

Parsiānā

The ZAGNY split

Iranian Zoroastrians in the Greater New York association have formed a separate organization.

Porus Cooper

New Rochelle, N.Y. — Eight years ago an Iranian philanthropist put Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians together under one roof here. Today they are still under the same roof, but not all together. Dissident Iranian members of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) have left to form their own group. They call it the Iranian Zoroastrian Association (IZA).

The split was confirmed this March when the Iranians held their Nowroze dinner a week after ZAGNY's. Attendance at the two dinners suggests the entire Iranian membership of ZAGNY — about a quarter of the total — has shifted its loyalty to IZA. There were hardly any Iranians at the ZAGNY dinner and few Parsis at IZA's. A truer test of the Iranians' allegiance will come with the next round of membership renewals in January.

The event is of some moment to the Zoroastrian community in North America. ZAGNY is one of the largest and oldest Zoroastrian organizations on this continent. It was with ZAGNY

that the late Arbab Rustam Guiv launched his continent-wide experiment in Parsi-Iranian coexistence. The building that houses the Darbe Mehr here was purchased with a donation of about \$240,000 by the Arbab. It was the first

There were hardly any Iranians at the ZAGNY dinner and few Parsis at IZA's.

of several such contributions made by him to Zoroastrian communities in the United States and Canada. While the Parsi-Iranian strife has long bedevilled the Zoroastrian community in California, ZAGNY had seemed to be immune from it.

The first reaction, therefore, of several of those interviewed is disbelief at the division. "I think there's no split. . . My opinion is that this (the IZA) is a

group within ZAGNY," says Dr Rostam Sarfeh, the retired physician who a decade ago introduced the Arbab to ZAGNY and now heads the Arbab Guiv Trust in California. "They probably want to hold lectures in Farsi," he adds. But in a long phone conversation, he proceeds to contradict himself. The split, he avers, is the result of deep-seated grievances among the Iranians.

If so, the Parsi majority in ZAGNY seems to have badly underestimated the depth of the Iranians' disgruntlement. "We just can't imagine what's (behind) the idea of forming a new association; we have tried our best to be united," says ZAGNY's president, Ms Ivy Gandhi.

She appears to be just as bewildered by the turn of events as the members of ZAGNY whom she informed of the split by letter this March. The Iranians, she revealed, had started functioning separately as early as May last year, though presumably still as members of ZAGNY.

At some point since, the rift solidified. The IZA was born. It appoints office-bearers and collects dues.

Interviews reveal a variety of motives for the Iranians' departure. Khodarahm Hematti, the best known leader of the dissidents, accuses the Parsi majority on ZAGNY's board of directors of "mismanagement" and unresponsiveness. But cultural differences, magnified by personal incompatibility, appear to have been the true catalyst for the split.

Hematti, a 56-year-old oil industry executive in New York, is held by many to be the moving spirit behind the Iranian exodus, though he refuses to claim that distinction. On the contrary, he says, he was long criticized by his fellow-Iranians for "compromising too much" with the Parsi board members.

But it is Hematti's four-year tenure on the ZAGNY board that forms the bulk of the dissidents' case. His list of complaints ranges from poor accounting procedures to unpalatable food at ZAGNY events. He is also bitter about an episode in which he was first promised and then denied the chairmanship of ZAGNY's finance committee. Others suggest his defeat in last year's election for vice-president of ZAGNY left him equally bitter. He denies it.

Ivy Gandhi, 40, a substitute teacher concedes the finance committee appointment could have been handled better, but stoutly denies the group's affairs are mismanaged.

Backing Hematti is Esfandiar Anoushiravani, a 32-year-old engineer from Philadelphia, who claims his short tenure on the ZAGNY board was a disillusioning experience. According to Hematti, Anoushiravani is the president of the IZA. Anoushiravani prefers to describe the new group's leadership as collegial.

Framroze "Freddy" Patel, 50, a past president of ZAGNY, heads a religious education project that is approved by the Boy Scouts of America and roundly criticized by Hematti. Patel expresses dismay at the criticism of a program he considers one of ZAGNY's most successful. He is supported by Dr Kaikhosrov Irani, who teaches philosophy at New York's City College and is a member of the ZAGNY board. Over the years Irani has come to play the role of philosopher-guide to the community, esteemed by many, Iranians as well as Parsis.

Two with influential positions in the Zoroastrian community and ambivalent feelings about the rift are Shahriar Merabi and Rostam Sarfeh. Dr Merabi is the chairman of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Temple Trust, which officially governs the Darbe Mehr in New Rochelle. He says his heart is with his fellow-Iranians, but hopes to persuade them to return to ZAGNY. Sarfeh is based in California, where the Arbab's aging widow lives. He too sympathizes

"Despite our repeated utterances on unity, the Iranian Zoroastrians still do not understand their Parsi compatriots and vice versa."

with most of the Iranians' grievances but seeks a reconciliation.

A diagnosis of the split would be incomplete if it omits the personal philosophies of these principals. Hematti says religion must be run as efficiently as a business. ZAGNY's financial management, he says, has been "naive." For example he points to a ZAGNY loan to the financially strapped *A Quest for Zarathushtra* film project.

Patel, while not conceding any mismanagement (at least while he was the association's president), seems to represent the general Parsi outlook on running volunteer organizations such as ZAGNY. Trustworthiness, dedication, financial sacrifice are some of the attributes he prizes in himself. Patel is a cost accountant, but unlike Hematti doesn't take his cue from his profession. "If you see my checkbook you will see how much (of my own) money I have spent on this program," he says of his leadership of the Scouts religious education project.

Hematti accuses the project of becoming "a government within a government." It collects money in ZAGNY's name, he says; why won't it ask ZAGNY's permission to spend it? Patel cannot understand why Hematti would insist on having him go to the ZAGNY board for authorization of every expense no matter how little. With all that, Patel claims to be on cordial terms with Hematti. Patel even at-

tended the IZA's Nowroze dinner. Hematti says Parsis are welcome to join his organization.

The Patel-Hematti relationship personifies the general complexity of the Parsi-Iranian estrangement. Perhaps only an expert social psychologist can make full sense of what has happened. While the division between the Iranians and Parsis is clear to see, less distinct are the cracks running on either side of the main rift.

Patel suggests the split could have been averted if the Parsis who succeeded him on the ZAGNY board had been less confrontational. Hematti is incensed when asked if he would heed Merabi and return to ZAGNY. "Who the hell is he to tell us anything?" he asks. Hematti similarly dismisses Sarfeh's unity efforts. The two, he says, are rivals for the control of the main Arbab Rustam Guiv Trust and have personal axes to grind.

The practical consequences of the split, in the meantime, are working to widen it.

The Darbe Mehr here, which bears the Arbab's name, is leased to ZAGNY. Now the IZA is challenging ZAGNY's exclusive hold on the building. ZAGNY expects IZA to pay for its use of the hall for Nowroze; IZA says ZAGNY needn't hold its breath for the money. "We (Iranians) have paid dues for years (as ZAGNY members)," says Hematti. The Darbe Mehr, he reminds, was purchased with Iranian money. "ZAGNY is one tenant (of the Darbe Mehr)," he adds, "we want to be another."

So far, ZAGNY has not insisted on collecting the \$101 rental from IZA, avoiding a potentially explosive confrontation.

Meanwhile, whether coincidentally or as a side effect of the rift, the Guiv Trust is seeking to transfer legal ownership of the Darbe Mehr from a trust in which ZAGNY has a large say to a recently created foundation in New York which too bears the Arbab's name but in which ZAGNY may not be as influential.

Also, while spokesmen on both sides hope they can find ways to share the Darbe Mehr, nobody entirely rules out the possibility of scheduling conflicts. Eventually, too, they will have to decide how to share the costs of the building's upkeep.

It is considerably easier to ascertain how the fabric unraveled than why.

The dispute had been rumored in the community at least since late 1984, but its seeds were planted much earlier.

In a letter to the ZAGNY membership dated March 24, 1984, Hematti, then a ZAGNY board member, listed his complaints and offered solutions. Hematti says his letter, distributed at last year's Nowroze and general body meeting, received scant attention then. It has since become the manifesto of the Iranian dissidents.

One fateful paragraph in it: "Despite our repeated utterances on unity, the Iranian Zoroastrians still do not understand their Parsi compatriots and vice versa." His solution: Hold a "round table" meeting periodically to compose the cultural differences. The Parsis, he added, could help by learning Farsi.

In her letter — mailed to members this March — Gandhi said a group of Iranians had held a meeting at the Darbe Mehr on May 20, 1984 and "resolved to form a body."

At first, says Gandhi, the ZAGNY board was assured the new group was part of ZAGNY. That July, she was hospitalized and missed several board meetings. Upon her return, second

thoughts about the Iranians' intentions began to trouble the board.

In a letter to the IZA in October 1984, the board wanted to know if IZA's members were also members of ZAGNY, whether their meetings were open to all ZAGNY members, and whether they informed all ZAGNY members of their meetings.

"To this," Gandhi wrote, "no reply was received."

An indirect reply was received however. Hematti, both a member of the ZAGNY board and a convener of the new group, stopped attending the monthly ZAGNY board meetings from December 1984. Hematti tells *Parsiana* he has abandoned his position on the board though for now he remains an ordinary member of ZAGNY.

Hematti alone of the Iranians served longest on the ZAGNY board. He joined it as a co-opted member in 1981. Now he is its loudest critic. For his part, Hematti claims to have restrained separatist sentiment among his fellow Iranians rather than instigated it. "I was the only Iranian who got along well with them (the Parsis on the board)," he says.

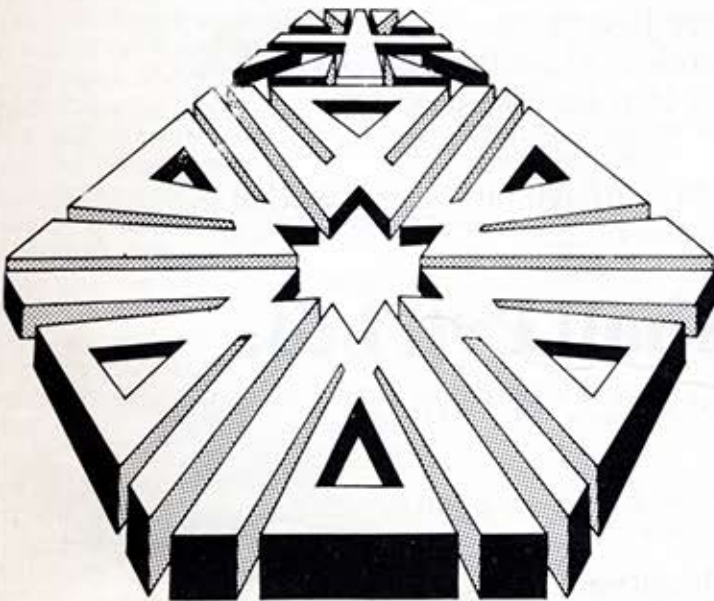
Patel, who as ZAGNY president put

Hematti on his board, does recall having "a very pleasant relationship" with him. If so the cordiality ended with Patel's departure. Patel was succeeded as president by Faroke Gandhi, and Gandhi by his wife Ivy for the current two-year term.

"I think he (Hematti) just could not work with the Gandhis," Patel says. But Hematti denies personal differences played any part in his leaving ZAGNY. Instead, he presents a litany of charges: lack of accountability on expenses, delay in repairs to the Darbe Mehr building, neglect of festivals significant to Iranians, excessive autonomy for the religious education project linked to the Boy Scouts of America, the award of a scholarship to a board member's son who didn't merit it, and squandering of money on the film *A Quest for Zarathushtra*. "It's not a question of somebody pocketing the money," he says of the \$10,000 loan made to the moviemaker. "They were foolish enough to put their own money in it." What galls him more, he says, is that the filmmakers were allowed an extension on the loan.

Yet speaking on the phone from his New York home, Hematti dropped

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enough hints to sustain Patel's claim that clashing personalities had at least sharpened the differences in culture and management philosophy.

Several times, Hematti referred to his opponents on the ZAGNY board as "the New Jersey Mafia," a reference to their residence in the state of New Jersey; often he chided them for being unduly sensitive to criticism. "If I said a book was missing from the library,

While Parsi-Iranian strife has long bedevilled the Zoroastrian community in California, ZAGNY had seemed to be immune from it.

Someone would say, "I didn't steal it." The ZAGNY newsletter, he said at one point, has become a "*Gandhi-Namah*," a vehicle of self-promotion for the ZAGNY president. He wished it to be used for intellectual discussion.

On the subject of the finance committee chairmanship, he accuses Ivy Gandhi of double-crossing him. Gandhi admits the board majority had accepted Hematti's request at its reorganization meeting but later changed its mind and appointed the treasurer to head the finance panel "since (the treasurer) handles all the ZAGNY accounts." But she says Hematti was retained as a member of the finance committee and had as much access to the financial records as the head of the panel. She cannot fathom the depth of Hematti's discontent.

Gandhi simply rejects Hematti's other charges. The loan to the movie project, she says, was approved by a vote of ZAGNY's general body — before she became president. Accounts are scrupulously kept. The award of a scholarship to the board member's son was not improper — "(The boy) had rendered a lot of service to the community."

As for neglecting Iranian festivals, she recalls a misunderstanding only on one occasion. A Meher-Gan jashan scheduled by the Iranis was postponed by a day to accommodate a talk by

Dastur Minochehr-Homji, who was visiting from India and whose schedule couldn't be changed. She remembers receiving an angry phone call from Hematti on that occasion. (Hematti recalls making no such call; he in turn says board meetings were often marked by tension and shouting).

"ZAGNY has made every possible attempt to have one association for all Zoroastrians," says Gandhi, her voice charged with emotion. "We are still proud to be an association of all Zoroastrians." She dismisses most of Hematti's charges as pretexts to justify a split.

In that she is largely supported by past president Patel as well as Irani. Patel, who is chairman of ZAGNY's Boy Scouts-affiliated "Good Life Emblem" project for religious education, stoutly defends it. It is the only self-sustained ZAGNY activity, he says. Having long ago returned the seed money it had borrowed from ZAGNY, it has since contributed to the group's general funds.

As for Hematti's charge that the Scout program spent money without the board's authority, Patel says the objection was not ignored. The project is now permitted to spend only up to \$200 without the board's prior authority, he says, and most often it spends far less. "The program is working. What is his point now?" he asks.

Irani reflects Patel's irritation. The scout program, he says, has been "widely praised." As for the ZAGNY accounts "I am not a specialist in accounts, I do not look at the accounts, but at no time have I felt there was anything wrong with the accounts," he says.

But even some who are critical of Hematti for walking out on ZAGNY — and the critics are not all Parsis — concede that the differences between the Iranians and the Parsis had always run deeper than the optimists would see.

At ZAGNY events, the English- and Gujarati-speaking Parsis and the mainly Farsi-speaking Iranians quickly gravitated to their own kind. The ZAGNY newsletter complimented the meal served on one occasion. Hematti said actually that day's food had made many Iranians "sick." Patel noted that (in regard to disposal of the dead) one side was for burial, the other for cremation. With notable exceptions, the navjote of the American, Joseph Peterson

found Parsis and Iranians on opposite sides of the controversy, the Iranians favoring it and the Parsis opposing it.

Some, like Sarfeh, profess to be caught in the middle, their loyalties divided. On the one hand he calls (the split) "a terrible mistake," on the other he reveals that he has sent his dues to the Iranian group even as he remains a member of ZAGNY.

"Unfortunately," he says, "the Parsis have a poor opinion of the (Iranian) Zoroastrians. These are not the same Iranians who clean tables in Bombay *chaikhana*s. These Iranians are highly educated."

The Parsis, he says, were taught by the British to feel inferior towards westerners, and above other orientals. What form this superiority complex took with regard to the Iranian Zoroastrians he won't explain, but asserts:

"Once you are
disaffected, you
begin to find reasons
to be disaffected."

"Don't think that these fellows have split for the fun of it. They have been deeply hurt."

Even so, while on a visit to New York in March, Sarfeh is said to have begged Hematti to meet with members of the ZAGNY board and compose his differences with them. Hematti declined. Then again, Sarfeh echoes many of Hematti's chief complaints: The annual repair grant from the Guiv trust to ZAGNY should not be used for other purposes, he agrees. And he concurs with Hematti that the Iranian minority deserved a larger say in ZAGNY's affairs because it was Iranian money that bought the Darbe Mehr.

"Why did they not elect Hematti to be vice-president? Why? I ask you, why?" Sarfeh says, "You have to give democracy a little exception." If a majority vote decided everything, he remarks, the Iranian minority would be "swept away."

It's impossible to estimate how closely Sarfeh's analysis approximates reality, for that would require reading minds. Hematti gives it short shrift, as does Irani. "There are innumerable Parsis," Irani says. "When you have a generalization of this kind... I wouldn't put much store by it." He-

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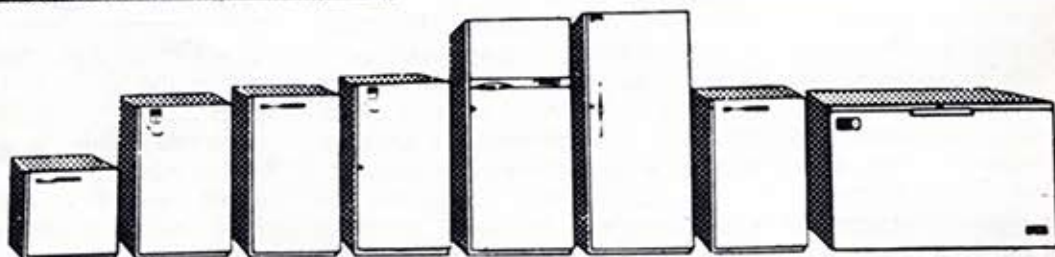
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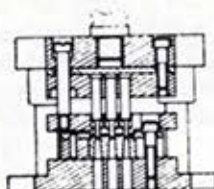
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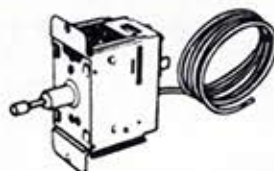
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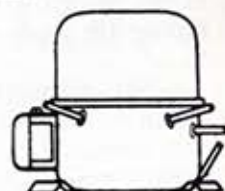
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matti insists there's nothing personal in his decision to quit ZAGNY.

Sarfeh himself adds that the Iranians as well suffer from a persecution complex. It's the result, he says, of second-class status in Muslim-dominated Iran.

Two years ago the Parsi majority had readily agreed to ensure that there would be at least three Iranians on the ZAGNY board, co-opting them if they failed to win the election. Even before that, Patel says, he sought to include Iranians on the board. He found Hematti.

But three is still a minority on a board that numbers 11. It's possible, Iranians were alienated by the rejection of Hematti in a general vote. Then again, it would hardly be an equitable solution to turn the large Parsi majority in the ZAGNY membership into an artificially small majority on the ZAGNY board. Irani says of Hematti's charges, "Once you are disaffected, you begin to find reasons to be disaffected."

It would have been not only undemocratic but also illegal, Irani says, for a tax-exempt group like ZAGNY to have discouraged someone from running against Hematti or reserved an official post for him. The Parsi majority, Irani suggests, went as far as it legally could to provide representation to the Iranians.

As for the future, the philosopher Irani expects passions to cool with the passage of time. "To me," he says, "it is a relatively trivial matter." If anything concerns him, it is that publicity for the quarrel will overshadow the lectures, discussions and other "worthwhile" activities ZAGNY.

On the other hand, the example of California, where Iranians and Parsis have remained in separate groups, suggests the rift in the New York area won't heal quickly. The California dispute as well began as a personality conflict. The prospect of a permanent separation, Gandhi says, deeply troubles her. Hematti, however, holds out the faint hope that a reconciliation is possible if a board, acceptable to the Iranians, takes charge of ZAGNY. The next board election is scheduled to take place at Nowroze next year.

Porus Cooper is an award winning editorial writer for The Courier-Post in New Jersey. He has written for Parsiana on several important occasions on an honorary basis.

It's "hard work" to stay united

If things are going wrong in New York, they are going right in Chicago. The Zoroastrian community there is about a third smaller — about 100 families — but the ratio of Iranians to Parsis is about the same as in New York, about 1 to 4. Several times in the course of interviewing subjects for the ZAGNY story, the name Rohinton Rivetna cropped up. Rivetna, 50, is the president of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago. "That Rivetna, God bless him," said one, "is doing wonderful things."

Among the wonderful things is a Darbe Mehr. The structure, much acclaimed in the community everywhere, was completed two years ago. It cost about \$300,000, about half of that amount coming from the Arbab Guiv Trust and the rest raised by the Chicago community. Members of the community contributed their time and talents as well as their money to the project. For example, Rivetna, an engineer, himself drew up the blueprint for the building.

Perhaps it is the united effort that the Darbe Mehr project required, that has made the Chicago community — Iranians as well as Parsis — as close-knit as it is. "Our people are our strength," Rivetna says. But even he acknowledges that their unity is no accident. In fact, he says, it's "hard work" to stay united.

"We have to face the fact that there are differences culturally," says Rivetna. "We try to play them down because they are transient. The next generation will have fewer differences. We always remind ourselves that it's a short period of time we have (to be concerned about). The future will take care of itself." He is keen to have the youth take over the affairs of the association as soon as they are ready.

That philosophy is backed up by organizational shrewdness. The group's office-bearers are not picked in general elections, which in the past had caused "ugliness" and discouraged the losers. Instead, anyone who wishes to serve on the board has merely to certify that he has read the association's constitution

and sign up. These members then elect the office-bearers and divide into various committees.

This system makes for an unusually large board — up to 24 members at one time, though the number has come down to about 14. And that sometimes makes for long-winded board meetings. But, Rivetna says, "people get things off their chest."

Members of the community meet once a month at the Darbe Mehr to mingle, hear guest speakers, discuss community concerns and have lunch. A "host" family usually prepares lunch. The meal is Parsi if the host is Parsi and Iranian if the host is Iranian. There are occasional gripes about the food, Rivetna says, but neither food nor language has been divisive.

While the Iranians seem to come out in strength only on the occasion of Nowroze, the activists among them are "always looking to the group as a whole," says Rivetna. In fact, their first president was an Iranian.

Individual Parsis and Iranians also invite each other to their homes. "I've told my wife, whenever there is a function, to be sure to call a couple of Iranian members," says Rivetna.

When the Peterson navjote threatened to disrupt the community's harmony — two of the priests who performed the navjote are Chicagoans — the association called a meeting and allowed everyone to speak his mind. "That was it," says Rivetna. "Since then there has been no discussion of the matter." The furor over the navjote led the New York group to draw up guidelines for the future. No such pressure was applied on leaders of the Chicago association. While individuals disagreed, as a group the Chicagoans apparently reached a silent consensus that each future case would be different.

Above all, a collective learning process is kept alive. Rivetna: "When we heard of (the problems in) New York, we reassured ourselves that we were all together. We decided to discuss our problems openly before they mushroomed into something big."

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Events and Personalities

Medical items on loan

A new service offered by the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of Secunderabad and Hyderabad (PZASH) is the free loan of hospital furnishings such as beds, gas cylinders, bedpans, saline drip sets and so on, notes the PZASH newsletter of April 1985.

Sixteen items have been 'graciously' loaned to the anjuman by former trustee, Dr Minocher Parakh. The items will be stored at the anjuman office and will be loaned for emergencies. The honorary secretary of the anjuman is empowered to refuse the loan of any item, states the newsletter.

"As this facility is intended for use in emergency only, no person or family will be allowed to retain any article for more than 15 days, so that others in need of the same may not be denied its use. In case the article loaned is to be retained further, prior permission from the honorary secretary should be obtained.

"This is a service to our community and no charges will be made for the articles loaned. But a written guarantee for the safe return of the articles in good condition will have to be furnished. However, transportation to and fro will have to be arranged and paid for by the borrower," reads the circular issued by J.D. Italia, president of the anjuman, and N.F. Nagarwala, honorary secretary.

"We are very grateful to Dr Minocher Parakh for this generous gesture," states the newsletter.

Borivli's fire quest

Another step to setting up a fire-temple in the Bombay suburb of Borivli was taken with the approval of a constitution for the Atash Kadeh at a special general meeting of the Borivli and

Suburban Zoroastrian Association (BSZA) states their May newsletter. The association has been examining the possibility of shifting a sacred fire to the suburb for sometime.

The association's committee has been unanimously reconstituted. The new office-bearers are: Ms D.H. Minocher, president, Pheroze Mulla, vice-president, Noshir Paghdwalla, honorary secretary, Ms Freney Siganporia and Bomi Umrigar, joint secretaries, Yezdi B. Motivala, treasurer and committee members, Dhunjisha Variava, Ms Dhun Patel, Ms Roshan Choi, Nariman Bhagwagar and Sam Wadia. Khurshed Pastakia and Kersi Amrolia are the two co-opted members, the report adds.

Due to "inflationary trends," the subscription of the BSZA has been recently raised from six rupees to Rs 10 per year, notes the newsletter.

An appeal to all members to donate newspapers so that their sale can augment the much needed resources of the association has been made. "We shall also appreciate if sale proceeds of newspapers are directly handed over to us by members," the newsletter adds.

Scholarships in the names of founder members, Cama, Painter and Ms Mulla are given every year to Higher Secondary Course (H.S.C.) students who have secured the highest marks in arts, science and commerce. "To derive the benefits of this appreciation of their scholastic achievement, do get in touch (with us) with a copy of the mark sheets," states the newsletter.

Padma Shri for Sethna

"Designer and weaver of national and international repute" Ms Nelly Homi Sethna was awarded the Padma Shri by



Sethna receiving the Padma Shri from President Zail Singh, as husband Homi looks on.

the President of India, Zail Singh, for her role in reviving the art of kalamkari (hand painted and handprinted vegetable dyed textiles), notes a booklet issued at the investiture ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on March 16, 1985.

Sethna has held several one-woman shows of handwoven and handcrafted creative experiments in India and abroad. She has also held special exhibitions of kalamkari layouts designed by her, and an exhibition of crewel embroidery of Kashmir. From 1976-78 she was given a special assignment by the All India Handicrafts Board to develop new designs in crewel embroidery of Kashmir, notes the booklet.

In 1972, Sethna edited and designed a book from her own collection titled *Shawl-Weaves and Embroideries of Kashmir*, notes her bio-data.

Born on November 1, 1932, Sethna obtained a National Diploma in Design (printed textiles) from the Regent Polytechnic, London, U.K. and did her post graduate course in weaving at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, U.S.A., adds the bio-data.

Sethna joined the Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Co Ltd as chief textile designer and was head of its design studio which she started, from 1960-68, notes the booklet.

In 1968, Sethna received a Travel and Study Award to attend the Congress of Craftsmen in Peru and to study crafts in different parts of the world. In 1972, she was awarded the Homi Bhabha fellowship to revitalize selected crafts, especially kalamkari, adds the booklet.

Award for Pudumjee

Noted puppeteer, Dadi Pudumjee, has been awarded the 1984 Sanskriti Award for the performing arts, notes the April 1985 newsletter of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India.

Pudumjee, who received a diploma from the Darpana Academy, Ahmedabad, and who is part of the Sutradhar Puppet Repertory, started in 1980, was invited to teach puppetry in Germany and other countries of Europe.

Executed and directed by Pudumjee, the productions of the company include, *Moti ki Moonch*, *Chhiyoram*, *Pakhendi Sher*, *The Ballad of Dhola Maru*, *Ek Tha Joota*, *Rangila Rakshas*, *Utsav* and *The Little Mermaid*.



Pudumjee: teaching puppetry abroad.

Sahitya for Daruwalla

Noted poet and senior official in the Central Intelligence, Keki Nusserwanji Daruwalla, was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award 1984, for his book of poems titled *The Keeper of the Dead*, notes *The Times of India* of February 27, 1985. The award included a casket, a copper plaque and a cheque for Rs 10,000, adds the report.

While reviewing the book, critic Geeta Doctor wrote (*Parsiiana*, August 1984): "In spite of the grim ugliness of death and decay with which he (Daruwalla) confronts us, what is moving, is the beauty of life, that is animated in the bright pinpoints of his poetic imagery."

Born in Lahore in 1937 and educated at the Government College of Ludhiana, Daruwalla's other works include *Under Orion*, *Apparition in April* and *Crossing of Rivers*, notes his bio-data.

Pardiwala MLA

Barjorji Pardiwala of the Congress I was elected to the Gujarat Legislative Assembly from the Bular constituency in South Gujarat. Pardiwala won the elections because "the electorate saw in him a ministerial candidate," notes a report in the *Indian Express* of March 9, 1985. The voters were hopeful that Pardiwala, who is a lawyer by profession, would "become the first Parsi minister from Gujarat," the report adds.

Seervai PUCL chief

Eminent jurist H.M. Seervai has been elected president of the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) for the year 1985-1986, at its annual general meeting.

Addressing a meeting organized by the Indian Merchants' Chamber, Seervai noted that the government should give a serious thought to the reservation policy which he described as "discrimination in reverse," states *The Daily* of April 4, 1985. Reservation, he feels, has led to a deterioration in the standards of vital sectors like medicine, education and administration, adds the report.

Rather than reservations in educational institutes and jobs, Seervai advocated free and compulsory education and financial assistance for scheduled tribes and castes, the report adds.

Once again, TCI

For the ninth consecutive year the Travel Corporation of India has received the prestigious Tourism Award presented by the Travel Agents Association of India. Executive director Jehangir N. Katgara received the award on behalf of TCI at the Travel Agents Association of India annual convention held in Bangalore this May.

TCI has handled over 25,000 foreign tourists, earned foreign exchange to the tune of Rs 12.5 crores and has a total turnover exceeding Rs 40 crores, states *The Times of India* report dated May 16, 1985.

As future projects, the company plans to develop the Andaman Islands for tourism, promote Buddhist pilgrim traffic to India, coordinate and handle tourist charter flights to India and organize cruises in the Indian Ocean, concludes the write-up.

Towards healthy teeth

After a dental examination by the Zoroastrian Dentists Organization (ZDO) of school going children of Navroz Baug at Lal Baug, Bombay in October 1984, it was observed that "the teeth of our children were in a very sorry state and a lot needs to be done to educate our young in the proper care of their teeth and gums..." notes a press release issued by the Zoroastrian Dentists Organization of Bombay.

Inaugurated by BPP trustee Homi P. Ranina, at Navroz Baug, the preventive dentistry program, included a talk with the help of slides to explain the prevention and care of dental disease. This was followed by a dental examination, when oral hygiene kits, donated by Hindustan Ciba Geigy were distributed. A healthy teeth contest, sponsored by the same firm, was also held.

Founded 32 years ago by senior Zoroastrian dental surgeons of Bombay, the ZDO aims at promoting brotherhood amongst Parsi dentists and helping the needy or poor dentists or students with financial assistance, during the difficult years of their dental education, states the press release.

The organization also conducts continuing education programs in dentistry, twice a year and financially supports needy students of the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy High School, adds the release.

The office-bearers of the organization, president Dr Sam K. Sahukar, treasurer Dr Ratan H. Doctor, secretary Dr Porus S. Turner and joint-secretary Dr Sorab M. Javeri, plan to visit all the Parsi colonies to inculcate within the community "good oral hygiene habits... preventive measures against tooth decay and gum diseases and... prevention and early recognition of mouth cancer," concludes the press release.

Z.D.O. dental examination for Navroz Baug children.



Justice Manohar (left) presents award to Dr Wadia. (Centre) Dotivala and seated Sudha Chandran (left) and area director Dr Khorshed Madon.

Zonta awards

The Zonta Club's Woman of the Year award was given to Dr Avabai Wadia, internationally known crusader for population control, by Justice (Ms) Sujata Manohar, on April 13, 1985, at the sixth charter anniversary of the Zonta Club of Bombay III, with Ms Havovi G. Dotivala in the chair, note newspaper reports.

Dr Wadia, president of the Family Planning Association of India, acknowledging the award said that

population control was still the biggest challenge facing the country as well as the whole world. She called upon executive women to take active part in community work, stated *The Daily* report of April 17, 1985. Wadia is also the head of the International Planned Parenthood Federation which received the 1985 United Nations Population Award, notes *Trimurti*, the bulletin of the club.

The Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Trophy for Zontian of the Year was presented to Ms Freny F. Paghdwala and Dr Varsha D. Vadara for their devotion and dedication to the ideals of Zonta; and the Personal Involvement Cup was awarded to Ms Meher S. Kotwal for her handcrafted candles which were presented to the guests of the club, adds *Trimurti*.

Speaking on the occasion, Manohar said, "Women today already have a lot on their hands... and if they also find some time to serve the community... it shows a deep commitment to the improvement of society," reports the *Mid-Day* of April 15, 1985.

The Zonta International, which was started in Buffalo, New York, in 1919, is a worldwide service organization of over 33,000 executive women in business and in the professions in over 900 Zonta Clubs in 50 countries, notes the directory of the Zonta Club of Bombay III. The word Zonta is derived from the language of the Sioux Indians and means 'honest and trustworthy,' adds the directory.

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Athravan trust inaugurated

An individual trust attempts to raise over a crore of rupees for the further education of priests.

Niloofer J. Madon

'An educated priesthood for a better tomorrow' is the pivot of the Athravan Educational Trust inaugurated on May 11, 1985 (*roz* Behram, *mah* Adar) on the main lawns of Cusrow Baug, Bombay. The trust which is attempting to raise over a crore of rupees for the upliftment of the priestly profession has been launched by Homi P. Ranina, the noted tax consultant and Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) trustee, Khojeste Mistree, founder of Zoroastrian Studies, Dastur Dr Firoze M. Kotwal, High Priest of the Wadia Atash Bahram and Ms Huzan R. Kharas, "who sowed the seeds of the trust" by her paper titled "Some findings on the socio-economic conditions of the priests (mobeds) in Bombay."

The inauguration function started with a special jashan, led by Kotwal and assisted by Ervad Asphandiar Dadachanjee and 200 other priests, in what Ranina described as "the most historical function in the Parsi community, where the largest number of mobeds, more than half the world population of mobeds," were taking part.

After the humbandagi and a benedictory prayer ("may not the radiant glory ever leave this house") led by Kotwal, each priest received a rose and a *pariku* of Rs 51.

Later Ranina, welcoming the audience, described what prompted the

launching of such a project. He said, "The seeds for the trust were sown by a young, dynamic lady, Huzan Kharas, who carried out an independent study," for her masters thesis in social work from Nirmala Niketan, affiliated to the University of Bombay, and who was "partially helped by the BPP."

Ranina warned that in the next generation, "one out of every 10 agiaries will be without mobeds; without mobeds there will be no religion, nobody to perform...important ceremonies, so vital to any religion. This is a very unfortunate situation."

Quoting the study, Ranina added that "in the last five years, only seven young boys have taken to (full-time) priesthood, whereas 50 mobeds have died or retired. If this trend continues there will be a new generation where there will be no young priests and the older generation of mobeds may not be there." Ranina attributed this lack of interest in the younger generation, to the low remuneration which is "Rs 650 per month, much less than what a person can earn in a secular job or a commercial firm."

Noting that a priest's day starts at four in the morning and lasts for 14 to 18 hours, Ranina asked, "Would you become a mobed if you had the choice?"

Laying out before the audience, the pathetic findings of the study, Ranina

revealed that 88 percent of the priests had no savings whatsoever for their old age... "nothing to tide them over a rainy day." They have "sacrificed all their lives, and at the end of the day they have nothing to look forward to."

"We are the only religion which has not looked after its priests, who have been demoralized and reduced to penury, due to our gross neglect...responsibility lies with us. Our generation stands on trial. (However) we can't wait for four to five months, we have to start today. Things are really getting out of hand."

According to Ranina "the trust feels a need for at least one crore of rupees, so as to get a yearly income of 14 to 15 lakhs." All donations made to the trust, have been exempted from income tax and gift tax by the charity commissioner.

The working of the trust, Ranina explained, is divided into two phases. In phase one, about 15 boys will be selected for three to four years of training, covering subjects like Zoroastrian theology, Zoroastrian rituals, world religions, Iranian history, philosophy, public speaking, etc. Those selected for this course, will receive a scholarship between Rs 600 to Rs 1,200 per month. Upon the satisfactory completion of the course each priest will be assured a monthly income of Rs 2,000. Dastur Kotwal has agreed to head the training of this course.

Phase two, to be launched in the next five years, will be directed towards upliftment of the existing priests. However, according to Ranina this will be possible only if the trust has a substantial financial corpus.

Said Ranina, "I want you to give with love in your heart, and warm feelings (because) the very existence and survival of the religion depends on this... If 5,000 Parsis give Rs 50 a month for three years, we will get 90

Kharas addressing meet.

Hambandagi led by Kotwal (right) Ranina and Mistree (at left).



lakhs. This is a commitment for just three years, so contribute as much as you can as fast as you can."

Talking about the housing problem among the mobeds ("two-thirds of the mobeds don't have a house") Ranina outlined the BPP plan to build 18 flats for them at Godrej Baug and "when-ever we construct new houses, five percent of the flats will be reserved for mobeds." Ranina concluded, "A lot more needs to be done, so strengthen our hands."

Kotwal, in his talk in Gujarati, outlined the need to uplift the mobeds. He said that our forefathers had come from Iran to India at the risk of their lives to preserve their religion. Because of that, this ancient religion still exists and to keep it going mobeds are essential. Kotwal added that 20 years have passed since talks began to uplift the mobeds, but nothing so far has been done. "Have eni silver jubilee bi thasé." (shortly the silver jubilee of this neglect will be observed), he exclaimed.

Kotwal explained that everywhere there is corruption and politics, and that is why the trust is independent and will keep away from community politics.

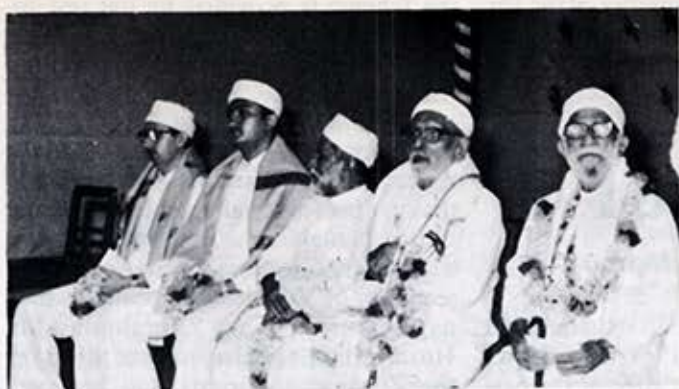
A mobed, according to Kotwal, should have three basic characteristics. Firstly, he should have a feeling in his heart that the religion he preaches is the true religion of Ahura Mazda. There are people who give up their religion to follow that of saints, sadhus, gurus and mahatmas, little knowing that their own religion is far more powerful.

Secondly, a mobed should have knowledge, ("M.A. Ph.D. nu nai") but knowledge of our religion, so that when youngsters ask questions they are ready with a suitable answer.

Thirdly, a mobed should have character; honesty, integrity and all other virtues that Zarathushtra preached should be incorporated within his life. Only then will the rituals that he performs acquire true spiritual potency.

Warning the audience not to expect a 24-hour miracle, ("Kai magic wand nathi") Kotwal said that anyone who truly loves the religion of Zarathushtra should take the first step and donate without hesitation.

In his talk, Mistree said, "The importance of the priesthood cannot be underestimated... Zoroastrianism is not just a philosophy, there is some-



From left: Peer, Phiroze Behram-Kamdin, Katrak, Sinor and Ranji.

Photos: Noshir Desai

thing else that keeps us going, and that is ritual. Without ritual I believe this religion cannot survive."

Talking of a religious renaissance Mistree added that, "whatever the other trusts are doing is good, but it is not enough. There is need for a new, young, dynamic organization to do it."

Concluding his speech, Mistree said, "Let us march unitedly. I believe and have a dream... Let us all join hands and make this dream come true."

The talks were followed by the felicitation of those priests who had been in the profession for the longest period of time and who had performed the most number of nirangdins. Chief among the mobeds felicitated was 88-year-old Ervad Feroze Sohrabji Ranji, who has been a mobed for 76 years. Ranji later graciously donated his packet to the trust.

Ervad Jamshedji Naoroji Sinor, who is 85 years old, was felicitated for his 76 years of service to the community, 65 years of which have been spent at the Doongerwadi.

A token of appreciation was also given to Ervad Erachsha Jal Katrak, of the Wadia Atash Bahram, who has performed the most number of nirangdins — 69, in his 43 years as a priest, and to Ervad Noshirwan Behram-Kamdin who has performed 65 nirangdins and who was felicitated in absentia.

Thirty-one-year-old Rohinton Peshotan Peer, was given a token of appreciation for being the only priest to have passed his Ph.D. from the younger generation.

Ervad Rustam Panthaky, principal of the Dadar madressa, was also felicitated in absentia. Ramyar Karanjia who received the token on his behalf, read Panthaky's message of thanks to the trust.

The felicitation was followed by a vote of thanks by Mistree, special men-

tions of which included the Godiwallas for their catering and decorations, Framroze Pavri for the stage, tables and chairs, the N.N. Wadia Trust for the use of their grounds, Minoo Irani for the stage decorations and flowers, Karl Mehta of the Blitz group of publications, for the brochure paper and printing, Cusrow Baug residents and many others who were listed in the program.

A short Gujarati play, written and directed by Adi Marzban and performed by the Zoroastrian Studies Theatre Group, followed. Using humour as the medium, the skit gave an insight into what could happen were the priestly class to dwindle in number by the next century: The punchline of the play being that mercy killing would have to be postponed since there were no priests to perform the death rites, anyway!

The skit was followed by a talk given by Ms Huzan Kharas, managing trustee of the Athraivan Educational Trust, who highlighted the salient features of her study. She explained, with the help of slides, the terrible conditions in which the priests lived today and outlined her dreams for a better, educated priesthood. (Parsiana has already carried a synopsis of Kharas's study in its July, 1984 issue.) Kharas was then presented a gift and a bouquet of flowers.

Sacred Fires, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) film on the history of Zoroastrianism and the Zoroastrians of Iran today, was screened for those awaiting their turn for the food sittings, giving an unexpected, yet delightful finish to the evening.

To conclude, in the words of Kharas, "The time has come for people with vision and determination to... rise to the challenge of providing a dynamic and educated priesthood to herald the dawn of the twenty-first century."

The inaugural function of the trust

has outlined many grandiose plans for the socio-economic upliftment of the priests, but only time will tell if they will succeed in their endeavour.

Phase I

Arnavaz S. Mama

"To save the Zoroastrian religion from becoming extinct," BPP trustee Homi Ranina who is also a trustee of the new Athravan Educational Trust, personally wrote to affluent Parsis saying, "if 500 Parsis decide to give amounts ranging from Rs 10,000 to one lakh, just once, we could raise the requisite amount." The targeted capital of one crore of rupees, to be collected in three years, would, according to Ranina, generate income to sustain the Athravan Trust's initial project aimed at educating and raising the economic status of Zoroastrian priests.

Ranina had promised to "set up a fund for the benefit of athornan families... (and) programs... conceived to better educate our priests" in his election manifesto published on April 30, 1984 to announce his candidature for BPP trusteeship.

Accordingly, the Athravan Trust, in its published brochure notes that its first project "is a practical scheme aimed at educating and raising the economic status of priests." Phase I includes "three to five years of training covering subjects like Zoroastrian theology, the role and nature of Zoroastrian rituals, world religions, Iranian history, social psychology, philosophy, plus short courses in public speaking, communications, English language, assertive training, interpersonal skills etc.

"Those inducted into this program will receive scholarships between Rs 600 to Rs 1,200 per month. Upon satisfactory completion of the course, the boys will be guaranteed an income of Rs 2,000 per month, in order for them to remain priests and make it a worthwhile career.

"It is our intention to launch Phase II in the next five years. In this phase we plan to help all the mobeds who may be in need of socio-economic upliftment."

While Ranina's organizational and financial acumen is well-known to the community, the theological, educational and administrative support to

the scheme is provided by the rest of the trustees: Dr Firoze Kotwal, high priest of the Wadia Atash Bahram, Khojeste Mistree, founder of Zoroastrian Studies (ZS), Ervad Aspi Gandhi, panthaky of the Vatcha Gandhi Agiary, ZS stalwart Ms Shernaz Panthaky, professional cost accountant Limji Nanabhoy, Jamshed Panday who is chief accountant and company secretary of Voltas Systems and as managing trustee, young ZS enthusiast Ms Huzan Kharas whose masters thesis on the Zoroastrian priests and her personal involvement provided a great part of the momentum.

Kharas, who is said to be involved with all aspects of the Athravan Trust's workings, notes that initially she had met some resistance from the mobeds on account of being a young woman but "now they've got a little more confidence," she laughs. While Mistree says "Huzan is a very sought-after lady among mobeds," Kotwal appreciates the sheer quantum of labour that she has put in, "*Agiary-agiary e farvun, ek ek mobed ne malvu, tetlaj tapla bi khava, e kai khava nu kaam nathi* (to go from agiary to agiary, meeting each mobed, often being rebuffed and insulted, is no joke) "

Fifteen is the maximum number in the first batch of young mobeds to be inducted into the Athravan Trust's training scheme, says Mistree. "We might find it easier to work with 12, but (we) won't reject a sixteenth if he chooses to join. We want to be cautious. The current thinking is to see these 15 through for three years; not to take on any more unless we find the system working very well..."

"Parents of the boys feel confident we will be able to do this. The boys have everything to gain, nothing to lose. It is our pilot project... we're dealing with a lot of unknown factors. We'd like to start the term probably some time after Nowroze, after the *muktad*. Everything is in the pipeline..."

Noting that the aim is to create free enlightened minds that can withstand the stresses of life, Kotwal notes that the 17-18-year-old boys, coming after undergoing their navar-maratab initiation at the madressa, would be at "the right age for cross-questioning their teachers," at an age when new ideas can generate enthusiasm and the appetite for more. Mistree wants "to expose the boys to a cross section of

opinion so that we can discern their intellectual capabilities."

Those lined up for the first batch, according to Kotwal, include 10 candidates from the Dadar Madressa, one from the Andheri Madressa and three who are already full-time practising priests at the Wadia Atash Bahram. Some of these boys will also be attending college, says Kotwal.

While the trustees are expected to work "harmoniously, as a team," in Mistree's words and it is a bit early to tell what specialized contribution each trustee will make, it is evident that Kotwal's "guidance on course structure" will be invaluable and that he "will be involved in a key way." To implement such advice and guidance will involve ZS personnel who, as Mistree notes, have acquired specialized communication skills.

"Even non-Zoroastrians will be teaching," says Mistree, emphasizing the very comprehensive mode of operation of the scheme which will include different aspects of communications, psychology, etc. "If (the teachers) give their services free, fine, if not, we pay for it. There are a number of different courses... depending on how the boys perform we'll decide whether we want to stretch our manpower or augment it. We do not want a hack job. We want to tutor the boys well."

Investigating the problem of student dropouts Mistree notes, "We have been examining the background (of the boys). Some are already practising priests (who) want to improve their knowledge... some come from out of town and will go back" to tend to the anjumans there. "We can't bind a person whose heart is not in it. If we give the right environment to these boys, give them a sense of well-being — no person can be 100 percent motivated... Go on the basis that if we do our job, they will do theirs. If a student at any level decides to change his vocation, we must allow the bird to fly" rather than accept the risk of half-hearted performance or negligent tending of consecrated fires because "the community will hold us, the (Athravan Trust's) trustees, responsible."

The accommodation problem of those student mobeds who come from mofussil areas may be met eventually, by the hostel facilities generated by the Dadar Madressa's horizontal extension being undertaken by the Athornan Mandal, says Ranina.

Although not a part of the original first phase of the project, the questioning of such facilities being meted out to the youngsters while the old priests who have been serving for 20-30 years are on a pittance, has led the trust to actively work on a medicare project that entails the listing of doctors — general practitioners and specialists — who agree to look after the mobeds free of cost. "Some very kind Parsi doctors have always been helping mobeds," says Mistree but the trust is now compiling area and speciality wise lists so that mobeds in need may know whom to approach.

The trust is also examining the possibility of medical insurance under government insurance schemes. Expecting the medicare scheme to become operational "within the next few months," Mistree notes, "If the trust has to incur expenditure on medical bills in terms of hospitalization, etc the mobeds' income-earning capacity will be considered. If our resources permit, without being wildly extravagant, yes, we'd like to have a first rate service for mobeds. Whether we levy a service charge to avoid wastage or have it totally free, we'd have to play it by ear..."

Referring to the "theological persona" (distinct individuality) of each consecrated fire, Mistree is appalled by the suggestion that fires be amalgamated and agiaries closed down where there is no one available to tend them. "When there is a lacuna, you correct the balance...one (must) improve the system," not eliminate other sections of it, he says.

"Our population in 1985 is larger than it was in 1885," says Mistree. "If the number of fire-temples could be sustained then, I don't see why they cannot be sustained now with greater resources at our disposal..."

"It is sad that that which has given us great strength is the tool we are now trying to run down."

Noting that it was only after the inaugural function of the Trust at Cusrow Baug that he learnt of attempts to sabotage it — one group, said Mistree, wanted to advertise in the *Jam-e-Jamshed*, requesting priests to keep away from the Cusrow Baug function, but the *Jam* owners and editors refused to accept the advertisement—Mistree concluded, "you and I may have our *geh sarna*, but our kids may not. That's what we are trying to avert."

EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES *continued from page 11*

The Zonta Club of Bombay III, which was chartered on March 15, 1979, has 16 members on its roster. It is involved in many noteworthy projects, the ongoing one being to build a recreational park for the handicapped, adds *Trimurti*.

Tata story in Marathi

The Marathi edition of Russi M. Lala's book on the House of Tatas, *The Creation of Wealth — the Tata Story*, was released by V.N. Gadgil, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, at a function on April 6, 1985 at Pune.

Titled *Samruddhichya Margawar* and translated by Professor Prabhakar Urdhwareche, the book which won the Escorts book award in 1982, has also been translated into Hindi and Gujarati, and will shortly be published in Malayalam, notes *The Daily* of April 8, 1985.

Published by Kirloskar Press Prakashan, Pune, the book has a foreword by J.R.D. Tata and illustrations by noted cartoonist. Mario, notes the newspaper report.

Speaking on the occasion, Gadgil related an incident with J.R.D. Tata, when he was minister of defense. The quotation by the Tatas being too high, a contract for the manufacture of one part of the Vijayanta tank was given to another firm. When Gadgil met J.R.D. on a plane, he told him the problem. J.R.D. replied:

"You tell me orally, not in writing that in the interest of the nation, reduce the quotation and I shall do it in one minute. You give me only a rupee."

"And if you ask, why Re 1, the reason is that my group is an industry, and, as an industry, it has certain norms. It is not right to give it free. But for the sake of the nation, certain concessions must be made and so even a rupee will do."

The next day a representative in Delhi called on Gadgil, and Tatas offered to manufacture the desired part of the Vijayanta tank with the message, "This is our cost. Even if we forgo profit, still our cost cannot be less than that of our competitor. If the cost is less you may give the contract to them, not to us, in the national interest. This is the message from J.R.D. Tata," relates a *Mid-Day* report dated April 10, 1985.

Exams in bed!

The first student in the 127-year-old history of the University of Bombay to appear for his examinations from a hospital bed was Ronnie Mehta, a student of the second year B.Com. correspondence course, notes a report in the *Indian Express* of April 7, 1985.

Having suffered burns on his back, yet determined not to lose a year, Mehta decided to give four out of six papers, thereby taking advantage of the ATKT (Allowed To Keep Terms) provision which requires that a student fail in not more than three papers.

The university, satisfied by the written certificate of his doctor, that writing the exams will not adversely affect Mehta's health, had to send the question papers, everyday to the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital, states the report.

However, Mehta had to bear the expenses of the supervisor and find himself a writer who was less qualified than himself, adds the report.

Sailing success

Sheriyar Bamboat, helmsman of the yacht *Jager*, crewed by Jehangir Jehangir and Zarthus Karai, sailed in seven races to win once more the Third Seabird National Yachting Championship and the prestigious Godrej Trophy, notes *The Times of India* dated April 17, 1985.

The Championships which attracted 14 competitors was conducted by the National Seabird Association under the aegis of The Royal Yacht Club, and "were held in light to medium wind conditions between the Dolphin and Sunkrock lighthouses in the tidal waters" off the coast of Bombay, states the write-up.

Dr Warden

Parsiana's founder editor, Dr Pestonji Warden, expired on June 9, 1985 at the age of 87.

A few days prior to his death, *Parsiana* had interviewed Dr Warden for the magazine's twentieth anniversary issue this August. *Parsiana* will publish the interview as scheduled as a tribute to its founder.

"Everyone
is a potential winner.

Some people
are disguised
as losers.

Don't let
their appearances
fool you"

- Kenneth Blanchard
Spencer Johnson

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"A company with the Zoroastrian touch"

The Mazda group is one of the few Parsi companies in recent times to go public.

Parinaz Toddywalla

In an attempt to attract Zoroastrians to the Parsi bastion of Gujarat, the Mazda group of companies is undertaking a three crore rupee housing project at Navsari.

The baug will comprise of six, nine storey buildings to be constructed on 1.5 acres of land, with all the 216 flats earmarked for Parsis.

"Three to four storeys of the first building" of the Dinshaw Park Apartments Co-operative Housing Society Ltd "have been completed," noted Homi D. Mehta, managing director of Mazda Leasing at his Maker Chambers V office whose walls are adorned with posters of the housing plan undertaken by a sister concern, Mazda Housing Development and Finance, on April 18, 1985.

There are a "lot of old houses and mohallas which are very Parsi. Sometimes there are one or two single Parsi houses surrounded by non-Parsis... We felt that those staying in such old cottages could sell them and invest in a flat at Dinshaw Baug" costing Rs 1.25 to Rs 2 lacs, offering a choice of "luxurious two bedrooms with hall and kitchen or one bedroom flats with hall and kitchen" as the information brochure states.

"Our baug is meant as a fillip for attracting Parsis back to Navsari," as at one time Navsari had a considerable Parsi population. Since south Gujarat is promising to become a "real industrial hubbing zone" they have come up with this "very good face project to invite Parsis to move out of Bombay into the Navsari-Vapi-Surat-Sanjan belt. Whenever Parsi business houses want to expand, we're trying to induce them to this belt." Such industrial satellite townships could provide employment opportunities to small scale Parsi en-

trepreneurs, he felt. "Housing was the first base for a proper industrial infrastructure."

"Our quality of business is A-I... We have consistently projected Mazda as a very professional company. Our image building has been very strategic. We do not mind having a low business profile, so long as our quality of management is maintained... We are a com-

"Our baug is meant as a fillip for attracting Parsis back to Navsari."

pany with the Zoroastrian touch."

Describing the Parsi response to their company as "extremely good," Mehta confirmed that there had been no change in the eight-member direc-

torial board of the company who were "at the helm of affairs." Six of the eight directors are Zoroastrians: tax consultant Homi P. Ranina; partner of M/s Mulla and Mulla, Burjor H. Antia; advocate Dara K. Deboo; chartered accountants Yezdi J. Master and Kersi J. Limathwalla; and business executive Homi D. Mehta. In addition they have retired executive director of Bank of Baroda, Balkrishan M. Shukla and former managing director of Searle India Ltd, Sharu S. Ragnekar.

Mehta reminisced with pleasure about the successful launching of Mazda Leasing in 1983, "At the first splash it just took off... After a very long time did some Parsis take the initiative of starting a public venture," he explained. Mehta recalled that while he was serving as adviser to Mazda Estate and Finance, "the seedling company floated by its pioneer Dara Deboo" who is presently its chairman, the latter



Mehta: leasing trends fantastic
(Photo: Homiyar Mistry)

suggested that they should expand their activities to leasing. Mehta however felt the need to "make a study on the subject of leasing and survey the trends abroad" before the company was established.

Touring abroad on this mission, Mehta managed to interest the British Equipment (Leasing) Ltd, U.K. with the Mazda plans. Presently Mazda Leasing is "the only leasing company in India with a foreign tie-up" prides Mehta. Quick to point out the distinction between a collaboration and a tie-up, he clarified that while the term 'collaboration' denotes an element of financial support, 'tie-up' refers to the business association with a foreign company whereby there is exclusive representation by one for the other in their respective countries and also a borrowing of "systems, procedures, goodwill, etc."

The company's public issue of Rs 75 lacs which opened in February 1984 was over subscribed by four times, notes the director's report to shareholders signed by the chairman Homi Ranina. Referring to the "150 percent escalation in share prices within one year" Mehta announced that "the

company was doing very well indeed." Whilst refusing to commit himself on the question of issuing debentures to shareholders, Mehta smilingly added "Let's say we will be making our

**"Whenever Parsi
business houses
want to expand,
we're trying to
induce
them to Gujarat."**

shareholders very happy." Mazda Leasing is listed on the Bombay and Ahmedabad stock exchanges.

In February-March 1985, the company introduced their two plans under the Fixed Deposit Scheme, depending on whether the minimum amount of deposit was Rs 5000 or Rs 3000. They are even issuing cash certificates to individuals now.

After starting its leasing operations in July 1984, till October 18, 1984 the "board had sanctioned leases to the

extent of Rs 259 lacs," notes the company's first annual report. Hirers availing of the leasing facilities "are repaying the instalments as stipulated," states the auditors' report for the year ended June 30, 1984.

Mehta further added that there was "no problem at all" on this front since they were "extremely particular in credit and quality of clientele." Such difficulties, he attributed to three main causes: dishonest management, rash decision making and lack of expertise.

Briefly outlining the pros and cons of leasing vis-a-vis other sources of finance, Mehta kept reiterating that profitability in this context "was a relative term" depending on extraneous factors like the stability of the company seeking finance and the purpose for which the facility was to be enjoyed. Citing the example of agriculturists, Mehta opined that the monetary needs of the farmers were such that they could be better met by the banking sector rather than through leasing.

For further details he suggested referring to an attractive folder brought out by them entitled "What's inside the Mazda package?" and a statement on the subject written by

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Ranina on the "Concept of Leasing." Ranina describes a financial lease as a legally enforceable contract whereby the lessee uses the asset for the specified term of the lease at a preconceived rent while the ownership rests with the lessor. Lease facilities are usually provided for the following equipment: standard plant and machinery manufactures, computers, office equipment, earth moving equipment as well as major aircraft.

Though a lease package could comprise of 30 to 40 combinations, Mazda Leasing offers a choice of three combinations: financial lease plan, vendor plan and operating lease plan. The incentives offered are: quick means of obtaining finance, less cumbersome formalities, almost cent percent of the cost of equipment provided, cash conserved, lease rentals chargeable as revenue expenditure, not taxable, and a hedge against inflation.

"The world trend in leasing is fantastic" says Mehta who then compares it to the Indian situation where "inspite of small beginnings, a similar trend is visible." Predicting that "leasing in India is going to grow at a very rapid pace," Mehta stated that more

companies are thinking and working on leasing. Even conventional companies think of it as a viable source of finance. Interest in leasing is steadily

Even conventional companies think of leasing as a viable source of finance. Interest in leasing is steadily growing "from multinationals to Marvaris..."

growing "from multinationals to Marvaris..."

Including only professional limited companies in his list of leasing companies, Mehta explains that these "seven to eight companies will grow and control the leasing market of India in the future."

The last budget has shown a change in the government's policy towards

"import of equipment. This liberalization will open the market (for finance), especially for a country like India," Mehta stressed.

Another Mazda company, Mazda Merbanco (Merchant Banking Company) is also believed to be doing "very successfully" helping entrepreneurs to identify areas of interest and then providing all the paraphernalia." Mazda Merbanco has established a business tie-up with a German company Deutscher Unternehmensberatungs-GmbH, which offers consultancy services and transfer of technology under appropriate licences between Germany and other countries.

With 24 years of banking and managerial experience behind him, Mehta who is also honorary director of Sir J. J. College of Commerce, was previously senior executive of the Central Bank of India and has also enjoyed a stint at orchard farming. Mehta's term as managing director of Mazda Leasing, expires in November 1988. Until then he is helping Mazda attain its "target growth of one new company, every two years." Next on the cards of the Mazda group is a medium scale engineering company.

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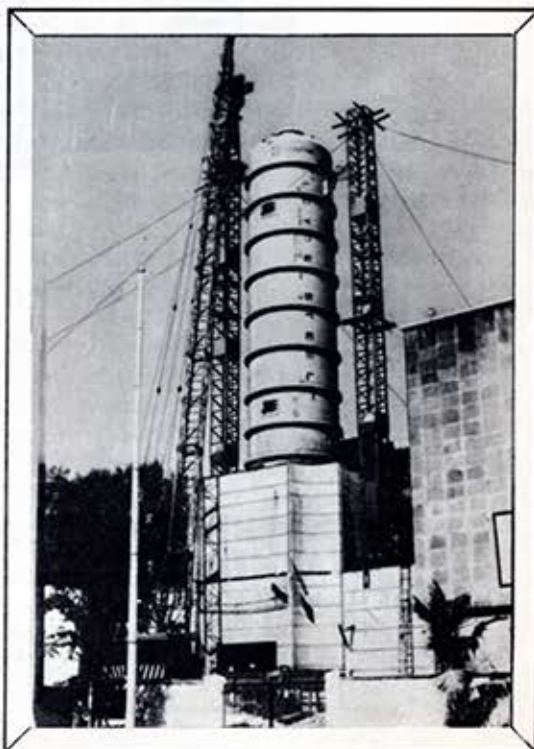


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