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 meet, 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 question is: are the anti-Girija forces working together? And if so, is there a “hidden hand” that wants him out? How would one explain these strange bedfellows working together for saying one thing and doing another? But as usual, we were powerless to prevent. It was the king’s way. Witnesses said everyone talked in circles, nothing was resolved. As usual the king took a forward march on his own, things may be different then. “The solution has to be found within the party,” agrees Hans Nath Dhakal, Nepal Congress MP. But the king’s action could be an indication that the political situation is worsening. “We are a new, young, uncompromising generation,” he says. “We are not going to give up.”

HOTEL HARAKIRI
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 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 meet, 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 question is: are the anti-Girija forces working together? And if so, is there a “hidden hand” that wants him out? How would one explain these strange bedfellows working together for saying one thing and doing another? But as usual, we were powerless to prevent. It was the king’s way. Witnesses said everyone talked in circles, nothing was resolved. As usual the king took a forward march on his own, things may be different then. “The solution has to be found within the party,” agrees Hans Nath Dhakal, Nepal Congress MP. But the king’s action could be an indication that the political situation is worsening. “We are a new, young, uncompromising generation,” he says. “We are not going to give up.”

JUMPING SHIP
The force in parliament hides an eternal Nepali Congress feud that is taking the party down, and dragging the country down with it.

PARLIAMENT HAS NOT MET FOR A MONTH. THE government has less than three weeks to get its important ordinances (one to stop an 113 MPs from moving past first base). That feud is still going strong and the government is powerless to prevent. The question is: are the anti-Girija forces working together? And if so, is there a “hidden hand” that wants him out? How would one explain these strange bedfellows working together for saying one thing and doing another? But as usual, we were powerless to prevent. It was the king’s way. Witnesses said everyone talked in circles, nothing was resolved. As usual the king took a forward march on his own, things may be different then. “The solution has to be found within the party,” agrees Hans Nath Dhakal, Nepal Congress MP. But the king’s action could be an indication that the political situation is worsening. “We are a new, young, uncompromising generation,” he says. “We are not going to give up.”

ICE CREAM IS HOT

“We can’t wait to be in Nepal”
South Asia’s hottest band, Junoon, hits the capital next Friday. On that day, the nation’s top English-language editor of Wave magazine, spoke to Salman Ahmad, Ali Azmat and Bicks 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 been like?
Ahmad: There’s no secret. We’ve been doing this for ten years—and it clicks with the audience. So what’s there for Pakistanis in your new album first? 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’re 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 this. We had them earlier, but they don’t really fit. It was the rock n roll ethic in us. It’s much more organic now. In an interview with Daily South Asian in 1998, you said “You have to kiss the government’s ass to be on TV.”
A: We’re not kissing ass to be on TV. Not with the present government. The people running television then—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. Where do 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 to do a set thing. It depends on the crowd. We look forward to seeing mountains, nature and new cultures. You’re our neighbour, how different can Nepal be from Pakistan. We’ll find out, we can’t wait. A: I’m looking forward to meeting new people, having fun, making connections, leaving a mark.
SEEING FORESTS (AND TREES)

You don't need to be a genius to figure out that Nepal's democracy is having a most troubled adolescence. We can't really blame the government because we haven't had a government for a while. A festering labour dispute in the hotel industry that could be easily resolved is threatening the national economy. A Maoist insurgency that feeds on decades of neglect and apathy by successive rulers endangers democracy and the constitutional monarchy. Parliament, which should be passing bills, has been paralyzed for three weeks.

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 Kathmandu Palanchok District east of Kathmandu was forest. By 1998 it had gone up to 35 percent. (High mountain forests and taral forests are not doing as well, and show declines.)

Kathre and Sindupathalok are districts that pioneered community forestry and showed us all what could be achieved through local motivation, devolved decision-making, and transferring ownership and control of natural resources to the village level through true decentralisation and grassroots democracy. Replicated throughout the midhills, Nepal's community forestry programme today covers more than one third of the nation's forests and has become a showcase for neighbouring South Asian countries. If there is one group of unsung heroes that deserve the next Right Livelihood Award, it will be the thousand or so village chairmen, forest user groups and woman's organisations that manage and protect woods across the land.

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 running 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 (FEFCOFUN) brought their protest to the capital. Their message: the amendment to the bill will take away that assurance. Maybe it is better parliament is paralysed—at least the amendment to the bill will be postponed.

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“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 Chandrakaji (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 Chandrakaji 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 also dare 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, the 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-talk scenario.

A. Continued to page 4

OPEL
What makes you think that talks are still possible? Only after the Dinesh Sharma episode. Ram Chandraji was trying, well, not to talk. If the minimum environment was created, make known the whereabouts of Bahadur. The委会 was formed, and the Maoists said they'd come to the table. The Karmachari Prashsteng done that. But what is the agenda? The government asked Maoists to join. The Maoists say They will be coming to the agenda.

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 the Maoists with the Maoists. The government has made clear there are no 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 sort 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 make known the people's voice. They don't believe in the parliamentary system, the purpose of their people's voice is to destroy the existing system and establish a new communist state. That is the long term goal of the people's view, which has made an impact nationally, and now they give up everything at once. The NCP Maoists cannot suddenly say, we'll talk and return to parliament. They may also believe that with or without talks they will continue on their path and even reach the capital, say, in five years. Those of us who think about the issues that could come up after the talks beg them not to be hasty. Many say the government has not done enough homework and that is why they are being able to make such a statement.

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 are making 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 foreign powers. But I've failed and don't have the ability or will to interest, then the foreign governments can come in.

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 talk matters, let's make message, 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 Bahadur. The委会 was formed, and the Maoists said they'd come to the table. The Karmachari Prashsteng done that. But what is the agenda? The government asked Maoists to join. The Maoists say They will be coming to the agenda.
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.

RAINYA LIMBU IN MUSKAT, 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-Muskat mountain highway linking remote Muskat’s district headquarters with Salyan to the south is under construction by the Royal Nepalese 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 Stapat, Khanbhot, Jhulichaur and will reach Muskat 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 “people’s war” began here five years ago, development work in the mid-western hinterland has stalled, and demobilised local representatives have been caught in the crossfire between the government and the Maoists. They were unable to mobilise local resources for community development during the war.

Now, in Karnataka and in the mid-western districts, planners and policy makers are hopeful that the government’s Basket Fund which pools central government resources with local ones will reinvigorate development activities in Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan, Jajarkot, and Kalikot, according to Khadka. “The Maoists-affected areas do warrant special attention and development programmes. But at not 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 by each Village Development Committee (VDC).

“This means individual VDCs will have less money for their development programmes,” says Khadka. So far the District Basket Fund Coordination Committee has made up of representatives from various political parties and the DDC chairman has found 11 VDCs anxious for the Salyan-Muskat highway.

The rest of the money came from the Roads Department. Other motorable roads being built with money from the Basket Fund include: Muskot-Burnbang, Devodh Kankakan-Chaurjhari and Charmure-Budugan-Chaurjhari. The Fund also provides for supply of chemical fertilizers, improving the district hospital and looking at ways to boost revenue.

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 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 overseeing who monitors the work.”

Back in Karnataka, National Planning Commission (NPC) member Dr Jagadish Chandra Pokharel sits in his desk in Singh Durbar and listens as we narrate the woes of local officials like Khadka and Oli in Muskat. He acknowledges the shortcomings of the Basket Fund, and says there is a need for better guidelines. “This is an area where local funds have either been frozen in the absence of local representatives, or their use dictated by Muscat, where the village councils haven’t met, and local representatives remain in the district headquarters owing to Maoist fears,” says Pokharel. With problems of access to Maoist-affected areas, the NPC feels it is better not to dispense the money to the grassroots, but concentrate on visible and tangible programs like roads, health, agriculture, etc.

Currently 400 locals are employed on the Salyan-Muskat road. The army also treats locals at its health clinic and carries out small drinking water projects which have been welcomed by locals. “It has turned out that they serve two purposes. They carry out construction work. But they are also a deterrent 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 the Maoist-affected district, Gorkha. The project seeks to involve the police, the army and aid organizations for integrated rural development programmes that

How the Maoists, whose parallel governments are a stark reality outside of the district headquarters in these three districts, will react to Basket Fund projects remains 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 parochial tendencies.” Most non-governmental organisations have left Rolpa and Rukum. In 1997, the Lutheran World Federation pulled out from Rolpa after completing four-year Rukum 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 felt because we did not want to jeopardise the staff,” says Shashi Rijal of LWF, which has now moved further west to Axcham, Doti and Kalikot. Last year, Maoists in Madhachaur, Rolpa disbanded a 32-member women’s savings credit group and warned off Women Development Organisation.

“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 as our programmes depending on their needs. These VDCs have a agreed to contribute a chunk each as match fund while the DDC will contribute one lakh,” says Anurag Kumar Ahire, 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.”

In the meantime, the government’s initiative to accelerate development in Maoist-controlled areas is moving ahead. In tune with the government’s decision to fund part of the project with resources allocated to local development, especially the Rs500,000 already allotted by each Village Development Committee (VDC), the government has initiated programmes for integrated rural development in several Maoist-afflicted districts. The Maoists themselves have their own small development projects—building small bridges, repairing community buildings and maintaining village trails. Villagers volunteer for the construction work. “I know the projects we carry out are small. But the work is carried out by the people themselves, and it teaches self-reliance,” says Comrade Ajay, a former Maoist combatant 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 overseeing who monitors the work.”

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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 ‘Gaun Jana, Janta Jagau’ (“Go to the villages, wake up the people”). He says: “There is plenty of propaganda, but the Maoists don’t control the whole district. It hasn’t kept us from going to the villages.”

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.

They are not as they seem

It’s early autumn south of the equator. The vines droop with bunches of 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 opening and groups of migrant labourers are starting to turn up in the central square, getting ready for the harvest. Overwhelmingly, this is a tourist country.

Seeing things as they are not

“The government is not going to give up its forests, while in the tarai it wants to let hill communities manage forests, while in the tarai it wants to let hill communities manage forests,” says Hari Prasad Neupane, the chairman of the Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal (FECOFUN):

“This is 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 why 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 us forests and children grow together,’ asked 40-year-old Khushal Gurung of Nuwakot Community Forest in Dolakha.

Community forestry has been a successful people’s participation enterprise in Nepal. It dates back to when 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 promising success and many developing countries have tried to replicate the Nepal model.

More than half the forest in Nepal today are community-managed, and it is this resource that the government seems to be eyeing. The week in this capital, the simple villages made the forceful point that they were not going to give up the greenery they have nurtured to corrupt politicians in Kathmandu.”

Forest Users of Nepal.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

They rally to keep forests

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 way of managing forests.

The Ministry’s plan is to hand over the management of forests to the community, but pending questions about land ownership and enforcement of the law have the villagers worried that they will lose their forests.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry wants to keep large forest blocks under its control through District Forest Officers.

Clockwise from below: Women protesters with banners saying “don’t touch the rights of people over natural resources”; women at a Forest User’s Group gathering in Satari; Malati Mahila Forest User’s Group office and local club at Satari, a community forest at Phuhaulari. a group of community forest users at Sugajur Community Forest Udyanpur.

Hari Prasad Neupane, chairman of the Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal.

Nepal Times

DANIEL LAK

The wom in the pudding

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

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 a stunning social change. But it’s almost impossible to do.

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 much 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 just not 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 a black 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 a stunning social change. But it’s almost impossible to do.

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

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Admit to a multicultural 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 as their privileges can be valued and remitted. 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 a stunning social change. But it’s almost impossible to do.

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Forest of Dolakha.

Kumar Lama of Nigure Community
it," warns 49-year old Krishna
regime and the Panchayat era. We
forest officials, even for resources of
the community at the mercy of
renewal, evaluation, management
sweeping powers on registration,
under the Ministry of Forest and
Department of Forest (DOF) and
will poach from it," he says.

But if it is someone else's people
will protect it like it is our own.
Chaudhary the VDC chairman from
the tarai. Deepak Kumar
but only 184 in the 19 districts of
percent of the total forest area in
regions, which comprise roughly 35
rules is applicable only in
between the Village Development
Committee and the District
Committee that it
s the rule is applicable only in the
tara, chure and inner tarai regions,
which comprise roughly 35
per cent of the total forest area in
Nepal. There are more than 10,000
forest user groups (FUGs) in Nepal,
based in the 19 districts of the
tara. Deepak Kumar
Chaudhary the VDC chairman from Tarai. Deepak Kumar
Chaudhary says people at large have been very
confused about FUGs, and a lot of people are not
sure about their status and role. He says people have
been scattered and insignificant. Moreover, FUGs have
been doing that," he says. Activists
fear that people in the tarai won't
accept the rule and start chopping trees at will.

"We have planted and
what we have planted and
all if the government wants to take
and start chopping trees at will.

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 Kaji Shrestha, facilitator for South Asia Forest, Tree
and People Programme, which works for
tree corridor forests 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 a disaster," says
another tara village,
Bhuvaneshwar Adhikary of Chautari
Community Forest of Raphar, Nawalparasi. "People will be angry
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Chandra Bahadur Lamasa of Tuli
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Act (1993) at the policy level and the Forest
Regulations (1995) at the
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use of forest resources and its
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When the community forestry act
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Another contentious part in the
Bill are forest corridors connecting
national parks, reserves and
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focuses mostly in the tarai. It aims
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community or government
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So this forest corridor plan will also
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Narayan Kaji Shrestha, facilitator for South Asia Forest, Tree
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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 4.8 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 damped 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 Eight Plan (8.3%).

Birgunj ICD update

Two months after completion, Nepal’s third Island Container Depot (ICD) at Birgunj remains unused, mainly because Indian Railway has yet to approve the operation mode for trains carrying cargo. Trucks 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.

A month ago, hoteliers were ready to remark in these pages, our government’s lassitude and you see how bad things can get. This isn’t about minor impeches either. Our service charge situation is a trifle compared with how we’ve failed to clear the air to get the Massis to the table and talking. A month ago, hostlers were ready to talk and agreed to negotiate through all outstanding issues, not just the service charge. Representatives of the hotels’ workers 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 is ensuring that they are conducted properly and not just the service charge. 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 unblinkingly—bad at it. Just look at our talks with India on water or trade issues. Or of that matter our attempt negotiations with the WTO. To be fair, it’s 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 slumber, and those khadi-clads who remained awake decided to turn their hand at modifying the industry waters for sport.

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ECONOMIC SENSE

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.

W

ile writing this column the Beed was eagerly preparing the decision of the Appellate Tribunal on the petition submitted by hotels and Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) demanding the declaration of strike 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 humbling manner of conducting negotiations, and the government’s lassitude and you see how bad things can get. This isn’t about minor impeches either. Our service charge situation is a trifle compared with how we’ve failed to clear the air to get the Massis to the table and talking. A month ago, hostlers were ready to talk and agreed to negotiate through all outstanding issues, not just the service charge.

Representatives of the hotels’ workers 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 is ensuring that they are conducted properly and not just the service charge. 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 unblinkingly—bad at it. Just look at our talks with India on water or trade issues. Or of that matter our attempted

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

Readers can post their views at arthadee@yahoo.com

NEPAL TIMES

NEPALI ECONOMY

BIZ NEWS

WANTED MARKETING EXECUTIVES

Himalmedia, Nepal’s premier publishing group, is looking for Marketing Executives for its operations in Katmandu.

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

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

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NEPAL TIMES

NEPALI ECONOMY
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-cream pops—iced sugar water with a touch of added colour and flavour. There are more than 200 manufacturers in Kathmandu who churn out these icy sticks of sugar water and they sell well. A Torrent 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 wares.

you get quite a decent sum for an industry that doesn’t cost much to set up. Street carts with names like Anand, Himal, and New Everest painted on them are a familiar sight. “I sell an average of Rs 400 worth of ice cream a day but the company makes a lot of money from the ice lollies,” says Ram Thapa, who sells Anand. The bigger players for a range of varied one could ever want. Whether you want low-fat or an ice cream dangerously high in calories, you get it all. Movenpick is the new rage. This Swiss premium ice cream is Europe’s hottest selling brand, now set on domineering South Asia, which they have already set foot in nine countries. The guys behind Movenpick say they aren’t here to take over the entire market. “We are targeting the upper 10 percent niche market,” says Anand Amatya, Marketing Manager of Movenpick South Asia. The 300 varieties that Movenpick has to offer are expensive, but the brand is already making its presence felt here, which is exactly what they want. “We can here to make our presence felt because Movenpick is not what ice cream is, it’s what ice cream can’t be,” adds Amatya. Movenpick’s distribution in Nepal Himal Shrestha of Rams Organisation is optimistic. “On the first day we got a street cart and

sold a few flavours in front of the boutique. We sold Rs 20,000 worth,” he claims. Movenpick ice creams are brought all the way from Switzerland and knowing Nepalese connoisseurs for spending it certainly looks like the brand is here to stay. What Himal Shrestha claims 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. Bakshy’s Robbins, 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, Walks, in the first outlet that opened at Wimpy’s on Durbar Marg. It still sells to other popular joints but in 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. Khas Bazar in Maka Bazaar in an unlikely place to find ice creams as 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 bit a hit a few years back was Nirula’s in Durbar Marg. Crowds thronged the fast food joint car ice cream parlour that served popular flavours like 21 Love, Manhattan, Mamba and Strawberry. It did well and was hugely popular but in the first 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 ‘Neerala’ and it has an outlet in the same place where Nirula’s previously sold their ice cream. 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 earn make

investment worthwhile. “The total market worth could be anywhere between Rs 70-80 million,” says Bhupendra Shaky. It has been in the industry for a long time. Shaky helped Nirula get in and today runs two local Ice Cream factories that sell the brand Ice Cream King.

Most of his 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, but one more grows. Success will never be the same again.
Songs of Freedom

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 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 Sufis. But these times are different: 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’s 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 12th 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 dholak 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 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-

“We see, as long as the government’s ass you’ll be on TV. Basically, that’s what it’s about.”
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 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 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 had 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 Vedder-esque persona. Ali was Salman’s neighbour in Lahore when the latter was studying medicine. All 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>
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.

It isn’t just Nepali music that has come of age, so has the aesthetically choreographed need to stage a Grammy style music award night in this country. This year’s event, the 4th 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 4th Annual Hits FM Awards—Jyoti Pradhan, Nina Rambha, Nabin Bhattacharya, Reema Gurung, Raja Lama, Ram Krishna Dhakal (to name only a few)—owed conviction in their talent. And they all sang praises of renowned musicians like Narayan Gopal, Anu Lama, Anupam Gurung, Gopal Yonjon, Deep Shrestha, Kunti Moktan, and Anu 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 artists 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 Anupam Gurung and Narayan Gopal? With the demise of Anup Thapa, the future of the good 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—Deep. Deep’s ode to his daughter.

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 timeliness and tireless contribution to the Nepali music industry. In the limelight this year was a 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 Baudhan Murmu 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 wasn’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. “I realized the potential in my song, ‘Jaunde Ma Dhuro Kante’,” said Elhara Adhikari as she received the award. The song was written by her son, Kshetra Pratap Adhikari, the best achievement of the evening.

The award ceremony went without a hitch, the ushers being 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, boredom speeches, squealing microphones, boos from the audience. But Hits FM 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 an event to watch, and it will encourage Nepali musicians to aspire to greater professionalism.

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.

The hits FM Awards aren’t just Nepali music that has come of age, so has the aesthetic choreography needed to stage a Grammy style music award night in this country. This year’s event, the 4th 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 in modern Nepali music.
The myth of the strong dollar

DUNCAN CAMPBELL AND JO TUCKMAN / IN MEXICO CITY

In a recent interview, America's new Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill got tripped up by a question about exchange rates. “We don't have a strong dollar policy,” he said. “If we had, the dollar would be 140 Yen!” Immediately attacked for revering an old-fashioned, pre-1992 Yen, he quickly retreated. Too bad, because his comment was a lot more sensible than his predecessor's statements.

The truth is, America really doesn't have an exchange-rate policy. When Alan Greenspan pondered the next move in US interest rates, little attention is paid to the dollar's exchange rate vis-à-vis the Yen, or other currencies. American monetary policy depends on the strength of or weakness of the US dollar, not the dollar exchange rates. In this sense, the “strong dollar” policy referred to by O'Neill had 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 to use in political rhetoric. A true statement for Rubin and Summers would have been: “Federal Reserve monetary policy does not dictate the dollar's exchange rate, and even if it did, it would be a bad policy.” The same US officials believe that the “strong dollar” statements help them get their way with foreign governments and market forces.

The US, as the world's leading economic power, simply cannot have a foreign exchange-rate policy. If it did, what country would it be pursuing a “weak China” policy? The “strong dollar” policy referred to by O'Neill was always just a slogan in support of US economic policy in other countries, such as China.

It was in 1914 that Emiliano Zapata, the man who gave his name to the Zapatista movement, walked through Mexico City for seven years demanding his rights, and the same struggle continues in 1999. The Zapatistas’ march from the southern highlands to the capital today should have been a moment of national triumph, but it was not.

The Zapatistas and their supporters were already balking at an attempt to turn the march into a popular campaign. Much of the popular support had been lost due to a lack of communication and organization.

The Zapatistas’ march was the beginning of a new round of resistance against domination by the US, which has lately begun to recognize the potential of these popular movements.

The Zapatistas and their supporters were already balking at an attempt to turn the march into a popular campaign. Much of the popular support had been lost due to a lack of communication and organization.

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

Zapatistas take the plaza

DUNCAN CAMPBELL AND JO TUCKMAN / IN MEXICO CITY

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

...than self-fulfilling prophecies. But eventually, fundamental economic strengths and weaknesses of the dollar would begin to predict the decline in its value. Similarly, the Yen would weaken as its exchange rate to the dollar is weak, not because of Japan’s underlining weaknesses.

Statements about a strong dollar policy had any effect at all, they would have to promote America's financial bubble during 1998-2000. Investors in the US and the rest of the world knew that this was short-lived. Even if some of the US assigned this richness this contributed to the boom...in US technology stocks. The naive view that the dollar would always remain strong (and it should even strengthen more even) is...invisibly. In this sense, market forces will probably lead to a further weakening of the dollar vis-à-vis both the Euro and the Yen...
The ethnic conflict once again casts its shadow over Sri Lanka’s national budget.

The ethnic conflict has been a constant feature in Sri Lanka's national budget negotiations for years. The Sri Lankan government is often under pressure to allocate funds for peacekeeping and reconciliation efforts, which can divert resources from other critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and economic development. The government's budget is also influenced by international pressures and donor demands, which can further complicate the allocation of funds. The budget process is fraught with political disagreements and debates over the allocation of resources, highlighting the challenges of managing a country with a history of ethnic conflict and political instability. Despite these challenges, the government continues to work on finding a sustainable solution to the conflict and rebuilding the country.
"Higher the position, higher the corruption!"

Excerpts from an interview with Ramshree Nath Pandey, MP, Upper House.

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 is 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 these people in these timing waiting for——the army, the King, the parliament or Maoists? I do not see the army in that role. According to the traditional understanding, 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 be towards the King. Let us not move the army any further from that position. Let it stay as and where it is, that will be the benefit of 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?

Everyone, 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 government. 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 blame? 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 till it is time for the next elections. Even the people who are running the country seem to be concerned about anything that is published in the party manifesto. This means that the common people never read these papers. Three elections have already taken place since 1996.

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 positions have been abused, misused. A person who has been found to be inefficient has gone on to be capable of the said aircraft. All nepali pilots won a strike in protest. But the strike was defied after 11 days. Foreign pilots are still flying the plane.

The tender had specifically stated that RNAK was looking to lease the aircraft for four years. According to some sources, the cost of the lease was US$ 2,850 per flight hour. The acting chairman had decided that the rate should be US$ 1,500 per hour. The committee would be called to fix the flight rate and that was shared by the UML and high officials at the RNAK.

If the present Armed Police Force (APF) ordinance does not become law, that is if it is not passed by parliament (irrespective of the session) and the courts, it could be a serious dilemma. We can total 800 police. We are thinking of formulating the regulations and setting up a body to replace the earlier one. One reason the parliament has decided to go for an ordinance is that the government has decided to go for an ordinance instead of passing an Act. The ordinance has not been passed yet. The ordinance will remain in force until the Act gets passed. Another ordinance?

The Maoist ‘people’s war’ that began with blackballs and a handful of timeworn districts in the 1970s is now the most serious threat to the monarchy and democracy. The Maoists have now occupied the leadership and spread their hold on as many as 75 districts of the country. Except for these districts, they have not made any real effective control in 36 districts. In these district government and authorities are either not functioning or are functioning under the Maoists. They are rapidly gaining ground in another nine districts. At this rate the same will also fall under their control. The government is considering the appointment of peacekeepers. (The Maoists also say that the government is about to take the same step.) However, the monarchists won’t be difficult if they are able to occupy the territory. They are not advancing just because they are maintaining control can be difficult. It is clear that the Maoists are
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<th>MOVIES</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FrancoFiction Film Festival</strong> with free screenings at the Moisétier Auditorium, Alliance Française, Thapathali. Ring 24823 for info on subtitles. Unless otherwise noted all screenings are at 6 pm.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Le Barbier de Siberie</strong> A Franco-Belgian cartoon by Michel Ocelot.</td>
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<td><strong>Kirikou la Sorciere</strong> by M Caso.</td>
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<td><strong>Hannibal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Gujarat’s earthquake victims. Tickets Rs 1000, Rs 500 and Rs 200 at Tick n’ Tok, Bluebird. 27 pm Royal Nepal Academy Hall.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>an array of sauces, Coffee for Connoisseurs International Club, Sanepa (opposite Shuvatara School). Rs 300 with dinner Rs 650 (members Rs 500).</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Dance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Drawings of Jerusalem</strong> Israeli artist Yossi Chkit returns on display for 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 10 am - 5 pm.</td>
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<td><strong>Events</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Rescheduled Son et Lumiere at the Ram Mandir. Please bring your tickets dated 24 February. Sunday, 17 March 7pm. Dawarika’s Hotel. 479488</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Dance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Odiszi dance by Sangeeta Dash TEWAD and the Indian Women’s Club in support of Gujarat’s earthquake victims. Tickets Rs 100, Rs 50 and Rs 20 at Tick n’ Tok, Bluibird. 27 March 6:30 pm Tribhuvan Art Hall, TEWAD, 546090 and the Indian Women’s Club, 421717.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>St. Patrick’s Day Party Dance</strong> with live Irish music by An Fainne. Tickets at Chez Caroline, Babar Mahal Revisited. Fire &amp; Ice, CIWEC Clinic and The British School. Saturday 17 March 7pm at the International Club, Sanepa (opposite Shuvatara School). Rs 300 with dinner Rs 650 (members Rs 500). 531934</td>
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<td><strong>5. Holy, with a double degree (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>9. Won soon, Sheer effect (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>11. Makes a non-divine mistake (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>12. Alegon in Belgium (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>13. Turn door for the cuppas (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>14. Cal-i-sea (3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>15. Beefalo (2)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>17. Lady of the cloth (3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>18. Nut (Aahl All mixed-up) (6)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>20. Maybe I’ll go away (6)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>22. Depart or leave (3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>23. Not interrelated, perhaps (2)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>24. Tear the shroud (3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>25. Missing in action (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>26. Bartitsu (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>27. Effective about the music (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>30. Queer of Carcage in TJP commercial (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>32. Lower hinge joint (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>34. Affectionate, perhaps like a water body (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Down</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1. Drope hole (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2. Doppler gauge (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>4.Old-fashioned gender-sensitivity (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>5. Greedy pig (2)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>6. Don’t gamble on hedging (3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>7. Gladiators’ home welcomes stadium rock (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>8. Russian desert (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>9. Assembly of Simply Stupid Nine-composers (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>10. Academic apple (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>11. Diverse, like a spotted flower (6)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>12. Unpredictable nationality (3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>13. Ambassador’s title (2)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>15. Love me, in the midst (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>20. Close fit (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>21. Uncivilised Europe, ca 7 CE (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>23. Work… déjà vu? (4)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>24. Stadium rock (5)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>25. Five of the lucky entities, the lucky winner is Chris Sowton.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>by Cross Eyes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>DANCE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Athletics”. 19 March-2 April. Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STORY OF DISABLED CHILDREN</strong> Discussion led by writer Khagendra Sangraula. Participation open to all. Unless otherwise noted presentations are in Nepal. 20 March. 246056, Fax: 240509</td>
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<td><strong>SPORTS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Himalayan Hash House Harriers Stals 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 <a href="mailto:davidpotter@apon.wlink.com.np">davidpotter@apon.wlink.com.np</a> or Fr. Bill Robbins at <a href="mailto:sxssc@wlink.com.np">sxssc@wlink.com.np</a> for more information</strong></td>
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Three golden kings

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

Certainly he could have seen all three, the three kings, and beginning work on the first statue as a very young man had matured enough to understand the immensity of the work and his lack of experience. It was unusual for a master craftsman to be employed in all the three capitals for their thrones. All are in attitudes of prayer, the right hands on the faces of the three kings, and the left hand, raised, by a golden likeness of himself and his sons, to Patan who occupied the throne of Bhaktapur. There, as an old man with the skills of a young man, he had a sudden illness, his face was as rich as the elephant. The golden likeness matches exactly upon his city. Several of Bhaktapur's most memorable monuments arose at this time. He dieth, he dies, and as it is done the king whispers to his sons and he is immolated in gilded metal, it is this more apparent than in the first, and longest, story in the new collection of tales, but these ones are anything but banal.

The mythical aura surrounding Lhasa has long entranced Newars and Tibetans. The latter, in their opinion, were not quite suitable for their occupation. They told me that they preferred Newars to Buddhists. The former were reliant on Nepal for their southern trade. Once the road was open, and no doubt that Bhaktapur's trade was now extended to 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 one cannot know how material goods and money were transported to these distant cities, and it is this more apparent than in the first, and largest, story in the new collection of tales, but these ones are anything but banal.

The Newar Merchants in Lhasa, by Kesar Lall. 2001. Travel narratives, histories, reminiscences, the mythical aura surrounding Lhasa has long entranced Newars and Tibetans. The latter, in their opinion, were not quite suitable for their occupation. They told me that they preferred Newars to Buddhists. The former were reliant on Nepal for their southern trade. Once the road was open, and no doubt that Bhaktapur's trade was now extended to 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 one cannot know how material goods and money were transported to these distant cities, and it is this more apparent than in the first, and largest, story in the new collection of tales, but these ones are anything but banal.

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**Shutterbug**

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

Yonzon was helped into photography by a relative. He started off with a Nikonmat 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? Yonzon thinks “one can survive,” but says there’s no culture here of 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 attendance 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.

### Happenings

**SHUTTERBUG**: (top left) Sagar Shrestha and Min Bajracharya at the Silver Jubilee exhibition at the Soaltee Hotel. (below) Uninhibited Artist.

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

### Sharp

Samuel Thomas

Koshy Bhandari

Kamal Thapa

Nikesh Pradhan

Kamal Shankar Bajracharya

Ketan Dixit

Roshan Shrestha
Now that we have handed over the governance of this country to lawyers, we can stand back and take a well-deserved break. 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 nur each other’s throats out in public, the army can go about shooting on sight anything that barks, the bureaucracy could take mass casual 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 tr-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 in wonder why we hadn’t thought of this before? All along, we put our faith in the judiciary, but we hadn’t thought of this before? Parliament can go into hibernate mode, political parties can do what they do best, which is nur each other’s throats out in public, the army can go about shooting on sight anything that barks, the bureaucracy could take mass casual

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