

EXCLUSIVE

Collateral Damage

Coinciding with the fifth anniversary of the launch of the armed struggle, the Maoists have carried out a series of stealthy ambushes which represents a shift from their earlier strategy of daring frontal night-time assaults on isolated police posts. But the new tactics, which involve the use of booby-trapped pipe bombs and pressure cooker explosives, have led to several "mistakes" in which innocents, foreigners and unintended targets have also been attacked.

First, it was Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhyay who had a narrow



escape when a convoy he was travelling in was ambushed near Surkhet on 3 Feb. Five others, including the registrar of the Surkhet Appellate Court, died. The Maoists later admitted it was a mistake. Then a similar ambush on 10 Feb in Sindhupalchowk wounded a Chinese national working on the Indrawati Hydro Project, the first ever foreigner to be injured in a Maoist attack. Eleven police were injured in the ensuing firefight. The Chinese warned they will abandon the project if adequate security measures are not taken. In the latest attack, two children died when a pipe bomb left by Maoists at a community water tap in Mangalsen, Accham, exploded on the morning of 12 Feb. Eight others were injured, five of them minors.

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission is still waiting for their Maoist "visas" to visit the four mid-western districts.

10%

After failing to resolve the 10 percent service charge issue by the 11 Feb deadline, all parties gave themselves till Saturday to do so. The prime minister has asked his new tourism minister to read the National Planning Commission report and see what action can be taken. There is a general mellowing of the hardline stance on both sides, with a proposal to postpone bargaining for two years, or until tourism arrivals hit 500,000, whichever happens first.

LOVING TO HATE GIRIJA

BINOD BHATTARAI

They all want him out: rebels within the ruling Congress, the main opposition UML, the smaller parties in parliament, the Maoists, the extreme right. Even Nepal's donors are getting impatient. But Girija Prasad Koirala is a stubborn fighter, and he is getting ready to take a last stand.

After thinking he had defused a mutiny within his party at the Pokhara Convention last month, Koirala was getting ready to train his guns at the opposition. But the internal rifts were too deep to heal, and even a crucial reshuffle last week didn't do the trick. Key ministerial appointee Khum Bahadur Khadka refused to take his oath of office at the Royal Palace and was fired a week later. Even the threat of a united opposition move during the winter session of parliament that began on 8 February failed to unite the Congress.

The UML's main charge is that Koirala was up to his neck in the controversial lease of a Boeing 767 for Royal Nepal Airlines from the Austrian charter operator, Lauda Air. Koirala sacrificed the airline's executive chairman and later his tourism minister but the opposition was not satisfied. We've learnt that it may take more time for the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) to press formal charges, if any. But that's not stopping UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal from making this the main issue in parliament. The UML and the smaller left and right opposition members have been raising slogans inside the House, walking out and staying away.

So, there we have it: a government whose presence cannot be felt, a ruling party with a majority but which is paralysed by dissent, an opposition driven to make its presence felt because of impending elections, and minor political groups forced



HANGING THEIR HEADS IN SHAME? (from l to r): KP Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal from the opposition bench, Girija Prasad Koirala, Ram Chandra Poudel, and Govinda Raj Joshi at the opening of the winter session of parliament. Parliament was paying its respects to "known and unknown" martyrs.

Girija-bashing is going into high gear.

to take sides, if only to prove that they too exist. The country meanwhile teeters on the edge, Girija refuses to go and the opposition refuses to let go.

The UML and the four other opposition groups know that they do not command the numbers to get rid of Koirala, they are banking on an outpouring of public outrage as in the Philippines which forced President Estrada out after charges of corruption. They are also seemingly unconcerned about what all this politicking will do to the CIAA, which is investigating the Lauda deal, and remains one of few institutions that most Nepalis still believe is clean. A CIAA source confided: "We're worried about where all this flag-waving is dragging us. There is no reason why the entire nation should be paralysed by one specific investigation that is taking its normal course."

The UML knows it has a juicy bone and is snarling at anyone who comes near. In a two-hour long tirade on the opening day of parliament, Nepal said Koirala was

not only a failed prime minister, but also corrupt. "If he wants to help the investigation he should resign, otherwise we'll have to understand he's there to destroy evidence," he warned. Nepal also gave the CIAA a veiled warning saying it was being watched to see if it would "chicken out" on the investigation.

To be sure, even considering the accepted wisdom that all aircraft deals in Nepal are tainted, the Lauda lease has some kinks. The aircraft is expensive (the \$3,350 per flying hour quoted does not include the large bills for crew layovers and other overheads). Still, papers available so far from the Parliamentary Accounts Committee (PAC) do not directly implicate the prime minister; all they show is that the cabinet approved the purchase and released the foreign exchange. What PAC members were more incensed about is that the Cabinet ignored it earlier directive to stop the agreement pending an investigation, and for violating a CIAA directive on leasing procedures. It was also suspicious about

why the tourism minister went back on his decision not to get the jet through direct negotiations. There is no hard evidence to back the allegations of malpractice, and the accusations hinge on suspicions that kickbacks were offered, and taken. They probably were, but someone has to prove it.

The CIAA is now combing the paperwork, including what we're told is a voluminous proposal given to the Cabinet. Only after it is through and prepares a case will we know if there will be any formal charges. One senior Koirala aide told us: "The opposition knows the prime minister won't resign over these charges. They may eventually try to take the issue to the streets."

Ironically, the boycott of parliament is delaying the enactment of crucial anti-corruption bills, including one that would give the CIAA more teeth. With the house paralysed, the Armed Police Force ordinance to set up a special paramilitary unit to fight the Maoists also hangs in the balance. ♦

Stop, look, and don't go

MIN BAIRACHARYA



ghost lurking in the shadows. The government had allowed Vikram owners to import low-capacity vehicles effectively tax-free, and to-be-displaced transport operators may demand the same. The Federation of Nepalese Transport Entrepreneurs has given the government more than

The transport strike has been called off but clearly this is no reason to celebrate. The government has just bought itself a month to meet the 13 demands of transport operators, most important of which is to roll back its decision to ban old vehicles. The issue about student fares was only a minor irritant. The country's environment authorities and traffic managers seem thoroughly confused about how to handle the issue.

Clearly the government found itself in a fix. It did little homework on how the decision would impact not just transporters but also commuters. Then there's the Vikram tempo

enough time to ponder the problem. But because we've not heard of any steps by government to assess the impact and alternatives, don't be surprised if there's another standoff one month from now.

It would first need to back its pollution claims and suggest alternatives for mass transit—especially after chakka-jams early this week. Then there's the task force report of November 2000 (when the ban was announced), which had recommended that no new passenger vehicles be registered until traffic management is improved considerably. The Department of Traffic Management (DOTM) had then said it would "soon formulate a policy to allow only environmentally friendly vehicles to ply in Kathmandu" and also "recommend the development of a mass transit system". That was the last we heard of the plan.

This is not the first time that promises of "environmentally friendly vehicles" and "mass rapid system" have been tossed about. The National Planning Commission (NPC) had made these suggestions as early as 1996. But instead of following the NPC recommendations, the government offered tax concessions to minibuses and electric and gas three-wheelers. With the number of commuters rising every year, the proliferation of small capacity vehicles will only lead to greater traffic problems. But this is also contentious territory—this is where arguments concerning per capita contribution to pollution and the "notorious" and "lesser" polluters, faster and slower vehicles, and industrial pollution in the Valley, also rest. (See also page 4-5).

Electronic Mail

WORLD LINK



1951, 1960, 1972, 1980, 1990, 2001

As with geology, political pressures welling up within Nepal tend to be released in a ten-year cycle of social seismicity. Nepal's "geo-politics" since 1951 has followed this rule. Four years after India got independence, the Ranas finally decided that their time was up. It took ten years of tinkering with this and that before the winds of change also wafted up the Himalaya, and we had our first-ever democratic elections. The Nepali Congress swept the polls, but King Mahendra and BP Koirala realised that Nepal was not big enough for the both of them. In 1961 democracy was shelved, parliament dismantled, elected leaders put in jail.

Remember, these were the bad old days of the Cold War, Nehru was trying to mix Soviet-style central planning with monopoly capitalism, and the Great Leap Forward over, Mao was preparing for the Cultural Revolution. Our own homegrown "suited-to-the-soil" Panchayat ideology was sustained by a grand design for development. We were starting from zero, so everything we built (highways, hydropower, hospitals) were huge achievements. A little over ten years later, King Mahendra died. It then took ten more years, despite King Birendra's efforts to revamp education, for the pressures to build up sufficiently for students to rise up to demand democracy. The crisis was defused by the 1980 referendum in which Panchayat-with-reforms won 55-45. It was business-as-usual for another ten years, but by this time so much pressure had built up that the lid very nearly came off. The 1990 Jana Andolan was the Nepali equivalent of the winds of democracy that swept across eastern Europe, Thailand, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The king became a constitutional monarch, he agreed to dismantle the Panchayat superstructure, a new constitution institutionalised political parties and multiparty elections were held.

The euphoria of democracy did not last long. From very early on, it was apparent that freedom fighters who went straight from their jail cells to take oaths of office were going to let the people down. But we told ourselves: democratic transitions are by definition messy, just give them some time. Now, time has run out, our transition has lasted too long, and it is messier than is permissible for a country with our capability.

Today, ten years after the renewal of democracy, the stench of political decay hangs heavy in the air. As in *Animal Farm*, it is getting more and more difficult to recognise our erstwhile revolutionaries and freedom fighters. When we look at their faces we don't see anymore the selfless sacrifice, incarceration and exile that many went through. All we see are the grinning, greedy countenances of leaders we trusted who have let us down—not once, not twice, but over and over again. The euphoria has now been replaced by disillusionment, apathy. Millions of impoverished Nepalis are unlikely to wait much longer for democracy to work its way out of its self-inflicted paralysis. Unless the right to vote leads to measureable improvements in the quality of their lives, Nepalis will see democracy as a trick. Radicals from the left and the right, religious zealots and separatists will fill this vacuum.

In the past ten years, the political leadership of all parties have had a chance to rule. But all they have shown is fecklessness, callous immorality, and a fatal deficiency in the art of governance. They have squandered their mandates in petty infighting, self-enrichment and self-centredness, radicalising a seething citizenry and bringing the country to its present state. Today, 50 years after our first taste of democracy and 40 years after restoring it, the moral of the story is: Democracy doesn't come with an indefinite guarantee. It needs to be safeguarded by careful and vigilant application.

TOO GOOD TO LAST

Even as we wait for the outcome of several meetings between the powerful transport lobby, tyre-burning students and a somnolent government, we've learnt that this is all probably for the common weal. The streets of Kathmandu have been visibly cleaner for the duration of the public transport strike. The lungs of Kathmandu residents were spared the soot, and we all got a lot of exercise walking or biking to and from work. All this must have added at least five days to our lives. This week we were looking at a control sample in air quality: what would happen if the streets were minus 20-year-old vehicles. And what we saw was what we'd get if perhaps emissions standards were more strictly enforced. Alas, it was not to last, the vehicle lobby has compromised with the government, the belching buses are back on the streets, and the pollution levels are back to normal. Just as well. All that oxygen in the air was making us dizzy.



The Rana resonance



Fifty years after democracy, Nepali society is still a long way from democratisation. The remnants of a feudal mindset keeps Nepal teetering permanently on the edge.

When Hegel bemoaned that people and governments never learnt anything from history, he had no idea of the difficulties involved in drawing any lessons from the glorious tales of gory rulers. History is often a bad dream that you want to wake up from. In order to learn anything from history, you need to read it with a point of view. This is like passing judgement in hindsight, but the present can't be explained without taking such a subjective approach.

According to the doctrine of sovereignty, Prithvi Narayan Shah's invasion of Kathmandu Valley can be seen as an act of aggression. His conquest of small principalities was Gorkha imperialism. His act of vengeance on Makwanpur and Kirtipur were barbaric. Dicky stuff: re-reading the rise of the House of Gorkha with such objectivity. Much more comfortable to stick with Babu Ram Acharya and Fr. Siders and continue to revere the first Shah empire-builder as the Father of the Nation even though his regard for his subjects as mere *dumra* (commoners) and *rauti* (surfs) meant to serve the dynasty perpetuity may not be politically correct from the vantage point of the present.

Jang Bahadur was an ambitious usurper who lasted upon the kingdom by the unfortunate circumstances of the conspiracy-ridden court intrigues of nineteenth century Kathmandu. Jang gained legitimacy by offering himself as the hatchet-man and errand-boy of the British during and after the mutiny of 1857. Those who call the first Rana (Jang's forefathers were Kunwars) nationalist end up revealing the vacuity of that term. Almost all Rana rulers thereafter spent time conspiring against each other while they grew rich as glorified *gallawals* (by selling the services of able-bodied Nepalis as soldiers) of British empire.

Even more incorrect is the assertion that the Ranas kept corruption in check. When the whole regime rested on corruption, the question of controlling it simply didn't arise. There was no difference between the state treasury and the personal fortune of the rulers. Taxes were spent pretty much as they pleased. Imposing wedding cake palaces, cars hauled up over Chitlang Pass on porter-back, concubines by the hundreds, were all paid for by Nepal's subsistent farmers. One saving grace

of absolute rulers, if it can be termed that, is that they gave patronage to the art and culture of the land. Ranas lacked even that, they shunned local music and dance, importing Moghul decadence from India instead. Their palaces were modelled after the loud excesses of imperial Europe, not the spartan grace of Lichhavi structures, nor the quiet and tasteful luxury of the Valley's Malla courtyards.

The Rana oligarchy had gone beyond redemption by 1950. It had rotted to its core, and things had become so unbearable that had King Tribhuvan not put his throne at stake by flying off to Delhi via the Indian Embassy, there would have been no throne left. Public opinion in India would have forced Delhi to act with even lesser restraint than it did in its settlement with Mohan Shumshere in the winter of 1951.

In retrospect, the achievements of February 18, 1951 (7 Falgun 2007 BS) do look less significant than it must have been to the 'freedom-fighters' back then. The importance of the event lay in the fact that while the Ranas had come to power and ruled for over a century on the basis of brute force alone, the restoration of power to the Shah dynasty in 1951 was backed by a popular movement.

Marx was fond of needling Hegel, and he said that history does repeat itself: "the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce". Something similar must have prompted King Mahendra to assume all powers in 1960 when he set the clock of social-change back to where it was well before 1950s. The ghosts of Ranas that continue to haunt us were resurrected by the Panchayat Pioneers.

Today, the 'nationalist' slogans of the Maoists resonate with the chants of the Khukuri Dal of 1950s. The vulgar mansions of contemporary politicians approximate the villas built by Rana-Shah descendants after the royal-takeover of 1960. Loud cries of corruption from the most corrupt are as jarring today as the slogans of democracy from the Panchas were in the 1970s. The culture of '*chakari*' and '*aphmo manchhe*' is

as familiar today as it was during the heydays of Narayanhiti secretaries of 1980s.

These days we elect what we believe are our rulers, but they are mere pawns in the hands of those who continue to carry the legacy of cultural corruption and political pollution. Nepali Congress activist Pradip Giri is merely being suggestive when he says that army-chiefs and inspector-generals live in palatial houses with multiple guards, while ministers in charge of defence or home portfolio have to often lock their doors all by themselves.

Half-a-century ago, power shifted from the male line of Ranas to their Shah cousins. Fifty years after democracy, Nepali society is still a long way from democratisation. The remnants of a feudal mindset keeps Nepal teetering permanently on the edge. Rana is not just a surname, it is a symbol of absolutism. In the colloquial, the term *Ranashahi* alludes to a century of dictatorship, decadence and debauchery. Its remnants need to be purged from our system to prevent a septic relapse.

The seventh of Falgun set in motion a process that led to the launch of the Jana Andolan in 2046 BS. It is not a day of celebration, but of determination, of resolving to press ahead on the path of democratisation. It was D. H. Lawrence who said: "Why doesn't the past decently bury itself, instead of sitting waiting to be admired by the present?" Resonance is bad enough, wonder what it would be like if it was a full-blown Renaissance... ♦





SUBHAS RAI

VIEWPOINT

by KAPIL
SHRESTHA

We had everything before us

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

—Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*

The celebrated English novelist Charles Dickens' observation on Revolutionary France some 225 years ago can easily be applied to present-day Nepal. Especially in the context of the euphoria following the "Revolution of 1951", popularly known as the "Sat Salko Kranti", and the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) of 1990.

These two events in recent Nepali history have had epochal consequences. They fired the popular imagination and gave rise to tremendous expectations. Despite being separated by almost half a century, the impact of these events on society and politics have been strikingly similar. 1951 ushered in democracy for the first time in Nepali history by toppling the 104-year-old Rana oligarchy, and catapulted an isolated country out of its medieval

slumber into the modern world. 1990 brought down the undemocratic Panchayat system which King Mahendra had put in place after staging the coup d'état against the 18-month-old popularly-elected government led by BP Koirala.

The success of both the 1951 and the 1990 movements set the stage for unprecedented transition, transformation and experimentation in Nepali politics. But an objective assessment of their consequences shows that the lofty missions they extolled and the high expectations they fostered remain as distant and unfulfilled as ever. No statesman of vision, integrity and commitment has emerged to fulfil them. A failure to meet the people's minimum expectations can quickly change the popular mood from hope and optimism that accompanied the euphoria of

change to disappointment and frustration, to cynicism, and then to anger and rebellion.

The genesis of the Maoist 'People's War', which celebrated its fifth anniversary a few days ago, can largely be attributed to the callous neglect of successive governments to their own commitments, compounded by a vulgar and megalomaniacal obsession with power and wealth among politicians who came to power after 1990.

The roots of the more general problems that bedevil our democratic system today, like endemic political instability, bad governance and corruption, can, however, be easily traced back to the period following the change in 1951. But we have learnt precious few lessons from our half-century-long efforts at governance to tackle them. In fact, we are

actively repeating the same old mistakes. The intriguing question really is: why have we failed to find solutions to familiar old problems with some of the stalwarts of the past, like Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala (and until very recently the late Ganesh Man Singh and Manmohan Adhikari) still around? Nepalis had expected these leaders to put their long experience, sacrifice and commitment to good use. Why did they fail?

Despite superficial transformation and modernisation, Nepal's political idiom has not changed in the last 50 years. There have been no conscious and collective attempts to transform a political culture and value system characterised by authoritarianism, patron-client dependency and patriarchal relationships. Not even radical-sounding communist leaders or their political parties have ventured out that far.

Other features that have remained

unchanged since 1951 are:

- The habit of politicians to go for untimely and counter-productive compromises and agreement with the status quo, jettisoning the original goals and objectives of their movement. The Delhi compromise in 1951, and the Tanakpur and Mahakali treaties in the 1990s are cases in point.
- The unwillingness of politicians to bring plunderers of national wealth or human rights violators to justice, thereby encouraging a pervasive culture of corruption and impunity in administration and government. For instance, the exoneration of the Ranas by Nepali Congress leaders in 1951 against allegations of "national loot", and the refusal of successive governments after 1990 to implement the recommendations of the Mallik Commission on human rights abuse during the 1990 movement.
- The wild scramble for power and unending internecine power struggles among politicians

and political parties without the slightest regard for values, ethics and norms.

We elect with our valuable ballots whenever we are called upon to do so. But since democracy cannot function successfully without efficient, honest and committed political parties and politicians, it is time for us to remind them of the historical challenges and opportunities confronting them. We can't always start from ground zero. We have to move from 50 years of transition and apprenticeship to serious consolidation. It is time to start building a viable, sustainable and efficient democracy that can finally give the long-suffering Nepali people a more decent life.

(Kapil Shrestha is Professor of Political Science at Tribhuvan University and a member of the National Human Rights Commission.)



LETTERS

SELFLESS

I hope readers of your recent article on the noble efforts to gain full and equal human rights for Nepali women (#24, *Women, rights, and the Bill*) did not



Sapana Malla

overlook this fact: Legal activists like Ms Sapana Malla-Pradhan could easily be working as professors in the law schools of Harvard and Yale, and are so professionally qualified they could have their pick of countries to take citizenship where they

would enjoy full and equal rights and privileges of humans—male and female—of those societies. But their selfless dedication drives them to their struggles for Nepal and set aside such a life of privilege. Such dedicated Nepali women activists inspire me to believe that there is indeed hope for the future of Nepal.

Lozang Sherpa
by email

Ramyata Limbu's writing on helicopters (#25) was good, but Janaki Gurung has written a great piece on domestic aviation. I am proud of Nepali women who can write about technology with such consummate ease.

Harisaran Rai
by email

OUTRAGEOUS

In the aftermath of a massive and tragic event like the Gujarat earthquake, it's obvious that emotions will run high, traumatised people will look for scapegoats. Nonetheless, the article by Shyam

Parekh of Gemini, (#29, *Covering the quake*) himself a survivor of the quake, make some extreme generalisations. His allegation, printed by you in a provocative sub headline, that the media ignored the plight of stricken villagers and thus was responsible for thousands of deaths, is outrageous and false.

As one of those reporters on the scene, I went to dozens of villages, many well off the highway. Colleagues with the BBC, CNN, American and British newspapers and countless Indian television and press outlets roamed far and wide over the vast district of Kutch, all within a few days the earthquake. It is simply untrue to say that the media "concentrated on Bhuj" and ignored Anjar, Rapar, Bhachau and the countless other places smashed in the earthquake. My own colleague at the BBC, Mike Wooldridge, went to Bhachau on 27 January and reported back that evening—the first international reporter to reach the epicentre. I

am not saying that the media did a flawless job of covering the earthquake; it did not. There were problems. But I strenuously object to the casual assertion that somehow we were to blame for the plight of the hapless people of Kutch.

Daniel Lak
Kupondole Heights

DAMAGE CONTROL

I am prompted to write this after a recording session at NTV. Despite my objections the session was dominated by technocrats who knocked the rest of us silly by going on about the "Indian plate" and the "Tibetan Plate", "active fault" and other technical terms that no one cares much about. What was said incompletely or, left unsaid, is perhaps more crucial: Whatever the cause of earthquakes, all indications are that Nepal is next in line for a big one, an earthquake. Also, the risk of one is too serious a matter to be left to technicians alone. Damage control is easier

when people are prepared and this requires political commitment at the highest level. Technicians could take five years for a massive awareness campaign. Leaders of the country can do it in three months, and achieve complete unity across party lines. Organisations like NSET (National Society for Earthquake Technology) or SCAEF-Nepal can carry out the actual donkey work.

Bibhuti Man Singh
SCAEF- Nepal

SERVICE CHARGE

As occasional visitors to Nepal over many years, we have always been impressed by the friendly, gracious and effective rendering of services in your hotels, lodges, restaurants and the like. It has become increasingly obvious, however, that these excellent workers receive less in gratuities than their counterparts elsewhere. That is especially true for the less obvious workers not visible to the visitor at checkout time. Also, many visitors may assume that a service charge is included in

their bill and inadvertently act unjustly. We, along with most visitors, would be satisfied, knowing that we had forgotten none of the many who provided cheerful and effective service to us.

Arthur Bennett
Marion Sonderegger
by email

MAD HATTER

How come the Mad Hatter missed some of the obvious cyberportfolios in "An Ultraviolet Mouse?" (#29). Given that the Auditor General has decided not to make any more recommendations on fiscal continence if the government won't take his audit reports seriously, Ram Sharan Mahat: fiscal@diarrhoea.imf.np.

With Purnagiri and all the UML acrobatics Baldev Sharma Majgajnya: poornagiri@mahakali.dpr.uml.np.

Dipak Gautam
Chakupat

Public transport, private operators

BINOD BHATTARAI

It is an all-too-familiar scenario. There is a build-up to a crisis that threatens to bring the country to a standstill. The public has no idea how to react. And the government stumbles along at its characteristic way pretending nothing is happening—until the last possible moment.

This time it is the Federation of Nepalese Transport Entrepreneurs (FNTE) that is on the warpath demanding that the government revoke its ban on vehicles 20 years or older. A well-planned calendar of protests has already been announced and we've already experienced some of the 'chakka-jams' in the past week. More are likely to come. At the same time, the student wing of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) chose to pipe in with their demands for a 50 percent discount on all bus fares for students, with an underlying 'or else' threat. The FNTE got another reason to react and immediately took all public transport off the streets from Saturday.

By Wednesday the buses were back on the streets after a government guarantee that it would ensure security against possible student violence. But the larger issue of the '20-year' ban remains unresolved, and the FNTE has hit back at the government decision with its own list of 13 demands (see NT#27). On Tuesday, the new environment minister pleaded for a month to resolve the matter. The transport operators magnanimously granted him that and an extra five days and called off their planned protests.

This whole mess began with a Ministry of Population and Environment (MOPE) announcement in November that effective 16 November this year, all vehicles manufactured before 1980 would be removed from Kathmandu roads. A part of the



The ban on old vehicles may not come through. And even if it does, the haze over the Valley will remain.

same decision also stated that all petrol- or gas-run three-wheelers with two-stroke engines would not be allowed to ply in municipal areas nation-wide.

Following the ensuing uproar, MOPE moved into damage control, and said only old vehicles used in public transport would be thrown out arguing that those used for private travel were better maintained. However, this part of the pronouncement has yet to be published in the Gazette, so it isn't taken too seriously.

MOPE's ad hocism becomes even more apparent when you consider that the Department of Transport Management (DOTM) was caught completely unawares. Immediately after the MOPE announcement we asked the DOTM how many vehicles would be displaced by the ban. They hadn't the faintest idea. We were told they would have to thumb through their files to find out, and that it would take a week.

MOPE may have overstepped its boundaries by declaring the blanket

ban. According to its own State of the Environment report, "vehicular pollution control" is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Transport. That is moot now, since the cabinet itself has endorsed the MOPE decision. However, it is clear that MOPE had gone ahead without even discussions within the ministry, let alone studies on how much pollution would be reduced and what it would cost. It did not take into its purview the industries in the Valley that are responsible for most of the pollution in the air. Neither did it take into account the slow traffic, road conditions, or fuel adulteration.

"Even now we don't know how much pollution is caused by vehicles and what types of vehicles are most to blame," an environmental economist told us. "It is all right to try to stop old cars, but then we should be able to tell how much pollution we're aiming to reduce, what the health benefits are and how they benefit the people." With green NGOs siding with government, there

was no one to question the government on the long-term impacts of its decision—including on the environment. The FNTE did raise some pertinent questions, but as they came from the aggrieved party, few gave them serious thought.

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), well known for quick comments on any government decision affecting its constituents, preferred to remain silent for almost a month. Only last week did it issue a statement saying the dispute and the chakka-jams should be resolved through talks. As transport entrepreneurs began organising protests, the government waited in silence, despite some convincing arguments about why the vehicle operators were contesting the decision, until the latter actually shut down services affecting hundreds of thousands of commuters.

As things stand today, the ban

could be a repeat of the September 1999 decision to rid the Valley of Vikram tempos. After protests, the government negotiated a way out by allowing the 600 or so operators of the diesel three-wheelers to import brand new minibuses with the 99 percent duty and Value Added Tax (VAT) waived. The government was happy because the tempo ban was something it could trumpet as an achievement, and business houses more so because they could raise their sales portfolio. But for all that Kathmandu's air quality shows no sign of improvement, the 50 percent pollution reduction claim by the then environment minister notwithstanding.

"Old vehicles have to be phased out at some point but not in the manner the government plans to," says Toran Sharma of Nepal Environmental and Scientific Services (NESS), which has studied Kathmandu's vehicular emissions extensively. "Does the government have a list of old vehicles that pollute or that of 20-year-olds whose emissions are within permissible standards?"

Definitely not at the DOTM or the Traffic Police Office, where emission-free 'green stickers' can be obtained for any vehicle by paying a bribe. The irony is that almost every vehicle on the streets of Kathmandu has a green sticker. Those affected most are pedestrians and traffic cops. It is ironic that the police out on Kathmandu streets have to suffer because their colleagues in another department are getting richer—through bribes.

There are even doubts if the government believes in emission checks. If it did, it would not have

gone in for a complete ban. The MOPE State of the Environment report says 30 percent of the roughly 136,000 vehicles tested between June 1996 and May 2000 flunked the tailpipe emission tests. Taking action against them alone could have led to a reduction of about 40,000 non-compliers. Nobody would have complained, and there would have been no strikes.

MOPE spokesman Ananta Raj Pandey says that the Ministry has conducted studies at various times and the decisions are based on these reports. "We had said we would phase out old vehicles when we decided to tackle the diesel tempos," says Pandey. "We've tried to address both the problem of pollution and carrying capacity of the roads."

Those who have studied air pollution first hand don't agree that all old vehicles are polluters. Even the MOPE environment report agrees that suspended particles and PM10 (particulate matter less than 10 microns) are the chief culprits, and not gaseous pollutants. Old vehicles do emit PM10—PM2.5 to be more specific—but MOPE studies show that household fuels (mainly kerosene) also contribute to PM10 in the atmosphere. Emissions also depend on road and fuel quality, vehicle maintenance and traffic speed. "Generally, more fuel is consumed by vehicles moving at lower speeds. The pollution almost doubles," says Sharma of NESS. "Vehicles may be old but that does not mean they are all poorly maintained and hence the main polluters."

The other concern is the



HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

No help in the loo

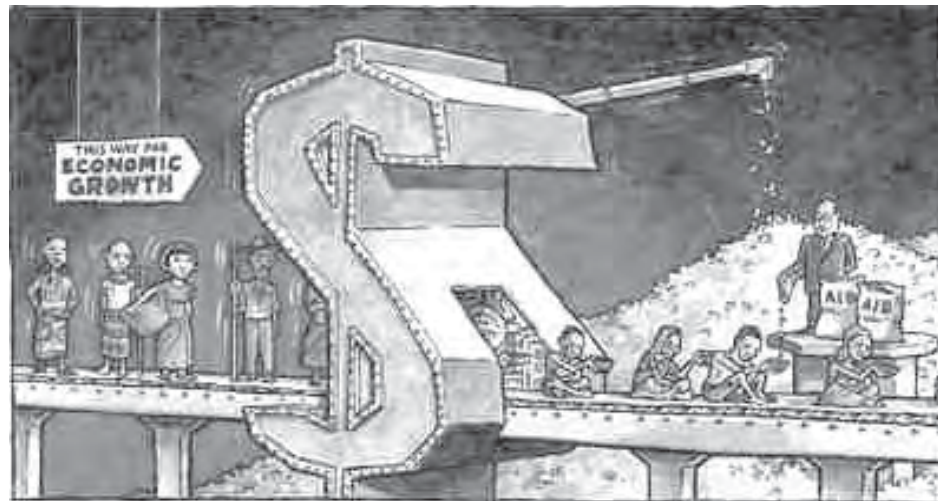
Too much outside assistance is a bad thing—it eats away at local initiative and pride, sidelines self reliance.

The plane shudders through the cloud that always seems to blanket the gap in the hills around the Kathmandu valley. I take a final sip of my RNAC coffee and hand the cup to a flight attendant, the horrors of the Gujarat earthquake well and truly behind me now. First off the plane, first through immigration, gazing around approvingly at the assembled ranks of foreign tourists come to lavish their hard currency on Nepal.

Then a jarring reminder of things unpleasant as I visit the mens' room briefly, near the luggage carousel. An attendant, presumably a government servant, makes no bones about it. "Sir, give me money," he says in pretty clear English, begging on duty. He's done this before, I can tell. The mind makes inevitable and perhaps slightly unfair comparisons with the past two weeks travelling through Gujarat—there were people truly in need, with no government jobs and little of any consequence left undamaged by the earthquake. And not once was a hand extended towards me in supplication, nor a voice raised to ask for anything other than the media coverage I provide because it's my job.

An old Muslim woman crouched on the rubble of a village home, tears dry on her dusty faces a few days after rescuers discovered her husband's body; members of a Hindu youth organisation rebuilding their shattered temple, but at the same time running a free and generous kitchen from a tent alongside; middle class families from old Bhuj getting together to sing bhajans in their tents at the city's old open air theatre—the stage piled high with relief goods. No one asked for anything. Some complained about the government, or said they'd really like to get their hands on a better tent. But no one asked me for one, because they knew I didn't have one. And they had their pride.

That washroom attendant in Tribhuvan Airport is a rich man by comparison, but no doubt he doesn't think so. Some readers may remember a column from some months ago, wondering whether it was right and proper to hand sweets out to children whilst trekking. That question, put to an foreign



acquaintance, brought a swift reply. "Why not? The country's addicted to foreign aid anyway. Might as well start them young." Oh dear, I thought at the time. Too cynical, too brutal, even as I offered up the obligatory wry chuckle. Now I'm not so sure. I've always had a sneaking suspicion that too much outside assistance is a bad thing for a person, a family, a community, a nation. It eats away at local initiative and pride, sidelines self reliance all of which Nepal has in abundant potential. People begin to think that good things only come from outside and they notice that local leaders and elites don't deliver the goods.

They have to take a begging bowl to the big table where the rich boys eat. Even fledgling or moribund notions of accountability and the role of democracy, the media and the courts in bringing the elite to book, all these are marginalised in a cascade of money for nothing.

In Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, I've seen how promiscuous development assistance, even given in good faith, spawns rampant corruption and destroys peoples' self worth. Yes, yes, there are many other forces at play here: natural disaster, social inequity, bad local management, incompetence, naiveté, even outright cynicism and larceny. But increasingly, I am convinced that aid itself is the major problem—however benign the source.

So apologies to the fellow in the loo at the airport. He extended his hand to the wrong man.

The American and Swedish tourists calling out to each other in the arrivals hall might have been easier pickings. But Nepal should be aware that once-generous international donors are starting to think like me. A scary thought, but consider that decades of generous overseas assistance has meant little to hundreds of millions in this subcontinent. They probably won't even know if it dries up, and I think they'll be the better for it. Perhaps they'll force their elites to get up and start doing the job they're supposed to do. Or else. ♦



financial cost. By DOTM numbers, 5,678 vehicles used in public transport qualify for displacement under the '20-year' ban. Another 1,616 government vehicles and 382 belonging to public corporations would also have to go, along with 2,334 owner-operated and 303 vehicles that carry tourists. If all these were to be replaced, it would cost the country billions of rupees. Calculated at Rs 600,000 per car (the cheapest compact car available in the market) it works out to a whopping Rs 6.2 billion.

Given all these inconsistencies, it is therefore not surprising that the FNTE even suspects corruption as the motivation for the government ban. It says that because auto dealers stand to benefit most from the new decision, they may have greased both the bureaucracy and the political leadership. The charges can neither be substantiated nor totally discounted.

Ramesh Parajuli of Martin Chautari, one organisation that wants the government to stand firm by its decision, says his group supports doing away with old

vehicles as long as the government does not come with another plan to subsidise new imports. "Imports must be allowed only after proper demand studies," he says.

Electric vehicle operators also support the government decision, not surprising because that will provide them more room to operate. But the number of electric vehicles now on the road is not just enough to meet transportation demands and they are unlikely to emerge as an alternative, at least in the near future.

The government has already set a precedent by offering tax concessions for the Vikram replacements. And the owners of 20-year-old buses and taxis may not settle for less, which, of course, the government cannot afford.



RAVI MANANDHAR

Even withdrawing the decision will send a wrong message. But that does not mean there's no way out.

"Strict monitoring of compliance to standards is the place to begin," says Sharma of NESS. "Policy maker, regulator and monitor need to be separate bodies and made to work." Still better would be to involve NGO representatives during spot checks and routine monitoring of compliance with emission standards rather than leave it to the cops alone.

Kathmandu Valley does not get strong winds to blow away pollutants in the atmosphere. The haze we see above the city is made up of smoke from motor vehicles, emissions from industries and combustion of household fuels and dust. The finest of the particles get lodged in the lungs, which is why clean-up is much required. But even zero emission vehicles cannot help in the clean-up if all the industries and brick kilns in the Valley are allowed to carry on with business as usual. ♦

Kathmandu's chaotic traffic chokes the streets and pollutes. Transport operators protest the government ban (facing page and left).

Maoist demands

The Maoist insurgency entered its sixth year this week. A few weeks before the 'People's War' began on 13 February 1996, the Baburam Bhattarai-led United People's Front (sometimes called the political wing of the CPN-Maoist) submitted a list of 40 demands to the government. In the absence of any further demands by the Maoists these 40 are still considered to represent the core of what they seek. This charter of demands is often referred to in conversation and in writing, including mention by both the US Ambassador to Nepal Ralph Frank and human rights activist Padma Ratna Tuladhar in Nepali Times #29). We publish below a translation:

Concerning nationality

- 1 All discriminatory treaties, including the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty, should be abrogated.
- 2 The so-called Integrated Mahakali Treaty concluded on 29 January 1996 should be repealed immediately, as it is designed to conceal the disastrous Tanakpur Treaty and allows Indian imperialist monopoly over Nepal's water resources.
- 3 The open border between Nepal and India should be regulated, controlled and systematised. All vehicles with Indian licence plates should be banned from Nepal.
- 4 The Gorkha/Gorkha Recruitment Centres should be closed. Nepali citizens should be provided dignified employment in the country.
- 5 Nepali workers should be given priority in different sectors. A "work permit" system should be strictly implemented if foreign workers are required in the country.
- 6 The domination of foreign capital in Nepali industries, business and finance should be stopped.
- 7 An appropriate customs policy should be devised and implemented so that economic development helps the nation become self-reliant.
- 8 The invasion of imperialist and colonial culture should be banned. Vulgar Hindi films, videos and magazines should be immediately outlawed.
- 9 The invasion of colonial and imperial elements in the name of NGOs and INGOs should be stopped.

Concerning people's democracy

- 10 A new Constitution should be drafted by representatives elected for the establishment of a people's democratic system.
- 11 All special privileges of the king and the royal family should be abolished.
- 12 The army, the police and the bureaucracy should be completely under people's control.
- 13 All repressive acts, including the Security Act, should be repealed.
- 14 Everyone arrested extra-judicially for political reasons or revenge in Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Gorkha, Kavre, Sindhupalchowk, Sindhuli, Dhanusa, Ramechhap, and so on, should be immediately released. All false cases should be immediately withdrawn.
- 15 The operation of armed police, repression and State-sponsored terror should be immediately stopped.
- 16 The whereabouts of citizens who disappeared in police custody at different times, namely Dilip Chaudhary, Bhuwan Thapa Magar, Prabhakar Subedi and others, should be investigated and those responsible brought to justice. The families of victims should be duly compensated.
- 17 All those killed during the People's Movement should be declared martyrs. The families of the martyrs and those injured and deformed should be duly compensated, and the murderers brought to justice.
- 18 Nepal should be declared a secular nation.
- 19 Patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women should be stopped. Daughters should be allowed access to paternal property.
- 20 All racial exploitation and suppression should be stopped. Where ethnic communities are in the majority, they should be allowed to form their own autonomous governments.
- 21 Discrimination against downtrodden and backward people should be stopped. The system of untouchability should be eliminated.
- 22 All languages and dialects should be given equal opportunities to prosper. The right to education in the mother tongue up to higher levels should be guaranteed.
- 23 The right to expression and freedom of press and publication should be guaranteed. The government mass media should be completely autonomous.
- 24 Academic and professional freedom of scholars, writers, artists and cultural workers should be guaranteed.
- 25 Regional discrimination between the hills and the tarai should be eliminated. Backward areas should be given regional autonomy. Rural and urban areas should be treated at par.
- 26 Local bodies should be empowered and appropriately equipped.

Concerning livelihood

- 27 Land should be belong to "tenants". Land under the control of the feudal system should be confiscated and distributed to the landless and the homeless.
- 28 The property of middlemen and comprador capitalists should be confiscated and nationalised. Capital lying unproductive should be invested to promote industrialisation.
- 29 Employment should be guaranteed for all. Until such time as employment can be arranged, an unemployment allowance should be provided.
- 30 A minimum wage for workers in industries, agriculture and so on should be fixed and strictly implemented.
- 31 The homeless should be rehabilitated. No one should be relocated until alternative infrastructure is guaranteed.
- 32 Poor farmers should be exempt from loan repayments. Loans taken by small farmers from the Agricultural Development Bank should be written off. Appropriate provisions should be made to provide loans for small farmers.
- 33 Fertiliser and seed should be easily available and at a cheap rate. Farmers should be provided with appropriate prices and markets for their produce.
- 34 People in flood- and drought-affected areas should be provided with appropriate relief materials.
- 35 Free and scientific health services and education should be available to all. The commercialisation of education should be stopped.
- 36 Inflation should be checked. Wages should be increased proportionate to inflation. Essential goods should be cheaply and easily available to everyone.
- 37 Drinking water, roads and electricity should be provided to all villagers.
- 38 Domestic and cottage industries should be protected and promoted.
- 39 Corruption, smuggling, black marketing, bribery, and the practices of middlemen and so on should be eliminated.
- 40 Orphans, the disabled, the elderly and children should be duly honoured and protected.

Dam lies

The opposition CPN (UML) parliamentarians who trekked to Purnagiri in west Nepal two weeks ago and came back with the revelation that India was unilaterally building a dam have some explaining to do. The government and the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu have both denied that any dam construction is taking place. An 8 February Indian Embassy press release says: "There can be no question whatsoever of one party to a bilateral agreement taking unilateral steps for any investigation or construction." It adds that the joint investigation underway at the potential dam site was to generate data necessary for the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) that is required if the Mahakali Treaty is to be implemented.

Some UML leaders have since backtracked from their earlier position that dam building is underway, but insist that even survey work should stop. It is believed that at a time the country is heading for local elections, the UML posturing has more to do erasing from public memory the fact that the party was right behind the government in ratifying the treaty. Differences over ratification of the Mahakali treaty a factor in the UML split in 1998.

The 12 February 1996 treaty that was ratified by parliament in 1997, approves the integrated development of the Mahakali River. This takes into account the existing Sarada and Tanakpur barrages built on the Indian side, and the Pancheshwar Project to be built jointly by Nepal and India. Investigations are now underway through a Joint Project Office set up in December 1999, and two sites, Rupaligad and Purnagiri, are being investigated for possible construction of the re-regulating dam.

Kathmandu to Kilimanjaro

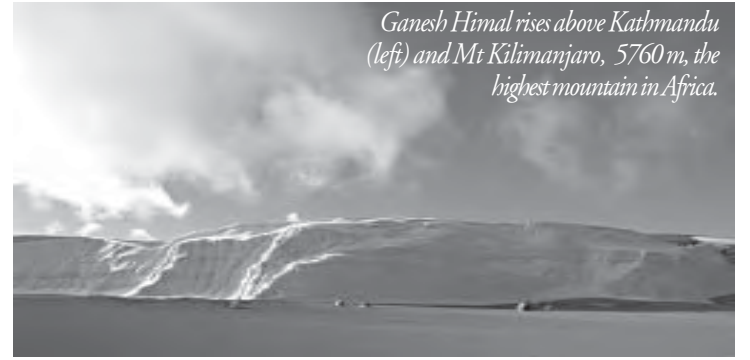
Leaving Nepal after nearly 20 years in development-related work was far harder than we had anticipated. We suffered withdrawal symptoms for nearly six months (and it wasn't just the lack of toxic fumes). But three years later, I am grateful, for leaving has enabled me to gain a new perspective. My new perspective—one neither from within, nor from the “West”, but from a country which at first glance might seem to have nothing in common with Nepal: Tanzania, on the east coast of Africa, has shown me that while Nepal may be economically poor, in psychological terms it is very rich.

On a recent visit to Nepal we found our friends eager to learn about life in Tanzania. “Is Tanzania as poor and backward as here?” they asked, unknowingly echoing the question our Tanzanian colleagues ask about Nepal. Changing countries, as any expatriate worker knows, leads to the bad habit of making comparisons. Hardly a day has gone by in the past three years when I haven't reflected upon the similarities and differences of the two countries. But the comparison in this instance is thought-provoking and instructive, and it is hard to think of two countries where the similarities are so strong and the differences so striking.

Leaving aside for a moment the obvious physical differences, let us look at the similarities. Both countries can be summed up as subsistence agrarian economies. According to UNDP's Human Development Index, Tanzania and Nepal are close neighbours. In 1998 they were ranked number 150 (0.358) and 152 (0.351) respectively out of 174 countries worldwide, which groups them both as “countries of low human development”. Throughout the 60s, 70s, and 80s, both were ruled by a one-party state, albeit one left-wing and one right-wing under a monarchy. Both embraced multi-party

democracy in the 90s, Tanzania's first multi-party elections being held in 1995. Ethnically, both are composed of a wide variety of tribes, but are strongly united.

Here the similarities begin to fade. Tanzania is a big country, 30 million people compared to Nepal's 22 million, and roughly seven times larger in area. Tanzania has fertile agricultural land that would make a Nepali peasant think he's reached heaven. A tobacco company official (a foreigner) shared with me that Tanzania could be wealthy on the basis of its tobacco-growing potential alone. Much of this land is under-exploited. True, rainfall is unreliable, but still there is good land with good rainfall that lies idle for much of the year while inhabitants scrape a living from a straggly crop of maize. (Interestingly, fertilising fields with animal manure, or using oxen for ploughing is not widely practised in Tanzania.) But Tanzania has mineral resources too. It has gold, diamonds, and other precious gems. It has more mineral wealth than South Africa according to a mining company official (another foreigner), all on the brink of being exploited (by foreign companies, of course). But mineral wealth in Africa is a dangerous asset: civil wars rage in mineral-rich countries as Angola, Congo, and Sierra Leone. Still, on top of these things, Tanzania has easy access to markets through the port of Dar es Salaam, as well as half a million annual tourists who come to enjoy its game parks, climb Mt Kilimanjaro, or bask on the beaches of Zanzibar. By comparison, the only natural resource that Nepal has (besides the Himalaya), is the monsoon which guarantees a crop once a year. It would seem that Nepal cannot begin to match Tanzania's resources, nor can it match Tanzania's adult literacy rate of 74 percent. Nepal's is 39 percent.



Ganesh Himal rises above Kathmandu (left) and Mt Kilimanjaro, 5760 m, the highest mountain in Africa.

An expatriate development worker compares Nepal with Tanzania and concludes that a sense of self-worth and political stability are worth more than economic prosperity.

I do not want to attempt a socio-economic analysis. What I want to say is that Nepal may be resource-poor, but it is rich in what I would term the “national psyche”. This is hard to define, but it depends on three things: the hard-working and industrious nature of Nepali people; their self-sufficiency and independence; and their sense of pride in who they are, and in their culture. The three are closely related, and it is impossible to say which is the cause and which the effect. I suppose I have always been aware of these qualities in Nepalis, but it is only my stay in a third country that has made me realise how important they are, far more than having a wealth of natural resources.

From an aid/development viewpoint, they make the one country a delight to work in, while in the other you wonder whether more aid means less progress. In Nepal a little help, financial or technical, goes a long way. A Nepali farmer is totally self-reliant—he saves his seed, builds his manure pile, ploughs and plants and harvests. He is willing to walk his vegetable crop to market, while his Tanzanian counterpart is likely to complain that the government doesn't hand out seed and fertiliser any more, and that he cannot market his crop until an aid project builds a road and donates a vehicle. Tanzanians' expectations are sky-high, as a result

they are doomed to be constantly disappointed and dejected. Nepalis are willing to do without, or make do with cheaper, less-sophisticated alternatives, rather than be beholden to anybody. Stubborn pride? Maybe. But it is an invaluable asset. When a Nepali peasant asks me (as they have many times) “Nepal is a poor and backward country, so why do you bother to come?” I know they're asking a rhetorical question. When I reply that Nepal is a wonderful country and Nepali people are the best in the world, I can sense the relief in their smiles, happy that their own feelings have been confirmed. It is due to this sense of national pride that black and white (or rather, wheat-brown and sun-screened pink) can meet in Nepal with no sense of imbalance, no sense that one is superior to the other. Psychiatrists know the importance of a sense of “self-hood”, of knowing who you are, and being happy in it.

By contrast, Tanzania seems like a nation that has lost its soul. In Tanzania I am conscious I carry a label that says Privileged White. As such I perceive that I am an object of envy, and also resentment. Tanzanians, I sense, are not happy. They would rather be somebody else, say privileged whites. Tanzanians don't just lack a sense of pride in who they are, they don't even know who they are. Separating out the different strands of

history that have led to this is beyond the scope of this article. Certainly colonialism and its legacy of racism played a role, as did the slave trade. Evangelism by Christian missionaries added to the slow erosion of indigenous culture, but socialism had an even more marked impact. Under the socialist policy of *ujamaa*, all land was owned by the government, and the population was forcibly moved into collective villages, and tribal identities and customs actively discouraged. Since an abrupt volte face in the 90s, capitalism has been embraced and foreign companies and consumer imports are flooding into the country. It is no wonder Tanzanians feel confused as to who they are.

What does the future hold for the two countries? When we first moved to Tanzania we were shocked by the high crime rate in Dar es Salaam and the general feeling of insecurity. In the light of our recent visit to Nepal, however, I am re-assessing this opinion. Our visit coincided with the riots in December. We also decided to risk visiting Kailali and Baglung districts, old stomping grounds of ours, where the Maoist insurgency is beginning to make its presence felt. These are disturbing developments in what I have always thought of as the most peaceful and tolerant country in the world. I would now say that of the

two, Tanzania is the more peaceful, the more politically stable country. Since adopting democracy, Tanzania has followed a very different political path to Nepal, largely due to the fact that her embracing of democracy was not the result of a spontaneous uprising, but the choice of her leaders. Consequently, the old socialist party of Julius Nyerere that ruled Tanzania for over 30 years, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), is still in power. In rural areas the socialists are still very popular, and they provide the country with stability. By contrast, the opposition parties are immature and fragmented, squabbling among, and within, themselves (sound familiar?).

So, while the rest of Africa burns with civil strife or inter-tribal warfare, Tanzania is a haven of peace, the temporary home to some 800,000 refugees who have fled Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. Like Nepal's sense of self-worth, that stability and peace are worth an awful lot more than economic prosperity. Viewing Nepal's political progress during the 90s one is led to have serious misgivings about democracy. Perhaps it is a necessary stage the country has to go through. Yet I fear by my next visit to Nepal there will be a civil war. I hope not. ♦

Joy Stephens is a freelance writer and development consultant.

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS

Don't control corruption, eradicate it

Corruption in the ruling elite represents a greater danger to Nepal's existence than the guns of Maoists.

So they've finally admitted that corruption is rampant in the ruling circles in Nepal, and since then we've had a spate of conferences on how to “control” it. By using that very ambiguous term (usually used in “controlling an unruly child”) the anti-corruption wallahs show that they accept the evil, and just want it kept within limits.

These limits will presumably be defined by those designated to “control” it. Are they going to arbitrarily decide who among their friends and acquaintances will be allowed to be corrupt, and to what extent? Will an upper limit of stealing, say ten million a month, be set by the controllers of corruption? Will unlimited corruption be allowed for special friends or politically necessary allies? And who is going to control the controllers?

Those who earn heaps of dollars by holding anti-corruption seminars should actually advocate “eradication”—trying to root it out, abolishing it. The difference is between *nijyantran* (control) and *nibaran* (eradication). But the argument of those who want to control corruption is that it is too pervasive, it exists even in the United States, and it is unrealistic to talk about eradicating it. Corruption is bad no matter where it exists, or who indulges in it, and we should at least assert that our goal is to wipe it out. Maintaining “acceptable” levels of corruption, using some arbitrarily decided upon measure or criteria will never root it out.

If corruption is illegal, immoral, and the opposite of all concepts of good governance, why should it be tolerated at all? Why should elected or non-elected officials be allowed to steal from the people, whatever the amount of money they steal? Does that not discourage the straight, honest bureaucrats or elected officials who are dirt-poor but can live with their conscience and constituents? There are many cases of civil servants who arrive to



work punctually, are dedicated to their work, refuse to have anything to do with the corruption going on around, but are scorned, harassed, and eventually hounded out of their jobs. In other words, instead of being rewarded for their zeal and honesty, they are forced by the corrupt to either give in to corruption, resign, or eventually be fired.

There is a simple English expression which describes very well the corrupt hypocritical faces calling for the control of corruption: “The pot calling the kettle black”. When-ever I attend one of those anti-corruption seminars or talk programmes my friends and I take notes on the known corrupt, a few of whom are always present on the panel or in the audience. Perhaps, as a prelude to such programmes, one could have a half hour of confessions by the participants. They should be collectively asked if they have ever taken kickbacks or had their palms greased. A few insiders should be supplied with information to shame someone who lies.

Perhaps the donor-driven, anti-corruption NGOs and INGOs could come up with a list of prevalent corrupt practices in all sectors of society, including the one peopled by foreigners, circulate them to participants and audience at anti-corruption seminars, and then ask them if they have ever indulged in any one of the listed practices. No one should be above it: media, NGOs themselves, donors, foreign businessmen, traders.

We are a bit leery of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) offer earlier this month to finance the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority to help improve its investigative powers. There have been hints of corruption even in that (until recently wimpy) organisation, and dangling large sums in front of its badly paid staff might actually be counterproductive. The donor presumption that in poor developing countries anything can be achieved if enough money is spent is almost as absurd as the Nepali: “How can we do anything without foreign aid?”

Much more important than ADB funding for the CIAA is a cadre of impeccably honest citizens, who will thoroughly and painstakingly research and list the “before” and “after” property of every high government official starting with the prime minister and his family, and including everyone through the joint secretary level. Most important is wiping out corruption in the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. As a recent article on corruption in the local press put it: corruption in the ruling elite represents a greater danger to Nepal's existence than the guns of Maoists. ♦



Bahadur Nepali

RAMYATA LIMBU

Some 40 "Bahadur Nepalis" gathered in the library of the Paropakar orphanage in Bhimsensthan, Kathmandu, to pay their last respects to the man who had touched and altered their lives. The people, a mix of teachers, hydrological and agricultural engineers, and shopkeepers, were in a reflective frame of mind.

"Daya Bir Singh *ba* believed that all men were equal. He didn't believe in class and caste so everyone who came to the orphanage took the surname Bahadur Nepali, meaning 'brave Nepalis'," says 50-year-old Damber Bahadur Nepali. One of over 250 students to pass out from the Paropakar orphanage, Nepal's oldest charitable organisation founded in 1952, Damber Bahadur Nepali is today deputy director of the Nepal Electricity Authority and managing director of the Chilime Hydro Power Company. "The principles of selfless service to one's country and countrymen that Daya Bir Singh *ba* practised are reflected in the design of the company. It is run entirely on Nepali investment, and seeks to provide cheap electricity to the Nepali population," says Damber Bahadur, who is also president of the Paropakar Alumni Association. Founder of Paropakar and its driving force until he fell ill five years ago, Daya Bir Singh Kansakar's legacy is huge.

In 1947, moved by the plight of people affected by the cholera epidemic that hit the Valley, Kansakar, then in his thirties, started a dispensary—Paropakar Aushadhalaya—after getting a seal of approval from the Rana rulers at the time. The dispensary was initially run from his cloth shop where he kept a stock of medicines and distributed them to families affected by the epidemic. "People

still remember the time he brought a cholera-stricken child into his home and nursed it back to health against the wishes of his family," says compounder Indra Prasad Nepali, one of Paropakar's earliest volunteers. Later, doctors and paramedics would come to help out at the dispensary.

An example in many ways, Kansakar became Nepal's first blood donor in 1950, when he donated blood at Bir Hospital. "People were afraid to give blood then. They thought donating blood weakened a person, sapped their energy. They'd rather donate a buffalo than give blood—as if a buffalo's blood could replace human blood," says 70-year-old Prayag Raj Suwal, another youth volunteer and currently chairman of Paropakar Organisation.

Following the democracy movement in 1950, the dispensary was transformed into the Paropakar Organisation—Nepal's first non-governmental organisation, under which the Paropakar Orphanage (1952), the Paropakar Ambulance Service (1953), the Paropakar Shri Panch Indra Rajya Laxmi Devi Prasuti Griha (1959), and the Paropakar Adarsha Secondary School (1962) were established. Today, the organisation has branches in 30 districts and runs primary health care centres in 175 villages around the country. The Paropakar Children's Village was set up in Duwakot, Bhaktapur this year.

Kansakar's last dreams, to set up a home for ageing people and to establish a medical college, remained unfulfilled when he passed away at the age of 90 on 5 February. "His death is an irreparable loss to Paropakar, one of few organisations that is run on the goodwill and charitable donations of the Nepali people," says Suwal. One of the youth volunteers Kansakar



FAMILY PICTURES

Daya Bir Singh Kansakar's last dreams, to set up a home for the aged and a medical college, remained unfulfilled when he passed away at the age of 90.

mobilised during the cholera epidemic, Suwal along with hundreds of Paropakar youth volunteers, was also active in the pro-democracy movement. "It wasn't possible for Bir Hospital, then the only hospital, to cope with the sick and the dying. Until the ambulance service was started, Paropakar volunteers would bring sick people on stretchers from places as far off as Sankhu and around the Valley rim to be treated at the dispensary. The feeling of selfless service was truly felt then," he recalls.

It was this feeling for Nepal's poor and underprivileged, that dissuaded Kansakar from accepting a Red Cross proposal to come under the international organisation's umbrella. "My father couldn't see the organisation without the name Paropakar—which means selfless service to others. It meant losing out on millions of dollars of regular aid but he decided that it was important to maintain the Nepaliess and uniqueness of Paropakar rather than

toe the line of donor-driven projects," says Daya Bir's oldest son and general secretary of Paropakar, Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar. "Later, he agreed to become a founder member of the Nepal Red Cross Society."

Towards the end of his life Kansakar was greatly disillusioned by the growing number of organisations that did little in the name of service. The government takeover of Prasuti Griha, the maternity hospital at Thapathali that Paropakar started with donations and help from local people was a great shock. He always hoped it would be returned to Paropakar some day. "We helped build the place, weeded the garden, helped carry stones," says Tara Devi Tuladhar. One of the first batch of Nepali nurses Kansakar sent to India to train in midwifery, Tuladhar considers herself fortunate to attend school in Kansakar's home even after the ruling Rana regime had ordered the closure of all educational institutions. "He treated men and



FAMILY PICTURES

From left: Nepal's first blood donor, Kansakar in 1950; visiting Indian Prime Minister Nehru looking out at the school from the orphanage building in 1952 (the late Ganesh Man Singh is behind Nehru with face partially covered); and Kansakar's body being taken for the last rites.



FAMILY PICTURES

women as equals and was constantly striving to educate and empower women," says Tuladhar. An executive board member of Paropakar Organisation, Tuladhar, along with other silver-haired members, is concerned about the 50 year-old organisation's future.

At the organisation's headquarters in Bhimsensthan, black-and-white pictures of the first batches of bedraggled and barefoot children occupy a pride of place alongside pictures of a smiling King Tribhuvan and numerous visiting dignitaries, including Nehru and Indira Gandhi, as memories of a glorious past. "There's a dire need to rejuvenate the organisation," says Damber Bahadur Nepali. "The various programmes Paropakar runs are supported by some government funds, charitable donations and income from a few shops that Paropakar has leased out. But it is not enough to fund any expansion of activities. Most of Paropakar's assets are in property."

As social service becomes more management- and donor-driven, organisations like Paropakar,

guided for decades by Kansakar's principles of selfless service, must now engage in some serious soul-searching and introspection. "Of course in a philanthropic organisation like Paropakar there's always more expenditure than income. Our orphanage, dispensary, ambulance services are all free. We do keep a little donation box. Those who can afford it leave something, which is welcome," says Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar. "But we have to think of more income-generating measures."

The orphanage has changed with the times. The fifty-two "Bahadur Nepalis" at the orphanage now sleep on iron bunk beds rather than old wooden ones, dining chairs have replaced the old traditional *pirkas*, an electric iron has replaced the coal iron and senior students have a separate study room. "They don't have to study under a single lamp like I did," smiles Damber Bahadur Nepali. He, like the others, is now thinking of ways to ensure that Paropakar can carry forward Daya Bir Singh Kansakar's work. ♦

FEEDBACK

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

Somewhere in Nepal

As an ardent supporter of the ongoing "people's war", I read your 9-15 February issue (#29) with special interest. Your editorial "Red Alert", Padma Ratna Tuladhar and the US Ambassador Ralph Frank all repeated calls for dialogue with varying degrees of fervour. Hari Rokka seemed to be a little more realistic about the core question: talks on what? However, even he voiced misplaced optimism about the Maoists joining the political mainstream, possibly because of a split in the movement.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) may be spearheading the violent insurgency that is raging in a large part of the country, but the movement is hardly a homogenous entity either in terms of ideology or operation. It is a melange of elements united in their opposition to the current political dispensation for their own reasons. Some joined the battle after having lost power and privileges and realised that they would never be able to reclaim the past in any other way. Others may have been frustrated by the mutilation of multiparty democracy by today's criminalised political class. Still others may have chosen to become Maobadis not out of any reverence for the Great Helmsman but because they have no other platform to register their opposition from. After all, the CPN-UML, RPP, Nepal Sadbhavana Party and all the other leftists in the political centre are brothers-in-arms when it comes to sharing the spoils of power—hung parliament or not.

I am not a believer in letting a hundred flowers bloom in my neighbourhood or taking a great leap forward towards international proletarianism. Neither do I look forward to following strictures laid down by a battle-hardened cabal entrenched inside a Great Hall of the People in some Kathmandu square. Nevertheless, I do unequivocally support the "people's war".

I do not have any remorse about 'innocent' blood being shed because, whether you like it or not, this is a war being waged in the hallowed name of the people. The government machinery unleashes its full force against the Maoist rebels in the name of defending defenceless men, women and children. The rebels more than match that ferociousness with the firm conviction that they are just responding to decades of state-sponsored terrorism against the people.

Obscured in the middle of this muddle is the fact that Nepal has never been

allowed to see real change. Our so-called revolutions have resembled nothing so much as compromises dictated by the power equations of the moment. Our revolutionaries have never squeezed enough change out of the order they replaced. The trickle-down effect has never been able to fill the pail of the people's aspirations.

Consider the following:

- The New Delhi accord on ending the Rana regime was drawn up even before BP Koirala and King Tribhuvan had a chance to meet face to face on the details of the order of precedence in the Rana-Congress coalition. In the end, what the 2007 'revolution' turned out to be was redeployment of the *bijuli garad* from Singha Darbar to Narayanhity Darbar.
- The abolition of multiparty democracy in 1960 saw BP Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and company thrown into jail. But the Panchayat system easily went on to garner the support of over three-quarters of the MPs in Nepal's first elected parliament. And let us not forget that the Nepali Congress had a two-thirds majority in the lower chamber.
- The changes of 1990 were neither a gift from the palace nor the gains of the people's movement. They were the outcome of a sudden compulsion to compromise, which was triggered by the attack on King Mahendra's statue on 6 April 1990. Had the real people who led that march on the Royal Palace been able to work for another few hours, we would already be living under many of today's Maobadi leaders, even if not in the form of a full-fledged People's Republic of Nepal. The 400,000 local-level *panchas* who were supposed to come out in the streets to defend the partyless polity knew where they fit in the grand scheme of things. They are the backbone of today's multiparty local bodies.

The country has suffered too long from these compromises of convenience. As for the dialogue that everyone thinks will end the Maoist insurgency, consider this: the Maobadis' demand for an end to the current parliamentary system and constitutional monarchy is not negotiable under the present constitution. Moreover, the Maobadis are not in a hurry to begin talks at a time when they have the capacity to hold on to their strategic advantage.

However, if the government really wants to hold talks, it can lay the basis for a meaningful agenda by deleting those four "unchangeable" features of the constitution. Otherwise, it should stop wasting time debating whether the "People's War" is a political or a law-and-order problem. We know that it's a mixture of both—it's just that the proportions keep changing with each offensive or ambush.

If they can, the multiparty leaders should try to eliminate the Maoist insurgents and their sympathisers physically. They have the international legitimacy and support that would cushion them from the consequences of such brutality. The Nepali Congress government might even qualify for western aid for search-and-destroy missions and mopping-up operations. However, no amount of firepower would be able to crush the spirit that drives the Maoist movement.

On the other hand, the government can let the Maobadis—that umbrella group of royalist reactionaries, rabid revolutionaries, amateur anarchists and impatient individuals—clamber onto the Tundikhel open theatre to proclaim their victory. Rest assured, they would soon turn against each other and contribute their might to another round of national destruction. In the process, the country will have witnessed the emergence of yet another aristocracy that would rival today's Pajero-driven political class.

Personally, I do not think events will culminate in either scenario. This "People's War" will go on in varying degrees of intensity because it benefits everybody. Those in power need something that would help them divert public attention from their inefficiency. This insurgency comes with added opportunities for lining pockets from arm-purchase commissions and the commissioning of the Armed Police Force.

For their part, the discontented and disaffected young can keep alive the myth that they are fighting for a change that will never take place and hand the torch to a new generation when they are exhausted.

Supporters of the "People's War", like myself, will be happy to see the sovereign people's name invoked in every matter of life and death. Isn't that incessant invocation what our hard-won democracy is all about?

(Fill in the colour of your choice) Salaam. ♦

BIZ NEWS

Tourist arrivals up

Nepal Tourism Board has reported an increase in January tourist arrivals compared to last year, when tourist arrivals dipped to an all-time low. The NTB says tourist arrivals were up by about 33 percent last month, compared to the same period in 2000. Third country arrivals (excluding India) grew fastest, by about 35 percent. Indian arrivals also grew by about 26 percent, not much, given that compared to January 1999, it was down by about 55 percent. Taiwanese tourists, followed by those from Israel, Sweden, Austria, China and Switzerland led this year's growth in third country arrivals. Arrivals from Spain were slightly down, though. Still, January arrivals this year were slightly higher than the 1999 total, mainly due to the increase in third country tourists. Indian arrivals in January this year were about 43 percent lower than in 1999.



Travel trends

Year/January	Total arrivals	Indian arrivals
1999	25,264	9,195
2000	19,529	4,207
2001	25,905	5,294

HFCL wins WLL supply

India's largest private sector telecom equipment manufacturer, Hindustan Futuristic Communications Limited (HFCL), will supply digital WLL (wireless in local loop) systems to the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation. Reports say HFCL was picked over nine companies, including Alcatel, Fujitsu, Mitsubishi, Mitsui and Sumitomo, for 5000 lines of WLL systems and microwave radio transmission equipment. HFCL quoted \$4.5 million for 5000 lines, followed by Sumitomo, which quoted \$5.1 million. NTC sought tenders for digital WLL technology in June 2000. The Nepal Telecommunications Authority is preparing to begin negotiations to license a rural telecom operator using the WLL system.

A winner in you

Surya Tobacco Company (P) Ltd is organising a "people enhancement" programme for Nepali executives 21-23 April. Shiv Khera, well-known educator and motivator, will moderate the workshop. The sessions will cost Rs10,000 per person.



NECO Insurance dividends

The 5th General Assembly of NECO Insurance has approved payment of 10 percent of its 1999-2000 profits as dividend to shareholders. The company's after-tax profit for the fiscal year 1999-2000 was Rs 9.78 million. Its insurance premium collection for the same year was Rs 140 million. The general public owns forty percent of NECO shares.

Hyundai Hungama

Avco International, sole distributors for Hyundai vehicles in Nepal, has announced the results of the 'Hyundai Hungama' lucky draw. The lucky draw was for persons who purchased a Hyundai vehicle between 17 October 2000-15 January 2001, and prizes were distributed at the Hyundai showroom at Nag Pokhari 5 February. Shailendra Dhakal of Kathmandu was the lucky winner of a Hyundai Accent and Kumar Shrestha of Birgunj a Hyundai Santro, a press release said. The company also gave away cash prizes totalling Rs 120,000.

Right man, right award

The corporate chairman of the Soaltee Group, Pravakar Rana, has been awarded the Outstanding Manager Award by the Management Association of Nepal (MAN). Soaltee has interests in hydropower, tourism, agribusiness and shipping, among others. "Nothing these days is done by an individual," says Rana, adding: "This award is for all the people behind the Soaltee Group." This year's MAN convention discussed the deteriorating law and order and industrial security in the country.

No Pajeros please, we're Chinese

Chinese authorities have banned the import of Mitsubishi Motors Corporation's Pajero sports utility vehicle (SUV) because of faulty brakes, Xinhua news agency reported last week.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Wake up, lawmakers!



We have yet to be grouped with failed nation-states.

Another session of Parliament begins, and the same story repeats itself—walk-outs, fruitless debates and never-ending power struggles. In the clamour for more power and access to power, basic issues and questions concerning the country get lost under a morass of unimportant squabbles. This session will end, insignificant legislation will be adopted, and we'll just wait for the next session of the lawmakers.

This is hardly new. After a decade of functioning, the government and the rest of parliament still can't learn their lessons and move on. Issues of economic importance never make it out of the files of lawmakers. We talk about hydropower, but successive sessions still haven't got around to formulating an official policy on it, even after two years of debate. There are many legislations that require urgent amendment, but nothing seems to happen. The laws remain the same, and it hardly seems to matter to our scores of "lawmakers".

Economic liberalisation initiated a decade ago seems to have some sort of loose direction. But people at the grassroots level demand more socialist policies and successive governments have not been able to push an open

market economy in any significant way. Protectionism remains the rule of the day as those in government and politics can work things to their own benefit if it remains in place. The result—there is no sense of urgency in preparing Nepal for the inevitable WTO regime and there are no systems in place to counter onslaughts from both sides of the border. We seem to be content to remain like many African



nations—a strong sovereign identity with no place in the global market.

Issues at the many seminars, meetings and workshops are the same—better laws that govern business, more tax-payer friendly laws, improved bureaucratic processes. But for any improvement on any of these fronts we need an active State, not one constantly teetering on the verge of failure. The people in power understand what remedies we need, but we are nowhere near seeing an amendment to the Companies Act or the Labour Act or the Income Tax Act.

The system spawns outdated legislation implemented by a graft-prone government and executive. It has led to a nation with an economic system and policies that do the exact opposite of what they should, retard growth and diminish prosperity. It is time lawmakers realised that they have to take the leading role to provide the right institutional and legislative framework for Nepal. Their power struggles and their prioritising of individual objectives over national ones have caused much damage.

There are several Acts that need change already lined up in Parliament for our lawmakers to deliberate upon, and more on their way. Walk-outs, pandemonium and mudslinging are not the only activities of parliamentarians. They are also responsible for the 22 million people they represent in various capacities. It is easy to criticise and point out past mistakes, but it is tough to lay the foundation of a better future. We have yet to be grouped with Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and other nations that have failed as nation-states. Our lawmakers cannot lead us down that road. ♦

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), with headquarters in Kathmandu, was established in 1983 to address problems of economic and environmental development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH): covering parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICIMOD is an independent organisation governed by a Board of Governors and funded by some 15 countries and donor organisations. Its mandatory activities are (i) Documentation and Information Exchange, (ii) Research, (iii) Training, and (iv) Advisory Services. Activities are implemented in close collaboration with partner institutions in the regional member countries. The Centre has 5 core thematic programmes.

- Sustainable Livelihoods for Mountain Household
- Gender Balanced Mountain Development
- Sustainable Development of Mountain Commons
- Capacity Building of Mountain Development Organisations
- Information and Outreach

The Centre presently has 20 internationally recruited professional staff and 19 national professional staff. Staff are members of activity and project teams, and are currently organised in 7 work divisions for administrative purposes. During the first quarter of 2001, the Centre intends to fill in the following positions.

Senior Agricultural Specialist

(International Recruitment - 'P' level)

8 years' experience in farming systems' research; demonstrated managerial competence and a capacity for intellectual leadership.

Water Resources Specialist

(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)

5 years' experience in integrated water resource management, hydrology or in a related field.

Senior Gender Specialist

(International Recruitment - 'P' level)

6 years' experience in gender & social issues' research; demonstrated managerial competence and a capacity for intellectual leadership.

Coordinator, International Year of Mountains

(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)

5 years' experience in conference coordination, communications, journalism, or advocacy.

Coordinator, Research Programme on Equity and Poverty in the Management of Common Property Resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas

(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)

3 years' experience in gender and social issues.

Planning Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist

(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)

6 years' experience in PRA and M & E activities.

Mountain Forum - Asia Pacific Coordinator

(Local Recruitment - 'GS' level)

5 years' experience in communications. A knowledge of electronic networking and familiarity with mountain areas.

Requirements for all these positions are as follow.

- Post graduate, PhD for senior positions, in related field
- Demonstrated ability to communicate professionally in English and, preferably regional language.
- Ability to prepare project proposals, progress reports, etc; skill in project planning, negotiation and assessment
- Record of publications in related subjects
- Experience in managing/working with multidisciplinary teams, particularly with international/regional agencies; part of the work experience should preferably have been gained in the HKH region
- Computer and Internet literate with knowledge of specific technical programmes
- Demonstrated commitment to mountain peoples and environment
- Physically fit to undertake frequent travel to remote and difficult mountainous regions.

Applications from women and disadvantaged groups are highly encouraged.

Detailed Terms of Reference for the positions are available on request or visit our website at www.icimod.org.np. Interested persons should apply with a complete bio-data and names and contact addresses of three referees to the following address by 9th March 2001.

Personnel Section

email: admin@icimod.org.np

ICIMOD, Jawalakhel, GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal
Fax: (977-1) 524509 / 536747

on Sunday 11th February 2001 at the Alliance Premises at 2pm.

The wand, the magician and the bird

by Sylvain, the magician

Ticket Rate: Rs. 100 for adults and
Rs. 50 for children (till the age of 15)

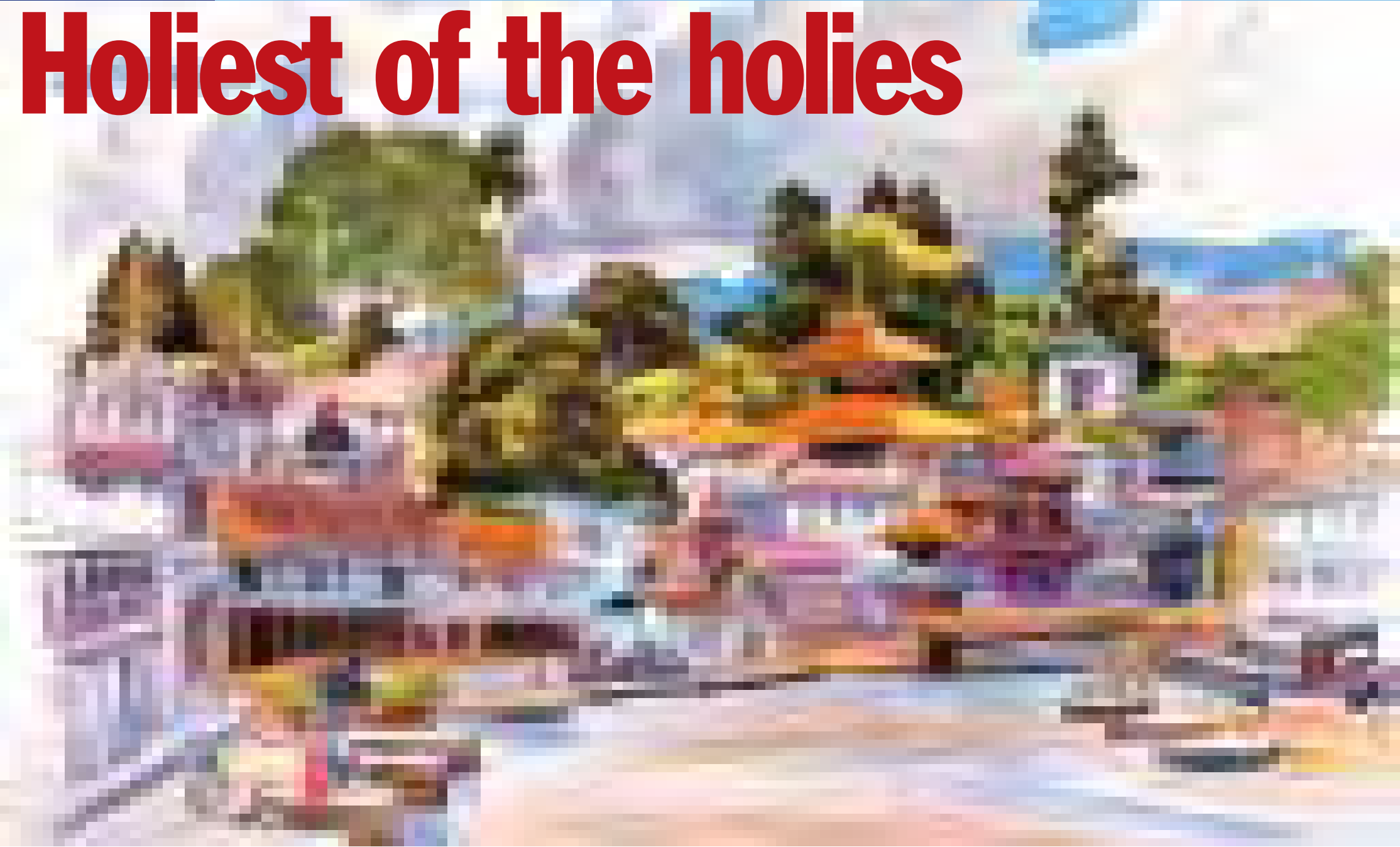
Tickets available at : Alliance Française, Thapathali

HITS FM 91.2

it's good to hear from you...again

CONGRATULATIONS!

WAVE



Tradition has the most sacred temple of Pashupatinath as one of the lotuses that floated on the turquoise lake that once filled the valley of Kathmandu. More substantial tales have the city of Deopatan which flourished in the third century BC occupying the banks of the holy Bagmati and built about the shrine of Pashupatinath. Even then it was crowded with lesser shrines, pilgrims, resthouses and burning ghats.

Today Pashupatinath is a pagoda-type temple with heavily gilded roofs, heavy silver doors that are closed to non-Hindus, and is the centre of a vast complex of temples, shrines, dharmshalas, bathing and burning ghats held together by an aura of religious fervour and smoke from funeral pyres. But history records that in 1412, King Jaya Jyoti Malla constructed a three-storey temple over a Shivalinga of great antiquity and miraculous origin.

Where the temple was built once stood a mound where a fabled cow was wont to go and offer her milk. Her intrigued cowherd decided to dig into the mound and of a sudden was consumed by a blaze of light that emanated from a Shivalinga with faces of Shiva carved on all four sides. So terrifying was one of the faces that an early invader who looked upon it took flight and died. It is miracles such as this that have contributed to the protective sanctity of Pashupatinath. Termites so ravaged the temple that in 1684, Queen Ganga Devi was able to rescue only two floors of it. Twelve years later the temple was entirely reconstructed by King Birpalendra Malla. And since then it has been so added to and embellished by patrons, royal and otherwise, that it is almost impossible to define the original. The last Malla king, Jai Prakash Malla had the gold

Pashupatinath both fascinates and frightens me. Here is beauty commissioned by art's greatest patron. But here too are Kathmandu's few real beggars, people ravaged by poverty and disease with death in their eyes.

finial melted down to finance his war against the invading Gurkhas and such is the power of Pashupatinath that he lost.

God Pashupati is Shiva the Destroyer in one of his 1008 reincarnations, protector of animals. Appropriately, throngs of chattering monkeys swarm through the temples, feasting off offerings of rice, fruit and cooked food. They live on the wooded hill which is a part of the temple complex and once reached to the airport until recently called *gauchar*, the meadow of cows.

Pashupatinath both fascinates and horrifies me. For here is beauty commissioned by art's greatest patron—religion, so that hardly a stone is unchiselled or wood uncarved. The windows of

even the humblest dharmshalas are ornamented with wasp-waisted deities and intricate floral designs; temple spires writhe with serpents of gold and on two of the platforms on which the dead are cremated are sixth-century stone carvings of rare beauty. But here too are Kathmandu's few real beggars, people ravaged by poverty and disease with death in their eyes, and the dying all around them.

There was a day I thought I recognised one, more by the old T-shirt he wore than by his withered face. Months before in Calcutta he had come to me for a job and shortly afterwards he had come again saying he was going home and was in need of clothes. I had given him an old T-shirt among other things and we laughed at its flamboyant design. Now, he said with haunting resignation he awaited death, for to die in Pashupatinath, feet caressed by the icy Bagmati, is to gain immediate entry to paradise. No, there was nothing I could do for him. But he would pray for me.

And I remember the old man who lay on a comfortable litter beside the river attended by the male members of his well-to-do family. They took it in turns to sit by him. And he demonstrated a remarkable unconcern for death by keeping time with an emaciated hand to the devotional songs being sung by Krishna worshippers at least half of whom were foreigners.

Foreigners who wish to see the temple are directed to climb the hill above Pashupatinath from where they can look down

on the temple and its busy courtyard. If they are lucky they may have a glimpse into the shrine, but usually no sooner are they sighted than the silver doors are hurriedly shut.

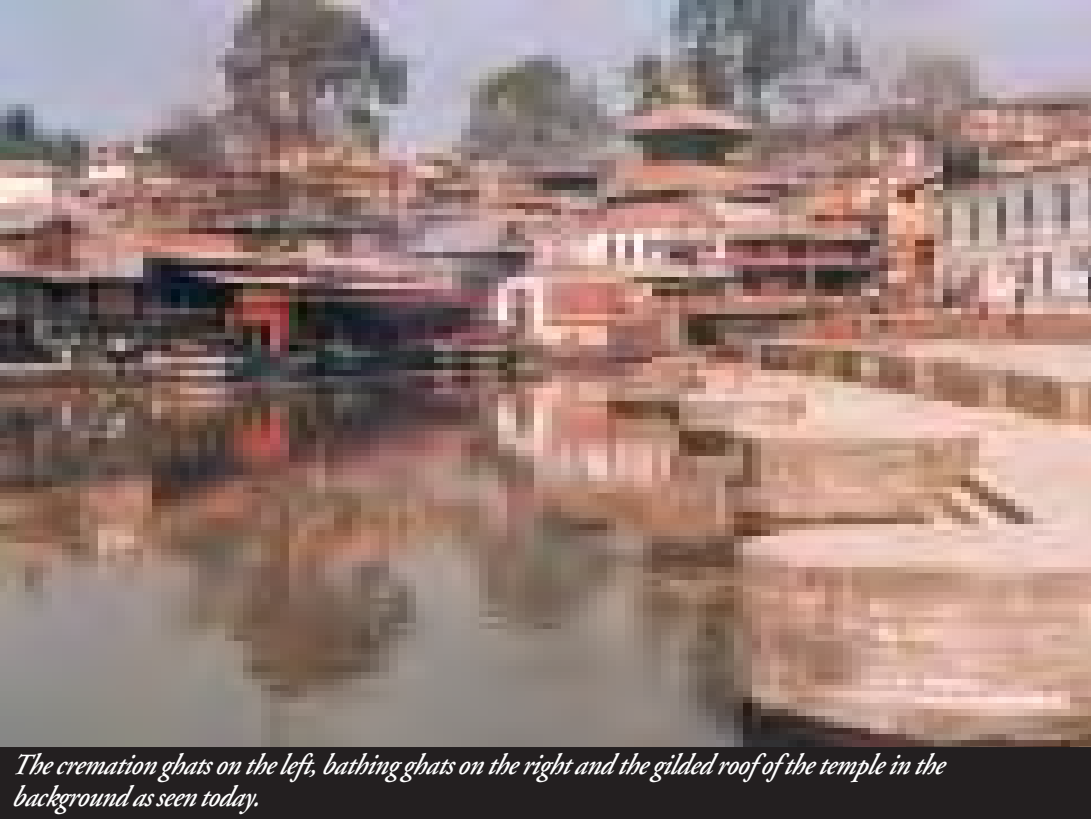
A Westerner who accompanied me to Kathmandu long before the first hippy arrived, went with me to Pashupatinath to sketch the temple. She was barefooted, wore gypsy clothes hung with sacred beads and had her hair tied sadhu-like in a knot. We got separated and after a while as darkness settled over Pashupatinath I started a search for her which became frantic until there she was being escorted by a concert of priests. Apparently on an impulse she had entered the forbidden temple ignoring signs that said "Hindus only" and had reached the holy of holies before she was discovered. As guards were summoned and priests congregated she sank quickly to the floor and assumed a lotus position proclaiming that she was a Buddhist determined to meditate at the shrine. She threatened to go into *samadhi* and stop breathing. Anger turned to concern. Her death would desecrate the temple, so she was asked politely to hurry her meditation and leave. Looking at her I realised that here had been no ordinary prank. A deeply religious woman, she was exalted.

Not far from the temple are the houses of blockmakers and block-printers who turn out the typical Nepali hand-printed material known as *Dumbarkumari*. *Dumbarkumari* was the name of one of Jung

Bahadur's daughters and she gave her name to the art by either patronising it or by being the first to wear it. Strangely the blockmakers and printers who practise their ancient craft in this Hindu stronghold are Muslims. One can take them a length of cloth and have it printed with blocks of one's own choosing. The colours are inflexibly orange, red and black.

When I first came to Kathmandu a famed mystic, the Shivapuri Baba lived on Pashupati Hill close by the airport. Troubled by Pashupati's overpowering reminder of death I went to meet him and was enchanted by a jovial old man with a flowing beard who claimed to be 150 years old. Life, he said was wonderful, to be lived and enjoyed without giving offence to others. He had done and seen so much in this century-and-a-half of living. Lest I should doubt his claim, he remembered Queen Victoria being made Empress of India and had seen the first trains. He had travelled far in search of contentment. Without conscious effort, without any profundity or obvious philosophy he exorcised the troubling aspects of Pashupatinath I had arrived with. He asked me to come back, but when I did some months later Pashupati had claimed him. But the woods are still filled with his message of living and one's capacity to enjoy it. There is too his humble hut—not a place of pilgrimage. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *My Kind of Kathmandu*, HarperCollins, 1999.)



The cremation ghats on the left, bathing ghats on the right and the gilded roof of the temple in the background as seen today.

Shiva's night

SALIL SUBEDI

Over 250,000 visitors are expected to visit Pashupatinath this year to celebrate the god of destruction during Maha Shivaratri, the great night of Shiva. The shrine, located 5 km east of Kathmandu, is preparing for the big night of 21 February. Already, naga babas (naked ascetics), sadhus, devotees, cult followers ("sons of Shiva"), tourists, the irreverent and curious, all manner of passing thugs and pickpockets, and plain strange people, have started gathering in the vicinity.

Considered one of the subcontinent's holiest Shiva sites—the others, Kedarnath, Badrinath and Haridwar, are in India—Pashupatinath is considered the second most powerful place for Shiva worship. Many Hindu pilgrims believe their devotion to Shiva won't bear fruit unless they pay homage to this metre-high four-faced black jyotirlinga, as the phallic manifestation of Shiva at Pashupatinath is called. And for Shiva devotees anywhere, Shivaratri is the most auspicious day to pay homage to the ascetic god with a name for each of his 1008 manifestations.

Indian and Nepali visitors are expected in equal numbers. "But Nepalis, especially the

Thought you'd seen it all at the Kumbh Mela? Wait till you see Shivaratri at Pashupatinath. Next Wednesday avoid being crushed or looted, take a dip in sewage, and be careful what you smoke.

younger people, come only to rejoice in the atmosphere, not really to pray at the temple," says Kamal KC, secretary of the local Bankali Youth Club. Ramesh Uprety, secretary of the Shivaratri PR committee of the Pashupati Area Development Fund (PADF), offers an explanation of uncertain sociological value. "Nepalis have more time on their hands, and

the population has increased. So they come here like they would go to a fair," he says. "This year, due to the Kumbh Mela, there will be many more pilgrims here."

Last year there were officially 175,000 visitors. But, Uprety says, that is just the number that entered the temple premises. "We can't count those who don't enter," he says, referring to the large crowd that remains in

the surrounding forests across the Bagmati on the eastern side of the temple. They're either more interested in observing the proceedings from a distance, or fascinated by the sadhus in trance and want to have a go at it themselves or, more controversially, because they are "non-Hindu", a designation bestowed on anyone who doesn't fit a stereotypical South Asian description. (NT #16)

"We're making preparations on a grander scale this time, so things run smoothly," says Uprety. He says the PADF will mobilise over 2,500 volunteers to ensure the smooth flow of devotees through the temple premises, and help organise shelter, first aid and security, and distribute free food to pilgrims and ascetics. Every year about 100 organisations and individuals contribute in cash or kind to support such facilities.

This year there are six first-aid camps and three camping grounds for the pilgrims at Kailashpuri and Bankali. "The most important thing is the security of pilgrims. We know of instances of theft from inside parked vehicles and from devotees who remove their jewellery and clothes to take a holy dip in the Bagmati," says Sudeep Shrestha of the Bankali Club. Like we said, if there's anyone who awaits fairs and outdoor jamborees more than

devotees and little children, it's petty thieves.

Water is another major concern. The Bagmati is basically sewage, and will remain so until several clean-up campaigns start producing results. Last year, pilgrims took their requisite "holy dip" from 15 taps attached to tankers. In an age where most rituals operate more on the symbolic than the literal level, it isn't difficult to forsake ambience to avoid nasty skin diseases and certain digestive collapse.

Logistical concerns like food and shelter aside, the municipality will face a litter nightmare. "It's hard to convince pilgrims to try and be neat," says KC, who, along with 51 club members, is busy preparing plans for a clean-up action. But it's hard to tell people to pick up after themselves when they've got more important traditions than cleanliness to uphold, some of which threaten to turn into stampedes. "Some pilgrims vow only to enter from the west gate and some only from the east. It's very tough to convince them to take the route set by the PADF," says KC. This year the entry points are through the north gate from Kailashpuri and the east gate near the bridge, and pilgrims will exit through the west gate. The PADF and the Gausala police post will be assigned extra policemen from other areas to help in crowd control.

Whatever happens on 21 February, the area around

Pashupatinath is already festive. The smoke from burning logs and countless chillums signals the presence of sadhus who've already taken up residence here. First-timers will likely be foaming at the mouth with excitement, seeing sadhus camping in the forest, looking terrifying and smoking dope all day. But for veterans and residents of the areas surrounding Pashupati, the charm of the babas is fading. "Earlier, sadhus walked here naked from all over. It was good to see so many of them. They still come, but the number of genuine sadhus has declined," say a Shivaratri veteran from Gausala.

Shivaratri is celebrated with bonfires, trance chants and dances. The temple and the forest around it are swept up in the rhythmic movement of red-eyed Shiva *bhaktas*, and the singing and chanting around the bonfires lit by sadhus. For "non-Hindus", a good vantage point is the Gorakhnath Shikara temple between Guheswori and Pashupatinath. But perhaps the best—and most crowded—observation spot is the platform on the hill across the bridge—beautiful *danda* in local slang. This is the starting and focal point for many of the devotees' activities. People sprawl across every available inch. Classical musicians will give recitals at the Kirateswor temple located on the northern flanks of the Kailashpuri near the Guheswori temple. Meanwhile across the river, east of Pashupatinath, the Pashupati Sangit Kala Pratishthan will offer another musical programme. Inside Pashupatinath, the Bhajan Kothari and Mukti Mandal will work themselves up to frenzy, singing songs in praise of Shiva.

The festival ends the day after Shivaratri, but the festive spirit lingers for a while longer. Most visiting sadhus betake themselves to other climes within a week, but some, feeling the effects of too many chillums, perhaps, hang around Pashupatinath for as long as a month. One sadhu from Varanasi who's already been here for a month, says: "I might stay longer. This time better arrangements have been made for honorary guests like us." In addition to food and shelter, the Guthi Sansthan, as a token of appreciation, has traditionally given sadhus a gift. Even until a few years ago, they were given marijuana—strictly for personal use. However, distribution ceased during the last

SAGAR SHRESTHA



MIN BAIRACHARYA



SAGAR SHRESTHA

The first cult of Pashupati is supposed to have started in the second century, BCE, in India. The oldest inscription in the temple has been dated to 477 CE but some believe that the shrine existed even 1000 years before that. The *lingam* is a fiery phallic icon with four faces, and a featureless one in the centre. The *jyotirlinga* supposedly depicts different aspects of Shiva, much like the Pancha Buddha icon. The fifth



There are a number of creation myths surrounding this much revered temple. There is a local spoken history that has Shiva living in the form of a deer the Migasthali forest across the Bagmati river from Pashupatinath. Tired of being praised to the skies by the other gods, he had come to the forest to hide out and spend some quality time with his beloved, Parvati. Soon the gods, who desperately needed Shiva to be present in the universe, tried to capture him. Their efforts were in vain, for the deer escaped, leaving them holding his horns. The horns turned into a lingam, which Brahma installed where Pashupati stands now. And because Shiva was taking care of the animals (in his deer-form), he was named *pashu* (animal) *pati* (lord).

The *Puranas* give the following version. One day, for no apparent reason, there was a big catastrophe and everything was plunged into darkness (meteorite hit?). Only Brahma, the god of creation and Bishnu, the god of well-being, remained. In the dark they began to fight over who would become the custodian of existence from then on. Their fighting irritated Shiva considerably. Wanting to show them who was boss, he appeared between the bickering gods as a massive lingam (phallus) four *kosh* (approx 8 miles) long, and radiating intense heat. Brahma and Vishnu backed off from this apparition and heard Shiva boom: "Brahma you are only the creator and Bishnu, you're just the protector. But I am the custodian of all. If either of you are what you claim to be, then find the ends of this lingam."

For his part, Bishnu had reached Patal, the nadir of the world, and encountered the serpent king, Karkat, who convinced him there was no end to the lingam.

Shiva made a few prognostications and then diplomatically faded away, leaving behind with the other two the jyotirlinga as a keepsake, although its flame eventually started dying out. Shiva then took to frolicking in various forms of deer, tending to animals along the way, thus earning the name Pashupatinath. He established the forest on the banks of the Bagmati where the holy temple stands today.

While stories like these can be neither confirmed nor denied, they abound in various forms, some even more complicated. Today this is lore that is related in excruciating detail by tourist guides in French, German, Japanese and English to slightly perplexed-looking tourists.



Many men, young or old, partake of the Shiva *buti*, Shiva's herb, as marijuana is called. "At least for a day you become like a sadhu, free from inhibitions and social obligations," says a youth from Chabahil. Adds


another, "But you've got to smoke in a religious way." And what about the cops? Yes, there is a law that bans the use of marijuana and plainclothes cops are on the lookout for smokers. "They catch you, they give you hard time. But if



Whether you will indulge in narcotic substances or not, and perhaps this is a good time to announce that this publication does not condone the use of such

substances, it's worth going and seeing the spectacle—just stay away from nanga babas who like to chase people. And forget about dipping as little as a toe in the Bagmati, or you could be looking at a gangrenous foot. ♦

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Silicon Plateau to Silicon Mountain



“IT requires the one commodity that is equally distributed among the world’s peoples—brain power”

THALIF DEEN

United Nations - UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has acknowledged India’s phenomenal success in the field of information technology (IT) and the giant strides the country has made in high-tech exports. India’s software exports, he says, exceeded \$4 billion last year, and are projected to reach a staggering \$50 billion by 2008. With over a billion people, India’s per capita income has remained at a little over \$200. But its international reserves have risen

more than threefold over the last six years: from about \$10.2 billion in 1993 to \$32.6 billion last year. Arguing that “our future depends on technology—especially new information technology,” Annan says that unlike earlier technologies, this one does not require vast amounts of hardware, financial capital or even energy. “What it does require is brain power—the one commodity that is equally distributed among the world’s peoples.” “So, for a relatively small investment—mainly investment in

basic education, for girls and boys alike—we can bring all kinds of knowledge within reach of poor people, and enable poor countries to leapfrog some of the long and painful stages of development that others had to go through,” he adds. Annan also cites the success story from a much smaller country—Costa Rica—whose rising 8.3 percent growth rate last year has been attributed to the development of its microchip industry, and whose high-tech products find a ready market in other countries. In its World Employment Report 2001 released in Geneva last month, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) said that given the different speed of diffusion in rich and poor countries, the information and communications technology revolution (ICT) is resulting in a widening global ‘digital divide’. “The ICT revolution offers genuine potential, but also raises the risk that a significant portion of the world will lose out,” says ILO Director-General Juan Somavia of Chile. The ILO points out that the East Asian economies of China, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines

and others, for example, have been able to make rapid progress in high-tech areas and were able to capture a significant share of the world market for semi-conductors and other data-processing equipment. But India alone, it says, has seen its software sector grow by 50 percent throughout the 1990s, creating not just exports, but thousands of domestic jobs and a technological talent pool that is drawing international attention from industrialised countries and large multinationals. Annan says that some African countries too, are learning the lesson. Mauritius uses the Internet to position its textile industry in the global market. Mali has established an intranet to provide better administrative services. And Senegal and South Africa have seen a growth in “telecentres”. In the World Economic and

Social Survey 2000 released last month, the United Nations said that the Indian software industry, like its pharmaceutical industry, owes its success largely to human capital. India had built up the critical mass of educated people necessary to take advantage of new developments in information technology. In 1996-1997, over six million students were enrolled in India’s tertiary education sector, the largest number among any developing country. Yet, by comparison with other developing countries that have not enjoyed such spectacular successes with new technology, India’s enrolment ratios are not exceptional. For instance, says the report, its gross enrolment rate for tertiary education, at 6.4 percent in 1995, was lower than the average of 9.1 percent for all developing nations. However, the Indian

educational system produced graduates of a very high standard, with many of them being sought by both Indian and foreign information technology companies. The report also said that the example of software exports by India highlights the fact that support to all levels of education, including the highest, is essential for the development of high-technology industries. Largely because of their connections with Silicon Valley in the United States, some highly motivated and qualified Indian entrepreneurs were able to exploit the advantages that came from the existence of this highly trained labour force, the study said. Indian entrepreneurs built up a software exporting industry of nearly 900 firms, employing about 280,000 engineers, the second largest group of software engineers in the world after the United States. ♦ (IPS)


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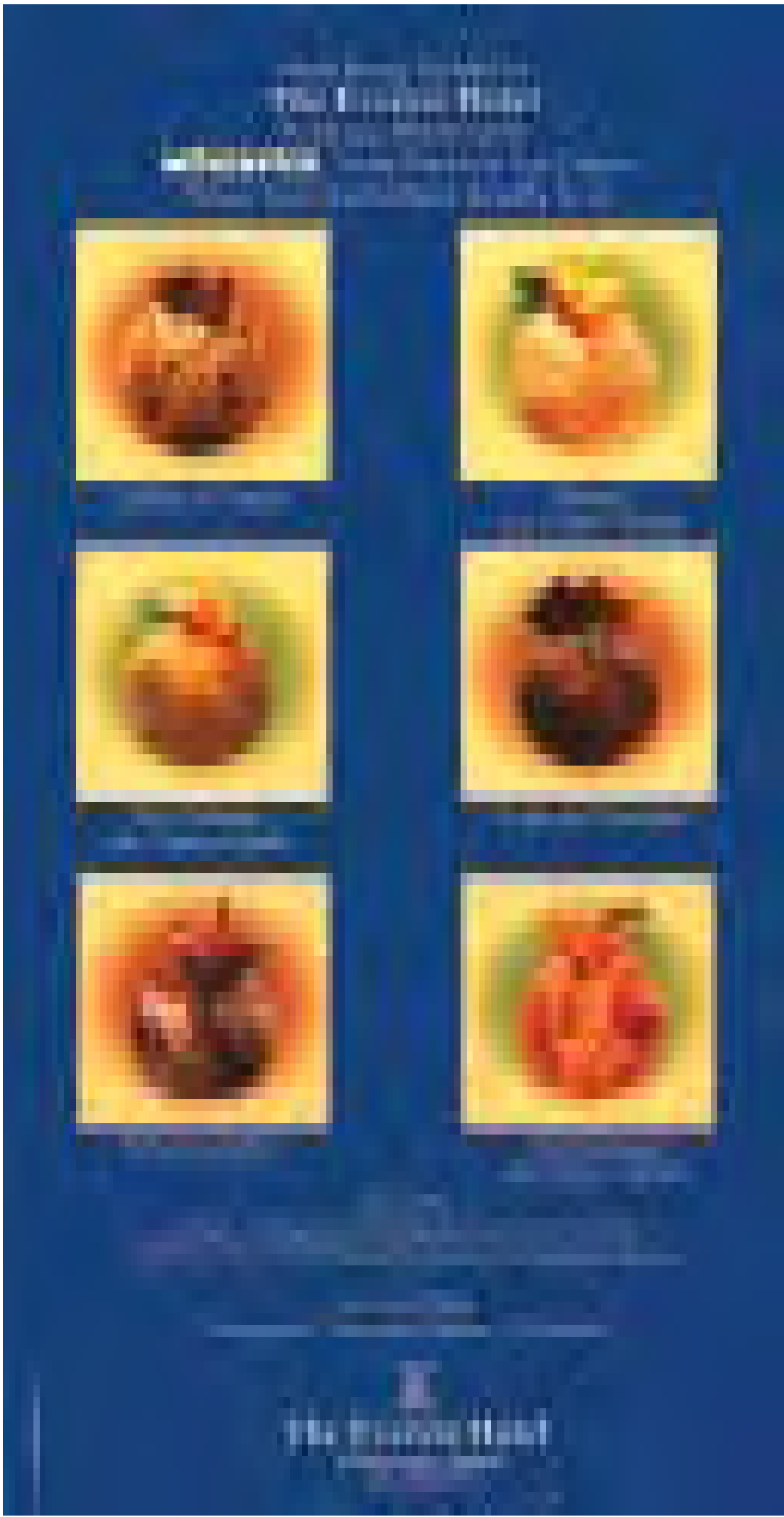
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ad for pg 16



The great skin flick

Skin removed from patients during plastic surgery was sold to a research centre specialising in chemical weapons. Salisbury Health Care Trust admitted last week that it sold off the skin for research without fully explaining to patients what it would be used for. This practice was only stopped a fortnight ago after hospital bosses reassessed their practice in the light of criticisms made over Alder Hey, where organs were removed and retained from dead children without consent.

The skin was sold to the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) at Porton Down paid £17,000 a year for regular supplies. The revelation follows the damning report into organ retention at Alder Hey Children's Hospital on Merseyside.

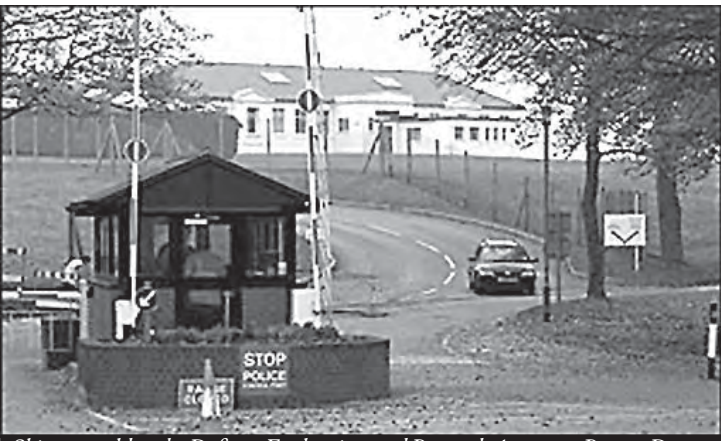
The skin, which was removed during breast and abdominal surgery at Salisbury District Hospital, was used in "chemical absorption studies" as well as investigations of drug delivery and barrier cream formulation, the Trust said. Patients were required to sign a consent form but this did not fully explain the purpose of the research, the trust admitted. A statement from the Trust said:

"The Trust now recognises that this did not inform patients of the specific use of the skin and that some individuals may not have wished for the skin to be used by DERA and offers its sincere apologies for this."

The chemical and biological warfare research centre at Porton Down is on Salisbury Plain. Experts at the South Wiltshire laboratories carried out the world's longest-running programme on chemical warfare experiments on humans between 1940 and 1989.

The consent form patients were required to sign, which was updated in 1996, read: "I agree/disagree to any tissue that is removed in the normal course of the operation being used for medical research." The Trust's statement said: "The Trust thought it appropriate for patients consent to be sought for the use of surplus skin in all forms of medical research through a consent form." It went on: "The Trust made a decision to stop providing skin to DERA two weeks ago in the light of issues raised in the Alder Hey report."

"The Department of Health is currently considering the issue of guidance on the appropriate use of human tissue and on gaining informed consent from patients and relatives for its use for medical purposes." A spokesman for the Trust added: "We are stopping the



Skin was sold to the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency at Porton Down.

After the organ retention scandal at Alder Hey, it is now revealed that skin removed from patients was sold for chemical weapons research.

process until we get further guidance from the Department of Health."

The Trust said the money it received from DERA went back into patient care. As well being sold to DERA, skin was also used within the Trust to investigate wound healing and the preparation of artificial skin, as well as the treatment of burn wounds.

A Ministry of Defence spokeswoman, speaking on behalf of DERA, confirmed the skin was used in chemical warfare tests. "Some of the tests were to find out how the skin absorbs chemicals that might be used to attack our armed forces.

But they were solely for defence purposes—we stopped developing chemicals for attack at Porton Down in the 1950s." She added: "Most of the chemical tests done were for the benefit of civilians. They were with corrosive chemicals that are used in the home and work place, to see how the skin would be affected by a spillage."

She confirmed the skin was also used to investigate drug delivery and barrier cream formulation. Representatives from DERA were currently in talks with the trust to decide what course of action to take, she said. ♦ (Guardian)

Feeling the heat down under

NEENA BHANDARI IN SYDNEY

The heavy floods and bushfires Australia experienced this summer are only a preview of what climate change has in store for the country. Indeed, changing weather patterns in the coming years due to gradual warming of the earth will affect agriculture-based businesses and communities the most, says a report released here last week called *Climate Change and Agriculture in New South Wales: The Challenge for Rural Communities*.

Farmers and agricultural workers are on the frontline, facing the adverse effects of rising temperatures, reduced access to water, higher salinity and frequent and intense droughts and floods. "Climate change, already severely affecting agricultural production, will only worsen in coming decades," said Tim Fischer, a federal Member of Parliament from Farrer.

The report, based on research by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), says climate change in the next 50 years will decrease water resources, increase temperatures, reduce arable land, cut livestock output and affect crop quality—very real effects that will affect people's everyday lives and livelihood. Agriculture plays an important role in Australia's economy. The gross value of agriculture commodities produced in 1998-99 was \$15.8 billion according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Principal crops grown here include wheat, barley, grain sorghum, maize, oats, rice and triticale. Besides fruits, there are oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton, peanuts, tobacco, legumes



Climate change is already affecting agricultural production.

Australia's location makes it particularly vulnerable to the ill effects of global warming.

and crops cut for hay.

"Climate change will cause greater competition between farmers for decreasing water supplies and productive lands," said Kathy Ridge, executive officer of the National Conservation Council of New South Wales, in southeastern Australia. "This will drive up costs of produce and put further stress on rivers and ground water systems supporting arable lands."

Previous reports, like that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have said Australia's location puts it at higher risk for agricultural problems due to global warming. Australia's relatively low latitude makes it particularly vulnerable to impacts on its scarce water resources and crops growing near or above their optimum temperatures. The IPCC report forecasts temperature increases of 0.8-3.9 degrees by 2050 and a 20 percent reduction in rainfall. Water flows in the crucial Murray Darling basin could fall by as

much as 35 percent by 2050.

Australia's agricultural economy could lose as much as 30 percent. The Macquarie River Basin agricultural economy would lose another six to 23 percent. Losses are predicted in beef, wool, wheat and cotton. The rise in carbon dioxide levels could cut wheat protein levels by up to 10 percent. Drier conditions would reduce milk yield from cows by four percent, pasture productivity by 15 percent and weight gain in cattle by 12 percent.

"Farmers will begin to lose agricultural productivity due to climate change in the next three decades if fossil fuels are not replaced with renewable energy," warned Peter Mullins, a farmer and chief executive officer of Greenpeace Australia Pacific. At the global negotiations on climate change in November, Australia, along with the United States, Japan and Canada shirked their responsibility to curb greenhouse gas

emissions by relying on trading emissions and 'carbon sinks'—trees, farmland and other vegetation that soak up carbon dioxide.

Research shows that increased temperatures will alter crop seasons, increase dairy and beef cattle heat stress and introduce new pest and disease occurrences. Dr Gerhard Berz, head of geo-scientific research at the world's largest re-insurer, Munich Re, warns that Australia will be one of the worst affected countries by global warming. Berz predicts that the global insurance bill for extreme weather events and rising sea levels may rise tenfold to \$290 billion a year by 2050. Frequent extreme weather events, such as the hailstorm which devastated Sydney in April 1999, are likely to make some parts of the country uninsurable, he warns. The impact of El Nino—wildfires, cyclones and hailstorms—could exceed the financial capacity of the insurance industry.

Worried farmers want to make climate change an election issue this year. John Cobb, president of the New South Wales Farmers Association says: "There are more recorded disasters now. Floods and droughts have greater consequences because of higher concentration of people and intensive farming." Some farmers also worry about a knee-jerk reaction from the government after the CSIRO report. While the CSIRO, Bureau of Meteorology and the Australia Greenhouse office are putting in up to \$5.5 million in research, most funding goes to monitoring past climate changes to try and establish that early predictions were real. ♦ (IPS)

Fortress Europe

STOCKHOLM - EU interior ministers agreed last week to speed up coordination of asylum policies to cut the number of illegal immigrants, but pledged not to spurn refugees fleeing persecution. Meeting in Stockholm, ministers broadly backed calls by Jack Straw, the British home secretary, for closer collaboration in an area of increasing concern across the EU.

No formal decisions were made, but Swedish diplomats running the union's rotating presidency said immigration officials would hold talks on practical moves to clamp down on trafficking humans from the Balkans. The risks of trafficking were highlighted last summer by the deaths of 58 Chinese immigrants found suffocated in a Dutch-owned truck, which arrived in Dover from Belgium.

Jack Straw, called earlier last week for a new approach to the United Nations refugee convention, bringing criticism that there was a danger of fostering a Fortress Europe mentality. He denied yesterday that he wanted to abandon the principles of the 1951 convention, but said: "We have to modernise the practices because the world today is different from what it was 50 years ago."

Last year 390,000 people applied for asylum in the EU, with Britain receiving the largest number of applications, 97,900, followed by Germany with 78,800. Ruud Lubbers, the newly appointed UN high commissioner for refugees, has called on the union to be more generous in its attitude to refugees and asylum seekers. Mary Robinson, the UN human rights commissioner, has also opposed any change to the 1951 convention.

Most EU member states agree that traffickers have exploited their different laws. "We are very anxious to coordinate EU action against the source of this smuggling," said Straw. Sweden's migration minister, Maj-Inger Klingvall, said: "The goal is that the first stage of our harmonisation work should be completed in 2004." Straw made a distinction between "genuine" refugees and others, but called for a tougher line towards "those who have unfounded claims for asylum and who are using the very complicated and contradictory practices of the different EU nations as a means of evading normal immigration controls."

Diplomats say the level of discussions marked a new sense of urgency since the 1999 Tampere summit in Finland. It was then that EU leaders set a strict timetable for improving cooperation among their police forces, easing the extradition of criminals, recognising each other's judicial decisions and combating money laundering, drug smuggling and illegal immigration. (IPS)

Controversial new Holocaust book

American academic Norman Finkelstein defended the publication in German of his controversial book *The Holocaust Industry* last week and urged Germany not to submit to blackmail over its past. "It is Germany's right to reject the use of the Nazi Holocaust as a weapon for political and economic gain," he said.

"The Holocaust is no longer a source of moral and historical enlightenment. It has become an extortion racket," Finkelstein said. The son of concentration camp survivors, he says Jewish leaders are stoking anti-Semitism by forcing German and Swiss institutions to pay new compensation to victims of the Nazis.

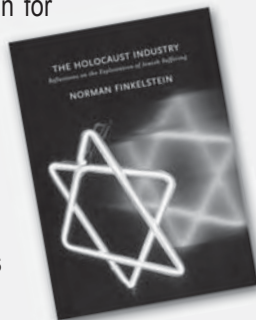
"The main fomenter of anti-Semitism now is the Holocaust industry with its ruthless and reckless extortion tactics," he said. But Michel Friedman, vice-president of the central council of Jews in Germany, attacked his thesis, saying the memory of the Holocaust should be kept alive so history does not repeat itself. "It is counter-productive and serves anti-Semitic clichés and prejudices. It confuses cause and effect, victim and perpetrator."

German government and industry agreed last year to pay \$4.8 billion in compensation to about 900,000 ageing survivors the Nazis pressed into slave labour during World War II, provided they dropped law suits in the US. But wrangles in the US over whether to dismiss class action suits filed by Holocaust survivors and victims' heirs have delayed compensation payments.

Finkelstein says survivors should not be compensated through bodies like the Jewish Claims Conference or World Jewish Congress, who he claims inflate numbers of victims still alive to win more money. "The German government should, on its own, distribute compensation," said Finkelstein, who accuses the body of holding up payments to his late mother while his father regularly received a pension from the German government.

Finkelstein admits he is worried that neo-Nazis, who have attracted increasing support since German reunification a decade ago, could exploit his thesis. Publishers Piper Verlag have come under heavy criticism in Germany for agreeing to publish the book and SWR television pulled a documentary on Finkelstein, saying they would rework the programme before airing it. But the author, a political scientist at Hunter College in New York, hopes his book will spark more open debate about the Holocaust in Germany.

"I think there is a kind of political correctness on this topic [in Germany] which makes honest discussion about these issues difficult," he said. "My father loathed and hated every German. But he never complained about compensation." (Asian Age)



The price of war

FEIZAL SAMATH IN COLOMBO

As Sri Lanka marked 53 years of freedom from British colonial rule this month, the country is feeling the economic and human toll of the 17-year-old conflict between the government and Tamil Tiger rebels seeking their own homeland. A new study, released before independence celebrations 4 February, revealed that the country has already lost billions of dollars in revenue, economic growth and human misery due to the conflict, among the world's longest-running internal conflicts.

But for the war, Sri Lanka's economy would have grown by seven percent or more compared to the average four-five percent now, said the study carried out by the MARGA Institute, the country's oldest economic and social research agency. The report, "Economic, Social and Human Cost of the War" (between the 1983 to 1998), was commissioned by the National Peace Council (NPC), a Norwegian-backed peace group and funded by International Alert, a Norwegian peace institute. The research team for the report was led by retired civil servant and activist Godfrey Gunatillake.

Sri Lanka should have had buoyant economic growth, comparable the Asian Tiger economies. Direct military spending by both the government and Tamil Tiger rebels totalled \$3.2 billion, while additional war expenditure by the government amounted to \$2.31 billion. A further \$4.34 billion was spent on law and

order between 1983 and 1998, while other war-related spending by the rebels reached \$4.5 billion, according to 1998 prices. The MARGA Institute's study is consistent with a report published by the semi-government Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) over a year ago, but its research also touches on the human misery.

"War is the most important factor that has held back an economy that should have done well," said Gunatillake. The report said the actual value of destroyed and damaged property was estimated at \$1.48 billion and the total of lost output in the country's north and the east, most affected by the conflict, at \$3 billion. The rebels are demanding a separate state in the country's northern and eastern regions. The cost to Sri Lanka's economy due to the loss of human capital professionals and others migrating was a cumulative \$1.22 billion, said the report. Thousands of people have either fled to the west or sought jobs abroad. Lost earnings from the tourism industry totalled \$2.17 billion with a value-added net loss of \$1.30 billion when foreign investment in the region of \$1 billion could have come into the country if not for the war.

Sumanasiri Liyanage, an economist and political scientist attached to Sri Lanka's University of Peradeniya, believes the biggest challenge facing the country is if and when the war ends. "The process of reconstruction and rehabilitation would be a tremendous challenge and whether it would take 10 years, 20



The human and economic cost of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is calculated in a new study.

years to restore normalcy, is anybody's guess." He says figures don't reflect the actual loss of production in the strife-torn north and east. Liyanage adds that some official figures in 1999 showed the government spent \$500,000 dollars while the rebels spent \$423 million on the war, which works out to "12 percent of the country's gross domestic product going into an unproductive sector."

The report put the estimated number of deaths due to the conflict at 50,000 to 60,000 up to 1998. It said more than 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers and many more civilians and Tamil Tiger rebels were disabled, and 800,000 people displaced due to the war. The report cited estimates saying 30,000 soldiers and rebels alone have died, a figure that implies 30,000 families have experienced the death of a young family member.

Widows and female-headed households have increased over the years and this group is very vulnerable. The report adds that children have likewise been brutalised by the war. "I am quite skilled at dismantling and re-assembling my father's rifle," one child living in a conflict area said.

The study said the direct financial cost of the war was making macro-economic management increasingly difficult. "The loss of economic opportunities is preventing the economy from moving to a path of higher growth essential for solving the urgent problems of unemployment, persistent poverty and malnutrition," it said. The exigencies and demands of the war are reducing Sri Lanka's capacity for good governance, the report concluded. ♦ (IPS)

Beyond chequebook diplomacy

TOKYO – Japan's prompt response to the devastating earthquake that hit India has been a chance for Tokyo to show it can go beyond 'chequebook diplomacy', say experts here.

Japan has pledged close to \$2.5 million to India since the quake struck. But in addition to giving funds, Japanese military cargo planes are now in Gujarat, with shipments of tents and blankets for hundreds of thousands of victims. Tokyo's despatch of its Self-Defence Forces, as its military forces are called, represents the second time Japanese forces have been sent overseas, after their involvement in relief operations for the 1998 hurricane in the Honduras.

"Japan is moving away from chequebook diplomacy and doing far more by sending personnel too," says Professor Toshiyuki Katada, earthquake expert at Musashi Technical University. The Self-Defence Forces also conducted training sessions for Indian officials on how to set up tents. In addition, government fact-finding missions are visiting earthquake-torn villages to determine the extent of assistance needed to rebuild homes. Japanese medical doctors and rescue workers from the government and non-governmental sectors have also been despatched.

The local media has covered the Indian earthquake in detail. A special half-hour focus programme was carried on national television earlier this week—covering the lack of sanitation, medical care and psychological care for the victims with a commentary by experts who called for more relief from Tokyo. (IPS)

More nuke-testing in South Asia?

SAN FRANCISCO – Relations between India and Pakistan remain volatile, making the risk of war between the two nuclear-armed adversaries "unacceptably high," director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet said last week.

In his report *Worldwide Threat 2001: National Security in a Changing World*, Tenet said: "Nuclear deterrence and the likelihood that a conventional war would bog down both sides argue against going to war. But both sides seem willing to take risks over Kashmir." He said there was no sign of a reduction in the proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and there was "a good prospect" of another round of nuclear tests.



"India decided to test another Agni MRBM missile last month, reflecting its determination to improve its nuclear weapons delivery capability. Pakistan may respond in kind," he cautioned. Tenet noted that India enjoyed advantages in "military balance" over Pakistan, pointing out that India held "a decisive advantage" in fighter aircraft, almost twice as many men under arms, and a much larger economy to support defence expenditure. "So, Pakistan relies heavily on its nuclear weapons for deterrence," Tenet explained, adding, "Deep-seated rivalry, frequent artillery exchanges in Kashmir, and short flight times for nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and aircraft all contribute to an unstable nuclear deterrence." (Asian Age)

Poles repay WWII debt to Gujarat

NEW DELHI – Jamnagar Children, a group of 5,000 Poles, galvanised public support to generate funds for the Gujarat victims. They reminded Polish people through TV and other media why Gujarat, and India in general, was important to them. The government of Poland responded promptly, sending its presidential Air Force One TU-154 to Ahmedabad with relief material. The government has also offered its 19-seater aircraft Sky Truck, which works almost like a helicopter, to the Gujarat government.

Poland's Gujarat connection dates back to World War II. In early 1942, the Maharaja of Jamnagar offered shelter to about 500 Polish orphans and their guardians who escaped from Russia. They were children of Polish prisoners who had formed an army against the Russians. Poland was the first country to be attacked by Germany in September 1939, and two weeks later by Soviet Russia. A large section of the civilian population was deported. In October 1941, the army went to Iraq, but civilians released from Russia—women with children, and disabled men—came to India.

They came from Tehran, via Ahvaz, to Karachi—after the 500 children were brought to Jamnagar—and were given place in Kolhapur. The Kolhapur Durbar built an extensive settlement at Valivade Park, nine km east of Kolhapur, over 250 acres. The Rs 3.2 million Polish refugee camp for 5,000 people, the largest in India, was completed by the end of 1943. The families lived there for a couple of years before returning to Poland. The Polish ambassador said the district collector of Jamnagar was handed over the package from Poland. "It was a gift from the Jamnagar children of the past to today's Jamnagar children," he said, adding that Jamnagar Children was an active group and that a high school in Warsaw has been named after the Maharaja of Jamnagar. (Asian Age)

Women make “dummy councillors”

Key to power

Bangladeshi Prime Minister: Sheikh Hasina

Sri Lankan President: Chandrika Kumaratunga

% of women among parliamentarians in Single or Lower chambers of national Parliaments	
	1999
World average	11
Africa	
North Africa	3
sub-Saharan Africa	10
Latin America & the Caribbean	13
Caribbean	13
Central America	13
South America	13
Asia	
East Asia	13
South-East Asia	12
South Asia	5
Central Asia	8
West Asia	5
Oceania	3
Developed regions	
East Europe	10
West Europe	21
Other developed regions	18

Today's women Presidents

Finland: Tarja Halonen
Ireland: Mary McAleese
Latvia: Vaira Vike-Freiberga
Panama: Mireya Moscoso
Sri Lanka: Chandrika Kumaratunga
Philippines: Gloria Arroyo

Today's women Prime Ministers

Bangladesh: Sheikh Hasina New Zealand: Helen Clark

NADEEM YAQUB IN PESHAWAR

Nasima had never thought of entering politics until a few months ago. "The people of the area wanted me to contest because they wanted to send an educated woman to the union council," the 35-year-old lawyer said. "My entire family, especially my brothers, backed me and I got elected."

Hailing from one of Pakistan's least developed areas, Nasima is the first person in her family to enter politics. Her chance to pursue public life came when Pakistan's military regime, which overthrew the civilian government in October 1999, called local government elections across the country, and reserved a third of the seats for women.

The elections, held in stages beginning 31 December and ending in

July, will bring newly-elected governments to the district level in Pakistan's four provinces and capital Islamabad. This is the first time in Pakistan's history that women have been guaranteed political positions. Across the country, 7,611 women have filed nomination papers for 5,742 women's seats reserved at the grassroots level. The process has given women like Nasima hope to change the political system.

But in male-dominated societies such as in the North West Frontier Province, such political awareness is the exception. Most women candidates in this conservative region were not fully told about the political process and the gender issues that were involved. Instead, they were propped up by influential politicians and tribal leaders of their areas—to do

Local elections in Pakistan guarantee women a spot in politics for the first time, but many fear that women are just becoming political pawns.

the men's bidding.

Such was the case for candidate Meera Jana, who when asked what she would do after being elected replied: "I will do what the men tell me to do." Jana reflects the more common picture of the women taking part in the polls. Women in traditional and tribal societies here are often kept on the margins of all decision-making processes. Many are uneducated, unemployed and restricted to the house. The men in the family make important decisions regarding their lives and future—even political decisions such as who to vote for in elections.

Such a situation inhibits women from participating in politics and, when they do, undermines their role. "Most female contestants do not have an identity of their own and are merely playing into the hands of men," said Mohammed Raza, a voter at the recent polls. "They are hardly aware what their responsibilities are and about their role as a councillor." Experts feel that getting women to run in elections is not enough to prompt social change and empower women. "For social change to attain some ends you have to unleash social forces. You can't just go directly towards that end," says Kamil Bangash, a leader of the labour-oriented Mazdoor Kissan Party. "There is no shortcut."

Activist groups are also worried about the quality of women

candidates. "We want genuine and not dummy councillors," says Saima Munir, a programme officer for the women's rights group Aurat Foundation. The Aurat Foundation and more than six other groups have been training prospective female candidates about the world of politics. The organisations also launched a "Citizens Campaign for Women" after local elections were announced last year. "The campaign aims to create an environment where women could participate, and to motivate people to accept women as public representatives," Munir said.

The biggest struggle will be against tradition. Despite the military's claims of introducing "new political leadership" and taking the country towards "true democracy" the fact remains that people went to the polls because of their historic political affiliations, communal and tribal links.

Afrasiab Khattak, chairman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, says the reservation of women's seats in local elections is a positive step, if not a breakthrough. "But this is not enough to improve the socio-economic conditions of the women," he says. "Mobilisation of people can only be done through political parties and they are the ones who generate public interest. The government has ignored this fact. I don't think these polls will have a long-term impact on the lives of people." ♦ (Gemini)

Infighting is not a healthy sign

Excerpts from an interview with Chiranjibi Wagle in *Nepalipatra*, 9 February

- Q. You have been identified as a dissident in the Congress. Is this why the prime minister didn't invite you to join the cabinet, or is it because you refused?

A. We are not dissatisfied. If we were dissatisfied we would have joined the government. Because of the amount of responsibility we now have we are not dissatisfied. We have already said that we are staying out of the government for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there has been an ongoing battle in the Congress for some time now. We have demanded that party elections be fair, free and that there should be no irregularities in the election process. Contrary to this, the party elections were full of irregularities. This raises questions of how the party is going to function properly in the coming days. We had demanded the PM think about this and try to solve this problem before doing anything else. If the PM is prepared to look into this, we might consider joining the government. Secondly, there is the Lauda Air issue. When we moved a vote of no-confidence, this was one of the issues raised. At that time the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) was not involved at all. The parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had begun work and had stated that irregularities had taken place. The CIAA has now started working on this and I, along with other friends, think it would not be proper to join the government now. It is because of these two reasons that we have stayed out of government.
- Q. In the Lauda Air case, the PAC, the CIAA and you have raised the issue and stated that the PM was involved in financial irregularities that took place. How are you going to deal with this issue in parliament?

A. We are going to raise this issue based on the findings and directives of the PAC report. The CIAA is at present investigating this issue. Therefore, our arguments are going to be based on the PAC findings.
- Q. To enable a free and fair investigation into the deal, the opposition has suggested that the PM resign. What is your reaction to this demand?

A. There is space for the opposition to raise its demands. It can present its views in any way it thinks is possible. We are MPs from the treasury bench. We will be present in parliament and we will remain within the parameters set by our party. There are parameters set by the parliament and parameters set by the party, and we will remain and work within these parameters.
- Q. The opposition finds the PM guilty. You too find the PM guilty. Then why don't you two join hands and work together with the opposition?

A. As I have just stated, we are MPs from the treasury bench. Therefore, we will have to behave and work within the parameters set by the party and the parliament.
- Q. If the opposition introduces a vote of no-confidence against the present government, what are you going to do? Do you have the guts to join hands with the opposition?

A. We are the ruling party. If the opposition moves a vote of no-confidence we will have to act as required of members of the treasury bench.
- Q. The PM is accused of not remaining neutral while nominating members to the Central Working Committee (CWC) of the Congress. What do you feel is happening?

A. We have always stated that, firstly, we should work to unify the party. Then we can think about the government and about strengthening it. But the party president has the authority to nominate members to the central committee. Till today he has nominated four members. Of the remaining 14 membership positions we have always requested that he should choose people on the basis of region, gender and caste. He should bring in those who are honest, and hard-working and who have been with the party for a long time. But again this is the power and authority of the party president.
- Q. The present government is a majority government formed by the Congress but it seems to be plagued by infighting. When is the government going to work and solve the problems of the common man?

A. Yes, it is true that there are problems like you have stated. This is the worst thing that has happened in the past ten years. The infighting and other problems that exist in the Congress are not a healthy sign, and this is not good for the party. Other parties have split over issues, but the Congress has not been divided or broken up. Because of internal problems the Congress has not been able to play a very positive role and prove its true capabilities. We feel that it is time to solve all the problems that exist within the Congress and move ahead. If the recent convention and party elections had been free and fair we could have solved a lot of these problems. What actually happened at the convention only added more fuel to existing problems. It is true that some problems have been solved. The party president has a big role in solving these issues. We have to wait and see to what extent he is successful.
- Q. You were elected in the very election that you accuse was full of irregularities. If this is true, it raises questions about your election too? Maybe your votes were rigged too?

A. Although party elections were full of irregularities, we had no other option but to participate. We had to either boycott the election or fight. If we had boycotted, where could we have gone? Therefore, we had to leave the party or participate in the elections, however full of malpractices. Since we do not want to leave the party, we decided to participate although the elections were not free and fair. Many honest and hard working party members could not cast their votes, and two election commissioners resigned after the election. Despite all these problems we fought the elections and thank everyone who participated and voted for us. If there were no irregularities, then many more honest and hard working people would have been elected too.



Maoists to target UML leaders

Naya Sadak, 8 February नयाँ सडक

A recent meeting of the politburo of the Maoists has bracketed the UML in the same league as the NC and the RPP. The UML has been classified as 'reactionary' and it has been decided that UML leaders too will be targeted from the Nepali new year in mid-April.

A circular doing the rounds among the rebels states that from the first day of the new year banks will be looted and police stations destroyed in the Maoists-affected tarai. The tarai districts affected by Maoist activity are Sunsari, Jhapa, Bara, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Parsa, Dhanusha, Nawalparasi, Chitwan and Makwanpur. In the same way it has been decided that new control areas will be formed in Bhojpur, Sindhuli, Therathum, Kavrepalanchowk, Sankhuwasabha and Sindhupalchowk. Likewise people's governments are to be formed in Dhading, Nuwakot, Lamjung and Gorkha.

It has been decided that a two-year programme will be initiated in the same way that people's governments are formed in areas where the Maoists are active. It has been decided that they will attack the district headquarters of Kalikot, Rukum, Jajarkot and Rolpa. The politburo has asked all Maoist supporters residing outside the country to come and help in the struggle. It has also stated that all departments, organisations and agencies working in these areas and related to the US and Indian governments in any way will be attacked. To strengthen the finances of the party, it has been decided to levy a charge of Rs 500 per month per house in their areas of influence or those bordering urban areas. To counter the armed police force recently formed, the party has stated that it is providing training to 800 of its cadre. Similarly, members of the organisation who are being trained in the jungle near Ratomato and Bhedabhari in Kavre are going to be deployed in the tarai and eastern districts of the country.

Itahari—The underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has started shaving the head of young men who keep long hair and sport earrings. The Maoists caught three students with long hair from the local Janata Bahumukhi Campus, took them out and had their hair shaved off and removed their earrings in broad daylight. According to eyewitnesses the rebels also went to the classes and threatened every male student with long hair and wearing earrings. They also advised the students to be properly clad when coming to college. That very day a group of students supporting the movement went to Jyoti Lower Secondary School and cut the hair of students with long hair. Sources at the school say they also warned the girl students not to wear short, revealing dresses or have short hair. Another group of students at the Mahendra Secondary School also had their heads shaved while five were warned to cut their hair within five days on Wednesday.

Reports also say that Maoists



1982. General Secretary of the CPN(UML) Madhav Kumar Nepal poses with his newly married wife Gayatri. From Chhalphal, 11 February 2001.

visiting different schools in the areas and checked the annual accounts of the schools. Principals and campus chiefs have also been warned not to make any improper utilisation of funds. The schools have also been instructed to complete the courses in time and not ask extra fees of students for extra tuition classes.

The Maoists have also been successful in eliminating vandalism and bullying, a major problem faced by the locals in Itahari. In the past, gangs armed with swords would be involved in bloody gang fights even in the daytime. Not even the police or the administration were able to solve the problem and the locals were being continually harassed.

We want to remove a corrupt PM

Excerpts from an interview with Bharat Mohan Adhikary, UML leader, Budhabar, 7 February बुधवार

Q. The Lauda Air issue has sidetracked all other issues. Why did you call an emergency meeting of the central committee?

A. This is an issue of corruption. It is not a protest directed against any one party, nor in support of any other party. This should not be made a party issue nor should a whip be issued. If a whip were issued in such cases, then the former president of the USA, Nixon, would never have been removed. He would not have resigned, the Republicans themselves voted to remove him.

In the same way, eight Congress members of parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) have stated that financial irregularities took place and that the Prime Minister is involved. The Congress MPs who registered a vote of no-confidence against the PM have also accused him in the Lauda Air case. This issue was also raised at the convention held recently in Pokhara.

By raising this issue we are not protesting or acting against the Congress. If the PM is involved in a case of corruption, then the whole country should raise this issue. We still tell the PM: "Vacate your position, form a committee to look into this matter, help in the investigation and if you are declared innocent you can have your position back again." The standing committee

of our party has asked for the resignation of the PM. Since this is a matter of grave consequence and is a very important issue, we felt that a meeting of our standing committee was required. How do we raise this issue in parliament, or how do we deal with it on the streets? To find answers to the questions raised we thought it would be best for the standing committee to meet.

Q. The Congress is in government; it has a majority government but remains unsuccessful. How long is the country going to be hostage to such a situation?

A. Regarding the Lauda Air issue, we have not demanded that the Congress government should go. The Congress has a majority in parliament and therefore it should form the government. However, the Congress can form a government under the leadership of anyone other than Koirala, since he is involved in the Lauda issue. We have not demanded that the Congress should not form a government.

No one feels that there is a proper government in place, in view of the situation of the past 20 months. It is not only the UML that thinks so. In



QUOTE OF THE WEEK

You don't get the sense that there's a government in the country. There's chaos everywhere. Everytime I leave home, I tell my family, "If a stranger knocks at the door and enquires after me, don't let him in."

—Ganesh Gurung, TU sociologist in Budhabar, 14 February.



I swear I will attend the the swearing-in ceremony and the take the oath and take whatever else I can as long as I am protected by my post and the oath of secrecy. नेपाल समाचारपत्र Nepal Samacharpatra, Daily, 11 February 2001

Man U play with the Yankees



This alliance means they can go everywhere in the world—they're in bed with each other, but not married.

NEW YORK—Manchester United, the richest soccer club in the world, has teamed up with baseball's world-famous New York Yankees in a marketing alliance they hope will make them even more money selling merchandise to fans around the globe.

YankeeNets LLC, parent of the World Series-winning Yankees, and United, runaway premier league soccer leaders, said the deal would allow each to move into new markets and reach more fans. They will be able to sell more shirts, caps, videos and other merchandise through each other's marketing and distribution channels.

"This is an alliance, there are no financial arrangements," said Peter Kenyon, chief executive of Manchester United. The intriguing thing is that the

alliance is non-competitive.

"We both have global synergies, but we're not competing with each other, so we look forward to bringing future benefits to both organisations," he told a news conference in New York.

"This is a unique alliance in sports and shows that YankeeNets and Manchester United are real pioneers," said Harvey Schiller, CEO of YankeeNets, which is also the parent of the New Jersey Nets basketball team and the Stanley Cup champion New Jersey Devils hockey team. It is also a marketing partner of the New York Giants football team.

Whether the marriage of two of the most glamorous sports clubs in the world is a home run or an own-goal remains to be seen, but officials of both organisations touted the

alliance, as did outside sports analysts. "This is a great deal for both sides," said sports analyst Craig Tartasky of E.J. Krause. "You take the two strongest brands in sports and cross-sell them to sponsors. It's how do you take two things worth so much—\$800 million for the Yankees and \$1 billion for United—and make them worth more? This alliance means they can go everywhere in the world—they're in bed with each other, but not married!"

Even though TV and merchandise licensing rights have not been finalised, there is huge potential for making billions of dollars from marketing the teams and their stars. United's David Beckham is married to Victoria "Posh" Spice and Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter is close to signing a new

contract reportedly worth \$189 million over 10 years. "I don't think most Americans understand just how big Manchester United's presence is in the world," said Scott Brannvold, a professor of sports management at Robert Morris College in Pittsburgh. "If one side could be said to get a good deal in this, it's the Yankees. As baseball makes inroads around the world, maybe this way the Yankees will get one step ahead of everyone else."

One thing the Yankees and United will not do is get involved in each other's sports. You won't see Yankee outfielder Paul O'Neil playing in goal at United's famed Old Trafford stadium, or United

Yankee Nets' Harvey Schiller presenting a Yankees jersey to United's chief executive Peter Kenyon.

midfielder Roy Keane playing defence for the Devils. "We don't forget our heritage, Manchester United won't produce baseball teams and the Yankees won't produce soccer teams," said former United legend Sir Bobby Charlton.

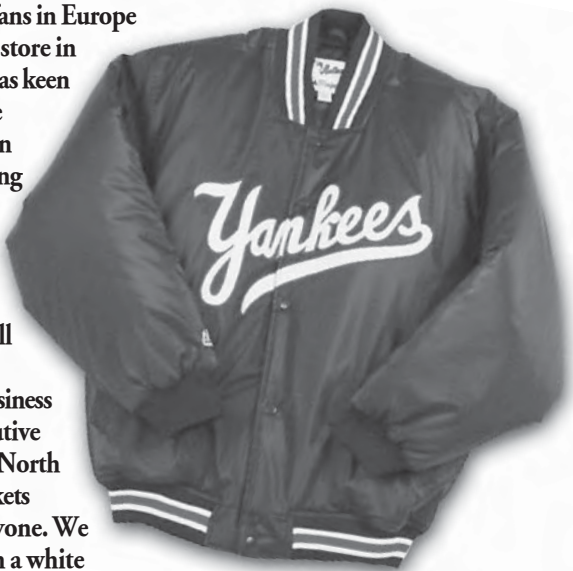
Asked whether the alliance was merely a cover for the club to sell more merchandise, he said the aim of the partnership was to help develop soccer in the United States. "We are not in the process of selling our souls to another sport. This is to make friends and grow the sport," said Charlton, who was the midfield general of England's 1966 World Cup-winning team and led United to the European Cup in 1968.

However, both Kenyon and Schiller brushed off questions asking why they did not invest in the existing US league, Major League Soccer, if they wanted the sport to grow in America.

Kenyon said United, which

has legions of fans in Europe and Asia and a store in Hong Kong, was keen to tap the huge North American market. Hooking up with the Yankees made that easier. "They have a particularly well developed multimedia business and their executive staff know the North American markets better than anyone. We can't ride in on a white charger and say 'This is the way to do it' because we don't know the US," Tartasky said the key to unlocking the financial potential of the alliance might be the TV rights and YankeeNets was keen to develop a regional sports TV network. Adding games from one of the world's top soccer teams could only enhance that network.

Kenyon said United, which recently signed a huge sponsorship deal with sportswear maker Nike, will eventually have team stores in the United States through Nike. US sports leagues currently control overseas licensing, but Schiller said YankeeNets will discuss the possibility of marketing Yankee merchandise in Britain through



United's outlets. As for Yankee, Nets or Devils games on Manchester United's own TV station, again the issue was one for the individual leagues.

The deal also includes plans for Manchester United to tour North America before the 2003-2004 season starts. In December, YankeeNets announced a cooperative marketing agreement with the NFL's New York Giants, who lost to Baltimore in last month's Super Bowl. That deal calls for YankeeNets and the Giants to sell sponsorships together and to examine selling each other's licensed goods. The agreement with Manchester United, which has won 13 English titles overall, is similar to the one with the Giants. ♦ (zoomsoccer.com)

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TIBET BOOKS

NEPALITERATURE

FOR KATHMANDU, WITH LOVE AND SQUALOUR: RAJAV



Author of three short story collections, one book of satire and two poetry collections, Rajav is one of the most skillful writers of today, capturing the psychological complexity of Nepal with a few deft strokes. The story below, originally published in his early collection Samaya Peeda, is one of his most compressed and succinct pieces, but the casual sadism it captures grows in the reader's mind after the story is over.

His father is the peon of Sharma and Company. Father leaves home at eight in the morning and returns at eight at night. Mother spends all day on the topmost floor braiding incense wicks. In the evenings she goes to sell these wicks to shopkeepers who have placed orders, then she takes orders from other shops and comes back home.

He's now ten years and three months old. When he was two months past seven years, his father introduced him to the first letter of the alphabet "ka" on the auspicious day of the Saraswati prayers. Till today he hasn't learned the next letter "kha." The year before last, his father talked of enrolling him in school, but then he'd put aside the matter, saying he'd have him enrolled next year. When that year came around, his father avoided the matter by saying it wasn't time yet, and this year he hasn't raised the issue at all.

He has a sister too. She's a total of five years and three months old. His father has spoken of introducing her to the letter "ka" during the coming Saraswati prayers. His sister either spends all day on the topmost floor sticking close to Mother, or she flees Mother's watchful eyes and scavenges pieces of half-eaten potatoes and grams and peas thrown about the courtyard, or collects eaten mango rinds and sucks on them in the passageway. His sister always tells their father to bring mangoes, but at night their father always returns empty handed in the half-trance of alcohol. His mother, though, sometimes brings home plums, peaches and cherries, and when they're cheap, pears and persimmons.

"Why are you sitting there with that look even after you've finished eating? Go down to the courtyard and mind the hens. Go feed a chick to the dogs like you did the other day!"—his mother said this a while ago, flashing a toss of the ladle. And he flung his pitcher to the floor, then headed straight down. After reaching the courtyard, he searched for and counted the two mother hens and twelve chicks. Then he took the alley next to the courtyard and reached the main street.

He spent half an hour at the edge of the street watching the amusement offered by the crowds of cars, bicycles and people. He found it really easy and amusing to spend all day in the compound of the cinema hall. The boy who sold ice there, the son of the dumpling vendor Pakcha, the son of Puncha the wheat and lentil fritter vendor, and the son of the midget Bahun had become his closest friends. He played marbles and sticks with them in the cinema hall's compound. Sometimes he stuck his ear to the hall door and listened to songs and dialogues. And he reached home before the film let out at night, before his father came back. By that time his mother would already have cooked noodle stew, and she'd be braiding incense wicks in the kitchen. His sister would be fast asleep on the floor.

Right now he's been standing for about ten minutes in front of a button

store. There are two customers standing in front of him. They've been here since he came.

After the customers leave he grabs a hold of the shop's bars and stares keenly at a pile of marbles in front of him. Pulling together a handful of courage he says: "Shopkeeper, give me two marbles."

"Shoo, ass." The shopkeeper stands up, lifting a broom.

He runs off and stands at a distance where even if the shopkeeper hurls his broom, it won't reach him.

"Just two," he says again after the shopkeeper sits down.

"Do I have to splash water on you bastard, or will you take off?"

"I'll bring the money tomorrow. Can't you give me just two?"

"Do you dare to keep talking, you bastard monkey?"

"Just two."

The shopkeeper asks, "Can you go all the way to Indrachowk naked?"

"I can! Will you give me the marbles then?"

"All right, take off your clothes and I'll give you not two—but five."

"Really?"

"Yeah, first take off your clothes and go to Indrachowk and come back."

By this time he's already taken off his shirt. Seeing this, four children gather around him. The cigarette vendor across the street also steps out, laughing, to stand at the door to his own shop.

"Will you really give me the marbles, then? Shall I go?"

"Yeah, take off your shorts too."

He puts his shirt on the shop bars, and, unfastening the buckle on his shorts, starts to undo the buttons. His shorts drop from his waist to his feet. The ten or twelve children who've gathered around by now begin to clap.

He puts his shorts on the bars, with his shirt. Now he's completely naked. The shopkeeper, in glee, exposes his teeth to some fresh air. "All right, now go all the way to Indrachowk and back."

By this time, quite a long line of children has piled up behind him. Most of the nearby shopkeepers have come to stand at their doors.

In the beginning he crouches in running position. But then he walks at a normal pace for the first ten or twelve steps. Then, to trick the rows of children behind him, he suddenly breaks into run.

"Ha...ha!" The children dash after him, screaming.

By the time he returns, the crowd of children behind him has doubled.

The shopkeeper gazes at him with subdued eyes. But his lips are still split open like before, and his teeth seem to be hanging in the wind.

"Where are my clothes?" he asks, clutching his marbles in his fist.

"You're asking me, beggar?"

"They were right here," he says tearfully, pointing at the bars.

The rice vendor a few doors down holds up his clothes and calls out, "Eb, this way, come this way."

So he goes with the crowd of children to stand in front of the rice shop.

"Give them to me!" He jumps for the clothes in the shopkeeper's hands.

"Wait, if you reach New Road as you are I'll give you fifteen paisa."

"Where's the money, then?"

"Do you want your clothes or not?"

"Then where's the money?"

"Here, corpse!" The rice vendor hurls a total of fifteen paisa onto the street.

He picks the three five paisa coins from the street.

"What are you looking at, you cadavers," he scolds the army of children, shoving them aside and running off at a swift pace.

When he returns his face is drenched. The sweat on his forehead is trickling down the bridge of his nose and dripping onto his chest. In one hand he's holding an ice stick that he's sucking, and with the other hand he's wiping off his face and neck.

By now all the shopkeepers have gathered at their doors, laughing. Along with them laugh the housebound women watching from nearby windows, women whose husbands and children are off at work and school. A sharp satisfaction glitters in everyone's laughter.

"So where are my clothes?"

"Did you really go all the way there?"

"Here, look." As proof he shows them the ice stick he's sucking. Then he turns, with a questioning look, towards the army of children.

"He went all the way," says one boy in the crowd. The rest lend their support by clapping heartily at their leader's success.

"Here." The shopkeeper hurls his shorts and shirt towards the crowd of children, then picks up a stick used for shooin cows and steps onto the street to chase them away. They all scamper to a nearby sidewalk. From a short distance, three of them open up their shorts and pay the shopkeeper a special homage.

But suddenly he totters and startles in fright. He hasn't put on his shorts yet, he's been busy buttoning his shirt; suddenly a hard, rough hand strikes his neck. A foot kicks his spine. He gets knocked down so badly he grinds his cheeks against the tar road.

He's still naked below the waist, holding his shorts in his hands.

"Deceitful glutton!" His mother makes as if to kick him again.

From among the army of children, a boy who recognised him had gone home to tell on him.

His mother steps back a little, then lands another kick on his back. When she lands another kick as well, he skitters three hand-lengths away. But not a word leaves his lips. He just looks aslant at his mother with wild, raging eyes.

His mother's eyes, looking like fire, dance from shopkeeper to shopkeeper in the surrounding shops.

"Strip your own children you gluttonous asses! Just because you find a child of a poor man..." She stands in the middle of the road shrieking, with her sari pulled up to her knees. It's like she's Randchandi, goddess of war. A passion for vengeance animates her face, and her eyes spark with the giddiness of wrath. With one hand she's holding her son's neck and with her other hand she's lifting her sari.

By now the shopkeepers have covered their teeth. As retaliation against him, revulsion for his mother has begun to speckle their faces.

"Walk, glutton! You'll see what's coming. Did I tell you to stay in the courtyard and mind the hens, or to put on an exhibition for these other gluttons? You rice-gobbling glutton!" The mother strikes another forceful slap on her son's face. Her son reels badly, but with great effort saves himself from tears.

"I said walk, you stubborn gluttonous corpse! You like becoming a spectacle, do you?" She strikes another slap on her son's other cheek and starts dragging him off with both hands.

Her son is still naked below the waist. The teeth of the shopkeepers who stripped him have also become naked.

ART REVIEW

by WAYNE AMTZIS

Embodying Myth



Known for her alluring and satirical prints, Ragini Upadhyay-Grela now displays her creative prowess with her work in oil. A single figure dominates a painterly landscape. Heavy, stable, secure and complete unto themselves, the animals she depicts contain a range of displaced symbols and forms. Against a wall-like background, or one of earth and sky, stained by numerous handprints that mark the central figures as well, Ragini asks the witness to merge with the larger form even as they identify the particular figures that are bound within. Puzzled or pleased by the

integrative process at work here, one cannot but be assured by the holding power of her animals. They stand (like a stupa or a Ganesh) as an implacable presence, not a cow or a lion or a tortoise, but cow-mother, lion-mother, tortoise-mother that will not abandon her progeny or her bodily parts, though they be torn from her and scattered over the earth. These forms are peaceful, yet indomitable. There is a violence here overcome, a chaos that will not prevail, for there is no moving her figures from their rightful place at the centre of creation. Only the handprints remain as signs of the forces she submits to, the violence willed against her.

These figures (the artist suggests) reinterpret mythic embodiments of the female psyche. Ragini says regarding her paintings: "The Tortoise suggests infinite patience, which is a female quality. The Cow called Kamdhenu in mythology a symbol of great and powerful Desire, which is locked in the case of most women." The effect on the witness is two-fold; perception and intellect are triggered by the seemingly

decorative placement of individual forms; yet an emotive and intuitive rapport is effected by the major figure itself. These works, though pleasing to the mind, are best encountered with the body, by a mirroring that will not be parsed with the logic of words. While her prints speak directly of corruption and hypocrisy or playfully of desire, Ragini's oils transcend her references with a more complete embodiment.

In her oil on canvas "The Woman", a cow with a peacock's tail and wearing a human mask gazes at us. Embedded within, a faceless woman dances, her outstretched leg, the cow's; a peacock on her shoulder and outstretched arm. For Ragini, "peacock and birds represent dream and freedom". There are other displaced symbols—a key around the cow's neck, a bird for a horn, a lotus for sexual organ, and the most prominent of handprints, like those that smear the space behind her, is stamped on the cow's hind leg. The language of myth and dream guided the artist, and we too can read the painting in this way. To open one's self to myth is to let go of the literal mind. To become one with the cow



mother, the peacock dreamer, the woman dancing, the lotus bringing forth, to take the key from the cow's neck, and, remove our handprints from her thigh is a beginning of a journey inward. Each one of Ragini's oils affords the onlooker the possibility of entering the psyche's hidden realms, though a few (like her prints) look outward, lambasting the social and political failings of

contemporary Nepal.

There is a familial and haunting presence revealed by Ragini's menagerie of cow, lion, tortoise et al. These animals, depicted with a primitive realism, display the magnetic and morphlike qualities of unaccountable creative force. These emblems of forbearance, these mythic figures, are signs for what outlasts and precedes us. This exhibit is not to be missed.

Ragini's figures, so familiar and unfamiliar, from another world, are revelatory glimpses of the world we inhabit or (like her larger than life Pig with topi and shoe) explicit condemnation of those who can no longer dissemble that world. ♦

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❖ **Authentic Nepali Sekuwa (Barbecue)** Regular Friday Night Sekuwa in the lamp-lit courtyard setting of a heritage hotel 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

❖ **Barbecue at the Ropes** The first barbecue open for lunch everyday. Over 20 dishes to choose from served with a splendid view of the Himalayas. 12 noon—2.30pm at the Sky Terrace, Hotel Everest. Reservations recommended. 488100

❖ **Chinese Food Festival** A month-long festival honouring the Year of the Snake offers a wide variety of authentic Chinese cuisine prepared by Chef Wong Jun. Until 22 February. Hotel Shangri La. 412999

FILM

❖ **Kathmandu Film Archives** present *Red Bells*, a Russian film about the Mexican Civil War. English subtitles. 22 February, Thursday, 5.30 pm. Russian Cultural Centre. Tickets Rs 50, at Mandala Book Point, Jamal; all Momo King branches; My Home CyberCafe, Patan; Martin Chuatari, Thapathali, GAA Hall, Thamel; and the venue. For more info email chautari@mos.com.np.

MUSIC

❖ **Fever at the Jazz Bar** Cadenza (Tuesday and Thursday), live Irish band (Friday), and solo piano the rest of the week. International cuisine and drinks, espresso, cognac and cigars www.hotelshangrila.com 412999.

❖ **Jazz** by Cadenza at Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7.30pm-10pm.

❖ **Live Shows** Various bands at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. Every evening. 416071

❖ **Chakra** The Piano Lounge at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. Every evening 7pm onwards. 248999

❖ **Unplugged** Syabru Lama plays guitar at the Coffee Shop, Hotel De l' Annapurna. Every evening 7.30pm–10pm. 221711

❖ **Classical Guitar** Kishor Gurung plays classical favourites at the Chimney, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Everyday 8pm onwards. 248999

DANCE

❖ **Classical Nepali Dances** based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and the Tantric pantheon at the Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra. Every Tuesday, 7pm. Rs 300. 271545

❖ **Ballads and Dances of Old Tibet** performed by Tsering Gurney and Tsering Paljor at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra. Every Thursday, 7pm. Rs 400. 271545

❖ **Traditional Dances** every evening at Dwarika's Hotel courtyard. Drinks from two bars. No entrance charge, however reservations are recommended for diners. 479488.

❖ **Sunday Night Fever.** Free dance classes every Sunday by dancemaster Andreas Lehrke. Salsa, Swing and more. The Piano Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 8.30pm. 248999

EVENTS

❖ **Ceramics Exhibition and Sale** by Jim Danish, Doug Caseberg and other American artists from the Anderson Ranch Arts Center (ARAC) and paintings by Oma (Judy) Chase. Part of the 10th Annual Rhythms of Nepali Life and Culture trip, sponsored by ARAC. Indigo Gallery. Starts Sunday 18 February. 10am onwards.

❖ **Son Et Lumiere** A temple's tale as told by the temple itself in speech, dance and lights. Classical dance and music performance in the Ram Mandir courtyard followed by *Sita Ko Bhojan*—Sita's feast. Performances by Nassa Culture Academy, Nepal Music Academy and Instant Karma. Rs 1100 for adults and Rs 800 for children. Money raised goes to the restoration of the Ram Mandir. 24 February, Ramachandra Courtyard, Battisputali. Dinner at Dwarika's. For more information and tickets dwarika@mos.com.np, 479488.

❖ **Shahanshah No. 1 McDowell's Bowling Week.** Introductory week at Hotel Shahanshah International's new bowling centre. Rs 75 per game, includes one free drink. Door prizes. 14—21 February. 353411

❖ **School Fair** St. Xavier's Godavari School. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the School. 17 February, St. Xavier's Godavari. 9am-4pm

MARTIN CHAUTARI

❖ **Education in the Mother Tongue.** Pandit: Bhusan Shrestha, and Arjun Limbu of the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung. Participation open to all. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. Tuesday, 20 February 5.30pm, Thapathali. 246065

FESTIVALS

❖ **Shivaratri, 21 February** Shivaratri is the night of Lord Shiva who is believed to have been created on this night through his own divine grace. The temple of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu, one of the holiest Shiva shrines, receives over 100,000 worshippers during Shivaratri.

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

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Across

- Terra firma (4)
- Leaping parasite (4)
- Hagar's laxative perhaps (4)
- Jacket promo (5)
- Writer's block, find a _____ (4)
- Characteristic of the country (5)
- Chief in church's petty officialdom (6)
- Easy direction (3)
- Uncertain estimator (7)
- Add to the agenda (7)
- Knotted choker (3)
- Prolific South, as in us (6)
- Ludicrous act (5)
- Imbibe tidily perhaps (4)
- Looking askance, slyly (5)
- Total canine (4)
- Makes a "people" mistake (4)
- Coke, flake and crystal (4)

Down

- Tyger maker's other creation (4)
- Shivering fit (4)
- Spaced out in Houston (4)
- Scoop silt (6)
- Influenced by the virus (3)
- Temptations for the trout (5)
- Common computer error (5)
- Capacity built perhaps (5)
- Old friend grows contempt (6)
- Severe insanity (6)
- The canonised lot (6)
- Many twisted story (4)
- Eatery in red (5)
- Dissuade the tree dweller (5)
- Another never-ending age (4)
- Warsaw counterpart (4)
- Stash in hold (4)
- American taxman (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 19

There were no correct entries this time.

INF COM Online

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

These pictures show a bar shaped cloud that is riding the jet stream pattern. Close on it and you will see precipitation falling over Nepal on February 22. The Plateau of Tibet is the source of these true stories. The next week the monsoon zone will be over the Himalayas. The chances of rain are next to none. The Indian monsoon is still in the

bar shaped cloud in a huge wave

and graze

the minimum cloud cover is low building efficient are of the

Tue

27-04

At 50, Zakir Hussain completes a full circle

ANAGHA NEELAKANTAN

There's something quite contradictory about a man who's an icon of Hindustani classical music but has played with Van Morrison, endorses a fairly prole tea with the inane exclamation "Wah Taj!" and who's consistently been voted the sexiest man in India for over a decade. But then Zakir Hussain is no ordinary classical musician. It is precisely this combination of prodigious talent, charisma and adventurousness that have made him the classical music equivalent of an international rock star. Hussain was in Kathmandu this week, where he played to a packed and appreciative Royal Nepal Academy. He has been here before and played at the Academy with flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia in 1997, but what he enjoyed best was being in Nepal as a tourist, "incognito", seeing the sights and wandering around the streets, listening to the rhythms of everyday life. Faced with a crowd, Hussain will go on a bit about Nepal's mystical and religious resonance, the beauty of its mountains, Lumbini and Pashupatinath. But one on one, the man has a lot more to say. But first, a hyper-standard bio: Hussain started playing tabla as a "wee lad"—a tot of two. When he was brought home from hospital, his father, instead of whispering the more traditional alphabet or other words of holy wisdom, filled the newborn's ears with the subversive beats of the tabla. The rest is a slice of music history. Hussain went on his first international tour at 12, played for Hindi films through his youth, all the while giving virtuoso Hindustani tabla performances. In his mid-20s, in 1975, he teamed up with British jazz

guitarist John McLaughlin, famous for his association with the Mahavishnu Light Orchestra, and in another unusual move, with two practitioners of Camatic music, violinist L.Shankar, and percussionist Vikku Vinayakram. The result, Shakti, is a classic of collaboration between diverse musical styles. Hussain has since played with everyone, including the poppy Van Morrison, the mad prophet of free jazz, Pharaoh Sanders, and the new guru of electronic music, Talvin Singh. Shakti may have been one of the first instances of truly organic-sounding collaboration between seemingly incompatible musical styles, but it didn't feel like it for Hussain. He was simply facilitating and playing music that came naturally to him, that he would've liked to hear, but didn't exist. Hindi film music is much maligned, but its catholic borrowing, from classical Arabic music, bop or ska, Rajasthani folk music, ragtime or Beethoven concertos, means that people who listened to it, or, until twenty years ago, played it, like Hussain, were used to all sorts of unlikely marriages. Growing up in Bombay in the 1960s didn't just mean familiarity with the workings of film music for Hussain, but also exposure to every American and British trend that hit the shores of India, like classic and psychedelic rock. Add to that the obsession with India that led to the Beatles showing up and jamming with Ravi Shankar, whose own collaboration with Hussain's father, Ustad Alla Rakha, was well-established at the time, and you begin to understand Hussain's musical licentiousness—er, adventurousness. Hussain remembers being

fascinated with the possibilities of manipulating music and technology to produce unexpected effects even back in 1967. The Beatles were visiting his family, and George Harrison had this nifty portable record player. "It was amazing. I'd never seen anything like it. It was tiny—a 78rpm would extend just over the end. Harrison had these little speakers to go with it. You just plugged the cord into an outlet and played music! But what really got me was *Revolver*—they'd just finished recording it and they played it to us. They were pointing out how this one track ('Tomorrow Never Knows') had a section that was mixed in backwards. My father kept asking what was wrong with the original recording that it needed to be played backwards. But that was really the point, to do something different from what people were used to hearing. That really got me." A few years later, Hussain, still playing and improving his Hindustani music skills, was doing much the same thing. "I was the first person in Bombay—excuse me Mumbai—to have a ghetto blaster. And when I walked around with it, I didn't even think of carrying it in my hand. It had to be on my shoulder. I used to walk around Bombay with my boombox listening to 'Light my fire'." From ghetto blasters to experimental Indian classical-jazz was a logical step, it would seem, listening to him. Hussain was clearly not a "classical music nerd", as so many young people who take their music seriously are labelled. Not only did he walk around with a boombox and "just scrape through" all his exams he was also on his school and college cricket team and, this is hard to believe, the wrestling team. He doesn't listen to as much rock music now, mostly just favourites like Billie Holliday, Aretha Franklin ("I listen to her regularly") and James Brown, who Hussain has seen live four times just in the last year. But Hussain



DIPENDRA BALACHANDRA

"I was the first person in Bombay to have a ghetto blaster. I walked around with it on my shoulder, playing 'Light my fire'."

also listens to music he believes is important, but which he may not enjoy in the same visceral way—"academic listening", which requires darkness and intense concentration, so it can be dissected and analysed later, like Indonesian gamelan music or Nubian drums. Listening to all sorts of music is important, says Hussain, "because otherwise how do you communicate with people, how do you understand what they're all about?" Hussain doesn't have any long-standing musical partnership like his father's with Ravi Shankar, but he comes pretty close with Ustad Sultan Khan, one of the foremost sarangi players and composer and singer of the vastly popular song, "Piya Basanti". He says Khan has the last word on all his recordings and even sat in for Hussain when he fell ill while composing the score for the South Indian film *Vanaprastham* two years ago, and on Hussain's latest foray into experimental and alternative music. Last year, the duo collaborated with Talvin Singh,

famous for his dance music album *Anokha: Soundz of the Asian Underground*, one of the phenomena that sparked off this new wave of interest in things vaguely Indian, with one important difference. Unlike in the 60s, it is now mostly cultural figures of Indian or South Asian origin determining what "Indian" thing becomes flavour of the month. And Zakir Hussain, collaborating with Talvin Singh (who Hussain claims is "a fine tabla player, though he hides it") on their new album, *Tabla Beat Science: Tala Matrix*, released last year, charts new territory in many different genres of music, and sets the agenda for further musical innovation. None of this means Hussain is giving up on classical music. He still performs and introduces new audiences to Hindustani music in his inimitable style. At the Royal Nepal Academy, he was quite the showman, playing mad solos and regaling the audience with amusing anecdotes about how different tabla

sounds evolved. Some say he's gimmicky, but when he banters with the audience in the middle of what is usually quite a hierarchical affair, with the performers performing and the audience reverentially listening, he's also taking classical music out of the bracket of High Art and allowing people to engage with it just as music. Hussain, who turns fifty next month, is called an "architect of the modern world music scene", but he's done more than that. His musical journey is in some ways emblematic of the kind of future many South Asians want to see. He's played across genres with John McLaughlin, Pharaoh Sanders and George Harrison. He's creating new forms of "Western" music for an interconnected world with a drum-and-bass musician like Talvin Singh. But as he does all this, he's also helping keep interest alive in Hindustani music for its own sake through his classical recitals. Contradictory, yes, but we live in a mixed-up world. ♦



HER MAJESTY QUEEN AISHWARYA: The queen being escorted by Sangita Thapa of Siddhartha Art Gallery and artist Ragini Upadhaya at the opening of Ragini's solo exhibition of paintings.



SELF-PORTRAIT: The National Forum of Photojournalists after their annual general meeting on 11 Feb which elected NT photographer Min Bajracharya (centre in green jacket) as chairman.



HEAD HUNTERS: De Model Hunt presents a pageant at the Verge Inn Club organised by Bijaya Lal Shrestha and Roshan Karnacharya on 11 February.

Sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Now that scientists from the Human Genome Project have proved that human beings have genes only slightly more numerous than the genes of a common housefly, civilisation as we know it can heave a collective sigh of relief. This explains a lot of things that have been puzzling me lately: for example, why Kathmandu's zebras are always painted during rush hour, why a species at the pinnacle of evolution still produces party leaders who fight like dung beetles to be on top of the manure heap, or why Durbar Marg is the only road in the whole Kingdom of Nepal where a person cannot make an illegal U-turn.

No modern nation state can consider itself truly free and democratic unless traffic rules can be violated with equal ease everywhere. There can be no exceptions. Few roads in the Kingdom have white dashes running down the middle, but the 300-metre stretch of Durbar Marg is the only road that has not one, but two thick yellow centre-lines. And to

make the point abundantly clear, there are reflective traffic barriers with red and white stripes on top of the double yellow lines that makes it look like a giant slalom. The message is clear: Don't Even Think About Making A U-Turn Here.

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking you will

use your diplomatic impunity to sneak out from the driveway of the Hotel Yank 'n' Yeti and and make a quick getaway in the general direction of the Tibetan Plateau. *Pensez vous*

ein mal you'll have members of Kathmandu's finest who know you are going to do exactly that, and they will be waiting to pounce on you from behind the bespectacled statue of Voice Emperor, the Late Narayan

Gopal at the Maharajgunj intersection. My question here is: Doesn't the Nepal Police (this year's watchword: "Wait Till We Get Our Night Vision Equipment") have

anything better to do? After all, human chromosomes (including the chromosomes of some human police) are supposed to have the same genetic makeup as the thermophilic bacteria found in the lower digestive tract of an adult gnu.

Now that it is possible with recent breakthroughs to determine who is genetically susceptible to

making illegal U-turns, the procedures for issuing driving licences will be fairly simple. All we need to do is require applicants to obtain a Chromosome Certificate before they go to Baggi Khana so that those with U-turn error in their DNA can be weeded out. Similar certificates can be required before anyone applying for a party ticket at election time. Invertebrate party cadre who have a mutant Kickback Gene lodged in their chromosomes will not get tickets. All smugglers and money launderers will be required to undergo a gene-change operation so that the particular DNA responsible for smuggling mobile phones or Russian uranium can have their offending jeans surgically removed with laser guns at the Centre for Investigation of Abuse of Authority's Special Anti-Corruption Clinic at Bag Bazar.

Since there isn't much of a difference between the human genome and the genetic make-up of a dung beetle, there is now hope that we can meet the WHO target of eradicating corruption by the year 2010. ♦

It's all in the jeans

NEPALI SOCIETY

Geeta, the Sky Cop

"It's like an addiction. Working as an air traffic controller, every second, every minute counts."

When Geeta Shrestha joined Nepal's civil aviation department in 1978, the college graduate hadn't the faintest idea that she'd spend the next 22 years in Air Traffic Service, the last six as an active Air Traffic Controller at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport.

Aside from having words with irate pilots queuing up to take off on a foggy day, and being forced to tackle a seemingly endless flight of stairs when the lift's out of order, Shrestha has no reason to complain. "You have to love your job, you know," she says as she takes the winding flight of stairs up to the control tower that rises high above the airport and the runway.

From her vantage point—shared by four other shift colleagues and a flock of roosting pigeons—Shrestha keeps a vigil on the runway. A swivel chair allows her a 360-degree view of the surrounding

air space. When visibility is low or if there's a communication problem, radar equipment in the Control Tower helps her direct incoming and outgoing traffic.

"My job is to maintain an orderly flow of air traffic and to prevent collisions between aircraft and any obstacle on the ground," says Shrestha one of a dozen women who control Kathmandu's sky-bound traffic (there are 50 active ATCs in the country). That means constantly monitoring the runway and taxiway, the surrounding air space, watching out for stray dogs or birds and checking her bible, the Air Traffic Control Manual, whose emergency procedures she knows by heart.

"It's one of the most stressful jobs. You have to be prepared for every possible emergency," says Shrestha. During 22 years of service, she has completed an Aeronautical Communication Course, an Aeronautical Communication Service Supervisor course



MIN BAIRACHARYA

(during which she topped her class at the Bailbrook College, London and was told she was a credit to her country), and a Communication-Air Traffic Control Conversion Course.

As an instructor at the Civil Aviation Training Centre, she's also assisted in designing and revising the curriculum for the ATC course. "It's like an addiction. Once you've worked as an air traffic controller, where every second, every minute counts and your senses are extremely well-tuned, you'd feel restless in any other job," says Shrestha.

There are tell-tale signs of the unseemly fixation—despite holding a Masters Degree in Business Logistics Management from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia, she's declined repeated offers to take up a management job at the Civil Aviation Authority's central office. "You have to constantly be in the working environment to do the job well. Once you're out of touch, it's very difficult to catch up. And with Kathmandu's air traffic increasing every day, one needs to be more alert."

After 22 years in the service Shrestha knows there's no margin for error. ♦



MIN BAIRACHARYA

