



AD INFINITUM
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19
ALL ABOUT LHOSAR

EXCLUSIVE

Sex on the road

Poverty, social vulnerability—and high demand—are forcing hundreds of women into selling sex along Nepal's highways. Transport workers, migrant workers, policemen and soldiers are the bulk of their clientele, but students, professionals and Indian tourists are also contributing to the recent boom in the highway sex market. It's exploitative, dangerous and there's no dignity in being a Commercial Sex Worker. And down this road lies the threat of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases for sex workers, their clients, and their clients' families.

Hemlata Rai travelled to centres near Hetauda and Narayanghat where commercial sex workers and their clients congregate. An exclusive report, *Drive through sex*, on p 4-5.

Gorkha Darbar

In what seems to be a move heavy with symbolism, the National Security Council is planning to move an army battalion to Gorkha for the protection of the ancestral palace of Nepal's Shah kings. Gorkha is among the districts classified as 'most affected' by the Maoist insurgency. It is significant that the old Gorkha Darbar that was being guarded by only a platoon will now be secured by an entire battalion. Sources say arrangements are being made to shift the Barda Bahadur battalion from the Pokhara command.



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Let the fun and games begin. Our honourable athletes are well rested, trained and ready for action in the Annual All-Nepal Knockout Tournament, which has just begun with the usual fanfare at the upgraded indoor sports facilities at the National Legislature. This year, the participating representatives have already shown a great spirit of sportsmanship, proving once more that it is not just a matter of winning or losing but of keeping the nation in their vice-like grip and letting nothing move. The athletes are in the best form they have ever been, and they have put a lot of practice into contact sports like Thai-style Boxing, Greco-Roman Wrestling and Fence-sitting. In this week's warm-up sessions we saw that our National Teams showed great eagerness to take matter into their own hands, and in so doing they got along like a House on fire.

One sport that is gaining popularity among the peoples' representatives is playing Tag. This is a simple and amusing game in which defenders and offenders try to tackle a minister carrying a speech before he can travel the 10 yards from the Treasury Bench to the Rostrum where the field goal is located. The offending forward can use a maximum of two sidekicks in a nickel and dime formation to outflank defenders. If heavily outnumbered, he can roll up his speech and make a Hail Mary pass to a quarterback darting towards the Rostrum for a touchdown. But if he fumbles the catch in the end zone then the speech is taken to the 20-yard line where the backbenchers have to tear the speech into little pieces and eat it. The most fun part of

All-Nepal Knockout Tournament

this game is the scrimmage, which is when everyone in the auditorium piles on top of one another to form a huge mass of parliamentary protoplasm measuring 10 metres across and 5 metres high on the House floor and can only be untangled by demolition experts equipped with blowtorches. Monday's preliminary round between reigning champions Congress Young Turks and the Underfed Marxists-Leninists ended in a draw when an alert offender tackled a forward striker just half-a-yard from touchdown. Both teams now go on to the semis.

Although Tag is fun, it is in the martial arts that this year's Knockout promises white-knuckled entertainment for all Nepalis. This is why MPs are being intensively coached in throwing techniques, grappling ground moves, control holds, arm locks and choking manoeuvres—all judo movements that will stand them in good stead during the tournament. And since this is a country known for its democratic norms and Rule of Law, we have to lay down some House Rules on safety so that our valuable MPs do not come into harm's way:

- All MPs must wear mouthpieces, helmets and groin-guards when inside parliament premises. If dislodged, the Speaker will call time and have them replaced at the first



- opportune moment. Dismemberment of a member is not allowed. All body parts should be checked to see if they are intact and functioning before and after bouts.
- Biting of earlobes, uprooting hair, and using wedding rings as weapons of last resort are strictly forbidden and will be enforced by the Chief Whips who will lash offenders.
- Feigning injury, or taking a dive, will be rewarded with free x-rays and CAT Scans on the House.
- In Greco-Roman Wrestling, Opposition Heavyweights will be paired with Ruling Party Overweights in the Finals. Full

straight-back souplesse from a rear-standing position, or straight-back salto to the head with a three-quarter nelson with a leg hook and neck wrench will be allowed provided the neck is not forced beyond normal limits. All contestants must have written proof that they actually have a spine before they can claim that it is broken. If these basic rules are followed, and the Knockout is broadcast live on national television it will provide much-needed distraction to entertainment-starved Nepalis from all walks of life. ♦

Battle of the Titans

The government's lawyer-in-chief and the country's anti-corruption boss are up in arms over who calls the shots.

BINOD BHATTARAI

A battle royal is brewing between two top statutory officials out to prove who has more muscle. On one side, is Attorney General Badri Bahadur Karki, formerly a well-known lawyer and law teacher. On the other is the chief of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Surya Nath Upadhyaya, a straight-talking former bureaucrat who was secretary to the committee which drafted the country's Constitution back in 1990.

At stake are credibility and authority of two critically important constitutional bodies—one responsible for ensuring the rule of law in a democracy and the other entrusted with weeding out corruption from the public sphere. Both are repositories of hope in a country fast running out of respectable institutions, and unfortunately today they are at each other's throats.

The fight has reached a point of no return for the two institutions because of a clash of righteous egos—that of Karki and Upadhyaya.

However, in terms of principle, the battle is over: a) the constitutionally defined authority of the Auditor General to make the "final" decision to prosecute or not, and implied immunity for decisions made; and, b) the right of the CIAA to investigate any and all public officials if it suspects corruption.

A five-judge Supreme Court bench is hearing arguments on a petition filed by Attorney General Karki asking it to block a CIAA investigation of a decision he had taken back in September 1998. This came after an earlier CIAA notice asking Karki to clarify his position on the decision in question.

Here's what had happened. On 4 September 1998, the Attorney General decided not to prosecute one Sunil Maskey, held for trying to take IRs12.1 million in 500-rupee denominations out of the country and also ordered that the money be

returned to the accused. The CIAA wants to know why the money was returned and not confiscated.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has banned export of 500-rupees notes to Nepal, even though it is still legal tender in India. The ban was aimed at checking the flow of "black money" and counterfeiting, among others. Normally, such Indian currency held for investigation is sent to the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) for safekeeping. After investigation, the NRB sends the confiscated bills to RBI and obtains its equivalent in Nepali rupees. NRB still holds some confiscated 500s, even though



Badri Bahadur Karki



Surya Nath Upadhyaya

Nepal's banks stopped dealing with it after the central bank issued a notice to that effect in August 1994. Even the transfer/possession of IRs500 bills has been deemed illegal as of July 2000.

Before the Supreme Court, the petitioner Attorney General's lawyers are arguing that IRs500 bills did not come under the definition of foreign currency in the *Nepal Rajpatra* (Gazette) of 1985 and 1990.

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PLAYING POLITICS WITH POLITICS

So they have come to blows. It is hard to imagine the Lower House sinking lower than this. You could put a positive spin on it and take this as proof that we have a vivacious democracy where our rambunctious elected officials do not hesitate to get up close and personal. We have seen scenes like this in the Taiwanese parliament when they discuss reunification, or in the Uttar Pradesh legislature where the political *kabbadi* gets too lively even by Indo-Gangetic standards. And in Nepal there have been instances in the past ten years when microphones have been used as missiles, and the tables of the Honourable Members had to be turned into improvised bomb shelters as a protection against projectiles. (Since then they have done the sensible thing and bolted everything down.) But when parliament is turned into an indoor stadium for an All-Nepal World Wrestling Federation qualifiers, then you know that our honourable members are taking things a bit too far. This is not what we meant when a couple of issues ago we called for a ban on bandhs, and urged political parties to be more creative in finding alternative means of protest.

The Unified Marxist-Leninists and the smaller opposition are already in election mode, that much is clear from how fixated they are in trying to do a Joseph Estrada on Girija Prasad Koirala over his alleged involvement in the deal to lease a 767 for Royal Nepal Airlines. We are not denying that there is corruption, in fact it would be surprising if someone somewhere in the tourism and civil aviation hierarchy said "No, thank you" to a juicy kickback. Believe it or not, such things used to happen in Nepal. When Royal Nepal Airlines bought two HS-748s in 1970, the negotiating team demanded that Hawker Siddeley reduce the price of the turbo-prop planes by the margin the manufacturers had set aside for the agent's commission, and we got them for a bargain. One of those planes is still flying today.

So what happened to this country that today we cannot even lease aircraft (let alone try to buy them) without the legislature and the executive coming to a standstill and politicians exhibiting their skills in the martial arts? The level of political interference in all facets of national life, including the national airline, has now become so blatant and rife that the carrier functions today more or less like an employment agency for the politicians of the day. It is also a reflection of the dearth of economic activity and investment in this country that the only company that can be squeezed dry is an already dessicated national airline. The problem is that it is not just the airline that suffers, the entire tourism industry and the national economy have been damaged by the political meddling that is at the root of the airline's mismanagement.

When the airline, after five long years of trial and error, finally managed in November to lease a wide-body aircraft, the industry heaved a sigh of relief. We still have clippings of the hotels, travel agencies and trekking outfits that published congratulatory notices in the daily papers lauding Lauda. Many thought this would be the end of the two-month waiting list to get on a flight to Delhi and the airline could at last spread its wings. Alas, it was not to be. The riots and hotel strikes sabotaged tourist arrivals, the plane started flying empty clocking up huge losses, and politicians stepped in again to score brownie points. When we watched the self-righteous grandstanding in parliament this week we could only intone: Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

Lauda is a storm that will blow over. The politicians will get tired when they figure out that they can only take it so far with their White Paper and Red Paper. Meanwhile, this charade of playing politics with politics drags on. The rest of the country does not matter.

BIG GUNS

Those of you who were woken up on Sunday morning by the sound of big guns could be forgiven for thinking the Maoists had attacked. What a great way to mark Democracy Day: by scaring the living daylights out of everyone in the capital. Whoever thought of this symbolic wake-up call deserves a medal. Tundikhel this



week has been the venue for our slightly bored army boys to play with their toys, while an equally bored citizenry thronged Tundikhel to watch their antics. So there they were dressed in smart white *gunjis* doing intricate things with batons, or lining up with their guns pointing in the air as if they were on some great grouse shootfest. Then on Shivaratri we saw the entire Air Wing consisting of four helicopters (each of a different make) raising a massive dust-storm while trying to land. Paragliders swooped down, struggling against brisk headwinds to touchdown approximately on Tundikhel. Others proceeded to blow up replicas of Nepali farm houses with huge orange explosions. The Shivaratri parade has traditionally been a psy-war exercise to impress Indian pilgrims with our military might. (A similar parade on Phulpati was aimed at impressing Tibetan mountain goat traders who came down from Kerung during Dasain.) Today, who are we trying to impress today, ourselves?





A crisis of legitimacy

In the final analysis it is the legitimacy of a government that is the single most important factor to determine the outcome of an insurgency. And nowhere is this more true than in the situation that we face in Nepal today five years after the start of the Maoist insurgency.

It was American military analyst Max G Manwaring who first developed the paradigm on which a response to an insurgency can be based in his 1991 book *Uncomfortable Wars: Towards a New paradigm of Low Intensity Conflict*. He analysed 43 post-World War II governments that resisted or succumbed to insurgencies. The ultimate outcome of any counterinsurgency effort, he said, is determined by six interrelated factors:

- Legitimacy of the government
- Organisation for unity of effort
- Type and consistency of support for the targeted government
- Ability to reduce outside aid to insurgents
- Intelligence (or action against subversion)
- Discipline and capabilities of the armed forces of the government

Legitimacy, or the moral right to govern, is gauged by the quality of national and local elections, viable political alternatives, high overall levels of participation, access by the left, and high commitment to democracy. The degree of legitimacy granted to a political system by the people of any society is related to the degree that they believe that the government "belongs to them", that it is responsive to them, and that they can influence its actions. Legitimacy of an incumbent regime is a primary strategic problem, and a serious effort to understand the issue and counter it should be the top priority in any anti-insurgency drive.

The struggle for legitimacy and allegiance by an existing regime and their legal as well as illegal opponents is more political and psychological than military. In Nepal's case corruption, political violence, lacklustre leadership and a growing insurgency has been steadily undermining whatever legitimacy was inherited from past elections and existed internationally or domestically—even within the army. In fact, there are not many people left in the insurgency-affected areas willing to provide their time, money and blood to the state.

The level of participation in both the national and local elections have been steadily declining since the onset of the Maoist insurgency, especially in the Maoist's "base areas". Political murders of village leaders has drastically reduced participation in local elections, and many who have been elected have given up their posts. Reports of irregularities during elections are also on the rise.

When grievances pile up, and Nepalis see no recourse in a discredited government machinery, the legitimacy of rulers begins to crumble. This is what is feeding the Maoist insurgency, and that is where a response must begin.

The cocktail of coalition governments that have taken office in the last five years may give an indication of the large number of viable political alternatives, but the shameless horse-trading that have led to these coalitions are undemocratic and even frightening. The minimal degree of dialogue and consensus required for democracy to function should have kept expanding in the last ten years, but in fact it has shrunk. The degree of civic and political liberty to ensure the integrity of political competition and



participation has seen MPs being hijacked or locked up in hotels, or in hand-to-hand combat on the floor of the Lower House. Democracy does not just mean political freedom, it must also bring hope of improved economic well-being and social justice. Nepalis, it seems, aren't getting much of either.

A government must have the capacity to accomplish realistic expectations and demands of the citizenry. A reasonably effective and

honest bureaucracy is a prerequisite, and one of the most pervasive factors in the loss of legitimacy of any regime is corruption. Unless persons and institutions within the nation are subordinate to the rule of law, the government cannot be considered morally legitimate. The law must be applied equally and impartially, and people with resources should not get the opportunity to influence the outcome of cases or to stay out of prison.

The ability of governments to extract resources in the form of taxes without resorting to coercion is a sign that the people support the government. How well the government is then able to use those resources to provide basic services and protection to the people becomes another key measure of legitimacy. If the ruling and opposition parties do not meet the standards of conduct expected by the people (especially in matters concerning corruption) political defeat is very likely.

And it is when these political, social and economic grievances pile up that the people see no recourse in a discredited government machinery. Then the legitimacy of rulers begins to crumble, and revolutionary slogans get populist support. This is the essential nature of what feeds an insurgency, and it is here that a response must begin. A campaign that fails to understand this and can only think of a military reaction is likely to fail. When the people become convinced that politicians are thieves, bureaucrats are kleptocrats and the army and police are being run by sycophants and petty thieves, an insurgency can only grow. When people with wealth not proportionate to either their income or ancestral property rule the nation, and when the majority of people under the poverty line are callously neglected, any option, however radical, becomes attractive for a people disenfranchised by the government they voted for.

In the past few years we have seen only a limited set of factors legitimising government institutions, and an overwhelming deterioration that undermines their legitimacy. Before the government starts doing something about the Maoist insurgency, it must admit and understand that it has a crisis of legitimacy on its hands. ♦

(Gyan Jung Thapa recently retired as a Colonel from the Royal Nepal Army. He is a graduate of the US Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from which he has a Masters in Military Arts and Science.)

LETTERS

NO "FRIEND OF NEPAL"

And now Mr CK Lal thinks aspiring Nepali beauty pageant contestants should idolise the late Maharani of Gwalior rather than Diana because of the former's alleged role as a "friend of Nepal" (by the way, I am not in favour of idolising Diana either). But Mr Lal is very miserly when it comes to the specificities of the Maharani's behind-the-scenes manoeuvres in her capacity as a friend of Nepal. I suspect that the reason might be that there was not much to write home about on that front. His caustic witticism aside, what Mr Lal so conveniently glosses over is the fact that the ideology of the late Maharani's beloved Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) borders on fascism, envisaging as it does a state-sponsored cultural hegemony, Hindu theocracy and discipline enforced by vigilante gangs of religious thugs. In fact, the Maharani was so dogmatic in her politico-religious beliefs that she never forgave her only son for joining the Congress Party. And then, on the immediate aftermath of her death, her own son's secretary was hinting, no doubt in bad taste, that she might have had a physical relationship with her "Rasputin-like" secretary, who allegedly talked her out of bequeathing her vast fortunes to her only son. Bravo, Mr Lal, you have certainly come up with an interesting role model for our aspiring beauty pageant contestants.

Ram Limbu
Sydney

RED LAL

This is in response to CK Lal's last column, *The Rana resonance* (# 30). Let me start by saying "Lal is not just a surname, it is a symbol of Communism." As a regular reader of your newspaper, I am astounded to find a full page given to a columnist who lacks analytical strength and investigative zeal. Yes, CK Lal



does keep talking about the feudal mindset and the lack of democracy, but he does not hesitate to stereotype, discriminate and conduct racial attacks. Correct me if I am wrong, but have you ever heard the term "Ranashahi"? Check your dictionary—it is "Tanashahi", not "Ranashahi". CK Lal quotes people like DH Lawrence. "Why does not the past decently bury itself, instead of sitting waiting to be admired by the present?" Well, because of people like CK Lal. People like him never want to give the past a decent burial, otherwise they will be out of a job and have to go back to their old ways—being feudal.

"Ashray"
Lainchour

MONUMENTAL HISTORY

In his latest column (*The Rana resonance*, #30) CK Lal makes this astonishing observation: "In order to learn anything from history, you need to read it with a point of view." Now, can history—or for that matter, any text—be read without a point of view, without the intervention of one's subjectivity? It might be salutary to note that the late French thinker Michael Foucault argued that even scientific methods and discourses were implicated in the ideologies of their times. How much more so a loaded intellectual practice as the writing and reading of history.

Talking about history, CK Lal is very fond of trashing Nepal's various myths of nationhood such as our "brave history". Granted that they are mostly nothing more than vacuities constructed by our pro-establishment scholars and academics, as often pointed out by CK Lal. But is there a nation on earth that has not knowingly grafted what Nietzsche called "monumental" (heroic and triumphalist) history?

Kanden Thebe
Taplejung

GESTAPO TACTICS

Your editorial Suicide (#28) certainly encapsulates conditions in Nepal. On 31 January my Nepali business partner and I were leaving the popular Harati Restaurant and Bar near my home in Naya Bazaar

at about 8 pm. We found the police hauling customers to a police van to be taken to jail. I protested (in English) and abusive obscenities were shouted at me in Nepali (which I understood). Rather than go to the police van, I walked to my scooter a few metres away, followed by two police officers demanding to smell my breath, evidently for alcohol. They noted only the scent of *supari* and let me go after inspecting my driver's license. My partner, instead, was forced to spend a night in jail paid for by His Majesty's Government. What is the purpose of all this: the enforcement of the law or the abuse of it, for what, *hapta uthaune*? These and other harrassing tactics toward an already disenfranchised citizenry creates more hopelessness and "negativism", as the US ambassador recently pointed out. As your editorial summarised: "and where went carpets and garments, tourism is sure to go". Harrassment of unsuspecting tourists and foreigners, not to speak of Nepalis, will add fuel to the self-destructing flames of an industry on the threshold of suicidal collapse.

John Snyder
Executive Director, Pilgrims
Publishing

ATTENTION!

The Maoists have got our attention, and it's at least possible

that that will be enough. After all, if what they want is to be a major force in Nepali politics, they've already won. They control a quarter of Nepal's 74 districts and a greater share of the national attention. And there's reason to hope that they are fighting for principles and progress rather than for the destruction of the State and civil society. The 40-point manifesto upon which the People's War is based is not a radical document. The Maoists' targets have been chosen for populist value and media impact, not damage to the nation. Look at what they have generally NOT targeted: the economy, trade and commerce, intellectuals, the media, religion, tourism, foreigners, or aid agencies. The exceptions—some extortion threats against businesses and NGOs, a couple of robberies of trekking groups, a hotel heist, and some property destruction—are few in number and are about raising money rather than raising consciousness. And some of those events may have been perpetrated by bandits rather than revolutionaries. This is a pragmatic war, not an ideological one, and to date our Maoists are employing violence as a tactic, not taking Nepal down the road to totalitarianism (China), holocaust (Cambodia), or civil war (Peru). If they really do want a democratic, independent, progressive Nepal, they have already made a strong position for themselves: They

have got our attention. And that's more than half the battle.

John Child
Concord, Massachussetts,
USA

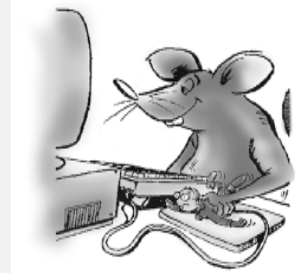
UP THE WALL

It's great to see the feisty and outspoken Barbara Adams back in print, calling a spade a spade... and what an excellent article by Joy Stephens on Nepal and Tanzania (both #30). Between them they remind us why we love this country, even if it sometimes drives us up the wall.

Mac Odell
Tangal

WOO MEN

In reading Kunda Dixit's "Ultra-Violent Mouse" (#29) I see he left one out. As always, half our population is ignored! But anyone



with an interest in "women, children and social welfare"—apparently the only capacity in which women are thought to be qualified—might want to email for Kamala Pant:

token@caregiver.kam
Hom Raj Acharya
Washington, DC

Drive-through sex

HEMLATA RAI

Sex is cheap on Nepal's highways. Demand is high, but it's the supply side that pays the price. Hundreds of women and young girls are risking their health and lives in the poorly paid but highly exploitative trade.

Poverty is the push factor here, but there are also other reasons that drag women into the trade. Renuka's is a typical story. Married off at the age of 13 to a widower 20 years older than her, she lost her husband when she was 21. As a young widow, she was watched closely so she wouldn't inflict the insult of "infidelity" upon her dead husband. Her life changed four years later—at 25, she eloped to a highway township along the Hetauda-Narayanghat section of the East-West highway on the border with a truck driver, a man already married once with a son. Renuka's second husband died when his truck collided with a bus three years ago. She was left with two children—a daughter of her own and a son from her husband's first marriage—and no source of income.

"Nobody respects a widow, for

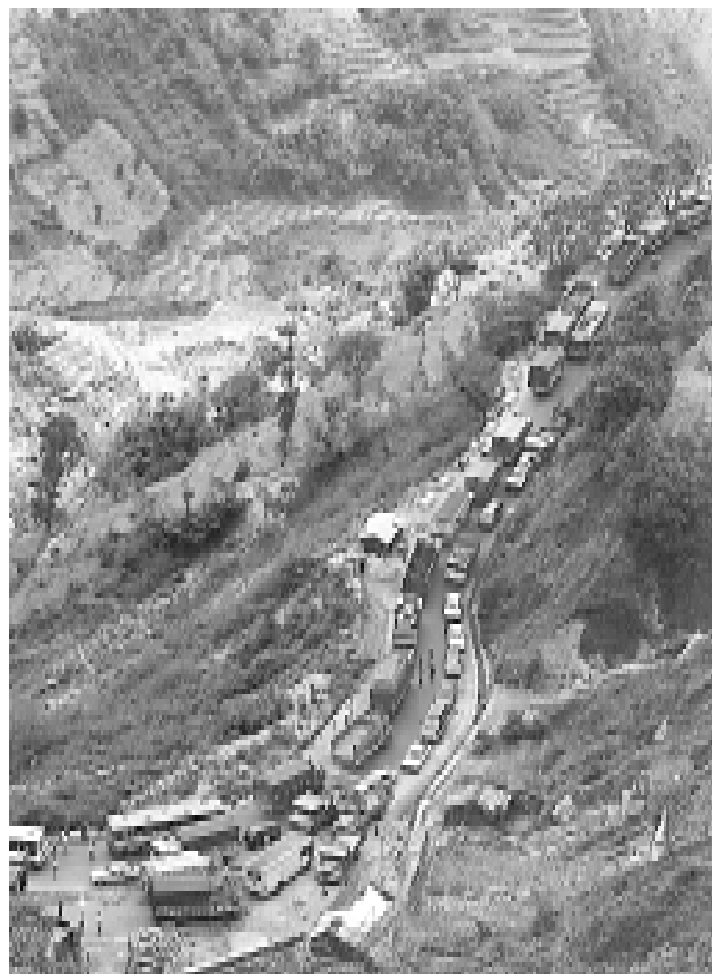
The pit stops on Nepal's arterial highways are not only for fuel, food and rest. They also supply cheap sex, and spread HIV.

.....
 them a widow is as cheaply available as a prostitute," she said in unprintable language, giving vent to her disgust. "It was not even a month after his death that my husband's colleagues suggested to me that I have sex for money." Renuka sold her family home and held out against these suggestions for as long as the money lasted. Now she is active in the sex market, and uses her teashop beside the highway as her point of contact with new clients. Her combined income from the teashop and the trade ranges between Rs 3,000 and Rs 4,000 a month. She sets aside Rs 1,600 towards rent and electricity, and the rest goes for food and clothing.

Several of Renuka's neighbours are commercial sex workers (CSW) as well, serving transport workers in particular, and the local farmers, who sometimes blackmail the women into giving them free sex. A little shanty town has sprung up where they live, with far too many teashops for such a deserted looking place. Most of the residents here are migrants from barren places in the central hill districts, in search of manual

labour. The rest are subsistence farmers evicted from their lands by recurring monsoon floods. Local men are a pretty rare sight though as they travel to towns in search of work. But towards evening, the settlement is abuzz with drivers and their helpers flocking the teashops. "As sundown approaches, this place comes to life," says Nir Bahadur Wagle, field co-ordinator of the General Welfare Pratisthan (GWP), an NGO working with CSWs and their clients to create awareness about HIV/AIDS.

This is a market that has been created by demand. And yet the rate of payment is fixed by the clients, because the CSWs lack the confidence to fix their own rates. In general, a single sexual encounter costs anything between Rs 100 and Rs 300. Most of the sex workers here say they feel guilty about their profession. If this weren't enough, the majority also carry the trauma of having been deserted by their husbands, usually for another woman. They all seem to be haunted by pessimism about their future, as



prospects for settling down again and starting new families appear increasingly impossible. It isn't just the fact of being a sex worker: they also already have dependent children. Despite the failures of their previous marriages, they seem unable to identify themselves or consider a satisfying future without a man in their lives. This works at many levels—CSWs with sons appear, at least outwardly, more secure about their future than those with only daughters.

"I was criticised and beaten by my husband for failing to produce a son. Out of sheer frustration, I took to drinking," said a childless sex-worker who lives and works in a squatter's settlement on the banks of the Narayani river. She still lives with her carpenter husband, but refuses to

share her income with him—she needs it for alcohol and cigarettes. An alcoholic and a chain smoker, she realises her beauty and youth are fading away. "It's different now, my clients hesitate to pay me even Rs 50 for my service," she said.

This woman is something of an anomaly. Most home-based CSWs have little control over their income. All of their earnings are used for their families, usually controlled by a father or a brother. They claim their family is unaware of their real source of income, although they live at home with their families. They operate independently of the market, with hardly any interaction with other CSWs.

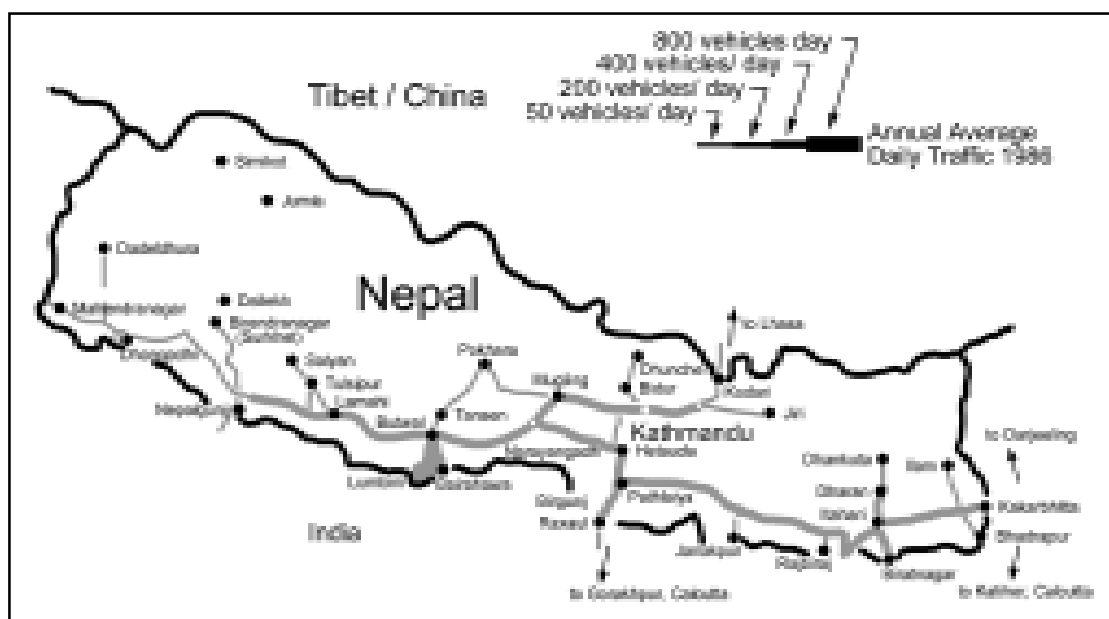
Sex workers with high mobility on the other hand often form informal networks among themselves, which



they use as a forum to discuss clients, rates, and family and health problems. These CSWs are concentrated in towns and run their businesses from rented rooms and frequently, for a higher charge, they will travel with clients. This class of sexual workers approaches their clients through pimps, who are usually migrant workers—or even clients themselves, who may trade their brokering service for free sex. The hotels and lodges located in areas busy with trucks, buses and other forms of transport are the main contact points for pimps, sex workers and their clients.

A lodge near the busy Pokhara Bus Park at Narayanghat serves as a popular pick-up spot. The owner, Shalini, works as a madam, and frequently travels with select high-paying clients. "I have 11 girls on contact, and they are very mobile. But I take care to make sure that at least six of them are at my lodge at any given time," she said. "My girls are expensive but I have clients who pay well, from Kathmandu to Raxaul, and Pokhara to Kakarvitta." On "good days", a girl working for her will service up to 16 clients. Shalini says her clients are Indian tourists who can often be charged as much as Rs 10,000 for a night, or Nepali professionals like bankers and engineers, and government employees stationed away from home.

Her clients pay a fixed amount of Rs 500 for each "contact" they make at the lodge reception, which she runs herself. They can then go and pick one of "her" girls. Other brothels in



HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Aid from Ancient Asia

Imagine for a moment something distant and unlikely. A village in Europe in what can still be called the Dark Ages. Barbarism.

Desperate poverty. A deeply conservative social order with great gaps between haves and have-nots. Little regard for the value of human life. And the status of women? Forget about it, not on the map. Disease and ignorance are rampant, and wandering witch-doctors compete with fallen priests and monks to cure the sick, and take their money. On top of all that, it's northern Europe. The weather is lousy.

Into this non-Shangri La come strangers from distant lands. They are well dressed cosmopolitan, and at ease. They are concerned, shocked even, by the deprivation around them. They speak among themselves in strange tongues—Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese. It's clear that on their journey to this distant land, they have seen much of this sort.

In parts of this dark land, they say to each other, people still live in caves, paint themselves blue, worship objects in the forest. Our visitors, humane men all of them, decide to take action. They send messages back to Cathay, Samarkand, Vijayanagar, Damascus, Teheran. "We must do something. These poor benighted people need our help. They don't know about sewerage systems, public health, algebra." The Chinese member of the party makes a special note about the absence of gunpowder and writing paper.



learn the languages of their employers and they embrace the concepts that have been imported with such goodwill and enthusiasm. All goes well. At first.

Then neighbouring villages, districts, kingdoms begin to wonder if they're losing out. Feudal lords in distant castles realise that despite local improvements, a lot of revenue is being spent on pointless things like

Into this non-Shangri La came strangers from distant lands—well dressed, cosmopolitan, and at ease.

Months later—this was pre-email, mind you—comes the signal from the head office: Do something then. Help them. But make it worth our while. Our mysterious but well-meaning party of wise men set up liaison offices and start importing technology and ideas from home to help the locals. It takes ages to get there, carried by porters and camel caravans. But eventually, in old barns on the edge of the village, supplies start to accumulate. Stacks of fine paper, carved quill pens, finely worked leather and iron implements, seeds from local plants, and folios of fine calligraphy, filled with the secrets of science, mathematics and medicine.

The locals take to this like fish to water. At first. They join the aid operations (for it is such) of the outsiders, signing-on as translators, cart drivers, labourers and willing participants in uplift programmes and joint ventures. They plant the outsiders' crops and harvest them with wonder and gratitude. They

schools, roads and water schemes. It should be accumulating in their coffers. Bandit leaders too eye the booty and recruit the resentful.

Worst of all, the sheer pace of change forces a local backlash. Old land disputes emerge with new vigour. The priests of the village church realise that control over social change is slipping away. And the adults worry about the impact of all this on the young. But even youth are having trouble adjusting. Instead of working in the fields, or the smithy, or just getting ready for future family life, young people want jobs, instant gratification; they develop the urban aspirations of those that help them. They feel they're not getting what they're entitled to, and they start blaming everyone but themselves.

The Asian benefactors are shocked and appalled. Sitting around an exclusive inn, amid steaming cauldrons of food from home, they express their resentment of the way things are going. They deplore the rising crime rate, the failure to rise to the occasion by local elite, the stubborn refusal of real, beneficial change to take root.

Of course, this is all a fallacious construct. But as I tour the developing world and see the almost ubiquitous presence of outside assistance, ideas, attitudes and technology, I wonder why the great civilisations of Asia didn't voyage through backwards Europe (and North America) and try to change things with lashings of cash and goodwill. I am glad they didn't, and that they left my forebears to make their own mistakes, follow their own blind alleys, decide for themselves that meaningful change has to be indigenous if it is to be long-lasting.

Hail the wise ones of the East (occidentally speaking) for their wisdom was great. And I know they'll regain their greatness soon enough. ♦



the neighbourhood also rely on mobile sex workers for their business. “I provide a safe place and take my share, but I do not keep track of the girls,” says a 65-year-old former sex-worker who is now a madam, targeting mainly low-paying clients like transport workers, low-ranking policemen and manual workers.

The highway towns in east Nepal are also witnessing a boom in commercial sex. ABDA, an NGO run by medical professionals working for HIV/AIDS awareness, estimates that there are 750 CSWs in its project areas of Sunsari, Morang and Jhapa. And many of the lodges at border towns like Kararvitta not only provide sex for their guests, but even arrange week-long package tours on behalf of their regular Indian customers. On these trips CSWs travel to Siliguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim in India and to tourism hubs in mid-west Nepal like Pokhara.

Although some of the town-based sex workers are now habituated, in some sense, to their profession and remain in the trade for extra money to buy luxuries, a majority are driven to prostitution by broken families, alcoholism and other addictions. Research conducted by the AIDS and STD Prevention Network in 1993 revealed that over 50 percent of Kathmandu-based sex workers had only a “moderate” relationship with their families—that is, they visited their families, usually subsistence farmers constantly short of food, only occasionally.

The Behavioural Surveillance Survey in the Highway Routes of Nepal, conducted by New ERA, a Kathmandu-based research institute, identifies migrant workers, policemen and soldiers who are frequently stationed far from home, and highly mobile transport workers as the major part of the CSW clientele. According to the study, about half of all truckers and 15 percent of migrant labourers regularly visit CSWs in Nepal, and five percent travel to Indian border towns as well for sex. The researchers assume that their ‘high-risk’ behaviour can pose a threat to public health through the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), since most CSW clients also maintain regular sexual contact with their wives and female friends.

Public awareness about HIV/AIDS, and also the use of condoms as prophylactic measures has increased, but sex workers and their clients remain at high risk. New ERA’s research found that regular condom use during encounters with sex workers had jumped to 51 percent among truck drivers last year, up from 33 percent in 1997, and 32 percent among migrant workers, up from 23 percent in 1997. But it isn’t all rosy—data also shows that sex workers remain at higher risk than their clients, due to lower levels of awareness, and the common perception that only men are protected by condoms. Last year, only 40 percent of sex workers said they used condoms consistently. Alcoholism among sex workers is seen as another reason for relatively low levels of condom use.

“Awareness about the use of condoms has definitely increased, but they are not aware that by having multiple partners they are risking their health,” said Meena Neupane of GWP. ♦

The right to choose

Rights activists have stepped-up lobbying to get the 11th Amendment of the Muluki Ain (Civil Code) through parliament in the 19th session. Among other things, the Amendment seeks to legalise abortion, and grant women equal claim to parental property. Parliament’s Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs committee held a series of meetings in all 14 zones of the country soliciting opinion on how to handle the Bill.

The clause to legalise abortion did not have many opponents in the districts, though some groups want the entire law, including the abortion clause, to be put up for a referendum. A 1997 study by the Centre for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CREHPA) found that 20 percent of all women in prisons were serving terms for abortion and infanticide, which, though illegal, are common at private clinics.

CREHPA studies (1998 and 1999) show that between 20 and 60 percent of all obstetric and gynaecological admissions in hospitals were complications due to attempted abortion. CREHPA says the law prevents safe abortion, but does not prevent it being done illegally, which makes it a major cause of death among young mothers. The bill is likely to be tabled in parliament’s on-going session—if the House actually meets. It didn’t for almost a week after opening 8 February.

Philanthropy one-to-one

There are no fund raising drives, no NGO-wallahs zooming in and out of the “project area” in Pajeros, and no action plans. Still Annantalingeswor Primary School in Dadhikot, near Kathmandu, has managed to raise funds to provide students with uniforms and also for a small school construction kitty that grows every year.

It all began in 1995 when a teacher told Bhairav Risal, a senior journalist originally from Dadhikot, that the school was losing students because their parents couldn’t afford to pay for uniforms. Risal learnt that it would cost Rs 200 to buy an outfit, complete with slippers, for one student. He went home and asked six family members to make contributions. That money was used to pay for uniforms for six of the poorest students. That’s how the “One-to-One” drive began.

Risal has since gone around asking his acquaintances to contribute money to clothe one child every year. This year he raised Rs 20,000 from 100 benefactors, which was more than enough for uniforms—the rest was added to a school construction fund. “We needed to buy uniforms for 80 students, so we had Rs 4000 extra,” says Risal.

The seed money for the construction fund came from an Austrian tourist who wrote a check for Rs 74,600, after seeing where the classes were held. The school has raised Rs 100,000 so far, but could still use some donations.



NEFEJ

Safer schools

The National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET-Nepal) is beginning to retrofit 18 public schools. The move aims at making the buildings quake-resistant and also raising awareness among school-goers about safety measures. NSET-Nepal began the School Earthquake Safety Programme in 1998 by retrofitting one school in Nakhali, Bhaktapur. The NSET provides technical support for reinforcing the buildings, while communities contribute funds for the construction. Four public schools in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur have already been reinforced.

“We’re attempting to educate communities on how small protective measures today can mitigate death and injury when a major earthquake occurs,” says Amod Dixit, General Secretary, NSET. “We chose schools because this is one way to make future generations aware of quake-safety measures. Children who understand what is happening in the schools can better communicate to their parents the need to take precautionary measures at home, says NSET. “The other reason for selecting schools is because communities are more interested in matters relating to schools than any other social institution.”

A vulnerability assessment of 800 public schools by NSET-Nepal in 1998 revealed alarming facts: 15 percent of the buildings were on the verge of collapse. Another 25 percent could be saved with some fixtures and the remaining 55 percent were good under “normal circumstances”, but could crumble if jolted by even a mild quake. NSET-Nepal next plans to undertake school-reinforcement programs in Dharan in east Nepal and Pokhara before heading out to look after public schools in all 58 municipalities.

Chandni in IFAD presidency race

Chandni Joshi, South Asia Regional Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), is in the running for the presidency of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a Rome-based UN agency. Joshi has also served as the Joint Secretary and Chief of Women’s Development Division for the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development of the Government of Nepal, and the Assistant Director of Plan International. The regional director of UNIFEM, a post Joshi has held since 1990, is responsible for nine countries in South Asia—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

IFAD’s Governing Council meets in Rome 22 February. This is the first time in the history of IFAD that a woman is contesting the office of IFAD President. Joshi is pitted against three men who have been officially nominated by their respective governments to replace Fawzi H. Al-Sultan from Kuwait, who has headed the organisation since 1993. IFAD was established as an international financial institution “to finance agricultural development projects primarily for food production in the developing countries,” as a result of the 1974 World Food Conference, organised in response to the food crises of the early 1970s that primarily affected the Sahelian countries of Africa. (IPS)

Æ from pl

Clash of the titans

They also say that Nepali law does not ban the export of IRs500 bills, which was why he saw no reason to prosecute Maskey. That is the substantive argument. The Attorney General also has a legalistic argument: the CIAA over-stepped its limits and violated the immunity granted to his position by Article 110 (2) of the constitution. The clause gives the Attorney General authority to take the “final decision” on prosecution, as is the case in Westminster-styled democracies.

The CIAA apparently suspects something is amiss. Its investigation is directed straight at Karki’s legal opinion on the case. For his part, Upadhyaya maintains that his agency’s investigation is sanctioned by Article 98 (1), which gives CIAA the right to probe anyone holding “public office” for “improper conduct or corruption”.

Karki charges the CIAA’s questioning of his decision is illegal and insulting, and that it questions his legal expertise, intentions and capability. Upadhyaya, who has already raised some eyebrows for failing to file formal charges (to date) on the celebrated Lauda Air case even as parliament remains deadlocked over the issue, now has some additional explaining to do.

Bad blood between the two apex-level officials—both acknowledged as outstanding workers in an otherwise much-maligned bureaucracy—seem to have originated after the CIAA pressed charges against a public prosecutor in the Butwal appellate court. The CIAA questioned the government lawyer’s judgement in using the appropriate law on a particular case. Attorney General Karki and a team of government lawyers paid a visit to Upadhyaya at his office to find out what was going on. In the exchange that followed, the Karki’s team is said to have told Upadhyaya to read the law and function “within its boundaries”.

Balaram KC, one of CIAA’s volunteer (private) lawyers, argues that his client has the right to question any public official, except those otherwise specified by the constitution.

Critics say there’s more to the battle than what has surfaced thus far. Karki, whose next career stop could well have been the bench of the Supreme Court, now is burdened with a controversy that may be difficult to shed completely. In a country where implications of corruption alone can destroy careers, this may be something he cannot afford.

Meanwhile, in trying to build the CIAA some credibility by pursuing high-profile cases, the questions remains whether Upadhyaya chose the right target in a country rife with financial skulduggery in the public sphere. And, is there a case here of trying to be both investigator and prosecutor—the latter job, ironically, resting more properly with the Attorney General under the present dispensation? ♦

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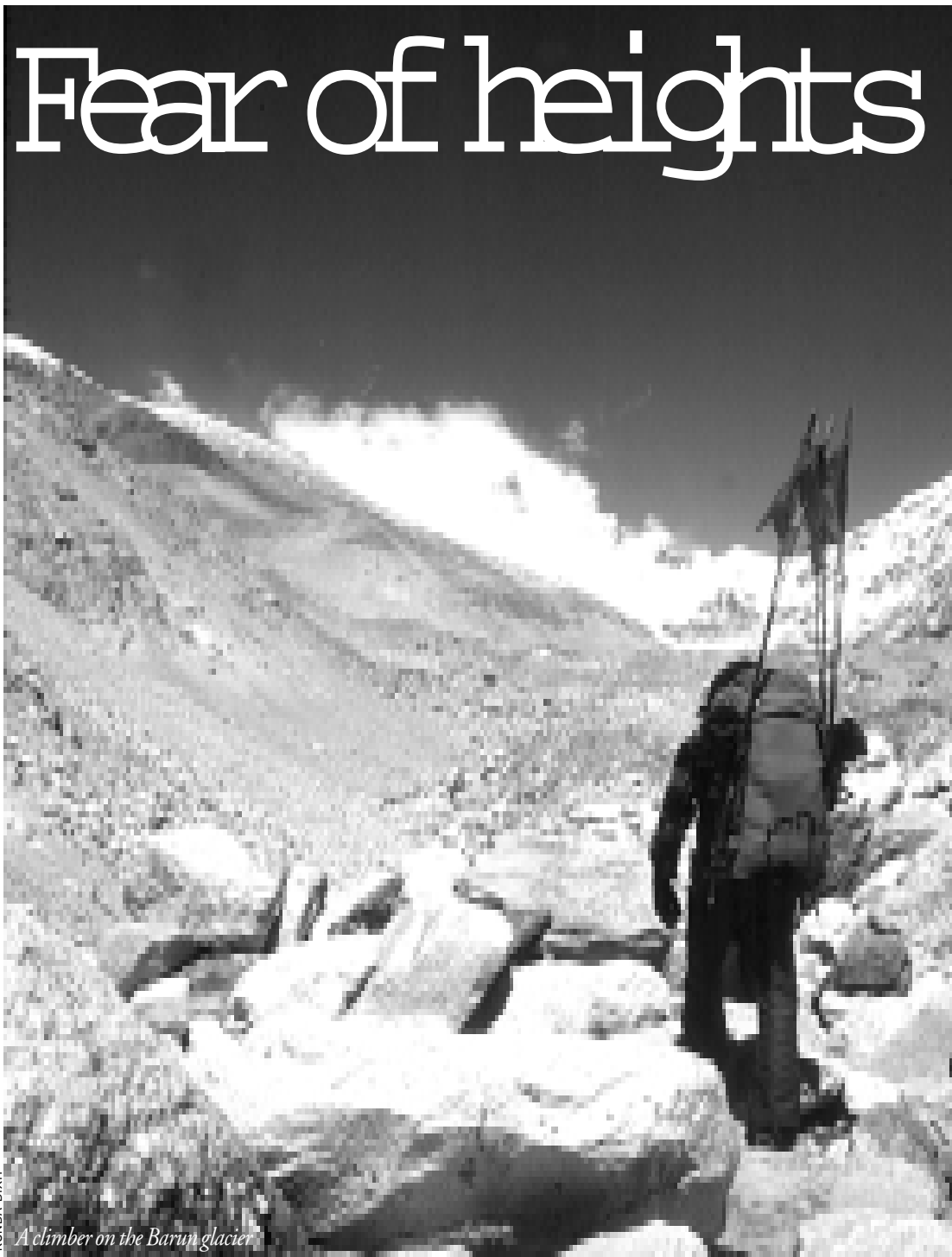
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PARKING AVAILABLE



As the trekking season re-commences, remember that altitude sickness is "100 percent preventable". Ascend slowly. Never climb with altitude sickness. Descend immediately if symptoms worsen.

AMS that was established in 1993. Two percent had High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE), a more malignant form of AMS that leads to fluid collection in the brain and is characterised by lack of muscular coordination, disorientation and vomiting. AMS

can also lead to High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE)—fluid collection in the lungs.

The only cure is to descend immediately—people with AMS often have impaired judgement and may have to be forced to descend. A person with symptoms should never wait for medication or oxygen to take effect before descending. "If sick tourists arrive at the post in the morning it's possible to call for a helicopter evacuation. But if they arrive in the evening, we administer oxygen through a concentrator, or give them a session in the Gamow Bag, which simulates the higher pressure found at low altitudes," says Sanjay Tripathy, an HRA official who's spent many a night tending to sick patients in Pheriche. The Gamow Bag, and similar devices like the Portable Altitude Chamber and the Certec Caisson can save lives, and people going on long treks may want to consider carrying one.

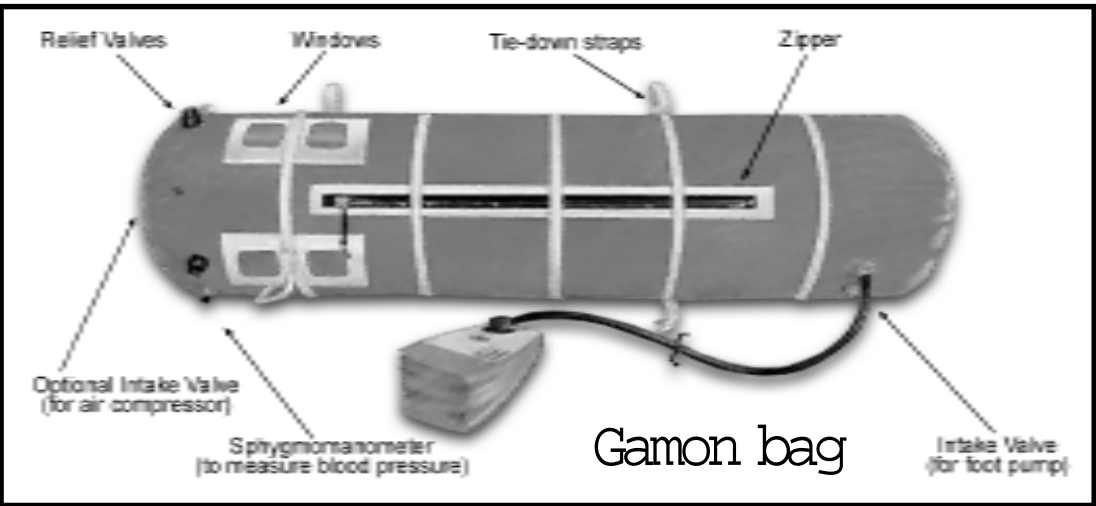
(See box for rental information in Kathmandu.)

rent a PAC, at \$7 a day, contact White Magic (253225, wmagic@wlink.com.np). **Helicopter rescue** If you're trekking with a Kathmandu-based agency, send a rescue request to them. Before you leave the city, ensure that they can guarantee payment in the event of an emergency—helicopter rescue by Royal Nepal Army choppers costs between \$1200 and \$2000 on average. Private airlines also provide the service, sometimes a little quicker, but they cost almost twice as much. If you're by yourself, send a message to friends. If you're a tourist, send a message to your embassy including your name, nationality, location and details of your injury or illness. If you have insurance, include details of that too. This takes less time if you've registered with your embassy before your trek and given them details of your rescue insurance. If your country does not have an embassy or consulate in Kathmandu, the safest thing to do is leave money with a reputed trekking agency before you go on your trek, and arrange for them to organise emergency measures should they be needed. Messages can be sent through the police radio system, the National Park radio system and from local airports. Rescue nearly always takes 24 hours, including getting the message out and being evacuated.

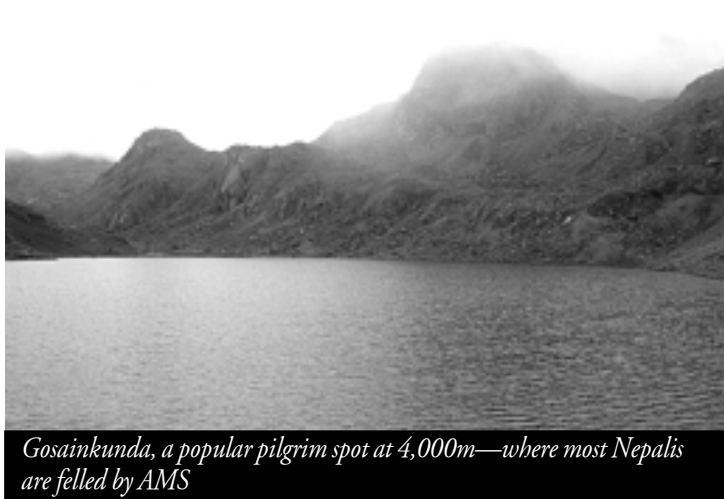
Emergency telephone numbers
Himalayan Rescue Association, Thamel, Kathmandu—262746
Asian Airlines, Thamel, Kathmandu—423383, 416116
Embassies
Australia—371678, 371764
France—413839, 412332
Germany—412786, 416527
Israel—411811, 413419
Japan—426680, 426686
South Korea
UK—411590, 410588
USA—411179, 413890

AMS emergency?

Symptoms If your symptoms of AMS are mild—headache, fatigue, loss of appetite and breathlessness—stay at that altitude until your symptoms go away, which usually takes a day or two. Do not ascend. If you're resting at the same altitude and you're feeling worse, or you don't feel significantly better, you must descend. Worsening symptoms include increasing fatigue, vomiting, severe headache and loss of coordination. These could be signs of High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE). Increasing shortness of breath, cough and exhaustion are signs of High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE). If ignored, both can be fatal in as little as 12 hours. **Descent** People suffering from AMS may be unable to think clearly and may have to be forced to descend. They must never descend alone, and even a descent of 300-500 m can lead to improvement. Descend when the ill person can still walk. If they can't, try and get a yak or a horse. Even porters will often carry sick people down. Don't ever wait at the same altitude for a helicopter rescue, even if you've administered oxygen or medication. Don't worry about sounding paranoid. Caution is wiser than treatment. **Acclimatisation, drugs and treatment** Drinking three to four litres of fluid everyday helps in the acclimatisation process. Stay away from sleeping pills, sedatives and alcohol. Diamox is used to relieve symptoms of AMS and aid in acclimatisation, but causes dehydration, already a problem at high altitudes. There are other drugs available for HACE and HAPE, but drugs only relieve symptoms temporarily—descending is the only real cure. **Equipment** A Gamow Bag costs \$2,500, and a Portable Altitude Chamber (PAC), \$1,200. The PAC is available in Kathmandu for both hire and purchase. To buy one, contact Maya Sherpa (415226, 428807, sherpa@expdtn.wlink.com.np). To



RAMYATA LIMBU
Last autumn, four people, two tourists and two Nepali porters, died of altitude sickness related complications in Khumbu and the Himalayan Rescue Association Aid Post at Pheriche carried out 36 helicopter evacuations. Every year, hundreds of trekkers fall victim to acute mountain sickness (AMS) which experts say can strike anywhere above 2,300 m, and sometimes even lower. With easy air travel and worldwide tourism, doctors say AMS incidence is more likely as harried lives don't allow people to ascend slowly, the best preventive measure for AMS, and people do too much too soon. This is especially true for Nepal where one of the most popular treks, the Everest base-camp trek, starts from Lukla at 2,800 m. "There are very few places on earth that allow trekkers to saunter at over 4,000 m with sustained exposure to altitude without using crampons or ascenders," says Dr Buddha Basnyat, medical director for the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA). "As a result, they don't realise the danger." "It is 100 percent preventable. So it's a tragedy when someone dies from high altitude sickness," says Dr Basnyat. The HRA recommends an ascent of no more than 300 m every day above 3,000 m. In many cases, though, this advice is ignored. Even slow ascents need to be carefully managed—drinking three to four litres of fluid daily helps in the acclimatisation process. A 1996 study of AMS conducted in Pheriche (4,243 m) showed that at least 30 percent of travellers had AMS. The symptoms—headaches and gastrointestinal troubles, or insomnia, dizziness and fatigue—fit the definition of



Helicopter evacuations are a boon—but they're also expensive, and waiting to be evacuated at high altitude while suffering from AMS is inadvisable. Ignoring progressive symptoms of HACE can lead to death in as little as 12 hours, while even a descent of just 300-500 m helps in recovery. In any case, if you aren't near the HRA posts, then it's common to have a 24-hour wait before a helicopter arrives—first, you have to find a police post or national park post or local airport with radio facilities, get the message out to Kathmandu (to a friend, your trekking agency, or embassy), and have someone in the city, whether your agency or insurance firm, guarantee payment for the rescue flight (\$800 an hour, \$1,200-\$2,000 for the whole flight).

There is a drug that hastens acclimatisation, Diamox, which the HRA sometimes recommends for symptoms of AMS, but the drug is a mild diuretic and causes dehydration, already a problem at high altitude. There are also drugs available for HACE and HAPE, but both have side effects which can themselves sometimes be fatal.

The HRA posts at Manang (3,500 m) and Pheriche are both equipped with an oxygen concentrator, and a Gamow Bag each. They also hold video screenings about the dangers of AMS for locals and trekkers. "I think a lot of people are still not aware about AMS. They've never seen anyone get sick. So they don't think it's a danger," says Dr Barbara Dahl, a volunteer medic who will be working at the post in Pheriche this spring. "A friend of mine, a nurse from California, spent a week of her ski vacation in Colorado in a hospital."

Even in the mountains of Colorado, situated at a relatively low 3,000 m, an estimated 15-40 percent of vacationers fall victim to mountain sickness. Their complaints are as minor and transient as headaches and loss of appetite, and as serious as disorientation and difficulty in breathing. Dr Dahl says the basic tenet of the HRA, is as applicable to Colorado as it is to Nepal is: "Never ascend with mild symptoms of AMS. And if they get worse, descend," she says.

Mountain sickness is basically caused by lack of oxygen—the

medical term is hypoxia—caused by the decrease in atmospheric pressure. It is generally believed that the effect of hypoxia on the brain causes most of the symptoms people experience. One theory holds that the chemical messages whizzing constantly around the brain are altered, but this doesn't explain why blood capillaries start to leak and fluid accumulates in the brain or the lungs.

Doctors who've worked in high-altitude clinics the world over are unanimous on one thing: fitness, age and gender have little to do with mountain sickness. Fatigue, dehydration, hunger, low blood sugar, quick ascents, and exertion after that, all heighten the risk of AMS. "This means that Nepalis are as susceptible to AMS as foreign trekkers are," says Dr Basnyat. "There's a term in Sanskrit *dum giri*, *dum* meaning 'breath' and *giri* meaning 'mountain', and a term in Nepali *lek laagnuu*. These show that AMS is known even among the local population."

Dr Basnyat believes that as many as a third of all porters suffer from AMS. What makes prevention even more important is that most people, including high-risk groups like porters and pilgrims, don't have insurance for helicopter evacuation in medical emergencies. "Unlike tourists, they may be slower to complain about AMS and thus jeopardise their life for fear of losing their jobs," says Dr Basnyat.

In fact, it was the death of a porter in 1997 on the Thorong La, two hours above the HRA post in Manang, that catalysed the formation of the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) to lobby and encourage Nepali and foreign trekking agencies, and their leaders and trekking guides, to provide a minimum standard of care for porters. "Lowland porters are just as susceptible to AMS as western trekkers, but also much more likely to develop hypothermia and frostbite," says Dr Jim Duff, a high-altitude medic and HRA volunteer who is behind the IPPG. "Over the years it is interesting to speculate just how many porters have died or been maimed in the trekking industry, and just how many of these deaths were preventable." ♦

Saving Nepal

On 19 February, even while the Congress and UML lawmakers were beating each other up in Parliament, across town at the Russian Cultural Centre three social scientists were charting the course to get the country back from the cliff-edge it is teetering on. Social scientists Dipak Gyawali, Stephen Mikesell and Pratyoush Onta spoke at a programme organised by NT's sister publication *Himal Khabarpatrika* titled, "How to pull the country back from the brink?" Excerpts:

Dipak Gyawali



Nepal is "on the edge," "going over the brink". How do we understand why things have come to such a pass? There's a Hindu concept that describes power as a triad of forces—*tamasik* (raw physical force like military power), *rajasik* (the power of social institutions) and *satwik* (all that matters beyond brawn and bullion, i.e. moral force). Our current malaise comes from failures in all three areas.

The Maoists "Peoples' War" has exposed the contradictions in the way the new dispensation planned to channel the *tamasik* power of society (Articles 118 and 119 of the Constitution, with their ambiguity about who controls the army). The government cannot use its armed forces and is now in the process of creating a new *tamasik* force. As Gandhi said, an eye for an eye will only leave the whole world blind. One way is to seriously think about a draft army with conscriptions, such as the Swiss and the Scandinavians have, in which everyone has to serve (and in the process acquire at least saleable vocational skills). We had something similar in the 1970s with the National Development Service. This option is no longer a hypothesis: the Maoists have already started a volunteer army, and when (and if) peace comes, this force will have to be demobilised through absorption into the Nepali army, just as the Mukti Sena of the 1951 movement had to be accommodated by creating the Nepal Police.

The failure in the management of our *rajasik* forces is seen in the role of unaccounted-for or dark money, which drives multiparty politics. This makes parties loyal not to their voters but to their paymasters. Nepal's economy is essentially informal and in the last few years, remittances from the Gulf and other places have added up to more than the government's revenues. Because of the nature of our comprador bourgeois politics, the government has not bothered with managing this money, let alone taxing it. It has essentially been left to the Maoists to levy taxes. However, with the assassination of Ramesh Dhungel, the Maoists must also realise that the *rajasik shakti* of dark money can destroy them just as it did the Panchas in the past and does the parties in parliament today.

One way to curb this is by limiting the terms of political office, and making sure office-holders return to their professions once their term is over. Professional, career politicians must be replaced by those who enter politics for public service, with a sense of volunteerism. If this is done, the clamour to "hand over power to the younger generation" becomes a non-issue. Another means to this end is to genuinely devolve power, not only to other government bodies, but also to other forces like the market and voluntary activist groups. It's time to ask if Prithvi Narayan Shah, who unified Nepal with *tamasik* power, would not have been a greater king if he'd managed to bring the *baise* and *chaubise* alliances together in a federation similar to the Swiss model with the use of *rajasik* force. Prithvi Narayan may have had no other option in his time, but Nepal's future leaders will seriously have to think along these lines to mitigate regional, ethnic and linguistic tensions.

The Hritik Roshan riots were a wake-up call. In the two days of burning tyres and (un)coordinated violence, there seemed to be no government. Nor was there a leader with the moral spine to stand as a bulwark against the madness. Part of the responsibility is ours: those we elected haven't lived up to our expectations, but isn't it said we get the government we deserve? So while talking about Nepal being on the brink and how to bring it back from there, we need to include ourselves as part of the equation. Our biggest failure has been in the *satwik* realm with the loss of moral authority. There is no shortcut, and the only way to go is engaging more in issue-based activism. We need to start more Paropakars and throw up more Daya Bir Singh Kansakars. Citizen's groups will have to start boycotting corrupt politicians instead of feting them in public functions. They must be questioned, made accountable to their voters, and if necessary, recalled through "people's power". And when the rift between the speech and the action of political parties becomes glaringly large, someone must challenge them publicly.

Otherwise we will continue to share the blame for our mess.

Stephen Mikesell



Violence in Nepal is seen by many as having started with the Maoist insurrection in 1996. However, I have seen, especially in the countryside, that there is a theme of symbolic or threatened everyday violence underlying the organisation of society itself. This everyday violence breeds an insidious frustration and anger that can be harnessed for various purposes, constructive and destructive. We saw the potential for communal violence in the recent controversy over a statement never made by a movie actor. Seven times more Nepali hill women are abducted to brothels in India every year than people have been killed in the entire Maoist war. This seems to me a great violence.

The People's War is one fact of violence in Nepal, but it's relatively controlled and directed compared to what's being done on a daily basis to the rural population. However, since it is seen as a direct challenge to state institutions and a personal threat to the elite it causes much official unease—enough to mobilise military forces against. The Maoists would say the social cost of guerrilla warfare is much less than letting the growing societal violence go unchallenged. Strategically, state violence plays into their hands by highlighting the violent character of the State and undermining other roles it might play. I was told before the People's War started that because concerned people were unable to expose the real character of parliament by working to bring out its contradictions from within, war was the only choice in the face of growing desperation of the rural population.

Looking from the outside—and I could be affected by the bias of the press—I sense the Maoists strangely combine the strategy of the pre-1949 Chinese anti-colonial struggle—setting up base areas, surrounding and isolating cities—and the highly sectarian post-1967 Cultural Revolution dogma. I've been told "no other alternative works"—other than armed insurgency—but I don't think the Peruvian Shining Path, to which Nepal's Maoists feel some kinship, has been overwhelmingly successful.

Armed struggle legitimises much greater violence in response. I believe struggle must expose violence in society and delegitimise that violence, rather than create conditions that excuse its intensification. I sense the Maoists are so sectarian they don't appreciate the need for complementary initiatives. In Peru, the Shining Path termed all unarmed initiatives by communities to confront oppression as revisionist and attacked them, losing many possible allies. In pre-revolutionary China, the Red Army's strategy was to build wide alliances, so that their enemy would be confronted by a broad front.

Sectarianism seems to characterise the entire Left, if not all the parties, here, and pits local people against each other. The overarching forces of oppression are the large multinational corporations and banks, many with budgets and control over resources larger than many countries. Nepal's present parliamentary democracy is a product of current corporate strategy, abandoning support for absolute dictators in favour of parliamentary democracies. Parliaments and elections provide an appearance of legitimacy because getting people involved in the fight over parliamentary seats creates a semblance of democratic self-rule. You buy off politicians relatively cheaply once they're elected, as there are no mechanisms to ensure that they remain accountable to their constituents, especially when they are divided and unorganised. The German sociologist Max Weber observed a century ago that elected officials are not representatives of the people but "their chosen masters". These "masters" in their turn are beholden to the sponsors of their parties, since it's the party that got them their positions. Every party will have its Lauda, and changing parties won't solve anything.

There are examples of common people frustrated with political parties creating new alternative parties democratically controlled from the bottom. For example, the Labour Party in Brazil developed out of years of community organising under the military regime in power from 1964 to the mid-1980s. Urban neighbourhoods in cities all across Brazil created neighbourhood committees, which in turn elected representatives to popular councils. Council members had to continue working in their local committees, ensuring against the development of a political elite. And committee and council members were subject to recall if their neighbourhood was dissatisfied with their work. When civilian rule were re-instituted in the 1980s, this organisation of committees and councils formed a Labour Party to contest in official elections. The Party has gained control of over 30 municipalities, including Rio de Janeiro. Most importantly, the councils continue to have recall power over their representatives even when they're elected to government office, and policies and decisions are made according to the wishes of the constituent councils.

That could be the roadmap for a future, truly democratic Nepal.

Pratyoush Onta



The failure of the political leadership and our own inability to make them accountable has created a vacuum that has been taken up by those who believe that only with force can change be brought about. That the Maoists could occupy the space that was left free by political institutions has showed us two or three things. One is that the Maoists have shown that besides the two power centres in Nepal, Narayanhity Darbar and Singha Darbar, there can also be a Darbar in Rolpa. Two, they showed that they did not need a huge mass of people to hijack the national agenda. And three, assuming there is no foreign resource involved in the Maoist movement, they have shown that resources within the country can be mobilised to meet their goals. No matter how we view the Maoists, these three lessons will remain with use even after the end of the Maoist movement.

For now, despite the government's stated position that it is open to talks, there is reason to question whether it is serious about finding a solution. Some time ago, there was the Deuba-Girija charade over talks with the Maoists. Then there were the discussions initiated by Padma Ratna Tuladhar but that went nowhere. Since then the government has not declared the channel through which talks can take place. We may have reason to believe that in the way the budget to contain the Maoists has increased (to over Rs 7 billion now), and with no accountability for the way the money is spent, the government is dragging its foot on the issue.

There is the question of using the army against the Maoists, although the past one year has been devoted to discussions on who controls the Nepali Army, the king or the prime minister. As confusion reigned it provided the palace with an opportunity to dwarf the leaders of political parties. That may have helped the image of the palace in the short run, but I fail to understand how the palace stands to benefit ultimately. The attack on the chief justice, and we need not debate whether it was intentional or not, shows that we can expect more of these attacks in future. And it is only a matter of time before the armed police and/or the army are deployed. Once that happens, there will be restrictions on some of the fundamental rights we were guaranteed by the constitution. In many parts of the country, those rights may be totally withdrawn. We may be able to live with that, but experience shows that when formal forces are sent to tackle guerrilla forces, civilian casualties increase. That again shows we are in for a long innings of violence.

There is another scenario developing. Anyone with even the slightest knowledge of Nepal's communist movement can be quite certain that when the Maoists become more powerful than they are today, there will be a formal or informal split among them. That would mean that regional camps will use the weapons they have accumulated against themselves. There will be a lot of casualties in crossfire and there is no knowing who will be caught in it. The other danger is that if people begin to believe that no one listens when you talk in a civilised way and need to resort to violence, to settle old feudal scores, there could be use of more sophisticated weapons and again an increase in violence. And the source of the violence may not necessarily be the Maoists.

All of us, those in the media and the analysts, are partly to blame for the pass we are in. We did not question political chicanery while it went on since we were concerned about making our own arrangements. And now when the country has reached to this stage, we want solutions fast. That, I think, is because we all have an authoritarian streak in us that has us believe in some benevolent dictator (and all of us privately believe that we ourselves are best suited for that job), even though it is not articulated in public. Self-reflection of this sort alone cannot save us. We need self-reflection without being stooges of the forces that have brought us so far. By not being stooges, I mean, for instance, people who can point out what the Maoists have done right, but at the same time also say where they have gone wrong.

We have a lot of seminars, but we have not had a dialogue so far. It is always the same kind of people talking, and the small voices always get lost. We have to find a way to begin a dialogue. We have to put our efforts into building institutions that can be useful in the long run and that can be done by building institutions, and increasing their credibility and of individuals associated, by making them transparent in their work. This applies to all the sectors—from literature and the arts to NGOs. Instead of running small fiefdoms, we can help regenerate some hope, by working along those lines.



SUBHAS RAI

BIZ NEWS

Bids for Butwal Power

Two companies are in the running to buy majority shares in the Butwal Power Company (BPC), a company the government has been trying to privatise for the last two years. The companies vying for 75 percent of BPC shares are the Norwegian developer Interkraft and the Anglo-American company, Independent Power Company (IPC). Interkraft's local partner is the Jyoti Group while IPC is being promoted by the Chaudhary Group. Four other companies had purchased the tender documents but did not bid in the end. Interkraft and IPC will make their financial bids after their technical proposals are evaluated and approved.

Bidding documents for the BPC were first prepared in November 1998. IPC and Interkraft had also contested an earlier bidding that was cancelled in December 1999 after IPC alleged "irregular circumstances" and pulled out. At that time IPC quoted \$10 million and Interkraft, \$8.25 million for the BPC shares. The government owns 96 percent of BPC, the United Mission to Nepal 2.8 percent, and the Nepal Electricity Authority, 1.1 percent. The BPC has two hydro-electricity generation stations with a total output of about 17 megawatts.

NGBL dividends

Nepal Grindlays Bank Ltd (NGBL) has announced a 100 percent dividend for shareholders, buoyed by good performance in 1999-2000. Standard Chartered Grindlays owns 50 percent of NGBL and Nepal Bank Limited 33.34 percent. The public holds the remaining 16.66 percent shares. NGBL, with 11 branch offices in Nepal, has a market share of about 9 percent and has remained the most profitable bank since 1996. Its stock (par value Rs 100) was selling for a market price of over Rs 2,350 last week.

Demo flight

A Polish-built aircraft called the M28 Skytruck made demonstration flights for the Royal Nepal Army and private airline operators last week. Manufactured by Polskie Zaklady Lotnicze of Mielec in Poland, the twin-tailed aircraft dazzled pilots with its short-take off and landing capabilities. Powered by Pratt and Whitney PT6A-65B engines, the plane can take off in less than 300 metres and land in less than 250 metres. The Army, which is looking for replacements for its ageing Shorts Skyvans, is said to be interested in the M28's rear-loading and parachuting capability. With a price tag of less than \$3 million, the plane is also attractive to private operators who have to stick to the government regulation that bars the import of planes more than 20 years old.



Nepal's blue chips

The Nepal Stock Exchange has rated 26 of the 110 listed companies with an A, three more in the category compared to last year. A-category companies are those that have at least Rs 20 million in paid-up capital, 1000 shareholders, and profits for three years running. Another requirement is the ability of the companies to produce audited financial statements within six months of the end of the fiscal year.

The financial sector businesses lead the A-team with seven commercial banks, nine finance companies and six insurance companies. Soaltee and Nepal Lever are the only companies from the hotel and manufacturing sectors to qualify for the A. Two government-promoted companies are also in group A. Three companies that were downgraded this year are Nepal Share Markets, Necon Air and Everest Insurance. All three failed to present their final accounts on time.

The LPG brigade

Even as it plans to rid Kathmandu Valley of vehicles over 20 years old, the government has decided to continue to allow the import of vehicles that run on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). Environmentalists claim LPG vehicles are not clean as they are made out to be. Martin Chautari estimates there are about 900 LPG-powered vehicles in Kathmandu Valley, 600 of them *Tuk-Tuks* and the rest minibuses. Because these vehicles run on subsidised cooking gas, the import of LPG shot up from 2,500 metric tons a month a year ago to 3,700 tons now. The use of LPG in the transport segment is also a major reason for the shortage of cooking gas in the Valley.

RNAC concession for senior citizens

The national flag carrier Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) has announced that it will grant a 50 percent concession on airfare to Nepali citizens of 65 years or above on its domestic and India flights. The tickets will be issued by the airline's head office in the capital and other branches upon presentation of citizenship certificates. The RNAC provides free tickets to cancer patients and tickets at a concession to a companion if they are flying within Nepal or to India for treatment.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED



Playing hard to get

The cost of the business of supply management is not just the hundred rupees one pays to get that cooking gas cylinder through the back door.

Having seen over the last few months the things people will do when there's an inadequate supply of cooking gas, this Beed has been inspired to analyse how we Nepalis go about managing supply. Historically, our economy has been oriented towards trading and this has basically revolved around managing supply for better gains.

So, the *sahaji* in Bhojpur hoards supplies before the monsoon, as access to the lowlands get difficult due to swollen rivers. No different are his brethren in Kalimati who hoard cases of beer before the budget session of parliament. Even state-run corporations appear to have perfected the management of supply for better profitability—crises in sugar supply hit only around Dasain and Tihar. Come news of a landslide in Krishnavir on the radio, and gas stations in Kathmandu hang out their No Petrol signs. Controlling supply has been the greatest means of making money for traders. It is a national practice.

The regulation of trade is very difficult the world over, and it comes as no big surprise that it is virtually impossible in Nepal. Traders here have an intricate understanding of the rule of demand and supply, and are adept at exploiting it to their maximum advantage. Yes, a free market does stipulate that levels of demand and supply determine prices—but in Nepal this is totally twisted. The fact that the Valley has just one "lifeline"—one road

connected to the supply stream—only encourages people to build up buffer stocks, especially just before the monsoon. In other parts of the country the absence of a decent transportation infrastructure is the only excuse anyone needs to stockpile goods. Further, a basically agrarian economy means that large numbers of people only have cash in hand after the harvest. So there's a complete



distortion of the demand curve due to fears of a supply crunch.

The political and bureaucratic machinery also helps the business of managing supply to prosper. Traders are favoured to ensure that anyone in a position of authority can also get a slice of the pie. If there's a shortage of sugar in the market, a person in government only needs to make a call to provide a truckload to a dealer he favours. The dealer then sells it at a premium and shares his booty with his political master. The tentacles of political influence are visible even at the village level, where a grassroots leader may supplement his income by controlling the supply of seed or urea. Managing supply has become one

of the most interesting areas of management studies. Problems surrounding supply management do not go away with the advent of a digital economy. The extensive Public Distribution System (PDS) in India hasn't been able to iron out all its problems even after decades of functioning. In Nepal, different mechanisms have been used, from having fair-price shops during Dasain, to running something along the lines of the PDS in rural areas, but there have been few gains.

The cost of the business of supply management is not only the hundred rupees that one pays to get that cooking gas cylinder through the back door. The cost is the man-days lost in queuing for hours to get it. The productivity of the thousands who queue up for that litre of kerosene or the hundreds who line up for their share of fertiliser is a drain on the country's resources. Over half of Nepal's population lives a hand-to-mouth existence, and they are made to sacrifice days of earning, queuing up to get sssbasic supplies.

This won't be regulated by legislation or resolved by economic theory. It's an issue of morality. It may be helped by education, but in the end the heart of the businessperson has to undergo a transformation. With every extra rupee that he makes, the country is poorer several times.

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

turn the pages

of your fate

win stuff every week on

wavemag.com.np

contest begins march 1

Advertisement for wavemag.com.np featuring a screenshot of the website interface. The interface shows a navigation bar with links like Home, About Us, Contact Us, etc. Below the navigation bar, there's a main content area with a large image of a person and text. The text includes a contest announcement for March 1st. The website is titled 'wavemag.com.np'.



WANTED MARKETING EXECUTIVES

Himalmedia, Nepal's premier publishing group, is looking for **Marketing Executives** for its operations in Kathmandu.

Eligibility: Graduates in any field, although those with media experience will be given preference.

Send in a detailed CV before 10 March 2001, by fax, email or hand delivered, addressed to the Marketing Manager, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Pulchowk, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal, Phones: (01) 543333-7, Fax: (01) 521013 or email to: sunainas@himalmedia.com



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Here comes the bottom-line generation

Siddhartha SJB Rana is the 34-year-old heir of Pravakar Rana’s Soaltee Group. The soft-spoken but articulate Group President was selected as one of this year’s 100 Global Leader of Tomorrow (GLT) by the World Economic Forum, Davos. Siddhartha’s empire-to-be has an annual turnover of about \$110 million with interests that range from travel and tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, hydropower generation, trading to shipping. Excerpts of an interview with Nepali Times.

How did you get selected to the World Economic Forum?

It came as a pleasant surprise. A letter from the WEF informed that I was elected to be one of the 100 Global Leaders of Tomorrow (GLT) selected from business, government and the social sector. GLTs are under the age of 40 and once initiated you’re expected to remain active with the Forum’s country and regional meetings, where you do not only discuss business but also sit on task forces that discuss ways to make the world a better place.

What did you take away from Davos?

I have a better understanding of the WEF now. It is more than just a closed club of big business—it has begun to recognise and listen to people from business and also from the social sector. For example, there’s a very interesting project to use IT for rural education in India, and I don’t see why it can’t be replicated here. Dr Mohammad Yunus, who started Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, said George Soros had supported the Grameen Telecom drive. Something good could be done here, with support from business. Like this year a big issue was that governments have not done enough with pharmaceutical companies on AIDS. So Bill Gates took the initiative with a \$100 million pledge to fund research.

There was also a slight sense of despair. There were close to 3,000 delegates representing almost every country. Countries that have greater problems than ours were there (we were not). Are we even on the world map? We have to make better efforts and not just expect to be invited. Someone once told me that in Nepal he got the sense of [a country] walking the middle path—between the medieval ages and this century—undecided what it wants to do. I think we should make that decision quickly, and there’s only one way to go.

Not much is done in Nepal with philanthropy...

One has certain social responsibilities. The tourism sector is an important and integral part of our economy and we need to contribute to protecting what encourages tourism in Nepal. The Soaltee Group has taken some initiative as far as pollution and protection of heritage sites are concerned. Business can also play a larger role in critical areas like education or health care. We are looking forward to a pilot project now being discussed with DFID where we will take private sector structured management to rural development.

What’s special about your group of companies?

At the corporate level our functions are not operational. We might be construed as a family business because two holding companies either jointly or exclusively own a significant amount of stock in each of our companies. The way we are structured is that we take decisions to invest or divest in certain business sectors but don’t interfere in businesses that we feel are best left to professionals. Each company is board-managed, and we have found it to be a very successful formula so far. Our handicaps in Nepal are the lack of finance, cutting-edge technology, and to some extent, management expertise. That is why we have chosen the joint venture route. Typically we enter into joint ventures where we come in as a strong local partner. As investors they come in with investment and management know-how because they are in that related field of business.

You finished schooling and suddenly had a big business empire waiting for you. Did papa hold your hand?

We share a father-son relationship at home and at work it is a professional relationship. A lot of eyes were initially focussed on whether it was a case of the father bringing in the son. But he said “go actually get your fingers dirty with a unit. You are more or less in-tune with contemporary business practices and we will give you a free hand. But let us evaluate your success before you move forward.” It has been a very healthy professional relationship.

You may take over as chairman of Soaltee Group sooner or later and will be compared with your father. How do you plan to stand up to the gaze?

Latently one does think of the future and he’s a tough act to follow. He’s been a wonderful guiding force for the group. All the basic tenets he leaves behind we’ll never compromise—corporate culture, ethics, values, and being progressively transparent. These are a strong foundation, which we’ll strengthen. There might be differences. The younger generation is more result-oriented—we may talk more about the bottom line. There may also be a slight sense of corporate ruthlessness internally.

How big is the company right now?

We have a turnover of about \$110-\$120 million, and employ about 1,500 people. The very recent Bhote Kosi project alone is an asset of \$98 million.

How is the investment environment in Nepal now?

Not very conducive. We have the security issue, the Maoist problem, the law and order situation, corruption. There is a lack of confidence because of governance issues [and the duty drawback payable to large companies]. Opportunities are there—tourism, power generation, transmission and distribution and agriculture—but the climate is not very conducive.

Are there signs of hope?

Yes, in vocalism. There is well-researched journalism and key issues are being discussed in a very responsible manner. One wishes also for some encouragement from the younger generation [in politics]—I don’t mean the construed younger generation, but even younger.

What must Nepal do to gear up for the changing world trading regime?

Over the decades the Nepali economy was supported by the invisible

economy, a smugglers economy.

Inevitably, that correction happened when India allowed joint ventures to manufacture here and took down duty barriers, which they are still doing. Because the old economy was sustained by illegal trading to up to 60 percent, I think the correction caught us completely off balance. In terms of the potential for growth I think we don’t need to be negative about being a landlocked country—yes it would be lovely to have had a port. We are in the middle of two of the largest markets of the world. We may never attract General Electric or IBM for manufacturing here but there are things we can do: like value-added agriculture that our topography allows, and hydropower where we have potential to sell to India. They need it, and we have it, although the possibility is diminishing daily as we begin to see the attractiveness of valued added gas from Bangladesh. The day the two ladies stop fighting that will become a reality.

We haven’t done enough ourselves. Three and a half years ago we signed the power trade agreement, which gives legitimacy to buying and selling of power between two countries. Nepal has not even discussed the basic document at the appropriate level. So if we go to India and ask if they are interested in hydropower develop along with us, the issue of that agreement comes up. The ball is really in our court and it has been there for a long time. ♦



MINI BALRACHARYA

Carlseberg

IN BOOKSHOPS FROM TODAY



The long out-of-print classic *Land and Social Change in East Nepal: A study of Hindu-tribal relations* by Lionel Caplan is now available in bookstores. This second edition contains a new chapter in which the author describes changes after the abolition of the *kipat* system.

A pioneering analysis of Limbu-Bahun relations that combines depths of historical understanding with intensive anthropological fieldwork. Lionel Caplan argues convincingly that cleavage between these two communities arises not so much from cultural difference as from confrontation over land. In particular, Caplan offers a valuable analysis of the *kipat* system of communal land ownership. Caplan’s detailed investigation demonstrates that in east Nepal land is inextricably linked to social change. The book provides an essential historical background to the current debate on relations between *janjatis*, caste Hindus and the Nepali State.

On the first edition
The book is important and valuable not only for those who are engaged in professional academic studies, but equally useful to administrators, social workers and planners.
Drona Rajaure & Dilli Ram Dahal

This thorough and well-conceived study helps fill several gaps in the literature on economic and political change in South Asia... adds to our comprehension of that age-old process under which non-Hundu communities in South Asia have been slowly but effectively Sanskritised.
Leo E Rose

Yet another Himal Books publication
Himal Association, Phone: 542544

Ad infinitum

A NEPALI TIMES REPORT

nonsense jingles taking up vital brain cells, the constant drone of kids clamouring for things they know from TV and radio, neon signs and hoardings everywhere. Loud or subliminal, advertising is here. The age of hard sell has hit, with over 400 advertising “agencies” in the business of manufacturing preference—“brand building”.

Good, bad and often rather ugly, market messages have been bombarding urban residents in Nepal over the years. With the entry of consumer goods from multinational and transnational companies into the market over the last five years, brand wars too are here to stay—Yamaha vs Kawasaki, Coke vs Pepsi, Lever vs Colgate-Palmolive, Daewoo vs LG. And now the Buddha Air and Necon rivalry has taken the battle to the skies.

Traditionally, agencies in Nepal were sales-driven and did plenty of release work, translating copy and dubbing soundtracks for release here, and most creative work came from a certain other country. But agencies are now creative driven, technical support has grown and the sudden growth in media is helping fuel the ad boom. Senior players say the industry has been growing at a steady 15-18 percent per year since the arrival of multinationals agencies and manufacturers. “We

have seen and been part of the growth. In fact, McCann Erickson was the first multinational ad agency to be granted an industrial license in 1998 to operate here in Nepal—with full foreign equity, and recognised as a service industry,” says Kaushik Ghosh, Country Head, McCann Erickson. “The growth in the



Kaushik Ghosh

industry indicates that clients are serious about this market. Not just having a threshold ad presence but increasing ad spend,” he adds.

Bhaskar Rajkarnikar, president of the Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal (AAAN) says that in fiscal 1999-2000, the industry grew at 25 percent. Growth has slowed this financial year to 16 percent, but

AAAN predicts it will jump back up to the region of 25 percent in fiscal 2001-2002. Boom time is predicted mainly due to the proposed satellite television channels that both Nepal Television and private operators are considering, greater media opportunities in print and radio, and the entry of even more multinationals.

Just ten years ago, things were really different. There was only the *Gorkhapatra* and *Rising Nepal*, and one radio station. There were (dubbed) short films in the theatres, (dubbed) jingles on radio (also dubbed) and (translated) calligraphy for print ads. The only real advertisers were tobacco and beer and liquor manufacturers. There was very little technical backup. Five years ago there was only one scanning house—Prisma. Today there are four state-of-the-art places doing image setting and the works. “There has been a quantum jump in production values. Good commercials have been made in Nepal,” says Kaushik Ghosh. The development of media options has also fuelled

growth—the number of publications has increased and so has quality colour publishing and short film production. “In the early days, we were ashamed to



JK Sthapit

Shangri-la is no longer a mere trading post here to stay, and there are over 400 “a

show our publications to clients,” says JK Sthapit, veteran ad man and head honcho at Echo.

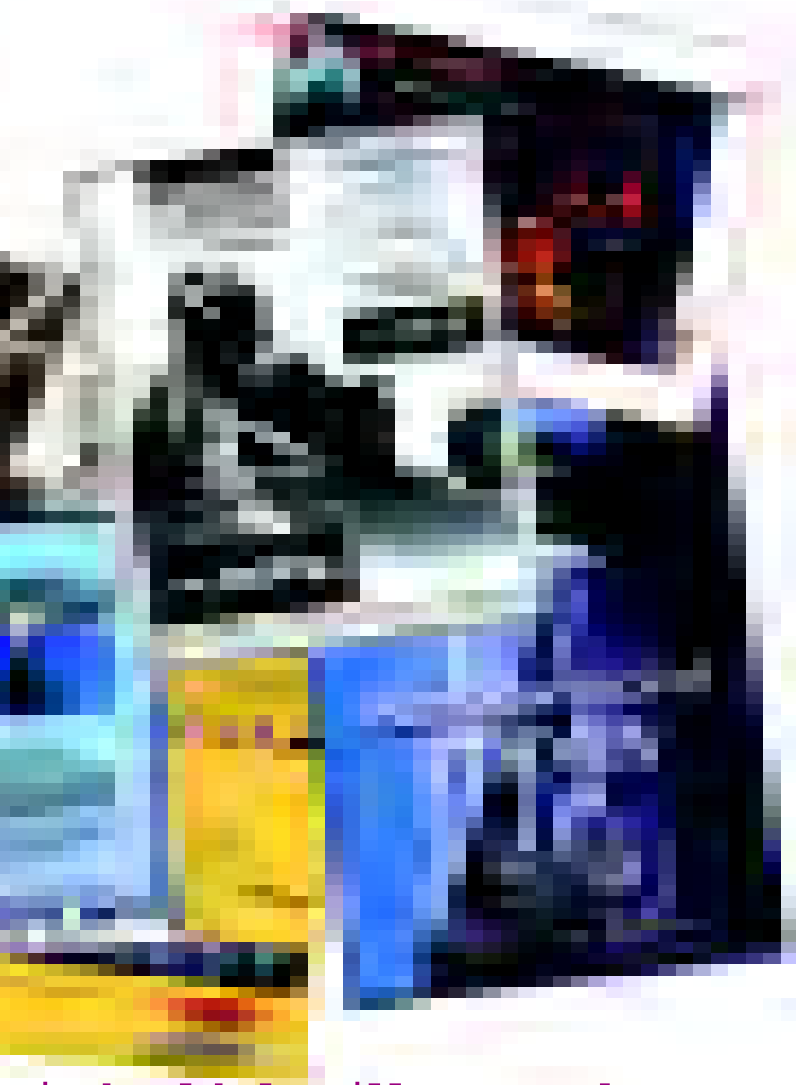
No one’s arguing that things are different, but some say it’s early days yet to diagnose boom-time. Multinational agencies like Thompson Nepal and McCann Erickson, who handle the big accounts like Coke, STC, Nepal Lever, the distilleries and the chow-chow makers are the

exception, they say. “The size of the slices in the pie may change, but the total ad-spend is virtually the same,” says Sanjeev Sharma



Sanjeev Sharma

Hits FM



in the global village. Brand wars are agencies' manufacturing preference.

Creative Head at Crayons Electra. If, for example, liquor advertising is low one year and increases the next, it's likely that some other segment, like the noodle industry, will be spending proportionally less. "The AAAN may say that the industry is worth Rs 1.5 billion, but I think it is roughly half that. Just add up media ad revenues (TV, print and



MIN BAJRACHARYA

radio) for a realistic figure," says Joydeb Chakravorty, MD of Thompson Nepal. Ad budgets have increased at a steady 15-20 percent over the last five years, but the media inflation rate has been roughly 10 percent. The general feel is that growth has been steady. "The industry here is chugging along. It has not gone through the crest and trough high-low like other places," says Kaushik Ghosh.

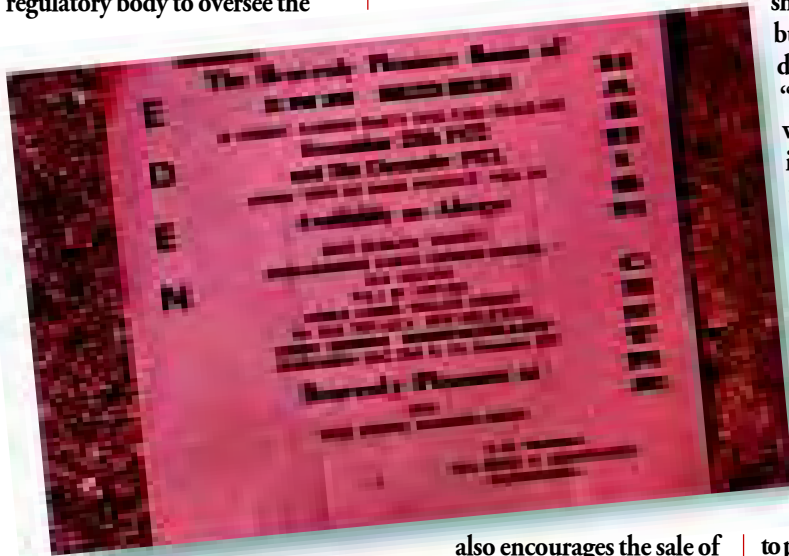


MIN BAJRACHARYA

Others agree, not for reasons of volume, but unprofessional industry habits—competition is marked by unhealthy undercutting and driven by commissions. Hankering after commissions is simply bad for business. Presumably, there is enough business for everyone, and no vital need to undercut and cheat. On the other hand, clients also need to understand that good agencies here can deliver, and that the cheapest deal may not really be

the best. Ravin Lama, MD of Stimulus Advertizers, is fond of saying: "If you pay peanuts, you'll get monkeys." To make matters worse, there is no tradition of pitching, a process whereby clients get to see concepts from a number of agencies, and award the account depending on the quality of work alone, a process that's pretty fair and also professionally rewarding. Only in UN agencies is it mandatory. "It's all very ad hoc. How can you compete with a one-man, briefcase agency," asks Ravin Lama, referring to the many "agencies" that do not have to worry about overheads, or practically anything else, and even offer free art work to clients.

A lot of this may have to do with the fact that there's no regulatory body to oversee the



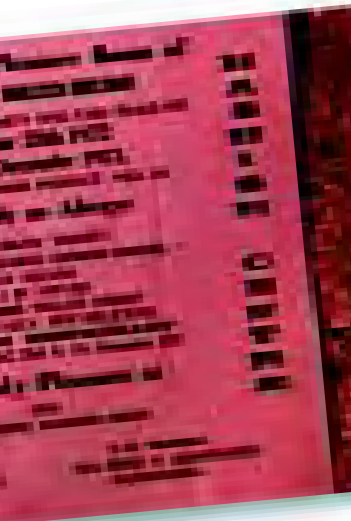
relationship between media houses, agencies and clients. The Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal was formed with the objective of bringing together all the players, lobbying the government and setting standards that would be beneficial for the industry as a whole. AAAN is the only body that liaises with agencies, the media, clients, consumer groups and the government. Ravin Lama, a consultant to the AAAN, says: "It is a free-for-all now. There are agencies out here taking clients for a ride. And clients who don't understand advertising as effective business. It's the commission

business that drives the industry." AAAN has been lobbying for a national advertising policy, and last week Association heads met with officials of the Ministry of Information and Communication. "We are trying to evolve a code of conduct for agencies, and the media. Right now our immediate demand is for a national advertising policy," says Bhaskar Rajkarnikar, president of AAAN.

A regulatory body can ensure that if a client defaults on payment, he will not find ad space in a publication or the services of another agency until the dues are settled. "Here there are any number of agencies willing to take up work with clients who ought to be blacklisted. The same goes for agencies," says Ravin Lama.

What about shifts in major segments? With the ban on tobacco and alcohol advertisements in the electronic media, the biggest spenders have now shifted to event promotion, sponsoring sports and a greater presence in the print media. "If the ban is extended to print media, these houses will move even more into events and sports," says Sanjeev Sharma of Crayons Electra. The growth of the ad industry has also spurred on the event management industry.

So if agencies can get past issues of ethical business, and take brand-building where it's never been before—bowling contests, art shows, basketball matches—does this mean they'll be better situated to put out, well, better ads than the generally sorry specimens we're bombarded with now? Agencies typically get defensive and blame "the masses". "The success of a campaign depends on whether it generates the desired sales or not. General comprehension levels have to be kept in mind—ads aren't meant for only the upper crust," says Terence D'Costa, a copywriter at Echo. "Most award winning international ads have terrible failures as far as generating sales are concerned," says Ravin Lama. Some add that pushing a brand here is tough because advertising



also encourages the sale of clever fakes. "Take the instance of P&G. They have two brands—Head and Shoulders and Pantene—but the market is flooded with fakes," says Sanjeev Sharma of Crayons Electra.

Another major factor responsible for the delayed emergence of the industry is the lack of trained manpower. "You do not get trained creative people servicing the media. There are no institutions, and the few local agencies here are owner-driven. Having personnel from a third country isn't the best choice—one needs local market knowledge on what drives brands," says Joydeb. There are

CREATIVE HIGHS

Television and Print: Fair and Lovely
Client: Nepal Lever
Agency: Thompson Nepal

Very slick. Many believe that these were the first world-class print and television ads made in Nepal. Local model made to look stunning. Well, fair and lovely.

Print Ad: Khukuri Rum
Client: Nepal Distilleries
Agency: Crayons Electra

Four decades of nostalgia that also recalled the time that Khukuri rum has been around, in the run up to 2001. Very understated, minimalist, yet powerful.

Print and television: Coke
Client: Bottlers Nepal Private Limited
Agency: McCann Erickson

The advertising equivalent of the message in a bottle. No copy, just fizz. No model, after all Hrithik is still a sensitive issue.

Print and television: Mayos noodles
Client: Himalayan Hygienic Snacks and Foods Private Limited
Agency: Business Advantage

Fairly good ad but with sheer SOV—share of voice, that often determines the success of a campaign. You just can't miss the Mayos campaign—radio, TV and print.

Print: Daewoo
Client: Daewoo
Agency: Echo

Used a local star, Ravi Lamichhane, and cast him in a memorable role for a scratch card. Agency cultivated the image of a guy who swung from sobriety to madness. The line in Nepali: *kotyaunuhos ra khushi le pagal hunuho* (Scratch and go mad with joy).

others who feel that the multinational agencies in Nepal should look beyond their business volumes and help develop the industry as a whole. "There should be open workshops, seminars and other interaction. What is the point of a few people speaking one language and the rest another?" asks Sanjeev Sharma. Thompson Nepal's Joydeb says they already do: "When we interact with local photographers, cinematographers, printers and pre-process people, we are also into local capacity-building," says Joydeb. Agencies and industry watchers say it's time to play catch-up, however it happens.

Nepal is a minuscule market in global terms, but it is strategically important and could soon emerge as a location of choice for MNCs to set up manufacturing facilities catering not only to the domestic market, but also to the huge North Indian segment. It really could be boom-time for agencies, and it's important they handle it right. Little can be done about quality so long as agencies take a dim view of "general comprehension levels", but regulation through a body like AAAN is a positive step. The next priority should be market research—there's simply no data for media planning. "Five to ten

years ago it just didn't make sense because there were hardly any media options. With the growth of the media sector, this will be an important part of any agency's work," says JK Sthapit. Agencies will now have back their work with hard facts. "Forget agency claims, even circulation figures put out by media houses are suspect. Good research is key—the future is all about media planning," says Sanjeev Sharma. Agencies might well have been stumbling in the dark until now. What have they been working off? "Just gut feel. There has been some work done for the UN and multinationals, but there is no readership survey or television ratings," says Ravin Lama.

Nepal is prime advertising ground for agencies. "Nepal is a young nation if you look at the population pyramid. And advertising growth means that youth are being exposed to a lot of trends. It is a crazy mix of

orthodoxy and extreme cosmopolitanism," says Sanjeev Sharma. It's going to be interesting to see where advertising goes in the next few years. AAAN, anticipating this, and to provide incentive for good work, started an Ad Club for the industry three years ago. They even announced an award, Kriti, for the best campaign. "We are still in the process of inviting ads for the competition. We'll do that in the next two months," says Bhaskar. Industry watchers and ad professionals are waiting—in the next few years this could prove crucial in establishing a benchmark for quality. Until then, we'll just put up with ugly billboards and mind-numbing jingles. ♦

Early billboards in the Valley, drawing tourists in 60s Thamel (below); and a handbill for early events—hash parties at Christmas and New Year (left).



Geek dreams

Whether you're a techie, or just like gadgets, here's part I of an occasional NT series on the latest in the world of gizmos

Creative Labs Nomad II MG (Silver/Magnesium)

The search for the funkiest MP3 player is officially over. The Nomad II MG from Creative Labs is as delectably attractive as it is superbly engineered. There's virtually nothing wrong with it from the circular view screen on the front of the player to the brilliant sound. Compact and easily portable, the player comes with 64MB of internal memory, and a SmartMedia slot allow you to crank up the overall amount to 192MB by adding a 128MB card.

The USB connection is insanely fast—all you need to do is place the Nomad in its docking cradle (yup, no more having to stick your portable device into and out of your computer), there's instant recognition between the player and your computer system, it is compatible with PCs and Macs, and it even recharges your batteries while you're docked. Then there's the speed with which you can change your playlist—it just takes a few seconds per song.

The Nomad is more than just an MP3 player. It comes with an FM tuner, and you can preset up to 20 stations at a time. There are so many good things about this foxy little gadget, but one of the best is that it doubles—triples, actually—as a voice recorder too!

The interface is a cunning drag-and-drop "Nomad Manager", and the electroluminescent backlit LCD ensures you'll have hassle-free operation even in the dark. The Nomad Manager software allows you to manage, access, upload and download content to your player. Other software includes the Creative Audio Digital Center by MusicMatch, with which you can encode, decode and archive MP3 and WMA files, and also convert unlimited CD tracks and compile them any which way.

The Nomad runs on either 2 AAA batteries, the rechargeable Ni/MH battery, or the AC adapter. It measures 3.5" x 2.3" x 0.7"—no larger than a deck of cards, really—and weighs in at a scant 80 grams, including the battery. And yes, the best things in life can be a little, well, expensive—\$399, to be precise.



Ortovox M2 Transceiver

Time is precious in avalanche-rescue situations. If you can find and dig out a victim within 15 minutes, you have a 92 percent chance of finding him or her alive. The M2 has accurate, easy-to-read electronics for fast tracking. Digital arrows point you toward your victim—who must, of course, also be carrying a transceiver for yours to pick up its signal—and a readout tells you how far away you are. It switches quickly and easily to both transmitting and receiving modes and allows for multiple users.

The transceiver can be used analog-style (listen to beeps to home in on a victim) or digitally (follow the arrow). The M2 sends and receives transmissions on a standard 457 kHz frequency. The range of the M2 is 80 metres, and the device is waterproof and shock-resistant. The battery lasts for about 250-300 hours if transmitting and around 40 hours is receiving. Not surprisingly, the Transceiver can take the cold—its tolerance is -30 to -50 degrees Celsius. The Ortovox M2 Transceiver weighs all of 230 grams and measures 15 x 6.4 x 2.5 cm. The cost of safety in the high snows? \$300.



Kerbango Internet Radio 100E

Finally, a stand-alone Internet radio. Tune into local broadcasts as well as all the radio lost out there in cyberspace. All you need is a broadband connection (ISDN, cable modem or, if you're lucky enough to have it, DSL). Connect to the Internet and use the Kerbango radio as you would any ordinary radio—it's got tuning knobs, stations listed by categories like jazz, classical, rock etc. Tune in to the one you want, press 'select' and Kerbango connects you to the stream and begins broadcast.

The radio includes other standard stereo features like a clock, alarm, a built-in AM/FM antenna, five-station preset, LCD display, universal power supply, lines for stereo-out and headphones, and full-range speakers.

The Kerbango radio also comes with all the hardware and software you'll need for Internet radio—a 32-bit processor running at 81 MHz, 16MB SDRAM, 8 MB Flash Memory and a 4 MB ROM, Linux Real Networks, RealPlayer and support for all versions of it, as well as for MP3s.

This drool-device-of-the-week weighs 3.75 lbs and measures 8"(h) x 10.5"(w) x 7.5"(d) and costs \$300.



Compaq iPaq H3650 Pocket PC

Break the unhealthy addiction to your Palm PDA with the iPaq. The iPAQ pocket PC combines a real Intel processor, new hardware and a sleek design. It offers 32 MB of RAM and 16 MB of ROM—enough memory to hold a goodly package of applications while leaving you a lot of room for your own applications.

The iPAQ allows you to input data in your own handwriting, by soft keyboard, by voice recorder, or through inking. The colour screen is lit by tiny lights all around, which makes it bright even in the sunlight, and you can view the screen from many different angles. The iPaq runs on a Microsoft Windows operating system. It has a microphone, a speaker, and an audio-in jack. It features an infrared port for wireless data transfer and connects to USB and serial ports. The iPaq is fast—it hot syncs at 690,000 bps. What's more, while it hot-syncs in the cradle, you can continue to work on the unit, something impossible to do with Palms.

In the future, Compaq plans to release a global positioning system pack, so you can make your iPAQ pocket PC into a GPS unit. Until then, you receive a great deal of Microsoft software—Pocket versions of Word, Excel, Internet Explorer, and Outlook as well as the full desktop version of Outlook 2000. Compaq has also built in utilities so that frequent actions, like such as switching between tasks, adjusting volume, or changing backlighting, are only a click away.

The iPaq weighs six oz and measure 5.11" x 3.28" x 0.62". But the cost of such functional sleekness is high, at \$500.



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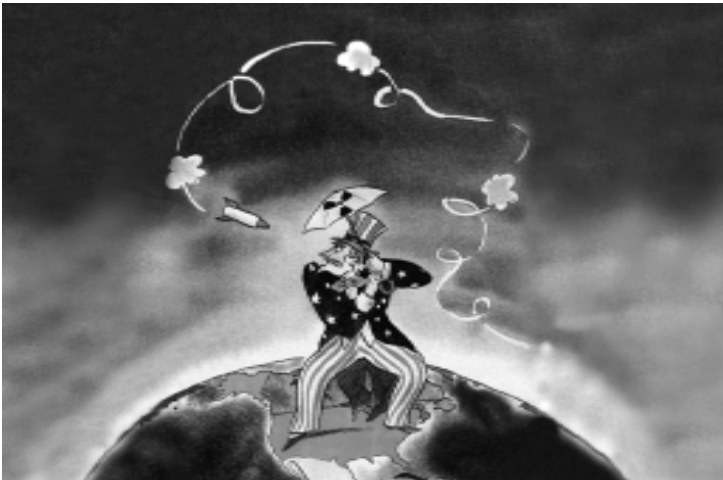
Customize

Star wars, redux

GUSTAVO CAPDEVILA IN GENEVA

The discrepancies between the United States and China regarding the question of an arms race in outer space have once again blocked the work of the Disarmament Conference. The chairman of the Conference, Canada's Christopher Westdal, said the lack of agreement on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) had made it impossible to achieve a consensus on a working programme. The work of the conference has been paralysed for three years due to the failure to reach agreement. The central points on the conference's agenda are PAROS, nuclear disarmament and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), otherwise known as the Prohibition of Production of Fissile Material Used in Nuclear Weapons and Other Nuclear Explosive Devices. The problems crop up when the 66 members of the conference begin to discuss a working programme for the sessions to take place over the coming year, which consists of assigning the debates on each issue to special committees or coordinators. The Group of 21, comprised of members of the non-aligned movement, proposed a "balanced" annual working plan that would keep the conference from limiting its discussions to questions of interest to the nuclear powers. But in the past few years, several countries have conditioned their approval of the working plan on

obtaining benefits in the discussions of questions of greater interest to their disarmament strategy. Thus, countries that are keen on further developing their nuclear capacity, like China, India and Pakistan, have blocked the debate on the FMCT, which would keep them from producing the plutonium needed to build more nuclear warheads. Meanwhile, the five big powers—the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain—are opposed to negotiating nuclear disarmament within the conference, and want bilateral talks instead. But the staunchest opposition to any progress in multilateral talks on nuclear disarmament comes from France, according to an expert close to the conference, who preferred not to be identified. While nearly all of the countries agree on the question of preventing an arms race in outer space, the United States is studying the possibility of putting a national missile defence system in place. Washington is not interested in discussing the question of outer space because in that area it is 30 years ahead of the other powers, said the source. The differences in views regarding the question of outer space were highlighted in the last session of the conference last week, when China expressed concern over reports on space war exercises recently staged by the United States. Hu Jiadoi, China's chief disarmament negotiator, said: "We are seriously concerned about the report of



China and the US can't agree on stopping the arms race in space.

a space war exercise that took place late last month. The exercise used the outer space as the battlefield, and its scenario was set to happen in 2017." The United States maintains that the treaties in effect since 1967 on an arms race in outer space are sufficient to guarantee peace and security on that front. The Chinese and US delegations, meanwhile, mutually accuse each other of blocking the negotiations. According to US ambassador Robert T Grey Jr, China has been using "diplomatic tactics which have the net effect of blocking discussion of the very issues they say they care about." Westdal, meanwhile, warned that "the linkages in our long-pending proposal threaten to preclude any unprogrammed treatment whatever of any of its

subjects, leaving us in the awkward position of wanting to treat substance credibly—without touching fissile material, nuclear disarmament or the prevention of an arms race in outer space," the key points on the agenda. Westdal's term as chairman of the conference ended last week, and as of this week, the new chair will be Chilean ambassador Juan Enrique Vega, after which the post will go to China's Hu. But the last chance for keeping this year's period of sessions from turning into a failure lies with Vega, said the source. Given the fact that he is an active party to the stand-off, China's representative will have a hard time creating the conditions essential to achieving the climate of consensus necessary to pull out of the deadlock, he said. ♦ (IPS)

Death row divide

Canada's top court, going far beyond past rulings on capital punishment, ruled last week that two Canadians who allegedly confessed to a brutal triple murder must not be sent to the United States to face the death penalty. Undercover police officers said Sebastian Burns and Atif Rafay, arrested in British Columbia in 1995, had bragged about killing off Rafay's parents and sister in Washington state. Burns allegedly bludgeoned them to death with a baseball bat. But the Supreme Court ruled it would be unconstitutional to extradite the two men unless Ottawa won assurances that they would not face execution, which has been abolished in Canada. The 9-0 decision effectively overrode a 1991 ruling in another case, which allowed the extradition of two US murder suspects to face possible execution, though capital punishment has generally been banned in Canada in 1976. The present chief justice, Beverley McLachlin, had argued for the court in 1991 that there was "no clear consensus in this country that capital punishment is morally abhorrent and absolutely unacceptable." But in the current case the court said that arguments have since then grown stronger against sending people away to face possible execution. "Canada is now abolitionist for all crimes, even those in the military field," it said, referring to a 1998 law, which formalised the practice of not executing soldiers. Canada has not put anyone to death since 1962. "The international trend against the death penalty has become clearer," it added, noting that there were also "hard-headed concerns about wrongful convictions." It referred to Canadian cases—Donald Marshall, David and Guy Paul Morin—where people had served time for murders. (Asian Age)

Fox killed ostrich for Bush boots?

Mexican President Vicente Fox illegally owned and sold ostriches from an endangered African species, ruffling the feathers of environmental inspectors, *Reforma* reported last week. It was not known if the ostrich skin boots that Fox was planning to present to US President George Bush were made from the endangered species. Fox was slapped with a \$900 fine two years ago for owning two adult ostriches and two babies of the *Estuhlio camelus* species, the report said. Investigation continues because the illegal birds were then sold. Fox first became involved with the long-necked birds four years ago, when he legally bought three *Estuhlio Camelus* ostriches and took them to his ranch in the central state of Guanajuato. The ranch is not far from Mr Fox's home in the village of San Cristobal, where a Bush visit was planned. Two baby ostriches subsequently born were, however, not registered with environmental officials. Fox also bought another two ostriches from a local businessman, which were also not registered. When environmental inspectors called at La Estancia in 1998, they found the four illegal fowl. But supervisor Javier Gonzalez insisted that only the baby birds were in truth illegal. In 1999, they slapped Mr Fox with the fine. In September 2000, Mr Fox, decided he had had enough of the ostrich business. (Asian Age)



Fox feeds Estuhlio camelus.



SAMANTA SEN IN LONDON

nation of shopkeepers or not, Britain is searching for a renewed sense of nationhood over a greengrocer up north. A simple matter has left a nation divided—national hero Steve Thoburn refuses to use the metric measure to weigh his bananas. The local authority, bound by rules set in the EU capital Brussels, is prosecuting Thoburn for selling fruits and vegetables by the ounce and pound. He faces up to six months imprisonment on two criminal charges and a fine of up to \$7,500—about the punishment for assaulting a police officer. "Justice in the balance," screamed a banner outside the magistrates court in Sunderland in north-east England where the case is being heard. Another said: "Weighing a pound of bananas a criminal offence! How in 21st century Europe could this be allowed to happen?" A spokeswoman for the council said the council had "done no more than to enforce the rules we were given to work with." The case was adjourned last month after a three-day trial. Final arguments will be presented on 1 March, and a ruling is expected on 9 April. Supporters of "imperial measures" are planning a huge demonstration in Sunderland at the end of this month. Prosecuted for being too English, Thoburn has found fame as the Metric Martyr. Inside the magistrate's court in Sunderland, Michael Shrimpton, a leading London lawyer, attacked kilograms and argued against the Treaty of Rome, the foundation of the EU. The debate will likely become an election issue. Conservative Party leader, William Hague, is on Thoburn's side. The surge of support for the

The Metric Martyr

British or European laws? "If it goes on like this we will be ordering beer by the 0.5683 litre in pubs," says a Tory.

old measures, coupled with backing from the Conservatives can mean trouble for Tony Blair's government, seen by many as too pro-Europe. A verdict in April just before elections, expected early May, would make this an election issue. "If it goes on like this we'll be ordering beer by the 0.5683 litre in pubs," a Tory said, explaining Hague's stand. But pints will stay, and so will miles. The rules apply to loose and packaged goods but in the fear of losing miles and pints lies political promise for the Tories, who're far behind Labour in opinion polls. Thoburn isn't the only one still using the imperial measure. According to a market estimate, 40,000 of 100,000 traders have not converted to the metric system yet. That support shows at Thoburn's store. He's getting a flood of customers buying ounces and pounds of anything. "If someone asks for a kilogram of apples I'd sell them," he says. "But nobody asks." Thoburn does not care about the debate or about Europe. He has never voted and never intends to. "All I want is to keep my customers happy," he says. Neil Herron, a second shopkeeper served notice is more in tune with the political fallout of the case. Using imperial measures "does not make me xenophobic, racist or unpatriotic," he says. Blair's government is being hypocritical, he says, because "even the weight of Prime Minister Tony Blair's baby son, Leo, was announced to the world's media as six pounds and 12 ounces. Imperial traders like myself are not thick or ignorant, we are simply businessmen responding to consumer demand... I can still go to McDonald's and buy a Quarter-Pounder, and why doesn't that have to be a 113-grammer?" Legally the case is whether the 1985 Weights and Measures Act, which gives traders the option to choose between the imperial and the metric measure, has precedence over the 1994 European Union legislation, which came into force 1 January, 2000. Under this law traders must weigh only in metric units in the interest of standardisation across Europe. "The implications will be long-term and widespread," says Tony Bennett, a leader of the Independence Party which wants severance from Europe. "It is about the precedence of British law or European law." Lawyer Shrimpton is not arguing about fruits and vegetables. His argument is that "where there is a clash between an Act of Parliament and a regulation of the EC it is the Act of Parliament which takes precedence." Sunderland is just the place for the debate. On the one hand is the grocery with weights in ounces, and on the other, a factory of the Japanese firm Nissan, built to develop a strong European presence for the company. Nissan is the biggest employer in Sunderland, but Thoburn is the hero. This is the heart of the Great British Debate of the day. ♦ (IPS)

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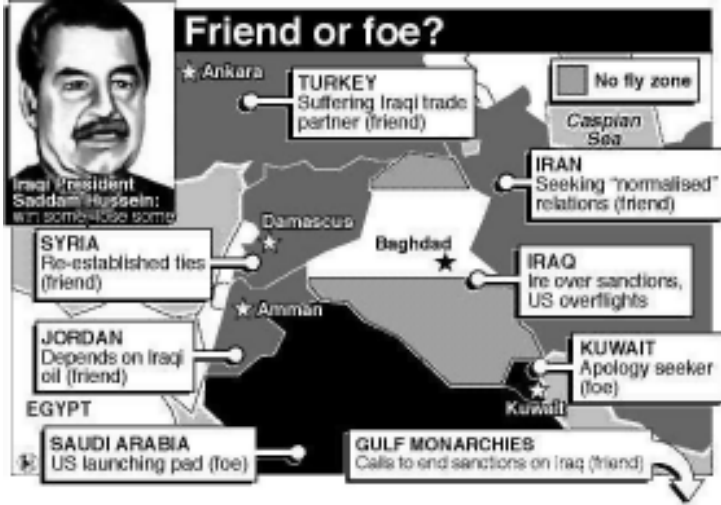
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Powell revisits Desert Storm



Brand new secretary of state carries message of Bush adventurism.

DILIP HIRO IN LONDON
Referring to his Middle East tour starting today, US Secretary of State General Colin Powell said: "It's my responsibility to try to rally again to make sure we keep the finger pointed on the Iraqi regime and not the Iraqi people, and remind everybody in the region: [Iraqi president] Saddam Hussein isn't threatening America; he is threatening every nation around him."

This must be news to Iran, Jordan, Syria, Turkey and the six Gulf Arab monarchies, except Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. All these states, save Iran and Jordan, joined the US-led coalition against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War.

A run-down of Saddam's regional friends and foes:

Jordan: Is wholly dependent on Iraq for oil, half of which it receives at a discount—with the full knowledge and approval of the UN sanctions committee on Iraq. The first country

to start scheduled flights from Amman to Baghdad in defiance of the committee last December.

Syria: Syria became the third nation (after Egypt) on 12 February to establish air links with Iraq, cut in 1982 after Iraq invaded Iran. Last November, Damascus reopened its oil pipeline connecting to Iraqi oilfields.

Turkey: Complains that the 10 years of UN sanctions on Iraq has cost it \$35 billion in trade losses.

Iran: Since 1998, Tehran has sent 3,000 pilgrims a week to holy places in Iraq. That year the two countries set up a special working committee to improve bilateral economic ties.

Gulf monarchies: Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have been vigorously advocating an end to UN sanctions. Now supported by Oman and Bahrain.

That leaves Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. As the victim of Baghdad's aggression, Kuwait remains wary of an

Iraq governed by Saddam, who led the seven-month occupation in the Emirate. It allows US troops and warplanes on its soil, as does Saudi Arabia, whose active involvement on the American side was vital to the Washington-led coalition in the Gulf War.

The Saudis bankrolled Iraq in its seven-year war against Iran, but now view Saddam as unreliable and Iraq as a rival in the regional power equation. American and British warplanes based in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait carry out 24-hour air surveillance of the 'no fly zone' in southern Iraq, imposed in August 1992. Squadrons from US aircraft carriers stationed in the Gulf supplement these planes.

Besides this zone, from which Iraqi planes and helicopters are banned, Washington and London maintain a similar zone in the north, with their aircraft stationed in southern Turkey. In the 18 months following December 1998, when Iraq decided to challenge the overflights, Anglo-American warplanes penetrated Iraqi airspace 21,600 times, killed 300 Iraqis and wounded 800, according to Baghdad. Iraq says there are on average 40 violations a day of its airspace by Anglo-American aircraft.

Iraqi foreign minister, Muhammad al-Sahhaf, raised the subject in January 1999 at an Arab League foreign ministers' conference—the first to which Iraq had been invited since its occupation of Kuwait. When Kuwait's foreign minister, Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, demanded an apology for Baghdad's invasion of Kuwait, al-Sahhaf refused. He just said that Iraq had made a "mistake". This was

unacceptable to al-Sabah who wanted to settle the issue of 600 Kuwaitis who went missing in the Gulf War and demanded that Iraq promise in writing that it wouldn't threaten its neighbours in future. On his part, al-Sahhaf wanted Kuwait to deny the use of its military bases to the US and Britain. This was not forthcoming.

That stalemate continues today—Saddam puts the nine-year-long Kuwaiti and Saudi involvement in the air surveillance on a par with his "mistake" over Kuwait, and says both sides are even. For the US, the southern no fly zone is strategically important—it is a way of denying Baghdad the chance to train its pilots in southern Iraq, and is a vital source of aerial intelligence. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia foot the bill for the aircraft fuel and accommodation for pilots and ground staff.

Even if Washington and London were denied the use of Saudi and Kuwaiti military bases, they would still be able to monitor the southern no fly zone by deploying warplanes aboard aircraft carriers stationed in the Gulf. But this would further inflame anti-American feelings among Arabs, already incensed at the excessive force that Israel has used against Palestine since October.

Colin Powell will find himself having to narrow his focus in the Middle East to only maintaining active support of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the continued monitoring of the no fly zone. ♦ (Gemini)

Dilip Hiro is the author of *Desert Shield to Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War*. His forthcoming book is *Neighbours, Not Friends: Iraq and Iran after the Gulf Wars*.

Underground in Japan

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI IN TOKYO
The recent arrest of a senior Japanese politician who accepted huge bribes in exchange for the promotion of cheap Asian labour in the country has revealed the dark side of Tokyo's policy on foreign workers.

Takao Koyama, a 57-year-old member of the powerful Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was arrested in January on suspicion of accepting up to 20 million yen (\$200,000) in bribes from a welfare cooperative called KSD, which provides support for small and medium companies. Koyama asked questions at the Japanese Parliament in 1995 and 1996 that urged the Labour Ministry to extend the period of stay for foreign workers invited into Japan as "trainees". The workers, mainly from Indonesia and China, were given three-year trainee visas that stipulate a year of training followed by on-the-job training for the rest of their stay. "But their experience was a nightmare," says Sonoko Kawakami, an activist with the Japan NGO Network on Indonesia (JANNI).

JANNI documentation on the KSD scandal reveals a clear policy on the part of Japanese officials and businessmen to recruit cheap labour from developing countries to go around Japan's official policy of not accepting foreign workers. "The government's hypocritical stance has paved the way for companies to mistreat foreign labour, increase profits and boost Japan's economic performance," says Kawakami.

Japan's labour market is officially



Japan must look at its vast underground workforce.

Officially closed Japan has 500,000 illegal workers driving its small businesses.

closed to foreigners, but does have the mechanism of "traineeships", allowing foreigners to be "interns" for a short time. Trainees don't have the usual work permits that other labour-receiving countries issue. There are hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, including the entertainment industry that attracts women from Asian countries—and for which there is another special visa.

Under the "trainee" policy, hundreds of young men were recruited through Indonesian and Chinese labour brokerages and sent through KSD to small and medium sized companies in the country. The workers signed contracts outlining technical internships. But the agreement also included requirements

that blatantly abused their human rights, say activists. For example, the contracts said workers must hand over their passports to their Japanese employers. They also made overtime work compulsory starting the second year of their "internships".

Workers reported they had put in 500 hours of unpaid overtime in the first year of internship. They were paid an average of 80,000 yen per month (\$800) after deductions for taxes and health insurance—less than half what their Japanese counterparts are paid. Employers also ordered them not to travel or forced them to "save" part of their salary.

The situation was so difficult that these men escaped and preferred to live as illegal workers. Ippei Torii, a

trade unionist, says: "Koyama's stance is a fitting illustration of the government's attitude toward foreign workers," says Torii, whose union includes Asian and African workers in Japan. Rather than ask questions about the situation of trainees, he says, businesses are urging longer trainee visas. According to the Justice Ministry, 5.27 million foreigners entered Japan last year and 1.6 million are officially registered as living in the country. The ministry estimates that there are 280,000 illegal workers in Japan, but activists say the number could be double. "Japanese workers shun small companies because of poor working conditions and low pay. Thus the demand for cheap foreign labour despite the economic slowdown," explains Torii.

A 2000 report by the UN pointed out that Japan will need 600,000 immigrants each year over the next 50 years to maintain its working population at its 1995 size. A poll conducted by the Cabinet Office in November showed that 49.4 percent of respondents do not condone the presence of illegal foreign workers. Many of the 3,000 respondents said they were worried about an increase in the crime rate and unemployment due to the foreign population—which critics call unfair discrimination.

Japan's ageing society means it urgently needs to develop a foreign worker policy. Jiro Nakamura, professor of economics at Tokyo Metropolitan University, says, "There is no denying foreign workers a place in Japan. We must accept them legally and treat them as equal to Japanese workers," he says. ♦ (IPS)

Counting India

NEW DELHI – India began counting its people this month after 10 years, in an exercise expected to show the social impact of a decade of economic reforms.

The \$217 million census is supposedly the world's largest, with over two million enumerators. India has been conducting census operations every 10 years since 1872. The specially trained enumerators will visit some 20 million households in over 500,000 villages and 5,500 towns and cities.

The national population is projected to be 1.01 billion. From 200 million people at the turn of the last century, India's population doubled by the 1950s, and grew to nearly 900 million in 1991. High levels of illiteracy, especially among women, poverty and poor basic health services are the main hurdles to the 50-year-old national family planning programme.

The census aims to give a "complete account of the socio-economic development and demographic health" of the country. For the first time, Indians will be asked if they work, how they commute to work and their sources of income. This is the first census since India replaced forty years of socialist state control with economic liberalisation in July 1991. Other first-time questions will ask the age of marriage and the nature of work rural families are engaged in. The set of 23 questions posed in 18 languages, will also make the first count of disabled people in the country and ask them about the nature of the disability. Officials claim the census—aided by computers in another first—will be 98 percent accurate. Provisional results are expected in mid-May.

But enumerators won't ask the one question most useful to politicians—people's caste. The only exception will be the officially designated Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who are guaranteed affirmative action in India's Constitution. The question—if a person belongs to the so-called other backward castes (OBCs)—was removed from the questionnaire after a bitter public debate. Indian politics has been thrown in upheaval during the past decade with the emergence of powerful new parties championing the cause of the OBCs. (IPS)

The road to Mandalay

BANGKOK – The 13 February opening of a highway between Myanmar and India linking South and South-east Asia has more political than economic or cultural significance for both countries.

Yangon and New Delhi insist the 160 km road, funded and built by India, is meant to smoothen existing trade and cultural contacts between the two neighbours. It will also make it easier for Myanmar's security forces to take on armed rebels from adjoining



north-east India, who are known to operate out of bases across the border in north-western Myanmar.

The road link is a major diplomatic gain for both nations. It is a "triumph" for Myanmar's military rulers in challenging the international isolation they have faced, and India has gained an ally in countering China's growing influence. Named the Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road, it links the north-eastern Indian border town of Moreh in Manipur state, with Kalewa in Myanmar. It is to be extended to Myanmar's second largest city, Mandalay. Yangon says the road is a key link on the proposed Asian Highway linking the continent to Europe. The road is the first of "several cross-border (infrastructure) cooperation projects," Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh said.

India and Myanmar also agreed to start border trade at four points and cooperate in battling Indian insurgents. Myanmar is likely to reopen the Indian consulate in Mandalay. Before leaving Yangon Thursday, Singh opened the Myanmar-India Friendship Centre for Remote Sensing and Data Processing, set up with the help of the Indian Space Research Organisation. India will also help in developing Myanmar's oil and natural gas fields.

Singh praised Yangon for the steps it was taking for the restoration of democracy. Singh's visit returns the November 2000 New Delhi visit of Maung Aye, vice chairman of Myanmar's military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The softening stance of the military regime toward the pro-democracy opposition has revived hopes of an end to the decade-old political deadlock. "This new context diminishes the arguable diplomatic odium of a particularly warm handshake between India and Myanmar at this moment," wrote the Indian daily *The Hindu*.

Indian diplomats say New Delhi's policy of engaging Yangon is a more effective way of nudging Myanmar to democracy. Countries like Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have made major business investments in Myanmar, they say. They deny that the move is important to counter China, but according to *The Hindu*, "New Delhi's present policy deserves to be evaluated in the context of India's increasing need for strategic autonomy in its foreign policy." Indian media has often reported about Chinese assistance in upgrading Myanmar's naval facilities along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. India also wants Myanmar's help in combating drug smuggling from South-east Asia into India. (IPS)

"I regret having supported Koirala"

Excerpts from an interview with Khum Bahadur Khadka, Congress dissident
Ghatana Ra Bichar, 14 February

- Q. People say that since you were not offered a suitable ministry you refused to join the government. What do you have to say to this?

A. I have an answer for people who say that. Prime Minister Koirala removed me earlier from his cabinet after accusing me of trying to overthrow him. I was minister for construction and water resources at that time. These two ministries between them get almost 50 percent of all development money. I was removed from these two ministries. If anyone has anything more to say, then I have nothing to say to him or her. A person who works will be able to work in any ministry. For the development of the nation, the construction and development ministry is the best. Therefore for me the ministry is not very important, the nation, people, democracy and the Congress are more important. For the sake of party unity, I will not only sacrifice a ministry but am willing to do anything else also.
- Q. How successful do you think Koirala will be in uniting the party?

A. A politician must always be hopeful, must believe and hope for the best. There is still some hope, not everything has been destroyed. Senior leaders must get together, act together and take the party and the government forward. If the present situation persists, then the Congress will cease to exist. Right now, some of us may be in the government and some may not, but remember there is only one year left for local elections and national elections are only three years away. We can forecast the results of the national elections by analysing the results of the local elections. In my view, the Congress will be in a worse position. If the Congress loses the election, it will never be able to rise nor will people ever believe it. Every time we come to power, we start fighting among ourselves. For how long are the people going to give us a majority? At the present moment people want peace, employment, security, not Congress infighting all the time. People believe in democracy and they believe that the Congress is democratic and vote for it time and again. The Congress has not been able to use this mandate properly at all. This is the tragedy of the Congress. If we do not get our act together and unite, then the future of the Congress is very bleak.
- Q. Who do you think is responsible for the present state of the party—some individuals or the entire party?

A. I think everyone is responsible to some extent, especially those in whose hands the party is at present. Maybe we too are responsible to some extent. I think it is not correct to point fingers at some people and not accept our share of the blame. The people at the top have to shoulder a little more of this blame. We can only give advice and make recommendations. It is up to the leadership to take action.
- Q. Koirala became the prime minister promising good governance, security, the control of corruption and the strengthening of government agencies. You supported him in the formation of the government. What do you have to say of his 11 months in power?

A. Yes, it is true I supported Koirala in removing Bhattarai and becoming PM. I was a minister then also, but I supported Koirala and resigned from my post. At that time I felt that the government was not able to provide security to the people and Bhattarai was not doing a very good job. There was friction in the government at that time. I felt that if Koirala became the prime minister the security aspect would be taken care of. Not only me, every party worker in the country was looking up to Koirala with great expectations. It is because of these reasons that I supported Koirala. But we were let down on both fronts. After he took over, things have become worse. The issue of security has gone out of the window. We did not think that such a situation would pop up when we removed Bhattarai. We thought that there would be security for everyone and a dialogue would be started with the Maoists. Now, when I look at the decision I made at that time, I realise I was wrong.



NIC to become a company

Desbantar, 11 February
देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

It has been learnt from various sources that the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) is going to be converted into a company from the Nepali new year. NTC is currently governed under the Corporation Act and after the said conversion it will be covered by the Company Act. Although there has been no official announcement, sources say that the process is already underway. Established nearly 25 years ago, NTC is fully government owned. This is one of the few government corporations that has been making huge profits for a long time. In fiscal 1999-2000, NTC earned a profit of Rs 2.59 billion.

NTC is on the list of companies the government has planned to privatise for a long time now. Under the 8th five-year plan (1992-1997) 16 corporations and companies were privatised. A target was also set to sell off another 30 companies and corporations under the 9th five-year plan, but in the first three years of the current plan the government has been able to dispose of only one. A second company, Butwal Power Company, is in the process of being privatised.

Maoists in the manger

Budhabar, 14 February
बुधवार

The Maoists have prohibited the people of Nayakbada village in Jajarkot district from using their community forests. It appears that the Maoists had asked the villagers to help in the formation of a local



people's committee and when they refused, the rebels reacted thus. Since the economic condition of the villagers is very weak, most of the men in the area migrate to India in the winter and take up all sorts of menial work. They save some money and return to their villages in the spring to cultivate and sow their fields. During winter, the women start collecting fodder for their cattle, firewood and other household goods. These women are now facing a great problem. For some time now, the Maoists have stopped the women from taking their cattle out to graze, have prevented them from cutting grass, and from collecting fodder and firewood.

The tragedy is that while the Maoists state that they are fighting for the rights of these people, they are torturing the very people they claim to represent. The Maoists have stated that if the villagers refuse to help them, then they will have no option but to chase away all the villagers and empty the villages. They then hope to fill these empty villages with people who support them. The villagers have so far refused to help the Maoists in any way. Another source of information states that the villagers are fed up with the behaviour of the Maoists after they began collecting taxes. These poor

villagers earn hardly anything. If they pay taxes to the Maoists, how are they going to survive?

Recently, people from ward 5 of Dahagaon village in the same district, are reported to have chased away some Maoists who had come to collect donations from the villagers. It seems that the Maoists used to enter the village, terrify and threaten the people, eat their food, extort money in various ways and make people suffer. It seems this time when the Maoists came, the villagers got together, took and threw away their guns and locked them up with their cattle in the barns. They released them the next morning but only after warning the Maoists not to enter the village again.

ML worries about the nation

Janadharana, 15 February
जनधारणा

The third national meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal/ Marxist-Leninist (CPN-ML) was held recently. The meeting concluded that many foreign powers were directly or indirectly interfering in the country's affairs. The ML has asked all political parties and fellow citizens to take this into consideration and to keep a sharp watch on all these powers. It has asked citizens to be careful and to crush the hands of all those who have evil designs on this country.

On the issue of Maoists, the party has stated that if the government continues to function in the present manner there is going to be civil war in the country in the near future. It further states that the government has already lost control of some areas in the country and that it will not be long before it loses more territory. It accuses the government of not being serious and of not being interested in solving the problem. It states that the country needs a change of leadership and although the Left parties could provide leadership to the country, the Left parties are divided into so many small factions that unity is difficult if not impossible. It states that unity among all Left parties is the need of the hour and that they should make all efforts to come together. It states that the Congress government has proved itself to be corrupt, inefficient and has lost the moral right to govern. The evil designs of the Congress have now come to the forefront and it should relinquish its hold on power immediately.

Tainted army officials freed

Jana Aastha, 14 February
आस्था

A court of inquiry was held against some officers of the Royal Nepal Army charged with selling arms, rations and ammunition to the Lebanese militia while on UN duty in Lebanon. Cases were filed against Lieutenant-Colonel Rajendra Khadka and 56 other army personnel. Besides Khadka all 56 personnel have been found not guilty and released, and it is expected that Khadka too will get a very lenient sentence. It is expected that Khadka will be fined Rs3-3.5 million and then asked to resign, while the rest of them will see their promotion stopped for the next few years and let off lightly.

According to sources, the inquiry was held under the

leadership of a brigadier in the staff college, Kiran Sumsher, and that his report is going to be presented on Sunday. Last Monday, Brigadier Kiran Sumsher left with 35 other army personnel for Dhaka to take part in a military programme. That very evening all 56 personnel besides Khadka were released and asked to report the next day at 10 am to the places where they had been detained. When they showed up, they were asked to report to their places of posting immediately.

According to military sources, Captain Hari Sharan Adhikary, the brother-in-law of defence secretary, Padam Kumar Acharya, too was involved in this case. Adhikary had to be saved at any cost and to save him the others involved were also let off with a very light sentence. After being released, Adhikary went to meet Acharya early in the morning. The secretary assured him that since he himself would be looking into the case now, Adhikary would not get a harsh sentence. One lieutenant colonel, nine majors, 18 other officers and 15 to 16 lower ranks were involved in this case.

Police resources in one area only

Naya Sadak, 19 February
नयाँ सडक

The Maoist insurgency which was previously only active in the mid western regions of Nepal has now spread to the eastern and southern districts of Nepal. According to a senior official in the police headquarters since resources had to be mobilised to the most-affected districts of Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Salyan, and Pyuthan, it has led to an increase in rebel and criminal activities in the eastern and southern areas of the country.

Thirty-five percent of the police personnel posted in Jhapa have been shifted to the western districts to help the striking force. The police have identified 26 districts as the most-affected areas. But this step has not been of much help. Most of the districts in the country have already started to feel the effect of the People's War. An official at the district police office in Jhapa said that headquarters had already sent word to the Home Ministry that 20 percent of the police personnel posted in the Mechi and Koshi zones have been taken to Maoist-affected districts. This transfer has reduced the number of personnel for day-to-day policing. The Superintendent of Police for Mechi Zone, Keshav Baral, says it is both difficult and dangerous to send smaller police forces to patrol at night because of the increase in rebel activity in these areas.

It is not only manpower that has been reduced. Around 45 percent of communication equipment and weapons have also been sent to the more seriously affected areas. Police say the reduction in communication equipment has made it difficult for them to work in the eastern and southern areas. Sixty percent of the 22 pistols which had been bought just a few months ago do not work properly and some 500 of the 'three-nought-three' rifles have been captured by the Maoists, leaving the police with only a bare minimum of weapons to work with. "The remaining weapons too have been sent away," says a police official. "If a security policy is not developed now and implemented throughout the nation, while transferring manpower and resources only to the more affected areas, the whole situation will worsen."

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The Prime Minister is against corruption and he is committed to the institutional development of democracy. We do not understand why is he taking so long to show respect to a democratic norm. But we are hopeful that he will make a dignified exit.
—CPN-UML leader, Ishwor Pokharel, demanding the prime minister's resignation on his alleged involvement in the controversial Lauda Air deal in Tarun, 19 February.



"Hey beggar, issue me a ticket I want to go back home."

नेपाल समाचारपत्र Nepal Samacharpatra, Daily, 18 February 2001

Will it be champagne for the champions in India?

Bill Lawry's team was the last group of men in baggy green to win a Test series in India. On pitches that were tailor-made for the Indian spin bowlers, Ashley Mallett finished with the substantial haul of 28 wickets as the Aussies pulled away to win 3-1.

"The Australians haven't won

Not too much emphasis should be placed on India's 2-0 series win in 1978-9 either. The cream of Australian cricket was involved in the

The Australian tour of 1998 was doomed from the outset. They arrived in India without pace ace Glenn McGrath and with Shane Warne a pale shadow of his normal self. Though the Sheik of Tweak bowled well in patches, the niggling shoulder injury that would require an operation just two months later was preying on his mind. While most remember the manner in which Sachin Tendulkar went after him, much of the credit has to go to Navjot Sidhu (who made four scores over 50 in that series), the Sardar never allowing Warne the luxury of settling into a line and length.

Much has changed in the past three years. Sidhu now offers expert insight into the game, while Warne arrives here having battled both injuries and controversy. McGrath is also here—his reputation enhanced by some sterling displays—having

Much has been made of the Australians' winning streak, both at home and in the Indian media. They arrive here with fifteen Test match wins on the trot, eleven of them having come on home soil. Such figures needn't really worry the Indians too much. They themselves put together the mother of all streaks, going unbeaten at home for thirteen seasons until South Africa broke the spell last March. In a sense, that 2-0 drubbing at the hands of the Proteas was the best thing that could've happened to Indian cricket. The weight of history can prove to be a terrible burden at times. As Nasser Hussain said after England's historic victory in Karachi, the pressure was always going to be on Pakistan since they had never lost at the National Stadium. Hussain's team had nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

With India's aura of invincibility at home now a thing of the past, the team can go into this crucial series with a clean slate. And that is exactly how need to approach the three Test matches. Forget about the fact that Australia hasn't won here in 31 years; forget about Waugh's winning streak. None of that counts for anything now, being just mere lines in the history books. The team that seizes the moment, without being weighed down by ghosts from the past, will prevail. As an older and wiser Mick Jagger sang in the early nineties, "Think about the future, stop living in the past. Time's not standing still, so stop looking through those tinted glasses..." ♦ (totalcricket.com)

LONDON - Not satisfied with beating England to staging the 2006 World Cup finals, the Germans are now threatening to make television coverage of the finals pay-per-view in England. And that is not just for the finals on their own soil in five years' time as the deal struck by Kirch, a German company who have paid £1.5billion for the European rights to broadcast the 2002 and 2006 finals, also threatens coverage of the Japan-South Korea finals next summer.

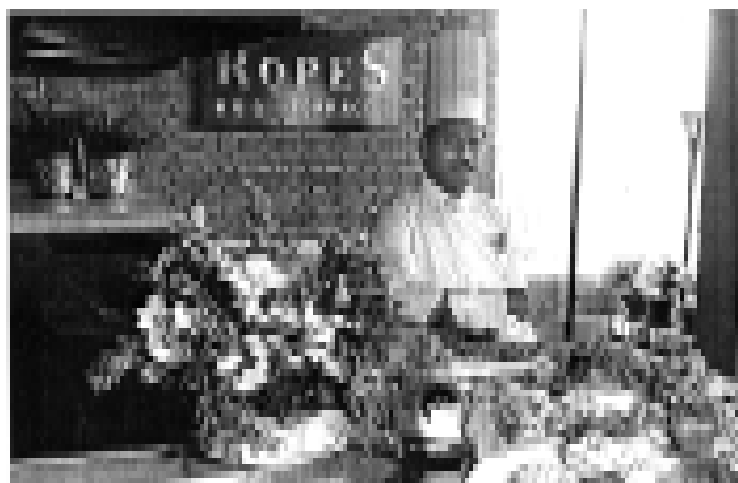


However, Kirch believe that they can circumvent British legislation and are pinning their hopes on a Court of Appeal decision using examples of precedents that they believe have already seen “protected” events being sold to subscription broadcasters such as Sky and ONdigital. The Court of Appeal ruling is expected by early March and Kirch are hoping the decision will go their way—having paid so much for the rights to the consecutive finals.

In turn the BBC and ITV will continue to balk at paying £90million each for the Japan-South Korean finals, not least because the match timings will see the majority of games screened in the early morning which they feel will lead to reduced viewing figures. ♦ (sports.com)

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The golden mask of the White Bhairab

One of the most dramatic sights in Kathmandu, heightened by the fact that it is revealed only once a year and then only for a few days is the great golden mask of Seto Bhairab, in the Durbar Square. For those who remember J. Milton Hayes' poem, the *Green Eye of the Yellow God*, thought by many to be vintage Kipling, this vast and pleasantly terrifying Bhairab is the kind of image the mind associates with the frivolous whim of a colonel's daughter and the irreverent exploits of Mad Carew. Commissioned in 1769 by King Rana Bahadur Shah, a great builder who in anguish caused more temples to be destroyed than he had built, its purpose apparently is to protect the old palace by warding off evil influences. Normally the mask can barely be glimpsed behind a carved wooden screen. But during the days of Indra

Jatra and the coinciding festival of the Living Goddess, it is open to public view, its golden crown of serpents, skulls and rock-sized jewels half hidden by floral and paper decoration: the petrified smile on its golden face heightened by black, red and white paint: awesomely colossal: too magnificent to be terrifying, though its white teeth suggest sacrificial hunger and its angry eyes were designed to strike fear into evil hearts.

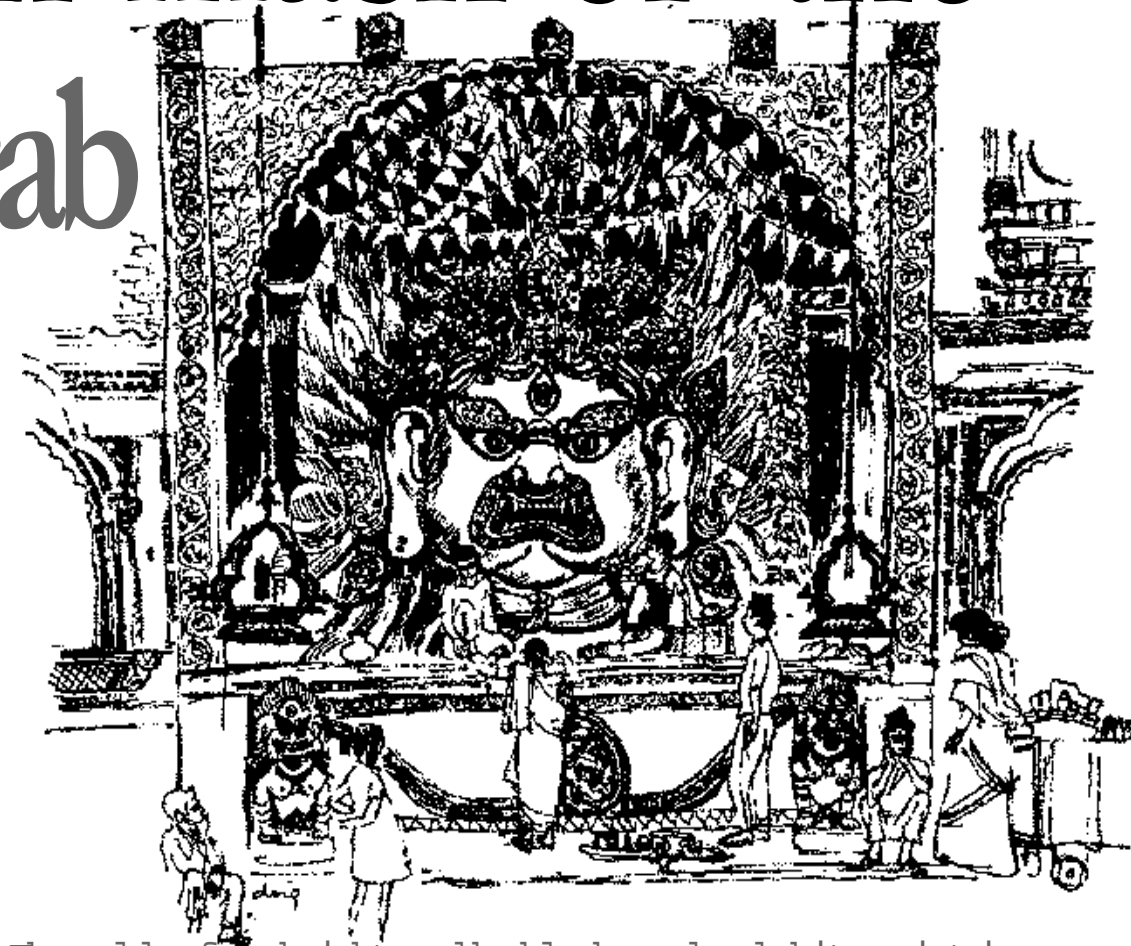
Young boys sit beside the scarlet mouth as if tempting providence, collecting offerings and giving *prasad* in return. Crowds form and disperse. Individuals or

families perform elaborate pujas before the god. Tourists visibly stunned by so incredible a sight go wild with still and movie cameras. The best is yet to come.

After being drawn through the streets of Kathmandu on her gilded *rath*, the Living Goddess, attended by her young escorts Bhairab and Ganesh, pauses before the great mask of the Seto Bhairab. Crowds by now are so dense it seems the Kumari's chariot will never move again. It is one of those fantastic sights that wears an aura of disbelief. The old palace on two sides, its temple towers filled with scarlet cloth, the scarlet Hanuman under his ceremonial umbrella beside a golden gate framed by statuary, stout palace pillars carved with green, writhing snakes; soldiers in old uniforms, clouds of incense, showers of flowers and coins on the three *raths*, the great grimacing mask of Bhairab reflecting the flames of votive lamps, and temples crowding the other side, among them a golden statue of a Malla king and his four sons on a stone pedestal.

The Kumari, her forehead painted red and gold, her eyes accentuated with *kajal*, crowned elaborately and dressed in cloth of gold and scarlet silk, sits serenely on a gilded throne, glancing with ill concealed interest at the dwarfing mask beside her *rath*. Basketfuls of *prasad* are dumped about her. Then a shout goes up as the ropes go taut and the chariots roll.

The Seto Bhairab is now the sole focus of attention as from a tube



The golden face heightened by black, red and white paint is awesomely colossal. Its white teeth suggest sacrificial hunger and its angry eyes were designed to strike fear into evil hearts.

protruding from his mouth, blessed rice beer begins to flow. The crowd scrambles, shoves, vaults each others' backs, is held up briefly by helping hands, to get a mouthful of the sanctified liquor. Some are expert at taking long swigs without seeming to swallow. Others are liberally drenched. All hope that they will catch the live fish tiny enough to pass through the tube, that has been placed in the barrel of liquor behind the mask. It portends great luck, but though I have waited long to watch the scramble, night darkening all but the lamp-lit

mask, I have yet to see the fish caught. Hundreds of Bhairab masks are exposed during Indra Jatra. A favourite legend has a great Nepali king of old, Yalambar, journey to India to witness the epic battle of the Mahabharata. He went disguised as Shiva in his terrifying Bhairab form, wearing a silver mask. When Yalambar and Krishna met on the battlefield, the god of love asked the Nepali king on which side he intended to fight. Yalambar replied that he would join the losing side, whereupon Krishna, fearing that such a move might turn the battle, swept off Yalambar's head


with such force that it soared through the air and landed in the Kathmandu valley. It is exposed to this day, a handsome silver mask, known as the Akash Bhairab. It too is honoured by a visit from the Living Goddess. The countless other Bhairab heads exposed throughout the valley have as many tales attached to them that explain the reason for the god's decapitation. I have found none that explain how the handsome Seto Bhairab lost his body. ♦
(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, HarperCollins, 1999.)



Royal Nepal has been flying with the wrong Bhairab for 45 years. The logo below the cockpit is actually the Sweta Bhairab, although the airline thinks it's the Akash Bhairab



Gangri's Sui Mai
Ka 3-182, Teku
Kathmandu Road
Telephone: 260639/231456
Opening hours: 10:30 am to 9 pm, Daily

Recommendation: 
Price Range: \$ to \$\$

Gangri's Sui Mai, the 15-year-old Teku institution, serves up the most innovative momos in town. Weekend nights are busiest, but it's packed most weekdays between 6 and 7:30 pm as well. The half-Tibetan-half-Newar family-owned business has raked in customers since 1986 with its winning combination of low-key atmosphere, consistently good food and fast service.

The core competency at Sui Mai are the momos, which come in two styles—Sui Mai Special Open Momo (SOM) and Closed Tibetan. The SOM is ergonomically designed—paper-thin skin holds the filling together at the base, gracefully fluting into four separate compartments towards the top of the momo, giving it a distinctive and flower-like look. The true utility of the design is clear once the sauces arrive. No less

The Hungry Eye

A Teku institution serves up the most innovative momos in town.

than three delectable sauces are presented, refilled by attentive waiters as soon as you need a top-up. The first sauce is standard fare, dull red, packed with tomatoes and a hint of spice. The second is light, translucent and very spicy, a blend of green chillies and freshly shredded coriander. The third and ultimate sauce is an eclectic blend of peanuts, onions, a touch of red chilli powder, and what we think may have been coconut. Sweet but subtle, hot and crunchy all at the same time—outrageous.

Repeated pleas to be told exactly what was in the sauce elicited vague and almost shy responses from the extremely polite waiters clad in green and brown jackets. In desperation, they pointed us towards the owner's brother, who told us that his brother makes the sauce himself, and no one else knows what is in it. Their Tibetan mother brought the recipe with her when she moved to Kathmandu, and she's not telling!

The idea is to fill each compartment of the ten open momos with a different sauce, which results in a flavour explosion. Since there are four compartments for each momo, and three sauces, life gets a little complicated—just duplicate your favourite sauce in diagonal compartments for the best effect. We like to start off with a complete

peanut sauce momo, followed by a peanut sauce mixed with green sauce momo, and then a mixture of all three sauces for the next seven momos. Of course the final momo has to be pure peanut, as this sauce is truly irresistible. Like most Tibetan momos, Sui Mai's are more meat than dough, allowing one to easily polish off a platter of ten in under ten minutes. Momos come in chicken (Rs 55), and buff and vegetable (Rs 35). Excellent value.

Sui Mai's menu is extensive—snacks include interesting offerings like *Chicken Beachamber*, *Prawn Russian Hills* and *Chicken Flam Spring Roll*. Main dishes range from *Chinese style Chicken with Mushroom in Garlic Sauce* to *Continental Fish and Chips* to *Mushroom Cauliflower Curry Indian Style*. These are all equally indifferent in flavour and presentation, with the exception of *Garlic Ginger Fish with pan-fried noodles*. This proved to be surprisingly good value at Rs 110 a portion—boneless chunks of fish (with slightly too much batter), lightly tossed with shredded ginger on a bed of sweet and tangy garlic crusted noodles.

The soup menu is substantial, with 10 options, and again, excellent value for money, with most dishes in this section priced at Rs 35–40. Portions are generous and packed with meat, making for a nourishing one-dish

budget meal on a not-so-hungry day. *Peking Hot and Sour* turned out to be the perfect choice for a cold evening, tongue-numbingly hot with shredded chicken and elephant mushrooms, with caramelised carrots providing a rich sauce. The *Hot Minchow* is a light egg drop soup, with minced mushrooms, garnished with crunchy green celery. *Tahmeini*, *Chicken Clear Soup*, and *Buff Wonton Soup* are also good bets.

Highly recommend—starting with a soup, and then an order of momos, which will set you back less than Rs 100 per head. Service is super-fast, so first order the soup and then the momos, otherwise they may arrive at the same time. The music is usually reliable—Dire Straits on Wednesdays and Nepali folk/pop on Sundays. The constant chirping twitter of the bell that signals fresh momos coming out of the steamer can also keep one entertained for a while if there's an unusual delay.

Gangri's Sui Mai has a Sino-Tibetan atmosphere with a fair bit of décor on the green walls—red lamps which seem mandatory in any place that serves 'Chicken in Hot Garlic Sauce', to painted fans with graceful flying birds on them. *Shao Mai*, *Shui Mai* and *Shio Mei* all mean "dumpling" in Chinese. Although the term usually

The Hungry Eye prowls Kathmandu Valley in search of offbeat places to eat.

Ratings take into account food quality, taste, hygiene levels and service and come in the following categories:

 Not recommended

 Recommended

 Highly recommended

Price ratings are approximately:

\$ Cheap

\$\$ Moderate

\$\$\$ Expensive

refers to shrimp or pork dumplings, neither of which is served at Gangri's Sui Mai, the connection is unmistakable.

Since peanut sauce is usually eaten only with grilled or roasted meats in Chinese cuisine, Gangri's Sui Mai's innovative approach towards creating exciting fusion cuisine is truly creditable—changing people's perceptions is no easy task. But the double row of motorbikes parked outside, the tables packed with couples out for a quick meal, expats in the know, and business people quaffing their own rum in a quiet corner, shows that if you offer Kathmandu diners consistent quality along with a new twist, they'll keep coming. ♦

Tashi Delek, Iron-Snake Year



SALIL SUBEDI

The Tibetan New Year (Lhosar) is a time of joyous celebration for Nepal's Sherpa and Tibetan community, and this year it falls on Saturday, 24 February. The best place to see the festivities in Kathmandu is around the Boudha stupa, and if you are already in the Khumbu, then Namche Bazaar or Tengboche Monastery are the places to go. People in traditional chubas, lamas and high priests dancing, singing and praying—the first three days of the first lunar month in the Tibetan calendar is a time for celebration and prayer.

Nepal actually has two other Lhosars besides the Tibetan-Sherpa one: the Tamu (Gurung) and the Tamang Lhosars. The former was celebrated last month and the Tamang Lhosar also falls on a different date. This year, the Tibetan-Sherpa Lhosar celebrates the beginning of the Iron-Snake Year 2128. The festivities begin on New Year's eve, 23 February, and culminates on 25 February. The day-long Sherpa Lhosar is on 26 February. In Khumbu the New Year is celebrated on 3 March.

All the different Lhosars in Nepal

have their own characteristics. But the general rule is that while the Tamu and Tamang Lhosars are more cultural in nature, the Tibetan-Sherpa Lhosar has a marked religious character. But the common strand that runs through all Lhosars are prayers for peace and for auspicious omens.

Celebrations kick off with feasts of traditional foods like kapse (Tibetan cookies), dresi (battered rice cooked with vegetables), sho (curd) and chhang. The real spectacle at Boudha and Tengboche is the cham dance, that whirling all-day dancing by monks. On New Year's Day itself (the 26th) the old and the young alike carry out the traditional circle-dance in the courtyards of gompas. The highlight of the day is usually the Mahakala Dance, choreographed according to the myths and legends of Mahayana Buddhism. The dance is supposed to drive away evil forces, depicted by Mahakala, whose effigy is burnt at the climax. Says Amdo Lama of Boudha: "The Mahakala is a very important ritual, we believe that it wards off evil spirits."

By the third day of the New Year celebrations, the rituals take on a more festive air with the eating of guthuk (a

This Lhosar, go to the nearest gumpa and join Nepal's Tibetan and Sherpa communities in the celebration of their New Year.

noodle dish made with tasty dumplings) and the drinking of copious quantities of chhang. "It's basically party time," explains another Boudha resident, Karma Tashi. "We visit friends and relatives and make merry."


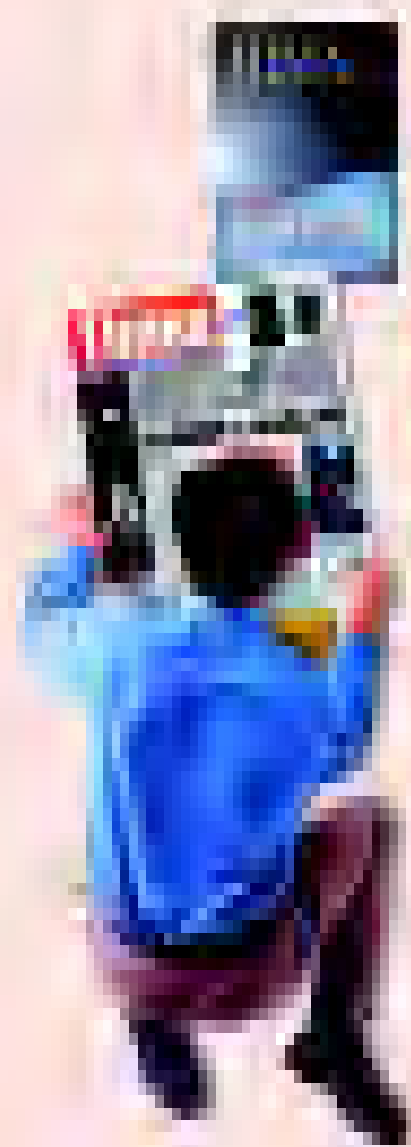
The third day is also when the old prayer flags are replaced with bright new ones. Monks from different monasteries in Nepal come to Boudha to circumambulate the famous stupa, and nothing quite prepares you for this ant-like procession of maroon and yellow monks shuffling around the shrine.

This year there are five Sherpa community elders coordinating the management of the Sherpa festivities in Boudha which will take place at the Sherpa Gumpa (just before the gates of Boudha stupa). "We will start the festival early in the morning, from 8 am. There will be a dance of the monks, followed by a sherbu group dance of all Sherpa people who want to join in," says an official.

The Sherpa Lhosar is similar to the Tibetan Lhosar, but Sherpas of Khumjung and Khunde have already celebrated their New Year. "Though all Sherpa people follow the same calendar for the New Year, the actual day of celebration differs from place to place," explains Phinzo Sherpa, country manager of the environmental group, Eco-Himal and vice-chairman of the Himalayan Sherpa Cultural Association. The Sherpas of Namche will celebrate their Lhosar on 3 March. In Kathmandu, the Himalayan Sherpa Cultural Association along with the Nepal Sherpa Association, the Nepal Sherpa Student's Forum and the Nepal Sherpa Service Centre, are taking out a car and motorbike rally on 26 February. The Sherpa and Tamangs of Helambu, Taplejun, Ramechhap and elsewhere in the highland regions have their own dates fixed to celebrate Lhosar, but the Sherpa community is the only one that follows the Tibetan calendar. ♦

From left to right: The altar for the Tibetan new year with the 'darga' that comprises of khapse, chhang, lubu, dresi, chema, with other offerings of sweets and butter. Chhang in ceremonial jugs. Chema, made out of tsampa and butter, is sprinkled as a good sign to commemorate the new year.





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HOMAGE TO THE FATHER OF THE NATION: At a ceremony on 18 February to mark the 51st Democracy Day, King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya seen flanking a cutout of King Tribhuvan at the army pavilion in Tundikhel.



MANAKAMANA TOUR: On the occasion of Democracy Day, AM Promotion sponsored a trip to Manakaman by cable car for the physically frail and financially weak elderly. Among the pilgrims was 102-year-old Sanjali Lama.



CHILD 'BRIDES': Young Newar girls line up for the Lasa Kusa (welcome) ceremony after the communal 'Bel Biha' that is organised every year by the Darbar Square Club.

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On higher ground

If there is one politician who is not just bent on reaching the top of the proverbial political dung heap, it is Ramesh Dangol. The politician and sportsman can't wait for the spring mountaineering season to begin. Mountains have always fascinated the 39-year-old chairman of Kathmandu's Ward 2, but only recently has he started paying his respects to them from up close. Inspired by his recent successful ascent of Yala Peak, he now wants to get to the top of Mt. Everest this year. He is doing all he can, following a tough daily physical training regimen that stretches to four hours over weekends. And he'll be accompanied to the peak of Everest by the very best—the legendary Babu Chhiri Sherpa. "It's part of my attempt to change the general perception that politicians talk big but do little," he says a little shyly. Dangol was elected on a CPM-UML ticket, and when the party split in 1998, he decided to go along with the CPN (Marxist-Leninist) splinter group. "I want to do something extraordinary that my community can take pride in," he says. Dangol's struggle to change the "general perception" of people isn't restricted to traipsing up and down mountains, though. He tries in more traditional ways, too, like by actually serving his constituents as best as he can. During his tenure, Ward 2 (the Lazimpat area) has witnessed impressive changes—the locality is significantly cleaner than it used to be, more than 2 km of inner roads have been black-topped and more areas are now served by an efficient sewerage system. His efforts have not gone unnoticed by residents—although his party saw a disastrous defeat in the last general election, he still commands a trail of local supporters. "There is much more to attain, and I am obliged to fulfil my election promises," says the athlete-cum-politician-cum-mountaineer. Dangol is a determined man who nevertheless came to politics after failures and disappointments. All job applications he put in here, on the strength of his Bachelor's degree in automobile engineering, were rejected. After a hard time in Nepal his skills and good judgement were recognised in Bahrain, where he worked for 18 months. "I was denied jobs here because I didn't have political connections. I got involved in politics because I want to change that," he says. Dangol prefers doing sport alone because of run-ins with the bureaucracy—despite a stellar performance as a sprinter at a national sporting meet, he was not asked to represent his home zone, Bagmati at any other time. He had also been selected to the national taekwondo team for the 1986 Seoul Asian Games, but was dropped for speaking his mind about a decision made regarding a team-member. Firm convictions and determination aside, there's more to Dangol than just toughness—his friends know his love for music and flowers. He himself says: "I surrendered to my love for my wife." He's an ardent follower of Newari culture, and a Buddhist, but six months ago married a non-Newar and non-Buddhist woman. No, she's not going up Everest with him, but she certainly will be on his mind. ♦



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