

MAPPING NEPAL 10 -12



MOBILE WARS 9



Under My Hat 20



EXCLUSIVE

205,000,000

The number of rupees the Maoists have looted from banks and savings schemes. Does not include gold and ornaments.

1,680 Number of Nepalis killed in the Maoist insurgency so far.

1045 Maoists killed.

347 Police killed.

288 Killed by Maoists for being "class enemies" of which 152 (NC), 24 (UML), 24 (RPP), 1 (Masal), 1 (NSP) 86 (unknown).

(All government figures)

Committing adulteration

They're still at it. Seven tankers were held up at the NOC depot in Kathmandu over a dispute over how to disburse kickbacks on allowing diesel they are carrying with more than 50 percent kerosene adulteration. The going rate per tanker is Rs 60,000. Anyone who wants to see the seven trucks can go to the NOC's airport depot. That is, if a deal is not struck by then. Meanwhile, a government committee set up to investigate fuel adulteration last year never submitted its report.



BINOD BHATTARAI AND SHIVA GAUNLE

Once again the streets of the capital had the familiar look of a war zone.

Barricades, uprooted railings, burning government vehicles, smashed pavements and tear gas. The main opposition UML led five leftist allies to the streets because, they said, the prime minister was being stubborn and not resigning when they told him to.

For some time now, the UML has felt squeezed from three sides: the Maoists, the ML and the Nepali Congress. A recent Himalmedia poll (NT#38) shows that although the UML is still leading, its support base has eroded since the last election—from 32 to 24 percent. The Maoists seem to have pulled the rug from under the moderate communists, swinging the political spectrum to the left. They need to woo the cadre back by rebranding itself with a more radical image. The UML managed to bring back five of the eight left parties that had gone over to its arch-rival, the ML. The UML is also co-opting ML and Maoist slogans: its student union now wants to ban Sanskrit and National Anthem from schools, reduce fees. And finally, UML was getting more and more worried about prime minister Girija Koirala getting too powerful within the Nepali Congress. It dreaded the thought of a Congress-formed paramilitary that was tabled in parliament for ratification.

The UML's turning point was the Congress Pokhara Convention in January when Koirala walked off with 60 percent of his party's support. The party high command sat down and decided on a one-point agenda: oust Koirala. It roped in other like-minded parties from the left and right, and got indirect advantage because the Congress was so disunited. Allegations of irregularities in leasing a jet for Royal Nepal Airlines was the perfect cover to paralyse parliament to block the two ordinances designed to strengthen the government's anti-Maoist muscles. Then, by the time the House was drawing to a close two weeks ago, the Maoists struck

DEADEND



FUTURE IN FLAMES: Children in Khichapokhari watch a government car burning on Monday.

Squeezed by the Maoists and the Nepali Congress, the UML is rebranding itself radically ahead of next year's local polls.

and massacred 70 policemen.

The UML smelt blood, and moved in for what it thought would be a coup de grace. Cornered, Koirala convened a NC meeting to rally his party, and he was emboldened last week by a joint EU-US statement backing the constitutional process, and a meeting with the king to get his pet ordinances re-promulgated. The UML and five minor leftist parties decided to follow through with a plan to prevent the prime minister from commuting to work. On Monday, Koirala sneaked into his secretariat as police chased away early protesters. The UML then went on a rampage burning government vehicles, barricading streets and destroying public property.

By taking to the streets, the UML has gambled on a must-win outcome and, some

analysts say, has burnt its bridges. Some UML leaders now privately admit that they are unsure where this round of protests will lead to. And neither, it seems, does the government—even though the UML's actions appear to have temporarily patched up rifts in the Congress. Both sides are now waiting for the other to blink and are trying to gauge the public mood before deciding what to do next.

Police roughed up demonstrators, and took opposition leaders, including Madhav Kumar Nepal into preventive custody. To add insult to injury, leftist leaders had to listen to Koirala's plea for reconciliation on radio at the police station. "Our relationship with government could deteriorate further because it prevented peaceful

protests and picking us up from the streets without warrants," UML supremo, Madhav Kumar Nepal told us.

Not all UML supporters agree with Nepal's strategy. "The single-demand approach for Koirala's resignation is wrong, it is a dead-end street, it leaves no room for negotiating," says a left-leaning analyst. But the communist rank and file has now worked itself into frenzy, and is in no mood to settle for anything short of the prize. "We'll throw him (Koirala) out, if the people support us he cannot crush our movement," MP Raghujii Pant told us.

Koirala's inner circle seems to understand that the UML needs to get the anger out of its system. They don't want to be provoked and say the top priority is to keep casualties low. Said a government insider: "Eventually an all-party dialogue may be what the UML needs to wriggle out of this standoff."

But when? And how long will the street protests continue? All that Narhari Acharya, the Congress spokesman would tell us was: "The prime minister has sought the cooperation of all to resolve the issue, we hope the opposition would take the offer responsibly." But Koirala himself has left a tantalising option open at the end of his address to the nation on Monday evening: "I will resign the morning after there are signs of the country getting back on track." But even his opponents know Girija will not do it under pressure. ♦

Here comes the story of Govinda Mainali

KUNDA DIXIT IN TOKYO

- Like hundreds of other Nepalis, Govinda Mainali left for Japan on a three-month tourist visa in 1994 at the age of 26 to seek his fortune. He had got restless looking after the farm and his elderly parents in their ancestral homestead in Ilam. Although the family had property and was moderately well-off, Govinda knew he had to earn some money to take care of his pregnant wife, Radha, and a daughter.
- Working on the top floor of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), Yasuko Watanabe was a bright and ambitious senior economist. But at age 39, she had hit the glass ceiling in Japan's conservative and male-dominated bureaucracy. Her father, with whom Yasuko was very close, had died when she was a teenager and she was supporting her

mother and younger sister.

This is the story of how fate brought a young Nepali working in an Indian restaurant in Tokyo together with a high-flying corporate Japanese office lady who led a shadowy dual life. Their saga is the story of sex, murder, the shadowy world of Tokyo's red-light districts, and the secretive ways of Japan's justice system. It has captivated Japan now for five years. It is the stuff of thrillers—only this is not fiction.



Govinda Mainali in Tokyo in 1996

GOVINDA, p. 4-5



FOREIGN HANDS

Nineteenth century powers had discovered one home truth about Nepal long before we ourselves did. This country is ungovernable. After waging a costly campaign to add more hill stations to its empire, the East India Company decided to leave the Kingdom of Gorkha alone. Invaders from the north too came sniffing around, took one look at the terrain and the squabbling populace and decided it wasn't worth the trouble.

We were left to our own devices, but that did not mean outsiders did not stop interfering. Lying astride geological and geopolitical faultlines along the Himalaya, Nepal fulfilled the role of a buffer state in the Great Game. Even when the Anglophile Ranas ruled, intra-family intrigue, conspiracies and inter-royal family rivalries in Kathmandu were partly fomented by successive resident envoys. No other foreigners were allowed to enter: until 50 years ago, this was a Kingdom of Xenophobia.

Every small country tends to want to magnify its clout by exaggerating its strategic importance. The topography may be murderous, the country too diverse to rule properly, but we have always been convinced that our landlocked Himalayan kingdom is so strategically located that every superpower worth its salt is vying to establish its hegemony here. So instead of getting on with things, trying to resolve our problems by ourselves by making ourselves strong enough to resist outside pressures, we see the shifting shadows of daggers on the wall behind us. This has been



a self-perpetuating cycle: we have allowed outsiders to divide and rule us, and over time this has undermined our ability to stand up to them on our own terms.

These are points to ponder during a week in which our political cauldron bubbled with spy scandals and allegations of "foreign interference". New Delhi and Islamabad continued playing "I spy" in Kathmandu, and our police were coaxed into busting a Pakistani diplomat who was said to be in possession of enough explosives to blow parts of this kingdom to kingdom come. Then the opposition UML saw a sinister design in the joint statement by the EU and the United States exhorting our leaders to abide by constitutional means to register their protest. Shadow foreign minister Jhala Nath Khanal countered with an acid statement virtually accusing the United States of America of being a Nepali Congress lackey. All this did was expose the UML's own deep-seated insecurities about its present tactic of demonstrating its adherence to democratic values by setting public property on fire and uprooting street railings to create barricades.

What worries us now is that the geopolitics of the Great Game may be replaced by the geopolitics of Civilisational Conflict, a la Samuel Huntington. Whatever you may think about Huntington, we are seeing the dangerous polarisation between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific that he predicted a decade ago. And Chinese fears of being encircled by hostile smaller neighbours is as real as India's paranoia of its fellow South Asians ganging up. Nepal just happens to be "strategically located" in the middle of this powder keg.

We have enough trouble in this country without "foreign hands" meddling with it to make it worse. Our state apparatus would do well to be pragmatic and see how we can keep our independence intact, and not let matters get so out of control that the two geopolitical plates in the vicinity begin to pulverise the yam. For an in-between country like ours, it is better to be a bridge rather than a wedge. After all, can we afford to bite the foreign hand that feeds us? The best way to says "hands off" is to cordially shake it first.

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Money matters most

Perhaps it is time Girija Prasad Koirala, who has been the prime minister for the maximum period over the last decade, apologised for the political economy of public deception

Poverty saps energy like nothing else. For the destitute, the luxury of reacting to reality is inconceivable. Registering complaint, and showing dissatisfaction with the way things are do not come naturally to people steeped in the tradition of deep-rooted fatalism. As such, the result of opinion polls in societies like ours need to be taken with a large pinch of salt.

At worst, they confirm the biases of pollsters. But even at their best, opinion polls do little more than reflect the concerns of the vocal middle-class. However, since it is this segment of society that sways electoral outcomes, political parties ignore them at their own peril.

This class has spoken up once again, and declared where its priorities lie. Asked to rank the three main problems facing the nation in an opinion poll conducted by Himalmedia ORG-Marg Nepal: 68 percent of respondents gave first priority to unemployment while 54 percent were most concerned about inflation. Likewise, for 52 percent of respondents, corruption was the main issue. All three concern money.

Most of our rural as well as urban middle class has either made its peace with the Maoist insurgency or feels that if it keeps ignoring it the problem will cease to exist. It appears that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala knew his constituency when he observed that the Maoist problem will "get solved over a period of time". This opinion poll confirms his reading of the middle-class attitude that money matters most.

The obsession of the vocal class with employment goes beyond just making a living. Getting a job gives meaning and purpose to a middle-class Nepali. Overnight, his social standing improves. He becomes a person of importance in his own right. Not having a job, irrespective of economic compulsions, is a disgrace. Even embracing sure death by taking up a gun and waging war on society looks more attractive in comparison. Inflation is inversely related to salary, and is therefore important. Our attitude (being from a rural lower

middle-class background, I know my kind) towards corruption is even more ambivalent. When we get to pocket tea money, it is a part of life, but when it's our turn to pay in order to get something done, we scream with self-righteous indignation: "This country is going to the dogs." Complaining vociferously about corruption is the most popular icebreaker, be it at village tea-shops or at five-star dinners.

Talking about corruption relieves our conscience, without having to bear the burden of doing something tangible about it. Maoists know this, so all they do is demand a cut from corrupt officials in their areas of influence. The Nepal Communist Party (UML) knows it too, hence it does not find it necessary to raise questions about micro-economic policies of state that have encouraged the culture of corruption. It prefers to indulge itself in the vulgarity of a controversial aircraft lease deal in stead.

However, there is no denying that most people prefer to place economics before politics. We want our politics to "do us some good", to borrow a popular phrase from post-communist Russia. Unfortunately, no government after the *Jana Andolan* has attempted to pay attention to this cry of the people. By ignoring the socialist principle of spreading the money and manure around for maximum effect, the political parties of Nepal have ended up alienating most of the middle-class.

In the first general elections held under the constitution of 1990, all political parties, barring those of former panchas, promised to usher in one or another form of socialism. But once the Nepali Congress party's majority government was formed, it attempted to push ahead with a "free market" agenda, presumably under pressure from donors. It must have been this contradiction in the ruling party that led to the sudden dismissal of four ministers from Koirala's cabinet and the hastily called mid-term polls.

In the second parliament also, socialists, with varying degrees of commitment to the cause, were elected with a massive majority. Apart from about 20-odd members of the

Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the entire lower house of parliament was composed of members who had sold dreams of socialism to their voters. But compulsions of power forced even the CPN (UML) to make compromises with the dominant ideology of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

Shorn of its ideology, the CPN (UML) failed to maintain its unity and split in two. Divisions in the ranks of the Nepali Congress were sharpened. Made to look impotent in pushing the socialist agenda they had promised voters, lawmakers sought refuge in passing self-serving legislations like increasing their allowances and granting themselves duty-free privileges to import four-wheel drive luxury vehicles. The people gave a similar verdict in the third parliament.

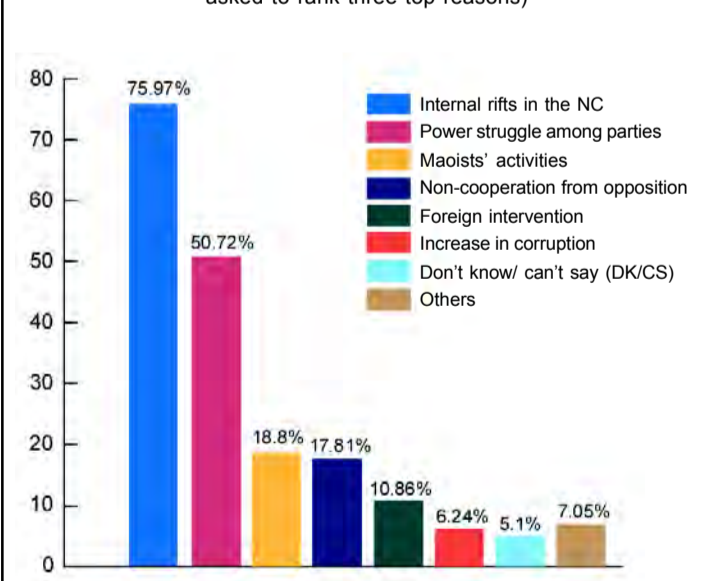
There are lies, damn lies and statistics. When these economists talk about the increase in our economic growth rate over the last decade, or about supposed strides made in the expansion of public facilities, they ignore the fact that the benefits haven't reached even the lower middle-class, let alone the poor. When the system of exploitation was hidden by an enduring patron-client culture, it didn't matter all that much. But now at least some of the exploited are also aware.

Perhaps it is time Girija Prasad Koirala, who has been prime minister for the maximum period over the last decade, apologised for the political economy of public deception. Former Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto recently apologised globally, accepting responsibility for the failure of economic reforms initiated by him. Leaders of the Nepali Congress must also show some maturity, and start doing what they have been promising the electorate for all these years. Their failure has fed the Maoist insurgency, and led to a situation where peoples' complaints in an opinion poll are all about money.

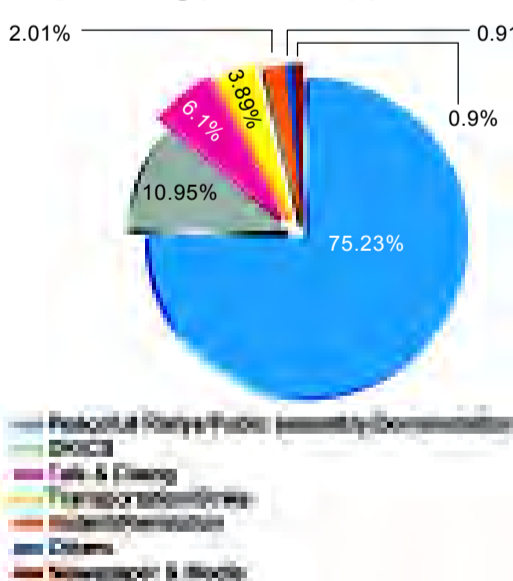
It can be read as writing on the wall. Or as a political death warrant. Mainstream political parties better make up their minds now. Tomorrow will be too late. ♦

Why is the country's situation getting worse?

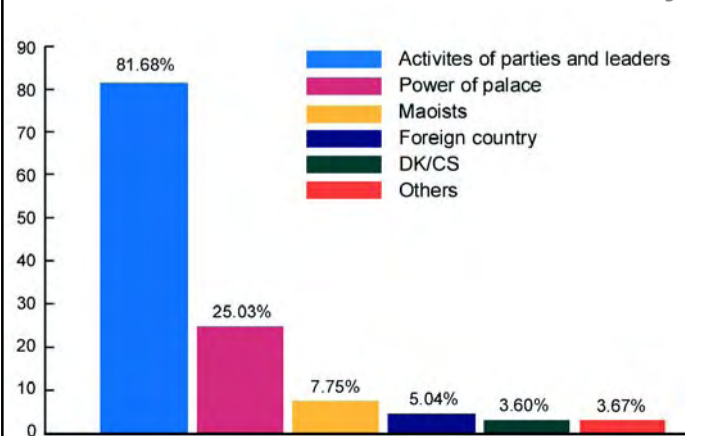
(Respondents who said things were worse were asked to rank three top reasons)



What is the best method of expressing political opposition?

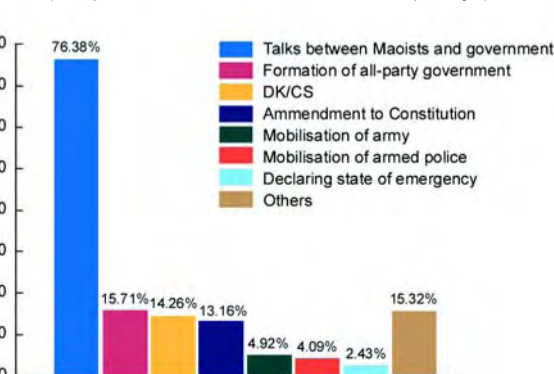


What is the source of threat to democracy?



What is the best way to solve the Maoist problem?

(Respondents asked to rank three top ways)



VIEWPOINT

by HARI ROKA



Why is democracy in danger?

Nepalis have been watching the development of underdevelopment as they struggle to survive from day to day. When more and more people are excluded from the benefits of development, there is bound to be a reaction against those supposed to ensure their wellbeing.

In the recent public opinion poll by Himalmedia (NT#38) two-thirds of respondents said Nepal's democracy was endangered. The majority think the political system is threatened by unemployment, inflation and corruption. Maybe if the Nepali Congress government, the main opposition, other political parties and Nepal's civil society had realised this and done something about it, the threat to democracy may not have reached such serious proportions.

It is not just Nepalis and political parties that are concerned about the threat to our democracy. The presiding chairman of the European Union, the Danish ambassador, and the American ambassador have also expressed their concern about the crisis facing our democracy. However, unlike most Nepalis who are concerned about unemployment, inflation and corruption, the foreign representatives see the threat coming from incomplete democratic processes, the mechanism for the transfer of power, and the modus operandi of the *andolans* (movements).

Nepal has not been able to establish itself as a self-dependent nation. It is poor even by Third World standards. It relies on foreign assistance, grants and loans, to pay for over 60 percent of the development budget. Domestic production and income from taxes and customs are also almost equal, the former is 32.5 percent of the GDP, the latter 25.7 percent (2000/2001). Low national savings and investment also explain the poor state of the economy. Revenue has not been able to grow by more than 0.5 percent of the GDP. Because industry, business and agriculture are also in a tailspin, both unemployment and underemployment are on the rise.

Five percent of the people in the

active age group (15-64 years) are unemployed, and nearly 50 percent of the country's total labour force is underemployed. If 42 percent of Nepalis were said to be under the poverty line before the restoration of democracy in 1990, today, the number has increased to 51 percent. The price of imported petroleum products is also going up and with that the cost of basic commodities. Inflation contributes to the growth in corruption. The people have been watching the development of underdevelopment, as they struggle to survive from day to day. When more people are excluded from the benefits of development, there is bound to be a reaction aimed at those supposed to ensure their wellbeing. This is the ruling system, in other words: democracy. Maybe, that was what the people were hinting at in their responses to the survey question.

Poverty triggers anarchy and unrest. Poverty can result from many things, sometimes from lack of resources at other times because of extremely exploitative and unjust ruling systems. In emerging Third World democracies such as ours, poverty results from mismanagement, lack of strategies and policies.

We've had much talk about making Nepal rich and successful. Our donor nations and the international financial institutions they influence have even attempted to show us how to do that. During the Panchayat days, we welcomed them with open arms and soon they began to influence our policy makers. In 1987, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), over which the United States (a country which boasts of having the world's oldest democracy) has strong influence, got Nepal to sign an agreement by which it was able to interfere in our economic policy making. Its influence

continued even after democracy was restored in 1990, and in 1992, we were told to embrace total liberalisation. Our policies for the last 14 years, have been guided by what was agreed on during the IMF's "Article Four Consultations" with member countries.

All governments in democratic Nepal have given continuity to the spirit, policies and programmes agreed on during the consultations. So, we do whatever our donors tell us. They told us to reduce customs rates, we complied. They told us to open all the doors to investment and we did. They told us to increase the electricity, water and telephone tariffs, we agreed. They told us to decrease subsidies provided to the people on fertiliser and seeds, and we removed them. They told us that the State should not run industries. So we privatised our state-run industries at extremely low prices (even lower than what they had cost us). Still we continue to be unemployed, and unemployment is rising every year. Instead of doing better, companies sold to the private sector are running losses. National income has declined and dependency has increased.

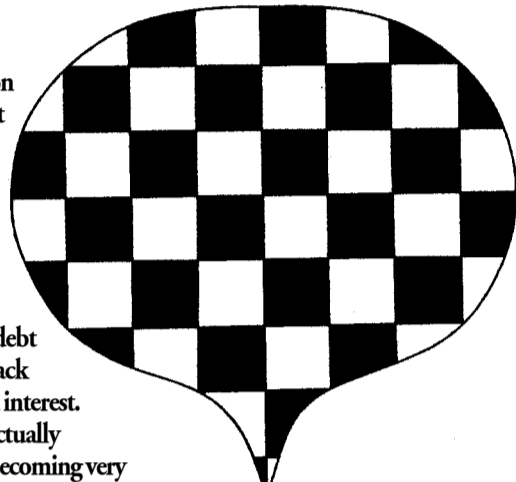
Today over 700 projects are being implemented in the country—paid for through foreign loans. The interest and principal repayments are increasing every year and foreign grants are on the decline. In 1969/70 our total debt was \$34 million and grants were \$1.86 billion. By 1984/85, debt increased to \$535 million and had reached \$2.48 billion in 1998/99. The share of foreign loan as a percentage of the budget in fiscal 1995/1996, 1996/1997 and 1997/1998) increased by 20.3 percent, 20.4 percent and 25 percent respectively. During the same period grants declined to 10.3 percent, 9.9 percent and 9.7

percent respectively. It won't be long before we get the HIPC—Highly Indebted Poor Country—tag.

Why do we keep on accepting the high cost of inappropriate projects? Maybe those who taught us to make our policies also taught us how to take kickbacks? As we move deeper into the debt trap, we have to pay back both the principal and interest. Even if the project is actually completed it ends up becoming very expensive. We are increasing poverty and unemployment while using foreign loans. Some of us have been corrupted by kickbacks on contracts funded by the loans. The projects and policies that we have been forced to accept have pushed us deeper into the pit of poverty.

Today Nepal's poverty and hunger stricken population is demanding its right to food, good education and healthcare. But the Nepali Congress that has ruled for most of the past decade and also claims to be the guardian angel of democracy, has not been able to deliver. Is this why the people and their representatives who are demanding their rights—within the democratic framework—are labelled undemocratic by donors and international financial institutions? Is that not interference with our basic rights? If the people cannot demand that much, then what is democracy anyway? ♦

Hari Roka is an independent left activist.



LETTERS

HUMAN RIGHTS?

How long will this indifference last? Whatever plausible reason can the government have for continually pushing aside the issue of equal parental property rights for women? If the issue in question is the abolition of the current legal property statute, which requires parents to relegate some of their property regardless of whether they want to or not, then I fully support that. However, if men will continue to have that right, but women are denied it, then there is definitely a call for reform. Nepal has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (it's "Human", not "Man"), it has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women *without any reservations*. Even the 1990 Constitution stipulates that there should be no discrimination

based on a person's religion, caste, class and sex. Why then is the property issue so difficult to resolve? The argument about "disrupting cultural harmony" is ludicrous. Nepali women are responsible for a little over half of agricultural output (not counting their contribution as homemakers), but Nepali men own 95 percent of all land holdings. If all other arguments fail, then at least the argument that anything that can help women catch up with men should be welcome on the grounds of equity alone.

Sujala Pant
Dillibazaar

BARB

I don't know why you give precious space in your excellent paper for radical-chic hippie era relics like Barbara Adams. Her column "Shanti, shanti, shanti..." (#38) is the kind of knee-jerk, infuriating, politically

correct and fashionably left-wing nonsense that we have come to expect from bored and self-righteous expats in Bangkok, Jakarta and Kathmandu. Just who does Ms Adams think is violating human rights in Nepal today? Cowering police who were shot between the eyes by their Maoist captors? Go home, Barbara, and take your Barbs with you.

Robert Liden
Kathmandu

DISEMPOWERED

Thank you for explaining the power cuts in "Powerless again" by Binod Bhattarai (#38) and the graph showing the supply and demand for electric power.

If the figures are correct, then explain to me one thing: why, during the time when the demand is less than the supply (May-July), according to your graph, do we always suffer from

load shedding?

Akanchhya Parajuli
Baneswor

GRASS

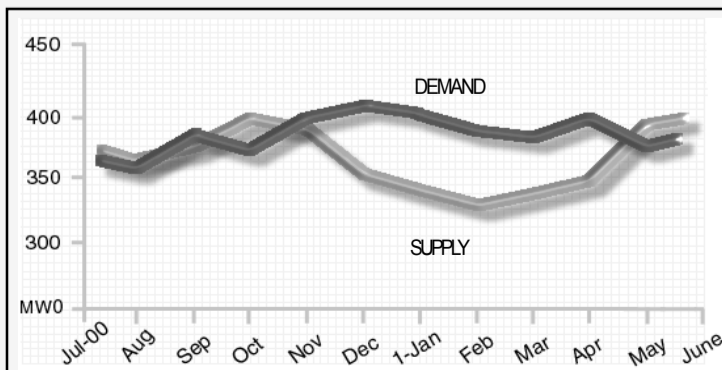
There is a good reason why the grass on our side of the fence is not as green as on the other side as Kunda Dixit reminds us in *Under my hat*, ("Greener pastures", #37). It is because we have taken this beautiful Buddhist poem too literally: "Sitting silently/Doing nothing/Spring comes/And the grass grows by itself." Alas, too late have we realised that unlike the divine herb gaanja, not all grasses grow on their own in the wilderness. And then, to top things off, the credo of our patron state god, Shiva, happens to be: "I smoke grass, therefore I am."

Ram Limbu
Sydney

CLARIFICATION

Some alert readers called to point out that in "We, the people" (p. 1, #38) the figures in one of the pie charts add up to more than 100 percent. The reason is that in the question "What is the best way to solve the Maoist problem?" respondents were asked to rank their top three answers.

We have re-rendered the graphics as more correctly on page two (opposite) along with some other questions that couldn't be placed in the last issue due to space constraints. Due to a design error, the size of some of the pie slices were also disproportionate to the percentages. -Ed





Govinda listening to the guilty verdict of judge Toshio Takagi of the Tokyo High Court

GOVINDA

The semen in the condom was found to be at least 20 days old—which corroborates Govinda's statement that he had sex with Yasuko more than a week before she was said to have been killed. Although the pubic hair that was proven to be Govinda's was produced as evidence, two other bits of hair which belonged to someone else were also found near the body were not produced in court. The lawyers also alleged that Govinda and his fellow-Nepalis had been beaten and intimidated while in custody to extract a confession. When Govinda did not confess, the police reportedly pressured one of his roommates to testify falsely against him and then deported him to Nepal. In his ruling, presiding Judge Toshikazu Obuchi said: "The possibility that the victim could have used the apartment with someone other than the defendant cannot be ruled out. There is nothing to prove Mainali committed the crime."

However, the Tokyo District Prosecutor's office promptly filed an appeal with the Tokyo High Court and also demanded that Govinda be kept in detention. In direct contravention of Japanese law that someone found not guilty cannot be kept in detention, Govinda was locked up again. Then, on 22 December last year the Tokyo High Court reversed the lower court's acquittal and sentenced him to life imprisonment. When judge Toshio Takagi read out his verdict in Japanese, there was a shocked silence in the court room, according to those who were present. Govinda waited quietly for the verdict to be translated, and then shouted in Japanese: "God! Please help me. I didn't do

it." He then looked at the audience in the court and repeated: "I didn't." As Takagi went on to justify his ruling, Govinda covered his ears with his hands and burst into Nepali: "I don't want to hear this unjust ruling translated into Nepali. What I told the court was the truth."

One of Govinda's lawyers, Asaka Kanda of Lexwell Partners which is defending him for free, remembers feeling outraged: "It was

completely unjust. The judgement was prejudiced, it refused to look at the evidence, and was based on the judge's refusal to believe the evidence." Kanda has met Govinda many times and is certain of his innocence. He told us: "Ever since I first met Govinda I was convinced he was not guilty. And the more I have investigated this case, the more I am convinced. We must help him go back to Nepal." Kanda and his fellow-lawyers say this is now no longer just the case of a falsely-convicted Nepali: "It could happen to any of us, it has exposed a deep-seated racism. I am sure if Govinda was an American or European he would have been free to go home."

The official Nepali line on the Govinda case is that he has been detained under the Japanese justice system. Japan is Nepal's biggest donor, and this is a very sensitive case for the Royal Nepal Embassy in Tokyo. However, the embassy has made representations at the Ministry of Justice, and regularly sends a diplomat to visit Govinda in detention.

Many other Japanese who were convinced of Govinda's innocence were similarly dismayed. Junko Hasumi of the Japan-Nepal Society told us it was a miscarriage of justice. "We are ashamed that this



Asaka Kanda



Junko Hasumi

should happen in Japan. How could someone be found guilty without proper criminal procedure being followed, and how could the original not-guilty verdict be dismissed without the presentation of any new evidence?" Hasumi and several other activists, including Rajan Pradhanang of the Nepali Association in Japan and Tohru Takahashi of the National Network for Solidarity with Migrant Workers have set up a lobby group called "Mujichosno Govindasan sasuerukai" (Justice for Govinda) to launch an appeal in Japan and Nepal to establish Govinda's innocence by mobilising public opinion in both countries. The group also offers Govinda moral support by visiting him regularly at the Tokyo Detention Centre in the Kosuge area.

It was on a cold and rainy

"God! Please help me. I didn't do it. I didn't."

KUND DIXIT

Every day after work at Tepco, Yasuko Watanabe used to take the subway to the seedy Shibuya neighbourhood of Tokyo to work the streets as a prostitute. She kept meticulous details in her diary of who she had sex with, when, and how much they paid. She seemed to have a quota of four customers a night, and many of them were illegal foreign workers living in rented rooms in Shibuya. One of them was Govinda, who lived with four other Nepalis near the street corner where she hung out every night.

On 19 March, 1997 Yasuko Watanabe's decomposing body was found in an empty room next door to where Govinda and the Nepalis lived. She had been strangled 10 days previously. When the police came, the Nepalis thought this was a raid to round up illegal immigrants, and



Yasuko Watanabe

they fled. But Govinda later turned himself in to tell the police he didn't do it. The police took him in and charged him with overstaying, but began quizzing him about the murder. Initially, Govinda denied knowing Yasuko Watanabe, but later confessed that he had sex with her three times, the last about ten days before when she was thought to have been murdered. The police began building a case

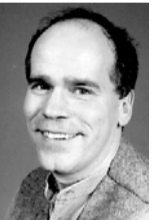
against Govinda, who they were convinced had killed Yasuko for the 40,000 yen they were told by another customer he had paid her earlier in the evening. They collected evidence: pubic hair and a condom found in the toilet. DNA tests of both showed they belonged to Govinda. One of the Nepalis sharing his flat told police that Govinda had paid back a 180,000 yen loan to him at about the time of the killing. When the case came to trial three years later, the Tokyo District Court on 14 April 2000 ruled that the evidence was circumstantial and found Govinda Mainali not guilty. Govinda was jubilant. By this time, the murder case and the sordid details of Yasuko Watanabe's life had become headline news in Japan. The not guilty ruling shocked many because almost all criminal cases in Japan end with a guilty verdict.

Govinda's government-appointed lawyers successfully argued that the prosecution's evidence was flimsy.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Kiss me quick, the government's coming



India's kissing classes are aghast. An advertisement for Close Up toothpaste has been banned for being un-Indian. A policewoman and a man condemned to die by firing squad get locked into a kiss that outlasts the ability of the men with the guns to stay awake. The message—use Close Up and avoid the death penalty, in a rather interesting manner. Advertising firms in Mumbai are protesting by holding contests to challenge the government's writ. The prize is a lifetime supply of toothpaste.

Another furore raged a few months back south of the border when Fashion Television from France was investigated by a government committee to see whether its daring costumes and scantily clad models passed the Indian culture litmus test, whatever that is. Editor and broadcaster Vir Sanghvi labelled the committee "the Nipple police" and formally applied to join the ranks. What more pleasant way to spend one's time, he wrote, than to monitor closely the progress of lovely women down the glamorous catwalks of Paris to see just how much skin was showing. Indian film stars who've posed provocatively for magazines have been charged with obscenity, never mind that their films are full of lewd exhibitions of simulated sex and that as *Himal South Asian* magazine pointed out recently, the damage done to women and men by how they're portrayed by Bollywood cannot be calculated.

Of course, it's even more strict in Pakistan which styles itself, among other things, as the land of the pure. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue* usually arrive a few weeks late and a quick glance through the pages told you why. Some fun-loathing devil had taken a black marker and obliterated any hint of a female nipple or buttock, while leaving the men's bodies, of far more interest to subscribers like my wife, in glorious unadulterated nakedness.

Here in Nepal, we have our own foibles of this sort, and it's not

We develop, as a people, when left alone to agree on our own community standards, not those imposed from above.



confined to the developing nations, not at all. Britain used to regularly ban pop songs, as too inflammatory for impressionable youth. Paul McCartney's *Give Ireland back to the Irish*, the Strawbs *You can't touch me, I'm in the Union* and, of all the things, *God Save the Queen* by the Sex Pistols were all banned at various times in recent history.

In Canada, a boy who wrote a story about an alienated loner who hatches a plot to plant bombs at his school was picked up by the police and held for more than a month. He committed no crime, merely wrote about one. Police raiding parties say they found evidence that the young author might just have been planning to bring his fiction to life, but he didn't. And they didn't make the evidence public.

Americans, at least liberals and constitutionalists, take a different approach to things. They protect the rights of almost anyone to do whatever they please in the name of free speech. Oliver Stone's film *The People vs Larry Flynt* is a classic example of this. Flynt published *Hustler* magazine, an odious pornographic rag that pushed the envelope of explicitness, while continuing to sell in mainstream news agents and shops. He was an outspoken champion of free speech and was even shot and wounded for his troubles by an insane assassin. Police forces around the country tried to charge him with various offences but he always won the day. Many Americans are rightly proud of this, however much they loathe the likes of Larry Flynt.

What gets banned when governments or elites try to think on our behalf often seems trivial, like the Close Up ad. Often something is indeed obscene. But what's lost if the authorities triumph is far worse than the potential damage to public morality. We develop, as a people, when left alone to agree on our own community standards, not those imposed from above. Sushma Swaraj, the anti-kisser and Indian minister of Information and Broadcasting, the magazine censors of Pakistan, and those who ban songs in Britain and Canada's fiction police do the most damage by presuming to act on behalf of us.

Mind you, there's nothing like a good ban to boost your profile. I'm sending copies of this column to Ms Swaraj, Pakistan, Britain, Canada et al, and hoping for the best. ♦

afternoon earlier this month that we visited the detention centre. Visitors are asked to fill out a form, and given ten minutes to meet the prisoner. Govinda walked into the cubicle across a thick plate glass accompanied by a policeman. He gives us a beaming smile and a namaste. He is not allowed to speak in Nepali, and we exchange greetings through an interpreter. Govinda looks shorter and stockier than his earlier photographs, he has also grown a goatee and his hair is thinning. "I was feeling really depressed today with the rain. I am so happy you came," he tells us in Japanese after we introduce ourselves. "Please try to get my wife Radha to come and visit, ask my family to keep writing letters." Govinda rests his hands on a thick note book with pages and pages of small, meticulous Nepali writing. We show him an album of photographs of his family, but he is allowed to pick only ten pictures. We show them to him through the glass, and he picks the ones with his wife and daughters. The younger one was born after he left for Japan and he has never seen her. We try to get in some sentences in Nepali ("Dharma namannus hami tapailai Nepal pharkauna prayas garbhau") but there is a sharp reprimand from the officer, who is busy taking notes.

Govinda's case will now come before the five-judge Supreme Court in about two years time. It is rare for Japan's Supreme Court, which unlike other countries is more conservative than the lower courts, to overturn a verdict. Says one expat legal expert working in Tokyo who did not want to be named: "The Govinda Mainali case is quite typical. The reason 99 percent of all criminal cases result in a guilty verdict is that they are



Shinichi Sano

mostly based on confessions. Elsewhere you establish truth in court, here the case is taken to court when it has all been decided." Life imprisonment in Japan is usually 20 years, and Govinda will be eligible for parole in 15 if he shows good behaviour. After the Tokyo High Court verdict there has also been an outcry in Japan's legal academia. Toshikuni Murai, professor of criminal law at Ryukoku University has this to say: "The high court's decision to detain the defendant before the trial began was based on prejudice." Takeshi Tsuchimoto of Teikyo University and a former prosecutor, agrees: "It was epoch-making that the court handed down a guilty verdict in such an important case on mere circumstantial evidence." But Tsuchimoto denies that it was racism that made the court decide to detain Govinda after

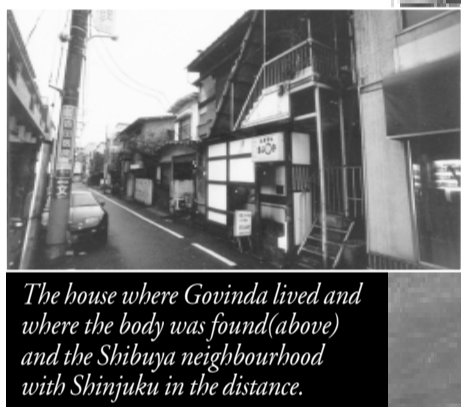
the first not guilty verdict, he says it had more to do with the fact that Nepal does not have an extradition treaty with Japan and that the defendant was an illegal migrant.

Japanese journalist and author, Shinichi Sano, who followed the case has written a best-selling book called *Tokyo Electric Power Co. Office Lady Murder Case* that investigates Yasuko Watanabe. Sano has visited Govinda in jail, and even travelled to Nepal to talk to his relatives and friends. "I never believed Govinda was guilty," Sano told us in his living room in a Tokyo suburb. "After meeting his family in Nepal I was even more convinced." Sano has also

tried to analyse the enigmatic life of Yasuko Watanabe, and he has come to the conclusion that it was deep frustration at the workplace and family problems after her father's death that drove her to the dual lifestyle. She had been passed over for promotion, and her relations with her mother were not good. Sano has a deeper interest in the case as a symbol of the hidden tensions within Japanese society: "In Japan we have a saying: when something is rotten, cover it up," he says. "And that is what happened, the truth was so ugly we tried to cover it up. And have a fall guy from a poor country that didn't dare make a fuss take all the blame." ♦



SHINCHOSA



The house where Govinda lived and where the body was found (above) and the Shibuya neighbourhood with Shinjuku in the distance.

Authenticity counts

If efforts by various ethnic organisations in the country take off, the upcoming census promises a more authentic, or at least more widely acceptable, picture of the country's diverse peoples. The Kirant Yakthung Chumlung, an organisation working for the rights of the indigenous Limbu population of eastern Nepal, is training volunteers in villages to help people fill in census forms accurately. Officials of the Kirant Yakthung Chumlung say people in the region have put down a mix of descriptions under caste, religion, and language in the past. As a result, accurate statistics on the Limbu community are unavailable. About 300,000 Limbus live in 11 districts in east Nepal. Like-minded indigenous groups including the Kirant Yokkha Chumma, the Kirant Rai Yayayakkha and the Sunuwar Samaj Sewa will also ask members of their community to report "Kirant" as their religion.

Fed up with bandhs

It's politicians versus the public. At a public hearing last week, people vented their frustration against politicians who feel bandhs and chakka jams are an appropriate way of expressing discontent against the government. Businesses say they lose nearly Rs 600 million each day the country shuts down. Schools say they have been forced to close for 61 extra days in the last nine years (including the 6 days they were forced to close down by the Maoists). The bandhs have been bad for tourism—entrepreneurs say a one-day bandh costs tourism enterprises Rs 39.7 million, and that Nepal's reputation is scaring off tourists. A recent survey by Himalmedia and ORG-MARG Nepal indicates that despite politicians' proclivity for shutdowns, most people prefer peaceful protests. Pro Public, the consumer rights group that organised the forum, says 45 Nepal bandhs have been held in Nepal since the 1990 People's Movement. Ten people have died and 179 have been injured during these shutdowns.

Revolutionaries unite

Now there seems to be concern about Maoists in India too. A report in the *Times of India* speaks about the Indian Home Ministry's concern about "the Bihar government's indifference to detect or keep a watch on the Nepali extremists [read Maoists] being trained in Bihar". The newspaper report, quoting "informed sources", says the People's War Group (PWG) is training Maoist guerrillas to use small arms and explosives. PWG leaders are even talking of creating a compact revolutionary band from Hyderabad to Kathmandu, extending its influence to Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, the report warned.

Empowering didis

A school ought to teach all, regardless of age. Little Angels' Primary School in Lalitpur recently proved this. Ten custodial staff members (didis) at the school just graduated from a six-week adult education program designed specifically for them. This may be the first program of its kind in Nepal, says principal Dr Rosemary Kerr, who wrote her PhD dissertation on Nepal's educational system. Plan International, an NGO, provided two teachers, Shifali Maharjan and Sashi Dhabadel, instruction in adult education. The two began to teach the ayahs, some well into middle age, to read and write Nepali and do simple maths. "I never imagined I would be able to sign my name. I want to learn more," says 66-year-old Ganga Maharjan, showing us her certificate.



Little Angels' Schools' graduating didis

Correction

Last week's domestic brief *Dancing for a cause* contained some errors:

The event, *Summer Vibes*, was not organised by Wave magazine, but by two 18-year-olds Kashish Das Shrestha and Prapti Shakya. There were over 50 people at the event. In addition to the money raised through ticket sales, other individuals and firms also contributed in cash and kind. The Rs 10,000 was to set up a seed fund to build new toilets for the aged at the Briddhashram in Pashupatinath. We regret the error. -Ed

Govinda's family

ILAM - Govinda's father, Jaya Prasad Mainali is 80 years old. "All I want before I die is to embrace my son one last time," he says. Jaya Prasad used to be the Ward Chairman of Golakharka village near Ilam and is a father figure to villagers all around. Among his three sons, Govinda was the closest to his elderly parents and was looking after them because his brothers live in Kathmandu.

Govinda's two daughters Mithila



Govinda's wife (left) and daughters Mithila and Elisa (above).

and Elisa are nine and seven. He has never seen Elisa, since she hadn't been born when he left for Japan in 1994. Mithila was very attached to her father and followed him everywhere, and he had to trick her that he was going to the market when left for the last time.

Govinda's wife Radha is 29 years old and spends most of her time taking care of his parents. Her neighbours have been kind to her, and made her the chairperson of the Community Forests User's Group to keep her busy. But Radha is more worried about her two daughters. "Sometimes they come home crying because their classmates tease them that their daddy is in jail," she says. "When Govinda comes back, I would like to move to Kathmandu and send them to a good school."

The family is well off, they own 200 ropanis of prime land along the highway, and after Govinda left it has been given to sharecroppers. "You know, he really didn't have to go to Japan. He just wanted to have some income to build a house in Kathmandu," says Radha. From

money he sent back, Govinda has already built a three-storey house in Sankhamul.

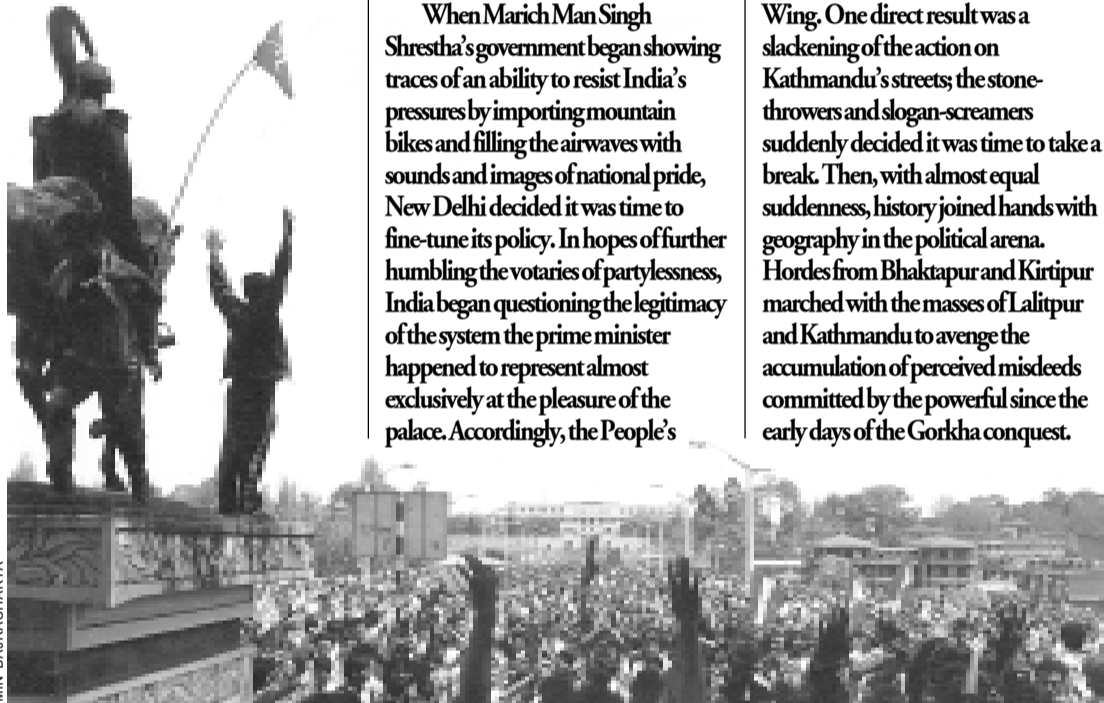
Govinda was accused of murder in Japan about six months before he was planning to come home for good in 1997. He was earning about 10,000 yen (\$80) a day in salary and tips and had considerable savings. He had already started buying presents: toys for his daughters, an overcoat, shoes and a watch for his wife. He was looking forward to coming back, and in letters he wrote to his brothers he said he would like to start a business or even use his Japanese language skills to lead trekking groups from Japan.

From his detention centre, Govinda writes regularly to Radha, sometimes translating slokas from the Gita. To his daughter he sends long letters, with drawings of a complete family with father, mother and two daughters living in a house in the mountains. Radha says he doesn't sound as depressed as he used to after the guilty verdict last year, and seems to be psyching himself up. ♦

The king is still smiling

Your piece *The King Smiled* (#38) contained crucial inside information about that crowning moment of the People's Movement of 1990 that simply cannot be laughed off. The first thing that struck me was the suppressed, almost subservient, tone with which the leaders of the People's Movement approached the King at the palace that night. That approach may have been their way of maintaining the dignity and decorum of the royal court, but it stood in sharp contrast to their fiery public pronouncements. The Nepali-people-have-spoken posturing of the commanders of the movement seemed to melt away in the midst of the persona of the supreme commander-in-chief of the Royal Nepal Army.

That next thing I got from the excerpts from Kiyoko Ogura's



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The streets are heating up with the ire of a confused generation ready for any form of hit-and-run campaign against a government they feel doesn't represent them.

Kathmandu Spring was a feel of the fickleness of the foundations of what has turned out to be an over-rated political compromise. If anything, I find myself one step closer to confirming my gut feeling that the restoration of multiparty democracy was a by-product of a botched bilateral showdown whose main agenda was the preservation of the status quo on mutually acceptable terms. For all it is worth, here is my theory. The Indian trade and transit embargo was part of our southern neighbour's effort to teach the palace a lesson that there are certain limits imposed by geopolitics, one being that you don't go up north to buy a couple of anti-aircraft guns.

When Marich Man Singh Shrestha's government began showing traces of an ability to resist India's pressures by importing mountain bikes and filling the airwaves with sounds and images of national pride, New Delhi decided it was time to fine-tune its policy. In hopes of further humbling the votaries of partylessness, India began questioning the legitimacy of the system the prime minister happened to represent almost exclusively at the pleasure of the palace. Accordingly, the People's

Movement was being plotted as a back-up strategy. Then, the Indian voters intervened. To the good fortune of both Narayanhiti and soon-to-be empowered Chaksibari darbars, long-time allies of Nepali Congress oldies took over power from Rajiv Gandhi. (It is important not to forget that the re-election of Rajiv, who was said to have been put off by persistent personal slights from the panchayati powerful, might have drastically changed the course of subsequent events.)

The confusion accompanying the change of political guard in New Delhi was bound to affect the Nepal desks at the Ministry of External Affairs and the Research and Analysis Wing. One direct result was a slackening of the action on Kathmandu's streets; the stone-throwers and slogan-screamers suddenly decided it was time to take a break. Then, with almost equal suddenness, history joined hands with geography in the political arena. Hordes from Bhaktapur and Kirtipur marched with the masses of Lalitpur and Kathmandu to avenge the accumulation of perceived misdeeds committed by the powerful since the early days of the Gorkha conquest.

Stories of severed noses and sliced ear lobes strewn across the Valley's tracks and trails peppered the revised version of the history of our national unification campaign. (It's not for nothing, after all, that Kathmandu Valley used to be called "Nepal khaldo").

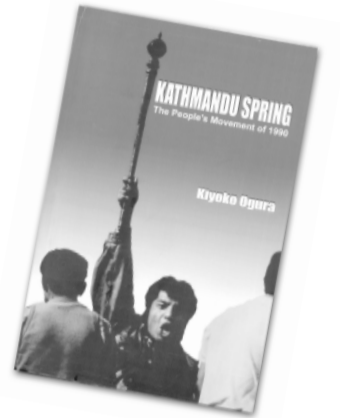
As the People's Movement gained new momentum, active participants and indifferent bystanders alike began falling victim to the bullets of police officers who knew more about the socialisation process partylessness tolerated than about taking a straight aim on an "anti-social" target. Everybody who fell on the street, excluding perhaps those who succumbed to cardiac arrest of panic attacks while trying to abide by the curfew orders, were declared martyrs to the cause of restoring multiparty democracy. Meanwhile, the partyless polity could proceed no further in saving itself because the international climate had turned hostile. The Iron Curtain had been breached in Europe and our own Iron Man (*lauha purush*) wasn't interested in anything less than declaring total victory, notwithstanding the fact the movement hadn't actually fired up people in more than a dozen of the country's 75 districts. (The reach of the 1979 student movement was more widespread, but the super powers then were still busy fighting their cold war to pay attention to the democratic aspirations of the Nepali people.)

The panchas came up with the perfect solution that would avoid

signing a declaration of surrender with the external foe: it would be better to bow to your own people than to the leaders of your southern neighbour. All that was needed to defuse the immediate crisis was the deletion of the word "partylessness" from the constitution. The rest could be taken care of later. In retrospect, Lokendra Bahadur Chand's government deserves more credit than it has received for its role in bringing the People's Movement to a safe landing.

The demise of partylessness in Nepal denied India that great opportunity of smashing and grabbing a second Himalayan kingdom within 15 years. Indian leaders, schooled for three decades in the art of alternately engaging and enraging the palace, were instead confronted with the challenge of dealing with a multitude of leaders of newly liberated and created political parties of all persuasions. Keeping track of what represented a carrot or a stick to whom was mind-boggling enough. Everything from patching up intra-party rifts to processing additional applications for cultural scholarships became a more prominent part of Indian diplomats' job descriptions.

Within a year, some top leaders of the Indian National Congress and bureaucrats were heard berating Rajiv Gandhi's myopic vision of what constituted good neighbourliness. Tanakpur, Kalapani, Pancheswor (who would have thought that anything to do with the much-reviled quintet would continue to haunt



South Block over a decade down the rivers?), Purnagiri, you name it, and "Bharatiya Bistarbad" becomes the instant battle cry.

In a way, we have come full circle in 12 years: We have received a new list of 11 dos and don'ts from India, an expanded version of the original six presented to the Marich Man government, it appears from press reports, although we still don't know whether the missive came courtesy KV Rajan, Amitabh Bachchan or directly through the Lainchaur diplomatic pouch.

The streets are heating up with the ire of a confused generation ready for any form of hit-and-run campaign against a government they feel doesn't represent them. The prime minister's chief challengers within his own fold are growing increasingly restive over the way he is mishandling the situation. Top underground leaders are holding secret meetings with important members of key power centres. Surya Bahadur Thapa has issued his impassioned the-nation-is-in-a-serious-crisis statement. Talk of amending the constitution to accommodate all political forces pervades the national discourse.

The King, meanwhile, still wears that familiar smile. ♦

(*Kathmandu Spring: The People's Movement of 1990* by Kiyoko Ogura, Himal Books, 2001. Rs 325)

VIEW POINT

by PRAKASH A RAJ

Playing cat and mouse in Kathmandu

The Indian media has predictably played up the incident as proof that Nepal is a hotbed of ISI activity.

Mohammad Arshad Cheema, First Secretary in Kathmandu's Pakistani Embassy was arrested last Thursday in a building rented by a construction contractor from Pakistan. Nepal Police said it discovered 16 kg of deadly explosives in the building, ready to be shipped to different destinations. Cheema was at the end of his tenure and was planning to fly home after completing his assignment. He was interrogated by police while in custody, and was declared persona non grata and ordered to leave Nepal within twenty-four hours. He denied he had anything to do with the explosives and blamed it on a "plot" by Indian intelligence.

Whatever the truth, this is serious business. Either way, it has implications for our security. Whether it is true that the Pakistani was shipping RDX to India through Nepal, or if it was actually Indian intelligence that framed him—both ways it is bad for us. Sixteen kg of RDX is no joke, it could have blown a large chunk of Baneswor sky high.

The Indian media has predictably played up the incident citing it as proof that Nepal is a hotbed for the anti-Indian activities of Pakistani intelligence. They have quoted Indian officials as saying that Cheema was the diplomat who provided the weapons to the hijackers of IC 814 in December 1999 at Kathmandu airport. At that time, in a similar sting operation to the one last week, a junior Pakistani embassy official named Saboor was arrested and deported amidst great hoopla for allegedly being in possession of fake Rs 500 denomination Indian currency. Interestingly, Saboor had served in Nepal two years earlier but had been implicated in another alleged RDX operation involving Khalistanis. The big question here is: how come our government allowed Saboor back if it knew of the previous incident.

Let us say for a moment that Cheema was indeed framed by the Indian intelligence agency, RAW, to implicate him belatedly for his role in the hijacking. If this is true then it is likely to have a very serious implication for



Pakistani First Secretary Cheema being led away by police last Thursday, 12 April

Nepal's sovereignty. It would mean that India could go to any extent to curb what it sees as the use of Nepali territory by Pakistan for carrying out operations in India across the open border. On the other hand, if there is any truth in Indian allegations that the RDX found in Baneswor was being sent for subversive activities to India, it would also have serious implications for our territorial integrity. Nepal can't allow its territory to be used against any of its neighbours.

Both of the scenarios described are so grave that they need urgent attention: Nepal's very existence as an independent entity may be at stake. If there is one obsession in New Delhi about Nepal, it is the perceived lack of sensitivity in Nepal to Indian security concerns.

When news of this sort gets wide media play, it is translated in the Indian

psyche as enemies of India using a neighbouring Hindu kingdom to harm the country with the largest Hindu population. Perceived thus, it is not surprising that Indian public opinion towards Nepal has today changed and needs to be remedied.

With the open southern border and Nepal's strategic location it will be difficult now to make our security airtight. But we have to start somewhere and we could do it by keeping a database of the comings and goings of non-tourist nationals from neighbouring countries in Nepal. ♦

(Prakash A Raj is a Kathmandu-based writer and development analyst.)

RAMYATA LIMBU

Seven years after he was driven to compose some rather desperate verse of a Valley submerged in "shit", Jagdish Ghimire still can't escape the stench that pervades his home in Chobhar. This is the holy spot where Manjushree sliced a limestone ridge in half with his flaming sword to let the waters of Kathmandu out to create a sacred valley. Ghimire moved here to get away from the congestion, noise and dust of Kathmandu. Little did he know that the river would be allowed to turn into a sewer full of black water.

"It's worse in the summer. When I open the windows of the house it smells like there's a dead rat right outside," he says. And sure enough, the whiff of decay and rot pervades the entire area even though the house is 500 m away from the river.

At the northern end of the Valley at Sundari Jal where the spring-fed waters fall into a stream is the head water of the Bagmati. Here the water is crystal clear and cool, good enough to scoop up and drink in the palm of your hand. But the river passes the suburbs of Chabahil, past the temple at Pashupati, and through Baneshwor and Thapathali, meeting other



MIN BAURACHARYA

A sewer runs through it

Mismanagement, utter disregard for waste disposal regulations make the Bagmati what it is: a metaphor for everything that is wrong with Kathmandu. But experts agree the river can still be saved.

the valley have reached the limits to growth. Coupled with mismanagement, the utter disregard for waste disposal regulations and you have the Bagmati, which has become a metaphor for everything that is wrong with Kathmandu.

With a population that has surpassed 1.7 million, the valley now generates 750 cubic metres of solid wastes every year. About 70 percent of this is disposed by the municipality at various landfills, and 5-10 percent is recycled, the rest is dumped on the banks of the river. So the Bagmati is not just a sewer, but also a garbage dump.

"Planners and those in power couldn't care less about what's happening to the Valley," says Huta Ram Baidya a longtime environmentalist and a campaigner for saving the Bagmati. He does not mind taking another visitor on a conducted tour of the river near his house in Thapathali. "In the mornings, the water from these pipes is yellow, just raw sewage," says Baidya pointing to a cavernous concrete pipe from which untreated sewage gushes out into the

river. Animal carcasses, rotting furniture and garbage float around nearby. More than 70 percent of the river below Teku is made up of untreated effluent in the dry season.

Pollution is killing the river's plant and animal life. Fish surveys conducted by the Bagmati Basin Water Management Strategy & Investment Program in the early 1990s recorded 13 fish species in the Bagmati River system—half the number recorded in 1979-80.

"It's difficult to imagine we're walking along the banks of a river around which the civilisation of this valley was built," says Baidya as we side step the remains of a dog being devoured by vultures. "According to mythology, the gods, including Indra, would come down to bathe in these waters. Today, they'd cringe. No one bathes at the ghats anymore." Last rites along the stone ghats from Pachali Teku to Sankhamul, among the most sacred stretches, are performed with water from tubewells today. The ghats and the stone steps that once led into the water are high and dry at least 100 metres away from

the main channel. They are also sinking due to excessive sand mining over the decades which has also caused the river bed to drop significantly.

For Baidya, who grew up near the banks of the Bagmati, it is painful to remember what the river used to be. "I consider the Bagmati as a close relative," says the 80-year-old activist. The Bagmati Bachau Andolan, which Baidya once spearheaded has fizzled out, but he is still engaged in a one-man crusade to raise public awareness about the river's deteriorating condition.

Unlike other Kathmandu residents, Baidya does not cover his nose or wince at the stench from the river. There's an urgency to his steps as he ushers along visitors, pointing out statues, stone ghats that are sinking daily, the squatter settlements and human encroachment that have taken over the flood plain.

"The municipality built this park from the garbage it dumped here, giving little thought for the ghats and the natural heritage sites that it has covered," says Baidya. Over the years,

he has written realms on the river, its historical and cultural significance, on the lack of government commitment and public apathy.

Still, Baidya does not think the river is a lost cause. Today, he's keen to guide people along the three-kilometre stretch of river bank from Teku Doban to Sankhamul in hope that it will arouse the sentiments of a public that seems to have lost its sense of cultural pride.

In 1994, Baidya spent six months conducting a survey on the cultural heritage sites along the river. It was mainly aimed at increasing public awareness.

The findings are part of the Bagmati Basin Water Management Strategy Investment Program, one of the most comprehensive studies of the Bagmati River Basin, the study highlights necessary management strategies and action plans, including the need for proper sewage disposal, public awareness, environmental legislation, and urban planning.

The report is designed to assist the government with the pre-feasibility identification and

assessment of practical measures and investments that can improve the environmental quality of water resources in the basin. The ultimate objective is to restore the river and its tributaries to an environmentally safe condition for all users, including the wetlands, to enhance the historical and cultural endowments along the water courses of the basin.

Tashi Tenzing, an environmental and sanitation engineer at the World Bank, which funded the study says copies were sent to the government but so far there haven't been any proposals to carry out or look into suggestions made. "The government has to take the initiative to transform the measures suggested in the report into action," he says.

Another activist who hasn't yet given up on the Bagmati is Toran Sharma of Nepal Environmental & Scientific Services (NESS). But he has no illusions that it will be difficult. "Rehabilitating the river is an extremely big challenge. But it's possible if there's political commitment, proper planning and management," he says.

Toran Sharma and his team carried out a water quality study of Bagmati from 1990-99 for the Melanchi Water Supply Project. The project plans to use excess water from the project after it fulfills the needs of local consumers, to artificially recharge the Valley's depleted aquifers and to replenish the river with fresh water flow.

While this may be possible in the distant future, more cost effective and immediate action to improve the environment would be to remove debris dumped on the banks, to improve the Teku-Thapathali river bank as an example for other sacred sites, and to operate small sewage treatment plants as suggested by the report.

The Kathmandu municipality has built a small, simple sewage treatment plant in Kohiti to treat the sewage of the neighbourhood. "It was a kind of trial. Unfortunately it's stopped functioning after two years," explains Bhushan Tuladhar an environmental engineer with the Municipality's Kathmandu Valley Mapping Project KVMP. He says the lack of monitoring and commitment by the community and the municipality resulted in the failure of the plant. "Some of the pipes were stolen, too."

Tuladhar, Sharma and Baidya all agree on one thing. The Bagmati is worth saving, and it can be saved. All it takes is the will to save it. ♦



Huta Ram Baidya

polluted rivers along the way. Even by the time the river gets to Koteswor it is already reeking of rot.

During the dry months of April and May, when the flow of the water is reduced to a trickle of a choking viscous liquid, the river turns into what it really is: an open air sewer.

Kathmandu is now one of the few cities in the world with more than one million people which is not located near an ocean or a major river. In terms of water supply for drinking and flushing its waste, the three cities in



HIMALAYAN EXPO 2001

APRIL 21 - 24TH (दुईदिने - चारदिने) BASKITI MANSAP

उच्चस्तरिय, अन्तराष्ट्रिय र शुद्ध व्यापारीक प्रदर्शनी

सम्पन्नताको लागि नयाँ उपाय, नयाँ शैली


USA (PHOENIX)


ENGLAND (LONDON)


INDIA (CHENNAI)


SRI LANKA (COLOMBO)


NEPAL (KATHMANDU)







BIZ NEWS

On again, off again

Spacetime Network's (STN) plan to broadcast via satellite has been scuttled once again, this time on the grounds that it failed to meet the requirements laid out by the National Broadcasting Regulations (1995). The Ministry of Information and Communication asked the station not to broadcast on 14 April, its planned inauguration, because it said Spacetime's equipment had not been inspected and approved and that the use of equipment other than that officially specified could affect other frequencies. That's the official version.

Unofficially, STN's broadcasting plans have been embroiled in a controversy of sorts since early this year when the MOIC suddenly cancelled the network's license over a technicality. However, in another month or so, the office—headed by a new minister—renewed the cancelled license without seeking fresh bids. STN then announced that its Channel Nepal would broadcast for four hours daily starting 14 April, Nepali New Year, from its studio at Min Bhawan. Our sources tell us the company does not have the bare minimum, in terms of equipment, to produce programs for the network, even though it sent a crew to Rukumkot to film the Maoist attack some weeks ago. STN declined to respond to our questions.

Private truck terminal

It is an idea whose time had come: private truck stops. Kathmandu's first privately run truck stop began operating on at Tinthana on 14 April, and the first few truckers have already made use of the service. The government approved the Build-Own-Operate-Transfer contract three years ago but the launch was delayed because of the government's inability to meet its commitments—especially enforcing the parking ban around the Ring Road. "Even now the parking ban has not been fully enforced," says Dr RP Singh, a promoter of the truck stop venture. The first phase of the project cost about Rs 180 million and another Rs 180 million is to be spent on completing the second phase. The complex is built on 380 hectares of land about 1 km off the bottleneck at the Kalanki-Ring Road junction. It has a capacity of 600 trucks. An estimated 3,600 vehicles exit and enter Kathmandu Valley everyday. "We will be introducing systematic parking, a proper warehouse with considerable unloading capacity and other facilities like cafeterias, a fuel station and a maintenance workshop," Singh told us. It costs a truck/bus Rs 100 to stop for the night, Rs 50 for a day and Rs 25 an hour.



Rupee slides

The Nepali rupee took a further dip on 13 April, triggered by the slide of the Indian rupee, which fell to an all-time low against the dollar the same day. The IRs slide began last Wednesday over concerns that foreign investment inflows could be drying. The dollar hit a new low of IRs 46.97 Thursday and closed slightly higher at IRs 46.81. In Nepal the price of the dollar shot up by 25 paisa from its opening of Rs 73.90 (buy) and Rs 74.60 (sell) to Rs 74.15 and Rs 74.85 respectively. Any change in Indian prices is automatically transferred to Nepal since the Nepali Rupee is pegged to the Indian Rupee.

NRB Governor

Tilak Rawal has re-assumed office as governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank. Rawal, who was sacked from his job last August, won a court battle seeking reinstatement on 28 March. Rawal took over duties at the central bank on 11 April.



Cross-border calls

Starting New Year this year, residents of two border towns Birgunj and Biratnagar don't have to pay international rates while making telephone calls across the border. This new development is possible because of direct links between neighbouring townships, Raxaul Bazaar and Jorpani respectively in India. Telephone calls now cost Rs 5 per minute instead of the Rs 30 in currencies of the respective countries.



Pashupatinath fee

Tourists visiting the Pashupatinath temple are now required to pay Rs 75 as entrance fee. The fee, charged starting 14 April, is imposed by the Trust responsible for the upkeep of the temple complex, which is a world heritage site. New fees are also planned for visitors to Hanuman Dhoka square.

Bonus shares

The Nepal SBI Bank is to issue bonus and rights shares to comply with the central bank ruling requiring banks to raise their core capital to Rs 500 million by mid-July this year. In its annual general meeting held last week the bank also announced an operating profit of Rs 146.7 million for fiscal year 1999/2000, up from Rs 82.7 million the previous year. Each shareholder is to get two shares for every 10, and one right share for every two.

Goodbye Avro

One more workhorse of Nepali domestic aviation has folded its wings. Necon Air, the only private airline still using the British-made HS 748s has grounded its last active Avro. Royal Nepal Airlines and the Royal Nepal Army still own one Avro each, although the RNAC plane has been mothballed. Royal Nepal Airlines bought its first two Avros back in 1970, replacing its DC-3s. When private airlines were allowed after deregulation in 1991, many operators preferred the familiar Avro. More passengers have flown the craft with Necon colours since the airline began operations in Nepal in September 1992. The Avro helped Necon Air corner over 55 percent of market share. Necon is now using the more fuel-efficient ATR-42s for all its domestic and international routes. It is acquiring a third ATR later this year.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED



In poor health

A trip to India highlights the inadequacy of Nepal's health care systems. The services we pay too much for here just aren't good enough.

NEW DELHI—Sometimes it is good to run into a chukka jam in a country other than Nepal. So, in the middle of an indefinite taxi, auto strike and power outages in the Indian capital, the Beed felt distinctly at home. South Asian democracy remains, as always, about the power to strike and a chronic shortage of power. The difference is the context, and here, unlike in Nepal, political shenanigans, uncertainties and strikes do not affect the economics of this country.

It is always interesting to meet curious Nepalis on the streets of New Delhi, whether from the hills in India or from Nepal itself. But this is changing, and it appears that Delhiites are now being asked to turn a suspicious rather than curious eye at us.

Next to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences lies this interesting lane full of lodges and houses leased out to people who come for treatment here, at one of the best medical institutions in South Asia. A few days ago public service announcements started being put out asking lodge owners and landlords to take extra caution and double-check the identity of all persons checking in saying they're from Nepal. Now Nepalis have never been the object of suspicion here, so this comes as a surprise not only to me, but also to Delhiites used to dealing with Nepalis. There are now forms to be filled in if Nepalis want to rent rooms. These little things that happen in the back-alleys of a nation's capital are an indication of what we can expect in the future. The identification of Nepalis with violence rather than peace is a matter of great concern.



In health services delivery systems in India, both private and public Nepali patients are not treated as outsiders, and they've never been billed in dollars. Nepalis from right across the kingdom are thankful to institutions here for providing them the medical aid they need. The major issues they talk about are the problems with our own health services system where rampant privatisation has not been able to guarantee quality. The more fortunate ones line up at corporate hospitals like Apollo where they consult doctors more to reconfirm the diagnosis and treatment they received in Nepal.

The health sector in India may have its own problems—we read about them in the papers—but the availability and delivery of public health services is of a much higher standard than anything available in Nepal. There is a more professional approach and the people in the medical profession are concerned about the probable backlash that will result from a wrong diagnosis or inept treatment. The issue of liability is not as terrifying here as it is in the United States or some European countries, but there is a basic sense of responsibility.

And what of Nepal? Public health service providers are inefficient and the private ones are

unaffordable. In absence of good insurance plans, medical services are moving out of the reach of common people. Private hospitals and clinics have mushroomed in the last decade, but there isn't adequate monitoring and regulation in place to ensure that these service providers in the private sector provide a certain level of quality. It is also interesting to see that private health service providers in India—at least the major ones—are increasingly moving towards corporatisation. We're yet to see a hospital in Nepal that is a corporation and not a mere partnership of medical practitioners.

Across the world, health services are being institutionalised and getting more consumer oriented. Government, all said and done, does not have the resources to provide health services for all, so it is now private sector service providers that will have to meet the ever-growing demand for quality health care. There have to be private institutions, but there also have to be schemes in place to make their services affordable. The trick is to strike the right balance. ♦

(Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com)



Inter-Cultural Film Society

अन्तर सांस्कृतिक चलचित्र समाज नेपाल

Our aim is to bring diverse feature films from different cultures around the globe to our audience for the "promotion of inter-cultural understanding". The richness of cultures is one of the beauties of our world which is reflected in our logo that symbolises unity in diversity.

Every month a film will be shown at the Russian Cultural Center in Kamal Pokhari on a screen 4X6m. The films are mainly from southern countries, spoken in their original language with English subtitles.

"The Cup"

A film by Khyentse Norbu, Bhutan/India 1999
Sunday 22 April 5:00pm
A delightful comedy about the lighter side of life in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery.

"Children of Heaven"

A film by Majid Majidi, Iran, 1998
Sunday 20 May 5:00pm
When Ali loses his sister Zahra's school shoes the pair plan to share his shoes and keep it a secret from their parents! Charming!

"The Knowledge of Healing"

A film by Franz Reichle, Switzerland, 1996
Sunday 17 June 5:00pm
A documentary about the secret of Tibetan medicine and how it found its way to Switzerland, challenging Western medicine.

"Mukundo"

A film by Tsering Rhitar Sherpa, Nepal, 1999
Sunday 22 July 5:00pm
The story of a couple involved with a Jhankrini who is deeply ambivalent about her shamanic role.

"West Beirut"

A film by Ziad Doueiri, Lebanon, 1998
Sunday 19 August 5:00pm
A cheerful and touching story of three beaming youths in the city of Beirut and their love for their Super 8 Film camera.

The Inter-Cultural Film Society is a registered non-profit NGO. This programme is sponsored by "Helvetas Nepal" as part of their interest in promoting the positive side of national cultures and to encourage a better understanding and affinity among the people of the world. Helvetas is committed to striving for a fairer world and for greater respect between nations.

To become a member you do the following:

- Register before the show or by e-mail: icfs@wlink.com.np
- Pay Rs.550 which allows you to see 11 films from April 2001 up to February 2002.

A detailed description of each film is available by e-mail or before the show.

Gamboling on mobile

There will soon be more mobiles phones in Nepal, perhaps cheaper too—now that private and public sector players are preparing for the cell phone showdown.

BINOD BHATTARAI

Finally, there are signs of life in Nepal's mobile telephony market. The Khetan Group is planning to offer its services starting August to compete with the monopoly of Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC).

In anticipation of the private sector rival, NTC has finally fixed some of the bugs afflicting its services at the busiest base stations in Kathmandu, and is adding seven new bases that serve as a gateway to the main exchange. It will be a few months before the new additions are

giants Ericsson and Siemens, who we are told are competing against a Chinese company offering the cheapest system.

But NTC needs to hurry now that competition is snapping at its heels. The Khetan Group has a business plan ready and is awaiting approval of a new joint venture it is forming to handle its mobiles. This week, technicians from Modicorp, Khetan's Indian joint venture partner which provides mobile services in Punjab, Kolkata and

protection against new competition does not apply.

"We are waiting for the court to reach a verdict," says Rajendra Khetan, but the firm is still planning to make all its services functional in August. The Group plans to flood the country with 70,000 connections—from Kakarvitta to Dhangadi. "We see every township and settlement as a

market," says Khetan. "We will aim at making our service affordable to anyone with a monthly salary of say Rs 5,000." To get a connection and mobile set, all you'll need is about Rs 15,000.

Khetan's new company is still unnamed but may come with the Spice brand name already in use in India. And the game plan is clear. "Service quality makes the

mid- and far-western regions. The NTC has one distinct advantage in this undertaking—the existence of telecommunication towers it owns in all major towns.

NTC hopes to connect all the new towns along the highways within a year—and highways by another year and half. This means that anywhere you are on the highways you'll be close enough to a base station—that would cover 40-90 km depending on terrain—to be

connected all the time. The time-frame looks promising, but the NTC's deadlines could change depending on how soon the bids are finalised and how long it takes the government—which is prone to delaying decisions—to select the bids and sign the contracts.

The NTC's mobile division is also facing delays from Rastra Bank for approving letter of credit and other procedures. It is also constrained by severe staff

shortages, the result of the blanket hiring freeze announced in the budget.

Till the NTC is privatised, this is going to be a battle of two titans: one private the other public sector. And the prize is the huge mobile market. Collections in January-February this year alone was Rs 380 million. With more connections and right pricing, this is bound to increase. Common economic sense says there will be a downward revision in prices even before Khetan enters the market—provided, of course, the rest of the government sees reason, like certain sections within NTC do. ♦



in place and functioning, but they may finally end the "network busy" tone on your phone once and for all. For now, NTC's focus is on getting another 50,000 lines, and bid evaluation is underway.

"In the New Road area if only 21 callers could call at a time, now 42 can do so at once," says MK Shaky, Director of the NTC's New Services, which includes mobile and Internet facilities. The upgrade is being done with equipment ordered for a 10,000 line extension approved in December last year. NTC has expanded the traffic channels serving New Road, Naikap, Chhauni and Gongabu, and other congestion "hot spots" in Tripureswor, Putali Sadak and Patan are in the process of being fixed.

The results are already visible. NTC statistics show that the call failure rate in the New Road area has come down to less than one percent from the extraordinarily high 45-50 percent. Congestion grows exponentially every time someone who does not get through redials immediately, explains Shaky. "You had 21 slots and everyone wanted to get connected at the same time—this problem has now been resolved." The industry standard for call failure is two percent.

NTC began its mobile services two years ago with 17 base stations. Problems with accessing the network emerged quickly as subscriptions crossed the initially planned 5,000 connections for the Valley. NTC now has over 11,500 mobile users in Kathmandu Valley, which was why the seven new base stations have to be built. Unlike fixed line telephones where you get access to the entire system the moment you have a connection, with cell phones you need to get into the network through the base stations, explains Shaky. Obviously, then, having more base stations mean less congestion. The corporation is also evaluating bids to add 50,000 more connections. Among the five companies that have submitted bids are global telecom

Karnataka, were in Kathmandu scouting possible locations for the main exchange and about 20 base stations it plans to build. They also met NTC officials to discuss interconnectivity.

But there are developments to the NTC's advantage—a suit by NTC employee unions in court has slowed down the private company. The Khetan's out-bid rivals late last year to be selected to be the only private mobile operator in the country. NTC employees are challenging this decision on the grounds that the corporation was not given adequate protection against the entry of competition under the licensing law. One argument against the charge is that NTC did not obtain its license through competitive bidding but as a "special case", which is why the rule that ensures

difference, we'll provide the right product mix to the right customer segments," says RS Desikan, Chief Financial Officer of Modicorp Limited. "We want to begin as soon as possible and are already going full steam with the pre-start up work."

The NTC is eyeing the same market that Khetan plans to cater to. The 50,000 new lines are to be sold in major townships from Kakarbhitta in the east to Pokhara in the west and all major settlements in between. Phase two of the corporation's expansion would entail uprooting some of the redundant bases from Kathmandu, Pokhara, Biratnagar and Birgunj and installing them in towns in the

Infocam

pepsi

Maps in a difficult terrain

SALIL SUBEDI

The hippies, explorers, and trail raiders—they all came to Nepal in the early 70s, without a care in the world, and sometimes even without a map. But on their heels came the demand for commercial thematic or tourist maps.

Explorers like Stan Armington, author of Lonely Planet's *Trekking in Nepal*, remembers acquiring illegally photocopied maps at a small shop across from the Hotel Mount Makalu, a 70s Thamel landmark. "They had some sort of black and white photographic negatives of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India of 1965. It wasn't even a proper photocopy," he recalls. A similar story revolves around US Spy maps, published by the Stanford Press in the UK in the late 1970s. Mandala Maps hand-copied these on tracing paper and sold them as "blueprint maps" in ammonia prints. "They used a primitive method of cartography called the pantograph. It was really tough to get hold of a good map then. Now it's amazing," says Armington.

And indeed, maps are flooding the Nepali market—from street vendors to high-end bookstores, retailers are increasingly interested in selling images of the country, her trekking trails, small lodges, check posts marked in blue, green, red and

In a country of half a million tourists each year, maps are crucial. But if Nepal's legislature has its way, the industry may just lose its way.

yellow. The clients? For anyone interested in knowing where places are—high altitude trekkers, middle hill hikers, mountain bikers, kayakers, and stargazers—there are maps to match any curiosity.

"Private map publishing in Nepal is growing," says Ramesh Shrestha of the Himalayan Map House, one of Nepal's leading map houses that recently joined hands with National Geographic Trails Illustrated to produce and distribute maps. The Himalayan Map House has 54 maps on 11 regions and themes, including maps on Bhutan and Tibet, all of which are revised and updated regularly. There are nine registered map publishers based in Kathmandu and Pokhara. "It is directly linked to tourism, so our business completely relies on the fortunes of that sector," says Bidur Dongol, publisher of Shangri-la Maps, a new entrant to the game, which released 21 maps in the last eight months.

Until the late 1970s, when decent, mainly European, maps became available, travellers were even known to have used those that came with Toni Hagen's *Nepal* (1961). Among the first of the



newer maps were the Schneider, the APA/Nelles, and the Berndtson and Berndtson—that they are still popular overseas is the best sign of how reliable they continue to be. The Schneider Maps are based on data from the Topographical Survey of India, conducted from 1968 to 1974, and still have the elaborate photogrammetrical work (making maps with measurements taken

from photographs) of the famous cartographer E Schneider. There are now six maps put out by this Austrian publication available in Nepal (updated 1999, on a 1:50,000 scale).

The publication of two sets of maps 25 years ago marked a real milestone in Nepali map-making history—by the French Centre National de la Recherche

Scientifique in France and by Nepal's Department of Topography under the Ministry of Land Reforms. These were important because they were easy to copy, particularly the latter, and also served as base maps for a new generation of cartographic undertakings. Most map houses today work the same way, off other maps, but they insist they do a lot of homework and build on the base maps. "The government map is of course one of our base maps. But we use our own expertise and create a better map. We have to cross check our facts and profiles, because all our maps are thematic, focusing on a particular area of interest," says Shrestha of Map House. The most important feature in creating such maps is the zooming in or out of the basic scale and getting distances and altitudes correct.

Madhav Maharjan of Mandala Book Point, one of the first commercial map publishers in Nepal, says: "It's only since the early 90s that private map publishers have gained ground. There has been no support from the government." Maharjan says all

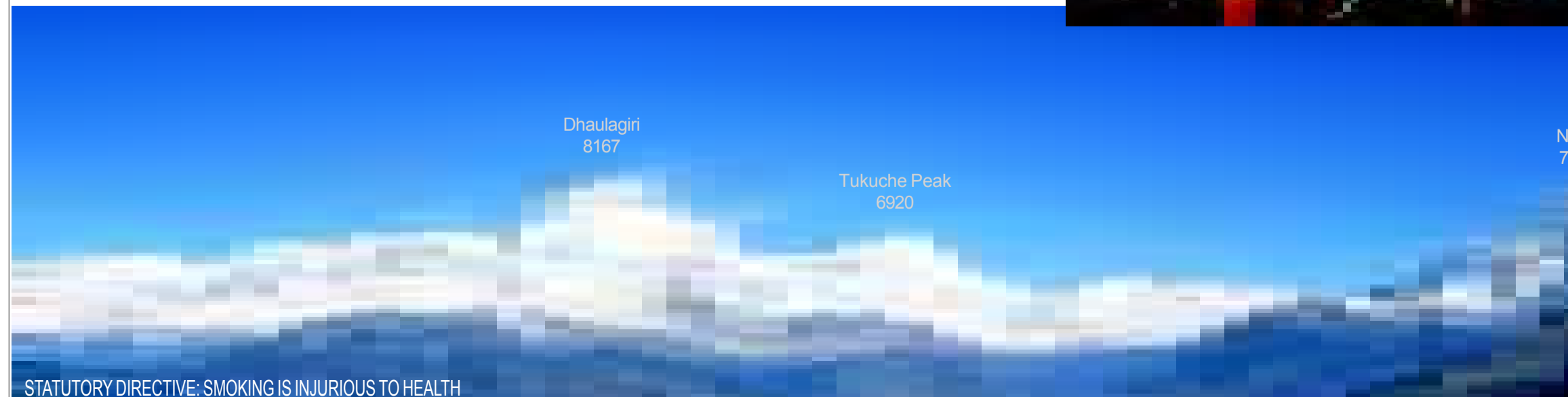
credit for creating and expanding this niche market goes to the private map houses. There is an official outlet for government-produced maps in New Baneswor, but the maps don't really cater to tourists, but to organisations. "The quality is okay, but the marketing is pretty bad," says Sarita Shrestha who has worked with the topography department for almost two decades. Government-produced maps have improved with the support of the Finnish government's FINIDA and the Japanese-funded JICA—both organisations conducted surveys for the Nepal government.

But the Department of Topography still has a long way to go before it can catch up with the more innovative, tourist market-driven private enterprises like the Himalayan Map House. Apart from the standard trekking maps, this firm also produces thematic astronomical, geological, river and biking maps. There's also what is probably Nepal's first astronomical map—*The Deep Sky of Nepal*—which illustrates constellations and zodiac sightings for all 12 months, and includes notes on the lore



SAGARMATHA

View from Gokyo peak (above) of the world's highest mountain, Sagarmatha (Mt Everest) and Nepal's longest glacier, the Ngozumba. Sagarmatha is flanked by lesser but nearer peaks of the Khumbu. Far off in the distance are Ama Dablam and Kangtega, the elegant peaks that tower over Tengboche Monastery. Nature at its most pristine. In Nepal.





behind them. "This is for stargazers who come to Nepal to gaze at the purest sky in the world from high altitudes," says Shrestha. The biking maps are also useful, especially 1000 km from Lhasa, with such helpful details as bike routes, itineraries, maintenance, campsites and speed information.

Other good trekking maps include the first Panoramic Map of Nepal by Carto Atelier a Swiss-Nepali venture, which upped the professionalism ante when it entered the Nepali market in 1996. Trekking maps charting the course to Everest Base Camp, Solu Khumbu, Annapurna Base Camp and the Helambu-Langtang trek are by far the most popular and readily available, together with street maps of Kathmandu and Pokhara. Nepali maps are also decent value for money, ranging from Rs 150 to Rs 800, while brand-name maps, like National Geographic's Trails Illustrated series, which are durable and have high production values, can easily run to Rs 1,050.

Commercial mapmakers in Nepal have made an easy transition

to digital technology and given up manual cartography. "We've even moved on from Auto Cad to Adobe Illustrator and are looking for other new software to enhance our production," says Menuka Shrestha, design head of Shangri-la Maps. Design aside, there are other technical impediments to the country's map industry—there isn't a press capable of printing larger than 24"x35".

But the real danger to this new industry comes from legal and legislative issues, something entrepreneurs and independent cartographers can do little about. For one, there is no way, in Nepal's legal system, to copyright artwork, so plagiarism is unpunished and on the rise. Says Ramesh Shrestha of the Himalayan Map House: "I don't mind other business houses copying my data and information—a map depicts universal things. But to copy artwork and original unique information without even verifying whether it's authentic is unethical." Such practices eventually affect quality, which would be a blow to the map industry as a whole.

If this dispute weren't enough, mapmakers are now up in arms against a new legislation that no one—entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, lawmakers—seems to know the specifics of. General consensus is that it revolves around the validity and accuracy of Nepal's boundaries as depicted on privately produced and distributed maps. Map houses fear that all new projects will now have to go through a tedious red-tape ridden approval procedure that will hold up new publications and subject them to the whims of the bureaucracy. What, ask publishers, will the government do to prevent tourists from bringing in unapproved maps from overseas? Why can't the government only require that all unauthorised maps carry a stamp announcing that they don't accurately depict the territory of Nepal? Officials play shy when asked. Rajaram Chaktulli, a senior official at the Department of Topography, says: "We don't know what the legislation is exactly going to do. But it will definitely bring about changes to safeguard the country's sovereignty by discouraging and banning maps that

go against the national interest." Mapmakers say they only wish they were consulted in the formulation of the new law.

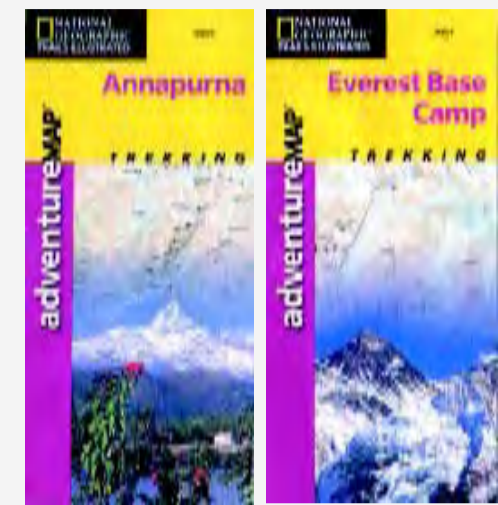
The Land Survey Management Act of 1962 (2019 BS), in its eight amendment of 2000 (2057 BS) rules that if any extra-governmental party wishes to conduct an aerial survey, to use control points established by the government, to publish maps produced by the government, or to sell maps published elsewhere in Nepal, they must comply with all the rules and regulations set forth by the Act.

Officials say rules and regulations are being prepared now. "As soon as the legislation is passed by parliament, the department will then have to impose the new strictures," says Chaktulli. The eighth amendment also bans maps of Nepal published outside the country that aren't just reproductions of official maps. But many experts point to the absurdity of the Act and the difficulty in actually implementing it. "You can find maps everywhere. In a few seconds, you can download any map from the Internet," says Armington. Shrestha of Map House asks: "How can you stop the flow of information. What about the pragmatics of a free market economy?"

Liberal laws would attract big companies like National Geographic to a tourist and nature destination like Nepal to invest in Nepali map houses. What we're seeing now has the potential to throw up a whole generation of Nepali cartographers and map enthusiasts. How it will eventually pan out is anybody's guess. ♦

The best maps in town..

are the four highly detailed National Geographic Trails Illustrated maps delineating Everest Base Camp, Khumbu, Langtang and Annapurna. These trekking



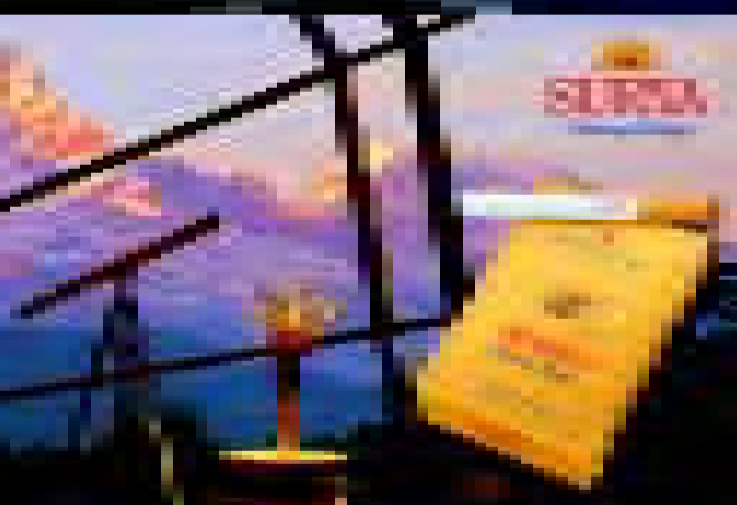
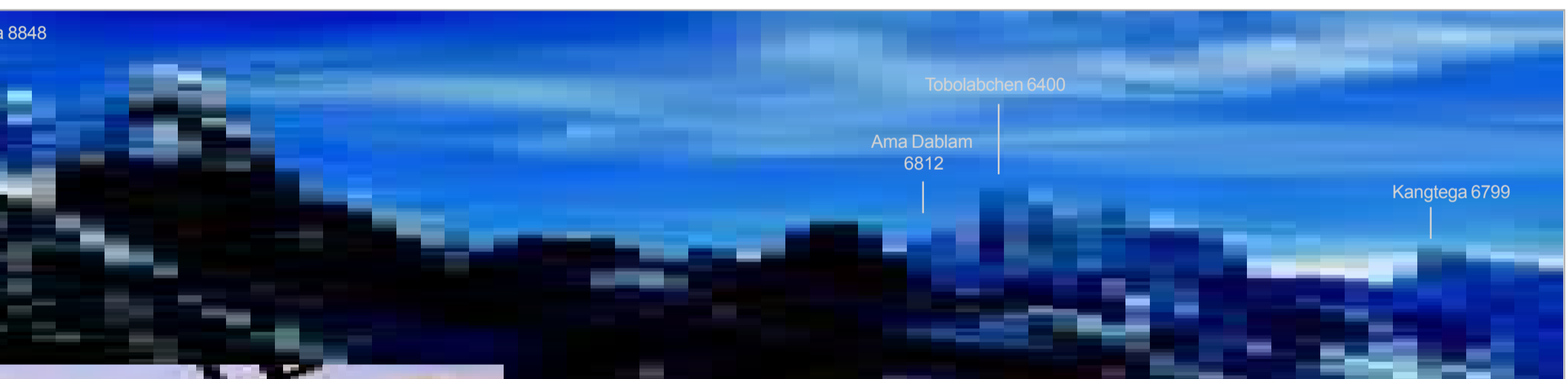
maps are the first in a series of worldwide adventure destination maps. Published on recycled plastic, they are waterproof and tear-resistant maps—all for up to Rs 1,050.

The scale of the Everest Base Camp map is 1:150 000, of Khumbu and Langtang 1:25,000 and Annapurna 1: 135 000. The maps have shaded relief to highlight trail routes, villages, cultivated areas, park boundaries and places of interest. They include an inset on Thamel and

highlight the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Himalayan Trust and the American Himalayan Foundation. The maps are produced and distributed in cooperation with the Himalayan Map House in Kathmandu. Partial proceeds from sales will be contributed to Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust to fund scholarships in Khumbu.



8848



DHAULAGIRI AND ANNA PURNA

A broad sweep of horizon (below) as seen from Ghorepani pass overlooking the world's deepest gorge, the Kali Gandaki. Towering above the valley are Dhaulagiri and Annapurna, the 7th and 12th highest mountains in the world. Off to the east is unique fish-tailed peak of Machapuchre. Truly, the most scenic places on earth. In Nepal.



giri 061

MAP REVIEW

by MANISHA ARYAL



Getting around

The new Kathmandu City Map is better than most, but could have been better.

Maps of Kathmandu Valley have traditionally focused on places of interest to short-term visitors—heritage sites, tourist areas, diplomatic enclaves, hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops. Now, Shangrila Maps, a relatively new entrant to the already crowded tourist-map market, has come out with yet another offering in the same genre: the Kathmandu City Map.

Based on municipal plans, the 23" by 30" map has the Valley stretching from Baudhanath in the east to Swoyambhunath in the west, and Maharajgunj in the north to Kuponol in the south. A tourist armed with this map will have no difficulty finding cafes and hotels in Thamel, airlines and travel agencies on Darbar Marg, and banks, hospitals, embassies and government offices in different areas of the city.

Like all other maps of the Valley, this one also features Thamel, Darbar Marg and the cities of Kirtipur and Bhaktapur separately. One extra feature of this map is that the city of Patan appears in its full glory. (No other map previously has given Patan the spread it deserves.) And unlike other maps, this one also lists the

arrival area of the Tribhuvan International Airport, for example) or the orange Rs 30 map from Mandala Book Point, and it comes out a definite winner. Display it alongside maps produced by Carto Atelier and Atelier Maya and it'll probably be the one to be picked up, for the layout is easy on the eye and the colours subtle and pleasing.

But if you want to go beyond the tourist areas in the Valley, and locate someone's house in Baneswor, or Mali Gaon, for example, the map will be of little help.

Like all the others in the market, this map too, is aimed at the tourist market. Perhaps because Nepalis do not grow up learning to read/use maps and hence do not form a significant market niche, this map seems to ignore Valley residents and the different parts of the Valley where they reside. Ghatte Kulo, Mali Gaon, Bishalnagar, Chandol, Battispatali,

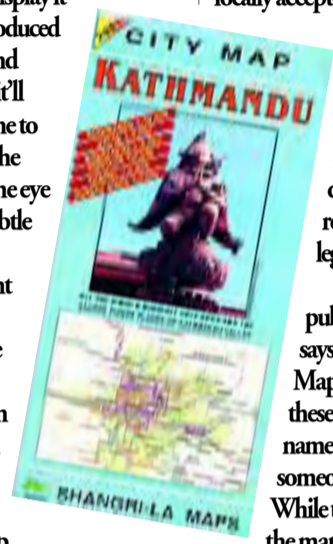
Naya Bazaar, Samakhushi, and Tahachal appear as big blobs of land with a maze of nameless, dirt and semi-tarred roads. Except for a handful of movie theatres and educational institutions that dot the spread, there are no landmarks and street names to guide you.

Many streets in Baneswor, Ghatte Kulo, and Chandol have locally accepted names, and the map

could have been made more useful for tourists as well as Valley residents if Shangrila Maps had done a little more research, a little more legwork.

Bidur Dongol, the publisher of Shangrila Maps says the Kathmandu City Map does not list many of these landmarks and street names because he's afraid someone will copy his work! While this might explain why the map is a bit of an

improvement over others in the market but stops short of offering more, it also means that Valley residents will have to continue to stop and ask for directions. ♦



City Map, Kathmandu
Shangrila Maps, March 2001
ISBN 9993360090
Price Rs 600

Hyatt

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WAVE

Something sinister in Cincinnati

ED VULLIAMY IN OHIO

The ghetto has not looked like this, they say, since the days after Martin Luther King was assassinated. Cincinnati's dark streets ghostly and deserted; the only sounds the wails of sirens in the mid-distance and the drone of helicopters casting their searchlight beams across the spectral slumscape.

In the ghetto, a church rally by the leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People had ended abruptly to the anger of his audience. The NAACP's president Kweisi Mfume had clasped hands with the still dazed mother of the boy whose shooting by a police officer had provoked the scenes of only 18 hours earlier—another first for Cincinnati since 1967: fury and shooting, burning and looting which—after two nights of the usual tragic wreckage within ghetto confines, had broken onto the white man's turf.

This time, cops were charging for real and the crowd was shooting back. This time, SWAT teams were throwing up barricades and their snipers leaping over rooftops. Every American riot tells a story, and on the surface it is the same: an incident undams years of tension between angry and poor black youths and a white police force stained by racism.

Like its northern counterparts, Cincinnati's slums were once middle-class neighbourhoods into which white Appalachian hillbillies moved first, then sharecroppers from the plantations in the great migration north. Time was when blacks taking the trains south from Cincinnati's great Union Terminal would have to occupy segregated compartments, while those arriving would be travelling with whites.

Cincinnati's ghetto is unique—indeed "ghetto" is hardly the right



The Ohio city was "one questionable shooting away from riots", and last week the inevitable happened.

term in an urban area that is 43 percent black. The community was founded by German immigrants and is one of America's nineteenth-century urban wonders. The world has seen these streets in the movie *Traffic*, with all its familiar ghetto hallmarks—ubiquitous porn shops and a rough-and-tumble summer street life.

It was here that Timothy Thomas was raised and drove his 1978 Chevy around. Eleven times since March 2000 he had been stopped by police and cited for 12 offences, mostly driving without carrying his licence or not wearing a seatbelt. The core of the row that rages not only here but across the US is that Timothy was victim of what is politely called "racial profiling"—that is, he was picked on because he was black.

Twice he ran from the police as they chased him and twice slipped the net, but the third time he died from a bullet fired by officer Steve Roach. He fell lifeless outside an abandoned building in a little alleyway,

number 1313 Republic Street, where the tributes are modest—bottles of wine or beer on his flagstone deathbed, and a placard: "No seatbelt equals death."

And so it does in Cincinnati, for it was not only Timothy's death that caused the rioting. Eighteen black men and boys have been shot dead by the police in Over-the-Rhine since the start of last year—a concentration of police violence that outstrips any other US city.

Although the mayor Charlie Luken is no Rudy Giuliani and admits to "a serious race relations problem", there are few northern cities in which blacks are so proportionately unrepresented in police or government. While unemployment is minimal among whites at 2 percent, it tops 20 percent in Over-the-Rhine; in schools there is almost total segregation. Current census figures show Greater Cincinnati to be the eighth most segregated metropolitan region in the US.

Another veteran who saw this

coming is Cecil Thomas, who left the police to head the city's Human Relations Commission. He warned that Cincinnati was "one questionable shooting away from riots." Last week he was in a group of 20 who formed a human wedge between an advancing crowd of youths and columns of riot police. The police advanced and a man called Larry Brenton shouted: "We need to take this fucking city down! I'm tired of getting up every morning and finding out someone else I knew has been murdered by the police."

Uprisings invariably throw up leaders and in this case the figure is Rev Damon Lynch. Pastor of the New Prospect Baptist Church in the heart of the ghetto, he said as he prepared to host the funeral of Timothy Thomas: "We've had 15 young blacks killed by the police since 1995 and seven since November—I call that consistent. In every case except one the officer was white." Cincinnati, he says, now incorporates, "the worst of the North and the worst of the South." He has a portrait of Martin Luther King on the wall and a Koran on the floor. "This is Easter time," he says, "Today is Good Friday and we mourn. Tomorrow we bury the kid, and on Sunday we look for the resurrection of our community. Three days of Easter."

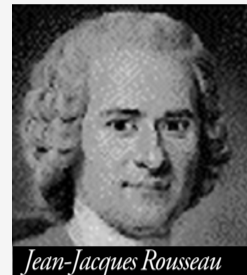
On Good Friday evening, women and the elderly chatter on steps beneath the fire escapes while the men collect in groups to banter. Riot police vans prowling the little streets, and choppers fly low above the rooftops. There's a bar called Race Cafi where drinkers are squeezing in a last Schlitz before curfew. "Maybe it'll blow," ponders Cyril Harris, 85, who has seen it all, from Alabama to the riots last time around. "Maybe it won't." ♦ *(The Observer)*

The myth of the Noble Savage

The Noble Savage, long attributed to eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was, in fact, a racist propaganda device of British anthropologists to create a climate where slavery and genocide could be mooted. The claim that Rousseau created the myth was made by one of the nineteenth century's most notorious racists to give weight to his belief in the notion of "inferior" races, according to a new book, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*.

Ter Ellingson, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Washington, believes the manipulation of the myth was part of a successful attempt by a faction of racist anthropologists to take over the anti-racist Ethnological Society in London in the late 1850s. The term "noble savage" was mentioned a handful of times before Rousseau, most notably by poet and playwright John Dryden, but Ellingson maintains it had fallen out of use until re-invoked by the racist anthropologist John Crawfurd in 1859. By attributing the myth to Rousseau, Crawfurd gave the notion intellectual weight.

Ellingson maintains that the myth was a vital tool, which enabled racist anthropologists such as Crawfurd to promote the centrality of race as a scientific ideology while advocating violently racist modes of ordering society. An unbroken three-month run of racist presentations followed the 1859 coup of the society's board and it was in the first of these lectures that Crawfurd demolished the illusion of savage nobility and denied any non-white race any right to equality. "Crawfurd's inaugural address was an announcement of the overthrow of the old ways and the ascendancy of a new anthropological racism and a new supporting mythology," said Ellingson. The myth of the Noble Savage then became a weapon in the Ethnological Society's scientific-racist project of helping to naturalise a genocidal stance towards "inferior" races. *(The Observer)*



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

EU relief ahead of UN meet

BRUSSELS - The European Commission has announced a raft of "practical measures" designed to help the world's poorest nations, including a "stronger targeting" of European Union (EU) aid on the most needy countries, the further extension of debt relief, and improved access to European markets. The decision was announced last week ahead of the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which the Commission is hosting in Brussels from 14-21 May.

The Commission, which is the EU executive body, will eliminate all debt owed by the 40 member states of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group that are among the world's 49 poorest countries, as defined by the United Nations. The move will free LDCs from having to repay some 60 million euros (\$54 million) worth of loans dispersed through the EU's European Development Fund, the instrument through which aid is given to ACP states, most of which are former European colonies. *(IPS)*

OPINION

by PETER SINGER



Americans, or ethics?

It may be defensible for president Bush to give some preference to American interests, but to place them above the interests of millions of others goes beyond what any ethical approach can justify.

Observing this, Timothy Garton Ash wrote: "It is a perverted moral code that allows a million innocent civilians of another race to be made destitute because you are not prepared to risk the life of a single professional soldier of your own." In Kosovo restricting intervention to aerial bombardment had this result: NATO forces suffered not a single casualty, but 300 Kosovar, 209 Serb and three Chinese civilians were killed.

This approach to the duties of a national leader, stated bluntly, forces us to consider a fundamental ethical issue. To what extent should political leaders see their role narrowly, and to what extent should they be concerned with the welfare of people everywhere? Romano Prodi, president of the EU Commission, and a former prime minister of Italy, responded to Bush's most recent statement by saying: "If one wants to be a

world leader, one must know how to look after the entire earth and not only American industry." But the question is not only for those aspiring to be world leaders. Leaders of smaller nations must also consider, in contexts like global warming, trade pacts, foreign aid and the treatment of refugees, to what extent they are prepared to consider the interests of "outsiders".

As Ash suggests, there is a strong ethical case for saying that it is wrong for leaders to give absolute priority to the interests of their own citizens. The value of the life of a human being does not vary according to nationality. Even the Bush administration put the lives of millions of HIV-infected Africans ahead of economic interests of American pharmaceutical corporations when it reaffirmed Clinton's executive order saying that the US would not prevent African

nations licensing their own manufacturers to produce cheap copies of drugs, even though American companies held the patents. If American interests always come first, that decision would be difficult to explain.

But, it might be said, the abstract ethical idea that all humans are entitled to equal consideration cannot govern the way we look at the duties of a political leader. Just as parents are expected to provide for the interests of their own children, rather than for the interests of strangers, in accepting the office of president, Bush assumed a specific role that makes it his duty to protect and further the interests of Americans. Other countries have their leaders, who have similar roles in respect to the interests of their fellow-citizens. There is no world political community. So long as that situation prevails, we must have nation-states and leaders of those nation-states must give preference to the interests of their citizens.

There is some truth in this. Without it, unless electors suddenly to turn into altruists of a kind never before seen on a large scale, democracy could not function. American voters would not elect a president who gave no more weight to their interests than to the interests of people living in other countries. Perhaps, given the global nature of the

problems we now face, this is an argument for a federalist world, rather than one divided into sovereign nation-states. But as long as that remains a lofty idea without political substance, our leaders will feel that they must give some degree of priority to the interests of their own citizens.

"Some degree", however, does not mean absolute priority. Abandoning the Kyoto accord, many believe, will threaten the lives of tens or hundreds of millions of people living in countries too poor to protect them from the consequences of climate change and rising sea levels. That is why Europeans, and people in many other countries are incensed at the casual way in which Bush assumed that "first things first are the people who live in America." It may be defensible for president Bush to give some preference to the economic interests of Americans, but to put them above the life-and-death interests of millions of human beings goes beyond what any ethical approach can justify. ♦ *(Project Syndicate)*

Peter Singer is Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, and the author, most recently, of *Writings on an Ethical Life*.



In explaining why he was abandoning the Kyoto accord on global warming, president Bush said: "We will not do anything that harms our economy, because first things first are the people who live in America." Those remarks should not have surprised anyone who followed the American election. In the second presidential debate, George W. Bush was asked how he would use America's global power and influence. He said that he would use it to benefit all Americans.

These remarks would not have surprised anyone who studied the speeches of the President's father. Bush Sr. said much the same thing

almost a decade ago, at the 1992 "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro. When representatives of developing nations asked him to put the over-consumption of resources by developed countries, especially the US, on the agenda he said that "the American life-style is not up for negotiation"—no matter what, or so it seemed to his audience, the costs to others might be.

But it is not only the Bush administration that put the interests of Americans first. In the Balkans, the Clinton-Gore administration made it clear that it was not prepared to risk the life of a single American in order to reduce the risk of civilian casualties.

The inevitable enemy?

The damaged US Navy EP-3E on Hainan island.



In the history of Sino-US ties crisis has a new formula: danger plus opportunity.

Look at the recent history of relations between the US and China provides an interesting perspective on the current situation. The last few decades were characterised by considerable vicissitudes throughout which the Sino-American relationship showed itself to be fragile yet durable. Each crisis was followed by incremental improvement. Indeed, crisis has become a new formula: danger plus opportunity.

Progress and problems are two

sides of one coin. To keep up the momentum of progress, both China and the United States should handle problems properly, especially at a time when the new Bush administration is just starting, and when China faces a new succession of top leadership next year. The six US presidents from Nixon to Clinton helped establish a bipartisan consensus of continuing a stable relationship between our two great nations. They have maintained a One China policy. I think this is the legacy of our

mutual relationship for the new Bush Administration. This is the framework set up by the top leadership from China and the United States.

Two years ago we used to summarise the differences between the United States and China as the Six Ts: the theft of nuclear technology, and TMD (Theatre Missile Defence), trade problems, Tibet, Taiwan, and the Tiananmen Square-related human rights issue. Now, I prefer to sum up our problems or concerns by three Ss

and two Ts: First, what should be our strategic goal? Should we be competitors, opponents, or adversaries? After Jiang Zemin's visit to the United States in 1997 and President Clinton's trip to China the following year, both leaders decided to establish a strategic partnership in the next century.

Today a shift is likely. The new secretary of state Colin Powell said at his Senate hearing, "China is not a strategic partner, China is a competitor. And China will probably become a potential regional adversary, but China is not an inevitable enemy in the future."

The good news is that China is not regarded as an enemy. The not-so-good news is that there is a tendency to downgrade our strategic goal from partnership to competition and even below. This worries Beijing.

The second question relates to strategic policy. Despite elements of ambiguity, a policy of engagement dominated US-China relations for almost eight years. Will it now become a limited engagement, constrained engagement, or even constraint instead of

engagement—or something new?

The new administration has kept silent on this matter thus far, maybe because the re-shuffle of the China team has not been completed. It's still too early to review their China policy.

As for security, the new administration's attitude towards NMD (National Missile Defence) and TMD is a major concern in Beijing. It seems that the new administration will proceed with the NMD programme, and we can see that a clash is taking place now over this issue, which makes people very worried, at least in Beijing, and even Shanghai.

If the US proceeds with missile defence in close co-operation with Japan, and if China becomes closer with Russia in response, a dangerous situation will arise. This is another concern or problem of Sino-Soviet relations.

The biggest issue confronting the new US president is likely to be Sino-US conflict over Taiwan. The Bush Administration has emphasised that it will continue to live up to its obligations to meet the defence needs of Taiwan, in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).

It has been reported recently that if Beijing continues to deploy missiles opposite Taiwan, this will affect Washington's arms sales policy. We

do not think that this is fair. Instead, this issue should depend as much on American behaviour as Chinese behaviour. If the United States reduces its arms sales to Taiwan, Beijing will definitely reciprocate.

China and the United States should look at their relationship strategically, from a broad perspective, and not only with a view to problem-solving. They should seek out common ground while retaining their differences, partly by strengthening and improving the mechanisms of mutual dialogue. Both sides need to re-evaluate how to view each other in the best interests of the Chinese and American people and of peace and development.

The bottom line is that China and the United States cannot and should not be enemies. We should avoid confrontation and become partners in competition. As long as our countries promote consensus, continue our contact, enhance trust, reduce trouble, avoid confrontation and strengthen co-operation, then China and the United States will be able to make new contributions to the peace, stability and prosperity of the world. ♦ (IPS)

Shixiong Ni is a professor at Fudan University, China.

Small arms, big problems

TOM FAWTHROP IN PHNOM PENH

After three decades of conflict, relative peace has come to Cambodia. But war has left a dangerous legacy—the country is awash with landmines and deadly small arms and explosives in illicit hands—making this nation a haven for the region's illicit small arms trade.

Since 1998 when the conflict ended, the government has campaigned to collect and destroy surplus arms and weapons. At a small arms conference in Tokyo in March, Hok Lundy, the country's police chief reported that over 107,000 weapons had been collected and more than 40,000 destroyed by the end of 2000. "This is the first country where the government started the process of destruction [of surplus arms] before they received international support," says retired Dutch General Henny van der Graaf, who manages a European Union project to rid Cambodia of privately-held small arms.

But the EU believes that the hundreds of thousands of firearms still out there can potentially threaten Cambodia's hard-won stability at any time. The EU is funding a special project in support of the government's arms collection campaign by financing a Weapons for Development programme. This pilot project is located in Snoul district in Kratie province, 250 km from the capital and close to the eastern border with Vietnam.

The programme hopes to mobilise public opinion for the call to surrender all weapons in exchange for funds to build schools, health clinics and roads. The EU is also providing \$300,000 to build safe storage facilities for weapons, ammunition and explosives in Kompong Cham province and developing an arms registration system.

An international conference on small arms proliferation and trade in the Asia Pacific held in Phnom Penh in February 2001 noted that many post-war societies are plagued with terrorism and organised crime that are fuelled by the huge stocks of arms floating around. This in turn undermines security and development; so countries can be locked in a cycle of conflict and poverty.

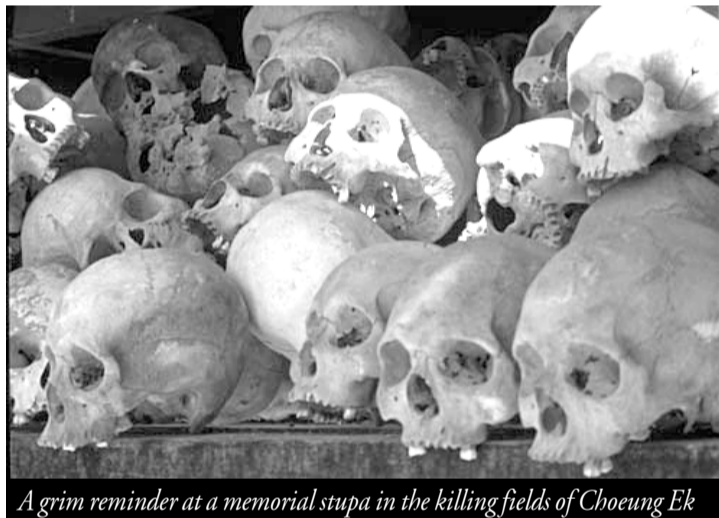
Two examples of post-conflict terrorism were attacks launched by a small Cambodian-American group calling itself the Cambodian Freedom Fighters, based in Long Beach, California. The CFF, composed of Khmer Rouge guerrillas committed to the violent overthrow of the Hun Sen government, staged an attack on a petrol depot in April 2000 and opened fire on the Ministry of Defence in November. The automatic rifles used by the CFF were mostly bought from disgruntled soldiers or ex-soldiers.

The Cambodian newspaper Rasmey Kampuchea estimates there are up to 900,000 unregistered small arms, even though the armed forces number only 140,000. The UN mission to Cambodia (UNTAC) reported in 1993 that the soldiers of all four Cambodian armies at the time had between them a total of 320,443 light weapons. Even these figures are unreliable as all sides maintained secret arms caches, especially Khmer Rouge rebels who never abandoned the ultimate aim to regain power through arms.

A foreign military expert puts the figure at around half a million. Illegal arms—on the black market or with the public—are said to number between 250,000 and 400,000. The Working Group for Weapon Reduction in Cambodia (WGWR), a local nongovernment organisation in the province of Kompong Thom, has found that every household claims to have at least one gun.

In the next five years the Ministry of Defence plans to demobilise another 55,000 soldiers and reintegrate them into civil society. Since 1993, some 23,000 have been reintegrated. International donors, anxious to prevent Cambodian demobilisation turning into a destabilising nightmare, have pledged \$45 million in support of reducing the armed forces and returning soldiers to civil society.

Another problem, says Neb Sinthay of WGWR, is the absence of an



A grim reminder at a memorial stupa in the killing fields of Choeung Ek

Three decades of conflict have left Cambodia highly militarised and a centre for the region's illicit arms trade.

effective registration system and safe storage of the government's "legal arms": often a vicious cycle results, in which "legal weapons" are sold off by poorly-paid soldiers, while illegal weapons that are confiscated once again become "legal weapons".

There is no dearth of buyers for arms on the Cambodian black market. Burmese rebel groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from Sri Lanka (they arranged several small arms shipments from a curry restaurant in Phnom Penh in 1998-9) and supporters of Acehnese secessionists in Indonesia are among those shopping in this busy arms bazaar. In spite of the government's crackdown on the illegal arms trade, at Teuk Thla market in Phnom Penh traders still take orders for weapons. In March the price of an AK47 automatic gun had dropped to \$40 after police action helped depress demand. But pistols still fetched around \$1,000 apiece.

Sinthay, who visited the gun traders in March was surprised that demands for more modern hardware could be met. "If you want to place an order for a new model it takes only 2-3 weeks to arrive in Phnom Penh. We can get you anything except a tank," an arms dealer told Sinthay.

There is another hitch: EU experts note that Cambodian authorities are reluctant to destroy all the weapons they have collected from civilians and former militias. They argue that still-usable weapons are sorely needed as reserves, as the Cambodian armed forces have no funds to purchase new weapons.

The government's arms control campaigns have targeted 10 out of 23 provinces, resulting in the mass destruction of firearms in so-called 'Flames of Peace' public ceremonies. But EU officials while appreciative of good results so far—approximately 40 per cent of all weapons collected have been destroyed—are insisting that surplus stocks held as reserves are also burnt. The tussle—reflected in the Cambodian experience of post-war transition and its attempts to control the arms legacy—is set to be closely studied at the UN Conference on Small Arms in New York in July this year. ♦ (Gemini)

Tom Fawthrop is a British journalist who covers South-East Asia for several newspapers. He is currently working on a book about Cambodia's genocide tribunal.

No curry, FMD worry

A way of seeing the so-called Third World came to Britain's dining tables in recent weeks—or rather, went off it. Political prejudice has come to change the evening meal. Indian cuisine is the most popular in Britain by far, with an estimated turnover of over \$3 billion a year. Chinese comes next. But the affair between the British and Indian and Chinese food staled after news reports that the foot-and-mouth epidemic was caused by food from India and China.

First it was a report that the disease had originated in India. Then that contaminated Chinese food fed to pigs started the epidemic. Both stories were carried widely and neither was substantiated. But the damage was done—business in Indian and Chinese cuisine is reported down an average 40 per cent. Last week over 1,000 Chinese took to the streets of London in a protest march from London's Chinatown to the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF). The reports blaming contaminated food from China had been attributed to "sources" in the ministry. They carried posters attacking media rumours that the disease had originated from Chinatown in Newcastle Upon Tyne in north England.

Agriculture Minister Nick Brown apologised to the demonstrators about the "source" in his ministry and said he despised the "underlying racialism." He also blamed the media, saying such rumours "should not have been reproduced by the press." But some newspapers continued to report that waste from Chinatown in Newcastle Upon Tyne had found its way to the farm where the disease is said to have originated. (IPS)

Derailing Track II

NEW DELHI - Newly revealed Indian government curbs on delegates from some nations attending international conferences in the country, have triggered loud protests. The organisers of such meetings will now have to get the ministry's prior approval if they expect participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan or Sri Lanka. Meetings that "have a bearing on external relations", must also be cleared by the foreign ministry. The interior ministry has also advised against inviting foreign delegates if the conference is of a "political, semi-political, communal or religious nature or...related to human rights...which can be utilised as a platform for any particular line of propaganda."

The order was issued last year, and though supposed to have been publicised widely, was actually revealed in April. Leading Indian peace activist and women's leader Mohini Giri says the order is absurd because it duplicates what the foreign ministry is already doing when it grants visas to delegates, and is contrary to government claims of promoting peace with arch-foe Pakistan by encouraging people-to-people contacts.

The so-called Track-Two diplomacy has acquired great importance specially after the two South Asian rivals tested nuclear weapons in May 1998. Kuldip Nayar, member of the upper house of Parliament and former Indian envoy to Britain, accuses the government of "trying to stall people-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan through the order".

But it is the tourist industry that is likely to be hurt most. "The organisers of conferences and seminars will now prefer to hold them in places like Dhaka or Kathmandu where there are far less hassles," says a tour operator who specialises in conference management. (IPS)

"The peoples' warriors cannot be blamed..."

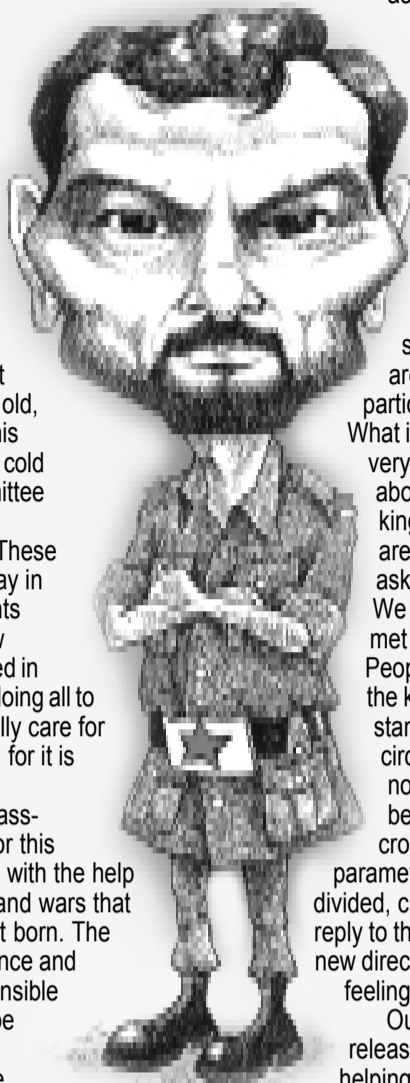
Dr Babu Ram Bhattarai in Kantipur, 13 April

After the military action last September [Dunai], the importance of simultaneous military action in the five districts, especially in Rukum and Dailekh, is of great importance. It is important for those swimming in the dirty well of parliament and those who do not understand the importance of a people's war, to understand the importance and gravity of this action. It is normal for those who have always followed and supported an oppressive, class-ridden society to look the other way or proclaim that they do not understand this struggle. This is not unusual behaviour on their part. It is a tragedy that these very people pick up a 60-year old, Biseswor Pokhrel, who was a respected person of his community, take him to a jungle and shoot him dead in cold blood in an "encounter". They picked up central committee member Danda Pani Neupane, 55, from the streets in Kathmandu, and his whereabouts are still unknown. These actions show that these people will do anything to stay in power, have no feelings, do not believe in human rights and are not humanitarian. These very people are now shedding crocodile tears for the armed policemen killed in Rukum and Dailekh. The media under their control is doing all to make us believe that these power-hungry people really care for common folk and work for their benefit. This is tragic, for it is the creation of a mirage.

But we haven't just discovered the issues in a class-based society, a class struggle or a class war. It is for this class, reactionary and opportunistic, which has ruled with the help of guns, to take responsibility for all class struggles and wars that have taken place from when a class society was first born. The people who have taken up arms to clean and clear, once and for all, this class-ridden society cannot be held responsible for all the violence. These people's warriors cannot be blamed. In the present scenario, if you analyse the working of people's war groups, they always, before attacking a police station, ask the policemen to come out and surrender. We still have recorded tapes that support this statement and they will be made available to those who want to listen. Incidents have made it clear that it is only after policemen refused to surrender that the people's army took action to disarm and capture these policemen, and took control of police stations. The people's army only fired when fired upon.

After policemen surrendered or were captured, it is clear that all efforts were made and are still being made to provide them proper security. It is clear that those policemen who refused to surrender and fired upon the people's army in Rukum, Dailekh, Dolakha and Palpa died in the crossfire while those who surrendered in Dhading were not killed or tortured. The government has created a lot of problems for those policemen who surrendered. They have made life hell for these people who joined the police in search of a better life. This shows the mindset of a reactionary and opportunist class. Then, the ruling class makes a mockery of people's sentiment and states loudly and clearly that children had to complete the last rites of their fallen parents. And at the same time the children of our fallen comrade and alternate politburo member Suresh Wagle were not given this right. The question now is not of sentiments but of the parameters and rules of war. We request all those who are connected with this to always remember this.

The incident that created a storm in a teacup recently was when leaders of our party met leaders of political parties and also met Ramesh Nath Pandey. Definitely, under the guidelines of our party and under the leadership of comrade Prachanda, some of our leaders did meet him. There is nothing to hide or feel ashamed about. In fact, we met many leaders, of left-leaning parties and also those in no way associated with leftist forces. We wanted to make public who our leaders met from other parties, but some leaders requested us not to make their names public and therefore we could not do so. We are not holding these meetings with any hidden agenda. It is out in the open, without any agenda other than that which will benefit the nation and the people. We will continue this



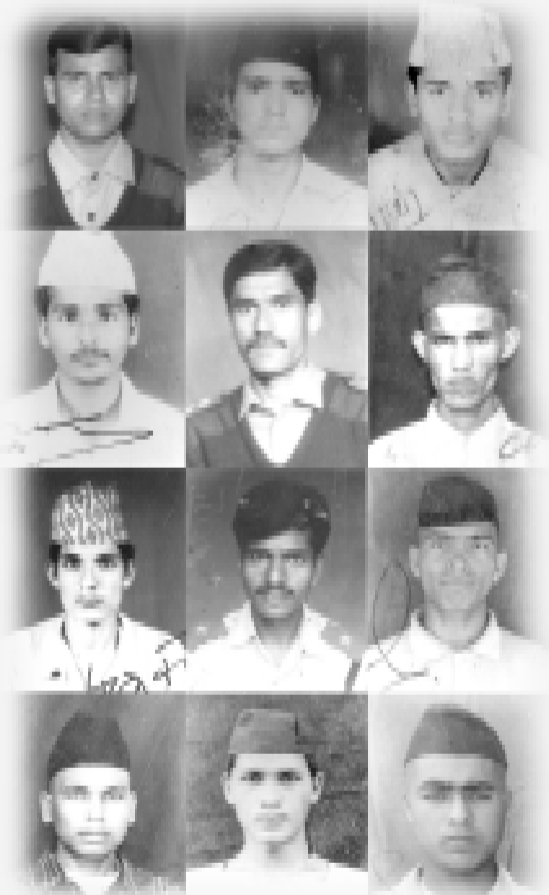
as long as we feel that it is of some benefit to the country. Everyone knows of our intentions and we will continue to meet leaders of all parties who understand that the nation is going through hard times. We feel that it is necessary to continue a dialogue with all political parties and not only with the government—after all, who knows when it will fall.

Our party feels that these meetings have brought out into the open the different positions of various political parties. The political thinking of all parties has been made very clear. What is very surprising is that our meetings with various leaders are being pushed to the sidelines and only that particular meeting with Pandey is being highlighted. What is the motive behind this? We are surprised that the very people we met are now raising a hue and cry about our meeting with Pandey. Since Pandey is a king's nominee in parliament, we feel that many people are sowing doubts in the minds of the people, by asking if we are really opening channels to the palace. We knew Pandey was the king's nominee and we still met him. People should not be in two minds about this. People should realise that we met him not because he is the king's nominee but because of his personal standing. In fact, people should realise that if circumstances demand, then we revolutionaries will not shy away from directly meeting even the king. We believe that, in these trying times when we are at the crossroads, revolutionaries must widen their thinking, parameters and minds. We will rise over and above this divided, class-ridden society and will give a fitting reply to those Indian stooges and opportunists. We will give new direction to the nation and ingrain in people nationalist feelings.

Our party leader Prachanda, in his latest press release, has again made clear that our party is all about helping the nation in these difficult times and that we will do all that we can to provide relief to the nation. He has clearly stated that our party is ready to help in finding a solution. For this to happen, we again state that a dialogue without any preconditions must be held. All that we want is that the demands that we made when Padma Ratna Tuladhar first got in touch with us should be fulfilled. One of the demands is that a complete list of all people missing or held should be made public and their whereabouts declared. I do not think that there can be any simpler or more flexible demand than that. What is more important is that, at a time when there is massive infighting within the ruling party and when the prime minister is caught in massive corruption charges, the government may not be capable of making the right moves—to even hope that the right moves will be made is foolish. It is not difficult to comprehend, after listening to Koirala's stooges, that they are prepared to take the country down with them and that they are quite capable of it.

How the ruling party is going to act is the topic of all discussions nowadays. We hope that there are elements within the ruling party that will sidetrack the fascist, anti-national and corrupt Koirala faction and try and solve the many problems that the country is facing. We sincerely believe that there are elements within the Congress who will be able to create the right atmosphere and conditions under which a dialogue can be held. Also, if we are really serious about solving the problems of this nation, then we should clearly define the parameters under which we can get down to work. Our second party convention has made the parameters clear: an all-party conference should be held, a national conference should be held, an all-party interim government should be formed. Then, elections should

be held to the constitutional assembly and this assembly should finally draft a people's constitution. For the last five years we have been waging a people's war and have had many successes. We are now proposing the simplest and easiest ways that the problems of this nation can be solved. We feel that all responsible parties and people ought to take this our proposals seriously and give them some thought. We are very hopeful that people will do that. ♦



Twelve of the 68 policemen killed in Maoist attacks in Rukumkot and Naumule two weeks ago.

Explanation not needed

Budhabar Saptahik, 11 April

It has been recently reported that the Maoists looted money that was to be distributed to the aged in Salyan district. Salyan has been identified as an "A class district", which means Maoists have a strong influence there. Of the Rs 30,000 that was to be distributed in Dhargi Pipal Village Development Committee in Salyan, Maoists looted Rs 25,700. The people's war appears to need the sacrifice of children, the blood of the aged and the innocent. This incident has shown how the happiness of the elderly can be stolen—this is what Maoists resort to. Only Rs 4,300 could be distributed before the Maoists struck.

Since no one had informed the Maoists that money was being distributed, they got angry and looted the village and the cash. This was the only way of venting their frustration. This action shows the behaviour and working of the Maoists' minds. It shows their thinking, and needs no explanation.

Language of orders

Dhurba Adhikary in Punajagaran Saptahik, 10 April

Last week the editor of a newspaper made a forceful request: "The prime minister should resign." In the same manner, using the same words, the leader of the opposition too made this demand. It is something to be applauded that within a span of nine months an editor has asked the prime minister to resign. You must consider the editor brave.

He reasoned thus: at the present moment, there are two governments in many parts of the country—the Koirala government and that of the Maoists. The people cannot accept such a situation and therefore one of them should resign. It must be the Koirala government that should resign. This, in short, was the editor's logic. This clearly shows that the Maoists won't be happy for long. After all, opportunistic behaviour is not beneficial to anyone in the long run.

Paid holidays

Samadristi National Weekly, 15 April

Accusing the prime minister of corruption in the Lauda Air issue, the opposition did not let parliament conduct even a single day's business in parliament. Many bills could not be presented and two ordinances could not be acted upon. The prime minister decided the best



tactic was an eye for an eye, and he is not prepared to step down at all. Now, the UML is all set to stop him from entering parliament. Meanwhile, questions have been raised over allowances members of parliament receive

while attending the sittings of the House. Only one MP, Narayan Singh Pun, stated publicly that he would not take the allowance he is entitled to, because no work was done during the session.

According to sources at the parliament secretariat, an MP gets a daily allowance of Rs 200 and Rs 150 a day for taxi fare when the House is in session. The House was to meet for 25 days in the 57-day winter session this year, but the opposition boycotted all these days. An MP is therefore entitled to Rs 11,400 for 57 days in allowances, and Rs 3,750 rupees as taxi fare for 25 days. So the total allowance expenditure for 265 MPs for 57 days works out to Rs 3.02 million and the total transport allowance Rs 993,000. Besides this, MPs also get funds to buy air tickets to their constituencies. Now what are these MPs going to do? "To take or not to take" is the question.

Oli returns money

Drishti Vernacular Weekly, 10 April

Deputy leader of the UML in parliament and standing committee member of the UML, KP Oli has publicly stated that he will return the money he received from the Political Sufferers Fund. The fund had granted him Rs 75,000.

Inaugurating a program held by INSEC, Oli said he was going to return the money. He stated that the fund was being misused and the actual political sufferers were not benefiting in any way. According to him the fund was benefiting the very people who were active during the Panchayat regime. He said he felt ashamed and disgraced by the way the fund was being used. He also said that if he returned the money to the government then it would be misused and the people would not benefit from the fund—



he did not believe in the government and so he would donate it to a social organisation or an honest charity. Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai is the chairman of the one-member committee that administers the Political Sufferers Fund.

Deepening mystery

Dhurba Adhikary in Punajagaran Saptahik, 10 April

One of the 10 people nominated by the king to the Upper House has met two Maoist leaders. He has already made news of the meeting public, and the deputy prime minister has reportedly termed it "mysterious". After the attack on the police station in Dailekh, the situation has not only become more mysterious but also more grave. Directly or indirectly, the monarchy has been drawn into the picture. Therefore the royal palace should not remain silent now. The palace should provide an explanation or counter speculation, and react in some way to defuse the situation. In 1991 (2047), when the palace was embroiled in the BCCI issue, it reacted publicly in some way.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Even foreigners have started commenting on corruption in Nepal. How can everyone be blamed for one person's corrupt actions?
—reacting to reports of the US ambassador's speech at the 50th anniversary of USAID, in Kantipur, 3 February, 2001

Foreign forces don't have any right to comment on Nepal's internal affairs. Some foreigners are feeding saline to the Nepali Congress government but this act won't save this government.
—reacting to more recent comments by the US ambassador on constitutional process, in Budhabar, 18 April, 2001

Madhav Kumar Nepal, CPN-UML General Secretary's reactions to the American ambassador's comments on two occasions.

Hungry Sir Alex

JOHN GREECHAN

Sir Alex Ferguson's personal value system dictates that, title or no title, his reputation rests on winning the Champions League at least once more before he stands down. Others are happy to judge him purely by his achievements—and hail him, prematurely perhaps, as the greatest manager in history.

Former Manchester United stalwart Steve Bruce, a rock on whom Sir Alex built his first champion Old Trafford team, believes the weekend's third straight Premiership title has already established Ferguson as a manager without rival. Bruce said: "Look at the trophies he's won. Has anyone been more successful? To win so many things, with two clubs as well, is quite staggering. He has to be one of the true greats. We talk about Sir Matt, Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, but I think in many people's eyes he's better than any of them."

Bruce is obviously biased towards the former Aberdeen manager who bought him from Norwich, then teamed him with Gary Pallister and provided the guidance for an honours-laden playing career. There is warmth as the pupil, once seen as a successor to Ferguson, talks about the master—though his argument is still based on logic. "His big strength is his hunger and desire to keep on winning," said Bruce. "Once he's won something, it's just on to winning it again and again. That's in you—you're either a winner or not—and he's got it in abundance. It is the key to United's success. The players he surrounds himself with are usually winners, too. He met me at the airport when he signed me from Norwich and I could tell right away that, under all this stern exterior, this aggressiveness, there was a great sense of humour and a charm about him."

It says much about the club's development, not to mention Ferguson's priorities, that it would be considered a catastrophe to exit Europe's premier club competition



Manchester United's Sir Alex Ferguson is being hailed as the greatest manager ever. Now Man U needs to win the Championship.

even at this late stage. Bruce bears the scars of an earlier age, when European football was just one long game of catch-up for United—who occasionally had their hands and feet tied together. The new Wigan manager, remember, scored the first goal in United's remarkable Cup-winners' Cup Final victory over Barcelona almost a decade ago. It was to prove a turning point. "That was a huge springboard for United because it was the first year English clubs were allowed back into Europe," said Bruce. "It was great United were at the forefront and to beat mighty Barcelona gave us all confidence. Winning the FA Cup in 1990 gave us the belief to compete in Europe, but the big thing for that squad was to go on and win the League. It had been 26 years since United had won the title, so it reminds you of what a huge thing it was."

Regular domestic success followed, but conquering Europe took a little longer. Bruce recalled: "In the 1994 Champions League, it was unfortunate because we couldn't play our best side because of the three-foreigner rule. With me, Pally, Denis Irwin and Paul

Parker at the back, Peter Schmeichel behind us, Ryan Giggs and Andrei Kanchelskis out wide with Paul Ince and Roy Keane in the centre, then Mark Hughes and Eric Cantona up front—it was a very, very good team. But we had to go to places like Barcelona without Schmeichel and Cantona. It would have been lovely for the '94 team to have had a run in Europe but we had one arm tied behind our backs."

You could almost hear Ferguson talking as Bruce added: "All of us, once we'd won the League, wanted to go on and win the European Cup. It took until 1999 for the club to do it and, if you're looking for the next progression, they've been to the quarter-finals twice and won it once in the last three years—so they're getting to the stage where they're among the best teams, if not the best team in Europe." Maybe, if a second Champions League title is attained, even Ferguson himself will allow the mantle of "best ever" to rest easily on his shoulders. For now, he will just have to deal with others pressing his claims. ♦ (soccernet)

Olympic politicking

There is growing concern amongst members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) over the sudden decision by outgoing president Juan Antonio Samaranch to introduce rules for the election battle for the most powerful job in the world of sport.

Only five months ago Samaranch announced in Lausanne that there were no rules for the candidates battling to replace him when he stands down this July. But since then the 80-year-old former Spanish diplomat had a change of mind and requested the IOC's ethics commission to draw up a list of campaign rules which it unveiled earlier this month.

Candidates are barred from having meetings to push their case, banned from colluding with one another and trips to visit members to promote their campaign are limited. All IOC members are banned from announcing who they support.

"Frankly the whole thing smacks of manipulation. Samaranch knows who he wants to replace him and the rules appear to clearly favour his chosen candidate," one IOC member told the media. Another member described the campaign laws as "draconian." "I have never seen anything like them," he said. "It's like going back to the Stalin era." Although none of the five candidates, Jacques Rogge, Kim Un-Yong, Dick Pound, Anita DeFrantz and Pal Schmitt have publicly criticised the rules, at least three are believed to have privately announced their anger to friends.

According to several sources, Samaranch favours Rogge to replace him and that he had to be recently talked out of coming out and giving his public support to the Belgian surgeon. Publicly Samaranch has always refused to comment on the race to succeed him. "All the candidates are strong," he has repeatedly said. One suggestion doing the rounds of IOC members on three continents is that Samaranch is concerned by the growing strength of Kim's election campaign. Despite being given a severe warning over his part in the Salt Lake City scandal, the 70-year-old Kim is being touted as the strongest contender to challenge Rogge, who is seen as the front-runner thanks to his large European power base. "Kim is very strong and getting stronger," said one IOC member. "It would be a great mistake if anyone was to underestimate him. Like Rogge, he has a powerful power base."

If either men falter before the 16 July election, Canada's Dick Pound would quickly fill the gap. The IOC marketing supremo has frequently been used by Samaranch in the past to "clean up". It was the 59-year-old Pound who Samaranch called on to sort out the Salt Lake scandal. His inquiry led to the expulsion of six members and the resignation of four others. He was also put in charge of setting up the World Anti-Drug Agency. "Dick is bright, clever, and a doer," said one supporter of the former Olympic swimmer.

But critics claim that it is his outspokenness that will harm him. "We need someone in charge who understands politics. Not someone who shoots from the hip," one member said. American Anita DeFrantz and Hungarian diplomat Pal Schmitt have also thrown their names into the ring but both are considered outsiders. (sportsfeatures)



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PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Mr. Michael Pickles - Student Services Manager, Central College Nepal is now available for confidential interviews in Kathmandu.

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SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

The gate of the vermilion god

The palace is centuries old and in all probability it stands on older foundations. Built partly by the Malla kings, it was added to by the Gorkha monarch Prithvi Narayan Shah when he overran the Valley of Kathmandu in 1768. The autocratic Ranas who held sway for 104 years added a touch of Kathmandu colonial. The present king, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, who resides in a modern palace a couple of miles away, has had the ancient buildings painstakingly restored rather than added to.

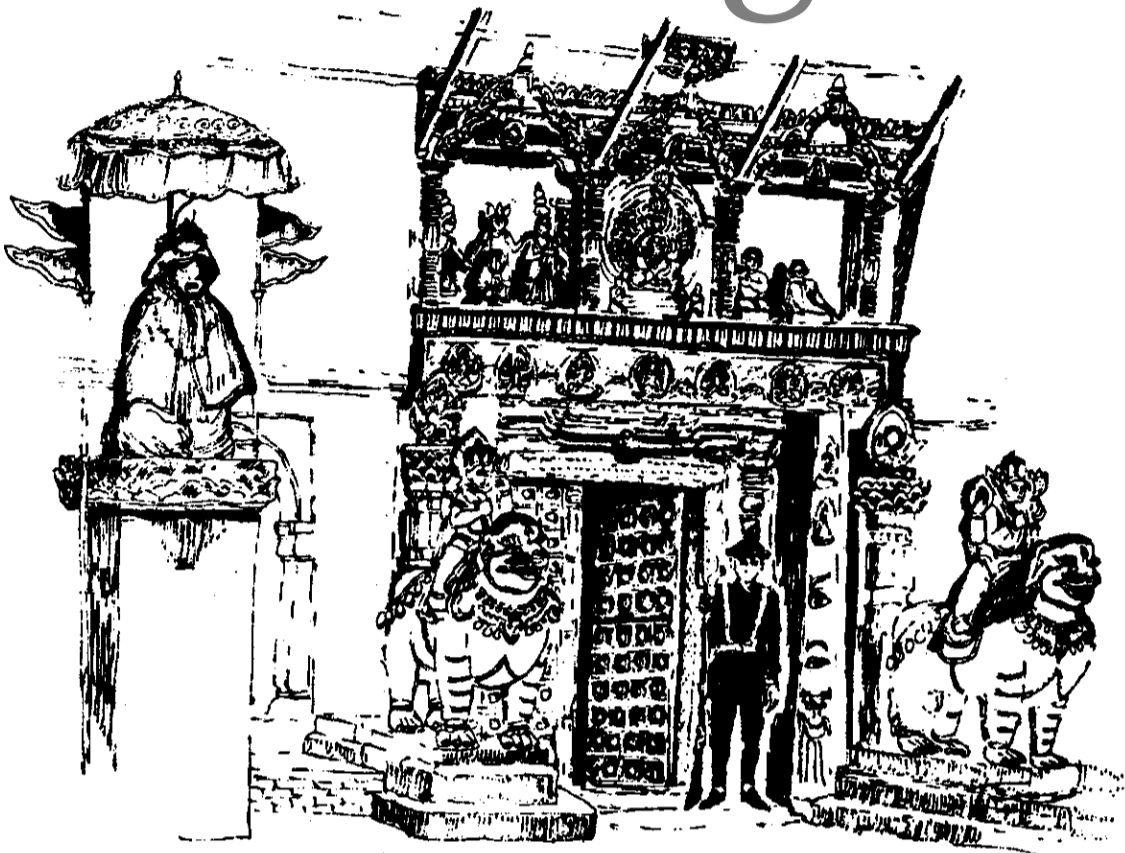
Partly open to the public, the old Darbar is a gem set in the centre of the city. There are at least ten courtyards or *chouks*, embellished with polished brick and exquisitely carved wood, gilded metal intricately fashioned, white plaster tracery on white plaster, carved stone, painted wood, and a brilliance of statuary and temples.

There is but one common gateway to all this magnificence—a golden doorway known as the Hanuman Dhoka. It takes its name from the kneeling figure of Hanuman that guards the gate, a statue covered with years of votive dress and vermilion that it has lost its shape.

A mouth silently snarls in the scarlet, featureless face. Scarlet robes drape its powerful figure. A tinsel-edged scarlet cloth covers its head and eyes. Tourist guides will tell you that his eyes are veiled to prevent him from seeing the erotic carvings on the nearby Jagannath temple. He is shielded by a painted Nepali umbrella that is changed once a year. And attended by youths who climb like monkeys onto the high pedestal to offer votive offerings and give prasad in return.

Hanuman was greatly regarded by the Mallas who claimed descent from Ram Chandra. His image is seen in all the old palaces of the Valley and countless are his shrines. The vermilion Hanuman at the old Kathmandu palace gate was erected at the command of King Pratap Malla in 1672. At that time, the palace gateway was probably made of heavy wood and iron. In 1810 the reigning Gorkha king decided upon the extravagance of a golden gate. There was one of exceptional beauty in the royal palace at Bhadgaon and great was the rivalry between these cities.

Unfortunately, the basic copper from which the gate was fashioned



Hanuman Dhoka takes its name from the kneeling figure of Hanuman that guards the gate, a statue covered with years of votive dress and vermilion.

was obtained by melting down plates inscribed with the history of Kathmandu, and so were lost invaluable records of earlier rulers and their times. But then history is full of such careless excesses. Looking at the handsome gate today one is just happy it is there. Though he didn't know it at the time, the king was providing a tourist attraction that sets thousands of cameras clicking today.

As I sat sketching, an American matron insisted her husband take yet another shot of the gate, this time without her. When he hesitated, she said, "Go on honey, it's real gold." Well, he might have wished the same of her.

Beside the awesome Hanuman, the gate is guarded by Shiva and Shakti riding lions; painted stone statues that predate the vermilion monkey god. Above the golden doorway and a panel of painted deities are three groups of figures.

One is of Krishna and two *gopinis*. Another is probably of King Pratap Malla and his queen, and the third is thought to represent a scene from the Mahabharat.

Supplementing all these divine forces are two Gorkha guards, one dressed in the ancient black and white uniform of Prithvi Narayan's soldiers, armed with a musket, long bayonet fixed, that makes it taller than the man, and the other in modern army green, carrying a cane. The black uniformed troops attend every important festival, carrying standards and flags as old as the history of the Gurkhas and marching to the music of flutes and drums.

A small fee gets one through the gate into the palace. Rather, into the Nasal Chowk, the largest courtyard in the sprawl of royal buildings. Legend has it that King Pratap Malla, a poet and dancer of renown, once dressed and danced publicly as Narsingh,

which so infuriated the god he cursed the king to dance forever. The king's passionate pleading and his promise to have a statue worthy of the god made and installed at the spot lifted the curse. Just inside the gate is a striking black marble image of Narsingh decorated with gold and silver: the king's penance.

It is in the Nasal Chowk, looked down upon by many splendoured towers and temple spires, that the Shah kings are crowned. Distinguished visitors crowd three sides of the courtyard, a military honour guards the fourth. According to ancient Vedic rites and at the exact moment considered most auspicious the king is crowned, his queen by his side. They then sit on a golden throne, under a canopy of raised serpent heads, and the royal couple accept the homage of all present.

The king and queen arrive through the Hanuman Dhoka dressed in simple homespun and leave in silks and brocades, magnificently crowned and bejewelled. Outside waits the royal tusk, richly caparisoned, which leads a procession of howdah elephants through the main streets of Kathmandu.

Kings, queens, nobles, courtiers, conspirators, assassins, plenispotentaries, invaders, soothsayers, priests; the gate of the monkey god has seen them all. And now it is the turn of the tourists. Perhaps King Pratap Malla foresaw their coming when he had erected, near the gate, a slab of stone engraved in several languages, a word in English, a couple in French. Obviously no one told him about Spaniards, Japanese and Russians. ♦

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

Benju Sharma FEMALE DESIRE

The female body is strangely absent in the literature of Nepali women. Men have sporadically written "high literature" on the female body, and Nepali pornography is of course centred on this subject, but by and large, women writers, even those who take up feminist concerns, have refrained from writing openly about the female body. A kind of Hindu prudery prevails in women's literature: love is shown as a play of pure emotions; sexuality is either absent or muted; desire is (often heavily) metaphorised; ancient cultural allusions (to Draupadi, Radha, Sita, Meera) substitute for a more direct, more contemporary address to women's free will. A few women writers do address the issue of female sexuality, and of the female body, in the context of the economic and psychological exploitation of women—a very important angle, to be sure, yet no one writes to claim the strength, resilience and beauty of the female body, no one writes on women's complex pleasures: there is no Nepali Anaïs Nin. The effect of this silence on the part of women is that the literary representation of the female body remains in the control of men writers; and women are assigned the subordinate position of reading men's writings on their own bodies.



KUMAR ALE

In her poems, Benju Sharma goes as far as any Nepali woman writer in giving voice to female desire. In our small, everyone-knows-everyone, nosy, critical, gossippy, petty-minded and ultra-conservative society, it is no mean task for a woman to risk her personal social standing by writing as Sharma does. The piece below echoes the refrain of some of her best poems: an uninhibited request for love and pleasure. It exemplifies the boldest writing on female desire by a woman writer—and also perhaps points to the need for women to be even more intrepid in laying full claim to their bodies.



OS

COME

Spring
come in the lips of
tender buds
Come red and fiery
sprouting passion on
cheeks ripened
by the scarlet of rhododendrons
Take me soaring
on the wings of horses
neighing far above
purple jacaranda trees
Binding me in the clasp of
velvety tips of green grass
slash through all these bars
with your sword
and seat me in a honeycomb
overflowing with
the elixir of bees
Set me on a dinghy
bobbling on swelling waves,
and cover me with
the sheltering embrace of the whole sky
Tie me with the mighty limbs of
boughs and branches
A few outcroppings
you might have to level
A few craters
you might have to fill
So come
gathering the force of a bulldozer
Come as ferocious Bhairava

This poem is translated from Sharma's poetry collection *Aandolanpurwaka Bandha Abhibyaktiharu*.



MIN BAURACHARYA

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

- ◆ **British Film Festival**
- Billy Elliott** Sunday, 22 April and Wednesday, 25 April
- Elizabeth** Friday, 20 April, Monday, 23 April
- LA without a map** Saturday, 21 April, Tuesday, 24 April
- Free screenings, all at 6pm in Krishna Hall, Gopi Krishna Cinema, Chababil. Organised by the British Embassy, the British Council and the Nepal Britain Chamber of Commerce. Sponsored by Gopi Krishna Movies, Qatar Airlines and Nabil Bank. 410798
- ◆ **The Cup** The 1999 Bhutanese/ Indian film by Khyentse Norbu. Presented by the Inter-Cultural Film Society. Sunday, 22 April, 5pm. Russain Cultural Centre, Kamal Pokhari. More info at icfs@wlink.com.np
- ◆ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

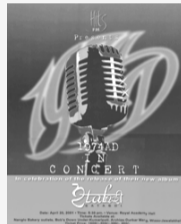
EATING OUT

- ◆ **The Shangri La Jazz Bar** Savour delights by French chef Phillippe Carpentier and Narayan Gurung's special menu all through out this month along with jazz music by Cadenza (Tuesday and Thursday), Irish music by An Saine (Wednesday and Friday). 412999
- ◆ **Everest Hotel** Punjabi Food Festival at The Far Pavilion until 22 April, with authentic condiments and accompaniments. Barbecue at the Ropes, 12 noon-2.30pm daily at The Sky Terrace. Saturday Splash, brunch buffet with use of the pool, Rs 555 per head, including a soft drink or beer, Rs 229 for children under three ft, including a soft drink. 488100
- ◆ **Stupa View Restaurant and Terrace** at the Baudhanath stupa. Pizza from a clay oven, vegetarian specialties. 11am-8pm. 480262
- ◆ **Soaltee lunch buffet** at the Garden Terrace Restaurant. International cuisine, salads, soups, desserts. Rs 700 for full buffet. Rs 450 for soup, salad, dessert. Rs 300 for salad. Rs 450 for children under four ft. Taxes applicable.
- ◆ **Movenpick ice cream** Exotic desserts at the new ice-cream lounge on Darbar Marg.



MUSIC

- ◆ **1974 AD in Concert.** 1974 AD play on the occasion of the release of their new album *Satabdi*. Royal Academy Hall. Friday 20 April, 5.30pm. Tickets Rs 1000, 500, 300, and 200 at Nanglo Bakery outlets, Bob's Down Under Kumaripati, Archies-Durbar Marg, Wizzo Jawalakhel
- ◆ **Classical Sitar** Pilgrims Book House auditorium, Thamel. Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays 7.00pm to 8.30pm. Rs 300.



EXHIBITION

- ◆ **Contemporary Graphic Prints** The Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA) in collaboration with the Indian Embassy and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) presents 81 graphics by 34 renowned artists like MF Hussain, Laxmi Goud and Gogi Saroj Pal. The exhibition earlier travelled to Havana, Lima, Bogota, Panama, Caracas, Venezuela, Hongkong and Dhaka. 15-30April, NAFA Art Gallery, Naxal
- ◆ **Jewellery Exhibition and Sales** Designs by Florence Dupoizat and Angela Soulier, executed by the women from the Vedfon Family Project. Organised by Alliance Française, Vedfon & ACP/Dhukuti. 24-27 April, 9am-6pm at Alliance Française, Thapathali
- ◆ **Book Festival** Huge clearance sale with savings up to 90% off on thousands of books, journals, magazines, and handicrafts. 10% discount on all food at the restaurant. 8am-8pm. 18-26 April, Pilgrims Book House, Thamel.
- ◆ **Nepal Vision II** Paintings by Roy Breimon and Vaclav Pisevc on exhibition. Roy Breimon, from the USA paints in a technique called 'reverse image' painting and his medium is acrylic on Plexiglas. Friday, 20 April. 5.30pm, Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- ◆ **Jomsom to Muktinath** Exhibition of water colours by Neera Joshi Pradhan. Park Gallery, Pulchowk. 15-30 April, 10am-6pm. 522307

LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS

- ◆ **Community Irrigation: Approaches to improving agricultural output while protecting Nepal's environment** Lecture by Rishi Neupane and Arjun Shah with video and book display. Monday, April 23, 3pm. American Center Auditorium, Gyaneswor. 415845
- ◆ **Asia Pico Hydro Manufacturers' Training Course** Hosted by Nottingham Trent University, UK with Energy Systems, Kathmandu. The course will teach manufacturers about the production and assembly of pico hydro systems— turbines, generators and controllers. Balaju Technical Training Centre 23 April-4 May. More info: Bholu Shrestha Energy Systems 372171, esystems@info.com.np

MARTIN CHAUTARI

- ◆ **Classic Literature Discussion Series 5:** Shankar Lamichhane's "Abstract Chintan Pyaj" Pandits: Khagendra Sangraula and Ashutosh Tiwari. Unless noted, all discussions are in Nepali. 24 April, 5.30pm at Martin Chautari, Thapathali. 246065. chautari@mos.com.np

EARTH DAY

- ◆ **The World Conservation Union (IUCN)** is organising a variety of events on the occasion of Earth Day. 500 students, academics, teachers and conservationists are expected to attend the daylong programme. Participation open to all. Sunday 22 April. Bakhundole. info@iucn.org.np. 527781

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

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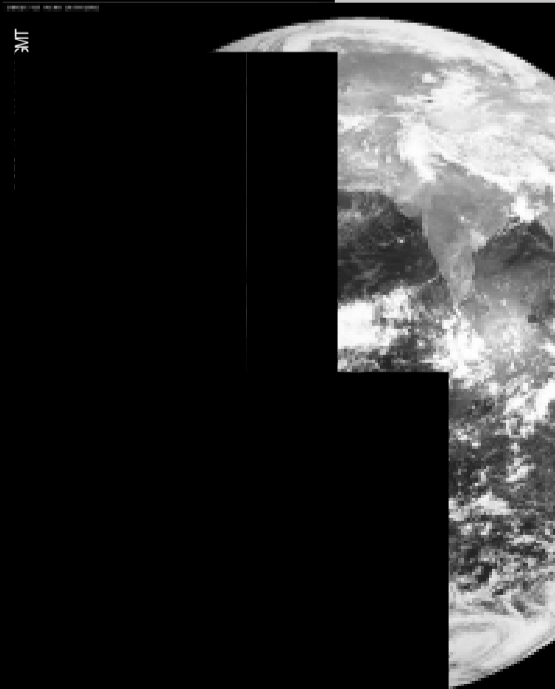
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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



This week's unexpected monsoon-like showers resulted from clouds moving into a low pressure trough over the Bay of Bengal, and this is now moving westwards and dissipating. A fresh cloud band is expected to enter Nepal on Friday bringing light showers and flurries and the higher reaches. Showers on the high

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SALIL SUBEDI

Don't let the name intimidate you. Thamel's Fire and Ice pizzeria is as laidback as they come—at least for the four hundred-odd customers who make their way here each day for wonderful, real Neapolitan pizza, good service and a festive atmosphere.

Step inside and you will understand why the woman who runs the place, Anna Maria Wifeman, named her pizzeria Fire and Ice. This is bold fusion: the hottest Nepali ingredients yielding the coolest Neapolitan delicacies. "It is a perfect combination," says 50-year-old Anna Maria, who has brought the best of her homeland to Thamel.

You might not catch the Mediterranean breeze or hear folk singers playing the mandolin while you stuff yourself, but what you will get are pizzas in the best Neapolitan tradition—Margherita, Napoletana, Salame, Pollo, Calzone, Paesang—with the choicest toppings of tomato, cheese, ham, pineapple, green pepper, ginger, oregano and others. Then there's the Zuppa di Verdura (home made minestrone) and Passato di Pomodoro (tomato soup) and not to forget the salads like the Insalata and the Pasqualina. The place also serves some fine wines and old whiskeys.

The pizzeria bustles after six in the evening and there is no let up till 8.30. Waitstaff in white Fire and Ice embroidered T-shirts flit across the aisles. Three oven boys continuously check on the pizzas in the moderately sized Moretti Forni Modulo oven imported from Italy. Customers hang around, waiting for a table. "It was important to bring in an Italian oven and accessories for a genuine Italian touch," says Anna Maria. "When we

Naples in Nepal

Anna Maria wants to take her Nepali Neapolitan pizzas to Rome.



SALIL SUBEDI

first opened in January 1995, we were nervous about how to treat our customers," she recalls. There were five staff to start with, now there are 35, at the kitchen, office and counter.

The best thing is that Anna Maria has been able to recreate the genuine taste of a Neapolitan pizza with nothing but local ingredients. "I get all my ingredients from the local market. They are all readily available, and fresh," she says. However, Anna Maria does perform some "magic" at home—a trade secret she will not reveal. "The secret is in the tomato sauce. The formula is a little secret of mine," she smiles.

The décor is eye-catching too. The ceiling is lined on all sides with rich free-hand Mithila frescos depicting red-hot chilli plants. "Italian people take the red chilly as a sign of good luck. See, here we have good luck everywhere," she laughs. The place has its regulars, commoners, celebrities and royalty alike. The

crown prince, Dipendra, is one. Richard Gere, during a brief visit to Nepal, came over for an ice cream, but unfortunately the machine was



Anna Maria Wifeman

SALIL SUBEDI

under repair. F&I attracts all types—mountaineers, trekkers, artists, spiritual types and gurus, musicians, budget travellers and locals.

What's special about what was long considered a peasant's meal in Italy for centuries? The popularising of the modern pizza is attributed to a baker of Napoli, Anna Maria's

hometown. Today's pizza evolved and spread to northern Italy and beyond and firmly established Naples as the pizza capital of the world. "It is a social thing. It brings family members together. Isn't it wonderful for a family to sit around a big table and chat and eat?" says Anna. Incidentally, she is a mother of five—four daughters and a son.

Anna Maria looks after every little thing, bustling around constantly—making seating arrangements, taking orders, serving and at the same time checking that the flavours are all they should be. And then she has a word with her dear customers before saying goodbye. It is a world of hard work, perfection and grace. The kids love it there too—she hands them paper and colours if she notices they're bored and lost among chatting or otherwise involved adults. And just before their parents bid goodbye, the kids hand her their contribution—a sketch or a

crazy whirl of lines depicting pizzas at Fire and Ice. Look for the collection behind the counter.

Anna Maria once toyed with the idea of opening a branch in Pokhara but finally didn't. "Since the Pokhara market is seasonal, I wasn't too interested," she says. However these days, Anna Maria has bigger plans. "My dream now is to open a similar pizzeria in Rome. I will take my staff there in turns," she says. Anna Maria is extremely happy with her crew—they all like to work together. "They are the best. In fact I supervise few things," she says.

Well, if all her dreams now lead to Rome, it won't be long before the chosen pizza there goes from Neapolitan to Nepali—it's easy to imagine Anna Maria and her Nepali team wooing the Italian capital with the finest pizzas at the Fire and Ice Kathmandu Pizzeria—that's the chosen name. ♦

HAPPENINGS



DEEPPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

BACK TO THE TEMPLE: On the last day of the Bajrajogini Festival in Sankhu on the valley's eastern rim, devotees pull the figure of the goddess to the temple on the hill on 16 April.



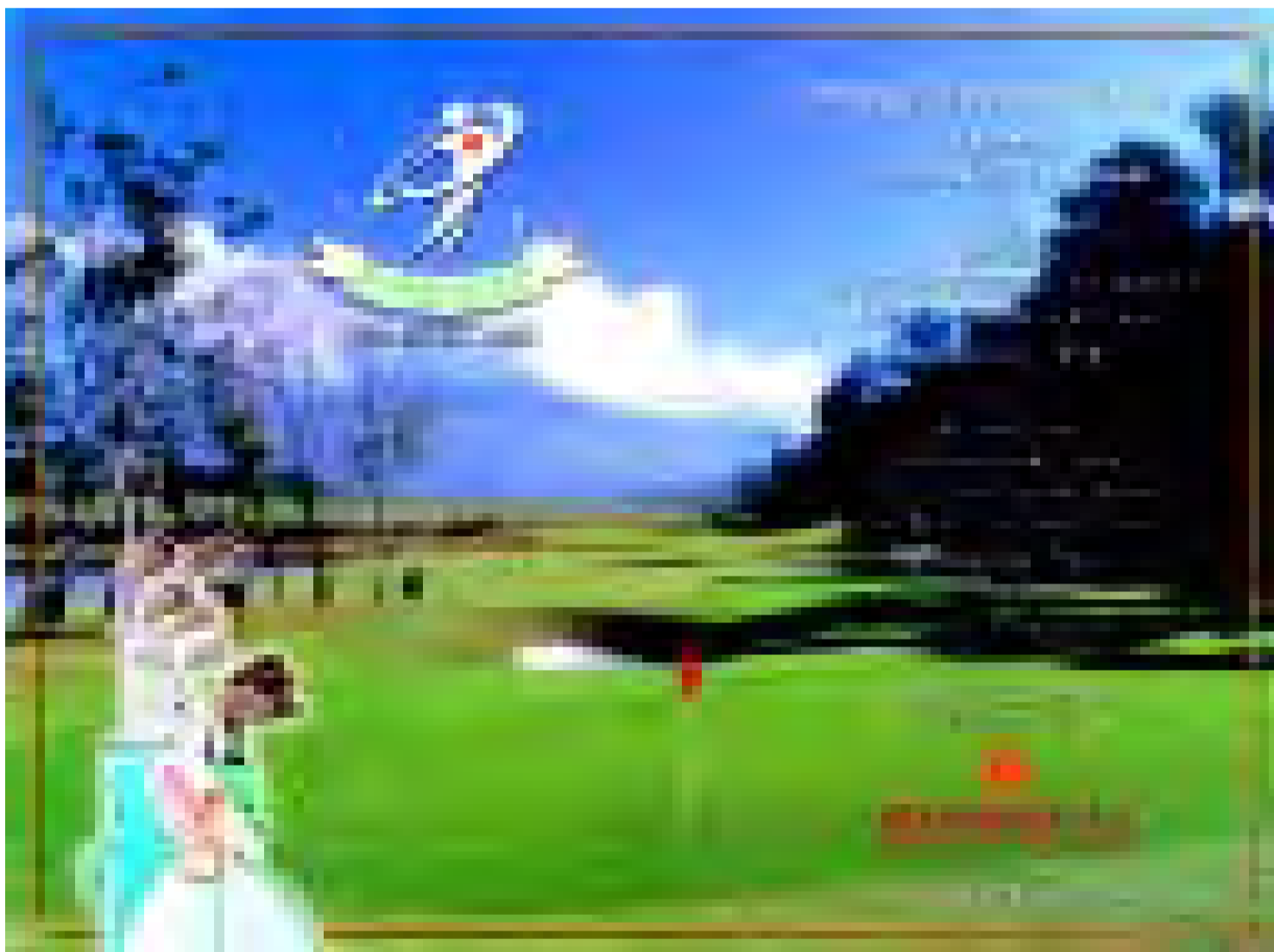
SUBARNA KRISHNA SHRESTHA

SNOW ON SWAYAMBHU: This exhibit, the Nepal Himalaya Mandap, won first place at the EXPO 2000 in Hanover, and was covered in late spring snow recently. The Nepal pavilion got 3.5 million visitors.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

FOREIGN HAND: Washington Post correspondent, Pamela Constable, shares a digital snap with a policewoman during the riot on Putali Sadak on Monday.



Sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

If we weren't already renowned the world over as the country where burning tyres on the streets is an expression of adult franchise, then we would have been famous for our habit of bursting into verse at the slightest provocation. This is a nation of poets. In the last census, nearly all Nepalis ranked "composing poems" as their third favourite past-time after "nose picking" and "blackhead squeezing". Young and old, married or unmarried, Congress or UML, we write poems for no rhyme or reason. Our budding bards start young, versifying about everyday objects around the house, like this eulogy to a domestic pet whose soul was tragically separated from his body by the municipality's canine death-squad. "Ode to a dead dog" was written by young Phanindra of Mt Xixapangma Lower Secondary Boarding School and Bar, (Pvt) Ltd.

*My dog's name was Jonny
He used to be very funny
Whenever I gave him a poke
He would tell me a joke
One day the mayor
(The big bad dog slayer)
Left a buff sizzler at our door
So, Jonny is a joker no more.*

See what I mean? OK, the iambic tetrameter in this one may be a bit off-whack, the rhymes may need some fine-tuning, and the pathos may be a trifle laboured, but no one will deny that Phanindra is going to be a multi-award winning poet laureate one day. Go on, read it again. Feel the rhythm of the words and the evocation of the transgenic affinity between human and non-human,

From bad to verse

explore the inevitable impermanence and suffering that accompanies life. The use of the past tense in the very first line imbues an early tension into the poem, and you can almost hear Jonny's canine clowning around and his by-gone bark. The young poet also gives away his predilection to buff sizzler, and he has let slip his own anti-Marxist-Leninist and pro-Unified-Marxist-Leninist leanings by using invectives like "big" and "bad" against our town's illustrious current mayor.

Let's read another poem by a college student which won the first prize in the Patriotic Category in this year's All-Nepal Zonal Level Futuristic Stars Poetry

Knockout
Tournament
organised by the
Ministry of Prose

and Poetry:

*O! Nepal!
Crimson land of rhododendron
Landlocked mountain kingdom
Shaped like an octahedron
You are like my Mom
The nine-colour danfe flaps his wings
The razor-sharp khukri swings
Your feathers are like rainbow
Go, Nepal! Go, Go Go!*



Here, again, we see from the very first sentence that the caesura underscores the young poet's expansive optimism for his motherland, in the second line there is an almost mundane allusion to our sealess location, and a choking appeal through the intimate "Mom", then a series of dactyls bring us in quick succession the symbols of the national pheasant, national blossom and national knife.

Poems like these from our new generation of young turks gives us hope that there is still a bright future after our octahedrons join Jonny in the happy hunting grounds. As long as we have poetry in us, we can hold our heads high in the community of nations. ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Back on top



RAMYATA LIMBU

Everest. A day later, another Sherpa woman, Pemba Doma, summited the peak from Tibet.

Their successes followed those of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa who became the first Nepali woman to summit Everest in 1993. She died on the descent.

What do you do if you are a woman and have already climbed Mt Everest? You climb it again. That is what Lhakpa Sherpa has decided to do. But the drive and determination that accompanied her first ascent have dimmed for this 28-year-old climber from the Barun Valley. "The urge to summit is not as intense as before," she says.

Last spring, the tall, sturdy climber (described by Mountainzone.com as "cute as a button") became the second Nepali woman to climb Mt

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa who became the first Nepali woman to summit Everest in 1993. She died on the descent.

The only climber of a five-member Sherpa women's team to reach the summit from the south side in the spring of 2000, Lhakpa braved intense cold, strong winds, and the threat of frostbite to realise her lifetime dream to stand on top of the world. Despite a distinct lack of enthusiasm to keep doing Everest over and over again like some of her male colleagues (quite a few of whom have climbed Everest

half-a-dozen times or more) Lhakpa is off to Everest again this season.

"But this time, I'm not taking any risks. It's not do or die, anymore," says Lhakpa whose eight-year-old son attends boarding school in Kathmandu. This spring, she is accompanying a group of international climbers cleaning up garbage on the upper reaches of Mt Everest from the northern Chinese side. Lhakpa plans to concentrate her energies on the climb - sponsored by Japanese Everest summiteer Ken Noguchi and Kathmandu-based Asian trekking. "Weather permitting, and circumstances being right, I will attempt the summit, but no fool-hardiness," she says.

Lhakpa, who returned recently from a two-month visit to the United States, where she went climbing in California and climbed skyscrapers in New York, decided not to prolong her stay. The mountains were calling. "The US was great. Very clean and very big. But I missed home and my baby. I missed the language, I missed the chillies. And of course, I missed the mountains." ♦

FAIR AND LOVELY