The nation speaks
in the first three months of 2001.

Improvement. Or it could be both. Either way,
last year was so dismal anything would be an
improvement. The nation speaks

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In the spring of 1990, the Nepali people got together to regain what had been forcibly taken away from them almost thirty years ago. It was a People’s Movement in its true form. All sections of society rose in unison, and broke the chains of a tyrannical system. And then we called upon the political class to build a system to suit our democratic aspirations. In retrospect, it appears that our faith was highly misplaced. We have promised and monitored our leaders better. It is little short of miraculous that democracy still survives, though barely so, despite the abuses it has been subjected to over the years by the political class. Our politicians turned out to be pygmies with pretensions of being giants. It has been a decade of shattered dreams, lost hopes and wilted aspirations.

Our leaders have failed to deliver everything they promised—peace, governance or development. In fact, they haven’t even tried seriously. The ruling party seems unwilling to rule. The opposition is incapable of offering alternatives. The ultra’s haven’t come to terms with the reality of a small country not being able to afford a drawn-out war without serious consequences to its sovereignty. By brutally killing innocent innocents on duty in Dolakha and Rukum, the Maoists displayed the ugly face of mindless political class. Our politicians turned out to be pygmies with to build a system to suit our democratic aspirations.

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The issue about missed deadlines is nonsense

Ram Sharan Mahat

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat spoke to NT about the mid-year economic figures, donors, and the prospects for the rest of the year.

We have a policy—donor concerns and priorities have to fit within the framework of our policy. There is the Ninth Plan, other government documents and the aid policy. Donors don't pull us in different directions. That said, it's true that we do not work perfectly in practice.

But that framework has not been finalised yet...

Yes, that is one of the other documents to work with and it does not mean that we don't have any policy at all. You have the Ninth Plan document and the agenda for priority action presented at the Paris conference.

You have new deadlines for meeting missed commitments. Are you confident they can be met, especially looking at the Rupee Ban? Don't expect success everywhere. Disruption at the top management level does not mean the things won't be known. There are people at the working level. Our policy has not changed.

Yes, but it does not make people very confident.

Confidence is about perception. We have been in touch with the concerned people, including international agencies, and they have not indicated that they are worried.

They may not have said that directly but how can you let a government fiddle around with an institution as important as the central bank?

There must be continuity. Something was wrong in the past but that does not mean that we continue to live with that problem. We should now worry about how the situation can be improved.

Development spending remains low and regular spending, high. Six percent growth is very possible because the non-agricultural sector has expanded and agriculture is good. Growth is not a function of public investment alone. We have a bumper crop. Experts are good, as is industrial production and the services sector. Our prediction is based on the survey of the National Account Division of the Central Bureau of Statistics. Development spending is only a small part of the total picture. Anyway, even if it is very low but at a comfortable level. Secondly, data on direct payments made by the donors to suppliers and contractors are not reflected by the treasury accounts. Although all numbers come in, by the end, you'll see development expenditure is not as bad as it appears.

You mentioned at the donor review meeting that you had reports on only about 280 projects. Why can't you make donors report on time?

The donors don't have to make reports. The reports did not come from the Accounts Division of the Central Bureau of Statistics. Development spending is an estimated number. The amounts are studied and then working out the programme. In the meantime, we have worked on the balance sheet. If you have deadlocks in the projects because the donors may not have begun to spend when the report was prepared, delays in accounting, etc.

The army is studying customised checkpoints to check revenue losses, but the government wants external auditing agencies that collection isn't off target. The revenue target for this year is high. There are leakage and revenue policy is inadequate. We don't have as many trained people as we need. We

The PRGF has been delayed. The IMF representative told me that though all conditions were met, they didn't want to proceed. I've studied the fiscal sector reform program, the process of the board of directors at Nepal Bank Limited where decisions could not be taken on time. The time frame was not realistic. It has taken much longer than expected to apprise the board for the 'management of the Ranita Banjya Bank' though people have been working day and night. Producing results is much more difficult when social and political issues are mixed up.

So do we assume that nothing has gone out of the rails as yet?

Generally, yes. The issue about deadlines not being met is nonsense. Deadlines cannot stand alone, they are influenced by social and political issues. Take the management contracts. You know the position of the trade unions, you know what the Public Account Committee has said and what the board of directors of the Nepal Bank Limited have been doing. It took a lot of persuasion and work to get them to agree to the plan and they have nominated their representatives to apprise the board. These issues were not anticipated while setting deadlines.

How critical are donors about missed deadlines?

We are more concerned than the donors about meeting deadlines and fixing targets as much as possible because there is no time to produce results. For donors, often the project may be the only one they have to worry about. For us, a project's failure is a failure for Nepal as a whole. It's important that we own our development programmes, because more than anybody we want projects to work. We don't initiate projects because donors tell us to. But I accept that there are weaknesses and problems. We should have been working faster, with greater efficiency, but for this there must be a commitment from all sides.

Donors have different priorities, how do you satisfy all of them when you don't even have a policy on foreign aid?

We have a policy—all donor concerns and priorities have to fit within the
HELMATA RAJ

It is only 6.30 am, but the 23 women members of the Kopila Saving Group of Hasuliya, VDC in Kailali district have already gathered together for their morning meeting. Today, they will deposit their compulsory monthly savings of Rs 10, pay interest on loans (of under Rs 5,000) they have taken and some might apply for further loans. They are not all literate, yet they apply for loans and repay them on their own.

This early morning at Hasuliya would gladden the heart of Prof Muhammad Yunus, the Bangladeshi economist who devised micro-finance as what has long been tossed around as the magic tool for poverty alleviation. There are over one hundred NGOs in Nepal working with rural communities to improve their access to institutional loans. They encourage people to come together and collect the scattered resources available in their own villages so they can make use of those funds when the time arises.

But the notion that micro-finance is a really effective means of increasing access of the poor to institutional credit is coming under increasing scrutiny. Even people involved in micro-finance doubt if their strategy is really effective. Researchers say that the availability of easy loans to the poor is only one aspect of reducing poverty and improving their social position, instead of projecting it as the panacea.

Government policies are in place to encourage the micro-finance sector. The rights granted to NGOs by the Financial Intermediary Act to distribute loans to the rural poor is a rare legal arrangement found nowhere else in the world. The interest rate is as high as 44 percent in the formal sector and up to 60 percent in informal ones like the NGO-supported savings-credit institutions. The Financial Intermediary Act to the rural poor to institutional loans. Another government policy requires all commercial banks to invest at least 12 percent of their total loan portfolio to priority-sector lending like agriculture and at least 9 percent of this amount must go to the deprived sector.

Yet for all of the government’s interventions and the involvement of the non-governmental sector studies show that the desired results are some way from being achieved. A Nepal Rastra Bank study shows that about 80 percent of the agriculture credit is still sought from the informal sector mostly village money-lenders. The interest rate is as high as 60 percent against about 20 percent in the formal sector and up to 50 percent in informal ones like the NGO-supported savings-credit credit institutions. Despite the healthy policy guidelines, the insensitiveness of banks is blamed for this state of affairs.

The Agriculture Development Bank of Nepal (ADBANK) is one of the first finance institutions to reach out to the poor. The success of its Small Farmers’ Development Programme that provides collateral-free loans can be attributed to the fact that it allows both women and the very poor to avail of loans. That is significant in a country where almost 70 percent of rural farmers have less than half a hectare of land, and women don’t have legal property rights.

Most of the NGOs that act as financial intermediaries and also operate micro-finance institution focus on women. Some of these genuinely want to improve women’s access to micro-credit, while others have less to offer. Women seem to prefer women as their target groups because a ‘gender sensitive’ approach to poverty reduction appeals better to donors.

Micro-finance has effectively established that women can also be sources for the expansion of financial services in businesses, but their reliance on male family members has not been effectively reduced. Women are still dependent on their husbands, fathers and in some cases, even their brothers decide if they should apply for loans. “My husband did not give me the money I needed to deposit at my compulsory weekly saving. I had to sell a hen given by my father. I was scared of a child,” says Sama Devi Pudasaini of Gita Nagar in Chitwan.

In some cases, only their women to get loans and other financial services from micro-finance institutions (MFIs), women still have to ask men for the amount they require for their group’s compulsory savings and pay the interest on loans. And, in the savings groups too, women’s voices and leadership are often neglected as long as there is participation by men. On the other hand, as these loans are directed only towards agriculture-related enterprises operated from family homes, critics like economist Meena Acharya claim that micro-credit has helped the “domestication of women” in that it has increased the workloads for women.

The micro-finance sector has other problems as well. While most of the MFIs are donor-driven it has created heavy dependence on donors, obliterating the health of micro-finance services in the country. But the phenomenon is global. The World Bank estimates that only one percent of the total MFIs in the world are sustainable, all others are heavily donor-dependent. As a way out of this dependence some of the MFIs and micro-finance intermediaries have expanded to attract funding from commercial investors.

At the same time, donor demands for a professional approach rather than a welfare- outreach is pressuring MFIs to...
display efficiency in credit management. There of the bigger NGOs that have replicated Bangladesh's Grameen Bank model are already developing into development banks. But their institutional health isn’t always good news for their target groups. "International experience shows that when an MFI develops into a bank, they usually shift their focus from the poor to where there is profit," says Namrata Sharma, Managing Director of Nirdhan Utthan Bank that started their micro-credit operations to the plains. The dependence of MFIs on donor monies is perpetuated by the very nature of the measures these institutions adopt to overcome the shortcomings of commercial banks in serving the poor with credit. ADB/N and commercial banks are accused of being anti-poor in terms of their collateral-based lending and their non-interactions with the poor. As opposed to the detached attitude of banks towards their smaller clients, MFIs approach and encourage the poor, especially women, to initiate income generating activities and monetary transactions, and that in turn boosts their confidence in taking credit. However, this "client confidence" is a fragile phenomenon that needs continuous backup to maintain. "The poor and the marginalised are willing to take risks, but continuous support of their investment is needed to maintain their confidence. As soon as they suspect that the credit they have taken is not yielding, they backtrack," says Harihar Dev Pant, Executive Director of Nirdhan Urban Bank that started as a micro-credit NGO and later turned into a development bank. But for all that, micro-credit activities are more successful in the rural plains than in the hills. Expert point out that because the rural poor enjoy easy access to a market where micro-credit clients can get immediate returns for their products. However, that may not be the sole reason for continued micro-credit activities to the plains. The problem lies in operational technicalities as well. Since MFIs have to have regular interactions and build rapport with their clients they look for easier modes of transportation, which the urban offers. There is also the fact that donor agencies demand efficiency in their operation and fund management, and the hills yield slow results. Yet, they face the paradoxical situation that though their recovery rate is over 95 percent (against the ADB/N’s repayment rate of 85 percent) and though they charge higher interest rates, they are still running losses. For instance, the Gramin Bikas Bank, a Nepal Rastra Bank initiative that lends only to poor women, enjoys a 98 percent rate of recovery yet suffers a fast erosion in its capital base due to a high 10 percent overhead cost. However, the main reason MFIs are confined to the tarai is a lack of creativity. Since the majority of the NGOs working in the micro-credit sector borrow from the capital market, they are suitable for Nepal’s tarai only. So far, they have not been able to modify the concept to meet the needs of the hills, although the success of the Small Farmers’ Cooperatives Limited (the SFCL, which is what the Small Farmers’ Development Programme becomes when the management is handed over to the local community) shows that people in the hills are also willing to take risks, if they are given the right groups, which operate across the country but have limited outreach and limited opportunities for expansion. Their growth is constrained by the limited financial skills of the members, unavailability of the capital needed for expansion and a lack of creativity in invest-ment plans. None of the savings and credit organisations we met had made investments apart from issuing loans to members, although some of the groups had already collected amounts that could not be utilised by their members. Also, since generally most group members invest in similar projects, competition among them is so intense that the price of their products declines. For instance, 27 of the 31 members of Bishal Chowk Women’s Community Bank in Kathmandu raised layer hens and because of that neighbouring Bhatharpur Bazaar saw the price of eggs plunge from Rs 130 per crate to Rs 90.

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The Corruption Control Act 1961 says those guilty of such falsification of their ages, are in a scramble to retire even as they "correct" their ages on their personal documents. As the Centre for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority investigates cases where senior government officials have falsified their ages on paper to gain a few more years in the civil services, reports say at least 300 officials have "corrected" their ages. The Corruption Control Act 1961 states that any officer of such action can be imprisoned for 2-6 years or fined or both. They would also have to resign from their posts and forseize their pensions. Senior civil servants began reducing their usual ages on paper after the new Civil Services Act 1992 made it mandatory for civil servants to retire after 30 years of service. The Act was amended in 1996.

Outstanding achievers

The appliance was redesigned as Nalit Keshu Shrestha and Koli Devi Mathema accepted The Tuborg Outstanding Award—2057 amidst a glittering ceremony in the capital. Accompanying the accolades, the result of a lifetime dedicated to music, was a cheque of Rs 100,000 each. A fit-looking Bikruitma Manandhar, Nepal’s marathon man and Babu Chhiri Thapa, the fastest man in Everest, shared centre-stage with the musical duo. Three-time gold medal winner at the South Asian Games, Manandhar continues to hold the Games’ marathon record. Babu Chhiri, who climbed Everest in a record 16 hours and 56 minutes last spring and stayed on the mountain for a total of 31 days, was presented with a cheque for Rs 100,000. All the recipients were awarded a cheque of Rs 10,000 each for their outstanding achievements in their respective fields. The Life Time Achievement Award was given to the late Lekh Raj Kumal, who was in the forefront of Nepal’s national cycling team for many years.

BB’s books

For readers who want a unique perspective on the political evolution of South Asia from 1940-1964, two books by Bishweshor Prasad Koirala, Nepali statesman and litterateur, are now available in English and in Hindi. Atmatmabita: Late Life and Recollections, a 324-page memoir of Koirala’s life (in English), begins with his family’s exile during the Rana regime, its political±sensibilisation in Banaras and the start of his political activism along with the luminaries of the Indian National Movement. The 200-page Jail Journal (in Hindi) consists of the jail diaries of BP from 1950-1954, part of the time when he was incarcerated at Sardaraj jail after King Mahendra outlawed him in a royal coup, bringing BP’s brief tenure as prime minister (1959-60) of Nepal’s first elected government to an end. The books were released by Chandra Shekhar, former prime minister of India and a long-time friend of Nepali Congress leaders, at a function in New Delhi.
To understand BP we need to de-deify him. Not subject his every move to Khrushchevian denunciation, but acknowledge that he was a human being with all the attendant foibles.

Believe BP himself created the conditions that make the question infinitely relevant. BP Koirala may have come as the best blend of intellect, foresight, probity and fortitude in a leader that Nepal could ever hope to see. But the fact that this attractive admixture was just too good to be true became evident early on. BP immediately established himself as a highly polarising force in Nepali politics. For a full understanding of BP and his contributions, we need to work harder to de-deify him. This does not mean that every political move he made must be subjected to Khrushchevian denunciation. The reference point for any meaningful discussion, however, is an acknowledgement that BP was a human being with all the attendant foibles and failings.

While discussing what BP might have done amid today’s national malaise, we also have to go back to the much older debate over whether the event of 15 December 1960 would have taken place had Subba Ram Rana been invited to form the government. We also cannot avoid asking whether BP’s decision to return from exile in India with his national reconciliation policy in 1975 was actually the direct outcome of his understanding of the impending geopolitical changes in South Asia and the implications for Nepal. Can we really ever be confident that the national reconciliation dogma was not BP’s clever exit strategy from Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s attempts to restrict his pro-Jana Praktikar Andolan activities during the Emergency.

Having met BP a few times as a student, I was struck in particular by his charm and memory. On one occasion, he simply picked up on a conversation we had had two years earlier. His personal warmth and feeling for you demeans, in my view, was in marked contrast to the nature of his politics. Was BP overly arrogant and impossibly self-righteous when it came to his political convictions? I don’t know whether he possessed those traits in any greater measure than most of us do. I don’t think BP was so naive a politician as to deliberately let a sense of intellectual superiority pervade the discussions he held with colleagues and contemporaries. Nevertheless, there must have been something in the man that never allowed a close associate like Ganesh Man Singh to move any closer than “Keirda” while addressing a leader almost every other Nepali knew by different variations of his first two initials.

Moreover, when you consider that BP’s closest aides were either lifelong loyalists in good times and bad or the primary source of his political downfall, there are grounds to question why his aura left no room for those wishing to live in the grey area. BP succeeded in projecting himself as the man of the people, but he could not show the public perception that he was tailor-made for the moment. BP’s rabid anti-communism, flowing from his firm conviction that no other Nepali political force could represent the true free will of the people, was a major obstacle to the full blossoming of democracy, which has left its poisonous effects to this day.

The main beneficiary of BP the anti-communist was the Panchayat system itself. While the Nepali Congress in exile was oscillating between its policies of armed struggle and peaceful agitation, the communists were tacitly being encouraged by the panchas to expand their organisational base inside the country as a counterweight to the Congress. The result: the panchas didn’t face too many problems in turning the results of the national referendum of 1980 in their favour. I cannot abandon the belief that the best organised communist group of the time, the Marxist-Leninists, voted in large numbers to retain the Panchayat system simply to forestall the emergence of a BP-dominated multi-party system. Since BP’s early endorsement of the referendum result, over the initial opposition of important party colleagues, was guided by his willingness to compromise with the rightists than with the left, it served to breathe new life into the party list politics.

At the handover ceremony that was supposed to have been solemnised Panchayat system, BP’s option in reaching an accommodation were obviously limited. Although BP was no human being to have felt some sense of betrayal until the very end, he was too used to being a politician not to have understood that politics was the accumulation of deception and persiflage. I wonder what course history would have taken had BP lived at the time of the Jana Andolan. Even if he had succeeded in disbelieving his legendary anti-communists to join hands with the United Left Front to overthrow the Panchayat system, would the communists have trusted him enough to go the full distance? Personally, I am still willing to believe that BP would have been March Man Singh Shrestha’s greatest ally. His youngest brother already had one foot on the Panchayat boot and his eldest son did his best to help the Jana Andolan Praktikar Samiti.

In terms of BP’s political philosophy, democratic socialism or social democracy, however you put it, has been at the core of Nepali political decision making in one form or the other from the time of Padma Shumsher. He was entrusted by the Panchayat constitution and today’s ultra-rightists, pratigamis would be in no hurry to review any of that. If that is a coincidence. Nepali political realities dictate the formulation of the same set of policies and campaign promises, albeit with wider liberty when it comes to the choice of language. That’s why politics has always involved personal ambitions. And that’s why a clearer understanding of BP the person became vital to the current debate.

Going through BP’s Jail Journal and Arvind Sharma, one goes on a rare journey to the bottom of Nepali politics. But there are a few clues that obscure a clear understanding of the anger, the desire to project himself with profound contradiction and enigma. For instance, the justified expression of contempt by his effusive supporter who, by his very ways serves as the palace’s principal manipulator in the upper house of parliament, in highly flattering terms despite his apparent realisation that the young man may not have been acting as an intermediary in an entirely above-board manner. In doings, BP may have been a monster but in life he was an effusive storyteller who understood to King Mahendra, too, possessed the ability to dissect the multiple elements of one’s personality and isolate them in keeping with that person’s values, attitudes, needs and expectations. In the end, BP was left wondering why asking with whom he thought. In this sense, you are correct. A good rapport would move not only to oust him but also subject him to the affronts. To many, the answer was obvious early on it was BP’s politics, not his personality, that put the king off. BP’s single-minded effort to present himself as the embodiment of the Nepali aspiration for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness was perhaps his greatest drawback. This consistent effort alienated his allies in other political parties and intimidated his adversaries. More importantly, it overwhelmed his support among the Nepalese electorate to join him in such a way that the surname Koirala, and any proximity to it, has become the shortest cut to the top of the party hierarchy. In death, BP eventually succeeded in transforming the party lists into a vehicle for the destruction of the Nepal quest for personal freedom, which, whether we like it or not, remains his greatest legacy. An ideal does not do justice to its inextricable worth just because it’s not universally idolised. In this sense, you are correct. You don’t have to be a ‘Keirda’ to say good things about BP. 😊
Living in fear

Many say the rampant crime in Bara and Parsa districts, the face of modern, industrial Nepal, is thriving because of an active nexus between criminals, political parties, the police and the local administration.

MOHAN MAINALI
CHANDRA KISHORE

Once restaurants in Birgunj do not have dances any more. There are singers who belt out songs, but the dancers are missing. It is not because no one is interested or that there are no dancers available. Until some time ago, restaurants used to be packed with all sorts of people. The local administration concluded that they were hangouts of criminals, and banned dances in the restaurants in an effort to clamp down on crime. But has that made any difference? The police now question anyone out after 11 pm. Even those with licensed weapons are not allowed to carry them around at night. The local administration has ordered that transportation of all goods has to be completed by 5 pm and scrapped, and the police have been given the right to fire on those who flout orders. The police patrol the Birgunj-Paithaliya road at night. Yet, there is no sign that crime is decreasing in these areas. In fact, it is on the rise.

Labourers are looted in factories. Kidnapping has become common. People in Bara and Parsa live in perpetual fear since they don’t know who will be kidnapped next. Even the police do not feel safe in these areas.

The Birgunj-Paithaliya area was the most attractive place in the country to set up factories. Over 250 factories, large and small, have been set up here and they conduct billions of rupees worth of business. Over 25,000 people are directly employed in these factories. This is also the most important entry and exit point for cargo in the country, the all the more so with the development of a huge dry port in Birgunj. A Trade Promotion Center has been set up here soon. That is now past and the future of this once-very-prosperous area looks bleak.

The Chief District Officer (CDO) of Birgunj, Dohi Bahadur Gurung, does not deny outright that crime is on the rise and slowly taking in toll. The local Superintendent of Police (SP), Shyam Krishna Tamang, thinks otherwise—he says the crime rate is neither very high and nor is it rising very fast. It is the nature of crimes that has become serious, and criminals have become very strong and to a greater degree than people had earlier suspected, he says.

On 3 February, a prominent local businessman, Shewar Kumaran Rana, was almost kidnapped, sending shock waves throughout Birgunj. That came just 10 days after five dreaded criminals had been tracked down by the police in the jungle near Nipalgunj. Who are these criminals? “The Mafiosi”! Last year, Mafiosi attacked installations of Syara Tobacco, Nepal Lever, Colgate-Palmolive and other multinational companies for the simple reason that these companies represented a form of “non-colonialism”. And they had no hesitation in claiming responsibility for these attacks. It was after those attacks that the crime rate shot up, but no one believes that it is the Mafiosi who are behind the other criminals now taking place.

CDO Gurung says there is nothing to link the Mafiosi to those crimes. There have been incidents like the attack on Nepali Congress Minister Surendra Choudhary’s house, but these were motivated by political reasons. People in the area like to make a distinction between such attacks and others of a criminal nature.

Umesh Chandra Thakur is director of the Triton Group which suffered heavy damage in the past year, but he does not see Mafiosi hand in it. Industrialist Rajendra Khetan and Padma Joyoti, who have been campaigning for better security in these areas for long, say that attacks on factories are not the work of Mafiosi. Joyoti’s spinning mill was attacked twice in the past year. As in other places, this area too has its share of labour problems, and criminals could be the problem of these dissatisfied workers. But this theory has few takers. Thakur admits there is a problem between management and labourers but it is not to bad that workers would carry out criminal activities against the factories.

The border

Partial is certainly—people near the border areas are the easiest and most common victims. Dacoits and smugglers from the Indian side commit crimes and escape across the porous border, making arrests very difficult. But that works both ways. Sources say that over 200 dacoits and smugglers have moved to the Nepali side and are living here under political protection. Political parties need criminals in their fold to provide muscle power and money during elections. District president of the Rastriya Prajatattva Party (RPP), Gopal Giri, says all political parties have criminals in their ranks. However, district president of the Nepali Congress in Parsa, Rajendra Bahadur Amatya, denies that his party shelters criminals. But when asked about the famous Indian dacoit, Tumston Singh, Amatya admits to having heard that Tumston is being provided political shelter.

Tumston Singh had been living in Birgunj for the last year and a half, when, one day, people from India came on motorcycles and shot him dead on a Birgunj street in broad daylight. People from Birgunj say Tumston was a good friend of former Nepali Congress minister and now leading dissident, Khum Bahadur Khadka, and that Khadka had met Tumston a few days before he was killed.

Not only Indian dacoits, people who have been sentenced to 20 years in prison also receive political patronage—among them are Barhi, Suman and Rajiblal. District president of the UML, Ram Chandra Shah, asks how these people move around freely if they aren’t protected by the ruling party. Shah says that these criminals always try to be close to the ruling party. That, however, doesn’t mean that only the ruling party shelters criminals. No party is clean; it is just that criminals find it more convenient to cozy up to the party.

The alliance between politicians and criminals started during the Panchayat regime but has become more widespread in the past year, especially since the death of Prime Minister B P Rana.

Rana was a good friend of Prime Minister Dahal and he was very much close to the ruling party. But this trend has continued since his death. As long as the police are political interference and that this situation, it won’t be long before civil war breaks out.

Chandra kishore
Mid-year economics
Consumer prices, an all-time low and exports continue billowing, the growth of revenue collection. That's the summary of the central bank's seven-month report on economic performance.

The National Urban Consumer Price Index grew by two percent in comparison to the 4.6 percent growth in mid-February 2000. Prices were kept low by a slump in food and beverage costs, down by 2.6 percent compared to the 1.2 percent growth in the same period last year. Prices in the non-food group also grew slowly compared to mid-February 2000.

Though exports have continued to grow, the rate of growth has slowed down. The growth in mid-February was 21.8 percent compared to 41 percent in the same year-earlier period. Exports to India grew 29 percent and sales in overseas markets by about 16 percent. The slowdown in exports resulted from a downsizing in garment and carpet sales. Paathmina sales continued to grow, reaching Rs 5.82 billion in mid-February. The trade deficit has shrunk by about three percent, mainly due to a slowdown in imports.

The government spent more money up to mid-February compared with the spending last year. Most of that money was spent on recurrent expenses, mainly pensions and salaries. Regular spending shot up by almost three times the money spent on development projects. The spending grew by about nine percent while regular expenses grew by 24 percent. The high spending and low internal revenue generation has led to a budget deficit of Rs 5.91 billion, which was plugged by issuing saving bonds and the foreign currency borrowing. The government also borrowed Rs 1.8 billion from the central bank. By law, overdrafts from the Nepal Rastra Bank have to be brought down to Rs 1 billion by the end of the year.

The Balance of Payments surplus, based on numbers until mid-December 2000, was Rs 4.97 billion. Despite the narrowing of the trade gap a decline in net services income has lead to a current account deficit of Rs 3 billion. The foreign exchange reserve in mid-February was Rs 106 billion, enough to pay for imports for 11 months.

Unions challenge strike ban
Nepal Independent Hotel Workers Union and the Nepal Tourism and Hotel Workers Association have jointly petitioned the court seeking annulling of the government's decision banning strikes in hotels and tourism businesses. The government banned strikes in hotels on 15 March, the day hotel workers demanding a 10-percent service charge had begun what was to have been an 'indefinite' strike. Unions say the new government rule is against the provisions of the constitution and the labour and trade union acts. The petition also claims that the right to protest is guaranteed by both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

New pack for Dabur’s Real
Dabur Nepal has begun marketing the Real Mango Nectar, a fruit juice brand in 200ml consumer packs. The company says Nepal’s market for non-aerated drinks is 0.5 million consumer packs per tray and each 200ml pack retails at Rs 15. Dabur Real Mango manufactured in India is also exported to Indian markets.

The reinstatement of Nepal Rastra Bank’s governor by the Supreme Court has added another dimension to the power of litigation. A non-functioning government saddled with inner party rivalry and inter-party feud has resulted in the legislature becoming yet another inefficient system. The executive is practically controlled by the legislature appointments to key positions around the power centres at the legislature. An influential parliament cannot make the executive work, and so everyone is now resorting to the judiciary.

Sustaining business and economic activities through encouraging their growth requires a suitable, conducive environment. The strength and core competence of business lies in doing business, not in getting any legal entanglements. Currently there are scores of issues of national and economic importance that are awaiting the verdict of courts. The hotel owners went to court, and now labour is fighting a legal battle. The dealers of Indian vehicles who understand only the rupees and dollars of being drawn-out legal battles between brokers or with trackers remain an important facet of our society. Citizen groups and other socially accepted bodies decide such cases. This habit of getting into litigation for even little issues is embedded in our national psyche and being replicated on a national level. Every day there are more cases being filed in courts across the country.

The world's largest economy can get away with being fond of the courtroom, not us.

One of Bhupi Sherchan's most popular poems, 'Yo hallai ko desh"', calls the country a land of rumours. An improvisation today would say "Yo mudala saha, ko sahar"—a city full of litigation.

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Nepal boasts an estimated 450 varieties of orchids, few plants up to an altitude of 2,900 m. About 350 are classified as ornamental orchids, but only 20 percent of these slow-growing perennial herbs are grown, collected, and sold — in the 150 or so nurseries registered with the Floriculture Association of Nepal (FAN).

But orchids are slowly becoming popular in Nepal, and efforts are on to try and market them systematically. Floriculture in general has grown hugely in Nepal in the last 15 years. “It is definitely encouraging. It has not even been a year and I have a good market. At least one in two people asks about orchids. It has to do with a growing interest in exotic flowers,” says Uma Rai, who has a nursery in the Balaju industrial area.

But there’s a difference between asking and buying, and the market for orchids hasn’t really grown significantly. “People prefer cheaper and easily available cut flowers like carnations, gladioli and roses,” says Joshi Paudyal of Women in Floriculture (WIF), which has an outlet in Kamaladi. Mid-January to mid-May is the orchid flowering season in Nepal, but it is uncertain how much the market will pick this year. The president of FAN reasons: “They require time and are difficult to grow. And since orchids haven’t gained mass appeal, ourselves we don’t see immediate returns.”

Orchids are also more expensive than other flowers — an orchid stem with flowers can cost up to Rs 100, compared to Rs 20 for a cut rose. It means that only people with a real passion for the flower will buy it. “Normandy people asking flowers don’t care whether it is orchid or something else as long as it looks beautiful and fresh,” says Kamal Bhattarai of Wizard’s Fresh Flower Shop in Kamaladi. That said, it isn’t much of a risk to stock orchids, and it does make good money — to buy them, as they keep their blooms for about a month in favourable circumstances.

The most popular varieties here are Zygopetalums, Cattleyas, Dendrobiums, Oncidiums, Phalaenopsis, Papiliondiums, Vanda, and Miltonas.

“Local orchids have definitely gained a foothold in the market compared to imported ones in the last two years,” says JI Tamang at the Cut Flower Wholesale Market facilitated by FAN. This reflects an increasing capacity of Nepali nurseries to produce better quality flowers. The drawback is time-consuming growth and a yearly bloom, and so importing brings in profits without much effort. “But imported orchids are being in diseases that harm vegetables, citrus and deciduous trees and plants,” remarks Basudev Karmacharya of the National Herbarium and Plant Research Centre in Godawari. “We must produce enough for the local market and slow the rate of import,” he adds.

Experts say that in the long run ornamental plants like orchids could be the backbone of the floriculture industry, especially with a good international marketing strategy which ensures that local people also benefit. If orchids at a city florist’s cost Rs 25,000 to floriculture entrepreneurs, he says.

But imported orchids can bring in Rs 100,000 to Rs 150,000 — a much higher cost. “In the country, we can even cultivate new hybrids of exotic plants like orchids,” says Rai. Now all we need is a culture that appreciates and understands the aesthetics of plants and flowers like orchids,” says Standard Nursery’s Shrestha.

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Most flowering plants and flowers were brought in to Kathmandu from Darjeeling and Kalimpong. “Now the floriculture industry has developed so much we can even cultivate new hybrids of exotic plants like orchids. Now all we need is a culture that appreciates and understands the aesthetics of plants and flowers like orchids,” says Shrestha of Standard Nursery.
Nepali kayakers go exploring

Four Nepali kayakers just explored the Likhu Khola for the first time. INKA TROLLSAS, who walked the valley trail alongside them, believes more such expeditions are needed.

A team of four Nepali kayakers explored the Likhu Khola in Okhaldhunga last month. This was the first time that a river in Nepal was explored by Nepalis. The river is extreme and only for experts. With a put-in at 1,700m and finish at 400 m, it is one of the steepest rivers ever run in Nepal. It was an unforgettable experience for all involved.

Ram Hari Silwal, the leader of the expedition, grew up next to the Trisuli river where he started his rafting career at twelve. He is now twenty-five and is one of the most experienced raft guides and kayakers in Nepal. Kayaking has taken him to ten different countries where he’s been on serious expeditions. Late last year he kayaked the well-known grade IV Dudh Kosi, with an international team. With all this experience behind him Ram has the confidence to explore Himalayan rivers, and wants to inspire other Nepali kayakers to do the same.

The other kayakers on the expedition were Dhruva Shekhar, Binaya Lama and Indra Thapa. They are all river-guides and amazing river runners. This team has worked together on Himalayan rivers over the years. They know each other’s skills, they’ve been in challenging situations on the river together and are good friends—an ideal team for the expedition.

Achyut Gautam, a raft guide who grew up in Lei, a small village close to the Likhu Khola, and I walked the trails along the river valley. Gautam planted the seed of this expedition in Ram’s mind—without him, it wouldn’t have happened.

The expedition took ten days. We started from Kathmandu 15 February, taking the local bus to Jiri. From there we walked along the Everest Base Camp trail for two days to our starting point in Kenja. Two porters carried the four kayaks and in every village they were asked what they were carrying. Some thought they were submarines, and one person guessed they were flying machines. Some people remembered having seen such boats before, when a few foreigners came along this route on their way to explore the Dudh Kosi.

The team was terribly excited and couldn’t wait to get to the river. None of them had seen it before, and no one had any idea what it would be like. The expedition’s knowledge of the river came from maps and advice from people from the area. At Kenja, the river looked great for kayaking. Ram and his team had picked the perfect time of the year for the expedition.

It took five days to get down to the confluence of the river with the Sun Kosi. The first three days were very difficult. The river is steep, and the many landslide areas in the valley made both the kayaking and the walk challenging. Many of the rapids were dangerous and a lot of them were not navigable—the team had to walk around them. Other parts of the valley were beautiful, with romantic gorges, waterfalls and caves. The next two days were an easy paddle down the river, and the trails along it also became less dangerous.

The expedition was self-funded, which meant that sleeping bags, shelter, first aid, food, cooking pots, etc. were carried in the boat. The boats were heavy and very difficult to control, and it was only the expertise of the team that averted many possible accidents. It would have been impossible to fit enough food in the boats for the whole trip, so we camped close to villages where we could get some food. The people around the Likhu Khola were extremely friendly and helpful.

The river trip ended in Harkapur, where we surprised the army that had just finished building a road. This was good news—no more walking, and navigating the way back would be someone else’s responsibility. Twenty-three hours, a breakdown and minor crashland, the bus arrived in Kathmandu.

There’s much scope for future expeditions by Nepali kayakers, and they are necessary if the rafting industry is to grow. In the high season the rivers are positively crowded. There are “traffic jams” on the upper Bhotekosi—I’m afraid when a couple of hundred tourists are rafting the river the same day. There are thousands of unexplored rivers in this country and plenty of kayakers to do it.

What is needed for future expeditions is financial support. It will be in the interest of rafting companies and the Nepal Tourism Board to support Nepali kayakers in exploring their own rivers. The Likhu Khola expedition cost Rs 45,000, and 80 percent of this was funded by the kayakers themselves.

Economically Nepal might be a poor country but in terms of natural water resources, Nepal is the second richest country in the world after Brazil. The masses of fresh water that run through the country is an important resource and can be used in many ways. The first that most people think of is the construction of hydropower projects. People talk about the possibility of generating enough electricity to not only meet Nepal’s needs, but also to export it, which will earn the country much-needed foreign exchange.

Kayakers and the rafting industry almost uniformly oppose such suggestions. There are even petitions going around Thamel demanding that dam-building be stopped. It seems to me that signing such a petition is like saying there should be no development work in Nepal.

The Likhu Khola expedition showed us what the building of a dam means to many people in remote parts of Nepal. It doesn’t only mean electricity. It means that a road will be built to their village. And with a road comes the possibility of getting to a hospital without walking for days, or getting work in different places, getting newspapers and being connected with other people in ways that are difficult now.

If rafting and rafting companies were to work together it might sound crazy but it could be possible. There’s a perfect—and most likely unintentional—example by the Leti Bridge on the Likhu Khola. There are plans to build a dam on a 3-km stretch where rafting and kayaking are impossible. Downstream of the dam, rafting will remain an option. Of course, such an undertaking will be very difficult, but it isn’t impossible.

—Inka Trollsas

Inka Trollsas is XXXX
Ultimate Descents

When shepherds came down from the surrounding mountains and invited them to their homes, “It was particularly apt that shepherds should come down to rescue us on Christmas Eve, and it was the best dal bhat I have ever tasted, then or since,” he recalls. From such humble beginnings, the rafting industry today has grown beyond recognition. The Nepal Association of Rafting Agents (NARA) says some 20,000 people went on organised white water rafting trips in Nepal in 1999, and this number is growing by about 15 percent a year. The Association says rafting today is moderately difficult. Depending on the remoteness and the difficulty of a river, costs can vary. A two-day rafting trip along the Trisuli can be as low as $170, while a nine-day trip on the Sun Kosi can cost $550. But there are problems: the proliferation of fly-by-night rafting companies has brought down standards and profit margins. Security is a concern, too. But the longer-term threat to white water rafting is the inevitable trend towards building hydroelectric power plants along Nepal’s rivers. Already, the fabulous rapids of the Marsyangdi have been blocked by the Kali Gandaki, after it takes its fabulous rapids of the Marsyangdi have been blocked by the Kali Gandaki, after it takes its...
Mapping the Internet

TIM GUEST

We call it the web, but is that the right description? What does the Internet look like? A British company working on the problem it calls “linkrot” (the estimated 10% of all hyperlinks that lead nowhere) decided the only way to tackle the problem was to map the entire web.

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But this is not the first attempt to map the Internet. Many others have worked on the problem, right from the first sketch of a single server. LinkGuard is close to completing the map, which it compares in complexity to the human genome. It claims the map will allow people to examine for the first time how clusters of websites link and interrelate.

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Arpanet node in 1969 (See www.cybergeography.org/atlas/arpanet.gif). The issue is not as simple as it might sound: after all, what is the Internet? Is it the cable? The server? Or something less tangible?

At www.cybergeography.org/atlas, Martin Dodge, author of Mapping Cyberspace, curates a museum and gallery with a huge range of approaches, from conceptual atlases through geographical charts to maps of individual websites and surfing patterns. The most immediately fascinating are the range of artistic interpretations at www.cybergeography.org/atlas/artistic.html. Scrolling down, it is clear how much these works of art have shaped the way we picture information space. From the familiar, pioneering light cycles and Master Control Program of Tron, the classic science fiction film, and later glinting green information corridors in The Matrix, it also reveals startling discoveries such as hybrid actual–virtual constructions of “transarchitect” Marcus Novak. Breathtaking towers of information are graffitied onto actual glass, steel and light at www.centrefuge.org/marcon.

The site also reminds us that the concept emerged from a much older imagination technology: the book. When William Gibson first described console cowboys jacking into cyberspace, it sounded much more thrilling than the reality of what we now know of as browsing HTML pages. Researchers are exploring ways of returning to the drama of Gibson’s vision by modelling the Internet as a world unto itself. At http://amap.ozy.com, a fascinating series of satellite images of the development of Alphaworld, a truly virtual 3D world constructed entirely by its members. What’s most interesting about the pictures, given that the members are able to build the landscape in any way they choose, is how much these top-down images resemble the street-plans of real cities.

Gibson’s far-reaching vision was inspired by geographical atlases, and the Matrix was the real beauty of all these maps is that they tell us that despite the garish colours, over-use of Flash animations and mip-mapped text, the web is still full of the prettiest maps of the Internet are geographical charts to maps of individual websites and surfing patterns. The most immediately fascinating are the range of artistic interpretations at www.cybergeography.org/atlas/artistic.html. Scrolling down, it is clear how much these works of art have shaped the way we picture information space. From the familiar, pioneering light cycles and Master Control Program of Tron, the classic science fiction film, and later glinting green information corridors in The Matrix, it also reveals startling discoveries such as hybrid actual–virtual constructions of “transarchitect” Marcus Novak. Breathtaking towers of information are graffitied onto actual glass, steel and light at www.centrefuge.org/marcon.

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The return of Dr. Strangelove

Fifty Russian diplomats have been expelled, both Cold War warriors are returning to key positions in the cabinet. Just beyond the chill wind really sweeping through Washington?

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

An international criminal court capable of trying suspects on genocide and war crimes charges should be ready in The Hague by next year, one of its key advocates said over the weekend. But Philippe Kirsch, chairman of the ICC preparatory commission and the driving force behind the court, said that it would not be able to try crimes committed prior to the court's creation.

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First Mate Fletcher Christian led his rebels to isolated Pitcairn Island in 1720. Two centuries later their children hope to join the world.

Mutiny island, tourist bounty

Anthony Browne

For more than 200 years it has been famed as one of the last remote communities in the world. Its legendary history has inspired several films. Its population has dwindled from 1000 in the 1800s to 20. But today Pitcairn is working to change that image.

The plans, by Wellesley Pacific, are to have a population of 3000, with three cruise ships a year to visit the island.

A mellower future aside, some in Aotearoa are concerned about how the international court will operate and join the outside world, isolated and with just three visiting passenger boats in 1997.

An anti-Milosevic poster was discovered.

Mutiny island, tourist bounty

Something is going on out there.

There is a way of life that is unique and an international treasure.

The plans, by Wellesley Pacific, involve an international airport with a 1,200-meter runway on the island of Oeno, one of the last unindustrialized coral atolls in the world. Two aircraft would connect it to Tahiti and New Zealand. Oeno would have a four-star hotel with 30 beds. There would be a second runway on Piccaninny Island, and two lodges. Changes would be made in Bounty Bay so that boats can land. The deputy governor of Pitcairn, a British official based at the High Commission in Wellington, New Zealand, visited the island to talk over the impact of the plans. In the referendum last week, 22 adults voted for the impact of the plans.

In the meantime, the island's unique plant, says Wellesley, has demanded exclusive access to the outside world. Islanders have a courthouse that has never seen a passenger boat in 1997.

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Islam and democracy

Islam and democracy are two concepts that are closely intertwined. The relationship between Islam and democracy is complex and has been the subject of much debate and discussion.

Islam is a monotheistic religion that originated in the Middle East. It is the religion of Muslims, who believe in one God and the final revelation of the Prophet Muhammad. Islam is one of the world's major religions, and it has a strong influence on the political, social, and cultural life of many countries.

Democracy, on the other hand, is a form of government in which power is held by the people, either directly or through elected representatives. Democracy is based on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice.

The relationship between Islam and democracy is complex and has been the subject of much debate and discussion. Some Muslims believe that Islam and democracy are compatible, while others believe that they are incompatible.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between Islam and democracy. Many Muslims have sought to reconcile these two concepts, and there have been many efforts to promote democratic values within Muslim societies.

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“There never was such a situation!”

Former minister and senior Nepali Congress leader, Jaggannath Acharya, in
"There never was such a situation" Bimarsha, 30 March

In my 52-year-long political life, there has never been a situation like the one we are facing now. Politics is moving in the wrong way. After democracy was restored 11 years ago, I now see there is no leader with the vision. It is not only the Nepali Congress leaders who lack vision, all political parties of the day are the same, whether they are in parliament or not. If there is no vision, how can anyone expect any positive action to be taken? After the advent of democracy, some work has been done in communication and transportation, but it is just too little to talk about. I am not saying that nothing has been done, but that more could have been accomplished. Politics has now become a very dirty field, and the rot has set in. Religion is being misused for short-term gains, society is bearing the brunt and nothing looks positive today. Lawlessness has set in. This is not a good sign. This is not going to benefit the people or the nation.

In such a short time, nothing positive has happened. The situation of the nation is deteriorating rapidly and this is surely everyone’s concern. People have become frustrated and they are losing their self-respect, and everyone is terrified. People should get serious now and seek a way out of the present situation. The tragedy is that party workers have started aligning themselves with their respective leaders, they do not care about anything, and only follow what their leaders say. All leaders in all parties have become very egoistic. This has not benefited the country. No sector seems to be functioning properly. Now it has become such that the Maoists are running some parts of the country, the other parties are either in the House or on the sidelines. Even in such a situation our leaders do not realise the magnitude of our problems and act. When are they going to put their brains to work?

I came back to the country with BP (Koirala), when he began his national reconciliation move. Today, it is not enough to just find consensus in the party. It isn’t only parties represented in parliament that are capable of running this country. Parties outside parliament too have to get their act together, for a consensus and act fast. If a consensus is not reached fast, then forget the future of democracy, because even this country’s prestige is going to be down the drain. It is sad that the party that struggled the most for democracy cannot run the country because of constant infighting. This is really very sad. Earlier, the infighting used to take place about issues, policies and thought. BP and Matrika Prasad used to be at loggerheads on the basis of their political philosophies and strategies. Today, it is because the present leaders have not been able to provide relief to the country, they have not been able to implement programmes. It is of concern to everyone that there are quarrels for posts and positions within the Nepali Congress, but if the party leaders had been conducted in a proper manner, then this problem would have been solved. Today the infighting is not for political philosophy or ideology but for positions and posts, for money and the power it brings with it. This is not going to benefit anyone.

Even if Koirala and Bhutto are perceived to be people without vision, who can the people turn to? This is a very serious question. Bhattarai tried to do something earlier but that proved unsuccessful. We should still thank him for taking a step, though. I feel that the consensus of parliament is not going to be enough now. Now it has become such that the Maoists are running some parts of the country. Now it has become such that the Maoists are running some parts of the country. The consensus of forces outside parliament too. We have to look for an all-party solution that the consensus of parliament is not going to be enough now. Now you have to take a look at the Maoists and the Maosists. The consensus is not reached fast, then forget the future of democracy, because even this country’s prestige is going to be down the drain. It is sad that the party that struggled the most for democracy cannot run the country because of constant infighting. This is really very sad. Earlier, the infighting used to take place about issues, policies and thought. BP and Matrika Prasad used to be at loggerheads on the basis of their political philosophies and strategies. Today, it is because the present leaders have not been able to provide relief to the country, they have not been able to implement programmes. It is of concern to everyone that there are quarrels for posts and positions within the Nepali Congress, but if the party leaders had been conducted in a proper manner, then this problem would have been solved. Today the infighting is not for political philosophy or ideology but for positions and posts, for money and the power it brings with it. This is not going to benefit anyone.

If our leaders had vision, in the past 11 years we would have made great progress and the country would not have been in such a sad state. Now it is very difficult for the Congress to take proper care of the country. This is because everyone has become self-centred and selfish and looks out for themselves only. Why did the Panchayati regime go? Not because there were so few Panchas, but because they were showing...
Rape in eternity

I wonder whether they would not look better left as they are: two lovely women who have borne together, in the same body, for centuries. The globe...
Queensland team led by Paul the National Rugby League charged with “contrary conduct” by bottoms. Hopoate was cited and for putting his finger up players’

In contrast, on the eve of their departure to India, both captain Steve Waugh and McGrath were talking about increasing the tally of test wins, not put his finger up Bowman’s bottom—to make them play the ball quickly. He also claimed he did not put his finger up in an important win in India. John Hopoate of the Wests Tigers gives an opponent the “wedgie”.

How the arrogant have fallen

Barney Reid played cricket for Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s. He has written extensively about cricket and has been a commentator for radio and television. His writing has appeared in cricket magazines and newspapers around the world. He is the author of several books on cricket, including "The Art of Cricket" and "The Spirit of Cricket". Reid has also written about tennis, having played at a high level himself. He is a regular contributor to The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian newspapers.

Rough play

An Australian rugby league player quits after he uses particularly unsportsman-like tactics on the field.

Meanwhile, coach Terry Lamb is set to become the latest casualty in Wests’ crisis. The rookie first grade coach admitted this week that he was aware Hopoate had been using his finger during matches. During Hopoate’s hearing, he had said that it was reasonably common to be touched in the region of the testicles. Lamb, who in 1986 became the first player to play in every game on a Kangaroo tour of England and France, told the Knox of Hopoate committing the act on St George Illawarra skipper Craig Smith earlier in the season. A Sydney newspaper claimed Lamb had replaced the incident during video sessions and laughed at it with players.  

Kournikova

Anna Kournikova has yet to win a singles title. She hasn’t even played competitive tennis since February because of a foot injury. But even in a dot-com economy downturn, Internet company higher-ups are still throwing cash at Kournikova. The Russian tennis star is endorsing Terra Yrics, operators of the Lyco’s Web portal. They plan on a new commercial in heavy rotation during the NCAA men’s basketball tournament. Kournikova’s sponsorship wasn’t disclosed, but remember, she once told a group of drooling teens, “You can’t afford me, boys.” Steve Fund, Lyco’s vice president of brand marketing, says she’s “the only celebrity I know who had a virus named after her,” referring to the recent e-mail virus that infected millions of computers. And here’s more big news for so-called “Annamaniacs”, devoted fans who made Kournikova the Internet’s most popular athlete. Her site, kournikova.com, might make a comeback even before she does. Lycos is negotiating with her representatives at the Octagon sports agency to take over production of her official site. The tennis star’s site was previously handled by Broadband Sports, which went out of business earlier this month.  

SPORTS

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The passionate Argentinean dance form has come to Kathmandu.

ALOK TUMBHANGPEHY

You saw Marlon Brando in Last Tango in Paris. But what if in the tango, really, other than a quasi relic of the last century, like the foxtrot or the waltz. A simple answer: a language to communicate your innermost emotions to your partner. There’s nothing quite like it. One almost needs to be born doing the samba, or “winding”, Tango-style. The idea and the manoeuvres are a bit, well, bubbly. Tangoistas, as one might want to call them, insist their dance is capable of expressing everything known to humanity. Die-hard dancers may take the passionate and introspective art form as their ideology for life, but there are also people who live it as the philosophy of their lives. “Tango should be enjoyed seriously,” he says. Lehrke is trying to get people to shake off this impression: “The tango does not necessarily need to be taken so seriously — although there are people who live it as the philosophy of their lives.” He’s referring to his two companions Dotta Piedra and Luis Rodriguez who will be here 11–13 April to do a workshop on tango and give a recital on 14 April. The duo is apparently so dedicated that they “live tango, sleep tango.” Piedra is trained in various African dances, modern dance and classical ballet. She worked as a choreographer, dancer and actress for several years, but since the early 90’s she’d been devoted to the study of tango, developing and directing several stage productions and teaching internationally. Rodriguez has studied with famous tango masters and participated in numerous shows including choreographing a production of The Threepenny Opera at the Municipal Theatre in Wuppertal, Germany. “Social” tango is not as melodramatic as the tango on stage, and Lehrke feels that’s the way it should be. “Tango should be enjoyed and it’s not always possible to be so serious,” he says. The tango workshop will try to do exactly this — erase all that anxiety and bring more people to the dance. The more the merrier. The more the emotions.
under my hat
by kunda dixit

there is one trait that makes us stand out in the international community of nations, it is the nepali’s ability to spot a dark cloud behind every silver lining. you can trust us to see another tunnel at the end of the tunnel, to harbour suspicions that the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is actually a potty full of poo.

what makes us such chronic pessimists? psychoanalysts have put forward many theories to explain why we have convinced ourselves that the grass is always greener on the other side. to begin with, it’s. take it from me, our grass is overrated. they have far better grass over there. on a recent grass-sampling trip it suddenly dawned on me that there is no reason for all this negativity since nepal is finally taken seriously by the rest of the world.

while in the old days someone with a nepali passport wouldn’t even deserve a second glance, these days being a nepali gives us special treatment at airports around the world. on a recent grass-sampling trip it suddenly dawned on me that there is no reason for all this negativity since nepal is finally taken seriously by the rest of the world.

30-year-old rakshya panday wants to show that when it comes to media production houses, nepalis are up there with the best of them. the nepali’s ability to spot a dark cloud behind every silver lining is the nepali’s ability to spot a dark cloud behind every silver lining.

Greener pastures

immigration that nepalis travelling abroad are now eligible for a free body massage. this is a new public service to make all nepalis feel relaxed and stress-free as they embark on a journey to greener pastures. our airport quarantine rooms are so professional they even go through your wallet and count your money for you. the gender-aggregated massage parlours are carpeted off, and you can request the reflexologist on duty for a luxury muscle-toning rub, a medium-intensity tickle of the armpits, or a special scratched hand-to-mouth itch (“able to the left. slightly to the right. lower. up. shit. yeah, abbbhhhh.”)

when we get to the other side, immigration officials fuss over nepalis like we are VIPs on a state visit. they study every page of our passport as if they were reading the latest john grisham novel. and as soon as they find out that we are from the land of lord buddha, amika, sagarmatha and the nine-coloured impregnant peahen, they take us to a special cubicle to get to know us even better. there they engage us in a metaphysical conversation with deeply philosophical questions like: “what is it you are doing here?” to which you answer: “i am on a spiritual quest for the meaning of existence, for the roots of altruism, love and compassion.” or they look into our eyes and want to know “how long are you going to stay?” and we reply: “what is time, if not a twinkling of an eye, a measure of our mortality?”

When we get to the other side, immigration officials fuss over Nepalis like we are VIPs on a state visit. They study every page of our passport as if they were reading the latest John Grisham novel. And as soon as they find out that we are from the land of Lord Buddha, Amika, Sagarmatha and the nine-coloured impregnant peahen, they take us to a special cubicle to get to know us even better. There they engage us in a metaphysical conversation with deeply philosophical questions like: “What is it you are doing here?” to which you answer: “I am on a spiritual quest for the meaning of existence, for the roots of altruism, love and compassion.” Or they look into our eyes and want to know “How long are you going to stay?” and we reply: “What is time, if not a twinkling of an eye, a measure of our mortality?” They want to plumb the mysteries of their own and our existence, the reasons of the universe, the joys of life, the joi de vivre, and the hours of trouble. And the last existential question: “Do you have any grass on you?” Your answer: “Sorry, didn’t bring any—thought it was greener on this side.”

faire and lovely

30-year-old rakshya panday wants to show that when it comes to media production houses, nepalis are up there with the best of them. the nepali’s ability to spot a dark cloud behind every silver lining is the nepali’s ability to spot a dark cloud behind every silver lining. the media production scene in nepal is a motley crew of misanthropes and the visionless. it would be great if there were more of the former and less of the latter, but unfortunately what we mostly see are commercials with mediocre production values.

some are different, noteworthy for their superior concept and professional execution. that is when one spares a thought for the people behind them. like rakshya pandey, who owns and runs vista entertainment, “nepal’s first complete media production house.” vista entertainment is nine months old, and has already done six commercials for some of the top brands here—wai wai instant noodles, de max beauty soap, and aqua mineral water. the difference, as rakshya puts it: “we’re not just an ad agency. we are a fully operational one-stop production house that does everything from concept visualisation to actually producing the story.” in just the short time that it has been around, vista is already a success story, and a good example for young entrepreneurs.

rakshya has an MBA degree from philippines christian university and is planning on a Masters degree in economics. at 30, and without any business background, rakshya could well have been a cog in some multinational, clawing her way up. but she preferred to come back to nepal and try her luck there instead. “when i finished my degree i was offered a job in a big multinational corporation in singapore,” she says, without name-dropping. she has dabbled in this and that—been active with an environmental group and taught marketing—but she never strayed far from the marketing communications field. after her last job in advertising she realised this was her calling. “there are no well-organised professional production houses here and the sad part is that even the few that are here have foreign nationals as the top brass. i want to prove that nepalis can do it too,” she adds.

rakshya is certainly off to a flying start. she plans to produce television serials, do some social marketing and maybe even try her hand at films. and aside from all that she is an inspiration for nepalis studying abroad—come back to nepal where their skills and commitment can be put to the best use.