

**REPORT #458/10**  
**DATE 07-JULY-2008**  
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The reception was a magnificent sight, worthy of all the praise it has received around the world. I stood right in the centre of it, enthralled by its majesty and unable to move. I could not avert my eyes from the sheer beauty of its design.

The floor was done in polished stone and pictured a map of the world. It was so vast that even a country (if one can call it that) like Monaco was large enough to contain my foot within its borders. The details were staggering, and each capital was written down, no details glossed over or omitted. The major rivers could also be seen, and some of its minor effluents as well. Mountain ranges were presented in slight relief which, if I am to believe what I have read about it, are in the actual scale compared to their elevation and highest peak. Despite the thousands of men and women that stepped on it every day, it looked as if no one had ever done so, for it was constantly being cleaned and maintained.

But the floor was not the main part of the reception. Rather, it was the four enormous columns that supported the entire weight of the building.

They were as thick as the famous sequoia trees of North America. As an educated guess I would say that a dozen men, with their arms outstretched and holding hands, would barely be able to encircle any of these columns. They rose to the ceiling, about fifteen

metres high and were decorated with no expenses spared.

The first column, holding the southeastern corner (the entrance being to the South), was dedicated to Hinduism - the religion of most Indians. The materials and craftsmanship necessary to create this column were donated by the top CEOs of the many companies owned by Bahtti. At the bottom I could see many representations of the cow, that maternal animal that provides milk, fuel, fertilizer and power to till the fields. Rising to the top of the column, the themes started to become more religious. There were representations of the five-faced Shiva in all his compassion and destructiveness, of Brahman (quite rare in India) and of Vishnu painted in blue like the sky.

The second column, on the northeast corner, was of a different religion - Christianity. It was built in marble and limestone in the best baroque style of Rome in the 17th century. There was gold up and down the column, the bullion being offered by Primi Ltd, an Italian company whose majority shareholder was none other than Bahtti himself after a takeover in the early 90s. The bottom part was quite scary, offering images of Hell as portrayed in the Bible and other sacred Christian texts. Horned devils holding women by spiked leashes, cauldrons of burning human fat, men torn apart and rendered limb from limb by vicious unnatural animals, heads on spikes, and, overseeing this ghastly vision, the Devil himself. But there was more to this column and the rest of it ascended towards God on the top, picturing in the middle episodes of the

life of Christ, the fall of Adam and Eve, and the Pearly Gates just before reaching Him.

The third column featured the life of Buddha. The lowest part was shaped like a lotus-flower from where the Buddha is said to symbolically have been born. The lower third featured the gilded palace where he lived as a young man and also details of his privileged lifestyle. The middle third showed him abandoning the palace and his family, and shaving his head to join the ascetic lifestyle. It also showed his many labours and travails until, at the very top, he achieves nirvana and his word spreads to all his followers. I must admit that in terms of characterisation and accuracy of the sculpture, this was perhaps the weakest of the columns, the jade highlights doing very little to enhance its effect in my opinion. A plaque at the bottom listed the several Chinese sponsors of this column, all of which have had dealings with Bahtti.

The fourth column, situated to the northwest of the large hall, was the most bizarre of them all. One would expect this column to feature any of the two large religions that were missing: Islam or Judaism. Instead it shows neither. The rejection of Islam as a potential subject for the fourth column is not hard to fathom. Bahtti does have dealings with Islamic countries (like Saudi Arabia), but he has had problems with fundamentalist terrorist activity on his companies situated in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Also, he suffered greatly in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, with

the loss of a cousin and a brother in the conflict.

Judaism was perhaps just not large enough to warrant inclusion as a theme for one of the columns, being practised by just 0.23% of humanity. Also, there seems to be a bias against this religion locally, as most of its practitioners have emigrated to Israel. In fact, there are only 33 synagogues in the country, most of which have been abandoned.

What this column did feature though, was perhaps what one could describe as capitalism. The entire column was decorated with bas-reliefs sculpted with great definition. The lower circle featured the currencies of the world - the US dollar, the pound sterling, the euro, the ruble, the Brazilian real, the Albanian lek, the vatu, and so on, from the most expensive to the cheapest, from the most important to the most irrelevant. The other circles had the faces, along with the names, of important people related to capitalism. The grandparents Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jean-Baptiste Say, and John Stuart Mill, all British, all part of the 18th century. Then moving through the 19th century with Menger, Kirzner, Reisman, Weber, et al. Finally, the 20th century circles were the most picturesque, with a level entirely dedicated to the directors of the IMF: Gutt, Rooth, Jacobsson, Schweitzer, Witteveen, de Larosière, Camdessus, Köhler, Rato and Strauss-Kahn. There was also space for Chairmen of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, like Greenspan, Eccles, Burns and Volcker. A truly bizarre sight this column.

There was so much to see in this hall that I almost forgot my original purpose, lost as I was on doing simple tourism. I made my way to the check-in desk, which was wide enough to serve nearly 10 people at the same time.

When prompted I announced my name and what had brought me there. They did not know who Miraya Sinha was! I asked to see Mr Bahtti then, for it had been his personal assistant who had summoned me to come at once. To this, they laughed, and told me it would be easier to see Dr. Manmohan Singh (India's PM). Your honour, at this stage I felt most dismayed, for it had been such a terrible trouble to arrange this meeting. If I was not able to overcome these Cerberis, then would I be able to get another meeting with Bahtti at a later date? Would he understand that I could not overcome the simple obstacle of getting through security? Doubtful. Doubtful indeed.

Alas, these people were beyond any reasoning or sensible argumentation and I relented. I headed back to the large marble gates, taking a last look at the grandiose reception. But I was stopped just as I was exiting. A man, dressed as a gardener, held my arm. He spoke to me in Hindi:

"I noticed they wouldn't let you in. But if you really want to get in you can take my security card and take my place. You will have to pay me a quarter of a lakh (note: around £300), and promise me

that you leave at 8 am tomorrow morning so they won't blame me for leaving early. Don't worry, there are so many gardeners they won't notice I'm missing."

Normally I would pay no heed to such a desperate scheme, but these were the circumstances I was facing. So I paid the man and took his card. I stepped into the reception once again, eyes cast downwards so as to avoid suspicion, and passed through the turnstiles, heading to the service elevator that would take me to the greenhouse and, from there, to my meeting with Bahtti and Sinha.