Sex on the road

Poverty, social vulnerability—and high demand—are forcing hundreds of women into sex work along Nepal’s highways. Transport workers, migrant workers, policemen and soldiers are the bulk of their clients, but students, professionals and Indian tourists are also contributing to the recent boom in the highway sex market. It is 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.

A few years ago, Binod Bhattacharya traveled to centres near Kathmandu and Narayanghat where commercial sex workers and their clients congregate. An exclusive report, Drive through sex, on p. 4-5.

Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

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 sport facilities at the National Stadium. This year, the participating representative teams have already shown great spirit of sportsmanship, proving once more that it is not just a matter of winning or losing, but in keeping the nation’s youth alive and kicking. This time the matches are being played at the Zoo Town where the goal is to score. The teams are divided into two categories: the Under-18 and the Open categories.

In what seems to be a move heavy with symbolism, the National Security Council is planning to move an army camp from the Gorkha Darbar to the 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 not clear what will be the new location of the camp, but it is expected that the move will help in securing the palace from further attacks by the Maoists.

In the context of the recent controversy regarding the move of the army camp, the government is also planning to move the national parliament to a new location in Kathmandu. This move is expected to help in securing the parliament from further attacks by the Maoists. The move is also expected to help in reducing the pollution in the capital city.

Gorkha Darbar

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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, a well-known lawyer and law teacher. On the other is the chief of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Surendra 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 the right of the CIAA to investigate and bring charges, and b) the right of the CIAA to carry out investigations 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 Surendra Maskey, held for trying to take Rs12.1 million in bogus currency notes out of the country and also ordered that the money be returned to the accused. The CIAA wanted to know why the money was returned and not confiscated.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had banned export of Rs500 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, but though

Electronic Mail
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 vicarious 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 kabbad 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 bandhas, 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 fluid 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 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 politicos 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 dippings of the hotels, travel agencies and trekking outfitters 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, Aaas, it was not to be. The riots and hotel strikes sabotaged tourist arrivals, the plane started flying empty, 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. Anyone in the capital knows the noise, you could have heard it from the moon. 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?
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.

In his latest column (#30) CK Lal makes this astonishing observation: "In order to learn anything from history, you need to read it with a point of view, without the intervention of one's subjectivity. It might be salutary to note that the late French thinker Michael Foucault protested (in English) and abusive threats against businesses and individuals, the media, the media, religion, tourism, foreigners, or aid agencies. The exceptions—such as blackmailing business leaders and NGOs, a couple of robbing of trekking groups, a hotel, an and let me

CK Lal. But is there a nation on this earth that has not knowingly that what Nietzsche called "monstrous" (heroic and triumphant) history?

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

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 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. Many of the sons work here as they feel guilty about their profession. If there wasn’t enough, the majority also carry the trauma of having been denied their husbands, usually for another woman. They all seem to be haunted by promises of their future, as they see 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 operation their clients through pimps, who are usually ignorant workers—or even criminals themselves, who may trade their brokering service for fees. The brothels and lodges located in areas busy with trucks, goods and other forms of transport are the main contact point for pimps, sex workers and clients

Aid from Ancient Asia

Into this non-Shangri La care 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, help them. But make it worth our while. Our mysterious but well funded office, stepping into technology and ideas from the west, is developing the urban aspirations of those that help them. They feel they’re not getting what they’re entitled to, and start blaming everyone but themselves. The Asian benefactors are shocked and appalled. Sitting around an exclusive inn, amidst steaming cadrons 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 the adults to change things. 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 start blaming everyone but themselves.
NATION

policemen and manual workers. Targeting mainly low-paying clients worker who is now a madam, “I provide a safe place and take my mobile sex workers for their business. The neighbourhood also rely on buy luxuries, a majority are driven to those sense, to their profession and sex workers are now habituated, in tourism hubs in mid-west Nepal Darjeeling and Sikkim in India and these trips CSWs travel to Siliguri, their guests, but even arrange week- lodges at border towns like in its project areas of Sunsari, Morung and Jhapa. And many of the lodges at border towns like Karova not only seek for their guests, but even arrange working-long package tours on behalf of their regular Indian customers. On these trips CSWs travel to Siliguri, Darjeeling and ShikLM 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, alcoholics and other additions.

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”. The clause to legalise abortion did not have many opponents in the districts, according to the statute, the day or half of all staff 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. The NEERA research found that regular condom use is uncommon among sex workers and their clients. In 1999, the workers had jumped to 51 percent among truck drivers, up from 33 percent in 1997, and 32 percent among migrant workers, up from 23 percent in 1997. But it is not all— they also show 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 48 percent of sex workers said they used condoms consistently. Alcoholism among sex workers is another reason for relatively low levels of condom use. “Awareness about the use of condoms is definitely increased, but they are not aware that by having multiple partners they are risking their health,” said Meena Neupane of GWDF.

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 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 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 in and out of the “project area” in Pajeros, and no action plans. Still Annantalingeswar Primary School in Dhadikh, 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, that his students of Darik, 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 uniform 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 2,000, 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 its Rs 100,000 so far, but could still use some donations.

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 Nakhal, Bhaktapur. The NSET provides technical support for reinforcing the buildings, while communities contribute funds for the construction. Four public schools in Dharan, one in Sankhu, one in Bhaktapur and another in Kathmandu have already been reinforced. "We are attempting to educate communities on how small protective measures today can mitigate death and injury when a major earthquake occurs," says Arshad Hussain, General Secretary of NSET-Nepal. The movement is also being celebrated as the year in which a 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 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 all 58 municipalities.

Chandni in IFAD presidency race

The 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 of Women’s Division in 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 Paddy Ashford, 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 (Mali, Senegal, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Benin, Gambia, and Senegal).
As the trekking season re-comes, remember that altitude sickness is “100 percent preventable”. Ascend slowly. Never climb with altitude sickness. Descend immediately if symptoms worsen.

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 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 should 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.

Descend when the ill person can still walk. If they can’t walk, send a message to friends. If you have insurance, include details of that too. This takes less time if you register your vehicle before your trek and then give them details of your rescue insurance.

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

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
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<td>India</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
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To report an AMS emergency, contact the High Altitude Rescue Association (HRA) at Pheriche (4,243 m). The HRA posts at Manang (3,500 m) and Pheriche are equipped with an oxygen concentrator, and can provide a minimum standard of care for 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 “Never ascend with mild symptoms of AMS. And if you 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 universally perceived that the effect of hypoxia on the brain causes most of the symptoms people experience. Obesity, however, holds that the chemical messages within the brain controlling around the homeostasis in ventilation is where explain why 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 ascent, 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: shauri, meaning ‘breath’ and jala, meaning ‘mountain’, and a term in Nepal bho lagnu. These show that AMS is known even among the local population.”

Dr Basnyat believes that as mountains get higher and cheaper, more people are likely to suffer from AMS. What makes prevention even more important is the increasing number of people, who seek control of high-risk groups like porters and pilgrims, don’t have insurance for mountain sickness. “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 that the Nagarkot, 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. •
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 Mikeskel and Pratyush Onta spoke at a programme organised by NT’s sister publication Himal Khabarpataniti, “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 this? One thing that comes to mind is how to make social institutions work. There’s a Hindu concept that describes power as a triad of forces—gunas (raw physical force like military power), ashrams (the power of social institutions) and atmashakti (all that makes a society what it is, in other words, moral force). Our current malaise stems from failures in all three areas.

The Maoist “People’s War” has exposed the contradictions in the way the new dispensation is expected to channel the social power of society (Articles 118 and 119 of the Constitution, with their ambiguity about who controls the army). The government cannot use armed forces and is now in the process of creating a new “village force.” As Gandhi said, an eye for an eye will only lead the whole world blind. One way to seriously think about a draft army with conscriptions, such as the Swiss and the Scandinavians have, in which everyone has to serve (in the process acquire at least scholarly vocational skills). It had something similar in the 1970s with the National Development Service. This option is no longer a distant possibility. The Maoists have already started a volunteer army, and when (if and when) this force will be militarised 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 village forces is seen in the role of armed forces. The 1991 street protests were led by the police, but the police were not prepared for the task. To this day we see the terms of political office, and making sure office-holders return to their professions. We have a lot of seminars, but we have not had a dialogue so far. It is only after the parties, here and there, and on their own, accept the proposals by the parties. Then there were the discussions initiated by Padma Rama Tuladhar that had 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 Re. 1 billion now), and with no accountability for the way the money is spent, the government is dragging its feet on the issue.

There is the question of using the army against the Maoists, although the past year has been devoted to discussions on who controls the Nepal Army, the king or the prime minister. As confusion reigns it provided the palace with an opportunity to dwarf the leader of political parties. That may have helped the image of the palace in the short run, but it has not helped the real character of parliament by working to bring out its contradictions from within. It 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 strongly combine the strategy of the pre-1949 Chinese anti-colonial struggle—setting up base areas, surrounding and isolating sites—and the highly sectarian post-1967 Cultural Revolution dogma. I've been told "no other alternative way”—other than armed insurgency—but I don't think the Nepali Shining Path falls in Nepal’s Maoists fitted some kind, it has been overwhelmingly successful.

Armed struggle legitimises much greater violence in response. I believe much of Maoist violence is rather than create conditions that excite its intensification. I sense the Maoists are so sectarian they don't appreciate the need for complementary initiatives. In Peru, the Shining Path had demonstrated that mass participation in the process of confrontation is repressed and attacked them, making possible all. In pre-Revolutionary China, the Red Army’s strategy was to build wide alliances, so that their enemy would be confronted a broad front.

Securing the peace will be a choice, be it an exercise in management of violence. 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 activism, contesting elections. Part of the terms of political office, and making sure office-holders return to their professions. We have a lot of seminars, but we have not had a dialogue so far. It is only after the parties, here and there, and on their own, accept the proposals by the parties. Then there were the discussions initiated by Padma Rama Tuladhar that had 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 Re. 1 billion now), and with no accountability for the way the money is spent, the government is dragging its feet on the issue.

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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), integrated in the Jyoti Group while IPC is being promoted by the Chautara 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.

Bids for 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 Interkraft said that 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.

Nepal Grindlays Bank Limited

Nepal Grindlays Bank Limited has published its annual financial statement for the fiscal year 1999-2000. The bank has recorded a net profit of Rs 22.01 million, compared to Rs 18.08 million recorded last year. A dividend of 50 percent has been recommended. The bank has declared a total dividend of Rs 100 million, which comes to about 50 percent of the shareholders' equity. The bank has a capital adequacy ratio of 12.3 percent, compared to 13.3 percent last year. The bank's capital adequacy ratio is well above the minimum prescribed by the Reserve Bank of Nepal. The bank's loan portfolio has grown by 30 percent, reaching Rs 1.17 billion. The bank's non-performing loans have increased from 0.9 percent of the outstanding loans last year to 1.3 percent this year.

Nepal's blue chips

Nepal's blue chips include companies such as Himalaya, Chautara, Jyoti, Chautara, and Samrat. These companies are well-established and have a strong market presence. They are considered to be the top performers in the Nepali stock market. Their financial performance is tracked closely by investors and analysts. These companies are likely to continue their growth trajectory and are expected to perform well in the coming fiscal year.
Siddhartha SJB Rana is the 34-year-old heir of Pravakar Rana’s Soaltee Group. The soft-spoken but articulate Group President was elected to be one of this year’s 100 Global Leaders of Tomorrow (GLT) selected from business, government and the social sector. GL Ts 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 on task forces that discuss how to make the world a better place.

What did you take away from Davos?

I have a better understanding of the WEF now. It’s more than just a closed club of big business — it has begun to engage 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 Mahamudur, the Bangladeshi textile manufacturer, said George Soros had supported the Gramene 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.

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

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.

Are there signs of hope?

Yes, in vocation. There is well-researched journalism and key issues are being discussed in a very responsible manner. One wishes also for some encouragement 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 then only one way to go.

What's special about your group of companies?

Not much is done in Nepal with philanthropy…

We do a lot of social work because we are engaged in professional academic studies, but equally useful to administrators, social workers and planners.

We have a father-son relationship at home and at work it is a professional relationship. A lot of eyes were initially focused 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 be on your success before you move forward.” It has been a very healthy professional relationship.

What big is the company right now?

We have a turnover of about $110-$120 million, and employ about 1,500 people. The very recent Illoilo Koni 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 vocation. 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 meant the construed younger generation but every younger.

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

Over the decades the Nepal 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 — just look at the 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. There 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 treatment at the appropriate level. So if we go to India and ask if they are interested in hydropower development 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.
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 industry indicates that clients are serious about this market. Not just having a threshold ad presence but increasing ad spend," he adds.

"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 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.
CREATIVE HIGHS

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

A few 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 JB Shukla. 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 they have been working off is just gut feel. There has been some work done for the UV 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, is participating in 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 watching—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. Ø

Print and television: Mayos noodles

early billboards in the Valley, drawing throngs in 6th There (below), and a handful for early events—both parties at Christmas, and New Year (left).
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 allowing 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 NiMH 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.

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 650,000 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.

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, 6 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.

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 is a robust, easy-to-reach 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 water- 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.
The Metric Martyr

British or European laws? "If it goes on like this we will be ordering beer by the 0.583 litres," said Tony Bennett, a lifelong imperialist. "Justice in the balance," screamed a banner outside the magistrates court. "But nobody asks," the Tories' Nottingham West MP Neil Farron said, "if they care about." He is right. The old measures, coupled with backing from the Conservatives can mean trouble for Tony Blair’s government, seen by many as pro-Europe. A verdict in April just before elections, expected early May, would make this an issue in the campaign. "If I were like this I'd still be ordering beer by the 0.583 litres in pubs," a Tory said, explaining Hague’s stand. But it will stay, and so will miles. The rules apply to loose and packaged goods but in the list of loaves and pies, and points of political promise for the Tories, who’re far behind Labour in opinion polls.

"In the balance," screamed a banner outside the magistrate’s court in Sunderland in north-east England where the case is being heard. Another said: "Weighing a pound of bananas a criminal offence!" If in 21st century Europe this could be allowed to happen? A spokesperson for the local 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 on the day of the trial. Protests for the measurement of the metric system are set to highlight the proposal to legislate for metrication. Sunderland is often seen as the place to be in the struggle for change. The Metric Martyr, as he is known, has been a well-known figure in the campaign for metrication, and has been a vocal critic of the metric system.

Gustavo Capdevila

The Group of 21, comprised of members of the non-aligned movement, has endorsed the FMCT, but the nuclear powers have conditioned their approval of the working plan on three years due to the failure to reach an agreement. The nuclear 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 deals instead. Thus, the Basic Agreement on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (BAPA) was not among the subjects discussed in the negotiations. The Group of 21, opposed to the Basic Agreement, would have opposed the conference's agenda, comprised of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Other Nuclear Explosive Devices, and the FMCT, a nuclear disarmament treaty.

Gustavo Capdevila

Canada’s Christopher Wldal, 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 postponed for three years due to the failure to reach an agreement. The central points on the conference’s agenda are PAROS, nuclear disarmament and the Framework Convention on Nuclear Weapons. The Group of 21, comprised of members of the non-aligned movement, has endorsed the FMCT, but the nuclear powers have conditioned their approval of the working plan on three years due to the failure to reach an agreement. The nuclear 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 deals instead. The Group of 21, comprised of members of the non-aligned movement, was opposed to the Basic Agreement on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (BAPA) was not among the subjects discussed in the negotiations. The Group of 21, opposed to the Basic Agreement, would have opposed the conference’s agenda, comprised of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Other Nuclear Explosive Devices, and the FMCT, a nuclear disarmament treaty.

Christopher Wldal

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." 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 1982. "The international trend against the death penalty has become clearer," it added, noting that there were also "hand-heated concerns about wrongful convictions." It referred to Canadian cases—Donald Marshall, David and Guy Paul Morin—where people had served time for murders. (Amin Ag)

Fox killed ostrich for Bush boost? 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.

Bush was with a $900 fine two years ago for owning two adult ostriches and two two baby ostriches 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 ostriches and took them to his ranch in the central state of Queretaro. 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 the Supreme Court ruled it would be uncon-
The first country to start scheduled flights from Amman to Baghdad in defiance of the committee last December. Syria: Syria became the third country (after Egypt) to establish air links with Iraq on 12 February to create the Gulf War.

Indian media has often reported about Chinese assistance in upgrading Myanmar's naval facilities along the Bay of Bengal. India and Myanmar also agreed to start border trade at four crossing points. It will also make it easier for Indian traders to do business in Myanmar's interior.

Dilip Hiro is the author of Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War. He says, “Koyama’s stance is a fitting illustration of the government’s attitude toward foreign workers.”

The set of 23 questions posed in 18 languages will also make the results are expected in mid-May.
**From the Nepali press**

The Prime Minister is against corruption and he is committed to the institutional development of democracy.

Q. 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 25 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. Politician must always be hopeful, must believe and hope for the best. There is still some hope, nothing 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.

**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 he is taking so long to show respect to a democratic norm. But we are hopeful that he will make a dignified exit.”

—CPN UML leader, Jhunu Dhakol, demanding the prime minister’s resignation on his alleged involvement in the controversial Linda deal at Tarai, 16 February

**NCT to become a company**

Dhulikhel, 11 February

It has been learnt from various sources that the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NCT) may 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 is no official announcement, sources say that the process is already underway.

However, NTC is only 24 years old. Since then 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 2.5 billion.

NCT is on the list of the 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 planned. A target was 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, Nepal Power Company, is in the process of being privatised.

**Maoists in the manger**

Jhapa, 14 February

The Maoists have prohibited the people of Nayakadaha village in Jhapa district from grazing their community forests. It appears that the Maoists had asked the villagers to help in the formation of a local police force.

The news is a return of the old. The Maoists were asked to disband their forces in the early 1990s by the government after losing heavily in a battle. However, the Maoists were able to recover in recent years, and their efforts to increase their power base have been one of the main reasons for the increased violence across the country. The Maoists have asked the people to take up all sorts of activities for the Maoists and to help in the formation of a local police force.

**Police resources in one region alone**

Nepal Setu, 19 February

Police resources in one region alone could have been enough to make the Maoists look at the issue of local districts carefully. It seems that the Maoists have been able to control the police in the area.

The Maoist insurgency which was pushed into the southern regions of Nepal has now spread to the eastern and southern districts of Nepal. According to a senior police officer in the police headquarters since resources had to be transferred to the eastern and southern districts of the country. The Maoists have been able to control the police in the area.

**Police resources in one region alone could have been enough to make the Maoists look at the issue of local districts carefully. It seems that the Maoists have been able to control the police in the area.**

**Tainted army officials freed**

Jana, 14 February

A court of inquiry was held against some officials of the Royal Nepalese Army charged with allegations made by the late former Prime Minister of the country. The court was held in the capital city of Kathmandu. The officials were accused of accepting bribes and influence-peddling. The court was held in the capital city of Kathmandu. The officials were accused of accepting bribes and influence-peddling.

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Now and then

The past counts for very little as India and Australia prepare to square off.

Sant Cockerill's charming song called "Don't know much about history" many years ago. Sometimes, just get the feeling that a lot of sportsmen, and cricketers in particular, would be better off if listened to it. With the Australians having arrived in India, there has been far too much talk, and far too many column inches written, about the past.

Lawry's men left Indian shores three years. Sidhu now offers expert insight into the game, while Warne arrives having battled both injuries and controversy. McGrath is also here—his reputation enhanced by some sterling displays—having promised a resumption of his personal duel with Tendulkar.

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 need a ready 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 they have never lost at the Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi. Of those four tours, the one in 1996 included just one Test match, on a dustbowl at the Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi. India walked the Aussies then, with Nayman Mongia scoring a big hundred and only Steve Waugh showing any stomach for a tussle with the Indian spinners.

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 series. DH

Reference

Richard Hallett: Champions will be crowned in the subcontinent -- the last time was over 25 years ago. It has been a long wait, but the time is right for India to restore their pride in the subcontinent. India have played well in recent years and have earned their place as one of the world's top teams. The Australian tour of 1998 was doomed from the outset. They arrived in India with a team of four spin bowlers, as Ashley Mallett that were tailor-made for the Indian conditions. The 1978-9 tour was a stalemated, with neither side possessing the resources to bowl out the other twice the tie.

Most of India's success in the past comes from the spin bowling from either side. The Australian tour of 1998 was doomed from the outset. They arrived in India with a team of four spin bowlers, as Ashley Mallett that were tailor-made for the Indian conditions. The 1978-9 tour was a stalemated, with neither side possessing the resources to bowl out the other twice the tie.

The past counts for very little as India and Australia prepare to square off. Will it be champagne for the champions in India? 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 need a ready 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 they have never lost at the Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi. Of those four tours, the one in 1996 included just one Test match, on a dustbowl at the Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi. India walked the Aussies then, with Nayman Mongia scoring a big hundred and only Steve Waugh showing any stomach for a tussle with the Indian spinners.

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 series. DH

Reference

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The golden mask of the White Bhairab

For centuries, the Bhairab mask has been a symbol of Nepal's rich cultural heritage, and as such, it has been the focus of attention as from a tube go taut and the chariots roll. Exposed throughout the valley have been many tales attached to them that explain how the handsome silver mask, known as the Akash Bhairab, is hoarded by the Living Goddess. Tourists visibly stunned by so incredible a sight go wild with still and movie cameras. The old palace on two feet, its white teeth suggest sacrificial hunger and its angry eyes were designed to strike fear into evil hearts.

The Kumari, her forehead painted scarlet mouth as if tempting disbelief. The old palace on two feet, its white teeth suggest sacrificial hunger and its angry eyes were designed to strike fear into evil hearts.

The golden face heightened by black, red and white paint is liberally drenched. All hope that expert at taking long swigs without helping hands, to get a mouthful of rice beer begins to flow. The crowd is unmistakable. With a new twist, they'll keep coming. Since peanut sauce is usually eaten only with peanut sauce momos, otherwise they may arrive at the same time—outrageous.

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Tashi Delek, Iron-Snake Year

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

This year there are five Sherpa Lhosars besides the Tibetan Lhosar. But Sherpas of Khumjung and Khunde have already celebrated their New Year. “Through all Sherpa people follow the same calendar for the New Year, the actual day of celebration differs from place to place,” explains Phinzo Sherpa, general manager of the environment management of the Sherpa festivities. The Sherpa Gompa (just before the gates of Boudha stupa) “will start the festival early in the morning, from 8 am. There will be a dance of the monks, followed by 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, county manager of the environment management of the Sherpa festivities. The Sherpas of Khumjung and Khunde have already celebrated their New Year. “Through all Sherpa people follow the same calendar for the New Year, the actual day of celebration differs from place to place,” explains Phinzo Sherpa, county manager of the environment management of the Sherpa festivities. The Sherpa Gompa (just before the gates of Boudha stupa) “will start the festival early in the morning, from 8 am. There will be a dance of the monks, followed by sherbu group dance of all Sherpa people who want to join in,” says an official.

By the third day of the New Year celebrations, the rituals take on a more festive air with the eating of guthak (a noodle dumpling) and the drinking of copious quantities of chang. It’s basically party time,” explains another Boudha resident, Karma Tashi. “We visit friends and relatives and make merit.”

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 army-like procession of monks 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 Gompa (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 a official.

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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, Bagnati 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.