Give and Take

The government got a low pass from donors last week.

BINOD BHATTARAI

Appointing a program to donors is like submitting homework to a class teacher. But unlike in a classroom, there are more than a dozen teachers and only one student: His Majesty’s Government of Nepal.

This compiles matters at donor meetings like the one last week at the Ministry of Finance. The government presented a report on aid and reform it had promised at the annual Paris donor consortium meeting last year. Nepal has received over Rs 191 billion in aid since 1990, over Rs 65 billion in grants. There has been dynamic progress in basic health indicators and in education, but the country is still at the bottom of the heap. Nepal is the poorest and least equal among even poor South Asian countries.

The way we want women, we are only slightly better than the Taliban. So where did all the money go?

Donors are the first to admit that they have flip-flopped on policy over the decades. They could not try this, and they got us to try that. Pouring money did not solve the problem—it just deepened dependency. Donors want us to come up with a strategy, but we are so addicted to aid that we can’t figure out what we want anymore.

“Ours is a case of a nation’s inability to articulate what we want,” explains Sudhindra Paudyal, a Nepali diplomat working on a doctoral thesis on foreign aid. “There is confusion created by conflicting demands, and unless we are clear in our heads about what we want and for how long, more delay will lead to more confusion.”

Everyone agrees we don’t need another aid strategy. There are enough research papers and reports made over the years gathering dust in the ministries and on donor shelves. Donors and government officials say the real problem is efficient aid utilisation and policy questions that are tied up with political will, which in turn is linked to political instability.

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat came out of the donor meeting on 19 March with a “loss pass.” It has been only a month since he became minister, so he had an easy alibi. He reiterated his personal commitment to Nepal’s Development Agenda agreed on in Paris last year, but admitted frankly that he didn’t have much progress to show. And the donors grumbled:

• The Danes, Germans and Norwegians were worried about security, which they feel was growing into something larger than a low and order problem. They warned frank discussion on the insurgency and how it was affecting development.
• The Swiss wanted stricter corruption controls, and an action plan for clean up.
• UNDP’s one-point agenda was more real decentralisation, both in laws and actions to push grassroots decision making.
• Another donor thought maybe we need more centralisation, given the vacuum at the top.
• The multilateral donors were worried about delays in the financial sector reforms and legislation to put them in place.
• Another asked why the government had not rejected the Army’s proposal to open a bank.
• One bilateral donor was unhappy about the negligible role of the private sector and slow progress on privatisation.
• All agreed that the Maoist problem was not just a security issue but a crisis of development, and the solution was negotiations not force. Some even offered to help in mediation.

If this was donor dictation, then you can’t blame Mahat for feeling a bit confused.

Especially on decentralization where we say revenue collection has actually gone down after local government was given the authority to tax its constituents. Aid works best when donors look at the overall direction and not poke their nose every time there’s a delay here or there.

“We want to take full charge of our development,” he told us. “Only that way we can adjust the modality and timing to the local situation.”

Ideological and policy differences, conflicting priorities among donors doesn’t help—especially for a country, which pays for over 65 percent of its development budget through aid.

Said one donor representative present at the meeting: “People said nice things as they do in such meetings but some did speak about schedules that had slipped. The overall tone was supportive, but we were concerned about delays in fulfilling past promises.”

Mahat argued that it was difficult to show results in the present climate of political uncertainty driven by “assertive vested interests.” Donors were not upset about how can we achieve an island of efficiency when everything else is going to pot? But they were worried that governance is suffering dangerously in the face of strikes, parliament boycotts, Maoist violence and the ruling party’s inability to do everything but rule. Kathmandu based diplomats and donors are becoming increasingly impatient and blunt in expressing public concern about the present situation. “Something has to give,” this is getting from us to donors, “one senior foreign diplomat told us on condition of anonymity.

Even so, the general donor assessment of last week’s meeting was a faulty Finance Ministry report was better than expected, partly because they were surprised that a document had actually been prepared. They were convinced that the Finance Ministry and the National Planning Commission are serious about reforms, but their worry is that this has not percolated down to line ministries. “We had promised in Paris to table new laws for banking,” says an MOF source. “Our inability to do that has been noted by donors and that will ultimately affect aid we are receiving.”

And this uncertainty does not bode well for an economy so dependent on external assistance. If foreign aid declines like foreign investment, it would be disastrous not just for development but also for the Kathmandu elite that depends on Kathmandu’s aid economy for everything—from NGO consultancy to house rents.

Finance Secretary Binod Prasad Koirala summarized it: “There are problems but donors in general are still positive about aid.”

We can overcome problems if donors allow us to take full charge in the driver’s seat.”

So, let’s do it.
WHAT WOULD BP HAVE DONE?

It is at times like these that you want to ask: what would BP Koirala have done if he were alive today? And it is a hard question to answer. But there are a few things we know for sure BP would not have done.

He would not be fighting tooth-and-claw with fellow-leaders within his own party and the whole country to grab to a gnat. Given his stature and leadership qualities, he would not be trying to divide and rule to improve his own political standing. As a fragile and simple man with no divisive standards, he would not allow allies and relatives to loot the land in his name. He would not suffer fools, nor would he put up with mediocrity and incompetence. He would not allow his own or other parties to hold the Nepali people hostage over petty politics. He would not be sidetracked from building a minimum multiparty consensus on this nation’s intolerable crises in health care, education and employment. As a committed social democrat, he would not endure a return to authoritarianism in any form, and he would work actively to prevent it. He would not play politics with the Maoist issue, and would not let other do so. He would not believe in a military solution to the insurgency, and would campaign to address the insecurities of income, opportunity and hope among Nepalis who have been neglected and kicked around for too long.

In the spirit of his lifelong principle of National Reconciliation, he would not be pushed into the trap of the partition and deadlock. He would not be pushed into the defensive in relations with neighbours and donors, and would put his house in order so they would not be tempted to tell us to cut and run.

The tragedy of BP Koirala’s legacy is that this thinker, statesman and politician is mis-regarded as the “intellectual property” of the Nepali Congress party, and neglected by the left and the right. So instead of being a Nepali icon, BP has remained a party icon. This is a tragedy because it allows this statesman into the narrow confines of his party. At a time when Nepal has democracy without leadership, government without governance, we miss the commanding yet eternal authoritarian persons of BP.

The royal coup of 1961 demolished democracy and landed Prime Minister BP Koirala in jail and exile for 16 years. BP died in 1982 before that to come to pass. Today, another 10 years later, it must be looking down at us and shaking his head. “Look at what we did with his dream. Squandered it all.” It is just as well that BP Koirala is not alive to see it. It is patched up in my favour. So, here comes Prachanda’s Law: you make any difference. Murphy’s Law is also applicable here, if anything is started does not work. We may start something to get rid of corruption, but it will not work. It will not work, but your flippant tone hurts. This statement is that Nepal is too sensitive while India is not. “The problem of Nepali water or power is the political problem.” Red Indians of various hues use more benign terms, but subtract them and the party line shows through. Leftie Prabir Purkayastha put it this blandly: “The problem of Nepal water or power is that Nepal is too sensitive while India is extremely insensitive.” We pull, comrade, but your flippant tune starts. This statement is no less patronising than the overt bearing of the libel of the babunis and babunis of South Block. The uniformity in the views of Indian ruling classes towards Nepal makes you wonder: should we blame ourselves for our fate? Dr Bhol Bhadra Thapa apparently thinks so. At a reception that he hosted at the India International Centre in honour of our own leftist stalwart, Jyada Nath Khadka, our Ambassador to the Delhi Darbar was as red-faced as only a very cautious person can afford to be. Being the suave diplomat that he is, he qualified all his remarks as “personal and off the record.” However, his demeanour clearly betrayed his real intention — he wanted his views made public. “Go ahead, and if you ever quote me, I’ll deny ever having said anything,” he seemed to say with his hearty laughter. The camaraderie between our elite and the Indian state is real Dr Thapa no end. Things are stitched up, and he is left twiddling his thumbs. Good thing it leaves him time to put in some golf.

Mr Viswanath Reddy himself, the Governor of Reserve Bank of India, himself has said, “For a government, inflation is a very convenient scapegoat.” If all positive motivation is rooted in self-extremism, then clearly our Babunia’s Road office is not properly primed. The expectations of middle-class Nepalis also help shape the Indian elite’s attitude towards Nepal. While we resent their backslapping big-brotherly arrogance, we also backslapping big-brotherly arrogance. We seldom hesitate in asking for special treatment. JNU, for instance, has been justified as an example of the depth of the Indian state’s love for Nepalis. Despite the “control of smuggling” excuse invented by our Finance Ministry, it appears certain that this decision was taken at India’s behest to check the flow of goods that it does not want to enter its territory. The flip-flop over the licence renewal of Spacetime Television demonstrates the limited freedom we have in framing our own policies and exposes how Indian intelligence apparatuses have started believing their own rumours. We can’t be Indian protectors. Nor yet, anyway. We have always been independent, and would like to live with that belief forever. Hence we are reluctant to accept that the rest of us are condemned to live with the complete sovereignty of an elite that considers itself to be the state. Dr Thapa can keep practising his golf; our Pandey’s have their Rajyas in New Delhi and vice versa. And all of us who continue to crib about Indian hegemony should realise that true independence can only come with a greater sense of self-esteem. 9

NEW DELHI – Here at the edge of the Thar desert and in the desolate expanse of Indian baboonish springs the oasis-like campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Bubbling with fresh ideas, fermenting with diversity, this island is the verdant tree of reason sway. While the rest of India hitches on to the globalisation wagon, this is where people are still passionate about fragility, where blind consumption and wastefulness are frowned upon and “self-sufficiency” and “ideology” are not bad, empty words. It is a place where the old dreams still live.

Yet, even here, in the very seat of non-conformism, the attitude towards relations with Nepal reflects official conservatism. A colonial approach towards Nepal straddles the ideological divide of the Indian power elite. The official consensus of India’s Bharatiya Janata Party flagrantly uses the so-called Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) threat from Pakistan to regularly bash Nepal. Sonia Gandhi’s Congress still carries with it the big stick of the trade blockade that her husband imposed on Nepal in 1989. Red Indians of various hues use more benign terms, but subtract them and the party line shows through. Leftie Prabir Purkayastha put it this blandly: “The problem of Nepal water or power is that Nepal is too sensitive while India is extremely insensitive.” We pull, comrade, but your flippant tune starts. This statement is no less patronising than the overt bearing of the libel of the babunis and babunis of South Block. The uniformity in the views of Indian ruling classes towards Nepal makes you wonder: should we blame ourselves for our fate? Dr Bhol Bhadra Thapa apparently thinks so. At a reception that he hosted at the India International Centre in honour of our own leftist stalwart, Jyada Nath Khadka, our Ambassador to the Delhi Darbar was as red-faced as only a very cautious person can afford to be. Being the suave diplomat that he is, he qualified all his remarks as “personal and off the record.” However, his demeanour clearly betrayed his real intention — he wanted his views made public. “Go ahead, and if you ever quote me, I’ll deny ever having said anything,” he seemed to say with his hearty laughter. The camaraderie between our elite and the Indian state is real Dr Thapa no end. Things are stitched up, and he is left twiddling his thumbs. Good thing it leaves him time to put in some golf.

Just about all Indian Embassy officials who have ever served in Kathmandu must have armies of sincere supplicants for life. Senior Nepali ministers have no hesitation calling upon their friends in South Block in clear breach of protocol. Had these ‘friendships’ been reciprocal, it could have been justified as an example of the depth of people-to-people relationship between our two countries.

In reality, what often happens is that the token flaunt their friendship with the powers that be in Nepal, and tempt Embassy employees when they have to deal with them on official business. Demoralized and dispelled diplomat moyans: “All negotiations between New Delhi and Kathmandu always take place directly. We don’t come in the picture. It’s only when things go wrong that we are called upon to do damage control. Or take the rap as convenient scapegoats.” If all positive motivation is rooted in self-extremism, then clearly our Babunia’s Road office is not properly primed. The expectations of middle-class Nepalis also help shape the Indian elite’s attitude towards Nepal. While we resent their backslapping big-brotherly arrogance, we seldom hesitate in asking for special treatment. JNU, for instance, has been justified as an example of the depth of the Indian state’s love for Nepalis. Despite the “control of smuggling” excuse invented by our Finance Ministry, it appears certain that this decision was taken at India’s behest to check the flow of goods that it does not want to enter its territory. The flip-flop over the licence renewal of Spacetime Television demonstrates the limited freedom we have in framing our own policies and exposes how Indian intelligence apparatuses have started believing their own rumours. We can’t be Indian protectors. Nor yet, anyway. We have always been independent, and would like to live with that belief forever. Hence we are reluctant to accept that the rest of us are condemned to live with the complete sovereignty of an elite that considers itself to be the state. Dr Thapa can keep practising his golf; our Pandey’s have their Rajyas in New Delhi and vice versa. And all of us who continue to crib about Indian hegemony should realise that true independence can only come with a greater sense of self-esteem. 9

dualism in dealing with India has always been the notion of our ruling elite. We want to have our roti and eat it too. We want to keep burning about Kalapani, and still save the Mahabali treaty. We want to scrap the “special relationship”, but continue worshipping the zeitgeist of Purnaparwar. We want to cozy up to the Indian elite without having to put up with their bawdy nuances. We want to treat like foreigners in India, but want to pay Indian rates on trains and in universities. This enigma of distance between two close neighbours produces the paradox of yearning for the hug, while fearing an embrace. Our priority perhaps ought to be sending our soldiers to fight the insurgency, but we would have to deploy our army to police the border. Despite the “control of smuggling” excuse invented by our Finance Ministry, it appears certain that this decision was taken at India’s behest to check the flow of goods that it does not want to enter its territory. The flip-flop over the licence renewal of Spacetime Television demonstrates the limited freedom we have in framing our own policies and exposes how Indian intelligence apparatuses have started believing their own rumours. We can’t be Indian protectors. Nor yet, anyway. We have always been independent, and would like to live with that belief forever. Hence we are reluctant to accept that the rest of us are condemned to live with the complete sovereignty of an elite that considers itself to be the state. Dr Thapa can keep practising his golf; our Pandey’s have their Rajyas in New Delhi and vice versa. And all of us who continue to crib about Indian hegemony should realise that true independence can only come with a greater sense of self-esteem. 9

STATE OF THE STATE

Sohere there are still peoples: somewhere there are still herds—but not here, my brothers. Here there are states.    - Friedrich Nietzsche

“Indian hegemony should realise that true sovereignty of an elite that considers itself to be the state. Dr Thapa can keep practising his golf; our Pandey’s have their Rajyas in New Delhi and vice versa. And all of us who continue to crib about Indian hegemony should realise that true independence can only come with a greater sense of self-esteem.”
When I found out that there wasn't much time left to live, Bisheshwar Prasad Koirala narrated his recollections over a period of seven months in 1981-82. The BP tapes were recorded by Advocate Ganesh Raj Shama, who transcribed and later published them in book form in Nepal three years ago. The following is an excerpt from his foreword to the English translation of B.P. Koirala’s Amatmbrianta: Life Recollections, being released today in New Delhi.

W hen he learnt that he could be dead within six months, BP came with Shri Dhiraj Bhusan straight to my residence, where Damodar Chand Shrestha, Radharam Adhikari and I were deliberating philosophically. He joined our discussion for a while, and then went on to ask me to write a book on the issue of equality, religion and human behaviour. He was the best example of BP’s attitude to life. He did not seem more worried than I did when the doctor had identified some problem the way they think we will be stopped? What’s next, discrimination against should not wear short hair business. Doesn’t want to foray into the fashion anti-corruption agenda and needs sponsors to make up for the damage.

He took me on a tour, and I accompanied him even though it was not necessary for the prime minister to go, but I went. During our travels, he was able to observe our party’s popularity. Of course, the king was personally popular. Wherever he went, the public would come out to the pump and festivity. There would be film shows in the evening, and the people would come for that as well. There would not be many politically inclined people present. He realized that I could have nothing to expect the government to have been more conscientious, particularly during the most recent period of political turmoil. Nevertheless, unlike individuals, government has continuity and perhaps it is not inappropriate to expect some hope on the existence of these and other materials related to BP. The royal palace must be a repository of such material related to BP, and it too should be sensitive to the fact that it has become too separate from the rest of the country — be printed in India, to be benevolent enough to allow publication of this manuscript within the country. BP’s interesting, febrile mind and his sharp-edged arguments, I was privileged to have a meal with him that evening. We used to have our film shows in the evenings, and the people would come for that as well. There would not be many politically inclined people present. He realized that he could have been more conscientious, particularly during the most recent period of political turmoil.

The king and I

The king [Mahendra] had mixed feelings of love and hate towards me. I think, I will take some time to explain my relationship with the king. He definitely became concerned upon seeing the extent of my popularity among the people. I, who worked as prime minister and the very momentum of events. But that was also at a time when everything he began to speak in praise of me, he had to completely revise what might have been his preconception, that there was a man just like all the rest who had gone before. The king was impressed when he saw my work ethic, by the debates I used to have with him, the discussions we used to have in trying to establish some principles of governance, and my ambitions. My plane was-against which I used to stay with him, are the same ones I speak of these days in public during rallies.

The king asked me to express my aspirations. I told him they were to provide a standard of middle class living, such as that of my family as a minimum for all the people. “How long will that take?” he asked, and I replied that it would require me to win elections three times and that I would work towards that. I used to bring all kinds of matters before the king so that he would not nurse any grudge. However, wherever I was speaking in public, the king invariably said something hurtful against our council of ministers. I then had to refuse to participate. In public, he would show himself to be in opposition to me, but in person he would try to make up for the damage.

The king also showed me hospitality. I had to leave the tour in Darjeeling to return to Kathmandu, and the king arranged for me to have a meal with him that evening. We used to have our lunch separately, but in the evenings we used to gather for games and so on. He called me that day, and said, “You are leaving tomorrow, let’s have some fun today.”

During the program he announced, “Okay, everyone recite some poem or the other. Now, I couldn’t recite any poem, but then he reported that a short one by Shelley, and I recited it. The poet addresses a lover:

We took before a laughter And praying for what is not. Our finest poems are those That are made of saddest thought I remember a poem from my school days, and recited that one too: As you leave us And visit their big cities You even delight in them. But we will tarry by these rivers, caves and chautaris and remember you: Don’t you forget us For we cannot forget you. As I wipe the sweat from the brow in the chautari. loved Then the postman sings: It was a beautiful poem, and it was addressed to me. Obviously, he would not have expressed such emotions if he had not liked me. (From B.P. Koirala’s Amatmbrianta: Life Recollections, Himal Books, 2007)
Learning to climb

To secure the future of Nepali expedition leaders and climbers, we need formal training programmes—and they appear to be off to a good start.

Chamonic, the hub of mountaineering schools in Europe. This means Gurung is qualified to be an assistant instructor for the Advanced Mountaineering Course and a Master Instructor for the Basic Course run by Nepal Mountaineering Association.
The next step up would be a course endorsed by the International Association of Guide de Montagne (UIAGM)—a professionally certified, internationally recognised training system. But that is not that simple.

"It's a very complex process to get the UIAGM rating," says Tashi Tshingpo Sherpa, president of the NMA and an ENSA diploma holder.

"It requires developing a course of study within the country and then getting the UIAGM to endorse the course," says Tshingpo. "Slovenia, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, Canada, Peru and New Zealand run UIAGM-certified courses. Slovenia recently joined the band."

"It's ironic," says Gurung, who completed and requires a broad study within the country about how to design a syllabus suited to Nepal—the UIAGM standards. But that is not that simple.

Internationale des Association de Montagne (ENSA) and has committed itself to registering a national official diploma holder about three months to complete and requires a broad understanding of history and geography, navigation, meteorology, advanced climbing and rescue techniques, andorganising and executing rescue operations.

So where does that leave the hundreds of learners on the job climbing like Babu Chhole Sherpa and Appa Sherpa? Such climbers would fit somewhere around the ENSA diploma level but would have to take a couple of extra credit courses such as in navigation," says Tashi Tshingpo Sherpa. The NMA, on the other hand, has committed itself to registering a national official diploma holder about three months to complete and requires a broad understanding of history and geography, navigation, meteorology, advanced climbing and rescue techniques, andorganising and executing rescue operations.

Agnostic turns cyberprophet

There's something energetic and committed about this corner of south India that even dedicated cynics like me can't dismiss.

Bangalore, Hyderabad and to lesser extent, Chennai, stormed into prominence in the early 1990s as sources of cheap, skilled labour to do the offshore data processing of western and Japanese companies. Then Bill Gates and other American IT barons realized that India produces more engineers than any ten other countries, more and more of them working in software. So they opened branches in India to work on software and to solve the specific problems of business clients. Again, the bottom line was value for money. That market is becoming overcrowded now, and not because of stock market crashes and the bursting of the IT bubble.

Now Indian companies have to start becoming world players with their own software and ideas, not just a source of offshore labour and expertise founded on other peoples' technology. There is still an economy here founded on cheap copies of foreign intellectual property and no matter where you stand on that issue, it's a barrier to South Asian success in the next generation of information technology. The young woman in the Internet cafe wants all the right things—to stay at home and presumably combine a fast-rise career in an information technology company with the primary duty of raising a family. She wants to work in a masala version of Silicon Valley. The Indian middle class that had been driven out of the IT business.

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So far, the training has been operated on an ad hoc basis. There’s no concept of continuity. The final goal of the NMA should be to create structures which after some years will be able to conduct training internally,” says Max Santner of Eco Himal, an Austrian development agency that is working towards establishing a mountaineering training centre in Thame, Khumbu. “The area is ideal because the climbers are training at an altitude that simulates the actual local environment they’ll be working in.”

So far 59 climbers, including two women, have been through the advanced training conducted jointly by Eco Himal and NMA since 1998. It involves attending environmental awareness classes in Kathmandu, rock climbing and theoretical lessons in Thame, first the basics of setting up and managing campsites. What started off as a half-hearted experiment has today evolved into a well-rounded training programme where volunteers like Angela Hawse, a high-altitude mountain guide from the US, and climber and tourism entrepreneur Nimi Sherpa will be guiding trainees like 19-year-old Sony Sherpa. “My father is in the trekking business. But I’ve never been on a trek,” says Sony Sherpa, a 19-year-old college student in Kathmandu. “Normally, parents aren’t keen on letting girls be away from home, especially overnight. I thought this was a great opportunity.”

“When I saw the information on the Eco Himal website, I was really excited and wanted to be involved in the project,” says Hawse, whose non-profit educational foundation, The Wind Horse Legacy, is sponsoring the training of ten of the women. Hawse, who was on the south summit of Everest in 1998, dreams of organizing a joint American-Nepali women’s team to attempt a peak in 2002. “Maybe Ama Dablam,” she says. Meanwhile, in Manang, the Slovenians have been helping out with the NMA’s mountaineering school and providing basic climbing training to more than 500 trainees since 1979. The French, namely the ENSA, have been involved in advanced training since 1980 and recently trained 17 climbers at Kyanjin Gompa in Langtang. The ENSA has also agreed to provide a quota for three outstanding Nepali climbers from 2001. Two will be sponsored by NMA, and the third by the French Embassy.

“With the help of the French, we’ve set up a centre in the Everest region. About 60 to 70 percent of the trainers are employed during the trekking season. Since 1999 Eco Himal and the NMA have also been training women. Presently, the third group of Outdoor Female Leadership trainers are on a trek in Helambu where they will be taught by the French,” says Santner.

Between the Slovenians, the French, the Austrians and Nepali instructors, they have trained nearly 900 Nepali climbers in the basic and advanced courses organized by the NMA. The challenge for the mountaineering body, now, is to formalise a course at a higher level. NMA President Sherpa is optimistic. “It all depends on how well ENSA and NMA work, how long we take to prepare the syllabus and get it endorsed by UIAGM.”

One more strategy is in the making, we’re told. About 200 people specialising in different aspects of water use and management got together last week to give final shape to a strategy on long-term use and management of Nepal’s water resources. The plan is to cut development for 25 years. Groundwork on the strategy began in 1996 with the support of the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency. The plan is to be reviewed by the Water and Energy Commission and National Water Council. Approval by the two bodies will take the strategy to the cabinet for final approval.

The Long road home

Officials from Nepal and Bhutan began screening the identities of refugees Monday to kick off a process that analysts say could take years to complete. Members of 10 families were brought to the screening centre on Monday and only two were screened. The officials first oriented them on how to fill up the different forms required for the exercise. Progress on Tuesday was seven more families. “Things are moving faster today,” said SB Subba of the Bhutanese Refugees’ Representative Repatriation Committee (BRPRC). The Khudurabari camp holds over 12,300 asylum seekers. In all there are 15,025 families, adding up to 95,099 individuals living in seven camps in Jhapa and Morang districts. Refugee groups have distributed copies of the required forms in camps and hope that the screening will move faster once people know what sort of questions they are going to be asked. There’s another problem though: there’s no arrangement for feeding the people who come to the verification centre, which needs to be addressed if the process is to take the entire day. We’ve learnt that the bus carrying the refugees is making two trips instead on one.

Everest clean-up

An exclusive club of Nepali mountaineers says it wants to clean up the upper reaches of the world’s highest mountain. The membership list of the newly-formed Everest Summiters Association that wants to pick garbage from the peak reads like a who’s who of Nepali mountaineering—Pemba Doma Sherpa, the first Nepali woman to climb Everest from the north; Appa Sherpa, 12-time climber of Everest, and Babu Chhiri who holds the record for sprinting to the summit. The criterion for membership to this new club—having climbed an 8000m peak. “Previous clean-ups have been done at lower altitudes and Base Camp, few people can go higher” says climber Kaji Sherpa. “We’d like to use our ability to climb higher to clean the mountain.” So far 984 climbers, including 202 Nepalis, have climbed Everest.

Water strategy

One more strategy is in the making, we’re told. About 200 people specialising in different aspects of water use and management got together last week to give final shape to a strategy on long-term use and management of Nepal’s water resources. The plan is to cut development for 25 years. Groundwork on the strategy began in 1996 with the support of the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency. The plan is to be reviewed by the Water and Energy Commission and National Water Council. Approval by the two bodies will take the strategy to the cabinet for final approval.
I was born in Kalimpong and ran away from home at a very young age and tried earning my livelihood in cities like Delhi, Dehradun and Bhuban. Later my mom called me to Kathmandu. She had married a different man. But I could not last with my tyrant stepfather for long. Mother also became an alcoholic. Then I got frustrated and left with all sorts of people. When I was around 18, I started selling movie tickets at Jai Nepal Hall. I had rich friends. It was after one of them died in a motorcycle accident that I started drinking. I never drank before, even when my friends urged me I refused. I used to hate the stuff. My friends would count how many glasses of liquor they could consume. One friend said, "Hey, I've had 15 glasses," another would boast. "That's nothing, I've already reached 22." One glass would be enough for me. When people would smoke cigarettes, I would tell them, "Please, don't blow smoke my way." That’s the kind of person I used to be at one time, a nice, polite boy. Yet this nice boy also became a hated thug.

When I was working as a scalper at the movie theatre, I fell in love with a girl called Bidya. Her family owned a small teashop. Our love affair lasted about four years. We talked about marriage. But since I was a Chhetri and she was a Newar, her family objected. We didn’t meet for a month. Then Bidya committed suicide. Her family told others that she had died of meningitis, but I suspected suicide. Her body was cremated. I put a corner and watched her body burn. After this event, my life took a very different turn. I couldn’t do without liquor. I started meeting women. As a scalper I had saved around Rs 22,000. My stepfather used to tell me to get married. He had this illness called raksi. I was feeling fine, but I fell sick. I was once again unemployed. My factory where I worked was sold, and I couldn’t find it. She suspected I gave it to my wife. Later, I accepted. We had a huge fight. I was very angry so I got drunk and attempted to stab her with a knife. She managed to escape. Sooner after, the left me. We had two sons, they live with their mother. I married about for seven years. After my wife left me, I was having sex regularly with two women. But I felt sick a few months later. When I went for a check-up, I discovered I had syphilis. I took medication and was feeling fine, but I fell sick again. When I had a check up again, it turned out I was looking for me. Don’t know how. He was like a god to me. He had treated me at Patan Hospital. And I am better now. At the moment, I am devoting my time to helping others. And I am ready to sacrifice my life for the benefit of others.

I used to hate alcohol. I never smoked. That’s the kind of person I used to be at one time, a nice, polite boy. Yet this nice boy also became a hated thug. Unfortunately, the radio shop where I worked was sold, and I was once again unemployed. My wife worked in a garment factory. I began drinking again, and the money my wife earned was no longer enough. I didn’t pay rent for three or four months. I borrowed some money to pay the rent, and I gave it to my wife. Later, she couldn’t find it. She suspected I had taken it and spent in drinking. But I hadn’t taken the money at all. Naturally, we had a huge fight. I was very angry so I burnt her and attempted to stab her with a knife. She managed to escape. Soon after, she left me. We had two sons, they live with their mother. I married for about seven years. After my wife left me, I was having sex regularly with two women. But I felt sick a few months later. When I went for a check-up, I discovered I had syphilis. I took medication and was feeling fine, but I fell sick again. When I had a check up again, it turned out I was looking for me. Don’t know how.

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A great leap backward

Can a country with a split personality ever break free while dismissing the BP Koirala government 40 years ago in another look at the transcript of the accusations made by the palace have changed, though. In those days, the personal involvement of more than capable of doing so in the presence of a former Indian parliament? Our honourable gentlemen recently proved that they were opposition and nominated legislators can't discuss national issues in change the head of the governing party) and the opposition (who argue precedent where the opposition parties are vested with the authority to mood of the day and the season of the session. revolution, why can't we accept the evolution of a Nepali model of multiparty democracy? The stand-off in parliament could then be seen

oiled elections, arms and aircraft commissions, village communes national institutions, comrades with questionable credentials, corruption-

but it would almost certainly take it away from the country. guns from our northern neighbour might vest sovereignty in the people, course, was that a democracy ushered in at a time when South Block was put to rest. The main demonstration to attack the statue of the personification of that spirit. It will always be outside, and women will always have to move out. There will be no change in their status as long as we keep them in any kind of goal. So I vehemently oppose these kind of interventions. I have heard of the 75 Village Development Committees (VDC) in my district advocating against using the shed. Even INGOs use a "shield" resource person to take across their message of gender equity. Now in every VDC there are at least four to five "convert" households. As far as myself, other than getting directly involved in religious rites, I had no normal life inside my home during my periods. I have even started cooking and milking cattle during those days. This is a "curse" we have on our selves... and we have to bear it. I will even sometimes have to make the practice of going away from the house to wash on a hot day. So I have been given a list of activities on what menstruation was all about and why it made no sense to stay outdoors. I learnt them on the hygiene aspect, on how they should take good

used to be among those women who used to spend a week every month in the chhaupadi goth (shelter) whenever I had my period. Not any more. I now only stay inside the house and any out-of-normal activities now, but I also have many, many taxes, many commitments in the village. I am always busy discussing proposals that the locals do not understand so that the gods wouldn't be angry, and that no mishap would befall our family... fire, snakebites, barren fields and livestock, and animals. Everyone was surprised that such matters were not related to women to a perfect normal physical cycle of the female body. But there was one delegate from Nepal, Angur Babu Joshi, who proudly told me that I am old-fashioned. "Oh, it's a new day in the shed any longer. Never in my life have I been so much in the mood for cooking. And so we carried on."

To all the women who come to me I give my "medicine"—a talk on what menstruation was all about. Only my medication was a lecture. To each of these women I gave my meditations on what menstruation was all about and why it made no sense to stay outdoors. I learnt them on the hygiene aspect, on how they should take good

for the next three months, in order not to put my husband in an awkward position, I did not declare that I had my period at all. I used to do all the work that women are not supposed to do, except religious and sexual activities. My husband asked me to let him know when I had my periods. He said he didn't mind cooking. And so we carried on.

They had begun to notice that I had not been visiting the shed. "Oh, Lali Rawal has done some treatment in Beijing to keep menstruation at bay," they said. So I told them that I was not going to visit the shed anymore. Then the women in the neighbourhood started pouring into my house to ask for "tika" (herbal, traditional) in the end, I told them, "You can take it, but I will not come to you."

"Why is the husband cooking and the husband watching?" My husband replied, "Oh, it's my turn now... she'll do the work."

This was another relative turned up and asked the same thing the old man had. My husband told him, "Oh, it's now, she'll look in the morning." For the next three months, in order not to put my husband in an awkward position, I did not declare that I had my period at all. I used to do all the work that women are not supposed to do, except religious and sexual activities. My husband asked me to let him know when I had my periods. He said he didn't mind cooking. And so we carried on.

Then the villagers started becoming curious and suspicious. They had begun to notice that I had not been visiting the shed. "Oh, Lali Rawal has done some treatment in Beijing to keep menstruation at bay," they said. So I told them that I was not going to visit the shed anymore. Then the women in the neighbourhood started pouring into my house to ask for "tika" (herbal, traditional) in the end, I told them, "You can take it, but I will not come to you."

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Lali Rawal and her husband Padma Rawal are from District Development Committee No. 3, Chhaupadi (Dhading) in Achham. Lali Rawal is 85 years old and has two sons. She is even better to me than the phone mobile of the palace's main representative in the Upper House.)

If you think this plea for political sanity is part of a cynical hatchet job or an unashamedly left-wing right against our hard-won democracy, then here's what you can do. Take another look at the transcript of the accusations made by the palace while dismissing the BP Koirala government 40 years ago in another look at the transcript of the accusations made by the palace
Winning with Surya

Among the highlights of the show are to be the Nepal-USA Pavilion that is to bring exhibiting companies and organisations exhibiting their products and services. Among the British exhibits are the British Council that is organising a film festival as part of the Expo. The other important factor is the willingness of the private sector. Taxation laws in this country are again a big hindrance. Between the arts sector and the business community there could be an ideal partnership institutionalised. Together with a system of tax breaks and incentives, there could be an ideal partnership between the arts sector and the business community in preserving, sustaining and furthering the development of creative forces in Nepal.

Chö: devotional songs to cut through ego clinging

Tickets now available at the following locations:

- Fire and Ice Pizzeria, Thamel, 11 AM – 10 PM, Ph. 250210
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- Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, front desk, ph. 491234

30 MARCH - APRIL 2001 NEPALI TIMES

ECONOMIC SENSE

mid the widespread coverage of our dysfunctional legislature and a general business slowdown, some interesting and exciting times in the Arts have passed by, almost unnoticed. The past month witnessed a series of events — plays staged by Azurah and Sawaran, the nativistic excellence of the Ma-Hadau, a performance by a regional musical group, and art and photo exhibitions that attracted quite a few. Fellow columnists and friends in the arts are having been asking this trend to examine the role of the Nepali private sector in the field of the Arts. At World Theatre Day is being celebrated this week, it’s a good time to ponder questions of support for art and culture.

However, as the Nepali art and theatre were patronised by the rulers and there have been few instances of business being involved in their promotion or development. The business community did undertake activities in the social development field, but these were mostly religious and cultural activities within communities. The loosening of the bonds created by the gafi and the absence of financial support have since taken hold quickly.

There have been efforts from the private sector to support the arts, but there are many who feel that not enough is being done. One of the problems of many arts and theatre groups is that it companies which have the financial muscle — and often willing to take the risk — to support their endeavours are mostly tobacco and alcoholic beverage companies. There are some who find it difficult to accept that the issue at stake is promotion of the arts, and that the source of the financial support is unimportant. We need to learn from examples elsewhere in the region, like the IT companies supporting cultural centers in India. There has been tremendous support from these companies in highlighting the importance of arts, keeping interest alive in this age and helping make the field more professional. It is essential to realise that in Nepal there are few choices and if the objective remains to make the arts prosper, then the source of this funding becomes secondary.

The other important factor is the legitimisation of arts-related undertakings. Nepal unfortunately does not have any Acts relating to the formation of trusts, and all efforts must somehow be conducted through private ventures or social service organisations. The system of forming trusts is widespread internationally. In most countries, where the arts have not thrived with the support of private ventures, they have through trusts. If the formation of trust was to find legal support, initiatives in drama, music, literature or any other form of art would surely grow, and finally be institutionalised. Together with a system of tax breaks and incentives, there could be an ideal partnership between the arts sector and the business community in preserving, sustaining and furthering the development of creative forces in Nepal.

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

For art’s sake

Tax-law reform is essential to make support for the arts an interesting proposition for the private sector.

The Nepali Electricity Authority (NEA) and the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA) have agreed to begin detailed studies for building the Kulekhani–III Hydroelectric project. Previous studies by the NEA estimate that extra step — unlike in other countries, here there are no tax breaks for those who support the arts. Making contributions and then paying a tax on it is absurd, and does not make sense to anyone who may be inclined. Philanthropy is rare, and businesses won’t give until they receive something in return. Tax-law reform is essential to make supporting artistic endeavours an interesting proposition for the private sector.

Limited legislation is the other major stumbling block in the legitimisation of arts-related undertakings. Nepal unfortunately does not have any Acts relating to the formation of trusts, and all efforts must somehow be conducted through private ventures or social service organisations. The system of forming trusts is widespread internationally. In most countries, where the arts have not thrived with the support of private ventures, they have through trusts. If the formation of trust was to find legal support, initiatives in drama, music, literature or any other form of art would surely grow, and finally be institutionalised. Together with a system of tax breaks and incentives, there could be an ideal partnership between the arts sector and the business community in preserving, sustaining and furthering the development of creative forces in Nepal.

Public expenditure review

The public expenditure review commission has submitted its final report to the government pointing out specific areas where costs can be cut. One suggestion is to cut the number of ministries from the present 22 to 19 and keep the government out of areas it doesn’t need to. Other adjustments to the rules require companies to make shares available for public subscription. Companies with lower bank borrowings will be required to have issues with due diligence. The commission, formed on 31 August 2000, has also pointing out specific areas where costs can be cut. One suggestion is to cut the number of ministries from the present 22 to 19 and keep the government out of areas it doesn’t need to. Other adjustments to the rules require companies to make shares available for public subscription. Companies with lower bank borrowings will be required to have issues with due diligence. The commission, formed on 31 August 2000, has also pointing out specific areas where costs can be cut. One suggestion is to cut the number of ministries from the present 22 to 19 and keep the government out of areas it doesn’t need to. Other adjustments to the rules require companies to make shares available for public subscription. Companies with lower bank borrowings will be required to have issues with due diligence. The commission, formed on 31 August 2000, has also pointing out specific areas where costs can be cut. One suggestion is to cut the number of ministries from the present 22 to 19 and keep the government out of areas it doesn’t need to. Other adjustments to the rules require companies to make shares available for public subscription. Companies with lower bank borrowings will be required to have issues with due diligence. The commission, formed on 31 August 2000, has also
Golfing the Himalaya

With scenic high-altitude putting, low rates and pleasant weather around the year, golf tourism could be just what Nepal’s ailing tourism industry needs. Now if only it were pitched right.

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

It’s probably high on most golfers’ wish list to tee off at 1,100 m with a breathtaking spectacle of the world’s highest mountains as the backdrop. Nepal has the potential to be the highest, most spectacular golf setting in the world.

Nepal has the potential to be the highest, most spectacular golf setting in the world. Your golfing fantasies could turn into reality—Nepal has the potential to be the highest, most spectacular golf setting in the world. Over the last few years, golf has become increasingly popular here. There are courses opening every year, competing golfers doing well, with events like the Surya Open International and the domestic PGA Calligraphy Championship, and there are some exciting Nepali patterns like Deepak Thapa, Deepak Acharya and Taran Shahi. We could give Asian and Scandinavian destinations that use golf to attract high-spending luxury tourists a run for their money. Golf is booming in Japan particularly, with an estimated 13 million Japanese playing on 1,820 courses. India, Indonesia, Taiwan and South Korea are following the trend, as is the Philippines, where there are 40 courses.

Nepal is ideally positioned to attract tourists to the region as, say, a stopover between New Delhi and Bangkok, or as part of triangular packages including Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore. A trip in Kathmandu on its way to a golf resort in India or Malaysia would add variety to a winter golfing tour—or all, in January it’s much warmer here than in Frankfurt or Stockholm. And golf also a good way to get more Asian tourists. According to industry estimates, there are one million golfers within four hours’ flying time of Kathmandu, and many more a little further afield in Japan. The best thing about this region of tourism is that volume isn’t everything—groups may be small, but they make up for it by having more disposable income than most others.

Golfers are always on the lookout for new, interesting courses. A diversity of playing fields, each with its own character and challenges will attract enthusiasts, and perhaps even repeat visitors. There are seven courses in Nepal. The Royal Nepal GC Club at Til Ganga, known until 1965 as the Gauchar Golf Course, is the oldest and most popular course in the country. This 9-hole, par-28 course run by Le Meridien Hotel has been a great instrumental in making the sport popular in Nepal. Pokhara has two courses, and there’s a third coming up. The Himalayan Golf Course is the brandchild of Major BD Gurung, formerly of the British army. Only seven km from Pokhara’s centre, it is the result of three years of planning and hard work. The course, designed by Gurung himself, is a splendid amphitheatre-like setting of a river canyon—view of the Annapurna range is a spellbinding experience. The club house stands 250 ft above the canyon. The Green Canyon Golf Club Executive Golf Course at the Fulbari Resort and Spa, also in Pokhara, is a challenging nine-hole par three course, which attracts business travellers and pairs of tourists.

For beginners in the Valley, there’s the year-old Bafal Hill Golf Centre, which is basically a driving range. But the cream of the crop is the two-year-old Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, inside the Gokarna Safari Park—Nepal’s only international-standard course. It’s one of the world’s rarest, ultra-luxurious courses. Only 25 pairs of shoes can play the 18-hole course in 36 holes per day. On one of the five driving ranges, the thick forest terrain with deer, peacocks, wild boar and monkeys, and Scotland’s world-famous Glenlochy Golf Development designed the course to make the best use of the spectacular setting. The setting of the Valley’s two major courses, the Royal Nepal Golf Club and the Gokarna resort, is unique—away from the noise and dust of the city, with easy access to cool forests.

Nepal is ideally positioned to attract tourists to the region as, say, a stopover between New Delhi and Bangkok, or as part of triangular packages including Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore.

There are good signs, but Nepal still has a way to go before it becomes one of Asia’s premier golfing destinations. First people must know that there are golfing opportunities here, and that these are being upgraded.

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Himalayan Golf Course
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The Fulbari Resort
KTM
Royal Nepal Golf Course
Til Ganga
Gokarna Forest Golf Course, Gokarna
Bafal Hill Golf Centre, Bafal

DARWIN
Dharan Country Club

"t's probably high on most golfers’ wish list to tee off at 1,100 m with a breathtaking spectacle of the world’s highest mountains as the backdrop. Nepal has the potential to be the highest, most spectacular golf setting in the world.
Usha Ramaswamy

On our way to the summit of Poon Hill, our guide explained the challenge of the trek. The highest altitude is 3,150 m, and we had to carry on steadily, not rare. We had to begin at Khare at ice down gullies to the trail. Accumulated snow and huge blocks of the flanks of Hiunchuli which funnels are exposed to avalanches coming off the Himalaya. The Himalaya offers redemption of a life lived with little artistry and success.

As the day drew on, the sky cleared and we started. The next day dawned, and...clear! We had a long walk ahead, my guide Dinesh and I were making for Deurali—the last stop before the day gets hot, and we were off seven. The next day, we were quite a crowd in the dining room. The lodges had two bathrooms. The private bath can become quite an obsession, but you're so tired that there's no room for worry. Every moment of the trek is a fact of a winter, no meat is allowed, everyone has to turn vegetarian.

Hinko Cave is actually just a huge rock overhang and guards a frozen avalanche, a jumble of ice, which must have tumbled down from Hiunchuli's face recently. I clipped twice and slid some feet on my backside, but we got into Deurali safely by late afternoon.

There were no warnings of snow danger and started a fortnight later? It was too late now, none of us were going to turn back.

Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya offers redemption of a life lived with little artistry and success.

The trip to Annapurna Base Camp, or ABC, as we (ahem) trekkers call it, is not an easy walk. As the day drew on, the sky cleared and we started. The next day dawned, and...clear! We had a long walk ahead, my guide Dinesh and I were making for Deurali—the last stop before the day gets hot, and we were off seven. The next day, we were quite a crowd in the dining room. The lodges had two bathrooms. The private bath can become quite an obsession, but you're so tired that there's no room for worry. Every moment of the trek is a fact of a winter, no meat is allowed, everyone has to turn vegetarian.

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wake me. “It’s clear,” he whispered excitedly. I leapt to the window and sure enough, it was a perfect morning. All the peaks were whitely, shiningly outlined against the dawn sky, and an unmade snowBlanket spread across the north. I could reach out, wrap wrapped, and snuggled against the light breeze, waving our torches, the only living thing in the still silent expanse. The first things to stir this morning. But someone—or something—had woken Dinesh up. He pointed out pug marks that trailed off to the glacier. It wasn’t a dream. The crushed snow, new snow, was not difficult to traverse, just a little slippery on the steeper parts. The snow got more and more dramatic. This is the drama in a trifle, this is the grandeur. Then the magical moment when the sun rose to flood the Annapurna peaks. Gold, white and blue. A celestial awakening. Imagine you’re in a white bowl, the sides of which are made of some of the loftiest peaks, overturned on this is another bowl of cobalt blue. That is the Annapurna Sanctuary.

DEB MUKHARJI

The trek to the Annapurna Sanctuary is among the most rewarding with its exquisite forest trails and stupendous views of the high Himalaya. Besides the breath-taking views from Machhapuchhre and Annapurna base camps, one will always remember the bamboo, oak and rhododendron (besides many others) forests between Sinuwa and Machhapuchhre base camp.

In the Lonely Planet guide, Stan Armitage cautions about the avalanches from Hiunchuli and Annapurna South which “come crashing into the valley with frightening speed and frequency.” In fact, between Hinko cave and Bagar the beauty of the gorge is palpably tinged with apprehension because you know that just behind the granite tips of the cliffs above you is the unseen vertical east-face of Hiunchuli whose avalanches could spill over the rocky ramparts of Modi Khola without notice and a sudden deep rumble wiping out everything in its path. Back to the evidence of this as you cross the swaths of destruction which have flattened and uprooted forests and the vast tracts of ice deposited by more recent avalanches.
Drug price wars and patent rows

Pharmaceutical giants slash AIDS drugs prices for Africa to counter bad publicity—and because an Indian firm may be competition.

In London

BRITAIN'S Roche, Switzerland's biggest drugmaker, has made a dramatic gesture to counter bad publicity—and because an Indian firm may be competition.

On Wednesday, Roche announced it was slashing the prices of its AIDS drugs in Africa by about 80 per cent. And South Africa, which has been the target of criticism and demonstrations against big pharmaceutical companies, has launched a separate initiative to slash prices of its own.

The move comes as the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for a global solution to the AIDS crisis, which has claimed more than 10 million lives worldwide. And it is the latest in a series of initiatives by governments and international organizations to address the epidemic.

But Roche's move is likely to be seen as a signal that other companies may follow suit. And it raises questions about the future of the pharmaceutical industry, which has been criticized for pricing its drugs too high in developing countries.

The deal is expected to save the South African government millions of dollars a year. And it is hoped that other companies will follow Roche's lead and slash their prices in Africa.

But there are concerns that the move could lead to a further erosion of pricing power for pharmaceutical companies. And it is not clear whether the new prices will be sustainable over the long term.

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The international reaction to women's rights and refugees in Afghanistan has not matched the war of words over the Bamiyan statues, Secretary-General Annan said in a talk "Beyond Bamiyan" in New York yesterday.

"In schools children are taught history as mainly a male identity. But the Taliban have replaced schools with madrassas (Islamic seminaries)," Professor Amin says. "We have been Muslims for the last 1,400 years and we keep our cultural and societal identities. The Taliban are not Afghan, they don't care about such things."

But the Taliban are also using their limited international outrage to stress the Bamiyan declaration was bold, while reaction to women's rights issues is rare that it is unnecessary. Similarly, concern over the refugee issue is rare. The thousands of women and men who have fled millions out of Afghanistan—has not matched the war of words over Osama Bin Laden, the Islamic terrorist wanted by Washington.

The UN sanctions were imposed against the Taliban mainly because it is feared to hand over Bin Laden. That meant that the Taliban could bring something to women's rights within their control. The bitter truth, say commentators, is that the world community's interest in women's rights is a form of the closing of the Cold War. According to right campaigner Khattak, Afghanistan's women have to go through Western powers abandoned the country after its withdrawal.

The UN also seems to have been able to swiftly step into their shoes and create an Afghanistan after their own images.

Nadeem Yaqub is a freelance journalist based in Peshawar.
The representative of the people are sitting down to discuss and issues relating to the welfare of the people. Basically, when a jointsecretary level staff member of a foreign government arrives, our leaders are willing to go to his hotel to meet him. Even someone nominated by the king to the House, and who could be considered a specialist of high status, also went to visit the official. Even he gave the foreign official a nice welcome to stay for the duration of his stay here. We don’t know what interests are at play.

Indian former ambassador KV Rajan’s five-day visit (March 1519) not only showed that parties like the CPN-UML and the Rastriya Prajnapti Party (RPP) that are aspiring to come to power need India’s support, but even fed people to wonder if the king also needed the backing. Otherwise, there is the question whether the son of someone like Ramkesh Nath Pandey, who calls himself a ‘royalist’, to present the petition to King Rajendra Bir (who is ending from government service soon) and be there to offer his services, Rajendra himself wanted to keep his visit a personal one.

The most interesting part of the affair is with the local leaders. Not just the general secretary of the UML, Madhur Kumar Nepal and its power noises, the RPP, OK, even RPP senior Pratap Thapa overthrew protocol and rushed to the Simran Gath. Rajan then met the Prime Minister at Bahundanda. It is hard to tell what

To accede the success meetings with Rajan will be, but the events have made one thing clear—against the wishes of the people, the ‘remote control’ for Nepali politics is not within to win.

The situation has been the case. One group that claims to be the true representative of the poor people has been sitting to the jungle, is making bombs and is ready to chop the heads of other Nepalis. It is not easy to listen to those who have opinions different from theirs. The CPN-UML has the potential to provide leadership and in parliament, but is unwilling to listen to explanations from the ruling party. The leader of the RPP, the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, the National People’s Front and the Nepali Workers’ and Peasants’ Party are in the same position. Nepalis never learn to love their own companies. Why do the leaders prefer to trust foreigners rather than their own party members? The members from opposition parties and their colleagues from other parties?

The Nepali people have to set the agenda for debate but journalists, both senior and junior don’t hesitate to sing Jana Gana Mana under the Indian tricolour and collect their monthly cheques to furnish the accurate location of ISIs activities in Nepal. An official at the secretariat can confide the locations of all clandestine intellects to organize seminars by inviting guest-owners. The brainstorming of Pashupatinath cannot sustain this country for long if the brains of intellectuals who are taking steps and actively create the opinion against all people and organisations that show such attitudes. These intellectuals also ago to look into the case and to take strong action against everyone they want. But even recently the action has been taken against Udas.

VIP treatment

The office of the civil aviation ministry at Tribhuvan International Airport has now received a number of VIP flight requests from all aviation companies asking them to provide refreshments to outgoing and incoming VIPs. Also, the concerned companies will be responsible for all VIPs passing through the airport.

Sources say an aviation industry veteran has stated that airlines will be able to provide refreshments to outgoing and incoming VIPs as befitting their status, but will be unable to provide refreshments to ‘civilians’ as long as it is not be paid. It means that refreshments should be provided within 20 minutes of the arrival of the VIPs. The airlines sources say that there is no point in providing refreshments to VIPs, if the VIPs refuse to take them. If this happens, the companies will be charged. Sources say that the airlines can be charged up to Rs 25,000.

The following, which is taken up from the Nepali Naya Tastra..

A major clash seems to be taking place between the Maoists and the ML student leaders. The student leaders called for 6 April by the student wing of the ML. As soon as the Maoists came to know of this, they got in touch with all ML leaders and requested them to withdraw the bandh. The ML leaders refused to withdraw and said that the agitation is caused by problems between the two parties. The Maoists then got in touch with the ML students and asked them to withdraw the bandh but the students refused.

The MLA students have reached very strongly against this attitude of the Maoists. They feel that the ML students have a very negative attitude and always try and force their way. In reply to the ML students, the MLA leaders have told them that they should support the bandh and, in return, the ML would support the bandh called by the Maoists on 7 and 8 April. The MLA students have called by saying that the students of the ML have a right to take part in the agitation. This has led to problems between the MLA and the ML students and it is yet to be seen how this is going to be settled.

The Nepali Samacharpatra daily, 25 March
The Himalayan Hash House Harriers (HHHH)—something to do with cannabis in the Himalaya, you think. Wrong. The HHHH, like 1,500 other hash groups around the world, are a bunch of sweaty runners who participate in a mad weekly non-competitive dash across the countryside with the lure of beer at the end of the line.

The idea of “hashing” came from the rather dubious English custom of fox-hunting where the Lords dress up in full hunting regalia, let a fox loose and set a pack of hounds after it. At the sound of the bugle, the Lords and Ladies gallop after the hounds, trying to hunt the poor animal down. Hashing’s the same, but all the participants are human. The “fox” here is called the hare. He starts first and marks the trail for the hounds with shreds of paper. Besides littering, the hare’s objective is to set up a good trail run and fool the hounds by marking the path with confusing signs. The hounds start 15 minutes later, and try to play catch-up with the hare but usually don’t. If they do, the hare must stand everyone a round of beer. The average run is 5-8 km long and lasts 45 minutes to an hour. Run over, it is customary for the tired hare and the hounds to retire to the nearest pub and engage in intensive rehydration therapy.

The first hash started in October 1938 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia by expatriate Britons, one an ex-British Army official. The “hash” here does not refer to smokeable resin. The official story is that the Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur was called the Hash House because it served a lot of, well, hash browns. This was the unspectacular imperial beginning of a beer-drinking club with the runs and a great deal of arcane technical terms comprehensible only to veterans.

The idea spread, and since the sun never set on the empire, hashers have proliferated to just about every corner of Planet Earth. The Himalayan Hash House Harriers was started on 15 October 1979 by Keith Robinson, who founded the Kuala Lumpur, Belait (Brunei) and the Dacca Hash, with Roger Binks, founder of the Cyprus Hash. That’s over two decades of the highest hashing in the world. The highest run the HHHH had was at Lauryabinayak, below Gosiankunda, at 15,000 ft. There have been hash treks to the Solu Khumbu as well. Today, hashers can be any nationality and are from all walks of life and all ages. There are even senior upgradations, keeping pace at a decent trot.

Twenty-two years after the Himalayan Hash House Harriers began, the hares and hounds are venturing further afield. Forty men set out in pairs to hike, run, climb and explore the remote regions of the Himalayas, trekking to places that would normally be considered out of bounds for normal backpacking. They use the runs as an excuse to get away from the stresses of daily life and to indulge in the camaraderie and quaffing that are the hallmarks of hashing.

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INFOCOM

NEPALI WEATHER

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CULTURE

SAVING FAITH

A divine sleep in stone

Did such perfection, daring to transcend the bounds of mortality, arouse divine rebuke?

Once upon a time, 44 years ago, I was in love with Banira Giri, for three upcoming years. It was love at first sight on the wet Chowrasta maidan in Darjeeling. I was 14 and in grade seven in 1957, I was one of the youngest students of Turnbull High School. We'd just been promoted from our half-pants halwa juvenile to the status of full khaki trousers. The lethal occasion was Banira Janyaiti, the annual grand celebrations dedicated to the Nepali Chaucer. She wore a sari, which took place every sometime in the rainy month of June.

Our venerable teachers, Intra Bahadur Rai and Ishwar Ballabh, in their many avatars as teachers, leaders and writers, chaperoned us and disciplined queues just like ours.

The programme began with choreuses, solo songs and speeches steeped in Banira lore. Then a young and exquisitely beautiful young woman climbed safeguards up to the stone podium and stood by the statue of All Kabi Banir Bahkha Acharya, watched over by another statue, a full-figure image of Dhir Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana.

This poetess was Banira Giri. Word spread through us infatuated lot that she was from Kusorgen, that little town between the plains of Siliguri and the high hills of Darjeeling. That Kusorgen possessed many beautiful women was well known to us. But a dive in real flesh and blood from there was standing in front of us that day. Clayton in a red sari, with painted lips and impeccably styled hair. Banira stoked our hearts that day and drove us crazy.

Came 1958, eighth grade and another Banira Janyaiti. Off we went to Chowrasta again. Banira was there again, this time in a pink sari, with vermilion on her forehead, about its above the crown of the image, and more vermilion. I remember that almost every early autumn in the Kathmandu valley we witnessed a similar sight. There was always a pigeon to accept the sacred image, which bled. But one day, it bled. In troubled awe, he cleared buried rock and when he chipped at the illusion of breathing and I had watched fascinated not only at the great chest rose and fell, but as the vermilion mouth smiled and the eyes changed in expressions. Even now, a young man standing beside her remarked, “She is adorable, she is happy today.”

And later, a renowned sashami told me in a burst of wistful laughter that the god who peacefully sleeping was about to wake. His eyes were moving. There were always flowers brushed above the cross of the image, and vermilion on its forehead, about its eyes and mouth and outstating the clothes and jewellery it wears.

Legend also has an old Brahmin aces, Nil Kishna, responsible for having carved the single image from a single enormous rock that had hardly laid aside his tools when disaster came. Were the gods displeased? Did such perfection, daring to transcend the bounds of mortality, arouse divine rebuke? Last, and even legend testify to how long afterwards, the buried god appeared to King Dhirguam Dutta in a dream so vivid that he was able to draw a sketch of the spot where it lay. But the image was hardly uncovered when the mountain fell again and the remaining Vishnu was once more buried. When it was being excavated for the second time, a woman accidentally dropped it. Then it seemed the huge image floated on the surface of a pond. People heard and crowded to worship this strange god that had risen from the earth. It was recognised as Vishnu, but confusingly it was named Badhanikarna, which suggests Shiva.

There are other legends. When an earthquake ran through the mountain, the image had only recently been consecrated. In fact the anonymous Lichchhavi master who carved it, from a single enormous rock that had hardly laid aside his tools when disaster came, was reminded that once, many years ago when carved stone mountains, now dry, used to pour a mountain water into the pond, the ripples flowing across the surface heightened the illusion of breathing and I had watched fascinanted not only at the great chest rose and fell, but as the vermilion mouth smiled and the eyes changed in expressions. Even now, a young man standing beside her remarked, “She is adorable, she is happy today.”

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Vernacular states the water of the new stagnant pond. Devotees mount a ramp to their four heads to the great face, collecting some fragment offerings made by others before them. In return, they offer flowers and rice and coins that others will collect. Pujari bathes and anoints the great face. More vermilion. Dramatic touches of offside. There are always pujasis to accept the rice that is offered. Yet another legend attaches to Badhanikarna, King Pratap Malla, who ruled in the seventeenth century, deemed that as soon as any of his descendants gazed upon the face of the vernacular, they would die. So no ruling monarch may visit this temple. If we look carefully at the great face. More vermilion. Dramatic touches of offside. There are always pujasis to accept the rice that is offered. Yet another legend attaches to Badhanikarna, King Pratap Malla, who ruled in the seventeenth century, deemed that as soon as any of his descendants gazed upon the face of the vernacular, they would die. So no ruling monarch may visit this temple. But Banira Giri was the first poet who brought the true sounds of Banira's poetry, translated and included in The Lake, Love. What I find unique is the participatory of many nationals in the translation of Banira's various poems givenly written in Nepali over the years. There is Wayne Thapa, a long-time American resident in Nepal who has translated and edited the anthology. Other translators are Chet Hult and Abl Bhandari. There is a Maurya Jiram, an important Nepali writer, translator and critic. Many of Banira Giri's poems, translated and included From The Lake, Love have also received emotional recognition and appreciation. India's Franshi, India, Danish, Indian Express, legrap, and Kavita Asia, Japan's Shinto, France's La Pr, Pakistan's Dawn, Alam E-Nezahin, All India Khidoot, D New York, USA have all published Banira's works.
Persistent Seeing

Photography shows us that the seen and how one sees are inextricably linked. Where vision and composition bring a distant place or another way of life into view, meaning resides with the object seen. Kioji Masuo from Japan and Normantus Paulius from Hungary speak dialects of the same language— that of someone from far drawing close to his subject. The distance crossed in their encounter is calibrated by the persistence of their endeavor. Kioji Masuo, photographically engaged with Nepal for many years, draws close to the present and what daily life and custom present to him. A trace of beauty qualifies many of his photos. In Picking Tea in Ilam, a woman bends to fill her basket with leaves of green tea. Linked by labour in a line winding through fields of green, other women bend to fill their baskets. Each in their own place, the nearby hills emerging through mist. In A Maithili Woman, Janakpur, a string tunic is all we see. The woman’s tattooed hands, firm and sure, sketch on rice paper figures echoing the walls of her house. Her sari is as rich as the reds she uses. When a man nears, we are told, she covers her head. Here she is not seen hiding, but revealing, through her art, how she works and lives.

Himalayan cultures, keeps his distance, establishing a layered perspective that speaks with the widest of possible contours. Kioji Masuo is a lucky photographer. Along the lanes and byways of Nepal, as unaffected as a neighbour who might drop in, unannounced, he accentuates the present and what daily life and custom present to him. A trace of beauty qualifies many of his photos. In Picking Tea in Ilam, a woman bends to fill her basket with leaves of green tea. Linked by labour in a line winding through fields of green, other women bend to fill their baskets. Each in their own place, the nearby hills emerging through mist. In A Maithili Woman, Janakpur, a string tunic is all we see. The woman’s tattooed hands, firm and sure, sketch on rice paper figures echoing the walls of her house. Her sari is as rich as the reds she uses. When a man nears, we are told, she covers her head. Here she is not seen hiding, but revealing, through her art, how she works and lives.

Paulius Paularius hews his vision with rock and air. Poet of light, opponent of confinement, he sounds space for its limits and recognizes the human in its place. In Mustang, a breath away from Tibet, 4,500 meters up, with sheer rock cliffs where no path leads, a simple 10th century monastery where meditators dwell in summer. In these pinnacled heights, hand-shaped stone holds our eye. Unapproachable place of worship, where only seeing can take us. Here, where distance reduces to abstraction or silence—peaks, shadow-modulated formations, wind-eroded lands and the vastness of the sky—the mundane appears, shaped as the earth has been shaped by the elements, a gompa, clearly human, clearly a part of the land.

In western Tibet, near Kailash, soft hills, low mud houses, two figures, small, yet undiminished, talk to each other in passing. In Kumbu, in northeast Tibet, an old lama, weary from his day of worship, red cape warming his back, pauses on the way to his room. We cannot see his face, but his presence is felt. In another photo a monk’s hands, rosary and robe are all we see. Surrounded by scenes of stark contrast and unaccountable vastness, there is no thing more gentle than these folded, self-contained hands.

In addition to the work of Kioji Masuo and Paulius Normantus currently on display at Siddhartha Art Gallery, the Mulchowk Gallery in the courtyard of Baber Mahal Revisted is showcasing a selection of photos titled Great Moments of World Championship in Athletics. Festival of Photography until 2 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisted.
There is a small problem concerning corruption that Dr. Peter Dunlop writes about in Nepal. The problem is that he is not sure if similarly tempted he would not take a "quick, look! Call everyone, I'm on TV" approach to greed and malfeasance. Booster shots are required, and we have been asked to come up with some suggestions.

- The Mao-Buddhist deterrent method. Make the bad guys pay a 100 percent duty on all kickbacks, have their hair and eyebrows shaved, and require them to wear a necklace of shoes to work.
- Vaccination. When grief enters a pandemic stage there is no other way but for the Ministry of Communicable Disease and Broadcasting to vaccinate civil society and not-so-civil society against the common cold bacteria on previously announced National Immunisation Days. Vaccinated individuals will stop showing symptoms like grey palms, and be resistant to greed and malfeasance. Booster shots are required every year.

- Genetic Engineering. This method isolates the gene for kleptomania and replaces it with one for generosity and sacrifice taken from an adult sea horse. With advances in bioengineering, therefore, the day is not far when honesty and integrity in public officials can be successfully closed. We must carry this out before the flhit hits the san during next year's Ghode Jatra.

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