



Bhekh and Rajan 3



11 A new FM station is gathering a cult following in Kathmandu

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Freedom To Be Fair

It was a journalist who once said that journalists were people without any ideas, but having an ability to express them. These are cynical times, and you will find that it is people in media themselves who are most cynical about media.

It has also become fashionable in Nepal's adolescent democracy to be cynical about democracy itself. We like to make fun of freedom.

Those who want to take us back to the bad old days of authoritarianism like to rub it in: they say that compared to 15 years ago, the only difference today is that Nepalis are free to complain about how miserable they are. OK, but that is precisely the point.

It is not fair to say how great the current situation is and how bad the past was. Looking back at those farcical times, we remember there was no direct, overt censorship. But there was an insidious and more dangerous form of censorship: self-censorship.

We accepted the boundary of freedom, and we did not cross it. Today, we know that freedom once won doesn't come with any warranties. Press freedom must be defended by its maximum application, by constant vigilance. And cannot be taken for granted.

It is true that freedom often becomes a free-for-all, and is often misused. Democracy doesn't stand a chance if cynical citizens have made up their minds to blame the system, and not those who give democracy a bad name.

The nation is then paralysed by low self-esteem and fatalism, as we are now. Memories of 30 authoritarian years have a tendency to fade as we struggle to survive its messy legacy.

The challenge is to use a free and independent media to ensure that elected leaders are more accountable to the people who put them in office. The truth is always subversive, and the public and policy-makers need to know it so they can make informed choices.

For too long we in media have taken objectivity as our main mantra. And we have forgotten fairness. Objectivity is not having to make up your mind about anything, fairness is listening to all sides. Objectivity is so sacred to us that we forget to be fair.

Today, globally and within many countries, society's balance of justice is heavily skewed to one side by the weight of the powerful. Objectivity perpetuates this status quo, fairness tries to set things right.

We at Nepali Times and the other publications of the Himalmedia group are committed to professional and high-quality journalism. The Nepali media must uphold the freedom to be fair. ♦

The people don't want war.

Maoists maul the police while Congress fiddles, and the economy gets its first knocks.



“ We have initiated a People's War and that is the only alternative left for the people...”

Comrade Prachanda

BINOD BHATTARAI, CHIEF CORRESPONDENT

The Maoists are seemingly winning the Battle. The big question is: who will win the War that is being fought in the name of the Nepali people?

The Police, isolated in vulnerable forward bases, is in limbo, in the absence of clear orders from its political masters. Not only the government, but the entire opposition and the intelligentsia are confused about what to do. The Police are forced to make do.

But this could change with the government's decision to set up a well-equipped paramilitary force trained by the Army in using

automatic rifles and counter-insurgency tactics, including landmine detection.

The paramilitary Armed Police Force is going to cost about Rs 2 billion and is likely to be ready for action by late autumn. The budget allocation for the police for the coming fiscal year has shot up to Rs. 5.3 billion from about Rs. 3 billion the year before.

Both sides, it seems, want to use a carrot and stick approach. So both are flexing their muscles to be able to negotiate from a position of strength.

The latest humiliation for Nepal Police occurred on the night of 7 June. The siege and destruction of

the Panchkhatia police post in Jajarkot was proof that the Maoists are escalating their offensives, while maintaining that they are open to talks.

The Maoists are using classic storming tactics on the ground, and taking full advantage of the guidanceless Nepal Police's lack of both motivation and equipment to fight the insurgency. Then there is the incredibly cynical power tussle within the ruling Nepali Congress, which the Maoists are using to full advantage.

The Panchkhatia attack was a replay of the classic tactics used by the Maoist insurgents against police. A group of about 1,000 probably

also including villagers allegedly used as human shields, attacked the outpost from the settlement side.

Police said their 51-strong force was unwilling to fire at the attackers for fear of hitting locals. Using flare-tipped arrows, the Maoists lit up the target and pelted them with homemade explosives. The police were sitting ducks, unable to return fire into the darkness with any accuracy.

“Our men did the best they could. When you are pinned down like that, it is difficult to lift your head to take aim,” said Ram Kaji Bantaba, Assistant Inspector General of Police in charge of operations. Another policeman who has fought on the

frontline: “They attack in waves. If one falls, he is immediately dragged away and replaced by another.”

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The latest phase in the Maoist offensive seems to be a planned attempt to undermine the Nepali economy as well. Robberies of trekking groups and attacks on a Pokhara tourist resort in April may well hit the autumn 2000 tourism season hard. In the past week, key Indian joint ventures in Nepal, Surya Tobacco and Colgate-Palmolive were firebombed by suspected Maoists in Simara and Hetauda.

It is becoming clear that the Police is fighting this war with one hand tied behind its back. Previous operations such as the one code-named “Kilo Sierra Two” last year cost them local support, and even party politicians in Kathmandu are unwilling to stick their necks out in support.

The mainstay of the police arsenal is the First World War Enfield “three-knot-three” single-load rifles. They heat up quickly and jam, and have proven to be no

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NEPALI Times

NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER

TALKING ABOUT TALKS

No matter what anyone says, it is a fact that the Nepali Congress fought and won the last general elections on the promise of freeing the nation from the mindless violence being perpetrated in the name of Maoism. Voters were so exasperated that they rejected outright the fellow travelers of Comrade Bamdev Gautam because he had spoken in support of Maoists.

However, when Krishna Prasad Bhattarai last year became the Prime Minister of a majority government he soon got too engrossed in the factional politics of his party than to try and find a solution to the violence. Girija Prasad Koirala, who put him in that chair, soon pulled the rug from under Bhattarai, and that was that.

Girija, as chairman of the Nepali Congress had to fight for the leadership of his own parliamentary committee in order to become the Prime Minister, which he did. Now, three months later, it is Girija who has to deliver on the election promise of restoring peace. The electorate is waiting to see if he can.

In the country's war zones, the situation has gone from bad to worse. The Panchkatiya massacre of June 8 and the escalation of violence in different parts of the country last week has shown that the threshold of violence has increased to unprecedented levels.

Nothing left to lose

And what are our leaders doing? They are hemming and hawing, talking about talks.

Experience of the last four years has clearly shown that the insurgency has roots in genuine grievances of the neglected masses who have nothing left to lose. A military solution is therefore not the answer. The state will need to have an armed response to an armed uprising, but negotiations to find a long-term solution is vital. It was perhaps for this very purpose that the government of K P Bhattarai had



formed a negotiating committee under the chairmanship of former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Sadly, except vague references in the media to the composition of the negotiating team and some exchange of faxes, nothing of note has come out of this committee. Almost every senior member of the government seems to agree on the importance of talks to resolve the issue. Khum Bahadur Khadka, senior Nepali Congress politico and Khadga Prasad Oli of the UML for example, have publicly spoken in favour of talks.

From the other side of the fence, the Maoist leadership have been playing a two-track strategy, keeping up the military pressure on the police while at the same time posturing about being ready to talk. They have even forward some demands, which do not seem unreasonable: cessation of offensives, release of prisoners, etc.

The priority is for Nepalis together to fight poverty and injustice, not to have Nepalis killing Nepalis. Instead of spending more and more on buying arms in a futile attempt to crush the rebels militarily, the Nepali Congress must fulfill its election promise and urgently prepare the ground for talks to resolve the crisis within an agreed time frame. The rebels must by now realise the futility of their actions come to the negotiating table.

If Deuba succeeds in solving this problem through talks, his political future is assured. And there is no reason why he cannot. All it needs is trust and a sincere effort on both sides to talk to each other, rather than at each other. No conflict is beyond the power of negotiation.

The violence is spiralling out of control. It is already late to begin the process, but it is better late than never. ♦



STATE OF THE STATE

by C.K. LAL



Keeping the peace is expensive business. In a country where half the people live below the official poverty line, Rs 6 billion will be spent this fiscal year in policing the population. The Maoists, too, must be spending quite a bit waging their so-called Peoples' War. One has to add up the two totals to grasp the magnitude of madness afflicting the nation.

And there are some things cannot be measured in rupees: nearly 2,000 Nepalis have been killed fighting each other in the past five years. The loss in investor confidence, the loss of productivity, the internally displaced, and the loss that will be felt if tourism is hurt.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is as distant a dream as ever, and the government has not been able to develop any kind of a peace strategy. Meanwhile, the country continues to burn, and nobody in Kathmandu seems to be too bothered.

That is strange, because the price of making peace is often a lot less than the cost of keeping it. Perhaps there are influential interests who make short-term benefit from the conflict, and don't want to wait around for the long-term possibility of a peace dividend.

Comrade Prachanda apparently does not want the conflict to end, either, for it will imply an end of his dictatorial days. A general is always interested in war. Peace is for politicians, and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai is more at home in that territory. Unfortunately, for common Nepalis, the venerated architect-planner appears to have less of a say in the decision-making processes within the Maoist fold than is commonly believed.

The possibility that the Maoists are serious about peace appears bleak. Comrade Prachanda will not come to the negotiating table with any sincerity unless he is cornered—partly because he himself does not seem to know what it is that he exactly wants.

The onus for taking an initiative for talking lies on former prime minister and Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba. But Deuba too is distracted: he needs numbers to face the impending organisational elections of Nepali Congress where he is likely to be a presidential candidate. So you can be sure he is not going to make any

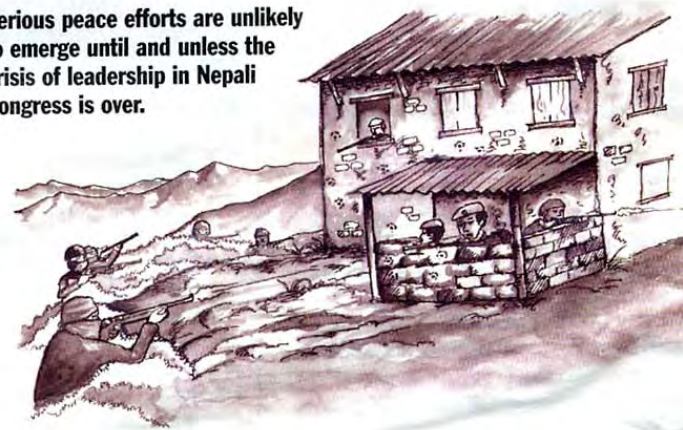
earthshaking breakthrough before autumn.

A government that lacks the self-confidence of enforcing its own laws is less likely to opt for the negotiating table. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala may chant the mantra of talks, but look at where he has put the money: in an expensive para-military force trained by the army and equipped with automatic weapons. If home-made bombs and vintage .303 rifles cause such mayhem already, the casualty rates from AK-47s are sure to go up.

Making peace is easier when

Elusive Peace

Serious peace efforts are unlikely to emerge until and unless the crisis of leadership in Nepali Congress is over.



attitudes exist which reinforce peace. The atmosphere in the country is quite the contrary. The extreme right wants the King back where the action is. Intellectuals sing paens in praise of democracy, but show little patience for political leaders and end up undermining the system.

With the population growing at 2.5 percent, and the economy at only about 3.9 percent annually, Nepal has a large pool of unemployed youths who have nothing to lose, and will take up guns at the slightest instigation. The situation is already so bad that even if Comrade Prachanda were to ask his band of desperados to lay down arms as part of a peace deal, there may be many who will still defy him for want of an alternative

occupation.

But peace still has a chance, for the simple reason that nothing else ever works. Comrade Prachanda must realise that he has already reached a point by exposing the shards of an unworkable system. Oppressed citizens who are ready to risk all because they hardly have anything anyway. And it should be clear to Sher Bahadur Deuba that his political future hinges on the outcome of his talks with the Maoists. If he succeeds, he will be hailed as a saviour. (A failure is unlikely to disappoint his detractors inside his party—they seem to be taking that outcome as forgone conclusion.)

Making peace is no less important for Prime Minister Koirala. There can hardly be a more fitting last hurrah for a man who has spent nearly six decades fighting for democracy and in active politics. Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Paudel has earned his spurs by negotiating successfully with stubborn opposition parties. If he wants to reach where he believes he is destined to

reach, he has to use those skills in getting the Maoists out of the terraces to the table.

But don't hold your breath. Serious peace efforts are unlikely to emerge until and unless the crisis of leadership in Nepali Congress is over. For that to happen, the party convention needs to take place in November.

There is an old Nepali proverb which says: "When the hut is on fire the fire-fighters wait for the auspicious astrological time to put it out." That kind of sums up the state of affairs inside the Nepali Congress. The long-suffering people of Nepal will have to exercise some more of that great gift which they have historically shown to have in plenty: patience. ♦

Bhekh Bahadur Thapa

On the hijacking crisis.

In the two and a half years I have been in Delhi, perhaps this was the most difficult period. At Nepal end we have yet to catch up with the reality of the information age. Even when we were projecting what eventually turned out to be the correct version, because of the time lag, the Indian public got the impression that Nepal was a willy-nilly a partner in the hijacking.

At the India end there was the knee-jerk reaction of the suspension of the flight itself. This was followed by the systematic and coordinated information that appeared in the Indian media.

When I came to Kathmandu at that time the impression here in Nepal was that they would rather trust Indian media more than the Nepali media itself. That to me was the sad and difficult part. Every dimension of India-Nepal relations, cordial as it is, it got derailed, we became hijack-oriented, hijack-centric.

On "secret intelligence report".

The foreign ministry spokesman has already made it very clear: the damage it has done. When I talk about relation between Nepal and India I say that it is good as relation between any two countries can be but it is also as difficult as relations between any two countries can be.

Where we in Nepal have to learn a lesson, at this end we have a big gap. We fail to recognise that the rest of the world is more organized that we are. I have seen in most of the countries of the world there is a system in place, there is a mechanism in place, their action is more coordinated. Whereas we stand totally disjointed. That makes conduct of foreign policy nearly impossible, and a challenging task.

In Nepali we call it the *laxman rekha*, the ultimate fine line of national interest, it is related to security, security of people, security of border, security of natural resources, these are the dimensions of national security. Somewhere along the line we have to define ourselves as a nation, what kind of nation are we.



On India-Nepal stalemate in hydropower.

Yes and No. I remember in my PhD dissertation in the early sixties, it was about Nepal's growth projections for 15 years. At that time I was secretary of planning and I had just prepared a five-year plan. I thought the third phase of Nepali development, the takeoff would come from water resources, and Karnali was the lynchpin.

We were pinning our hopes on Karnali giving us this breakthrough for a takeoff stage. That there would be greater inter-dependence rather than total dependence on the Indian economy. Forty years ago that was a dream, even today it remains a dream.

In recent discussions it is clear that India has an acute and growing need, and the Nepalis have been somewhat consistent in demanding fair play.

India today stands more ready than India was ten years ago to talk more seriously about some of the projects.

Snags in bilateral trade.

Here again you know, the treaty of 1995 and the transit treaty of 1997 in many ways are as perfect as one could envision. So the structure is in place, broad, accommodative. But where we have difficulty is both in interpretation and implementation.

I think the process of educating the babus at both ends stands as a major impediment.

On Nepal-India mistrust.

I don't think there is any trick that works. India is not

Nepal - India

STATE OF RELATIONS

only a very large country. Our relation with India is a dominant factor of our foreign policy. For India we are one of the neighbours, important at that.

I wish we were not as India-centric in our thinking. It might also provide for some degree of balance. Secondly, even small issues between India and Nepal somehow or other become highly emotive, whether it is the hijacking or this recent report. Even during the five months of hijacking, expect for the fact that Indian Airlines was not flying to Nepal, what had gone wrong. Our trade was flourishing, people were coming back and forth. People to people relation was normal. But the perception was that everything was on the docks, which in fact was not.

In India also there was a lesson that hopefully they have learnt. Some people I talk to now say that maybe we too were wrong, maybe we went too far, maybe that has hurt Nepali sentiments. My approach or our approach is to deal with the truth. Don't get derailed or excessively disturbed by daily incidents, because if that happens you get derailed too.

Dealing with the problems is easier when the overall environment is somewhat more conducive. However difficult the issue, if it is discussed in a friendly manner, the solution becomes easier. ♦

Achievements of his tenure.

When I arrived here, there were anxieties about the India-Nepal relationship. There were doubts in Nepal about whether India was sincere in wanting to deal with it as a multi-party democracy.

With different coalition governments, India tried hard to show its sensitivity to Nepali aspirations and sentiments, such as in the concessions regarding the Phulbari route and the Mahakali Treaty. That has probably helped make the political community here more relaxed about India's intentions. I have had the dubious distinction of being ambassador here with something like 15 or 16 governments, but we were able to maintain a certain continuity with the government as well as the opposition.

On Mahakali, Phulbari and trade.

The fact that Nepal and India could come up with a treaty which had been under discussion for more than 40 years, and that too on the basis of equal partnership, is one of the significant achievements of multi-party democracy in Nepal.

The Gujral Doctrine.

The essence of the Gujral Doctrine, that India does not expect reciprocity in an arithmetical sense, has always been part of India's approach to Nepal and other neighbours. The difference was that Mr. Gujral gave a strikingly explicit articulation to this

as a basis for our foreign policy. However, it was an oversimplification to assume that the goodwill inherent in the Doctrine would be at the cost of India's national interests.

The hijacking of IC 814.

Of course, it would have been wonderful if the hijacking had not happened. Here the overriding sentiment was to protect the country's reputation, and it is true that there was a caricaturing of Nepal in some sections of the media. But perhaps people here have not quite understood the sense of anguish in India when the hijacking took place.

India Today's intelligence report.

I would urge our friends in Nepal to consider that if there had been a sinister intention, surely the timing was wrong. You do not leak a report like this to a newspaper on the eve of the visit to Nepal of your principal secretary to the prime minister and national security advisor (Brajesh Mishra). It makes no sense. There are lots of pieces of paper in systems like ours which are floating around all the time and they are not always based on verification.

ISI and Nepali Muslims.

It has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that there are activities taking place not just in Nepal, but in India, and in other neighbouring countries, aimed against India. The Government of India is quite convinced that Nepal is serious about not allowing its soil to be used against any friendly neighbour.

It would be totally unfair to

K.V. Rajan

the Muslim community and to Nepal as a country to even think on these terms. India, of all countries, does not have any reservation about religious institutions, madrassas, mosques, etc., as long as they are performing religious tasks. The problem arises when reliable reports sometimes point to activities that are more political in nature.

Open border.

Both countries should understand that, in this day and age, an open border has also got to be a friendly and well-managed border. A well-managed border will not create harassment for people engaged in bona fide activities, and will prevent criminals or terrorists from misusing it. Today, both countries are engaged in a constructive discussion on ensuring a well-managed open border, and our focus is on communications, infrastructure and development projects.

Smuggling.

I think the liberal sentiment in India has always been that the Indian economy can absorb the shocks that come with smuggling from Nepal. Things become serious when the smuggling mafias begin to operate on a very large scale, then it is no longer a few batteries or cameras or computer parts.

The Maoist insurgency.

India and Nepal are willing to cooperate on all issues which are of common concern, and if there is any kind of terrorist activity which is, or can at some future point be, planned from Indian soil, then it will obviously be the duty and responsibility of the Government of India to cooperate to the extent desired by the Government of Nepal.

The Bhutanese refugee problem.

It is all very well for Nepal to say that India should get involved to help resolve the problem, but India's judgement should also matter as to whether it can help or not. ♦

(The full text of this interview conducted on June 11 is available at the Nepali Times site on www.nepalnews.com)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DIASPORA

Congratulations for (at least) the Internet version of the soon-to-be-launched English weekly. The way it looks on my screen, it is certainly going to make a big debut in the media chhetra of Nepal. I also join those who feel a strong need of such a newspaper that can care to those readers who have had enough from the current junk.

May I also suggest that you try to penetrate those areas inhabited by Nepalis of Indian origin or Nepali origin. You have to tap these working journalists from their base and lure them to report for Nepali Times. There is no worthy publication now in

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council or Gorkhaland. You will have a bigger readership if you cater to the Nepali diaspora.

Ratna B. Thapa

VULTURES

I just happened to see the latest issue of your magazine in the Internet. I am very pleased with the kind of articles you have published. I was impressed with Barbara Adams' very accurate portrayal of what happened to Nepal after the introduction of the so called democracy. As far as I am concerned democracy spells disaster for Nepal and her people. The idiotic politicians and irresponsible govt. employees have

looted the nation and destroyed the basic fabric of our country.

Those of us who have left the country in desperation only feel sad, helpless, and sorry for our friends and relatives. It will take a miracle to even restore Nepal to what it was ten years ago. When I visited Nepal last year, I saw nothing that was positive for the people and the country. I have thought about a solution for the problems of Nepal and for all those poor countries with illiterate people who have resorted to democracy only to find out that the corrupt politicians have

stolen their dreams. The Nepalese politicians have no moral, no ethics, and no values. They have turned into vultures and vampires and are sucking the blood of our people and eating their flesh. Shame on these elected corruptocrats.

Thank you and Jay Nepal.

Dr. Khagendra Thapa
USA

PANCHAYAT

I do not know how it felt during the Panchayati Raj, because I was just too small, but what I can figure out in 25 years of my life are that human beings are

always free. I do not understand how one can call those years as 'dictatorship'.

The learned people in Nepal do not understand that the masses are still not in a position to use 'freedom'. Our country would have been better off in the Panchayati Raj.

Bkesh

GUNS & PENS

Congratulation to Nepali Times, Internet edition. With Funny Side Up, I feel younger by 20 years! Sounds like birds of like feather all have joined NT! If you cannot shoot them with guns, shoot them with your pen.

Narayan

SAFA

I have not lived in Kathmandu for the last eight years, but every time I visit home, it seems the valley's environment is getting worse. For a country that depends heavily on tourism this is very bad news. My American friends who visited Kathmandu recently complained about the air pollution.

I don't know why the government is taking such a stupid action but it only reflects what the politicians in Nepal really care about.

Dibesh Karmacharya
Princeton, New Jersey

KUNDA DIXIT

Eathe easy. Once and for all, it's official: Kathmandu Valley's air pollution is not as bad as Delhi or Beijing.

Now, the bad news. But it is getting worse, and for now residents have to be more worried about the dust than the other poisonous gases from vehicles.

The other myth shattering revelation: last year's ban on diesel three wheelers (Vikram tempos) may have made the streets look cleaner, but it has not improved air quality along Kathmandu's road corridors in any measurable way.

"Yes, after the tempos were gone, you stopped seeing that black smoke on the streets. But 20,000 more vehicles have come onto the roads in Kathmandu after the Vikrams were banned," says Toran Sharma of the Nepal Environmental and Scientific Services (NESS).

Latest measurements prove that the additional vehicles have more than made up for the reduction of pollution, especially dust in diesel exhaust, after the 350 Vikrams were banned.

NESS has been measuring Kathmandu Valley's air pollution levels for the past ten years, ever since it started becoming a serious health issue. The most recent monitoring results NESS did for the Asian Development Bank show that things are much worse than in 1993.

"The conclusion is that Kathmandu valley air quality is degrading, especially with regards to total suspended particulate matter," says Sharma. And that means dust—dust from roadside rubbish, construction materials, digging, diesel smoke, brick kiln ash, stack emissions from the Himal Cement factory in Chobar.

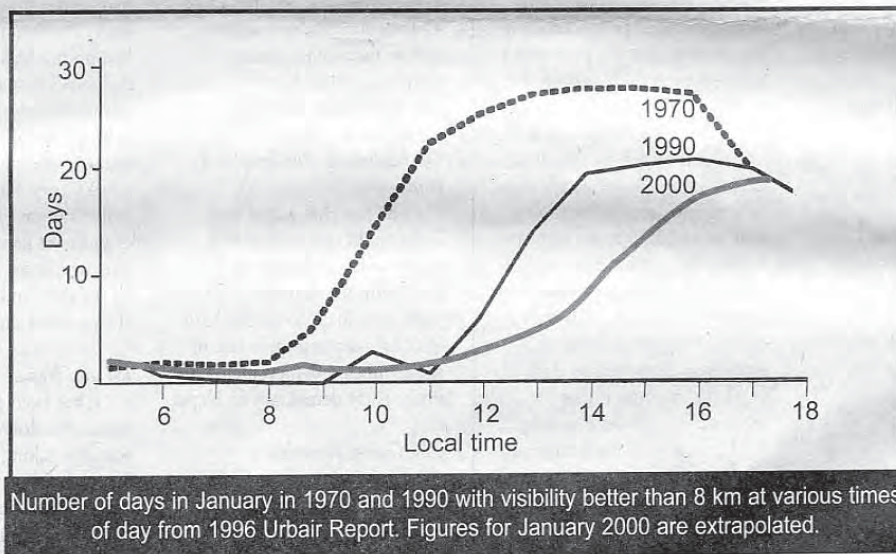
Air quality measurements for Kathmandu consistently show that particulate pollution are up to seven times higher than safe levels set by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Some 24,000 tons of total suspended particulates are spewed out into the valley's atmosphere every year, of which about 7,000 tons are less than 10 microns in size.

The main sources of dust in Kathmandu Valley are (in order of emissions): the brick kilns, Himal Cement, vehicular pollution, domestic fuel, and roadside rubbish re-suspension.



Dust to dust

The number of days in January with visibility better than 8 km at noon had decreased from 25 days in the 1970 to only five days in 1993. By 2000 there were only two days when the pollution haze had cleared by midday.



Even ten years ago, pollution levels were serious enough for scientists to raise the alarm. The World Bank's landmark Urbair Report for Kathmandu Valley in 1996 even tried to put a dollar and cent figure on the health impact of air pollution.

It calculated that in 1990, the monetary impact of pollution (mainly through deaths and sickness) was more than Rs 200 million. This excluded the impact on tourism and impact on intelligence due to leaded gasoline.

Between 1980 and 1999, there has been a 80 percent growth in the Valley population, the total number of vehicles has nearly quadrupled, and there has been a staggering 300 percent increase in the number of brick kilns.

Although the number of brick kilns has remained more or less static in the past ten years, they have become more serious polluters because of the use of low-grade coal and urban plastic trash and tyres.

The number of vehicles which increased at an average of 15 percent a year in the 1990s, has seen a sharp rise to 25 percent today. Total motorcycles and scooters with two-stroke engines, grew from 30,000 in 1990 to 120,000 in 1999.

One comparison done by M. L. Shrestha in 1995 shows that (see figure)

Said the Urbair report: "Suspended particles are the primary air pollution problem in the Valley, leading to both potential health risks and to visibility."

By the late 1990s, the number of days with good visibility at noon had gone down to 0-2 days. Sources at the airport say this has sharply increased the number of morning arrival cancellations and aborted landings by big jet aircraft in winter.

The impact on air traffic is especially glaring because the brick kilns are concentrated on the southern approach path to the runway at Tribhuvan International Airport.

The dust pollution is exacerbated in winter by Kathmandu Valley's bowl-shaped topography which creates severe temperature inversion trapping warm, polluted surface air beneath a blanket of colder air during the dry winter months.

The inversion layer is not dispersed till late

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS



In Kathmandu rain, disillusionment reigns

The general despair and apathy that permeates the Valley at the moment is accompanied by a resurgence of questions about the past ten years: What went wrong? Why? The Rising Nepal quotes Narayan Man Bijukche as saying that the main reason for the emergence of Maoist activities is the failure to carry out recommendations of the Malik Commission Report.

"After the restoration of multi-party system, people had great expectations that all the corrupt people would be punished," Bijukche is reported to have said. The tragedy for Nepal is that those who should

have worked to ensure that the corrupt were punished became corrupt themselves.

Ten years on, more and more of the men and women who were involved in the Jana Andolan and its aftermath would agree with Bijukche. Others who were also in the political scene in that period have not yet gone public with their views, but they privately lament the failure to bring about fundamental changes during the period of the interim government.

Even during those early days of democracy, disenchanted young Congress Party workers were already complaining that their leaders had failed to bring

about changes for which they had fought. Their leaders were consorting with the same corrupt businessmen who were courted during the Panchayat regime.

They were more interested in attending seminars and opening beer factories than in tending the needs of the poor. The disillusioned young drifted away to other parties and political ideas. The tradition of chakari and chaplusi still worked, and people got themselves lucrative jobs. One particular gentleman, whose name has been in the press a lot lately, wangled a job with extracurricular potential and is now a very rich man.

The question seems to be:

once you squander a popular movement and lose the confidence of the people who made it happen, how do you regain momentum and trust? Sadly, the answer is: "You don't." Especially the trust of the idealistic young who have collected their lost dreams and deposited them with the Maoists.

Every intelligent citizen of Nepal has realised that if there ever was a time for "crushing" the Maoist movement, it has long passed. The more any movement for change is suppressed the more it grows. For every innocent killed by the state, several revolutionaries will take their place.

We are doing it all wrong by failing to win the hearts of minds of Nepal's future generations, by failing to attend to the needs of the poor and marginalised who are joining the Maoist fold. Despite the Rambo-like pronouncements of certain government officials, they must have now realised that time is running out for meaningful dialogue with the Maoists.

Take the budget. Does it address these problems? It is so blatantly elitist and donor-driven that it has been widely criticised even from within the government that produced it. Or take the composition of the new Human Rights Commission, it

shows that the contagion of politicisation has now spread from the civil service to civil society. Even human rights is now politicised.

Oddly, those who are criticising the appointment of the new Human Rights Commissioner praise the "regional and political balance" shown in the selection of appointees. As for me, I can only praise the appointment of Indira Rana in the commission. For the others, one could name dozens of impartial, non-political, nationally respected figures with the best credentials that are not in it. ♦

Barbara Adams is a Kathmandu-based writer and commentator.

afternoon because of the lack of wind and also because the growing population, vehicles and industries have made surface pollution worse.

The worst areas for dust contamination in Kathmandu remain the main road corridors of Kathmandu along Kantipath, Putali Sadak, Lazimpat, the uphill to Pulchowk and the Baneshwor intersection on the Airport road.

Before you start thinking of moving to the outskirts, find out more about dispersal of brick kiln dust and Chobar cement factory dust dispersal throughout the valley.

Swanky new millionaire residential areas in Godavari and Bhaishepati are downwind from the worst dust emitters, and levels of dust there can be as bad as the city

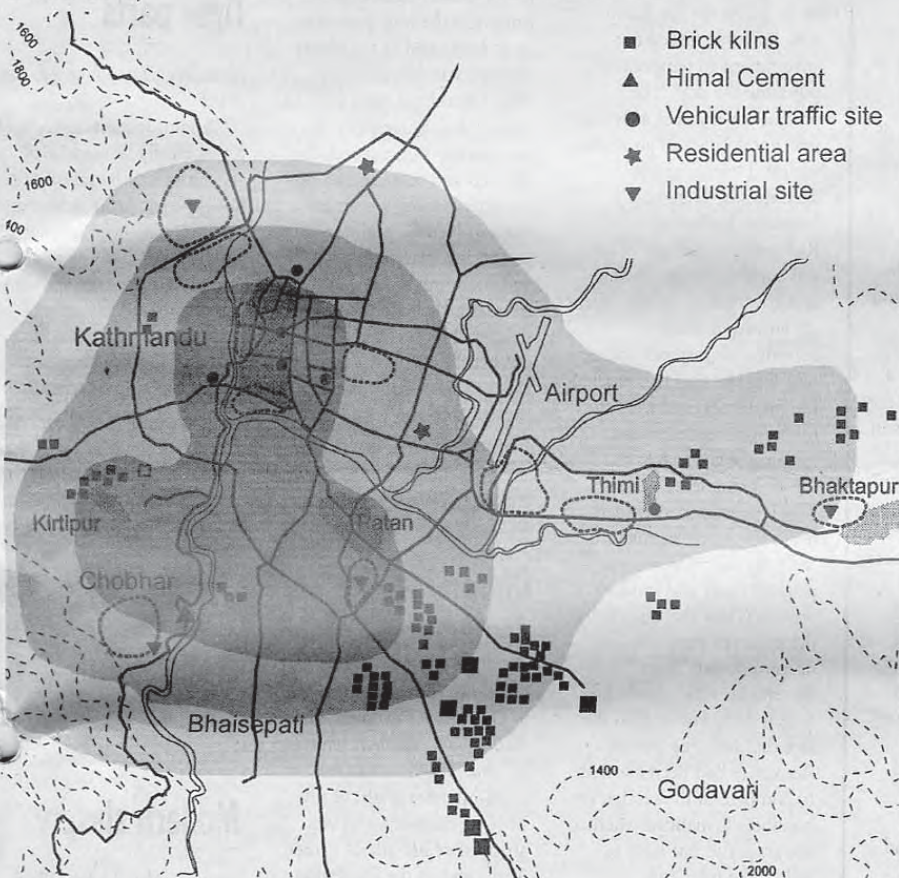
center depending on the direction of prevailing winds.

Toran Sharma says while dust is the main culprit, Kathmandu's urban planners must also keep a close watch on carbon monoxide, which is growing alarmingly mainly because of the proliferation of scooters and motorcycles.

Although carbon monoxide levels on Kathmandu sidewalks are five times higher than 1993 levels, they are still within the WHO threshold. "But if it grows at this rate, we will be at serious risk of carbon monoxide pollution. And it will not just be the roadsides that will be affected," says Sharma. ♦

Depending on the size, dust affects human respiration in three ways:

- ❖ The largest particles are inhaled into the upper respiratory tract and most are immediately exhaled.
- ❖ Slightly smaller particles penetrate the larynx to enter the tracheo-bronchial region and trigger infections.
- ❖ The smallest ones go deep into the lungs and can lead to asthma, lung disorders and even cancers.



Concentration of 10 micron dust particles from brick kilns, the cement factory, vehicular exhaust and roadside suspension in Kathmandu Valley estimated from 1999 data. The darker areas show concentrations of 75 micrograms per meter cube and above, with lighter shades depicting areas where there is less dust.

IN OTHER NEWS

A lot more rhinos

Nepal's rhino population has almost doubled since the last count six years ago, and there are as many of them as there were in Chitwan 50 years ago.

Rhino Count 2000 recorded 612 greater one-horned rhinoceros, and endangered species that is only found in Nepal and India. "Successful conservation is the reason for the comeback," said Tirtha Man Maskey, director general of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC).

The population of rhinos in community forests and in the jungles along the park borders is up, hinting of possible overcrowding within the protected areas. This has also increased the incidents of nocturnal rhino raids on farms fringing the park.

About 800 rhinos roamed the pristine grasslands of Chitwan in the 1950s but their numbers dwindled with increase in human habitation that began with the eradication of malaria. The number had plummeted to less than 150 in 1972, when the Royal Chitwan National Park was set up.

Guarded by the Royal Nepal Army, rhinos

started staging a comeback and number doubled within six years to 300. Today Chitwan has 544 rhinos, up from the 466 six years ago.

In some community forests the locals are benefiting from eco-tourism and have built machans (watchtowers) to take tourists on rhino-safaris. The communities use the income from tourism for local development projects.

The population in Bardia—where rhinos were first brought from Chitwan in



The more the merrier

1986—has reached 67. A lone male rhino roams the Royal Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in Far-west Nepal.

The greater one-horned rhino that used to roam the jungles of South Asia—from Pakistan to Myanmar—is now found only in Nepal and India. Conservationists estimate that there could be as many as 1,300 rhinos India's Assam and West Bengal states. ♦

China to help Nepal Television

Nepal Television has signed a Rs 550 million deal with China to build a television transmission facility in Kathmandu that will also broadcast a new Metro Channel. Government officials said the agreement has been initiated and the facility is expected to be operational within two years.

Minister of Information and Communication Jaya Prakash Gupta said last week that NTV would soon have a nationwide signal footprint via satellite. Though talk about beaming NTV

signals have been underway since the mid-1990s, it is now more likely to happen since China is expected to be involved in the setting up of the satellite hookup and repeater stations.

China has in the past provided NTV with a mobile live transmission van and other transmission equipment.

There are estimated to be about one million television sets in Nepal, but with only 14 percent of Nepalis having access to electricity, television's reach in Nepal is limited. ♦

Indian bunds submerge Nepalis

Nepal has begun to resettle over 350 families whose homesteads are threatened by India's Laxmanpur barrage in Uttar Pradesh and afflux bund along Nepal-India border in Banke district.

Members of a parliamentary team formed to investigate the impact of the barrage and embankment say India has violated all international norms, laws and treaty by unilaterally building the structures. They are demanding that India be made to compensate the victims.

The bunds have blocked the north-south flow of the Rapti River and its tributaries which

now threatens to submerge several Nepali settlements and affect over 15,000 people of five village development committees of Banke district.

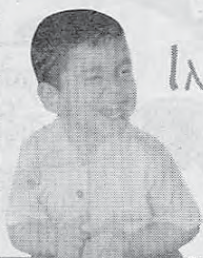
The embankment was built by India to augment the flow at the Laxmanpur barrage and protect over 50 Indian settlements from annual flooding and inundation which it has by effectively transferring the problems to Nepal.

The Laxmanpur barrage was built 15 years ago and this new embankment is 13.6 km long. The bund is only 300 metres away from Nepal-India border pillar number 19. ♦



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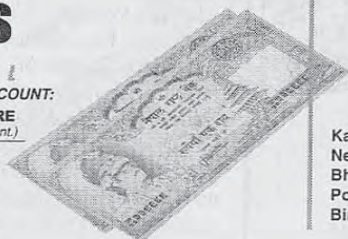
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Business Administration/MA/0005

Slaughter in Panchkatiya

HARIHAR SINGH RATHOR OF KANTIPUR IN JAJARKOT

Dhanroopa was having her meal with her three-years-old son Kamal and six years old daughter Meera in her lap. She had just served rice to her husband Ran Bahadur Singh. As usual policemen were lounging in the verandah of her house. Then the shooting started.

By the end of the battle, the attack of Maoist guerrillas on the Area Police Post of Panchkatiya located on the border of Khalanga and Dhime VDCs at least 25 people were dead, including Dhanroopa, Meera and Kamal.

"Police started to fire, we could not get out of our house," said Rana Bahadur, still in shock three days after the tragedy. "As soon as the police ordered to close the door, our world collapsed around us. I lost everything. I do not know how I survived."

Panchkatiya Area Police Post was considered to be second most secure one after the District Police Office itself. By morning 12 policemen including 1 inspector were dead, six guerrillas were killed and then there were the seven

civilians who included five young children.

The battle also engulfed Purnadevi Hotel where the family Chhabilal Oli and a tea-shop owner, was wiped out.

Thirty-five years old Chabilal, along with his youngest son Dale aged 6, another son Jit Bahadur aged 10 and daughter Draupadi aged 10 died in that attack.

Around nine o'clock on Friday evening, a group of Maoist guerrillas came again and set fire to the corpses of the seven innocent victims on a common funeral pyre made in front of the destroyed buildings.

Rana Bahadur weeps uncontrollably: "I could not even conduct the final rites of my children." When the walls of the house collapsed, his wife was crushed with the children still in her lap.

Incessant rains on the night of the attack hampered the police relief and rescue operations. According to policeman Padam Bahdur Bajgain, who was injured in the attack, Maoists started their attacks without warning. "Within moments, Major Hawaldar Tanka Bhadur Thapa of Dailekh fell," said



Bombed out shell of the Panchkatiya Police Station. (Picture: Harihar Singh Rathor, Kantipur)

Bajgain, adding, "With much difficulty, I pulled out the bullet that had hit me in my left hand."

Even 72 hours after the tragedy, police assistance hadn't reached the site. Maoists guerrillas still at the scene tried to justify their attack on the police post and the death of children. A guerrilla with No. 36 emblazoned on his uniform in yellow said: "This police post was engaged in the brutal repression since the commencement of Peoples War, it had to be destroyed according to the instructions of our party. That's why our Platoon No. 3 has attacked this post." The attacking Maoists force was said to be 1,000-strong.

He claimed the house was used by a police sentry and everyone had been warned to come out. A woman guerrilla wearing uniform numbered S PCG 141 said: "Our commander was passing orders to the locals to come out of their house. Before they could comply, police bolted the door. Commander Mahendra was killed by the police, so our enraged army may have bombed the house."

The Maoists also lost guerrillas, including Commander Mahendra, a resident of Pwarg in Rukum. Police claimed that six Maoists were killed, three of whom were buried by them on Gaikhur Hillock.

Rescue teams had not arrived the scene till Friday, and a pet dog of the police post had already devoured a major portion of the body of a policeman killed in the encounter. Two policemen lay dead with their hands tied

with ropes, four other bodies were in a nearby potato field. Another four dead policemen were inside a trench. Other policemen seem to have been killed while fleeing and lay faces down by the riverbank.

Within few hours after the battle of Panchkatiya started, Inspector Nav Raj Paudel started out towards the district headquarter at Khalanga. Maoist guerrillas stationed along the way to stop police reinforcement from reaching the scene, ambushed him, dismembered his hand and killed him. "He fought with Maoists until his last breath," said Deputy Superintendent Durja Kumar Rai, who had gone looking for Poudel.

It is believed that Maoists intercepted a radio message sent by Poudel, and knew exactly where he would be. ♦

Army plane

The Himalaya Times/Nepal Samacharpatra, 14 June 2000

A recent meeting of the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) ordered, citing the irregularities in the deal, not to proceed with the purchase of the Avro RJ-100 jet aircraft for the Royal Nepal Army. The coalition government, in 1999 prior to the general elections, had decided to buy the aircraft for the Army. The



ensuing controversy over the price and also the suitability of the plane for the Army had, however, forced the government to temporarily put aside the deal. The present government after one year has decided to go ahead with it. Defending the decision, the Defense Secretary, Keshavraj Rajbhandari, said the plane was suitable for use by state and government heads, relief activities and also for commercial purposes. He also said that the deal had entered the final stage, and only the formalities related to the opening of the Letter of Credit remained.

The PAC members chided the Secretary for going forward with the purchase without any detailed study and bidding process. They also questioned the apparent rush from the decision to buy to its agreement, which took only fifteen days. Pointing to the fact that only the British Aerospace had been allowed to compete in the tender, the members demanded whether the army did not have to follow the rules and regulations of the country. The members also alleged that one of the reasons given, namely that of commercial use, was only an excuse to obtain loans from the banks. Since nowhere in the world had the army conducted commercial flights, there was not any reason for the army in Nepal to do so as if it did not have any other work, the members said.

Professor Emeritus

Chhalphal Weekly, 11 June 2000

The venerated professor is a contented man. Prof. Tarapad Chaudhari says: "I achieved a lot. I got satisfaction. I received honor and respect. The post of Professor Emeritus was created to honor me. I am very satisfied. Now I do not covet any honor or post. But I do get hurt when things promised do not take place."

Born in Purulia district of West Bengal in 1912, Prof. Chaudhari came as a Visiting Professor to Tribhuvan University in 1960. An MA in Mathematics, Statistics and Economics from Calcutta University, Chaudhari did his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. After working as Visiting Professor for nine years, Chaudhari returned to Bengal. In 1975, he agreed to come back to Nepal at the insistence of his students, who had gone to his home to fetch him. But on

one condition: he would not take the remuneration provided by the university but would put it in a trust to help students and to carry out research. A year ago,

Chaudhari was conferred the position of Professor Emeritus, the only person to be so honoured at the oldest university in Nepal. Prof. Chaudhari, who stays in a two-room university apartment, is unmarried. Beloved and respected by his students, among whom are some of Nepal's prominent politicians, planners, teachers and economists, Prof. Chaudhari is renowned as a strict and highly capable teacher. His wish is to serve the university "till my last breath". He also wishes that following his death he be cremated in Nepal, the country of his adoption.

Dhirendra on democracy

Abstracted from an interview of Dhirendra Shah published in Rastra-Vani National Weekly, 14 June 2000

Dhirendra Shah, brother of King Birendra, who was stripped of his title of Prince at the end of the Panchayat period, said love and concern



for the country had forced him to return at the earliest. While constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy were fine ideals and in accordance with the present, he said the time had come to review them in the Nepali context. Shah also said that the ultimate goal and vision of his late father, King Mahendra, had been a democratic system, and there were differences only regarding the timing and the way it was to be brought about. Dhirendra thinks the monarchy and democracy can

go hand in hand, and he stressed on the need for unity among Nepalis to develop the country and protect national interests. Referring to the Maoists, he said that they, despite the talk of a republican state, were Nepali and nationalists. An end should be sought to the violence through talks, he added.

Talking about his own future, Shah said that although he was not interested in joining politics, he was willing to do anything for the country if the necessity arose. He also said that he did not find any change in his status without his title, and people regarded him as in the past. Shah also disclosed during the course of the interview that he was settling down permanently in the country.

Tiger parts

Himalaya Times, June 14, 2000

A joint inspection team of Royal Bardia National Park and Shiva Dal Battalion of Royal Nepal Army held two poachers with wild animals remains near Budhi Khola inside the park Thakurdwara Monday (June 12). According to the park office, about 13 kgs tiger bones, bones of 3 leopard with their skulls, and skin of two leopards were found in the possession of the poachers. Poachers have refused to divulge their names and addresses so far. It is said that they were taking the contraband animal parts to Jodhipur of Jamuni VDC to sell. Park Ranger Ramesh Kumar Thapa said further investigations about the incident was on.

Modern slavery

Dristi Weekly, 13 June 2000

Liberation Movement of bonded labor that had started from Kailali District demanding minimum wages as fixed by the government has now spread to Bardia. Nearly 300 bonded labourers of Bardia district filed a joint complain in the District Administration Office against their "owners". According to Dinesh Shrestha, coordinator of Bonded Labor Liberation Movement Committee, bonded labors have demanded that they be freed from the control of their masters and their outstanding dues be waived.

The complaint further requests for the payment of their due wages from their owners at the rate of Rs. 70 per day according to the provisions of Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal Clause 20(1). Clause 2 of the Flesh Trade provisions of the Muluki Ain, and the decision of Ministry of Labor of Paus 29, B. S. 2056. There are 5,037 bonded labourers in Bardia District. ♦



Prakash Weekly, 12 June 2000

Government and Maoists in unison: "We are ready for talks".

“We have to make a leap...”

Excerpts from answers by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Comrade Prachanda) in an interview to the journal *Revolutionary Worker* #1043 earlier this year.

* Nepal is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. And MLM (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) says that in oppressed countries like this, semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries, in general, a revolutionary objective situation prevails... Industrial development is very poor, and the kinds of industrial bases that are there are all in the hands of a comprador bourgeois class—mainly the Indian expansionist bourgeoisie... there are sharp class distinctions

* Nepalese people fought heroically against British India but ultimately they did not succeed... This was armed struggle, this war with British India, and people participated in this war in different ways. Hundreds and hundreds of masses, including women and old men, all fought in that war. But the Nepalese ruling class, mainly the monarchy, the king, surrendered to India.

* When the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was initiated in China under the leadership of great comrade Mao, it directly impacted on the revolution in Nepal. There were so many materials from the Chinese Cultural Revolution that came to Nepal. This Cultural Revolution inspired mainly the younger generation of communists and the masses. And at the same time young people in the communist movement were also inspired by the Naxalite Movement in India.

* In 1986, we finalized Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as our ideology. At the time, only the Communist Party of Peru had said this, and we had some documents from the PCP. But on that question, already for four or five years, there had been some discussion about: Why Mao Tsetung Thought? Why not Maoism? We had a debate for one year to change this terminology and then the whole party adopted Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as our ideology... this is our ideological, political, subjective basis...

* At the time of initiation, we tried to figure out the whole history of Nepal. And at that time we found some specific characteristics of the situation in Nepal... the mountainous region is very favourable for guerrilla warfare, for People's War... we also looked at the fact that we are surrounded on three sides by this big Indian country.

* The West (of Nepal) is historically, geographically, and culturally the basin of the revolution. It is the main point for the revolution—the people here are more oppressed by the ruling classes, and the government in Kathmandu is very far from there.

* At one point in our party, for every comrade, on the lip of every comrade was the question of leap, leap—we have to make a leap. We made this question of making a leap very sharp, that we have to make the leap. The revisionist parties and revisionist leaders always teach the people the question of reform, reform, reform. And reform is reformism, is revisionism. But the question of making leaps is revolutionary.

* In making the plan for initiation there was great debate over how to go to the armed struggle because many people were influenced by “peaceful” struggle, work in the parliament, rightist and petty bourgeois feelings, and a long tradition of the reformist movement. Then we said that the only process must be a big push, big leap. Not gradual change

* Our view was, we should declare freely and frankly that we have initiated the People's War and that this is the only alternative left for the people, for their emancipation, for their independence from the brutal imperialists.

* And in the plan for initiation we had a military plan to attack the police force, the landlords, the local goons in the rural areas. But we did not have a big plan for sabotage in the capital city because, at that time, we did not want to create a situation where with one stroke the intellectuals would go away from us. We wanted to sustain their support.

* And after one year, we saw further big transformation in the rural areas. Thousands and thousands of mass organizations were built up, and in new areas the party's influence spread and new organization developed. Some petty bourgeois

revolutionaries, due to terror, fled to India, to Arab countries and other places.

* Just one year after the initiation, for one month, I was in Rolpa, Rukum, Jarjarkot, Salyan, and I saw... the people were not only fighting with the police or reactionary, feudal agents, but they were also breaking the feudal chains of exploitation and oppression and a whole cultural revolution was going on among the people. Questions of marriage, questions of love, questions of family, questions of relations between people. All of these things were being turned upside down and changed in the rural areas.

* We came to understand Mao's vision that the backward rural areas will be the basin of revolution—the real base of the revolution. We saw in Rolpa, Rukum, Gorkha, Sindhuli, Kabre, the seeds of the new society, the examples to inspire people.

* The intellectuals' instinctive tendency is that we have to learn all these things, we should read everything, we have to do all these things, and then we can make war. These kinds of tendencies were there right from the beginning. But we said, no, this is not Maoism. This is not Marxism. This is not dialectical materialism. This is not according to the scientific theory of knowledge. The question is learning war through war.

* To establish base areas a particular national situation and international situation is also necessary. This means there are big contradictions among the ruling classes—they are fighting among each other—and there is also an unstable situation with India. Because for us, ultimately, we will have to fight with the Indian army. When the Indian army comes in with thousands and thousands of soldiers, it will be a very big thing. But we are not afraid of the Indian Army because, in one way, it will be a very good thing.

* They will give us lots of guns. And lots of people will fight them. This will be a national war. And it will be a very big thing. They will have many difficulties intervening. It will not be so easy for them. But if they stupidly dare... they will dare, they will be compelled. They will do that stupidity.

* We have to prepare for that. And for that reason we are saying we will also need a particular international situation. And for us this has to do mainly with India, Indian expansionism.

* When we declare we have made a base area then formally we will make a central government. We are thinking that when Rolpa, Rukum, Jarjarkot, Salyan become a liberated zone, then we will declare the People's Republic of Nepal—the government of the People's Republic of Nepal.

* Training the masses in the spirit of sacrifice is very important because in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution, in today's whole situation, without sacrifice, without bloodshed, we cannot seize power, and we cannot transform the whole society on a new basis. People want to be martyrs. The people feel that to be martyrs is to be respected. This is the great feeling which will enable us to change the whole feudal, individualistic, and anarchist outlook prevailing in this society...

* Mao said, if there is a third world war, everybody cannot be killed. The spirit of what he said is not that millions of people should die.

* My main thrust is that I hate revisionism, I seriously hate revisionism. And I never compromise with revisionism. I fought and fought again with revisionism...

* And from the economic cultural and political basis, we see that a new wave of world revolution is beginning. This is fact. We have to grasp this question because just like Mao said, there will be 50 to 100 years of great turmoil and great transformation... ♦

The mind of Nepali Maoists

Dipak Gyawali writing in *Himal Khabarpatrika*

Prachanda, with indeed much of Nepal's left, continues to believe that Nepal is a “semi-feudal and semi-colonial country”. However, if one examines the numbers, one sees that the contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP has declined from 90 percent fifty years ago to 40 percent at present, and the main source of state's revenue comes no longer from agriculture (as it should in a feudal setup), but from customs. This means state power has shifted from the feudals to the trading comprador bourgeoisie. Furthermore, landholdings in Nepal have been relatively small, and only about 15 percent of farmers have enough land to feed themselves for the whole year the rest having to find seasonal income supplements. Large holdings that existed were broken up in the land reform initiated by King Mahendra in 1964. Thus, if one carried out conventional land reform today, one would probably find little surplus land for re-distribution.

The solution to Nepal's rural ills is thus not an agrarian revolution that seizes land and distributes them among the poor peasants herding them into collective farms a la Stalin, as proposed by Prachanda, but the transfer of semi-employed agricultural labour force to the industrial sector. Today, an estimated 300,000 youth enter the labour market every year, but Nepal has been able to provide jobs for only 2 percent in the productive industries and 3.5 percent in the service sector. Since the Nepali state machinery remains in the hands of traders that profit from price difference and not genuine industrialists, a large percentage of the Nepali labour force cannot find employment and has been forced to migrate to India and further abroad for jobs. This trend has accelerated in recent years, not out of fear of the “people's war”, as Prachanda assumes, but because the ‘comprador bourgeoisie’ government, eager to relieve the pressure on itself, made it easy to acquire passports in district headquarters. This type of labour movement has, as a consequence, changed the character of the Nepali rural family and its social structure, and is something that is better understood through new advances in the social sciences than through 19th Century Marxist fundamentalism.

Prachanda's interpretation of the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-16 does not follow Marxist internationalism. The unification of Nepal was not a voluntary merger of different states as with the Swiss confederation, but was basically a feudal imposition of one fiefdom's hegemony over other states. His belief that the Nepali people heroically fought the British in defense of nationalism is contradicted by ample evidence that newly subjugated people had no love for the nationalism of their new Gorkhali rulers. Had it been otherwise, they would not have so readily flocked to recruitment centers of the British Indian Army immediately after the Sugauli Treaty. This treaty too was not as anti-national and self-serving a capitulation by Nepal's rulers, as Prachanda claims, but was a wise retreat from adventurist militarism pursued earlier by Kathmandu's rulers that had brought the British to within striking distance of Kathmandu. With it, some of the new territories were ceded to Britain leaving the core intact: without it, all would have been lost!

A basic contradiction is evident in Prachanda's thinking when he says that the Maoists will ultimately have to fight with the Indian army to defend Nepal's nationalism and will ultimately succeed in guerilla warfare with advanced weapons captured from them, while at the same time asserting the right of self-determination of the exploited sub-national caste and ethnic groups. Considering the cross-border family and kinship linkages of many Nepali

communities as well as the fractured and diffuse nature of Nepal's population and its changing demography, Prachanda's declaration of simultaneous war on both the external and internal fronts indicates insufficient homework by the Maoists regarding the consequences of their policies and actions.

The term ‘Marxism-Leninism’ was first used by Stalin in 1939 to gloss over the atrocities committed by him during the purges of 1936-38, essentially making it another name for Stalinism, where a highly bureaucratic party stifles alternative viewpoints. Contrary to Stalin's view that a socialist revolution can succeed in only one country, another leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Trotsky, was of the opinion that revolution, in the age of imperialism, had to be global to truly succeed. He was also of the opinion that, under such global conditions, the party should be open to differing views and should not be overly bureaucratized. Prachanda, while agreeing with Trotsky's thesis in saying that the “people's war” will not succeed without international assistance, has not, however, been able to come to the liberal views of Trotsky.

Under the sweeping term ‘revisionism’, Prachanda denounces all those who do not agree with him, including his erstwhile mentors Nirmal Lama and Mohan Bickram who had urged their younger comrades caution before embarking on a path of violence that closes all peaceful avenues. In contumely obdurate polemic, he misapplies Hegelian dialectics to declare that destruction is primary and creation secondary. Nepali Maoists will therefore be destructive until they achieve political power and it could take 50 to 100 years and the death of thousands of cadres. Reformists are strongly disparaged of, as are intellectuals, and anyone reading the website interview can be forgiven if s/he comes away with a strong impression of anti-intellectual philistinism.

One hundred and fifty years have passed since Karl Marx wrote the ‘Communist Manifesto’. Events since show clearly that today those at the vanguard fighting for social justice are no longer communist parties but social and environmental activists. Latin American neo-Marxist “depedencia” theorists and others have adapted Marxism to the struggle of their day, emphasising identity struggles of communities over international class struggle.

As a result, they have had greater success, through their waging of overt movements, in making state and capital more accountable to the greater common good than through covert violence. Prachanda's interview, however, shows that since Nepal's Maoists have equipped themselves with 70-year-old tools, they have condemned themselves to searching for 70-year-old problems.

The success of the Maoists in Nepal during the last four years is primarily due to two factors. One is their successful exploiting of the contradiction in Nepal's new constitution, primarily Article 118 and 119, which in practice places the coercive apparatus of the state (the Royal Nepal Army) beyond the control of the elected government.

As a result, when there is armed uprising against the state, the state cannot use its army, a state of affairs that certainly will not be the case if a Maoists regime were in place in Singha Durbar! The more important reason for the rapid spread of Maoist activity, however, is the non-performance and corrupt “Pajero Culture” indulged in by the main parties in parliament which has stoked the fire of public discontent.

Public anger can be lit by any demagogue but practitioners of mature politics should think if such a fire would not burn down the whole village. The view of the Maoists, as it reads in Prachanda's interview, seems to be the romantic adventurism of “let's light the fuse and see what happens”.

Prachanda talks about a long campaign that will include engaging the Indian Army but his colleague, Baburam Bhattarai, argues for a united front with the King to protect Nepali nationalism. This is a strange call from a party that has plastered walls all over Nepal with their slogan “Let's eradicate monarchy!” The sad result of infantile romanticism will be the opportunity it provides the reactionaries to use it as the excuse for authoritarian measures. ♦



HIMAL MONTAGE

BIZ NEWS

Denmark pledges \$95 m

Denmark has become one of the biggest sources of development assistance to Nepal with the announcement that it will provide close to US\$ 100 million. But there is a catch: the money will be available only if Nepal adds staff in the VAT office, and takes back the freeze on Safa tempo registration.

The money is for projects in primary education, energy, natural resource management and environment projects in Nepal.

The DKK 795m (US\$96.64m) would also fund projects on "cross-cutting" issues such as gender, environment and democracy and human rights. It does not include technical assistance, training, fellowships and private sector support programs, roughly valued at \$25 m.

One major Danish condition for the grant was the government's half-baked decision banning registration of electric three-wheelers. This was reversed by no less than the prime minister, and the Danes seem satisfied with that. DANIDA supported the introduction of battery-powered tempos, and their number has now crossed 600.

Uphill task for Nepal's hill tea

Nepal's hill tea growers say that competition with well-established brands in the global market is hotting up, and lack of government support for this export is hampering them.

Hill tea growers from eastern Nepal have younger plants and produce better quality leaves than Darjeeling or Ceylon teas. But competing with these established brands that were nurtured with special subsidies, including support to build infrastructure has become an uphill battle for Nepali estate owners.

Specifically, Nepali tea growers want an interest subsidy that was discontinued eight years ago to be restored. Nepal's hill tea, also known technically as "orthodox tea", is a high value product already being sold in small



amounts in Germany, Japan and India. Because of high production costs, Nepali producers have not been able to grow enough to compete with established brands.

Nepal hopes to produce 46.1 million kg of tea each year after 10 years of which 31.1 million kg would be high value orthodox tea. The present annual output is barely 4.4 million kg.

Nepal exported 313,000 kg of orthodox tea worth US\$1.04 million in 1997/98. Nepal consumes about 8 million kg of tea each year, half of which is met through imports from India.

The Himalayan Orthodox Tea Producers Association (HOTPA) says the major problems faced by Nepali producers are high interest on cultivation loans—12%, up from 7.5% after subsidies in the early 1990s—re-capitalisation of old credit, poor rural infrastructures and lack of a national policy to develop the industry.

Small tea growers in the hills produce over 90% of the leaf processed in Nepal. Even though Nepal does have a National Tea and Coffee Development Board, it has remained "defunct" because of excessive politicisation.

Jinxed jet

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) asked the government to freeze the purchase of a controversial aircraft for use by the Royal Nepal Army until it carries out further investigation on the deal.

The parliamentary committee also asked the Defence Secretary to send all files related to the Arvo RJ100 purchase decision to the House.

"Please stop any action on opening the letter of credit," Subash Nemwang, PAC Chairman told the Defence Secretary Keshab Raj Rajbhandary. The Defence Ministry had already

ordered the aircraft from British Aerospace, and only needed to open a letter of credit.

The first decision to purchase an Arvo RJ100 was made in March, 1999 by the coalition cabinet of the Nepali Congress and Unified Marxist-Leninists that was headed by Girija Prasad Koirala. The purchase decision was reaffirmed on December 3, 1999 by the government headed by K.P. Bhattarai, adding that the RNA could use income from commercial operations to raise money to pay back the loan.

British Aerospace was the only company asked for a quotation for the US\$33.52 million aircraft—including costs for spares, insurance and other costs, over the basic price—according to Raj Rajbhandary.

PAC members are trying to determine why the plane is over-priced by \$8 million, why the Army did not consider more appropriate aircraft for rescue, and how the Army will pay back the loan which comes from the government-owned Rastriya Banijya Bank (Rs 900 million) and the Employees Provident Fund (Rs 680 million).

Lukla airport to reopen Soon

The Short-Take-Off and Landing airstrip in Lukla—the gateway to the Everest region—is to reopen in September. The airstrip was closed on 1 June for upgrading the landing strip that perhaps has the highest traffic after Kathmandu.

Jumla was also closed on 15 June. The repair and blacktopping of the airport is to take 13 months. The closure has already started affecting transport of both people and goods and locals are demanding that the government run helicopter services until the runway is ready.

NTC to be Taken to Court

The government's Telecom monopoly is being sued over a tax it has been charging customers for two years that lawyers say is illegal. The petitioners are challenging the 10% Telecom Service Charge (TSC) which the Nepal Telecommunication Corporation has transferred to customers. Section 22 of the Fiscal Act 2056, says the government will levy a 10% charge from institutions providing telecommunications services.

Instead of paying the Rs21 billion tax, the Corporation passed it on to customers in the guise of a "service charge".

"The tax is not one that can be transferred," said Satish Kharel, a lawyer, likely to represent the petitioners in court.

"Our senior colleagues may join us in court because all of us have been paying that tax," he added.

A typical NTC bill lists the local and long-distance charges, a service charge, 10% VAT and 10% TSC—the contested charge. TSC was introduced in November 1997 when the government began implementing the VAT.

The Fiscal Act 2057 exempts NTC new Internet service from the TSC.

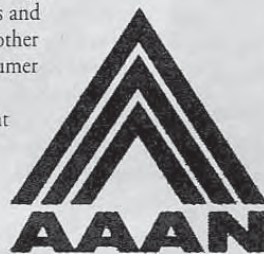
AAAN wants policy on ads

Nepal's Association of Advertisers says only a comprehensive government advertising policy can help the fledgling industry and inject creativity and professionalism in business.

The ban last year on tobacco and alcohol, including beer, advertisements in the broadcasting media had slowed growth in the market.

The major advertisers in the Nepali media are the tobacco and beer industries followed by carbonated drinks and those producing other fast moving consumer goods, soaps, toothpaste, instant noodles, etc.

The advertising business made up of both Nepali and joint venture companies that collectively employ about 3,000 people, and another 10,000 indirectly.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

A concrete column



There I was browsing through last week's *International Herald Tribune* and comparing it to the Kathmandu English dailies. OK, one costs Rs 160 and the other costs Rs 4, but the other glaring difference is that while the Trib is strong on economic coverage on page one, our locals economise on economy and stick it into the inside pages.

Even compared to other English papers in the subcontinent our dailies are far behind. We have relegated economics to the inside pages and find most of our joy in the business of politics. Why are we consciously avoiding economic issues?

There could be two possibilities: either there is too little in our economy to talk about, or we have too little interest in economic issues. There is a flashflood of coverage during the budget, just like there is an overdose of the environment on World Environment Day. But for the rest of the year, no serious coverage of one vital issue that should affect every citizen where it matters—in the wallet.

Is it that our economy doesn't make sense, or that we don't have an economic sense?

Nepal has been a democracy for 10 years, and our lawmakers know they are supposed to enlighten the less knowledgeable masses on economic issues. But they seem to prefer the subsidised tea in the Sansad Canteen rather than get involved in the discussions on the economy. Just look at the poor attendance in parliament during the budget speeches.

This lack of interest in business issues among the honourable peoples' representatives has resulted in Nepal having laws with many flaws. The education system does not give the required priority in teaching business and economy at secondary levels.

Politicians and bureaucrats alike look at economic issues through ideological prisms. Even in the business community, economics is restricted to profit-making. Business and economy is synonymous to money in the bank, or locked up in non-performing assets.

In actual fact, the economy is not figures and numbers. Nor is it the speeches that get delivered at trade meetings, parliament or the conferences and seminars. The economy is the gamut of relationships of wellbeing of a nation vis-à-vis its people and vice-versa.

The many individual elements need to be integrated to understand the whole. Economics is the language and identity of a country, it is the barometer of prosperity, the means of being ranked in this world. How can we afford to dismiss it so callously?

The Nepali economy is an analysts delight because the informal economy is much larger than the formal one. While Nepal's per capita is one of the lowest in the world, the prime real estate prices are at par with Manhattan.

Expensive alcohol including French wine is more freely available than milk, "businesses" like health and education are the most prosperous. This is an economy where reform means having the largest number of airlines in the region. This is an economy where donors have poured in four billion of dollars over the past three decades, and the problems are much worse.

As Artha Beed, I will try to start the process of putting the economic agenda before the political ones. In forthcoming columns I will examine common economic issues from an uncommon perspective. And maybe it will be a catalyst for us to understand better how the world out there affects our daily lives in Nepal. ♦

Artha Beed is a leading Nepali financial and management consultant. Readers can post their views and discuss issues at arthabeed@yahoo.com

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Powerless to export

Nepal will not be able to export hydropower to India unless a Power Trading Agreement is in place. But Nepali politicians seem too busy politicking to table the treaty.

BINOD BHATTARAI

A \$1 billion joint venture with an Australian company to build a dam that would generate 750 megawatts of power to export India is in limbo because Nepal's Parliament has not yet ratified a bilateral Power Trading Agreement drawn up four years ago.

The ratification is necessary before construction can begin on the mammoth 195-metre-high dam on the West Seti River. But several weeks into the parliament's ongoing 18th session, there is no word if the document is going to be ratified or rejected. The future of this and other power export projects hang in the balance.

The Power Trading Agreement (PTA) was initialled by junior water resources ministers from India and Nepal in Kathmandu on June 5, 1997.

Politicians of all hues from Sher Bahadur Deuba (Nepali Congress) and Pashupati Sumsher Rana (Rastriya Prajatantra Party) to Bharat Mohan Adhikary (Unified Marxists-Leninists) have rarely missed an opportunity to extol the potential benefits of hydro-exports to India. But they all seem oblivious that this cannot happen without a PTA.

"All potential power buyers we have approached in India wanted some sort of central government clearance before they said they could agree to purchase," said Himalaya Pande, Director, West Seti, at Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation in Kathmandu.

SMEC's potential financiers will not consider investment without an approved PTA. "We have sent them the initialled PTA and they may be watching the developments closely," Pande added.

The mega project has a price tag of over \$1 billion, and SMEC would be able to raise it only if it can make firm power purchase agreements in India, something that is almost impossible without the Agreement.

The West Seti project is to be built on the Seti River in Dadeldhura District. If built, it will store 11 times as much water than Nepal's largest storage dam on the Kulekhani River. The reservoir will submerge 1425 sq km, displace 1114 households and generate 3,300 GWh of energy each year.

Just its size is enough to scare environmentalists and human rights activists who fear submergence and displacement of locals. And then there is a third stream of opponents that question the rationale of allowing power to be exported when almost 18 million Nepalis do not have electricity in their homes. They also demand compensation

for downstream flood control benefits.

But this debate is premature, since there can be no project without a ratified PTA in the first place. So far, the majority view among policy-makers here is that the technical aspects of the PTA are clear and that the sooner the document is ratified the better.

The minority argument—shaped to some extent by suspicions about India's designs in the wording of some Articles of the agreement, and partisan politics—is about the need for approval by a two-third majority vote, and even possible renegotiation of the PTA.

The suspicions of conspiracy theorists is based on history. Nepal has been cheated so often by India on past hydro deals, that they say it has to be very careful.

Former Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party MP Hiranyalal Shrestha (now ML), says that such a ratification by a two-third majority of parliament is stipulated by Article 126 (2) of the Constitution. He also said that the PTA "should be reviewed, revised and ratified after seeking consensus of all national parties".

Shrestha, like the others that saw "problems" with the agreement, argue that Article 3, which talks about government assistance for "construction, installation, operation and maintenance of facilities required for generation and transmission of

power," was not needed in a trading pact.

Although a two-thirds vote and a renegotiation may be difficult to bring about, they are not entirely impossible. Parliament, however, would still have to begin discussing the PTA to decide if Nepal even needs it.

At a recent panel organised by Jalsrot Vikas Sanstha (JVS) Pande challenged Shrestha: "Why didn't Hiranyalalji ask the question to his party when the agreement was initialled?" He pointed out that when the PTA was signed, the UML was partner in the coalition government of the day.

"The initialled document has gone to bankers and other potential investors and they may soon begin to ask why it has not been ratified," Pande said. "If we don't have the agreement, we cannot move forward in India."

The PTA would allow SMEC to sell electricity directly to parties across the border, at their own terms. One of its unique features is that it would permit Nepali power producers like West Seti to sell not just to one large buyer in India - a practice that had always posed problems for the government - but to several.

"To me the agreement is innocuous, it can only do good and help attract investors," said Ajit Narayan Thapa, former managing director of the Nepal Electricity Authority. "Imagine the situation without the PTA, and the confusion there would

have been."

Kishor Babu Aryal, Director General of the Electricity Development Centre, the government's licensing window, said it was Nepal after all that had wanted India to agree on the PTA because it could be useful to attract foreign investors.

Aryal, who was involved in the PTA preparatory process, thinks concern about Article 3 are misplaced. He says: "No party can do even a survey in Nepal without a license. There thus is no reason to fear the wording in Article 3." Those opposed to the articles should keep in mind that it would be applicable only to licensed developers, he added.

"Politicians may be ill-informed, but problems come up once technicians begin to tell lies or support wrong facts by their silence," said Nepali Congress member Laxman Ghimire, who was water resources minister when the agreement to

invite SMEC to take up West Seti was signed.

He recalls: "A day after signing I briefed opposition members (Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhala Nath Khanal) about it and they endorsed the decision."

Meanwhile, JVS General Secretary Surya Nath Upadhyaya, who is himself a former water resources secretary, said the PTA was not such a hot issue and much of the debate is needless.

Upadhyaya sees no big difficulty: "If we agree that electricity should be sold to India, then agreement has to be ratified, which could be done by a simple majority under the Treaty Act." ♦



ARTICLE 3

All parties entering into such an agreement for power trade shall be afforded all necessary assistance by respective Governments, in accordance with the laws and regulations of respective Governments, in accordance with the laws and regulations of respective countries, for the conduct of surveys including field investigations and for construction, installation, operation and maintenance of facilities required for generation and transmission of power in the territories of both countries, required for such power trading.

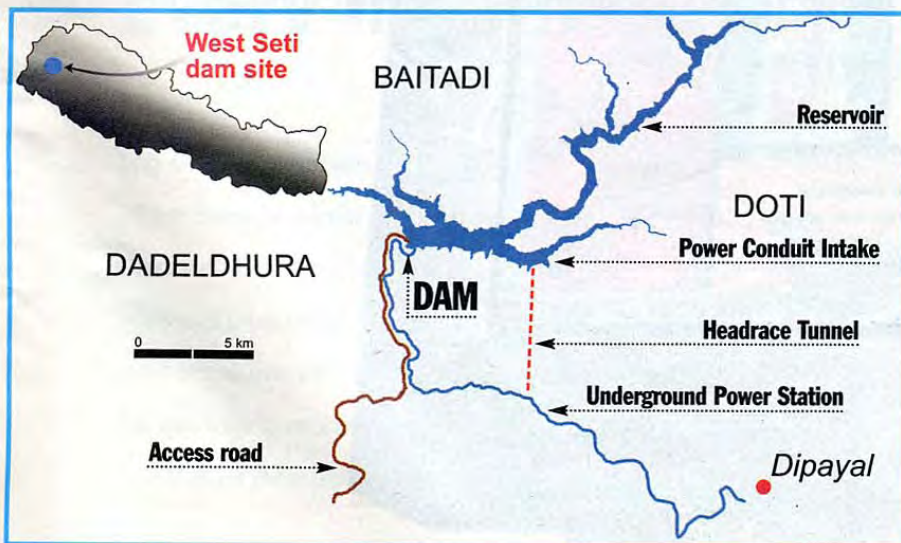
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Few Visitors to Costly World Fair

Expo 2000, the much-vaunted first world fair to be held in Germany, is turning into a headache for organisers.

MARTIN BENSLEY

HANOVER—Poor attendance figures, high entrance fees and embarrassing ticket sale glitches have taken the shine off the extravaganza that opened June 8 and lasts until October 31. Expo organisers had predicted as much 220,000 visitors a day to the ambitious show, which offers a stimulating glimpse of the future under the motto of "Humankind - Nature - Technology".

The Expo had a promising start, but just a week after the turnstiles started rotating, the figures had slumped to just 90,000 tickets sold a day. Some reports even had a day when only 25,000 people came to the fair. Pictures from the Expo shown nightly on German television news also had a noticeable lack of large crowds of people.

Expo 2000 managing director Reinhard Volk has declined to issue exact figures, while a fair spokesman said it was too early to jump to conclusions. He added that the "Expo is a marathon, and we are in the first minute".

By mid-June, around 360,000



The Hungarian pavilion at the Expo 2000 is one of the most spectacular exhibits. Made entirely of wood, it depicts two open palms. Two women enter the nearly deserted concourse in Hanover (right).

people had visited the fair. If ticket sales continue at current levels, that would mean only 10 million Expo visitors instead of the projected 40 million on which all the calculations regarding the event were based.

Just to break even, the fair must still attract more visitors than it is doing currently -- and not the doom and gloom commentaries carried so far by leading German newspapers. "Dramatic lack of visitors at Expo," read the headline in the Sueddeutsche Zeitung whose leader writer said, "A loss of prestige is looming and, worse than that, a financial disaster."

"Expo gets off to a painfully slow start" said the Frankfurter Allgemeine, adding in a leader: "Expo 2000 is beginning to look like a limp balloon in the sky of major international events."

But at least the newspaper also said the Expo organisers were trying to put a brave face on things and noted their call for patience now that a computer booking system is running smoothly.

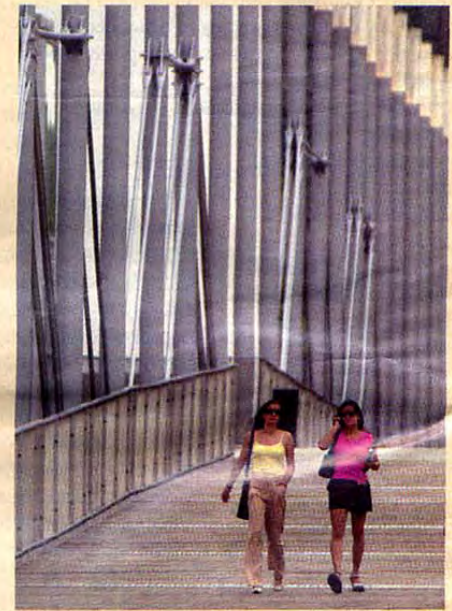
The fair's officials have staunchly resisted suggestions to go downmarket by cutting entry fees from a current 69 marks (some US\$35) per person and slashing weekend supplements.

The problem is that the German taxpayer will have to pick up the financial tab and politicians in Lower Saxony state, of which Hanover is the capital, are already making noises about the heavy losses they may incur if things do not pick up.

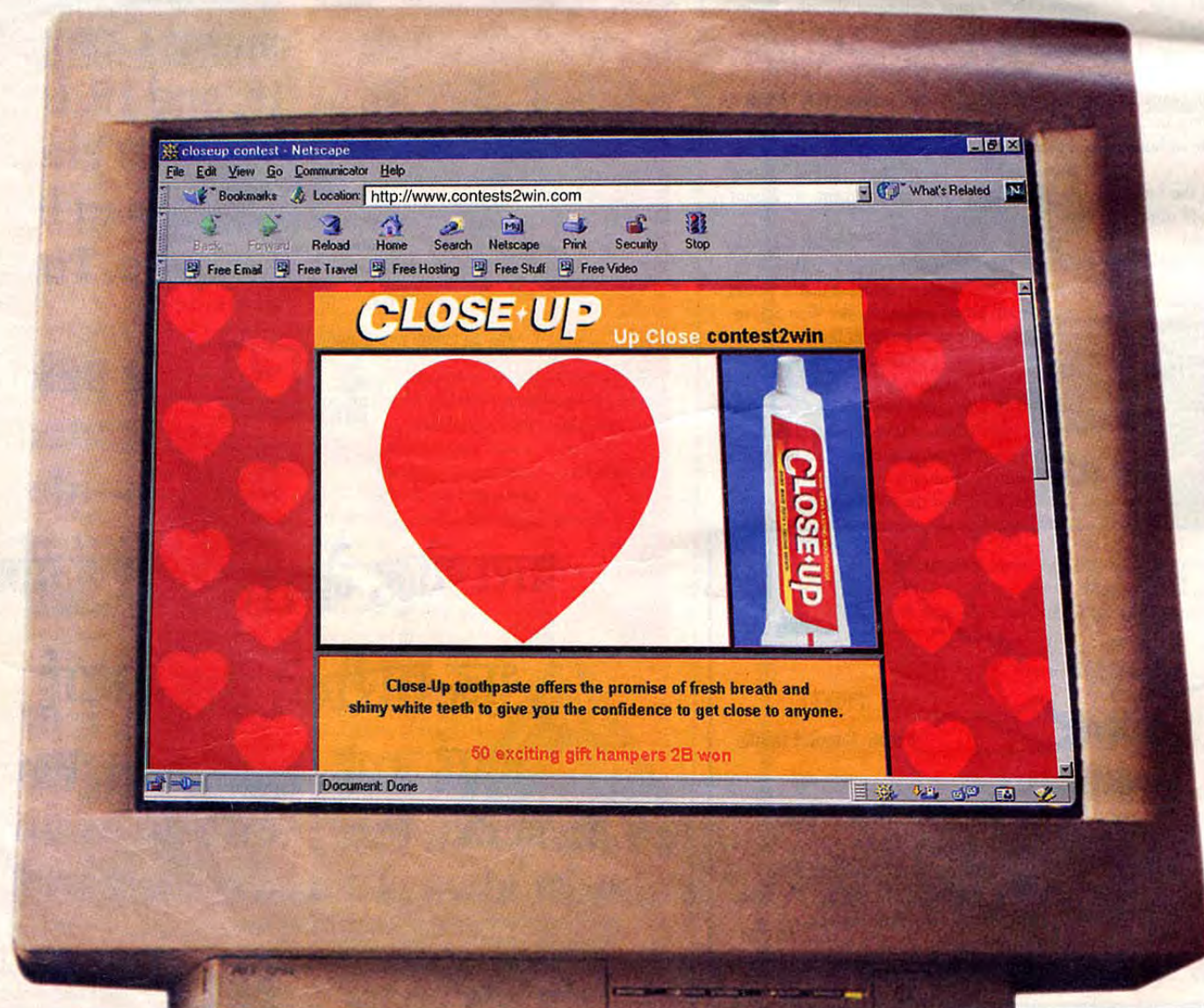
The location is another bugbear since Hanover is a quiet northern city with an undistinguished hinterland unlike previous fair hosts like Lisbon, Seville and New York. Hanover does not usually attract many tourists. Nearly 180 countries are taking part in the fair, which features some spectacular architecture, folklore displays and demonstrations of cutting edge technology.

Notably missing though is the United States, which failed to find the right sponsors and some critics are asking whether there is a place in the modern world for a fair in the tradition of the first exposition, which was held in London 150 years ago.

Britain's *Guardian* newspaper was among the sceptics: "The signs, in other words, are that this is a concept on the retreat, as might be expected in an age when people no longer need to go to a specific place to learn of the latest technological advances." (dpa) ♦



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Music therapy for chaotic Kathmandu

SALIL SUBEDI AND MIN BAJRACHARYA

Sometimes it's mistaken for Radio Nepal's morning religion programme since it begins its daily broadcast with an "Om Shanti" mantra. But then follows a steady stream of music for the soul, which could only mean you've stumbled upon one of the best-kept secrets of Kathmandu's airwaves: Himalayan Broadcasting Corporation 94FM, Shakti Radio.

HBC 94FM is the latest FM station in Kathmandu Valley to take advantage of the liberalised policy towards private radio broadcasters. While Radio Nepal rules the waves nationwide on the AM bands, there are now six private FM stations in Kathmandu. Most of them sound alike, but 94FM stands out with its unique voice, lack of chatter and its superb music selection.

This is one radio station where you will not be assaulted while still half-asleep by mindless teenage banter, panel discussions involving some of the most violently boring individuals in the valley, or a cacophony of pop. It is so mellifluous, so relaxing that it should be prescribed for people with hypertension. Rx: Two hours of Shakti Radio in the morning before meals.

From its studios in Arubari in Boudha, where the all-seeing eyes of the Buddha look down, Fred Cagan gets the day's music mix ready: classical Indian and Western, spiritual, meaningful contemporary, world music, indigenous flute and drums, blues and jazz.

Says Cagan: "Our daily broadcast is like the flow of the river and in that pure river we put small boats, different programmes, to take you for a ride to a different world. We don't want to jampack the river and that is why we sail calmly, reaching out to every other flow of life."

HBC started broadcasting on New Year's Day this April, but now has a growing cult following among Nepali music-lovers and the Valley's

expatriate community.

The station has already had its share of drama.

One recent morning, the studio spontaneously combusted; investigations later showed a short circuit as the culprit, but the explosion could also have been from all the shakti stored inside.

Its brochure says the station's aim is to convey "the treasures of the rich culture, spirit, medicine, knowledge, geomancy and sacred arts of the Himalayas. Sound in prayer and chanting, music and dance, evoke conscious expansion and understanding".

Sounds slightly quirky, but then HBC is the brainchild of Italian musician and amateur philosopher Claudio Rocchi, who came to Kathmandu and found it so peaceful he decided to locate his peace radio here. Rocchi has been deeply influenced by the subcontinent's spiritualism and among other things set up the Radio Krishna Centrale, and FM network for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.



The unique voice of 94FM is gathering a cult following in Kathmandu Valley

So far, HBC has been broadcasting 20 hours a day: 4 AM to midnight, with a slight change in the mood of the music for the morning, day and evening hours. The HBC philosophy regards sound broadcast as an instant connection to the fifth and most subtle, healing, alchemical element: akash, the ether.

Spiritually oriented morning prayers and meditation music start its day. The bhajans, chants and sufi rhythms are ecumenical-not religion, per se, but pure consciousness. Lately, a few weekly spiritual talk programs are being aired with anchors - called 'Soul-Js' - like Swami Chandresh and Dudh Baba. Cagan says, "We hope the programmes will help the people of Kathmandu open their inner eyes and make them aware of their responsibilities in the society."

As the sun climbs higher in the sky, 94FM fades into a mix of eastern, western and Nepali folk melodies. "Very soon," says producer Sanjay Chhetri, "we will be inviting young Nepali musicians and upcoming talents to share their view through our station."

By afternoon, the station has put on Dylan Dai and his Ramblin' and Gamblin' Willy. There are a variety of treats for the young and the old alike-whether you are hunkered down studying for an upcoming exam, ticketing in a travel agency or chewing supari to the beat of Dire Straits in a government adda. After that, a refreshing change: Junoon and the Azadi Fighters.

The selections take deeper colours as night finds its way home. By late evening, 94FM is dipping into a gentler pool of classical notes, sometimes jazz, blues and once in a while into the aboriginal scales of the Didjeridu and African drums.

The HBC producers also put a lot of effort into their signature tunes and station jingles. "We spend more time in creating these messages than selecting the music. Because they are our soul," says station manager Sambhu Ghimire.

Some messages sound like relics of Freak Street circa 1969: "Sometimes you think you can spread love and peace to the entire human race... we believe you can." And Yubakar Rajkarnikar, editor of the youth magazine 'Wave', comments, "There is good music, but I wish that in the future they become more Nepali and behave less like outsiders."

Well, Rajkarnikar may be glad to know that Rocchi seems to be doing just that -- or at least something that will "integrate" the station into Valley a bit more. Rocchi is working towards a once a week "common time" where all FM stations in Kathmandu get together to broadcast a selection of their best programmes simultaneously on all stations.

This will be expanded into a "peace network", a creative exchange with other radio stations, musicians and artists worldwide. Rocchi says, "It will be the bridging of sound across time and space to promote international friendship and respect". ♦

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Wap whipped by i-mode

JONATHAN WATTS IN LONDON

There is a new walk on the streets of Tokyo these days. It is too slow to be a stroll and too purposeful to be a wander. In crowds, it often results in the odd stumble, bump and mumbled apology. But it is no drunken stagger either. The legs know where they have to go, but the eyes are too preoccupied to chart a clear course.

Suddenly it is cool not to look where you are going in Japan. Why? Because you are engrossed in the latest way to surf the "wireless web" - a mobile phone and internet service called i-mode.

I-mode (the "i" is for information) is the first system to put cyberspace in subscribers' pockets 24 hours a day with cheap and continuous access to a range of information services. Technically sophisticated, but simple to use, it is tipped as the next big thing to come out of the land of the Walkman, the Game Boy and the PlayStation.

What's the big deal? Britons can already use their cell phones to get online and exchange email messages using the wireless application protocol (Wap) system. Like i-mode, Wap phones do not access the internet as we know it - rather a cut down version designed to work on small screens.

But, while Wap and i-mode are rivals, their contest is in danger of turning into a mismatch between a weedy infant and a bodybuilding giant. In terms of cost, popularity, ease of use and commercial success, Wap is being whipped. It may have been adopted last summer as the European standard, but it has been slow to take off, whereas i-mode is here, now and changing millions of lives.

Since its launch in February 1999, the system has transformed Japan from an online laggard into one of the fastest growing online markets in the world. With 7 million subscribers, i-mode is the country's most popular online portal. At current rates of growth it will make Japan the first country in the world where mobiles are more popular than PCs

as a way of getting into cyberspace, and 600,000 new customers signing up every month have put i-mode on course to overtake America Online (AOL) as the planet's leading online portal by the middle of 2002. The service is so popular that its operator, NTT DoCoMo, had to halt sales and advertising temporarily last month because demand kept crashing the system.

Meanwhile investors have made DoCoMo the hottest company in Japan. Last year, it overtook the motor manufacturer Toyota to become the country's most valuable corporation.

In Tokyo's trendy Shibuya district, the system is changing the way people look, sound and spend their time.

For Yoko Uenishi, a 17-year-old high school girl, a stylish i-mode phone completes a look that includes bleached grey hair, white eyeshadow and precariously high-platformed sandals.

"I bought it because it looked cool and all my friends had one," she says. "But now I use it all the time, especially when I want to kill time on the train."

Her phone - a tiny, ultra-light, metallic pink device that flips open like a Star Trek communicator - is decorated with a designer strap and stickers of cartoon characters. To personalise it even further, she has downloaded a Hello Kitty animation for the 3cm by 5cm screen inside and a pop song melody that plays when she has a call or a new email. Each day, she picks a new image and tune, for which 100 yen (\$1) is added to her monthly phone bill.

Like most teens, Yoko mainly uses i-mode for email. She reckons she sends and receives about 15 messages a day - which means clicking away at tiny phone pad buttons until her fingers ache. But she also checks her horoscope each morning, books concert tickets and follows the latest chart news - which, naturally, includes a new top 10 of downloaded melodies. ♦

(Guardian News Service)



Millennium Brit in Stone Age Shape

LONDON - Half of all British men wear their trousers too tight in a desperate bid to deny they are losing their battle with their ever-expanding girths, according to a new study done by a British academic.

The men are also in danger of regressing to the shapes of their Neanderthal ancestors, said the fresh research, as long hours spent slumped in front of computer and television screens are causing them to become round-shouldered and stooped.

"Millions of years after man became upright, Millennium man is stooping lower and lower," said the study's author, Stephen Gray of Nottingham Trent University.

Gray surveyed more than 2,000 men in Britain and found that half were squeezing into trousers that were a size too small. Only one in 10, however, admitted to always wearing their trousers too tight, and few are really aware of how their bodies really look.

Gray also scanned 3D images of 10 male volunteers to show them how they really looked. Only four correctly identified their own image, and only two women picked out their partner's scanned image.

"When the men were shown their 3D images, some were aghast because they really did not know what they looked like," Gray said. "Men are not as good as women at looking after their bodies, and knowing how to eat sensibly and diet properly." ♦

(dpa)



New Harry Potter already best seller.

THE "MUGGLES" have fallen for it again. The least surprising publishing news of the summer is that the fourth Harry Potter story is a bestseller. The surprising news is that copies are being bought by the thousand, sight unseen, title unknown, three weeks before publication.

The book is the number one bestseller on Amazon.com, the online bookshop, with hundreds of advance orders arriving daily from readers desperate to beat the queues for copies. It has been in the top five since December, when orders started coming in from all over the world.

The three earlier books are still on Amazon's top 20 list, at 9, 12 and 19, and all sales worldwide, in 30 languages, are estimated at 31m copies.

Paranoid security surrounds the launch of the next episode in the life of British author JK Rowling's boy wizard, the book that forces Harry to confront the twin demons of sorcery and puberty.

At Bloomsbury, the U.K. publishers, a spokesman said only a handful of top executives had read it. Everyone involved, from cover designer to printers, had signed a secrecy agreement.

Amazon has organised security at its distribution centre north of London worthy of a gold vault: a Harry Potter area has been cordoned off, and staff are forbidden to discuss the book with outsiders.

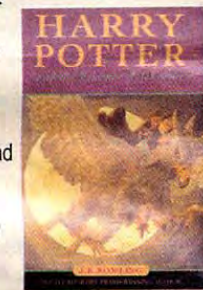
In the U.S., where the books have sold 18m copies, interest is being fanned to fever pitch by the planned Hollywood film version, with applications from 40,000 young hopefuls to audition for the part of Harry.

Bloomsbury is planning an elaborate launch for the new book on July 8, with part of Paddington station in west London transformed into the mysterious platform nine-and-three-quarters, where pupils, owls and brooms in hand, join their train for Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

At the tiny Kew Bookshop in west London the initial order for Harry IV is 100 copies, 10 times its normal maximum order. It is also planning a Harry Potter day on July 8, opening the shop hours early.

Its only fear is that the advance orders will eat up all its copies, leaving it with no hope of reordering until the second edition. "We've had to give in to pleas from regular customers," said the owner, Caroline Blomfield. "I've read all (the earlier books) myself, I adore them, I can hardly wait. It is a genuine phenomenon." ♦

(Guardian News Service)



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WELCOME A

The next dodo

LONDON - The bird Gurney's Pitta is about to go the way of the Dodo, and may become the first major species to become extinct in this millennium.

Despite conservation efforts, the ultramarine blue and black bird, which are found in Thailand, have slumped to one third of breeding numbers of 1989 - from 30 pairs to just 10.

The bird was named after English banker and naturalist John H Gurney. Gurney's Pitta was once numerous in South-east Asian forests. But that is no longer true. Said naturalist Marcos Cohler said: "This bird is the most likely candidate for early extinction. Forest in which the bird was living 10 years ago has disappeared and it is reduced to a remnant."

Cohler said the place where he saw the birds nesting in 1989 is now a housing estate and a car park. At this rate, he said, the bird will be gone by 2003. "If they keep whittling away the forest they are whittling away the attraction," Cohler said. "Soon there will be nothing left." ♦

Huddled masses yearning to be rich

The discovery of 35 corpses of illegal immigrants in Britain this week is bound to heat up the debate on economic migrants.

FAISAL ISLAM IN LONDON

The term 'economic migrant' has pejorative overtones: would-be workers are vilified as parasites or social benefit fraudsters.

But while politicians compete to reduce the incentives for coming to the UK, the British Department for Education and Employment is devising economic incentives to lure highly skilled workers - presumably also economic migrants - to fill acute skills shortages.

In the US there are moves to lift the cap on foreign high-tech workers, and a remarkable coalition of conservatives, liberals and trade unions is pushing for a total amnesty for up to 6 million illegal immigrant workers. Even Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, has given tacit approval.

But make no mistake, this is not a bout of compassion. National self-interest is the driving force. Immigrants, legal and illegal, have played a vital role in the US in building the so-called 'Goldilocks' economy (strong technology-driven growth that nonetheless avoids inflation). Western European demographics also point to the need for immigration. The economic migrant will be essential, it seems, to protect your state pension.

Analysis of migration has been traditionally couched in negative terms. Mass population movement has been closely entwined with slavery, bonded labour and expulsions.

Waves of migrants

More generally, a layman's understanding of economics leads to negative sentiment towards immigrant labour which is seen as displacing native workers from their jobs. This is based on the fallacy that there is a fixed number of jobs available.

But economic development depends on waves of migration. The oldest 'stages of development' theories emphasise that rural-urban migration is a key engine of economic growth. Applied globally, this means that though capital is mobile, restricting labour mobility inhibits optimum production.

Similarly, trade theory suggests that free movement of labour across borders is a necessary counterpart to free capital movements. Such theories are not just pie in the sky - they form the economic basis for the existence of the European Union.

Immigrant workers increase the size of the pie being prepared before slices can be taken from it. In purely demographic terms, this is because immigrants tend to be concentrated in age groups where people contribute more to the public coffers.

Immigrant workers increase the size of the pie being prepared before slices can be taken from it. In purely demographic terms, this is because immigrants tend to be concentrated in age groups where people contribute more to the public coffers.

The EU population is declining and ageing rapidly. Overall population is expected to decline by five million in 25 years and by 40 million by 2050. It is also ageing at an unprecedented rate. A recent United Nations study said the EU will need 159 million immigrants to maintain the current ratio of people of working age to the retired population.

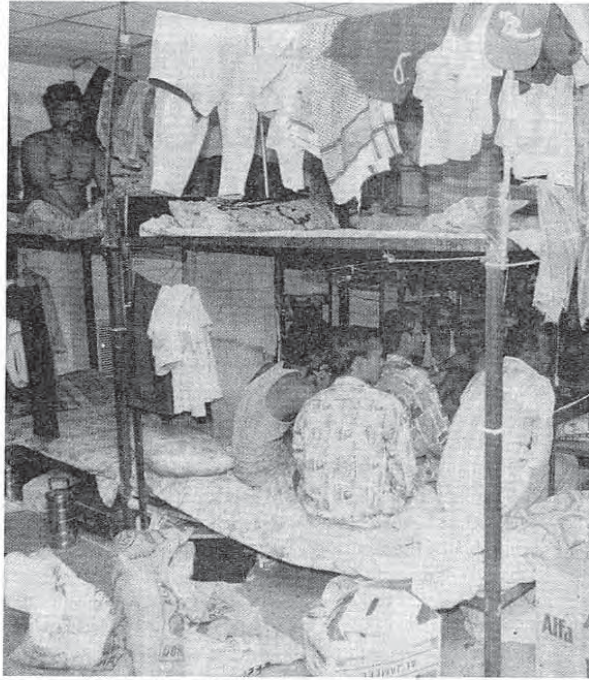
Net migration to the UK was 660,000 people between 1990 and 1998, an average of 73,000 a year. The UK population would remain constant if these numbers stayed the same. But net inward migration would have to double to maintain the current numbers of working people. Without it, the retirement age would have to rise to about 72 to maintain the 'support ratio' at 4.1 in 50 years.

In theory, one might dispute the contention that the 'support ratio' should stay constant. If there are wild jumps in productivity, perhaps aided by technology, then the required ratio of working to non-working people could go down, obviating the need for immigration.

But the recent leaps in productivity associated with technology are rooted in immigrant labour, and these foreigners are most definitely 'economic migrants'.

In the US, from corporate boardrooms and influential venture capital firms to the Ivy League business schools and saffron start-ups, it is workers from India who are making their mark on Silicon Valley and the internet economy, driving growth.

Immigrants made up 32 per cent of Silicon Valley's scientific and engineering workforce in 1990, and that number will have increased thanks to a loosening of immigration restrictions, according to a report by Anna Lee Saxenian, a University of California professor at Berkeley. It showed that Chinese and Indian engineers were senior executives in businesses that together accounted for more than \$16.8



Bangladeshi immigrants in the Middle East.

billion in sales and 58,282 jobs.

There is concern, however, that developed nations might siphon off the cream of developing countries' talent, setting back their economic development further - although the increasing trend for Asian expats to invest heavily in their country of origin would mitigate this.

The success of immigration of the highly skilled has not been lost on EU governments. Germany and the UK have announced schemes to attract high-tech workers along the lines of the American H-1B programme, which allows skilled foreigners to work in the US. The US scheme is set to expand from 115,000 visas to 200,000. From October 1998 to March 1999, 46 per cent of the visas went to Indians.

The German government's plan to issue 20,000 special visas is under threat because conservative politicians want the money that would be spent on Indian workers to go into education. Schooling is clearly a good long-term aim, but the skills shortage is here and now.

According to research by the International Data Corporation and Microsoft, by 2003 Europe will lack 1.7 million technology workers. The cost of that would be it \$348bn.

The UK will be among the hardest hit: 14 per cent short of the high-tech workers it requires.

There are already 50,000 IT vacancies here, but only around 18,000 graduates coming out of university. Industry bodies said that training unskilled workers would take a minimum of five years. An Arthur Andersen report forecasts 80,000 unfilled vacancies in the internet economy by 2002.

Inflationary pressures will build up if these are not filled - in practical terms, highly-skilled foreign workers will mean that British technical staff will not be able to charge such a high premium for their services, and might lose out.

The 6 million illegal immigrants in the US - many from its poorer neighbours - mainly work in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs and are often open to exploitation.

Rarely are they considered the object of union sympathy. But it is their role in tempering simmering inflationary pressures that is leading to calls for an amnesty.

In practice, this means that some poor immigrants receive real wages that are lower than people who did the same jobs 20 years ago.

It explains why the immigration enforcement agencies have been relaxed about illegal employment.

But this seems a long way off when Scandinavian immigrants such as Linus Torvalds, inventor of the Linux operating system - considered a challenger to Microsoft Windows - is still waiting for his Green Card. ♦

(Observer News Service)

ABOUT TOWN

Art

❖ People of Nepal

Drawings by Australian Artist Rebecca Ashcroft at Helping Hands International Contemporary Gallery. Mon - Fri, 10am to 8pm till June 30. Arcadia Building, 2nd Floor, opposite Ying Yang Restaurant, Thamel. @sian Artists
Exhibition of works of well-known Nepali artists and students of the French School. 20-22 June, Alliance Fraincaise: 24-26 June, Summit Hotel.

❖ Figures and Compositions

An exhibition of figurative paintings and abstract compositions of Chirag Bangdel at Radisson Gallery, Radisson Hotel. Open 24 hours.

MUSIC

❖ The Harvard Din & Tonic

Internationally recognised jazz a capella group from Harvard University performing for the first time in Nepal. Venue: Yak & Yeti Hotel on 12 July.

❖ Music Festival

Ministry of Culture celebrates the International Music Day with Nepali music—from classical to pop. 21 June Venue: Royal Nepal Academy, 4-7pm. Alliance Fraincaise celebrates world music day on June 24 at Tudikhel from 12 noon to 5pm. Children between the ages of 11 to 15 are also participating at alliance Fraincaise hall, 7pm, entrance free

❖ Wet and Wild Summer

Central Godavari Resort offers a package every Saturday that includes swimming with buffet lunch and a bottle of beer/soft drink. Tel: 560675

❖ Swimming Camp for Kids

At Hotel de l'Annapurna. Coach available between 10am - 11am and 4pm - 5pm.

❖ Inter Cultural Film Society

'Thuong nho dong que' - Longing for the Country. A film by Dang Nhat Minh, Vietnam 1996 will be screened on July 22, 6pm at Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari.

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Burma must try dialogue

RANGOON - While it is clear that the international community sympathises with the democracy movement in Burma, there still is a need for constant vigilance and continued action to ensure that the human rights situation does not deteriorate further.

In Burma, where we have been crushed under the military regime for many years, want and fear are two of the greatest enemies that we have to contend with from day to day.

The military regime first came to power in 1958, and except for a brief respite between 1960-1962, we have lived under an extremely repressive dictatorship ever since. In May 1990, elections were held which our political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won by an overwhelming majority. However, the military regime, which held the elections, ignored its results and has clung to power.

Want and fear go together where there are no human rights and where there is no justice. In Burma, people wake up in the morning wondering which of their friends have been taken into detention by the authorities, where the next meal is going to come from, and what the future of their children will be.



In Asia, where so many of us believe in such high ideals, there is still a great need for understanding the basic human factors that make human life acceptable. I sometimes think that we Asians are too hard on ourselves as human beings. There is a lack of compassion, which is a great pity — and a great surprise since it was in Asia that Buddhism, which is the great religion of compassion, was born.

Resentment of Burma's military regime is growing for economic as well as social reasons. Prices have been rising as the standard of living has fallen. The common people are having difficulty making ends meet. Their children cannot complete their education because the universities

have been closed for about three years.

Meanwhile, the elite who are close to or part of the regime have become very wealthy from whatever openings there have been in the past decade. And their children can study abroad.

There is a possibility that this resentment will explode into violence. A warning of this potential was the incident last October in which a group of five Burmese students barged into the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok and seized a number of hostages. Then at the end of January there was the tragic and failed occupation of a hospital, also in Thailand, by a group of Burmese rebels, ten of whom were killed in the process.

While the sense of frustration and great injustice that would have led these groups to such acts is understandable, they must recognise that what we are fighting against is this very approach: the use of arms to bring about political change. We cannot support such acts, which we are subjected to daily in Burma.

This is a very real concern because we don't want change to come about through violence. It would be a very bad precedent. The NLD has chosen the non-violent path because we want to show that the human spirit can prevail over the force of arms through the strength of our convictions and our perseverance. We are absolutely confident that democracy will come to Burma, and that it will come through non-violent means. We are confident as well that we will be able to persuade those who are now using violence to oppress Burma to see our point of view and to understand that they, and the rest of the country, of course, would be far better off if it were justice that ruled rather than weapons.

The military regime is frightened of losing power. Its members are frightened of the emergence of a democratic government because they don't understand what a democratic government really is. They don't understand that we're not out for revenge, or to crush them or the army. Our goal is simply to establish a system whereby there can be a balance between justice, security and freedom for all our people.

To stem the potential for violence in Burma, the government should adopt peaceful methods. It should think of the exchange of views and dialogue as an honourable and dignified way of bringing about change.

Instead it seems to think that by accepting a dialogue with the opposition they would lose face. This is not true. What the military regime doesn't understand is that it would greatly enhance its standing with the whole world, not just with Burma, by doing so. ♦

© Inter Press Service

Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is the general secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Burma and has been living under house arrest in Rangoon since 1990.

More massacres in Bihar

New Delhi - The Indian state of Bihar confirmed its reputation as the most lawless place in India last week when gunmen from a private army massacred at least 34 villagers in a bloody caste feud.

The black-clad gunmen descended on the village of Miapur early on 17 June. They dragged villagers from their beds, lined them up and mowed them down with automatic weapons. The victims were mainly members of the lower-caste Yadav. They included six children aged between five and eight. Twenty-two people died immediately and the rest later.

Detectives said the attack was carried out by the Ranvir Sena, a banned upper-caste landlord army whose murderous six-year feud with left-wing groups representing the lower castes has turned Bihar into a killing field. This latest massacre was the eighth major caste-related attack in the past six months. So far this month, 44 people have died.

Though no group claimed responsibility for the Miapur massacre, it is believed to be a Ranvir Sena revenge attack following the murder of 11 upper-caste villagers last Sunday. Miapur, a remote off-road settlement, is only six miles away from Senari, where the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) party slaughtered 34 of the upper Bhumihar caste in March last year. (Observer News Service)

Pakistan Cuts Military Budget

Islamabad Pakistan's military regime announced a 13.42 billion dollar national budget for the fiscal year 2000-2001, allocating less money for the military than last year.

But the new year's allocation of 2.57 billion dollars is in reality higher than last year's as the military's pension account of 500 million dollars has been transferred to the civilian side as of the new fiscal year, beginning on 1 July.

"There was no game plan (involved in the transfer). It is purely an accounting procedure practiced by other countries also," Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz told reporters, explaining "the 10-percent increase" in the allocations to the military.

"We do not want an arms race in the region, but it is necessary to maintain credible defence," he said.

Nationalist elements in Pakistan were hoping the regime would increase the military budget since India had raised its military budget by 3.2 billion dollars last March.

India announced its 13.6-billion dollar military budget in the wake of the near war the two countries fought in the disputed state of Kashmir in the summer of 1999. (dpa)

Tigers held at gates of Jaffna

Colombo - Sri Lankans across the religious and ethnic divide - Tamils included - are breathing a sigh of relief that the Government appears to have beaten back the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam who, two weeks ago, were on the brink of recapturing Jaffna.

The army has, once again, taken the upper hand, though a suicide bomb in Colombo last week killed a Cabinet minister and at least 15 others.

Most Tamils live in the north and east of the country and the LTTE has been waging a 17-year civil war in pursuit of a separate state.

But ordinary civilians - Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims alike - say they would prefer to continue living side by side, as they have done so peacefully for years, than be controlled by the much feared LTTE.

A Tamil cultivator from the northern Vavuniya district said: "There is no purpose in what the Tigers are doing. They will call me a traitor for saying this. But we can live as friends with the Sinhalese farmers as we have done for so long."

Dayawathi Samarasinghe, from Nikaweratiya in the north western province, said her sons joined the army "because they had no jobs. If they had jobs they may not have gone. The last letter I had from one of my sons was one month ago. I don't want this war to go on. I want my sons alive".

Mr S. Manoranjan, a Tamil journalist who was once a member of a Tamil militant group, said: "The fact is that the LTTE is the biggest enemy of the Tamils. It believes in fascist terror."

The Tamils in Jaffna experienced this for nearly six years under their rule. They are now acting on their own agenda to profit by prolonging the war." (Observer News Service)



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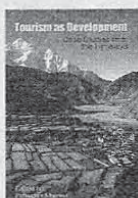
Rs 600/- (hardback)
Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage
edited by Philippe Ramirez
(2000, pp. x+304)

Everything you wanted to know about the two central Nepal districts of Gulmi and Arghakhanchi. This book is history, geography, ethnography and cultural studies all rolled into one. The result of a nine-year-long research by a team of French social scientists—perhaps the first study of its kind in Nepal.

A Bibliotheca Himalayica book

Tourism as Development: Case Studies from the Himalaya
edited by Pitamber Sharma
(2000, pp. xiii+179)

Ever wondered why Pokhara's Phewa Lake area has become such an eyesore? Or, how the opening of Upper Mustang has benefitted the locals there? This book has the answers, and more, as it looks at three other tourist destinations in the Himalaya and highlights the essential interrelationship between tourism and local progress.



Rs 1945/- (hardback)
Faces of Nepal
by Jan Salter and Harka Gurung
(1999, pp. vi+99)

The second and completely revised edition of this acclaimed picture book-cum-ethnography study by a British artist and a Nepali scholar. The new edition deals with three additional population groups and comes with more colour plates and sketches, and an additional linguistic map of Nepal.

Toni Hagen's
Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalaya
revised and updated with Deepak Thapa
(1999, pp. xviii+251)

When Toni Hagen first set foot in Nepal in 1950, he came as a development expert. Over the nine years that he walked 14,000 km across the length and breadth of Nepal, conducting its first reconnaissance survey, he grew to become a valued friend of the country. This is the original book that introduced Nepal, both to Nepalis and outsiders. This fourth edition of this classic includes the original reports and photographs even as it brings the reader up-to-date with the changes Hagen has seen over the course of a half-century.



Women drivers in Dubai

Dubai - The first women taxi drivers in the conservative Arabian Peninsula have taken to the road in Dubai after overcoming prejudices in society that until now has considered this type of job suitable only for men.

Seven Arab women - four Syrians, a Jordanian, a Sudanese and one national of the United Arab Emirates - have started working as taxi drivers for the Dubai Transport Corporation, a government company.

Despite the new "modernity" introduced in the United Arab Emirates, the promoters of the idea did not want to break all social moulds and the seven women will only take other women and their families as passengers.

Dubai, one of the seven sheikhdoms that make up the UAE, and the other countries in the Arabian Peninsula - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Yemen - have a social system which segregates the sexes.

"We have decided to launch this new service of women taxi drivers because of suggestions from our customers who need us for their wives and children," said Gehad Asbita, Head of Trading Centre in the Dubai Transport Corporation.

"Islamic society in the United Arab Emirates does not consider it good for a Moslem woman to be alone in the company of a male who is not a member of her family, as happens when one hails a taxi in the street," added Asbita.

Asbita said the seven women will be working mainly daylight hours from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and only be available to people booking the taxis by phone and not by flagging them down in the street. (dpa) ♦

by RAKESH WADHWHA

from page 1

The Police and the People's War

match to the gelatine charges lobbed by Maoists. The Maoists are taking a leaf out of their mentor, Mao Zedong, using psychological-warfare tactics to maximum advantage. Typically, a surprise attack begins with explosions and deafening chants of revolutionary slogans. Escape routes are sealed with trip-wire mines and sharpshooters, flares and explosives create chaos, and lethal explosives hand-crafted from pressure cookers and pipes are set off. The Maoist arsenal includes knives, clubs, muzzle-loader muskets and rifles taken from the police. What they lack in sophistication, they make up with guerrilla tactics and firepower—thought to be made from the stash of four tons of gelatine which was looted from a construction project in Charikot four years ago. "Their strategy now is hit-and-run guerrilla warfare," said Achyut Krishna Kharel, chief of the Nepal Police. "We are very visible targets. Police posts are accessible to all. Anyone can walk in and scout our defences and the trenches. We cannot withdraw, because our job is to maintain law and order." During the beginning of the People's War there was concern over police atrocities. Now, both sides have been accused of human rights abuses. Perhaps because of its earlier role in Kilo Sierra, there is little public sympathy evident for the Police today when the war started going wrong. Nearly 200 policemen have been killed since the insurgency began in 1996, with a sharp rise in deaths since March 1999. Most have been killed in raids on remote

garrisons or blown up by improvised mines along village trails. As many as 15 policemen were felled in one single attack, at Ghartigaon in Ropla. The insurgency has cost over 1,300 lives, many of them civilians caught in the crossfire.

Says one senior policeman: "When Sri Lanka has a civil war, it is the army which is made to fight. But when there is a similar war brewing in Nepal, the political parties field a police force with its hands tied. Either the police has to be empowered to fight like an army, or the army has to be brought out of the barracks."

After making initial noise of using the sahi sena, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has now retreated. And the Maoists while keeping up the pressure, have studiously kept clear of creating any incident that may raise hackles in the military brass. It is the ordinary constables, assistant sub-inspectors, sub-inspectors and inspectors who bear the brunt of this increasingly brutal war.

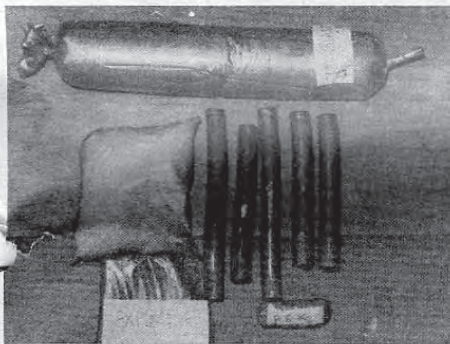
The first hope that there may be a resolution came when Comrade Prachanda (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) said he was willing to talk to the government. That offer may have been made from a position of strength or weakness, or it may have been a ploy to gain time, but it was an opportunity to see what the Maoists' minimum demands were. Unfortunately, this opportunity has been all but lost with the tussle for party leadership between Girija Prasad Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba. Over the past week, Koirala and Deuba have been cynically playing political football with the possibility of talks.

"The talks have not begun, why argue about the agenda?" Deuba said on June 18. He was responding to remarks made by Koirala about the need for one to get the talks started. "Everyone knows about the Maoist agenda, it has appeared in newspapers," Deuba added. Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi, who is supposed to be commanding the counter-insurgency, knew less. He told parliament on 13 June: "HMG has no knowledge of what the Maoists' demands are."

A day after the Panchkatiya killings, Prachanda repeated his demand for the creation of a "minimum atmosphere" for talks. Deuba responded by saying he was open to talk about everything within the framework of the constitution. Koirala had reassured all saying that the Commission headed by Deuba had "full authority" to talk.

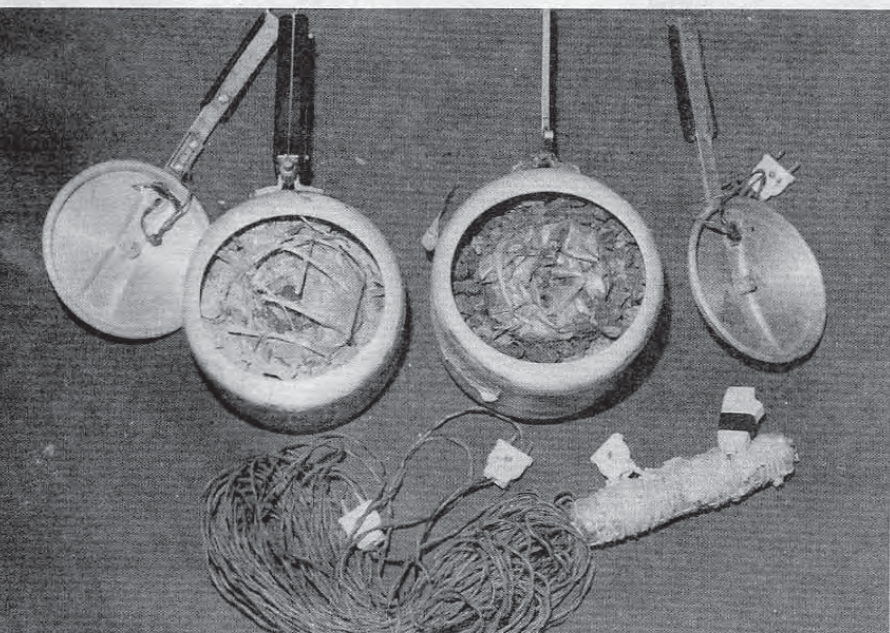
Clearly, the Nepali Congress leadership is playing with the country's future by not considering the insurgency with more urgency. The other political parties, including the main Opposition UML, seem to be content to see the government squirm. This lack of seriousness means that the body bags continue to pile up, and a war that the people don't want rages on.

Clearly, the Nepali Congress leadership is playing with the country's future by not considering the insurgency with more urgency. The other political parties, including the main Opposition UML, seem to be content to see the government squirm. This lack of seriousness means that the body bags continue to pile up, and a war that the people don't want rages on.



THE MAOIST ARSENAL

From top: Pipe bombs with gelatine sac, grenade clusters in a booby trap, pressure cooker bombs filled with explosives and detonator. All photos: Nepal Police.



OPINION

Legalise cricket gambling

We are paying a price, an unacceptable heavy price, for keeping betting on cricket illegal. The entire operation is controlled by a network of illegal bookies whose tentacles crisscross the whole of India and several other countries that share its ridiculous policies.

The underground does not care two hoots about the finer points of cricket. When it is already breaking the law by accepting bets, it is not going to be deterred from going one step further by conniving to fix the outcome of a match on which millions of rupees are riding.

This is the pernicious effect of laws that victimise those they are supposed to protect. If Indians make so many laws, and laws of such nature that otherwise upright individuals are forced to break them, a law abiding nation is turned into a country of habitual criminals. And all just to stop people from having a drink, or placing a bet.

Disrespect for one set of laws usually leads to disrespect of all laws – even laws that are actually for our good. Time and again, experience has shown it is not possible to abolish a popular activity by fiat. Whether it is drinking, gambling or prostitution, delegitimisation merely drives the activity underground – from the custody of entrepreneurs into the hands of criminals.

The surest way to ensure criminals run an activity is to criminalise it. The best way to ensure law abiding businesspeople are in charge of an activity is to declare it legal.

The Gandhian ideal of a liquor-free India has remained just that: an ideal. The moment any state tries to enforce prohibition, the trade passes into the hands of criminals who are just waiting in the wings. The ill effects of such "idealistic" policies soon become so pervasive that, as in the United States, state after state in India has reluctantly had to admit defeat and decriminalise liquor and

drinking. The Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Haryana are just the most recent examples.

Gambling is no different. Till the mid 20th century, gambling in the United States was controlled by the mob, much as it is controlled in India today. The likes of Bugsy Siegel ran the vast gambling networks in the United States. In an exact parallel, our own homegrown Mumbai mafia controls betting on cricket.

We are a cricket-crazy society, and for many of us, betting on the games adds to the excitement of watching matches. What is the rationale for keeping such betting illegal? Even if we were to concede the presumption that a ban serves some greater social purpose, it is universally acknowledged that it is not just possible to stop this activity.

The law as it stands today serves no purpose. Its only use is to protect the mafia from competition from legitimate businessmen. It is precisely free competition that would result in far greater protection for the consumer by ensuring better odds for the vast majority of the betting public. If the mafia is to be forced out of cricket, if we are to avoid match-fixing scandals, there is really no option but to legalise gambling. As it is, even if such a law was passed, it would take many years before gambling would pass fully into the hands of legitimate businessmen and companies. The mafia will not be displaced overnight.

Thanks to the government, only the mafia has the expertise to run sports betting in India. Betting should have been liberalised when it started. The next best time is now. The debate must begin. Irrespective of what inquiries are held or how many people are arrested, if gambling remains against the law, cricket will never be free of the mafia.

Rakesh Wadhwa is a writer and economist and manages two casinos in Kathmandu.



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No match for gamblers

NEVILLE DE SILVA

LONDON -- The event: a one-day cricket match between arch rivals India and Pakistan. The venue: the gigantic Eden Gardens Stadium in Calcutta.

Pakistani Wasim Akram's very first ball is so wayward and wide, it goes over slip fielders' heads. With a mere six runs on the scoreboard, India declares. Pakistan goes in to bat. Indian all-rounder Kapil Dev bowls an underarm full toss to Pakistani batting sensation Salim Malik. Even a schoolboy would have wacked it to the boundary - Malik promptly misses the ball. He is bowled.

Shock all around, except among the bookies and match-fixers. Fortunately, this isn't a real-life match. It was dreamed up by the London Observer newspaper recently for an editorial.

The light-hearted piece on the raging controversy over sportsmen throwing away matches in return for money, made for a good laugh. But by mentioning only India and Pakistan, it also made out that match-fixing and corruption in cricket is a peculiarly South Asian pastime, if not the region's monopoly.

Of course, big money has corrupted not only cricket but many other sports. The question is why some people insist

on thinking that honour among cricket players began slipping in the subcontinent, and only in

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, DUT?!

Who says cricket corruption is a predominantly South Asian phenomenon?



To be sure, that was when widespread reports about match-fixing involving star players from South Asia led to a warning from the International Cricket Council (ICC).

But what about the 1980s, when many players accepted without demur huge sums of money to undertake tours to ostracised South Africa? This violated the Gleneagles Agreement that banned all sporting contacts with the white minority-run country. Many of the so-called rebel players were English. Not one was South Asian.

Then Australian Kerry Packer not only put big money into cricket but changed the complexion of the game by breaking with tradition.

Even when there was evidence that dubious dealings were creeping into cricket, the game's administrators adopted to ignore it. In the 1981 Test at Headingley, Australian speedster Dennis Lillee and his wicket keeper colleague Rodney Marsh laid 500-1 bets on England defeating their team. But cricket's mandarins took no action.

South African skipper Hansie Cronje and his team twice discussed throwing a match during the 1997-98 tour of India. Australians Shane Warne and Mark Waugh are alleged to have taken money from bookmakers to provide information about playing conditions and other matters.

Again, cricket administrators in Australia and the ICC failed to highlight the fines imposed on Warne and Waugh or take tougher action against them. Cronje now says, "In a moment of stupidity and weakness I allowed Satan and the world to dictate terms to me." (Gemini News) ♦

Tyson cargo

HEATHROW cargo terminal's control post 24 is normally reserved for piles of airline food, force-fed to a captive audience. On Sunday, as catering wagons trundled past, Mike Tyson was whisked unceremoniously out of this humble exit and into Britain for the second time.

Just under an hour earlier the boxer's Concorde jet from New York had dropped out of a clear blue sky into an airport in chaos, after an air traffic control computer glitch which had left many thousands of travellers stranded.

Tyson, 33, had been advised by police to avoid walking into Terminal 4 after being mobbed on his last visit.

Fan violence worries

Spa, Belgium - English football authorities were seeking urgent talks with the sport's European governing body UEFA Monday after a threat to expel England from the European Championships in the wake of hooligan violence in Belgium. The Football Association was also set to hold a meeting with British government representatives Monday morning to discuss the crisis.

FA executive director David Davies said Monday: "We expect to meet UEFA within 24 hours. We have been talking overnight with the government."

BOOKS

by ANTHONY BROWNE

Atlas of sex

In Britain, intercourse takes an average of 21 minutes compared to 14 minutes in Italy and the French and the Americans seem to have more sex than anyone. For more, read the The Penguin Atlas of Human Sexual Behaviour.

British men, often portrayed as cold fish who prefer hot water bottles and nightgowns to nights of passion, can hold their heads high. The first atlas of sexual behaviour has revealed them as the sexual tigers of Europe. They start young, have lots of sex and last a lot longer than anyone else.

Perhaps more shockingly, Italian men - dark, suave and sophisticated, and the supposed dream lover of every British woman - are revealed as the pandas of the Continent.

Their reputation as the world's hottest sex machines is shattered by a barrage of humbling statistics that reveal the naked truth: they start having sex late, they don't have it often, and when they do it's all over in the blink of an eye. In fact, Italians are the least sexually active people in Europe, and when they do have sex, it lasts the shortest time.

Every day 120 million acts of sexual intercourse take place around the world - resulting in 910,000 conceptions. On average, it lasts 21 minutes in the UK, compared with 17 in Germany, 14 in Italy and 10 in Thailand (where they do it quickest). The Brazilians, who average 30 minutes, are the world's sexual gold medallists (although 44 per cent of Brazilian women confess faking orgasms).

The Penguin Atlas of Human Sexual Behaviour - a serious academic study dressed up as soft porn - categorises each nation by its most intimate details, painting a fascinating but often bizarre insight into different cultures.


The revelations can be unflattering: 46 per cent of American women think a good night's sleep is better than sex. They can be disturbing: 23 per cent of Germans are sexually stimulated by underarm odour. And they can be upsetting: in Egypt, 80 per cent of women suffer female genital excision, although it is banned by law.

The author, Professor Judith Mackay, an adviser to the World Health Organisation and a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, also helps explain the behaviour of certain relatives: 'Some aged aunts, aphids, wasps, bees, naked mole rats and Caribbean snapping shrimps abandon procreation and invest their energies into helping relatives' genes survival,' she writes.

Other stereotypes are dramatically confirmed. Gallic pride is unchallenged, with the French having the most sex of anyone in Europe, doing it more than 130 times a year. Apart from the Irish, women from Finland, Denmark and Iceland are the most sexually advanced in Europe: on average, they lose their virginity at 16, and by the age of 18 around three-quarters of them are having sex.

In Europe, it's in the traditional Mediterranean countries that women develop latest. Only one in four women of 18 in Greece and Portugal is sexually active, and on average they wait till they are 19 to lose their virginity.

By almost all measures, Americans are more sexual than British people. Both men and women lose their virginity younger, and they have sex more times a year than their limey counterparts - and the sex lasts a lot longer (well, seven minutes). (Guardian News Service)



the explore nepal group

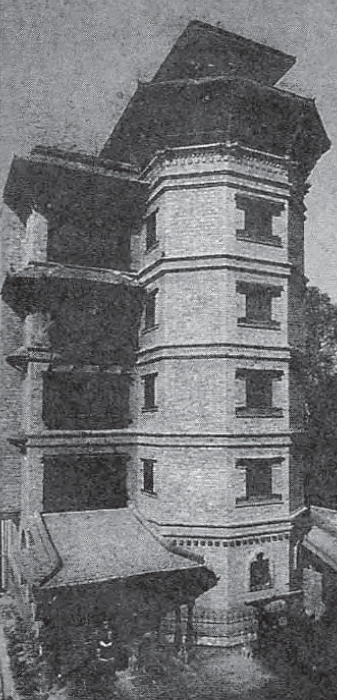
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SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

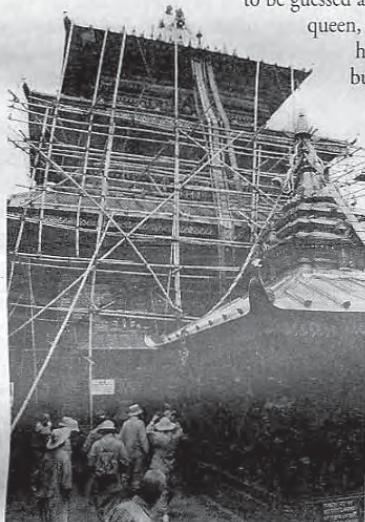
Patan's Grand Temple Golden

Nepali Times brings readers the vivid sketches and passionate writings of Desmond Doig, excerpted every week from his book, *In the Kingdom of the Gods* (HarperCollins India 1999).

I've been finking this sketch for ages, ever since I turned my attention to the lovely city of Patan. I've been visiting the Golden Temple once or twice a week. Searching for possible angles. Examining its myriad details. Shrinking from tides of tourists even as I summoned up enough courage to begin.

Making excuses of too little or too much light, freezing temperatures and sneaky breezes. There is a Nepalese saying, even more expressive than domane or manyana, which merely puts off for tomorrow what could be done today. Bholi parsi is tomorrow or the day after, and if tomorrow sometimes comes, parsi certainly doesn't. I've been bholi parsiyng like mad over the fabulous Golden Temple which is no single masterpiece, rather a collection of masterpieces, big and small, fused into a shrine of overwhelming grandeur.

There is the extravagance of gold that lands the first punch: gold from ground level to high finials. Golden roofs, golden images, golden friezes of intricate detail, golden birds perched on upturned, golden eaves. Golden serpents. Rearing golden griffins, and delicate golden parasols shading the highest finials. It takes time to get the whole extraordinary thing into focus, to grasp the magnificent concept, appreciate the proportions, the use of space, isolate detail. Above one's head, for instance, as one stands in amazement at the entrance, is a frieze of deities and mythical beasts. The

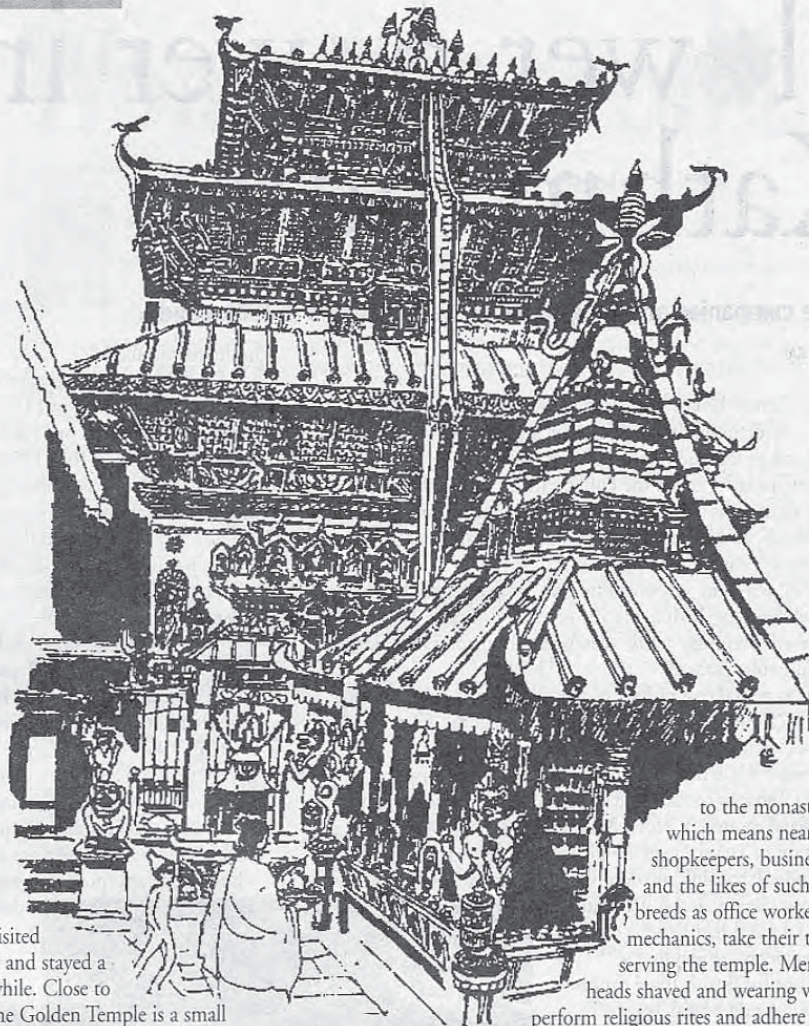


The Golden Temple is under scaffolding this month for repairs. There is a Rs 200 entry fee for foreigners entering Patan, and a Rs 25 fee to enter the temple.

artistry is stunning. Two divine beings, long deprived of the stringed instruments they played, have hands so exquisitely fashioned that they form sound the way mudras speak. Their hands are no bigger than a thumb nail. At the same spot, just before one, are twin tableaux of gilded princes riding gilded elephants, stood on gilded tortoises, as high as a tall man. The actual temple reaches across one side of a small courtyard. At the centre of the courtyard is a much smaller shrine, a chaitya, more golden than the temple itself. Under its eaves, and facing the main door of the temple, are series ranks of royal images; kings and queens in ancient stone and gilded metal who, in search of immortality, left their likenesses behind. Two of them, though only to be guessed at, are the legendary Marwari queen, Pingala, and her unknown husband, who are believed to have built the temple. By way of legends no one knows when, but temple records reach back to 1409 when the gilded kalash was installed on the finial.

So lavish a display of devotion must have had special reason, which has one wondering why this spot is so hallowed, why such largesse was poured upon it. The other great temples of Kathmandu valley commemorate miracles: the appearance of Shiva in an incinerating light; the settling of a divine lotus when the lake on which it floated was drained by a slash of a deity's sword; the coming of the royal goddess. Ancient Patan was largely a Buddhist city. It is believed that Gautam Buddha

visited it and stayed a while. Close to the Golden Temple is a small courtyard where the Buddha baptised a king and gave to a caste of metalworkers his own name. It could be possible that this glorious temple was built upon miraculous foundations, perhaps upon the very spot where the Buddha was supposed to have dwelt. But even legend has lost its memory. Were archaeologists to burrow into a mound nearby that locals point out as an ancient palace, they might find an answer. From the mound, upon which the inevitable peepal tree holds together a mute profusion of crumbling brick and stone, it is possible to guess at the old city. The Malla palace with its filigreed courtyards, temples, baths and statuary is a reach away. Passing below the mound is the highway from Kathmandu, the old trade route between India and Tibet. Set beside it is the glitter of the Golden Temple, the first great monument, other than an Ashoka stupa the traveller from the north would have happened upon. Before the city grew about the temple, it must have been surrounded by the houses of priests and devotees. Following ancient custom, the people attached



to the monastery, which means nearby shopkeepers, businessmen, and the likes of such new breeds as office workers and mechanics, take their turn at serving the temple. Men, their heads shaved and wearing white, perform religious rites and adhere to a strict convention of rules during the month they serve. So I have found the jolly young curio dealer with whom I have spent much time haggling over prices and who is something of a Honda-riding Romeo, suddenly shorn and barefooted, padding about the temple courtyard with all the dignity he can command.

Another, who has done his month of service, tells me why the exquisite silver doors of the temple are now guarded by unlovely wrought iron barricades and why the once mobile image of the Buddha has been riveted to its base: image lifters, who think nothing of scaling the surrounding buildings and coming over the roofs at night. Few thieves anywhere could find themselves in such tempting surroundings.

I have yet to visit the temple at three o'clock in the morning when the day's pups begin. My friends about the temple tell me it is an experience not to be missed, a time when magic is afoot, when the gods are very close and even temple thieves relent. ♦

CULTURE VULTURE

by Manjushree Thapa

Literature in a Hostile Terrain

With a literacy rate near 30 percent, Nepal seems unlikely grounds indeed for those who seek to create imaginary worlds in language. Yet there are hundreds of writers and poets all over the country—an alarming number of whom are concentrated in Kathmandu Valley—who persist in writing despite the fact that no one asks them to write, and no one thanks them for doing so.

Writers and poets mirror society and offer new visions that enrich the lives of their readers. In return for the efforts, though, Nepal's creative writers are rarely even paid royalties by publishers, and many must in fact subsidise their own publishing.

The established literary magazines of Nepal pay about Rs 500 per story, while most just offer the thrill of seeing one's work in print. To support themselves, writers and poets work as professors, lawyers, bankers, columnists — even Members of Parliament. Still, few of them can afford to buy foreign books, and must content themselves with borrowing dog-eared copies from friends and from poorly stocked libraries. Those who don't read English scour bookstalls for cheap Hindi translations of world literature, or read only Nepali writings.

Women writers, in particular, are so pressed with work and family commitments that they hardly have any free time to write. And for those who live by computers, it is humbling to realise that almost all novels, stories and poems written today are still painstakingly written and revised by hand on foolscap sheets. All this is done for a tiny and utterly indifferent readership: a print run of 1,100 books is the most that a writer can hope for in Nepal, and even then, the free copies are the only books in real demand.

Yet Nepal's writers and poets keep writing, thanks mainly, it seems, to an unshakable faith in the worth of their own words. Large egos can sometimes be a blessing.

Meeting in tea shops and seedy brew houses, at bookshops and in their offices, today's writers and poets exchange thoughts, opinions, criticism and gossip with great verve. Organisations like the Royal Nepal Academy, as well as other writers' associations and informal groups hold readings, gatherings and literary events all over the country. Many vociferous statements are made on the topic of literature. Small, divergent, sometimes cliquish schools of thought are led by eccentric and often impossibly egotistical personalities.

Manifestos are drafted regularly, while movements begin and end abruptly. A shocking number of awards—though most with modest purses—are distributed at many stiff, officious ceremonies. And the number of near-bankrupt literary magazines found in the market would astonish the more money-minded.

An impressive variety of voices emerges from all this hectic literary activity. The question "What is Nepal's contemporary literature like?" can be answered with one word: "Diverse." While some of today's writers still favor traditional Sanskrit-derived forms, others opt for either revolutionary or western romanticism, or social realism, or prose of Hemingway-like restraint. Others write predominantly psychological works heavily influenced by Freudian theory. Some poets pen fiery free verse for the masses while others are wildly experimental and abstract in their style. A growing number of writers and poets are writing in their mother tongues, and some regional writers mix languages, reflecting Nepal's

multilingual nature. As in much of the world, the writing of the left thrives here, but it cannot be said that there is any one dominant school of literature in today's Nepal. My own view, which I will refrain from tiresomely repeating in this column, is that the literary community of Nepal embodies the postmodern conditions described by current western literary theory. The ancient, the modern and the contemporary are simultaneously present here in ruptured, discontinuous and wholly unexpected ways.

There is, I believe, no authoritative place to begin introducing English lay readers to Nepali literature. I'll begin the first article of this column arbitrarily, then, with *The Naudanda Hills*, a short, compressed poem by Shailendra Sakar that grows evocatively in the reader's mind after the first simple reading. In particular, the old woman in the poem is intriguing: both wily and naive, she is at once a mother figure, huckster and world-weary commentator. She deftly translates the narrator into her son despite his resistance to it. This is one of a series of poems based on places in Sakar's versatile 1990 collection *Sarpaharu Geet Gaundainan*. It stands, here, as proof that hostile conditions can — remarkably — inspire and sustain the writing of some excellent literature.

THE NAUDANDA HILLS— Shailendra Sakar
 Along the trail of the Muktimath trek
 a simple ancient Nepali crone
 examines me for quite a while and tells me
 her son's gone to work in Brunei
 I can't be translated into her son
 Figuring I'm here to sell hashish the crone
 puts on airs and coyly asks for a joint
 Then she spends a long time lamenting:
 what else do we have to sell to tourists
 except for hashish and our bodies

Flower power in Kathmandu

Private companies are vying to adopt traffic islands in Kathmandu.

HEMLATA RAI

Kathmandu may be fast becoming renowned for its squalour, but the city's residents and visitors are now getting visual pick-me-ups in pocket gardens that are sprouting all over the city.

A new initiative called the Public-Private Partnership Programme - 4P for short - has marigolds and snap dragons jostling for space in traffic islands, and has even given King Tribhuvan's statue in Tripureswor a much needed face-lift.

The 4P is a joint 'city beautification' project of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and the private businesses. So far it has transformed seven ugly traffic islands in Kathmandu into small but colourful public gardens.

Built at a total cost of Rs 1,613,000, the seven traffic islands need Rs 722,000 to maintain every year. Under the 4P, private businesses shoulder the costs of garden development and maintenance while the KMC provides design, supervision and water.

Surya Tobacco has adopted King Tribhuvan's statue and the traffic island around it, Hotel Association of Nepal and Nepal Association of Travel Agent are maintaining the Maiti Ghar intersection, Chabahal Junction has been handed over to the Tourist Guide Association, and Aqua Water is doing Mahankalthan Road.

Agreements are pending with Nepal Tourism Board, Israel Embassy, Rotary Club and Mittal Tea.

"Our involvement in the beautification activities is a combination of attempts to contribute something good to society and boost the hotel industry in the long run," says Narendra Bajracharya of Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN), a pioneer

in the partnership.

The KMC expects to complete 13 such other projects in 11 Kathmandu localities by October at an estimated cost of Rs 3,175,000, and private parties have already agreed to be involved. However, the eye sore at Tin Kune on the airport road is not in the beautification list since the land has been under litigation for over 10 years.

"I took it as a personal challenge," says Rinchin Yonzon of the KMC, who designed the 4P project and is implementing it.

At first, the 4P was met with a pinch of scepticism. After all, Kathmandu has had a surfeit of ambitious urban development plans since the 1960s--most of these have ended up in the archives of government offices, where they have been gathering dust.

This is even as the government spends nearly 30 percent of its total development budget within the 600 sq km area of the Kathmandu Valley. There are also as many as 160 government bodies whose express purpose is to work on Kathmandu's urban development.

Yet in the past, the municipality's idea of making Kathmandu "clean and green" was usually to merely paint pedestrian fences green, or stack flowerpots on police traffic pedestals. Other similar projects also attracted big businesses eager for the publicity, but not for the long-term attention such initiatives needed.

KMC itself is still reeling from the controversy whipped up by its attempt



No room for flowers at Ratna Park at rush hour (above). Rinchin Yonzon of KMC makes her garden grow at Maiti Ghar intersection (below left).



beautify the Darahara and Sundhara area. The move drew flak after a private company was asked to manage the 25,000 sq ft area and operate a café.

The local Sudhara Rehabilitation Committee took the matter to the Supreme Court, arguing against the "commercialisation" of a historical area and alleging that Mayor Keshab Sthapit had personal interest in the arrangement. The Court has yet to decide on the case. Meanwhile, a part of the Dharhara garden that was designed and built before the stay order has gone to ruins.

The traffic island gardens are a modest step forward from previous efforts, but at least everyone agrees that they add colour and zest to an otherwise rapidly greying city. More importantly, private companies are vying to maintain them.

"Community support and strict supervision made the traffic island gardens possible," says Yonzon, who can be seen most days personally supervising the upkeep of the traffic island gardens. In Bhotahity, locals have even been inspired enough to construct and maintain their own traffic island garden without the involvement of the KMC.

Unfortunately, not all the 4P traffic island gardens are in bloom. The rock garden in Naya Baneswor has become rundown, the mayor blames lack of supervision by Ward 10 functionaries, and a fast food chain for breaking an agreement with the KMC. ♦

FILM REVIEW

by MANESH SHRESTHA

Silence of the Palace

If it wasn't a Tunisian film, *Silence of the Palace* (1994), winner of several international awards including a mention for the Camera d'Or, would have been a perfect Nepali production. The film was screened by Kathmandu's new Inter-Cultural Film Society on 17 June.

The movie is about Alia, a 25-year-old daughter of a concubine who becomes a nightclub singer. It could have easily been transposed into the story of a Nepali Rana darbar in the 1940s. While watching the film, you can't help wondering why Nepali film makers haven't used similar narratives to make cinematic masterpieces like *Silence of the Palace*.

Alia's life has been a "series of abortions". On the morning of yet another abortion she receives news of the death of Prince Sid' Ali, in whose palace her mother had been a concubine. She returns to the palace which she left 10 years earlier. The empty rooms and the corridors bring back memories of her lonely and complex life when she was approaching womanhood and trying to find her identity. Alia does not know who her

father is and no one tells her. In the palace the one rule everybody learns is silence. The pregnant silence and understatement are

the film's powerful elements.

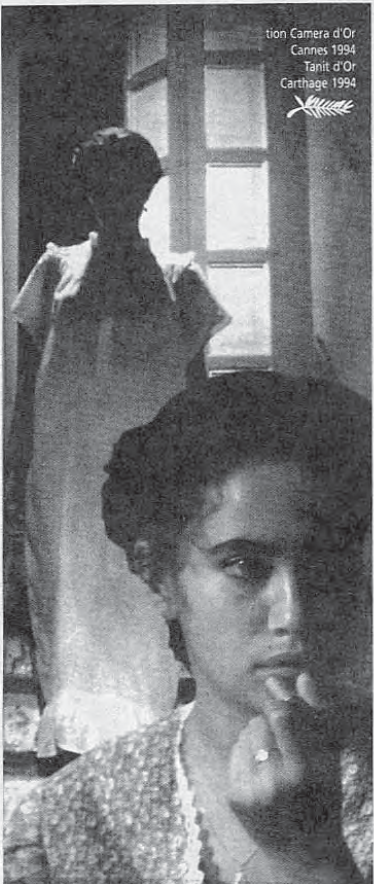
It was a tumultuous time for Tunisia which was trying to win its independence from France.


Tunisia's fight for independence is also Alia's own fight—she does not want to live the life of her mother. But she is as helpless as her mother was.

The Inter-Cultural Film Society aims to "bring feature films from different cultures around the globe ... for the promotion inter-cultural understanding" to Kathmandu.


"The response we have been getting so far for our efforts is very encouraging," says Susi Groel, a Swiss national, whose brainchild Inter-Cultural Film Society is. Since March it has screened films from India, Argentina and China. The next two films are from Vietnam and Switzerland. "I only wish more Nepalis came to see the films." ♦

(For information on screenings and membership contact Prem Basnet at: icf@wlink.com.np)





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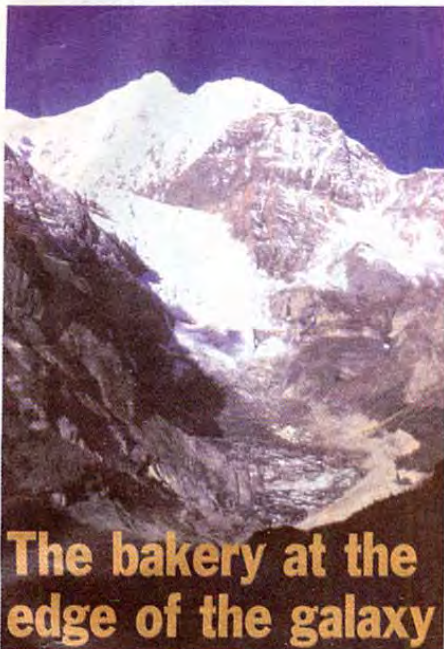
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OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by Salil Subedi



The bakery at the edge of the galaxy

Great bread awaits you in Manang

even hot pizzas. You steer with your nose and let the smell guide you into the village and along narrow, inclined cobblestone streets.

Sure enough, the olfactory signals take you to Bharka Bakery. Inside, the smell of hot bread mixed with brewed coffee is cosy, dry and warm. This place would be unique even in Thamel, but here at the edge of the galaxy, it is out of this world.

Tensing Gurung owns

Bharka Bakery. He is used to the surprised smiles of tired trekkers who stumble in. "I don't have to drag my customers in, the smell does that, and once inside, they are glued to the cakes and bakes," he says.

In the past few years, bakeries have been sprouting like muffins across the Manang Valley. But the record-holder and pioneer must be Mesong Gurung, who 10 years ago set up a bakery right on top of Thorung La at 4,500 m.

In the laconic ways of the Manang people, Mesong understates his contribution: "There was no doubt that a bakery would do well in this

remote valley. The only problem is the transport of flour." All of it comes from Pokhara and is transported from from Besisahar by mules.

The online guide, yetizone.com, also has some nice things to say about the bakeries in Manang: "The cakes in here are absolutely world class. The coffee is heavenly.

Moving up from Bharka to Braga, you are greeted by more bakeries. Since the monsoon has already arrived, the trekking traffic has thinned, but this is possibly the best time to be in Manang since the rains don't really reach up here and there are fewer crowds.

The bakery's only problem is the seasonality of the trekking traffic. "We need to have other businesses running side by side, we can't depend just on the bakery," says Karma Gurung of the Tilicho Hotel.

About 10,000 trekkers on the Annapurna circuit visit Manang every year during the two seasons: March-May and September-November. ♦



PHOTOGRAPHS: SALIL SUBEDI

Woman to woman

JASMINE RAJBHANDARY



People still tend to assume women to be more trustworthy, loyal and morally upright than men, but human beings it seems will be human beings, regardless of sex. Which is to say, a woman can no more expect to be safer in the hands of another female stranger than if she were with a man.

I have come to this conclusion after several distressing incidents involving Didis in Blue at the Tribhuvan International Airport. In the first episode last year, I had cleared immigration and collected my bag after getting it x-rayed when the only policewoman on duty asked me to step for ekai-chhin. She then drew a curtain around us at the side of the hand luggage check and began the usual body search. When she came across my wallet, she started fumbling through it and asking me where I was going.

My flight was already boarding by then, but she persisted with her inquisition until she finally came to her point: "You are going to visit family for Dashain, what about giving me some chiya paisa for my Dashain?" I was furious, and pushed my way out of the curtains. (hassled I hope I don't bump into her at the airport again, or I will surely be.)

After another similar incident, I was at TIA again recently. Given my past experiences I was vigilant and kept my handbag (with money in it) outside the curtained female body search area, placing it atop a nearby windowsill. I thought I'd finally had the situation licked, but the policewoman spotted my bag after doing the body pat-down. She took the purse from the windowsill and soon began the now familiar

Women are almost always victimised by men, right? Wrong.

litany of questions while her hands were on my wallet. It was only after I mentioned that my Dai was with me, and she double checked that he was right outside, when she let me go. I'm not sure if this incident would have led to more chiya paisa or not, but it sure felt like it could have.

I would dare to say that almost every female in Nepal at some time or another has felt unsafe, insecure or uncomfortable in her surroundings and those in it. But lately it is not only the men who are provoking these feelings. These days, it is other women, too. Of course we've heard of the horror stories of the abusive mothers- and sisters-in-law. But with more women becoming figures of authority, the cases of women exploiting women are bound to rise.

At the TIA, for instance, policy makers - presumably men - determined that women need their privacy while they are being "body-checked" in the intensified security following the December hijacking. Hence the need for curtains. Men, in comparison, get checked right in the open. But this attempt at giving women privacy may have just made them more vulnerable to extortion. The official thinking may be that a police woman would do no wrong because



she is a woman. If you were to ask me if would I prefer an "in-depth" body check in an open public space instead of behind curtains, I would still hesitate to say yes. But after being victimised by fellow-women, I am not so sure anymore. ♦

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And we're not just talking about it !

NECON AIR

NEPALI WEATHER



After a false start, the monsoon is making healthy progress through the subcontinent. The main pulse reached Kathmandu on June 15, even though pre-monsoon rains had arrived earlier. Western Nepal, which saw above-average pre-monsoon downpours is now getting the first showers of the real monsoon. The week June 23-30 will see a further consolidation of the monsoon rains, with snow at altitudes higher than 5,500 metres. The trans-Himalayan belt in Mugu, Mustang, Dolpo and Manang will be drier, with occasional afternoon showers. Kathmandu temperatures will be 28-30 C maximum and 19-21 C minimum.

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Funny Side Up

by Kunda Dixit

There are people right here in Kathmandu who are miffed that Indian intelligence left out their names from the list of Pakistani agents in Nepal. They are hurt, their credibility has been shattered. Not being on this list means the Indians don't take you seriously. And if the Indians don't take you seriously in this country, you ain't nobody.

People take extreme care of their reputations around here. And there is nothing that bolsters a person's standing more than having it whispered in the Kathmandu cocktail circuit that you are a spook.

Welcome to the Kingdom of the Paranoid, where the national game is I Spy. We still have a clipping of a headline in an imaginative Kathmandu tabloid that once alleged that the then Indian Ambassador was a Pakistani double agent.

I really can't understand why, when ambassadors have diplomatic impunity and spies work so well together at the people-to-people level, their governments are at each other's throats. Extremists on both sides read the same text books: how to cause mayhem in trains, how to demolish places of worship, they even exchange notes on surgical methods of extracting truths. But for some reason our officialdoms just don't see eyeball to eyeball.

All this cloak-and-dagger-in-the-back is nothing new to Nepali politics either, as poor Bhimsen Thapa found out to his grief. The extreme intrigue of the Nepal durbar in the 19th Century is probably what kept the East India Company away, and spared us from being turned into a hill-station connected to the plains by a toy train.

The Company took one look at the conspiracy theorists in Kathmandu, and said lets get the hell out of here, these guys are pros. Same with the Tibetan Army: they rode in as close as Nuwakot and then suddenly turned right around and galloped back to their high plateau. No point, they must have reasoned, trying to conquer a country that is so spooky.

But Calcutta did win the right to place a reagent in Kathmandu, the express purpose of which was to meddle, interfere, divide and rule.

I, Yes, I



The present occupants of a partitioned Lazimpat carry on this grand tradition. And that was fine with everybody until the Other Guys wanted a piece of the action as well. Nepalis sort of got caught in the middle.

Be that as it may, and notwithstanding how we ourselves thrive on intrigue, it is a great honour to play host to such skullduggery. What deserving recognition of our ancestral conspirators that Nepal today can proudly call itself a hotbed for every intelligence agency worth its salt.

But I must say this. I have serious doubts about the IQ of foreign spooks who are reading these words over my shoulder even as we speak. (They also can't hold their drinks, and have bad breath.)

If the intelligence agents of one particular friendly country of one billion people located south of the border whose capital city is made up of two words beginning with the initials M and D were not oxymorons, they would have realised by now that their so-called secret report has actually united Nepalis like nothing else.

Not since ZeeNews revealed to the world that Mr Tamrakar was a hijacker have Nepalis bonded so well. Where are you, Binny? Haven't seen you around lately.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Model pilot

Niru Shrestha is used to sashaying down the ramp, but these days, she is more often found on an airport runway.

Most passengers flying Buddha Air's Raytheon-Beech 1900D aircraft are surprised to see a woman at the controls, but they would be even more surprised if they knew their pilot was a former Miss Nepal.

Shrestha won the title in 1998, while she was still in flying school. She is now probably the only ex-beauty queen in the world who is also a commercial airline pilot. The 21-year-old has just clocked 800 commercial flying hours at the controls, and will be captain once she reaches 3,000.

Shrestha used to model as well. But she has not had much time for that lately. Almost every day, she is on the right seat in a Buddha Air cockpit. One of her favourite trips is the early morning sightseeing flight from Kathmandu to Mount Everest.

Says Niru: "Passengers come up to me often, both Nepalis and foreigners, and say they feel proud to see a woman flying them. I also like what I am doing."

But despite a job that takes her up to the skies, Shrestha keeps her feet on the ground. One of her many interests is in social service and she has been actively helping the home for the elderly in Pashupati.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepalis on top

The Prime Minister's daughter Sujata Koirala and her organization, Sushma Koirala Memorial Trust had backed the all-woman expedition. The "first daughter" posed for a picture (center) with all the successful Nepali climbers at a khada

ceremony. Lakhpa Sherpa of the All-Woman Nepali Expedition to Everest reached the summit on 22 May, and a few hours later Pemba Dolma got to the top from the Tibetan Chomolungma side of the mountain. Also this season, Babu Chhiri Sherpa



MIN BAJRACHARYA

practically ran all the way to the top, doing the entire climb in a record 16 hr 56 min. Appa Sherpa set another record by getting to the top of the world for the 11th time.

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