

A surprise awaited UNESCO experts who met in Kathmandu last week to finalise a concept for the reconstruction of the Mayadevi Temple at Lumbini. They were invited to the prime minister's residence where an elaborate model with buildings and roads was shown off. UNESCO chaps were not impressed. Said one: "It was too aggressive, it was megalomania. It looked like Disneyland." The plan goes against the original idea of the birthplace of the Buddha being a tranquil oasis for meditation and international peace studies. (p. 7)

МИН. БУХГАЛТЕРИИ

PASHMINA EXPORTS
July 2000-April 2001
(in millions of rupees)

Month	Exports (millions of rupees)
Aug	700
Sep	1100
Oct	1150
Nov	1050
Dec	1000
Jan	200
Feb	350
Mar	250
Apr	150



POWDER KEG

Eclipsed by the Maoist crisis in this country, and buried by headline-grabbing news of the unseemly power struggle going on at Singha Darbar, is a crisis that could potentially make both look like a picnic. It is the Citizenship Bill, and the plight of some three million madhesi Nepalis of the tarai. With their linguistic and ethnic nearness to India, madhesis have over the years found it difficult to obtain Nepali citizenship. Last year, a law that finally sought to resolve the issue and define who is Nepali was tabled in parliament.

While the bill was being debated, the main opposition Unified Marxist-Leninists (UML), which had earlier worked on the draft, got cold feet and pulled out because it was afraid that its rival Marxist-Leninists (ML) and other fringe left groups would gain political mileage by stoking nationalist and anti-tarai sentiments. But since the Nepali Congress had a majority in parliament, the bill sailed through the house. (We did suffer a bandh on 2 August last year called by comrades of the seat-less ML, remember?) The NC also thought it did a clever thing by sending the draft to the King as a Finance Bill, thus bypassing the need to have approval of the Upper House.

The King, mindful of the fact that this was a political hot potato, in turn passed the bill on to the Supreme Court. And last week, the Supreme Court declared the Citizenship Bill unconstitutional. Now, everyone is in a bind. There is a bit of a legal Catch 22 here: the constitution requires the King to give automatic approval to finance bills and send them back to parliament, but because the Supreme Court has ruled it unconstitutional, he cannot approve it. And then there is the other complication of whether the Citizenship Bill could have been tabled as a finance bill in the first place. While lawyers debate this to death, you can bet that the real question of addressing the grievances of millions of Nepalis who cannot get a citizenship certificate because they "look Indian" will be sidelined. The fear of being swamped by a billion Indians living to the south of our open border is so palpable, that politicians of every persuasion have tried to use the citizenship issue to their advantage, while sabotaging any attempt by any party to resolve it and take credit from the tarai vote bank.

The Citizenship Bill as tabled in parliament finally sought to defuse a potential ethnic crisis by making it easier for genuine Nepali madhesis to get their papers. There are enough safeguards in it to prevent foreigners from illegally getting citizenship, and tough penalties for fraud and misrepresentation. If properly implemented, and that indeed is the real sticking point, the bill could stop the present travesty: foreigners with the right amount of cash can illegally buy citizenship, while bonafide Nepalis cannot get citizenship whatever they do.

The main objection of critics of the bill seems to be that it grants people citizenship even if their daddies do not have citizenship. This can easily be reworked without hurting the chances of genuine Nepalis to finally get their papers, but that would demand political will and vision—both in short supply among our elected officials. Political parties cannot seem to see beyond the tips of their noses, and are interested only in politicising the citizenship issue for easy pickings. In a multi-ethnic country like Nepal, citizenship should not be confused with nationality. And as we have seen from our South Asian neighbours, the worst possible thing you can do is mix politics and ethnicity. Don't even think about touching that powder keg. Politicians, back off.

NOBODY MOVE

Politicians across Asia are getting streetwise. Why go through messy and muddled constitutional procedures in parliament, when you can make your presence felt with street demos? Philippine president Arroyo got the ball rolling recently when the middle class poured out on to Manila's flyovers to overthrow Joseph Estrada in a replay of People Power '86. Estrada had tried to manipulate senate votes against his impeachment, but the military switched allegiance to Arroyo and that was that. This week Estrada was arrested for plunder, and on the flyovers history is repeating itself as a farce as Manila's poor pour out in support of their Robin Hood screen hero who is actually a real-life crook.

On the streets of Jakarta, Gus Dur's hire-a-mob supporters are fighting pitched battles with opposition protesters who want the president impeached for corruption. The idea in both Manila and Jakarta is to flex political muscle by showing strength in numbers on the streets. Here at home, our own comrades from the UML's left alliance appear to see no reason why they can't do the same. But they have to keep the momentum of protest up through artificial respiration. They brought parliament to a standstill, they brought traffic to a standstill, now they want to bring schools to a standstill. Democracy doesn't stand a chance when the motto is: "Nobody move, or else."



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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



In a state of statelessness

If the Buddha was alive today, he probably would not be eligible for Nepali citizenship.

Chulhai Kapar is a non-person. He is a Nepali national, but not eligible for the citizenship of this country under existing laws of the land. Chulhai is just one of the estimated 3 million stateless Nepalis of the tarai whose chances of acquiring legitimacy have been jeopardised by a recent court order. In the considered opinion of the Supreme Court, the bill intended to grant citizenship certificates to people like Chulhai is against the provisions of The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047 (1990).

For India-locked Nepal, citizenship has always been a contentious issue. The Kathmandu elite has a deep fear of being overrun by Indians. Laws are stringent, and their implementation even more severe when it comes to granting citizenship to those who look or sound like Indians. Due to such a deep-seated paranoia among mostly high-caste hill dwellers, the issue of granting citizenship to Nepali nationals of the tarai has been hanging fire for decades.

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, almost all major political parties played politics and sought votes on the promise of resolving the citizenship issue. But they all backtrack as soon as they enter the miasma of Kathmandu Valley where jingoism and pollution fight for supremacy at all times of the day, in every season of the year.

The Nepal Communist Party (UML) set the Dhanapati Commission to work; the Nepali Congress formed the Mahantha Thakur Commission to examine the issue. Both fizzled out and did nothing to address the madhesi grievances. In the end, the Nepali Congress with its majority in parliament took the lead. Initially, the UML went along. But the comrades backed out once they sensed the belligerent mood of the champions of hill-centric nationalism in Kathmandu.

After a bit of a controversy, the bill was passed on the strength of Nepali Congress majority in the Lower House and was submitted for the royal seal to turn the bill into an Act. Meanwhile, Kathmandu's High Priests of Patriotism went into action, whipping up fears of an

Indian population invasion. Nobody, but nobody, spared a thought for madhesis like Chulhai. If anything, some condescending opinion leaders were seen offering unsolicited advice to madhesis that they will be swamped by immigrants from down south, ignoring the reality that population pressure from the hills already threatens to turn people of tarai origin into a minority in their own region.

The attempt to drum up a mass-hysteria by the likes of Ramesh Nath Pandey, Daman Nath Dhungana, Bal Krishna Neupane and Kirti Nidhi Bista failed to fire the imagination of the general population. But it caught the attention of the king. He promptly referred the bill to the Supreme Court. A special bench of the court—incidentally, composed entirely of the people of hill origin—deliberated over the bill, and came to the conclusion that the proposed provision of granting citizenship to a person whose father hadn't acquired a citizenship certificate amounted to a contravention of constitutional provisions.

People like Chulhai will now have to wait indefinitely for an amendment of the constitution. Some may be forced to resort to extra-constitutional means, but no one in Kathmandu is losing sleep over it. They are gloating over their success in the courts, unmindful of the implications of their victory will have for the stability of the state of Nepal.

Citizenship gives a person the basic

right to have rights. There is ample proof from countries in the neighbourhood of what happens if this right is denied for too long. Citizenship is not charity that Kathmandu dispenses at its will and convenience. It's a right, and people do things for rights that are not always to the liking of those who take those very rights for granted.

Forget Chulhai, laws governing citizenship in Nepal are so inflexible and their implementation so blatantly discriminatory that if Lord Buddha were to be a commoner in contemporary Nepal, he wouldn't succeed in getting a citizenship certificate. Being from Kapilavastu, Buddha would be a madhesi for the Nepali establishment, a person of Indian origin for the members of intelligentsia, and nobody would grant him his true status: a person of tarai origin.

Contemporary Buddha would probably speak Awadhi, and the Chief District Officer's clerks would give him a standard application form to be filled in Nepali. He would wear a *dhoti-kurta*, and have to hire a *bhadgaunle* or *dhaka topi* to be photographed for the citizenship certificate. Someone in the CDO office would probably even taunt him for his *gamchhi* and ask him to appear in the office in *labeda-surawal*, black coat and black shoes. Even after enduring all this humiliation, if his father hadn't taken the citizenship certificate, the Buddha would be stateless.

The Kathmandu establishment must decide whether it wants a united Nepal based on inclusive nationalism or a fragmented one based on the patriotism of communal purity.

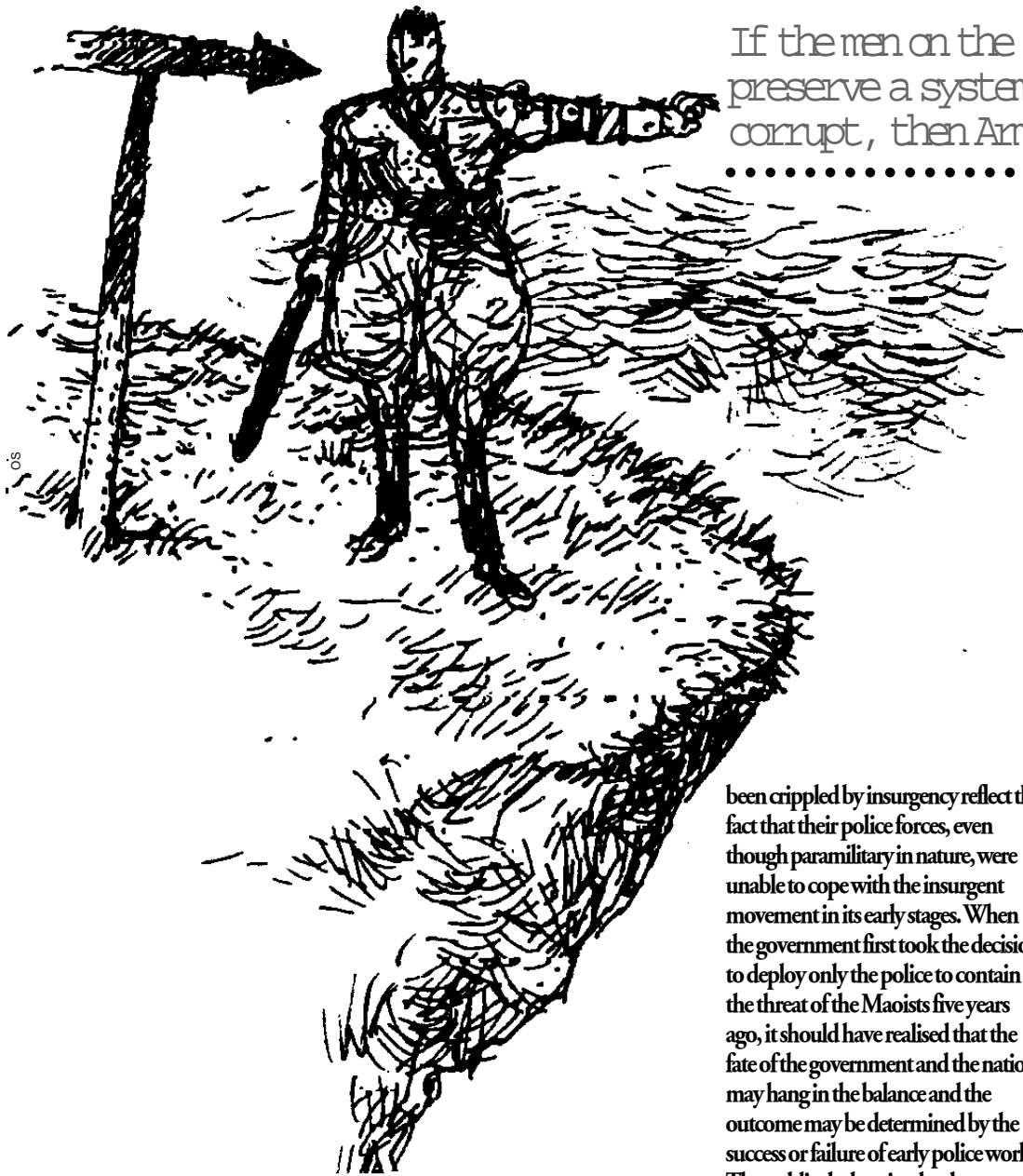
This is a decision that can't be postponed any more and it is ticking. A sadistic section of Kathmandu society seems to be bent on self-destruction. Those who do not listen when the meek speak run the risk of being blown away by the fury of silence. A state that does not accept the legitimacy of its own citizens may lose its own, and when that time comes it can't ask for the loyalty of people it considers stateless. A point to remember, perhaps, on Buddha's 2,545th birthday. ♦





An ostrich in trouble

If the men on the front lines get an impression that they are fighting to preserve a system that is not responsive to their needs and leaders who are corrupt, then Army deployment will be doomed even before it starts.



Covenants without swords are mere words and that seems to be the fate of the much publicised Integrated Security and Development Plan (ISDP) of the government. This response of the government to the astounding victories of the Maoists at Naumule and Rukumkot started with the hasty huddles of the ruling party and culminated with the delegation led by prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala briefing the king on ISDP and asking for his approval to deploy the army. Deputy prime minister Ram Chandra Poudel, as chairman of the political sub-committee, was on overdrive trying to garner political and

public consensus, but he seems to have run into a wall. The army chief as head of the security sub-committee has not only achieved tactical surprise, but also thrown the spanner in the wheel just when everyone thought that the government had finally got its act together to seriously address this national dilemma. His declaration that the army will be mobilised at the appropriate time and appropriate situation raises the million-dollar question: who has and/or should have the legal authority and the required expertise to decide that appropriate time and situation—the army, or the elected government? Historically, nations that have

been crippled by insurgency reflect the fact that their police forces, even though paramilitary in nature, were unable to cope with the insurgent movement in its early stages. When the government first took the decision to deploy only the police to contain the threat of the Maoists five years ago, it should have realised that the fate of the government and the nation may hang in the balance and the outcome may be determined by the success or failure of early police work. The public declaration by the Inspector General of Police that the police was not set up to fight terrorism, and that the Maoist insurgency is beyond the control of the police, calls for urgent action by the government. Hoping that the recently created Armed Police Force will restore public order and confidence would reflect the behaviour of an ostrich in trouble. The need for effective stopgap measures to check the Maoists movement from expanding during the time required to organise and train the paramilitary force has now become a stark reality. What do we do till then? Even if the paramilitary is raised and trained to become a competent force

in due time, it alone will not be able to handle the insurgency as it exists today. The issue of a clear chain of command for mobilising the army is valid if the intentions of the military leadership are noble. However, if this is a covert struggle between the political leaders, military and the civilian bureaucracy to wrest more authority, it would be extremely unfortunate for Nepal's national interest. The successful counterinsurgency experience of Guatemala in the 80s illustrated that the military had to turn to the civilian bureaucracy and professionals of its own government, to political and psychological warfare programmes and strategies, as a means to defeat the insurgents and remove them as a political option for the nation. Without adequate organisation at the highest level to establish, enforce and refine a national campaign plan embracing both the civilian and military efforts and programmes, authority is fragmented. When this happens, there is not sufficient unity of effort to resolve the myriad of problems endemic in an insurgency. Delaying the deployment of the army by seeking political consensus, or by stating that bringing out the army out of the barracks is a last resort and it cannot fail, reflects a failure to understand the reality. The genius of generalship is not merely knowing the principles of strategy, but also understanding how to correctly judge the situation and apply the principles of strategy. Once the situation has reached the point of no return, bringing out the army may prove to be counter-productive and actually hasten the collapse of the government. The much-ballyhooed ISDP was concocted in haste and is still half-baked. Proof is the fact that political leaders do not even seem to know

what the acronym actually stands for: Integrated Security and Development —“Plan”, “Package”, “Programme” and even a “Fund”. The refusal by the main opposition party and most left parties to support the government in this issue signals that they were not consulted during the preparation of this plan. Such a crucial strategy should have been based on a realistic assessment of local conditions, resources, and the needs and desires of the people. Whether the activities under the ISDP were tailored to achieve specific, constructive goals is still vague, but this is an essential aspect for the security forces. If the army or the police is committed to a campaign that has no clear aim or a vague one, they are likely to face defeat even if resources are plentiful, as was convincingly proven in Vietnam. If the security forces do not have a clearly defined aim, especially in a counter-insurgency, then the men who are putting their lives on the line are bound to ask what is it that they are fighting for. When this question cannot be answered properly and convincingly, the motivation to fight and take risks vanishes. If the security forces, especially the men on the frontlines, get an impression that they are fighting to preserve a system that is not responsive to their needs and leaders who are corrupt, then the deployment will be doomed even before it starts. Co-operation, harmony and collaboration between the military and civilian arms of the government is necessary because the Maoist crisis is not a military problem alone. The very concept of the proposed ISDP is based on the strategy of simultaneous internal defence and internal development programmes, and is directed towards the populace and insurgents alike. The internal defence aspect should seek to achieve internal

security and a state of law and order, and internal development should promote balanced growth by building viable institutions—political, economic, military and social—that respond to the needs of the society. At the national level, the following points need to be addressed urgently:

- The ISDP must mould the internal defence and development activities into a unified strategy and must be capable of adjusting to the intensity of insurgent warfare
- The ISDP's activities must be coordinated with government agencies, yet not interfere with the normal day-to-day functions of these agencies.
- Political, economic, social, military, psychological, and information affairs offices from the line ministries and concerned agencies should be incorporated in the national co-ordination council to develop policies and operational concepts for inclusion in the national plan of action. Also needed: civilian advisory committees to help evaluate the success of government activities, to help gain popular support, to establish a link to the people and to receive feedback on which to base future operations are needed. Whether these theoretical aspects have been included in the ISDP plans and programmes of the government is unclear. But the polarisation and confusion regarding the ISDP doesn't bode well for now, or for the future. ♦

(Gyan Jung Thapa was given premature retirement last year as a Colonel from the Royal Nepal Army. He is a graduate of the US Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from which he has a Masters in military arts and science.)

LETTERS

DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM Daniel Lak is right that foreign aid and development are legitimate subjects for journalists (Here and there, #40). Development should be a publicly-owned endeavour and aid issues are major issues everywhere in a rapidly globalising world. It is both sad and surprising that there is so little independent journalistic involvement in them. Everywhere in the world, it seems, the most common coverage of aid issues is obedient and uncritical. Next—but still a long way behind—comes cheap swipes at aid agencies. We need to move beyond both to a situation where journalists are competent and free to raise and analyse critical issues in the behaviour and practice of development agencies. Graham Hancock's "seminal" work is indeed old and partly out of date now. But even at the time it seemed like a missed opportunity to really get to the heart of the crucial issues that it at least raised. Since its publication, informed development and aid journalism has virtually disappeared and has certainly not

progressed. I, for one, would trust Daniel Lak to make a good start in filling this void and, so, urge him to write more!

Simon Mollison
Save the Children (UK)
Jawalakhel

BIG GUNS Here are a few points regarding your exclusive "More guns" (#40):

- For \$10 million, one cannot get 50,000 new assault rifles—maybe the figure quoted is for the first consignment?
- Heckler & Koch of Royal Ordnance, UK, is being promoted by the same group that was behind the controversial RJ100 jet deal last year
- The Rs 3.70 million weapons repair and maintenance workshop awarded to H&K is like putting the cart before the horse
- Weapons procurements needs to determine whether a weapon is "battle-proven" and unfortunately the H&K G36 is not
- There has been no tender notice on the procurement of weapons stipulating quantities,

type of product needed, delivery, like there was for the army's helicopter purchase procured from the same budget.

'A Nepali'
by email

GOVINDA With due cognizance to the true violation of human rights that this poor man from a poor country is facing in a foreign land ("Govinda" #39), one thing struck me as incomplete. With due regard to the most important story at hand, of the miscarriage of justice, of human rights violations, and so forth that Kunda Dixit so eloquently describes for us, the article throws up many questions: a man who left his wife and kids to presumably make their lifestyle better is engaged in soliciting (on multiple occasions) a prostitute. What does his wife think about that? Does she know? Does she await him with equal eagerness? Does her forgiveness involve her regard for her children? Would she be willing to forgive her husband if they had no children? How did she

feel about her husband leaving a pregnant wife at home apparently away to pursue his self-fulfillment? What about the wife's needs or the children's needs? I realise that these questions are distractions in the principal case, which is to restore the human rights that this man deserves. But, living away from Japan, and being outside of the circle of people actually devoted (and at present faced with a different goal: that of getting him free), we can discuss such hypothetical scenarios. It just struck me that there is not a mention of the wife's perspective, her involvement in this matter. And the flaws of this man are quietly brushed aside.

"Hari"
by email

BARBARA ADAMS I was outraged at Robert Liden's letter (#39) about Barbara Adams' column. The words he used, "politically correct" and "left-wing nonsense" have absolutely no bearing on the people who are fighting for basic human rights in

Rukum, Rolpa, Kalikot, and almost every other district of Nepal. This is not America Mr. Liden. This struggle of the people, whom you call Moaists and who you believe are the "true" human rights violators of Nepal, cannot be compared to the Seattle protesters. They are people rising up from centuries of oppression, corruption and abuse. Maybe if you experienced what they have from the hands of those in power, you wouldn't insult their movement.

Margaret King
Kathmandu/Madison, USA

INEVITABLE "The inevitable enemy" by Shixiong Ni (#39) was brilliant analysis. But, Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State says: "China is not an inevitable enemy in the future." Does this not mean that right now China is regarded as enemy whether it is inevitable or not?

Sudan Shrestha
Biratnagar

RNAC Thanks to Prashanta Aryal for his well-researched, detailed report on RNAC (Pull up, pull up...#40) The message

was clear: curse the politicians and their appointees who have ruined the airline.

Ananta Parajuli
Bhimsengola



CORRECTION The man in the mask being carried away by colleagues during the UN's disaster simulation exercise (Happenings, #40) was actually Bart Hoekx of WFP. This is what the real Shree Ram Maharjan of WHO looked like as he was carried away with pretend wounds.

The box showing delayed flight schedules of Royal Nepal Airlines in "Pull up, pull up..." (#40) should have been credited to *Nepal Travel Trade Reporter*.
Ed.

People moved by peoples' war



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Families who fled the insurgency from Sindhupalchok live and work in this brick kiln in Patan.

Kathmandu Valley is turning into a refugee camp for people fleeing both the Maoists and the police from insurgency-affected areas.

HEMLATA RAI

Madan Prasad Giri of Bhote Namgal village in Sindhupalchok was killed last year by Maoists to teach the villagers a lesson. Once a Maoist supporter, Giri had got disillusioned by the violence and shifted his allegiance to the Nepali Congress. And he had dared to publicly criticise the Maoists for killing villagers who did not agree with them.

Feeling threatened, Giri's widow, 22-year-old Goma, left Bhote Namgal for Kathmandu to find a job to support her two children, one born four months after his father's murder. In Kathmandu, she lives with her sister's family in a cramped rented room. Her brother-in-law has now also fled his ancestral home in Sindhupalchok after he was identified an "enemy of the revolution" by the Maoists. For the moment, Goma is supported

by her sister's family, but she knows she cannot depend on her forever. She has already sent her three-year-old daughter back to Sindhupalchok to be cared for by her maternal grandmother. "My seventh-grader will also migrate to Kathmandu as soon as her exams are over. There is too much pressure on the young to join the Maoist militia," says Goma.

There are thousands upon thousands with stories like Goma—people caught in the crossfire between the Maoists and the Police who have fled both for the security of Kathmandu. They are first compelled to migrate to the safety of district headquarters, the towns nearest their homes, and eventually to the capital. Towns like Nepalgunj, Ghorahi, Lamahi, Surkhet also host a transient population of displaced and bereaved families. Some district headquarters in Rukum, Rolpa, and other mid-western districts are already bursting at the seams.

Now, Kathmandu is also feeling a pressure of the new arrivals. And to meet the rush, landlords have been adding floors and rooms to their houses in a frenzy of building not seen in the last six years. The dry season is usually slack for the real estate and construction businesses in Kathmandu, but brick kilns this year did not experience the slowdown in sales they are used to. Locally manufactured bricks that normally sell for Rs 1,700 per thousand were going for as much as Rs 2,800 this winter. And it is getting increasingly difficult for displaced families with little savings and no income to rent rooms in the Valley.

Back in the villages, the impact of the insurgency on the economy of the affected areas and the lives of individuals is apparent. In the absence of young men, the entire burden of agriculture has been shifted onto women, children and the aged. Rolpa and Rukum used to earlier produce and export vegetable

seeds worth Rs 20 million, it is now negligible. Professionals like lawyers and teachers find themselves running tea shops or even working as day labourers in district headquarters. Students are forced to drop out and look for jobs to support their families. And all those who move away, do so with very little—they find no takers for their property.

Everyone agrees that the People's War has resulted in a significant displacement of individuals and families, but nobody is actually keeping count. Kapil Shrestha, a member of the National Human Rights Commission, estimates that about 5,000 families from the ten worst affected districts have left their homes to find safety elsewhere. But he cautions that counting families who are displaced because they support the Maoists and fear being victimised by police is very

difficult.

Traditionally, thousands of young men from the mid-western hill districts in the Maoist heartland used to migrate to India, "Kalapar" in local slang. Impoverished and neglected by Kathmandu for centuries, they could never grow enough food to feed their families so they earned extra cash to buy food by working as seasonal labourers in India. But since the fighting began five years ago, the exodus of youth into India has become even greater. And those who migrated earlier are wary of coming back home, families from the area told us.

In Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan, Jajarkot and Kalikot there are very few able-bodied young men left, and pressure is mounting on young women to join the Maoist militia, which is now one-fifth female.

"Traditionally, youth who went away to work would come home after the fallow season ended, but these days their stints in India are markedly longer. Some have not returned for more than a year," says Govinda Bikram Shah, a parliamentarian from Jajarkot. The Nepal Labour Force Survey 1998/99 also noticed this trend—it counted more than 500,000 people absent from their homesteads in the six districts worst affected by the insurgency.

As illiterate and semi-literate youths swarm to nearby towns or across the border for manual labour, young educated and skilled people are trying their luck in bigger places. "More and more of my constituents have moved away from their homes fearing clashes between the Maoists and the police. Some come to Kathmandu and expect me to help them find a job. Others ask me to use my influence to speed up procedure to issue passports so they can go to the Gulf," says parliamentarian Tirtha Gautam from Rukum, whose husband was killed by the Maoists.

Madan Bahadur Magar of Ghartigaun, Rolpa, was a high school student before he was arrested and tortured by the police, who suspected he was a Maoist

sympathiser. One-and-a-half years ago he came to Kathmandu and now works as a porter or a construction worker, whatever is available. "Before my family moved to Kathmandu, we could sustain ourselves, at least as far as food went," he told us. In Kathmandu, his family's total wages are not enough for six people. He says there is hardly anyone left in his village in Rolpa.

"The government's hardline approach to the insurgency is responsible for accelerating the displacement. The harder the government comes down on the Maoists and their supporters, the faster the insurgents accelerate their defence," says MP Shah. According to him, Jajarkot district saw the most people displaced after the police launched its brutal Kilo-Sierra Two operation three years ago. In August 1999, Shah was compelled to provide food and shelter to about 150 of his constituents for two months when they refused to go home for fear of being victimised by the police.

He fears that another exodus will be triggered when the government finally implements the proposed Integrated Security and Development Plan (ISDP) and the Maoists go on the offensive again. If all goes according to plan, the ISDP will be taken to Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Salyan, Gorkha, Pyuthan and Kalikot districts. When that happens, it might well be people like Shah—MPs, political activists, their supporters and families—who find themselves on the run.

Ruling party parliamentarian Bharat Bahadur Basnet, elected from Sindhupalchok and president of the Nepali Congress District Committee says that 25 percent of party workers from his district are already displaced, and that the rest are agonising over what to do. All political parties agree that their party structure has been weakened due to the insurgency and that this will seriously affect their prospects in the upcoming local elections. ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Serendipitous lessons

COLOMBO: Can a landlocked mountain kingdom learn anything from a democratic socialist island republic? I hope so, for there are a few glimmers of silver in the clouds over Sri Lanka that could reflect hope as far north as Nepal. Of course, this place has been through orgies of unimaginable violence that have scarred the national psyche and left hardly a family untouched. A high literacy rate, the ever-improving status of women, and enthusiastic if frequently subverted democracy, all pale in the face of fear of the next car bomb in the capital, of the sound of the army on the march towards a northern village.

But back to hope. Perhaps we could gather Nepal's pessimists and doomsayers together and fly them south for a while. A week on the beaches and in the cosmopolitan precincts of Colombo would do them a world of good. Especially once they meet the men and women of the Peoples' Liberation Front, known by their Sinhalese initials, the JVP. This was an acronym that once stood for terror, unspeakable atrocities, piles of bodies smouldering by the roadside at dawn. It also stood for the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin with a leadership drawn from the middle class, university-educated Sinhala majority, and a support base from the vast pool of unemployed and downtrodden members of the same ethnic community.

The JVP first tried to fight its way to power in 1971. The government turned on the leftists with

Sri Lanka's formerly virulent Maoists have renounced violence and become kingmakers in parliament. A lesson for our own comrades?

fury and more than a touch of cynical awareness that a bogeyman was just what the nation needed to unite, and forget the follies of politics. Tens of thousands died, mostly JVP supporters. But the movement remained and it slowly grew in strength and determination. When Tamils and Sinhalese turned on each other with brutal ferocity in the 1983 ethnic riots, the JVP discovered crude communal nationalism and became one of the most chauvinist voices on the island. It was eventually banned in a paroxysm of paranoia by the government of the day, another catalyst to its growing militancy.

Four years later began the dreadful secret war that pitted Sinhala against Sinhala, divided families, and turned the southern countryside into a morass of blood and fear. Sixty thousand died, many horribly tortured or maimed by JVP and government death squads. A ham-handed attempt by the National Security Minister to negotiate a truce collapsed when it emerged that his interlocutor was not from the JVP but a perverse hoaxer. The killing continued.



JVP founder Rohana Wijeyaweera

Eventually the government took a page from Nepali history and staged a local version of the Kot massacre, wiping out almost all the JVP leadership at a stroke.

So where are the JVP now? A bloodstained blot on the history books? Plotting a comeback in the jungles? In exile, licking their many wounds? No, the Peoples' Liberation Front is an enthusiastic player in Sri Lankan democracy and the change of course has paid off. The party holds the balance of power in three of five powerful provincial councils, and is a member of a united opposition alliance in the national parliament. It has renounced violence and committed itself to the helping the poor and unemployed through job creation schemes, encouraging private investment and setting up government cricket clinics to develop Sri Lankan talent. The 30th anniversary of the 1971 uprising was recently marked with a cultural show and, wait for it: a trade fair.

Of course, there's another side to this. The JVP has tasted power and its perks. Accusations of corruption are starting to emerge. Former Maoist MPs now import duty free vehicles (even Pajeros!). Disgruntled purists who escaped the death squads still long to return to the jungle. And it's doubtful that the JVP can even be more than a king maker in Sri Lanka's two party system. But, I submit, this is a success story with obvious parallels for Nepal. Now, all aboard the flight for Colombo leaving from gate number two. Perhaps we'll stop off in western Nepal and take on a few more passengers... ♦

Maoists target private schools

Maoist threats to private schools have hardened the position of the moderate left as well, even though party cadre send their own children to private schools.

HEMLATA RAI

This is crisis time for the education sector as students groups aligned to various communist factions try to outdo each other in their hardline stance towards private schools. As a taste of things to come, they will force all schools to close for a week—14-21 May.

The demands are a ban on singing the national anthem that praises the monarchy, a ban on teaching Sanskrit, slashing private school fees by half, stopping “western” influences forthwith, and ultimately forcing the nationalisation of private schools.

This frontal attack on the schooling system is a part of a Maoist strategy to push what it considers populist reform and is spearheaded by a students’ union at the forefront of the agitation. Unions backed by the UML and ML have been forced to harden their positions in response to the Maoists’ radical stance.

However, some analysts say the agitation could prove counter-productive since the closure of schools will affect a wide swath of Nepal’s middle class, including supporters of all shades of communists. The move to slash fees will in all likelihood mostly benefit richer families who are the only ones who can afford to send their children to private schools in the first place. Senior Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai himself went to a missionary-run school in Gorkha, a district where many schools have now been shut down due to Maoist threats.

St Mary’s School in Gorkha and Notre Dame Higher Secondary School in Bandipur have both announced that they are shutting down from the coming academic year. Ironically, these two schools are not-for-profit even though they are private, and they have shown more commitment to quality education and motivation than most other commercially-run private schools.

“I would like to believe that the Maoists are serious about improving education in this country, but by lumping everyone together, and making no distinction between those for whom schooling is a business and for whom it is a commitment, they have proven that this is just a slogan for them,” says one educationist in Kathmandu. The Maoists have so far only sent threatening letters to the two schools, and they haven’t said what aspect of the instruction in the schools they find harmful. When asked, Maoist supporters give the party line on “western cultural imperialism”. Says Devendra Parajuli of the Maoist-affiliated student union: “The closure of missionary-run schools is only the first step towards our ultimate goal of *janabadi shiksha* (people-oriented education) in all schools.”

To be sure, many private schools are run like businesses, the quality of instruction is questionable, fees are many times more than government schools and there is an emphasis on English. Educationists, teachers, parents, and even students themselves,

feel that schools need a thorough revamp. Successive governments have been making changes, and new models have been tried. But the standard of cash-starved government schools continues to deteriorate, while expensive private schools are charging premium rates by promising quality that is not always there.

Even the government admits that the education sector is in crisis. The reason it says is decades of mismanagement and ad hoc planning. But the students want the government to set things right within a month, or else.

The closure of missionary-run schools, pressure on existing private schools to reduce fees, and reconstruction of the schooling system to accommodate children from poor families, is already taking its toll on private schools in Kathmandu. Bhoj Bahadur Shah of the Private and Boarding School Organisation of Nepal (PABSON) says that member schools are already reporting a fall in enrolment. Only 20 percent of the students of PABSON member schools have applied for readmission, he says. Others are awaiting a confirmation that the Maoists’ call would not affect their children’s education. ♦



KIRAN PANDAY



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More than a climber

It is one of life’s ironies. Babu Chiri fell to his death on the mountain he had summited ten times while he was out taking pictures at Camp Two. Babu fell down a crevasse last Sunday. His funeral was held in Swayambhu on Thursday.



An unassuming man, Babu was much more than a Sherpa in the quest for records. He climbed with a purpose—the funds raised from his exploits and his growing international fame were geared towards building schools in his native village of Taksendu in Solukhumbu. The 35-year-old father of six daughters always regretted not having had the chance to go to school.

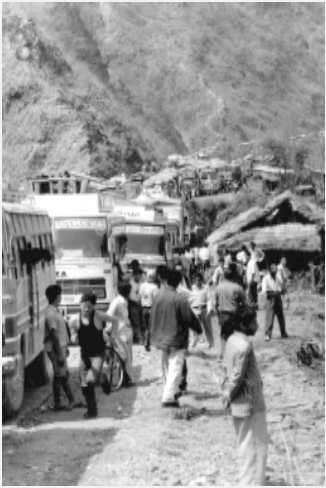
Babu, who began his career as a 13 year-old porter, was inspired by French climber Mark Batard’s attempt to spend eight hours on Everest in 1990. Babu’s own attempt nine years later left the world gasping and will hold its own in mountaineering history for some time. Last year Babu set the world record for the fastest climb of Everest. Babu’s bulky appearance often belied his immense stamina and endurance. He said last year that his proudest moment was the 21 hours he spent on top of the world.

Nepali skin

Nepalis generally don’t sunbathe, and we don’t have any beaches. But dermatologists have warned that Nepalis are not immune to a variety of skin ailments, including skin cancer. According to a pilot study on skin disease, the number of Nepalis suffering from skin-related afflictions is on the rise. Skin diseases account for 20 percent of all diseases in Nepal, and 12 to 18 percent of these afflict children. Dermatologists warn against complacency and advise that 40 percent of skin diseases can be avoided if we are more careful about protecting ourselves from direct sunlight. Allergy, shingles, scabies, ringworm, white leprosy and pimples are common diseases caused by diet, living conditions, a weak immune system, and environmental pollution. Twelve people die from skin-related diseases every year at Kathmandu’s Teaching Hospital. The study indicates that leprosy and venereal diseases account for one percent of the skin diseases prevalent in the country, and that 12 percent of cancer patients suffer from skin cancer. And there is only one dermatologist for every 600,000 people.

Sitting on the highway

Approximately 60,000 people were left foodless, waterless and *charpi*-less for 17 hours last week when landslides at Krishnabhir and a couple of other places along the Prithvi Highway brought traffic to a standstill. And of course it was not happening for the first time: Krishnabhir made headlines last year when traffic was disrupted for about two weeks.



Eyewitnesses say about 25 km of road between Narayanghat and Mugling, Pokhara and Mugling, and between Mugling and Kathmandu was jammed with vehicles.

A Nepali Times calculation arrived at 110 buses/trucks per km (approximately 30 ft/bus or truck) resulting in approximately 3,000 vehicles, some double or triple parked along the highway and at Mugling. Now if half those vehicles were buses, carrying 40 passengers each, then that makes 60,000 people. Sitting on the highway, with no facilities and tempers fraying.

Now what?

The Supreme Court has given its verdict. It is of the opinion that the controversial Citizenship Bill sent to the Palace for royal approval violates provisions of the constitution. The proposed Bill, on which the king sought the opinion of the court, maintains that a person can obtain Nepali citizenship through descent even though if his or her father is not a Nepali citizen. The constitution, however, categorically states that only a person whose father is a citizen of Nepal at the time of the person’s birth is eligible for citizenship by descent. After meeting some resistance in the Upper House and from other parties in Parliament, the ruling Nepali Congress, with a majority in the house, pushed the Bill through as a Finance Bill. Complicating this whole situation is the fact that a Finance Bill cannot be returned to Parliament and the king is required by the constitution to approve it.

2,545 years

RAJENDRA S. KHADKA

Revolutionary may not be the word that springs to mind at the mention of Gautama Buddha, but that is what he was. Siddhartha Gautama was a radical who, throughout his long life, behaved in the most unconventional manner, constantly challenging and reforming the customs and traditions of his times.

His first, and more commonly known, step in this direction was to renounce his privileged birthright. Of Siddhartha's Four Meetings outside the gates of his father Suddodhan's palace in Kapilavastu—with an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a sadhu—the first three plunged him into sorrow and despair about the fate of humans, but the fourth offered him a glimpse of a path leading to freedom from earthly suffering. And so, at 29, the Sakya noble born in Lumbini turned his back on a princely life of pleasure and pomp and went forth as a humble seeker of spiritual fortunes.

It was Siddhartha's second unconventional act—another renunciation, really—that formed the basis of Buddhist philosophy as it is most widely understood. After practising severe austerity for six years,

he decided he was not going to find enlightenment by abusing his body. His self-starvation was so extreme that he said later of this time: "When I touched my belly, I encountered my backbone... when I rubbed my limbs, hair, rotted at the roots, fell in my hands... But even with this extreme asceticism I did not reach the highest goal of human striving, true Aryan wisdom." And he wondered: Might not there be an alternative way to enlightenment?

Siddhartha then accepted food from a young village girl called Sujata, only to have five Brahman ascetics who had been his admirers immediately leave because they were "disillusioned and shocked" that he had accepted nourishment. But Siddhartha remained firm in his conviction that the Middle Way, as he had termed his realisation, was the path to nirvana. The Middle Way, as he explained it, avoids two extremes: that of indulgence in sensual pleasures and the other of the pursuit of physical torture, both being "ignoble and unprofitable". He once remarked to a group of young men looking for girls: "Which is better for you, young men, to go in search of women or go in search of yourselves?" When one

adheres to the Middle Way, the Buddha said, one gains "clear vision, insight, tranquillity, enlightenment and nirvana." And he described this last state as "the end of sorrow".

But Siddhartha Gautam's most radical actions took place after he gained enlightenment and became a Buddha. And these are the acts urgently relevant to us today, and worthy of emulation. The Buddha completely and absolutely ignored all the trappings that arise from birth, caste, occupation and social status. His disciples included kings, courtesans, aristocrats, merchants, untouchables, slaves, and even a notorious ex-robber known as Angulimala for wearing a garland of his victims' fingers.

There is one curious deviation from his egalitarianism, though—at first he was reluctant to allow women into his sangha. He is supposed to have said to Ananda, his cousin and faithful attendant, that if women hadn't been allowed to found their own order of nuns, the dharma would've lasted a thousand years, but now that women could become nuns, the dharma of the Middle Way would only last five hundred years. He may not have been eager to accept women

We need to remember that the Buddha was a radical and a reformer.

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

PM, C-in-C and HM

Do we really need this explosion of criticism of the army chief's apparent insubordination when Nepalis in general are asserting this particular feature of personal liberty on all fronts? (#40) I think we are wasting time trying to discover the obvious. Look at all the needless effort we have put in to find out who controls the army. For months, the pradhan mantri found himself sparring with the pradhan senapati in the National Security Council (NSC) and they still couldn't figure out who was supposed to take orders from whom. So the prime minister ordered his finance minister to stop worrying about the budget deficit and handed him the defence portfolio in an effort to dilute the chief's dominance in the NSC. The government has had a two-to-one majority in the NSC ever since, but the general is sticking to his guns.

For the first time since sovereignty was vested in the people a decade ago, the prime minister, accompanied by key cabinet colleagues, the army and police chiefs, and top bureaucrats held an emergency meeting at Narayanhity Darbar. We were notified that the meeting amicably agreed to implement an Integrated Security and Development Plan (ISDP) to calm things on the Maoist front. A few days later, the army chief renewed his call for a national consensus before mobilising the army as part of the ISDP. Doesn't this sequence of events clearly explain who the boss is? If you still have doubts, repeat the words "supreme commander" three times and visualise the personality who enters your mind in full military

regalia. If the generals blame the prime minister for trying to break their chain of command, you can't blame them. Technically speaking,

For a prime minister who has developed a special relationship with Royal Nepal Airlines during each of his four stints in office and who is ex-officio chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, this apparent inability to tame the third RNA must have come as nothing short of a personal failure. But times like these are not propitious for letting your personal feelings guide your politics. At a certain level, the political and the martial classes operate the same strategy: plotting the best way to rout your rival and charging full-speed ahead. But that's just about as far as the ballot and the bullet can hope to work together.

To be honest, our men in uniform are taking the rap. They are slammed for salivating to go on United Nations peacekeeping operations abroad and on customs checkpoint patrols but shying away from the rebel-held forests. The comparison is unfair. Our soldiers go to local border posts and foreign buffer zones only after they have done their risk analyses and calculating what the input-output ratio would be. Standing between the Hezbollah and the Israeli Army wearing a blue beret, carrying light arms for largely decorative purposes and getting paid in dollars is quite different from having to deploy in the danger zones of Dunai or Dailekh on perpetual red alert. At the customs checkpoints, the army's presence is enough to scare the wits out of the unauthorised traders. Such low-risk missions can't be compared to high-

The pradhan mantri and the pradhan senapati can't figure out who is supposed to take orders from whom. The answer is clear: neither.



risk operations that would almost certainly require trading fire with an adversary whose arsenal consists of as many surprises as socket bombs.

The Maoist countryside is a craggy battlefield. You can't expect soldiers to fight the shadowy irregulars on ambiguous orders given by civilian leaders to whom firearms are just tools for winning elections. (I wonder how many leaders elected from Maoist-affected districts are willing to go back to the people they represent and talk peace.) The generals know that the

Maoist insurgency has bloomed beyond that phase where an army flag march would be enough to keep the flowering lads and lasses out of sight. You can't expect flustered foot soldiers to fight ideologically focused clusters of warriors on promises of integrated security and development that half our members of parliament either oppose or don't understand.

All the generals want are some specifics. Are the soldiers just supposed to protect the police, build

roads and bridges and provide a sense of security to the villagers? Are they expected to conduct joint operations to be followed by their own search-and-destroy missions? If the Maoist problem demands such a drastic solution as calling out the army on combat duty, what is holding back the government from declaring a constitutionally mandated state of emergency in districts affected by the insurgency? Can't the army—which is institutionally more sensitive than civil society about who gives the orders—expect basic candour from the people's representatives?

To be sure, there are complex issues involved on both sides. Allowing the army greater legroom within the current constitutional framework could pose a risk to our democratic evolution. Look at Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif. He fired an army chief for giving a speech that contained political overtones and replaced him with an officially vetted loyalist. Sharif then called out the troops to manage the state water and power company and gave them a free hand in collecting long overdue bills. He ended up losing his party's loyalty and his freedom to live in the country.

That said, our obsession with the country's democratic future must not be allowed to obscure the genuine concerns of our soldiers. They, too,

keep up with current affairs. When serving and retired generals continue their Maoists-are-Nepalis-too chants, what they also mean is that they don't want the force to become a football the ruling and opposition parties can kick around at their convenience. More importantly, our soldiers want to be sure they don't find themselves fighting extradition proceedings to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

How much more civil can the commander-in-chief be on such a grave matter than seeking an all-party consensus in an address to an almost all-military audience at Shivapuri? It's not as if he expressed his feelings at a face-the-nation programme organised by the Nepali Society of Newspaper Editors where the defence minister was his co-panelist. Under the free-speech provisions of the constitution, even the army chief is entitled to some man-to-man talk on home turf with the boys he is being asked to put in harm's way. So let's not jump the gun here in our ardour to preserve the achievements of the historic people's movement.

This brings us back to the original question. Is the army under the government's control? Certainly not. Shouldn't it be? We're asking that question a decade too late. The architects of the constitution had their chance to settle the matter and blew it big time through their don't-ask-don't-tell compromise. The question does, however, retain its historical validity. After all, wouldn't putting the military back under the control of Singha Darbar undo the main achievement of the 1951 revolution—the restraining of an imperial prime minister—one of the very few national events we have been celebrating with equal fervour across party—and partyless—lines? ♦

later...

into the order, but the Buddha did admit to Ananda that women are in every way “capable of realising nirvana.” And what do we have today? Self-proclaimed leaders, organisations and even national laws that consider women less than a man, even less than human, and believe that virtuous women are those hidden at home, illiterate, pregnant, slaving in the kitchen, bundled in voluminous clothes.

In the caste- and class-conscious, Brahmin-dominated society of the sixth century BCE, the Buddha treated the courtesan and the king with equal civility. Of many examples, two stand out:

In Vaishali, the Buddha received a dinner invitation from a famous courtesan, Ambapalika, which he accepted. Later, the city’s nobles also invited him to dine with them. He declined, owing to his previous engagement. The second instance is exceedingly poignant, since it is speculated that it probably hastened the Buddha’s death. At this time he was over 80 years old and in poor health. He was aware that his “parinirvana” was close at hand, and was travelling north to Kapilavastu, to die among his Sakya clan. Near Kushinara, he was invited to dinner by an untouchable blacksmith called Cunda. There is some dispute about whether Cunda served pork or bamboo shoots for dinner. What is irrefutable is that the Buddha ate whatever he was offered. All accounts agree that soon after the Venerable One suffered from stomach trouble and, given his age and illness, soon entered that state which he himself had described as “the end of sorrow.”

There are countless examples of the Buddha’s acts of compassion, tenderness, generosity, wit, and even anger. Of course, over the centuries, the stories and anecdotes have been embellished, if not fabricated, by his followers to make him look even better than he already was. But like many truly spiritual beings, Siddhartha Gautam discovered for himself a unique path that he asserted would lighten the sorrows and sufferings of his fellow human beings. For forty years, he tirelessly preached this alternative path to enlightenment, the Middle Way.

Today in Nepal—“the land of Buddha’s birth”, as we are reminded ad nauseum—it is sad to note that untouchability, oppression, deceit, corruption, discrimination and other social evils are rampant. The courageous Buddha dined with courtesans and outcasts, while our leaders carry out nefarious deeds under cover of darkness.

The Buddha promised no miracles, no divine intervention that would make us better people, but declared that with our own individual effort, we too, just like him, could achieve “the end of sorrow.” It won’t do for us to just hope our pillars of community learn some lessons this Buddha Jayanti. As individuals, we all need to. We need to realise that the change we hope for can only come from within us. The Dhammapada says: “The perfume of flowers goes not against the wind... but the perfume of virtue travels against the wind and reaches unto the ends of the world.” ♦

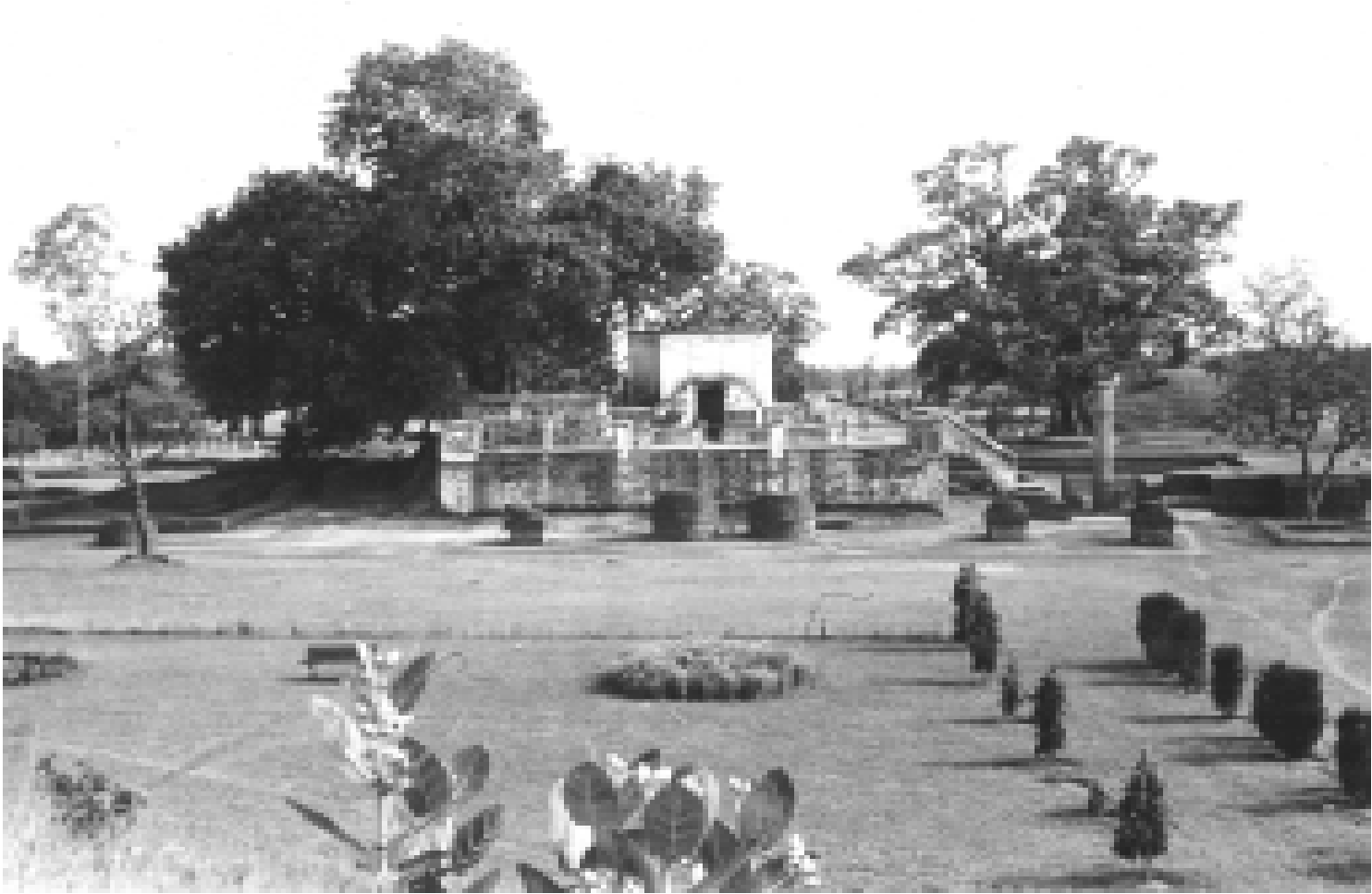
RAMYATA LIMBU

Come 7 May, thousands of Buddhists will have cause to celebrate. After years of discourse and delay, conservation work on the birth site of the Buddha is slated to begin this Buddha Jayanti.

“We still have to get the final excavation report from the Japanese archaeologist. It is behind schedule, but we hope to start work as soon as possible. People are running out of patience,” says Omkar Prasad Gauchan, vice chairman of the Lumbini Development Trust, the Nepali caretaker organisation.

After the Mayadevi Temple Renovation Project, started by the Japanese Buddhist Federation (JBF) and the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), metamorphosed into the Mayadevi Temple Restoration Project in 1992, the sacred site has been under siege. First by an exercise to rein in the wayward roots of the pipal tree standing near the temple and later by archaeologists excavating the temple. Since then, the nativity statue in black stone, showing Mayadevi giving birth to young Gautama, which earlier stood in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, has been moved to a nearby shed while antiquities uncovered by the excavation (which go back to the Maurya, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods) are kept in another shelter to which the JBF, the LDT and Nepal’s Department of Archeology have access. Visitors have not been able to see any of these for close to a decade and conservation experts are concerned that the metal sheet and scaffolding shelter may, under certain climatic conditions, pose a danger to the archaeological remains and visitors.

A devout Buddhist, Gauchan believes the statue has been kept away from the public too long and that it is time to begin reconstruction of the temple. This is a far cry from the indifferent attitude of Kathmandu-based politicians and bureaucrats. At the World Buddhist Summit in 1998, archaeologists and conservationists were aghast when Prime Minister Koirala poured concrete while laying the



Plans are afoot to restore and, indeed, transform the birthplace of the Buddha into a place for worship, research, creativity and dwelling.

foundation stone of the reconstruction of the sacred site, a complete no-no in conservation efforts.

They were even more taken aback when in April this year he summoned members of the UNESCO international technical meeting for conservation and presentation of the archaeological site of Mayadevi temple to his residence and presented a conceptual design he had asked a local architectural concern to prepare without prior notice. A stunned expert politely pointed out that the Sacred Garden had been declared an international heritage site in 1997 and did not only belong to Nepal. “The model did not keep in mind several conservation aspects strongly recommended by a UNESCO monitoring mission to Lumbini last April,” says an architect who was present at the meeting.

The mission recommends that draft conceptual designs for the Mayadevi Temple keep in mind elements of non-intrusion, reversibility, shelter, visibility, focus, access, worship, authentic material and integration with Kenzo Tange’s 1978 Master Plan of Lumbini—to leave the site as natural and untouched as possible. What Koirala displayed, says the architect, was “more suited to Disney World or Sentosa Island.”

The mission also rejected four conceptual designs submitted

earlier, one by Nepal’s Institute of Engineering and three by Japanese architect Kumagai on the basis that the construction of a short-term temple (with an estimated lifespan of 100 years) will result in significant long term damage to the fragile site. None of the designs met the criteria in place for the project, as they utilised steel, concrete and other materials deemed inauthentic. Also, they all propose air conditioning to stabilise the environment of the encased archaeological remains. Such a system was required by all four designs as otherwise the exposed brick walls, the nativity statue and the marker stone would be subject to temperature and humidity extremes. “Air conditioning, however, would be extremely expensive. Then there’s the question of inadequate and irregular power supply,” says a UNESCO official.

Observers point out that no human blueprint, however grand or sublime, can ever do justice to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Already there is concern that Lumbini is giving way to tacky commercialism, encouraged by the easy availability of East Asian hard currency and competition between different sects and nationalities. Thai Temples, Burmese pagodas and Tibetan monasteries, on which tens of millions have been spent, vie for attention in an area near the

nativity site. “The LDT supplies the plots, they design their own building,” says Gauchan who feels this is an expression of the diverse aspects of Buddhism. Nepal’s own plot is lost in the shadow of the Chinese and Korean temples.

Those who want Lumbini to remain a spiritual legacy to the whole world—and not be the stomping ground for a few sects with money and access—are closely watching the garden to ensure that nothing inappropriate comes up. Last month’s UNESCO international technical meeting appears to have nudged things in the right direction. Nepali and international experts agreed on a conceptual design for a golden pavilion within the Sacred Garden of the Buddha’s birthplace. “We have agreed as a concept to a timber framed structure that will support a gold-plated metal roof, but the technical details and design have to still be sorted out,” says architect Sudarshan Raj Tiwari. The structure will protect the statue and the marker stone, and the former will be put back in its original place. A light wood platform will be built around them so that it will be accessible and visible to devotees. The 15 brick chambers in the area will be evened out and protected by three layers of old bricks excavated from the site, making clear where the original structure was and

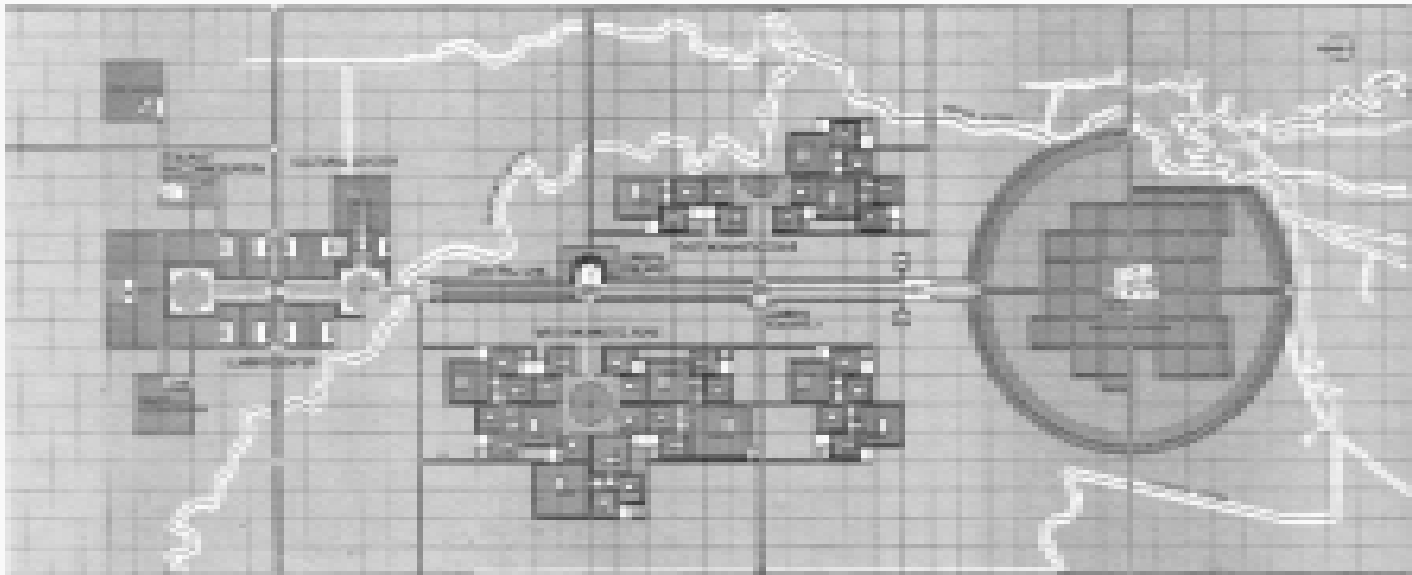
allowing for future excavations.

Such a structure would keep the site as natural and untouched as possible, as envisioned by Professor Kenzo Tenge, the man who drafted the original Lumbini Master Plan in 1978, funded by the UNDP. Tange’s plan proposes to transform three square miles of paddy land into “a sculpted landscape to make the teachings of Lord Buddha accessible to all humanity” and is divided into three linear zones on a north-south access.

The first, the most northerly, is to be a residential village, cultural centre and accommodation for visitors and tourists. The second, or monastic zone, is divided into 41 plots for places of worship and it possesses a library, a museum and an international research centre on Buddhism.

The final zone is the sacred garden—the focus of much international and local interests. Protected by a circular levee with the Ashokan Pillar and Mayadevi temple in the centre, the LDT in 1988 stated that the Sacred Garden “to be tranquil and undisturbed, the beauty of its plant life restored to create a reverent atmosphere in which to experience Buddha’s universal message.” The current conceptual design would make matters simpler, less time consuming and more cost effective. “People complain about things moving slowly,” says Gauchan. “But sometimes they forget the enormity and ambition of Tange’s plan. Nepal cannot implement it alone.”

A multi-volume report was recently completed by the JICA on the infrastructure development project of Lumbini. The report cites lack of resources and a lack of reciprocal commitment as reasons why Tange’s Master Plan has been restricted to paper for the past 18 years. Says a UNESCO official: “Money is no bar. There are so many Buddhist and non Buddhist organisations, including the Japanese Buddhist Federation, UNDP, ADB, who are interested in developing Lumbini. More important is political will and an improved and efficient LDT.” ♦



Kenzo Tenge’s Lumbini Master Plan, with the tourism zone on the left, the monastic zone in the centre and the circular sacred garden on the right.

BIZ NEWS

Overseas exports slow

Carpet exports were down by about eight percent in mid-March from Rs 6.31 billion to Rs 5.79 billion. Exporters say inferior quality exports from India, sold in Western markets under an 'Indo-Nepal' label, and poor government support to the industry are reasons for the downside. The export of readymade garments may also be beginning to plateau—exports grew by just 1.4 percent to Rs 9.30 billion, according to the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). Producers blame the opening up of the American market to products from African countries. Garment exports are expected to dip further after the World Trade Organisation trading regime comes into effect.

Half-yearly BoP

Continued growth in total exports (overseas and to India), and a slowdown of imports kept the trade deficit at Rs 27.39 billion in mid-January, the sixth month of the fiscal year, but the current account deficit has grown, NRB's six monthly Balance of Payments statistics show. The gains on the trade front were offset by a 16.2 percent drop in services—resulting from, among other things, a 14 percent slump in tourism receipts and a 29 percent increase in payments on investments, such as repatriation of earnings from major hydro-projects and other investments, and a 12.5 percent decline in grants. The capital account remained sound, despite a trade credit (payable) of Rs 3.58 billion, offset mainly by "miscellaneous capital items" receipts, which reached Rs 8.07 billion—a 39 percent increase compared to the same period in 1999/00.

Financial reforms update

Court-appointed governor of the central bank Tilak Bahadur Rawal says he's willing to discuss the timing and practicability of the directives issued by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) to commercial banks recently, but there was no possibility of going back on financial sector reforms. In a 48-page statement distributed on Friday, the NRB adds that banks not meeting core capital adequacy requirements (Rs 500 million) by mid-July 2001 would be barred from paying dividends to share holders. Banks can count paid-up capital, general reserves, share premiums, non-redeemable preference shares, preference shares and retained earnings for meeting the capital adequacy requirement. But they cannot use the retained earnings without displaying capital adequacy. Rawal also said there was a tendency among bank promoters to offload shares after a certain number of years and walk away with profits, which the new directives also aim to discourage.

Rawal, sacked last year by the government on grounds of incompetence, was re-appointed governor after he came back with a court order 28 March. The reappointment came after about seven months. In the meanwhile, his successor Dipendra Purush Dhakal had begun some changes, such as cancelling the NRB's plan to purchase eight banknote sorters (Rs 6.4 million apiece), ending overtime payments to note sorters and requiring commercial banks to do their own sorting. Dhakal also began a move to "systematise" the contract workers by requiring them to take tests to become full-time staff. The NRB has about 300 contractual employees. Rawal has indefinitely postponed the examinations.

"I cannot go back on government policy, nor do I want to," Rawal says about financial sector reforms. The NRB has already selected a company to take over management of one of two troubled banks, while proposals for the second one are being evaluated. The plan is to hand over Nepal Bank Limited and the Rastriya Baniya Bank to foreign companies under a management contract by mid-July. The World Bank is helping the financial reforms project with a \$20.5 million loan.



Singapore aims at Nepali tourists

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is planning a campaign to attract Nepali tourists, the first time the island nation will actually be promoting tourism in Nepal. The effort is part of the STB's "New Asia Singapore" under the "Live it up in Singapore" campaign. Last year 12,700 Nepalis visited Singapore, 25 percent on holiday. "We have much more to offer visitors in Singapore and this year we are actually doing some promotion in Nepal," says Leslie Chan, STB Director for South Asia. The promo begins 24 May when the STB and Singapore Airlines will put together a three-day Singapore food festival at the Yak and Yeti Hotel. Nepalis visiting Singapore don't need visas, a bonus for frequent travellers. Chan was in Kathmandu last week for a seminar with Nepali tour operators to inform them of events Singapore was planning, like the Great Singapore Sale, Jazz Festivals, etc.

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ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Tea time



This could be a great time for tea in Nepal—unless the industry goes the way of carpets and pashmina.

Last week's Tea Meet and Expo showcased the first organised endeavour in Nepal to bring together the different groups involved in the tea trade. This focus on a potential agribusiness is long overdue, and people like Dr Shakya of the Agro Enterprise Centre at the FNCCI helped a great deal in bringing this forum to fruition. It is time for us to examine where Nepal stands vis-à-vis this industry.

Despite favourable climatic conditions and topography, Nepal has not been a big player on the world tea scene. Though the hills adjacent to Darjeeling have the potential to produce the same class of tea, we have not been able to exploit this potential. Last decade saw a spurt in new plantations, especially in the mid-nineties, after a surge in tea prices on account of a world wide fall in production. The herd mentality in Nepal then saw rampant unplanned plantations of tea, and from being a country that hardly met half its consumption needs in the early nineties we are now more than self-sufficient.

If production has increased quantitatively the issue of quality remains as pertinent as ever. Complete disregard for quality and constant price undercutting have rendered this industry one of the more difficult ones to run in Nepal. Retail prices having remained nearly constant over the last eight years, and this will be an interesting aspect to



watch in the future.

The industry, plagued by a strong labour-politics nexus, has also seen a surge in manpower costs. Coupled with the increase in prices of other inputs, especially electricity, it has made the viability of many units questionable. Overheads are rising and revenues falling—obvious indicators of an industry in trouble.

It is not the intent, again, to point fingers at the government, but we definitely do not have a long-term policy conducive to the growth of such an industry. This industry has a long gestation period, and certainly has lots of gains on account of economies of scale. Therefore, unplanned mushrooming of plantations may not be the best way of going about this business.

World-wide, tea is a business that is mostly conducted by multinationals operating on a large scale. If Nepal wants to be a world player, there has to be a conducive environment for such players to operate. This could range from having enterprise-friendly

labour laws to options on long-term finance. It is useless to harp upon potential (like we often do about our water resources) until we have the right environment for investors.

The demand for tea across the world has not increased much over the years, but supplies certainly have. Improved technology has cut the cost of production and any country wanting to be a major player needs a strong competitive advantage. Sri Lanka, for example, is doing very well in producing quality tea at very competitive prices, and poses a threat to India. Apart from traditional countries that are now doing better, countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and even Turkey are experimenting with tea. Competition for Nepal will continue to increase.

One advantage Nepal has is access to the large Indian market, but here again quality is a key issue. Exports to Europe and Japan may have potential but it is important that Nepal creates a niche brand for itself. We have seen with the carpet industry and now with pashmina, that being in the rat race makes us compromise on quality. One can only hope that tea exports don't follow this predictable, depressing route.

Yes, these are times to be euphoric and talk of Nepal's potential to be a tea great, but there are many issues that lie between the cup and the lip. ♦

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

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BOOKS

SALIL SUBEDI

It is time for the Valley's book lovers to take some time out. At the fifth Nepal Education and Book Fair 2001 beginning today, they can walk through, browse and buy from almost a million titles on display and sale at over fifty stalls set up by distributors and publishers from Nepal and India. The organisers expect about 75,000 visitors, including bookworms and students exploring educational and career options. "This year more publishers are participating with new titles," says Govinda P Shrestha, president of the National Book Publisher's Association of Nepal (NBPAN) which has been collaborating since 1999 with a private firm, Global Exposition and Management (GEMS) to organise the fair.

It all began in 1997 when the first of such fairs was put together at the same venue, Bhrikuti Mandap, with 47 participants. "It instantly worked as a facilitator between educational institutions, publishers and the public," says Bijay Chettri of GEMS. The organisers say that the number of visitors has been increasing by 10,000 every year, beginning with 25,000 at the first show. This year, with the fair running two additional days, Chettri expects a larger rise in numbers.

This year's expo has two components, the Education and Career fair, from 4-7 May, and the Book Fair proper, from 4-12 May. Students can meet career counsellors and use interactive programmes to identify appropriate institutions they can apply to overseas. There will also be on-the-spot admissions to some universities and colleges.

The book section will showcase a large collection of academic and general books from India and Nepal, with over 100 publishers displaying their works in the fifty or so stalls. But you'll have to walk through and see what catches your interest—books and stalls are not sorted into Nepali and foreign books, or by category. There will be many new releases in the Nepali stalls—Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Mandala Books, Himal Books, and Ekta Books are all expected to bring their bestsellers and new releases in English and Nepali. Children's books will be well represented by Bal Sansar, an organisation that promotes children's literature. The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, the WWF

Nepal Programme and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) are also participating with specialised nature, environment and conservation-related titles. Himalayan Book Centre, run by one of the oldest Nepali book distributors, Pairavi Prakashan, Nepal Sahitya Prakashan and Vidyarthi Pustak, will showcase classic and contemporary



Nepali literature.

Last year's visitors, who saw unbelievable sales as distributors saw a great chance to dump stock, will be disappointed that discounts this time will not run to more than 10 percent. "This year's discount is based on international standards and aims at discouraging the sort of cheap competition evident in earlier exhibitions," says Madhab Lal Maharjan, general secretary of the NBPAN. Organisers estimate that each participating institution will bring books worth Rs 500 million and that revenue generated will be in the region of Rs 1 billion.

The book fair includes renowned publishers and distribution houses from Nepal and India, while the education fair has institutions from the UK, Singapore, India, Cyprus, Australia and Nepal. Most institutions will be represented by their local agents in Nepal. There's plenty of opportunity for students, but the organisers are unable to develop a mechanism to check instances of fraud that seem to dog the foreign university counselling business. Students are advised to take their time and do independent research before committing themselves to anything.

Another problem that organisers acknowledge they will face is piracy and institutions that peddle pirated books. They say they have no criteria to reject applications for participation, and that they are in no position to evaluate an institution's authenticity. The NBPAN sent out a circular requesting publishers to be vigilant about pirated books, but how effective this will be is anyone's guess.



The annual Kathmandu book fair, beginning Friday, will be the biggest ever.

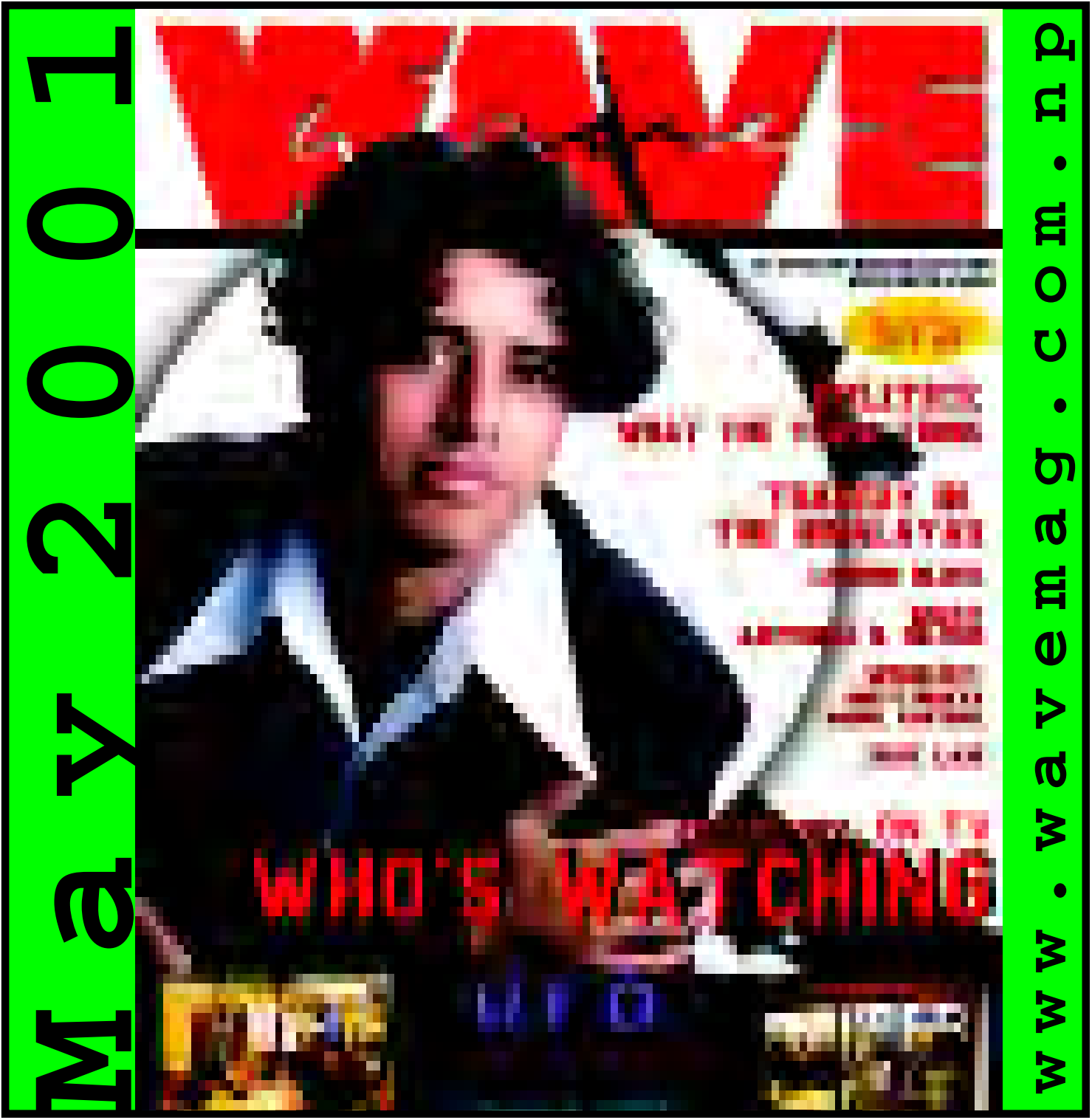
Unfortunately, in Nepal, the economics of book fairs, exports and imports aren't yet completely sorted out. Under existing laws, books and hardware are in the same category. "It's strange that iron and books are categorised as the same kind of export," says Maharjan. "The Nepali diaspora in north-east and north-west India is a rich potential market. The government should come up with a trade policy so the export of books is easier," he adds. Basically, because they do not fall under the Open General Licence

(OGL) regulations, foreign currency restrictions make imports and exports tedious. Chettri also complains about the complicated financial transactions: "We can't charge higher entry and participation fees. But we are faced with increasing overheads and it is getting difficult to sustain the fete."

There is good news, though, that might encourage more discussion about these issues: the NBPAN plans to work with six associations from the SAARC

region to develop an annual book fair with support from the SAARC Book Development Council in New Delhi. The consortium plans to have each SAARC country host the book fair on a rotation basis, and have the others participate with a good selection. All publishers will be requested to donate a display copy to the SAARC library. "If all countries receive approval from their ministries, the plan will be put forward during the meeting of the SAARC Foreign Secretaries in Colombo early June," says the

NBPAN's Maharjan. SAARC countries can then decide whether to also organise their usual domestic book fairs or just have one large jamboree every few years. The NBPAN also envisions promoting co-production, joint authorship, and the sale of subsidiary rights. If all goes according to plan, they anticipate that the regulations governing cross-border trade of books will be made less cumbersome. The first SAARC book fair is tentatively planned for next year in Bangladesh. ♦





DUBBY BHAGAT

Kipling famously wrote: "The wildest dreams of Kew/Are the facts of Kathmandu." You're taking a walk on the delightfully wild side when you eat in Kathmandu's many-splendoured havens of civilisation. Old Nepal is will tell you about a lineage of kings who ruled for 800 years but went into decline because they feasted too much and too well, and that 108 years of regal Prime Ministers faded away because of a surfeit of hedonism and food. The old Nepal is inevitably add that food is a wonderful way to go, if you must. No surprise, then, that restaurants are thick on the ground in the Valley and the hills are alive with the

sounds of nibbling, tasting and downright chomping in at least 12 languages. Kathmandu is incestuously small and one knows all the people whose establishments one frequents. So if this is a plug for friends, acquaintances and those in-between, no apology is tendered. Their food is superb.

Gitu Rana isn't just the landlord of Baber Mahal Revisited, but also co-owns a Rana restaurant there, Baithak, where you feast on delicacies like wild boar cooked to perfection served on heavy silver thalis that have legs so that,

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

Kathmandu valley is alive with the sounds of nibbling, tasting and downright chomping in at least 12 languages.

Rana-style, you don't have to bend too much. Around you are portraits of ancestors who look stern but well fed. King Birendra is known to have eaten at Baithak and rumour has him so enjoying himself that when he left late, huge tips were left to the staff as a royal apology for keeping them late.

Also there is Chez Caroline, run by an long-time Kathmanduite who, I like to think, tired of cooking macher jhol for her Bengali husband, and now serves crepes, quiches, and other hedonistic dishes. My favourites are the roast capon with truffle oil and foie gras, the *recherche* guinea fowl served in a pink pepper sauce and the mixed salad with Roquefort cheese, walnut and chicken. Diplomats throng Chez Caroline giving credence to Oscar Wilde's saying, "To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist—the problem is entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar."

Opposite Chez Caroline, is Kunal Lama's ambulatory Simply Shutters that moved into Baber Mahal Revisited and is about to move out again. Lama, 28, is the youngest purveyor of fine food in Kathmandu. His Zen Mackerel, delicately sautéed in ginger and garlic and salad of Chinese spinach tossed in soy sauce and sesame oil, will have me search Thamel for Simply Shutters and Kunal's new incarnation. Or perhaps not, I owe him a horrific sum of money for several helpings of his unbelievable Torta Caprese.

Thamel combines the Left Bank and Greenwich Village in a unique shop-live-eat experience where youth of all ages from around the world find bliss. And at the heart of it is the Thai Yin Yang, the only place in Kathmandu you have to make a reservation. Mine host and friend is Martin, an able Schweitzer, who regales me with anecdotes of Kathmandu happenings like rickshaw rallies, fashion shows and who's doing what to whom. I eat his superb Penang Curry or the delicate chicken in oyster sauce, coming up for air only

to greet the Thai lady-chef who tells me what to eat next.

An American flag flies outside Over The Rainbow in Thamel—John Childs' tribute to The Joy Of Cooking, the US's best-selling cookbook and to Dorothy, Toto, and Oz. Here are humongous New York deli sandwiches, named after *The Wizard of Oz*, and wholesome American fare like chicken pot pie, meat loaf, shepherd's pie and a stew so delicious I order it on the side every time. Doggie bags are freely available and frequently necessary.

Opposite is Pilgrims Read and Read that a vegetarian gourmet friend insists is the best in Kathmandu. Run by a jovial Banarasi and a Nam veteran, the bookshop's café is full of tourists delighting in deals, bolting down bhartas and revelling in rotis hot from a visible tandoor. The restaurant also serves tongba, a millet beer traditionally served hot in bamboo and sipped through an iron straw.

KC's, whose steaks are the best in Thamel, rivals Rum Doodle as the earliest restaurant in Thamel. Rum Doodle is run by a clan of friendly Pokharels. The drinks are generous and get more so as the evening progresses and the snacks, especially the *vol-au-vent*, are terrific. Large plywood Yeti feet adorn the walls with messages from all patrons who've climbed a six-thousander. If some are unreadable, blame it on the booze.

Away from Thamel is The Shangri La Hotel, which has a new Jazz Bar. The menu is contemporary fusion chic—Southeast Asian delicacies, French accents and even some Indian and there are cigars on order and cognac in snifters. The Shaubala Garden Café in hotel's award-winning garden has a nifty mixed grill I indulge in every time I pass by. When a friend objected to the amount of meat and talked of clean arteries, I looked around at the beautiful garden and the beckoning grill and thought maybe this is the hereafter and who wants *Better Homes and Gardens* arteries anyway?



Mandarin, The Everest Hotel's Chinese outlet, revolves around the *gyokko*, a meal in a dish that meandered from Manchuria to Tibet four centuries ago. And what a dish—brass with a chimney for hot coals around a bowl full of meats and vegetables in a headed chicken broth. The sauces allow you to create your own taste-fiery Szechuan, zesty Hun or mild Cantonese. Chef Xiao Bing and Chef Bhakti preside and mainland China and India are endlessly "thai bhai". The food at The Casino Everest is delicious and free for gamblers. Chef Keshab's most special speciality is a Bhuma Bhuma Ghost.

The Radisson has an outlet called The Olive Garden with a menu positively sinful in its caloric content. Chef Roger Blundy conjures sheer magic, which, while

not strictly Italian, is a delightful combination of east, west and other compass points. I have many favourites but frequently order the sirloin steak or rack of New Zealand lamb. Roger's art lies in the herbs that gently flavour my favourites.

The Alfresco at The Salt Tree Crowne Plaza is traditional Italian fare at its best. The ambience is perfect, the minestrone genuine and the pastas marvelous. But best of all is the smoked salmon starter, not Italian, but impeccably served with just the right amount of capers, and onion rings. And the tiramisu is a dream.

So come to Kathmandu eat and drink late into the Himalayan nights, sleep and then go gently to the first meal of the day remembering that only dull people are brilliant at breakfast. ♦



WHAT THE PAPER EATS

NT staffers pick their favourites. There's a suspicious abundance of daal-bhaat and Japanese restaurants, which leads one to believe reports are filed on rice paper.

BK's Fries

A Thamel place with a difference—there's no IndianChineseContinentalNepaliSetMeal menu. They do fries. These are the best fries in the Valley, perhaps even the country. The small, medium and large servings of double-fried chips come in paper cones with a choice of dips in little leaf platters. BK's does mayo, ketchup, hot ketchup, tartar, cocktail, devil, pinda, pataje oorlog and the mysteriously named "special", which contains mayo, onion and hot ketchup. This friendly place is an open-on-two-sides storefront with four barstools off which it is easy to slide when engorged on fries. Near the Bamboo Club and Hotel Vaishali.



Thakali Bhaancha

Thakali Bhaancha, opposite BK's Fries, has that classic sign of good, down-home food—it is packed with customers, all eating the same thing. The specialty here is daal, bhaat and tarkari, Thakali style. It is ideal if you are a "bhatte", a rice lover, but you can also make a pig of yourself over more hardcore Thakali food like ghyanto (spinach gravy), dhung (thakali sausage), dhedo (corn or millet pudding), and phapaar ko rotis. Chhang is also available.

Momotarou

A small Thamel place for Japanese budget tourists—30 covers in a pinch—that encourages you to look beyond tuna rolls and norimaki. There are delicious breakfasts like tempura, egg, or onion chicken over rice, accompanied by a tiny, incredibly fresh salad and miso soup. Lunch and dinner are pitch perfect renditions of the usual suspects—sukiyaki, teriyaki, cutlets and udon. The set meals include potato and tofu, ginger chicken, mackerel and a stunning light fried whole fish with a faint zing of wasabi. All come with a generous bowl of rice, miso soup, a ginger dressed shredded cabbage salad, the breakfast salad, and a large herby cube of extremely creamy tofu. Good complimentary mukicha (barley tea) too.



Tamura at Hotel Kido

Finding Tamura on Thapathali Hill can be tricky, but once you're there, it's great. The almost exclusively Japanese clientele, wood panelled décor, bilingual waiters and piping hot hand-towels upon arrival make for a chilled out spot. The comprehensive sushi box with California rolls, or a huge slurpy bowl of udon or soba noodles with very fresh green veggies and/or prawn tempura is perfect for a light lunch. Chicken with ginger, pork with garlic, and fillet with onions are served sizzler-style with all the trimmings: rice, miso soup and a Japanese salad that's a meal in itself. Undoubtedly, the best green tea in town. Probably the best Japanese food north of Lumbini.

Upstairs

If you're a momo buff who doesn't have hang-ups about pork, go to Upstairs. This cosy outfit opposite the Bluebird on Lazimpat has the best pork momos in town. There are also excellent vegetarian, veggie cheese and buff momos on offer. And great aloo dum. The spicy potatoes are cooked Darjeeling style—not too much masala, but plenty of chilli. The perfect accompaniments to such delectations are on hand: chilled beer and good jazz (live Saturday evenings). After the momos and potatoes, try the fried pork and juicy French fries.



Didi ko Bhaancha Ghar

In Thamel, if you want daal bhaat, Nepali Standard style, go down the alleyway leading to Hotel Sagarmatha until you come to a small building that looks like it should be in a paddy field. This is where Thamel shopkeepers, guides and Chinese balm sellers wolf down aachaar, seasonal tarkari, *jhane ko daal*—brown lentils with ghee and *jimbu*—salad and chicken or mutton. It is the closest you will get to eating at home on a workday. And it almost is—Maya "didi" has been in Thamel for about two decades and runs a family operation.

DEBUNKING MYTHS

by MARK TURIN



Have you taken your fooding?

A white man's experience of Nepali cuisine.

Myth One: *Daal Bhaat Tarkari* (hereafter DBT) is the national food of Nepal, and Nepalis eat nothing else their whole lives. Hogwash.

Myth Two: Once you have

paste, nettle-soup and animal bits. It was delicious, once I had found a way to break bits off the summit and get them into my mouth without losing them down my shirt.

compelled to censor the opinions of rice-eating guests everywhere. Should they succeed, it will be the end of *Dietary Natural Selection* (by which people choose to eat in the tastiest restaurants) and the beginning of an era which will go down in history as *The Survival of*



tried one DBT, you have tried them all. Huhbug.

Let me speak from personal experience. Ten years ago, my first plate of Nepali village food was not quite what I had expected. I had read various guidebooks, and while they differed in certain respects, they all concurred that in Nepal, life is DBT and DBT is life.

Admittedly, I was sitting in the dark and only the flickering light from the fire illuminated our meal, but I could make out no rice, no lentils and definitely no vegetable curry. The yellowish mountain on my plate was either one very large grain of hitherto undocumented rice or it was not rice at all, and I had a sneaking hunch that it was the latter. In the place where the lentils should have been was a semi-fluorescent green soup, and where I had imagined bite-sized chunks of potato or strings of spinach, I was faced with what looked distinctly like bits of stomach lining.

Yes, I was eating *Dhab Sisinu Maasu* (hereafter DSM), roughly translated as polenta-

But it was not rice.

Perhaps the motive behind the Myth of DBT is what we can call the lowest common denominator effect. From the plains of the tarai, where breads (roti, paratha, puri) make up a significant part of the diet to the mountains where *dhab* in all of its incarnations (maize, millet wheat and buckwheat) is the staple, little unites Nepalis in terms of dietary intake. Rice is an all-rounder that is increasingly available throughout the country, and it has understandably become the carbohydrate of choice.

As for dispelling the second Myth: no two DBTs are the same. Alongside the obvious differences resulting from longitude and latitude, every household has its own trade secrets for bringing out those special flavours, and of course, as all young Nepali men will tell you, no wife cooks quite like mummy does. However, a deep and dark undercurrent in Nepali society is trying to nullify the difference between a good plate of rice and a bad one. These are the followers of the "Even If It's Not Tasty, Then Eat It As If It Were" Movement, a group of radicals who feel

the Blarney.

The culture and traditions of the countries one visits should be respected. In fact, the differences are the very reason that most people travel. However, some things go too far. Just as I believe that no visitor to Britain should be forced to converse about the weather nor to engage in the rhetorical nonsense of the "how do you do" ritual, so too I think that foreigners should not be asked to lie about food when in Nepal. In short: if it's not tasty, then don't pretend that it is. If the idea of drawing an eyeball of goat or foot of chicken is not your idea of dietary delectation, then you should not be forced to eat even *lakti*.

Perhaps there is a solution to the political vacuum in Nepal at present: Nationalism through DBT. Given the chance, from Mechi all the way to Mahakali, I am sure that villagers would vote for *Daal Bhaat Tarkari* Party instead of *Tree, Sun* or *Plough*. After all, there is a limit to the number of Pajeros a plate of rice can own. When you start seeing steaming plates of rice and vegetable curry all over the billboards in town, with "Vote Daal Bhaat" stencilled underneath, you will know that real democracy has come. And while we are on the subject: Enjoy Your Fooding. ♦

pepsi

Been there, outlawed it—banned the T-shirt

JOHN NAUGHTON . . .

Our future is bracketed by two writers. George Orwell thought we would be destroyed by the things we hate. Aldous Huxley feared we would be undermined by the things we love. For much of the last century, Orwell seemed to have the upper hand. And although the forces of Big Brother (the UK Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and the new EU Directive on cybercrime) are still alive and kicking the hell out of civil liberties, it's beginning to look as though Huxley's nightmare will dominate the twenty-first century.

How come? Well, it's all to do with our lust for packaged entertainment, particularly films and recorded music. The advent of digital technology, and especially the rise of the Internet as a mass medium, created a formidable problem for the huge companies that control the "intellectual property" embodied in movies and music.

Their initial responses to the challenge were clumsy and inept. Long after the MP3 horse had bolted, for example, the record companies tried to lock the stable door with their own proprietary and controllable-file compression software.

The world yawned and gave its answer in the shape of Napster, an MP3-fuelled file-sharing service that signed up 60 million users in its first 18 months of life. Because Napster was a company seeking to make profits, it was easy to bring to heel. The existing laws of copyright proved sufficient for the purpose. What the furor over the case obscured, however, was the incredible lengths to which the copyright lobby is prepared to go to secure its intellectual property and the implications of this for civil society.

What has emerged is a formidable three-pronged strategy to secure these property rights. The first and most obvious strand is aggressive use of existing copyright laws. The second involves the use of



A combination of technology plus compliant legislatures threatens to bring about Huxley's nightmare.



encryption and security technology to counter the technological challenge of MP3 and the like.

The third involves the effective suborning of compliant and ignorant legislatures (notably the US Congress and the European Parliament) to create a new legal framework that gives unprecedented privileges to copyright owners over other groups in society. It's the combination of technology plus compliant legislatures that threatens to bring about Huxley's nightmare.

We're already seeing the effects of this with DVD discs. DVD movies are encrypted using a system called CSS and can be played only on devices that are equipped with approved decryption software. The industry tries to use this to control who can see which version of each movie: DVD discs purchased in the US cannot be played on European DVD players. But the encryption system is relatively easy to crack. Now 'hacked' DVD players can be obtained (if you know where to look) and a decryption program (called DeCSS) is available on the net, so owners of Linux-based computers are able to play DVDs on their machines.

But here's where the double whammy strikes. The copyright lobby persuaded the US Congress to include a clause in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) that makes it illegal to write software like DeCSS. And not only are people being prosecuted for doing so, but a computer magazine is being sued in New York for publishing the DeCSS code.

The program is relatively small. It is possible to print it on a T-shirt and indeed such garments already exist. Under the DMCA, wearing one in public may be a crime. DeCSS has also been published as a haiku. Does this mean that certain kinds of poetry will eventually be outlawed simply to appease the holders of intellectual property? This stuff is no longer about technology; it's about freedom. ♦ (The Observer)



Global Expo

Patents and poor patients



CAMBRIDGE – Debates over drug pricing and intellectual property rights are raging. Many life-saving drugs, notably those used to fight AIDS, are produced under patents mainly by US and European pharmaceutical companies. The patent-protected prices of these drugs often puts them out of reach of poor people in the poorest countries. Thus, while many AIDS patients in rich countries are kept alive by these drugs, millions of people in poor countries are dying before they should, leaving behind misery, millions of orphans, and economic devastation.

A typical AIDS drug regimen is priced at about \$10,000 per patient, per year in rich countries. The costs of producing these drugs, however, are much less than the market price, perhaps as low as \$350-\$500 per year for some of the three-drug combinations. Some quality producers of generic drugs, such as Cipla of India, have offered to provide these drugs at prices near to the cost of production. In response to this offer (and to bad publicity), Merck, Abbott Laboratories, and Bristol Myers Squibb, three large patent-holding companies, announced their willingness to supply the African market at “zero profit”—at around



STEPHAN VAN LERENEN

\$500 per patient per year. The tragedy of millions of impoverished people dying of AIDS even when drugs exist to treat them raises deep questions about global intellectual property rights, because patent protection is creating a barrier to essential medicines reaching the world's poor. But how can the benefits of a global patent system that provides incentives for innovation and new discoveries be combined with an assurance that poor people gain access to the medical care that they desperately need? One way is to set drug prices at different levels in rich and poor countries. In rich countries, patent

protection should continue so that the pharmaceutical industry keeps innovating. This is particularly important in the case of AIDS, because the spread of drug-resistant viruses and the unwanted side-effects of existing medicines, means that new anti-retroviral drugs will be needed to keep treatments effective. Thus drug companies must keep ploughing their earnings back into research and development. To assure that, profits-protected by patents—are needed. Yet poor countries—or donors acting on behalf of the poor—cannot pay the same price. Africa's average annual income is over \$35,000 per

How can the benefits of a global patent system that provides incentives for innovation be combined with an assurance that poor people gain access to medical care they desperately need?

person; in much of Africa, annual income is less than \$350 per person. Poor countries are, indeed, so poor that they cannot afford the drugs even at the production cost of around \$350 per patient, per year, because even these reduced prices amount to a year's average income. Thus, few Africans can afford AIDS treatment even when supplied by generic drug producers. Any viable solution requires that the following conditions be satisfied: drug companies—whether patent holders or generic drug producers—must provide drugs to poor countries at prices near to production costs; drug prices in rich countries must remain higher through patent protection to preserve incentives for innovation; rich and poor markets must be separated, so that cheap drugs from poor countries are not smuggled into rich countries (or are not allowed in legally through parallel-market imports); governments in rich countries must provide

substantial assistance to poor countries, so that the poor—who are too poor to afford these drugs even at reduced prices—can make use of them. Indeed, rich countries should create a “Global Health Fund” to help less fortunate countries by drugs and medical services to fight killer diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. This fund would be aimed not only at poor countries, but at some middle-income countries like South Africa where diseases like AIDS are so rampant that the volume of drugs needed to combat disease cannot be purchased even at reduced prices. But rich-country voters may demand that drug prices for them should also fall. If politicians agree in here say, by eliminating patent protection, imposing price controls, or allowing re-import of drugs from poor countries—innovation for new drugs will stall. Still, rich-country drug purchasers, however, should not fear the worst: there is no reason to believe that the drug prices they pay would

rise just because drug companies agree to lower prices in poor countries. During the recent court fights over AIDS drugs in South Africa, patents received a black eye. But without them, the stream of new anti-retroviral products used to fight AIDS would not have flowed, because the incentives for developing new drugs would be lacking. Some opponents of patents argue that government-sponsored research is enough to develop new drugs, but history shows that, although government-sponsored research is good at basic science, the profit-based private sector is best at developing and introducing new products. So, reform the international patent system to guarantee the poor access to essential medicines, but don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg by undermining the patent system. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

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Let the Serbs try Milosevic



A lot has been happening in Yugoslavia recently, much of it surprising. After some procrastination and an initial failed attempt, Milosevic has been arrested, without bloodshed, though not without danger. The peaceful vote in Montenegro last week may prefigure conflict and difficult decisions about independence, but chances are strong that the parties will settle these matters by talking rather than fighting. These are great steps forward, and they show that despite brainwashing and the complicity of many Serbs in the crimes of the Milosevic regime, democracy and open society have a chance of taking root in what remains of Yugoslavia. One key decision facing Serbia, and its new authorities, is whether Milosevic should be extradited to The Hague. There seems to be almost universal agreement that he should, and international pressure is being applied on President Kostunica to comply. But the decision may have life-and-death ramifications for Serbia's future. Many who agree that Milosevic is a war criminal now think that we should listen to the voices coming from Belgrade and their cry that Milosevic should face trial before his own people. Ultimate moral responsibility for what was done by Milosevic rests with Serbia's people. They brought him to power, albeit not in a way that conforms precisely with democratic norms; they supported him, even when he led them into genocidal crimes and to defeat after defeat. Finally, they brought him down, and the new democratic leadership in Belgrade has, at no little risk to its own position and standing, arrested him. That arrest could well have ended in a bloodbath that might have destabilised a still insecure democratic government. Yugoslavia's new leadership should now be allowed to deal with Milosevic in a way that promotes democracy within Yugoslavia. His crimes should be judged by his own people—not by an international tribunal. In this way the trial will gain more legitimacy and credibility,

The lessons from any trial of Milosevic should be taught to Serbia's citizens by Serbian judges, within a normative system that most Serbs accept as legitimate.

..... especially among the many Serbs who still need to be educated in order to realise the true extent of Milosevic's crimes. Most importantly, by dealing with Milosevic, the Serbs, many of whom supported his regime, will be forced to confront their own behaviour and deal with their own consciences. Only through this process will Serbia be able to rejoin the ranks of free and healthy European nations. If the trial is held before distant judges, sitting in a far-away capital, applying a not very transparent and somehow abstract code of law, many Serbs will see this not as a trial of Milosevic, but as victors' justice meted out to the Serbian nation. They will be wrong. Nonetheless, political trials (and war crime trials are always political trials) must not only punish, but also teach. The lessons from any trial of Milosevic should be taught to Serbia's citizens by Serbian judges, within a normative system that most Serbs accept as legitimate. The international hue and cry for Milosevic to be brought to The Hague, regardless of political consequences, is understandable. Yet this pressure is unwise, and somewhat hypocritical. After all, the peacekeeping forces in Bosnia can, should they decide to act, arrest Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs who have been indicted by the Hague Tribunal. They have not done so, and show no signs of doing so. Why this inaction? Clearly, political reasons are at the root of this: the British, US and French governments are reluctant to risk the lives of their own soldiers in order to bring these arch-criminals to justice. Indeed, Karadzic and Mladic have evaded arrest for years; indeed, since the Dayton peace accords were signed. Shouldn't equal consideration for the political constraints faced by President Kostunica and the sensitivities of the Serbian people be given? Is it really worth the risk of destabilising Yugoslavia's infant democracy to carry out trials that Yugoslavia's government shows every sign of being able to carry out? That there will now be a Truce and Reconciliation Commission in Belgrade suggests that the current Yugoslav leadership understands that it needs to heal the wounds inflicted on its own people by the murderous Milosevic regime. Let the international community show the same compassion and understanding to the Serbian people that it applies when it has to decide whether to risk its own soldiers in an attempt to apprehend Karadzic and Mladic. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

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2030, not 2015

..... UNITED NATIONS - The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is disappointed that an international commitment to reduce the world's hungry by half by 2015 has fallen far short of its target. “The rate at which progress is being made is not sufficient. This is not acceptable,” complained FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf of Senegal. If the current rate of reducing the world's hungry—about 8 million a year—continues into the next decade, the goal set by the World Food Summit would only be achieved by 2030, not 2015, he told reporters last weekend. The target set by the summit, which was held at the FAO headquarters in Rome in 1996, was to reduce the number of hungry people by half by 2015, from 824 million to 412 million. The summit also adopted a Rome Declaration and a Plan of Action to resolve the food crisis. The issue, Diouf argued, is one of political will and resources—both of which are in short supply, precipitating the ongoing food crisis. The FAO is planning a follow-up to the World Food Summit, also in Rome, 5-9 November. The proposed meeting—to be attended by heads of state and government—is not intended to re-open discussions or re-negotiate the summit's goals. But it will address the lack of political will and the shortage of resources to achieve the target. Two years ago, Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci of Italy, then president of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), singled out the World Food Summit as an “illuminating example” of a UN talk-fest long on pledges but short on action. (IPS)

Rhetorical justice

..... VIENNA - An Austrian appeal court ruled last week that far right politician Jörg Haider had made comments which trivialised the crimes of the Third Reich. The judgement was a victory for political scientist Anton Pelinka of Innsbruck university. In a television interview Prof Pelinka had referred to a statement by Haider that concentration camps were “punishment centres”, saying that Haider had played down the horrors of Nazi rule. The cases against Haider have highlighted fears that the entry of Haider's Freedom party (FPÖ) in a coalition government with conservatives has severely damaged freedom of speech in Austria and has also served to make the FPÖ's anti-foreigner rhetoric part of mainstream discourse. Haider gained notoriety for enthusing about Hitler's unemployment policies and praising SS veterans as “men of character”. He has turned into a figure of fascination for linguists over the years, who have remarked that he has become increasingly proficient at using the methods of distortion, exaggeration, diversion, simplification, mitigation, and more than any other Austrian politician, humour, to play his populist game. “Haider is someone who plays the populist game combined with a very clever rhetoric to which one cannot react with objective facts,” according to Ruth Wodak, professor of applied linguistics at Vienna university. A linguistic study she led some months ago concluded that Austria was the only country in which the far right was not only included in mainstream debate, but where it actually led the agenda. (The Guardian)

Old order, new order

JAKARTA – Indonesia is in the process of decaying and if the younger generations do not take over the leadership, the country could break apart. Although Indonesia's reform movement, spearheaded by the younger generation and particularly students, succeeded in toppling then-president Suharto in May 1998, it failed to bring about real change. Almost three years later, the country is in worse shape than before as a result of conflicting interests of the political parties that participated in the 1999 general elections.

Ethnic and religious violence continues across the country, causing the deaths of thousands of innocent people. In his more than 15 months in office, Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid has clearly failed to bring the situation under control. In Ambon and North Maluku provinces, religious clashes have flared for more than two years now and show no sign of abating. In West and Central Kalimantan provinces, ethnic violence between indigenous Dayaks and migrant Madurese has become a common occurrence, killing thousands and



displacing tens of thousands more on both sides. Moreover, Wahid has failed to win back the hearts of the Achehese and Irianese who fought so long for independence. These ethnic and religious conflicts are the creation of people who lost their power and privileges because of the country's reform movement and are attempting to regain them. It is no coincidence that they, and other forms of violence, began immediately after

Indonesia needs leaders with character who have passed the test of history. Unfortunately, none of the country's current political leaders has even undergone this test, let alone passed it.

.....

Suharto's forced resignation. If the situation does not improve, the disintegration of Indonesia will become a very real danger. The people no longer believe in the rule of law and have started to take matters into their own hands. More than one hundred police stations have been attacked by angry mobs so far. Such events could eventually ignite a social revolution.

When the founding fathers declared the country's independence on 17 August 1945, they envisioned Indonesia as a free, democratic and modern country. It is very far from that today. At present all problems are resolved through killing. Democracy has simply never taken root, leaving the patronage system, or 'patronisme', in place. The reform movement seems to have given a free ride to power-

hungry hypocritical politicians, who are fighting only for their own party's interests at the expense of their constituents' well-being and the country's unity. They all witnessed the massacres that Suharto's New Order regime carried out over its 32 years in power and did nothing to prevent them.

These self-proclaimed pro-reform politicians are the products, indeed the remnants, of the New Order regime and lack the moral authority to govern the country. President Wahid, Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri, Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Amien Rais, House of Representatives (DPR) Speaker Akbar Tandjung, and other political leaders were all members of the MPR and/or the DPR under Suharto.

Wahid is a leader without a vision. He makes frequent

overseas trips without a clear mission. As president, he is responsible for shaping government policy, not travelling overseas or focusing on extraneous issues, like the indictment of alleged computers. He has, however, successfully reduced the power of the Indonesian army, at least for the time being. Other leaders wouldn't have dared to do that and likely would have compromised with army leaders.

Megawati, who is also the chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) that won the 1999 general election with 153 representatives in the House, owes her political advancement to the New Order. In fact, she is a New Order politician. When she was an MPR member during the Suharto regime, she did not dare to fight for the rights of her father Sukarno, the country's first

president. Rais, on the other hand, wants to be president, and everything that he does is geared toward that goal. As for Tandjung, he is the chairperson of Golkar, Suharto's political bandwagon.

Indonesia needs leaders with character who have passed the test of history. Unfortunately, none of the country's current political leaders has even undergone this test, let alone passed it. The young chairperson of the Democratic People's Party (PRD) Budiman Sudjatmiko has. He was imprisoned in 1997 and 1998 because of his political convictions. When former president Bahrudin Jusuf Habibie granted him amnesty in 1998, he vehemently rejected it because he believed he committed no mistake.

There is no hope for the present regime. It should exit the stage and make room for the younger generation in order to prevent the country from breaking up. ♦ (IBS)

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, now 75, is Indonesia's most famous and prolific writer, with over 30 works translated into 30 languages. He was imprisoned and banished under both Sukarno and Suharto. The ban on his books imposed by Suharto for allegedly being pro-communist has not been officially lifted.

Daughters of the faith



RANJIT DEVRAJ IN NEW DELHI

alamed by the rapid fall in the number of girl children in northern Punjab, Sikh religious leaders have threatened excommunication for adherents who resort to female foeticide. The fears of the Sikh clergy that followers are using ultrasonography to determine the sex of unborn children and aborting female ones were confirmed by statistics from India's latest census, which was conducted through February.

According to the headcount, the female sex ratio in Punjab has dropped to 874 for every 1,000 males in 2001, from 882 10 years ago. Even more shocking is the fact that the number of girls for every 1,000 boys in the under-six age group had dropped to 793 over the same period of time.

Apparently, girls in the under-six age group have received no better treatment over the last decade in several important northern states and territories that flank Punjab. In Haryana, the ratio of girls to boys has dropped from 879 to 829, in Himachal Pradesh from 951 to 897, in Gujarat from 928 to 878, in the federal territory of Chandigarh (the heavily urbanised joint-capital of Haryana and Punjab) from 899 to 845. In Delhi, the ratio of girls to boys has fallen from 915 to 865 in 10 years.

This week, India's Planning Commission asked Punjab's chief minister Parkash Singh Badal for a detailed report on the continued decline in the state's female-to-male ratio. "If this (trend) is not arrested in time, there will serious social implications," Planning Commission Chairman KC Pant warned Badal during discussions last week on Punjab's annual plan.

The Sikh clergy plans to rope in heads of other religious denominations in India for a concerted campaign against female foeticide. "It is the moral responsibility of religious leaders to ensure a proper balance in the sex ratio," said Manjeet Singh, one of Sikhism's five top leaders. Though orthodox, the Sikh religion accords a high status to women. In March 1999, the well-endowed Sikh Temple Management Committee (SIMC), which controls the community's shrines around the world, had its first woman head in Bibi Jagir Kaur.

The Sikh edict against female foeticide is a bold step in a country where religious groups are yet to theologically reckon with modern methods of sex determination.

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But in the following year, Kaur was forced to step down after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's premier sleuthing agency, charged her with having had her teenage daughter murdered after she was discovered to have been pregnant through a lover Kaur did not approve of.

India's foremost demographer, Ashish Bose, says the Sikh edict against foeticide issued last week was a welcome move. But he also worries that nothing similar could be done in other northern states where there is social hostility toward the girl child. "It is more than clear that the law cannot be enforced unless the government hires thousands of private detectives," he said. According to Neelam Singh, an obstetrician who has been running a United Nations-backed campaign against female foeticide in Lucknow, capital of northern Uttar Pradesh state, the practice has lately been spreading to the city's large Muslim population.

"Islamic tenets expressly forbid foeticide but I know many women who do it secretly," said Sultana Usmani, a government health extension worker who believes that religious leaders have a major role to play especially through counselling. Much of the problem, she says, stems from the fact that doctors who use ultrasound machines—indispensable for monitoring the health of the growing fetus—can convey the sex of an unborn child to its parents without even uttering a word.

The next step, abortion, is facilitated by lenient laws shaped by population control needs and by legions of quacks and midwives whose services may extend to outright infanticide. Singh says it is impossible to detect with accuracy the sex of the fetus in the first trimester of pregnancy, when abortion is safe and legal. "What is likely is that male fetuses are also aborted because doctors who accept payments don't want to take chances," she said.

Leaders of India's major religions, including Hinduism and Islam, frown on abortion at any stage as murder and most are yet to theologically reckon with modern methods of sex determination. The Sikh edict was a first. Soon after its issuance last week, the Akal Takht, the headquarters of the sect in Amritsar city, was flooded with messages of congratulations from religious leaders and international organisations.

Bose, the demographer, says the girl child is up against an unholy alliance between tradition, with its son complex and customs like dowry, and technology represented by ultrasound and the electronic media which promotes consumerist values. He says: "The message for would-be parents is clear: If you produce girls you will be financially crippled. Better to spend a few thousand rupees now on pre-birth and sex selective abortions rather spend fortunes on dowries after years of saving." ♦ (IBS)

The distance between olives

North Korea's communist leaders imported two Italian chefs to prepare secret banquets of pizza at the height of the country's famine, it has emerged. The chefs were flown into Pyongyang with special ovens to feed its "Respected Supreme Commander", Kim Jong-il, in 1997 while millions starved on a diet of seaweed, cabbage stalks and grass.

Ermanno Furlanis and Antonio Macchia were monitored by army generals as they taught selected chefs the art of rolling dough to ensure thin crusts. "They measured every one of my moves. They even measured the distance between the olives," Furlanis said. CIA agents allegedly intercepted oven parts at Berlin airport, suspecting they had a military use. "They were very worried. Maybe they thought they were nuclear ovens or something of the sort," he said.

In spring 1997, North Korean agents, posing as businessmen, asked Macchia, the head chef at a Trieste hotel restaurant, to find a partner who would be willing to give a pizza training course. He turned to Furlanis, an independent financial adviser who moonlighted as a pizza chef in the nearby town of Codroipo, north-east Italy. The chefs, travelling with their wives, had their passports confiscated during their three weeks in military quarters at Pyongyang and a seaside resort.

The revelations will appear in the geopolitical journal *Heartland*, which commissioned Furlanis to shed light on the secretive regime. Furlanis's piece, entitled *Four Italians in the Court of the King*, was a cross between Marco Polo and an unfathomable James Bond, said the *Italy Daily*. (The Guardian)

No favourite concubine

BEIJING - China's legislature last week passed sweeping changes to the nation's marriage law, in a bid to curb the widespread adultery blamed for many family breakups, the state media reported. It will now be illegal for married Chinese to live with someone other than their spouse—a move aimed mainly at the widespread practice of men living part-time with their mistresses.

The marriage law for the first time now also explicitly bans domestic violence, reported in 30 percent of Chinese families and the cause of 60 percent of divorces.

Bigamy and the keeping of mistresses by the country's new rich are eroding social morality, the state news agency quoted lawmakers as saying. They also said such practices by many Communist Party and government officials was tarnishing the image of the government. China has for years debated the growing problem of adultery, but critics previously stopped moves to toughen the law, saying the government had no business in people's bedrooms.

Running out of time



Excerpts from an interview with Padma Ratna Tuladhar
Nepali Jagaran, 23 April

The various meetings between the Maoists and the palace have led many to believe that democracy is in danger. What do you think?

I do not think

democracy is threatened, because the king is a constitutional monarch. There are questions being raised concerning changes in the constitution. The prime minister has met the king and discussed deploying the army. Everyone knows he is keen to have the backing of the king in this matter. If everyone remains and works within the parameters of the constitution, then it is all right. Once they go beyond those parameters, people will protest. Until now the king has not crossed the parameters.

Of the Maoists and the government, who do you think is more sincere about coming to the table for dialogue?

There is a problem—we have to be very careful, we just cannot answer this question. Since we are involved in facilitation, we have agreed not to bring out in the open the issues raised by the sides that are to come to talks. Both sides must prepare to be flexible to some degree in the meetings. Otherwise not much can be achieved. We cannot take sides and say that one party is more flexible than the other.

How do you analyse the prime minister's address to the nation? The people think it was quite strong.

In the context of the dialogue, we have taken that speech in a positive manner. Whoever the prime minister may be, the person in the office of prime minister continues to raise the issue of a dialogue all the time. The deputy prime minister, too, has called for talks, time and again. Even Prachanda, in his latest speeches, has said that dialogue is the only way forward. He too seems in favour of having a dialogue. Since both the sides are keen on it, we hope that they will come to the table and sit together and solve the problem in a peaceful manner. This is what we believe in and wish would happen.

Would you like to say anything else?

The people of the country want dialogue to be held very soon, as soon as possible. Before we have a civil war on our hands, we should come to the negotiating table and start talks. Until the possibility of talks is explored, the army should not be mobilised, and the Maoists should refrain from escalating their attacks. This is what the people want and both sides must take this seriously. We will help in whatever way we can.

Excerpts from an interview with Lagu Dhan Rai, nominated MP
Saptahik Bhugol 23 April

As a nominated member of parliament, what are your views on the political situation in the country?

The country is in a very bad state politically. The situation is going from bad to worse. No one besides His Majesty seems to be concerned. There is another government outside Kathmandu. The government at Singha Darbar has not realised that Nepal exists outside the Valley too, and this has made matters worse. Outside the Valley, police posts are being destroyed rapidly, people are being killed in large numbers. Elected representatives are being asked to vacate their positions and reactionary forces are moving into the vacuum they have created.

How do you analyse the opposition parties' demand for the resignation of the prime minister?

This is a political demand. But not letting parliament function, stopping traffic and destroying public property is not the way to go. One must work through constitutional measures.

What can be done to deal with these problems?

The main problem now is the Maoist insurgency. The second is unemployment. The Maoists have become very destructive. The situation is such that now one cannot ask "who is a Maoist," but must rather ask "who is not a Maoist". The government must go in for a dialogue, there is no other way. The mobilisation of the army will be detrimental to the nation, it will destroy the nation. The army must not be mobilised at all. The question on many people's minds is why the army should be used to kill another Nepali. If His Majesty had used the army in 1990, then what would the situation have been, what would have happened to all the leaders who are today in the political spotlight? This is a political problem, a problem of beliefs and ideology. Since nothing positive has happened in the past 10 years, people have become frustrated and have moved to the other side. Since the king believed in democracy, as soon as 20-30 people were killed, he was hurt and disturbed, and agreed to having multiparty democracy. The present leaders are different. More than two thousand people have died but the government is not worried at all. It has not been progressing much on dialogue.

Will you tell the same to His Majesty?

I will place this before the king. But our advice will not be taken seriously. The main advisor to the king is the prime minister. The king has to listen to the PM. But the prime minister has not taken any steps to solve this problem. He does not take any advice, or even listen to any that is offered. In a parliamentary system, parliament is where all problems are listened to and then solved. We nominated MPs are neutral. We only speak in the interests of the nation.



mission if they could create a fissure between the palace and the government. As soon as they realised that the king had also agreed to deploying the army, they became scared. This decision of the government has put the Maoists on alert.

Radio Lumbini

Saptahik Sahara, 22 April

The transmitting capacity of Radio Lumbini, located eight kmsouth of Butwal and 14 kmnorth of Bhairahawa, has been improved. Earlier the radiostation transmitted programmes for seven hours daily, but from 14 April, Radio Lumbini has been on air 10 hours a day. The station was set up in 1999, as a cooperative, and is said to be the first cooperative-run radio in South Asia. Radio Lumbini is also the first station set up outside the valley, and was set up using its own resources.

The total cost of setting up the station was initially estimated to be around Rs 800,000, but because of the lack of skilled manpower and technical know-how, the costs went up by about Rs 700,000. The station is very popular and it seems that listeners wait more. The station broadcasts from 6am to 9am, then again from noon to 3am and finally from 5pm to 9pm.

Ransom notes

Saptahik Sahara, 22 April

Left-wing students unions were waiting for the SLC exams to end to begin their protests. The students' groups interested in organising the bharths, boycotting classes and holding the education system to ransom are aligned to the UML, the ML and the Maoists. The unions are going their separate ways, but their demands are similar, and some clearly impossible to fulfil. The Revolutionary Students' Wing, which is very close to the Maoists, has 15 demands, including the abolition of school fees. They also demand that children of all high ranking government officials, including the PM, ministers, heads of all constitutional bodies, political leaders



and MPs, study in government schools. They want the teaching of Sanskrit language to be discontinued, the present national anthem scrapped and replaced by one that represents the "true feelings" of the people. They say that if their demands are not met by the end of this month, they will be forced to take drastic action.

The students' wing aligned to the UML has also presented to government a list of 46 demands, some new and some old. Some of their demands are: immediate reduction of fees in private boarding schools, an end to the teaching of Sanskrit in schools, starting many of the proposed middle schools, investing more in the education sector and providing quality education to all. These unions have planned several programmes from 29 April to 9 May. If these demands are not met by then, they say, they will launch a nationwide agitation. As a first step, the union will burn down the chairs of all corrupt district education officers, teachers and headmasters. The group also says it

will publish a list of all boarding schools that are not going about their business in a proper manner and take action against them.

The students' wing of the ML also has similar demands. Besides the regular demands which all unions have, the ML student group wants a 50 percent cut in public transport and entertainment costs.

Post haste

Saptahik Nepaligatra, 27 April

The Maoist attacks in many areas of the country, especially in Rukum, Dailekh and Dolakha, have created panic in the minds of policemen, as this recent incident in Pyuthand shows.

The police heard that Maoists were going to attack police stations in a number of villages. Upon hearing the news, over 100 from one post surrendered their weapons and fled to the district headquarters, even as senior officials were instructing them to stay put. The policemen packed their bags, got onto buses and left for the district HQ. After the constables left, the offices followed.

Only a week ago, the police force at the post had been doubled from 50 to 100. This post is more than an hour's walk from the main road and is located between two hills. It is in an ideal target. The station had asked for additional personnel, but this request was turned down which is why they decided to leave the post. They complained that neither enough personnel nor weapons were supplied to the policemen on duty. Instead, if a policeman complained, he would be taken into custody, questioned and action would be taken against him. The policemen who have reached the district headquarters are just whiling away their time.

Porn free

Jana Dhan National Weekly, 27 April

The All Nepal Women's Union (Revolutionary) is going to start an agitation against the publication of pornographic books and against anything they deem as anti-culture. The ANWA will start its anti-porn programme in the next couple of weeks. They will protest the indecent behaviour of customers in dance restaurants, fight for the protection of women and, in fact, attempt to close dance restaurants that appear to be flourishing all over the country.

A press release issued by the Kathmandu Valley chief of ANWA states that the union would try and pressurise dance restaurants, massage centres, and cabin restaurants to shut down, and try to halt the screening of films that portray women in a negative manner. They feel that women are being sexually abused in all these places and that if something is not done, then our society and culture will be destroyed. They have called on all these places to stop the activities by the middle of May, otherwise they will move in and take whatever action they feel is necessary to close them down. They have warned that they would not be responsible for any of the consequences.

The release further states that the government is corrupt, thinks only of taking kickbacks from the business class and treats women as commodities. Women are exploited in all places, big and small and the government, by not doing anything, seems to be encouraging such behaviour.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

There is a constitutional provision for the National Security Council to mobilise the army. But to my knowledge, it has not even formed an action plan let alone a policy. Why this inaction? Why can't a constitutional body like the Council initiate an action plan even a decade after its formation?

—Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani, Rastriya Prajatantra Party leader in Saptahik Bimarsaha, 27 April.



Only air! Where is the water? On the Internet?

स्वेसटाइम दैनिक Sweektime Dainik, 29 April

Red alert

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 25 April

As soon as it was confirmed that the government would be deploying the army in Maoist-affected areas, the Maoists panicked and held an emergency meeting in Chitwan. The meeting was held some time last week and lasted two days. After the attacks in Rukum and Dailekh, the government became very serious and realised there was no alternative to deploying the army. The king, too, has agreed to the deployment, in principle. As soon as the Maoists got wind of the decision to deploy the army, they began moving and called an emergency meeting. They had guessed the army would be deployed after the Rukum and Dailekh incidents. Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai in the meantime met many people supposed to be very close to the Palace. They did this in a desperate attempt to stave off the deployment of the army. The Maoists realised a long time ago that they would only be successful in their

Like father, like daughter



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Few young Nepalis take sport seriously enough to think about it as a career option. The reasons are clear—lack of opportunity, an uncertain future and remarkably little money. But 15-year-old Malika Rana has decided she wants to be a tennis star. This is no idle fantasy, she is already beginning to realise her dreams.

Malika, a grade nine student at Shwetara School in Lalitpur, began to play tennis rather late, just four years ago, when she was 11. "I was into swimming at first but my father inspired me to play tennis," she says. She even hopes to go to a professional tennis academy abroad.

Malika's father and coach, Manoj Rana, is one the few decent tennis players in Nepal.

He was number-up in the veteran's (over 40) singles division of the recent second King's Cup Open Tennis Championship organised by the All Nepal Lawn Tennis Association (ANLTA) in Kathmandu. His showcase at home displays dozens of cups he's won at tournaments in Nepal and overseas. And to these, young Malika is slowly adding her share.

Although Malika has not yet clinched any titles, her performance is worth keeping track of. She might well be the only Nepali to have played six tournaments at such a young age. And her career is still young. She has participated in the International Tennis Federation's Central Asian Tournament (under-14) twice, in Sri Lanka in

Young Malika Rana wants to be a tennis star.

1998 and Pakistan in 1999, where, just two years after she began playing, she was ranked 13th among the 26 under-14 girls playing.

At the Delhi Lawn Tennis Association's DSC Open Tennis Championship, formerly known as the Shiram Open Tennis Championship, in October 2000, Malika managed to serve, volley and smash all the way to the quarter finals. This championship is the largest tournament on the Indian tennis circuit. And in the second King's Cup Tennis Tournament in Kathmandu, last week, Malika faced Niana



Karsolia from India (ranked 74 by the All India Tennis Association, the AITA) in the finals of both the ladies junior female singles. Karsolia's advantage was her greater experience, which she used cleverly, forcing Malika to constantly use her weaker forehand.

Malika practises for two hours everyday on weekdays and three hours on weekends. Her dad is her inspiration and coach, but she lacks tournament experience. "Players in Nepal get as little as two tournament experiences a year, while in India tournaments are held constantly. That is where the experience comes in handy," Malika acknowledges. Nepali players cannot really make up for the expense involved in going abroad, even to neighbouring countries, where they are often invited.

The ANLTA does seem to slowly be catching up, which is encouraging for players like Malika. As the turnout at the King's Cup showed, more Nepalis are being attracted to tennis. This development is as good for Malika as it will be for the future of the sport in Nepal, if this talented young player does indeed become a star. ♦

Teeing off in the sun

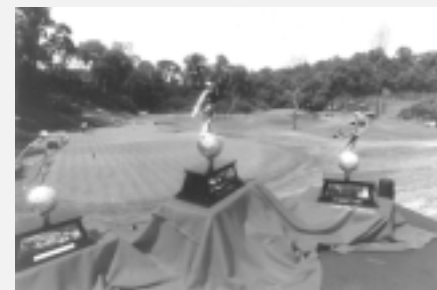
As the summer progresses and the golfing greens get greener, one-day golfing tournaments are happening all over the Valley. The most recent was a tournament organised by the Shangri La Hotel at the Gokarna Golf Resort. 99 golfers, including diplomats and entrepreneurs,



Golfers in action at the Shangri La's one-day tournament.

teed off on 28 April. The grand prize—a trip for two to Vienna by Lauda Air, accommodation there in a luxury hotel, and a 51cm colour TV—was taken by Pawan Chawala of Sun Apparels Industries who scored 40 stableford points. The runner-up, Major DB Gurung, received a ticket for two to Bangalore and accommodation there at the Le Meridian Hotel.

The Soaltee Crowne Plaza is organising the annual Soaltee Challenge Cup on 4-5 May at the Royal Nepal Golf Course. The Soaltee has been organising championships and tournaments for the past 13 years. The Soaltee Challenge Cup, one of the most popular events on the Nepali golfing scene, was won last year by MB Limbu. Prizes will be awarded to not just the winners and runners-up in all age groups, but also for the most birdies, the closest pin, the longest drive, a lucky seven, and, oddly, the most elegant golfer.



Running with the wind

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

38-year old Tika Bogati from Gorkha district is a gold medal winning marathon runner, but no one seems to remember him any more. From an average Nepali family, as an 18-year-old Bogati did what many Nepali boys his age did then and still do—join the Royal Nepal Army in the non-gazetted ranks. That was where the athlete in him emerged—for reasons one might not immediately guess.

"In the army performing well in sports betters your chances of getting promotions," says Bogati, who rose to the rank of sergeant before he voluntarily retired in 1997, with enough years of service to earn a pension. "I had promotions at the back of my mind through all my efforts," he adds. While serving in the army, the annual King's Banner Inter-Barrack Games offered Bogati the chance to see just how fast he could be, and soon he was participating in non-Army sporting events. He first represented Nepal in the men's marathon in the Fifth South Asian Federation Games held in Sri Lanka in December 1991 where he managed to snag bronze. He continued to run steadily and in the seventh SAF Games in Madras in 1995, he jogged into first place in the men's 42 km marathon.

His performance in the '95 Games impressed the government enough to award him the prestigious Gurkha Dakshin Bahu award and Rs 100,000. He also



Gold medal-winning Tika Bogati's hopes of coaching young marathoners may be dashed by the NSC.

receives a monthly salary of Rs 1,534, part of the Nepal Sports Council (NSC) attempt to support athletes who have performed well for the country. "What can we do with Rs 1,534," asks Bogati, who considers himself lucky because he also receives his army pension. This may change when the Nepal Sports Council (NSC) finalises a plan in the works to increase the monthly payment to anyone who has won gold for Nepal.

After Bogati took first place in the seventh SAF Games, he decided to retire from competition and be a coach or a trainer. Until 1997, he trained athletes in the army, but now that he is retired, there's no avenue for him to impart his knowledge to the next generation of

marathoners.

The NSC does not recognise Bogati as a national trainer, although he and 29 other former national athletes recently participated in the International Amateur Athlete Federation's Coaches Education Certificate System training programme sponsored by the International Development Co-operation Programme and organised by the Nepal Olympic Committee (NOC) and the Nepal Amateur Athletics Association (NAAA). The two week long training programme was meant to sharpen their skills so they could train younger athletes professionally. Unfortunately, only 13 of the 30 participants passed both the written and practical exams—most were denied the certificates

because they couldn't pass the English exams, and they were disgruntled. "We did not have the necessary connections to get us the certificates," said a longtime colleague of Bogati who spoke on condition of anonymity. But Bogati doesn't mind. "The certificate is just a symbol, I am confident enough to go and train other younger people if the NSC gives me a chance to do so," he says.

Bogati's case is emblematic of what happens to many Nepali sports persons. The problem revolves around money—the NSC, which is an umbrella group for all other government sporting bodies, gets a good deal of funding from donors, and many

allege this is why the Council looks out just for itself and insists on being the deciding authority on everything. Organisations like the NAAA, a government-affiliated body to which all athletes representing the country must belong, are dependant on the NSC and the NOC for the budget to organise events and train their members. (Some organisations, like the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA), do occasionally receive funding from international bodies.) On a tiny Rs 200,000 budget, the NAAA provides free training for amateur athletes, organises competitions and somehow manages to meet overheads. Kamal Lama, a member of the NAAA executive committee says that realistically, the association's annual budget isn't even enough to organise a proper competition.

What happens to people like Bogati when the money and the power to make decisions remain under the control of an overarching central body is that he must wait until the NSC goes through his entire profile and decides whether they will employ him as a coach. If the NAAA or another body dedicated to athletics alone had a little more power, they could take such decisions, and focus on developing the capabilities of Nepali athletes. The NSC could focus on larger sporting issues, instead of getting involved in the nitty-gritty of the administration of all sports.

Bogati wants to go back to Gorkha and train young athletes there, but he may never be able to do so formally. He still does his daily practice runs and visits the NAAA hoping the association can do something for him. ♦

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The hill of the flaming lotus

Many legends ago, the valley of Kathmandu was turquoise like, so beautiful that sages who came to meditate along its shore considered it sacred. Upon its waters rested a single lotus from which rose a flame as colourful as a rainbow. In time it was called Swayambhu, the self-born, self-existent one. Among those who heard of its divine reputation was the great Mongolian saint Manjushri, who came to pay homage. When he saw the lotus for himself, so great was his desire to approach it that he cut the Valley wall with his flaming sword of wisdom to allow the water to drain away. The lotus settled on a low hill and there Manjushri worshipped and caused a shrine to be built. As people

A completely serious and learned survey of Swayambhu by a foreign agency has concluded that the number of monkeys always remains the same.

settled in the new valley, the city they built was called Manjupatan. A combination of legend and history places the origin of the great stupa of Swayambhunath about two thousand years ago. While repudiating divine intervention, geologists support the belief that the Kathmandu Valley was once under water. Swayambhunath hill was probably an island, which in a way it is today, a forested island in emerald fields, which attracts pious individuals and religious institutions as certainly as

it did the sages of old. Several Tibetan monasteries have begun to ring the hill and even climb it. And joining hill is covered with buildings housing such diverse people as hippies, Tibetan refugees, Buddhist nuns, the first Western Rinpoches, artists and Tibetologists. One of the nuns, who claimed to have lived centuries ago when the reigning Malla king was so impressed by meeting her that he gifted her land and money for a monastery, tells fortunes and unhes the head. I've taken a problem to her. She's quite impressive.

Leading to the top of the hill area flight of ancient steps and in recent years, a motorable road that stops reverently short of the summit. To take the 365 steps is not only meritorious but rewarding as well, for it climbs through trees and piled rock, past huge painted images of the Buddha and the traditional vehicle of the gods, a horse, an elephant, a peacock, a garuda, a lion. There are also the imprints of Manjushri's feet in stone. And hordes of monkeys, which have given Swayambhunath stupa the popular tourist name, 'monkey temple'. A slightly irreverent legend accounts for them also. When Manjushri had his hair cut on the hill, every hair became a tree and the lice monkeys. A completely serious and learned survey by a foreign agency has concluded that the number of monkeys always remains the same. Where the steps grow suddenly steep below the summit, iron handrails have been thoughtfully provided, that help the falling pilgrims only when children and monkeys permit. It's a



fairly shattering experience the first time around to find monkeys sliding towards one at vast speed, chattering happily to themselves as they pass by. The children merely imitate them. I've always wished one could slide rapidly upward, for legend again promises nirvana and all the bliss in it to those who can climb the 365 stairs in a single breath. At the foot of the stairs are three old and enormous statues of Gautama Buddha in meditation. Old people make obeisance as they pass, touching their foreheads to the crouching pedestals. The young climb the statues happily in play or to pose for tourist cameras. The benign expressions never change. The huge hands remain at rest. If their meditation permits, what amazing sights they must have seen! Every twelve years in a field

nearby, the reigning king of Nepal comes as Vishnu incarnate, and an aspect of Buddha, to receive the homage of hundreds of gilded Buddha statues brought from all over the valley. Countless Hindus and Buddhists climb the hill to worship, for Swayambhunath is sacred to them both. As I sat to sketch, procession after procession, each led by a band of flutes, pipes and drums, descended the hill, marking the last day of the holy Buddhist month of Gunla. Now a colourful Tibetan style gateway stands at the entrance to the stairs and a wall of prayer wheels promises to circumscribe the hill. Not far away is a small new monastery that enshrines some miraculous images. Long ago in Tibet, when an agnostic king tried to stamp out Buddhism, he came to

the original monastery and declared to the assembled monks that if their deities were truly divine they would feel the cut of his sword. As he slashed at images about him they miraculously cried out in pain. Brought to Nepal in 1959, they remain happily mute. It is impossible to see Swayambhunath hill from every corner of the Kathmandu Valley. There are magic moments when from a cloudy sky that shadows the entire landscape, a shaft of light illuminates the hill, its stupa and its golden spire. It is easy, then, to remember the ancient legend. The divine lotus floating on a lake. The mystic flame. The self-born, self-existent one—Swayambhu. ♦ (Excerpted with permission from In the Kingdom of the Gods, Harper Collins, 1994.)



MIN BAURACHARYA



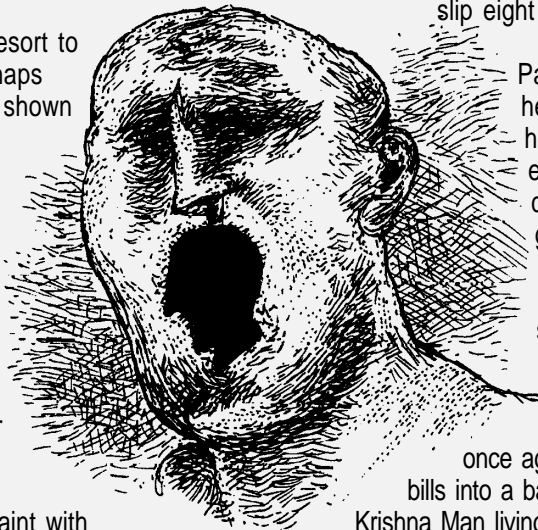
Govinda Giri Prerana DRIVEN BY INSPIRATION

Govinda Giri 'Prerana' is one of today's most prolific writers, churning out as many as six books in a single year. He writes novels, he writes stories, he writes poems, he translates literary writings into Nepali, and he is by far the most energetic figure in any gathering of (generally quite listless) Nepali litterateurs. He manages to write even as he holds down a day job as an internal auditor in Tribhuvan University's Inspection Division. The inspiration that drives 'Prerana' (this Nepali word means inspiration) is obviously quite forceful: he is also currently editing a literary magazine dedicated to contemporary free verse. The story below appears in his 1990 short story collection Antaraal, and shows the mercurial wavering of the identity of an ordinary man.

Krishna Man: Counter Man

In the end he'd come to be known by his nickname Counter Man. He had entered that bank as an employee with the name of Krishna Man, and since the day of his appointment he had for the most part performed counter duty. Ever since a colleague jokingly called Krishna Man Counter Man, everyone had taken to calling him Counter Man. Now things are so far gone that only when a staff member addresses him as Krishna Man does he remember that he is indeed Krishna Man. Krishna Man is hungry today. It's not just today that he's hungry; it's a common matter for

Krishna Man to stay hungry through a couple of mealtimes every month. Of all the office's staff members, he's probably the one who buys the cheapest snacks. What can he do about this? It's just a myth that bank jobs are plush—not only does he not meet the demands of his wife and children, he finds it hard to set straight even the simplest of problems. Krishna Man has integrity, he doesn't resort to wrongdoing; everyone trusts him. But perhaps because of his integrity, money has never shown much faith in him. All day long, Krishna Man is translated into Counter Man. Counter Man is rich. Playing with one paisa coins and bundles of thousand rupee bills, lots of people receive payments of thousands and thousands from his hands. But when evening falls, he is translated back from Counter Man to Krishna Man. Krishna Man is poor: he's liberated from his duty only after placing all the money from the counter in the bank's safe. Then his pockets are empty. It's not that on some days, when he's faint with hunger, Krishna Man doesn't feel the urge to take a handful of bills, and go to a good restaurant to eat till his stomach bursts; but the intellectual integrity inside attacks the base thoughts that arise from such momentary impulses, and he changes back into a meek and civilised worker—into the same hungry, dissatisfied, and suffering Krishna Man.



No matter what, Krishna Man has not betrayed his father's and grandfather's good name—he hasn't lost his integrity. No one in all the neighbourhood has ever derided his family with the smelly cap of wrongdoing. When he stands before all his bosses, and before those considered important in the neighbourhood, everyone's ten fingers join in namaste. Krishna Man is most civilised. Everyone says so. Today Krishna Man is extremely sick with hunger. His back and shoulders feel weakened by starvation. There are bundles of bills in his hands. He is at the moment translated into Counter Man. If he wished, it would take no off-day for him to slip eight or ten thousand into his pockets, and disappear on the pretence of going to the toilet. How difficult can it be to slip eight or ten bills into the pocket? Krishna Man is hardened today. Paying no mind to the rest of the world, he has placed ten bills of a thousand into his pocket. Slowly he stands up, and excusing himself from a nearby colleague, goes outside. There is a guard with a loaded gun at the door. The cocked gun in the guard's hands arouses no fear in him. But outside the door stands integrity—entirely unarmed—and this makes Krishna Man slacken. Poor Krishna Man gets ashamed, and feels weak and watery. He returns once again to his counter. Slowly he mixes those bills into a bag filled with countless bills. And finally the Krishna Man living inside Krishna Man is set to peace. In the meanwhile he is bathed in sweat. Krishna Man calls the peon Hari Bahadur and asks for water. Hari Bahadur brings a glass and places it in his hands. Krishna Man begins to gulp the water. The engorged veins on the neck of the famished man are clearly visible at this time. ♦

ABOUT TOWN

EATING OUT

❖ **Thai Food Festival** The Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Ingredients flown in from Thailand. 11-20 May. A lucky diner will win a round trip to Bangkok, courtesy Thai Airways, and a three night stay at the Grand Hyatt Erawan, Bangkok.

❖ **Barbecue at the Ropes** Noon-2.30pm, 7pm-10.30pm daily at the Mandarin 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. The Everest Hotel, 488100

❖ **Sekuwa (BBQ) Night.** Starters, meats and vegetarian selections, an array of desserts, traditional dances. Rs 699 per head including a complimentary drink. Fridays at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

❖ **Weekend Splash and buffet** Shangri La Village, Pokhara. Adults Rs 550, children upto 12 50 percent discount. Noon—3pm. 412999


❖ **Wet & Wild Summer** Swimming and a buffet lunch with Kantipur FM. Saturdays at the Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Tax extra. 560675, 560775

❖ **Botega Restaurant and Tequila Bar** authentic spicy Mexican specialities, steaks, salsa and meringue music. Thamel. 266433

❖ **Naked Chef Restaurant** Nagarkot. Indian, and continental gourmet cuisine. Great views. 262039, 680115

❖ **Movenpick ice cream** Exotic desserts at the new ice-cream lounge on Darbar Marg.

❖ **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. Tax extra.



MUSIC

❖ **Love thy earth, love thy neighbour** The Worldcolor band. Tickets Rs 1,000, 500, 350 at Tik 'n' Tok, New Road; Dexo Music and East meets West, Thamel; Namaste Supermarket, Jawalakhel; Bluebird, Lazimpat and Tripureswor; International Club, Sanepa; all Nanglo Bakery Café outlets, and Kathmandu Environmental Education Project, Thamel. Birendra International Convention Centre 5 May, 5pm.

EVENTS

❖ **The Panchatantra** Studio 7 presents classic tales about wise conduct in life. The Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra. 4,5,6 May. 7.15pm. Tea and show, Rs 600. vajra@mos.com.np. 271545

❖ **The Maoist Problem in Nepal** 1998 Australian documentary on the Maoist insurgency. Tuesday, 8 May, 6pm. Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka.

❖ **Nepal Education and Book Fair 2001** Nepal's career, educational and book fair. 4-12 May, Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall.

MEETINGS

❖ **Friends of the Bagmati River** The Nepal River Conservation Trust puts forward its proposal for a "Monsoon Bagmati River Festival". Wednesday, 9 May, 3pm. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

EXHIBITION

❖ **Painting exhibition** of the work of 37 artists. In memory of artist Prashanta Shrestha. Organised by Kasthamandap Art Studio. Until 9 May, 10am-5pm. NAFA Gallery, Bal Mandir. 411729

❖ **Exhibition of paintings** Siddhartha Art Gallery concludes a two year long project with Dutch artists Ed van der Kooj and Peter Warffemius. 7-21 May, 11am-6pm, Sunday to Friday.

❖ **Nepal Vision II** Paintings by Roy Breimon and Vaclav Pisvejc on exhibition. American Roy Breimon uses a technique called reverse image" painting, acrylic on Plexiglas. Open until 29 May, 8am-6pm, Indigo Gallery, Naxal.

❖ **Realities** An exhibition of multi-media paintings by Shova Adhikari-Wagley. Until 16 May. Alliance Francaise, Thapathali

MARTIN CHAUTARI

❖ **Nepali Diasporic Histories** (East Nepal-Calcutta-the Caribbean—the Netherlands Connection) Personal reflections by Dr Glenn Mitrasingh, general secretary, International Council for Friends of Nepal, The Netherlands. Friday, 4 May, 3pm. Martin Chautari, Thapathali. chautari@mos.com.np. 246065

❖ **Subaltern agency** An epistemological and methodological challenge for human science. Guy Poitevin, Centre for Cooperative Research in Social Science, Pune, India. 8 May, 5.30pm, Martin Chautari.

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

BOOKWORM

Namma: A Tibetan Love Story Kate Karko
Hodder and Staughton, Great Britain, 2000
Rs 800



Karko's comfortable upbringing did not prepare her for meeting her Tibetan husband, Tsedup, in India. For nine years they had to live on England and could not see his family. When they made it back, Karko was accepted into the tribe and called "Namma". She lived in a tent on the remote grasslands of Amdo, at the far east of the Tibetan Plateau. Namma is a travel book and love story for our times.



Two Wheels in the Dust: From Kathmandu to Kandy Anne Mustoe
Virgin Publishing Ltd, Great Britain, 2001
Rs 1,680

Mustoe, an English schoolteacher, made an amazing bicycle journey from Nepal to Sri Lanka, spurred on by a man she saw praying to Hanuman in the middle of a hectic Udaipur street. She decided to ride through the Indian subcontinent—and back three millennia—to the origins of the Ramayana. With her chosen method of transport, she was able to interact with local people and learn of their customs and daily lives in ways closed to the conventional traveller.

Nadia, Captive of Hope: Memoir of an Arab Woman Fay Afaf Kanafani
Penguin, India, 1999
Rs 472



The birth of Kanafani (Nadia) coincided with the end of WWI and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. She moved from her native Lebanon to Palestine and lived there until the creation of Israel made her a refugee. She reconstructs her life as an abused child, a young smother, a widow twice over, a breadwinner, and ultimately a survivor.



The Death of Vishnu Manil Suri
Bloomsbury Publishing, Great Britain, 2001
Rs 895

Vishnu, the odd-job man in a Mumbai apartment block, lies dying on a staircase landing. Fevered, he looks back on his love affair, while all around him is played out the drama of the apartment block dwellers: bickering over shared kitchens, obsession, dreaming, elopement... To ignite this mix of social and religious differences comes a pronouncement that Vishnu is no ordinary man.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The westerly storm systems have suddenly got more robust, as can be seen in this satellite picture of a huge cloud mass over central Nepal taken on Wednesday morning. The daily afternoon storms were full of sound and fury, but didn't give much rain until the moisture-laden systems arrived from the west earlier this week. The storms brought snow down to 14,000 ft, blocking high Himalayan passes, but the rainfall was below 10 mm in most parts of the midhills. This was enough for the power deficit to ease. Satellite images show that the present trend of thundershowers will continue for another week. There is a favorable pressure pattern over the North Ganges plains and Himalaya to draw fresh westerly fronts toward the region. Western Nepal will receive more rain and snow in the upper reaches. Expect afternoon thunderstorms with occasional hail in Kathmandu. The present trend of pre-monsoon showers could continue in May.

KATHMANDU

Fri

Sat

Sun

Mon

Tue











30-13

30-14

31-14

31-13

32-14

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Princess Sruti



intimacy with the subject.

And so it is with the portrait of Princess Sruti, which will be on exhibit at the Siddhartha Art Galley in Baber Mahal Revisited from 7-21 May in an exhibition with abstract paintings also by fellow-Dutch artist Piet Warffemius. The radiance of the princess' smile, her

Dutch painter Ed Vanderkooy is obsessed with beautiful women and with Asia. He has roamed from Bali to Tibet, from Mustang to Shanghai in search of subjects to render into acrylic on canvas. He takes months on each portrait and only paints a few every year. But what a few! The paintings are astounding: breathtakingly intricate with a sharpness and clarity that transcends even a photographic image of the subject. The paintings are life-size, and the women all wear traditional dresses with Ed taking as much trouble painting the dresses as the faces. The elaborate designs, the texture of the fabric, the play of shadow and light on the robes yield rich and stupendously life-like portraits that give the viewer a feeling of

face and bearing gives us a rare look at our royalty that a photograph would not have been able to capture. Ed first spoke to Princess Sruti for nearly two hours, getting to know her personality, taking photographs of her and taking it all



back to The Hague to work for two months on the painting. "She is a thoroughly modern woman of the world. She is shy but not formal, and she is very knowledgeable about art. It was a pleasure to paint her," says Ed who started

from dark brown and worked with lighter and lighter shades of acrylic. The result is a portrait that could well be in the same class as the Dutch masters exhibited in the Amsterdam Museum. ♦

Siddhartha Art Gallery: 411122
Web site: www.edvanderkooy.nl

Under the banyan tree



MANESH SHRESTHA

The annual spring presentation of Studio 7 at the Vajra Hotel is the only reliable theatre event to look forward to in this city for many reasons. The Naga Theatre's relatively small size allows actors and audience a certain intimacy. The company's plays are satirical and meaningful without being didactic. Almost always adaptations of novels, films, biographies and even plays, Studio 7 seems to portray the

many facets of Nepali society.

But probably the best part is the set design and the costumes that transport the audience to a faraway but uncannily familiar land. *The Panchatantra: Poetic Images of Wise Conduct in Life*, the current offering, does not disappoint. The décor, dominated by a banyan tree in white is striking and probably the best set design in the five year history of the

group. Bravo, Ludmilla Hungerhuber!

And there are three plays, not one, all of which are scripted such that they powerfully convey simple homilies that all of us Nepalis would do well to remember. The acting, as always, is superb and well supported by director and

script-writer Sabine Lehmann's rich dialogue. If the production has a weakness, it is the English diction of the Nepali members of the ensemble. To give them their due, though, they are improving every year. This weekend is your last chance to catch this production, so rush. ♦

Music of love



Worldcolor, a musical ensemble of artists from around the world, will perform for love, harmony, spiritualism and nature this Saturday, 5 May, at the Birendra International Convention Centre.

The two hour multi-media, multi-cultural production promises a show Kathmandu won't forget.

International artists like Lakota/Sioux flute player, hoop dancer and international speaker Kevin Locke, Emile Hassan Dyer, the African-American percussionist known in Kathmandu as Jambo, Pamela Whitman, a western classical flautist from HBC, Franck Bernede, a French cellist researching a PhD on the Hudko Damais of western Nepal will perform with Nepali musicians. The all-star Nepali cast includes Prangat Moktan, Shristi's tabla player, Hindustani classical flautist Manose Singh from Mahayantra, Binayak Shah from the old band Criss Cross, Rizu Tuladhar and Sunit Kansakar from Robin and Looza, rock drummer Nikhil Tuladhar, and the young vocalist from the Flower Generation Sanyog Shahi.

The band has come up with a composition called Mother Gaia (the Greek mythological word for Earth). Alongside its performance, a video on Nepal's environment jointly produced by the Nepal Forum for Environment Journalists and Vista Entertainment will be projected. Singh and Bernede will perform their version of a Bach composition. And finally, Hiralal Gandarva acclaimed sarangi player will also sing some folk songs accompanied by Moktan on tabla.

Sounds like fun. ♦

(The proceeds of the concert go to the Bagmati River Awareness and Purification Project.)

HAPPENINGS



INDIGENOUS WALK: Women members of the All Nepal Conference for Ethnic People walking through the city centre on 1 May at the start of their conference this week to press demands for local autonomy.



SUMMIT AUTOGRAPH: Russian climber Sokolov Sergey signing his name on the Rum Doodle Summitter's Club's hall of fame in Thamel on 24 May after climbing Mt Everest.



HOSPITAL STRIKE: Striking nurses outside Bir Hospital on 27 April as a handicapped man wheels himself into the ward. The strike was called off Sunday after the nurses' demands were met.

Sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Have you ever faced a Hobson’s choice about whether to go for a Pyrrhic victory while casting a Nelsonian eye over your Achilles’ heel, or letting out a can of worms from your Pandora’s box during a storm in a teacup with the assistance of Atilla the Hun? If so, then stop being hydra-headed, cross the Rubicon, and write to Auntie Agnes and pour out your agony. She will be only too happy to answer them by hook, or by crook. Probably the latter.

• Our first question today comes from a housewife in Sorakhuttepati who says: “For the past two decades, I have endured a househusband who snores. Yes, after all these years, I have finally realised that I have all along been married to a stereophonic Greater Himalayan Sloth Bear. He even looks like one. I have tried stuffing Q-tips into his beak, clipping his snout with a clothespin, but to no avail. Short of hiring an assassin, is there anything that I can do to muzzle my reverberating better half? Yours in anticipation, Gemma”

Aunty Agnes: The Taiwanese have come up with the ingenious Silent Night™ proboscis silencer that is guaranteed to bring down the nocturnal decibel level in your bedroom. (Blurb: “Turn your husband’s roar into a purr, or your money back.”) It is quite a handy contraption that looks rather like a World War I gas mask. You can assist your husband in putting it on every night before he goes to bed, adjust the volume setting to “Low”, and you can simply turn over and sleep the sleep of the just. With a small on-



Aunty Agnes

board computer that analyses the wave-length of a particular snore (no two snores are alike) the mask transmits anti-noise to cancel out your husband’s nasal saxophone.

• Next we have a question from Battisputali: “After getting hooked up to cable TV, I have fallen head over heels in love with the BBC’s Richard Quest. Is it realistic for me to pursue this relationship, or is it a lost cause? How do I let him know that I care for him deeply? Are there any historical records of affairs of this type coming to a mutually satisfactory conclusion? Yours lovingly, Nina.”

Aunty Agnes: We have it on good authority that Mr Quest is already married. Not only that, he has also quit the BBC and defected to CNN’s Money Programme. I’d suggest you switch to watching CNN for a while and let this relationship grow on you and see how you both feel about it after a while. Logistically, it may be easier to fall in love with someone from Nepal Television. There are quite a few hunks in the daily Farming Programme.

• The next question comes from a certain GP Koirala in Baluwatar: “Dear Aunty Agnes, I have been meaning to write to you, but something or other keeps coming up. I am having difficulty commuting to and from Singha Darbar, do you have any suggestions? Yours frantically.”

Aunty Agnes: I have checked with some constitutional experts and it seems you have a range of options: a) get one of those masks with dark glasses, nose and moustache and walk to work incognito pretending to be from the Groucho faction of the Marxist-Leninists, b) go underground by digging a tunnel from Baluwatar to Singha Darbar c) Just buy a Silent Night™ Proboscis Silencer and sleep at home. ♦

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