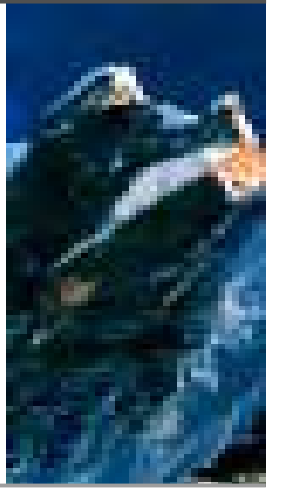


LONGING FOR
LANGTANG 11



Tea 9



EXCLUSIVE

One month to go

The Nepal Census 2001 is due to take place 10-21 June, so don't go anywhere. This time, it is not just about population and numbers. This is the first census in Nepal that will look deeply into gender-related data to give us a true picture of the status of Nepali women. It will also try to find out in more detail than in previous censuses the ethnicity, religion and language of the people of this diverse land. There is a simmering controversy about just who is an indigenous *janjati* and who is not. Janjati groups are not satisfied that the enumerators are trained well enough to take down correct answers, and have launched their own awareness drive. Mainstream Hindu groups say such fine cross-sectioning of the population will harm national identity and unity. (p. 4-5)

China and Maoists



Just before the Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Nepal 14-16 May, Chinese ambassador Zeng Xuyong (left) was drawn out for the first time in public about Beijing's opinion on the Maoist problem in Nepal. He told a press meet on Wednesday: "As a close neighbour we are always concerned about Nepal's peace and stability...the Maoist problem is an internal problem of Nepal...and we will not allow people to carry out activities that are harmful to Nepal."

BINOD BHATTARAI

he death toll in five years of the Maoist "peoples' war", according to official figures, is now nearing 1,700. But there is another casualty: development.

Poverty and government neglect drive the insurgency and feed public frustration. But, ironically, development projects aimed at addressing those very problems are grinding to a halt because of the violence and fear accompanying this conflict.

This is happening not just in "Maoist-affected areas". Across Nepal, non-governmental organisations and community groups say they are finding it increasingly difficult to carry on. Caught between suspicious security forces, and Maoist threats and extortion, grassroots workers are lying low—affecting vital projects in education, health, water supply, micro-credit, agricultural extension and training. One of the few achievements of 10 years of democracy was the empowerment that came with local self-governance, and this could be one of the most irreparable casualties of the insurgency.

"I was working as a social mobiliser, I really believed we could change Nepal by motivating people to be self-reliant. We had started seeing the transformation resulting from our work," said one dejected NGO activist. "Today, when I walk through villages, I see people cowering in fear. They are afraid to come out, afraid to speak, afraid to take the lead." Most Nepalis and expatriates interviewed for this article asked that their names not be used, indicating just how pervasive the fear psychosis is. Some didn't even want the district where they worked to be named for fear of reprisal by Maoists or police.

Paradoxically, there is another side to this. Despite the silent terror that stalks the land, highways are still being built

Maoists in the mist

"The local Maoist commanders tell us: you are doing social mobilisation, so are we. Let's work together."

— NGO worker

across Maoist-controlled areas with donor-funding, community development activities of NGOs are going on even in the Maoist heartland of the mid-west. The presence of NGOs is proof that not all development work is at a standstill. "We have met local Maoist commanders, and they tell us: you are doing social mobilisation, so are we. Let's work together," said a Nepali staff of an international development outfit in the far-west.

Another leader of a development agency with projects all over Nepal told us: "We try to be neutral and offer to work with anyone willing to be our partners, as long as their interests are to help the poor. In some

cases we have worked effectively with Maoists." An agency that had packed up its bags to leave one of the mid-western districts because its workers were being picked up by police along the trails, was approached by the local Maoist commander who asked them to stay.

Elsewhere across Nepal, there is proof that as long as the organisation has a policy of transparency in its budget, local villagers want and benefit from their activities, and it is carried out by Nepalis there have been no problems. Said one NGO working in Kabhre: "We put our entire budget, with even the smallest details of how much a bag of cement cost us, in charts up on the wall. When the Maoists come, we show them

what we are doing and they don't disturb us." Still, Maoists have often attacked projects they don't like. On Tuesday night, they torched a car belonging to an EU project in Gulmi.

So, have the Maoists succeeded where countless workshops and seminars on aid strategy, donor reform and ensuring cost-efficiency in aid have failed? It is tempting to think so. But Maoist policy on development and foreign aid is muddled, and there are too many contradictions in the way in which local Maoist leaders have treated development projects. p. 7

Editorial p. 2

Welfare of the weakest

... not yet gone

Last Wednesday, Girija Prasad Koirala Secretary draft his resignation letter. His cleared out their desks. The prime at peace with himself: he had made up his quit. Then he started listening to his relatives and cronies who had a vested interest in him remaining in power. By Saturday morning Koirala was hesitating, by Sunday he was not so sure, and by Monday he declared he wasn't stepping down.

"Last week Girijababu was behaving like a politician, this week he is behaving like a cornered cat. He is fighting for his political life," confided a close colleague of the prime minister who advised him to step down. There is no doubt that Koirala missed the opportunity to make an honourable exit over the issue of the



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

from the Centre for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) asking him for clarifications on the Lauda jet lease deal. Those who advised Koirala to hang tough argued that the letter was not an accusation, and legally there was no need to resign over it. "He was riding a tiger, if he had jumped off, it would have eaten him up," one adviser told us. Koirala faced two dilemmas: he looked around and found no successor he could completely trust, and he didn't want to leave the legacy of a prime minister who had to resign under a cloud of corruption. Also, the anti-Koirala faction in the NC is still in disarray and cannot offer a viable challenge.

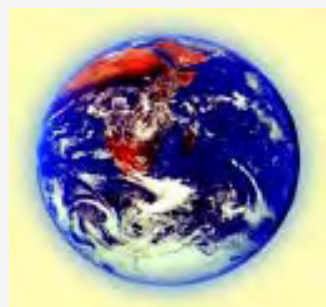
Congress succession race has now become an indelible part of this country's politics, and has paralysed it. The tussle seems to be the outward

manifestation of a power struggle between the old guard represented by right wing ex-Panchayat elements and post-1990 politicians of the democratic era. The Maoists, the soft left, and Congress factions are united by their present anti-Koirala posture, and they all are trying to gain political advantage as Koirala squirms. Explained one disillusioned Congress insider: "The trouble is that Girijababu has lost his moral standing to put up a fight on behalf of the people." If it is the succession question that is bothering him, then maybe the prime minister should look beyond his immediate circle, he added.

Political analysts say there is going to be an unofficial truce next week during the visit here of the Chinese premier Zhu Rongji. After that, if Koirala still wants to defuse the crisis, he would have the final option of calling a session of parliament to give a valedictory speech and bow out. If he is advised against it, then his party and the country are headed for increased political turmoil. The soft left is hardening its stand, and has already called for an unprecedented Bangladesh-style three-day shutdown at the end of May.

One senior politician had this bit of advice for Koirala: "A planned exit is better than being hounded out." ♦

one world...



...one link

WORLD LINK



WELFARE OF THE WEAKEST

The Maoist insurgency may be a ruthless and violent grab for power. It may be part of a conspiracy by the far right to secretly co-opt the agenda of the far-left. It may be a plot by ex-panchas to dismantle parliamentary democracy and take us back to the bad old days. There may be foreign hands involved.

One or more of the above may be a fact. But there is one larger truth: the insurgency feeds on decades of indifference, disregard and utter lack of interest by a succession of governing elites in Kathmandu to the living conditions of its citizens. It is not by chance that more mothers die in Nepal in childbirth than in most other countries. The only places where more women die are where health services have been wrecked by years of civil war. That we have actually managed such an abysmal record of human un-development in peacetime underlines just how unconsciously negligent our state systems have always been.

Just this one statistic (forget about all the others for the moment) about the health of Nepali women reflects the cumulative result of a criminal lack of accountability of those who have been in power over the last 40 years, the apathy and neglect of those entrusted with delivering these services, and the smug unconcern of rulers in Kathmandu about the welfare and well-being of the weakest and most vulnerable citizens.

For decades now, we have debated Nepal's development dilemma. We have lamented ineffective and wasteful foreign aid, we have held countless seminars on governance and corruption. We have talked a lot, and we haven't done much. So, along come the Maoists and they say enough is enough, we need to shake Kathmandu awake. And they proceed to do so with a shockingly effective insurgency that capitalises on the disarray at the centre, by skilfully implemented psy-war that magnifies their strength, and by strategic alliances with their brothers-in-arms to paralyse the state apparatus.

At one level, this is all a power game. And there is no guarantee that our current revolutionaries will not rot like all the rulers who precede them. If that happens, the long-suffering people of Nepal will be let down one more time by a group that got to power through a war that was fought in their name. The paralysis of government and a sense of dread about the future has brought investment, development and governance to a grinding halt.

But at another level, it has woken people up somewhat in Kathmandu. Rubbing its eyes, the government thought up this Integrated Security and Development Plan which, though fatally flawed, at least shows a belated recognition of the need to win back the people through development. The threat of Maoist retribution has made village teachers teach, and doctors treat. Foreign aid projects are suddenly mindful about whether "the target groups are beneficiaries" not just in their reports, but in real life. However, improvements derived from threats and fear of punishment will not last. In the long run, public opinion expressed through a system of choosing the most efficient and honest delivery mechanism is the only way.

GRENADA AND NEPAL



When the United States invaded Grenada way back when on some pretext or another, the media hype surrounding the arrival of the macho marines on that tiny speck of an island in the Caribbean reached a crescendo. Soon after, some bright researcher surveyed high school students across America and handed out sheets of paper with an outline of the continental United States, and asked students to draw Grenada. Most traced an island the size of Australia off Florida.

Some of the Indian media coverage of Nepal as a security threat to the Indian state has started doing the same in the subcontinent. If Indian school children were asked to draw Nepal, they may actually show a country the size of Mongolia in the Himalaya.

The latest story in the media is of a foiled bid this week on the life of the editor of *tehelka.com* (which exposed corruption in the Indian defence establishment) by a bunch of supposed Pakistani agents who had supposedly been armed by a nameless Nepali "don" to supposedly embarrass the Indian government who would be blamed for the slaying. We've heard conspiracy theories, but this one takes the chappati. The only thing we can say for certain is that Indian intelligence has started believing its own rumours, and the police in Delhi are spoofing Bollywood.

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Tourism fizzles as India sizzles

The problem of Nepali tourism isn't that Indians aren't coming, the real problem is that deep down we do not seem to want them.

It has become a sort of ritual that once the temperature in New Delhi hits 40 degrees (that Celsius) we start seeing the exodus to Kathmandu of foreign correspondents covering South Asia from the Indian capital. Close on their heels come Indian tourists, refugees from the sizzling plains. Flush with cash from unprecedented economic growth of more than five percent for over five years in a row, the Indian middle-class is migrating en masse to chill out.

But unlike in the past, fewer and fewer Indians are coming to the land of Pashupatinath, casinos, Hong Kong markets and Himalaya. Even low-budget honeymooners from Bengal and Orissa are keeping away from Pokhara. It's bad news for Nepali tourism. It was the Indians who kept the hotel rooms occupied after the Europeans and Japanese depart after the April and October peaks.

There are many reasons why Indians aren't coming: adverse coverage in Indian media and the requirement of passport or voters' IDs for tourists flying into Nepal are just the two of them. The reason why we are fourth foreign destination of choice for over four million Indian tourists who go abroad every year may lie in the way we treat Indians in this country.

At the airport, taxi-drivers consider every Indian fare game for fleecing. Front office clerks in five-star hotels make Indian guests feel unwanted. Stewards at upscale eateries treat Indians as if they are doing them a favour by serving them. Shopkeepers handle Indian customers with barely concealed contempt. OK, there is some truth in the fact that Indian tourists with their noisy families are demanding, bothersome and bossy, but isn't our slogan supposed to be "Guest is God"? And despite all this, if Indians still come, the credit must go to Lord Pashupatinath. We do our best to make Indians feel unwelcome.

With so many not-so-subtle messages imbibed by Indians visiting Nepal, what effect would the "Postcards from Nepal" in *Femina* sponsored by the Nepal Tourism Board have? If the best customer is the repeat customer, and the best publicity is "word-of-mouth" we probably need to lavish care on the Indian tourists that are already here rather than

going after the ones planning to visit us in the near future. Is the Nepal Tourism Board aware that their promotional blitz in India will boomerang if the tourism-trade does not get its act together here in Nepal? When the trade is not ready to receive customers, soft-sell may be better than hard-sell.

Then there is the growing lawlessness in Nepal. Oh, but aren't Indians used to that, you may say. But why would anyone spend a holiday at a destination where you could be thrown out of your hotel at the dead of the night because the owners decide to go on strike. Where you risk being stranded at the airport because some party has decided to declare a *chakka jam*? Where you are swindled by a shopkeeper and there is nobody to listen to your complaint? An Indian willing to put up with that may think, why not go to Kashmir? At least they have their army up there.

We have to decide once and for all: do we want Indian tourists or not? The middle-class Nepali's disdain for India is so visible that no Indian visitor here can fail to notice it. Every year, hundreds of people die in road accidents in Nepal, but when an Indian bus hit a pedestrian on a highway a few months ago, irate locals overturned the bus right into the River Trisuli. The police watched. Last week, a group of leftist students in Kakarvitta went for some wild adventure to Mechi Bridge where they beat up a few poor Indians. On their way back, they wanted some more fun and excitement, so they vandalised vehicles with Indian number plates. And we still want Indian tourists to visit Nepal.

"Festival of lights," says the tourism board, and hopes to lure Indians with that promise. To a hapless Indian tourist,

the imagery is painfully evocative of the tyres that burnt on every street corner during the communal riots over what Hrithik Roshan hadn't said in December. Come to think of it, the problem of Nepali tourism isn't that Indians aren't coming, the real problem is that deep down we do not seem to want them. And unless we want them in right earnest, no amount of advertising is going to draw Indians to us. As things stand, perhaps it's better to place our hopes on the possibility of Chinese tourists willing to use their outbound facility to visit Nepal.

It's not just tourism, if we continue to love to hate our neighbours from the 'south, there is no way that we can benefit from the market of a prosperous Indian middle-class for the export of our manufactured goods. Why would any Indian investor in his right mind consider bringing his capital to a country where his mere presence is barely tolerated, if not openly resented? He would do so only in those sectors where profit margins are fat enough to offset the social risks involved. That rules out any productive investment with a long gestation period. Consequently, most Indian investments that do come to Nepal are in the fly-by-night category, further fuelling resentment against Indians and their capital.

The troubles of Nepali tourism are all of our own making. The sooner we take a pragmatic decision to overcome our xenophobia and social schizophrenia the better it will be for us and our country's economy. Instead of launching a media blitz in India, maybe the Nepal Tourism Board needed an awareness campaign in Nepal first. After all, people on both sides of the India-Nepal border have such strong social ties that even the mighty propaganda machine of South Block has not been able to make visible dents in that. And let's not request "concerned authorities" to take "appropriate actions" to address the "grievances" of Indians. When the image of the country is at stake, all of us are concerned authorities, and each one of us has to do her bit to save Nepal's tourism from jingoism and foolish bravado. ♦



"We may see the recurrence of a new cold war in our region. This would put Nepal in a very uneasy and difficult position."

Foreign Minister Chakra Bastola spoke to Nepali Times on the eve of the visit to Nepal by the Chinese premier Zhu Rongji about Nepal's expectations from the visit and relations with its giant northern neighbour, China's security concerns, changing re-alignments in geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific, our relations with India and last but not least about the current turmoil within the Nepali Congress.

What is the significance of the visit to Nepal next week of the Chinese premier Zhu Rongji?

Any bilateral visit of the prime minister of a neighbouring country is important. Apart from that, the fact that Mr Zhu Rongji is also visiting other South Asian countries gives us an indication of the importance that China attaches to relations with Nepal and other countries in the region. Apart from trade, China also aims to play a significant role in the region as a major power.

What are the substantial achievements that can be expected from the visit?

Overall, we have very healthy bilateral trade with China. There are a few bilateral agreements that are in the pipeline and four or five of them are in the final stages of negotiations and are likely to be signed during the visit.

Such as?

There is the 80 million yuan development cooperation agreement that includes the building of a civil service hospital, a polytechnic and construction of the Nuwakot-Syabrubesi highway. There is a possibility of an agreement on agriculture, tourism—China has agreed to give Nepal an outbound tourist destination status, which is very important for our tourism industry—an agreement on avoidance of double taxation, and another agreement on border trade, transport and transit. But the major highlight will be the development cooperation agreement.

There has been a general deterioration in the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region in the past few months with disputes between the new US administration and China over the spy plane and arms sales to Taiwan on the one hand, and signs of an unprecedented convergence between Washington and New Delhi on the other. How will these new alignments affect Nepal?

This is a bit worrying. The Cold War ended more than ten years ago, but we may be seeing the recurrence of a new Cold War in our region. If US-China tensions spill over into South Asia, then it could revive a Cold War and could put us in a very uneasy and difficult position.

But China and India fought a hot war in the early 1960s, and we handled things pretty well then. How will it be different this time if relations deteriorate?

We have to look at this from multiple dimensions. At one point in time the goal of our foreign policy was to strengthen our national identity, and that was done pretty well. I don't think we have an identity crisis any more. Our identity was linked to the preservation of independence and sovereignty, and today we have moved ahead from that point. Now, we are looking at development and the well being of Nepalis. Tensions that are brewing in the region may distract from this task of development. And that is what is worrying.

These geopolitical realignments also seem to be causing worries for China. We had the recent visit here of the Chinese defence minister, what are their concerns?

As far as China is concerned and going by what they have said publicly, they are preoccupied with the situation in Tibet and Taiwan. Apart from these two issues, they do not have any major problems. And we have very good working relations with China.

How do the Chinese see the Maoist problem in Nepal? Is this a security concern to them?

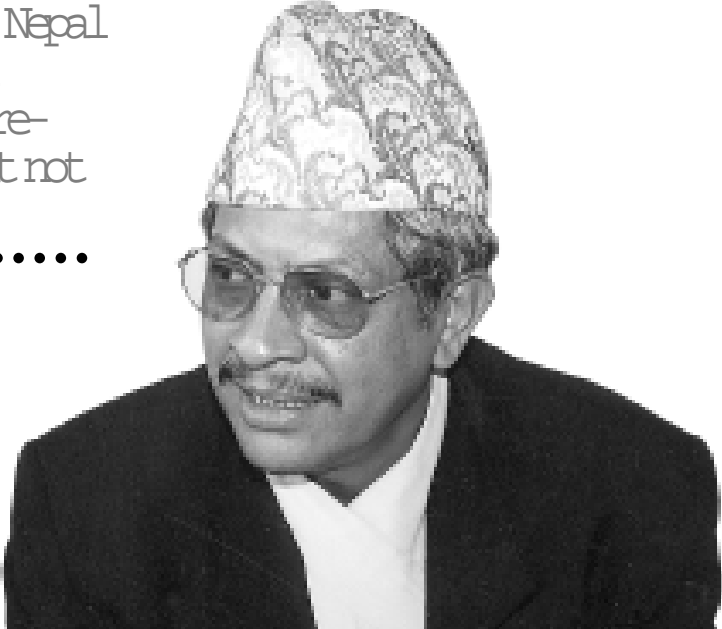
We have not yet talked to them seriously about it, and neither have we heard their observations on this issue yet. We know they are following developments and studying the issue, and maybe during the prime minister's visit it will come up. When the Chinese defence minister was here recently, the issue of a regional peacekeeping centre did come up, and he assured us of support. The Chinese have also told us that they are going to increase the intensity of visits to Nepal at various levels, and that we will have very thick interactions.

Is Nepal going to get membership in the BIMSTC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia) grouping?

The idea here was that Nepal should strike out beyond SAARC to be a member of other regional groupings. At the Yangon meeting earlier this year, Myanmar proposed our membership and Bangladesh seconded it. Our membership was supposed to be discussed at the next meeting this month, but it has been postponed. At that meeting we will probably also get support from Sri Lanka and Thailand. Membership of BIMSTC would be important for us, because it would be a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN and would also put us in the Indian Ocean Rim.

But isn't India making its own "Look East" economic foray into Southeast Asia?

Yes, but that does not preclude the importance of a part-South Asian-part-Southeast Asian grouping like BIMSTC. Also, over time we have come up with some new directions in our foreign policy. We may have been too "Eurocentric" in our foreign policy. We need a policy that looks nearer home: South Asia, Myanmar, Thailand. ASEAN countries were on their way to becoming tigers, but they did not grab our attention as we were looking elsewhere. Then Asian economic crisis and the rebound both happened right in our neighbourhood, but we were oblivious. Take the IT revolution in India, we know precious little about it. Bad things percolate to us, why not the good things? Take Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan—we interact with them at the SAARC level, but there is tremendous room to build on bilateral relations with them. With Myanmar, for instance, we need to make a special effort because it is very strategically located and there are 300,000 Nepali speakers there.



It has been six months since the prime minister's visit to India, before which you had told us your priority was to bring Indo-Nepal relations to a more even keel. Since then there have been the Hrithik Roshan episode, the Indian media campaign against Chinese goods, the ISI and calls to roll back the 1996 trade treaty. It doesn't look like things have improved.

What we emphasised during the prime minister's visit was regular, more frequent interactions so that we don't leave any space for misunderstanding. But that hasn't really happened. There was an invitation to the Indian prime minister, my invitation with the foreign minister is pending. The need for frequent interactions is as important as ever before. But during that time, there have been at least five important visits here by various Chinese delegations.

Some western embassies in Kathmandu expressed concern about dangers to the democratic process in Nepal, and have been accused by some quarters of interference. What is your take on that?

They expressed their concern, and they have understood that democracy in its early stages is fragile. There have been attacks on the democratic process from inside parliament and from outside parliament. In that situation, what they have done is reiterated their commitment to democracy in Nepal. That is all. This is a lesson to all of us involved in the democratic process to be more sensitive to the working of democracy in our country. That is how we should take it, rather than as interference.

You are a member of the ruling party that has become quite shaky of late. Where do you see this heading?

What I can say is that there has been a gradual erosion of state authority. The private sector, media and civil society are all moving much faster than the state, and that is quite natural for a country in our stage of development. But the government either has to strike a partnership with the private sector and civil society, or move ahead faster than the private sector. If you don't do that these factors will challenge state authority and result in its gradual erosion. And we see evidence of this. The state has to be agile, swift and flexible to the changing demands of the times. ♦

LETTERS

LUMBINI

Just in case your readers are wondering: we are the "local" architectural concern behind the "aggressive, megalomaniacal..." proposal in Ramyata Limbu's "2,545 years later" (#41). Actually we were invited by HMG after the success of the Hannover Expo, and after their disappointment with Lumbini, JBF, UNESCO, et al to submit a proposal. The involvement of a besieged prime minister in this does not in any way detract from the merits of our proposal, which were ignored in the mad rush to ridicule and reject it. Comparing our proposal to Disneyland is curt and unfair. What our proposal really sought was a rethink on some of UNESCO's lofty concepts and debate the serious oversights in the Kenzo Tange Master Plan. As it is, even Emperor Ashoka would not have been allowed to put in his famous pillar at the nativity site. And Kenzo Tange's Sacred Garden concept would not allow it to rise beyond its present graveyard status.

Bibhuti Man Singh
Implementing Experts Group
Kathmandu

HEART BREAKING

In "Red Star Over Mt Everest?" (#40) Barbara Adams points out that the atrocities committed by the Maoists are perhaps the natural outcome of decades of failure by the government to provide even the basic needs to the vast majority of Nepali population, especially in rural areas. The pictures of poverty-stricken, hungry, and hopeless Nepalis would be as gruesome and heart-breaking as those of dead Nepali policemen and their widowed wives weeping over their bodies.

Anil J Shahi
Maharajgunj

JAMES BOND

I found Ganesh Raj Sharma's opinion "The reasons behind..." (#40) to be adventurous. Although he uses the Cold War analogy, Mr Sharma seems to almost create an excuse for the so-called "internal problems" like political instability, security, poverty and decentralisation. Blaming external forces rather than ourselves is a dangerous game that can give politicians, leaders and intellectu-

als excuses for their own shortcomings by inciting nationalistic/communal fervour. It leaves no room for individual self-responsibility. Mr Sharma's flair for Cold War theatrics is evident in his conspiracy theories, espionage and political manoeuvrings that he lists in his James Bondesque piece. Although interesting, the article was not enlightening.

Subarna Bhattachan
Kansas, USA

STATE OF THE STATE

Thank you CK Lal for your poignant argument about the Citizenship Bill "In a state of statelessness" (#41). We Nepalis would not wish the Buddha denied citizenship for whatever reasons. In the same vein, those genuine Nepali regardless of their ethnic background and whatever the potential problems of process, should not be denied their right of citizenship.

B Rana
Brunei

CK Lal seems to give the impression that he is more

comfortable with the Nepali tarai being flooded with True Indians from the south rather than True Nepalis from the hills. The present Citizenship Bill entitles every Indian to be a Nepali citizen. Why doesn't he instead suggest a way by which the genuine tarai people get citizenship easily?

"Another Nepali"
by email

I just wish there were many more Nepalis who view the ill-fated Citizenship Bill in as broad a perspective as CK Lal does. There are millions of Nepalis born in this country who are deprived of basic proof that they are citizens. The bill is the hope for stateless madhesi Nepalis, why can't the

political parties see that? OK, there are chances that some Indians will try to get citizenship from the tarai districts. But to prevent this happening we have to ensure that genuine Nepalis benefit from the bill and existing rules must be enforced and strengthened to prevent Indians from illegally obtaining citizenship. Madhesi Nepalis are living with pahadi Nepalis in Mahottari, Dhanusha, Sarlahi where 98 percent of the people are madhesi. Why can't our pahadi friends even think of giving bonafide Nepalis citizenship?

Dhirendra Karna
Jaleswor/Kathmandu

I agree with CK Lal's logical argument that we have to resolve the citizenship issue for serious to control. Here are millions of Nepalis serving the country and yet they are denied their basic right of citizenship. All political parties should be serious about the bill and think

carefully about the long-term implications.

Rajesh Gautam
Germany

TINY

Thank you for "Tiny is even more beautiful" by Binod Bhattarai (#40). I first came to Nepal in 1959, appointed by the Swiss agency, SATA. After the completion of the premises of Balaju Yantra Shala my then colleague, Arnold Wyler, a Swiss engineer in-charge of the management made the first foray into microhydro in Nepal. A first prototype of a propeller-turbine was installed 1962 at the Fishery Project in Godavari. Our successors in BYS have been closely engaged in the development of microhydro, especially in improved design of cross-flow turbines. One of my first trainees, Shyam Raj Pradhan, has been running his own company, Nepal Yantra Shala, Energy in the Patan Industrial District, specialising in turbine production.

Karl Mueller
Kupondol Height



Janjatis want to stand up,

Indigenous groups in Nepal are teaching their communities how to correctly fill out questionnaires in the 2001 Census next month on mother tongue, second language, religion and ethnicity. The result may give us a more realistic (and different) picture of Nepal's true diversity.



Janjati women walking through Kathmandu city centre to press their demands for local autonomy.

HEMLATA RAI

Priyvi Narayan Shah famously described Nepal as a garden of many flowers, referring to the multicultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious nature of the Nepali nation he had just unified. Two and half centuries later, ethnic communities across Nepal who had been bypassed by development, by the mainstream economy and politics are asserting themselves. And they find the upcoming census in June as an opportunity to finally stand up and be counted.

The census is officially called the "Nepal Census on Population and Housing 2001", therefore at

the centre of attention of the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NFN), an umbrella organisation representing various indigenous peoples' groups across Nepal. Dissatisfied *janjatis* say they were under-counted in previous censuses and they are determined to correct that. Janjatis started intensifying their demands after the restoration of democracy in 1990 and have been demanding a greater role in national issues likely to affect their cultural, linguistic and religious status. In the run up to the census next month, 39 janjati organisations affiliated to the NFN have begun an awareness programme in their communities.

In 1996, a government taskforce led

by Shanta Bahadur Gurung defined "janjati" as an indigenous community with its "own mother tongue and traditional culture, but not belonging to the Hindu caste system" and identified 61 different janjatis across the country, 21 in the mountains, 23 in the hills and 17 in the tarai. In July 1997, the Gazette endorsed this list, but put forth a slightly different definition of the term. Much to the dissatisfaction of janjati activists and anthropologists, it applies an economic yardstick to determine if a group is truly janjati: it defines janjatis as groups having "original and distinct language and culture" that are "socially backward in comparison to other caste groups".

The guidelines prepared for the forthcoming census follows the definition provided by the 1996 taskforce somewhat, although it chooses not to elaborate on the term. Enumerators without detailed anthropological knowledge—and they will be many of those—will find the annex listing the sub-clans of various janjatis insufficient in the field. For instance, more than 32 sub-clans have been recorded among the western hills Rai community, but the census guidelines list only 20. Similarly, there are some mistakes in categorising sub-clans—Hirachan is wrongly identified as a Thakali sub-clan.

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) claims the questionnaire designed for the next census is far more scientific than those of the nine previous censuses. It also says that all the necessary revisions and modifications have been made to accommodate statistics related to diversity in language, culture and religion. But janjati groups remain sceptical. "Since janjatis are under-represented in policy making levels, their right to be impartially counted in a national census has been breached so far, and the establishment is resistant to amend its mistakes," says Bal Krishna Mabuhang, general secretary of the NFN. Mabuhang is the first professional demographer to analyse data collection in the 1991 census relating to caste, ethnicity and religion.

The first time a section on ethnicity was included was in the second national census in 1920, and this was used till the 1950 census. The findings of these surveys were not made public, and the issue of ethnicity was dropped for the next three censuses in 1961, 1971 and 1981, only to resurface in the last count in 1991. That was the first time the data was in the public domain. Armed with this new government-authorised information, janjati organisations could finally analyse how they were being represented, and the CBS came in for a good deal of criticism for under-enumeration and biased interpretation of the social reality of janjatis. Of all the listed janjati groups, the census only counted 23.

Despite efforts, it looks like this year's census will not be free of gaps that may result in under-counting and mis-counting of janjatis. The popularisation of Sanskritised names

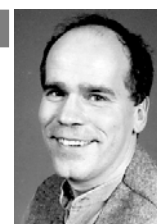
of some communities may cause enumerators to undercount janjati respondents, about which the guidelines do not give any clues. For instance, there is no guideline that Tamu and Gurung are the name of the same community, while Praja and Udhau are the Sanskritised titles of the Chepang and Jhagad communities respectively.

If this sounds like sloppy homework and misdirection, consider this: a directive of the 1920 census guidelines instructed enumerators to rely on their "own discretion" to slot respondents into a caste group if they could not identify themselves clearly in such terms. Similarly, guidelines till recently said that in case a respondent failed to provide a "straightforward" answer related to the question of religious faith, enumerators were to determine religion on the basis of the gods the person worshipped. Since Buddhists and other non-Hindu communities also worship some Hindu gods, janjati religions were also inaccurately counted. The clause, first set out in the 1920 census and in place until the last one, has been amended this year—enumerators are now allowed to determine respondents' religion on the basis of the priest employed for worship. But, as with gods, many communities are flexible about which priests they go to if their immediate religious leaders are unavailable—a Limbu from Panchthar might quite easily consult a Hindu Brahmin or a Buddhist Lama if his traditional Phedangma cannot be reached.

In order to avoid under-enumeration, janjati organisations have been running campaigns in their communities to create a consensus about responses to queries about

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



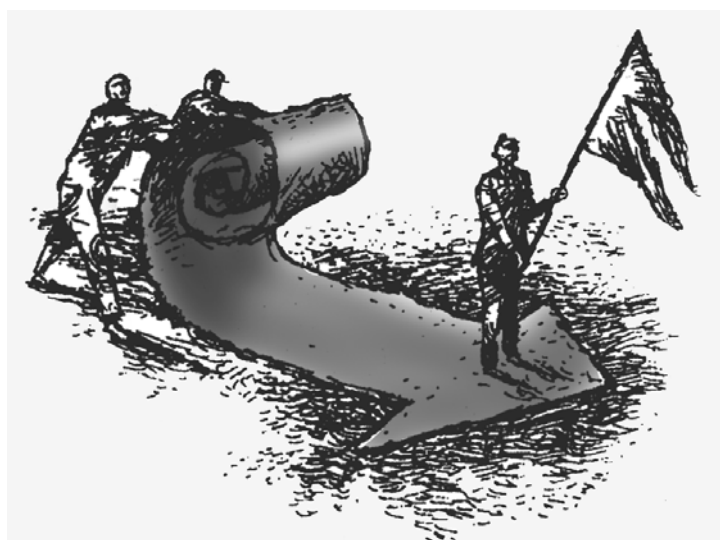
The patriot game

Flags and national dress will be bits of mouldy thread in some archaeologist's sieve one day.

Patriotism, said the science fiction writer and polymath, Issac Asimov, is the last refuge of scoundrels. It was a theme that popped up frequently in his books and essays, good people versus the patriots, the best and the worst of a nation or society. For some, Asimov probably went a little overboard. After all, what's wrong with feeling good when your country does well in sport, or is praised by someone famous or respectable. Nothing at all. But I'm with Asimov on his main point. The assertive patriotism of people inside and outside our own countries should make us suspicious and sceptical. Especially when they attack others to build national feeling at home.

The Irish put it best, as they often do. They used to refer to the war of terror against British forces in their island as "the patriot game". In a brilliant folk song of that name, a young man named O'Hanlan tells of the allure of patriotism—how he'd learned all his life through that cruel England was to blame for his woes, so he played out his part in the patriot game. The last stanza has young O'Hanlan dying from a British bullet, a victim of the game. As his life ebbs away, he reflects on the futility of a patriotism that sanctions violence, abuse of the innocent and meaningless death.

In the 1960s, the American establishment demonstrated the witless extremes of patriotism as the youth of the nation revolted against the Vietnam war and a system that left them alienated and angry. The Stars and Stripes frequently flew over anti-government demonstrations as the young showed that they too valued their country. It was just that they wanted to change it. The American flag popped up elsewhere too. On T-shirts and rucksacks, on tattoos and infamously, on the seat of a pair of jeans belonging to a young man from Florida. I was in the American south at the



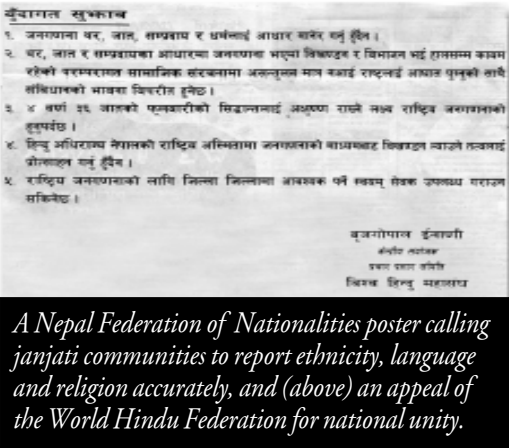
time, and the story was all over the local news. The fellow in question was getting into his car when the police spotted Old Glory on the backside of his trousers. He drove off and officers gave chase. The young man had reason to flee, he was carrying a tiny amount of marijuana, then part of the whole livery of rebellion in America. He drove faster and faster as more police cruisers joined the chase. Inevitably, the pursued vehicle ran off the

road and into a forest, killing the young man with the flag on his behind. "An insult to the flag" was the justification of the pursuing officers, and illegal to boot. Perhaps, but was it really worth a meaningless death.

We spend but a short time on the face of this planet. Our notions, nations and self-definitions are fleeting and momentary whether you believe in eternity or not. Flags and national dress will be bits of mouldy thread in some archaeologist's sieve one day. All that patriots hold dear will surely pass, just as they themselves will. Symbols of nationhood, a proud history, simply being from a certain place, these are nothing to be proud of in isolation. As a Canadian, I suppose I'm proud of the qualities of tolerance, equality and redress of historic wrongs that are supposed to lie at the heart of our nationalism. Perhaps they don't, but there are plenty of people—journalists, activists, even politicians—making sure that they remain topics of constant debate.

In fact, I believe many of the strengths of liberal societies are partially because there is no single definition of patriotism. There are no topics too sacred to be left undebated. Anything can change if it improves peoples' lives and makes the country a better place to live. You can't use flags for shelter or eat your national dress when the crops fail. As the nation-states of the world surge forward or fall back, it's never wrong to question what it means to be a citizen. Mind you, I do wish the Canadians would do a little better at sport so I can be a scoundrel at least once in my life. ♦

and be counted



mother tongue, second language, religion and ethnicity. If these efforts pan out, we will get a more realistic and fairly different picture of Nepali society than previously. Ten years ago, 49 percent of Limbus, 65 percent of Rais and 96.5 percent of Sunuwars said they were Hindu. Similarly 57 percent of Thakalis said they were Hindus, while going by the religion clause, a leftover of the 1950 CBS guidelines. Magars and Gurungs were all counted as Hindu. As a result, the 1991 census reported that 50 to 75 percent of janjatis were Hindu. This time, Thakalis, Gurungs, Tamangs and Magars will register as Buddhist, Dhimals as "natural religion", and a consortium of Rais, Limbus, Sunuwars and Yakhas have collectively decided to call themselves Kirati. Doubtless, the number of recorded Buddhists and Kiratis (just 1.7 percent of the population as last counted) will rise.

The questionnaire also requires every individual to respond to queries relating to language. The guidelines say that different members of one family might have a different mother tongue and second language, pointing out that some might have stopped using their ethnic language because of migration, their educational background or profession. Janjati activists say that by stressing the possibility of different mother tongue within the same family, the government is encouraging the

hegemony of Nepali over other languages. In the last census, for example, 36 different mother tongues were counted, while a 1995 report by the Rastriya Bhasha Niti Sujhav Ayog (the national commission to make recommendations on language policy) says that in Nepal 69 languages are in use, 21 with their own script. The report also says that 62 of these languages are spoken by janjatis.

And measuring all of this will be

complicated by the very nature of a census, according to Tribhuvan University sociology professor, Krishna Bhattachan: "The census questionnaire is individual centred, that might affect janjati communities, for whom collective living is the social norm."

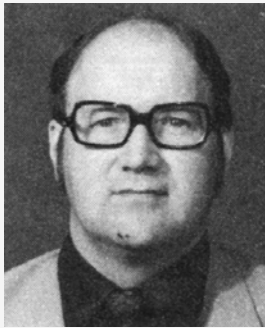
The CBS is feeling the heat on many fronts—from those who want to emphasise the diversity and changes in Nepali society, and from those who'd rather believe that janjatis should assimilate. After the

first draft of the census questionnaire was released three years ago, janjatis submitted memoranda demanding that the Kirat religion be added, and also recommended other amendments and elaboration. The World Hindu Federation and 51 affiliated organisations, on the other hand, demanded that queries related to caste/ethnicity, religion and language be scratched. The CBS is trying to be balanced, but acknowledges that it is difficult. "There might have been some under-reporting in the previous census, but we have taken the janjati campaigning positively and tried to accommodate their valid demands in the questionnaire. But we have our reservations—their telling individuals to report as a group might distort the fast-changing reality of our society," said Radha Krishna GC, deputy director of the CBS.

Janjati organisations are convinced that they are right in campaigning in their communities. Their movement to make themselves count and count right is gaining strength, though how much of an impact this will have on the policy level is unclear. And for this reason, even inaccuracy and vagueness in the National Census 2001 will be an indicator of the status of the janjati struggle in Nepal. ♦

Hallvard Kuloy, Nepal lover

The 70's saw a return of old Himalayan books which had been lying neglected in libraries or hidden away in personal collections. The man behind the re-printing of these books, Hallvard K Kuloy, was a UNICEF official who worked in India and Nepal from the late 1960's to the mid-1970's. It was under Kuloy's Bibliotheca Himalayaica series that classics such as Colonel Kirkpatrick's *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* and John Ware Edgar's *Report on a Visit to Sikkim and the Thibetan Frontier* were re-printed in the Bibliotheca series. Sadly, Kuloy passed away on 3 May in Oslo, Norway.



One wouldn't perhaps expect it of a UN employee, but Kuloy preferred to spend his free time reading and researching Himalayan literature. His posting to Nepal in 1972 gave him the perfect opportunity to delve deeper into the subject. His pioneering efforts helped set the trend for specialised books on the region, both old and newly researched works such as the 19th century Japanese traveller Ekai Kawaguchi's *Three Years in Tibet* and Sarat Chandra Das' *Journey to Lhasa and Tibet*. But perhaps what Kuloy should be best remembered for was his commitment to encouraging world-class publishing in Nepal. He was also one of the chief architects of the Publishing and Research In Nepal and Tibet Foundation

New jobs for junior ministers

The government has assigned 15 junior ministers to monitor development and security operations in all of Nepal's 14 zones and the central region. Their job is to assess the law and order and development situation in the areas they are assigned to serve. The government move gives junior ministers—who've been grumbling about everything being done by senior ministers of their respective ministries—something to do. The ministers will be required to listen to and win the trust of the people by ensuring that they get essential services. The high-level inspection teams may, if necessary, issue directives to government officials and departments and demand clarifications in the seven districts where the Integrated Security and Development Program is to be implemented. They won't have to worry about security in these Maoist-affected districts, because the army—to be deployed from 14 May—will be watching their backs.

Not so clean

We appear to be getting more than we bargained for with LPG vehicles. A study conducted by Clean Energy Nepal (CEN) with the help of the Valley Traffic Police indicates that gas-run vehicles are not as clean as they are thought to be. CEN had tested 35 LPG-powered vehicles, both three- and four-wheelers and the results were telling: 55 percent failed emission standards set by the Ministry of Population and Environment. An LPG-operated three-wheeler is allowed to emit at most three percent carbon monoxide (CO) by volume and 7,800ppm (parts per million) hydrocarbons (HC). Four-wheelers may emit up to three percent CO and 4,000ppm HC. Tailpipe emission tests found as much as 8.16 percent CO by volume, and 4,000ppm HC emitted.

This is bad enough, but what makes it worse is that the government provides import subsidies to these vehicles (99 percent on custom duty and 100 percent on VAT) on the assumption that they're clean.

Picture power

The power of the picture has come into public debate after government officials on World Press Freedom Day (3 May), asked photojournalists not to play up images that demoralise the police. Officials were reacting to pictures on the Maoist insurgency—sometimes gory—in newspapers. "What they don't realise is that pictures depicting Maoist violence undermine Maoist support," says Min Bajracharya, president of the newly formed Nepal National Forum of Photojournalists.

Help for too few

Labour and rights groups say a large number of Nepali child workers have been left out of a new, time-bound, programme for eliminating the worst forms of child labour. The programme targets five groups of child workers: porters, domestics, rag pickers, bonded labourers and victims of trafficking. Children working in the informal sector—agriculture, construction and industry like garments and carpets—are left out. According to ILO, nearly one in every three children of Nepal's 7.9 million children between ages five and fourteen is a child worker.

RA woes

Royal Nepal is sinking further. The airline's controversial Lauda 767 jet took off to Thailand a fortnight ago—to make Bangkok its base instead of Kathmandu. That is going to increase rentals from the present \$3,350 per flight hour to about \$5,000 per hour. It is unclear who is going to bear this additional burden. And who is going to pay for the plane to fly empty to Kathmandu and then fly to other destinations? One of the airline's own 757s, which had been grounded in Kathmandu for nearly two months because the airline had not paid up for an engine servicing job by a Chinese company, is now in Brunei for a patch-up job on its engines. This plane is expected to re-enter service next week.

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SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

Taking to the streets



The country's modern political history begins with the tale of a street in front of Singha Darbar.

With reference to the editorial on street-wise politicians (#41), I believe it is important to view our experience from a global perspective to get some road sense. From Downing Street to Wall Street, power, pelf and privilege pervade the pavement. This concentration of authority and prosperity in political and corporate pockets was bound to provoke a backlash. Accordingly, anti-globalisation activists have now worked out an annual calendar of street shows to accompany every conference they believe only

advance the interests of the world's capitalist roaders.

Our continental cousins have been particularly adept in using the street for political purposes. In 1986 and this year, Filipinos showed the collective muscle people can flex when they decide it's time to hit the road. Supporters of ousted president Joseph Estrada failed to pull off a People Power III last month, but that work is in progress. In Indonesia, supporters and opponents of President Abdurrahman Wahid have not lost any bit of the passion that united

them to force strongman Suharto to step down in favour of his vice-president, paving the way for the current phase of democratisation. Even today, talk of impeaching the president heats up or cools down depending on who's shouting which slogans on Jakarta's main thoroughfares.

Closer to home, the battle of the begums has established the roadworthiness of Bangladesh's democracy. Former military ruler Hussein Mohammed Ershad is the prime ally of the party that is fresh out of power. Like our own

Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Ershad's Jatiya Party brings a blast from the past and is driven by factionalism. Nevertheless, it is always happy to play the role of the facilitator. Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Begum Khalida Zia never seem to tire of wooing the general either by threatening to haul him in jail or by promising to secure his release as the case might be.

Nepal's streets are paved with politics. The country's modern political history begins with the tale of a street in front of Singha Darbar. The humiliation induced by the exclusion of the common people from that hallowed stretch provided the spark that spread isolated stirrings of anti-Rana sentiments into a full-blown struggle for equality. That's the genesis of our deep and abiding faith in streetocracy. Nepalis were soon familiarised with how governments could be set up and disbanded in accordance with the frequency and intensity of sit-ins and shutdowns. National reconciliation actually predates BP Koirala's touchdown at Tribhuvan Airport in 1976. The way Dharma, Ganga and Sukra Paths have all converged on the steps to the statue of Juddha Sumshere already offered a powerful expression of our inherent capacity for peaceful coexistence.

As we stand at one of those crucial political crossroads that approach every 10 years, some introspection would be in order. Would our own vision of democracy have been complete without the mass demonstrations triggered by the state's intolerance for public

protests against the execution of a prime minister of another country in 1979? Could the contours of political change have etched themselves in the public imagination without the pitched battles fought on the Sundhara-New Road alley on the opening day of the People's Movement of 1990? Moreover, when roughly 40 percent of the voting population stays home on election day, we need to guarantee their right to vote with their feet, don't we?

The street has become such an accepted agent of change that politicians and their student proteges no longer monopolise the macadam. The business community rails against the government's tax policies, semi-skilled workers holler slogans against the government and business owners. So much so that remarks a foreign movie star said he never made—and nobody could recall hearing him make—left a fiery trail of destruction. Rebels with a cause are capable of lethal effect and it's hard to keep track of the cost. Perhaps we shouldn't even bother to put a monetary value on these perennial road shows. Burning tyres, broken bricks, shards of glass and the smouldering remains of public and private vehicles all serve to embellish the potency of today's street potentates. With avenues of employment being constricted by the day, the streets offer the best forum for the urban youth to show their shot put and public-speaking skills every time a burning political issue is involved. Many draw inspiration from the way leaders who only a decade ago were walking

the streets of the capital have succeeded in raising super shelters on tracts of prime property.

Revolutionaries, reactionaries and their fellow travellers have become street smart after all these years on the road. Every movement from the Maoists' Prachanda Path to the King-save-the country clamour tests its credibility on the streets of Kathmandu. The route is clear. No matter where the procession starts or ends, it must pass through New Road, Indrachowk, Bhotahitya and Ratna Park to gain full effect.

In acknowledging the historic People's Movement as the source of the current political system, the constitution, too, enshrines the sanctity of street power. The foot soldiers of the People's War and their corps commanders are confident that the preamble to the supreme law of the land conforms to their philosophy of permanent revolution. At the moment, mainstream leftist parties are demonstrating their firm conviction that, when it comes to voicing your concerns, the street is in no way inferior to the chambers they helped stall for the entire winter session. In view of the evolution and nature of Nepali politics, the *sadan* and *sadak* cannot be regarded as mutually exclusive organs of state. Especially not when a majority government has developed the habit of trying to bulldoze legislation through parliament over the objections of opposition parties representing both ends of the political spectrum.

A special request to our opposition MPs: Even if you decide to take your seats in the upcoming budget session of parliament, please try not to take away the excitement from the streets. ♦

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS

The insurgency's human face

Visiting a Tamang village last week, we chatted with the villagers and asked if any Maoists had been there. They said a group of five Maoists had come a few years ago and held meetings to educate the people, specially school teachers. The teachers, they said, usually spent the time drinking and gambling instead of teaching. So where were the Maoists now? "The police came to the village and killed all five of them," one villager replied, adding: "But the teachers are much better behaved now." So the police had killed five young Maoists who had improved the performance of three young teachers. Two years later, the villagers said, Maoists killed a group of policemen on an adjoining ridge.

We hear these stories every day about villagers caught in the crossfire between police and Maoists. If the police use a village house, Maoists come and interrogate the house owners. If the Maoists eat or sleep there, the family can expect an unpleasant visit from the police. Often, a fate worse than interrogation befalls the family. Everyone we talked to last week in the villages we passed hate the



Grieving relatives in Dailekh

police, and most accept the Maoists. Once the police are out of an area, and the Maoists are securely established, they say, peace returns.

Now, it is no longer just ordinary villagers who are caught in the middle. Increasingly, we hear of hotel and factory owners getting harassed by both sides. One well-known first class hotel got a visit from Maoists who demanded a donation according to the size and class of the hotel. Since the donation demanded was large, and the hotel manager was accountable to the owners, he said he'd have to check with the owners. He explained this to the Maoists who said they would

come back in a few days.

Then the police called him and said they had heard that Maoists had paid a visit and what could the manager tell them about who came and what was said. The manager was naturally evasive. After a few more visits and talks between the well-behaved Maoists and the afraid-of-his-boss hotel manager, the police came to show the manager some photographs of a small group of men at the hotel gate and accused him of lying. They said the men in the photographs were the Maoists who had been visiting him. The hotel manager, afraid of retribution from both sides left town and took a

The young man was terrified of the Maoists who thought he was police, terrified of the police who thought he was Maoist.

different job.

A month ago, a group of fifteen or so young Nepalis were travelling to a remote project site in one of the Maoist inhabited areas. They were carrying about Rs 400,000 for project expenses. They were joined along the path by two men who turned out to be plainclothes policemen. A group of Maoists, encountered on the trail recognised the two local police, and suspecting that the others were also police kept them in the Maoist's jungle headquarters. One of the project members was killed by Maoists after they tried to confiscate the money. The fifteen men who had been trekking up to the project were extensively questioned to determine whether they too were plainclothes policemen.

Finally, after three weeks of questioning and observation, one young man was allowed back to Kathmandu to bring back proof that they all really were with the project and not with the police. The 22-year-old who was designated to return to

Kathmandu, arrived in town shaking and terrified: terrified of the Maoists who thought he was police, terrified of the police thought he was Maoist, terrified of his boss and how to explain the missing money.

Nepalis who heard this story, and the terrified young man himself, blamed neither the police nor the Maoists. They all blamed Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. They blamed his well-known hatred of anyone called "communist" which has led to his adamant refusal to negotiate or seek compromise with the Maoists. They blame his outsized ego and megalomania that is destroying the country.

Ordinary Nepalis are sick of the violence and are longing for peace and a return to normalcy. The idea of a multi-pronged Integrated Security and Development Plan is adding a whole series of new imponderables into an already complicated situation. Most Nepalis are aghast at the potential horrors that could

ensue. If you thought Rukumkot and Dailekh were bad, one can well imagine what kind of casualties will occur when both sides have more sophisticated weapons.

The new Plan to defeat the Maoists is supposed to win the "hearts and minds" of Nepalis, but this slogan which might have made sense three-and-a-half years ago when it was rejected by Girija Koirala, is a joke today.

The Maoists have already won the hearts and minds of much of Nepal including many intellectuals in Kathmandu. If the prime minister thinks the way to win over the villagers is to send more and more force to shoot through the hearts and blow out the minds of Maoists or their sympathisers, they today understand even less than they did three years ago when they launched Kilo Sierra II. One only needs to look at the same discredited faces who still surround and advise the prime minister, and who have presumably concocted another exercise in killing, to realise why this plan is doomed to failure.

It is now becoming more and more apparent that the process of creating a peaceful and socially just Nepal can only begin with the departure from the political scene of Koirala and his self-serving entourage. ♦



“They say Kathmandu is looting us, and we poor have to pay the price.”



Empty school in Khalanga, Jajarkot. Children near the Musikot hospital which never opened. Martyr's gate in Maoist country.

Æ from p. 1

One reason could be that the leadership structure and hierarchy is decentralised and the goals and strategies formulated at the top don't reach local commissars.

International charities whose projects are tolerated in one district are attacked in a neighbouring one. There is also a lot of misinformation doing the rounds. We were told a private foreign group in Rasuwa had folded up because of Maoist threats, but last week we checked, they were still there. All it took was one phone call to find out that another voluntary organisation in Mugu, also rumoured to have left because of Maoist threats, was in fact continuing its work in the area.

"There is a real difficulty in planning in Nepal now," admitted one frustrated head of an international relief group in Kathmandu. "I have to know whether I am wasting time here or not. Either I have to piss or get out of the pot. If they don't like us, let them tell us, and I'll take my money and go somewhere else."

In many places from which development workers have actually been forced to leave, the effect has been devastating. The Maoists are too busy fighting, the government virtually doesn't exist and development work has come to a standstill. "The Maoists run us out, they can't fill the void and they are too preoccupied to get on with grassroots development work that needs outside resources or expertise," said one activist who is now back in Kathmandu.

Aside from rhetoric and slogans, Maoists have shown they have no coherent policy on how to deal with external development agencies, bilateral aid, or even international charities. Maoist ideologue Babu Ram Bhattarai writing in his 1998 pamphlet *Politico-economic Rationale of the Peoples' War in Nepal*, is not much help: "Foreign aid is the entry of imperialist and expansionist financial capital in disguise... In keeping with the imperialist plan of checking the mounting crisis in oppressed nations from breaking into revolutionary upheavals, billions of rupees have been pumped into rural areas in the name of NGOs/INGOs."

Except for the 40-point demand announced six years ago, party literature is mum on a vision for development. Said one leftist analyst in Kathmandu who has closely followed the spread of Maoist influence: "I haven't seen a clearly articulated plan of action." Revolutionary land reform tops their developmental agenda, but aside from saying that they would "take from the rich and give to the poor" there is little clue about how this will be carried out. Nor is there a plan to address unemployment. Although

there is an emphasis on self-reliance, the Maoists' present methods of tax-collection, extortion and outright robbery of banks and community savings schemes means it cannot resist the need to depend on outside resources.

So far, the only consistent pattern seen in the attacks on development activities seems to be violence, threats and intimidation directed at village leaders with allegiance to the Nepali Congress. There have also been instances where foreign aid workers have been asked if they are American, and at least one international aid organisation was reportedly attacked because local Maoists said it was supported by "imperialist Americans".

Said one agricultural specialist who worked with a US-funded air programme in Dang: "They are somewhat allergic to Americans, but it does not mean they target Americans. Also, they have no problems if funds are coming from the US as long as the work in the field is effective." Instances where development workers have been killed are mostly due to personal conflicts and disagreements with local Maoists. One multilateral-funded agricultural project with field activities in 40 districts is being implemented without hindrance from Maoists, according to project managers. Said one: "We sit down with them and tell them what we are doing with agro-forestry user groups, training and savings schemes, and as long as we are transparent about what we are doing and we are not arrogant and ostentatious they give us full cooperation."

Not ogres

Said another farming expert back in the capital from a field visit: "You realise they are not ogres, they don't have horns. They tell you what they want, and you tell them why you are there and usually it is for the same reason: to make Nepalis more self-reliant, better fed, better educated, more healthy." He adds that what the Maoists say strikes a chord in most Nepali villagers outside the district headquarters: "They say Kathmandu is looting us, and we poor have to pay the price. We have to bring them in line."

Even so, police records show Maoists have ransacked 18 field offices of donor agencies in the last five years. But there have been many more unreported threats and attempts to extort and intimidate staff. One development worker from the far-west told us local Maoists used to ask

for money from time to time, but now it is very organised. "Everyone in the village has been asked to pay one month's salary every year as tax to support the Peoples' War, and there are threats if you don't pay," he said. The field worker is in a dilemma because his regional office in Nepalgunj will not reimburse him his salary, and it has to come out of his own pocket. He says civil servants, and even police, pay the Maoist tax.

Four-wheel drives

There is a tendency among local Maoist commissars—not very different from the general Nepali mindset—to look at infrastructure projects as "real" development, and other processes like social mobilisation, training and awareness building as a waste of time. Local Maoists tend to piggy-back on local community groups set up by development agencies to spread their doctrine. Refusal can lead to conflicts.

In a few remote pockets, Maoist commanders have warned development workers to stay away from villages where they carry out training. They target high-profile programmes with fancy four-wheel drive vehicles, and projects with a large and showy presence. But is all pretty arbitrary, depending on the local situation, the perceived need for the type of development activity, and the whim of the local Maoist commander. Nepal's biggest development project to date, the Kali Gandaki-A, even has a slogan written in chalk at the entrance to the power house in Beltari: "Let's support the ongoing Kali Gandaki A Project, NCP (Maoist)". Three members of the Melamchi Project, including a Canadian consultant looking at social and environmental mitigation, were briefly detained last week near Mahankal by armed Maoists. The three were quizzed on project goals and benefits to the local community, and later released unharmed. Large infrastructure projects that benefit the nation, tourism and trekking on which ordinary porters and villagers depend on for income appear to be deliberately left alone.

In three mid-western districts where the Maoists have declared the formation of "people's governments" they have built bridges, maintained village trails and drinking water systems and erected lots of gates to commemorate dead comrades. But there is no clear pattern or strategy for village development. An important gain has been in gender

equality (at least among the Maoist cadre) in areas of Nepal where the status of women has traditionally been the lowest. Maoists have shown a puritanical streak, but it is whimsical and quite random: threatening women who cut their hair short in Itahari, warning women not to wear jeans in Biratnagar, and banning alcohol in areas where they are in firm control. There is much genuine support for the Maoists' goals, but there is a lot of disagreement about the violent methods and the public acquiescence is largely driven by fear of retribution so there is no overt opposition to the Maoists.

But a more worrying aspect is the seeming lack of central policy and control. While in the first three years of the insurgency, Maoists carried out populist punishment of known village criminals and corrupt officials, today incidents of extortion, "taxation", looting of village savings schemes and brutal murders of popular local leaders have also affected their image. It is now often difficult to tell the difference between "Maobadi" and armed criminal "khaobadi"—robbers who loot a bank and leave shouting Maoist slogans, or those who steal from savings and credit groups. "There's no way to tell if they are real Maoists," said one village elder whose savings and credit programme was looted recently.

Khaobadis

With more and more police posts being pulled back to secure areas, large parts of the country have been left in the hands of local criminals. The Maoists have their own Peoples' Courts to address local disputes and carry out public punishments of *khaobadis*. The police retreat has actually made remotes districts more peaceful, giving the sense that once the Maoists are in control things return to normal—as long as no one disagrees. This is why there is apprehension about the government's recently announced Integrated Security and Development Programme (ISDP) providing the security umbrella for development activities to take place with the help of the police, paramilitary and the Royal Nepal Army. Many development workers who had got used to the return to calm now fear a return to fighting. One health worker from the mid-west told us: "We had just got used to working with the Maoists after the police moved out, now with the ISDP it will be uncertain again." ♦

Students vs students

Maoists are on an anti-school rampage, government is unable to provide security, and private schools are going to close.

A NEPALI TIMES REPORT

It had seemed for a while that the threat by the Maoist students union—the All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary)—to disrupt schooling by calling a one-week closure of schools starting 14 May had been withdrawn. With that came hope that their attempt to bring all private "boarding" schooling to a grinding halt would also be put on the back burner.

This hope came from a promise made by Devendra Parajuli, Kathmandu-based above-ground president of the ANNFSU(R), at an all-party public hearing organised this week. "There will be no one-week school bandh starting 14 May," he told the gathering. The administrators of private schools had expected that this assurance held some weight, particularly because of his reasonable demeanour and the pressure exerted on him by the other politicians at the meeting (organised by INHURON, and led by journalist and activist Shova Gautam).

However, the attacks by Maoist student groups on two prominent schools in Kathmandu Valley Tuesday morning put everything back. Elites Co-ed in Lamatar in the Valley's south-east rim, and Rupy's International in Kalimati had property damaged and torched by the weapon-wielding visitors. Neena Morada, the founder principal of Elites, was manhandled and her faced smeared with grease, while the founder principal of Rupy's even had kerosene sprinkled on her with the threat of setting her on fire.

With the Maoists on a rampage, and the government unable to provide security, private schools are unlikely to open now. The loss to national education is irreparable. Private schooling is one area where the country has made strides in the last decade, with investments in the last ten years amounting to Rs 8 billion according to one estimate. The trend of Nepalis going to Indian schools in Delhi, Dehradun, Darjeeling and Nainital, had quietly been reversed in the last few years saving precious money draining out of the country. In the future, it seemed, Nepal's private schools might actually attract students from India and thus provide a great boost to the national economy.

Instead, off-the-cuff demands for school closures and reduction of fees by 50 percent is rolling everything back. Across the hinterland, hundreds of private schools have already closed. Notre Dame, a school funded by Japanese nuns in the hilltop town of Bandipur, possibly the best public school in the Nepali midhills and one that served the rural populace with world-class schooling at subsidised rates, has already announced closure after a decade of operation.

Meanwhile, parents and guardians in the hills are desperately seeking schools in Kathmandu, Chitwan and Pokhara. But with the Maoists targeting even these areas, Nepalis who can afford it are heading out to India again. Flights to Bhadrapur are filling up with guardians making exploratory trips to Darjeeling.

The 7 May meeting was called to address these alarming trends and what the assembled leadership had to say was heartening. The stalwart of the CPN (UML) Jhalanath Khanal



said courageously that he would, under present conditions, continue to send his child to a private school, but would give his life if necessary for the improvement of education in Nepal. Devi Prasad Ojha, another front-rank Left leader, said that private schools should be monitored, but not closed. More than one leader pointed out that reduction of fees in private schools in fact helped the relatively rich, whether in the villages or in the towns and that the real focus should be to improve public education rather than try and kill private education.

But the latest action indicates either that the Maoist leadership is not in charge of its ground-level cadre, or that the leadership is no different from other political parties—saying one thing and doing another. The promise made by Devendra Parajuli certainly does not look like it was made in good faith. ♦

BIZ NEWS

Budget errors

The countdown for the budget for the fiscal year 2001/02 (2058/59) has begun. One thing is almost certain: finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat will have few surprises concerning regular expenses. That's because the spending on budget lines like salaries, allowances, and pensions to government employees have overshot the budget. There has also been an increase in the debt-servicing bill, mainly because of the depreciation of the Nepali rupee. The government has allocated Rs 17.31 billion for payments to about 300,000 people on the public payroll, including teachers, the armed forces and the police. This amount is expected to grow to about Rs 21 billion. The government raised salaries last year, which also led to corresponding increases in allowances and pensions. Still another reason was that the number of people on the payroll was underestimated. According to a finance ministry official, last year's budget assumed there were 110,000 teachers. This number later turned out to be 145,000. The budget is also expected to shoot up due to a larger internal security bill which the Internal Defence and Security Programme (ISDP) will contribute to. Government figures say ISDP spending in seven districts will be Rs 254 million.

The total regular expenditure in last year's budget was Rs 54.31 billion. The government's ability to pay for increased security expenses will depend on its ability to collect revenue, one of the reasons troops now guard the border customs.

The taxman prowleth

The tax office of Kathmandu's area two has made a startling discovery: a survey of 250 mom-and-pop businesses in the heart of the city revealed that most small retailers don't pay taxes or even file returns. This has reached epidemic proportions in Bagbazaar, where up to 70 percent of the stores don't pay tax. Businesses in Anamnagar are more well-behaved: most stores that filed returns and paid up were here. The department, which hopes to expand the tax net, has already sent notices to unregistered traders asking them to submit their transaction records. Of the 8,000 such retail outlets in Kathmandu, only 20 percent are in the tax net. Most shop owners claimed they "had just begun business" and were in the process of registering at the tax office. Small shops in the Kathmandu metropolitan city with an annual turnover of less than one million rupees are required to pay Rs 2,000 a year in tax. This drops to Rs 1,500 in municipal areas and Rs 1,000 elsewhere. The tax office, working with the association of retailers, is offering businesses a one-time rebate to encourage them to contribute to tax revenues.

Insuring Nepali lives

The second private company allowed to issue life insurance in Nepal opened shop last week. The Nepal Life and Insurance Company—a fully Nepali venture—does general life insurance in addition to other regular services. The authorised capital of the new company is Rs 250 million, and shares for 20 percent of this will be sold to the general public. The company plans to sell 10,000 insurance policies this year, and is aiming at achieving 100,000 annual policy-sales by the end of five years.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Budget boredom



As always, the budget will be predictable, and the economy, wildly otherwise.

When we worthy denizens of the Management Association of Nepal got together last week for our annual ritual, we naturally discussed the end of the fiscal year and the upcoming budget. Of course, the equally worthy denizens of parliament may not allow the budget session to go along its conventional, boring route, but we are traditionalists: we took as a given that Government Would Work. In between all the other fun, we heard and presented interesting papers and asked cutting questions. The finance minister also spoke—mainly to explain precisely how his hands are tied. All in all, I think we had a better time than we would at any boring old budget session.

The wonderful thing about this country is that the government can function without a budget and the budget, which works in mysterious ways, can function without the government. In preparing the budget, we stick to the old ways and magic numbers like 1.6. But perhaps it is time to be hard-nosed economists. Every year, trade bodies, business and professional associations and others go through the rigmarole of suggesting to the government what would be best for the country. This has become another public ritual and the hordes of hastily-prepared documents pile up at the finance ministry like so many dead lemmings. The ministry, pressed for time, cuts and pastes and behold!



another budget speech is ready.

It might be worthwhile, given all this, to perhaps extend out economic horizons beyond the boundaries of the fiscal year. We have long-term debt repayment obligations that we ignore or forget at our own peril. As for five-year plans, those arbitrary products of mostly unsuccessful Soviet-style planning and India's confused mixed economy, they really have no utility in Nepal. As for quantitative analysis, this is a number soup that is neither understood nor expelled.

If the budget is to have any real meaning, it must stop being an exercise in doling out largesse to MPs and other cronies who inveigle themselves into development projects that are already products of political opportunism rather than economic sense. Regular expenditure is soaring and revenue increases will never keep pace. The rising budget deficits are funded by domestic and foreign borrowings from the bread line into the debt trap. The finances of the government are no different from

those of its numerous ailing corporations. Each year, expenditure balloons out of control, mainly due to personnel-related spending. Like in ailing state-owned enterprises (SOE), revenues cannot increase unless the flawed and unplanned collection system is not amended. Again like in SOEs, there is no sense of accountability.

It's time for us to grow up and examine the planning process, explore different ways of moving the grassroots to the national level. We need to think hard about what is the responsibility of the state and what is not. Which is more important for the government: investing and repeatedly bailing out ailing tobacco or airline companies, or finally building that road to Jumla? The Local Governance Act, the Agriculture Perspective Plans and the proposed Tax laws envisage decentralisation—where does this fit into the planning paradigm? What is the role of the regulatory agencies like the Securities Board in the planning and implementation process?

The list of questions is endless. I have this sneaking suspicion that discussing hot to deal with them will be nothing at all like a predictably dull and hysterical session in parliament. In fact, I think it might even be more fun that we had at the Management Association of Nepal do. ♦

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com



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KIRAN NEPAL

Until a decade ago, virtually all you heard about Nepali tea revolved around the inefficiency of the state-run Nepal Tea Development Corporation (NTDC). In the 1990s, the trouble entered Phase Two: labour disputes and nasty battles between political parties over privatisation. The government privatised the NTDC last year and there is finally room for real business talk.

Nepal produces two types of tea: CTC, processed from leaf harvested in gardens in the plains, which is granular, fine-cut tea (crushed, torn and curled) that produces thick liquor. The other, finer, variety is "orthodox tea" from shrubs grown in the hills, which produces a lighter, more fragrant liquor with distinct seasonal flavours. Nepal already has 11 factories producing orthodox tea, and CTC production in Nepal is also expanding. "We'll be able to produce enough CTC for domestic consumption in three or four years," says Muktiraj Sharma, executive director of the National Tea and Coffee Development Board. Nepal currently imports 3 million kg of tea annually. Nepali teas on the market include Uday, Muna, Upahar, Mechi, and Tinpate, all produced in the factories of Jhapa and Ilam

Clearly there's room for more, and not just here, but even overseas. So much, in fact, that tea growers say they can do better with their product than even the carpet industry did. All they want is a little help from the government.

The tea grown in Nepal's eastern hills adjacent to the more famous Darjeeling gardens, is possibly the best in the world. The climate is just right and because the bushes are young, the produce is world class. Tea growing has already spread from Ilam and Panchthar in the east to Kaski, southwest of Kathmandu. Almost every stretch of barren slope in between can be used for growing tea.

This is what the Nepal Tea Development Policy 2000 says is possible and needs to be done in Nepal:

- Tea growing can be expanded from the present 10,000 hectares to 40,000 hectares.
- Output can be increased from the present 6 million kg to 46 million kg.
- Over 60 million seedlings need to be planted for a cost of Rs 2 billion.
- Such expansion would provide jobs for 80,000 people

Getting to this point depends on one simple factor: investment. Tea growing needs continuous investment over four to eight years, which is money most growers-even large industrialists-don't have. And because returns from tea only start to really add up after seven or eight years, it takes growers anywhere between nine and 14 years to pay back loans, while still pumping in

more money into their business.

The Agricultural Development Bank has loans worth Rs 120 million earmarked for tea growers, but the terms of the loan policy don't match the tea production cycle, and farmers end up with overdue interest in excess of what they actually borrowed. Commercial banks are just not interested in investing in tea-they would rather pay a fine to the central bank for not meeting the minimum level of loans they are required to provide to the priority sector. "If we go to ask them for loans to set up nurseries, they tell us to go set up the nursery first and then apply for loans," says Suraj Vaidya, owner of Guranse Tea Industries, the leading exporter of Nepali orthodox tea to Japan and Germany. "There has to be a mechanism to make borrowing easy."

Tea growing is investment intensive-you need land, labourers, fertilisers, irrigation and even trained extension workers. The up side is that it grows on slopes where other crops do not thrive and is labour intensive, helping generate employment-on average about three labourers per hectare. A study in the hills of Ilam, Panchthar, Dhankuta and Tehrathum threw interesting light on how the tea economy helps rural families: 80 percent of the 65 families surveyed were literate, 90 percent had administered their children all three doses of the polio immunisation course and 65 percent had drinking water systems in their homes. "Tea has the potential of bringing about an economic revolution of sorts. I don't understand why we're not doing the minimum to enable that to happen," says Vaidya.

Nepal's tea growers are individual farmers, farmer groups and large corporate growers. The government classifies people farming on less than 18 hectares as small growers. Those cultivating over larger areas are either tea farmers (operations that don't have factories) or tea gardens that have in-house processing facilities. It makes economic sense to set up factories in areas where the plantations can cover around 150 hectares, but growing tea on individual farms can also be a viable proposition if there are processing centres nearby to sell the produce. In fact, many tea factories in east Nepal don't even own tea gardens-instead, they process the leaf grown by small farmers. Three of the 11 factories that produce orthodox tea rely entirely on leaf supplied by small growers. Nepal has 29 tea factories, all in the country's east-18 in Jhapa and 11 in Ilam, Panchthar and Dhankuta. The reason tea cultivation has not spread to other parts of the country where it is feasible is the lack of

Nepali tea growers believe their cuppa could prove more potent economically than even carpets. But they need a little help.

processing facilities. But, of course, few growers means there's no real call to set up processing factories. This pattern will be difficult to break without real incentive.

Expanding plantations isn't the only problem planners need to address: there's also the issue of access to the export market, especially to major tea auctions,

and meeting transportation costs. Darjeeling, for example, has lower transport costs and easier access to the Calcutta auction. But this doesn't have to mean Darjeeling tea has the monopoly on fine leaf from South Asia. Seventy-four tea gardens in Darjeeling used to supply 10 million kg of tea to Germany. This suddenly increased to 40 million

kg, and it emerged later that tea from other gardens in India was being passed off as the "champagne of teas". German buyers filed a complaint with the Indian tea board, and the quota for Darjeeling exports was reduced to the earlier ceiling. "That's the market vacuum we should be aiming at-it is within reach," says a Nepali official

who did not want to be named. The private sector made a move in the right direction some weeks ago. At the Tea Event buyers from Japan and Pakistan committed to purchasing 250 and 2,000 tonnes of tea respectively. Now the industry and government need to get their act together and build on this incentive. Fast.

Carlsberg

Climb every mountain

Doug Scott, the first person to climb the southwest face of Mt Everest, is now a part-time philosopher, and helps Nepalis build schools.

RAMYATA LIMBU

"My mother says I was a strong baby who craved attention. I would rock my cradle this way and that so she was forced to come to me between feeds," says Doug Scott. The 59-year-old British mountaineer tells this story as a strangely modest refutation of his humility.

Scott quit crying a long time ago. Instead, he concentrated his energies on climbing. Growing up in post-war England—his father fought in World War II—he found solace in the hills and mountains around his home. Scott climbed more and more and in 1975, on his second Everest attempt, Scott, with his climbing partner Dougal Haston, became the first Briton on top of the world. He hasn't looked back, and is one of only a few climbers (52 or 62, depending on how you're counting) to complete the seven summits, the highest points on all continents. All in all, Scott has had what he simply describes as "a good run of climbing". And he's got a lot of attention. The quintessential Himalayan climber, Scott's humility, strength, and courage on the mountain, his numerous first and difficult ascents, mainly in the Greater Himalayan Range, have earned him a CBE (Commander of the British Empire). "I think that means I'm not quite a Lord," says the long-haired climber whose yellow backpack and casual T-shirt belie his fame.

When he's not climbing a remote Himalayan pass or growing organic vegetables at home in Nottingham, England, Scott travels the world giving lectures about his experiences in the mountains, including in Nepal, where he has returned regularly since his first Everest attempt in 1972. The "merciless passage of time" and 30 years of playing club-level rugby have taken their toll on the climber, making it easier and more enjoyable for him to just trek the mid-hill regions of the country where few tourists go, but where most Nepali porters come from.

"For most people in these places, every day is an adventure. You work so hard, the last thing you want to do is go off climbing. People are hard



MIN BAIRAGIARVA

pressed to feed themselves and their families, threatened by floods and drought... despite all this, it is amazing how collected, spontaneous, and genuine people are. It may sound a bit trite, but it's a privilege to stay in their homes." This isn't idle trekker-talk either: Scott is doing his bit for communities in the Solukhumbu, Sindhupalchok, Kaski, Dhankuta and Langtang areas. As chairman and co-founder of Community Action Nepal, a not-for-profit organisation, he organises projects in sustainable health and education. CAN's first goal, following in Mike Cheney's footsteps, was ensuring that porters receive a fair wage for their labour. But, Scott says, in the face of Nepal's climbing hierarchy and the tendency to look after the welfare of one's immediate family rather than the larger community, it's been an uphill task. Still, he enjoys being in the area, close to nature, in the middle of spontaneous everyday village life. "Life expectancy is not so great here, but people live life fully, with total attention. They do everything with such grace and economy of effort, getting far more out of it."

High up on the mountain, Scott manages to live like that, if just for a while. "I get grumpy when I don't climb," he says, meditating on the changes that climbing has seen in recent times. "I'm sure those who started the British Alpine Club [of which Scott is president] in 1859—doctors, lawyers, parsons—professionals who wanted a break from the city—would have frowned on people like me, professional climbers who make a living by talking and writing about mountaineering." He takes with a certain

equanimity the media-driven transformation climbing has undergone from being weekend recreation to an eminently marketable and glamorous sport. He's pleased that there are still thousands who enjoy the adrenaline rush of conquering a small rock face. "On weekends they push themselves to their physical limits. They return on the bus, their bones aching, but with a glow. They come back to do what they have to do with a renewed enthusiasm. It's a quick fix solution."

It's a solution that Scott seeks when the internal dialogue, the chatter and the trivia of daily life overwhelm him. Working new routes, uncertain faces that no one's done before, going up a mountainside finding a line of weakness, wondering where to spend the night—this is not everyone's idea of fun, but for this man it is all exhilarating. "You're so focused on surviving, it stops the internal chatter. I do start to see a bit of what is normally hidden." Scott knows what he wants out of climbing and he's fine-tuned the experience over the years.

It was during the descent from Everest, when Scott and Haston were forced to make a hazardous bivouac in a snow hole at the extreme height of 8,750 m that it became clear to the climber that with a bolder approach based on better techniques and improved equipment, the menace of high altitude climbing could be handled. After Everest, an elite international group of which Scott was a leading member began tackling the highest peaks in the rapid style used in the Alps. Success followed on Xixapangma (Southwest Face), Shivling (East Pillar), Kusum Kangguru (North Summit), Nuptse (North Face) and notably Kangchendzonga, where his ascent of the North Ridge in 1979 with Joe Tasker and Pete Boardman ranks among the great Himalayan climbs—it was the first time one of the big three peaks was climbed by a small team without oxygen. In a postscript to his *Himalayan Climber*:

A Lifetime's Quest to the World's Greater Ranges, Scott's description of the climb is almost poetic. "On Kangchenjunga, when we had made the decision to have one last try and found that the wind had eased, it was like the parting of the Red Sea, a brief and precious lull, granted only to us, when for a few hours we were able to advance to the top of that great peak and return unscathed."

Scott's confidence and instincts honed through years of climbing around the world—the Sahara, East Africa, Iceland, Canada, Alaska, the Soviet Union, the Hindukush, Karakoram—have helped him survive near fatal accidents. In 1977 he broke his legs while abseiling down after summiting the Ogre in the Karakoram with Chris Bonington. The painful journey back to Base Camp took eight days and was partly accomplished by crawling down the glacier and moraines to reach Camp. It was a lesson in humility. Everest had made him arrogant. Says Scott in his book: "It was a severe lesson which I was lucky to survive and am not anxious to repeat."

Today, Scott, who climbed most of the continental summits without even considering the seven summits challenge—he thinks it's a "disreputable concept"—is concentrating on discovering smaller, unclimbed peaks in Tibet, Bhutan, and north-east India. A typically good climb in recent years was his 1998 ascent of Drohmo opposite Kangchendzonga where he left the margin of safety satisfyingly narrow, but without closing the gap. "The walk from South Pillar to central summit took four days. It was totally satisfying," says Scott.

Each time he's back from a climb, there is a glow. "You return a lot more aware, with more enthusiasm to do what you've been doing before. There's more tolerance, more compassion." Then, his self-deprecating smile appears again: "It doesn't last too long, though. So you have to go again." ♦

Should some peaks remain virgin?

As cash-strapped countries like ours think of opening up new peaks to boost the country's tourism-dependent economy, it isn't only the local populace that gets caught up in the debate. The question refers to increasing environmental and cultural degradation, and disregard for peoples' religious sentiments concerning Machapuchre here and Kailash in Tibet.

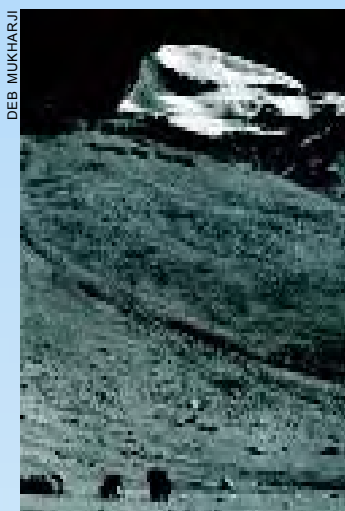
A recent BBC World Today debate on whether the sanctity of Machapuchre should be defiled by opening it to climbers resulted in a flurry of emails from around the world. Most respondents felt that a country's culture and tradition shouldn't be sacrificed at the altar of commerce. Others, citing Everest as a case in point, were concerned about environmental degradation and commercialisation. "The question of sanctity does not arise as Dr Harka Gurung has proved the mountain is not holy," said Kanak Mani Dixit during the debate. "The dramatic visual attraction of Machapuchre as seen from Pokhara Valley and the surroundings will not be undermined by allowing climbers to attempt to scale it." Others felt the relatively few extra climbers who would be attracted to the region would not justify a decision to open the mountain either financially or environmentally.

Dr Harka Gurung, an eminent geographer who has travelled extensively in the area, points out that while Machapuchre is a beautiful mountain, it is not sacred to local Gurungs who live around its base. Dr Gurung says it is necessary to open up mountains, including Machapuchre, to climbers to boost the local economy, but stresses that there should be adequate management and that revenue generated should go back to the area.

This isn't the first time Nepal's most distinctive mountain has been the focus of such attention. In the mid 80s, UNICEF had



UNUSUAL ANGLES: Machapuchre from the north and Kailash from the west.



DEB MUKHARJI

expressed an interest to organise an international expedition to the summit to raise funds for its children's programmes. The idea was abandoned after it met with strong objections. "There was never any protest from the locals in the immediate vicinity of the mountain. They didn't say it was sacred. The protests came from Kathmandu," says Elizabeth Hawley, the Reuters mountaineering correspondent in Nepal.

And now there's another controversy brewing that will call forth even more passionate responses. The Chinese government recently decided to allow a group of Spanish climbers led by Jesus Martinez Novas to climb Mt Kailash in Tibet. Unlike Machapuchre, Kailash, standing in a remote corner of Tibet, is most definitely held sacred and venerated by more than a billion Buddhists and Hindus in Asia. Hindus believe the snow-capped pyramid of Kailash is the abode of Shiva and an earthly representation of Mt Sumeru, the cosmic mountain at the centre of the universe. Buddhists lore has the Tibetan (or, as is claimed, Nepali) poet and mystic Milarepa being carried to the top of the mountain on the rays of the morning sun in the 11th century. Coming less than a month after the Taliban ordered the destruction of the 2000-year old Bamiyan Buddha statues, the Chinese decision is seen by some as political propaganda to demoralise Tibetan nationalism and independence.

This is not the first time climbers have been permitted to attempt Kailash. In the mid 80s, Chinese authorities told Reinhold Messner he could climb Kailash. The Italian climber declined and said in an interview with the *British Observer*: "If we conquer this mountain, then we conquer something in other people's souls. I would suggest they go and climb something a little harder. Kailash is not so high and not so hard."

"It's not a very difficult mountain," agrees Doug Scott, president of the British Alpine club. "We've urged the Spanish to be cautious. To even think about climbing Kailash diminishes what others hold sacred. I think they have withdrawn their plan, since we haven't heard from them."

In 1979 Scott, Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman stopped a few yards short of the summit of Kangchendzonga in deference to the people of Sikkim who believe their gods reside there. A British and Indian team who made the first and second ascent of the mountain, before them, did the same. ♦

OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by ANIL KARKI

If you have only a week, and want a feel for wild Nepal, then Langtang National Park is your best bet. But, shhh, don't tell anyone. Langtang is also unique because so few people visit there, preferring the more famous trails on the Everest route or the Annapurnas.

Only a day's bus ride and walk away, the entrance to the park is remarkably close to Kathmandu. Langtang also offers pure wilderness, something quite rare among treks in Nepal because the routes are mostly along well-populated or well-travelled trails. Langtang has everything: unsurpassed scenery, forests, waterfalls and wildlife, villages and ways of life largely untouched by the outside world.

Upper Langtang is a U-shaped valley carved by ancient glaciers. The rivers of ice have receded, leaving swaths of bulldozed boulders and earth piled up on large moraines. Teetering precariously on a cliff ledge overlooking Langtang village are the blue seracs of the Langtang icefall. They do tumble down periodically, bathing the whole valley in snow dust. The east-west valley takes a sudden sharp turn to the north near Kyanjin—this is the destination and the most scenic part of the entire trek.

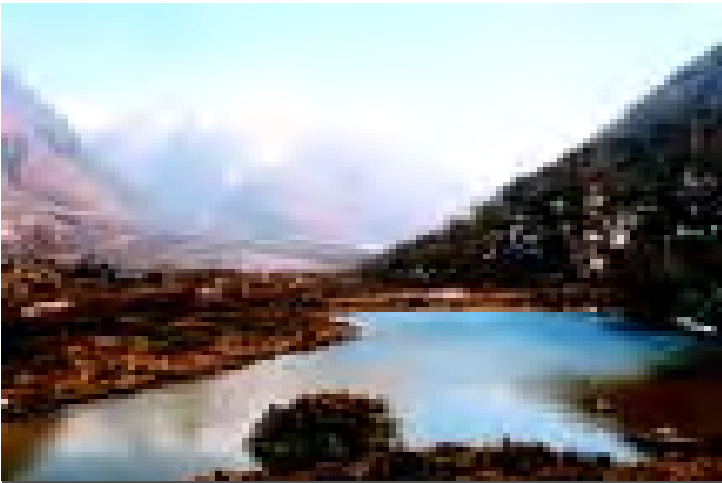
Mountains of the Jugal Himal range to the east, Xixapangma the eight-thousander looms to the north just inside Tibet, above you is the dominating presence of Langtang Lirung, its snowy east face so bright in the rays of the rising sun that it bathes the whole valley in the eerie golden glow of a second sun. Then to the south the jagged saw-tooth of Naya Kanga and the Ganja La pass that provides a difficult shortcut back to Kathmandu. It is difficult to imagine that we are only 32 km horizontally and about 2 km vertically from Kathmandu Valley here.

You cannot, should not, hurry through Langtang. You have to linger and savour the ambience of this magical place. Watch and live the moods of the mountains in the morning, noon, evenings and nights. Feel the rhythm of the village as the Langtangis go about with their yak grazing, cheese-making, playing with their children. You go to Langtang to tarry, to recharge your soul, and you can only do that if you hang around and not go tearing across the countryside at breakneck speed in your group's trekking itinerary.

You will be thankful when the hair-raising bus ride on an appalling road from Kathmandu to Dhunche comes to an end. The daily bus service is always overcrowded, but cheap (Rs 120). If you want to travel in style then you can hire a taxi up to Dhunche but it will set you back about Rs 6,000. You could go on to Syabru Besi, which is a shorter route, but for views Dhunche is better. It is also better to start walking right away because Dhunche has the air of a wild west frontier town. Camp near the entrance to the park. The next morning, you will find yourself walking in thick fragrant forests of oak, pine, fir and spruce, alive with birds, musk deer, monkeys and the playful Himalayan red panda. The crystal clear Langtang Khola thunders nearby, and this sound never leaves you as you ascend.



ALL PHOTO ANIL SHRESTHA



LOVELY LANGTANG: The east face of Langtang Lirung glows in the first rays of the rising sun (above), while nearby Kimsun's craggy ridge soars above the Langtang Glacier (right). A moraine-dammed lake near Kyanjin is the perfect stopover for migratory birds, and trekkers who will be enchanted with the reflections of mountains on its glassy surface.



The park is not completely uninhabited. There are 45 villages (846 households of 4,500 people) inside the park. The majority are Tamangs, and higher up in Langtang Valley are Tibetans. The prime trekking season normally begins mid-October and lasts till mid-December, and mid-February to mid-April although it will still be

cold at higher elevations. The rest of May before the monsoon arrives is still ideal for Langtang, but expect hefty afternoon thunderstorms and snow in the upper regions of the valley. The rhododendron season is now ending, but the forests will be alive with summer colours and scents. But even Langtang cannot escape modernisation and there are

now lodges along the trail every 5 km or so, serving *dal bhat*, *chow mein* and even pasta with meat sauce and extra cheese. Langtang is where the Swiss first built yak cheese plants in Nepal in the 1950s, and the word Langtang has the same ring as Emmental in some wine-and-cheese circles in Kathmandu. By the end of the trek,

you will have cheese and the more traditional Nepali *churpi* coming out of your ears.

The highlight of Langtang is Kyanjin, a small beautiful village, approximately 2-3 hrs from Langtang Village and the last permanent settlement before the glaciers. Kyanjin hotels are sophisticated, and designed for

trekkers who have come here to attain nirvana. The rooms are cosy, the dining rooms have central fireplaces, solar heaters for hot showers. All that and a hot chocolate on yak milk while watching the sun set, and the moon rise simultaneously in one of the world's most stupendously beautiful places. Nearly heaven. ♦



A new web semantics

XML is the future of the World Wide Web, says Tim Berners Lee, inventor of the web.

GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA
IN HONG KONG

Imagine having data on the World Wide Web defined and linked in a way so that it can be used not just for display purposes, but also for automation, integration and reuse of data across various applications. All the different devices you may have—microwave oven to mobile phone—integrated in a seamless database. Isn't that wonderful?

The world of web developers and standards groups also thinks so, and is working towards making this vision a reality. In order make this a reality for the web, supporting standards, technologies and policies must be designed to enable machines to make more sense of the Web, and thus making the Web more useful for humans. Facilities and technologies to put machine-understandable data on the Web are rapidly becoming a high priority for many communities. For the web to scale, programs must be able to share and process data even when these programs have been designed totally independently. The web can reach its full potential only if it becomes a place where data can be shared and processed by automated tools as well as by people.

Enter semantic web along with RDF, XML, XSLT, WSDL, UDDI, WAI, DCMI, OIL, ebXML, SOAP, DCML, XTM, OIL, SVG, and more alphabet soup. If you find all these arcane, the people working towards making the web easier to use live with this particular kind of soup. There are seemingly more. In three days, I was exposed to at least 12 new terms—and I already knew the above mentioned.

The future of the web is mostly in the hands of the world body World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). This consortium, including rival industry players like IBM and Microsoft and academics from all over the world, gives the final nod to web standards. They have working committees that discuss and produce drafts for standards. After thorough discussions, these drafts are passed as recommendations, so that developers around the world can follow it, and so can browser makers.

The group is now geared towards making the web an integral part of the people's mind. Tim Berners Lee, W3C Director and the inventor of the web in his opening keynote at the 10th world wide web conference (WWW10) outlined the Web Phase Two, which is all about semantic web and web services. Service is an abstract protocol but technology to deliver it is required. So what technology is going to make it happen?

The greatest thing in the first phase of the web was HTML, the language of web pages. Simpletons may be surprised, but HTML is an unstructured language, meant only for displaying pages. Machines are not able to interpret any data out of HTML. It is not meant for the phase two. Enter XML (eXtensible Markup Language), which as its name signifies is extensible. Now, as Lee and others would like us to believe, the next greatest thing is XML and associated standards. The XML 2.0 standard was declared recommended last week, which will now let hordes of developers to start working with it.

Already, various XML derivatives try to meet specific needs. RDF (Resource Description

Framework), as an implementation of XML, is used to put data onto the web in a form that can be processed by machines with less prior arrangement through the use of a common data model and machine-interpretable data schemas. The common underlying XML structure, with a well-defined description framework, lets developers create one set of data to fit all needs.

XSL (Extensible Stylesheet Language), which consists of XSLT (XSL Transformations), XPath (XML Path Language) and XML formatting language, is a language for expressing style sheets. A stylesheet specifies the layout of the particular page. To change the design, a change in the stylesheet is enough. This is currently done using CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), with HTML. In the XML world, XSL will do this work. An XSL stylesheet specifies the presentation of a class of XML documents by describing how an instance of the class is transformed into an XML document that uses the formatting vocabulary.

SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics) is a language for describing two-dimensional graphics in XML. Contrary to the now popular JPEG format, SVG drawing can be dynamic and interactive. The DOM (Document Object Model) for SVG includes full XML DOM, allows efficient vector graphics animation via scripts. No need to use heavy "flash" animations.

The semantic Web initiative also is working on SMIL (Synchronised Multimedia Integration Language, pronounced "smile") to impart a TV like multimedia experience on the web. For mobile users CC/PP (Composite Capabilities/Preferences Profiles) is on its way.

There is more alphabet soup, and seemingly many working groups working to create different standards. The notion of the web as a limited, computer-based access to static information will be changed in the future. One of the biggest adopters of XML technology has been IBM. It already provides lots of implementation in software that it provides for downloads, as it re-brands itself as a major service provider for all—from Pop Tate's to Fortune 500 companies.



GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

Infotech conference. But we still need some "techie" conferences, so that even the public at large get their share of the soup.

In 2010, everyone will have a mobile, you can customise the looks of your digital secretary, and you will have a paper less desk (finally) as Keiji Tachikawa, President and CEO of NTT, DoCoMo put it. It's time to gear up for it! ♦

Gaurab Upadhaya was in Hong Kong last week to speak at the WWW10 conference.



A common sight at the conference: an American delegate with a Hong Kong mobile phone.



ANALYSIS

by MARTIN RAVALLION

Poverty versus growth



The debate among governments, economists, and NGOs about how much the world's poor benefit from economic growth seems unending. Last year *The Economist* claimed that "Growth really does help the poor: in fact it raises their incomes by about as much as it raises the incomes of everybody else."

Yet, in a letter published soon after by the same magazine, Justin Forsyth of Oxfam claimed that "...current patterns of growth and globalisation are widening income disparities and hence acting as a brake on poverty reduction." Irreconcilable positions? Not necessarily: for both sides in this debate are, in many respects, talking about different things. One side may be talking about absolute poverty, the other about relative poverty. Moreover, average findings conceal large differences: in some countries the poor can benefit from economic growth, in others they may be too deprived to take advantage of it. In short, some truth resides on both sides. The full picture, however, is more complicated than

The average impact of policy reform on inequality is zero.

either point of view.

New data from the 1990s confirms earlier studies that there is little or no evidence that economic growth is associated with increases in income inequality as measured by national household surveys. This finding is important. For if the share of national income going to the poor does not fall with economic growth then of course the poor will gain in absolute terms; growth will be poverty reducing, and contraction will be poverty increasing. Moreover, the available data confirms that the higher the rate of growth, the higher the average rate of poverty reduction. That is the type of evidence that *The Economist* was promoting. Yet it is deceptive to conclude from this that growth raises the incomes of the poor "...by about as much as it raises the incomes of everybody else." Given existing inequality, the absolute income gain to the rich will be greater—much greater—than the gains to the poor. For the richest 10 percent of people in India the income gain from aggregate economic growth tends to be about four times higher than the gain to the poorest 20 percent. In Brazil it tends to be almost 20 times higher. This is consistent with growth having no overall effect on inequality as conventionally measured.

Focusing on average outcomes also misses the fact that the experiences of poor people during times of economic growth are diverse.

The same growth rate can bring anything from a modest drop in poverty to a dramatic decline. One finds plenty of cases of rising inequality during spells of growth. Indeed, the best data available suggests that inequality increases about half the time, and falls the other half. Even when inequality does not change with growth, one finds both gainers and losers at all levels of living. In cases where household survey data has tracked the same families over time it is common to find considerable churning under the surface. Many people escape poverty while others fall into poverty, even when the overall poverty rate moves rather little.

An important factor in the heterogeneous experiences of developing countries in the 1990s is that starting conditions varied immensely between countries undergoing economic reform. The most important differences appear to be in the physical and human assets of the poor. In economies where poor people tend to be illiterate, sick, hard to reach and/or marginalised socially, they have less chance of sharing in the gains from growth than in an economy in which such debilities are less severe. In other words, in countries where the level of income inequality is high, inequality is reduced less by growth than in countries where inequality is relatively low.

These differences are, in turn, associated with long-standing

differences in policy regimes. Suppose you could divide reforming countries into two categories: those whose previous policies benefited the rich, keeping inequality artificially high, and those whose previous policies had the opposite effect, keeping inequality low. Opening the economy and freeing internal markets may well entail sizable redistribution between rich and poor, but in opposite directions in the two groups of countries. In fact, the average impact of policy reform on inequality is zero. Yet there is abundant distributional change going on under the surface. Policy reforms shift the distribution of income in different directions in different developing countries, as expected, given the diverse starting conditions. As a result, behind the averages, people are often hurting.

So, both sides in this debate have valid points. One side smoothes over the diversity in country experiences; the other often ignores the averages, and focuses instead on cases in which high or rising inequality dulls the gains to the poor from growth. Yet the evidence is compelling that, on average, the gains to the poor from growth outweigh the losses. It is equally important, however, to understand the variety in outcomes for the poor, so as to understand better what else must be done to assure more growth that directly benefits them. That is where the debate should now turn. ♦

Martin Ravallion is director of development economics at the World Bank.



Stingy rich countries

PARIS - Figures released by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) belie the widespread view that world's poorer nations will profit from economic growth in industrialised countries.

African, Asian, Caribbean and Latin American countries got \$53.1 billion dollars last year in official development assistance (ODA), down from \$56.4 billion in 1999. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC), a special forum of the OECD, said despite strong overall growth last year, aid as a proportion of the 23-member DAC's combined GNP had declined from 0.24 percent in 1999 to 0.22 percent. The ODA/GNP ratio last year was in stark contrast to the UN target of 0.7 percent adopted in 1970. Only a few countries have achieved this goal: Denmark (1.06 percent), Netherlands (0.82 percent), Sweden (0.81 percent), Norway (0.80 percent) and Luxembourg (0.7 percent). The average country effort was 0.39 percent of GNP. The OECD said that development aid by DAC countries in real terms had fallen "slightly in 2000—by 1.6 percent." At current prices and exchange rates, the total net ODA flows registered a fall of six percent. "But most of this was due to lower exchange rates for most currencies against the US dollar," the OECD said. The organisation said one factor responsible for the decline in ODA was a change in the list of countries eligible to receive assistance. Adjusting for these changes, total ODA fell by just 0.2 percent at constant prices and exchange rates.

Another highlight of 2000: Japan's aid was \$2.3 billion lower than in 1999, when it included contributions to the Asian Development Bank in the wake of the Asian financial crisis. 15 DAC countries reported a rise in ODA in real terms in 2000. (IPS)

Vital signs

WASHINGTON - Anti-poverty goals set at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit are unlikely to be met by the 2015 deadline given current trends, says the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2001*. Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, where the Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs) have had the greatest influence on macro-economic policy and structural reforms over the past decade, are lagging far behind.

The annual report offers national, regional, and global statistics on everything from basic economic data, like GDP, to deforestation, energy use and even computer ownership. The summit's goals included halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015, enrolling all children in primary school and reducing infant and child-mortality rates by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015. Virtually all regions show improvement in health care and advances in eliminating gender disparities in education, but only East Asia is on track to meet all the goals.

The number of people in absolute poverty—under a dollar a day—in 1998 was 1.2 billion, 100 million fewer than in 1990: a drop from 29 percent to 23 percent of the world's population, or a reduction of 20 percent. But these estimates are based on data collected before or during 1997—before the Asian financial crisis wreaked havoc on middle-income countries from Indonesia to Argentina. The number of absolute poor actually increased in this period in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

If the average annual growth rate of developing countries after 2001 is 2.3 percent, the number of absolute poor will decline only slightly by 2015, and in Africa, which has a higher population growth rate, it will increase by 25 percent. If the average growth rate reaches 3.7 percent, there will be 2.3 billion people living on less than two dollars a day—25 percent less than 1990. (IPS)

Brazil new foot in mouth victim

LONDON – Britain's foot-in-mouth disease is becoming more serious than the foot-and-mouth outbreak. And not just over the name, though an increasing number of American newspapers are reporting it as "hoof and mouth" disease on the ground that cattle have hooves, not feet.

First India was blamed, as the source of the disease by an "expert" who never quite explained how it travelled. Then the Chinese were blamed for importing it with food for a Chinese restaurant. Later it was reported that the outbreak came from contaminated food from an army depot. The army itself was quickly absolved—the scapegoats now were Uruguay and Brazil where the army was said to have imported its meat from.

All evidence points to the fact that the contaminated meat could not have come from Brazil or Uruguay. "Brazil has exported beef to the EU for over 30 years during which time not a single outbreak of foot-and-mouth in the EU has been identified as originating from Brazil," the Brazilian embassy in London said. Brazil is actually safer than Britain for meat production, as it has a vaccination programme that Britain does not, and the International Organisation of Epizootias (IOE) has declared the southern region of Brazil free of foot-and-mouth disease.

Minister for agriculture Nick Brown had to eat his ministry's words again: "I do not think the army's procurement arrangements are the source of this outbreak." But the needle of suspicion continues to be pointed around the world. Brown says the source is illegally imported meat but won't say where from "for legal reasons". Newspapers speak of a "pan-Asian" source. But grounds remain for believing the infection arose within Britain, possibly in a military camp.

Britain is now being shunned by millions of tourists. It is estimated the tourism trade has lost \$8-12 billion dollars already. American tourists particularly are giving Britain a miss. Reports that several humans had caught foot-and-mouth disease have not helped. The famous Exmoor National Park has cancelled the reopening of its footpaths because of a new cluster of nearby foot-and-mouth cases. This was after Prime Minister Tony Blair said Britain is "on the home straight" in its battle with the disease. (IPS)

OPINION

by PETER SINGER

The truth about the animal industry

On British television recently, a tearful farmer spoke of the fact that his sheep were being shot to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease: "We're so sorry to see our lambs die—they should be the symbol of spring, of new life. But now they die due to this awful disease." Total hypocrisy.

Before you start weeping in sympathy with the farmer, ask yourself one question: what would have been the fate of the lambs if there had been no outbreak of foot and mouth disease? The farmer would have taken these little symbols of spring away from their mothers, packed them into trucks, and sent them to slaughter. The symbol of new life would become dead meat. Then the farmer would have happily banked the cheque he was paid for doing this. (He'll still get a cheque, since farmers are compensated by government for animals shot to contain the outbreak.)

The lambs may have lost out on a few weeks of life, but they were also spared the distress of separation from their mothers, the misery of transportation, possibly for hundreds of kilometres, and the crowding and terror of the slaughterhouse.

When intensively reared pigs are shot as a disease control measure, they lose even less. Kept indoors all their lives, on bare concrete without straw for bedding—pigs love straw, but it costs money and makes the floors harder to keep clean—with nothing to do all day except for the short time they are eating, it is hard to see that longer existence brings them any benefits at all. It's a matter of judgment, and others might disagree, but in my view the lucky factory farmed pigs are those shot on the farm. The unlucky ones have to live longer.

I've been reading newspaper columns in which writers say how dreadful it is, this mass slaughter of hundreds of thousands of animals. They question its necessity, noting that the disease poses zero risk to humans, and even in animals, 95 percent will recover within a week or two—or would, if they were not shot first. There is even a vaccine for it.

Columnists point out that the real reason for the slaughter is economic. The disease causes a temporary loss of production, and once foot and mouth disease is established in a country, other countries will prohibit the importation of its meat and dairy products because they don't want the disease to spread to their animals. Vaccination, however, doesn't solve the export problem, because it produces false positives on blood tests of animals suspected of having the disease, so the importing countries don't know if they have found an animal with the



Yes, give up meat. But not because you pity the animals being shot or don't like all this killing taking place for mere economic gain.

disease, or an animal that has been vaccinated against it. To do further tests distinguishing the infected animals from the vaccinated ones is expensive, and not yet proven to be reliable. To be on the safe side, countries ban the import of vaccinated animals anyway.

So, having demonstrated that the slaughter is unnecessary, it is then said that the slaughter should stop, that it shows the wrong attitude to animals, that we must show them more respect, and not just treat them as a means to our ends. While they are not vegetarian, some of these columnists say, they are so disgusted with what they have been seeing on television that they have been thinking of giving up meat.

Oh please! Where have the people been all these years? You must have known that all these animals were going to get slaughtered anyway? If you can read, and didn't deliberately turn away from anything that might disturb your comfort, you should also know that the entire animal industry is unnecessary, that we would be healthier, and do less damage to our environment, without it?

These animals are just means to our ends, that is their sole reason for existing. How can farmers treat them with respect when consumers want cheaper meat and supermarkets are using their immense bargaining power to force producers to use every possible means to cut costs? Yes, do give up meat. It's the right decision to make, and better late than never. But don't give it up because you pity the animals being shot, and don't like the attitude to animals that is conveyed by the fact that all this killing is taking place for mere economic gain. Give it up because all of this slaughter has at last brought home to you the real truth about the nature of the animal industry today. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Peter Singer is DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, and the author of *Animal Liberation*, the book often credited with starting the modern animal rights movement.

Moving on in the Philippines



MELVYN CALDERON

MANILA - Two days after the supporters of former President Joseph Estrada stormed the presidential palace on 1 May, I visited him in his jail cell to make sure he's as comfortable as possible. It was a humanitarian gesture and part of my duty as president.

The visit was not a move to calm things down. Had it been, I should have done it at the height of the rallies on 1 May, not after the government successfully calmed them. I will also visit the Estrada

supporters who were victimised in the rallies, but not those who plotted against the government. For them, justice must first be served. It should be clear that the government is not the enemy of the Estrada supporters. Their enemies are those who inveigled them into marching on the palace and then abandoned them when the law started to be enforced.

What happened was not a matter of class war, as the instigators of the rallies claimed,

In declaring a state of rebellion, I was going after people who sowed hatred to grab power.

but a grab at power by people who sowed hatred to advance their cause. They bussed in the poor and for five days harangued them about how the elite despise them. It amounts to a thorough brainwashing. What they said was unequivocally incorrect. To begin with I am the daughter of the only president that came from the masses. Indeed, at the rally I was called Gloria Lavandera (washwoman). I don't find this name insulting, however. My grandmother was a *lavandera*. In contrast, neither Estrada nor his parents came from the masses.

Nonetheless, we have to let the poor know what we have been doing and more. On urban land reform, we have been able to help a thousand families in 100 days, which is more than what the previous administration did in two-and-a-half years. The palace siege has not created an unstable situation for my administration. The presumption of the military was always that the government has moral ascendancy. It takes great talent for a commander-in-chief to lose the support of the military because they are very professional and constitutionally oriented.

What happened in January, when the army withdrew its support for Estrada, was really unusual

because the government had lost moral ascendancy even in the minds of the armed forces. They did not seize power, but allowed the constitutional succession to take place. If these power grabbers try to make a comeback I will have to calibrate my response to the extent of the threat. However, I don't think we should emphasise the possibility of martial law.

Claims by the pro-Estrada opposition—many whom were the plotters—that my actions were politically-motivated are simply wrong. I acted without political considerations in mind. I had to do my duty as president.

In this case, the power grab was aborted, which shows the strength of our democratic institutions. On the issue of warrantless arrests, the Philippine constitution says they are legitimate when a crime is in progress or about to be committed or continuing. Rebellion is a continuing crime. We acted fully within the constitution and were successful in thwarting an attempt at power grabbing. This was a major step in restoring peace and order in the country. ♦ (IPS)

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became president of the Philippines in January 2001 after corruption charges brought down former president Joseph Estrada.



Caste and race

NEW DELHI – India's long-suffering Dalits are demanding that their problems be heard at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR). But the Indian government thinks that the phenomenon of caste does not fall within the scope of the conference to be held in South Africa from 31 August-7 September.

According to Smita Narula, senior researcher for the New York-based rights group Human Rights Watch, Indian officials have "erroneously" argued that the conference is about racism—and no other forms of discrimination. But "the very title of the conference undercuts this argument," she says. India has some 160 million Dalits out of a population of one billion people, South Asia some 240 million.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) accuses the government of obstructing efforts to draw international attention to their problems, which range from being shut out from work opportunities to being barred from intermarriages with those of other groups. "We apprehend that Dalit activists wishing to attend the meeting in Durban may be denied passports," says Paul Divakar, convenor of the NCDHR. Divakar said the Asia-Pacific Regional NGO Coordination Forum that met in Kathmandu, Nepal last week favoured putting pressure on UN development agencies to pay attention to violence against lower caste groups.

Meanwhile, the issue of whether caste discrimination is in fact a form of racism has become the subject of polemics aired through newspaper columns by Indian sociologists. Prof. Andre Beteille of Delhi University holds that "treating caste as a form of race is politically mischievous." He has accused the United Nations of trying to "revive and expand the idea of race, ostensibly to combat the many forms of social and political discrimination prevalent in the world." Gail Omvedt, an activist on behalf of the Dalits, writes that the South Africa conference is a big step for the global Dalit movement, which has succeeded in overcoming decades of obstructionism by "the Indian government and the India elite" to get their plight discussed at an international forum. "Indians may find it demeaning to be condemned for forms of racism but what is truly demeaning is the effort to block discussion, the refusal to have transparency before the world," Omvedt writes. (IPS)

Maximum sentence

DHAKA - A judge has sentenced a man and a woman to 20 years of hard labour for trying to smuggle five teenage Bangladeshi girls to India where they may have ended up in brothels, court officials said last week. The landmark judgement, which gave the maximum penalty under law, may have an impact on trafficking of Bangladeshi women into India, an issue that has been raised at the United Nations.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, Sri Lanka-based co-ordinator of the UN Human Rights Commission on Violence against Women, said in March that in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, 10,000-15,000 girls and women are trafficked across the border to India each year. The traffickers, who use the 4,096.70 km unfenced border, are rarely arrested and punished. In a 43-page report on the situation of women and children in Bangladesh, Nepal and India, she said that traffickers use deception, fraud, intimidation, drugs and violence to take vulnerable women and children across borders.

Many women, desperate to escape discrimination and poverty in their home countries, often co-operate, at least initially, the report says. International agencies figure 100,000 to 200,000 women from Nepal are engaged in forced prostitution in northern and central India and increasingly farther afield in South Asia and the Middle East.

Mayday generals

ISLAMABAD - More than 1,000 political workers are languishing in Pakistani jails following the military government's crackdown on May Day to quell a rally planned in the southern city of Karachi against army rule. The action not only exposed the true face of the generals, but also their uneasiness with any form of people's mobilisation, critics say.

The military government's crackdown last week followed an announcement by the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) in the third week of April of plans to hold a rally in Karachi on 1 May to denounce military rule and demand the immediate restoration of democracy. The alliance groups together Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League, besides several other regional and nationalist parties.

In a countrywide swoop that started a week before the rally, the government arrested around 1,500 political leaders and workers while putting the leaders of key parties under house arrest. The human rights group Amnesty International was quick to respond to the military action and declared the arrested political workers prisoners of conscience. Demanding their unconditional and immediate release, the London-based organisation said a ban on all forms of public political activity breaches international human rights standards.

"The (clampdown) is a sharp contradiction to military government's claims of believing in the democratic process. Apparently, it only believes in handpicking people through its much publicised grassroots democracy plan," said Rizwan Ata of the Labour Party Pakistan. For its part, the ARD says it will continue its political struggle to oust military rule and vows to organise more rallies throughout the country despite the latest crackdown on dissent. "We'll see how many people they will put in jail. Pakistan belongs to people and not to the whims of a few men in khaki," vowed an ARD spokesperson. (IPS)

ANALYSIS

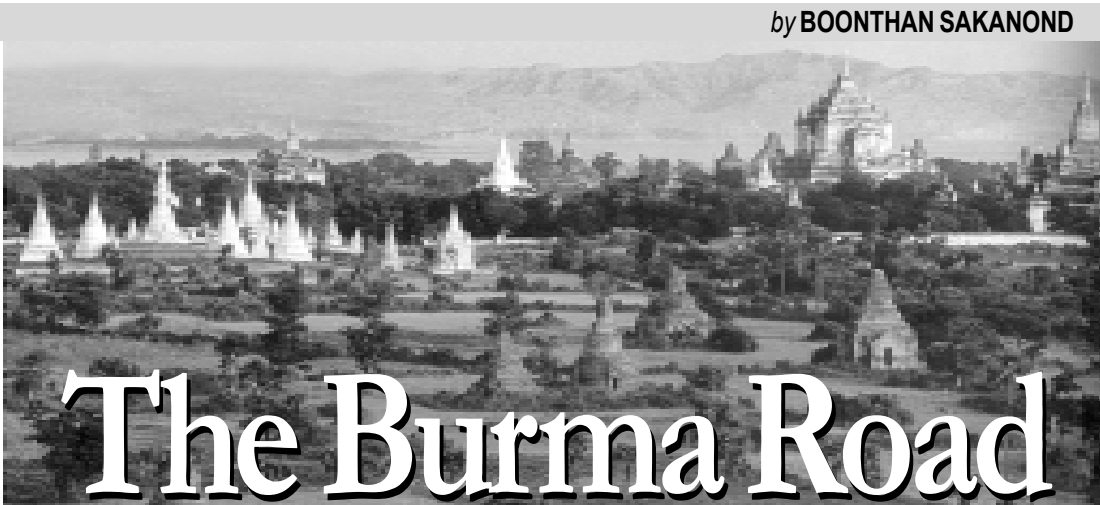
CHIANG MAI, Thailand – No one is more apprehensive about the fallout from the US-China spat over the collision of a US spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet than Asian nations close to the Chinese mainland.

Countries like the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam have territorial disputes with China over islands in the South China Sea and are afraid that a militarily assertive Beijing will leave no room for negotiations. Others worry that worsening Sino-US relations will negatively affect their economies, already battered by the 1997 Asian economic crisis. But some in Thailand believe the real theatre of any military action in the near future could be to the southwest, on China's weakest flank—Myanmar. "Myanmar is the only true ally China has in this region, apart from North Korea. Any US move against the military dictatorship in Yangon will be telling Beijing off at its own doorstep," says an Asian diplomat in Bangkok. Washington has expended much rhetoric against Myanmar's military dictatorship but never considered serious action.

The context for a US role exists—Thailand and Myanmar have both amassed troops along their borders in recent weeks and placed their armies on the highest state of alert in many decades. The Thais accuse Myanmar's government of supporting the production of methamphetamines and flooding Thailand with drugs, while Yangon alleges that the Thai military has been actively helping Shan rebels in their battle for independence from Rangoon.

Analysts say there is increased US presence on the Thai side of the border, fuelling speculation about a dramatic escalation of this otherwise routine border war. Since March, the northern Thai province of Chiang Rai bordering Myanmar has been host to 40 American military trainers ostensibly there to train Thai infantry battalions in "anti-drug" warfare. While the US Drug Enforcement Agency has always been quite active along the Thai-Myanmar border that forms part of the notorious Golden Triangle, this is the first time US aid to Thailand for combating drugs has taken a purely military turn. From 15-29 May, 5,000 US troops will join nearly 6,000 Thai and other regional troops for a simulated drug interdiction action. This is part of an annual Thai-US military exercise Cobra Gold, but the location is clearly meant to send a message to Yangon.

Other factors are also increasing the possibility of the US playing a more aggressive role vis a vis Myanmar. The Bush administration in Washington is seen worldwide as willing to push beyond the norms of usual diplomacy. If it can overturn Yangon's political establishment, Washington would re-establish its diminishing military role in Asia and occupy a strategic position in Myanmar as



by BOONTHAN SAKANOND

The Burma Road

If the US and China kiss and make up soon, Washington may well support military intervention in Myanmar.

part of its long-term policy of "encircling" China. "Upsetting the reigning order in Myanmar would be an easy way of threatening China without risking a major confrontation," says a Thai defence analyst. Since the crushing of the pro-democracy movement in the late eighties, the military regime in Yangon has moved closer to China. Beijing has supplied it with military and material help, but is unlikely to risk much defending Myanmar against a concerted US effort to topple the regime.

In Thailand, a nexus is developing between the Thai military, deprived of any political role for nearly a decade, and clueless businessmen-turned-politicians, trying to salvage an economy in a deep mess. For politicians, an anti-Myanmar campaign is a way to divert attention from their failures on the economic front and for the military, to regain centre stage.

Meanwhile, within Myanmar, an internecine struggle is on between "hardliners" led by Gen Maung Aye and the "moderates" under Lt Gen Khin Nyunt, Secretary Number One of the ruling State Peace and Democracy Council (SPDC). Strong external pressure on the regime—only possible militarily—could lead to a split in its top rungs and bring down the dictatorship more easily. Many pro-democracy groups, while averse to foreign intervention in Myanmar to "restore democracy", do admit that if the ball is set rolling by Thailand and the US, many in their ranks will join in happily. But today intervention in Myanmar will be difficult due to the complicated web of relations the military regime has woven with the country's ethnic minority groups—many have signed ceasefire agreements with the government despite fighting for independence for years. International efforts to "liberate" Myanmar would get bogged down in renewed demands from minority groups for independence. This is a controversial issue within Myanmar's pro-democracy groups, many of whom support autonomy but not secession. ♦ (IPS)

Boonthan Sakanond is a Thai political analyst.

"The king should be consulted"

Excerpts from an interview with Pashupati SJB Rana, general secretary, RPP
Prakash Weekly, 30 April

The Panchayat regime was dictatorial and unable to develop the country and so it was replaced by a democratic system. Now that democracy has run into problems, the stalwarts of the Panchayat must be very happy.

How can we be happy seeing the problems the country is facing? How can people who have sacrificed their lives for the nation be happy when the state of the country is so bad. I believe that democracy should be successful. I hope the present constitution is successful. I definitely worked during the Panchayat and I am not ashamed, and have no regrets. All the work I did during the Panchayat regime has definitely benefited the nation. After the advent of democracy I have tried my best to work for the benefit of the nation, with sincerity, respect and full responsibility. At present, people who try to do good work are simply not allowed to function.

Your party held its central committee meeting recently and has made public its white paper, but people say it was held in very mysterious circumstances.

There was nothing mysterious. We have made public our report. I do not feel that this far-thinking and far-reaching paper should be called mysterious. It is the responsibility of every citizen to help the nation get back on its feet. If we analyse the serious problems the nation is facing, we will realise the Congress alone cannot resolve them. So all the forces and parties within and outside parliament—including the monarchy—must act together to put the nation back on its feet. Only a joint effort will help resolve the problems.

Does this mean that you are suggesting the king should step in?

You have to understand what we have said about the king and the role expected of him. We have clearly stated that you have to take the king into confidence and put in place mechanisms whereby the king can help. We have not said you should go beyond the parameters set by the constitution. If you study the constitution properly, you will find that the king can play a part in many ways. The king is the symbol of unity. The king is the defender of the constitution and this power has been given to him by the constitution. The constitution also harbours the spirit of the "king in parliament". In fact, article 35 describes the role of the king in detail. All work that is done by the government is done in the king's name. Where is it said that he should not be consulted at all?

Where does the constitution say that you should consult the king?

The constitution clearly states that one must give advice, encourage and give prior information to the king. When all these things are mentioned in the constitution, then one should seek his help. How can you say it is suspicious, when we say that the king should be consulted?

The king is not using the powers given to him by the constitution...

I feel the king has not used the powers vested in him properly. For this to happen, the prime minister must also play his role to help the king. The constitution states that the PM should take the king into confidence, but until now no PM has played a positive role in this

matter. Maybe you don't have to discuss minor issues, but major problems faced by the nation should definitely be discussed. The nation is at the edge of a cliff. What is the reason for ignoring such an experienced institution in such difficult times? What we are saying is that not just the king, but all the forces of the nation—the UML, the ML, the RPP and other parties—have to come together. Only then, can we find ways by which the nation can be strengthened again. This nation is between two big countries and if we become weak, others will definitely take advantage of us. Therefore we should come together and find a common ground and deal with the forces working within the parameters set by the constitution.

What is your opinion regarding the biggest problem facing the nation, the Maoist problem?

The Maoist problem exists and it started because of social, political and economic failures. This can only be solved politically and the first step in that direction is to hold a dialogue.

Is this a terrorist problem or a political one?

You have to see and understand it in two ways. The rebellion part is political in nature, while the violence is a terrorist act. You can't say it isn't a terrorist act. Although the problem is political in nature, the ways of the Maoists are those of terrorists.

Could you state clearly whether you think it is political or a terrorist problem?

Nothing stops one from defining a situation in two ways. We can call it both.

To strike at the Maoists, the government is planning to mobilise the army...

There must be a national consensus on the issue of deploying the army. On such a serious issue, the government first made up its mind and then asked us for support. Is this a way of finding national consensus? We say emphasis should be placed on holding a dialogue and only then should other avenues be explored. We did not even get to put forward our thoughts.

Is your party, and its members, facing problems because of the Maoists?

Many party members have been killed. Our party workers were killed in Rolpa, Sindhupalchok, Okhaldhunga, Ilam, Sankhuwasabha and many other districts. We are facing many problems because of the Maoists. We have protested against this and we state that the way being taken by the Maoists is detrimental to the country. Everyone should lay down their arms and begin a dialogue.



Deuba. No one knows for sure what was discussed, but Deuba must have told the king that it was because of Koirala that the nation was in such a bad state. Reports say Deuba also spoke with the king about the Lauda Air issue and the Maoists.

King's nominees
Budhabar Saptahik, 2 May

Sources say Hemraj Gyawali, chairman of Kantipur Publications, will be nominated to the Upper House shortly. This information was reportedly leaked by official sources at a tea party hosted by the chief of the Sadbhavana Party, Gajendra Narayan Singh. People were discussing a news item in Kantipur which was very critical of Koirala. Reacting to this, the PM said Gyawali might be nominated to the Upper House later this year when some members complete their term.

Secret parleys
Janadharana National Weekly, 3 May

Sources claim that Maoist leader Prachanda was in Lumbini in the last week of April. It is said he was there to meet the UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal. The source did not mention whether other leaders from



the Maoist camp were present. The meeting, which went on for 12 hours, was held in secrecy. We are told that a wide range of issues were discussed, including how to rid the country of its problems and how to get rid of Koirala. None of the parties involved have publicly said anything about the meeting so far.

Helpless, insecure
Saptahik Punajagaran, 1 May
Excerpts from an interview with KP Bhattarai of the Nepali Congress.

Do you think the government is responsible for good governance besides securing peace and solving the Maoist issue?

Yes. After all, citing these two issues Koirala tabled a no-confidence motion when I was prime minister. The situation on both fronts is worse than during my tenure. The Maoists, who were prepared for a dialogue, have now gone back to the jungles and are creating havoc. Many, many innocent people have been killed. The government is helpless and the police, insecure.

The PM accepts the situation has gone from bad to worse, but he has not taken responsibility for it.

If the government is incapable of providing security to the nation, then it should give others an opportunity to try and solve the problem. It is undemocratic to think that no one else can solve the problems of the day.

The government says it will only hold talks after it mobilises the army. Do you see that possibility after the army has been mobilised?

The Maoists have said that they will not come to the negotiating

table as long as Koirala remains in office. The Congress has a majority in parliament. If he cannot solve the problems of the country, then he should hand over power to someone from his own party; that will be good for the nation.

Engaging in dialogue with the Maoists and stopping the slaughter of one's countrymen is proof of one's nationalism. Mobilising the army and then holding talks is like putting the cart before the horse.

Armed and ready
Jana Aastha National Weekly, 2 May

The Maoists have been fighting the police for six years and have gained a lot of experience. Now, they may have to face the might of the army—and the army too seems ready to face the insurgents. The army has permission to use long-range heavy weapons like heavy machine guns, mortars, rocket launchers and grenades. In Gorkha district, the army is going to be mobilised in 14 different places. The government has so far sanctioned Rs 50 million for the mobilisation process. The government wants to mobilise the army and carry out development work simultaneously in these Maoist-strongholds. This plan may not be successful—but Rs 50 million has already been diverted from the development budget. The total amount that was sanctioned for this undertaking was only Rs 150 million, and one third of the budget has already been spent, even before any work has begun. Last week a meeting on troop mobilisation was held between the heads of the army, the police and intelligence department.

The army is under the command of the king and will remain so. Many people feel that the mobilisation of the army will not succeed because fissures between different constitutional agencies have already begun to show. The king gave his consent to mobilise the army, but there were questions raised about the plan. These were sorted out with great difficulty.

According to a retired army source, since the army has not been in battle for a long time, it may not be fully prepared to deal with the rebels. He feels that the army should begin with a psychological operation rather than with a tactical move. He believes the army, which has not been used much until now, could be defeated by a force that is battle-hardened. Failure could result if it goes in directly for a tactical war. Therefore, a psychological war has to be fought in the beginning. The army is going to send in battalions to tackle the rebels, while the Maoists have already readied their companies to face the army. The international norm is that one guerrilla can take on 10 army personnel. By this measure, the rebels are going to be many times more powerful than the soldiers. According to sources, the rebels have reached a stage of strategic counter-offensive, which means that they prepared to fight the army.

The rebels seem to have all the information concerning troop mobilisation. One reading among the insurgents is that the army will be deployed to encircle them and the police will then attack.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The people have given the Nepali Congress a mandate to govern for five years. So I don't understand where this talk of forming a national government comes from. It would have been a different matter if no party had a majority.

– Sushil Koirala, Nepali Congress Central Working Committee member in Deshantar Weekly, 6 May.

What are they talking about? If I resign, there's going to be chaos in the country!

Budhabar Saptahik, 9 May

King and Deuba
Drishti Vernacular Weekly, 1 May

The meeting between the king and Sher Bahadur Deuba comes at a time when it is agreed that Prime Minister Koirala is leading the country to disaster. The king met Deuba at the rice-feeding ceremony of Prince Paras' daughter recently. They spoke for almost half an hour. Sources say the king ignored the prime minister, other ministers, heads of constitutional bodies and political heavyweights, remaining engrossed in conversation with



Athens makes up



International Olympics Committee officials express satisfaction over Greece’s preparations for the 2004 Olympics.

ATHENS - International Olympic Committee officials last week expressed satisfaction with the progress made by Athens on the construction of long-delayed sports venues, considered a key element in its struggle to prepare for the 2004 Summer Games. Greek government officials also for the first time presented IOC inspectors led by Jacques Rogge with final locations for all venues and firm dates for their construction.

“It is going good. They have made a lot of good progress on all the venue preparation and then also on the structure of the organisation. So a lot of progress has been made since last time,” IOC Sports Director Gilbert Felli said. During an earlier visit in February, Rogge said he was concerned about Greece’s ability to make up for three-and-a-half years of lost time.

After meeting with Public Works Minister Costas Laliotis, Rogge said:

“The organisational effort of Greece for the Olympic Games of 2004 is on the right path.”

Venue construction and infrastructure topped Rogge’s agenda at meetings with government officials, who in the past have been blamed for the unwieldy bureaucracy that led the IOC to warn last year that the Athens Games were in danger.

Rogge was also to discuss security issues with Public Order Minister Michalis Chrisohoides following the IOC’s approval of a master plan for the Games. The Socialist government last week proposed widespread legal changes to improve the nation’s widely criticised record on terrorism. It recently allocated \$600 million for Olympic security.

Greece’s inability to crack down on a number of domestic terrorist groups and arson gangs has increased international concerns over its ability to provide adequate security for the Olympics. “I think in the last years

Greece has taken important steps to deal with this phenomenon ... the public order ministry’s security plan has been judged by the IOC as being very good,” Sports Minister George Florides said in an interview.

Florides admitted the construction of sports venues—including long-delayed weightlifting and wrestling arenas—were an issue of concern for the IOC. “The dates we have now are final. ... From now on because our eight most important works have been tendered, we can estimate the times exactly... and also the possible difficulties that may appear in the process,” Florides said. Rogge has repeatedly told government officials that he wants to see the start of construction on all outstanding venues and projects.

“We have seen that the deadlines proposed could be met except for a few little things, but I think we are on a good track,” Felli said.

Last week bulldozers began clearing ground at the sites of the weightlifting and wrestling arenas. The government this week gave approval for construction of the Olympic Village and one of five complexes that will house journalists. “He wants to see construction crews ... well construction crews he can see,” Florides said.

In another development, Athens organisers announced they had finalised the location of all sports venues. In recent months locations had been fluid for venues such as basketball, volleyball, judo, tae kwon do, and handball. “We are now in a position to say that all venue locations have been completed for the Olympic Games and we have written approval from all international federations and basketball and handball. It is now a reality,” said Makis Asimakopoulos, sports director for the Athens organising committee. ♦

Cricketing Afghanistan

TORKHAM - War-weary Afghanistan sent its first cricket team on its first tour this week. The cricketers had to push and shove their way to the giant steel gates that separates the two countries. They waded through hundreds of their fellow countrymen, who were trying to get to Pakistan to escape a devastating drought and a bitter and protracted civil war.

The team arrived wearing the traditional salwar kameez, baggy pants and a long tunic, sporting beards—demanded by the ruling Taliban—and wearing the flowing turban, also required attire by the ruling militia. And they were ready to play cricket. “We are a good team. This is our first tour and we will show that our players are talented,” said Allah Dad Noori, team captain.

Cricket came only recently to Afghanistan, brought here by refugees returning home from cricket-crazy Pakistan. Two former Pakistani Test cricketers, Farukh Zaman, who also is an international referee, and Rehmat Gul welcomed the young team on its first tour. At the request of the International Cricket Committee Zaman last year spent several weeks coaching Afghan cricketers. The Afghan team is seeking international cricket membership, along with Bhutan, Maldives, South Korea and Bahrain, said Noori.

The ICC, which is giving equipment to the impoverished Afghan team, will be sending a delegation to the war battered nation within the next one year before deciding on Afghanistan’s membership request. Afghan cricketers arrived in Pakistan with the permission of the ruling Taliban, a hardline Islamic militia that has imposed a harsh brand of rule on the 95 percent of the country it controls.

In Afghanistan most forms of light entertainment are outlawed as against the tenets of Islam. Hardline Taliban officials discourage sport saying it distracts the young from prayer. But not cricket, says Noori. “The Taliban have recognised cricket as a sport. We have no problem with the Taliban, rather they are encouraging us,” he said. There are only two cricket pitches in the war-shattered Afghan capital of Kabul. Last year Pakistan donated a roller to make new pitches. “There is a wrong impression that the Taliban have banned sports,” said Maulvi Abdul Rehman, vice-president of Afghanistan’s Olympic Committee. “We are encouraging the healthy activities but in accordance with our religion and traditions.”

“Right now the Afghan team is at the club level,” said Zaman. But with practice and equipment, Noori said his team could be world class. “Given the opportunity we could play in the cricket World Cup and win,” he said.

Johnson runs into officialdom

Michael Johnson’s hopes of bowing out of international athletics at the World Championships in Edmonton were dashed by the US athletics’ governing body on this week. The world record holder for the 200 and 400m had hoped to run in the 4x400m without first competing in the US Championships.

But chairman of the US men’s track and field committee John Chaplin dented his plans. Speaking after a Track and Field board of directors’ conference, he said every athlete hoping to compete in the worlds “has to go to the (US) meet and run one round in one event.” The conference discussed altering the long-standing rule that all athletes wishing to represent the United States at an Olympic Games or world championship had to compete in the national championships.

The 33-year-old Johnson will make a world farewell tour this year where he will only run in relays and non-championship distances. But he had been hoping to end his illustrious international athletics career in Edmonton and to capture his 10th world title.

“I’m not going to say it wouldn’t be fun for me,” said the five-time Olympic gold medallist. “But it’s not a disappointment for me because I’m still doing things that are important to me. I’ll still be at the world championships signing autographs and doing other things for fans. I never asked for anything special, and I’m never going to. I don’t want any controversy to take away from what I want to do this year.”



Hyatt

Hyatt

SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

The gates to the Royal Palace

The old palace has gone, but the gate remains like a giant's wedding cake that the party somehow forgot to devour. In its fussy, faded white way it remains a monument to the great house that the first Rana prime minister, Jung Bahadur, had built for his brother Rana Udip Singh in 1847. For a site, he chose an area then outside the city limits, beside a historic spring and a famous temple to Narayan. One or perhaps both of the famous Narsingh brothers, who had been trained at the Roorkee Engineering College, were responsible for the building and they appear to have been inspired by more than one of Calcutta's grand colonial piles: a snatch of Government House which in turn was a copy of Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, and a trace of the high court façade, sans stone.

Perhaps it was that threat of eventual collapse that prompted replacing the splendid old palace with a modern complex.

Rana Udip Singh, who succeeded Jung Bahadur as prime minister, was assassinated in the palace by his nephews. Their motivation was simple. Jung Bahadur had decreed that succession to the post of prime minister would pass from brother to brother, then to the eldest nephew and his brothers thereafter. Which meant an inordinately long wait for those who desired the office. It is common in Kathmandu to hear reference to the families of Seven and Seventeen. Every Rana is descended from them. The seven are the brothers of Jung Bahadur, who after the murder of Rana Udip Singh disappeared from the official scene

to be replaced by their seventeen nephews.

Ironically, the palace built by the first Rana prime minister became the official residence of the kings of Nepal after the murder of Rang Udip Singh. It was handsomely enlarged by Kumar Narsingh in 1899 and landscaped in the European manner with reflecting pools and follies, a bandstand and garden sculpture. This is how I saw it when Chou En-lai visited Kathmandu and was given a lavish reception in the old palace by the late King Mahendra. Red carpets climbed its twin marble stairways. Gurkha guards stood

smartly in twin sentry boxes by the stairs and magnificent chandeliers blazed in the regal reception rooms. But no doubt about it, the old building trembled quite alarmingly below the weight of hundreds of guests. It was that threat of eventual collapse, perhaps, that prompted the tearing down of the splendid old palace and replacing it with a modern complex of uncertain architecture. At the same time as that was done, a modern road called Darbar Marg was bulldozed through parks and other palaces, to lead to the new front gate of the brand new Narayanhiti Darbar.

What perhaps the old palace lacked, the new one has in plenty—a limited but clear public view of the royal residence. Past the tall, wrought iron gates the loyal approach passes through manicured gardens to marble stairs that climb to large silver doors. Above the doors is a tower of modern Nepali design with a full-length window through which, on occasion, can be seen the glitter of vast chandeliers.

Two of the original gates remain. A yellow concrete, art nouveau confection capped with white concrete snow, and the lovely old giant's wedding cake. I remember, when I first came to Kathmandu, crowds collecting outside the yellow concrete gate every morning for *darshan*. They seldom, if ever, caught a glimpse of the king, but they were there out of tradition and the ancient loyalty that



binds the Nepali monarch to his people. After standing about, almost reverently, for a while, they would disperse as if on some given signal—voluble again, smiling, satisfied. Village folk often stand outside the new gates, peering in wonder at the abode of their king, while foreign tourists pose for photographs. I never fail to feel a sense of disappointment for them, because someone somewhere in this land of the famous Gurkha soldiers, should have devised a small daily pageant of changing of the guard.

While I sketched the old rococo gate, a group of Spanish tourists persuaded the khaki and scarlet uniformed guards to pose with them. A great deal of fun was had by all, as everyone took turns to photograph the others and in an amazing mixture of Spanish and Nepali addresses were exchanged. I hope the photographs arrive safely.

It was probably through this old gate, then flying banners and bunting, that the extravagant marriage procession of Jung Bahadur's eight-year-old son and a royal princess of six, passed on its

way to Jung Bahadur's palace at Thapathali. And through the same gate, came a similar procession to finally carry the bride away. According to contemporary records, they were occasions of great grandeur and celebration as cannons boomed and fireworks exploded in the Kathmandu night.

Legend has a king of old sacrificing himself, so that water would fill the new tank he had built at Narayanhiti at a time of great drought. He chose his eldest son to be his unsuspecting murderer and it is believed that the carved foundations in the grounds of the Narayan temple close by the palace gate, turned their heads to heaven in horror. They are there still. And there is water in the tank. Perhaps, it was no mere chance that made Jung Bahadur choose this site for his brother's palace and no strange coincidence that had it become the residence of Nepal's kings. ♦

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



MIN BAIRACHARYA

LEARNING NEPALI BLUES AND BREAKTHROUGHS

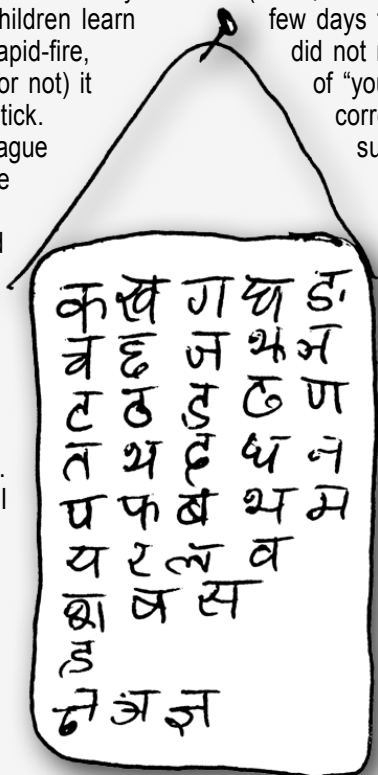
by LEAH SCHULTE



From carrot breath to conversation

"Gaajar saasa, ho?" ("You have carrot breath, yes?") was my first formal step toward conquering the Nepali language in America. Through goofy phrases, sing-song rhymes, and quick playful exchanges, the instructor (founder and owner of a language institute) claimed any language could be easily mastered. He justified the technique saying children learn language this way. When language is funny, rapid-fire, linked with activity and situations (meaningful or not) it sticks. Bland, contrived language does NOT stick. Actually, I think Nepali was a little out of his league with me, his first client interested in Nepali. He claimed great success with other languages though, and claimed many could be mastered simultaneously. What a bargain! Become fluent in all the Romance languages in two to three years. As I waited for my session to begin with sweaty palms and cassette player primed with fresh batteries, I enviously eyed the hordes of business-suited and briefcase-toting Romance language students emerging.

So, this solo Nepali student struggled. I half-heartedly talked about skipping with butterflies, runny noses while sipping soup, giving and receiving the unimaginable, and bantered (in my mind, a little disrespectfully) with my instructor. As my return to Nepal loomed closer, I finally confessed to uncertainty. Would I have any practical language skills when I stepped off the plane? Would I insult Nepalis, or perhaps send them off in belly aching laughter from my conversation attempts? A Nepali college student was rounded up for the rest of the lessons. She rolled her eyes, tossed the material aside, and thankfully commenced on a more pragmatic approach to language acquisition.



Now, seven years later, I still struggle. "But Nepali is an easy language to learn" my Nepali friends in the USA and here would exclaim when confronted with my slow progress. I always disproved their foolish claim. Nepali has three "to be" verbs.

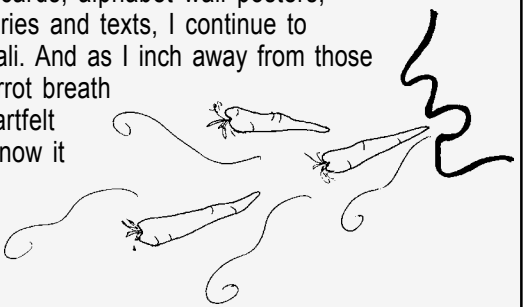
(Once, while hiking near Nepal's northern border, it took me a few days to understand that the porters' frequent "chhaina" did not refer to China.) Nepali has more than three forms of "you". Nepali has different verb conjugations to correspond with a host of different third-person subject pronouns. Various subtle differences exist between spoken and more proper or literate Nepali. Two forms of -ing verbs exist, with only one of those having a negative form. And all those minute, but oh-so-important, discourse particles. The alphabet alone is daunting with 36 consonants multiplied by 10 different vowels not to mention an infinite number of conjuncts. Rules exist, yes, but in such number and complexity that one wants to run with butterflies instead of committing them to memory. As for speaking the language properly, Nepali is dotted with landmines and pitfalls in the form of retroflexes, nasals, and aspirated sounds.

Since my initial overpriced language experiment, it has been a hodge-podge approach for this student. I exchanged meals or coursework assistance with Nepali college students in the USA for conversation. I invested time and money in countless teach-yourself Nepali textbooks, phrasebooks, and language tapes. I grabbed occasional lessons with ever-changing tutors from different language institutes during brief stays in Kathmandu between trips to the village. The opportunity for orderly, intensive language instruction sadly never arose. Once, I caught a bit of a shortwave radio broadcast on

language instruction that claimed chewing gum relaxes the novice speaker's jaw muscles and hence improves pronunciation. It didn't help and I feared losing my fillings in the village. I tried to apply a tip learned in night-school French class decades ago—classical music in the background promotes rapid learning as it stimulates the right side of the brain near language centers. It didn't work. It led to daydreaming and I couldn't simultaneously play the music and my Nepali tapes. I even meditated to improve my auditory retention skills. I remained a visual learner. A new word repeated 10 times over would remain elusive until written down.

Perhaps my hopes are too high. I want to be able to understand the news on Nepali Radio and study the words of Narayan Gopal's songs rather than just hum along. I want to be able to add and multiply in Nepali numbers when shopping in Ason Tol. I want to be able to review official Nepali documents and read the countless Nepali newspapers amongst the crowds gathered outside the tea-stall. I want to be able to talk to the village elders about the changes they've seen in their lifetimes. To village students about their perceptions of opportunity. To the women's group members about how to reduce their workload. To menfolk on the direction of politics. To the jhakris about the power of prayers and rituals.

So, surrounded by my verb conjugation tables, homemade flash cards, alphabet wall posters, countless dictionaries and texts, I continue to struggle with Nepali. And as I inch away from those butterflies and carrot breath to meaningful heartfelt conversations, I know it will be worth the struggle. ♦



ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

❖ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

EATING OUT

❖ **Thai Food Festival** Ingredients flown in from Thailand. Lucky diner will win a round trip to Bangkok, courtesy Thai Airways, and a three-night stay at the Grand Hyatt Erawan. 11-20 May, The Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234

❖ **Singapore Festival** Three day food festival organised Special artists, entertainers, and musicians. Lucky couple wins free trip to Singapore. 24-27 May, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

❖ **Barbecue at the Ropes** Noon-2.30pm, 7-10.30pm 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

❖ **Pheri Jaun Hai Pokhara** Free airfare, room, breakfast, airport transport and lots more. Rs 1500 for Nepalis, \$45 for expats (per person per night on twin sharing basis). Shangri La Hotel & Resort; sales@hotelshangrila.com, 435741

❖ **Wet & Wild Summer** Swimming in a cool pool and a buffet lunch, session live on Kantipur FM. Saturdays at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Taxes extra. 560675, 560775

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

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

❖ **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.

❖ **Karavalli Festival** Karavalli is India's west coast from Goa to Kerala. Authentic family recipes. The Arch Room, Hotel de l'Annapurna. from 9 May. 7-10.30pm. Rs 799 per head. 221711

❖ **Summer Pizza Festival** Pizza from clay ovens. Vegetarian specialties. Stupa View Restaurant at Baudhanath Stupa. Starting 15 May. 11am-7pm. 480262

DANCE

❖ **Bharatanatyam recital** by Alarmel Valli. 25 May, 6pm. Royal Nepal Academy Hall Passes available from 14 May at: Embassy of India, Lainchaur (413174), Nepal-Bharat Sanskritik Kendra, (243497, 255414), Bhartiya Gorkha Sainik Niwas, Thamel, (413785, 414283), Indian Airlines, Hattisar, (429468), Chez Caroline, Babar Mahal Revisited (251647, 263070), Nepal Association of Fine Arts (411729), and the Indigo Gallery, (413580). Organised by The Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Embassy of India.

MUSIC

❖ **Jazz by Cadenza** Upstairs, Lazimpat. Every Saturday, 7.30pm-10pm. Rs 200.

EVENTS

❖ **Spiny Babbler Museum** Readings and presentations of contemporary Nepali literature and art Sundays 5-6pm Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel; Tuesdays 4-5pm Kathmandu Environment Education Project, Thamel; Thursdays 7-8pm Bamboo Club Restaurant, Thamel, Saturdays 5-6pm New Orleans Café, Thamel. spinybabbler@mos.com.np. 542810, 546725

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

EXHIBITION

❖ **Exhibition of paintings** by Dutch artists Ed van der Kooj and Peter Warffemius. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 7-21 May, 11am-6pm, Sunday to Friday.

❖ **Nepal Vision II** Paintings by Roy Breimon and Vaclav Pisvejc. 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

❖ **Reflection of Nature** Painting exhibition by Dagmar Mathes. 12-30 May, 10am-6pm. Park Gallery, Pulchowk. 522307

MARTIN CHAUTARI

❖ **Youths: Are they just pillars of the future or...?** Pundits: Rajendra Mulmi and Sujata Thapa, Yuba Abhiyan. 15 May, 5.30pm, Martin Chautari, Thapathali. All presentations in Nepali unless otherwise noted. chautari@mos.com.np. 246065

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

BOOKWORM



NGO, Civil Society and Government in Nepal: Critical Examination of their Roles and Responsibilities edited volume
Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Trubhuvan University, in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Kirtipur, 2001
Rs 200
The legitimacy of the title's actors rests on the promotion of core public values like quality of life, equality and individual self-realisation. The authors in this volume explore these issues and how they underscore the conditions of modernity and democracy.



Politics, People & Ideology: Democracy and Social Change in Nepal Martin Hoftun, William Raeper and John Whelpton
Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu, 1999
Rs 450
The main focus of this book is a comparison of the two "revolutions" in Nepal's modern history: the 1950.51 revolution which opened the country to ideas and impulses from outside and the 1990 revolution which marked the beginning of democratic mass politics.



Sacred Complex of Ruruksetra: A Holy Tirtha of Hinduism in Western Nepal Ram Niwas Pandey
Adroit Publishers, Delhi, 2000
Rs 1,360
At the confluence of the Gandaki River and Ridi Khola is Ruruksetra (now Ridiksetra), a Hindu pilgrimage site that became the focus of religious activity after the 16th century Palpa king Mukunda Sena I built a temple there. This book is an account of how the author countered the modernisation and commercialisation here.



Antiquities of Northern Tibet: The Buddhist Archaeological Discoveries on the High Plateau: findings of the Changthang Circuit Expedition, 1999 John Vincent Bellezza
Adroit Publishers, Delhi, 2001
Rs 3,600
The Changthang Expedition travelled to the highest parts of the Tibetan plateau. With his own fieldwork and translation of Tibetan texts, and other scholars' research, the author places the ancient sites he documents in mythological and historical context to explore the identity of the sophisticated Metal Age civilisation in Tibet, which in the 7th century CE entered its classical phase with the adoption of Indian Buddhism.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

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- Western setting, MD and general practitioners, imported vaccinations, lab test, minor surgical facilities, information about mountain sickness. Parking available. 9am-5pm. Jyatha, Thamel. Near Utse Hotel. 225455, 223197
- Kodari Eco-Resort Tatopani.**
- Minutes from the Tibetan border, peaceful and pleasant stay. Delicious food, friendly service. Hiking, border shopping, hot springs. Rooms with attached bath and lodge-type rooms. Special rates for Nepalis, expats, travel agencies. kodari@mos.com.np, 480262.
- Car for Sale.**
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- Car for sale** Mitsubishi Lancer '75 model, but in top condition. Very low mileage. Cheap! Email janaki_gurung@yahoo.com.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



If you were expecting some rain-free days ahead, you may be in for a disappointment. The pre-monsoon showers have been unexpectedly early this year, although the amount of precipitation is not much. The satellite images show a series of fresh clouds continuously pouring into South Asia from across the Hindu Kush, drawn in by a powerful and persistent low pressure system hovering over Bangladesh. The root of the current weather front extends as far as Siberia. As a result, there will be more precipitation in the form of snow in the higher Himalaya and heavy rainfall in the midhills and tarai. Because of the humidity effect caused by the rains in the last four weeks, maximum temperature has dropped by 4 C below normal for this time of year, while the minimum temperature has risen by the same proportion.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
				
28-16	27-17	28-16	29-16	30-15

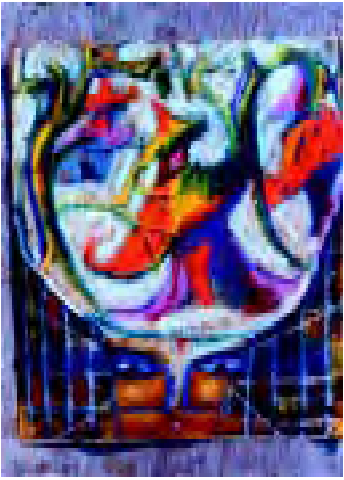
ART REVIEW

by AJIT BARAL

Shova's senses

The Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand believed that “art is the most important weapon of creative humanism—the only ‘ism’ left in which we might believe.” This is perhaps why a show like Shova Adhikari-Wagley’s comes as a saving grace in a country like ours

“Realities” is Wagley’s fourth solo exhibition and displays 37 paintings in mixed media. Most of the paintings in the show are linked by theme—portraiture that shows



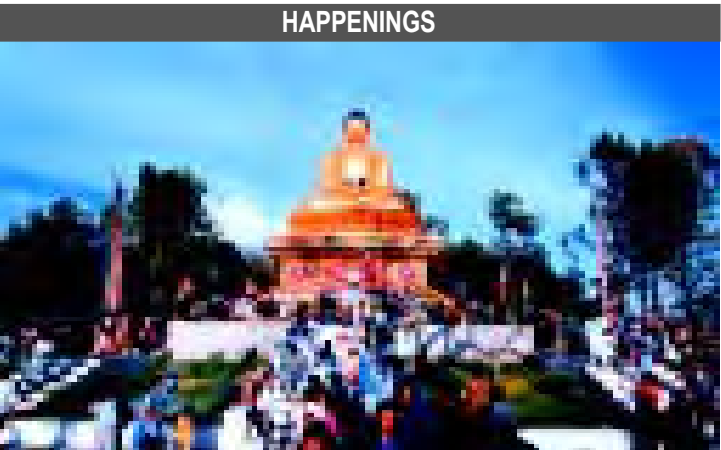
Shova Wagley’s paintings want to privilege perception by the senses.

distorted and elongated faces in the manner of expressionists. Wagley paints ears like *karkaloko pat*, a mouth like that of a large lazily burping fish, and eyes like the mascaraed eyes of a Kathak dancer that seem to want to capture the whole world in one look. Ears, eyes, brain, mouth, all relate to the senses. And as it is Wagley’s conviction they are underused, she paints them distorted to show their full potential.

These works are largely successful, mainly because they refuse to be literal representations. If they have a fault, it is in the use of colour. Wagley’s hues look as if they were applied by a novice artist, and this enervates the conceptual strength of the paintings. And it is paradoxical that a show which foregrounds the senses is

stronger on concept than on the pure experience of viewing.

There are also other paintings in the show that privilege perception through the senses. These work through highly textured surfaces like sawdust on plywood, canvas or paper. These tactile paintings are of temples standing solidly or undulating, like paddy against the breeze, all in a multicoloured blaze. In these, blocks of flat colour and the way space is organised eliminate the illusion of distance and the viewer’s eye is gently directed to see what Wagley believes is the gist of the painting. Concept and execution mesh well here, asking that we explore new, more sensory ways of knowing and understanding the world. A good show. ♦



BIG BUDDHA: A new gilded 70-ft figure of the Buddha was unveiled near Swayambhu on 7 May, the Buddha’s birth anniversary.



LINING UP TO READ: School children line up to enter the week-long Book Fair at the Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall in Kathmandu on Sunday. The exhibition is on till 12 May.



JUST A FACADE: A facade of a traditional Newari house hiding the construction going on inside in Patan Durbar Square. The finished building will resemble the facade in style and size.

by WAYNE AMTZIS



RAVI MANANDHAR

Clockwork tenderness

The art of Piet Warffemius works within and against the western appropriation of non-western artefacts.

Piet Warffemius and Ed Van der Kooij
Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited till 21 May.
Above, Princess Sruti with Warffemius after inaugurating his show on 7 May.



parsed in a language that partakes of the universal, one wonders why the artist needed to leave home to find that particular template missing from Europe’s architecture of expression. Warffemius’ iconic gestures cannot deny the emptiness that sends artists eastward, nor can they dispel that undefined desire that troubles western aesthetic forms, and yet in their small way they may make the absence of the exotic, an acceptable mode for contemporary achievement. ♦

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Don't laugh. Given the present state of the nation, it is our duty to inform all concerned authorities, heads of constitutional bodies, and public sector torsos that laughing in public will henceforth be totally banned in all 75 district headquarters from 1 Jestha 2058. Guffaws, giggles and chuckles are hereby declared against the national interest, since they distract attention from our most serious problem: our continued inability to take things seriously. An alliance of 108 left-out parties led by the Unruffled Marxbad-Leninbad will start a phase-wise nationwide

per capita duration that an adult Nepali can break into paroxysms of laughter on any given day. With most of the allotted time taken up by the state media, they must spare a thought for those compatriots who just can't laugh no more. Although the editors are understandably tickled pink by the goings-on in our landlocked Himalayan kingdom of 23 million, they must exercise restraint, and not overstep their bounds. Today, more than ever before, we need journalists who understand that although the constitution (much to our amusement) guarantees the freedom to laugh at

No laughing matter

programme to protest the misuse of laughter in all its forms. Led by its vanguard student wing, the All-over-Nepal Campaign To Abolish Laughter and Glee (Revoltng) will first target state-controlled media, which is the source of much mirth all over the kingdom at primetime everyday. It is extremely detrimental for our national morality, our territorial imperative and sovereignty that the entire nation breaks into gales of laughter before, during and after the evening news on radio and television. I don't speak in jest when I say that the mouth organs of government lack a certain gravitas. They will therefore be forced to refrain from outright comedy in their broadcasts, to wit: they will be forced to look and sound more tragic as befitting the times.

The various party organs (motto: "He who laughs last is history") also need to be disciplined since they don't seem to realise that there are limits to the average



whoever we want whenever we want to, this freedom comes with responsibility and should not be abused. And more importantly, we must never, ever, laugh at ourselves since this will have a negative impact on our sense of national self-esteem, self-importance, self-aggrandisement and ultimately erode our self-defence.

Epidemiologists tell us that laughter is contagious, and this is all the more reason

that we must stop this nonsense of breaking into fits of laughter at every tiny excuse. Remember: laughter spreads by word of mouth. So, every time you feel like chortling in public, spare a thought for all the innocent bystanders who will be inadvertently infected. This is why, however amused we may be, we must suppress our urge to laugh at least until such time as an all-clear is sounded and we know that the country's current crisis has passed. You, at the back in the Groucho mask, what are you sniggering at? ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

More than 100 years ago, the West India Company in the Caribbean hired thousands of indentured labourers from India to work in the sugar plantations in Jamaica, Trinidad and Surinam. There were steamers with the subcontinent's huddled masses leaving Calcutta every other day. It was a harrowing tale of desperation, home sickness and sea sickness. Many died on the trip, or when they got to the Americas.

Among the tens of thousands of labourers from the north Indian plains were a sprinkling of Nepalis and their descendants. Today they live across the Caribbean—nearly assimilated in the migrant Indian sub-culture there. In many of them, there is only a feeble hint of a Nepali past.

Glenn Krishna Mitrasingh is the descendent of one such Nepali family who migrated to Suriname in the early 1900s. Glenn has pursued that feeble hint of Nepaliness, and as a medical doctor has been visiting Nepal since 1996. "It was not a coincidence, nor was it an emotional attraction that pulled me here. I do a lot of humanitarian work in many countries and Nepal also happened to be one," says the soft-spoken Glenn, adding: "But I do feel very at home here." Glenn is also General Secretary of the International Council for Friends of Nepal in the

One-eighth Nepali



Netherlands, an organisation that helps fundraise for development projects in Nepal.

"My great grandfather and grandmother were supposed to be from Taplejung," says Glenn who was born in Surinam and his Nepali bahun blood has now been diluted over four generations. Everybody in Glenn's patriarchal line had married into a different community. The name Krishna came through Glenn's father whose middle name was Balkisun. The surname Mitrasingh comes from a disguised name that his great grandfather used while boarding the ship in Calcutta.

"We are told that our great grandfather used to threaten to cut off the feet if anyone of his family ever married black Christians. However, except one, everyone got married to people of different races, ethnicities and religions," says Glenn.

According to Glenn's reckoning, there were about

50 Nepali communities living in Surinam when it got independence from the Dutch in 1975. But after the 1980 military coup many Indonesian and Indian families were killed. Intellectuals were targeted and eliminated, universities closed.

That was the time the young Glenn left Surinam for Holland. "There were two options: Brazil to be still near my parents, or to Holland." Most of the Nepali diaspora opted for Holland. One thing Glenn is impatient with is the patronising tone some Nepalis use when they find out he is one-eighth Nepali. "I find my ancestor's history interesting, but please don't put the monkey on my back," he says. "I don't like to preach. Every individual, every nation has to find its own way forward." He also has a word of warning for those wanting to blindly imitate the west: "Don't copy us. You will copy all our problems." ♦

CLOSE UP

May 2001

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