



SHUTTERBUG

19



9

ICE CREAM IS HOT

## EXCLUSIVE

### HOTEL HAKIRI

Hotel executives and senior managers in ties waiting on tables, doing the dishes, answering phones. It had to come to this: a strike no one wanted but everyone was powerless to prevent. It was so easy to solve: the unions are controlled by political parties, some hotels were willing to bargain with the unions, the unions themselves were showing flexibility. Then, two weeks ago the Hotel Association of



Hotel executives serve breakfast on Wednesday morning.

Nepal (HAN) sought a court injunction banning the strike, sending the unions again on warpath. Till then, there was some hope that the two sides would mellow, and government mediation would work. But as usual, we showed our exceptional talent for national harakiri. Neither HAN nor the unions are now backing down, and the only thing to do is count up the losses for the national economy: estimated at Rs330 million a day. The timing couldn't be worse: the beginning of the peak season with 80 percent occupancy in some top hotels. The impact of this will be felt years hence. Everyone bungled, Nepal and Nepalis are the losers. ♦



BINOD BHATTARAI

Parliament has not met for a month. The government has less than three weeks to get two important ordinances (one to set up a paramilitary force to combat the Maoists) passed by the House. Two ministers jumped ship this week, the remaining spend more time politicking nervously than governing. The country is effectively at a standstill. And even if the house impasse is resolved, there is the faction within the ruling party spoiling for a fight. Prime Minister Girija Koirala is running out of options.

For its part, the main opposition UML is squeezed between the Nepali Congress and the Maoists, and has a single-point agenda: get rid of Girija. For the UML this was never really about alleged hanky-panky in the Lauda Air lease, it is about grandstanding and blocking the armed police ordinance which would benefit the Maoists, and make the Army glad. But who is using whom?

Koirala's departure will not necessarily mean the UML's ascent to power, he will be replaced by

another NC prime minister and the UML would not gain much. Still, the UML's Ishwor Pokhrel is upbeat: "We've got hold of the leg, and we won't let go until we pull everything out in the open." Pokhrel is a member of the UML's new task force entrusted with toppling the prime minister. The UML believes the Maoist insurgency can only be contained by immediate and radical measures (which it wants to work out), and that is why the prime minister has to go.

Koirala is said to be reconciled to leaving his post—he would still wield considerable king-making powers in the NC as party president. And it must be tempting to let someone else hold the lightning rod of the prime ministerial post in these trying times. But he does not want to resign and needs a face-saving way out. "How can I resign when the CIAA has not even questioned me," Koirala told close aides this week while he tried to speak in parliament. The NC having a huddle on Sunday of all 113 MPs, upper house members and district leaders to strategise about the course of action. "This is all the result of our internal

tussle, and we are going to resolve it once and for all," one Congress insider told us.

If Koirala does not resign what options does he have? He could go for a confidence vote in parliament if the UML lets him, he could call mid-term polls, or he could "step aside". Koirala has sounded out his rivals in the Congress, but they hate him dearly and don't want to give him an easy parachute. Last week Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, his septuagenarian adversary, tried to smoke the peace pipe at Bhaisepati. Witnesses said everyone talked in circles, nothing was resolved. As Sunday is being put forward as a make-or-break session, things may be different there. "The solution has to be found within the party," agrees Hom Nath Dahal, Nepali Congress MP from the rebel faction. His group is discussing resignation, or nothing. Chiranjibi Wagle from the rebel camp is uncompromising: "We're saying if resignation is the only solution, then don't wait, go."

So, to recap: the opposition UML has deadlocked parliament, and the Congress rebels have deadlocked the party, and what this means is that the whole country is deadlocked.

The Girija-go campaign has led to interesting realignments in the major opposition parties. The centre-right RPP's radical wing is led by Pashupati Sumsher Rana and Rabinendra Nath Sharma, and not its leader Surya Bahadur Thapa. Even the UML is said to have fissures—between general secretary Madhav Nepal who is more hard-line than next-in-line Khadga Prasad Oli.

The question is are the anti-Girija forces working together? And if so, is there a "hidden hand" that wants him out? How else would one explain these strange bedfellows working together for so long? One way to find out is to seek motive. The UML cannot hope to come to power by bringing down Koirala—all they want is to stall the Armed Police Force ordinance, which the king took three months to sign, and which was supposed to be ratified by the winter session. "Because the king took so long to reluctantly approve the ordinance, maybe even the Royal Palace and the Army want the bill to die quietly in parliament," a political analyst who did not want to be named told us. The ordinance will cease to exist if it fails to get parliamentary approval.

The other wild card is the India factor. What does New Delhi want? Koirala gets along with an older generation of Indian leaders, but foreign policymakers in New Delhi and second-echelon BJP cadre have not hidden their disdain for him. And then there is China, whose defence minister gave the message last month in Kathmandu that it doesn't want to see a re-incarnated Mao Zedong in its backyard. Both new Delhi and Beijing see political instability in Nepal as feeding the insurgency and want our rulers to get their act together. By now we have seen Nepal governed by two "majority" Congress governments led by Bhattarai and Koirala. Internal rifts prevented both from moving past first base. That feud is still on, dragging the party down, and the country with it. ♦

## "We can't wait to be in Nepal"

South Asia's hottest band, Junoon, hits the capital next Friday. Yubakar Rajkarnikar, editor of Wave magazine, spoke to Salman Ahmad, Ali Azmat and Brian O'Connell in Karachi this week about music, politics, and their upcoming trip. Excerpts:

Riz Khan [CNN] called you "the biggest band in Asia". What's your secret?

Bryan: There's no secret. We've been doing this for ten years—and it clicks with the audience.

So what's there for Junoonis in your new album Ishq?

B: It's a pretty direct follow up of our

other albums, you instantly know it's Junoon. Our writings are more mature. There are three of Ali's tunes on the album. Earlier Salman did virtually all the writing. He's a brilliant, but this album is different, refreshing. You've made it in South Asia. Any plans to move on, do songs in English?

B: It's natural—our music is becoming more world music. We have one English number on Ishq. We had them earlier, but they didn't really fit, it was the rock n roll itch in us. It's much more organic now.

In an interview in Himal South Asian in 1998, you said "You have to kiss the government's ass to be on TV."

Are you on TV now?

B: We are not kissing ass to be on TV. Not with the present government. The people running television then—if they had a grudge you could be banned. In our case, for three years.

So, the ban has been lifted?

B: We're back on Pakistan TV (PTV) in a big way. A lot has changed.

How did you react to the demolition of the Buddha statues in Afghanistan?

Ahmad: Basically they are jahil, uneducated and ignorant. They don't really know much about religion.

Do you have anything special planned for Nepal?

A: You don't know what will happen



on stage. It's a very adventurous space. We don't bind ourselves, do a set thing. It depends on the crowd. What do you look forward to in Nepal?

B: I know so little of Nepal. I look forward to seeing mountains, nature

and new cultures. You're our neighbour, how different can Nepalis be from Pakistanis. We'll find out, we can't wait.

A: I'm looking forward to meeting new people, having fun, making connections, leaving a mark. ♦

worldlink



It is difficult to find things that are going right. But one of the most visible success stories of the past ten years has been the spread of community forests throughout the midhills of Nepal. It is success on such a grand scale that the increase in the chlorophyll content of the vegetation is now visible from outer space. Comparing Landsat images of Nepal taken 15 years ago with those taken in 2000 show new red splotches—indicating greater canopy cover. There is as much as 15 percent more forest today than there was in 1978. At that time, for instance, only 10 percent of Kabhre Palanchok District east of Kathmandu was forest. By 1998 this had gone up to 35 percent. (High mountain forests and tarai forests are not doing as well, and show declines.)

*Community foresters at rally in the capital this week.*

*Community foresters at rally in the capital this week.*

This national achievement is now threatened by a proposed amendment to the Forest Act 1997 that seeks to undo the 1993 Community Forestry law that made much of this success possible. Once more, our rulers have shown that they cannot see the forest for the trees. Once more they are ruining in one fell swoop what has been achieved by decades of hard work and commitment by villagers all over Nepal. Once more corrupt national level politicians with a bureaucracy in cahoots is equating forest with timber, and nothing else. And for the first time, community forest groups, grassroots conservationists, and villagers from all over Nepal under the Federation of Community Users, Nepal (FECONFUN) brought their protest to the capital. Their message: leave us and our forests alone.

The lesson from Nepal's success story with community-managed forests was this: if villagers are assured a long-term stake in healthy forests, they will protect them. The amendment to the bill will take away that assurance. Maybe it is better parliament is paralysed—at least the amendment to the Forest Act 1997 will not be passed.

A small, pixelated illustration of a landscape. It features a green hill with a small structure on top, a blue pond in the foreground, and a small tree on the right. The background is a light blue sky.

## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

# Mythic Mithila

It may be time our national politicians took a pointer or two from the deities of Mithila and went to the doors of voters rather than preaching from their pulpits in the capital.

At dawn, it's magical. The breeze is cool, but not chilly. The sky takes on a ripe hue, as the sun peeps out from a filter of haze, red as an apple. Legend has it that Hanuman, the monkey-god, actually mistook the sun for an apple and chomped on it, plunging the universe in darkness. After much coaxing, Bayuputra (Son of Air) set the sun free and the world survived. Time ticks slowly here in this corner of low-land Nepal, and it reminds you that you are home.

The only jarring note is that of loudspeakers blaring latest Anoop Jalota *bhajans* in the distance. The invention of the amplifier must be considered a curse on mankind—it prompts politicians to become demagogues and forces us to shout at each other in order to be heard. Microphones and loudspeakers have snatched away the serenity from rural landscapes. Even where there is no electricity, pop bhajans and lewd folk songs are battery-powered.

When I was a boy, nobody in our village had an alarm clock. They didn't need it. As the stars faded the sparrows and mainahs would start chirping as if it were tomorrow. And it was: as the day broke the cuckoos would go, well, cuckoo on the mango trees. These days, the din of badly rendered *Hanuman chalisa* being played over loudspeakers drowns out the songs of birds.

But getting up early has its rewards even today. The sight of birds catching worms in the fields is just one of them. Reminds me of the Shel Silverstein poem: "If you are a bird, get up early, if you are a worm, sleep late." Stepping on dew-wet grass on a walk along the irrigation canal is another. The joy of picking monkey-peas off stems, peeling off the pods and then eating the green kernel raw is as close to nirvana as you can get in this day and age.


And then all of a sudden, it was rush hour once again as people by the thousands took over the empty road nearby. From

livered palanquins of the presiding deity to the tattered clothes of devotees carrying their meagre belongings on their heads in bundles, the sight of pilgrims on the Mithila Parikrama rekindles faith, inspires hope. Times are bad all right, but we shall overcome. Hasn't this circumambulation of the ancient capital of Mithila been taking place for centuries—unbroken—despite floods, fire, famines, plagues, and the petty wars of competing principalities?

Dharma is not such a long journey—in a fortnight, Mithila Parikrama covers only *Panch Kosh*, or about 16 km. Apart from the deities in their palanquins, pilgrims walk bare-foot, singing devotional songs and even dancing occasionally. This year, armed policemen were escorting the procession. Not surprisingly, some of them didn't wear any shoes either.

Parikrama is a ritual of taking the deities to the doors of those devotees who cannot make it to the temple. Starting from Kachuri near Janakapur, it goes along the perimeter of the ancient capital of Mithila. Part of this area now falls in the political boundary of modern India, but it continues to belong to the same cultural region. Pilgrims walk during the day and camp for the night, usually in mango orchards on the outskirts of villages. Such campsites are then transformed into impromptu rural markets for trinkets, toys and other stuff that are part of any *mela* in the tarai. It can get cold at night, and many spend their time by the fire. Teashops spring up where villagers gather to gossip.

And news about the state of the state percolates down here, too. The communication revolution brought on by the night-buses (Kathmandu papers get here by the next day) and long-distance phone booths allow villagers to check up on news from relatives and friends in Kathmandu. Rural Nepal was never ignorant, only apathetic. Today, it is also aware, well-informed and alert. Because of this, there is general disdain for the political antics being played out in Kathmandu. Very



few sitting in the tea shops appeared to be bothered by the stalemate in parliament. Some voiced the opinion that it was a ploy to obstruct the passage of the Armed Police Force Bill. Others thought it was

meant to deflect attention from the King's reservations about the Citizenship Bill. This is heavy analysis that would put our well-plugged pundits in Kathmandu to shame.

Here, it is citizenship that is the big issue, and people tend to get openly inimical towards the Kathmandu elite. The communally-tinged riots that followed the Hritihik-fiasco in December has hardened attitudes. Gajendra Narayan Singh of the Sadhbhavana Party was on a long drive in the name of his Mechi-Mahakali Rally, and the fall-out of all this was that Nepali Congress-backed Nepal Students' Union lost the elections at its stronghold in Janakapur, defeated by Gajjubabu's boys.

Anti-Kathmandu sentiments are so strong in the tarai that the more Girija Koirala is cornered by the opposition in the capital, the more popular he gets in places like Siraha or Mahottari. Had the Nepal Communist Party (UML) gone to the doors of the voters, they would have got this message loud and clear. Lauda may be an obsession with the chattering classes of the Valley, but here in the plains the primary concern is

security. It's not that people do not know about Lauda here, they simply don't care. Perhaps it's time now for the UML comrades to come to their senses and end this show, it has paralysed the nation long enough. In fact it has helped the Nepali Congress by distracting attention from the real issue of resolving the Maoist insurgency. If the main opposition continues with its antics much longer, it may prove to be suicidal here in these parts and others like it along the south.

It may be time our national politicians took a pointer or two from the deities of Mithila and went to the doors of their voters rather than preaching from their pulpits in the capital. ♦



"Prachandaji has told me personally that if there is progress in talks, then the People's War could be halted." *- Padma Ratna Tuladhar*

*How do you read the recent government overture for talks, and Chairman Prachanda's response?*

It is very positive because there had been no moves towards talks from any side after the Dinesh Sharma debacle, it was as if all communications had broken down. Ram Chandraji (Deputy Prime Minister) has made the effort, and it is positive. The Maoists have also told me they are serious about talks. Till Tuesday (6 March) the government had not responded to the Maoist demand to make public a list of disappeared people. But at least the deputy prime minister has made public a list, it may be an incomplete list, but it forms the basis for resuming talks.

*Both sides say they want to talk, but talk about what?*

The government wants the Maoists to join the mainstream, under the constitution. The Maoists want to include everything, including what the government considers non-negotiable aspects. But even the Maoists said at the informal talks between Ram Chandraji and Rabindra Shrestha (in November) that talks are about compromise. Some fear that talks are useless because the Maoists want a communist peoples' republic and the government won't hear of it. But Rabindra repeatedly told us: "We

communists are pro-republicanism, we will continue to raise the issue. But we are also clear that everything we put forward may not materialise right away. We will try to get as much as we can and you will do the same."

Many also say: why just a constituent assembly, why can't a peoples' republic be on the agenda? The conflict may go on while talks are underway, so the Maoists are also saying why don't we fight under rules set out in the Geneva Convention. If both sides agree to abide by Common Clause 3, then violence and murders will stop. The clause bars you from killing unarmed people, people not party to the conflict, you have to treat the wounded, you cannot do anything to those who surrender, you cannot abduct. That would be an achievement in itself.

The Maoists have also proposed an all-party meeting. The Nepali Congress or Maoists alone cannot have a constitutional amendment. They have hinted there is the need for a national consensus from the king down. Prachandaji has told me personally that if there is progress in talks then the people's war could be halted. And the prime minister has told me that there could be a general amnesty and compensation if talks succeed. There seems to be some thinking going on in the leadership of both sides about a post-talks scenario.

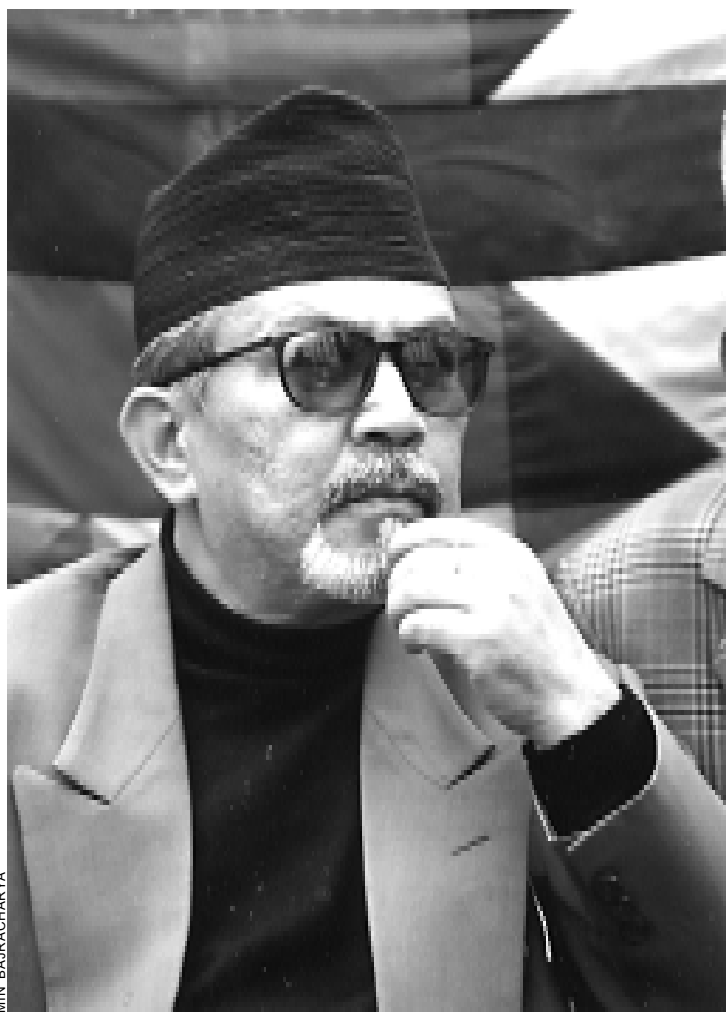
*Continued to page 4*



NIN BARACHARYA

OPEL





MIN. BAJRAHARYA

Continued from page 3

*What is the reason for this sudden mellowing?*

It didn't happen overnight. The talk of talks began with the launching of the People's War in 1996. Human rights groups met the then prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who said that we should try to get talks started. I sent messages, and the Maoists were positive. They wanted the government to make a public call for peace, write them an official letter and they would reply. The Sher Bahadur peace committee was formed, and the Maoists said they'd come to the table if the minimum environment was created, make known the whereabouts of those disappeared, withdraw fabricated charges, form an impartial commission to investigate incidents like Khara and end state terrorism. Contacts stopped only after the Dinesh Sharma episode. Ram Chandrari was trying, well, not with me, but with Kapil Shrestha, Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha and others to restart talks. The Maoists repeatedly inquired of me if there was a fresh proposal from the government.

*When was the last time the Maoists asked you about a government proposal?*

They had asked if there was initiative for talks some time before Ram Chandrari took the recent initiative.

*What makes you think that talks are still possible?*

We have both the PM and the DPM saying there should be talks. The Maoists are also saying they are very serious about talks. After the Dinesh episode, Prachanda told me on the phone that he'd join talks if the four conditions were met. He even said I could take responsibility for talks on their behalf if the conditions were right. I believe there is commitment on both sides.

## "A dangerous mafia is offering arms to the Maoists on credit."

*Are the 40 demands still the main issues in the agenda of future talks? If so, how can those demands be resolved through talks?*

I don't think the 40 demands are very important. It was submitted by the United People's Front (UPF) and not the NCP-Maoists. The UPF has been disbanded, but the 40 points are still taken to be the Maoists' demands. I think the political issues at their conference last month are more important.

*Isn't that also a shift?*

I think that is flexibility. If they have given up the demand for a constituent assembly then I take it as a positive sign. They may have assessed public opinion—it is more reasonable. Ram Chandrari has said that the Constitution we have is a people's constitution, why do we need another one. But it is also true that this may be more acceptable than the demand for a constituent assembly. I think the only problem is getting the two sides to the table, and that's why the human rights groups agreed on a common mechanism for facilitating talks. Neither side is talking because of the absence of a mechanism. But what is the agenda? The government asked the Maoists to suggest one. The Maoists say we'll bring the agenda to the table. If the government is proposing talks, maybe it should come up with an agenda.

*What should this agenda be?*

There could be differences on what to talk about, like the issue of the constituent assembly. The moment the Maoists raise the issue of a republic there could be differences. There could be differences about replacing multi-party democracy with communism. The government has said clearly these are the non-negotiable aspects of the constitution. For their part, the Maoists have accepted that talks are about give and take.

*Will the constituents of the Maoists allow their leaders to talk about anything short of their main goal?*

It is unclear. Some leftist groups say that Maoists should accept the constitution and come to the mainstream, which will also aid the left movement. The Maoists have their own constituency. They had a constituency in the early 1990s when they had nine seats in parliament. Now they have a special type of support, not just geared towards collecting votes, but which has helped them establish people's rule. They don't believe in the parliamentary system, the purpose of their people's war is to destroy the existing system and establish a new communist state. That is the long-term goal of the people's war, which has made an impact nationally. So how can they give up everything at once? The NCP Maoist cannot suddenly say ok, we'll talk and return to parliamentary politics. They may also believe that with or without talks they will continue on their path and even reach the capital in, say, five years. Those of us for talks have to think about the issues that could come up after the talks begin, there has to be homework. Many say the government has not done enough homework and that is why they are asking the Maoists for an agenda.

What the Maoists have clearly said is they will present the agenda at the table. The two positions are so entrenched, it may be better not to have a pre-determined agenda. That is why they may be taking a practical approach, let us get to the table first and discuss the agenda there.

*Is there space for foreign governments to mediate?*

I think that we should make that effort ourselves. If we need mediation, we should do it on our own, not hand over the responsibility to foreigners. But if we

fail and don't have the ability or we lose interest, then the foreigners can come in. But they need to be apolitical, like the Red Cross, which says it can provide humanitarian support.

*There is talk about International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)?*

I have contacted the ICRC myself and so have other groups. We have almost reached the stage for talks. Suppose talks are about to begin at the leadership level and Baburam Bhattarai himself is to come, the logistics and safe-passage have to be worked out. How will he come—in a taxi, a bus, or a government vehicle? There are issues of security involved and his supporters might not want him to travel under police escort. In such a situation there could be a role for the ICRC. If both sides agree, it can even arrange a venue, in Nepal or abroad. If Baburam was to come, he may need a helicopter, and even that can be arranged.

*There is now a new Maoist strategy. Some say Maoists have softened, others say it's a classic communist hammer and anvil approach. How do you read the new position?*

On one side there's the possibility of talks. On the other the Maoists are doing everything as a communist party, having ideological debates, deciding on strategy. They have not stopped the war, and if it escalates, there could be civil war. Those who fear a civil war should be serious about talks. If there are no talks, the Maoist party will continue to grow in influence as they have in the past five years. Another argument is that talks may never materialise and the Maoists need to be crushed. I heard Prachanda once say, "If the efforts are aimed at crushing us, then we're all ready to die rather than surrender. At least we will make history." Violence could be benefiting some, there are profits for those dealing in arms. Those groups may not want talks. The Maoist supporters may say we're finally having a revolution in Nepal, why go for talks.

*You seem to be well informed about the Maoists. What could be their strength now, in terms of core cadres? Weaponry?*

I don't know much. I have not visited the war zone yet. I have been to Rolpa twice, but I could not go to the villages. From them I have heard that their numbers have grown. We hear figures of 25,000. The worry is that the government sometimes talks about using the military or the Armed Police, which could force the Maoists to upgrade their weapons. There is a dangerous mafia involved in the arms trade, and I have heard that they have reached the Maoists and told them "We will supply you arms on credit, and get them across the border." If talks cannot take place the Maoists would be trapped into taking the arms.

*It is feared that the missing Maoists may have been killed. Do the Maoists want the government to say so and so has been killed...*

Yes. It is a matter of formality. The Maoists' suspicion was confirmed two years ago when a delegation had gone to meet Krishna Prasad Bhattarai when he was prime minister. Kirti Nidhi Bista, Rishikesh Shah, Krishna Prasad Bhandari and myself had gone to express concern on those that were missing. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai interrupted and said in English: "They are already killed." On Danda Pani Neupane, there are doubts about his living. It is suspected (that he may be dead). But the party cannot make that announcement formally without some basis. Ram Chandrari has told me that after he become home minister the government had not allowed police to kill anyone under their control. ♦

## LETTERS

### SEX ON THE ROAD

Thanks for the story "Drive-through sex" (#31) by Hemlata Rai who seems to



have put in a lot of work to uncover the sex worker situation in the tarai specially in Family Health International's (FHI) project area, and backing it up with indicators taken from the New Era survey. The work under FHI's HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted disease prevention also includes a media campaign, treatment, social marketing of condoms which could not have all fit into a single article. We hope you will follow it up in future issues. The article gives a strong indication that the sex

business is booming in the tarai, and this is a dangerous pointer to the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission. There is some HIV/AIDS and STD prevention work being done with sex workers which were not highlighted in Ms Rai's article. We strongly feel this information is necessary to share with the public. Next time?

**Deepak Deo Bhatta**  
Family Health International  
Kathmandu

### PHOTO POET

Though I do not deserve the publicity, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to your readers through your Nepali Society column (#33). But your reporter has made a mistake in attributing titles to me which are not correct and hardly used. The label that has actually stuck is "photo kabi" (Photo Poet), a title conferred on me by Kamal Dixit in Darjeeling in 1999.

**Kumar Ale**  
Kathmandu

### THAMEL

One of the reasons I am a regular buyer of your paper is the quality and type of articles you publish, often reporting on issues pertinent to this country that other

publications shy away from or skim over. However, I felt that this was not so with your recent article on Thamel, which gave a bit of background information then the usual drill on shops and a slant on the entertainment scene. Giving positive strokes to some outlets, and making negative or flippant remarks about others based on the author's whim. How many times has this been done before and I am sure will be repeated again and again by other publications? I hope your articles in the future will be refreshingly different and thought provoking as the majority of them are now.

**A Pradhan**  
by email

### PRO-GIRIJA

I have been a regular reader of Nepali Times and have found most of the features and analysis interesting. But I was astonished to see that on the issue of the Citizenship Bill and His Majesty's decision to seek the recommendation from the Supreme Court, your paper chose to keep mum, and translated a poorly written

reportage in *Bimarsha* (From the Nepali Press, #33) which is a pro-Girija faction weekly. Maybe by doing this you have scored points with the Indian Embassy, but you've lost faithful readers like myself.

**Ranjana Shrestha**  
Durbar Marg

### CK LAL

Thanks to CK Lal in "Corruption, Nepalis and the Expat" (#32) for calling a spade a spade and exposing the hypocrisy and bigotry of the powerful and privileged, donors and diplomats. Although his arguments about the democratisation of corruption after 1990 (and perhaps helping the GDP by spreading the wealth around and keeping graft money within the country) are a bit disingenuous, Mr Lal makes a strong point for self-reliance and Nepalis pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. But cursed with the calibre of rulers we have, maybe the right dose of diplomatic pesticide at the right time may not be such a

bad thing to give them a wake-up call.

**Binode B. Gurung**  
Pokhara

CK Lal deserves to be declared the Sultan of Oversimplification. If there are still doubts over the eligibility of the brilliant columnist for this singular honour, then they should be dispelled by this pearl of wisdom from his State of the State column (#32): "Capitalism is based on avarice ... ." This sweeping claim has as much merit as, say, an assertion such as "Communism is based on envy."

As to his tilt at binary oppositions, Lal stands self-condemned. As one of the earliest researchers in the field, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, pointed out, language itself functions through the operation of binary oppositions. For example, Lal's word 'love' in the sentence "The paternalistic power elite love ..." has any significance only in its binary opposition to the word 'hate'. The cognitive process itself is a function of binary oppositions; therefore,

the 'paternalistic power elite' cannot be blamed for using binary oppositions to serve their vested interests. Without recourse to the much-maligned binary oppositions, Lal himself could not come up with his compelling ratio-cinations week after week. PS: I remain a die hard CK Lal fan, though.

**Kanden Thebe**  
Sinam, Taplejung

Congratulations on your excellent articles covering various aspects of Nepali Society. Mr CK Lal is the best, and others are no less. Your articles always keep me close to home while far away.

**Prajwal Pradhan**  
Canada

### DELHI SQUEEZES

After reading your front page brief "Delhi sneezes..." (#33) where you show a near-empty toothpaste tube to detail the adverse effects of the Indian budget on Nepal's exports to India, I thought you could have titled the piece "Delhi squeezes".

**S Shrestha**  
New Road

# Hearts, minds and Maoists

The government has started building roads with its Basket Fund for Maoist-affected areas. But it will take more than highways to make a difference to the lives of the long-suffering people of Rolpa and Rukum.

.....  
**RAMYATA LIMBU** IN MUSIKOT, RUKUM

In the heart of Maoist country, the chairman of the District Development Committee (DDC) Khem Man Khadka sees a silver lining in the insurgency. It is because of the war that his district is finally getting a road.

The Salyan-Musikot mountain highway linking remote Rukum's district headquarters with Salyan to the south is under construction by the Royal Nepal Army. On a clear day, the outline of the road is already visible in the distance from here, snaking up the mountains. Beginning from Salyan, the 80 km road has already passed Sitapati, Kharibot, Jhulkhet and will reach Musikot by next year—unless the government runs out of money.

Rukum has always been famous for its export of vegetable seeds and other farm produce, and people like Khadka hope that the road will provide access to markets, bring income to the peasants here, and boost the local economy. The road is happening as a direct result of the Maoist insurgency, part of the government's effort to accelerate development in this long-neglected area. Ever since the Maoist "peoples war" began here five years ago, development work in the mid-western hinterland has slackened because demoralised local village representatives were caught in the crossfire between the government and the Maoists. They were unable to mobilise local resources for community development.

Now, in Kathmandu and in the mid-western districts, planners and policy makers are hopeful that the government's Basket Fund which pools central government budget with local resources, will revive development activities in Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan, Jajarkot, and Kalikot. Says Khadka: "The Maoist-affected areas do warrant special attention and development packages. But not at the cost of disabling and weakening local governments." While Khadka and his colleagues welcome the idea of a Basket Fund, they are critical of the government's decision to fund part of the project with resources allocated to local development, especially the Rs500,000 already allotted to each Village Development Committee (VDC). "This means individual VDCs will have less money for their programmes," says Khadka. So far the District Basket Fund Coordination Committee, made up of representatives from various political parties and the DDC chairman, has allocated 40 lakhs for the Salyan-Musikot highway. The rest of the money came from the Roads Department. Other motorable roads being built with money from the Basket Fund

include: Musikot-Burtibang, Devsthal Kankadan-Chaurjhari and Charmare-Budagaun Chaujhari. The Fund also provides for supply of chemical fertiliser, improving the district hospital and looking at ways to boost agriculture.

But there is a problem of getting the money where it is needed because of Maoist activities. Sita Oli is a Nepali Congress supporter and VDC

out construction work. But they are also a deterrence to Maoists, and have helped maintain the government's presence." The army is looking at the highway as a test-case for the government's "Defence and Development" project for another Maoist-affected district, Gorkha. The project seeks to involve the police, the army and aid organisations for integrated rural development programmes that



SUDHEER SHARMA

chairperson of Khara in Rukum who has been living in the district headquarters for the past four years. "I know it is my duty to stay in the village. But the environment is not safe. We have an overseer who monitors the work."

Back in Kathmandu, National Planning Commission (NPC) member Dr Jagadish Chandra Pokharel sits at his desk in Singha Darbar and listens as we narrate the woes of local officials like Khadka and Oli in Musikot. He acknowledges the shortcomings of the Basket Fund, and says there is

have a quick and tangible effect on local standards of living.

While Maoists tolerate agriculture, health, and water technicians to go about their businesses in village areas, they are critical of the roads being built by the army in Rolpa and Rukum. We ran into a Comrade Ajay on the trail to Musikot, and he was clearly displeased: "The roads are not being built with the people in mind. It will make it easier for the government to infiltrate our stronghold." But for the moment it is not in the

Comrade Ajay.

How the Maoists, whose parallel governments are a stark reality outside of the district headquarters in these districts, will react to Basket Fund projects remain to be seen. In the past, the Maoists have made it clear that they are opposed to foreign-funded development programmes, arguing that they "undermine the people's war and encourage economic indiscipline, corruption and parasitic tendencies". Most non-governmental organizations have left Rolpa and Rukum. In 1997, the Lutheran World Federation pulled out from Rolpa after completing its five-year Rolpa Community Development Project which included literacy, infrastructure building, saving credit schemes, drinking water programmes.

"There was never any direct threat from anyone. But we were in an odd position, sandwiched between the Maoists and the police, and we left because we did not want to jeopardise the staff," says Shashi Rijal of LWF, which has now moved further west to Accham, Doti and Kalikot. Last year, Maoists in Madhichaur, Rolpa disbanded a 22-member women's savings credit group and warned off Women Development officials. Recalls Nausara Pun: "We were having a meeting when some cadres came up and took the papers of the group and the bags of the women workers. We haven't met since."

That hasn't kept aid organisations from trying. The UNDP-supported Participatory District Development Project (PDDP) has initiated programmes in several Maoist affected districts

in mid-western Nepal this year. In Rukum and Jajarkot it has established district level programmes, and is now moving into outlying villages. "We've selected five VDCs to run programmes depending on their needs. These VDCs have agreed to contribute a lakh each as matching funds while the DDC will contribute one lakh," says Arjun Kumar Ale, PDDP representative in Rukum.

At a meeting recently organised by PDDP, 35 of the 43 VDC secretaries from Rukum came to Musikot to take part in an orientation. "They were very positive about development programmes. Judging from the response, I don't think we'll have a problem in the villages. But it's too soon to say. We have yet to go in."

Khadka and his DDC team, largely Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) supporters, admit that visits into the interior have decreased following increased Maoist activities. But Khadka has been touring 30 of the 43 VDCs as a part of the UML's 'Gauri Jaun, Janta Jagau' ("Go to the village, wake up the people"). He says: "There is plenty of propaganda, but the Maoist don't control the whole district. It hasn't kept us from going to the villages." ♦

Top right: Bridge built by Maoists in Baagmaara, Rolpa, left to right: Porters on the Salyan-Musikot Highway, Tribhuvan Highway near Naubise, Sita Oli, Khara VDC Chairperson, Rukum.



DHURBA BASNET



SALIL SUBEDI



RAMYATA LIMBU

Benetton

# They speak for the trees



"Greedy people in Kathmandu want to steal our forests," says Hari Prasad Neupane, chairman of the Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal.



**SALIL SUBEDI**  
More than 12,000 villagers from all over Nepal descended on the capital this week to protest a draft legislation that threatens to take away their right to protect and manage community forests. The amendments to the existing Forest Act (1993) and the Forest Regulations (1995) will, they say, turn the clock back on a progressive law that has saved Nepal's forests from total destruction. This was a historic rally, one of the biggest consumer

demonstrations in the capital. It was focused, multi-partisan, multi-ethnic, apolitical and designed to prevent what many consider a colossal mistake that will have far-reaching consequences for Nepali society and environment in future. Old and young, men and women alike, were asking to be allowed to own and nurture their forests, to be able to build schools and health posts from forest earnings. All this was promised by the 1993 legislation, but would be taken away by the amendment. "Why doesn't the government leave us



alone and let our forests and children grow together," asked 40-year old Kanchi Gurung of Nigure Community Forest in Dolakha. Community forestry has been a successful people's participation enterprise in Nepal. It dates back to the implementation of the Forest Act and Regulations after the restoration of multiparty democracy ten years ago. Forests were allowed to be cared for and managed as common property by organised groups of villagers who decided how to use forest products sustainably and use earnings for community

development. So far, it has been a resounding success and many developing countries have tried to replicate the Nepal model. More than half the forests in Nepal today are community-managed, and it is this resource that the government seems to be eyeing. This week in the capital, simple villagers made the forceful point that they were not going to give up the greenery they have nurtured to "corrupt politicians in Kathmandu". Says Hari Prasad Neupane the chairman of Federation of Community Forest

Users of Nepal (FECOFUN): "This is the result of greedy people who were groomed in an undemocratic and unethical environment, and they want to steal our forests." Neupane says a section of the forest bureaucracy is cunningly getting the politicians to enact a law that will push back the clock on decades of conservation. "Nepalis are no more ignorant, we know what is what. We know our rights. They better not try to push us around," warned Neupane, whose federation groups community forest users all over Nepal. We asked the spokesperson of the forestry ministry, Uday Raj Sharma, what he thought of the allegations. He hedged the question, answering: "We are in the process of devising new programmes to be implemented in different parts of the country to manage forests in a proper way." The Ministry's plan is to let hill communities manage forests, while in the tarai it wants a "block forest" management system called *chakla*. In the proposed amendment, the government says *chakla* forests in the tarai, inner tarai and chure exceeding 50 hectares, will not be given out to communities. But

the rally seems to have scared the government, and by Wednesday, the clauses in the amendment had been changed and the mention of 50 hectares limit deleted. The government wants to keep large forest blocks under its control through District Forest Officers

*Clockwise from below: Women protesters with banner saying: "don't snatch the rights of people over natural resources"; women at a Forest User's Group gathering in Saptari; Malati Mahila Forest User's Group offices and local club at Saptari; a community forest at Phaparbari Makwanpur; Rani Pouwa forest in Nuwakot; gathering fodder from Sugajor Community Forest Udaypur.*



## HERE AND THERE by DANIEL LAK

FRANSCHOEK, SOUTH AFRICA: This is an achingly beautiful land. The hills are low by Nepali standards but they soar above broad valleys full of vineyards, orchards and prim white cottages built by religious refugees from northern Europe three hundred years ago. Weather sculpted rock tops each height, tempting the hiker, tracing convoluted lines against an impossibly blue sky. By night, stars blaze in a celestial fireworks display, the constellations subtly different. This is the southern hemisphere.

It's early autumn south of the equator. The vines droop with bunches of purple and green grapes. The apples are ripening and groups of migrant labourers are starting to turn up in the central square, getting ready for the harvest. Overwhelmingly though, this is tourist country. The little villages are full of small, nearly perfect guesthouses and restaurants, dozens of vineyards promise a chance to taste far too many wines. The relics of a poor, rural past provide the backdrop for urban stress-relief—a wooden plough in the window of an antique shop is borne off to a stockbroker's sea-front flat, the sweat from the ploughman's grip still etched on handles of twisted cypress.

And yet, as one always doomed to look for the worm in the pudding, I can't help but see that things are not as they seem, that there are swirling sinister undercurrents. Immediately, you see the signs on literally every house that read "Armed Response". A burglar alarm is not enough. Crime is so high that the only deterrent is the threat of a private SWAT team, just a phone call away. At the airport, people check in for their flight, then go to a special counter to deposit their guns for secure storage on the plane. You pick up your pistol at your destination. Everyone has a tale of robbery or violence and they get passed on at cocktail parties in the same tone of voice as we in Nepal discuss the Lauda Air scam, or our next trek.

We once abhorred South Africa for its dreadful apartheid system. Now we

# The worm in the pudding

It is impossible not to use a racial lens to view the successes and failures of post-apartheid South Africa.



*A man killed and thrown off a high speed train in a Johannesburg suburb.*

admire a multiracial democracy committed to social justice and free markets. Nelson Mandela's generosity of spirit, his emphasis on reconciliation, meant that all but the most vicious excesses of that evil system are ostensibly forgiven, if not forgotten. Everyone votes, anyone can marry anyone else, no more are people officially classified by race and ethnicity so their privileges can be qualified and restricted. Yet, I'm still looking for the South African dream. So far, it seems confined to those to whom apartheid was most kind—prosperous white people. In this part of the country, black Africans still do the menial jobs,

waiting on tables, harvesting crops, buying tatty clothing sold from the back of a car in front of an exclusive, white-run boutique. I accept that it's wrong, very wrong, to celebrate the end of apartheid and then use a racial lens to view the successes and failures of the aftermath of such a stunning social change. But it's almost impossible not to.

Flying over the cities of this land is a troubling experience. There are vast tracts of green suburbia, detached, luxurious homes with blue swimming pools a vivid pattern among the trees and fences. Then across a busy motorway, what used to be called a "township", a cluster of huts and dusty lanes, a densely packed warren of lives given to labour and probably more than a little crime. These are the black South Africans—free to vote and travel where they please, still living in squalor with aspirations unmet. Apparently, a black middle class is growing rapidly and buying homes with swimming pools in areas once reserved for whites. And that's not just socially acceptable; it's essential for harmonious development. Economics, and not just racism, now divides this society, as many others.

But I keep thinking about those signs promising armed retribution for burglars daring enough to break-in. One house in this seemingly idyllic village of vineyards and cafés sported a placard asking "Is there life after death?" and then went on to answer, "Come inside and see for yourself." An illustration of a prone human body underlined the point.

It was easy to hate apartheid. It's much more difficult to develop the new South Africa. ♦





(DFO) and Regional Forest Directors who will be granted sweeping powers on registration, renewal, evaluation, management and resource utilisation. This places the community at the mercy of forest officials, even for resources of daily use. "It will be like the Rana regime and the Panchayat era. We will start sneaking back into the forest to fell trees, because we need it," warns 49-year old Krishna Kumar Lama of Nigure Community Forest of Dolakha.

The amendment does allow local communities to grow forests on dead or dying woodlands, scrubland, and degraded slopes. Though the proposed legislation says daily necessities like grass and firewood will be given free to the communities, forest users will have to pay 40 percent of proceeds from the sale of timber to the government. Forest user groups say this is unrealistic, and opens up gray areas for widespread corruption.

Interestingly, even this clause now seems to have been changed after the rally. A new version of the draft legislation now states that the 40 percent proceeds from sale of timber will now be "shared" between the Village Development Committee and the District Development Committee. But it says the rule is applicable only in the tarai, chure and inner tarai regions, which comprise roughly 35 percent of the total forest area in Nepal. There are more than 10,000 forest user groups (FUGs) in Nepal, but only 184 in the 19 districts of the tarai. Deepak Kumar Chaudhary the VDC chairman from Terouta in Saptari says people in the tarai have been denied the right to do community forestry. "If they let us manage our own forests, we will protect it like it is our own. But if it is someone else's people will poach from it," he says.

In 2 November 1999 the Department of Forest (DOF) and the Community Forest Development Programme, both under the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation issued a circular to all forest officials giving them powers to put a halt on the sale of timber from community forests. It said that the circular was targeted at the tarai to halt the felling of hardwood *sal* trees. However, district forest officials all over the country bent the rule and issued a different notice asking all forest user groups to stop harvesting trees. This triggered a revolt among FUGs against what they considered corrupt forestry officials.

The government seems confused. If it wants to protect *sal* why is there a blanket ban on all FUGs? Spokesperson Poudel is unable to clear it up, all he could



KUNDA DMIT



BADRI POUDYAL

tell us was: "We are still under the process of finalising the amendment. It is wrong to accuse the government at present."

Another contentious part in the Bill are forest corridors connecting national parks, reserves and protected areas under the Nepal Biodiversity Action Plan which focuses mostly in the tarai. It aims to take over forests—whether community or government managed, and put them under the control of the national park management allowing people to only use the forest resources under the applicable rules. "But once the Bill is passed, the same will apply to national parks in the hills as well. So this forest corridor plan will also affect people in the hills," says Narayan Kazi Shrestha, facilitator for South Asia Forest, Tree and People Programme, which lobbies for community forest organisations and raises awareness among people and policy makers. "Bureaucrats are just bullying the people and it's been quite a while since they've been doing that," he says. Activists fear that people in the tarai won't be given any more forests to manage and even existing community forests will disappear into park boundaries.

"This will be disastrous," says another tarai villager,

Bhuvaneshwor Adhikary of Chautari Community Forest of Rajhar, Nawalparasi. "People will be angry and start chopping trees at will. Even I will do it, it's my right. After all if the government wants to take what we have planted and protected, why should we leave it to them?" Adhikary and others at the Kathmandu rally were clearly worried about the future. Said Chandra Bahadur Lama of Tuli village in Dhanusa: "The forest mafia will completely take over people's lives."

Community Forests in Nepal are functioning under the Forest Act (1993) at the policy level and the Forest Regulations (1995) at the operational level. Though the forest remains state property, the use of forest resources and its management is taken care of by the community themselves with the state providing technical support. When the community forestry act was first mooted in 1987, it was futuristic and first-of-its-kind. Nepal became the first country in the Asia-Pacific with a community forest master plan. Although overall forest cover has gone down because of the destruction of tarai forest, there has been a resurgence in forest cover in pockets along the midhills. ♦

## Where is Sen?

Journalists and human rights activists have criticised the government for withholding the whereabouts of Krishna Sen, editor of *Janadesh*, a Maoist-affiliated weekly.

Sen, who was in detention for nearly two years at the Rajbiraj prison under the Public Security Act, was released on Saturday, but his whereabouts remained unknown as of mid-week. Unofficial reports say Sen was taken to the Mahottari prison, where he is being detained, again under the Public Security Act. In a sitting of the full bench, the Supreme Court last Thursday issued a habeas corpus writ releasing Sen. Last Saturday, Sen invited local journalists to visit him Sunday morning. Rajbiraj prison officials say they released Sen 7pm Saturday evening.

In protest, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists presented a protest letter to Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, and members of the federation wore black bands at the workplace. A spokesman of the FNJ, of which Sen is a member, said the protests will turn more "serious" if the journalist's whereabouts are not revealed soon.

## Holiday Index plummets

Come 1 Baishak, and the overwhelming number of holidays that brighten the Nepali calendar will be nine less. The Home Ministry after consultations with the Cabinet has decided to cut Dasain holidays short by four days, including the day of *Ghatastapana* (planting of jamara). *Basanta panchami*, *Rishi panchami*, and the Valley-specific *Gajatra*, *Ghodejatra*, and *Bhotejatra* have also been removed from the list of public holidays.

A Home Ministry official says Dasain holidays will extend from *Saptami* to *Duadashi*, a mere six days. Previously, government offices remained closed from *Saptami* till *Purnima*, a grand total of nine days. The courts, however will continue to enjoy holidays as before, because changing these dates would mean amending laws regarding the judiciary.

Even though nine days are off the list, Nepalis continue to be eligible for a day off when the king decides to take a royal trip.

## Soldiers' pay

British Gurkha soldiers fighting for pension parity with their English counterparts organised a conference to gather international support for their cause, which they plan to take to major human rights forums. The Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) has also formed a 11-member committee to continue the lobbying. GAESO demands a review of the Tripartite Treaty (1947) between India, Nepal and Britain which governs recruitment of Nepalis into the British Army, and disclosure of the complete list of Gurkhas killed in major conflicts. It also wants Nepal to begin talks on pension parity with the British government.

GAESO says that Gurkhas are paid about one-sixth of what their British counterparts are in pensions and other welfare benefits. GAESO is also demanding compensation for Gurkhas sent home without any benefits at the end of World Wars I and II, residential visas for Gurkhas and their families, and education and employment opportunities for their children. There are two organisations that claim to represent the former Gurkhas. Former Gurkhas organised under GAESO and the Gurkha Ex-Servicemen's Association began lobbying for these demands about six years ago. In May 1999 the British government announced equal compensation for death-in-service, following the killing of Sergeant Balaram Rai, a Gurkha soldier who died on duty in Kosovo, and whose widow would've received a pittance compared to the wife of a British soldier of the same rank.

The British government has been making some efforts to address the issue. British Gurkha pensions were increased by 100 percent in November 1999, and they are revised every year. This year, the increase was 10.9 percent.



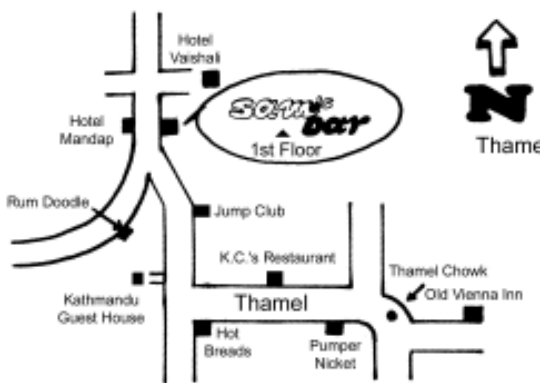
## Waste not

The residents of Radhakrishna tol of the Jorpati Village Development Committee in Kathmandu have shown the government a way out of its decade-old attempt at creating a landfill site to deal with the capital's waste. The 600 families of Radhakrishna tol, under the name Local Effort for Environment Protection and Locality Development Committee, have built their own waste recycling plant. The three-chambered recycling plant cost the committee around Rs 100,000, which was raised through a donation drive within the community. The 160 kg of waste that Radhakrishna tol produces everyday is collected from residents' homes for weekly fee of Rs 20. The recycling plant hopes to become self-reliant in the near future through the sale of composted manure produced at the plant. The plant can produce about 1,000 kg of compost a month, which means an average earning of Rs 15,000 a month—sufficient to maintain the daily waste collection schedule, and the recycling plant, and pay the salary of the two people employed to operate the plant.

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Reviewing the plan

A review of the country's "development" performance reveals that growth continues to fall short of goals set by the Ninth Plan 1997-2002. Overall growth in the real sector in the past three years was 4.6 percent, 1.4 percentage points short of the Plan's 6 percent target. Growth in the agriculture sector was 2.9 percent between fiscal year 1997-1998 and fiscal year 1999-2000, against a target of 4 percent. Growth in the non-agricultural sector was 6 percent compared to the Plan's 7.3 percent growth target.

The only sector where growth has exceeded the target is social services—0.3 percentage points over the 7 percent goal. The overall Gross Domestic Product was low in the first two years of the Plan period due mainly to poor weather, which directly affects agriculture that contributes about 39 percent to the GDP. Yet, the Nepal Rastra Bank report estimates that the average growth in the five-year period will fall short by about one percent only, based mainly on the assumption that GDP growth will be six percent in the current fiscal year.

The government plan was to increase revenue by 0.5 percent each fiscal year, which the NRB review says is quite unlikely. Revenue from customs and domestic production are lower than the Plan target, while there has been a slight increase in income and property tax, and non-tax revenue collections. The privatisation of public enterprises is also way off target. The plan was to privatise 30 of the 43 public enterprises. Only one, the Nepal Tea Development Corporation, has been privatised. Work on privatising one more enterprise, the Butwal Power Company, is on, while the two large commercial banks that were on the list seem to have been taken off.

The government's regular expenditure—in salaries and administration mainly—is up to nearly 9 percent of the GDP during the three years under review, growing at an average of 12.4 percent each year. The Plan had envisaged keeping the growth of regular expenditure at less than six percent of the GDP. Inflation has remained low during the review period, though it is higher than the Plan target of keeping it under 6.5 percent. The average inflation was 7.7 percent during the review period, lower than the average during the Eighth Plan (8.3%).

Birgunj ICD update

Two months after completion, Nepal's third Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Birgunj remains unused, mainly because Indian Railways has yet to approve the operation modality for trains carrying cargo. Tracks were tested on 7 March and it may only be a matter of time because the formalities have been completed.

But the ICD could face another problem though. The residents of Sarsiya village development committee say they will not allow the ICD to be operated unless the government meets some of their demands—made when construction began in March 1998. The demands include construction of a dumping site and public toilets and the renovation of the road. Another demand is to employ one member of each family displaced by the construction of the \$28.5 million complex.

The new container depot is expected to reduce transit and transport cost of goods moving to and from Nepal by almost 30 percent, and can handle about 40,000 containers annually. It is the largest among the three ICDs in Nepal—Biratnagar and Bhairahawa have container depots that are already operational.

Overseas exports up 13 percent

The Trade Promotion Centre has reported a 13 percent growth of overseas exports, pushed mainly by readymade garments, pashmina shawls, lentils and tanned leather. Data for the six months of the fiscal year show pashmina sales reaching Rs 2.3 billion. The export of woollen carpets, Nepal's number one export item until last year, dipped by 12.4 percent to Rs 4.56 billion.

Kodak again

The Supreme Court has asked the government and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) to explain why a Certificate of Origin (CO) was not issued to Kodak Nepal.

Kodak began production in September 1999 but was forced to stop producing after failing to obtain origin certification needed for duty free export to India. Kodak's product origin was certified for export to Singapore but not for sales in India, which is what the company is now challenging in court. Kodak had planned to sell 80 percent of its products in India and is likely to pack up and leave should it fail to obtain origin certification through the court order. Industry sources say India has opposed Kodak's colour photo paper making process as "manufacturing", by which it would be eligible for duty-free entry. The trade treaty between Nepal and India however does not define "manufacturing".



Leaving it to the last minute

In negotiations, it isn't just lack of talking and listening skills, we do little homework and wake up too late.

While writing this column the Beed was eagerly awaiting the decision of the Appellate Tribunal on the petition submitted by hotels and Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) demanding the declaration of strikes in hotels illegal. By the time this goes out to readers, a decision will have been made, but that will not take away from the central question: did Nepalis deserve such an impasse?

As your melancholy correspondent often has occasion to remark in these pages, our problem is that we react, but don't know how to be pro-active. The eleventh hour for us gets whittled down to the nail-biting fifty-ninth minute of the last hour. Add to that our uniquely bumbling manner of conducting negotiations, and the government's lassitude and you see how bad things can get. This isn't about minor impasses either. Our service charge situation is a trifle compared with how we've failed to clear the air to get the Maoists to the table and talking. A month ago, hoteliers were ready to talk and agreed to negotiate through all outstanding issues, not just the service charge. Representatives of the hotels' workforce were also ready to finally agree on a resolution to the whole unsavoury affair. But the issue remained unresolved.

One of the first things you learn in business school, or in a real business, is the art of negotiation. And one of the fundamentals is the lesson that the negotiating psyche, or the one being negotiated with is never the same. It cannot be reduced to a few constant features. A party

ready to resolve a particular issue at a particular time will not have the same intentions later. Situations and motivations change, especially after one or both sides are ready to talk, but their attempts are frustrated. It's like going to buy something. A buyer is ready to pay a particular price at a point of time, and a seller may be willing to sell at that price at that time. If the transaction does not take place then, it might be hard to find the same consensus later. In the case of the service charge impasse, all parties concerned overlooked this fact. We forget that negotiations are based firstly on prevailing conditions. The issue

negotiations with the WTO. To be fair, it isn't just lack of talking and listening skills—we also do little homework and wake up too late. The current government believes indecision is the best form of governance. The government realised in December the importance of tourism to Nepal, and the Prime Minister intervened. Perhaps then tourism stopped being important, or looked like it could use a few months of curing, like a fine cheese. So Sleeping Beauty fell back into her slumber, and those khadi-clads who remained awake decided to turn their hand at muddying the industry waters for sport.



is ensuring that they are conducted properly and are result-oriented. Let's stop dreaming about the perfect "talks", and just focus more on having good negotiations.

There are even consulting firms whose forte is negotiation, a vital aspect of management skills. We're just singularly—and uniformly—bad at it. Just look at our talks with India on water or trade issues. Or for that matter our attempted

So what have we Not Yet Learnt from this hotel-labour-service-charge imbroglio? That negotiations are important and mature ways of resolving problems. That opportunities should be grasped, with both hands, while they exist. That the next such "situation" could be foreseen well in advance, so it needn't have to come to this. ♦

Readers can post their views at [arthabeed@yahoo.com](mailto:arthabeed@yahoo.com)



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# Ice cream is hot

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

The ice-cream business is now hot. Consider this: within two years two international brand names have entered the Nepali market. Clearly, the days of drooling over pictures are over. Quality slurp days are here, and well in time for the summer.

Old timers still remember the first ice cream business in Nepal. It was called Rum Doodle and was started in 1976-1977. It was cheap and good, but it soon shut down. There is no account of small businesses that manufacture ice sticks sold by street vendors in colourful little carts, but the big names are all too familiar: Kwality, Neerula's (formerly Nirula's), Baskin31Robbins (B&R), Nepal Dairy (ND's), and more recently, the world-famous Mövenpick. It's up to you to decide how deep you want to reach into your pocket to give yourself a treat.

The street vendors outside school gates and parks sell what is not really ice cream in the truest sense but rather ice sticks or ice-lollypops—iced sugar water with a touch of added colour and flavour. There are more than 200 manufacturers in Kathmandu who churn out these iced sticks of sugar water and they sell well. A street vendor sells an average of Rs 300 worth of sticks a day and each company has 10-15 carts. Easy math, and

Slurp, dribble and drool this summer at the ice-cream wars.

you get quite a decent sum for an industry that doesn't cost much to set up. Street carts with names like Anand, Himali, and New Everest painted on them are a familiar sight. "I sell an average of Rs 400 worth of ice cream and ice lollies a day. For me the profits come from ice cream but the company makes a lot of money from the ice lollies," says Ram Thapa, who sells Anand.

The bigger players offer you a range as varied one could ever want. Whether you want low-fat or an ice cream dangerously high in calories, you get it all. Mövenpick is the new rage. This Swiss premium ice cream is Europe's hottest selling brand, now set to capture South Asia as well—they have already set foot in nine countries. The guys behind Mövenpick say they are not here to take over the entire market. "We are targeting the upper ten percent niche market," says Ananta Amatya, Marketing Manager of Mövenpick South Asia. The 300 varieties that Mövenpick has to offer are expensive, but the brand is already making its presence felt here, which is exactly what they want. "We are here to make our presence felt because Mövenpick is not what ice cream is,

it is what ice cream is not," adds Amatya. Mövenpick's distributor in Nepal Himmat Shrestha of Ratna Organisation is optimistic. "On the first day we put a street car and

sold a few flavours in front of the boutique. We sold Rs 20,000 worth," he claims. Mövenpick ice creams are brought all the way from Switzerland and knowing Nepali connoisseurs fondness for spending it certainly looks like the brand is here to stay.

If what Himmat Shrestha claims did actually happen, others in the business are in for a tough time. While it is true that international brand names easily attract initial attention they are harder to sell in the long run because they are expensive. Baskin31Robbins, the famous American brand, is on the verge of shutting down after just a year in the Nepali market. Industry sources say it's likely to happen within a few months. B&R has already been replaced by another brand, Walls, in the first outlet that it opened at Wimpy's on Darbar Marg. It still sells in other popular joints but its target

consumers in Nepal never got used to paying the price it demanded.

That may be why Nepal Dairy's brand ND's is popular. Khasa Bazaar in Maha Bouddha is an unlikely place to find ice creams one would think, but surprisingly ND does and well. "ND's is a home product, cheap and good," says Mukunda Bhattarai, an ice cream lover. Any flavour and one has only to pay Rs 30 compared to the Rs 100-350 per flavour for foreign brands.

Another name that was a big hit a few years back was Nirula's in Darbar Marg. Crowds thronged the fast food joint cum ice cream parlour that served popular flavours like 21 Love, Manhattan Mania and Strawberry. It did well and was hugely popular but internal management problems eventually shut it down. "The problem was that it was managed by people from Delhi who didn't



know the environment here. That caused problems even though the outlet was doing good," says VR Satyan manager of Food Court Pvt Ltd, the company that is now trying to cash in on Nirula's goodwill. Food Court produces 'Neerula' and has an outlet in the same place where Nirula's previously sold theirs. It has an average annual turnover of over Rs 10 million and outlets in three other places outside Kathmandu.

An average manufacturer sells around 500 litres of ice cream a day. Most of the big firms have expensive machinery but returns make

investment worthwhile. "The total market worth could be anywhere between Rs70-80 million," says Bhupendra Shakya who has been in the industry for a long time. Shakya helped Kwality get on its feet and today runs his own Himalayan Ice Cream factory that sells the brand Ice Cream King.

Most of the ice cream business use local raw material well and the industry employs thousands. With summer fast approaching, the business is all geared up for another bout of tough competition. This, here, has meant greater choice. Summers will never be the same again. ♦



## Sweet tooth

CK LAL

I have a confession to make. Ice cream. The ultimate luxury of slurping this silky, sweet frozen delight in the cool interior of a cinema hall in India. Before you know it, you are 25, and rushing to reach somewhere, anywhere. For a brief moment, you are distracted by the opposite sex, but soon the sweet tooth reasserts itself and you reach for the scoops out of impulse. By 45, the excesses of life have to be paid for. You learn to wake up early, rediscover swimming, and sweat at the local gym, but you put all the calories right back with a heap of Mango-Tango. Holding an ice cream cone, you close your eyes, trying to remember your teenage fire. Hit 50, and ice cream becomes a fantasy, an object of desire.

When the temptation gets too strong, you steal a lick now and then, rejoicing over the forbidden fruit or agonising over your lack of self-control. Past 65, you prefer ice creams served in crystal bowls with long stems. Rather than a single flavour, you want an amalgamation of vanilla white, strawberry pink, mango yellow, chocolate brown—all forming a rainbow of seduction. Now it's the eyes that stimulate the brain, and not the tongue—or tooth. After 75, you don't care a hang and you enjoy slurping up cones once more in the company of grandchildren.

When I was a child, we used to swarm the ice-candy man. He announced himself with a rattle of his damaru. Clutching a five paisa copper coin that had a picture of a cow, we would rush to buy an ice-block with a stick. We had to start licking immediately because the hot tarai sun would melt the stuff. It cost a mohar—all of fifty paisa. In Kathmandu you could get it at Ranjana Galli on New Road, where they also sold soda water bottles with glass-marbles for corks that made a whoosh sound when opened.

Then Nepal Dairy Corporation (NDC) opened an outlet in Basantpur that sold ice cream in tiny cups. But being a government-run outfit they were always out of stock. Even today, what NDC ice creams lack in variety they make up for in value for money. Restaurants made and served ice cream to order, but the mass market of the middle class didn't really reach here till the eighties. That's when New Delhi's Nirula's joined hands with the Hotel de l'Annapurna, and Annarula of Darbar Marg took the city by storm. The well-heeled made a beeline for ice cream with a dash of saffron. Boys and girls would would save to splurge and slurp. Take-away thermocole packs were introduced for those who didn't want to socialise with the hoi polloi. When the Amatya Group brought in Kwality, a favourite and deliberately mis-spelled Indian brand, they opened a factory at Sina Mangal later, and fresh ice cream was suddenly in all the general stores in town.

The next brand to hit was Vadilal's, from Bombay, and the Lords of Poverty could be seen chilling out at its outlet in Patan. But the crème-de-la-crème of ice cream today are Baskin Robbins and Mövenpick. In the beginning, you had to go to Darbar Marg for Baskin Robbins, now even Bakery Cafes stock it. Like jeans, gym and gin there are people who consider ice cream symbols of westoxication and decadence. But this is one form of decadence I don't mind.

philips

# Songs of Freedom



**SALIL SUBEDI**  
.....  
Oh what do you call a band that has been weaned on Santana, Led Zeppelin and Queen, described as the “biggest crossover success since the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan”, and play

a heady mix of Sindhi-Punjabi folk, hard rock and mystic Sufi music? *Junoon*, Urdu for passion. South Asia’s biggest band, hailing from Karachi, is essentially a blend of ancient Sufi lyric and modern expression. The stage is

set now for their maiden performance in Nepal. Never has a band of this stature and popularity come to this country, and the band’s intensity in performance and the uniqueness of their genre is a potent mix that

“The spirit is the common denominator and that’s how people from different cultures relate to us.”

.....  
is sure to transport Kathmanduites into a magical world that can heighten and liberate their sense of music.

Salman Ahmad, Ali Azmat and Brian O’Connell form Junoon. The word might mean passion and obsession in easy English, but this Urdu noun is a complex gem—one has to explore the mystical to ferret out its depth. Or even better, be at a Junoon concert.

Junoon, excuse me, is just not your regular band. True, they too sing of mysticism, passion and

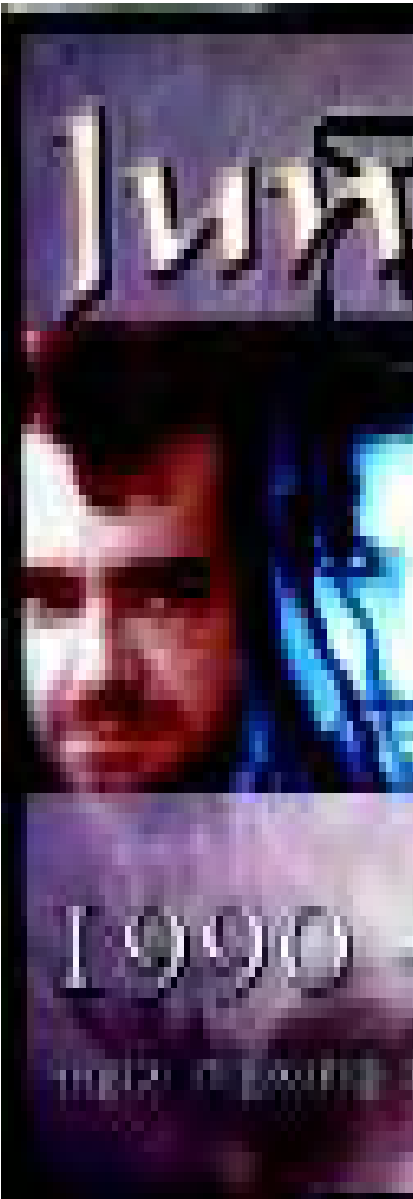


love. They too are prophets of freedom, much like the Sufi *sants*. But these times are difficult; in the Pakistan they live, they have had to stand up for their rights to be even allowed to sing. “You see, as long as you kiss the government’s ass you’ll be on TV. Basically, that’s what it is about,” that’s what song writer and ‘spokesman’ Salman Ahmad said in an interview when the band was banned on Pakistan Television (PTV).

Junoon’s lyrics come from the Sufi poets of the 12<sup>th</sup> century who were your original romantics and gypsy minstrels. What Junoon does is to fuse these traditional prayer-songs of love with rock, folk and qawwali, and for which they have had their share of flak. Salman Ahmad says: “When I compose, it’s natural for us to see these elements coming into our melodies and then the rhythm comes automatically. The *dhholak* and *tabla* reflect Punjabi and Sindhi rhythms and they are already in our sub-consciousness. It is the same with our listeners.”

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was (is) a great influence on the group and the band’s popular *Azadi* album is dedicated to the late maestro. It was Nusrat who experimented and proved that something traditional could be adapted into the modern context. But, like Nusrat, Junoon’s middle class boys too faced scorn for doing the musically blasphemous—fusion.

When you have young men suddenly being seen as rebellious mystics, then they are up for it from the orthodoxy and the political establishment. The band has been banned, their phones tapped, their homes searched by the police and they have received death threats. The Benazir Bhutto-led government in 1990 completely banished them from the state airwaves. The boys held on, with a conviction largely derived from the stuff they were doing, and from the love the Junoonis (the fans) had for them. And so, three days after the Indian nuclear tests in 1998, you have Junoon performing to a



“You see, as long as you kiss government’s ass you’ll be on TV. Basically, that’s what it is about.”



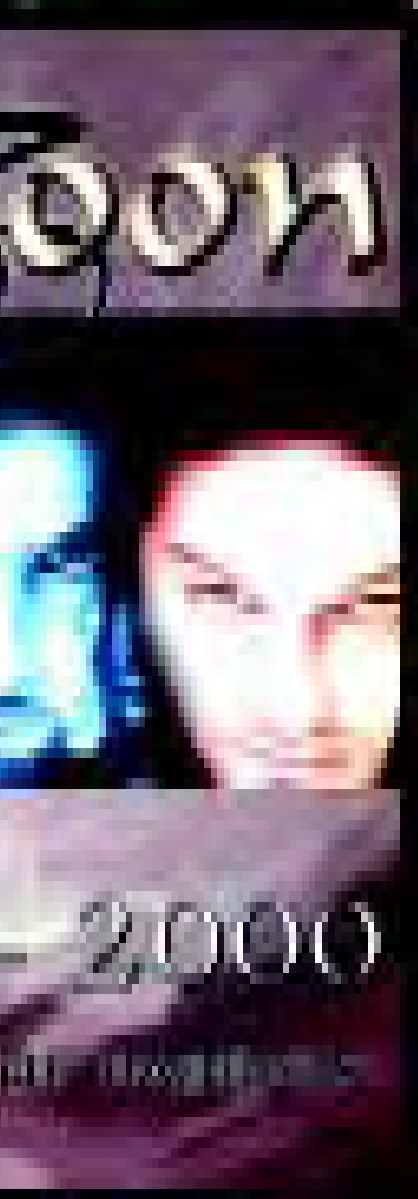
hysterical crowd of around 50,000, in all places, New Delhi. One banner there, they particularly liked: “Cultural Fusion, not Nuclear Fusion”. Back home, another ban. Their first big hit—*Jazba-e-*

Toyota





*Junoon* (spirit of passion) became the official song of the 1996 World Cup Cricket jointly hosted by India and Pakistan. The song later featured in the *Inquilaab* (revolution) album the same year, pushing Junoon into the mainstream where their existence was both welcomed and rubbished. In December 1996, the song *Ehtesaab* (accountability), which mocked



as you kiss the  
you'll be on TV.  
that it is about. "



at corruption and the Pakistani political culture, was banned by PTV on the pretext that it might destabilise a country already on the brink of elections. Salman, in one of his interviews, remembers how songs



like *Talash* (search) that had lines like: "Under the hot sun we are seeking shelter/ once the dust of prejudice settles we'll find our identity" did not raise people's concern. But when Benazir Bhutto's government fell a month later after the *Ehtesaab* release, the public fell back on Junoon who were still performing and speaking rebellion. PTV banned them for the next six months, until *Sayonee* came to their rescue. It is said that PTV was compelled to show the video, as it was rocking the Subcontinent and much else.

The most acclaimed album, *Azadi*, is a 1997 release that opened with the hit song *Sayonee*. The band believes each song in *Azadi* is like a chapter in a book. In an interview with *Connect*, Salman says: "All the songs have to deal with freedom of the soul... Brian is a Christian as is our drummer Malcolm. Ali and I are Muslims. The people in India are Hindus but we all come from the same source. The Sufi realm is all about transcending religion since that is all dogma and a barrier. So *Sayonee* could be about humanity talking to God, asking Him to relieve us of the madness around us and free our spirit. I think what people are trying to define is inner spirituality of the music that is in the melody and the poetry, and a lot in the new album *Azadi* deals with metaphysics. Now a lot of people tried to push that into the Islamic realm. I don't think it has to do with any religion, the spirit is the common denominator and that's how people from different cultures relate to us."

In 1998, the band was awarded the Best International Group Award at the Channel V Musical Awards in New Delhi. The next year the UN recognised them for fostering peace in South Asia. And while all the plaudits came along, they also got to play along with Western big names like Sting and Def Leppard. Before the Nepal trip, Junoon has toured Denmark, Japan, India, US, West Asia and Bangladesh.

Let's welcome the Junoon men to town. We need some music. ♦

Ali Azmat is the magnetic lead singer who delights and entrances his audience with shamanistic stage performances. Critics say he is perhaps the perfect representation of Nusrat-tinged Sufi vocals electrified by an Eddie Vedderesque persona. Ali was Salman's neighbour in Lahore when the latter was studying medicine. Ali used to do Whitesnake and Led Zeppelin in the early days.

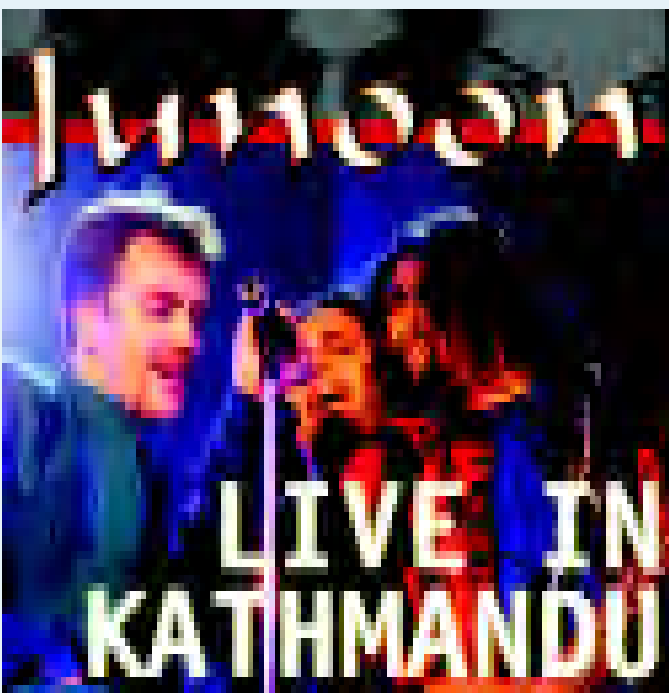


Brian O' Connell and Salman were childhood friends at age 13, when they first met in NY as Salman's father had an airline job in the US. Though Brian was always into music, he supported himself by working with mentally disabled people. Upon Salman's request Brian moved to Karachi in 1992 for good, married a Pakistani model-actress and now visits NY once in a while. He does bass, keyboard, tambourine, and backing vocals for Junoon.



Salman Ahmad is the Sufi poet of modern times and the heart of Junoon. Salman does electric and acoustic guitar, and backing vocals. He was with the first Pakistani pop band 'Vital Sign' and quit the band when it was at its peak. Salman is a medical doctor, which he says he completed for his parents. His inspiration is wife Samina, a backbone of the band. She worked heroically to promote the band in the early days, printing flyers, booking gigs and physically dragging friends to concerts.

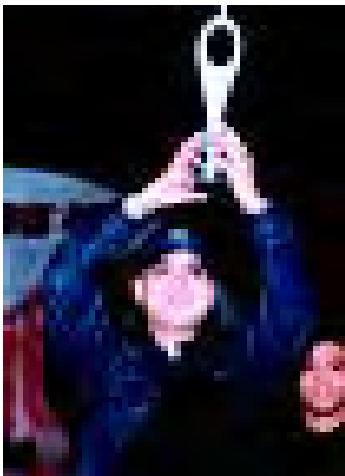
If you want to be a Junooni (the fond nickname for the band's fans), log on to the band's official website <[www.junoon.com](http://www.junoon.com)>



carlsburg



# And the winner is: Nepali Music



Modern Nepali music has gained enormous confidence and maturity. Proof of that was the annual Hits FM Music Awards last Saturday.

**TSERING CHODEN**

It isn't just Nepali music that has come of age, so has the meticulous choreography needed to stage a Grammy-style music

award night in this country. This is the lasting impression the 1,300 people who attended the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Hits FM Music Awards 2057 sponsored by Close-Up at the

Birendra International Convention Centre last Saturday took away. The quality of the music was an indicator of how far we have come, and a tribute to the enormous self-

confidence, maturity and professionalism that modern Nepali music has gained in the past five or so years.

It may be too soon to call it the golden age of Nepali music, but we are certainly getting there. And if this is the pace of change, then it won't be long before Nepali music receives much-deserved international recognition. What's the harm in dreaming? All we require is a little bit of patience and a whole lot of passion.

Love for music survives on this passion, and that is how icons are born. All the contemporary artists nominated for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Hits FM Awards—Jems Pradhan, Nima Rumba, Nabin Bhattarai, Reema Gurung, Raju Lama, Ram Krishna Dhakal (to name only a few) oozed conviction in their talent. And they all sang praises of renowned musicians like Narayan Gopal, Aruna Lama, Ambar Gurung, Gopal

Yonjon, Deep Shrestha, Kunti Moktan, and Arun Thapa.

It's interesting enough that young Reema Gurung and veteran Kunti Moktan were nominated in the same category, Best Female Vocal Performance. And no junior artistes were forgetting what they owed their seniors. That is why Reema Gurung did not have to feign surprise, or even shock, when she emerged winner in that category. "This honour means even more to me because I was nominated with artists I regard as my inspiration," said a visibly moved Reema as she clutched her silver award statue.

People who like and follow Nepali music have been a little worried lately. Would the younger generation come from under the shadow of big names like Ambar Gurung and Narayan Gopal? With the demise of Arun Thapa, the future of Nepali music did seem a little bleak. But now there is no reason to panic. Still in our midst is Deep Shrestha, who has broken his almost decade-long silence with the finest Nepali album of recent times—*Dhristi*, Deep's ode to his daughter. It was Deep's night as he walked

*Chha*, a song he wrote keeping Narayan Gopal in mind. But Narayan Gopal died before he could sing it, and so did Gopal Yonjon and Aruna Lama. By this time, *Jindagi...* seemed jinxed. As Kshetra Pratap Adhikari's son recalled while receiving the award on behalf of his father, there were doubts that the song would ever find a voice. But it did. And who better than Ram Krishna Dhakal, Narayan Gopal's protégé. It seemed then that destiny was just waiting to do its bit.

Sunny Shrestha of Hits FM and the architect of the award evening is thrilled with the response. "What it showed is that if you have quality in Nepali music, you can finally have your economic reward. Look at Narayan Gopal, he died a pauper. He needn't have. Today, as long as you don't compromise on quality, music artists can have a great career." And if it seems the Nepali public has become more demanding, it is also finding ways to reward merit.

The award ceremony went without a hitch, the organisers

The quality of music was an indicator of how far we have come, and a tribute to the enormous self-confidence, maturity and professionalism in modern Nepali music.

away with three of the most coveted awards, Album of the Year, Best Male Vocal Performance and Record of the Year.

Other young musicians also got their place in the sun, and the older and more experienced were appreciated for their timeless and tireless contribution to the Nepali music industry. In the limelight this year was 74-year-old, composer, lyricist, singer, Nati Kaji Shrestha who received the Lifetime Achievement Award. It was in 1948 that Nati Kaji recorded his first song. And on Saturday night, when presenters Basudev Munal and Haribhakta Katuwal climbed down from the stage to the first row of the hall to bestow his award, there was in Nati Kaji's eyes a glint. His shining eyes must mean that his struggles, his passion, his love for music weren't wasted after all. The audience gave him the loudest and longest ovation.

It was a historic moment when lyricist Kshetra Pratap Adhikari won the silver statue for Song of the Year. *Jindagi Ma Dherai Kura Garna Baaki*

clearly learnt from the glitches of the past and carefully planned the performance that was broadcast live on Nepal Television as well as on Hits FM 91.2. The ushers were hearing- and speech-impaired students. And the three-hour performance was awe-inspiring for the sole reason that we have come to expect time over-runs, power outages, boring speeches, squealing microphones, hooters in the audience. But Hits made sure everything went right, and the whole performance was slick, exuded finesse, and was brilliantly MC-ed by Deepesh Shrestha. The Hits FM Annual Music Awards is definitely now an event to watch, and it will encourage Nepali musicians to aspire to greater professionalism. ♦

Tsering Choden is assistant editor of Wave magazine.

Left to right: Comeback man Deep Shrestha, Kunti Moktan, who won the award for the Best Pop Vocal Performance Female, and Nabin Bhattarai, this year's Best Pop Vocal Performance Male winner, who's now won at all the four Hits FM Music Awards.

mercantile



Fusion band Mahayantra



# The myth of the strong dollar

CAMBRIDGE - In his first international outing, America's new Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill got tripped up—by telling the truth. During the Clinton Administration, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and then Lawrence Summers stated that America had a “strong dollar policy.” O'Neill reportedly said that “We are not pursuing... a policy of a strong dollar.” Immediately attacked for reversing a long-held policy, he quickly retreated. Too bad, because his comment made a lot more sense than his predecessors' statements.

The truth is, America really doesn't have an exchange rate policy. When Alan Greenspan ponders the next move in US interest rates, little attention is paid to the dollar's exchange rate vis-à-vis the Euro, Yen, or other currencies. American monetary policy decisions depend on the strength or weakness of the domestic economy and on US inflation. If the economy is slowing, if there is excess capacity, and if inflation is low, interest rates are reduced; if the economy is strong, if excess capacity is limited, and if inflationary pressures are growing, interest rates are raised. Nor does the Fed intervene directly in foreign exchange markets except in extraordinary circumstances.

In only one sense does the US

The US would do better to focus on its own business conditions, letting markets determine the exchange rate.

actually pursue a “strong dollar” policy: the Federal Reserve's monetary policy is designed to keep inflation low. The dollar is kept “strong” in terms of its purchasing power over US goods and services. But this is not what markets believed the “strong dollar” policy meant. They believed that the strong dollar policy referred to exchange rates. In this sense, the “strong dollar” policy would mean that America has a “weak Euro” policy or a “weak Yen” policy. It has no such thing.

So why did successive Treasury Secretaries say that the US has a strong dollar policy? Part of the answer is that support for a strong dollar is an easy slogan; it sounds patriotic. A truer statement for Rubin and Summers would have been to say that America actually has no exchange rate policy, the answer that O'Neill tried to give.

Another reason exists for their statements. Some US officials believe that the “strong dollar” statements helped stabilise foreign exchange markets, even if American monetary policy was not directed at the dollar's strength vis-à-vis the Euro or Yen.

Some believe that, without such statements, the dollar would plunge relative to the Euro and Yen. After all, if the US Treasury Secretary does not support the dollar, what would sustain its value?

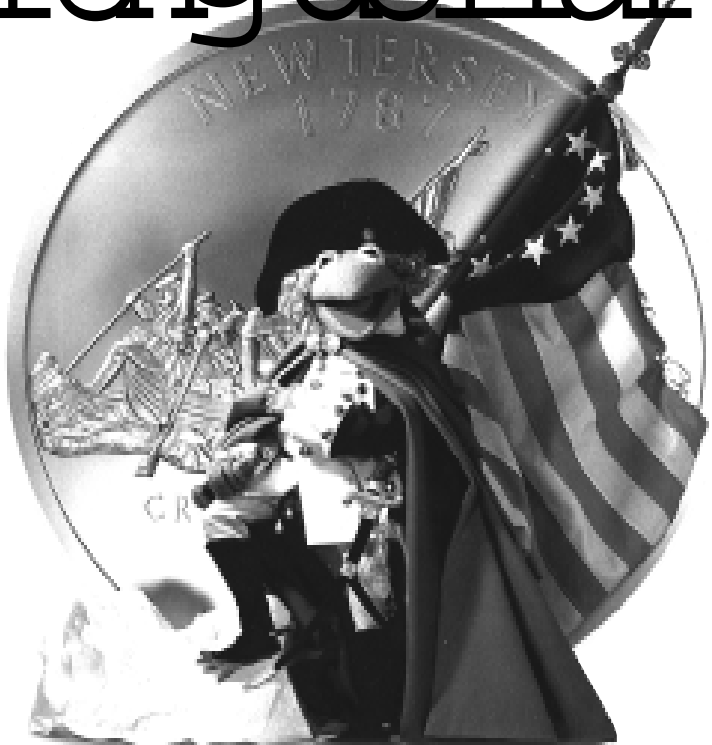
According to this interpretation, market participants would begin to predict the decline of the dollar. They would sell dollars in anticipation of its decline. Those currency sales would indeed lead to a collapse of the currency. The decline in the dollar's value would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. But eventually, fundamental economic strengths and weaknesses have more effect on the exchange rate than self-fulfilling prophecies.

If, as now seems to be the case, America's economy is weakening while Europe's economies remain strong, the dollar will weaken vis-à-vis the Euro whether or not the US Treasury Secretary promotes the dollar. A weaker dollar vis-à-vis the Euro will help sustain demand in the US as the economy slows. Similarly, the Yen will tend to weaken vis-à-vis both the dollar and the Euro because of Japan's underlying weaknesses.

If statements about a strong dollar policy had any effect at all, they probably helped promote America's financial bubble during 1998-2000. Investors in the US and the rest of the world believed for this short period that investments in the US guaranteed riches; this contributed to the boom and bust in US technology stocks.

The naive view that the dollar would always remain strong (and would strengthen even more) vis-à-vis the Euro added fuel to the capital inflows into America. Now that the bubble is bursting, US stock markets are down and the dollar is weakening relative to the Euro. The earlier excesses could bring on a recession in the US this year.

So what should America's exchange rate policy be? Basing American monetary policy on domestic business conditions, rather than on the exchange rate, is correct. Small economies closely integrated with their trading partners might set exchange rate targets, or fix their exchange rate to the currencies of their trading partners, but large and relatively closed economies like the



US, EU, and Japan, do better to focus on their own business conditions, letting markets determine the exchange rate.

The dollar should be left to rise or fall vis-à-vis the Euro and Yen depending on the underlying strengths and weaknesses of the three economic areas. In today's context, market forces will probably lead to a further weakening of the dollar vis-à-vis the Euro, and a further weakening of the Yen vis-à-

vis both the dollar and the Euro.

Secretary O'Neill therefore had it right, even if his words were clumsy. America should have neither a strong dollar nor a weak dollar policy, only a policy of sensible domestic monetary policies, and a belief that foreign exchange markets should determine exchange rates. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D. Sachs is Galen L. Stone Professor of Economics, and Director of the Centre for International Development, Harvard University.

# Zapatistas takes the plaza

DUNCAN CAMPBELL AND JO TUCKMAN IN MEXICO CITY . . . . .

he unimaginable happened. The Zapatistas, led by their masked commandantes and their enigmatic leader, Subcommandante Marcos, finally entered the heart of the capital of the nation with which they have been at war for seven years.

Their entrance was remarkable in that these rebels not only came unarmed but also with a welcome from the president of the country that made them outlaws. “We came here only to say we are here,” Subcommandante Marcos told an enraptured crowd of 150,000 in the Zocalo, the main square of the capital. “We are a reflection and a cry and we will always be there. We can be with or without a face, armed or without fire. But we are Zapatistas as we will always be.”

He had arrived with 23 Zapatista commandantes in an open lorry bearing the slogan “Never again a Mexico without us”. Helicopters circled over as the caravan finally reached the end of its historic journey. In an appeal to all of Mexico for a fairer society, he called on “indigenous brothers and sisters, workers, peasants, teachers, students, farmworkers, housewives, drivers, fishermen, taxi-drivers, office workers, street vendors, gangs, the unemployed, journalists, professionals, nuns and monks, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals, artists, intellectuals, sailors, soldiers, athletes and legislators, men, women, children, young people and old, brothers and sisters”, all to join with them.

But despite the enormous turnout and the success of the long march, the mood was not triumphalist in recognition, perhaps, of the uncertainty that lies ahead. Before Marcos spoke, other commandantes made brief appeals for greater respect for indigenous people. Each read their speeches, as they have done throughout the march, from spiral notebooks and then took their places back in the line as Marcos directed proceedings. The Mexican press was in no doubt as to the significance of the day. “Marcos takes the capital” said one paper. “They're taking the plaza” said another. *La Prensa* summed up the mood with the word “unimaginable”.

At dawn, the caravan of the Zapatistas and their supporters was already breakfasting on tamales in a sports complex on the outskirts of Mexico City where they had been billeted for the last night of their 16-day pilgrimage from Chiapas. They had come in pursuit of constitutional rights for the country's 10 million indigenous people, around 10 percent of the population, and yesterday was the culmination of the journey that had taken them through 12 states. As the 2,100-mile, 16-day trek from Chiapas ended, they were joined by public figures from around the world: human rights ambassador Danielle Mitterand, Portuguese Nobel prizewinning author Jose Saramago, and the French anti-multinational activist Jose Bove. The Zocalo, the largest city square in the world after Red Square, greeted them, but the only sights trained from the rooftops and behind the belfries were those of the photographers and camera crews from around the world and the only explosions were of firecrackers and rockets.

It was in 1914 that Emiliano Zapata, the man who gave his name to the current movement, rode in revolutionary triumph into the same Zocalo. There had been rumours that the new Zapatistas would also gallop into the square on horseback but this, like many of the rumours that have shrouded the march and the Zapatistas, proved unfounded. But yesterday Marcos and the Zapatistas did indeed stand below the balcony of the palace where Zapata and Pancho Villa had greeted their own adoring crowds nearly 90 years earlier. Throughout the morning the street vendors there were busily selling their Zapatista masks,



Subcommandante Marcos addresses supporters in Xochimilco as the rebels neared Mexico City.

Zapatistas march to the capital in pursuit of constitutional rights for Mexico's 10 million indigenous people.

T-shirts, mugs, jugs and recorded music, their Marcos scarves and action dolls complete with pipe and baladava, mixed in with images of Che Guevara. Watching the Zapatistas on their final push, Santos Orozco, 67, a canal boatman said: “They are the defenders of the poor, not just the indigenous.”

The Zapatistas finally marched on the capital, disdaining an invitation issued over the weekend by President Vicente Fox to meet in the presidential palace. Marcos accused Fox of trivialising the indigenous cause. “He wants to turn a serious movement into a prime time event,” said Marcos. “It would be a hollow media event.” In a 20-minute address to the crowd and the nation beyond, Marcos referred to the way that the “first people” of Mexico had become the last in terms of how they had been treated. “We are the people of the colour of the earth. We ask you not to let another dawn break before that flag has a place for us, we who are the colour of the earth,” he said.

While opinion polls do show overwhelming support for the march, a peace accord and Mexico's need to act over trampled indigenous rights, not everyone is sympathetic to the Zapatistas. The head of the country's biggest employers' organisation, Jorge Espina Reyes, called them “irresponsible utopian demagogues”. ♦ (The Guardian)

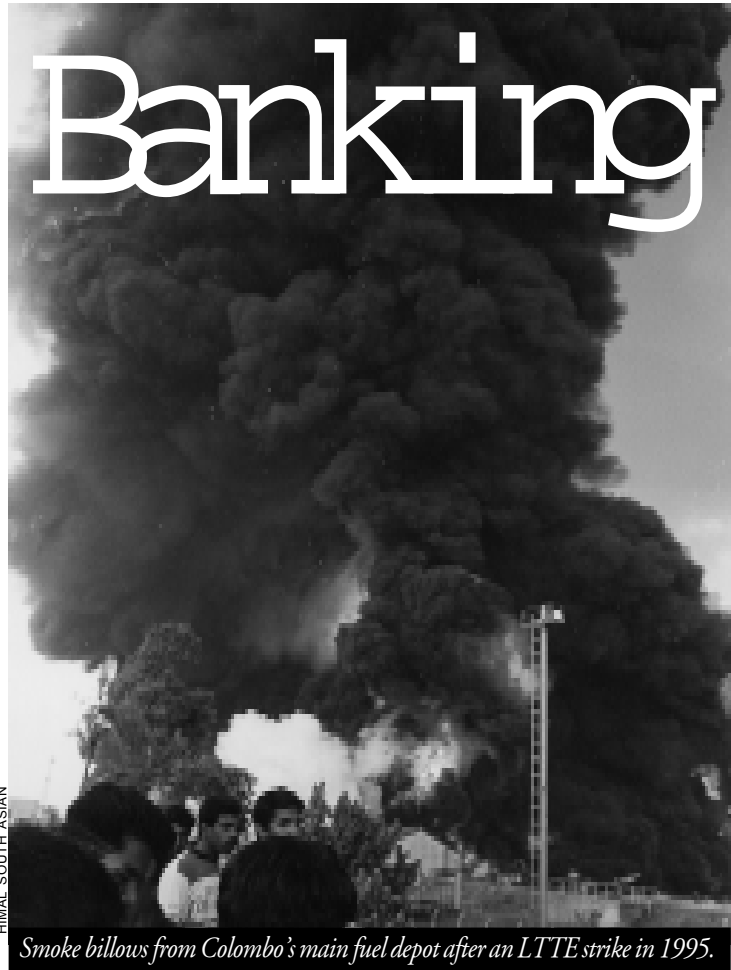
## New peace prize, for women

UNITED NATIONS - Four women and three women's organisations from war-torn and conflict-ridden nations are first winners of the new Millennium Peace Prize for Women, awarded last Thursday, International Women's Day. While the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded since 1901, only 10 of the approximately 106 winners have been women or women's organisations. The Millennium Peace Prize acknowledges women's leadership in finding innovative alternatives to war, holding communities together and bridging ethnic divides. The recipients are Flora Brovina (Kosovo), Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani (Pakistan); Venerananda Nzambazamariya (Rwanda), Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres (Colombia), the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (Papua New Guinea), and Woman in Black (based in Belgrade).

Despite the many challenges they face, women across Asia, Africa, Europe and North and South America are already at the forefront of many peace efforts. “In some cases, women have succeeded in collecting arms in exchange for hot meals, or they have relentlessly demonstrated and appealed for the violence to stop. Others have formally joined peace negotiations, working to ensure that new constitutions include such legal protections for women and girls as access to education, land and property rights and at least 30 percent representation in public office,” said Noeleen Heyzer, director of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The prize is a joint initiative between UNIFEM and the London-based non-governmental organisation International Alert that works with organisations and individuals to identify the root causes of violence and contribute to the just and peaceful transformation of violent internal conflict.

Brovina of Kosovo is the president of the League of Albanian Women of Kosovo, a non-political organisation she founded in 1992 to assist ethnic Albanian women. Brovina was accused of and imprisoned for gathering food, clothing and medical supplies for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Jahangir and her sister Jilani helped to found the Women's Action Forum to help women obtain divorces from abusive husbands. In 1986 they co-founded the Pakistan Human Rights Commission.

Nzambazamariya, who died last year in an air-crash, dedicated herself to empowering women politically and economically, and to restructuring and sensitising Rwanda's imbalanced political, economic and social infrastructures and laws that were biased against women. The Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres movement ensures that women's alternative plans for peace and co-existence reach influential circles in conflict-ridden Colombia. The Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency has been a keystone in the process of peace negotiations and reconstruction in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea since the 1990's. The island has been home to a rebellion against the Papua New Guinea government. Finally, Women in Black is a worldwide network sponsoring politics of resistance, which inspires women in different parts of the world to organise action and non-violent protest. (IPS)



Smoke billows from Colombo's main fuel depot after an LTTE strike in 1995.

**FEIZAL SAMATH** IN COLOMBO  
Sri Lanka's government is banking on likely peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels to kick-start an economy slowed down considerably by the

18-year-old ethnic conflict in the Indian Ocean island nation. Economy analysts said the government's 8 March budget was based on the hope that the peace talks, widely expected to

# Banking on peace

The ethnic conflict once again casts its shadow over Sri Lanka's national budget.

start in May, would trigger a major economic revival, helped by an infusion of \$700 million in foreign aid. The aid has been promised to support rehabilitation programmes in the conflict-torn northern region of the country.

The ethnic violence has claimed more than 65,000 lives so far and retarded economic growth, which now averages about five percent annually. This year too, it has cast its shadow on the government's budget that is expected to add to the woes of ordinary Sri Lankans. Last week, the government imposed further belt-tightening—at least for the next six months—on Sri Lankans, already reeling under soaring living costs in the past year.

"The government appeals to the people to refrain from demanding concessions at least for

the next six months and fully co-operate with us to re-strengthen our economic fundamentals," said Deputy Finance Minister GL Peiris while presenting the year 2001 annual budget in parliament. "If peace comes, then the whole scenario changes and confidence could be restored in the economy," said Sumanasiri Liyanage, senior economist at Sri Lanka's University of Peradeniya. Hopes of peace have been raised with Tamil rebels, who were demanding a separate home for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority people all these years, now saying they are ready to discuss a devolution of powers to Tamil-majority areas.

Peiris said the country's economic growth might slow to 4.5 percent this year from six percent last year, due to lower agricultural

and manufacturing production. Sri Lanka's finances, dented by rising defence spending, worsened as foreign exchange reserves slumped to \$950 million at the end of last year from \$2.5 billion two years ago. With just enough reserves for 45 days of imports, against the earlier average of three months, the Central Bank was forced, late January, to free the rupee from controls.

"Peace will trigger off a massive rehabilitation programme for the north and the east, which would boost economic activities across the country," Peiris said. It could also halve military spending down to three percent of the national income, he added. As part of the austerity measures, the government has decided to freeze public sector salaries till January 2002. Peiris raised taxes and trimmed allowances of ministers and their deputies as part of proposals that are estimated to raise 264.5 billion rupees (\$3.1 billion) in revenue for the government, against a projected expenditure of 387.5 billion rupees. The government also hiked by one percent, an earlier 6.5 percent defence levy on manufacture. This is expected to further push up consumer prices.

War spending has been pegged at 64 billion rupees this

year, up from last year's earlier estimate of 55 billion rupees. It later shot up to 85 billion rupees when the military went on a buying spree to ward off a massive Tamil rebel threat in the northern Jaffna peninsula. The expected slowdown in the economy this year has been compounded by a prolonged labour dispute on tea and rubber plantations, which produce Sri Lanka's main export. The annual inflation rose in February to a four-year high of 16 percent. The rise is attributed to higher local and imported food prices, due to a depreciating rupee and the impact of higher prices of flour, kerosene, diesel and public transport. Most people were expecting some relief on consumer prices, which never came.

Peiris also increased to three rupees, the one-rupee export tax on garments, hiked the surcharge on corporate taxes and doubled the international embarkation tax to 1,000 rupees. The government also decided to tax gamblers by pushing up the tax on casinos to 2.5 billion from one million rupees earlier, while the tax on companies accepting bets on overseas horse races was hiked 10 times to one million rupees. ♦ (IPS)

# The last of the Kochi Jews

**JOSHUA NEWTON** IN KOCHI, KERALA  
Johnny Hallegua hates cameras. He swishes his arm across the lens and shoos away a wide-eyed tourist, because he doesn't like to be considered a leftover of the Jewish presence in Kochi, a major port city in southern India's Kerala state. "They come here and flash lenses and stare at us," complains the man in his early 60s, before declaiming to no one in particular: "Gentlemen, we're not dinosaurs."

But the dwindling numbers of Jews in Kochi (formerly Cochin) mean that Hallegua and others are often viewed as no more than a living relic of a bygone age—one more tourist attraction in a stunningly beautiful coastal state. Today, as few as 16 Jews remain in a narrow lane named Jew Town Road in Kochi's Mattancherry neighbourhood.

On the quiet and empty lane to the synagogue stands Samuel Hallegua, a 69-year-old Jewish businessman whose forefathers settled here in 1595. They came over from Aleppo in Syria. Like his brother Johnny, he is among the few Jews in the town who have refused to leave for Israel. But Sammy, as friends call him, wonders how long the young will stay. "Kerala is not a place where businessmen would like to settle down," the fatherly figure says. "Our young ones quite naturally saw through it and travelled to Israel seeking better prospects."

"Besides, they might have preferred the Judaic ambience in Israel to the minority feeling here," he says. "I guess it had something to do with the cultural mood there. Not that we face any ill feeling from Keralites—till today, not a brow has folded at us. That is the best facet of these people... I really love this place." This sentiment has grown so strong in men like Samuel Hallegua, they cannot think of living anywhere else. "Those of us who are still here want to stay and



Kochi's Jews are often viewed as no more than living relics of a bygone age—as few as 16 remain in Jew Town today.

die here. This land brought us up... I myself wouldn't want to go anywhere. I want to die here."

The Jews of Kochi, called Cochins by Israelis, originally settled in Cranganore, an ancient port 35 kilometres north of Kochi, after the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, they moved south to Kochi—a thriving and colourful port that drew traders from the Middle East, Persia, China, Portugal and Holland.

They were never persecuted and, indeed, prospered as merchants. But the Kochi Jews never crossed the count of 2,500. By 1951, their numbers declined to 370, largely due to an exodus to Israel following its creation. Two more decades and their number slumped to 112. Across India, there are some 6,000 Jews, who belong to four main communities—the Bene Israelis, Kochi Jews, Baghdadi Jews and Manipur Jews (Bene Menashe). Judaism is probably the oldest of the religions of non-Indian origin to arrive in India—some Bene Israelis and Kochi Jews claim their forefathers came to India over 2,000 years ago.

Whatever be the truth of their history in India, it seems even more remote today. Jacob Elias Cohen, the oldest Jew in Kerala, died in October

1998 after reaching his early 90s. Today the youngest of the Kochi Jews, a cousin of Sammy Hallegua, is 24. She is thinking of migrating. That would leave 15 Jews.

Just two of the eight synagogues remaining around Kochi are in good shape. One is in Paravur, maintained by a Jewish family, while the other, built in 1568, is in Mattancherry. Yet the quest for a Judaic ambience in Israel has not always ended in bliss. Elias Elson, a tailor, migrated with his family to Israel in 1978 seeking a better life. But as he told the Mumbai-based *Blitz* weekly, he found it elusive. "It's too hard to live there," he said. "I was unable to bear the economic and political turmoil." Although Elson says that some Indian Jews seemed "mighty happy" in Israel, others have been known to return to Kochi after being miserable abroad.

Monique Zetlaoui, a Jewish scholar from Tunisia, says in his book, *History of Jewish Communities in India*, that those who moved to Israel faced discrimination and were shunned by the orthodox and religious sections of the population; they have neither become a part of the intellectual or social life nor made it financially.

In India, Jews were embraced by the mainstream secular culture, and allowed to maintain their

distinct identity and pursue their beliefs over centuries. They added immeasurably to the rich cultural tapestry of Kerala and, at the same time, adopted many of the traditional social aspects of life. "The uniqueness of Kochi Jews is the manner in which they got Indianised," Jewish scholar Nathan Katz says. "Though their religious observances are for the most part like those that prevail in Israel and the United States, the location of the synagogues here—at the end of the street—is similar to that of temples at the end of a row of Brahmin houses." Just like devout Hindus at a temple, Kochi Jews will remove their shoes or sandals before entering their synagogue. Often their houses will have a front door and an inner door, as in Brahmin households.



The synagogue at the end of the road.

And an oil lamp will burn in a small cavern in the wall. Now their dwindling numbers have forced Kochi Jews to adjust their remaining religious rituals. "These days we find it tough to form a *minyán* in the synagogue," says Blossom Hallegua, referring to the 10-member quorum needed for Sabbath services. "We just pray and leave."

It makes Samuel Hallegua sad. "Down 50 years our synagogue might pass on to something like a trust and flourish as a tourist spot," he says. "There's nothing any of us can do to avert the end of the Jewish life here. Perhaps a day might come when someone here will think that it was all a dream." ♦ (Gemini)

## The Drug Divide

Accused of 'piracy' by transnational drug companies, India is defending its right to make cheaper generic medicines, on legal and ethical grounds. The charges were renewed recently when Cipla, an Indian pharmaceutical company, offered poor countries an anti-AIDS medication at a fraction of its international price.

The controversy points to the strengths of India's 31-year-old patent rules, which recognise manufacturing processes and not products. Western drug majors call this piracy. A study by the Pharmaceutical Research Manufacturers of America last year calculates the losses to the US drug industry to be about \$60 million annually on 20 drugs made in India.

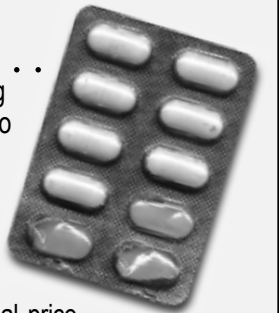
India's top government health official, Javed Chowdhury says there's nothing illegal about generic manufacture until 2005, when India will have to conform to the WTO rules on intellectual property. India's patent policies on drugs were put into place in 1970 with the aim of making the country self-sufficient in medicines, and backed by strict government control on drug prices. Though chafing at the regulations, the largely private Indian pharmaceutical industry grew rapidly—providing direct employment to over half-a-million people, besides producing the cheapest drugs in the world.

India's prowess in making generic drugs was dramatically evident earlier this year, when the Mumbai-based Cipla offered to sell poor countries an anti-HIV 'drug cocktail' for a fraction of the price charged by drug transnationals. With support from the Nobel Prize winner, Paris-based doctors' group, *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (MSF), Cipla is offering a one-year course of the AIDS drugs at \$350, against the about \$15,000 charged by Western pharmaceutical companies.

The global debate, which followed Cipla's offer, saw WTO chief Mike Moore, defending the patent system. "Were it not for a patent system that rewards companies for risking millions on research, anti-AIDS drugs would not exist," Moore wrote in the *International Herald Tribune*. The WTO chief, however, acknowledged that the new, world trade rules have made medicines more expensive for the poor. The WTO-administered global intellectual property rules protect patents for 20 years. The new rules do impose some conditions and permit certain national restrictions on patent rights to help poor nations.

But, says Mira Shiva of the Voluntary Health Association of India, "Pharmaceutical companies may even stop production of drugs, which are used to treat diseases that have been wiped out in the West, but continue to plague warm tropical countries." Companies like Cipla say they'll continue developing cheaper generic drugs until 2005.

Meanwhile, Cipla's offer on anti-HIV drugs has already triggered a downward revision in prices. The US drug maker Merck announced earlier this month that it was slashing prices of two AIDS drugs in developing countries. The company announced that it would strive not to profit on sales of these medications. According to a Merck statement, this was partly a response to increasing competitive pressure from Indian generic drug manufacturers. (IPS)





“Higher the position, higher the corruption”

Excerpts from an interview with Ramesh Nath Pandey, MP, Upper House.  
Tarun National Weekly, 5 March

Every 10 years there is a crisis. Is the present one a crisis of the legislature?

Balakrishna Sama has written a book on the unexpectedness of events. These events do not follow any laws or thought processes, and happen all of a sudden. The events occurring in our country every 10 years are just like what Sama said. The decadal cycles show that we haven't been able to learn all that history has taught us.

Who are people in these tiring times waiting for—the army, the King, the parliament or Maoists?

I do not see the army in that role. According to tradition the army is an organ of the State. Its loyalty is towards the country. Since the King is at the centre of the nation, its loyalty will lie towards the King. Let us not move the army any further from that position. Let it stay as and where it is, that will benefit the nation.

History is looking for the role of the King. Our history, culture, in fact even our constitution accepts that the King is the focal point of this nation. It is but natural therefore to look for a role of the King.

Please give us a definite answer. Which individual or party is responsible for the present crisis?  
Everybody, including myself who sits in parliament, is responsible. A bigger part of this blame has to be carried by the people who are in power, who are ruling this country. After that it is the responsibility of all forces capable of forming governments. Another group that is responsible are the ones who are not in government but run the show. It does not do to just blame the people, the constitution and democracy for our present ills.

Still, who is to be blamed? Is it because of the inefficiencies of the political parties or because of the character of some people?

We practice a weird type of politics in our country. Political parties publish manifestos during elections and other policy papers and documents, but no one reads or studies them it till it is time for the next elections. Even the people never raise questions concerning anything that is published in the party manifestos. This means that the common people never ever read these papers. Three elections have already taken place since.

There is not one responsible position in the country at the present moment that comes on the basis of capacity or capability—they have all been bought. How can there be honesty when positions are bought? All positions have been abused, misused. A person who has been found to be inefficient has gone on to be posted to a better position, and no one has completed his or her tenure. We have set bad precedents and created an inefficient system. What a tragedy that no one wanted to take the post of finance minister. The leader of the majority party in parliament had to go to MPs' houses to ask them to join government. What can be a better example of the falling standards of democracy? Isn't this an insult to democracy?

The opposition has asked for the resignation of the prime minister. Is the Lauda Air corruption case the only reason or are there others?

Seriousness and trust are lacking in the country. This is a regular session of parliament and it is the responsibility of the government to conduct these sessions. The opposition will have its complaints. Why should parliament be caught up in these problems? This shows a lack of seriousness and responsibility.

If we point out inefficiencies of the prime minister, they deserve proper answers. Questions must be raised properly. The PM does not come forward on a personal basis or as a group to discuss matters, and those around him are incapable of carrying out a discussion. There is also doubt about his honesty. He promises everything when he wants support but does not fulfil his promises. The opposition is raising its voice in parliament but the ruling party is not providing answers. Almost 90 percent of the ruling party seats are always vacant in parliament. How can empty chairs provide answers? The ruling party members present there have become mere spectators. Is there any parliament in the world where there are only spectators and people asking questions? No one has paid any attention as to why such a situation has come about. The government takes everything lightly. Matters that have to be acted upon are not touched at all.

After the third general election, a huge hue and cry was raised in parliament concerning the leakage in revenue. An all-party committee was formed, and a report was submitted. Just as the report was being presented the country went into elections, after which the report was presented and passed by both houses. But nothing was done about it and it was not implemented. Ministers who had been accused by that report are still ministers. No action was taken against any bureaucrat, businessman or other person who was named. We have closed the door on ourselves.

In the Lauda Air case, no court has said that the PM is involved in corruption. Therefore, why should he resign? Now that is a legal matter. Everyone agrees that corruption has reached a very high level in this country. People believe that whoever reaches a high position is corrupt and the higher the position, the higher the level of corruption. There maybe some honest people but the masses are not prepared to accept that. The longer parliament does not function, the longer this thought will linger in the minds of the masses. The longer this thinking persists, the faster problems will arise.



Ramesh Nath Pandey (right) with Gajendra Narayan Singh.

Officers, not gentlemen

Jana Aastha National Weekly,  
7 March

The final court martial report concerning the 38th group of UN peacekeepers has been submitted to the Royal Nepal Army. It is learnt that Captain Dr. Steve Pande has fled sensing that action would be taken against him and that the remaining court-martial procedures would be undertaken after his arrest. (The soldiers on UN Peacekeeping duty in Lebanon have been accused of selling arms and ammunition to rebel groups).

Lt Col Rajendra Khadka, who led the Nepali forces on peacekeeping duty, has been dismissed from the army and fined Rs 2.2 million. Others who have been asked to resign are: Havaldars Megh Bahadur Khadka, Kundal Bahadur Tamang, Hom Bahadur Katuwal and Subedar Tirtha Bahadur Adhikary. Officers who have been demoted are: Hari Sharan Adhikary, Captain Bishnu Khatri, Captain Rajesh Thapa Magar, Subedar Sambhu Jung Thapa and Havaldar Ram Hari Thapa.

Major Rishab Dev Bhattarai will not be promoted for the next four years. Officers who will not be promoted for the next three years are: Majors Prabhat Bikram Shah, Pradip Shrestha, Maha Dev Gurung and Naresh Subba, Jamadar Narayan Bahadur Thapa Magar will also not be promoted for the next three years. Additionally, five Majors and one Captain will not be promoted in the next two years, and four Captains, four Subedars, ten Jamadars and four Havaldars will not be promoted for one year. It has also been decided that none of those against whom action has been taken will be sent again on UN duty anywhere in the future.

Why UML cries foul about Lauda

Deshaantar Saptahik, 4 March

Using the Lauda Air issue as a shield, the UML has been able to hide corruption that took place in the China South West Airlines (CSWA) deal some years ago. Two parliamentary committees were formed to look into the irregularities that took place in both the Lauda and CSWA deals by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) The chief of the committee investigating the CSWA deal is Budhiman Tamang of the RPP, the two members are Pari Thapa of the Rastriya Jan Morcha and Rajendra Pandey of the UML.

The parliament has not been allowed to function since its opening, which has come as blessing for the opposition party because the PAC team has not been able to look into the CSWA deal. The committee was all set to meet, but Rajendra Pandey was hurt in the scuffle that took place in parliament and had to be hospitalised. This means that the committee will not be able to present its findings in the present session of parliament.

According to sources at RNAC, there have been irregularities while the CSWA plane. To date RNAC has leased aircraft 19 times, and it has taken CSWA planes 9 times. In 7 out of the 9 instances a Left-led government was in power or a Leftist minister was in charge of RNAC. In most cases it was a member of the UML.

At present RNAC has one plane

leased from CSWA. This aircraft was brought into the country in March 1999. It was about the time when the general election was held, Bhim Rawal was the tourism minister then. On 25 January 1999, RNAC called for bids for a wide-body Boeing with a capacity of 250 seats. On the day the tender was to close, 8 February, many interested parties had submitted the bids. But acting chairman BKM Man Singh, who was brought into RNAC by minister Rawal disqualified all bidders. RNAC did not seek more tenders but Singh, without informing the RNAC board, went to China. On 4 March 1999, he leased a CSWA narrow-body jet (Boeing 757-200) on a wet lease and returned to Nepal with the pilots who had been hired. Sunil Rai, a member of the UML, and board director of RNAC at the time, had accompanied Singh to China. And even though Nepali pilots were capable of flying the said aircraft RNAC had settled for a wet lease. Nepali pilots went on a strike in



protest but the strike was defused after 11 days. Foreign pilots are still flying the plane.

The tender had specifically stated that RNAC was looking to lease the aircraft on a dry lease. According to sources, the cost of the lease was US\$ 2,850 per flight hour. The acting chairman then decided that the rate should be US\$3,150 per hour. The commission worked out to be US\$200 per flight hour and that was shared by the UML and high officials at the RNAC.

Another ordinance?

Deshaantar Saptahik, 4 March

If the present Armed Police Force (APF) Ordinance does not become law, that is if it is not passed by parliament in this session, then an amended APF Ordinance may be formulated immediately after the session ends. Legal experts close to the ruling party are said have come together and drafted amendments to the ordinance after the opposition parties said they were opposed to it and as a precaution if it were not to be passed at all.

The amendment will most probably be issued after the current session of parliament. Clause 2 (d) of Art. 72 of the constitution clearly states that an ordinance once issued will have to be passed within 60 days. If it is not passed within the stipulated time, then it is automatically deemed void. But if the same ordinance is amended and then re-issued, then it gets a total of 240 days within which it must be passed, and it can be presented to parliament again within this period.

Since the opposition parties have been preventing the House from carrying out normal proceedings, the government has not been able to table the ordinance in parliament. Although the ruling party has a majority in the Lower House, it does not have a majority in the Upper House. The members of the Upper House nominated by the king are not in favour of the ordinance. Sensing this, the government has not tabled the ordinance. Meanwhile the government has already formed the Armed Police Force (APF) and since the ordinance has not been passed, it is now forced to issue an amendment

to replace the earlier one. One reason why the parliament is still in session is the ordinance. The government has also formulated the regulations and appointed the regional administrators on the basis of another ordinance. If the ordinance is not passed by parliament, then the government will be caught in a moral dilemma.

Sensing all these problems, the government has decided to go for an amendment to the ordinance that will be issued soon. The government is also thinking of formulating the amendments by consulting the opposition parties. However, there are still doubts about what the government is actually thinking about. The government has also already named the regional administrators, one for each of five of the country's development regions.

Maoists become stronger

Ghatna Ra Bichar, 14 March

The Maoist 'people's war' that began with khukuris and spears in a handful of mid-western districts five years ago is now the most serious threat to the monarchy and democracy. The Maoists now have modern weapons at their disposal and have spread to all the 75 districts of the country. Except for district headquarters, they now have effective control in 36 districts. In these districts government and administration are confined to the headquarters. They are rapidly gaining ground in another nine districts. At this rate the nine will also fall under their control in a few months, forcing the government to confine itself to the headquarters. Maoist sources say taking control of the headquarters won't be difficult if they are able to occupy the periphery. But they are not advancing just yet because maintaining control can be difficult. It is learnt that the Maoists are



using Manang district, believed to be a Nepali Congress stronghold, to smuggle weapons from Tibet. They have not intensified activities in the district, but plan to use it as a safe point to trade and transfer weapons. In recent years Tibet has become a big market for illegal arms. Maoist sources claim that Tibet is a safer, easier and cheaper alternative to India for smuggling weapons.

The districts where Maoists are strongest are Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Pyuthan, Jajarkot, Dailekh, Surkhet, Kalikot, Humla, Jumla, Dolpa, Achham, Bajura, Udaypur, Siraha, Bhojpur, Okhaldunga, Solukhumbu, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Dolakha, Makwanpur, Rautahat, Bara, Kapilvastu, Arghakhachi, Gulmi, Kavre, Sindhupalchok, gorkha, Lamjung, Tanahu, Dhading, Parbat, Myagdi and Baglung. In these districts, government presence can be felt only near the highways and the headquarters.

In addition to the 36 districts, Maoists have intensified their activities in Dang, Khotang, Sangkhuwasabha, Dhanusha, Palpa, Syangja, Mugu, Saptari and Nuwakot.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Corrupt individuals have more resources than the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). For example, they can afford better defence lawyers than the CIAA. The Constitution has granted authority, but CIAA lacks adequate funds to practice the given authority.  
—Former CIAA Chief Commissioner Radha Raman Upadhaya, in Nepali Patra, 9 March



“The biggest success of my France visit is that nobody there demanded my resignation.”

हिमालय टाइम्स Himalaya Times, 11 March 2001

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

- ❖ **Francophone Film Festival** with free screenings at the Moliere Auditorium, Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. Ring 242832 for info on subtitles. Unless otherwise noted all screenings are at 6 pm.
- ❖ **La Banquiere** with Claude Brasseur, Jean-Claude Brially, Romy Schneider and Jean-Louis Trintignant, and directed by Francis Girod. Sunday 18 March 2pm.
- La Cite des Enfants Perdus** by M Caso.
- Kirikou la Sorciere** A Franco-Belgian cartoon by Michel Ocelot.
- Le Barbier de Siberie** A Russian-French joint venture by Nikita Mikhaelkov.
- Le Huitieme Jour** A Belgian film by Jaco Van Darmael.
- Hannibal** Oscar-nominated English film with Anthony Hopkins. The Club, Bhatbhateni. No cover charge for members or their guests. Sunday 18 March, 7:15pm. 416430
- ❖ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at [www.nepalshop.com](http://www.nepalshop.com)

EATING OUT

- ❖ **Momo Mania** The Bakery Cafés' third momo festival. Eat 18 varieties and participate in momo-making and eating competitions. Door prizes. Live music by Rock Yogis and others. Rs 350 for adults, Rs 200 for children. Includes a beer for adults and aerated drinks for children—and unlimited momos. The Bakery Café, Teku. Saturday 17 March. 12noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm.
- ❖ **Mayhem in March** Radisson Hotel's annual March festival: Bubbly Brunch Buffet and unlimited champagne, BBQ In the Waterfall Garden Grill your own steak with an array of sauces, Coffee for Connoisseurs Gourmet coffees and premium liqueur, Rice From Around the World - enjoy the best world class cuisines under the same roof at The Fun Café. Hotel Radisson, Lazimpat. Open anytime.
- ❖ **Exotic Coffee and delicious Nepali food** Jatra houses a café, reading room, a dark room, craft shop and an art gallery. Serves exotic coffee from all around the world as well as delicious Nepali food. Saat Ghumti, Thamel. [www.jatranepal.com](http://www.jatranepal.com) 433859
- ❖ **Weekend Buffet Lunches** at The Café overlooking the pool. Rs 850+tax. 11am onwards. Hyatt Regency. 491234

EXHIBITION

- ❖ **Drawings of Jerusalem** Israeli artist Yossi Chitrit displays over 44 etchings of Jerusalem in ink, charcoal, acrylic and panda. Sponsored by the Tribhuvan University and the Embassy of Israel. Tribhuvan University Central Library, Kirtipur. 19-26 March. Open 10am - 5pm.
- ❖ **A Festival of Photography** "Photographs of Mustang" by Hungarian Normantus Paulius, "Photographs of Nepal" by Japanese Kioji Masuo, and "Great Moments of World Championship in Athletics". 19 March-2 April. Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Rescheduled Son et Lumiere** at the Ram Mandir. Please bring your tickets dated 24 February. Sunday, 17 March 7pm. Dawarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **Aruka Fulko Sapana** AarohanTheatre group stages Abhi Subedi's play. 22 March, Royal Nepal Academy. Tickets Rs 1000, Rs 500 and Rs 100. Contact Sunil Pokharel at 429311.

DANCE

- ❖ **Odissi dance by Sangeeta Dash** TEWA in association with the Indian Women's Club in support of Gujarat's earthquake victims. Tickets Rs 1000, Rs 500 and Rs 200 at Tick n' Tok, Bluebird. 27 March 6.30 pm Royal Nepal Academy Hall. TEWA, 544659 and the Indian Women's Club, 421717.
- ❖ **St. Patrick's Day Party** Dance with live Irish music by An Fainne. Tickets at Chez Caroline, Babar Mahal Revisited, Fire & Ice, CIWEC Clinic and The British School. Saturday 17 March 7pm on at the International Club, Sanepa (opposite Shuvatarra School). Rs 300 with dinner Rs 650 (members Rs 500). 531934
- ❖ **DJ Bishwas** every evening at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. Live Jazz Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Latin nights Friday and Saturday. Hyatt Regency, Taragaon. 491234

MUSIC

- ❖ **Junoon Live in Kathmandu** The South-Asian Sufi rock band plays at the Birendra International Convention Centre Friday, 23 March 6pm. Organised by Infinity International. No cameras. Tickets Rs 2000, Rs 1000, Rs 500 and Rs 350 at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Chez Caroline, Nanglo Bakery Outlets, Hot Bread outlets, Bhat Bhateni Supermarket, Namaste Supermarket and Tik n' Tok.

MARTIN CHAUTARI

- ❖ **Story of Disabled Children** Discussion led by writer Khagendra Sangraula. Participation open to all. Unless otherwise noted presentations are in Nepali. 20 March. 246065. Fax: 240059

SPORTS

- ❖ **Himalayan Hash House Harriers** Stats and the Merry Men will set a St. Patrick's Day run which will start off at Jalapa School at Baniyatar. 17 March, 3.30 pm. Contact grandmaster David Potter at [davidpotter@apon.wlink.com.np](mailto:davidpotter@apon.wlink.com.np) or Fr. Bill Robbins at [sxssc@wlink.com.np](mailto:sxssc@wlink.com.np) for more information

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QUICKWORD 24

by CROSS EYES

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**Across**  
1 The seven-year predicament (4)  
5 Holy, with a double degree (4)  
9 Won soon, sheer effect (5)  
11 Makes a non-divine mistake (4)  
12 Allegiance in Belgium (5)  
13 Turn chair for the cuppas (4)  
14 Cul-de-sac (3)  
15 Beetle (2)  
17 Lady of the cloth (3)  
18 Nut? Aha! All mixed-up. (6)  
20 Maybe it'll go away (6)  
22 Depart or leave (3)  
23 Not intertwined, perhaps (2)  
24 Tear the shroud (3)  
27 Missing in action (4)  
29 Bail button (5)  
31 Effusive about the music (4)  
32 Queens of Carthage in 7Up commercial (5)  
33 Lower hinge joint (4)  
34 Affectionate, perhaps like a water body (4)

**Down**  
1 Creole home (4)  
2 Doppelganger (4)  
3 Old-fashioned gender-sensitivity (4)  
4 Greedy pig (3)  
5 Don't gamble on hedging (3)  
6 Gladiator's home welcomes stadium rock (5)  
7 Teutonic depilator (5)  
8 Assembly of Simply Stupid Nincompoops (4)  
10 Academic apple (6)  
16 Diverse, like a spotty flower (6)  
18 Unhinged nationality (2)  
19 Ambassador's title (2)  
20 I owe one, in the midwest (5)  
21 A close fit (5)  
22 Uncivilised Europe, ca 7<sup>th</sup> CE (4)  
24 Work... déjà vu? (4)  
25 Idol, usually of flesh, sometimes wood (4)  
26 Post-trauma, briefly (4)  
28 Confederate commander meets kung-fu king (3)  
30 In a moment, ages ago (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 23

T	O	Y	S			B	A	T	T
I	R	A	Q			R	A	B	B
M	E	N	U			I	D	I	O
E	S	K	I	M	O		D	N	A
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T	A	P	S	T	E	R			
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L	I	K	E	S		G	L	E	N
E	L	S	E			S	O	R	E

Of the five correct entries, the lucky winner is **Chris Sowton**.

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

Name.....

Ph.....email.....

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

hilly in the morning  
chylous clouds  
impendent  
shower  
entirely  
now  
is clear

Tue  
28-06

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## SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

# Three golden kings

Among the many Nepali kings of old, three are remembered not so much because of how they reigned or what they achieved, so much as by the very personal monuments they left behind—three golden likenesses of themselves. They kneel in the Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, atop high stone pedestals with lotus capitals for their thrones. All are attired in the finery of court dress obviously inspired by Mughal fashion: turbaned, plumed, bejewelled, belted and armed with swords, daggers and shields. All are in attitudes of devotion. Two are shaded by the hoods of rearing serpents; one by a royal parasol.

If the same master created all three, as it would seem, then he lived and worked as long as Michelangelo.

There are the inevitable tales that have kings so delighted by the work they commissioned they had the artist either killed or maimed to avoid their masterpiece being surpassed.

Certainly he could have seen all the three kings, and beginning work on the first statue as a very young man have completed his ultimate masterpiece in his late sixties or early seventies. It was unusual for a master craftsman to be employed in all the three cities. And so when Pratap Malla of Kathmandu, who reigned from 1641 to 1674 decided to be immortalised in gilded metal, it is possible the sculptor went on to portray King Yoganandra Malla of Patan who occupied the throne of Patan from 1865 to 1705. Finally, he would have been summoned by the

flamboyant King Bhupatindra Malla of Bhaktapur who ruled from 1697 to 1729. By then, he was a master of mature excellence who created in his likeness of the king his greatest masterpiece.

This, of course, is conjecture. Even though there were artistic exchanges between the three cities so often at loggerheads if not embroiled in open warfare, it is unlikely that a single sculptor would in fact have created the three statues, since patrons jealously guarded their master craftsmen and kings were no exception. There are the inevitable tales that have kings so delighted by the work they commissioned they had the artist either killed or maimed to avoid their masterpiece being surpassed. As inevitable are the stories that have artists knowing they would lose their eyes or hands stalling for time usually by saying their work wasn't complete until they had made sure of their escape.

So I blatantly romanticise. A young Newari Benvenuto Cellini comes to the notice of the king of Kathmandu, known as a great poet and lover of art. He commissions a metal likeness of himself and his sons, and as it is done the king whispers orders for the artist's despatch, and the young man escapes across the river to Patan. There he does a similar life size portrait of the king by royal command and when the time comes for his life or limbs to be endangered, he flees to the distant city of Bhaktapur. There, as an old man with all the skills of his years, he sculpts a serene likeness of the king. And there, perhaps his glorious creativity ended.

But tradition has it he played on and on for time assuring a fastidious king that his work was not quite complete until he was too old to beat and gild metal any longer. Alas, that his name does not survive with his masterpieces.

Even to this day, several lanes of Patan echo to the tap-tap-tap of metal workers creating anything from pots and pans to images of gods and goddesses. So it must have been in the past, and many could have been the masters who took their wares and their skills to the other capital cities of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, just as the famous woodcarvers of Bhaktapur laboured in Patan and Kathmandu.

Of the three golden kings, there is no doubt that Bhaktapur's Bhupatindra Malla is the most classic. If I were permitted to choose a single masterpiece from all of Kathmandu valley's amazing treasure, without hesitation I would ask for the statue of the Bhaktapur king. He sits so lifelike, his hands gently touching in the attitude of namaskar, his shirt sleeves minutely creased, his forehead marked with vermilion, and turquoise rings still upon his fingers that it should surprise no modern beholder if he rose slowly and mounted a waiting elephant. The golden likeness matches the man, for his life was as rich as the metal he was immortalised in.

It is said that when he was a young boy he was sent by his scheming stepmother to the forests about Bhaktapur with paid assassins. So earnestly did the handsome prince plead for his life that the assassins left him with a family of Tibetan craftsmen and, dispatching a goat to bloody their knives, returned to the



palace. The young prince grew strong and well versed in the arts of his foster people. And he gained sufficient popularity to lead an army on the palace, kill his usurping stepmother and her lover, and ascend the throne in triumph.

Once crowned king, he lost no time in lavishing his love of the arts upon his city. Several of Bhaktapur's most memorable monuments arose at his command. It is said he often took

an active part in their building.

Strangely, none of the succeeding Malla kings were moved to perpetuate themselves in lifelike gold. Perhaps there was already a heavy strain on their gilded purses. Or had the ultimate master cast the ultimate golden king? ♦

Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, Harper Collins, 1994.



King Bhupatindra Malla's gilded statue silhouetted against the evening sky.

## BOOK REVIEW

by MARK TURIN

## Banjas along the Barkhor

Nepal's master storyteller, Kesar Lall, has brought out a new collection of tales, but these ones are anything but folk. *The Newar Merchants in Lhasa* is a tribute to the traders of the Kathmandu Valley who braved bandits, snow drifts, ice falls and stubborn mules to discover for themselves both the mercantile potential and spiritual dimension of Tibet's mysterious capital.

The compilation is comprised of seven first-hand accounts, varying in detail and length, from men who made the journey to Lhasa and wrote about it. Aside from one, which is adapted from an original in English, all the contributions were previously published in Newari, and it is a tribute to Lall as compiler and translator that he has managed to convey the very different individual styles of the authors. It is often said that the best translations are the ones in which the translator's voice is mute and where the reader would never have guessed that the text has been translated. Lall achieves this, and it is no small task, given that he was faced with rendering cultural, culinary and religious terms into English from the four languages of Nepali, Newari, Sanskrit and Tibetan.

The intermingling of trade and religion is a common thread which weaves through each of the seven accounts, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the first, and longest, story in the book. Entitled *In the Footsteps of A Lama*, it charts the fortunes of Mahapragya who gained notoriety for being one of the five Buddhist monks arrested in Kathmandu in 1924 and later expelled from the country for refusing to renounce his religious convictions. His voyage takes him through Kyirong, Gyantse, Lhasa, Champaling, Samye and Shigatse, and the reader is left

The mythical aura surrounding Lhasa has long entranced Newars south of the border, and is not limited to Westerners disenchanted with the capitalist way.

with the feeling that he left no stone unturned and no village unvisited. His eye for descriptive detail together with frequent passages of direct speech make his story a particularly interesting historical document on travelling in Tibet in the late 1920s.

Dharmaloka Mahasthavir's account, *A Pilgrim in Tibet*, is a touch more anthropological and he makes some thought-provoking, if rather open-ended, comments, such as "travelling can be quite instructive" (page 50). He notes that until the construction of the Kalimpong-Tibet road, Tibetans were reliant on Nepal for their southern trade. Once the road was up and running, Tibetans made their way to places as far afield as Calcutta and began trading themselves. According to Mahasthavir, this meant that "they lost their respect for the Nepalese" (page 50). His conclusion that "religion was rooted deeply in Tibet because the learned lamas made great efforts to explain the texts clearly" will ring true with many practising Buddhists to this day.

A Merchant's Letter to his Wife, by Chittadhar 'Hridaya', is an excerpt from his longer novel *Mimmanah Pau* written in Newari. This short account has a more personal flavour, particularly his poignant description of leaving his wife ("your tears had stained my white socks", page 65) and being reunited with his father in Lhasa.

An excerpt from the autobiography of Nhuchhe Bahadur Bajracharya is included, under the title of *A Tibetan Odyssey*, and it

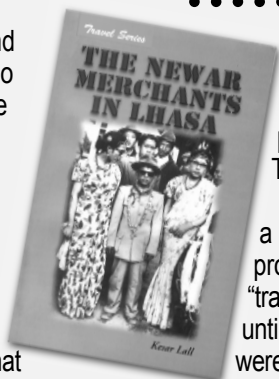
makes for good reading. More than the other accounts, it reads easily and has a distinctly light touch. His description of an accident with a mule after a toilet stop could be called comic, were it not for the serious nature of the incident. The episode was clearly memorable enough to warrant the purchase of a horse: "my intense dislike and total distrust of the mule are already well known to all readers" (page 106). The section of his account entitled *A Tibetan Home* is full of interested cultural observations and demonstrates his keen eye for social documentation. It is comforting to know that the famed Newar business acumen and associated cockiness was alive and well as much 50 years ago as it is now:

"A few Newar businessmen suggested that I join them in their occupation. They told me that they preferred Newars to Tibetans. The latter, in their opinion, were not quite suitable for the purpose." (page 96).

The final three accounts, by Harshamuni Shakyia, Manikratna Kansakar and Kuldharma Ratna Kansakar are pleasant travel vignettes but too short for the reader to be drawn into the world of the narrator. The reviewer would have preferred one longer piece, with more descriptive insight, in the place of these three cursory outlines.

Tibet, as we know, is all the rage. Everyone is bleating the word, it is the veritable chorus of the sheep. More intriguing is that the mythical aura surrounding Lhasa has long entranced Newars south of the border, and is not limited to Westerners disenchanted with the capitalist way. In the Preface, Kesar Lall confesses that he too "was fascinated and duly impressed by the lore and legends of Tibet", and his magnificent collection shows us why. ♦

*The Newar Merchants in Lhasa*, by Kesar Lall. 2001. Travel Series, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu. iv + 126 pages. 16 black & white plates. ISBN 99933-0-187-6. Rs 150.



# Shutterbug



SAMUEL THOMAS

Pradeep Yonzon calls himself an accidental photographer. It describes how he strayed into the vocation, but not the careful attention he pays to his subjects. His recent exhibition in the capital, Euphoria—presented at the Soaltee by the Chomolungma UNESCO Centre—was a studied exploration, and the 30 photographs had a definite touch of class—engaging, brilliant for the most part, and somewhat disturbing.

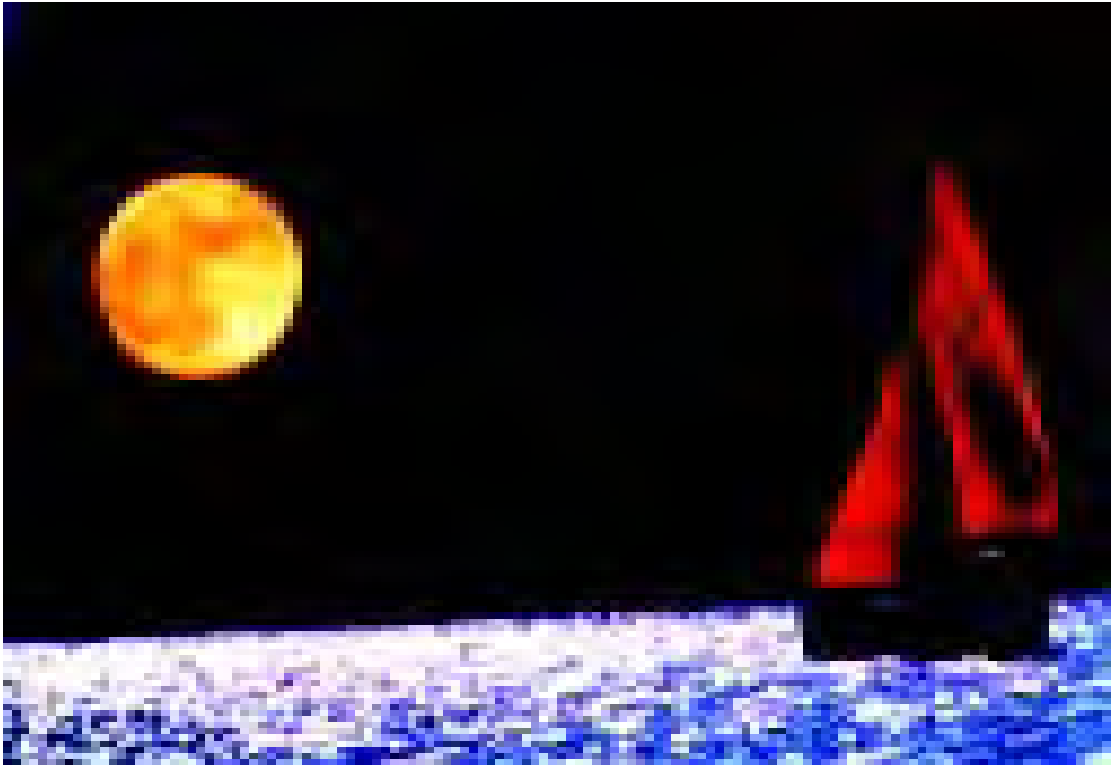
The man constantly experiments. “I don’t like to idealise things. I like breaking rules,” he says. This was amply on display—in the almost surreal *Eternal Quest*, the euphoria of *The Uninhibited Artist*, the humanisation of pottery in *Solidarity*, or the disturbing *Passion*, there is a lot of free play in his work. Yonzon doesn’t fit the bill of a regular photographer in many ways. You won’t find him lugging his camera around all the time, armed for

“I don’t like to idealise things. I like breaking rules.”

sudden action. It’s also very difficult to get him to talk about the technical aspects of his work. “The mechanics of it are less important to me,” he says. Ask him how he thinks his work has been progressing, and he replies: “The work is still in the same genre—part realistic, part abstract—but the subjects have changed. I like playing with elements—light, shade and solid forms. My focus is not on the subject

itself. If the photograph is in colour, then the emphasis is on colour, tone, patterns.” Yonzon believes most of the work comes from his sub-conscious. “When you start focussing, it modulates the vision. I see things then that I don’t normally see.”

“Photographs disturb people. I like that,” says Pradeep. Asked to assume the role of a critic he laughs: “This is probably the work of a madman.” Not one for a regular job,



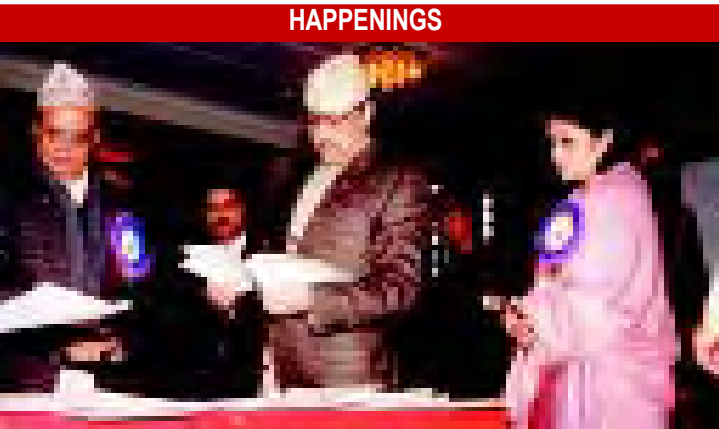
cabinet for a long time. His first big break came in 1991, when he worked along with several artists on a Goethe Institut-sponsored project. “I had worked for years, but was always unsure about how the public would react to my pictures. I just did not have a clue as to how to present my pictures to the world.” That first exhibition did Yonzon a great deal of good. “It gave me a lot of inspiration, even though people did not fully understand my work.”

Yonzon’s done his share of commercial photography—fashion, tabletop and the like—but today he is more of a stock photographer. This shift happened over the last five years, as he decided to concentrate on the kind of photography that he likes doing. “There are two distinct parts of

my work today—that which can be sold some day and the work that I do only for myself.” He’d like to do it all for himself, and spend all his time on building a superb collection. But then “the other bit is for survival” he adds.

Yonzon also refuses to discuss whether his work is “art”. “Art is that which has artiness in it,” he laughs. He then hands me a paper with a quote from writer Susan Sontag: “Photographers generally claim to be recording, impartially observing, revealing, witnessing, exploring themselves. . . anything but making works of art.” Many at the exhibition would disagree. ♦

Pics: *Lonely Sail* (top); *Solidarity* (below); *Uninhibited Artist* (left); and, *Invincible Force* (far left).



SILVER JUBILEE: King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya at the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Mrigendra Medical Trust on 12 March. Dr Mrigendra Raj Pandey (on left).



KOFI IN KATHMANDU: On arrival in Kathmandu for a 24-hour stopover Kofi Annan, flanked by Foreign Minister Chakra Bastola and UN Resident Coordinator Henning Karcher, answers questions from the press.



POLITICAL VOLLEYBALL: Bodyguards and chauffeurs play volleyball outside the National Parliament as house deliberations remained stalled for the third week.

Yonzon was helped into photography by a relative. He started off with a Nikomat FT in 1978, doing portraits, attending functions and the odd assignment. “I never knew then that photography could have such scope, such influence,” he says. He’s a self-taught photographer, his knowledge and skills acquired by reading books and magazines and

constantly experimenting.

What is it like being an experimental photographer in Nepal? Well, Yonzon thinks “one can survive,” but says there’s no culture here of people buying photographs for their personal collections or of business houses and organisations doing enough to promote such work. The lack of such a tradition kept Yonzon’s pictures in the

Sharp





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Now that we have handed over the governance of this country to lawyers, we can all stand back and take a well-deserved R&R, snug in the conviction that we are in capable hands, and that the legal eagles will sort everything out for us. Parliament can go into hibernate mode, political parties can do what they do best, which is tear each other's throats out in public, the army can go about shooting on sight anything that barks, the bureaucracy could take mass casual

courts in our country always have the locus standi to work out the status quo of an amicus curiae (not to mention the lapis lazuli) which is a priori included in the lophophorus impejanus and sine qua non of that fundamental question: quo vadis? There has never been a busier time in the history of democratic Nepal for our court system. Plenty is going on: the Supreme Court is trying to decide whether the legitimate child of an illegitimate Nepali is eligible for citizenship, the

to choose his own poison, a hearing is on in the case of People vs MPs for paralysing parliament, hotels and unions are in the appellate court fighting for the right to keep all tourists away, and the national airline has made a court deposition that it rented a wide-body plane so it can fly nearly-empty thus providing greater comfort and more personalised service to its passengers. So, to figure out what on earth is going on, we finally sneaked a hidden camera inside the speaker's

tahalka.com.np

leave—not that it would make an iota of difference, the national airline can mothball all planes and get into the kitchen-gas powered tuk-tuk business, hotels can declare a two-year moratorium on guests, and we in the fourth estate can now re-direct our energies towards more gainful activities. Such as organising tri-annual staff picnics at Sundarijal. Slogan for Amazing Nepal Year 2001: "When in doubt, leave it to lawyers." So, now that barristers are sliding down banisters in their hurry to rescue the nation, the only question we can ask is: wonder why we hadn't thought of this before? All along, we put our faith in politicians whereas we should have deployed the vastly superior legal profession. After all, didn't the



Centre for Investigation of Abuse of Alcohol (CIAA) is busy figuring out if the Attorney General has on occasion had one too many, and the Attorney General has in turn sued the CIAA for infringing on his right

chamber and saw an all-party meeting in progress: Speaker: OK, the Treasury Bench wants buff momos, and the Main Opposition wants khasi. The Smaller Left will go with khasi provided it also comes with gravy. It is now eleven at night, can I make a motion to have dinner while we wait for an all-party consensus on the lunch menu? Nepal: Yeah, let's have dinner first. I second that motion. Speaker: Is that OK with you, prime minister? Koirala: My dear friend, all I need right now is a tall glass of tea. Speaker: Good point. Marshall, tea! Marshall: Sorry sir, hotels are on strike. There is no delivery. ♦

Move'n pick

NEPALI SOCIETY

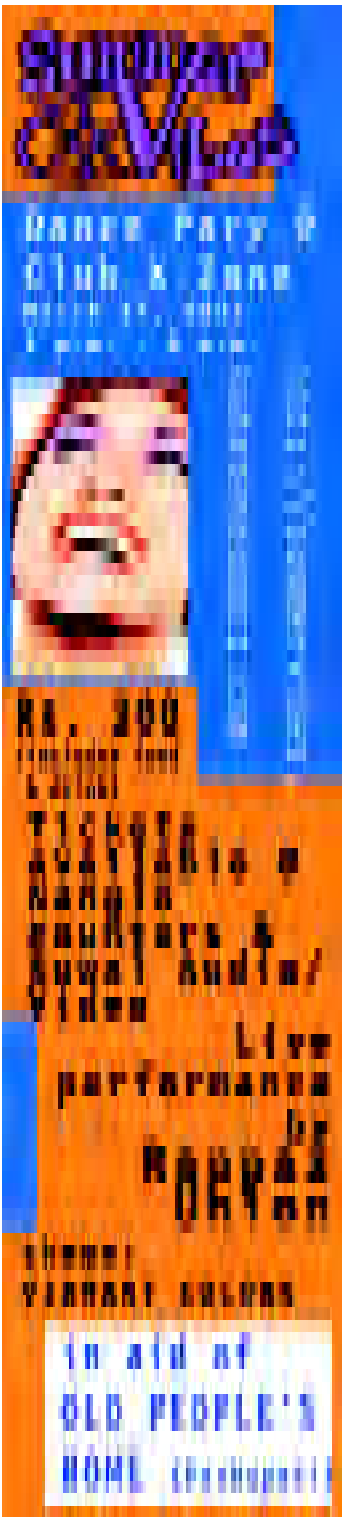
Citizen Ken



When he came to Nepal to help the Gandaki Boarding School modernise in 1984, Ken Afful had no idea he would be beached in landlocked Nepal for almost two decades. But that is what happened and this affable Ghanaian is still working on plans to go home. "Maybe in a year's time," he says wistfully. You can tell he doesn't really mean it. Ken's got to love Nepal. He has scores of friends and although it is a long way from the village of Anomabu on Ghana's Atlantic coast to Anamnagar he feels perfectly at home here. He is still "Ken Sir" to GBS alumni and Kathmandu University students. And to grocers and farmers in Okhaldhunga he is "Ken Daju". (He was a rural development consultant with the United Mission to Nepal). In his time in Nepal, Ken has seen development workers come and development workers go. Some may have forgotten him, but none has forgotten his famous peanut soup. "You really have to teach me how to cook that soup without meat. How come it tastes that good," a guest at Ken's in 1991 wrote in his Visitors Book. The secret of Ken's "national" soup is a closely guarded secret.

And Ken the person? "You are a crazy academic dedicated to Nepal," wrote another guest in his Visitors Book. Many find it difficult to explain what the stocky, African with degrees from Lancaster and the London School of Economics sees in Nepal and why

he lingers. We put it to him, and he thought about it before replying: "They had warned me when I first came that I may not survive long in Nepal. But I wanted to prove them wrong." In his latest avatar, Ken calls himself an Organisation and Management Consultant, busying himself with the Organisation Development Centre that he helped set up in Kathmandu. Staffed mainly by former colleagues and students of Ken, the ODC is an attempt to try to pass on their experiences in the management of Nepali organisations. He spends the rest of his time writing books and reports on management and behavioural approaches to organisation development. And when he eventually gets back home, he wants to set up a similar organisation there. We asked Ken if being African was a problem in Nepal, and if Nepalis are racist. "No they are not racist," he answered firmly. "I have experienced racism elsewhere, not here. If Nepalis sees a dark, stocky person with a flat nose and curly hair they are not used to it, but they always accept you." Maybe here is a candidate for Nepali citizenship? ♦



AMBASSADOR