

Chinese-built rail project becomes a concern for Indonesia

Smash And Grab

By Sunanda Datta Ray

Contd.... CHAPTER 7

Her first appearance in Sikkim was apparently with Taya Zinkin, the journalist wife of Maurice Zinkin of the ICS.

Alt that was known for certain about the mystery woman came from the recollections of people whose paths had crossed hers. An elderly Englishman said he had met her when she was the wife of an English tea-planter in Jorhat. Delhi journalists described her as a fixture in H.V. Kamath's bachelor establishment. They had also known her as married to a director of health services, carrying on a vendetta against Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, her husband's minister. Mrs Langford-Rae had taught boys at St Columbus' school as well as civil service cadets; she had been an interpreter; and Pasupati Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana in Kathmandu remembered her as his governess when he was a child in Delhi and his father the Nepalese ambassador. A missionary woman from Gangtok had actually run to earth Mrs Langford-Rae's sister, a doctor's widow, in the middle class respectability of an Edinburgh flat. That was the closest that anyone ever got to her origins.

Her own stories were far more colourful. But the different versions she trotted out seldom agreed, dates never. She was Scots by birth and had been brought up in a Belgian convent. No, she was Belgian but had studied medicine in Edinburgh. The sepia photograph of a woman in veil and bustle, taken three-quarters from behind in the style of 50 years ago, was her mother, "a dear little German baroness". Her mother had been a French countess settled in Geneva. She had a flat in Brussels crammed with period furniture, cut glass, and antique silver. Her treasures were stored with Harrods in London, and she had ordered them to send flowers to Sir Tashi after an operation at the London Clinic. Her son was in the British Foreign Office. He was in the Bank of England. He had been in the colonial police. He was really her stepson. Her own son, Rory, had been in tea, killed in a motoring accident in north Bengal. She talked of Kemal Ataturk and Chou En-lai, of Sarvepali Radhakrishnan and Maharajah Mohan Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana. She claimed that an uncle had taken her for safety across Siberia when war broke out, but no one was sure whether it was the First or Second World War or some minor Balkan conflict. She said she had lived in Burma and Hong Kong, and recounted precise incidents about anonymous people of many nationalities in vague places. Her husbands seemed to have been legion.

Late one evening after the chhang flagons had been filled many times, she peremptorily ordered "the photograph" to be brought. It turned out to be the silver-framed portrait of a splendidly mustachioed officer covered in ribbons and medals. "My father!" she announced with a superb flourish; then as the gathering waited expectantly, "Marshal Carl Gustaf Mannerheim of Finland". By 1961 she had been married to Kazi for several years, her account of how it happened predictably embellished into an improbable fairy tale. "I was just going to bed in Delhi when Maya Devi Chhetri [a Kalimpang MP] phoned to say she was bringing some people to see me. I was so tired and didn't want to be bothered, but what could I do? Dear Maya Devi was so insistent." So Mrs Langford-Rae struggled back into a dress and quickly laid out some snacks. "And then they arrived and Maya Devi, who really is a sweetie, had this rather strange creature with her who didn't say a word and I said to myself, 'Oh dear, another of those dumb hillbillies' and put him out of my mind."

The visitors stayed on and their reluctant hostess, though weary and nearly dropping off to sleep, was too polite to say so. "I was bored and exhausted when suddenly Maya Devi suggested we should all go out to dinner. I grabbed at the chance to get some rest and at once said 'You go on, do.' " But they would not hear of it. "A sandwich and a cup of tea with a book was all I wanted but they were ever so persistent. The argument went on and on and I didn't want to go out at all, I only wanted to get rid of them, when our mountain friend, who hadn't opened his mouth all evening, suddenly said 'You come too!' and I said to myself 'Good heavens, it speaks! Well at least that's something.' You know, I really had begun to think it was a vegetable or something." So she changed again and then, just as all of them were setting out, Kazi grabbed her hand and mumbled "You marry me, yes?"

"It was so weird I didn't know what to say, whether to laugh or cry. I mean he couldn't possibly have been serious, could he?" There was a peal of thunder just then and as the rain poured down in buckets, Kazi clapped his hands and let out a guffaw of pleased boyish laughter. "It really was delightful to hear, so simple and unaffected. They told me that rain and thunder are auspicious signs in Sikkim."

So they were married by a magistrate and the marriage lines were safely locked away by a firm of solicitors in Calcutta.

They could not have been a more ill-matched pair. The bride was fluent in several European languages, whereas Kazi spoke only Sikkimese and somewhat broken Hindustani. The language of the kitchen, in which memsahibs give household instructions to bearers, was their only means of communication, an appropriate one as it happened. She was also an accomplished woman of the world, wrapped in an air of roccoco intrigue, while Kazi had never ventured beyond the subcontinent though his past was less inaccessible. He was nearly 60 at the time and already married to a woman of property. Kazi's family was implacably opposed to this unsuitable second alliance. Rumour had it that his nephew offered Mrs Langford-Rae a blank cheque to fill in her price and quietly go away. There were tantrums too in Chakung where the womenfolk barricaded themselves inside the house and pelted the foreign intruder with pots and pans. The family never did accept her; years later Kalimpang watched in amusement while Kazi and her husband's great-nephew shrieked abuse at each other in the market-place.

But the marriage was the turning-point in Kazi's life. He had someone to write his petitions and proclamations. His first wife conveniently dying, her fortune was used to renovate the Kalimpang bungalow and furnish it for comfort as well as Sikkimese elegance. It was named Chakung House; at the same time, Lendup Dorji, who had always signed himself as L.D. Kazi, adopted the Western-style territorial dignity of Kazi Sahib of Chakung. On occasions his wife even prefixed it with an Excellency. The metamorphosis was reflected in the well-cut tweeds and khos of soft Tibetan wool or glowing Chinese brocade that Kazi began to wear. He took to sending out Christmas cards decorated with a Sikkimese symbol cunningly stylized to resemble an European heraldic crest. But more significantly for Sikkim, Kazi became the symbol and spearhead of a relentless campaign against the durbar. contd...



Manoj Ghimire, June 24, 2023

Indonesian President Joko Widodo's ambitious plans to flag off the country's first high-speed railway in November 2022 in the presence of major world leaders during the G20 summit remained on paper.

The reason was Chinese-funded project failed to meet the deadline. It has run into delays.

Now there is uncertainty if the rail project would be able to begin in 2023. The delays, cost escalations and alleged inefficiency are putting a tremendous financial burden on Indonesia, which may nudge the country into a debt trap like Sri Lanka. The 142-km high-speed rail line from the capital city of Jakarta to Bandung is a part of the much-touted BRI. China has portrayed BRI as a megaproject that would boost infrastructure building and connect the major global centers.

However, many BRI projects in different parts of the world including in Indonesia are facing challenges.

The participant countries are facing financial problems. The non-functional BRI projects have led revenue loss while the unexpected cost overruns due to delays have added to financial problems.

The Indonesian rail project was supposed to be ready in 2019. However, the implementation of the crucial BRI project was affected due to poor planning and implantation activities such as hiring underqualified contractors, damages to houses during the blasting process, fatal accidents, besides high-cost overruns.

Many houses were damaged or collapsed during rail line construction work. Yeni Yuliati from West Java province said: "My house collapsed and almost fell on my children. I feel unsafe with the new house since our land [is located] too close to the tunnel."

There have been negative environmental and social impacts of the China-funded rail line.

Meiki W Paendong of NGO WALHI West Java said the rail project hurt local livelihoods and violated at least six Indonesian laws.

"Project developers blatantly ignored major red flags related to the project's design, sustainability, and legal compliance," she said.

Even the Indonesian Public Works Ministry picked holes in the rail line development by the Chinese contractor.

Faisal Basri, Economist at the University of Indonesia, had flagged the funding for the rail project. "We all know that working with China has many 'under tables. Don't expect to be clean if you still cooperate with

China," he said. The delay of four years for the Jakarta-Bandung rail line has become a big embarrassment for the ruling government and tainted China's credibility to develop and deliver big projects, said Teuku Rezayyah, an international relations analyst at Bandung-based Padjadjaran University. "A further delay will only become ammunition for the opposition to attack," he said.

The project cost has escalated by 40 percent. The cost overruns have touched the USD 1.49 billion figure. Moreover, the Chinese contractors are seeking an addition of 30 years to its 50-year concession of the rail project.

This would mean China would have control over the rail project until the early 22nd century, thus igniting fear of a debt-trap.

There has been constant and intense criticism of the delayed rail project and its financial liabilities.

The Indonesian government has to make statements frequently that the country would not fall into a debt trap due to Chinese BRI investment.

The nondisclosure of BRI project agreements is adding to the concerns and among people of Southeast Asia's largest economy.

Analysts and newspapers expressed concerns that Indonesia was inching closer to a debt trap.

They had warned of a possible debt trap when the project was signed in 2016.

"Now China is insisting to convert the overrun cost into the government with ridiculously high-interest rates. This is too scandalous for us to ignore," Jakarta Post quoted a senior government observer as saying.

The strong criticism led the project proponent Indonesia-China High-Speed Train (KCIC) consortium to announce that the rail line would be operational in mid-August.

"By September and October, the train will operate normally. We wait for the transition period according to regulations," said Emir Monti, the spokesman for the Chinese contractors-led KCIC consortium.

However, an internal report prepared by the Indonesian Transport Ministry and three independent consultants revealed that the KCIC claims were unrealistic and misleading, as too many unfinished tasks were yet to be completed.

And the rail line could only be started in 2024.

"There is a risk that the target of commercial operations in August could be delayed to complete all construction by December 31," reads the report, @khabarhub.com

नेताबिरुद्ध नेताको छिकी हाने चाल, देश बेहाल



बारुदमाथि उभिन पुग्यो
दुर्घटना निश्चित

२२ सिस्टे माओंबाबीलाई ६९, सिस्टे दुलो पार्टी कार्यसाले बोकेपछि सुन् भएको राजनीतिक अराजकता प्रधानमन्ती तथा माओंबाबी केन्द्र अध्यक्ष प्रचण्डले जस्ता र नेकपा समाजीवीहरू, संसदवालाको विलोपीया माओंबाबीलाई समेत काही च्यार असामाजिक मोर्चा बनाएपछि राजनीतिक वृत्तमा समेत तरारा उत्पन्न भएको। आफालाई योखाको चुनाव क्षेत्र छाडिएने बाबुराम भट्टराईलाई समेत पछाएपछि प्रचण्डले आलोपालो मोर्चाको नेतृत्व हुनेपारी गठन गरेको मोर्चाको कारण नेपालको प्रजातात्त्विक परिपाटीमाथि ने प्रति उत्तरायाको विवलेणु मझहोहेको छ। ५८४८ दिनमले दिल्लीविद्यालयालाई नेपालको चाच्चा सूरक्ष मएको छ।

हन त चुनावबिधि २ वर्ष कार्यसाले र अनिम चुनावी वर्ष नेपालमा सका अध्यक्ष माधवबहुमार नेपाल प्रधानमन्ती हुन् सहमतिमा यो सरकार कर्नोको हो। यसी सरकालालै बल मिले गरी अदालतले यसअधिकारीको राष्ट्रपतिले यस्कारिएन बनाएपछि प्राप्तिकरण गरेपछि ऐरोको मुद्रामा खारेज गरेको सधाएको मात्र छैन, सत्ताधारीलाई चुनाव जिल्ले वातावरण पालन बनाएपछिएको छ। ताजा संसद बिनासको अवस्थामा संसद भएर अधिवन्दन पर्ने विवेयकलाई अदालतले जसरी सताको पक्षमा फैसला गरिएको छ, वस्तवात अदालतपरिषत जनमानसमान नकारात्मक प्रभाव परेको चाच्चाहरू व्याप्त भएको छ।

राजनीतिले कस्तो बाटो लेला : राजनीतिक परिवर्तु बारुदमाथि उभिन पुगेको छ। जुनमुकु बेला विस्फोट हुनसक्छ, दुर्घटना प्रकार छ भनेछैदै।

Premier Steel
सार्वज्ञ लागि, सार्वज्ञ ताकि

Nepal's 1st 36 MM TMT

**PREMIER
NXT 500D**

