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HUNZA AND NAGAR YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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THE recent agreements between Pakistan and the People's Republic of China to delimit their common border, to link themselves by an air service, and to foster cultural and commercial relations have underlined the strategic importance of the twin states of Hunza and Nagar, which form a wedge thrust into the area where Soviet Turkestan, Chinese Sinkiang, and Afghan Wakhan approach one another. Northern Hunza extends into the mountainous region where the Hindu Kush and Mustagh ranges meet; and the state is separated from the Yasin district of Gilgit to its west by more mountains. Nagar lies to the east of Hunza, and is divided from Baltistan, again further east, by the Mustagh range. Both states are bounded to the south by Gilgit, which provides their only exit to the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent. Together they form a kind of watch-tower overlooking Central Asia, and through Hunza runs an old trade route from Kashgar and Yarkand over the 15,400 feet Mintaka Pass, along which as late as British times there passed caravans bringing the products of China for exchange for the goods in the bazaars of northern India. Hunza has always maintained strong links with Chinese Turkestan, now better known as Sinkiang; and its rulers, formerly known by the old title of Tham (Governor), not only regularly exchanged presents with the Chinese authorities of Kashgar but also claimed the allegiance of the inhabitants of Roskam and the Taghdumbash Pamir on the Sinkiang side of the frontier.

I had once visited Hunza, a good many years ago, when the old Kashmir Durbar claimed a shadowy paramountcy over Hunza and Nagar. Nagar I had never visited, but I cherished a vivid recollection of the extraordinary natural beauty of the whole area, shadowed by the Karakorams and dominated by Rakaposhi. Accordingly, when the Government of Pakistan invited my wife and myself to visit their country again in the winter of 1963-64, and asked us where we would like to go, I picked out Hunza and Nagar as our first priority. I am afraid that it never struck me that this request might give our hosts a lot of trouble; although no doubt I ought to have reflected that with the process of frontier delimitation actually going on between representatives of Pakistan and China, foreigners might not be welcome. It was only when we reached Pakistan that we discovered the current situation. The whole of the Gilgit Agency territory north of Nomal, seventeen miles from Gilgit, was closed to travellers. Not even the diplomatic representatives of Commonwealth—to say nothing of foreign—countries could gain access to it. But a most kind and courteous exception was made in our case; the concurrence of all the departments of Government concerned, civil and military, was readily

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forthcoming. All arrangements were made for our transport; but we were warned that the journey beyond Gilgit was not one to be lightly undertaken, especially as winter was approaching. Even so, the opportunity was too good to be missed.

While we were staying in Rawalpindi with our old friends Major-General M. Z. Kiani and the Begum Sahiba—who had themselves occupied the historic Gilgit Residency from 1955 to 1958—I took the chance of doing a little reading, and making a few enquiries, about the territory that we were to visit. I learned that until about 1878 Hunza and Nagar were scarcely known to the British except as formidable if small states in a condition of almost perpetual warfare with each other and with the Kashmir Durbar. This would not have mattered so much if they had not lain astride the trade route, which they could interrupt at will. But the silk, tea, porcelain and other commodities which laboriously climbed the Mintaka ("Thousand Ibex") Pass were valued items in India's economy; and it was thought desirable to encourage the Kashmir authorities to subsidize Hunza and Nagar to keep the old Marco Polo road open to caravans. But the Muslim Hunzawalis and Nagaris—the former Ismailis and the latter Shiah—disliked the intrusion of the Hindu Dogras of Kashmir in the Gilgit area, and gave strong support to the last R'as of Gilgit in his heroic but eventually hopeless fight against Dogra rule. When Gilgit with its dependencies of Yasin, Astore and the rest were finally conquered, Hunza and Nagar withdrew into isolation, although rebellious members of the ruling Houses of each State occasionally presented themselves at Srinagar to invoke Dogra intervention in support of their cause.

In addition to their interest in the trade route, the British were also concerned about developments in Central Asia. This was the period when both Whitehall and Simla were perturbed about the steady advance of Russia towards the northern as well as the western purlieus of India. By agreement with the Kashmir Durbar, the British stationed a Political Agent in Gilgit in 1878 to watch the situation. Continual friction, which often developed into open fighting, between Hunza and Nagar kept the Gilgit area in a state of tension, especially as both states were always ready to forget their differences and join in harassing local Kashmiri garrisons. A permanent British Agency was established in Gilgit in 1889 under Lt.-Colonel A. G. A. Durand. He tried his best to establish good relations with Hunza and Nagar, paying the rulers of both states a further subsidy, in addition to that which they drew from the Kashmir Durbar, to leave the trade route in peace. The agreement was not respected. Worse still, from the British point of view, was the fact that the Mir of Hunza, Safdar Ali, was in touch with a Russian explorer named Captain Gromveski. Safdar Ali was told that unless he broke off these contacts, and ceased raiding the caravans, action would be taken against him. He returned a defiant answer, saying that if lead ran short, Hunza and Nagar would use gold bullets rather than submit. But the expedition which Colonel Durand mounted in 1891 against Hunza and Nagar was too formidable to be repelled. After fierce and bloody fighting round the strategic fort of Nilt, Safdar Ali fled to his Russian and Chinese friends, who did nothing to help him. Both states submitted, and came under British suzerainty.

From 1891 until 1897 a British Political Officer with a military force was stationed in Hunza.

Curiously enough, the peoples of Hunza and Nagar accepted the presence of the British quite willingly, and indeed still speak of them even today with the warmth of affection. Within a year of the conquest, the British established a half-brother of Safdar Ali as the new Mir of Hunza, and the Mir of Nagar was reinstated. Both worked with the British in complete amity. The Hunzawalis and the Nagaris liked the British; the British liked the hardy hillmen, stout warriors and good sportsmen, devoid of any traditional Oriental evasiveness or double-talk. Both states sent very serviceable contingents of fighting men to the relief of Chitral in 1895—only four years after they had themselves submitted to British arms.

The Mirs of Hunza and Nagar speak well of the time when their lands were under British rule, and flatly deny that they have accepted the suzerainty of anyone else. But the British felt that they could not remain for ever in this remote patch of Central Asia, especially as Hunza and Nagar were eminently capable of looking after themselves; and in 1897 the Political Agent and the garrison withdrew. In theory, no doubt, Hunza and Nagar came to be regarded as parts of the huge, ramshackle Kashmir State; in fact, they were independent except for the cordial relations they maintained with the British Agency in Gilgit.

Before the British came, Hunza and Nagar were almost trackless except for the old Marco Polo caravan trail. The local ponies seem to be able to go anywhere; the inhabitants can move as fast up a vertical cliff-face as they can upon level ground. Moreover, when they were fighting the Kashmiris, roads were a disadvantage to local resistance. But with the coming of the British, this changed. Not only did the Mirs of Hunza and Nagar permit the construction of improved communications from Chalt, the summer capital of Nagar, to Gilgit and the south; they also allowed the British to run strategic tracks through various parts of their own territory. Before this, conditions faced by travellers were probably much the same as they had been in the time of the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang, who wrote (A.D. 631-642) of the narrow tracks chiselled out of the sheer rock, from which pilgrims and merchants had to launch themselves into mid-air on ropes or chains to cross the crevices cut by mountain torrents. British engineers cut a number of practicable mule and pony tracks along the sides of the gorges of the Hunza River and of some of the side-streams, often bridging the torrents encountered on the way with wooden galleries supported on struts. They also built a fine suspension bridge at Tashod to form a short-cut between Nagar City and Baltit, the capital of Hunza. This was later carried away by a spate; only the piers at each end remain, to provide an anchorage for the ropes by which goods and passengers can be hauled across the deep ravine with its raging torrent many feet below. Unfortunately, in making these roads, blasting was used as little as possible to save expense. The employment of unskilled manual labour made it necessary to look for soft strata in the gorge-walls, and to cut the tracks accordingly. The result is that the tracks rise and fall perpetually as the line of the strata varies; gradients of one in three are quite common; and hairpin bends of extreme severity are encountered at frequent intervals.

This did not matter to mule trains and ponies; while local travellers usually prefer to take their own short cuts on the cliff face, ignoring the road altogether when it diverges too much from the straight line. But these tracks are a nightmare to modern mechanical transport, as my wife and I found when we used them. They are usually too narrow for a Land Rover; even in the smallest size of jeep there is as a rule only an inch or two of clearance between the outside wheels and the edge of the abyss below. Four-wheel drive has to be used most of the time because of the steepness of the gradients up and down—it is often on an incline of one in three that the vehicle has to back three times to get round a hairpin bend. Travelling in these conditions in a heavily-laden jeep, full to the brim with humans, baggage and jerricans of petrol, is an unforgettable experience.

The modern history of Hunza and Nagar begins when they acceded to Pakistan in 1947, after the British supervision in Gilgit was withdrawn. As it happened, both rulers were actually staying with Maharaja Hari Singh in Srinagar when the revolt of Gilgit against Dogra rule broke out; but, like the Gilgitis and the Baltis, they were not prepared for Indian or Kashmiri strangers to step into the shoes of their friends the British in the Gilgit Agency. As soon as possible, they returned to their own states. Kinsmen of both Ruling families took a prominent part in the revolts in Gilgit and Baltistan; and Hunza and Nagar quickly acceded to Pakistan on the same terms that other rulers enjoyed; namely, internal autonomy, and cession to Pakistan of powers over defence, foreign relations and communications. As of old, they continued to look to the Gilgit Agency for advice and help; the only difference was that there was now a Pakistani instead of a British officer as Resident.

In 1956 and 1957 I had enjoyed the opportunity of long talks with the Mirs of Hunza and Nagar while I was staying at the Residency at Gilgit; and I was able to gather a pretty clear impression of what the new régime means to them. They spoke cordially of their relations with the Pakistan authorities, saying that they had experienced no interference in their management of their local affairs, and had profited a good deal from the help of Pakistani agricultural and other experts as well as from the new opportunities which their subjects enjoyed for enlisting in the Pakistan Army, Police and other services. They particularly welcomed the presence in their area of the Northern Scouts, of which the rank and file are mostly local men, while the officers are usually Pakistani regulars who welcome junior members of the Hunza and Nagar ruling families in the commissioned cadres. Since Hunza and Nagar have handed over the control of communications, Pakistani engineers now look after the roads; it is thanks to them that the old tracks have become "jeepable". The job of keeping them in this condition is, as will have been gathered from what I have written earlier in this article, almost incredibly difficult. It necessitates constant work all the year round. In this glacier-ridden terrain, landslides are frequent; scarcely a month passes without some breach in a vital road. These breaches are quickly and efficiently mended; but it is perhaps significant that when my wife and I went to Hunza and Nagar, the authorities insisted that we took with us a Public Works Department officer, in order that he could quickly mobilize local labour to repair any break in the

road which might bring us to a halt. Pakistan's care for the communications in the Hunza-Nagar area no doubt springs mainly from strategic considerations, for across the Mintaka Pass lies Sinkiang, and for a long time Chinese intentions were uncertain. But I learned that the Mir of Hunza's ancient connections across the border were proving very useful; he received, and passed on to the Pakistan authorities, early and precise intelligence about the approach of Chinese patrols. The result was that the Northern Scouts were able to occupy in advance any doubtful ground, so that the Chinese troops saluted and retreated. The probing tactics of the Chinese which proved so disastrous to India in the Aksai Chin area failed altogether in the Karakoram region because of Pakistani vigilance. So far as I could gather, the only complaint of the Mirs of Hunza and Nagar at the time when I saw them was that since the communist Government of China had taken over control in Sinkiang, practically no trade came over the passes. This was all the more tantalizing because the roads to carry it were now so much better! Even so, the fruit and other products of Hunza and Nagar were finding their profitable way down to Gilgit; and already there was talk of the wonderful new all-weather road which would link Gilgit by way of Swat and the Malakand Pass to Rawalpindi and the markets of Pakistan.

In 1956 and 1957 my wife and I were not able to accept the cordial invitation of both Mirs to come to Hunza and Nagar to see things for ourselves; but the knowledge that we should be welcome added to the pleasure with which we anticipated our later journey. We were anxious to find out how the people of Hunza and Nagar viewed the recent agreements with the Chinese; what they thought of the whole situation; and what, if any, difference it was likely to make to them. But before we left Rawalpindi, we did our best to orientate ourselves, as it were into the outlook of the Pakistan authorities, who helped us by discussing their position frankly and freely.

I have written briefly elsewhere of the reasons which underlie the change which has taken place in the foreign policy of Pakistan during the last two years (see *The Times* of May 23, 1964) and I do not wish to interrupt the main thread of this article, which deals with Hunza and Nagar. But it seems worth while to say in passing that none of the policy-makers to whom we talked viewed recent developments in Pakistan's foreign policy as anything much more than an adaptation to circumstances which were not of Pakistan's making. I received the distinct impression that all of them would have been happy to continue the old policy of keeping the strongest possible ties with the Commonwealth and with the western democracies, and maintaining with the Communist *bloc* only such relations as diplomatic courtesy necessitated. The change, I was assured, had been forced upon Pakistan by the bitter realization that Britain and the United States attach more importance to conciliating the doubtful neutralism of India than to confirming the unwavering friendship of Pakistan. Since India had rejected, three years ago, the suggestion that she should join with Pakistan for a joint defence of the subcontinent; since Britain and the United States had lavished arms, munitions, and expert military advice upon India to help her in a situation arising mainly from her own

mishandling of an ordinary boundary dispute with China, without regard to the effect on Pakistan of this accretion to India's strength, Pakistan found herself faced on two sides by potential enemies. What, then, was she to do but regulate her relations with China, just as Britain and the United States were trying to do with *their* principal Communist "opposite number", Soviet Russia? The change did not imply any weakening of Pakistan's alliances; it was pure re-insurance. Such was the outlook which I found in Rawalpindi before we set off for Hunza and Nagar.

Among all the links which bind the peoples and regions of Pakistan into a nation, not the least potent is the enterprise, initiative, and remarkable efficiency of Pakistan International Airways. The services which they maintain with Gilgit function with astonishing regularity, in spite of the vagaries of the weather; but flying is so hazardous in those latitudes that the pilots are specially trained for it. My wife and I made the journey to Gilgit in one of the new pressurized Fokker Friendships—it was comforting to see the sturdy Rolls-Royce engines forcing us smoothly through the air at 18,000 feet above the lower peaks, with Nanga Parbat and the ice-bastions of the Karakoram above us. Yet, in spite of the power and range of these modern machines, some of the pilots to whom we talked still prefer the old Dakotas for the job of winding low among the gorges, when "things up above" are difficult. Until the grand new road to Gilgit via Swat and the Malakand is ready—110 miles of the 420 are already finished—air services are the only link between Gilgit and the plains which can be used all the year round.

Gilgit itself has expanded greatly since we last visited it only a few years ago; and while we were collecting our transport, we took the opportunity to see the enlarged bazaars, and to look at the new rest-houses, schools (for both girls and boys) and hospitals. Incorporation in Pakistan has done much for the people, who are now able to go out and earn money in the plains; for the cultivable area is small, the holdings microscopic, and most of the food has to be imported from more fertile areas. Basic democracies, which have done so well in Baltistan, are soon to be introduced; already there is a good deal of work going on to build bridges and improve village roads on a self-help basis. We had to stay in Gilgit two days longer than we expected because the road had gone near Chalt, carried away by a sudden torrent; and we could not reach Nagar until it was mended.

I have already indicated the kind of roads over which we had to travel, and I will not enlarge on the terrifying aspects of the journey, for I must devote the remainder of this article to the impressions which we formed of the situation in Hunza and Nagar when we arrived.

Although the people of both states are descended from the same stock, claiming Yüeh-chi descent, and mostly speaking Burashaski—there are also some Tshina-speaking areas in Nagar—they dress and behave differently. Before the British came, the states spent all their time fighting each other; every village was fortified. If the Hunza people caught a Nagar man in their territory, they sold him as a slave to the Chinese in Sinkiang; if the Nagar people caught a Hunza man, they killed him out of hand. British influence healed traditional feuds; marriage alliances between the ruling families have cemented the good understanding which is based upon

economic interdependence. Much of what Hunza needs—eggs, meat, vegetables, fruit, firewood—comes from Nagar; but the Hunza people seem gayer and are better clad, even if the Nagar people are better fed. An old legend explains this difference to everybody's satisfaction. It is related that when the great saint Shaikh Waliullah (whose shrine lies between Chalt and Nagar) was on his deathbed, he despatched a disciple to the then Mir of Nagar, asking for a shroud. The Mir agreed to give one; and went inside, keeping the messenger waiting. Time went on; the messenger had been exhorted to return by sunset, when the saint expected to breathe his last. In despair, he left, and approached the Mir of Hunza at Baltit, who promptly provided a shroud with which the messenger galloped back. Meanwhile the Mir of Nagar emerged, with a shroud all ready, only to be told that the messenger had already left. He blamed himself bitterly for his dilatory behaviour; and, by way of making amends, despatched at once meats, vegetables, poultry and fruit for a sumptuous funeral feast. The provisions arrived just at the moment when the shroud came from Baltit; the saint was still alive. He blessed the Mirs and the people of both states, saying that Hunza should never lack fine raiment and that Nagar should never lack food.

The people of Nagar are very strict Shiahs and much under the influence of the local Mullahs. In almost every village there is at least one man who has made the pilgrimage to Kerbela, and who can read Arabic and Persian. It is quite common for a man to sell his land to raise money for the *haj*; he comes back penniless, but lives on deeply respected. There is a curious aspect as of Calvin's Geneva about the place; anyone who drinks wine or other alcoholic liquor is publicly beaten; and the ancient sport of polo has died out because the Mullahs say that it is better for people to pray than to waste time watching an idle game. The deserted and ruined polo grounds, of which every village has one, are sad reminders of the passing of more joyous days. But although the Mullahs of Nagar may be responsible for the decline of polo in that State, it seems probable that other causes also are at work. Polo seems dying out throughout much of the Gilgit Agency; I was told that ponies are becoming a luxury now that roads are "jeep-able" and jeeps have become readily available under American aid schemes in so many villages. Few men can afford to keep ponies merely to play polo. This explanation, however, does not seem to fit Nagar, where there are still many ponies in regular use for transport; so perhaps Mullah influence is indeed the major factor in the local eclipse of the game.

Hunza, and Baltit the capital, seem gayer places than Nagar. Something must no doubt be ascribed to the situation; Baltit lies on the sunny side of the Hunza River, and the Golden Mountain beautifies the view without overshadowing it. The people are Ismailis, with the cosmopolitan outlook which that creed brings. They seem to travel more extensively than the Nagaris—in spite of the strong tradition of pilgrimage in Nagar—many of them find their way down into the plains to seek employment. The trading tradition seems strong among them, no doubt because of their connection with the old Silk Road.

Both the Hunzawalis and the Nagaris are excellent agriculturalists, and the terraces which they carve out of the sheer hillsides and stock with soil

carried thousands of feet from below are miracles of perseverance and ingenuity. In the spring and summer, these terraces are green from the water of the glaciers which are channelled down from the snow-line; there is an entire local lore about how glaciers can be controlled, used for irrigation, and, on occasion, "seeded" to create new ones, by taking material from the nearest "male" and "female" specimens. Fruit, and in particular apricots, is grown in abundance; apricots form a staple food in both states, and the people ascribe their excellent health and physique to this fruit. For a very long time, disease of any kind was virtually unknown in Hunza and Nagar; there was not a single doctor or dispensary in the entire area. But now, with the opening of communications, common diseases like influenza and dysentery are beginning to make their appearance. Even so, the people look astonishingly robust and vigorous.

Among those I talked to, who included high officials as well as ordinary men, I did not find one who failed to welcome the new understanding between Pakistan and China. Not only did they consider that it would guarantee peace in the area; they were also looking forward to the revival of trade along the old route from Kashgar and Yarkand. Moreover, everyone seemed pleased that the Chinese have taken into full account the traditional claims of Hunza beyond the former frontier; they have pulled back the boundary of Sinkiang to give the Mir of Hunza not only some very good grazing lands, but also a useful salt mine. Since salt is almost like gold in these regions, both Hunza and Nagar have good cause for satisfaction.

With the improvement of the roads into Hunza and Nagar under Pakistan's ægis, there is a prospect of tourist trade. Already, in the summer, people are coming from Gilgit and the south to sample the extraordinary natural beauty of this region, and to take advantage of the sport which it offers in the way of ibex, markhor and snow leopard. In addition to the hospitality that the Mir of Hunza offers to his guests, there is a little hotel in Baltit; but I seemed to sense that any increase over the present number of visitors would give rise to difficult problems of accommodation. The real trouble is the difficulty of getting in and out; there is a tendency, perhaps, for some visitors to outstay their welcome! Even the ingenuity of Pakistan International Airways is for the moment baffled by this problem; exploratory planes have been sent to Hunza and Nagar, but have been obliged to return. Short of felling groves of most valuable fruit trees, there is nowhere at all to land; and I was informed that the extreme elevation—Baltit is 8,000 feet above sea level—makes the use of helicopters difficult and dangerous.

Hunza and Nagar, and particularly Nagar, retain much of their old unspoiled charm. Even such travel films as the American *Search for Paradise* have been unable to bridge the gap which deters the most hardy globe-trotters from linking this outpost of Central Asia with the stamping-grounds of the ordinary Tourist Agency.

