

EXCLUSIVE

Dead Line

It is turning out as everyone feared: with three days to go for another hotel strike deadline there is no compromise in sight. It's not just a dispute about the 10 percent service charge anymore, it is now a question of the survival of the tourism industry and the nation's economy itself. Arrivals are down by 11 percent, hotels are empty and the economy is already feeling the pinch. Everyone with a stake in this dispute: hoteliers, hotel employees, the government and the mediators in the National Planning Commission (NPC) share the blame for playing politics with the issue and for foot-dragging. Despite their posturing, hotel owners and workers both say they want to resolve the issue. But the NPC-led committee report, which could have worked as the basis for a solution, was delayed because vice-chairman Prithvi Raj Ligal was on an extended junket abroad. He's now back. But for a delicate industry that plans a year in advance, it is already too late to do anything to salvage tourism.

Nepal-India

Officials from Nepal and India are meeting next week to iron out problems in bilateral trade. They will discuss the "surge" in certain Nepali exports and under-invoicing that India believes is taking place. The "problem" exports from Nepal: *vanaspati ghiu* (Nepal's largest



export to India), acrylic yarns, copper wires, zinc oxide, metal pipes, etc. Delhi also says some goods are being dumped, and semi-finished raw materials are being re-exported from Nepal. Kathmandu says it is open to finding solutions to real problems but can't help it if inefficient and protected Indian industries are hurt. Indian officials will query Nepal's ban on Indian vehicle imports on environmental grounds. They'll say if the Japanese and Koreans can self-certify, why not Indians?

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

BINOD BHATTARAI

The country has now been held hostage to the ruling party infighting for nearly a year. There was hope that the ministerial reshuffle this week would finally close that chapter, but we underestimated the intensity of the competition among politicians for the juicy ministerial posts.

That was the reason for the original infighting in October, and that is why Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's efforts to soften dissidents by offering them cabinet carrots failed on Wednesday. In the end it all boiled down to who got what, and the protégés of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai in the dissident camp didn't get what they wanted, which included the party secretary-generalship and slots in the parliamentary board that is responsible for handing out party tickets.

Koirala tried to make sure he had covered all the bases. He made sure his grouchy colleague Bhattarai would be happy with the choice of Khum Bahadur Khadka and Omkar Shrestha, he picked nephew Prakash Koirala as a senior minister to rein in rebellious relatives. He even nearly roped in some of Sher Bahadur Deuba's key supporters like Chiranjivi Wagle and Bhakta Bahadur Balayar. But, in the end, it all came to nought. Now, Koirala has to be satisfied with a council of ministers largely made up of his own loyalists. And the bottom line is that Congress infighting will continue

and long-suffering Nepalis will have to keep on paying the price for selfish politicians who can't get along.

Koirala's house of cards began crumbling hours after the new appointments were announced on Wednesday morning. By mid-day Khum Bahadur Khadka, awarded the plum Melanchi ministry (Physical Planning and Works), and Palten Gurung, given his pick, the labour and transport management portfolio, had come out with a statement that they would not join the cabinet. Insiders close to Koirala say that the actual reason was their dissatisfaction over their cronies not being appointed to other posts, although they claimed Koirala had named his ministers unilaterally, and also wanted the Lauda Air scam resolved before they joined in. (Adding a further twist to the drama, Gurung arrived at the ministerial line-up at the Royal Palace swearing-in at the last moment on Wednesday evening.)

So, one year later, we are back to where it all started. True to a fragmented party's nature, its members have become reckless. "That's when you stop believing that delivery of goods gives you the legitimacy with which you win votes and rule," said a Congress analyst. "They don't seem to care at all."

Otherwise, Koirala had been fairly open in the selection of the new team. 'Neutral' Ram

Has the ruling party become ungovernable, and unable to govern?

Sharan Mahat (who couldn't attend Wednesday's swearing-in due to health reasons) replaced Koirala's blue-eyed boy Mahesh Acharya at the treasury while the lucrative tourism portfolio was given to Omkar Shrestha, a Bhattarai faithful.

Koirala tried, but has failed to keep his party together, and this means a bumpy ride ahead for him within his party and in parliament until the elections for local bodies due next year.

This shameless exposition of greed, power and disunity was music to the ears of the main opposition Unified Marxist-Leninists which is gearing up to oust Koirala in the winter session

of parliament that started Thursday. But the Congress still has a majority in parliament, and the arithmetic does not favour the UML.

But the UML is mounting this challenge more with the 2002 elections in mind. For the moment, Koirala will continue to stay in charge but will come under increasing pressure from within his party and without. And his failure to rally his party will leave the Congress in tatters and the country's urgent problems unresolved. ♦

Editorial p2
Red Alert

"Perhaps the armed police can bring the Maoists to the table."

US Ambassador Ralph Frank speaks to Nepali Times on the Maoist insurgency. The rest of the interview is continued on page three.

The government has launched what it calls a "hearts and minds" programme in the Maoist-affected areas with a development package. Is there a feeling that the United States should help with some of these programmes?

We and many other donors stand ready to provide assistance in the Maoist-affected areas if and when the issue is solved constitutionally and peacefully. Most donors I've talked to are prepared to move into those areas.

...Only after it is solved? But the government says it needs the aid to solve the issue...

My government is particularly unable to because of security problems. We cannot put our people at risk. The Maoists basically pre-empted us from doing that.

Do you see a way out of this crisis?

Negotiations are the only path. I have taken it up at every level with everyone. If you look at our national seal: here is the eagle and on one talon it has an olive branch, and on the other it has arrows. Right now the Maoists have no opposition, so why should they negotiate?

But what if both sides want to negotiate from a point of strength and arm themselves with more sophisticated weapons?

I think they already are. Certainly the Maoists have, and they are doing quite well. But then the choice is: are they going to continue the armed struggle ad infinitum or do they want real peace, do they want solutions? I think there has to be a reason for the Maoists to come to the table, and it perhaps could be the armed police that brings them there. We strongly feel that all parties have to come to the table, and whatever it takes to get them to come to the table we have to do. Both sides have to negotiate to solve the problem. You don't have a choice.

What is your take on the negotiations that have taken place so far? My impression is that half of the story is not out there. I only know what I read, but I presume there is a lot more going on.

Is there a role for an international mediator?

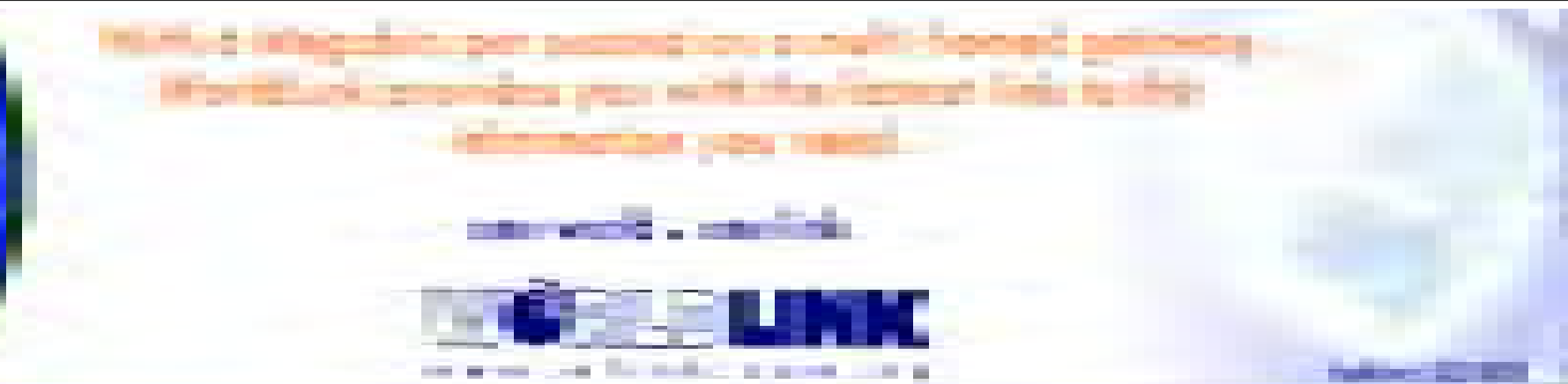
Could be. It would have to be someone trusted by both sides. Sometime long ago someone asked if we would be interested? I said the Maoists clearly would not trust us, we certainly would be interested but we certainly would not be a credible player. Negotiations have to take place. That's what I've been telling all major government officials.

What is their response?

The same sorts of answers they give you.



MIN BAIRACHARYA



'I'm using the C-word this time'

—Ralph Frank, US Ambassador to Nepal

Nepali Times: It's been a sort of a tradition for your predecessors to come out strong with everything they wanted to say during their tenures here before they leave Nepal. Was your speech last week a part of this tradition?

Ralph Frank: I'm saving that for later, I'm not ready to leave quite yet.

But were you surprised by the fallout of that speech?

Quite so, we had not planned to have such a big splash. It was really meant to be a wish for the future of Nepal. It was not directed at the government, it was not directed at the palace. In fact when the speech was written we did not know if either of those institutions would be represented. We did not plan on it, we did not expect it.

So when are you actually leaving?

It is completely a function of the new administration. I suspect it will be mid-to-late-summer. But it is not imminent.

In the speech you were very passionate about the whole process of development, and the obstacles created by bad governance. Is your government rethinking aid?

I would say that's absolutely not a case in terms of rethinking aid, or anything of that sort. Over the years the focus has been between infrastructure vs people-to-people programmes. We tend to adjust our programmes as our confidence in a particular ministry or particular government changes. We also adjust our programmes, to be honest to you, depending on what our values are in our own government. Since the time of President Carter, there has been a lot more emphasis on human rights, individual rights.

Are we going to see some change with the new administration in Washington?

Not going to be noticed here. I think there is going to be the same strong emphasis on South Asia as a whole. That happened in the previous administration and will continue, we've certainly got strong indications of that. Our primary goal in Nepal has been supporting democracy through institutions such as the Election Commission, pushing for the Human Rights Commission and the CIAA (Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority).

Is there a sense of cynicism or even negativity about Nepal in the donor community, or within your own policy-making circles?

Rather than cynicism, I'd say there is frustration with unrealised possibilities. I'm working on my sixth year here and the potential is still fantastic, but it is still unrealised.

Who do you blame for that?

Actually I was thinking about this question earlier. It's the government, it's the parties, it's none of those, it's all of those. Almost every party has ruled in the last 10 years. When I came here the RPP had all the powerful positions, the UML's had their shot, Nepali Congress has had plenty of opportunity. Part of it is the growing process, people have to demand the fruits of democracy, they have to go crazy when they see corruption. I think corruption—I'm using the C-word this time—is more rampant now than anytime I've been here. I don't think you can get a driver's licence without paying a bribe, you can't get things across the border without a bribe, it's everywhere. It affects businesses, it affects attitude towards Nepal. The negativism (comes from) the frustration that it could be better.

Do you see the Maoist problem as a sort of a backlash to this?

I've never addressed the Maoist situation directly. (But) the conditions that have bred the Maoist movement are very serious, and most of them should be addressed. I would tell you quite frankly that if you look at the (Maoists') 40 points, I think most sane people would agree with a large percentage of it. You can quote me if you want, but I do look at them regularly: should there be property rights, should discriminatory treaties be abandoned? But there's also a lot of it that is pretty awful, and pretty undemocratic. You probably saw in the press in the last couple of weeks that the Maoists in certain areas have prohibited

the right of assembly. Unfortunately what they're actually coming up with is probably worse, the medicine is worse than the illness.

They've also come out very strongly against economic globalisation, the activities of multinationals, the expansionist tendencies of foreign countries...

I think they are incredibly naive about what most of that means. For example, identifying the US with imperialist desires on Nepal. I cannot imagine what they are referring to. With the globalisation issue it's really a choice of whether Nepal wants to be a part of the world economy, or wants to put up barriers and continue protecting inefficient industries.

Have you had any direct communications that Americans are threatened by the Maoists?

Yes.

Is that why you have circulated advisories advising Americans to exercise caution...

Since we put out that advisory there has been the assassination attempt on the chief justice and there have been to the best of my knowledge, eight simultaneous attacks on US-identified facilities. I think the basis for our caution was absolutely on target. The suggestion that you made (editorial in Nepali Times #28, "Be Warned") to put the notice on the wall of the Embassy, that is exactly what we're not allowed to do. If you remember in the Lockerbie bombing incident, there was a warning similar to that which was not given broad distribution, but just put on the wall of the embassy. As a result of that a law was passed that whenever we receive information that Americans are at risk we are required to get that information to the public. I appreciate your concerns, but I would suggest that the problems with the tourism industry in Nepal have a whole lot more to do with the government than with the US Embassy.

But you would admit that this would have a negative impact...

I would admit that the hotel strike, transportation strike, the problem with airlines flying or not flying last year, the Maoist problem all have a whole lot more to do with what's happened to the tourism industry than our travel advisories.

But no Americans have actually been harmed so far...

We have had Americans present when Maoists have attacked, called on tourist facilities. The Maoists have attacked tourists, and we've had Americans as part of the groups.

But they were not targeted because they were Americans...

Not until now, but now we have a situation where American-identified facilities have been attacked.

When were the American facilities attacked?

They'll probably become pretty evident in the next few days. I hear about it all over town. It's not for me to say who they are.



MIN BAIRACHARYA

All this is having a very negative impact on foreign direct investment as well.

I think the Maoist problem is only a part of the investment climate problem. There have been many other circumstances which also do not encourage investors. We've had numerous American companies that have wanted to come in and invest. Some have decided not to because the rule of law is not clear. It is not carried out because of bribery. Nepali institutions that manage those segments made up regulations, requiring large deposits which have no basis in law. In a couple of cases the



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companies agreed under certain conditions, but they are still unable to do business here. Maoists are a factor, but nowhere near the only factor.

What were the sectors those Americans were considering?

I think you're well aware of those: hydropower, financial services, you probably know the story of Kodak.

Speaking of which, Kodak has taken the matter to the Supreme Court. We've heard that the US had made attempts to talk to India.

Yes, when the president went to India our secretary of commerce raised the issue. And at the time there was a commitment to assist, which has never come to fruition. Yes, we have raised it at the highest level we could.

Is Kodak going to have a fallout on other potential US investors?

It's clear that word gets around very quickly. I think they have around a six-million-dollar investment, which they are going to close and lock the door and move out.

For ten years things were deadlocked on the problem of Bhutanese refugees, and suddenly doors started opening. Was it US initiative that set it off?

A lot of that is wrapped in some sort of diplomatic arm-twisting. We'll best leave it at that.

But the letters...

There have been a number of letters to the Bhutanese, the Nepalis. There was a proposal on the part of Assistant Secretary (Julia) Taft, there were visits by Ms Ogata (of UNHCR) and letters by Ms Ogata. A lot of it was very, as they say in diplomatic terminology, frank and open discussions. It was pretty blunt talk all the way round—not only to the Bhutanese, it was with our colleagues here as well.

How about India?

I believe that was raised with India, and the response was the same as that of Nepal.

Have you analysed why there is a problem raising money needed for investing in hydropower?

Like every Nepali I share the hope that Nepal will develop its hydropower potential, and as frustrated as they are that we're still talking about potential. I salute those few folks that are on line now, Khimti, Bhote Kosi and some of the others that are moving along. Over time, the political governments (in Nepal) have changed how they look at this issue. When I got here there was the perception that the developing company should go and negotiate Nepal's hydropower costs and benefits. I found that quite outrageous because it was a national issue, and should not be re-negotiated every time there was a new company. Nepal should be negotiating with India and those views changed with changes in government. We've had everybody from Pashupati Rana to Shailaja Acharya to Govinda Raj Joshi and they all had different views. ♦

Excerpts from interview by Kunda Dixit and Binod Bhattarai on 5 February, 2001.

LETTERS

his active role in promoting the industry.

Rajib Subba
Secretary General
Computer Association of Nepal

DHARAN

We read "Dharan at 100" (#25). In the context of the reference to the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, we wish to mention that it was established under an agreement signed between the Government of India and His Majesty's Government of Nepal in 1994. The infrastructure cost Rs 2,600 million and was completed on schedule, contributing to socio-economic regeneration of not only Dharan but also to its environs. It has been agreed that Indian

support for the Institute will continue till 2009. The project is one of the outstanding examples of a partnership between two countries anywhere in the region, and it has become a leading teaching hospital not only in Nepal but also South Asia.

PK Kapur
Minister, Embassy of India
Kathmandu

CAPITAL R

Your article titled "Rana renaissance" (#28) was a very good read. Whatever said and done the "Ranas" are an indelible part of Nepali history. Rana-bashing is a popular recourse undertaken by all to cover up individual and organisational shortcomings. The

credentials of Ranas as staunch nationalists, verified by unbiased historians and intellectuals, cannot be written off.

Regarding the conclusion drawn in the article pertaining to commercialism could it not be that Baber Mahal Revisted is more about history, cultural heritage, national pride and aesthetic revivalism than merely a commercial attraction? And, more pointedly, shouldn't the article be 'Rana Renaissance' in capitals instead of an unusual and incorrect small 'r' for "Renaissance"?

Gaurav Shumsher
Kathmandu

NO JINGOISM

Your paper comes as a breath of fresh air in Nepali journalism, it is professional and not jingoistic. But "Rationalism and nationalism"

(#25) by the Indian journalist P Sainath judges news about Nepal in the Indian press very harshly and in a narrow-minded perspective. And why don't you address the narrow-minded India-bashing in the media which misleads the Nepali public into thinking that India is the enemy?

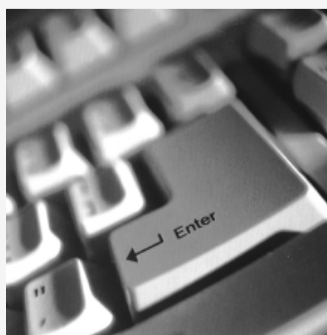
"An Intolerant Indian"
Kathmandu

HATS OFF

Just a short note to let you know how much my husband and I enjoy your paper. When he is out of the country, I have to send him Under My Hat. I am impressed that Daniel Lak is also reporting for you on the earthquake in India. Keep up the excellent work.

Barbara Collum
Kopundol

IT'S WONDERFUL
Thanks for the Information Technology Special (#27) and Mark Turin's "The Internet on the roof of the world". However, the article gives an impression that the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report is the sole important assessment and that there has been no further development



since then. Actually, IT in Nepal has taken a big leap since January 2000 and the report does not reflect these developments in the past year:

- This fiscal year budget is the most IT-friendly since it has removed the service tax on ISPs
- The government has resolved the frequency dispute positively
- The Ministry of Science and Technology released its landmark IT Policy 2000
- The Policy and Strategy work by the National Planning Commission on six different aspects of IT is comprehensive.

The infotech community in Nepal has also given Surendra Prasad Chaudhary, Minister of Science and Technology, the title of "IT friendly Minister" for

"I still believe talks are possible"

Ever since the fiasco over the release of Dinesh Sharma (on 4 November, when the CPN-Maoist central committee member was let go after he denounced his party and ideology at a press conference), the government has done nothing to hold talks with the Maoists. Instead, it has now established an armed police force. Many people are concerned that once the armed police begin to engage the Maoists, it will herald a phase of civil war in our country. All this is happening at a time when the possibility of talks still remains open.

The prospect of dialogue between the two sides is not new. As soon as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) announced the "People's War" five years ago, the then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had proposed that a way out be sought through talks. At his request, Rishikesh Shah, Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta, then chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Human Rights Committee of the House of Representatives and the present communication minister, and myself immediately formed an informal group, and I was given the responsibility of contacting the Maoists. In a similar way, the Maoist leadership too has always been positive about talks. From the very beginning, they have maintained that they are not against talks in principle and that a dialogue is possible. Since both sides were agreeable to sorting out the matter through discussions, we were very optimistic.

Later, when a committee was formed in late-1999 under Sher Bahadur Deuba to make recommendations to the government on how to handle the Maoist situation, Deuba personally approached me to act as a go-between. Until then, the Maoists had been announcing their willingness for talks, should some "minimum conditions" be fulfilled.

When I approached the Maoists, they reiterated their demands of "minimum conditions". Deuba asked me to find out what specifically those conditions were. At that point I contacted Prachanda himself and asked if they could be more forthcoming. Within a few days Prachanda announced their four-point charter of demands:

- The government should make public the whereabouts of all people arrested in connection with Maoist activists, including Dinesh Sharma and other CPN (Maoist) central committee members and initiate a process to release them;
- The thousands of people arrested on trumped-up charges should be released;
- An independent commission should be set up to investigate cases like the Khara incident (where the houses of innocent people were burnt down by the police), and that the culprits responsible should be punished; and
- There should be an immediate end to state terrorism.

We have come to know through other sources that even if only the first of their four demands had been fulfilled, the Maoists would be willing to sit down for talks. If only the Dinesh Sharma episode had been handled properly, or if the proper procedure had been followed during his release (like handing him over to a human rights group), it was more or less certain that the talks would have materialised. But there is still hope. In a letter signed by Comrade Prachanda to Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Maoists gave the assurance that they would end the violence as soon as they reached the negotiating table. Deuba must have told the prime minister about this since he has said this publicly on many occasions.

It has been debated in various fora whether either side is really serious about dialogue. The government has never said it is against talks, but has not taken any steps towards it. On the other hand, there is no let-up in Maoist violence even as they claim to be positive about negotiations. So a

fair degree of scepticism about the whole process is only to be expected. The main stumbling block right now is the Maoist demand that the whereabouts of their arrested colleagues be made public. The government should have no problem with that, since our Constitution and our laws, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international covenants related to humanity, enjoin the government to do exactly that. In this context, it is natural to doubt if the government is serious about talking with the Maoists.

Past records show that nothing has happened so far mainly because of the reluctance of whichever government is in power to a serious commitment to actually sitting down at a table. For example, the Deuba government failed to meet the simple demand of issuing a public notice that there would be talks and sending a formal letter stating the same to the CPN (Maoist). The Chand-UML government tried to push through the anti-terrorist bill, as did others later on. In the same way, even as moves to begin talks were going on, the Thapa-Nepali Congress

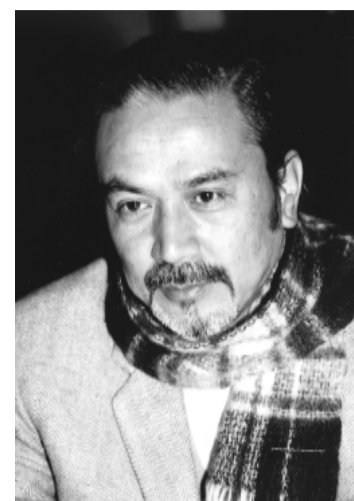
power 10 months ago, Prime Minister Koirala invited me and spoke about holding talks with the Maoists. He talked about national unity, and even raised issues of nationalism and the sensitive nature of the Nepal-India relationship, and said there must be talks with the Maoists. He even said that if the talks are successful there are possibilities of general amnesty, and they could even discuss compensation for the victims of violence on both sides. I was greatly impressed. Talk to Sher Bahadur Deuba, and he too will come across as someone serious about talks. Just before the Dinesh Sharma case, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Ram Chandra Poudel had even held an informal meeting with a member of the Maoist central committee. Unfortunately, due to the bungling over Dinesh Sharma's release, nothing came of it.

There is also scepticism whether the Maoist issue can really be solved through negotiations. The Maoists are demanding the establishment of a republican state. Is there a precedent

Bahadur Deuba, told us many times over that apart from these two demands (among the 40 the Maoists have presented), everything else is up for discussion.

Yet I have hopes and I have my reasons. I was present when Poudel met Rabinendra Shrestha of the CPN (Maoist). At the very outset of their meeting, Shrestha had proposed that a joint declaration signed by [CPN-Maoist General Secretary] Prachanda and the prime minister should announce a ceasefire. He said that his party is aware that all their demands may not be met, but that as communists, it was natural that they advocate a republican Nepal. He also recognised that negotiations involve both giving and taking, and that the art of negotiation is to obtain something by convincing the other party.

As an independent observer, I can say there is no obstacle to begin substantive negotiations, and the government should recognise its potential to bring peace to our country. Similarly, of their 40 demands, if only 50 percent can be



MIN BAHADUR DEUBA

an immediate end to the violence. Concerns have been raised that as there is no ready mechanism to bring the two sides together there may be foreign interference. Many of us are opposed to any such possibility, but if we cannot take care of our problems, it will provide an excuse for foreigners to meddle in our affairs. Voices have been raised that perhaps foreign actors have to come into the picture to mediate between the two sides. Already conflict resolution and conflict prevention experts have started landing in Kathmandu. They will surely enter the scene as mediators if the government and civil society do not take the initiative to start talks. Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda once told me that they are willing to hold talks even without mediation. But their only concern was how trustworthy the government is. In such a situation of a crisis of confidence, the only way out, in the Maoists' view, is for a group of human rights activists, trusted by the government as well as themselves, to be present when they meet, but only as witnesses not mediators. ♦

(Human rights activist Padma Ratna Tuladhar was a minister in the 1994-95 UML government. This article is adapted from a talk given at "Peace and Good Governance", a conference organised by SAP-Nepal, 31 January.)

Prachanda wrote to Sher Bahadur Deuba assuring an end to the violence as soon as they reached the negotiating table.

government took particularly and (at that time) unusually repressive measures against a bandh called by the Maoists. As for the present government, it refuses to even meet the minimal conditions set by the CPN (Maoist) that require basically that the government abide by its own laws and international agreements. Here it must be remembered that although Dinesh Sharma's name gained prominence in the newspapers, the CPN (Maoist) had requested information on and commencement of the release of 74 missing persons.

But I still believe that talks are possible. Not long after he re-assumed

anywhere in the world where a monarchy has been replaced by a republic or a multi-party system by a single-party one without bloodshed? Because of this, people like us who stress that talks are the only way out have also been accused of misleading the public and there are people who try to discourage us. The Constitution is clear that the fact of the multi-party system and parliamentary rule in Nepal cannot be altered, and neither can the position of the monarchy. Recognising this, both as prime minister and coordinator of the government committee, Sher

achieved, for the sake of people, the Maoists should consider such a proposition seriously. Baburam Bhattarai has written time and again in his newspaper articles that there is a possibility for a ceasefire if not an end to the insurgency itself. That is why I say we must have a dialogue, and that only through dialogue can we achieve anything. If talks begin, an understanding to end the violence can be reached. The main concern of Nepalis is to see an end to the violence and killings. Nobody has ever opposed anyone for believing in anything, whether it is Maoism or Gandhianism. The public's concern is

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



A culture in ruins

Many have been left alive—bereaved, bereft of a past, traumatised forever by catastrophe, but alive. I search their eyes for that spark that says they'll carry on, somehow.



The 600-year old 'shaking minarets' of Ahmedabad after the quake.

there now, three of them, the only night-time inhabitants of old Bhuj. They sleep under trees in a huge courtyard, gazing at the Italianate clock tower that an ancestor built in the 1800s, leaning now and cracked along its spiral staircase. Raja Ram Singh, the middle son, escorts the visitor around, pointing out various exhibits in the palace museum, the Aina Mahal. "That's the costume room," he

says, a hand rubbing unshaven cheeks, "and that's where my great-great grandfather rebuilt his quarters after the last bad quake in 1819." He is pointing through gaping holes in the wall where four-hundred year old brick work came tumbling outward as the earth did a crazy dance.

I don't find the tragedy of the royal family any more compelling than the ten thousand tragedies that surround the palace and radiate out across Kutch like cracks of misery, pain and loss. But somehow, the patient fellow who walked me around his shattered life—and told me about his Rana relatives in Nepal—helped me realise how hope has fled this place; how there's little point in talking about reconstruction, rehabilitation, a new Bhuj arising on the foundations of the old. It will, perhaps, but it won't be the same. It'll be like the outskirts of the town, where the temples to misplaced modernity are built all across the south Asia, the Soviet-style or ersatz-California office blocks and apartment towers. Prosperous Bhuj had its share of these already. Eventually, the bureaucrats, the builders will have their way, and another concrete cluster will come up.

Yes, the gods have truly smashed a way of life with their levelling hammers. But many have been left alive—bereaved, bereft of a past, traumatised forever by catastrophe, but alive. And that's how the planet forever reinvents itself, in ways brutal or banal. I'm off now to see yet another devastated community and to search the eyes of survivors for that spark that says they'll carry on, somehow. It's the only thing they can do. ♦

BHUJ, GUJARAT—It is as if the gods took hammers and destroyed a way of life. The destruction is vast, irreparable and incomprehensible. From nomad camps to cities of one hundred thousand, the entire district of Kutch is no more. Ancient communities and modern suburban colonies are heaps of rubble, now stinking in the desert heat as bodies and livestock carcasses rot in concrete and sandstone tombs. Only the vultures are happy. In a low-lying salt marsh sits the epicentre of the destroyer of Kutch, quiet now, riven with cracks. One expects sulphurous fumes but there is only the omnipresent dust of the desert. Bizarrely, few died in the nearby village where this slithering monster came to the surface of the earth to drink blood and break stone. Even more strangely, local people take visitors to a stagnant, salt water pool and dip their fingers in red mud. They taste the mud and tell tales of how it oozed from the cracks as the earth pitched and shook on Friday, the 26th of January, 2001. They can't explain why they do this, but it's clear that the earthquake was an almost religious experience to them. So perhaps to appease an angry or capricious deity, they taste that mud every time they go near the epicentre.

I thought as I walked the streets of Bhuj about Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. Here too are old, twisty streets where old and new structures lean against each other. A mercantile class tries to cram as much commerce as possible into crazy, small spaces. But where the calls of jewellers and handicraft salesmen once tempted the wanderer, now there are long, ghostly silences, punctuated by the crunch of shattered clay roof tiles underfoot; a shout from a neighbouring street as someone fills a handcart with possessions; a policeman throwing a stone at a dog sniffing at the wreckage. Everyone who lived here is either dead or gone. They'll probably never be back and when the wreckers level this place, countless icons of ordinary life will be buried with the unwanted rubble of old Bhuj. In the centre of the old town, the palace of the Maharao has not escaped the scythe of destruction. The sons of the old ruler live

"Talks are a mirage"

It has become almost fashionable to say that the Maoist People's War should be resolved through dialogue. Private individuals hold forth authoritatively, various political parties have stated that it is the only way out, and the government itself has time and again announced that it is all for talks. And now, in the name of civil society, various non-governmental organisations are also getting into the act. The most all this talk of talks has resulted in is the formality of a meeting between the home minister and a central committee member of the CPN (Maoist) at the initiative of human rights activist Padma Ratna Tuladhar.

In the last five years, the Maoist insurgency has grown by leaps and bounds. It has spread its tentacles to all 75 districts of the country. In the fifth year alone, there were 14 Maoist attacks on the police in 13 districts. Many policemen lost their lives and weapons were looted by the hundred. For the first time, rebels were able to launch a frontal attack on a district centre and overrun it—the capture of Dunai was an indication of their strength, their confidence and their fighting skills. And with last week's ambush of the chief justice's convoy in Surkhet, it is clear that the insurgency has entered yet another phase.

The Maoists are well on their way to fighting a real war. The creation of fighting units, the manner in which prisoners are taken and released, the destruction of key targets such as bridges, and their preference for consolidating strength rather than engaging in political talks are all indicators of their intentions. Their contacts with the government and others in the political spectrum are but a minor part of their political strategy to establish communism in Nepal. Those who fail to see this and still talk about a peace process are chasing a mirage.

Looking back at the events since the launch of the People's War five years ago, there can be no doubt that the Maoists have been very successful. There has been no force strong enough to counter their determined progress. But more important is

technology seems to have missed their purview. It would also be pertinent to ask if today's society is willing to embrace a style of armed struggle perfected in the 30s and guided by the idea of 'endless revolution' articulated in the 60s. All this shows that the People's War is moving forward almost mechanically. And a war fought mechanically can never guide the politics of a movement.

The present world economic order is increasingly marginalising large portions of the population, and that is particularly so in countries like ours. Those who once were in the forefront of opposing the capitalist imperialism of yesteryear have been sidelined and their arguments have lost out in relevance. Their place has been taken over by issues of regionalism, communalism and ethnicity. Disillusionment is on the rise in many countries, and many capitalist parliamentary systems established in the last decade of the 20th century are losing credibility. Political instability, especially in Third World countries, has created perfect conditions for rebellion. Extrapolated to Nepal, at a time when the establishment has adopted a socio-economic policy that falls within the ambit of capitalist globalisation, and when workers, peasants and the underprivileged are being pushed to the margins, it should not come as a surprise that they would take up arms.

In a sense the People's War is only a local manifestation of discontent worldwide. But nowhere has armed rebellion been able to lead this universal restlessness. Insurgencies generally



MIN BALJAKHARVA

Regardless of its outcome the only way forward for the Maoists is armed struggle.

that their success is directly related to the incompetence of the present establishment.

When the Maoists began their struggle it was a do-or-die mission to offer Nepalis an alternative to the present system that is flawed in every sense—economic, social, cultural and political. And they have built on the shortcomings of the establishment to reach out further to achieve their goal. In the last five years, the police have proved incapable of dealing with the insurgents. Intelligence gathering has been useless, administration is a farce and there is still confusion about mobilising the army. Those in power are secretly paying off the Maoists for their personal safety, while some, believing a Maoist victory is imminent, are speedily accumulating wealth and preparing for a getaway.

None of the government institutions have been able to assure common citizens that security and justice will prevail. Corruption is flourishing and has been institutionalised. Disenchantment with the present political system is complete. It is therefore no wonder that the young, who are by nature idealists, find the People's War the only way out and flock to the Maoist fold in droves. In such a situation, to hope that the Maoists will come to the table is a bit unrealistic.

The Maoists did not begin their campaign only because both the time and conditions were ripe for an insurgency. They had their own compulsions. Even so, they do not seem to have taken into consideration factors such as Nepal's geo-political location and the international situation. The Maoist leadership did not even consider joining hands with fraternal organisations that were sympathetic to their cause. Neither do they seem to have understood the changing world situation where globalisation is the order of the day and within which various forces are acting out their power play. The development of information

start off well, but ultimately end in failure. The success or failure of a movement no longer depends on the support of one friendly country. International powers decide the outcome.

There is a possibility of the Maoists' struggle becoming isolated in Nepal. Because of their class and political relationships that cut across political boundaries, most of the powerful forces in the country are now standing united against the Maoists. Certainly the Maoists have tried to upset this carefully calibrated balance, but the best way would have been political action rather than a declaration of war. Driven by burning ambition and buoyed by minor military victories that they have taken as an indication of their great success, they have angered the forces that could have stood by them. Discarded on the wayside has also been their attempt to create a united front of like-minded forces. In this situation the only option they have is the path of armed struggle. Regardless of victory or defeat that is the only way forward for them.

Those who advocate talks have only been viewing isolated incidents in the course of the People's War. They should realise that good intentions alone are not enough for talks to take place. The only way it will be possible is if the present general discontent is recognised and comprehensive reforms implemented, political forces re-align and there is a show of determined military strength. The Maoists are flying high, especially after Dunai, and it is unlikely that they will choose to negotiate. Talks will not bring about an end to the crisis. Rather, if there is to be an end, it is likely to result from internal dissension within the CPN (Maoist), as is becoming evident from the contradictory statements its leadership has been issuing over the Surkhet episode. ♦

(Hari Rokka is a communist activist.)

Charge-sheet

Five opposition parties submitted their formal charge-sheet to the Prime Minister on 5 February. Their conclusion: he should resign for having "totally" failed to solve the problems facing the country. PM Koirala is charged with failing to maintain law and order. "In many parts of the country, it has become difficult even to feel government presence," the memorandum says. It has also been accused of taking a stand suppressing the Maoists instead of trying to solve the problem through talks, which they fear will lead to huge loss of life and property. The five parties also blame the government for failing to bring the Maoists to the table despite the rebels' willingness to start a dialogue.

Signatories to the petition include top leaders of four communist parties in parliament, including the main opposition UML and the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party. The Prime Minister is also accused of failing to keep prices down, borrowing over the legal limits and disregarding the orders of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). The opposition also finds the government at fault for creating an Armed Police Force through ordinance, when it should have been discussed in parliament. Another charge: not extending the term of the Special Election Courts that are still hearing cases related to last parliamentary elections.

On corruption control the opposition says the government has not just failed to control it but has been involved in it. That's in reference to the PAC decision on the Lauda Air deal. It rules that the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) suspended the executive chairman of the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation on that basis and also "forced" the tourism minister to resign. Arguing that the investigations were now pointing towards the prime minister, they want him to resign to allow the law take its course. As an afterthought, the five also say that comments made by the "head of a diplomatic mission" (US Ambassador) on the "problems of governance and corruption" should help helped the prime minister to understand the seriousness of the situation.

Wait and see: Purnagiri

A dozen MPs of the main opposition UML trekked to Purnagiri in Dadeldhura district and came back with a revelation last week: India has begun building a dam, they said. The Democratic National Youth Association—a UML-affiliated organisation—organised the trek to Dadeldhura, following which the MPs disclosed their "findings": 50,000 people would be affected by the dam which the Indians were building on "war-footing."

The Ministry of Water Resources said a day later that such talk was baseless and what was underway were surveys for the preparation of a Detailed Project Report (DPR) of the Pancheshwor project, which Nepal and India agreed to build together in September 1996. It said the sites being considered for building a flow-regulation dam were Rupaligad, Sirsegad and Purnagiri. The minsitry added that only the DPR would identify where the structure would actually be built—after all the technical, socio-economic and environmental assessments were complete.

For quality education

The Private and Boarding Schools Organisation of Nepal (PABSON) organised a rally to celebrate the contributions made by private schools to education, as part of its 6th anniversary last week. PABSON says the 800 private schools in Nepal are providing quality education to over one million students, and employment to over 75,000 teachers. Some 50,000 students, teachers and parents from 175 PABSON-member schools were out to assert their right to quality education and fewer disruptions. This comes in the wake of demands by a group of communist students to nationalise all private institutions. The student group forced five million students across the country out of the classrooms 8-14th December to demonstrate widespread "support" for its demands. Minister of Education and Sports Amod Prasad Upadhyaya blames the politicisation of students for the falling standards of instruction. The government adds that it never promised free education and that, in fact, it now has fewer resources to dedicate to schools.

Meanwhile, there have been reports of Maoists locking out government schools not just in districts where they are strongest but also in pockets in Makawanpur district. There are around 24,000 government-run schools attended by some 4.8 million students, and employing over 130,000 teachers.




Kamaiyas evicted

Police set fire to hundreds of huts put up by kamaiyas on land which the government says belongs to the Cotton Development Board 3 February, razing everything to the ground. Roughly 300 kamaiya families who had taken over the land as part of their drive to occupy unclaimed land lost all their meager belongings in the fire. There are 16,500 kamaiya families who were "freed" from bondage by a government order last July. On 17 January the kamaiyas, who were living in temporary settlements, began to move out and settle on unclaimed land. Local administration has allowed some to camp along the East-West Highway until arrangements for permanent settlements are made.

Holidays in court

The Supreme Court has ordered the government to explain how it decides on the declaration of public holidays, in response to a petition filed by Bharat Jangam, a lawyer and activist. Jangam, who earlier challenged and obtained a court order scrapping pensions for former MPs, argues that government officials have over 200 days off in a year. The court is also hearing two other petitions on holidays: in one the petitioner is demanding that the government should not scrap "religious" holidays and in the other the plaintiff argues that the two-day weekend in Kathmandu Valley is illegal.



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The wand, the magician and the bird

by Sylvain, the magician

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English have their *adhas*, Awadhis their *majlis*, 19th century Europeans had their *café-klatzsch*. All these are different names for an inherent homo sapien habit. We like to gossip, exchange views, share ideas, and let words flow in a congenial atmosphere. That is what chatrooms attempt to recreate in cyberia. But, it's cold out there—the anonymity of the Internet fails to connect us deeply with each other.

The traditional spaces for such interaction for women were by the community well, or the lonely tree at the edge of the forest, where they gathered fodder or firewood. Men sat under the canopy of a banyan tree near a temple or school. In the hills of Nepal, such a tree, often with a raised platform around its base, is called a *chautari*. Prosperous and aware villages have quite a few. But every village has at least one.

Then came tea-shops and *bhattis*, selling homebrew and cheap edibles, which took away some of the regulars from rural chautaris. After that, radio, television to an extent, and the offices of political culture became focal points and agenda-setters in such discussions. There are many functional chautaris in the countryside, but they aren't used as extensively. Does this decline in the popularity of chautaris have something to do with the increasing intolerance in Nepali society? It's difficult to say, but people do have little time, and even less inclination, to listen to views that aren't consonant with their own.

Kathmandu may be called a metropolitan city, but it is the capital of a primarily agrarian and rural country—close to nine-tenth of Nepal's population still lives in villages. And there are few places here



COURTESY MARTIN CHAUTARI

Any topic of interest to anyone can be freely discussed at Martin Chautari. It is the world of the word, but its members are also successful activists.

to express idiosyncratic ideas on culture, politics and the arts—other, that is, than Martin Chautari. The discussion on 9 January, the second Tuesday of the month, as always, was typical. On offer was Darjeeling-based writer Indra Bahadur Rai's path-breaking Nepali novel, *Aaj Ramita Chha*, (roughly: Today Is Interesting), in the sense of the Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times".

The discussion was kicked off by Sangita, a working mother who had ploughed through the book with some effort. Her remark was forthright and unpretentious: "The book ambles without a beginning and an end." Her judgment: "It's a difficult read." That is what any reader uninitiated into the nuances of high-literature feels while reading classics, but few have the courage to accept it. Sangita did, and got an appreciative nod from other participants in a similar dilemma.

The second reader to comment was Ashutosh, a Harvard graduate and activist. His suggestion: "Read the book twice to appreciate the slice of

life it serves." After that, an animated discussion followed for over an hour and engaged ex-ambassador and linguist Novel Kishor Rai, novelist Khagendra Sangraula, poet-satirist Bimal Nibha, writer-commentator Narayan Dhakal, writer-commentator Basanta Thapa, novelist Manjushree Thapa and a group of young students familiar with the cult of Indra Bahadur Rai. Discussions over, those participants who wanted to, contributed Rs 10 each to the tea-kitty and went their separate ways—content, and perhaps enlightened. Most of them will come back for more *mangal-bares*—the Tuesday discussion.

Topics vary. From property rights for women to the lack of trust laws in Nepal, the predicament of people of the tarai, the status of women in Vedic literature, the threats to democracy and the vibrancy of the press—any topic of interest to anyone can be discussed at Chautari. The procedure is simple. The programme for the month is fixed in advance, and circulated through e-

mail, photocopied signs and word-of-mouth. The main speaker—the *pundit* in Chautari-speak—presents his views in about half-an-hour. After that, anyone with a view can be an expert commentator or an interrogator. This goes on for a couple of hours.

Chautari has no hierarchy. Pratyoush Onta, a convenor, says: "Chautari disagrees with the tradition of an elite speaking from the pulpit to an audience of lesser mortals listening respectfully. It is a forum for dialogue, or even polylogue." That, in essence, is the mission statement of sorts—not formally declared, but universally accepted by all those who frequent Chautari. "I am right, you are also right. I may be wrong, so could you. Let us think, listen, speak and re-think and develop a culture of communication." Simple, challenging, and a helluva lot of fun.

This has been Chautari's rallying cry since its humble beginning in October 1991 when water-resources engineer Bikash Pandey, Norwegian

engineer Odd Hoftun and his Nepal-born political scientist son Martin, initiated a fortnightly discussion forum on "development philosophy". When Martin died in a plane-crash in July 1992 on his way to Nepal from Oxford where he studied, Hoftun Sr made available some space for the forum to continue. Since April 1995, it has been called Martin Chautari.

Today, Chautari is run by a committed mix of activists, journalists, writers, commentators and students. Though it remains within the world of

Kathmandu and elsewhere in Nepal needs serious attention." The kind of commitment required to run such a forum is not common anywhere. It is even less so in Nepal where intellectuals do not consider themselves learners, but interpreters of divine wisdom.

But Chautari has ignited a change. The ideals of Chautari—tolerance, respect for the other, and the freedom of thought and speech—remain with everyone who comes in contact with it. How many insti-



COURTESY MARTIN CHAUTARI

the word—spoken and written—its members have notched up remarkable successes in social activism. Recently, it functioned as the focal point of a movement for the emancipation of kamaiyas in western Nepal. Earlier, Chautari members spearheaded the campaign to ban diesel three-wheelers from the Valley, and succeeded where better-funded NGOs and INGOs failed. Chautari is often the first place where non-conformist ideas are expressed and discussed.

After a decade, Chautari is reassessing itself. In an internal document floated for discussion, Ashutosh observes: "Chautari's flagship programme—*mangalbare*—is a success and an anomaly." Agrees Pratyoush Onta: "Even though it is exceedingly successful on its own, Chautari's failure to replicate itself in

tutions can claim to have initiated a culture and sustained it for over a decade, sticking to its undeclared mission? Success sits lightly on Chautari members. They laugh it off as the reward of a job well done, and done for its own sake. It is this nonchalance that makes Chautari what it is—a live chat-room. Forget Internet versions. In a country of twenty-three million people, Nepal has about three hundred thousand phone lines, fifty thousand computers, and less than thirty-thousand Internet connections. Chautaris are not just relevant, but important.

The Chautari keeps the Socratic tradition alive in a city that is getting impersonal by the day without fully acquiring the urbanity of a metropolis. That in itself is something to celebrate. ♦

BOOK REVIEW

by SUDHINDRA SHARMA

The mountain of the horned sage

The process of 'sanskritisation' (or what some would regard as 'nepalisation') taking place for well over three centuries, beginning in the western part and gradually moving eastward, is something that has been well researched and documented by scholars studying Nepali society and culture. Such studies have made known the general contours of this process of acculturation, and also that different Tibeto-Burman communities have been affected in varying degrees, with the Magars being the most thoroughly acculturated. What is not so well known, however, is how this process occurred among the Magars, the one ethnic group that has lived contiguous to the dominant Bahun-Chhettris for the longest period of time. One of the major contributions of the book under review lies in precisely in explaining this process.

A work that combines historical analysis with ethnography, *Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage* has other distinctive features as well. It concentrates on an area of Nepal—the western hills—that has long been neglected by sociologists and anthropologists. Also unique is the fact that the geographical boundary of the area studied is not ecological such as a basin or a watershed but political, constituting as it does, the two districts of Gulmi and Arghakhanchi. Lastly, all the contributors to the volume are French. There has been substantial work on Nepal by French authors, including the celebrated *Le Nepal* by Sylvain Levi, but almost all of it unfortunately remains largely inaccessible to a Nepali readership proficient in English at best. In this sense, *Resunga* has tried to bridge the gap even as it offers wider appreciation to French scholars writing about Nepal.

The nine chapters in the book look into the various aspects of Gulmi and Arghakhanchi districts, ranging from topography to population, natural resources, history and politics, through an approach the editor calls a "pluridisciplinary" approach. Research was carried out by young scholars affiliated to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique between 1985 and 1993, and it generated several PhD dissertations, and Masters and engineering theses. The volume, which derives its name from a hill overlooking Tamghas, the headquarters of Gulmi, has been culled from those dissertations and theses.

The book comes with a few limitations though—some more serious than others. One of the minor ones concerns its inability to take into its purview the political and social changes that overtook the districts during the 1990s. Since the research was conducted between 1985 to 1993 it would have been

A new collection of historical and ethnographic essays focuses on Nepal's western hills—an area long neglected by scholars.

worthwhile either to publish the book earlier say during mid-1990s or to update a few key articles such as the one that documents changing political leadership once publishing got delayed.

Another concerns the organisation of the book. One fails to understand the sequence of the nine disparate articles ranging from landscape diversity to kings and potters, while these could easily have been grouped into several themes. Structured in, say, three or four broad topics, the themes could have been more clear compared to the present form where the only link is the focus on a common geographical area.

More serious, however, is the manner in which the more sociological and anthropological of the chapters have tended to portray their subjects. I am talking about the issue of representation, and since this concern may not be so easily apparent, some explanation may be in order.

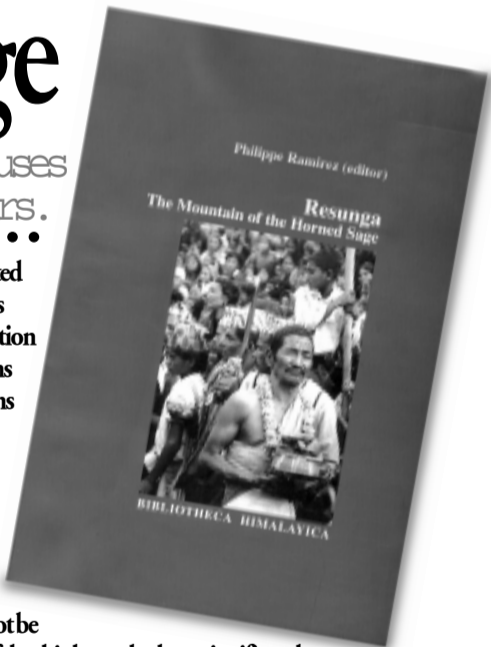
Historically, one of the contributions of anthropology has been to salvage distinct cultural forms of life from Westernisation and to serve it as a form of cultural critique of the West as Marcus and Fischer (1986) point out in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. One of its enduring weaknesses, until recently, has been the uncritical manner in which other cultures and societies were represented. With the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) the problematic nature of representing cultures and societies different from one's own, has increasingly become recognised. Sociologists and anthropologists studying other cultures and societies are now more engaged in critical self-reflection. Some of the issues they need to reflect on is: how and under what circumstances do they enter the social scene being studied, what is the relationship between those studies and oneself, and how do those being studied finally become represented. The manner in which *Resunga* discuss various facets of social life in Gulmi and Arghakhanchi, reveals either a lack of awareness or insensitivity towards the problem inherent in representing other cultures and societies. Reading the book one gets the impression that the debates on method, problems of epistemology, interpretation, and discursive forms of representation that have raged in the past two decades, had, in fact, not occurred at all. Or, it seems not to have affected the authors.

What one also seems to miss in the volume is: (1) the linkage between the

empirical material presented and the research questions asked, and (2) the connection between research questions and the dominant concerns of contemporary social sciences. For those interested in larger theoretical questions, the connection between the empirical material and social theory simply cannot be made. Given that some of the thinkers who have significantly affected social theorising during the 80s and 90s have been French, one would at least have expected some sort of a mention of Michel Foucault (discourse, power and knowledge), Jean-Francois Lyotard (modernity as a grand narrative), Jean Baudrillard (simulations, hyperreality and implosion) and Pierre Bourdieu (habitus and the field), to name a few. These names that have impacted social theory at the close of the twentieth century are conspicuously absent.

These limitations aside, the text is rich empirically. On the whole, *Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage* is an immensely readable book made all the more reader-friendly by the numerous pictures, photographs, charts and diagrams it contains. With its treatment of a range of topics it would prove useful for students and scholars across a spectrum of disciplines ranging from anthropology to engineering, not to mention to development practitioners and experts. ♦

Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage
edited by Philippe Ramirez
Translated from the French by Susan Keyes
Bibliotheca Himalayica, Volume 16
Himal Books, Lalitpur, 2000
pp. 304.



Underground water supply



RAMYATA LIMBU

After the long dry winter and another three months before the monsoon sets in, water has once again become a major concern for the Valley's growing population. "Now that the dry season is approaching, the situation is going to get worse," says Thamel resident Smriti Bhattarai. Even though Bhattarai is connected to the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) distribution network, there are times when she doesn't get water for days at a stretch. "When we do, it is so regulated that supply is not adequate at all." A shallow tube-well and an open well fulfil Bhattarai's drinking and household needs.

A couple of blocks away, Tashi Gurung has given up on the NWSC altogether. "We use groundwater pumped from a tube well dug a couple of hundred feet deep. All the houses in this area do." He attributes a slight depression in the ground floor of his four-storey home to excessive pumping of groundwater.

Experts say the same could happen to Kathmandu itself—the aquifer system will be exhausted, causing ecological disaster and potential land subsidence. Already the rate of extraction in excess of recharge has caused the water table to drop at an average rate of 2.5 metres a year. The first groundwater extraction was carried out by the Nepal Water Supply Corporation in 1970, and increased extraction in the Valley

began in 1984 at 9 million litres per day (mld). By 1987, it quadrupled from 9 mld to 34 mld, and by 1998 the extraction of the Valley's groundwater, withdrawn through deep tube-wells, shallow tube-wells, stone taps, open wells and spring sources reached 42 mld—five times the 1984 level. While a World Bank Study in 1994 indicated that total sustainable withdrawal of groundwater from the Valley's aquifers is approximately 26.3 mld, a 1999 ADB study says total groundwater currently extracted is about 58.6 mld—overexploitation by 60 percent.

Nepal Water Supply Corporation NWSC is one of the largest users of the Valley's groundwater. To meet the needs of a parched Valley, the NWSC pumps nearly 42.3 mld (78.3 percent). Hotels in the capital extract a little over 8.4 percent of this (10 mld), industry, 7.9 percent and the government 5.3 percent. A study conducted by the ADB also discovered over 300 tube wells, both deep and shallow, owned by the Nepal Water Supply Corporation and the private sector. Added to this is a rapid increase in private tube-wells, installed to augment water supply to Valley households.

Declining forest area and increasing urban built-up area are responsible for diminishing recharge capacity in the Valley. A 1990 JICA report, on the basis of a simulation model, calculated the recharge rate to be 27,000 mld, slightly less than the earlier estimate of 30,000-

40,000 mld. Despite recharge occurring mainly in the northern groundwater districts, the percentage remains low owing to the geological nature of the area. As upper deposits of the central and southern aquifers are thick layers of impermeable clay, recharge capability is much lower in these areas. The rate of depletion of the water table is more pronounced—and alarming—in the northern well fields of Bansbari and Manohara where the NWSC carries out extensive pumping to meet the city's needs.

Another indicator is the drying up of stone spouts. Two dozen of the city's historical spouts are dry, and the water level at Rani Pokhari, Sundhara and Panchdhara are seriously affected—some directly by NWSC wells.

It is common knowledge that groundwater should be used judiciously, to ensure a balance between long-term demand and natural replenishment. Groundwater experts are therefore keenly awaiting the enactment of a legislation governing the extraction of groundwater currently being drawn at the initiative of the Water Resources Ministry. "It may not be in time for this session of Parliament. But it will definitely be ready for the next session," says Dinesh C Pyakural, Executive Director of the Melamchi Water Supply Project. The legislation being drafted addresses the need to control private extraction of groundwater through licensing,

The Valley's precious groundwater is threatened by indiscriminate and wasteful exploitation, and contamination.

tariffs and regulation.

The \$464 million Melamchi project, which plans to bring in piped water from the Melamchi Khola by 2006, is especially keen that the legislation regulates private extraction of the Valley's depleting groundwater supply. Once the licensing of groundwater extraction is made mandatory, it would become a sound source of water supply for a privatised NSWSC (one of the preconditions set by donors of the Melamchi project). Adequate supply will then ensure that the Corporation will win the confidence of consumers before Melamchi water is piped in.

"During the pre-Melamchi phase, a nominal fee would ensure that consumers make judicious use of the Valley's groundwater, which could then be used to augment supply in the dry season," says Pyakural. Post-Melamchi tariffs, he says, will reduce the rate of extraction. It would discourage use of groundwater—a precious reserve—when a privatised NSWSC has an adequate supply. "It makes economic and financial sense that the project should recover half of

\$464 million that donors have invested," says Pyakural.

At present consumers pay Rs 8 for every 1000 litres of water supplied by NSWSC. But when you add the debt service, the depreciation, the costs of boiling and filtering water, and medical costs, it reaches Rs 16 per 1000 litres. In addition, the NSWSC hasn't been able to fulfil consumer needs in specific areas.

Melamchi's water, at Rs 24 per 1000 litres, would ensure safe, reliable, and regular supply of drinking water, says Pyakural. The project plans to launch a public awareness campaign as part of its comprehensive policy for sustainable use of water resources. The project is carrying out a pilot feasibility and appropriate technology study for enhancing groundwater storage by artificial recharge in Manohara. The absence, however, of defined aquifers makes it a complicated process, say experts. Limestone and non-developed alluvial areas around the Valley are being checked as potential additional groundwater resources, but there's been no positive finding so far.



ALL PHOTOS: MIN BAIKACHARYA

Also at risk is the quality of groundwater. At the behest of the MWSP, a team from the Irrigation Department has been monitoring the quality of groundwater in 50 wells around the Valley for the last year. "About 60 percent of the water from shallow wells is contaminated," says Mohan Singh Khadka, senior divisional chemist at the Groundwater Division, Department of Irrigation. "Most water samples from stone taps and open wells were found to contain faecal matter and high numbers of coliform bacteria."

While deep aquifers are relatively unpolluted, they contain high levels of iron and manganese, which means the water has to be treated before use. "We should refrain from using water from deep aquifers. It's a precious resource that should be stored protected from contamination. Once groundwater is polluted, it will take years, probably hundreds of years, to restore its original quality," says Jeevan Lal Shrestha, Project Chief, Groundwater Resources Development Project. More simple and cost effective, say experts, would be to reuse treated wastewater, harvest rainwater and not waste water. ♦



Drinking sewage

When Baneswor residents went out to collect water last week they were in for an unpleasant surprise. Without even having to get near the tap they realised what was pouring into their vessels because of the foul smell it was giving out. The "drinking water" smelled of sewage. Samples of the water gathered from these taps were then taken for analysis to a laboratory and their fears were confirmed.

Says Chemist Minesh Prasad Shrestha of CEMAT Water Lab who tested the Baneswor water sample: "It did not require a professional to tell that the water came straight from the sewer. But when we did analyse the sample, the report looked very dangerous." Ammonia, Chloride, and Phosphate content was high, much higher than WHO specified standards. The total number of coliform bacteria (bacteria found in the human intestine) was so high that the report just said TNTC—Too Numerous To Count. Dr IL Shrestha of Siddhi Polyclinic says: "This is exactly what causes water borne diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, and even more dangerous, spreads the Hepatitis A and E viruses." With summer fast approaching and water supply running out, this could mean disaster for the Valley's thirsty population.

The corporation says it is looking to find the spot where sewage enters the drinking water supply line, but clearly this is not just a Baneswor problem. Time and again residents from all around the Valley have faced similar problems. "People from Patan, Paknajol, Tahachal, Naradevi, Asan, and Thamel have reported such problems, especially during summer," says Dr Roshan Shrestha of Environment and Public Health Organization, which carried out research on drinking water in the Valley.

—Alok Tumbahangphey

REQUEST FROM FEDERATION OF NEPALESE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (FNCCI) & NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR EARTHQUAKE TECHNOLOGY-NEPAL (NSET-NEPAL) TO ALL CONCERNED

You must be aware that Nepal and India lies in highly earthquake prone zone. Earthquakes are unavoidable in this region like in other earthquake prone countries. It was proven by the recent devastating "GUJARAT BHUJ EARTHQUAKE", in which death toll is rapidly rising.

The numbers of injured and homeless people are also increasing rapidly. Being a neighboring country and, it is indeed duty and responsibility of all Nepalese to help the victims of recent earthquake in India. So in the context, Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and National Society of Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET-Nepal) has jointly taken the initiative to fund for the earthquake victims and send it to the concerned Indian Authority through the Indian Embassy of Nepal.

Therefore it is requested to all interested citizens and organizations to contribute to "GUJARAT EARTHQUAKE RELIEF FUND" in the following account numbers of the following bank.

Banks	AC No
Everest Bank Ltd. New Baneshwor	00852 0C
Nepal Bangladesh Bank Ltd., New Baneshwor	025151 C
Rastriya Banijya Bank Ltd. Teku	5422/44

The amount collected will be bank transferred to Prime Minister Relief Fund of India and the list of contributors will be forwarded through the Indian Embassy in Nepal. The list will also be made public. NSET-Nepal and FNCCI will play the role of facilitator and will not draw from this account. So let us work together for the humanity !!! Looking forward for your kind cooperation!!!



NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR EARTHQUAKE TECHNOLOGY-NEPAL (NSET-NEPAL)
P.O.Box # 13775, Mahadevsthan, Baneshor
Telephone: 977-1-474192,
fax: 9771-490943
E-mail: nset@nset.org.np
Contact person: Mahesh Nakarmi



FEDERATION OF NEPALESE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (FNCCI)
P.O.Box # 269
Pachali, Sahid Sukra, FNCCI
Telephone: 262218, 262007
Fax: 261022, 262007
E-mail: fncci@mos.com.np
Contact Person: Suraj Vaidya

Kodak sues government

Kodak Nepal (P) Limited has filed a petition in the Supreme Court demanding that it be provided a Certificate of Origin (CO), needed to qualify it for duty-free exports to India under the 1996 Treaty of Trade between Nepal and India. The petition, dated 18 January, accuses the Cabinet Secretariat, various government agencies and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) of delaying its origin certification with no explanation whatsoever. Krishna Prasad Silwal, on behalf of Ramachandran Subramany, a director at Kodak, filed the petition.

Kodak Nepal, an undertaking of Eastman Kodak Company of the USA and Kodak India (80-20 percent), was registered at the company registrar's office in Nepal in July 1998. It has since spent over Rs 370 million to build a factory and train employees. Kodak began production on 9 September 1999 but has been unable to export to India, although it has exported to Singapore. Kodak is required to sell at least 20 percent of its products in third countries, that it has done. The government certified the origin of its exports for sale in Singapore, but not for export to India, the petitioner argues.

Kodak Nepal says it first applied for origin certification on 8 January 1999 at the Department of Industry and was told it would be issued one on the start of production. That has not happened. Since October 1999 Kodak Nepal has been writing to the FNCCI and different government departments enquiring about its application but has not been given a certificate or an explanation.

It is believed that Kodak has been denied a CO for fear of Indian retaliation, because India does not accept Kodak's value addition process as manufacturing. The colour photo paper lobby is against Kodak and so are officials at India's finance ministry, who see it as a ploy to dodge high Indian duties. The charge: Kodak came to Nepal only to avoid high import duties. Other sources say officials at the Indian embassy in Kathmandu helped Kodak during the licensing process, which makes the Indian government's new position contradictory.

Generally the FNCCI issues the CO after a technical committee comprising business and government representatives approves the application. Because Kodak was a special case—there were doubts about whether its process was actually manufacturing even while it was building a factory—the technical committee is said to be waiting for India's "tacit" approval. The government of Nepal, for its part, has accepted Kodak's process as manufacturing, which was even notified in the Nepal Gazette.

The Kodak issue has been discussed at political levels too. US Secretary of Commerce who was accompanying Bill Clinton to India in April 2000 even put in a word for the company. Prime Minister Koirala also raised the issue during talks with his counterpart while visiting New Delhi last year. Later he is said to have pitched for Kodak again at a meeting with the Indian PM at the UN General Assembly in New York.

Vanaspati prospects

Nepal's vegetable *ghiu*—hydrogenated vegetable oil—exports jumped by about 126 percent to Rs 1.09 billion in the first four months of the fiscal year, promising to reach 1999-2000 levels, if all goes well. Export of vegetable *ghiu* slumped to Rs 2.71 billion in the last fiscal year, a 14 percent drop compared to the sales in the previous year. Looking at the monthly average, *ghiu* exports are headed toward crossing the Rs 3 billion mark once again.

The 14 vegetable *ghiu* makers in Nepal have a total installed capacity of 220,000 tons and produce about 135,000 tons, of which about 80 percent is sold in nearby markets in India's Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh states. It is also the one Nepali export that has faced stiff opposition from local Indian producers, who officials say have been badly affected by the imports from Nepal. Nepali *ghiu* is said to be cheaper and of better quality.

Indian officials have also singled out *ghiu* as a "problem product" saying it has grown just too fast. Capacity-wise, Nepali production does not compare with what the three states of Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh can collectively produce. According to the 23rd Annual Report the Indian Vanaspati Producers Association, India's total installed capacity is about 3.8 million tons, with Bihar (111,000 tons), West Bengal (226,650 tons) and Uttar Pradesh (616,850 tons) capable of producing almost five times more *ghiu* than Nepal.

Nepal Lever employees give to quake relief

200 employees of Nepal Lever donated a day's salary and wages towards earthquake relief in Gujarat to the charge d'affaires of the Indian Embassy, Ashok Kumar, on 5 February. This contribution exceeds the significant corporate contributions of the company. The employees, all Nepali citizens, work at Nepal Lever's manufacturing operations in Hetauda.

Nepal Lever was set up in collaboration with Unilever, which has 2,000 Nepali shareholders. Unilever's Indian subsidiary Hindustan Lever's manufacturing units in Kandla have suffered some damage and employees have been dislocated. Unilever and Hindustan Lever are also undertaking relief work in Gujarat.



Nepal Lever Managing Director Sandip Ghose handing over employees' quake relief contributions to Ashok Kumar, charge d'affaires, Indian Embassy

The factory was set up in mid-1975 with Chinese aid but has faced huge losses, largely due to cheap Chinese and Indian imports that have almost destroyed the Nepali textile industry. Its accumulated losses add up to Rs 230.5 million, about half of which was incurred during fiscal year 1998-99, according to the Ministry of Finance (MoF). The MoF publication on the performance of public enterprises adds that HTL loans and other liabilities in the same year amounted to Rs 148.6 million. Finally, the company was unable to pay employee salaries and even its electricity and water bills. The closure will render over 1,071 unemployed.

IDBI joins NDB

The Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) has acquired a 10 percent equity in the Nepal Industrial Development Bank, a company press statement says. IDBI is also to share its expertise with NDB in financial management, merchant banking and staff training. NBA began operations in February 1999 and says it has Rs 1.55 billion in deposits and Rs 1.38 billion loans. Its net operating profit in the first half of fiscal year 2000-01 was Rs 18.6 million.



Please, no public companies

It is time we re-evaluated the necessity of widespread public holding of companies.

The week before last we witnessed heavy over-subscription to the shares of a finance company. The company was looking for something on the order of Rs 25 million from the public, but there were applications for more than thirty times that amount. Yes, it was a good company but why should a firm be penalised for being good? Let me explain: The company will now end up spending over a quarter of the issue amount on handling charges and fees to deal with the overwhelming applications and the refund of the extra funds. The over-subscription happened because of excess liquidity in the market, which made it easy to finance such applications. Now the company must start the tedious process of using all the random number formulae imaginable in making a judicious allotment of shares.

A couple of weeks ago this Beed wrote about Nepal's understanding of the corporate world (*Shareholding Nepali style*, #25). Companies are an inherently capitalistic concept and you simply can't impose socialism on them and expect anything to then function as it should. The allotment process for this company now means that over ten thousand individuals will have to be provided with at least some shares. What does this mean to the company? Say it spends only Rs 100 a year on every shareholder, on such essentials like mailing them the annual accounts and minutes, recording transactions and other administrative costs. Now

multiply that by ten thousand—it will spend close to Rs 1 million. Of course, this isn't a problem for larger companies, but smaller ones will certainly feel the pinch. There is some truth after all in the old accountants' maxim—if a public company reports profits and would like to share them with its shareholders, it would swiftly run up losses—it would have to print



thousands of copies of the accounts.

It is time we re-evaluated the necessity of widespread public holding of companies. Does every promoter who has brilliant ideas about banking, finance or insurance *have* to share the proceeds with the public, and that on such a large scale? The theory of dispersed public holding may be perfect for state enterprises which are effectively owned by the public anyway, but not for private enterprise. The perils of going public are so high that right now no successful private company would like its shares listed or traded. The Companies Act and all the other Acts that make public holding compulsory need amendment. The concept of a joint-stock company needs to be understood, and it should be up to companies to decide how they want the public to participate in

their activities. There is really no point in the State defining the manner of public participation, whether in terms of the number of shareholders or the way in which shares are subscribed to.

The fundamental issue here is to recognise and understand that shares can come in various forms. It isn't necessary that the public participate in the way equity shareholders do, with the same voting rights and dividends. There could be shares that have no voting rights, but be entitled to higher dividends or shares with voting rights which receive lesser dividends. There are shares that may have a guaranteed fixed amount of returns, and shares with various options on convertibility. Financial re-engineering is a creative endeavour worldwide. There's no reason it shouldn't start to be in Nepal, too. Financially sound companies should be allowed to raise money without the Securities Board or the Stock Exchange dictating how many shareholders they should have.

Post-liberalisation we have been testing all the Acts pertaining to companies. It's been a long-time and the learning curve is surely complete by now. Let's move on swiftly and make changes that benefit companies and provide much-needed impetus to the Nepali capital market. ♦

Readers can post their views and comments at arthabeed@yahoo.com

godavari ad

All sewn up



Nepali garments ready for export.

Nepal's garment industry must turn more competitive rather than hanker for preferential access to its traditional markets.

MUKUL HUMAGAIN
Here's an industry that has done its bit for Nepal's economy. With steady growth registered over the last fifteen years, Nepal's garment industry is today the highest foreign exchange earner in the manufacturing segment. But that will change when the WTO trading regime takes effect after 2005. Today, Nepal sells more garments than woollen carpets, and the last two years have been positively scintillating. Taking advantage of the US guidelines devised in 1974 for the allotment of trade quotas to least developed countries (LDCs), Nepali garment exporters have developed the US as their main market, selling clothes worth \$164 million last year, up from \$126 million in 1999. That represents only 0.0174 percent of total imports into the US although it is a full 85 percent of Nepal's garment exports.

But despite this 30 percent boom, entrepreneurs are sceptical about the future. They're right in thinking so and it is about time they began planning ways of competing in the global market—with no quotas and with competitors who have economies of scale that cannot even be compared with Nepal. The only advantage Nepal has over those producers is the experience in selling in the US. The reason for the jitters in the Nepali garment industry is the opening of the US market to garments manufactured in sub-Saharan Africa. Some Central American countries have also been granted preferential access, and Sri Lanka and Singapore are also lobbying the US government for duty-free market access. The main eligibility criterion now for exporting nations is a per capita income under \$1500. Nepal's per

capita income hovers a little above \$200 and businesspersons here say that if they've understood the provisions correctly, they're also entitled to the duty-free export quota. The decision to allow duty-free access from sub-Saharan countries comes within the 10-year transitional programme of the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), which came into effect on 1 January 1995. ATC is a special safeguard mechanism to deal with new cases of serious damage or threat thereof to domestic producers during the transition period. Before the Agreement, most textile and clothing exports from developing countries to industrialised countries were subject to quotas under a special regime outside normal GATT rules. But since 1995, WTO members have committed to removing the quotas by 1 January 2005 by integrating the sector fully within GATT. Nepali exporters have plenty of cause for worry. Nepali garments

are relatively more expensive and will obviously become less competitive if businesses in the US have access to a wider variety of products. The Nepali garment industry's global market access relies primarily on the quota system. Though businessmen are hopeful that US would grant duty free access to Nepal as well, they are unsure when that decision will be made. They believe that Nepal is already losing out to new players out to make a killing before the WTO regime and that if the US does not decide in their favour soon enough, that disadvantage will be pressed home, at a great loss to Nepali business. Presently, businessmen in the US importing textile products from Nepal pay 18-21 percent duty. "If other countries are not obliged to pay any duty, certainly, they will be at an advantage," says Udaya Raj Pandey, general secretary of the Garment Association Of Nepal. In addition, there's been no serious impact assessment study on what the planned phasing out of the

American pie. "Most garment factories will shut down after removal of the quotas. The high cost of production here means we won't be in a position to compete with other countries in the global market," says Chandi Dhakal, owner of Nepal's largest garment factory, Memento Apparels. All the raw materials are imported from third countries and transportation costs are high. It is for these reasons that garment entrepreneurs feel that they won't be able to compete in the global market after WTO comes into the force. Nepal has stuck to basics, and is far removed from the world of high-fashion apparel. Entrepreneurs blame this on the lack of co-operation and support from the government. For instance, the government had promised to provide soft loans and bank guarantees to apparel manufacturers and exporters, but all that remains on paper. For their part, entrepreneurs also want a separate labour policy for this industry. With such a crisis in Nepal's premier manufacturing segment, in an industry that employs over 40,000 people, entrepreneurs and the government had better sew things up fast. ♦



Future tense: Cutting and stitching at one of the garment factories.

Multifibre Arrangement (MFA)—the official US term for the quota system it has been phasing since 1995. "The challenge facing the garment industry is immense. Nothing has been done to obtain duty free access to the US textile and clothing market, and entrepreneurs are yet to understand the impact of Nepal's accession to WTO," says Pandey. Entrepreneurs say the Nepali government must start lobbying soon for duty-free export privileges, if nothing but to use the next four years to some profit. But it appears that the government is not particularly interested or bothered. It's still not entirely a doomsday scenario—under the WTO regime, Nepal being an LDC, will be entitled to a number of facilities, including low tariff barriers and preferential treatment in some sectors. The other market Nepali garment exporters could explore is the EU, but they have not taken it up seriously. Explains JP Agrawal, joint-secretary of GAN: "Since there is high volume in the US market, even when there is less margin we can sustain ourselves. The EU market volume is much less." After the removal of the quota system, Nepal will have to compete with 123 other countries for their slice of the



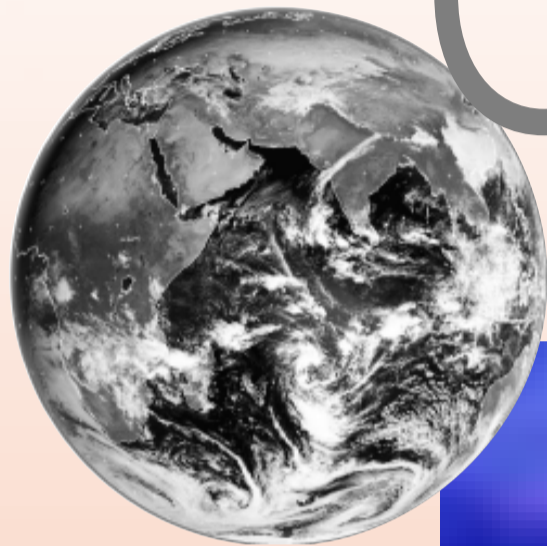
The stitch, in time

The history of the readymade garment industry in Nepal goes back about 15 years. Before that, garments as an export-oriented segment in Nepal meant only traditional Nepali garments exported to a few countries in small quantities. The meteoric rise of the garment industry was the result of the interplay of various factors, both domestic and foreign. The first much-needed boost came when garment-exporting industries in Asia were hit by the quota system that limited their exports. It also coincided with rising labour costs in garment-exporting countries which undermined their low-cost advantage. Producers were forced to look for cheaper alternatives. Nepal emerged as a relocation site, especially for Indian producers by the mid-1980s, when they hit the quota ceiling and began pouring into Nepal. By then corporate development of the industry had already begun with a few Nepali players. ♦



ACCESS/GDE/H04/00/2001

Pabil Ganesh II Ganesh I Ganesh V Langtang



One fine day

On a rare day like this you can see forever. From Annapurna to Everest—500 km of sky in one great sweep of the northern horizon.

KUNDA DIXIT

They are getting rarer and rarer, days like this when the wind suddenly shifts, bringing a crisp freshness in the air, and Kathmandu Valley briefly lives up to its reputation again of being one of the most scenic capitals in the world. The pall of brown haze over the valley is parted like a curtain, letting the blue hills unexpectedly leap out of the haze. And beyond, the mountains come out one by one, as if frozen on the catwalk of a gigantic Himalayan beauty pageant.

Not everyone is into mountains, of course, and we Nepalis are pretty blasé about that saw-toothed line of jagged rock and ice to the north. It is a thing of vague beauty extolled in a few patriotic songs, but regarded more as obstacles on the path of development, obstacles that have to be sliced by highways and demolished with our bare hands. It is also where the gods live, halfway between earth and heaven, and therefore out of bounds. We are indifferent about our mountains rather like Maldivians are casual about the beauty of their lagoons—we acknowledge that they are there but aren't terribly excited by them. Until we found out in the early part of this century that the highest mountain in the world and eight of the ten highest were



The Big Cloud glows red above Kathmandu Valley on 1 February, and the Cloud on a satellite picture.

located in our country, we really didn't take too much of an interest in the peaks. In fact it was only after Westerners began mapping them that we started giving the peaks individual names, like Sagarmatha itself. For centuries most mountains (except peaks like Machhapuchhre or Gauri Shankar) were just "himals".

So last week when the setting sun set ablaze a spectacular ceiling of altocumulus clouds grazing the tops of the mountains, the terrace restaurants and hotel balconies in Kathmandu were full of tourists in a trance, but none of the surrounding rooftops had locals admiring this once-in-a-lifetime view. It was one of those

really rare displays of nature's flamboyance, almost as if after a dreary, dry winter we were being compensated with a two-hour extravaganza of psychedelic proportions.

The Big Cloud must have been at 8,000 m moving from southwest to northeast, the leading edge of a gigantic plume travelling from the southern Arabian Sea to the Himalaya in an enormous arc across the Subcontinent. And there it was above the Valley, looking like the underbelly of one of those science fiction Hollywood movies of incredibly large alien spaceships visiting the earth for close encounters of some kind. Although it was just an expanse of

water vapour, the cloud had an almost-solid presence with the entire central and eastern Himalaya brooding under its shadow all day. But it was towards evening, when the sun dipped into that layer of sky between cloud and horizon that the slanting rays from the west turned the heavens crimson. From below, the ribbed shadows on the ochre cloud made it look like the inverted surface of Mars. Then the peaks themselves finally caught the pale rays of a dying sun: the rocky snowless flanks of Gosainkunda turned velvety mauve, 40 miles from us Langtang glowed like ember, further east Dorje Lakpa just had a brief blush.

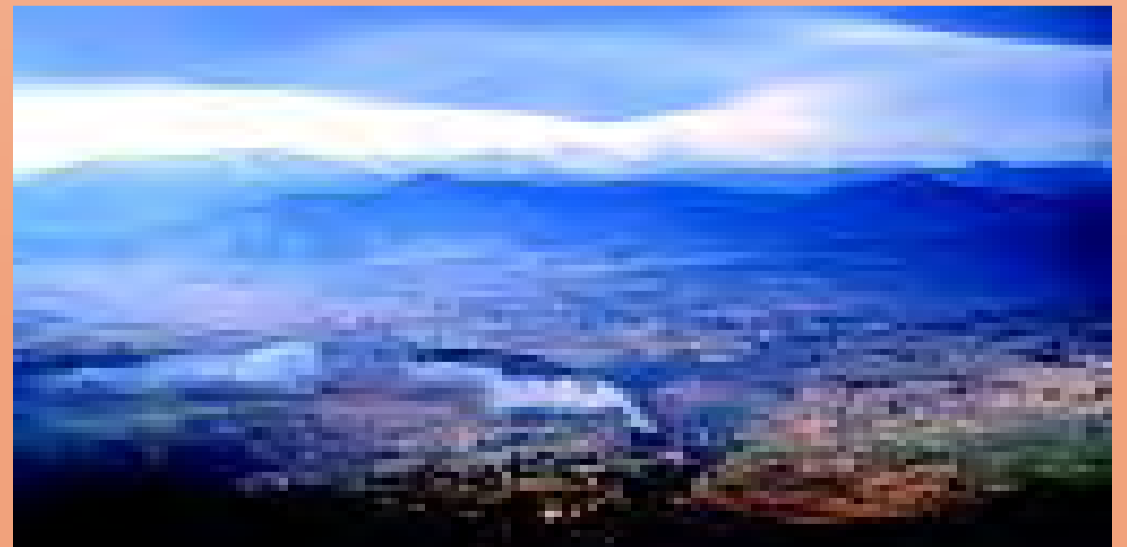
But it was Ganesh Himal that stole the solar spotlight that evening. There was about 15 minutes of sunlight left, and it hit the Ganesh peaks, incongruously, from the base up. The icefall at the bottom of Pabil was ignited, exploding into a golden flash that travelled up the southeast face. Pabil's exquisitely chiselled profile suddenly shone brighter than the sun, illuminating the clouds, and its reflected glory gave Kathmandu Valley an unfamiliar northern light. And it stayed like that for a few more minutes, until the gold turned to fuchsia to crimson to a cold ashy white. We may have to wait many years for a day like 1 February 2000.

The show was over, and it was hard to believe that this celestial-temporal drama of sky, earth and light had actually happened at all. We rushed to download digital images from camera to computer, and it was clear that the technology is incapable of capturing such subtlety of light and shadow in such difficult exposure conditions. Any reproduction technology would be inadequate in capturing and replicating such perfection. The celluloid film fared slightly better, but turned an experience that bordered on the sacred into just another kitschy picture postcard.

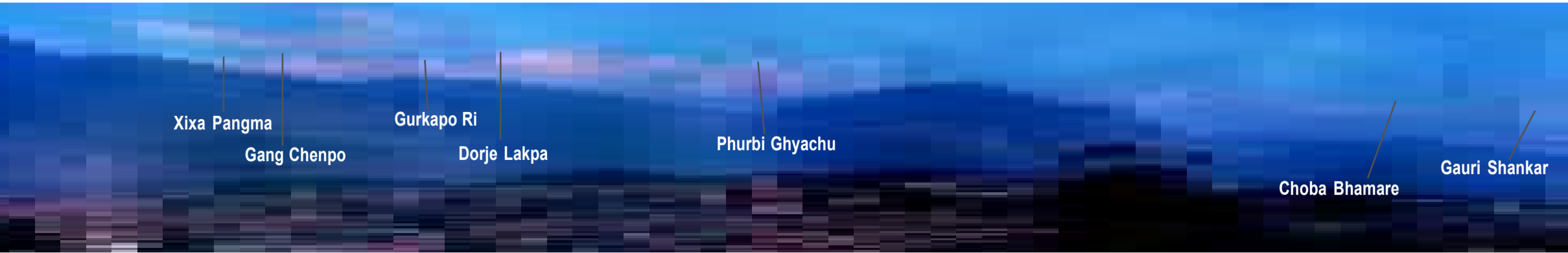
The next day dawned cold and frosty. We had just seen the highest daily variation of temperature in Kathmandu Valley in recent memory with the temperature ranging from a low of 0.5 Celsius in the morning to previous afternoon's maximum at 26.5 Celsius. The mountains

turned from white to pink to yellow in reverse as the sun came up that mistless morning. But without the interplay of cloud, the peaks looked alone and naked. No wonder the scriptures believe the clouds to be the wings of the mountain gods that were clipped off by a demon, and that is supposed to be why they often come back to linger among the mountains to try to attach themselves to the snows again, since that is where they belong.

This was too perfect a day to be on the Valley floor, so we drove off to the hills on the rim. As we climbed, the mountains rose with us above the smogline, above the ridges of Shivapuri on the other side of the valley until we saw the Himalayan wall in its true perspective. Try to imagine where Mt Blanc would be if it was where Gauri Shankar is, and you realise that Europe's highest point wouldn't even reach the base of the black ridge at its feet. The valley itself looked like a soup bowl, and the soup was the smog forming a flat inversion layer topping off at 5,500 ft. The filth is emitted not just by the vehicles, as we tend to think, but by the hundreds of chimneys of the brick kilns belching black smoke on the city's outskirts. We also blame the bad visibility only on Kathmandu Valley pollution, it is not. If the smog does not clear after noon, it is clear that the dust and haze is also blowing in from the Gangetic plains. And that is what was happening, the wind changed to southwest, and suddenly the mountains start fading. The sun was pale, Kathmandu's urban sprawl started to disappear into a miasma. The sun was a dirty red eye again. ♦



Compare this picture of Kathmandu Valley taken in 1956 by Toni Hagen from Hatiban with one taken from the same spot in 1999. The hills on the valley rim have more forest, but the city is bursting at the seams with the Chobhar cement in the foreground spewing dust.



in Kathmandu

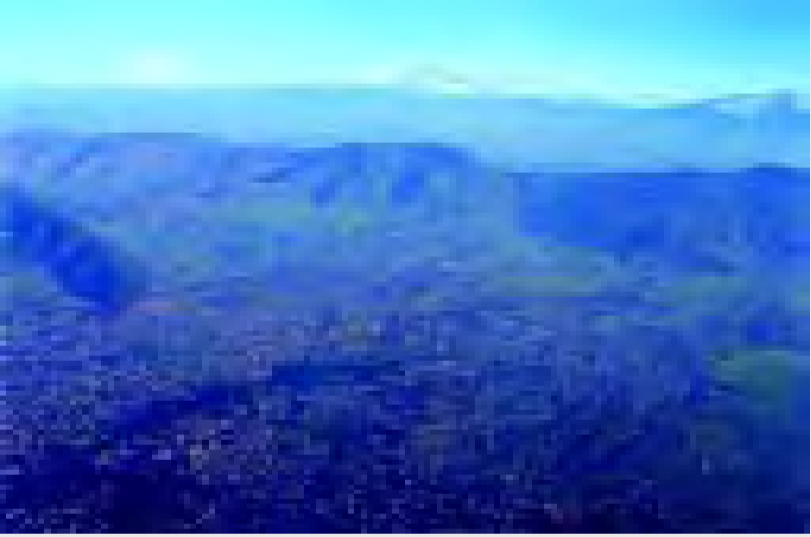


Wheat and mustard terraces on the southern outskirts of the Valley.



How green is our Valley, still? View from Nagarkot.

Vantage Points



RUPA JOSHI

If you want to see the mountains on a clear day from Kathmandu, the general rule is: go south. That is where you get enough distance from the hills to the north of the valley for the mountains to emerge. Some of the rooftop restaurants near Patan Durbar Square offer great views of the historic monuments below as well as the mountains beyond. Bhaktapur has some of the best vistas of the Jugal Himal group from the valley, while a visit to Swayambhu at sunset on a clear day can be rewarding for a view across the valley and Gauri Shankar far off on the horizon, but you have to be very lucky. Venturing even more south, the well-preserved Newar towns of Thecho and Bungmati offer good views of not just the mountains to the north but also (believe it or not) Machhapuchhre. Both are within biking-distance of the city centre, and are becoming increasingly popular with Kathmandu residents looking to work up a sweat amidst scenic surroundings. Kathmandu Valley is tilted to the north, so going south also means you are going

uphill where the haze is thinner. The road to Godavari offers good views of the mountains normally blocked from Kathmandu: Himalchuli, Manasalu and the Annapurnas. But if you really want to get above the haze, then climb up to the highest mountain on the valley rim,

Phulchoki (9,100 ft) or along the Haatiban ridge on to Champadevi (7,000ft). There is a jeepable road that gets up to Phulchoki past thick forests, and the panorama from here is unsurpassed: from Dhaulagiri to Makalu with Kathmandu Valley spread out at your feet below. Chandragiri is more barren, and does not have a road going to the summit, but it also offers the best views of Mt Everest from the valley rim—even better than Nagarkot.

But for by far the best of Kathmandu and the mountains in serene surroundings, and the vantage point of the gods, there is absolutely nothing to beat a hot air balloon ride floating at 11,000 ft in the early morning above the city. Dangling on a small wicker basket hanging from an enormous balloon painted with Buddha's eyes is an experience of a life-time. The picture (above) shows Kathmandu with Himalchuli and Ganesh on the horizon as seen from an early morning balloon ride. ♦

pepsi

Marathon Man



AARON RETICA

Ernst Jünger's early writings on technology, war, and death earned him the admiration of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, and the command of a firing squad in WWII. His later, sceptical ideas about modern technology found expression in his futuristic post-war novels. One of these startling works, *The Glass Bees* (New York Review Books), depicts a barbarous near-future in which "human perfection and technical perfection are incompatible." In today's heady atmosphere of technological enthusiasm, a revival of interest in Jünger's work is underway.

Elliot Neaman, a historian at the University of San Francisco and the author of *A Dubious Past: Ernst*

Jünger and the Politics of Literature After Nazism (California), suggests that in his allegorical novels, Jünger presaged the Internet and the rootless, networked culture of Silicon Valley. If so, it was an ironic act of foresight for a man who disdained even the most widespread modern inventions, including cars, which he refused to drive.

In the course of his long life (he died at the age of 102 in 1998), Jünger shifted restlessly from one intellectual phase to the next: from aristocratic-minded foe of the Weimar Republic to "national Bolshevik" reactionary, from "inner emigrant" during World War II to science-fiction novelist, from psychedelic-drug enthusiast to nonagenarian diarist, all the while working as an amateur entomologist,

Ernst Jünger—tech visionary, sceptic, Nazi supporter—wrote about a future in which "human perfection and technological perfection are incompatible."

According to Thomas Nevin, author of *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945*, in his early years Jünger had a "chivalric perspective on war, almost an anachronistic position." Nevin explains, "Schoolboys in his day looked to the military as we look to Bill Gates and Steve Jobs." But Jünger, who was wounded thirteen times in the war and earned Germany's highest honour for bravery, came to feel that preserving pre-modern codes of soldierly conduct was impossible in the face of the mechanisation and mass mobilisation used to carry out war's carnage.

In 1920, Jünger published one of his finest books, the brutal war memoir *The Storm of Steel*. Battle here was a worthwhile "inner experience", a genuine and thrilling proving ground. Still, the extremes of modern warfare suggested to Jünger that the factory model had finally caught up with the front lines, with devastating effects on men and the true warrior ethic. According to Neaman, Jünger saw "the coming technologies and how important they would be." He adds: "Jünger was deeply reactionary, but he's the kind of reactionary who really wants to understand what he's up against." The airplane, mustard gas, mass mobilisation—the very scale and sophistication of the killing—threatened the old-fashioned heroism,

authority, and individuality that Jünger valued. Technology's levelling effect might even carry over into civilian life, he worried—and once set in motion, it could not be stopped.

After World War I, writing in newspapers published by Nazis, veterans, and independent fascists, Jünger argued that Germany should be governed by a dictatorship that would "substitute deed for word, blood for ink, sacrifice for phrase, and sword for pen". *The Storm of Steel*, admired by Hitler and Goebbels, was included as recommended reading in the Third Reich's school curriculum. Yet for all his seeming support of the Nazi Party, Jünger never joined it. In 1939, he published the novel *On the Marble Cliffs*, which many interpreted as a thinly veiled indictment of the vulgar direction totalitarianism was taking in Germany—and as a mocking caricature of Hermann Göring and Goebbels. Jünger "understood democracy as a totalitarian phenomenon," Nevin argues, and "he interpreted the Third Reich in the same terms." Cultivating a deeply anti-modern aristocratic elitism, he felt superior to mass movements on the left and the right.

Because of his good standing with Hitler, Jünger was not punished for writing *On the Marble Cliffs*, and continued to have reservations about the Nazis, in part because he began to comprehend what he called "the



decimation of the Jews". After the war, Jünger began to write science fiction to address his long-standing concerns about technology. *The Glass Bees*, originally published in 1957, is an example of this approach, an allegorical novel that can be read—depending on one's perspective—either as a remorseful meditation on Jünger's role in developing Nazi culture or as a surreptitious plea to resist technological barbarism by returning to the goals and methods of the old German right.

The novel's narrator is an unemployed veteran, Captain Richard, raised in the glorious traditions of a distinctly Prussian army. Captain Richard has fallen on hard times because of his honour-bound code of ethics is out of tune with modern ways, so he is receptive when a fellow veteran offers to help get him a security job working for the inventor Zapparoni. (In his introduction to *The Glass Bees*, the cyberpunk novelist Bruce Sterling suggests that the inventor can be read as "a hybrid of Bill Gates and Walt Disney.") Captain Richard interviews for the job at Zapparoni's home, a former monastery turned tech wonderland where, among other inventions, Zapparoni keeps a collection of mobile glass bees. The bees exemplify his technical gift for



Jünger in World War I

miniaturisation, which plays a key role in his worldwide dominance of movies, household gadgets, and military secrets. The captain ends up a bureaucratic lackey.

What do we make of this story? Nevin contends that the way Captain Richard is "brought in and co-opted by power is interesting for anyone going through the Third Reich," and so *The Glass Bees* becomes a cautionary tale. Neaman, on the other hand, sees Jünger's later novels as "the most popular version of messages to the faithful," bagatelles for reactionaries—perhaps even signals to hibernate and wait for the technological and emotional self-destruction of the modern world. Here, Zapparoni represents not fascism but decadent corporatist democracy, and Captain Richard, one of the faithful, does whatever is necessary to survive, even if it means being corrupted.

Whether his technological explorations were a sound response to Germany's awful history or an invitation to repeat it is, perhaps, a question that Jünger himself could not have answered. When Nevin met him, he asked why evil had been at the heart of his work. "Because it is so often hidden," Jünger replied. ♦ (Lingua Franca)

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To develop the revolutionary same-day electronic newspaper distribution and publishing concept PEPC, Publishers Electronic Printing Concept, has established strategic partnerships with IBM and Xerox, and the publishers of the world's leading newspapers. The first Units were installed in the Holiday Inn Hotel and Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, both in Amsterdam.

Raoul Maphar, CEO of PEPC Worldwide says: "International travellers and global business executives sacrifice the comforts of home. Now, they no longer have to settle for yesterday's news, but are able to read the latest edition of their favourite hometown newspaper. Our aim is to install the Units at hotels, airports, amusement parks—wherever international travellers congregate." ♦

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The age of Frankenstein

MONTEVIDEO - In his novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley predicted the assembly-line production of human beings. Embryos would be developed in test tubes according to their future social functions, from those created to command to those made for servitude.

Now, seventy years later, biogenetics promises us, as a sort of millennium gift, a new human race. Altering the genetic code for generations to come, science will produce beings that are intelligent, beautiful, healthy, and perhaps immortal, depending on how much money the parents have to spend. Nobel laureate James Watson, who discovered the structure of DNA and heads the Human Genome Project, preaches a despotism of science. Watson refuses to accept any limit on the manipulation of human reproductive cells, either on research or on commerce. He says: "We have to stay away from rules and regulations."

Gregory Pence, a professor of medical ethics at the University of Alabama, is an advocate of the right of parents to pick the children they



The despotism of science will produce genetically-modified people just as it does foods.

wish to have, just as "great breeders try to match a breed of dog to the needs of a family". Lester Thurow, economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the successful theorist of success, asks who would turn down the chance to programme a child with greater intelligence. "And if you don't," he argues, "your neighbours will, and your child will be the stupidest in the neighbourhood."

If we are lucky, the nurseries of

the future will produce superbabies like these geniuses. Today the improvement of the species doesn't require the gas chambers that Germany employed to purify its race, nor the surgery that the United States, Sweden, and other countries use to prevent low-quality human models from reproducing. The world will manufacture genetically-modified people just as it does foods.

As Stanley Kubrick predicted

thirty years ago in his film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, today we eat chemical food. We are part of a procession of abbreviations: after DDT and PCBs, which were finally banned after it became known, years ago, that they caused more cancer than comfort, it was GM's turn. And now GMs from the United States, Canada, and Argentina are invading the whole world, and we are all the guinea pigs in these gastrological experiments of the major laboratories.

In reality, we don't even know what we eat. Except for a few exceptions, the labels on the foods we buy don't tell us whether their ingredients have been genetically modified (GM). Monsanto, the main provider of these products, doesn't include this detail on its labels, even in the case of milk from cows that have been treated with transgenic growth hormones, which according to studies published in *The Lancet*, *Science*, *The International Journal of Health Services*, and others are a cause of breast and prostate cancer.

Nonetheless, the US Food and Drug Administration has

authorised the sale of this milk without mention of this fact on the label, because hormones stimulate growth and increase production, and more production means more profit. And it's the health of the economy that comes first.

Anyway, even when Monsanto is required to admit what it's selling, nothing much changes. A few years ago the company had to pay a fine for "seventy-five inexact mentions" on the cans of its poisonous herbicide "Roundup". The company was given a special bulk rate and paid a mere \$3000 per lie.

The Europeans are the only ones who are defending themselves, or at least trying to. The import of GM products is prohibited in certain cases and subject to regulation in others. Since 1998, for example, the European Union has required clear labelling on genetically-modified soy products. But it is hard to put this good intention into practice: the trace of this substance is lost when combined with other ingredients. According to Greenpeace, GM soy is present in 60 percent of all the processed food sold in supermarkets around the world.

The attitude of the Europeans was shaped under the pressure of public opinion. When French farmers set fire to the silos of transgenic corn to

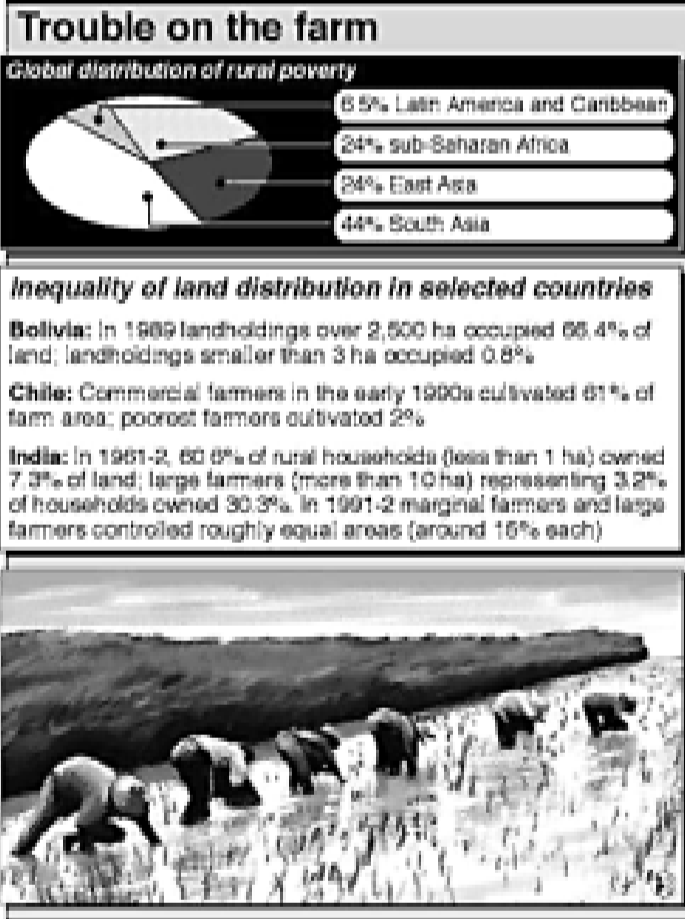
protest the damage it does to the ecosystem, the agitator/organiser Jose Bove became a national hero, a new Asterix, who stated in his defence: "When were we, the farmers and the consumers, consulted about this?" The government, which had arrested him, withdrew its authorisation of the cultivation of biotech corn.

Of course the Europeans have other reasons to distrust technocrats' manoeuvres on their dinner tables. They are still shaken by their recent experience with mad cows. For the thousands of years that cows lived off grass and grain, their behaviour was impeccable and they accepted their fate with resignation. Then our insane current system forced them into cannibalism. Cows ate cows and grew fatter, rendered humanity more meat and milk, won the applause of the markets and encomiums from their owners—and went stark raving mad. People made a lot of jokes about this—until they started to die from it.

In 1996 the British Ministry of Agriculture informed the population that animal feed made from animal blood, fat, and gelatin was safe for cattle and not harmful to human health. Bon appetit! ♦ (IPS)

Eduardo Galeano, an Uruguayan journalist, is author of *Memories of Fire* and *The Open Veins of Latin America*.

Reforms and other lies of the land



NEVILLE DE SILVA IN LONDON

After years of suffering neglect at the hands of international financial institutions, land reform is suddenly back on the development agenda. The World Bank and major donor nations are singing its praises. But it is a sanitised version they advocate, not the land reform of the past under which governments nationalised land and distributed it among the landless and poor or simply bought it from their wealthy owners for a low price.

The flavour of the times is market-oriented land reform, as explained by a United Nations agency, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in its *Global Poverty Report* for 2001. IFAD urges that land reform be hastened as a means of reducing global poverty which has fallen far

behind the target set by world leaders because rural poverty is not addressed. 'New-wave' land reform—the redistribution of land through decentralised, market-based means—is a cost-effective strategy to reduce poverty through creating small family farms," says IFAD.

The 'New-wave' reform mirrors recent World Bank ideas. Rogier van den Brink and Klaus Deininger of the World Bank wrote last year: "Land reform is more likely to result in poverty reduction if it harnesses (rather than undermines) the operation of land markets and is implemented in a decentralised fashion." Markets are the best arbiter of supply and demand of goods and services, and stress the need for "consensual arrangements" between buyers and sellers, which would eliminate conflicts arising from nationalisation or forcible occupation

The World Bank, UN agencies and donor nations are excited by market-driven land reform. But this may not alleviate rural poverty or lead to agricultural reform.

of land. The government would get together with other players and, identifying regions where land is available for distribution, organise land markets. Since this market by itself would not be sufficient to transfer land to the poor, the state would provide loans and institutional services to establish their rights to the land. "It is important to draw distinctions between confiscatory, statist or top-down approaches and the New-wave land reform: decentralised, market-friendly, with support from and involvement of civil-society action with consensus," the IFAD report says.

Global poverty-reduction targets are clearly not being met. Thirty million people a year should have been released from poverty for the 2015 target to be met. IFAD says the figure is no more than 10 million a year. Since 75 percent of extreme poverty occurs in rural areas, IFAD says that the whole question be looked at in the context of the rural world. "Current development efforts grossly and increasingly neglect agriculture and rural people," says Dr Michael Lipton, director of the Poverty Research Unit at Sussex University, who co-authored the report.

Between 1987-98 agricultural aid to low-income or least developed countries, which account for over 85 percent of the world's poor, shrank by two thirds. John Madeley, a writer specialising in agricultural issues, says: "When rural families—small-scale farmers—have land and secure control over that land, they are likely to grow more food and see their incomes rise." Landlessness and poverty go hand-in-hand in Ethiopia, Chile, China, Ivory Coast and Tanzania. And extreme land inequality leaves the poor with few options in Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, northeast Brazil, and parts of India and the Philippines.

But the World Bank-inspired New-wave land reform programme in the northeastern states of Brazil has run into criticism and protest. The *Cedula da Terra* project, designed by the Bank in conjunction with the Brazilian government, began in 1997 as a three-year project with a loan of \$90 million from the Bank and \$60 million from Brazil. "The project pays for land in cash rather than in 20-year bonds. It allows landowners to negotiate prices and determine which plots to sell. *Cedula da Terra* allows

landowners to dump less desirable plots in return for immediate cash, protecting their prime holdings—idle or not—from disappropriation," says 50 Years is Enough, which campaigns for winding up of the Bank and its sister organisation, the International Monetary Fund. In 1998 the National Forum for Agricultural Reform and Justice in Rural Areas, an umbrella organisation of Brazil's rural workers, filed a formal request with the World Bank, claiming "the project will harm family farmers and

impair the land reform process in Brazil".

The Bank is also targeted by the Peasant Movement of the Philippines (KMP) for influencing the half-hearted land reform programme of former President Corazon Aquino. KMP accuses Aquino's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP) of never intending to "distribute land to the poor and landless peasants, let alone shatter feudal rule in the countryside". ♦ (Gemini)

Antarctic ice cap thinning

British scientists have detected ominous signs of the ice thinning in west Antarctica. The continent's biggest glacier, which has been systematically measured for the last eight years, has lost a 10-metre thickness of ice and retreated five km inland. If the thinning goes on at that rate, the entire glacier could disappear into the ocean within a few hundred years. The region holds enough ice to raise worldwide sea levels by five metres, flooding coastal cities such as London, New York, Tokyo, and Calcutta.

An international panel of climate scientists last week confirmed that the Arctic ice sheet had thinned by 40 percent because of global warming in the northern hemisphere—but said there were so far no signs of similar thinning near the south pole. But researchers from London's University College and the British Antarctic Survey report in *Science* that the Pine Island glacier, the largest in the west Antarctic, has lost 32 cubic kilometres of ice over a 5,000 sq km area since 1992. The glacier is one of the fastest in the world, flowing at 8 metres a day.

"For the past 25 years there has been speculation about whether a retreat of a west Antarctic glacier could accelerate ice flow from its interior, producing rise in sea level," said Andrew Shepherd of UCL, who led the study. Scientists said the discovery added weight to the argument that small changes at the coast of the continent—such as the effects of global warming—could be transmitted swiftly inland, leading to an acceleration of sea level rise.

There had also been dramatic losses of ice in the Larsen ice shelf, on the other side of the Antarctic. But researchers were not yet confident that these two things added up to evidence of global warming around the continent.

The Antarctic contains 90 percent of the world's snow and ice. The mountain glaciers in the west get the worst blizzards and some of the harshest cold on the planet. The zone is too hostile for any research station, and scientists had to base their information on satellite studies and aerial surveys.

Pine Island glacier starts at an altitude of 2,500m, and its frozen tributaries gather into a massive river of gradually accelerating ice, 25 km wide and 150 km long, which reaches the sea in a wall 750m high. "It is a very, very fast glacier, one of the fastest in Antarctica," said Dr Shepherd. "It starts at around 100m a year and the ice flows into it gradually. Alpine glaciers generally travel at no more than 50m a year and this one travels at 2,500m a year." (Guardian)



Dangerous waters

Pirates struck 75 times in the Malacca Strait last year, compared with two the year before.

RUSSELL BARLING

The *Global Mars*, an ageing, modest-sized tanker bound for India with 6,000 tonnes of palm oil products, was making good time.

After 20 hours of watching her bow cut a path from Port Kelang in Malaysia through the busy waters of the Malacca Strait, the Burmese pilot's focus had begun to waver. He had already weaved his way through the 200-odd commercial vessels that ply the 500-mile waterway daily.

As night fell he continued northwest at 12 knots into the Andaman Sea, off the coast of Thailand. The strait's narrowest passage, where most of Asia's pirates lurk, had long dipped below the horizon. The 17 other members of the crew were relaxing in their cabins.

Silently, an unlit fishing vessel glided up to the stern. A masked man threw a shrouded grappling hook over the rail and clambered aboard, lowering a rope to the many waiting hands below.

Within minutes the pirates, masked and armed with guns and metre-long swords, had rounded

up the 18 startled sailors, bound and blindfolded them, and transferred them to the hold of the waiting boat.

There they remained for 11 days while their captors anchored the *Global Mars* at sea, repainted her, renamed her *Bulawan*, and sailed her into a pre-selected port, carrying forged identity papers and flying a Honduran flag, to unload 3,500 tonnes of their booty. It was the kind of a professionalism exhibited only by organised crime syndicates.

On the 12th day the crew were dumped into an open boat and set adrift with minimal rations. After five days in the Andaman Sea they were found off the coast of Phuket.

Horrifying though their ordeal may have been, they were fortunate. Last year 72 crew and passengers were killed in pirate attacks, 40 of them in southeast Asia, according to the International Maritime Bureau's annual report on piracy, released

last week. Twenty-six people are missing. Piracy rose by 56 percent last year to 469 incidents, of which 119 were reported in Indonesian waters, hostages being taken in 46 of the latter incidents.

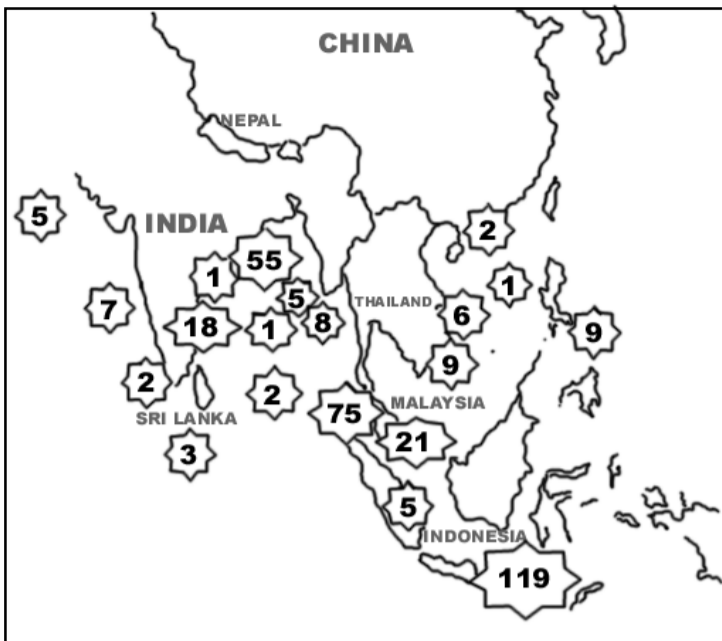
Even those attacks which do not result in loss of life or hostage-taking are becoming increasingly violent, the IMB's deputy director, Capt Jayant Abhyankar, said. "These pirates are extremely brutal. They terrorise the crews, beat them, shoot them and lock them up for long periods, during which they are in constant fear for their lives." On the *Global Mars*, when one of the crew locked himself in his cabin the pirates fired shots into the air, telling him they would continue killing his mates if he did not come out.

A spokesman for the cruise company Maersk-Sealand said: "We have had some incidents with charters in southeast Asia in the past. Our scheduling is now arranged to make sure all our vessels only arrive and depart

during daylight, to eliminate the risk of having to anchor outside ports, waiting for pilots."

Pirates struck 75 times in the Malacca Strait last year, compared with two the year before. It makes an inviting target: 90 percent of Malaysia's trade by volume traverses through it and it is 1,000 miles shorter than alternative routes from the Persian Gulf to the Pacific. Its 2,700 miles of coastline is pock-marked with bays, inlets and tributaries that make perfect hideouts. Some experts believe that changes in regional economics drove piracy from its mid-1990s hotbed in the HLH triangle (Hong Kong-Luzon-Hainan Island) further south into and around the straits. "The after-effects of the financial crisis was definitely a factor in the rise of piracy in southeast Asia," said David Tan, executive director of the Singapore Shipping Association. "Indonesia's ongoing political instability has not allowed it to recover from that as quickly as some of its northern neighbours."

The global liberalisation of trade



Pirate attacks in the Asia-Pacific region in 2000.

has also had some influence, by reducing the demand for some black-market goods, Capt Abhyankar said. Because smuggling has become less profitable, the crime syndicates which used to control the waterways jealously have moved on, allowing petty criminals to flourish. In May, four months after the *Global Mars* was hijacked, the *Bulawan* was found anchored off Zhuhai, southern China. The authorities, tipped off by the IMB, arrested the 11 Filipinos and nine Burmese nationals on board, but just as promptly released them. They said there was no evidence of any

offence being committed in Chinese waters, despite an array of munitions on board.

This, Capt Abhyankar said, illustrates the problems faced by the IMB. There are jurisdictional hurdles to overcome before prosecuting, and some countries, including Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, have no laws governing piracy. "Piracy is a growing problem and very difficult to prosecute," he said. "The UN has said it may get involved, we hope they do. It may be time for the Security Council to have a look at this." ♦ (Guardian)

Covering the quake

SHYAM PAREKH

IN BHACHAU, GUJARAT

When the 26 January earthquake hit Gujarat, the national and international media made an instant beeline for Bhuj, the ill-equipped headquarters of the flattened district of Kutch. The epicentre of the earthquake lay some 20 km north-east of the town.

Within hours, visuals and news reports about the utter destruction of the town had reached all corners of the world—through the Internet, radio, press and television. In turn, aid agencies, alerted in time, were able to respond rapidly and in proportion to the scale of the disaster. But there was a downside to this, as the state government, the federal administration and aid agencies all channelled their aid to Bhuj.

For the next 48 hours—the critical period for saving lives—the world and the rest of India saw the disaster only in terms of a handful of urban centres: Bhuj, some of the other nine towns in Kutch, and Ahmedabad, Gujarat's largest city. But there are 884 villages in Kutch, which also happens to be India's second largest district! Surely, an earthquake of this magnitude—at least 7.7—would have affected these villages. And surely aid should have been spread all over the district.

Immediately upon receiving news of the quake the state machinery should have dispatched small teams to all corners of the district and conducted an aerial survey. By the same evening they could have had a good estimate of where aid was needed most, and directed aid agencies accordingly.

As it happened, with the media, officials and aid agencies concentrating on Bhuj, people in the villages were left to the mercy of nature—to die under the debris of their own homes. The conditions in these places were dire. Small towns like Anjar, Rapar



Aerial view of the centre of Bhachau, Gujarat

Reporters rushed to cover Bhuj and ignored villages—a mistake that may have led to thousands of preventable deaths.

and Bhachau, from where I reported, had simply ceased to exist. Relatives rushing in from different parts of the country and the world, carrying addresses of their relatives, were shell-shocked to learn that none of the addresses existed any longer. There were no buildings—or streets or roads.

Those who had survived were in a daze. Those still able to move about helped cremate dead bodies, burning them with kerosene, wood, petrol, diesel, plastic, rubber, paper—anything that would burn. In Bhachau, funeral pyres were lit on the roads. The sight of so many charred and half-burnt bodies was unbearable—and this was just the day after the quake. Thirty hours after the

earthquake, there was no one, barring a few local volunteers, to provide relief. A few local policemen and doctors did whatever they could—heroically under the circumstances, for every one of them had faced personal tragedy.

The first bulldozer entered Bhachau after 6 pm on 27 January. By then only a few people had been pulled out alive—by locals who had chosen to stay back. The survivors included an advocate who lit the funeral pyre of his wife and a daughter on the night of 27 January, after dragging their bodies out of what was their home and then rigging up the pyre on the street outside. "Still there is another daughter buried inside and I am feeding her with water and food. I

don't know whether I should wait for the rescue worker to pull her out or take my nephew to hospital," he said.

There was a cinema, where now only the screen stands—an eerie epitaph to the mass grave below. Slowly some ambulances and cars began arriving but by then it was clear that not many would be found alive. Most of the survivors had left the town in any case. Tremors still occurred, shaking debris, vehicles and people. Here, the devastation was complete, much greater than what was shown on the television or published in the newspapers.

This tragedy is far from over. What I have written is based on what I could gather from the few towns that were approachable immediately after the earthquake. Even on 1 February, a full week after the quake, nobody knew the fate of the hundreds of villages spread over the expanse of the 45,000 sq km Kutch district, which had a population of nearly 1.5 million.

This need not have been so. Just a little disaster preparedness would have helped save thousands of lives. Having coped with three drought years in the 1980s, a devastating cyclone in 1998 and the subsequent floods, the Gujarat administration should not have been caught by surprise. The criticism might appear too extreme but as a reporter rendered homeless by the earthquake I feel the shock. Along with my colleagues at the *Times of India* in Ahmedabad, I work from an office building that was still being shaken by daily tremors a week after the earthquake.

Such mismanagement is particularly ironic in a country where business management institutes attract thousands every year and whose business management gurus are exported all around the world. ♦ (Gemini)

Panda flies from Japan to Mexico

TOKYO – A team of Japanese zoo keepers and Ling Ling, a giant panda, travelled last week to a breeding programme in Mexico. The giant panda has become a symbol for international organisations campaigning for the protection of endangered species. According to the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), there are currently about 1,000 pandas in the wild in China, and some 114 in captivity, 99 in Chinese zoos.

For Japan, which acquired its first pair of pandas from China in 1972, Ling Ling's trip inspires both hope and apprehension. "Ling Ling is the sole survivor in Ueno zoo," explains Fukuharu Sugimoto, one of the panda's keepers. The 15-year-old male panda was born in a successful artificial insemination programme in China. It will be on loan to Mexico, which has only three female pandas. The first cub born will be sent to Ueno Zoo and Mexico will keep the second. The San Diego zoo, the sponsor of this effort, is entitled to one cub. Last March, a sperm sample from Ling Ling was sent to Mexico but produced nothing. If the current trip does not work out, Mexico will dispatch a female panda to Tokyo.

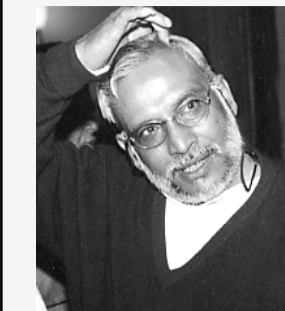
Wildlife experts see the project differently. "Wild animals are best protected in their natural habitat," says Makiko Mizuno of WWF Japan. Mizuno believes that the illegal trade of wildlife is also to blame for the panda crisis. She points to Japan's foot-dragging on the ban on the import of Chinese medicinal herbs that contain tiger products or bears' gall bladders as an example of how even protected animals such as the tiger and bear, face the threat of extinction.

China has had a WWF panda programme for over a decade—wild pandas are bred in an environment as close to its natural habitat so the animals can be released to the wild. However, experts acknowledge the going is tough because it is difficult to return animals bred in captivity to the wild and because development programmes are rapidly encroaching on natural habitats.

Japan is eagerly awaiting news of Ling Ling's visit to Mexico. Panda hysteria is such among the Japanese that people will pay \$1,000 for a small panda statue. (IPS)



The mafia has a stranglehold over business



(Excerpts from an interview with leading industrialist Mohan Gopal Khetan Punarjagaran, 30 January)

How do you assess the economic situation of the country?
It is not very good. Industrialists do not feel confident enough to invest here. There is a mafia-like group that wants to make fast money through any means. The country's economy is in the hands of this group; industrialists and the business community in general have no say about the nation's economy. Unless the industrialists and business community are allowed a certain amount of freedom there will be no improvement in the economy.

Currently, a vast portion of the business community's earnings slips away to the government in the form of revenue and bank interest, and the rest goes to pay wages. If you follow the trends of the last three months, you will find that all the industries are running up losses. The performance of the share markets and the reports of the FNCCI suggest that the economic scenario of the country is bleak.

How do you suggest the industrial sector in the country be improved?
First of all, political interference in the industrial sector must end. Currently, politics and industry are infringing on each other's territory. Politicians try to use business to serve their interests, and the business community tries to influence politicians. The business community is taking far too much interest in politics. Secondly, I think that we are the victims of a misconception. We have developed a habit of contacting New Delhi for whatever occurs. In the case of China, talking to Tibet can solve problems—we don't need to rush to Beijing.

When Sher Bahadur Deuba visited China, I was part of the business delegation. Beijing said that since Tibet is our neighbour, we should talk to Tibet if problems in trade occur, and that only policy problems should be referred to Beijing. They told us that if the trade agreement reflects the interests of people on both sides of the border, no trade problems would arise. On the contrary, New Delhi has never displayed this courtesy. I believe if India adopts a similar policy, many trade problems will be solved—whether issues of customs or the expanding market for our products. UP and Bihar are our main concern, but we sign agreements with New Delhi. Our neighbours, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, then decline to comply and as a result the Nepali business community is made to suffer.

I believe that Nepal should first take the UP and Bihar governments into confidence. If we manage to expand our market to the 400 million people along the Nepal-India border, our industry and business will boom. New Delhi's concern is only external affairs, defence and other policy issues. As far as commerce is concerned, we should review our policy of approaching the UP or Bihar governments.

It was once claimed that political instability is costing Nepali commerce heavily. Now, we have political stability but business and commerce have failed to grow. Times have changed. In the last 10-15 years there have been political changes. There is crisis of confidence in the political and commerce sectors—corruption is rampant, underhand dealings are the norm. As a result the non-commercial sector has become very influential in industry. A non-industrial group was granted the Upper Karnali licence and a luggage loader at RNAC has become its promoter. In this situation how do you expect economic growth?

You have claimed that the business community is losing and that politicians have gained control over money. Can you explain?

It is not my claim alone. Whether it is the issue of shares or the Nepali Congress convention, millions of rupees are diverted. Leaders who could hardly garner 100 votes chartered a plane or reserved tens of vehicles. Where do you think the money came from? It is simply a show of wealth acquired by unjustifiable means. As I mentioned before, politicians have become businessmen. There is no room for genuine businessmen. If people in power interfere with the commercial sector, the powerless businessmen cannot survive competition. Those who have mafia connections can open an LC today and deliver consignments by the evening. The next day, they are ready for more business. It is only these people who can survive in business today.

It is rumoured that the Marwari community has been targeted in Kathmandu.
No, this is not the case. Of course, windowpanes were shattered during the riots. Processions were taken out under the banner of the NC, CPN-UML and the Nine Left groups. But what we should understand is that small groups that tailed the genuine processions were responsible for the vandalism. The Marwari community has become synonymous with wealth, and when the poor are hungry, the rich are often targeted.

So instead of interpreting the incident as a communal outburst, the poor should be given employment. The government did nothing to protect the Marwari community for three days. During the Panchayat regime, when the Jansewa Cinema was burnt, King Mahendra personally visited the site and suspended the Zonal Chief Bishnu Mani Acharya. This time around the government remained tight-lipped and reluctant. It is natural for the Marwari community to feel insecure in such a situation.

Do you provide the Maoists with donations?
I have never been forced to donate to the Maoists for reasons unknown. Four years ago, Baburam Bhattarai called and said he would ask for help when needed. But he has not approached me since.

When are you planning to start mobile phone services?
How can we begin providing services when the government keeps playing games? The government provided us with the licence to begin mobile phone service and then restrained us. How can a responsible government let an employee file a writ against the licence after the concerned ministry had already issued the licence? If the employee filed the writ of his own accord, the government could have taken action against the individual. The government has played dirty regarding the mobile phone licence.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

We are not trying to displace the Nepali Congress. We are asking a corrupt Girija Prasad Koirala to resign from the post of prime minister.

—Bharat Mohan Adhikari, chief whip of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) in Budhabar, 7 February.

"No, go that way. All of you will be satisfied. Then it will be difficult." (The banner reads: Nepali Congress (Dissatisfied). The sign says: Cabinet Reshuffle)

हिमालय टाइम्स Himalaya Times, Daily, 4 February 2001

RNA can crush insurgency

Desbantar, 4 February

A report prepared by the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) after conducting a survey in Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan and Jajarkot says only 20-30 percent of the people living in these areas have joined the insurgency on their own free will. According to a source in the RNA most people are supporting the Maoists out of fear of retribution and pressure. The source says 2-3 percent of Maoists are elderly people who have joined up of their own free will and that the rest are mostly youngsters. Unemployed youth find the job of an insurgent attractive. "The Maoists even provide a salary to the young," said the source.

The report, which the source says took one year to prepare, places the blame squarely on government's weakness and failure to control the insurgency. The army source also claims that the military can easily bring the situation under control but that the government should set the stage to use the army. "To use the army, the government must declare a military programme in the region," said the source. According to the Military Act 1962, in case military rule is announced, all cases looked after by the civil courts will be handled by the military court except those of homicide and rape. To use the army, the region must be declared a riot-hit region, after which the civil administration will automatically be transferred to the army. Habeas corpus all other civil rights will be discontinued.

The fact that Maoists have declared their own government in certain regions is an attempt against sovereignty. Because this is not a common riot situation but one that questions sovereignty itself, the army, which is at the disposal of the government, may be utilised.

After the formation of the Armed Police Force, the question of whether to use the army or not has definitely moved further away. While the army chief, Prajwol Shamsheer Rana, has said that the army will only move in if the Armed Police Force fails, a major general has been included in the central security board of the force.

Month-long Maoist violence

Desbantar, 4 February

The Maoists have declared a month-long programme of violence to celebrate the sixth year of their insurgency. Sources close to the Maoists said they plan to increase activities in the eastern and mid-western regions of the country. They also said that the special rebel task forces deployed in these areas would be upgraded to that of a company and that they might attack any strategically and geographically weak district headquarters. Likewise, the campaign against the mandatory teaching of Sanskrit in schools and the singing of the national anthem already on in the far-west will be extended to the eastern and mid-western regions once the insurgency enters its sixth year.

With the formation of the new Armed Police Force, with its trained manpower and semi-

automatic weapons, the Maoists have also felt the need for self-loading rifles. According to the leftist leader Padma Ratna Tuladhar, in case no talks take place between the government and insurgents, rebels might get time to acquire more weapons. "From what I have heard, the arms mafia has contacted the rebels with the intention of selling them modern weapons saying that they will accept payment later. If there are no talks before the Armed Police Force is sent to action, a civil war will break out in the country," said Tuladhar.

The Maoists too claim to be in the process of acquiring modern weaponry. "Rebel commander Baburam Bhattarai is worried that once his forces get their hands on modern weaponry they might think like the army," say Maoists sources.

The rebels, entering their sixth year of insurgency, are also preparing to end the government administration in Rukum, Rolpa, and Jajarkot and start their own rule. An FM radio station is on its way to announce the formation of their government. But the leaders are discussing the issue, the source said.

To make their strategy last the rebels are thinking of creating a united front in the centre and involving opposition parties where required, bringing the revolution to the streets and making the insurgency constitutional. The long-term plan is to put the government under siege from all sides. Since the start of the insurgency on 13 March, 1996, the Maoists have been stepping up their activities every anniversary.

PM's messenger at Oli's house

Jana Aastha, 31 January



The UML has decided to ask for the prime minister's resignation in the forthcoming session of parliament. They have accused the PM of being inefficient and say that corruption, instead of being curtailed, is increasing daily. Discussion of the Lauda Air issue features prominently in the UML's plan of action. The UML had asked for the PM's resignation late last month, and immediately after that, on 29 January, the PM spoke over the phone with UML leader KP Oli. The conversation lasted at the most five minutes. Immediately after this conversation, at around 9pm, the PM sent his secretary, Gokarna Poudel, to meet Oli at his place. Gokarna went to meet Oli in a car with private plates. As soon as Madhav Kumar Nepal got wind of this conversation and Gokarna's visit to Oli, he rushed back to the capital from Bara, the very next day. Unfortunately, Nepal could only reach Kathmandu the following day.

Lauda costs Rs 110 mn a month

Budhabar Saptahik, 31 January

Royal Nepal Airline Corporation (RNAC) employees have demanded that the Lauda Air plane that has been leased for 18 months be sent back immediately. They state that this deal is not in the country's interests and fear that if the plane is not returned immediately, there is very little chance of RNAC surviving in the near future.

In a press conference organised yesterday, the Nepal Airlines Pilot Association (NAPA) and the RNAC Employees' Union stated that leasing the Lauda Air aircraft has placed a extra financial burden of almost Rs 110 million per month on RNAC.

NAPA general secretary Yuvraj Kumar Bhattarai and Badri Bahadur Karki jointly stated that the earlier Boeing 767-300 ER RNAC had leased for 10 years cost Rs 850-900 million annually, but the Lauda Air plane would cost RNAC Rs 1.34 billion, a cost the airline cannot bear.

According to them, RNAC can function adequately with three aircraft and the fourth one was not needed at all. In fact, it has become a burden on the RNAC. According to the agreement, if the aircraft needs repair, a replacement plane will not be sent over by Lauda, and the RNAC will have to pay \$7,000 per day for repairs. Although it has been stated in the agreement that it will cost only \$3,350 per hour to lease the plane, if actual costs and other hidden costs are taken into consideration, it works out to over \$5,000 per hour.

Deuba-UML in secret parleys

Prakash Saptahik, 29 January

Earlier when the Nine Left were agitating and demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister, the UML withdrew from that agitation and supported the Koirala regime. Now it has again taken a stand against the Koirala government and has asked for his resignation. The Nine Left view this action—and the UML—with suspicion.

According to sources, a meeting took place recently between a leader of the UML and the leader of the anti-Koirala faction in the Nepali Congress, Sher Bahadur Deuba, in Kathmandu. The agenda of the meeting was how to demand Koirala's resignation. The silence of UML heavyweight Oli has added to the mystery. According to a source close to Oli, the UML leader is sick at present. But he thinks that even if Koirala goes and Deuba steps into the PM's slot, this will not stop the present chaos and therefore feels that any step of the UML has to be thought out very carefully and taken cautiously. In the meanwhile, Madhav Kumar Nepal, who is vocally demanding the PM's resignation, is out of the Valley. This has led to the UML and its leaders still not being able to finalise their course of action.

SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

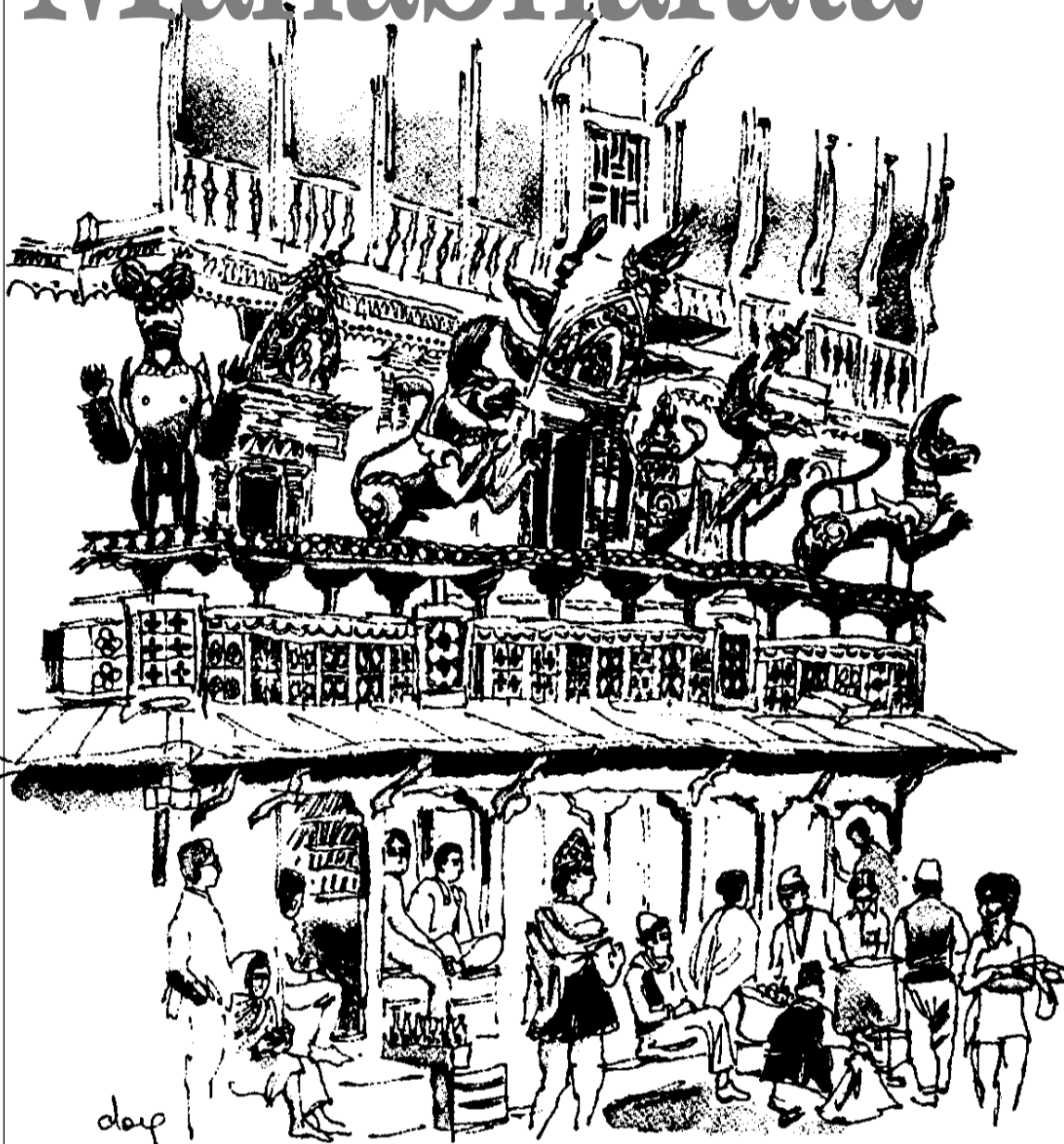
A victim of the Mahabharata

In the heart of Kathmandu, where streets old and new meet in a small square known as Indra Chowk, is a temple of uncertain date dedicated to Akash Bhairab, or the Bhairab of the sky. The present structure, but for its powerful embellishments, is much like an old Nepali house; tiled, two storeyed, with a row of shops on the ground floor. The square is a meeting place for just about everybody, from Kathmandu, the surrounding valley and the distant mountains, and well-known to visitors from India who pass it in their perambulations between the modern shops and supermarket and the small but enticing shops in the old Asan bazaar where Tibetan traders sell goodies from Bangkok and Hong Kong.

Until recently, the two handsome metal lions on either side of the entrance door used to provide convenient display for a fruit vendor who innocently hung bunches of bananas from the gaping jaws or tied a shading umbrella to the mane or tail. She has been tidied up and in the effort has deprived tourists of a splendid photograph. But rickshaws and *thelas*, happy porters from the hills and tentative pavement shops that bloom between the coming and going of policemen, lend a busy charm to Indra Chowk. Within reach are a shimmering bead market, shops selling *pashmina* shawls of every quality, fruit and flower vendors, and flute men. These unsung musicians, some of them quite brilliant, stand under trees made of flutes stuck into bamboo poles enticing passers-by with the latest Hindi film song or the most popular tunes of Radio Nepal.

The actual shrine is on the first floor, at its centre a large silver mask of God Bhairab stained with the vermillion and yellow of endless anointing. Always there are flowers and usually the much beloved marigold. The eyes of the god are turned upward giving emphasis to the incredible story connected with the deity.

It is told that the first Kirati king, a great warrior by the name of Yalambar, was anxious to take part in

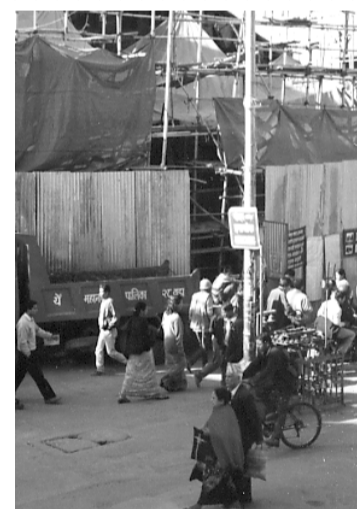


Krishna fearing that Yalambar would join the Kauravas, decapitated the king with a blow so powerful that his masked head flew across the lower ranges of the Himalaya to come to rest in Kathmandu.

the epic war of the Mahabharata then being fought on the plains of India. He went suitably attired in the armour of the times and upon his face wore a dazzling silver mask representing Bhairab, Lord of Terror. And with him went a seemingly invincible horde of Nepali warriors. One can imagine his appearance on

the battlefield; a mighty figure at the head of a terrifying army even among the warring gods and epic mortals about him. Indeed, so powerful was his presence that Lord Krishna appeared before him to ask whose side the king and his army had come to join. Yalambar grandly said that he would ally himself to the losing forces. Whereupon, Krishna fearing that Yalambar would join the Kauravas, decapitated the king with a blow so powerful that his masked head flew across the lower ranges of the Himalaya to come to rest in Kathmandu.

There is another version of this story which has the beheaded Yalambar beg of Krishna that his eyes be permitted to view the battle until its end. Many versions of the ancient books, the *Puranas*, record that this heroic request was granted and only when the war ceased did Yalambar's head return to Kathmandu. The existing temple in the old bazaar fails in its humble way to match so stupendous an act, so immortal a deed. True, the windows through which the image can be glimpsed are beautifully carved and four large gilded gryphons, outside the windows, appear to be hurling themselves into the sky. There are rows of prayer lamps along the balcony of the first floor and the façade is tricked out with a variety of porcelain tiles, which at a glance appear incongruous but grow on one so that it is difficult to imagine the temple, placed as it is at the meeting place of old and new



Indra Chowk today teems with life, scaffolds, and renovation as the Akash Bhairab temple undergoes a complete face-lift.

Kathmandu to be any different.

Once a year at the time of the Kumari Jatra which coincides with Indra Jatra, the great silver mask of the Akash Bhairab is enthroned in the square below the temple. Thousands come to worship and feed the god so that his silver face almost disappears beneath countless garlands and bouquets and votive offerings.

Aptly, the mask of the Akash Bhairab has been adopted as the symbol of Nepal's flag carrier Royal Nepal Airlines. And I like to think that the god is pleased that his epic journey is commemorated every day by the Kathmandu-Delhi Kathmandu flight. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, HarperCollins, 1999.)

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

'NO GREATER LITERATURE THAN REALITY'

Indra Bahadur Rai



Many years ago, someone who knows much about modern Nepali literature—and views much of it in a critical light—told me, rather crossly, not to bother with too many writers, to just go straight to Indra Bahadur Rai's work and to translate that if I had the capacity to. When I finally read Rai's *Aaja Ramita Chha* (There's a Commotion Today) some time ago, I found that my cross and critical adviser was right: if I had the time and linguistic dexterity, I would take on this novel to translate.

Aaja Ramita Chha is, without a doubt, one of the most evocative and lively novels I have read in any language, sketching the larger social life of Darjeeling town, and the individual lives of myriad characters with a deftness and lightness of touch that is both breathtaking and heartrending. The hodge-podge of Darjeeling Nepali, English, Hindi and Bengali languages textures the novel with vibrant, everyday inflections. The attention that Rai pays to his characters' smallest gestures and mannerisms invests them with a rare humanity and individuality. This is the kind of novel to read and re-read, savouring all its stray wisdoms and passing insights. The author's introduction to the novel contains much to think about for younger writers such as myself, and it is this that I present below:

To write a novel one needs some paper and a pen, and one needs some knowledge of life. Knowledge of life consists of three parts: experience to one part, imagination to one part, and the land is formed as age and experience lead us to recognise life. That's the view which makes one write a novel. If a single story about equal characters is written with five separate views, these are in the truest sense five separate novels; but if written with a single view, hundred and hundreds of volumes remain but the divergences of a single novel. Others won't feel the way I feel about life based on my experience. Thus not everyone has the same view of novel writing. Through experiences and reflection on them—which is, in short, attentiveness—each writer has to slowly, slowly discover this view for himself, and bring it to the fore. Any literary effort without reflection is only a fanciful pretense, a sham.

I saw that life was moving ahead, but not in an orderly way, exactly as it should. In a similar way I've disarranged this novel. I didn't see life as a singular concern or the chemical purity of one topic and unhindered progress. Love is the mother of all emotions, one that if handled makes all our emotions and feelings writhe to life. But even those who run behind it undertake other tasks in between which are just as vital in understanding life. If this is how things are in life they shouldn't be otherwise in literature. It is said that there shouldn't be any unnecessary character in a novel, but there are such characters in this novel even though they have no purpose in the story because there aren't only wanted people in the world that I see. If after having lived together throughout life someone doesn't affect us at all, that too is a story, an appealing story of a non-event. Literature reproduces life and the land, but such is the philosophy written in refined volumes on reproduction. There is a rage against that philosophy in this novel. There can be no stillness or lack of refinement in the unaltered reproduction of life and the land. There is no greater literature than reality. Between drowning in the world's best oeuvre for three hours and simply spending three hours living, the latter contains far more literature. There is no greater literature than existence. There is a novel on love, it has a story of 'no love'. Just as the future remains unknown the strands of the story remain just as they are.

It took me many months to discover my main characters—Janak, Bhudev, MK, Ravi, etcetera. When I created Janak I took down the details of the good and bad qualities of many people of my acquaintance. I had to melt together three people when I made MK. I met 'Khag Prasad' in the winter of '54 at a Chainpur tailor's shop in Damak bazaar, on the far side of Jhapa district. He had come to have his bag sewn as he was returning to Dhankuta that day, I had come to have a shirt sewn after having lost all my clothes along the way. Both of us were in a rush but the tailor was toothless, his machine was old, so anytime he sped up the machine its needle would run off without stitching a thing. We were forced to wait there all day, chatting. A writer must know more about his characters than what he writes, and only then can he make the character believable in a few words. Another thing, it's only possible to write a story about someone that one likes.

Indra Bahadur Rai
Darjeeling
18-2-1958

(Note: I have translated the enigmatic shorthand term "ma.s.a." used by Rai as 'details': if anyone familiar with colloquial Darjeeling Nepali can inform me otherwise, I am ready to stand corrected.)



Coach Constantine

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY
Nepali football today faces an uncertain future, and not because of a lack of determination among players or lack of money and infrastructure to promote the sport. The sticking point is who should lead Nepal's favourite sport, and both the Geeta Rana and Ganesh Thapa factions' vested interests are seriously damaging the game.
But before prophesying the demise of Nepal's most-loved game, fans would do well to turn their attention to the manager and coach of the national team, Stephen Constantine. The 38-year-old Londoner started as a forward on his school team and later moved on to teams in England, Cyprus and the United States. Recalls Constantine: "I was just about making a living in the States playing for a number of pro and semi-pro clubs. I won several Championships and even Player of the Year once."
But his career as a player ended when he was involved in a freak accident during a game between his team, the New York Freedoms, and an Italian team. For the 18 months it took him to recover, Constantine gave his involvement with football serious thought, and finally decided to give up



A jubilant Coach Constantine and his wards after a win in the SAF Games semi-final.

playing and move on to coaching. He attended programmes for aspiring coaches and earned the English Advanced Licence, the United States Advanced Licence and the UEFA Advanced Licence.
Constantine responded to an English FA call for coaches for Asia, and was offered a post in Cambodia in 1999. But luckily for Nepal, Ganesh Thapa, then president of the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) had been petitioning the Asian Football Confederation for a coach. Constantine, then 36, was offered the job of manager and coach of the Nepal Senior National Side, making him perhaps the youngest professional coach to train a national team in the history of football. He believed he

could make a difference, and he did. In August 1999 he was in Kathmandu and had two months to prepare the national team for the upcoming South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. "It was the best thing I ever did," he says.
And it was one of the best things to have happened to Nepali football, something on the order of a minor miracle, given the state of the disillusioned team Constantine started with. The national team had been through a series of coaches and trained to differing, sometimes contradictory, standards. It would have been fantastic if Nepal had not lost to Bangladesh by one goal in the SAF finals, but perhaps what should be remembered more than the loss is the thrill Nepali fans felt, watching their



Stephen Constantine
"If losing a game makes us stronger, I'll take the loss."
team play decently. What made the event even more memorable was Constantine walking into the stadium dressed in daura-suruwal, exuding team spirit and national loyalty. "It was quite an inspiration when the coach entered the stadium in national dress, something not even Nepalis wear these days," says Bikesh Shrestha president of the Nepal Football Fan Club. Stephen considers the loss in the finals a tragedy, one that he remembers everyday. But, he says: "If losing a game makes us even stronger, I'll take the loss." And things did get better. At the under-16 Asian Cup in Vietnam last year, the Nepali team made it to the finals, the first time any Nepali sports team has qualified for

the finals of an international tournament. Nepal lost badly, but, "To the boys it was the experience of having played in an international game and that counted more than the ass-kicking loss," says the coach.
Stephen Constantine is the first football coach ever to be awarded the Prabal Gorkha Dakshin Bahu, the Nepali equivalent of the British OBE, for his outstanding services to the nation. Modest as ever, he says: "I was only doing what I love doing and this is the highest award I've ever received."
Constantine has many more plans. He now understands the strengths and weaknesses of football in Nepal, and wants to start coaching players as young as 12, and also form a federation of Nepali coaches. Nepal gets a lot of aid from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and FIFA (which other sources confirmed as nearly \$250,000 per year) and if those funds are utilised well, Nepali football could go a long way. 40 young footballers have been given scholarships to study and train in Kathmandu. "But why only 40, why not 400?" asks the coach. "We have the money, all we need to do is plan and implement those plans. If the people concerned thought more about what is best for the country then there is so much that we could do."
Due to the ANFA controversy, Nepal lost its chance to host the World Cup Group-6 preliminaries here. Any lessons learnt? Not really—

football administrators are now fighting like cats and dogs over which faction should take the national team to Kazakhstan for the qualifiers that start 21 April. "This is shameful. Nepali fans might never get the chance to witness another World Cup game here, and what is more the team would have had all the support they could ever want if the games had been held here," says Constantine who now has to prepare his team to face Iraq, Kazakhstan, and Macao. Any possibilities of success there? "We might be able to face Macao, but the Iraqis and the Kazakhs are too well built for us," he says pointing out that a well-built physique is a necessary component of the game. "Not every one is a Maradona," he says.
Constantine's contract is for a three-year term, subject to renewal every year. He gets a modest salary from ANFA—not as high as any club in England would willingly pay him, but it's the game that counts. "Nepali players are among the most coachable players I have ever known, but if the controversy goes on and people forget the game and think about their own pockets I might have to think about whether I want to stay here after my contract," says he. The coach is currently in Switzerland undergoing training that will make him one of only 55 FIFA instructors. But for now ANFA should take matters seriously—the future of Nepali football can be different if Constantine stays on. ♦

What is Waugh hiding?

MIKE GIBSON
Provided you haven't had too much to drink, you have nothing to fear from the random breath test. The cops pull you over. No hassle. You don't mind having your breath analysed when it helps to keep lawbreakers off the road. So why is Mark Waugh refusing to blow into the bag, so to speak?
Why is he refusing to co-operate with authorities who are trying to weed out lawbreakers in cricket? Why, when he could absolve not only his own reputation but help clean up the game he professes to love, would he not assist authorities in every possible way? Why is Mark hiding behind his lawyers? Why has he put up the shutters? Why has he reneged on the statement he made in November, when he said: "Of course I'm willing to co-operate if there are further investigations with the ACB or the ICC."

By taking the coward's way out, Mark Waugh continues to raise suspicion.
.....
There are further investigations. Investigations are ongoing. Investigations never stopped. Authorities are continuing to investigate claims by Indian bookmaker Mukesh Gupta that Waugh took in the vicinity of \$36,000 from an illegal bookie seven years ago in Hong Kong. If such a slur were cast against you, if someone defamed you in such a way, wouldn't you be doing everything within your power to prove you are innocent?
Some people have to wait months—even years—to finally have their day in court. Many have had to fight long and hard for the opportunity to stand up and prove to society that they have been hideously wronged. Here we have the anti-corruption investigator Greg Melick, appointed by the ACB, merely wanting to ask a few questions of a man who has already confessed to doing the wrong thing by accepting money from an illegal bookie during a tour of Sri Lanka. And what does he do?
Does he welcome the chance to assist the investigator by giving his side of the story, and helping to clean up the game? No. His lawyers issue a statement declaring, "Waugh's focus is on his commitment to cricket and to ensure the game's reputation is not further tarnished by endless inquiries and speculation." What a load of claptrap. Surely Waugh's "commitment to cricket" should be to try to help salvage the reputation of the game that has been so good to him?
While he may be one of the outstanding all-round players in the

game, while he may have regained some of his best form in the autumn of his career, surely his first priority is to assist authorities to expose the scum and the lowlives who have shamed themselves and their sport by dragging it into the gutter?
By refusing to talk to authorities, by taking what has been described as the coward's way out, Waugh is in fact ensuring that the game's reputation is further tarnished.
Speculation will never disappear as long as those who are the subject of it refuse to give evidence that might clear their names. There will always be an odour surrounding Waugh—and, by association, Australian cricket and the Australian team—while he continues to duck for cover and refuses to cooperate with those trying to eradicate the cheats and the crooks who prey on the game.
Waugh's defence throughout this sorry mess has been to sheepishly



make cameo appearances at hastily-convened media conferences, shakily read out brief, prepared statements, and refuse to submit to any questioning from the press.
Now he won't even read out his own statement. He leaves it to the lawyers to issue one instead and refuses to submit to any questioning from authorities.
The situation is intolerable. It is bordering on laughable. If it weren't so serious, it would be a joke. What's the point in having a special investigator into cricket corruption when the chief witness thumbs his nose and refuses to talk to him? If Waugh isn't prepared

to co-operate with authorities trying to clean up the game, he no longer deserves to be part of it. The ACB should throw him out of the team until he is prepared to come forward and assist in their inquiries.
None of us knows if there is a case against Waugh. Yet by his vow of silence it is Waugh who continues to raise our suspicions. By his reticence to come forward, it is Waugh who feeds our doubts. In a summer in which the Australian team has been all-conquering and Waugh has taken so many fine catches, the shame is that he dropped the one that mattered most. ♦ *(cricket.com)*

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MUSIC

Tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain and Ustad Sultan Khan on sarangi. Organised by the Indian Embassy and the BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation. Royal Nepal Academy, 13 February. 413174

Live Piano/ Drums/Double Bass by Budaprithi Trio at the Juneli Bar, Hotel De l'Annapurna, Durbar Marg. Friday 9 February 7 to 9.30pm 221711.

Classical Sitar at Pilgrims Book House, Thamel. Friday, 9 February, 7pm-8.30pm. Rs300. 425919


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Live Irish music at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangri La, Lazimpat. Friday 9 February 435741

All That Jazz International buffet with live jazz—Rodi Band at the Sunrise Cafe, Yak & Yeti Hotel. Rs800+tax. Friday, 9 February 7:30pm. 248999

Classical Guitar by renowned guitarist Kishor Gurung at the Chimney, Yak & Yeti Hotel. Friday, 9 February 8pm onwards. 248999

Tranquil Tones Mahayantra, the fusion trio of Navaraj Gurung, Sunil Bardewa and Manose Singh. Also playing Kala Premi, Chirag Bangdel, Rappaz Union. Hotel Shahanshah International, Dhapasi. 10 February 6.00 pm. Rs500. Tickets available at Simply Shutters, Banu's, Maya's Cocktail Pub, G's Terrace, The Jump Club and the venue. Organised by Stimulus Advertisers. 435561



DANCE

Classical Nepali Dances based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and the Tantric pantheon at the Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra, Every Tuesday, 7pm onwards. Rs300. 271545

Ballads and Dances of Old Tibet performed by Tsering Gurmey and Tsering Paljor at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra. Every Thursday, 7pm onwards. Rs400. 271545

EATING OUT

Authentic Nepali Sekuwa (Barbecue) Regular Friday night Sekuwa in the lamp-lit courtyard at Dwarika's Hotel. Select your own appetisers, momos, salads and choice of meats as well as delicious desserts. Package includes one free drink and lucky draw. Reservations recommended. 479488

Strawberries and Desserts Pastry Shop, Hotel de l'Annapurna. Strawberries in all forms on 8 February, 24 hours or until fruit lasts. Dessert festival starting 10 February. 221711

Chulo Batta Nepali cuisine buffet lunch with live Nepali music at the Sunrise Cafe, Yak & Yeti Hotel. Rs700+tax. From 12 noon. Reservations. 248999

Barbecue Summit Hotel, Kupondole. Friday 9 February 7 - 9.30 pm. 521810

Organic vegetable market and lunch Special vegetarian organic lunch Rs 350+tax. Summit Hotel, Kupondole. Sunday 11 February. 10 am to 12.30 pm 521810


EXHIBITION

Ragini's Odyssey 2001 Exhibition of printings & etchings by Ragini Upadhyaya-Grela. Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 9 February—10 March. 11am-6pm. Sunday-Friday

SWASTHANI FESTIVAL

The month-long Swasthani fast comes to an end 8 February, full moon night, at Sali river in Sankhu. Campers can pitch their camp along with the devotees. Puja by the river bank. To Sankhu: microbuses available from Boudha.

Swasthani Internet Festival A cultural presentation by the Spiny Babbler Museum. Readings (in English, Nepali, Newari and Maithali), lectures, play, art- and photo-exhibition. More information at spinybabbler@info.com.np, www.spinybabbler.org. 542810. All day, 10 February. Spiny Babbler, Bakhundole.



EVENTS

Slide Show and talk by Anil Chitrakar on how Kathmandu has evolved into a cosmopolitan city, the challenges it faces and the strategies being adopted and implemented to preserve its unique built, living and natural heritage. Organised by The Nepal Britain Society. Monday 12 February 4pm. The British School Auditorium, Sanepa. 521794

MARTIN CHAUTARI

Tarai and Hills Options Study: Who should deliver service—the government, NGOs or the private sector? Pandits: Srikrishna Upadhyaya and Dr Govinda Koirala, SAPROS Nepal. Participation open to all. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. Discussions take place at Martin Chautari every Tuesday 5.30pm Thapathali. 246065, Fax: 240059

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

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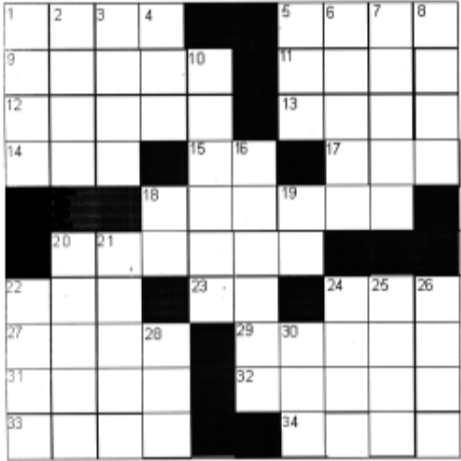
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QUICKWORD 19

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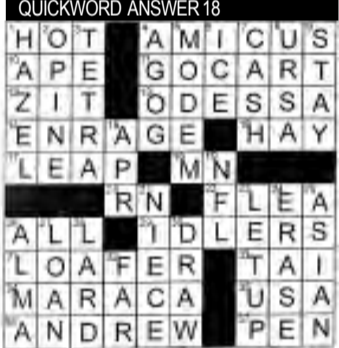
Across

- Upon a time (4)
- Bullying spot in school (4)
- Shtetl in Lithuania (5)
- Winged, sort-of (4)
- Gloss sounds, like in Nepali aama (5)
- Companionable Argentinean beverage (4)
- Shortened symbol (3)
- Unit of measurement of radioactivity (2)
- The sound of fury selfishness (3)
- Slowly performed piece (6)
- Tie up, like an animal (6)
- Invective at the mutt, partly (3)
- High in the windy city (2)
- What the Lumiere brothers missed (3)
- Projection, like a mushroom's cap (4)
- Forward fencing (5)
- Bondsman in detective novels (4)
- Think of the ascetic (5)
- Gamblers raise the stakes, up the _ (4)
- Rushed the dyslexic to, in the beginning (2,2)

Down

- Finished and out (4)
- Begins at Jinja (4)
- Prune to short hit (4)
- Finis (3)
- Starchy tuber, like sweet potato tapioca (3)
- Singular nuke-building in America (5)
- Tariffs (5)
- Sketched, like water from a well (4)
- Make fizzy (6)
- Exploratory technology, like rigs (6)
- Korean electronics company
- Short mother-earth metal (2)
- To err (5)
- Neils Bohr's vital discovery (5)
- Free num, cola, and? (4)
- Ginger biscuit (4)
- Man-eating giant (4)
- Enough for you _ , not your greed (4)
- Bullfighter's cry (3)
- Highs (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 18



Of the nine correct entries, the lucky winner is Pushpa Shova Tuladhar.

To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to crossword@himalmedia.com. Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Satellite images show the Tibetan Plateau. A series of movements toward the subcontinent last week saw the temperature reached 26 degrees Celsius. The period was 25 days. The temperature fluctuates between 30 degrees Celsius in the mornings to 30 degrees Celsius in the evenings. I give way to the temperature.

KATHMANDU

Fri



25-02







Tue



26-04

JANAKI GURUNG

In the cockpit of Necon Air's new ATR-42, Captain S Burathoki is running through the pre-flight checklist. Outside, the narrow domestic apron at Kathmandu airport looks like the deck of an aircraft carrier. Two Twin Otters starting up together, Beech 1900s taxiing in for parking, a SAAB 340 requesting clearance. After a 15-minute wait, the controllers allow us to taxi out to the runway for the 20-minute flight to Pokhara, but there are four other planes in front which take turns taking off between international arrivals during the busy afternoon rush.

Finally, cleared to enter the runway, Capt Burathoki guns the throttle and begins the take-off run from the intersection itself to make room quickly for another landing aircraft. The two Pratt and Whitney turboprops give the aircraft a powerful kick, and the plane accelerates quickly down the runway. Rotation is smooth, and the climb would put an Avro to shame. Engine power comes down a notch as the pilot banks left and aims the nose of the plane for the gap between Nagarjun and Kakani on a smooth climb to 13,500 ft. He is not going to climb higher today because of strong headwinds of up to 30 knots. Flying back from Pokhara he will go up to 16,000 to ride the tail wind.

The vibration and noise level inside the cockpit is low enough for the air traffic banter to be audible through the intercom, and the pilots take off their headsets, set the plane on autopilot and sit back. "The Avros were great planes, but the ATR is a new generation and it is a much more



Ten years after deregulation, Nepal's domestic airline industry is finally taking the leap to larger, newer airliners.

advanced aircraft," explains Capt Burathoki. "The main displays are actually computer screens, it is faster, flies higher and is smoother." Necon is now phasing out its gas-guzzling Avros of which it once had five. The ATR-42 is built by the French-Italian consortium, Avions de Transport Regional (ATR), and has a maximum cruising speed of nearly 330 mph and a maximum cruising altitude of 25,000 ft. Some 750 ATR-42 and the stretched ATR-72 have so far been sold around the world. With seating for 44 passengers in two-abreast configuration, Necon's two ATRs are the biggest passenger aircraft operating in Nepal's domestic skies at the moment and they are also flying the Kathmandu-Patna and Kathmandu-Varanasi sectors. Another impact of deregulation that is beginning to be felt over Nepalis skies is readily apparent as the ATR reaches cruising altitude and



levels off. To the left and climbing steeply is a Buddha Air flight to Bhairawa, a Shangrila Air Beech 1900 slips by two thousand feet below us. Kathmandu's radar control comes on the intercom: "Foxtrot Uniform, traffic approaching twelve o'clock at one five five, ATR." It is Necon's other ATR-42 from Nepalgunj to Kathmandu descending to 15,500 feet. In the cockpit, a computer voice barks: "Traffic. Traffic." This is the Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) that is now mandatory for flying over Indian airspace. With the growth in traffic on the Kathmandu-Pokhara corridor and the Mount Everest sightseeing flight, TCAS is also becoming a vital safety feature on aircraft here. The fast-approaching speck straight ahead

grows in size and it is the unmistakable silhouette of an ATR-42 passing swiftly above us. "We have now designated incoming and outgoing routes from Kathmandu to Pokhara," says Necon's Capt DR Niroula. "The airlines have also got together to space out planes on mountain flights." The new arrangements were instituted after a near miss at 24,000 ft between two planes near Mt Everest last monsoon. Also worrying is the lack of parking space and hangar facilities, and the airlines all blame the civil aviation authorities for dragging their feet. The new Pokhara airport is a case in point: it is already too small for the daily 40 take-offs and landings. At the top of descent, the pilots are in touch with Pokhara tower which informs that the VOR-DME beacon is out of order, which means that the



pilots will have to extrapolate from Kathmandu to measure distance and bearing to Pokhara. The plane begins its descent into the haze below. Another vital piece of equipment for flying in Nepal is the Ground Proximity Warning which computes the planes descent rate with a ground-monitoring radar and gives a cockpit warning by sounding the terrain alarm. It become especially useful during the monsoon when visibility is poor. The pilot asks for 86 percent power, deploys full flaps, goes through the final checklist and makes a steep bank to align himself with the runway, flares nicely, touches down and with a roar of reverse props comes to a stop with plenty of runway to spare. At Pokhara airport, Necon's CEO, Deep Mani Rajbhandari, himself a pilot, is ecstatic about the

new aircraft. "After four months of operation, we were very satisfied with the ATR, that is why we acquired another one. And if all goes well, we may add another one in future." The main advantage is economics, the ATR takes less maintenance and has slashed Necon's fuel bill by about 30 percent. For an airline that spends nearly half its operating cost on fuel, this is a big saving. The flying cost per seat mile is therefore much lower in an ATR, and compares favourably both with bigger jets and with the small commuter transport operated by other domestic carriers in Nepal. But given the altitude and short



ALL PHOTOS MIN BAIRACHARYA



FOUR WHEELS, GOOD: Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba arrives at the Himalaya Hotel for a workshop on peace and governance organised by SAP Nepal. Deuba spoke on negotiating with the Maoists.



PEACENIKS: Anti nuke activists (from l to r) Sandip Pandey, Retired admiral L Ramdas, Zia Mian, and AH Nayyar. Moderating the session at Baggikhana is Nepali Times columnist, CK Lal (far left).



IN CHARITABLE FASHION: A participant at a fashion show for charity organised by the Active Women's Organisation of Nepal at Baithak, Baber Mahal Revisited, 1 February.

Sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

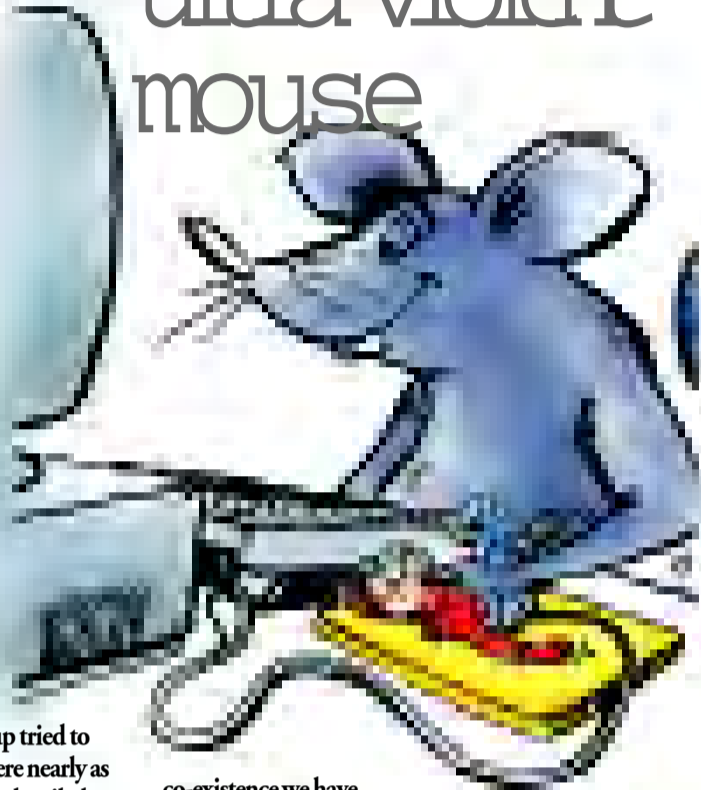
Recently, I had the opportunity of visiting the CAN Infotech at the International Convulsion Centre at New Baneswore where young nerds in diapers rubbed shoulders with even younger geeks sucking pacifiers. Having myself been born sometime during the Lichhavi Period, I felt absolutely obsolete among these disgustingly young whippersnappers. Forget the digital divide, we were face to face here across an age chasm. The other thing that struck me immediately was that no one at the International Confusion Centre actually spoke any known language. The lingua franca there was Geekspeak.

I tried to make myself heard: "Hullo. Yes, I'd like to buy a...um...computer. Would you happen to have a computer, please?" A kidlet who looked like he had just been weaned from breast-milk to solid foods unglued his face from a monitor and replied: "Ah, yes, old timer, here we have a gfunuk compendium of muscle-jet, think-head 40x Lotus-eater smart suite millennium Ethernet 12.1" SVGA TFT active matrix ultralight paraglider, mfumboomba Dvorak keyboard with stainless black duralium chassis." It struck me that I may need an interpreter, so I waddled over to the help desk which was manned by two women who looked like they were first and second runners-up in the Miss Photofinish Nepal contest. *Summusna*, I said nervously. "Do you know where I can buy a cheap computer?" First runner up tried to be helpful, unfurled her eyelashes which were nearly as large as the wings of a Lesser Himalayan Fork-tailed Drongo, and asked sweetly: "Do you want a pipeline burst cache with dual entry docking cradle at 99.9 percent uptime supported by five premium backbones with integrated 6.8 GB 5400 RPM Smart II ultra ATA hard drive C++ 8.95 gigahertz 15.9" megapixel, or would a simple Titan quantum raid controller with an ultra-violent mouse do?"

That is when I figured that unless these cyber tadpoles at the International Confession Centre learn to speak in a language everybody can understand, the Digital Divide in Nepal will only Multiply. And here is where the newly-appointed Minister of Micro-Chips

and Instant Noodles, Cyber Prasad, can make a huge difference in the way this country is governed. He's already made a bold start by attempting to defrag the country, and now wants to ensure that all 37 members of the new council of ministers get online as soon as possible. In the fitting tradition of the ruling party, there is sure to be a mad scramble for the more sought-after email addresses, and this could bring a country that is already at a standstill into an even bigger standstill. So, in the interest of national harmony, amity and peaceful

An ultra-violent mouse



co-existence we have tabulated below suggested email addresses for cabinet members:

- Girija Prasad Koirala: esp@pm.gov.np
- Ram Chandra Poudel: home@sweet_home.net
- Khum Bahadur Khadka: melamchi%@water.np
- Aftab Alam: timber!@yahoo.com
- Mahesh Acharya: ak_47@army.org
- Omkar Shrestha: my_turn@lauda.air.at
- Surendra Prasad Chaudhari: cyberprasad@info.com
- Chakra Bastola: on_your_mark@jet.set.go
- Jay Prakash Anand: fertiliser@agro.com
- Palten Gurung: labour@doha.qt

NEPALI SOCIETY

Wagle's wanderlust

Narayan Wagle was pleasantly surprised when his article on Thinley Lundup Lama, the charismatic and crusty salt trader in Caravan, triggered off a wave of goodwill for the Dolpo resident. "I knew it was one of the best interviews I had taken. You know, that restless feeling, you're not able to sleep, all the details churning in your mind...trying to organise them. But I never thought it would help Thinley cover the cost of his son's treatment in Kathmandu," says a modest Wagle.

It's not the first time that Wagle's empathy for his subject, the common citizen, and his articulate writing, have evoked unexpected responses from Nepali people and policy-makers alike. His reportage from Humla two years ago forced authorities to address the food crisis that the country's remote western districts have faced for thirty years now.

Recalls Wagle: "I was actually wandering through the area, getting away from the city, when I saw a herder I had met six years ago. He was standing in line outside the food depot." The carefree, independent herder, who'd been on his way to Tibet to trade sheep for salt when Wagle met him on the remote mountain trail to Kailash, was a shadow of his former self. Community forests had occupied his grazing land.

With the pastures gone, he had to sell his sheep and bid goodbye to his way of life. Says Wagle:

"What could I do but write about him? This man didn't have a voice."

In a decade-old career, Wagle's taken strides not many can match. Few people would link the writer of the popular weekly "Coffee Guff" column to the man who presently occupies the news editor's desk of *Kantipur*, the country's largest Nepali daily. "I came up with the name while drinking coffee at a roof-top restaurant in Thamel. It's a fiction of facts, a platform to write about all the interesting people I meet but can't fit into the limitations of daily reporting," says Wagle.

A workaholic according to colleagues, Wagle's zeal is today focused on grooming a younger set of journalists and strengthening the role of Nepali media. Since his first piece, about films, was published in a weekly while he was still at college, he's been hooked on

journalism. "Nepali media, to a large extent, has not been able to enjoy the trust of the masses," says Wagle. He wants to make the profession as respectable as that of doctor, engineer, or IT professional.

His present responsibilities may have curtailed his time for exploration and adventure—a dusty pair of leather sandals has replaced his trademark hiking boots—but it certainly hasn't checked the lanky scribe's wanderlust. Wagle's ultimate ambition is to follow in the footsteps of Dr Harka Gurung, the eminent geographer, and Dor Bahadur Bista, the anthropologist. There's a slight trace of envy in his voice, and a certain wistfulness. "They've visited every nook and corner. Been to all 75 districts of the country." Wagle's been to "only" 65. ♦

MIN. BAIRACHARYA

