Government’s peace offensive

BINO BHANDARI

This was the first sign of life from a moribund government in a long time. It has become quite unusual to see the ruling Nepal Congress being proactive; and there it was the government meeting a longstanding Maoist precondition for talks by releasing the names and whereabouts of their captured comrades as a prelude to releasing them. Suddenly, there are fresh hopes for talks again. “We have done everything needed to create an appropriate environment for talks,” Ram Chandra Poudel said on Tuesday. “We have made the request, they now have to establish contact.” The 300-plus names on the list include those under preventive detention and in jail. But conspicuous by his absence is well-known Maoist Danda Pani Neupane. The government explanation is that those not on the list could be those arrested under aliases, or unidentified rebels killed in ‘encounters’, or those killed by the Maoists themselves in internal purges. (The government has also acknowledged that the rebels release the whereabouts of 131 people abducted by the Maoists.)

The government move follows close on the heels of the announcement of the Maoists’ new Prachanda Path doctrine that lays down a new direction in their revolution that many saw as a mellowing of their previous hardline position. The government had to respond, and what better than to make public this list. For his part, Poudel admitted he couldn’t figure out Chairman Prachanda. “We see confusion in Maoist thinking; they have to be clear about their position for talks. Sugar-coated words alone will not do.”

Depending on how the Maoists respond to this government offer, the plan is to have informal meetings to iron out preliminaries like logistics, naming of delegates and decoding the agenda. That would lead to round two—of real political bargaining.

EXCLUSIVE

NOC, NOC

Nobody wanted to tell us why six tankers carrying diesel adulterated with over 50 percent kerosene took three days to off-load their fuel into the Nepal Oil Corporation’s storage tanks near the Tribhuvan International Airport. But we found out the NOC and tanker owners were haggling about the price. The government set up an inquiry commission on fuel adulteration to file a report in a month. Three months ago. Looks like business as usual. p 8

DELHI SNEEZES...

Indian finance minister Yashwant Sinha did not have a SAD—special additional duty—in his budget proposal this year, but had introduced another acronym that could still be a sad story for Nepal exporters, especially manufactures using high Indian raw material content. He will replace countervailing duty charged on export prices with a flat 10 percent on the Maximum Retail Price (MRP). This could lead to a cost difference as high as Rs 20,000 per ton of Nepal-made toothpaste exported to India. Companies in Nepal that use raw material imported from India would be hit the hardest because the duty-duty drawback is low and is almost eaten up by transport and other unseemly costs of moving goods in and out of Indian border towns. “MRP could have a serious impact on our exports,” says Sandip Ghose of Nepal Lever, Nepal’s largest exporter of soaps and detergents. The sellers of toothpaste would also be hit hard. Colgate-Palmolive is Nepal’s top toothpaste exporter.

(RECIPES FOR DISASTER)

Under my hat

KRUSHAN SPECIAL

10–11

BOLLYWOOD

19

RECIPE

For Disaster

Dhanush

One who only ambushes along the village trails. It is also their job to interrogate strangers, and collect levies from villagers, businesses, teachers, and government officials.

“When we’re not on duty, we often lay down our guns to help on community farms, with construction projects and give the peasants a helping hand where they need it,” says Conrado Segovia, as he prepares bamboo stakes with his livestock to repair the roof of a villager’s house. It is hard to believe that this soft spoken farmer leads an 11-member squad that has been trained to kill with his blunder in the name of the People’s War.

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So the women cook and clean, collect water. The elderly stay at home taking care of the grand children. There is a marked absence of young men. They used to traditionally migrate to “Kahalpur” (India) from here for seasonal work, where they would get enough food to get by on what the fields produced. But since the fighting started five years ago, there haven’t been enough seasonal workers. Almost of being attracted by the police or recruited by the Maoists, most able-bodied men have stayed away. Away from the village trails, the children go to school clutching copy-books under their arms past the tiny ruins of police chowki at Ghartigaon destroyed in a Maoist attack in March 2000. Fifteen policemen died.

“Since the police were pulled out a year and a half ago, life has been peaceful,” says Mansar Ram, the head owner. “We used to be caught between the Maoist and police. We were constantly in fear of our lives and police harassment. We couldn’t go anywhere.” Today, Mansaran and his wife are left alone as long as they pay their “tax” of Rs 100 a month to the Maoists, feed them, put them up, and bring Maoist gatherings and work occasionally on small hillside building and road repair brigades.

Everyone in the village extends support in cash or kind. You can’t be different. There’s fear. They have the guns,” says Mansarmon. The Maoists hate police posts that are abandoned, in wooden beams used to dry clothes. No longer threaten by government security forces, members of the Maoist militia are relaxed.

Government’s peace offensive

Binod Bhattarai

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Human rights groups have named a team of five consisting of Pratima Ratna Tikadhar, Daman Nath Shuguna, Sinhu Nath Pyakurel, Sudip Pathak and Gauri Prasharan to facilitate peace talks. But no one has any illusions that the negotiations will be long and arduous, and will probably be accompanied by some escalation in violence. “I sense better preparedness in the government, which is a positive sign,” says Gopal Swarkoti Chintan, a human rights activist and lawyer. “At best they may meet and agree on a code of conduct for conducting the insurgency and counter-insurgency. Politically the two sides are still poles apart.”

Going by Prachanda Path, the Maoists now want an all-party interim government to negotiate the constitution. That would integrate them into the power structure, giving more say in whatever happens there. It is unlikely the government will agree to that because it says Nepal’s constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy are non-negotiable. While some see the demand for an interim government as softening of the earlier Maoist stand, the new Maoist doctrine adds an “armed mass struggle” to its strategy. Some analysts read this as a classic Maoist ‘hammer-and-sickle’ plan to spread chaos and confusion in urban areas, forcing the government to spread its forces more thinly. Adding an urban insurrection to its rural base areas would make a deadly combination that could be used as a bargaining chip to push through its demands for constitutional change.

The official toll: 1563 dead—1018 Maoists, 278 civilians, and 267 police personnel.}

...
When the devotees of the Sakayami in the Kushan empire, nearly two thousand years ago, set about carving two giant statues of the Buddha on the rock-conglomerate escarpments of present-day central Afghanistan, little did they know what would be wrought in the first year of the third millennium.

By ordering the destruction of the two towering statues in Bamian (it is not entirely clear that they are totally destroyed at the moment of going to press) and hundreds or perhaps thousands of other scattered about in the moribund museums and archaeological sites around the country, the Afghan leader Mullah Omar and the Ulema as a whole have shown themselves to be a) intolerant, b) anti-intellectual and anti-knowledge, c) anti-history and anti-heritage and d) ignorant of economics.

Given that Sakayami himself was born in present-day Nepal, and given the large Buddhist flock in this country, it is natural that the destruction of Buddhist iconography hits us harder in the heart.

While the soul of Himalayan Buddhism is Mahayanic and Vaibhavic and the period the Bamian Buddhas epitomise, Ghandharan, both nevertheless have the underpinnings in the message of the Sakayami, which is the display of karuna, the feeling of compassion for fellow creatures.

What the Taliban of Afghanistan have done by destroying the Buddhist heritage of the country is show lack of karun on an unimaginable scale.

Firstly, it is lack of empathy for the devotees and artisans of nearly two millennia ago, who built these images, long before Islam and its anti-intellectual and anti-knowledge, anti-history and anti-heritage and ignorance of economics.

Secondly, it is lack of understanding for the mass of humanity, Buddhism and non-Buddhist, who all share in the ownership of these images.

Lastly, it shows complete disregard for the interests of the Afghans themselves, who were custodians of this heritage for the rest of civilisation and who (in better times) benefited economically from the Buddha’s existence. At one time, Bamiyan’s Buddhas and the nearby lakes of Band-e-Amir were two tourist attractions of Afghanistan. The place will be no more than a place of mourning.

There is one lesson that can be derived at this moment of desecration of the Bamian Buddhas that we might also perhaps have advised us. It is to learn that there is that dark patch in each of us, which if allowed out by the confluence of social forces, can erupt as mob action at the mass level.

In the 1960s, Mao Zedong brought out the mass campaigns in China, which were effectively a functionally efficient network of decentralised area-based guerrilla organisations capable of mobilising the masses on the local level. These organisations appear to be built on the base of poor peasants and the occupational group categories, some political blend and other unorthodox political organisations. 

Afghanistan has had its own at a scale before.

The masquerade of appearing educated, partially educated and uneducated youths being the backbone of the Taliban is no different.

The strength of the Taliban has been the historic weakness of the Nepalese state. They have capitalised on this by dismantling the undervelopyment of the remoteregions.

Ideological cooption, extortion, loot and appearance of the peasantry have all been used to good effect to mobilise local financial and human resources towards the procurement and Annimation from outside Nepal and maintain a reliable cadre base.

The bastard strategy “liquidation” of “informer” and other “dubious” elements in the short term muffled the danger of subversion from within.

The legibility of the Maoists is in terms of propaganda, recruitment, training, deployment both for combat purposes and for propaganda and “hiding within the masses” etc., which has by all accounts been the hallmark of the Taliban.

Whether the Maoist force can continue doing so in the event of an all-out war declared by the United States is a subject for thought.

The Maoist leadership has in share of problems. A decentralised command structure can be less of a problem in the smaller and intellectual, political and economic development strategy of the country. The issue is not
The Maoist People’s War has fundamentally questioned the credibility of Nepal’s mainstream left. It is doubtful whether a dialogue devoid of an economic and political agenda would really contribute much to the resolution of the Maoist insurgency, and it would be up to the left political parties to make a singular contribution by negotiating such an agenda, and helping the nation back from the brink of a civil war in which there would be no winners.

(Pitamber Sharma: A former professor of geography at Tribhuvan University.)

A classic example is provided by Pico Iyer, who, during his visit to North Korea in 1996, discovered that the great leader Kim Il Sung was not just a ‘great comrade, great man and fighter’ to his people, but also a ‘great thinker, politician and strategist...a great man and father of the people...the sun of the nation, peerless patriot and national hero...a triumphant, resolute and incomparable leader...eminent Marxist-Leninist and outstanding military strategist’. Prachanda is already a rather flattering nom de guerre of Pukhang, a ‘Shining’ revolutionary. Given the toxic association of Marxism in the past century with such monstrous abominations as the ‘great leap forward’ and the ‘cultural revolution’, our Maoist high command is doing well to stamp out its bloody insurrection through a clever piece of semiological linguistic surgery is understandable. But more interestingly, Prachanda is part of a highly ambitious bid of Chairman Prachanda to ascend Red Olympus and rub shoulders with the likes of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

History tells us that the apotheosis of Communist leaders is generally accompanied by an embasement of epithetic riches.

On the issue of government’s response to the Maoist insurgency, instead of bringing a paradigm shift in development thinking—a political, economic and social transformation which has not been realised, constructive, and not innovative. The debate the Maoist People’s War should have initiated within ruling circles has unfortunately been limited to the search for a symptomatic rather than a systemic treatment of the issue. The violence and terrorism perpetrated by Maoists as well as the government forces need to be deployed and all effort needs to be made to end it. But the ‘quiet and sustained violence’ endured by Nepalis because of degrading poverty, of inhuman degradation poverty, of inhuman exploitation and resources and opportunities for better lives—of social justice can continue to be ignored.

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Sharing the load

Trekking porters carry their load—a tarpaulin, distributing the load over the vertebrae and neck muscles, cables and thighs, and heavy as their way along. It is known that this style of backstrap can back 15,000 pounds in time, long before pulleys, levers and wheels were invented.

Locally known as barna, the porters in the Himalaya, men and women, are at the moment mounting loads exceeding 60 kg and transporting that for 7 hours at an average of Rs 60 per day. "People say it's a tough job, but one has to make a living," says 38-year-old Dhunja Tamang of Dhading.

So far, insurance for porters is virtually non-existent. During normal calamities or high altitudes, porters' chances of survival, or even getting compensation for injury or mutilated body parts, are low. "A direct helicopter rescue of a single porter costs up to Rs 2,200. You can easily understand why porters become illiterate," says Prakash Adhikary, chief executive of the Himalayan Rescue Association of Nepal (HRA) and the Nepalese section of the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

The IPPG, a volunteers-based advocacy organization run by mountain specialists and workers from around the world, laid out five guidelines on how to keep porters safe (see box). The HRA at both aid posts at Pheriche (4,300m) and Namche (3,500m) provides medical facilities to porters and trekking staff at an annual consultation charge of Rs 50. "But most of the time we waive the fee for porters," says Adhikary. "There are no official estimates about the number of porters, and certainly not of how many people have died or gone missing while portering."

The major concern for porters and porter activists is the elimination of exploitation and support for such measures from all concerned parties. So far, there has been no direct support from the government, and national planners have traditionally underestimated the socio-economic enterprise. However, Nepal law states that provisions should be made for the safety of porters, they be provided with personal protective equipment including medical and clothing depending on the weather, and that the management (employer) is responsible for their rescue when required. "Last! After one trek, the next thing they have to do is to hire another porter, whereas we should all be treating them as equals," says another trekking porter Chandra Bahadur Tamang from Dolakha. Porters have little to record them and compensate them for their loss," says Adhikary.

Another round of outrage from the "international community", this time over the admittedly dreadful acts against the giant Buddha of Bamiyan, by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Taliban apologists are telling us that the destruction is an act of defiance, even something as spurious as its enemies.

"An ill wind from the West"

Without excusing the reprehensible vandalism of the Taliban, one wonders about the hypocrisy and the incompetence of Western leaders.

Smashing statues and forcing women back into the medieval times. But that's out of ignorance and fanaticism," she reminded me of how President Bush Jr. took office in January and immediately imposed a ban on American overseas aid money to go to families planning or women's health groups that have anything at all to do with abortion. "With that, he condemned how many thousands, how many hundreds of thousands of poor women to die at the hands of back street butchers. And why didn't he do it? Because abortion? Maybe, but why doesn't he have the guts to ban it in his own country? Why does he pick on our poor women?"

There are no official estimates about the number of porters, and certainly not of how many people have died or gone missing while portering. During the first three months of 1999 in the Nepalese Himalayas, 42 Nepalis were officially declared dead, and many more are believed to have perished. "Cost like this have occurred decades ago. But there has been no official effort as far as to record them and compensate them for their loss," says Adhikary. "Trekking agencies say that claiming a dead porter means a lot of hassle, so they don't report it so that the market is not affected."

Industry sources put the ratio of two Western trekking agencies for the average 100,000 trekkers who visit Nepal every year. Trekking agencies hire porters at random every trekking season and very few agencies have staff porters. But even they are employed on daily wage basis. Individual tourists and climbers also hire freelance porters along the trekking trail. "Most freelance porters are simple villagers. For decent money they often carry excess weight, which is hazardous," says Pranam Dhamel, strolling porter in his mid-twenties from Sankhuwasabha.

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bargaining power, as supply is usually greater than demand. Agencies hiring porters normally tend to put porters on the defensive by threatening to fire them should they demand more than the price set by the group or agency.

Though portering is in the best interest of the trekking industry and aid support systems for thousands of Nepali families, there’s no organization or union of porters—they don’t even have the time to come together and talk. By its nature, portering doesn’t allow the workers to sit in one place and talk things over. However, the Trekking Worker’s Association (NWDA) does ban on issues concerning porters and other trekking workers.

Women join portering as an escape from drudgery and discrimination women’s backs in the village. There have four kids and three in school. I took a long break of five years to look after my kids. Now I plan to go to carry loads because I need money to support my kids,” says 30-year-old Tika Tamang from Shurtang in Dhading, whose husband is also a trekking porter.

Portering might be one of the few enterprises where women and men receive equal pay. But they are not free of sexual harassment from clients or the guides and porters.

“What can you do? Sometimes you say no, and if you say yes, you will be verbally harassed by the guides and porters. But because they are our employers we can’t really be rude to them,” says Chhun Prabha Tamang from Ddohka. Porter-related issues are moving into the open, and there are calls for NGOs to step in and take action.

The Porter Protection Group (IPPG) recommends the following guidelines:

To prevent illness and accidents

- That adequate clothing be available for protection in bad weather and at altitude. This should include adequate footwear, hat, gloves, windproof jacket and trousers, sunglasses and access to blanket and pasted below the snowline.

- That leaders and trekkers provide the same standard of medical care for porters, as they would expect for themselves.

- That porters be paid as skilled workers without the leader or trekker being unharmed.

- That sick porters never be sent down alone, but with someone who speaks their language and understands the problem.

- That sufficient funds be provided to sick porters to cover the cost of emergency rescue.

More on www.ippg.net
The craft of craft

Promising everything to those who have nothing

Baris

Will the wrath of the gods wreak revenge on the people of this sacred Valley by sullying it with pornographic billboards?

by Barbara Adams

There are so many of them, and so many more with a view from the new hilltop of the Bagmati Bridge into Patan, turning into one big glut of billboards—most of them with drunken advertisements of drink, whores, and cigarettes. Even Darbar Marg is not spared—a large billboard that was suit has run out of space, and was replaced, so that there was no room for anything. The new, large, state-owned hoardings in Patan have become a sight for sore eyes, and not just for those who can afford them. The new billboards are not only a sight for sore eyes, but also for sore heads, as their loud advertisements, blaring out in a cacophony of sound, make them an eyesore for the people of the Valley.

The treasurers are on the list of mourners, and the political (and non-political) are equally culpable. The treasurers and their committees have failed to take action against the people who have benefited from the fund. This is where the trouble lies.

The main point that has to be noted is that people who have benefited from the fund were political sufferer, Bhattarai withdrew Rs 75,000 from this committee's function. It is not only Congress leaders who have benefited from this fund. Leaders from all major parties have at some time or the other received money, and the members of the committee were not aware of the fact.

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 Lessons from the Andes

PRAKASH A RAJ

The Prachanda Path is deliberately mired after the Shining Path, Nepal’s rulers need to study the history of the Peruvian insurgency and look at how they can reverse the historical neglect of the peasantry and address the roots of the crisis.

PRAKASH A RAJ

When there is a crisis of legitimacy in a democracy, people respond by using force. This is something we see happening in both Bolivia and Peru. It is not just an issue of income, it is also the issue of the political class not responding to the needs of the people.

The Shining Path of Peru

The Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) was a Maoist insurgency that operated in Peru from 1980 to 1992. It was led by a group of intellectuals who believed that the Peruvian state was corrupt and had to be replaced by a communist government.

In 1992, the Peruvian government launched a military crackdown on the Shining Path, which led to the capture of the group's leader, Jesus Chávez. This marked the end of the Shining Path insurgency.

The Prachanda Path

Prachanda, the former leader of the Communist Party of Nepal, is facing a similar crisis of legitimacy in his country. The Nepal Communist Party has been in power since 2015, but its policies have failed to address the needs of the people.

In a recent speech, Prachanda said that the party needed to listen to the people and address their concerns. This is similar to what happened in Peru in 1992, when the government of Alan Garcia was unable to deal with the Shining Path insurgency.

The lessons from Peru are clear. If the Nepal Communist Party wants to avoid a similar fate, it needs to listen to the people and address their concerns.

One of the most important lessons from Peru is that the government needs to listen to the people and address their concerns. This is something that the Nepal Communist Party needs to learn from.

Another lesson is that the government needs to be honest and transparent. The Shining Path was able to gain the support of the people because it was perceived as being honest and transparent. The Nepal Communist Party needs to learn from this.

The third lesson is that the government needs to be accountable. The Shining Path was able to gain the support of the people because it was perceived as being accountable. The Nepal Communist Party needs to learn from this.

In conclusion, the lessons from Peru are clear. If the Nepal Communist Party wants to avoid a similar fate, it needs to listen to the people and address their concerns. It also needs to be honest and transparent, and accountable. This is something that the government of Alan Garcia learned in 1992, and it is something that the Nepal Communist Party needs to learn now.
BIZ
NEWS

TAKING STOCK

The Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) Index stood at 22 percentage point lower last week, leading to fictitious at the exchange between retail buyers and sellers, brokers and officials of the exchange. Around 1 pm, 28 February, trading was going on as usual, when investors began ringing the glass panels separating the trading floor and the visitors' gallery. Blue chip shares, whose prices had been on a doveswing for the last three months, were falling even lower, faster. Investors say they would not buy the NEPSE if fixed prices in collision with NEPSE officials.

Trading has become safer since, and both the Nepal Stock Exchange Ltd and the Securities Board (SB) are looking at what could have gone wrong. “There's more that could be done about transparency at the level of transactions and, in particular, sais Damodra Prasad Chhughi, chairman of the securities board. That says it all. Really, a cupboard at the prices and volume traded over time reveal that some bank stocks are changing hands several times faster than others—something the SB is now looking into. “We've met brokers and investors and all have agreed to ensure that more information is available to all investors and brokers,” said Madan Raj Joshi, general manager of the NEPSE. Analysts agree that some banks are selling faster and in larger volumes as compared to others, for no apparent reason, and that this could be the place to start investigations. Among the Bank of Kathmandu (BOK), the Nepal Bangladesh Bank (NB) and the Nepal Industrial and Commercial bank (NIC), which appeared on the charts selling at a high of Rs 610 in mid-July 2000, was trading at Rs 710 in December. In 28 February NIC stocks plunged to Rs 430. NB bank stocks have seen a similar trend—the price climbed from Rs 1,500 last July to reach Rs 3,050 in December, only to tumble to about Rs 2,100 last week. BOK stocks stood at a high of Rs 1,100 last July, up to Rs 1,600, in December, and tumbled to Rs 1,040 on 28 February.

Banking stocks in Nepal have followed a path similar to IT stocks at exchanges in overseas markets, and the soaring price was partly driven by a “boom in advertising and Internet business. The lack of effective monitoring, mis-

interpretation of Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) directives and lack of corporate transparency are other reasons that explain the high price movements. NEPSE officials said misinterpretation of the NRB directive to banks to have Rs 500 million as paid-up capital reserves by the end of this fiscal year partly fuelled the boom. The directive has since been re-interpreted to mean that this amount could also include reserves, and that the stock is on the books. That came on the heels of the realisation on the part of investors, who expected to receive rights and bonus shares that it would not be as straightforward as they hoped.

Still ailing diesel

The long-overdue government inquiry on fuel adulteration has not yet presented its report, and predictably, rampant mixing of diesel and petrol with subsidised kerosene goes on. (See Nepali Times, # 19). Since that appeared, we have learnt that six tankers fully laden with diesel that arrived at the Fuel Depot near the airport in Kathmandu from Amlekhganj on 3 March were found to have been mixed with over 50 percent kerosene. Usually the Nepal Oil Corporation looks for a way out of the adulteration is “only” 30 percent. But this time, there was no way out. The price with NOD officials, who reportedly refused to unload the fuel unless they were paid Rs 20,000 per tanker, according to NOD sources. Tanker owners said they would pay Rs 5,000 per vehicle, and they were threatened with legal action if they continued. The authorities at the fuel depot, Kamal Dhungana told us: “We have no provision to return the fuel if it is adulterated.” “We mean the diesel itself; it has been “diluted” with the depot’s 700,000 litre diesel tanks and passed on to gas stations in the capital. Next time you see the black smoke billowing from the back of your fancy diesel four-wheel drive know why you.

Channel Nepal, still on

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has decided to give the satellite broadcasting licence of the Spacetime Network, which had earlier been cancelled on 3 January. The licence was cancelled by a controversial decision by the then minister in charge of MOC, Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta. The company was charged of squading on its license issued about eight years ago. The same criterion was not applied to another company, South Asian Broadcasting, which had started preliminary work towards beginning broadcasting via satellite, while Spacetime’s equipment had already arrived at the border customs office. Another company, South Asian Broadcasting, which had not started preliminary work towards beginning broadcasting, refused to unload the fuel unless they were paid Rs 20,000 per tanker, according to NOD sources. Tanker owners said they would pay Rs 5,000 per vehicle, and they were threatened with legal action if they continued. The authorities at the fuel depot, Kamal Dhungana told us: “We have no provision to return the fuel if it is adulterated.” “We mean the diesel itself; it has been “diluted” with the depot’s 700,000 litre diesel tanks and passed on to gas stations in the capital. Next time you see the black smoke billowing from the back of your fancy diesel four-wheel drive know why you.

Excellence in industry

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) has instituted an award to recognise excellence in industry and is seeking applications from its members. The award has a grandiose title—the Sensees, the index of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), registered a 177 point increase.

Nepal can learn a lot from this budget. Firstly, that maybe we should acknowledge that reforms are here to stay and secondly, that the model is globalisation. We need to stimulate bold new labour laws and we can easily nick a few ideas from them in how to make them industry-friendly. We need to set in place educational loan schemes and rationalise the taxation system.

Now for the bad part—the real meaning of the Indian budget for the future of the Nepalean economy. Import regulations have been tightened to provide Indian industry with the protection it’s been demanding, and a new provision requires that the minimum retail price (MRP) be indicated on exports to India. This means that many Nepal industries, because their products will now have to meet the MRP regulations laid down by Indian excise laws. These are pretty stiff non-tariff barriers, which require that importers have to declare the retail value of goods. Interestingly, the creation of this barrier is contrary to the WTO’s rules on valuation, which stipulate that the value of goods be determined by the logistics of the transaction, rather than what they are valued at. Equally, it means that generating revenue through the trade in gold are numbered. The new import duty on a mere Rs 250 per gram. This, combined with the new foreign exchange regulations, ensures that there might be little reason for gold to find its way into Nepal. The long monopoly of gold of imports on government revenues is over. We need to find another product to create the right combination for smuggling.

The Indians have even a sense of humour about their defensiveness. The Indian finance minister, Yashwant Sinha, attempted to ease up the proceedings when he came to call on the “valuable and allied imports” “We shall move whimsically whenever any perceptible threat on account of import is noticed.” There have been huge increases in the customs duty on various forms of edible oils and refined oils, an2ed that gold imports are now granted. Indian oil lobby in India has got a shot of a dippery situation, where their business was apparently threatened by importers from Nepal. There is, however, a more disturbing news for the long term for Nepal—duties on agricultural products have been halved. The import duty on rice has been halved. Domestic production is going to outstrip demand, and Nepali tea growers were crying the Indian market. How profitable the tea industry will remain, and for how much longer is something to think about.

To be sure, budgets are statements of intent, and what the people behind them have in mind might be quite different from the interpretations put forth in offices and factories in Rashid or Jodhpur. But still, it is hard to be persuaded that we won’t be affected by this budget. The changes to the Customs Tariff Act—the new guidelines related to the MRP and imports—will probably bit us the hardest. We’ve seen how long it takes official notification to get from Pata to Rashid. There will be some anxious moments for Nepali businesses before they know the exact changes that will affect them. We also must wait for more fine-tuned analyses in the Indian press to see other repercussions the budget may have for us. This Red has gone on a little about the negative impact of the budget on the Nepali economy. There’s a glimmer of hope, though—the Indian budget is pro-business, is strategically targeted at achieving a specific growth rate, Nepal might well benefit from the spillover, We saw how long it took for our economy when we went into the first phase of economic reforms—we can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again. We can only hope this will happen again.

THE LONG MONOPOLY

The new Indian budget cements economic reforms—but there are nagging hints of protectionism that should worry Nepali Industry.

Nepalese Picnic Bonanza

At Himalayan Shangri-La Resort, Dhulikel

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Convenient conventions

Nepal could turn into a major destination for convention tourism.

MICE is a mighty nice way to go.

Most top hotels are now getting ready to accommodate conference groups. Subodh Rana, Managing Director of the Godavari Village Resort, an upmarket property 14 km south of Kathmandu, says: "We had an average one conference a day last year. This year also looks good, but all depends on how we deal with issues like the hotel strike and security." Godavari's proximity to the city gives it a distinct advantage. "Our clients commend us for the relative isolation and tranquillity," says Janaki Shah, executive director. Just in case some guests may be unhappy for not being able to shop and unwind, the hotel provides a free shuttle service to come to town. It is this upbeat in the conferencing market that explains why even a "village" resort has four "function rooms", with capacities ranging from 20-180 persons theatre-style, and facilities that compare with any 5-star hotel. There was a time when the

Nepal's tourism industry has been described as "fragile". But there's hope in one sector of the hospitality business which has been growing steadily, and promising to help break the seasonality curse in arrivals. If all goes well, Nepal could be bursting at the seams with convention tourists.

The Birendra International Convention Centre (BICC) is hosting a large conference of educators later this year. Education International (EI)—the Brussels-based global union for teaching professionals—is having its Third World Congress 25-29 July. The House of Rajkarnikar is helping organize the mega-event, including an Education Exchange Exhibition at the venue. Over 500 delegates from the EI from 150 countries are expected to attend. In addition there will also be representatives of EI's partners, and observers.

A convention of this scale would bring in more guests during the peak monsoon, when western tourists barely trickle in. Traditionally, Indian tourists fill Nepal's hotels in the summer but their numbers are also dwindling. The EI conference will have on-site catering, which means those in the business will have something more to do than just serve food at weddings and functions.

Travel agents and taxi drivers will get more business, mountain flights more passengers and some groups may even decide to extend their stay just to snake out of Pokhara or Dhulikhel—a increasing tourist receipts and spending money around.

Nepal's tourism industry, which has been in a tailspin since late-1999, could definitely use more of such events. And though large conventions are still rare, they could well emerge as a "new product" to help Nepal diversify and sell more than just adventure and culture. "Adventurers do not bring in the top dollar, conventions can get us people who expect quality and spend more," says Subodh Rana, president of the Nepal Incentive and Convention Association (NICA). Adventure serves a purpose, it creates tourism income to villages. "But the money is in meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE)," he adds.

Nepal has some distinct advantages over in South Asia neighbours for going the MICE way. Now with the "doha" out, even Royal Nepal has adequate seats for flying people in, not to mention direct connections provided by other airlines such as Transavia, Austrian, Qatar and Gulf that fly from Europe and West Asia. There are roughly 20,000 air seats available each week.

Connections in East Asia are also well served by Royal Nepal, Singapore and Thai, among others. Nepal has

regional connections and also simpler visa formalities.

Nepal now and still reasonably well kept convention venue. BICC, has the capacity to host a Non-Aligned Movement-sized summit. In addition, major hotels in Kathmandu and Pokhara have facilities comparable to any city in the region. "The gap in our inability to get in a big way to get MICE tourists," says Rana. NICA's an association of about 20 major hotels, airlines and travel agents. The Nepal Tourism Board acknowledges the potential of MICE but has yet to focus marketing on this "new" product though it has supported NICA participation in promotion. "We'll begin to make MICE presentations to Indian corporate this month," says Mohan Baburam Paraj, manager at NTR.

"We're already doing a little to spread the word." What Nepal offers to incentive travellers—quick trivia.

Bratavandas.

RD Tuttle's IRs555

Clockwise from left: Soaltee Holiday Inn, Talk and Yet, the Godavari Resort and the Birendra International Convention Centre.

"Our tourists come mainly September to late-April, and the slack sets in from May. "This is when we need tourism the most," says NICA's Rana. "The low rates will also benefit companies granting travel incentives to employees or conference "lads'retreats" organisations."

The facilities at big hotels are all set for conferences are organised in the same languages. The facilities at big hotels are getting bigger. Soaltee's Migma and

Mulbar rooms can seat about 380 classroom-style and accommodate 1,000 for cocktails. The Lal Durbar Convention Centre's Pagal and Iti Yak & Yeti can accommodate 990 for cocktails and 360 in classroom style seating. Radisson's largest hall can accommodate 800 for cocktails. The brand new Hyatt Regency also has similar facilities.

With so many places to choose from, organizers who do their rounds can get the best deals. Generally, hotels don’t charge for space if meals are to be served. They also offer corporate discounts on room tariff if conferences are organised in the same language. It is this competition that has forced almost every hotel worth its name to build meeting rooms.

seagrams
The world's hottest chilli, chemical weaponry, and why one enjoys a hot dish more than once in its journey through the body.

ESTHER ADDLEY in London

be Mayan Indians had the right idea about chilli: eat it with great caution, but inflict it on those you don't like without mercy. Unfortunately enemies of the tribe would retreat from battle under a hail of the spicy peppers, though it is not recorded whether the Mayans then ran after them to pick up their fruity weapons, which they also used, presumably rather bruised, as currency.

But when it came to their cuisine the Mayans really knew how to treat chilli with respect. They even had a word for it: _huuyub_. That is, to pucker one's mouth and take a sharp intake of breath after taking too large a bite of a chilli.

Chillies have always occupied the more hardcore end of the cookery scale. Few other seed fruits after all, hold such a distinct distinction of having been used as instruments of torture. Powdered chilli has traditionally been used as a weapon in India, to particular effect when thrown in the eye of an attacker. It also forms the basis of pepper sprays, used increasingly in place of other chemicals by police forces to restrain offenders.

But it seems the chillies we buy have been tamed and have become more humble compared to a killer _vindaloo_ waiting to be sampled. Scientists recently revealed a variety of pepper that makes all that has gone before seem about as spicy as a cucumber—and what's more, it does not even come from the New World where the fruit originated.

This new pepper, the _naga jolokia_ or _Tezpur chilli_, is so hot it is reported practically to induce heart failure in anyone who hasn't grown up with it in its intestine-stripping qualities. And it is not from New Mexico or the Caribbean, but from India. The Mayans may have liked their food spicy, but put them up against a bunch of kids from the banks of the Brahmaputra river in Assam, north-east India, and they would be ordering another glass of wine before they could taste the chilli.

That is, to pucker one's mouth and take a sharp intake of breath after taking too large a bite of a chilli.

Therefore, the cause of heart failure in anyone who hasn't grown up with it in its intestine-stripping qualities is not entirely to do with our sense of taste. As Dr Len Fisher, a biophysicist and food writer from Bristol University, England, notes, the suspicion that eating a raw chilli is all about pain has a strong basis in chemical fact.

“The tongue is the thing that picks up taste: sweet, sour, salt, bitter and umami,” he says. “Your receptors that will send nerve signals to the brain. The chemical capsaicin can bind to these pain receptors and set them off like a switch so your brain is interpreting them as pain and damage to the tongue.”

The chemical does not get less potent during cooking, and is also extremely resistant to being broken down in the intestinal tract, which is why you can enjoy a very hot dish more than once in its journey through the body. The capsaicin burn will be detected on the capsaicin and keep it away from your mucous membranes, and has a large surface area to absorb the capsaicin."

Despite my request for the hottest dish on the menu, however, Mir is anxious to stress that the flavour and enjoyment of spicy dishes is not due only to their chilli content. “Hot curry has chilli but also cloves, cardamom, cumin and nutmeg. It is those spices that really bring out the aroma and taste. If you use chilli in too great a quantity it just burns and it spoils its taste. Chillies is hotness is different to the spicy hotness. If you put a clove in your mouth it burns, but it’s a different type of burning.”

Ricky Dhabhar, executive chef at the Santa Fe restaurant chain in London and an expert in Mexican and New Mexican cuisine, is in emphatic agreement about the utilitarian qualities of chilli:

“Talk about wine and only mentioning the alcohol. “His favourite chilli, “this week”, is the comparatively mild ciliaco, “a hard wooden handled bowl of jalapeno”, “It’s great in soups and sauces,” he says. “It’s given this wonderful smoky baste. There are so many ways to use chilli to explore with some that have been smoked, some are dried, some are toasted, blackened, burned before they are used. The important thing is to get a depth of flavour into the food rather than just concentrating on the heat.”

The world's hottest chilli, chemical weaponry, and why one enjoys a hot dish more than once in its journey through the body.

SUYATA TULADHAR

there is no specific food that could be termed Nepali except perhaps a _daal bhat_ (rice with vegetable dish) that cannot be anything but spicy hot. It is a dish of both fish, salt, oil...
and chilli powder, and other exotic spices, which is boiled until all the ingredients dissolve into one unrecognisable translucent reddish mass. It is only eaten after it cools down and resembles jelly. Aakrita is also prepared using the same procedure but with water buffalo meat, including the skin. Both are dishes that Newari people just can’t do without during Kathmandu winters. Chhewa is roasted buffalo meat, garnished with generous amounts of spices—mainly chilli powder. Haku (black) chhewa is a variant of chhewa that can be even hotter than regular chhewa.

A delicacy at the famous Hurachha’s Pasal at Patan Darbar Square is asu tarkari (potato curry). Fiery red in appearance and equally fiery in taste, the dish attracts masochistic people who nearly have smoke coming out of their ears, but love every minute of it. Then there is nama aso, made with bamboo shoots and potatoes and considered to be more delicious with that extra green chilli and considered to be more delicious with that extra green chilli...

“Even if the pickle is not very hot, the combination of vinegar and chilli gives a good colour to the product,” says Pramila Shah, another pickle supplier.

“Pickles might not do the body any good, but they do wonders for the WEAN cooperative says: Sarala Bhattarai, a pickle supplier. These must be handled with care. And this is partly explained by Amit Gupta, a homeopath, who says: "Chillies, but there are pickles made..."
The wireless war

Asia battles it out over mobile Internet.

THOMAS CRAMPTON

HONGKONG - Greg Tarr was usefully up to speed on his new Internet-enabled telephone when he unsuccessfully tried to log on to text services offered for his late-model Nokia telephone, designed for WAP, or wireless application protocol, services at a Hong Kong restaurant. His other mobile phone only works in South Korea, but goes online almost instantly and allows Tarr to check the weather, trade stocks and play games online. Tarr, manager of a venture-capital fund in Asia, uses a third phone in Japan, the wildly popular i-mode handset.

Many Asia have the Internet in their pockets. High cellular phone penetration rates and a relatively low density of personal computers make Asia fertile ground for mobile Internet growth. Companies, technologies and approaches are battling it out, country by country, on exactly how it is to be delivered. Experiments in regulating, transmitting and selling mobile Internet services are well under way, with a range of business plans already launched and modified—or even tried and discarded.

The single most successful foray into wireless Internet has been Japan’s i-mode telephone. A teen fashion craze since its introduction in February 1999, the service, sold by NTT DoCoMo, is a serious revenue source, one that it plans to export to Europe and, on the heels of a major deal last week with AT&T, to the US very soon. Nearly one in 10 Japanese subscribes to the service. Its cute offerings — cartoon characters and electronic pets— have been tempered by sites offering news, financial information and directory services. Subscribers to i-mode check into the wireless service an average of 10 times a day each, but people in most of Asia, Europe and the US, face frustration attempting to use the much-touted WAP system.

I-mode rocks while WAP has floundered, it would seem. But Scott Goldman, CEO of an organisation that promotes and coordinates the development of WAP, says: “Comparing i-mode to WAP is like placing apples next to oranges. If the service is bad, don’t complain to WAP, complain to your mobile telephone service provider.”

Goldman runs the WAP Forum, an eight-person organisation based in California that coordinates the over 600 companies actively involved in developing the protocols’ standards. Any description that pits i-mode against WAP is erroneous. Goldman says, since the creator of i-mode, DoCoMo, is also a member of the WAP Forum. “i-mode is a very successful service that is literally and metaphorically on an island,” Goldman said. “DoCoMo may be strong and powerful, but it would be mighty difficult for them to convince all 600 members of the WAP Forum to drop their commonly developed standard in favour of i-mode.”

With the expressed intentions of both standards to adopt the new programming language XML, some level of convergence between i-mode and WAP appears inevitable. DoCoMo hints that it might make i-mode compatible with WAP, and export it in handsets as early as 2002. Global roaming would be impossible for DoCoMo’s Japan-specific standards, and so the company has started groundwork for exporting a mode with purchases of minority stakes in mobile carriers and deals with content providers around the world. In addition to reported talks with carriers LG Electronics and SK Telecom Co in South Korea and C&W Optus in Australia, DoCoMo has already invested in the carrier KG Telecom in Taiwan, KPN Mobile NV in the Netherlands and Hutchinson 3G in Britain and has signed a memorandum with the media and Internet giant America Online Inc.

Most significant and telling, however, was the Japanese company’s $8.8 billion purchase of a 16 percent stake in US-based AT&T Wireless Group announced last week. DoCoMo promises an operational American version of i-mode by the end of next year.

This global-conquering strategy cannot be countered by a similar WAP tactic, because WAP isn’t owned by any single company. But the WAP Forum’s membership already reaches around the world and includes the largest manufacturers of mobile telephone equipment such as Nokia, Ericsson and Motorola. Instead, WAP supporters rely on convincing consumers, software developers and phone companies that it is already the de facto mobile telephone standard. You could think of i-mode as a one-company, tightly engineered service, like America Online’s proprietary software, and WAP as an open system, like the Internet. I-mode provides specific, carefully chosen, consumer-targeted services, while WAP allows entry into an electronic universal. “You can visit a bad website, but that doesn’t mean you dismiss the Web.”

Misleading advertising deserves much of the blame for WAP’s tarnished reputation, he said. “I would be a lot happier doing my job if more realistic expectations had been promoted.” Goldman says. Among the wireless Internet ads aired recently in Asia is a humorous Nokia TV spot with people speaking into video cameras as if they were telephones and making phone calls from their credit cards. “To watch Baywatch,” Goldman says. “I felt believed all women should look like Baywatch, or even Baywatch.”

Several systems are based on various of WAP, but Korean carriers have developed proprietary handset systems. Since the trading of stocks on office computers is prohibited by many companies, employees often buy and sell shares on cell phones in the privacy of the toilet or outside on the street. The challenge for WAP will be to coordinate among mobile operators and small companies that offer services to ensure timely payment and allow instant delivery of stock quotes and other information.

“A successful wireless-Internet service sits on a three-legged stool,” says Tarr, who runs a $100 million fund that invests in wireless start-ups in South Korea and Japan. “If the businesses, network operators and small software companies do not cooperate, it just won’t work,” he notes. The increased bandwidth that will come online in the next few years carries high stakes for the spread of WAP technology. Goldman is convinced that by the time bandwidth increases, WAP will already be deeply entrenched as the default operating system for wireless Internet access.

Tarr, the venture-fund manager with three phones, is less convinced. “It is too easy to predict since we just don’t know what sort of environment such wide bandwidths will give us,” said #.
Raiders of the last aiks

In the last few years, there have been discoveries of a large number of shipwrecks along the South African coast. These shipwrecks have been a source of significant interest and controversy. Many of these wrecks are laden with valuable goods, including gold coins, that were lost during the period of British colonial rule in South Africa. The discovery of these shipwrecks has sparked a debate about the proper handling of the artifacts and their potential value.

One of the most notable shipwrecks is the Edgecote, Houghton and Stretham, which was discovered by a group of unnamed divers in 1997. The wreck was reported to be carrying a treasure trove of gold coins, which were believed to be worth millions of dollars. However, the recovery and distribution of these coins have been hotly debated.

There is much looting from some 2,200 wrecks lying along the South African coast. These wrecks were discovered by divers, but the recovery of the artifacts has been difficult due to the risk of looting and the logistics of transporting the artifacts to the surface. The government of South Africa has been involved in the recovery of some of these wrecks, but the process has been slow and contentious.

The discovery of the Edgecote, Houghton and Stretham wreck has sparked a debate about the proper handling of the artifacts and their potential value. Some argue that the artifacts should be returned to the seller, while others believe that they should remain in South Africa as part of its cultural heritage.

The discovery of these wrecks has also raised questions about the role of the British colonial government in South Africa. The British colonial government was accused of exploiting South Africa's natural resources for the benefit of the British crown. The discovery of these wrecks has been seen as evidence of this exploitation.

There is a growing movement to return the artifacts to South Africa, but the process has been slow and contentious. The government of South Africa has been involved in the recovery of some of these wrecks, but the process has been slow and contentious. The discovery of the Edgecote, Houghton and Stretham wreck has sparked a debate about the proper handling of the artifacts and their potential value.

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Mainstreaming the left

The emergence of left-wing parties is today's Philippines' long-running political saga.

By CHUNG HEE

Asia's newpolitik

As the economy has slowed for decades, Pakistan and India have taken their dispute into film theatres. A series of films released in the past few months by the Pakistani film industry—Lollywood—has called into question the alleged human rights abuses by the Indian army. These films, produced by a new generation of filmmakers, offer a rare glimpse into one of Asia's most intriguing and volatile regions.

The films, which explore the themes of nationalism, identity, and politics, have become increasingly popular among younger audiences. They challenge the traditional narratives of the region's history and politics, offering new perspectives on the complex relationship between India and Pakistan.

The films address issues such as the Kashmir conflict, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the ongoing struggle for autonomy in the region. They also raise questions about the roles of the two countries in the region's recent history and the potential for reconciliation.

Despite criticism from some quarters, these films have been widely acclaimed both domestically and internationally. They have sparked a debate about the role of cinema in promoting peace and understanding in the region.

The Pakistani films have been particularly successful in the region, with some of them becoming box office hits. In India, the films have also gained traction, with audiences responding enthusiastically to their portrayal of the region's complex history and politics.

In conclusion, the films offer a unique window into the region's complex political landscape and provide a platform for dialogue and understanding. They demonstrate the power of cinema as a tool for promoting peace and harmony in a region that has been scarred by conflict for decades.

Cinema hall wars

After the success of the first film, a new wave of Pakistani films has emerged, challenging the traditional narratives of the region's history and politics. These films, produced by a new generation of filmmakers, offer a rare glimpse into one of Asia's most intriguing and volatile regions.

The films, which explore the themes of nationalism, identity, and politics, have become increasingly popular among younger audiences. They challenge the traditional narratives of the region's history and politics, offering new perspectives on the complex relationship between India and Pakistan.

The films address issues such as the Kashmir conflict, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the ongoing struggle for autonomy in the region. They also raise questions about the roles of the two countries in the region's recent history and the potential for reconciliation.

Despite criticism from some quarters, these films have been widely acclaimed both domestically and internationally. They have sparked a debate about the role of cinema in promoting peace and understanding in the region.

The Pakistani films have been particularly successful in the region, with some of them becoming box office hits. In India, the films have also gained traction, with audiences responding enthusiastically to their portrayal of the region's complex history and politics.

In conclusion, the films offer a unique window into the region's complex political landscape and provide a platform for dialogue and understanding. They demonstrate the power of cinema as a tool for promoting peace and harmony in a region that has been scarred by conflict for decades.
A Recently, a newspaper article accused me of

Q. Do you think the present parliamentary session

A. Well, they are still sticking to their earlier

Q. What do you think of the way out of the present situation?

A. I do not think the dialogue has failed, none of

Q. Why can you not gather dissatisfied MPs of the Congress and move a vote of no confidence?

A. To have this power from corruption and to

Q. Is it in the interest of the Maoists to finish off the present system?

A. If the Maoists will adapt themselves to power

Q. Will you still support the Supreme Court in their recent decision?

A. I cannot comment on it.
Of divine street walkers

by DESMOND DOIG

God no longer walks the streets of Kathmandu, or if she does, there is an insufficiency of powerful tantrics to recognise them, or perhaps the cosmopolitan crowds make recognition impossible.

Indra, the Lord of Heaven, himself visited Kathmandu to steal flowers from a garden for his mother’s devotion, but was discovered and taken captive. While he was about to be led into the city for him, his mother descended from heaven to find her son, and when she disclosed to the people who their prisoner was there was much apology, much rejoice and the inevitable taking of food.

Probably the last occasion of deities mingling with humans in Kathmandu was in the early seventeenth century when the Kashta Mandap, the house of wood, was prepared to break if Kalpavriksha and bound him with a spell which he could not break. The young prince refused and dropped the stone to the ground, yet still splashed his feet.

We had seen a command, the saint said, there would be no magic to break if he should lead him to success wherever they went, a prophecy that came true. Gaurishankh was patron saint of the king and Gaksah.

Not only was the wood from the celestial tree sufficient to build a large house at the very centre of Kathmandu but there was enough left over with which to construct several other houses in the area. They all stood to this day at their centre the Kusha Mandap, the house of wood, from which the city of Kathmandu is supposed to have taken its name.

All three storeys are open sided with arched balconies which wading ascetics or pilgrims could rest. The first floor are two panels that illustrate the life of the Buddha, which suggest a Buddhist beginning. However, in the valley of Kathmandu, Buddhists and Hindus coexist so closely that from the time it was built, between 1620 and 1639, the house of wood was probably intended for people of all beliefs.

There are, in close proximity to the Kusha Mandap, an adobe house for Buddha priests with a manning painted door at its entrance, several vestive Buddhist chaityas, great stone Gaksah and Hindu temples, the most famous of which is the Ashok Bhanjyang, worshipped by both Hindus and Buddhists.

Strangely, this entirely gilded temple has no finial: it is open to the skies in commemoration of two beliefs. One is that the shrine was originally under an Ashoka tree when Gaurishanukh was seated and the other is that Ganesh was seen levitating under the tree and so the temple made provision for him to come and go through the roof.

Whatever the real reason, there it stands today, within a few feet of the Kusha Mandap and considered so sacred that the king comes in procession to pray there immediately after his coronation at the old palace, a short distance away. The present king walked to the devotional thousands watched from the high planks of temples near the Kusha Mandap. Indians know the Kusha Mandap well. It was where, in the film, Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, Zeenat Aman danced while assorted hippies pulled on flowers and the famous hare Marc Davis was born.


SOCIETY AND SENTIMENT

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Society and private sentiment find equal place in the work of poet Shyamal: his commentaries on social injustice are deeply personal, and their expressions of suffering are firmly grounded in the injustices which shape Nepali society. The two poems translated below are excerpted from his 1987 collection Tapainharu Marfat. Written against Panchayat beliefs. One is that the shrine was

What was the colour of the sky last night?

Perhaps you were seeking immortality placing such words on a hangman’s rope?

There was a parade of black cats in the kitchen and in the bedroom apparitions

Perhaps you had some business to tend to?

Must I keep loving you without speaking a single kind word

Your laughter right now – ah!

What a pity! Your disposition would be caged

If they were to close in, drumming against the ear which set the whole earth a quiver

Your laughter right now – ah!

You have no citizenship now only visions of placing your footsteps on flowers

When eagles’ claws pounce instead on your movement of doves, swimming in air

When questions come to you as to others your dreams become as misshapen as your country

When the loneliness of harrowing nights lingers in you....

All you have right now are rays of moonlight which set the whole earth a quiver

If you could become a pride of lions and

When the loneliness of harrowing nights lingers in you....

All you have right now are rays of moonlight which set the whole earth a quiver

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When the loneliness of harrowin
Ramyata Limbu

On 13 February, forty runners will set off on what is described as the mother of all marathons in the Himalayas—The Annapurna Mandala Trail 2001. Recognised as one of the most demanding races in the world, competitors, equipped with only a backpack and counting on local hospitality, will take off from Besi Sahar, Lamjung, at 820m, and make their way around the Annapurnas in eight days—a journey that usually takes two weeks.

International competitors, including four Nepali athletes, one of them last year’s winner Nar Bahadur Shah, will run along rice paddies at 800m and go as high as the Thorong La (5,416 m) in Manang. The impressive 2,700 metres of combined altitude difference is a challenge that runners will have to endure on the trail.

“The competitors will have a day to acclimatise at Manang village before they make their way up to the pass,” says event organiser Padam Ghaley, who organised a similar run with the French trail runner Bruno Poirier last year. “At Thorong Phedi (4,400 m), medics from the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) post in Manang will make sure they are medically fit before they attempt the run up to the pass. If they’re given a clean bill of health, they will be allowed to continue.”

The Annapurna Marathon is considered more taxing than the Everest Marathon (a one-day event that begins from Gorak Shep at 5,184 m down to Namche at 3,446 m—a horizontal distance of 40 m). Just being fit and acclimatised aren’t the only requirements runners have to fulfil in the Annapurnas. Runners have to sign the Racer Solidarity Assistance chart, stipulating assistance to any endangered fellow race—the slightest lapse will mean instant disqualification. “The Annapurna Mandala Trail is a real competition but in the spirit of solidarity of the mountain people,” says Mandala Trekking’s Ghaley, who plans to organise a one-day Sankhu to Kathmandu Darbar Square marathon early next year.

This time his team of more than 24 sirdars and Sherpas will get their fair share of exercise, too. “Not only do they have to cover the distance but they also have to follow international standards of timing, control and assistance, combined with the efficiency and dedication that have made Nepal’s mountain people world famous,” he says. While runners are expected to run from one place to another without assistance, thus preserving the spirit of the mountain trail in its simplest form, a technical team and light medical support will be provided by running doctors and nurses in collaboration with the Himalayan Rescue Association and Fishtail Air.

And, to wash off the sweat, each runner will get a cake of biodegradable chemical-free soap—courtesy of a Euro-Nepal soap manufacturing venture.

Mother of all marathons

“To run over the Annapurnas with only a backpack and local hospitality to rely on is the definition of the Annapurna Mandala Trail” Bruno Poirier, French trail runner.

PADAM GHALEY
If forcing people into celebrations wasn’t bad enough, the contents of flying lolas this week are a case for chemical weapons inspectors.

India and do not conform to any standards. Our investigation showed that there is no official monitoring of these chemicals. Says Dr. Jaya Prasad Bhard, a dermatologist: "Some of the colours can cause skin irritation but it depends on the amount of toxic chemicals in the colour." For women, getting poisoned isn’t the only cause for concern. The sheer ferocity of the South Asian male finds numerous creative outlets on this day. Fag Purana literally means ‘the full moon of the month of Fagun’. Among other things, the festival scribes in the joys of spring. Spring is all very fine, but the associations of virility appear exaggerated in the minds of many, who use the day as a free-for-all groove fest. Stories abound of women, especially foreigners, being physically abused by sexually charged youths. It is the customer’s call. Asked whether they knew if metallic colours were harmful Munaj Kunaji replies: "We know they are, but what can we do about it? It is the customer’s will." The colours used today are cheaply produced in factories in lead, nickel, and even traces of mercury. Some of these can leave permanent harmful traces in the body if inhaled or ingested, others cause skin irritation and eye infections.

Krishna Kunaji and Mohan Kunaji are a father-son duo involved in selling colour and paint for the past 25 years. They have a little shop in Bangemudah where they sell colour and paint of every kind. "We used colour in our day too, but not like today, when kids use just any paints," says the older Kunaji. Asked whether they knew if metallic colours are harmful Munaj Kunaji replies: "We know they are, but what can we do about it? It is the customer’s will." The colours used today are cheaply produced in factories in lead, nickel, and even traces of mercury. Some of these can leave permanent harmful traces in the body if inhaled or ingested, others cause skin irritation and eye infections.

If you think you’re a Wild Party Animal on Holi, ensuring everyone in sight with colour and hitting people from all over and make merry. The men still wear the traditional Thakali female dress. An astounding variety of food items are cooked. The men participate in archery competitions and the women play nauna (cowries) and lola, a pebble-picking game. The Thakali women in Kathmandu are trying to preserve these traditions, even if many of their members have permanently given up their ancestral homes in Thak Saatsaya. But the archery competitions are turning into serious gambling affairs, and the festivities don’t seem as wholesome as before. Jyoti Sherchan, a former chairman of the Samaaj, fears trafficking of drugs. The government needs to recognise Fag Purana as a festival of the Thakalis and give us an official holiday, like they do for Daasain," Likewise are Nepal’s few Sikhs, who also celebrate Fag Purana, what they call Hola Mohalla, in a manner similar to the mainstream Hindu celebration, but mainly to strengthen communal harmony.

Holi is a time for fun, colours and the ingestion of thugg, yes, but in the face of toxic colours, harassment and the homogenising of traditions, one wonders how long it will remain this way.
Recipes for disaster

Boiled Eggs a la Murgh
(Special Non-Veg Treat for Eggplant lovers)
Ingredients:
- One egg, or chicken, whichever comes first.
Remarks: The Boiled Egg is a particular favourite of light reserve for special occasions like Easter and Dishawarsa Puja. First make sure egg was laid by hen and not a velociraptor. Too concerned to regret pot of water and heat over simmering flame. Careful overheating may cause egg to harden. Boil for time to ensure Thermal Equilibrium within the Epithelium.

When tapping from inside the shell-shocks, you can see sure chicken little is dead, and the treat is ready to serve.

Supari with Semtex
Ingredients:
- One 25 ga .9 mm explosiv
- One heavy-duty nutcracker
- Three tons of Semtex explosives

Remarks:
- I vowed to capture at least one subject every day, not necessarily a famous personality, says Ale. Today he has images of over 1,500 people, ranging from musicians, artists and poets, mostly in black and white.
- He doesn’t make much money from his pictures, but Ale isn’t complaining. “I did not do this for money. This is purely personal. The only thing I hope to get out of this is that it may inspire others to be creative and use their imagination for a good cause."
- “I wanted to capture at least one subject everyday, not necessarily a famous personality,” says Ale. Today he has images of over 1,500 people, ranging from musicians, artists and poets, mostly in black and white.
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