

T R A C I N G M Y R O O T S

A research project of history III
students

by

J BUDDU

REG No. 5648

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PREFACE

I encountered a number of problems in tracing my roots. The main reason for my problem was the fact that my father was the only child of his parents. Furthermore, it is well over thirty years since my father died and not many records are available. However, I preferred to do a study of my own family as it gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

I wish to thank a Mr S Gopal for his assistance as he remembers my grandfather very well. I would also like to thank my mother, Mrs I Buddu, as she was able to verify some of the facts for me.

J BUDDU

INTRODUCTION

The majority of Indian South Africans are the descendants of indentured workers brought to Natal between 1860 and 1911 to develop the country's sugar belt. From the earliest days of the settlement of Natal, the problem of obtaining labour has loomed large. Natal had a large Bantu population, but they were not accustomed to work for wages. The reserves established by Shepstone were still ample, and the unfortunate planter in the height of the crushing season might awake and find that his whole labour force had decamped in the night to attend a wedding feast or other ceremony in the home kraal.

It became clear that some other source of docile, reliable labour had to be found, if the colony was to prosper and develop. It was in 1855 that the question was first raised. A deputation of citizens waited on Sir George Gray, requesting him to open negotiations with the East India Company for the importation of coolies to Natal. But the negotiating parties were soon changed. Natal ceased to be a dependency of the Cape in 1856 and acquired a lieutenant-governor and a legislative council of its own. As a result of the Indian Mutiny, the East India Company ceased to be the Government of India, and the British Government took over the responsibility for the great dependency in 1958. Negotiations were soon resumed, but not without difficulties. Efforts were made to get workers from other sources (Zululand and St Helena, for instance), but without success¹.

¹ M PALMER: The Indian as a South African, p3.

The first Bill for the introduction of Indians into Natal was disallowed by the British Government as being too harsh. But the second, passed in 1859, was approved, and the way was opened for negotiations with the new Government of India. So anxious was Natal for the importation of coolies that it despatched its Post Master, Mr Collins, to Calcutta to urge the Indian Government to agree. He urged the Government to pass the Bill as a matter of urgency, he also arranged for the appointment of an agent in India, and to engage the necessary ships. In Natal a "Coolie Agent", the Natal variant of a Protector of Indian Immigrants, had been appointed, barracks had been prepared, and the planters had been invited to make applications for assignment of coolies and arrange for the payment of the passage money for which they were to be responsible.

Mr Collins chartered a ship at Calcutta, the Belvedere, and another at Madras, the Truro, to carry the first labourers from India to Natal. The Truro reached Durban first and dropped anchor on Friday, 16 November 1860. On the memorable day of November 17, a party of 341 Indians disembarked from the Truro.

Under the heading of "The Coolies Here" this description of the landing of the indentured Indian labourers appeared in the "Natal Mercury" of November 22: -

"A very remarkable scene was the landing of the first batch of Indian indentured labourers and one well worth remembrance and record. Most of the spectators who were present had been led

to expect a lot of dried-up, vapid, and sleepy-looking anatomies. They were agreeably disappointed. As the swarthy hordes came pouring out of the boat's hold, laughing, jabbering and staring about them with a very well-satisfied expression of self-complacency on their faces, they hardly realised the idea one had formed regarding them and their faculties.

"They were a queer, comical, foreign-looking very oriental like crowd. The men with their huge muslim turbans, bare scraggy shin bones, and coloured garments, the women with their flashing eyes, long dishevelled pitchy hair and their half-covered, well-formed figures, and their keen inquisitive glances ; the children with their meagre, intelligent, cute and humorous countenances mounted on bodies of unscionable fragility, were all evidently beings of a different race and kind to any we have yet seen in Africa or England. Master Coolie seemed to make himself perfectly at home, and was not in the least disconcerted by the novelty of his situation. He looked about him in considerable animation and very generally remarked that Natal was colder than Madras.

"There has seldom been such a crowd at the Point as there was on Saturday (the day on which the immigrants actually landed in Durban). The boats seemed to disgorge an endless stream of living cargo. The major portion of this lot were, we understand, not so much field labourers, as mechanics, household servants, domestics, gardeners and trade people. There are barbers, carpenters,

accountants /

accountants and grooms amongst them. Among the women we find ayahs, nurses and maids. It seems to be rather a heterogenous assortment comprising a few of all callings, than a supply of labourers for the plantations."

The coolie labourers were an invaluable acquisition and gave general satisfaction. In spite of their expense, they were accepted as being more reliable than the African labourers.

My grandfather, Jirakhan, came to South Africa on the 17th of April 1896 on the S.S. Umlazi. He was 26 years old when he came to South Africa. Mr Jirakhan came from the district of Kamirpug which is in the State of Bihar in India. (See Appendix 1 and 2).

REASONS FOR LEAVING INDIA

Most of the population (over 80 % in India) were tied to the land. The rural economy never stayed in a condition of equilibrium. Peasant farmers, at all periods, were losing their land, through falling into debt, or suffering illness or other domestic disasters. These folk then found themselves landless labourers. Some might depart to find new land while others stayed in the village, dependent upon the proprietors of large estates to give them work at harvest time. But some drifted off to the towns in search of casual employment. Mr Jirakhan was one of them who drifted to the town in search of employment and he fell into the hands of a coolie recruiter who eventually sent him to Natal².

The drift from the land became a large-scale movement during any time of trouble : famine, flood or invasion. There seems to be an ancient instinct to move to the town as a refuge when all else fails. And so a pool of casual labour was formed in the great cities of India. Calcutta and Madras became the "coolie catchment" centres for the world's trade in indentured labour in the nineteenth century and recruiters from British and European colonists set up their offices and vied with each other to despatch their orders.

The recruiting agencies took the people who were available in the ports of embarkation, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. These were the flotsam of humanity, drawn to the big city by the prospect of employment which had vanished and left them stranded. Some were domestic servants, who had accompanied a European master

to the/ ...

to the city, and had been discharged when he was transferred elsewhere or went home to Europe on leave or retirement. They included cooks, footmen, washermen, grooms and coachmen. Then there were entertainers who had fallen on bad times - dancers, musicians, prostitutes. The great majority, however, were simple country folk who had been attracted to the big city in search of casual work as burden carriers - coolies in the basic sense. All these were swept into the Emigration Agents' net. He was supposed to check their muscles, and to inspect their hands for evidence of manual toil. But the agent needed to fill his ship, and if the vessel were delayed demurrage fees must be paid, so nobody looked too closely at the hands of the itinerant musician or the barber who had been cozened into going overseas.

During the first thirty or forty years of organised emigration, the main ports of embarkation were Calcutta and Madras and the recruits were furnished from the hinterland of these two cities (see Map in Appendix I).

In the late eighteenth century a class of landlord-revenue collectors with enormous powers over the rural population who, by law, became their tenants developed. Layer upon layer of intermediary tax-collectors-cum-landlords fastened upon the countryside in the process called subinfeudation. The people at the bottom, both economically and socially inferior, felt the heaviest weight of landlordism. These low caste folk were almost all

landless/

landless labourers; many had lost their little holdings to superior castes because of exactions placed upon them. In Bihar there was a kind of semi-slavery known as "kamiuti", by which the poor people sold their services, and sometimes those of their children in years to come, in order to obtain resources to meet their pressing needs. Such people were easy prey for the recruiters for emigration overseas. It required little persuasion to show that they would be better off by engaging themselves in indenture, a form of servitude which must seem light compared to the yoke of the landlord or the moneylender³.

Thus it was these conditions in India that led to many of our grandparents leaving India and going out as indentured labourers to the British Colonies. Mr Jirakhan was one who could not pay his landlord because of a drought and thus the failure of his crop. As a result he drifted to the city of Calcutta and was there recruited as a passenger for the ship S.S. Umlazi which brought him to Durban in South Africa.

3. H TINKER: A New System of Slavery, p53.

SETTLEMENT AND OCCUPATION

"The Coolie Immigration Agent" in Natal was responsible for the assignment of the immigrants to employers, on terms which varied with the successive laws. In every case the inhabitant of Natal desirous of the services of an indentured Indian immigrant had signed a bond, binding him to pay to the Government the sum due under the prevailing law. In every case the Natal Government paid all the expenses of the immigration - expenses incurred in the recruiting and transport of the immigrant and his maintenance before assignment. In every case the assignment - a contract between employer and employee in terms of the prevailing law - was accompanied by the employers' payment to the agent of a sum which partially reimbursed the Government for its outlay⁴.

A contract of service was drawn up between the employer and the indentured Indian worker. The labourers were indentured to their employers for three years - afterwards lengthening to five years - at a wage of ten shillings a month, rising by one shilling a month with each year of service (see Appendix 3). They were provided with housing accommodation and rations. At the end of his indentured service the labourer had three choices. He could return to India at the expense of the Government, he could re-indenture for a further term of service, or he could accept a piece of land of value equal to the cost of his return passage to India (see Appendix 4).

4. L M THOMPSON: Archives Year Book for S.A. History, p25.

Mr Jirakhan was contracted to Reynold Brothers Limited, a sugar estate at Sezela on the Natal South Coast. From Sezela he was transferred to the Umzinto Sugar Company which was bought by the Reynold Bothers. It was here that he met his wife who was to mother his only child named Buddu.

The labourers on the plantations worked from sunrise to sunset and returned much too exhausted to consider their immediate environment. They cooked their starchy meals, prepared from their daily ration of rice and mealie meal, in sufficient quantity to last till lunch the next day and provide a hurried breakfast at dawn. Supper over, they slumped into a dead sleep, to be taken out of it by the clanging of the bell and the shouting of the sirdars, in the darkness of the night, about to break into day. There was no time to search out appropriate places for ablution and toiletry and, none provided, they improvised at the nearest point, their minds distracted all the time by the sirdars shouting and bullying⁵.

After his first five years of service as a labourer Mr Jirakhan was promoted to work in a mill at Umzinto. As a mill worker he earned two shillings more than those who worked in the fields.

Mr Gopal pointed out that some of the sahibs (the bosses) were good and the hours of work were good. The workers would then have some time to cultivate a little land around the hut and raise some vegetables. Dry fish was a luxury item on their menu, and they used the half a pound weekly ration sparingly to

flavour the vegetables and when there was onions and tomatoes they braised them in some of their weekly ration of a quarter of a pound of butter or oil, and made it into a chutney, but that was a feast. At times they kneaded the mealie meal into a dough and rolled it into flat rounds and baked the rotis on an iron pan on a fire scooped into the floors of their huts .

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

The early Hindus in this country were very proud of their heritage. They had brought with them their cultures and civilisation, their religion and philosophy, their language and literature, their food and dress, their music and art, their ceremonies and festivals, and, in fact, they had transported a minute part of India to South African soil. They zealously followed their own style of life amidst their white masters and the black indigenous people, though removed thousands of miles away from their homeland. They underwent many stresses and strains but struggled with courage and determination to preserve their Indian identity and religious character.

The Hindus kept alive their religious consciousness by erecting temples, by establishing vernacular classes and schools, by forming music and dancing clubs, by performing rituals and ceremonies, by observing festivals such as Deepavali, Ram Naumi, Krishnashtami, Navaratri, Pongal, Sarasvati Puja, Kavadi, by organising the recital and reading of prose and poetry from religious literature e.g. and Ramayana, the Bhagavad Gita, Thevaram, Thirukurral and Thiruvassagam.

It must be remembered that Jirakhan was the one who started the "Gita Week" at Umzinto.

During this week^{of}/Ram Naumi different people from the community were called upon to deliver lectures on the Bhagavad Gita. This procedure is still followed in many parts of South Africa even today.

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Indians who had worked out their indenture sought work as fishermen, market gardeners, waiters, etc. and in 1870 the first batch sailed back for India. Natal was most unwilling to let them go and offered to provide those who stayed with a free grant of crown land. The Indian communities in Umzinto and Verulam thus came into existence.

At this stage there was a strong feeling of anti-Indian sentiments developing among the whites because of unfair competition in the field of trade. A number of whites felt that the period of indenture should end in India. But this was opposed because it was declared it would be unworthy of Natal to take the best years of a man's working life and then return him to his native land.

But the demand was pressed and finally a delegation headed by Mr Binns was sent to India. Other delegations followed and, finally, the Indian Government agreed rather unwillingly to a compromise, i.e. that in future indentures it should be specified that if a coolie on finishing his indentures wished to remain in Natal, he should be liable to pay a licence fee, but that in no case should he be liable to criminal proceedings if he failed to pay.

(see Appendix 5)

The tax was ultimately fixed at £3 per year. / It was a monstrous imposition. The Indian and all members of his family over the age of sixteen were liable. It fell only on those who were

indentured /

indentured after a certain date. It was admitted that the indentured labourers had a very vague comprehension of the terms of their indentures. It turned many respectable workers into vagabonds, and many were sent to prison for contempt of court when they failed to obey a court order that they should pay the tax.

At the same time, an agitation began for denying to the Indians the right of voting for the legislative council. The British Government steadily refused its consent to such a measure. But when Natal got responsible government the bill was passed. It did not specify Indians, but refused the right of voting to persons who came from a country where parliamentary institutions were not in force. It was not retrospective and a few Indians remained as voters, getting fewer, of course, as the years passed. By the middle of the nineties, the anti-Indian agitation had begun in earnest.

It was at this point that Gandhi appeared in South Africa. He came first in 1893 as a legal adviser to a Natal Indian client. But what he saw and the treatment he was subjected to himself, convinced him that steps should be taken to remedy Indian grievances.

He organised the burning of passes in Johannesburg and it was when he returned from a visit to India in 1897 that the famous protest against the landing of more free Indians took place in Durban.

CARE OF THE SICK

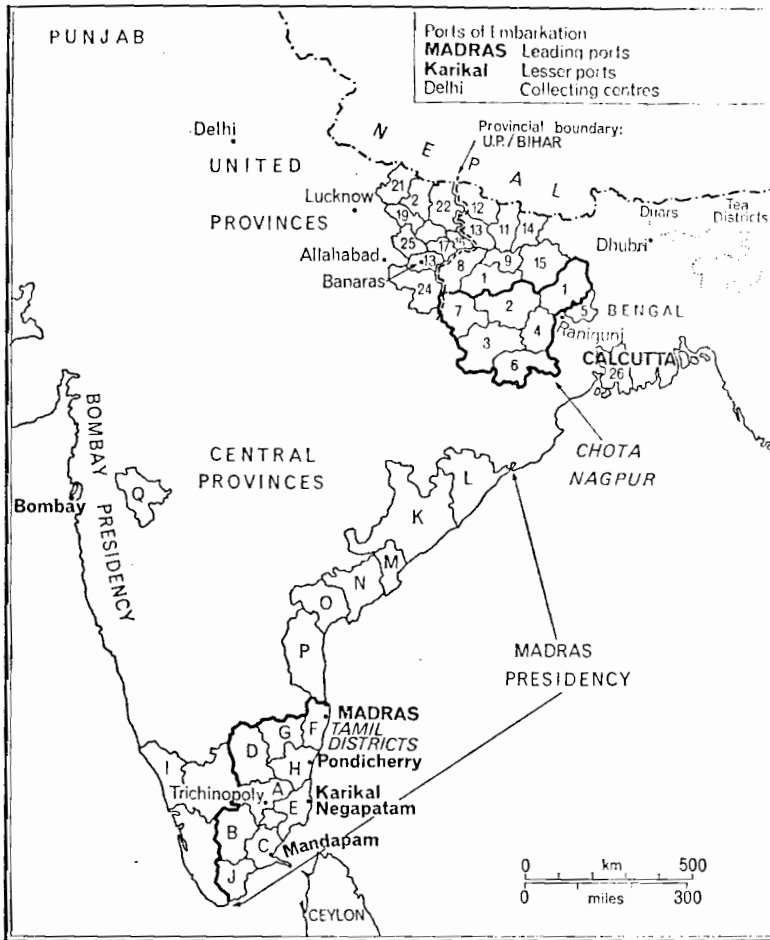
Medical treatment was either altogether absent on the estates or inadequate even though the law required employers of twenty or more Indians, to provide hospitals. In 1872, only one estate had provided a sick room and in 1885 only three and these contained neither beds, bedding, medical attendants, latrines, urinals nor toilets. The depot hospital was primitive in the extreme - no water basins or baths and only four latrines which were holes in the ground, no segregation of sexes, no separation of infectious disease, a staff of one male nurse and a superintendent, and corpses left to lie in the open.

The fact of the matter was that planters did not accept that "coolies could fall ill". They could only pretend to be ill. The only kind of sickness that masters recognised in their coolies was "humbug" or "sham sickness", and they treated it accordingly, punishing them hard for it and thereby jolting them back to work. After all, a coolie was no use to a master after five years when he would no longer own him.

Thus Kuram Pillai sentenced to fourteen days' hard labour for an alleged petty offence, told the prison authorities that he was ill and could not do the work. They did not believe him, and when he collapsed during work, the guard assumed that he was malingering and kicked him so that he fell into the water. He died a few hours later. He had, in fact, been suffering from a serious heart condition.⁶

6. Y S MEER: Documents of Indentured Labour Natal 1851-1917, p10.

APPENDIX 1



Main Districts of Recruitment

Note: each group is listed in order of concentration of recruitment

SOUTH INDIA

The Tamil Districts

- A. Trichinopoly
- B. Madura
- C. Ramnad
- D. Salem
- E. Tanjore
- F. Chingleput
- G. North Arcot
- H. South Arcot
- I. Malabar
- J. Tinnevely

Telugu Districts

- K. Vizagapatam
- L. Ganjam
- M. East Godavari
- N. West Godavari
- O. Guntur

P. Nellore

Bombay Presidency

Q. Ahmadnagar District

NORTH INDIA

Hill Coolie Districts

- 1. Santal Parganas
- 2. Hazaribagh
- 3. Ranchi
- 4. Manbhum
- 5. Birbhum
- 6. Singhbhum
- 7. Palamau

Bihari Districts

- 8. Shahabad
- 9. Patna
- 10. Gaya
- 11. Muzaffarpur

12. Champaran

13. Saran

14. Darbhanga

15. Monghyr

Districts of the United Provinces

- 16. Ballia
- 17. Ghazipur
- 18. Azamghar
- 19. Fyzabad
- 20. Basti
- 21. Gonda
- 22. Gorakhpur
- 23. Banaras
- 24. Mirzapur
- 25. Jaunpur

Calcutta Metropolitan Area

- 26. Twenty-Four Parganas

APPENDIX 2

B.M.25

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRSCOPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	<u>344</u>
Colonial Number	:	<u>62068</u>
Date of Arrival	:	<u>17 APRIL 1896</u>
Name of Ship	:	<u>S.S. UMLAZI</u>
Place of Registration	:	<u>-</u>
Date of Registration	:	<u>-</u>
Number in Register	:	<u>-</u>
Name	:	<u>JIRA KHAN</u>
Father's Name	:	<u>SABSUKH</u>
Age	:	<u>26 YRS</u>
Sex	:	<u>MALE</u>
Caste	:	<u>AHIR</u>
District	:	<u>KAMIRPUG</u>
Thanna/Taluq	:	<u>MONDAHA</u>
Village	:	<u>SAIB</u>
Height	:	<u>5'6"</u>
Bodily Marks	:	<u>SCAR LEFT ARM</u>
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	<u>-</u>
Relations Accompanied	:	<u>-</u>
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	<u>VACCINATED.</u>
Remarks	:	<u>-</u>

Certified a true copy.



REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

(MAN'S)
**CONTRACT OF SERVICE WITH INDIAN
 IMMIGRANTS.**

We It Remembered,

That on this 23rd day of April
 in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and ~~Eighty~~ Ninety
 and Telucksing of Surinam Indian Immigrant
 No. Bandhu appeared before me,
41698 Louis H. Mason Protector of Immigrants,
 and in my presence signed (or made his mark) to the following Contract of Service:—

The said Telucksing agrees to
 hire the services of the said Indian Immigrant, and the said Indian Immigrant agrees to
 render the said Telucksing
 his services in the capacity of General Labourer for Five Years, commencing on the
23rd day of April, in the Year of our Lord
 One Thousand Eight Hundred and ~~Eighty~~ Ninety

And it is further agreed between the said Parties, that the said Indian Immigrant shall be employed as above for six days in each week, save as in such Law is mentioned, and that the hours of labour shall not be more than nine hours daily, between sunrise and sunset, with a break of at least an hour for

And it is further agreed between the said Parties, that the said Telucksing shall
 pay to the said Indian Immigrant, as such servant as aforesaid, wages at and after the rate
 of TEN SHILLINGS for the first year, ELEVEN SHILLINGS for the second year, TWELVE
 SHILLINGS for the third year, THIRTEEN SHILLINGS for the fourth year, FOURTEEN
 SHILLINGS for the fifth year, for the remuneration of the services of the said Indian Immigrant, and that such wages shall be paid on the first day of each month.

And lastly, the said Telucksing
 doth hereby bind and oblige himself to give, grant, and provide, to and for the said Indian Immigrant, and for such family as may be allotted, good and comfortable lodging, wholesome and suitable food, and proper medical attendance and medicines, during the period for which this present contract is made, and otherwise to observe and fulfil all the conditions and obligations of the Coolie Laws of the Colony so far as the same are applicable to this Contract and Agreement.

Bandhu

Bandhu

His X mark.

The preceding Agreement was signed by the above-named Parties in my presence, on the day and year above written, voluntarily, the same being, as far as I am able to judge, fully understood by them respectively.

L. H. Mason
 Protector of Immigrants.

APPENDIX 4

Certificate of Freedom

This is a facsimile of the Certificate issued to Indians upon completion of five years of industrial labour. The document was referred to as "Certificate of Freedom" and failure to produce it rendered ex-indentured labourers to immediate arrest and imprisonment as vagrants. The Passes and the Certificates of Industrial Service were the two most important documents in the possession of Indians in the early days.

Natal

CERTIFICATE OF INDUSTRIAL SERVICE

Under Law 2 of 1879, Sec. 56.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that.

Indian Immigrant, having completed indenture, is hereby released from further Industrial Service.

DESCRIPTION

Age.

Height.

Bodily marks

Date of Arrival in Colony

Ship

Last Employer

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION
Durban, Natal.

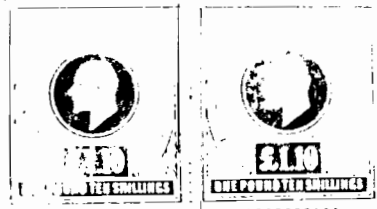
.....
Protector of Immigrants

APPENDIX 5

Pass under Act 17, 1895

No. 9308

D



Pass the Indian Immigrant

James J. ...

Colonial Number *50533*

Sex *M.* Age *27* Height *4.7*

Bodily Marks *Scar Right side*

...he having paid the Annual License of (£3) Three Pounds sterling, as required by Section 6, Law 17, 1895.

This Pass expires on the *23rd April* 190*5*.

and must then be renewed.

Issued at the

R.M. Office *Port of Spain*
James J. ...
190*5* R.M.

APPENDIX 6

B-I 20

15135

REPUBLIC VAN SUID-AFRIKA

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

VERKORTE STERFTESERTIFIKAAT

ABRIDGED DEATH CERTIFICATE

(Uitgereik krachtens Wet No. 81 van 1963)

(Issued in terms of Act No. 81 of 1963)

Gesertifiseer 'n ware uittreksel uit die sterfte-
register van:

Certified a true extract from the death register
of:

Identiteitsnommer
Identity number

					NONE			
--	--	--	--	--	------	--	--	--

Van _____
Surname

KHAN

Volle voorname.....
First names in full

TIRA

Geboortedatum:
Date of birth:

Dag
Day

Maand
Month

Jaar
Year

45 YRS

Geslag
Sex

MALE

Bevolkingsgroep....
Population group

INDIAN

Huwelikstaat...
Marital status

NOT STATED

Datum van afsterwe: Dag
Date of death: Day

Dag
Day

Maand
Month

Jaar
Year

913

Plek van afsterwe.
Place of death

UAGZINTO

Oorsake van dood.
Causes of death

PNEUMONIA

SYNCOPE

DEPARTMENT OF
INTERIOR
(Amplified kantoordatum-
REGIONAL stampel)
PRIVATE 320
07 1953
STREET
(Official date stamp)
BINNENLANDSE AANGELEENTHEDEN

[Signature]
Sektetaris van Binnelandse Sake
Secretary for the Interior

D/R. 1003/1913

G.P.-S.53858—1970-71—1 000-100 S

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