAVAN's picture of the Buckingham Canal rather reflects a 'no hope' situation. (Also see page 2.)

## TRAFFIC WORST CONFOUNDED

Vehicular population on the roads fast exploding  
With mindless driving and congestion building  
Poison emitting exhausts lungs choking  
Indiscriminate parking, cacophony of horns jarring  
Fatal accidents statistically beyond reckoning  
This in our city is the traffic scene.

Two wheelers precariously carrying  
Four or more people front and pillion riding  
Rashly, indiscriminately on the roads rushing  
Crazily fast lane to footpath patterns weaving  
Slow vehicle centre stage greedily hogging  
A dangerous menace in our city traffic scene.

Outdated bullock carts leisurely ambling  
Trishaws and trailers aimlessly driving  
With goods dangerously loaded and overpiling  
Out of the vehicle's perimeters sticking  
No permits or special licences needing  
Hazardously plying in our city traffic scene.

City and interstate buses overspeeding  
Packed with passengers, dangerously tilting  
Youngsters for thrills from footboards hanging  
Drivers no challans or legal prosecutions fearing  
Following neither rules nor lane discipline  
Licensed to kill in our city traffic scene.

Autos with faulty meters merrily running  
Many VIP owned, with political union backing  
To hell with 'No U turn', 'No entry', 'No parking'  
Brash, unmannered, indisciplined, arguing  
Fleeing passengers, destinations predetermining  
Ignoring all safety in our city traffic scene.

Automobiles driven by impatient human beings  
Dangerously raced by unlicensed under eighteens  
No red, no amber, no waiting for green  
Scraping, screeching, braking and bumping  
Like models on catwalks speedily lane changing  
Educated, unlettered violators in our city traffic scene.

Traffic cops at crossroads indifferently standing  
Gossiping or at the nearest tea shop sauntering  
Or political, social, religious processions escorting  
Creating hold-ups and jams in our city traffic scene.

Padmini Natarajan

problems leading to the deterioration of the quality of life in the City.

Identification of the problems and prioritising them was completed recently by five Consultative Groups set up under the Sustainable Madras Project. The Project, supported by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the Government of Tamil Nadu, is being implemented by the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority.

The prioritised problems are to be presented and discussed at a high-level consultative workshop to be held in the middle of December, at which, it is expected, the Chief Minister and the Mayor will be present. The deliberations of

the consultation are likely to be then discussed at citywide meetings "attended by a cross-section of representation from as many interest groups as possible".

The recommendations that will emerge from all these discussions will be presented to the Government and to the local authorities together with action plans and listings of possible sources of fundings. These recommendations are expected to be presented by the end of September 1997. The ball will then be in the Government's and local authorities' courts. Will they carry it and run? Will there be, by that time, Citizens' Groups to egg them on and lend a helping hand as well? We at *Madras Musings* hope so.

## Additions to stir to life the Archives

(By A Staff Reporter)

The Tamil Nadu Archives in Egmore might not be the best-kept of ones or the easiest and most comfortable of places to work in. But this treasure-house of records is certainly better than most of the archives in the country and probably has a greater collection of an accessible 400-year-old past than the others. It is now slowly improving on that record.

Latest additions are a trove of MGR's writings — letters, articles, drafts etc. — that have been gifted by the family to the Archives.

Archivists have also been trolling through the *Indian Ex-*

*press* records and making a collection of historic photographs which the newspaper plans to gift to the Archives. This will be the beginning of a photographic collection, the Archives authorities say.

Enlarging the collection is a commendable idea, but making access to it, and, more important, getting copies of anything in the Archives QUICKLY for reproduction purpose — say within 24 hours — should be ensured. This would need a special quick service section that would enable prompt reference and quick copying and granting of permission.

## Another sanctified change?

We hope we DIDN'T hear it right. But if we did, we may one of these days find ourselves calling Fort St. George *Punidha Georgein Kottai!*

The word around Fort St. George, the present seat of the Tamil Nadu Government and the place from where modern India began, is that the Minister for Tamil Language and Culture, Thiru Thamizh-kudimagan, is set on changing the name of the historical fort to this. We only hope it's another of the jokes heard so often in the corridors of the Secretariat.

If the change, however, is NO joke, we must be grateful that the foreigner's name, George, is retained and not changed, as has been done in the Malayalam tradition to something like Verghese or whatever. For, if that change sets a trend, imagine what we would have to do with names like Thomas and Stella, Nehru, Nelson and Stalin!

Can't we, Thiru Thamizh-kudimagan, pay a little more attention to setting up a cooperative bookshop where ALL Tamil books will be available or to supporting a reprint of important Tamil books or the printing of archival records in Tamil, THAN to this rather more costly business of changing names? May we hope?

— The Editor



# Becoming a writer



Graham Greene (left) and R K Narayan at the BBC studios in London, 1958. "This is the only available photograph of the two friends together," say the Rams in their recently released biography of the Indian novelist, R K Narayan: The Early Years, 1906-1945, published by Viking Penguin India, courtesy of whom this picture is published here.

...In order to stabilize my income I became a newspaper reporter. My business would be to gather Mysore city news and send it daily to a newspaper published in Madras called *The Justice*. The daily was intended to promote the cause of the non-Brahmin who suffered from the domination of the minority Brahmin class in public life, government service and education. Though *The Justice* was a propagandist paper against the Brahmin class, it somehow did not mind having me as its correspondent in Mysore.

spendents were lofty and did not care for the items I valued. After the despatch of the copy, I relaxed in my room; that was also the time when my wife could give me her company. I described to her the day's events, such as traffic accidents, suicides, or crimes, which were the grist for my mill; then I sank into a siesta

(which could, in effect only mean denying luncheon facilities) whereupon I declared that I would report him to our Journalists' Association, pass a resolution against him, and syndicate it to all the world's press and denounce him as an autocrat and enemy of freedom. He said, "Do you know that I have powers to smash you and your papers..." I walked out of the union meeting in protest, and so did a couple of my colleagues. I began to ignore its activities and boycotted its functions. I realised soon that this did not affect the prospect of world peace either way, nor provoke my news-editor to question why I was not covering the League of Nations Union.

Murders were my stand-by. From Nanjangud or Chamaraj-nagar, at the extreme South of Mysore District, the police brought in a steady stream of murder cases. On such occasions, I let myself go. I hung about the mortuary for the post-mortem verdict and the first police report. As long as I used the expression 'alleged'

by **R.K. Narayan**

liberally, there was no danger of being hauled up for false reporting or contempt of court. I knew a lot of police officers, plainclothesmen, and informers — apart from presidents and secretaries of various public bodies (including the Pinarajapole, a home for aged or disabled animals) who craved publicity and sought my favour. Quite a number of wedding invitations came to me from fond parents hoping for a report and a photograph of the bridal pair in the paper. I should have gladly given all the space available to whoever wanted it, but my news-editor, when he did not reject it outright, mutilated and decimated my copy. He compressed my most eloquent descriptions into two lines.

What did I make out of it all? Our contract was that I would be paid three rupees and eight annas per column of 21 inches. I fancied that the news I sent would cover at least 15 inches each day and fetch me at least 75 rupees a month, but thanks to the news-editor's talents for abridgement, I had to crawl up each day by fractions of an inch. I measured my total 'inches' with a scale at the end of the month and sent my bill; and they would invariably doubt and disallow my measurements and send me some arbitrary amount, never more than thirty rupees, often less.

● In October 1996, India's best-known man of letters, R.K. NARAYAN, was 90. And he's still going strong. We conclude this celebratory series with today's feature.

for an hour and was ready to go out again at four o'clock after a cup of coffee. This time it would be a visit to the magistrate's court before closing time, to take down the judgment in a counterfeit case or murder conspiracy. On Saturday afternoons I sat at the municipal meeting, watching the city fathers wrangle over their obscure issues — all through the evening it would go on. In those days there were always a couple of lawyers on the council, and they never permitted the business to proceed beyond an examination of the procedure and the by-laws. No more than a couple of items in the voluminous agenda would be covered at the end of two hours. After a coffee break, I would suddenly clutch the agenda papers and leave, afflicted with a headache.

Some days there would be academic matters to cover, a distinguished visitor lecturing at the university or a senate meeting. In those days there was a local League of Nations Union, which strove to establish peace in this world in its own way. The secretary of this union, who was a history professor, decreed that our reports should be scrutinised by him before we filed them. I resisted his order as an encroachment on the freedom of the press, and he threatened to dis-accredit me as a correspondent

### Getting more than one copy of Madras Musings?

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# Small-scale's big woes

"Twentythree per cent of Tamil Nadu's two lakh small-scale industrial (SSI) units are sick, as are about 15% of the country's 26 lakh units," says M S Parthasarathy, President, National Confederation of Small Industries (NACOSI). And lack of capability, or education, are not the reasons for this situation. What are, are inadequate working capital and cumbersome procedures preventing growth from small-scale to medium-scale.

Committee has come and gone, the Abid Hussein Committee constituted last year has yet to submit its report — have provided no relief. Meanwhile, Parthasarathy suggests: — Construction of sheds for the tiny sector. — A tiny sector development corporation which should also advise on sales tax, excise etc. — SIDBI should programme assistance for SSIs and the tiny sector. — Margin money for loans for both medium-term loans

overburdened with processing reams of papers to fulfil outmoded norms, the entrepreneur spends much fewer hours at his workshop compared to the time he spends with banking and excise officials," Parthasarathy charges.

Then there is the reluctance of the bigger units to settle their bills within 30 days, although there exists the Prompt Payment Act. "The threat of blacklisting stops the SSIs from taking action under the Act against the big companies," complains Parthasarathy. To compound the problem, banks are not interested in financing the SSIs till their dues are settled by their clients, and that kill the units for want of working capital. Ironically, the big companies avail of credit facilities from the banks against the stocks in their godowns — for which they haven't paid the SSI units! In this regard, even a US giant is yet to settle Rs.40 lakh dues to a Madras-based unit, dampening the latter's plans!

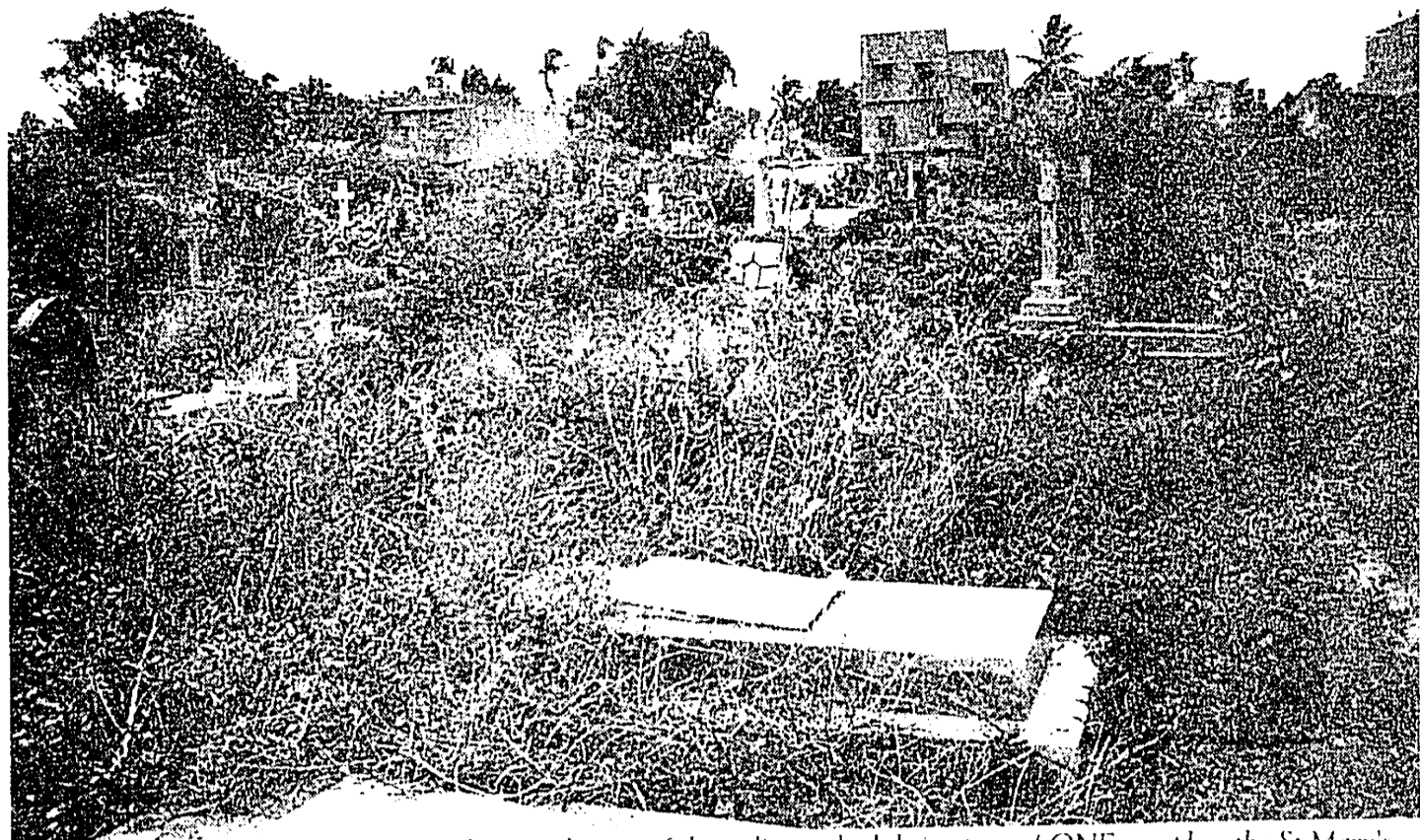
Of the country's nearly 26 lakh SSI units, accounting for about 1.5 crore employees, the tiny sector comprises nearly 90 per cent. *The Economic Survey, 1995-96* shows that, in real terms, the small-scale sector recorded a growth of 10 per cent in 1993-94 as against 7 per cent in 1992-93 and contributed to nearly 34% of the exports of the big companies and 40% of the gross turnover in the manufacturing sector. Parthasarathy feels that if the country is to witness healthy industrial growth, the SSI units need to be nurtured. What SSI needs is a separate policy in line with the changing environment. The Common Minimum Programme of the United Front Government spelt support to SSI units; the budget presented by P Chidambaram did not.

Committees appointed by the Centre to look into the problems of SSIs — the Nayak

and working capital should not exceed 20 per cent. — The tiny sector must not be charged interest of more than 13.5% for medium-term loans and 15% for working capital. In Tamil Nadu, the small-scale units are mainly in and around Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore and Tiruchi. Several of them have started the process of obtaining ISO certification, but the industry as a whole has a long way to go in this regard.

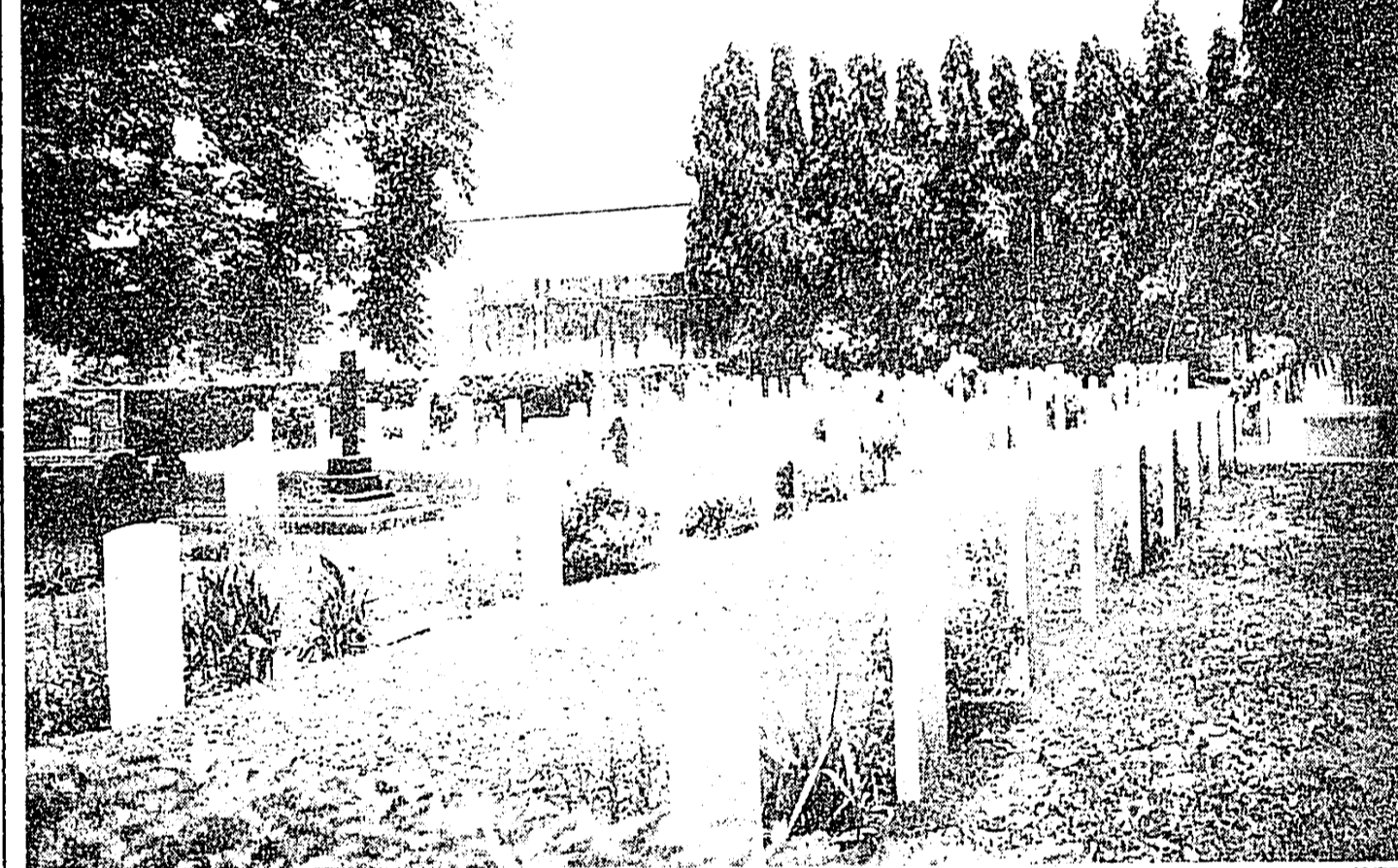
**Oilrigs to hotels**  
Oilrig major Aban Lloyd Chiles Offshore Ltd. is the latest industry major to plan diversification into hotels. An investment of Rs 60 crore is expected to be made in the project, which will see a hotel being set up on a one-acre plot near Egmore. The company is also planning to invest about Rs 45 crore on expanding its current business. Aban's proposal for putting up a 100%-export-oriented oil refinery in Tuticorin has, however, been mired in the ICICI headquarters for more than a year. The company had applied for a Rs 900 crore loan for the Rs 1350 crore project, and had planned to raise the balance through a premium public issue. The company had already imported a second-hand refinery plant from Canada for the purpose. But there's still no news about the loan. Meanwhile, the company is awaiting ONGC's renewal of the recently-expired hiring contract for its rig in the East Godavari basin.

**TAILPIECE:** Pentafour's plans to move into travel and leisure are anchored in beach resorts in Muthukkadu and Pondicherry, according to market reports. But the company is in no hurry to rush into this field which is virgin for it.



Our OLD and NEW! this fortnight are a bit out of the ordinary, both being part of ONE complex, the St Mary's Cemetery on The Island. Madras's first British cemetery, later called St Mary's Cemetery, was where the Law College has come up, south of George Town and north of the Fort. When the first Indian settlement was established by Fort St George it was on what is now the High Court campus and the British burial ground was to the west of it. After the French returned the Fort to the British in 1749 and following their second siege of the Fort in the late 1750s, the Indian settlement, 'Black Town', was razed by the British and its settlers moved into what has developed as George Town. As for St Mary's Cemetery, some of its tombstones and monuments were moved to its present location but several tombstones were also used to pave the courtyard of St Mary's Church in the Fort.

**THE OLD... & THE NEW**  
Our OLD shows what St Mary's Cemetery on The Island looks like today, with its old tombs and newer ones all overgrown by Nature gone wild. How can anyone find their kin, leave alone pay their homage to them, in a cemetery which has virtually hidden most of its tombs?! A contrast is the NEW, which is in the southwest corner of this cemetery. This is where the British War Graves Commission who provide funding and send out inspection teams from time to time. If official funding of this order can't be obtained from the Government to keep the main section neat and orderly, can't the diocese appeal to the kin of those buried here for funds to clean up this 'jungle' and maintain it thereafter. (Photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



# Developing a balanced transport system

Recently, I spotted two news items side by side in a leading newspaper. One said that the automobile sector is growing rapidly at a rate of 26 per cent, and collaborations with foreign companies promise to push up capacities. The second said that India's petroleum products' consumption will grow in the next decade from 81 million tonnes (mt) to 150 million tonnes. There is, of course, a strong link between the two developments. There are further linkages with urbanisation, traffic congestion, environmental pollution, social values and equity. But hardly anybody seems to be asking if so many cars are really required! More than that, what are we doing about developing a balanced transport system which would meet the needs of different sections

of people in all our burgeoning cities? This is not the type of planning issue you set aside even for a year. This must top the planners' agenda all the time. The speed with which cities are growing in the developing world is unparalleled in human history. And transport planning cannot go without land-use planning and environmental planning. Forget the environmental hellholes in the making. Let us just talk about traffic congestion. The very purpose of using automobiles will be lost if cars were slowed down to a speed of 5-10 km an hour. And yet at peak hours, that is precisely what motorists do in a city like Delhi at many traffic junctions. In the process, they breathe in huge quantities of toxic pollutants. What is worrying about all this is that nobody is seriously looking at this problem from a national perspective. There are many cities in Asia which have this same problem. But worldwide, people are trying to find solutions to these problems. Southeast Asian NGOs have formed a sustainable transport action network for Asia and the Pacific. In South Korea, (Continued on P 6)

● With vehicular pollution becoming an acute global environmental problem, planners need to put the development of a balanced transport system at the top of their agendas. They must at the same time keep in mind that transport planning cannot go without land-use and environmental planning.



# Madras-born Benu a Royal ballerina



Dancing her way into the international limelight with the Royal Ballet of the United Kingdom is the striking looking Madras-born ballerina Benazir Hussein, whose stage nowadays is more often that not the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. The rising star of the company, Benazir Hussein is little known in India, but has caught the attention of the British media with her recent portrayal of 'Profane Love' in Sir Frederick Ashton's ballet, *Illuminations*.

Benazir, or Benu, looks far younger than 23 years, yet her features bear that classical stamp and regality that has been attributed to ballet dancers through the ages. She was born in Madras to an Indian father, Jawad 'Joe' Hussein, who played for the Madras Cricket Club, and an English mother. The family was firmly established in Madras until Benazir was a year old. They then decided to move to England because the Madras climate did not seem to suit her.

Life in England was spent in a cricket-mad household, what with her father and three elder brothers all very keen on the game. A suitable pastime for the daughter of the house was

never discussed, until Jawad Hussein went on a cricketing tour to Singapore and happened to see a group of little girls performing ballet. He was so taken with what he had seen that on his return he insisted that Benazir be enrolled in ballet school.

At 11, she enrolled at White Lodge, the Royal Ballet's lower school. "White Lodge is the training ground for generations of the Royal Ballet's future stars. Essentially a boarding school, the six hours of dancing each day is fitted around an academic curriculum. My first two years at White Lodge I was absolutely fine, then I got to the third year and suddenly I didn't want to dance any more."

A part of the problem was every ballet dancer's nightmare: growing too tall. By then Benazir was already 5'7" tall. At the end of each academic year, she had to have a back X-ray to see if she might be growing too tall and there was always a lurking fear that before long a ballet career would be ruled out. In the end it wasn't.

At 15, she moved to the Upper School in London. "I found it quite difficult because from the ages of 11 to 15 you are in

this sheltered environment and then they bring you to London and suddenly you are asked to fend for yourself." But in the last year at school, when a certain number of students from all the classes are picked to enter the graduation class and some are asked to work with the company as a student in the Corps de Ballet, Benazir found herself one of them.

After graduating into the Corps de Ballet, the dancer rises through the ranks by becoming a First Artist, then a Soloist and eventually reaches the pinnacle of the profession as a principal ballerina. Benazir became a First Artist in September 1993 and currently is a Soloist, having held that position since December 1994. In the past few months, the Royal Ballet have been promoting her extensively and it is tempting to assume that she is being groomed to take on the mantle of Principal. She herself is naturally cautious about the possibility of star billing which would catapult her to the ranks of luminaries such as Dame Margot Fonteyn and her own idol, Anna Pavlova, in generations past, and alongside the current line-up of Principals that dominate the ballet world,

namely Darcey Bussell, Viviana Durante and Sylvie Guillem.

When Benazir is not immersed in the world of dance, she spends time with family and friends and involves herself in various sporting activities. "I love sport. I've had to love sport, coming from a cricketing family. I watched the World Cup although I was very disappointed my brother was not playing." The brother in question is none other than English cricketer Nasser Hussein. The Madras-born batsman has since scored his first Test century.

The brother and sister are close and frequently appear in the media together. Both concede that close family ties and support have played a major part in allowing them to rise to the top of their respective professions. The youngest of four children and the only girl, Benazir admits to being spoilt while enjoying the focus of the family's attention. The three brothers — Mel, Abbas and Nasser have always been protective of their sister. "My brothers were quite possessive towards me and still are. They would always check out who I was with, especially my middle

brother Abbas, who really looked after me."

As she was growing up, Benazir admits experiencing a certain amount of cultural conflict. Both her parents are Muslim. Her mother, who lived in India for 13 years, is fluent in three different Indian languages and steeped in Indian culture. "With my father it was a very cultural thing: 'you are still an Indian girl and I don't want you dating'. My father always hoped that I would marry an Indian, but later I think he knew it was inevitable that I would marry an Englishman, being brought up here all my life."

On August 13th, Benazir married Errol Pickford, Principal Dancer with the Royal Ballet. Errol, thankfully, has received the family's stamp of approval, especially from the three brothers, whose opinion still counts for a lot in such matters. — (Courtesy: Society).

— Farida R.C. Cooper











## Answers to Quiz

1. Harare and Rome; 2. Capt. Satish Sharma; 3. Allan Donald of South Africa; 4. Saudia's Boeing 747 and Kazakh Airways' IL-76; 5. Michael Jackson; 6. Akkineni Nageswara Rao; 7. Karnataka (obviously); 8. Cleopatra; 9. Sanjay Manjrekar; 10. ...airplane in the world with a seating capacity for 555 passengers; 11. Pope John Paul II; 12. Evander Holyfield; 13. J.R. Jayewardene; 14. Madhav Rao Scindia; 15. Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt for his Mohana Veena.

\* \* \*

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