

triguingly unclear. But as in Olympics past, the athletes will be the sideshow.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: FIFTY YEARS OF REPORTING SOUTH ASIA
Edited by John Elliott, Bernard Imhasly and Simon Denyer
 Penguin Books India, 424 pages, Rs 695

Reviewed by BEN FRUMIN

IT'S NO SECRET that the days of the whiskey-sipping foreign correspondent who slides cynically over the years from intrepid romantic to resigned realist while trying to make sense of a far-flung land are over. The world has shrunk. Or flattened. Or digitized. And today few Western newspapers are willing to plunk down a quarter of a million dollars to maintain an overseas bureau when they could pay a wire agency a fraction of that for access to similar coverage.

According to the Washington Post, between 2002 and 2006 the number of foreign-based American correspondents shrank to 141 from 188, and few U.S. papers (The Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, and the Post among them) maintain a stable of foreign correspondents. And it's the depletion of these ranks and the hyperspeed changes of what it means to be a foreign correspondent in today's 24/7 news world that makes reading the excellent *Foreign Correspondent: Fifty Years of Reporting South Asia* something of a bittersweet experience.

Foreign Correspondent is a collection of 79 dispatches—ranging in topic from war to tiger hunting—that mark the 50th anniversary of the Delhi-based Foreign Correspondents' Association of South Asia,

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which was renamed the Foreign Correspondents' Club in 1991. The role of foreign correspondents, the editors write in the collection's introduction, is to "try to inform people across the world about the complexities of the region, to expose what is wrong, cruel and criminal, as well as to celebrate what is good and successful."

Here is the track record of South Asia's foreign correspondents, warts and all. Further, *Foreign Correspondent* is a first-rate primer on recent South Asian history, as well as Exhibit A in the case that international reporting by mainstream media remains critically important. There is immense public good in pieces like Sudip Mazumdar's cutting 1984 Newsweek investigation of the lax safety standards that led to the horrific Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal that killed and maimed untold numbers of Indians. The same goes for *Foreign Correspondent's* explorations and analyses of Indira Gandhi's stifling 20-month suspension of India's constitution in the mid-1970s, as well as the demonically violent religious riots in Bombay in 1993 and Gujarat a decade later.

In many cases, foreign correspondents included in their stories details that were too incendiary for Indian publications. Take Ed Gargan's 1993 New York Times piece on the Bombay riots, which reported "startling evidence of police complicity" in the form of transcripts of conversations picked up off police radio. These incriminating conversations were actually obtained by Indian reporters and translated to English; it took a foreign correspondent to get them into print because, as Mr. Gargan writes, "they are too inflammatory" for the local press.

When the dispatches reach 1991, the leading subject matter suddenly changes, just as the story of modern India did, because of long-awaited liberalization of the heavily regulated, socialist-leaning economy. Of course, the book's second half still includes plenty of nonbusiness stories on

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the sort of problems that never really go away—a kidnapping in Kashmir, the Maoist uprising in Chhattisgarh, India's child slave trade and the devastating 2004 tsunami.

But into the mix come dispatches on Indian entrepreneurship, the deep contradictions and hurdles that India's massive infrastructure overhaul faces, and the strikingly unbalanced wealth gap that has arisen from India's rapid modernization. There's a piece exploring the inability of the Indian government to provide water to its poor—contrasted with Amelia Gentleman's punchy profile of a modern day maharaja in Pune who dropped \$940,000 on his eighth Rolls Royce. As India changes at lightning speed, we are ever more dependent on foreign correspondents to explore such contradictions and dig into the ugly inequities that they illustrate, the chasms that globalization has caused or failed to counter.

Of course, *Foreign Correspondent* has shortfalls. Peter Jackson's much-lauded Reuters scoop catching Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay as they came down from Mount Everest in 1953 is a surprisingly dull read, and the inclusion of two Wall Street Journal pieces by Danny Pearl, who was murdered by Islamic militants in Pakistan in 2002, seems dutiful rather than merited. Still, the overwhelming majority of the stories remain fresh, engaging and relevant.

One of the most important pieces is a story then-BBC correspondent Daniel Lak wrote for The South China Morning Post in June 2001, a week after the Nepalese royal family was massacred at dinner by King Birendra's eldest son, Prince Dipendra. With naked disgust, Mr. Lak castigates the rabid exploitation, salacious truth-bending and callous disrespect of foreign journalists who descended on Nepal to cover the tragedy. These journalists, many of whom Mr.

Lak implies had no right to write with authority about a place they'd just arrived and barely understood (Mr. Lak had been based in the region for nearly a decade), presented this Himalayan kingdom to the world "as a place of regicidal and maniacal princes, or hardened communist rioters and a confused, self-deluding public who cannot come to terms with the truth."

Nepalis were "thrust blinking into the merciless glare of globalization's shock troops" in which the "rapacious global press pack" offered weakly sourced "unsympathetic scrutiny" of the nation's most sensitive matters. Mr. Lak angrily and unflinchingly warns of the danger posed by uncaring foreign journalists who swoop in for a scoop, in too much of a hurry to bother with ethics or the true feelings of those they cover. The blessing of the information revolution is that it allows dispatches to be immediately delivered to audiences of once-unimaginable size, but it also demands speed that increases the risk that quality and care will be sacrificed. Let's hope *Foreign Correspondent* doesn't become a eulogy of the good old days.

**MANAGING THE DRAGON: HOW
I'M BUILDING A BILLION-DOLLAR
BUSINESS IN CHINA**

by Jack Perkowski

Crown Business, 336 pages, \$27.50

Reviewed by ALEXANDRA HARNEY

FOUR YEARS AGO, Tim Clissold, an English businessman, wrote a book about how he and a former Wall Street banker lost millions of dollars trying to build a business in China. His hu-