

NEW THRILL: CANYONING 19



Thamel's secret
KESHAR
GARDEN



EXCLUSIVE

EU pulls out

The European Union has put the \$13 million Gulmi-Argakhanchi Rural Development Project (GARDEP) on indefinite hold after a project vehicle was torched by Maoists on 8 May. The attack came just as the project's second phase to build roads, schools and drinking water projects in the two districts was getting underway. Most half-done construction of schools and roads have been abandoned. The Maoists haven't yet claimed responsibility for the attack, and there had been no overt threats. Local officials said the torching was not planned, and was the result of local Maoists suspecting that a project personnel was using the car's radio. They say EU over-reacted, and are lobbying for the project to resume. Said DDC chairman Kausal Pokhrel: "This is really unfortunate, it will set us back many years."

Tibetans warned

Days before Chinese premier Zhu Rongji's visit Chakra Prasad Bastola told the press that Nepal would not allow its territory to be used for anti-China activities. And he meant it. Three government agencies sprung into action—the Ministry of Home Affairs, the office of the Chief District Officer and the Hanuman Dhoka police office. All had one simple message for Kathmandu's Tibetan community: "Don't be seen, and don't be heard. Or else you will be deported.' There are 60,000 Tibetans living in Nepal and lately the government has become intolerant of even Tibetan cultural activities. Said one Tibetan resident: "It is sad that after 40 years of being here, we still have to be guiet." Now that Zhu's gone, things may be more relaxed.

BINOD BHATTARAI

nywhere else in the world a school shutdown that prevents nearly a million children from attending classes would be a national crisis. Here, it is just politics-as-usual.

Everyone agrees that Nepal's education is a mess. Constant tinkering and experimenting with reforms since 1975 has resulted in politicised government schools with falling standards. Most private schools that moved in to fill the demand are run like businesses. The result: a school system ridden with inequities.

Since the government wasn't doing much to reform education, student unions affiliated with three left parties, including one controlled by the Maoists, have entered the fray. They want to change overnight what took 30 years to wreck. Further complicating matters is the fact that the three unions are competing with each other to appear more radical.

Last week, armed members of the All-Nepal Independent Student's Union (Revolutionary) attacked in broad daylight two private schools with Indian affiliations. They vandalised property, set vehicles on fire, doused one principal with kerosene, and physically abused another. "This government does not listen, so as a warning, we had to carry out the attacks on schools that are run with foreign capital," said the general secretary of the pro-Maoist union, Purna Poudel. The Maoists have already closed down many private schools in the districts where they are active. Among them, the Japanese-run Notre Dame in Bandipur closes next week. (See box, p.7)

The government said it would provide security this week, but private schools were too spooked to open. The Ministry of Education made some last-minute attempts

A classless society?

A million Nepali children couldn't go to school for a week because adults were playing politics.



to negotiate after minister Amod Prasad Upadhyaya was flayed by media for not taking the issue seriously. On Saturday, government officials met Maoist students, parents and private school representatives but failed to reach a compromise. Then the government made a blunder by arresting two Maoist student leaders as they left the talks. They have since been released, but the action torpedoed chances of compromise.

The list of demands by the three student unions are long, confusing, and

some of them would need decades to implement. But to summarise the main points, they include: 50 percent reduction in private school fees, ban on singing the national anthem, ban on compulsory Sanskrit, ban on re-admission fees and an increase in investments in public schools.

The main opposition UML's Standing Committee member and the party's education commisar, Jhala Nath Khanal, told us: "The 50 percent reduction in school fees

demanded by Maoists cannot

be implemented. Our students are only demanding a reduction in fees, but by how much can only be decided after a through study."

The Maoist students are admant that the government must

Essay p. 6

Hurt, frustrated and hopeful
thool fees by half

reduce private school fees by half and provide free education in public school before they will even come to the negotiating table.

p. 7 🔿

Jumping the gun?

he race to supply the Royal Nepal Army with a new generation of rifles and carbines to replace its ageing SLRs is going into its final lap. The main contenders include the German G-36, US-made M-16s and Israeli Galils, and they are all neck-to-neck in this high-stakes deal which could total some \$ 50 million over the next five years. All are assault rifles that use imported 5.56mm calibre, "double base" ammunition that have a killing range of up to 600 m.

According to military sources, the G-36 which had been a favourite because of intense lobbying is now falling behind after a high-level field test showed defects with its sophisticated optical sight. The rifle optical sight needs zeroing every time it is jerked, and is not battle-tested.

The G-36 is made by the German company, Heckler & Koch which is partly owned by British Royal Ordnance. The G-36 was reported to have an edge over its rivals because the manufacturers had won a \$ 5 million deal to set up a maintenance and repair facility for the rifle. The maintenance deal

was finalised before the rifle was selected. Nepali media has taken a keen interest in the deal, and there have been reports that the German contract is linked to the army's decision to purchase the RJ-100 jet last year. That deal was scuttled because of media pressure and intense lobbying by rivals. A well-known Nepali commission agent is the representative in Nepal for both Heckler & Koch (Royal Ordnance) and British Aerospace.

Complications arose because BAe had already paid its commission to the agent on the RJ100 deal, and the G-36 repair shop was offered as a swap. Said the source: "With a purchase of this scale, any other manufacturer would

have given the maintenance workshop for free if we had bargained hard."

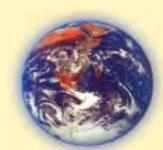
It is standard operating procedure to pay a sales commission to the manufacturer's agent, and whatever gun the army buys there will commissions involved. But informed insiders say this should not be an excuse to push through an inappropriate gun, just because some past deal didn't materialise. The other issue is weapons standardisation.

The army presently has a requirement for 50,000 guns, which include assault rifles, light machine guns, grenade launchers and carbines. Most officers and rank-and-file soldiers seem to prefer weapons like the M-16 which they have used while on UN peacekeeping duty and of which the army already has some 4,500 units. Still others find the Israeli Galil even more suitable because it is lighter, and more durable because of its solid body parts.

The gun purchase has a sense of urgency because the army is thinking of passing on its Belgian SLRs to the Armed Police Force that the government is setting up to fight the Maoists, and for internal peacekeeping. Many would debate whether one of the world's poorest countries should be spending so much on guns. But if they are needed, then they have to be the right equipment at the right price.

Hotline: 523050

one world...



...one link



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EDITORIAL 18 - 24 MAY 2001 **NEPALI TIMES**



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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Time to go



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MAYDAY, MAYDAY

Analysts have come up with many analogies to describe the present state of the nation: a patient in intensive care, a village on a volcano, a boat that has sprung a leak, a truck falling off a cliff. But the best one we have heard so far in the cocktail circuit is a jet with a major systems malfunction that is diving towards the ground, while the captain and co-pilot are busy punching each others' faces, as a hijacker behind them holds a gun to their heads. Go figure out who is who

Pretty soon, at the rate we are going, there will be nothing left to fight over. Here we are, confronting one of the most perilous times in our nation's history and our elected politicians are behaving as if it is plunder as usual. At a time when we need a national consensus, we are at our most divisive. At a time when we need decisive leadership, we have vacillation and a twiddling of thumbs. At a time when we need transparency and accountability, the looting has gone into high gear. At a time when we need to be delivering health care and education on a war footing, we are footing a war. And there is even a sickening scramble on to pocket kickbacks on the paraphernalia to fight that war.

The main opposition UML, squeezed by the Maoists who have commandeered their cadre and a stubborn government that refuses to go, have started collecting tyres for street pyres. Then there is that most intractable quarrel: between Girija Prasad Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and/or Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba. The latter both had started rubbing their hands in anticipation of the power grab when Koirala's resignation was deemed to be imminent.

Now, we hear rumblings of dissent even within Koirala's inner circle. Sushil Koirala, the mysterious behind-the-scenes confidante of the prime minister, loathes Mahesh Acharya, Khum Bahadur Khadka, and Govinda Raj Joshi. Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel can barely stand Joshi and Jaya Prakash Anand and Acharya, and they heartily return the favour. Acharya and Mahat can't get along, and both have problems with Arjun Narsingh KC.

If you thought that was bad enough, look at the Koirala family: Prakash hates First Daughter Sujata who hates First Neice Shailaja who hates actress Manisha. Auntie Nona, for her part, is disgusted with Sujata and Sushil who reciprocate the feeling

What's with Nepal's bahuns? Just because they can't get along, do they have to drag the whole country down with them? Not that the high priests in the other parties are any better. Our Communist Party has the distinction of being the most splintered of any communist party in the world—from blood red to pale pink all connected loosely in shifting alliances and vying to outdo each other in closing down schools, calling three-day bandhs, torching public property and launching

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and a threatened three-day national shutdown next week, the UML has failed to fire the imaginations of Nepalis. The party's once-admired apparatchiks stand naked out there, shorn of their workingclass pretensions. Let us remember that vitriolic attacks on each other through their corruption did not start with the Nepali media mouthpieces We have a situation here.

It is time Koirala the citizen and Koirala the president of the ruling party asked Koirala the prime minister to step down.

he Nepali bourgeoisie is angrily demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. Capitalists of the capital are up in arms in the name of corruption. The chatterati wants Koirala out on grounds of morality. The elite wants Koirala kicked out because they find him too arrogant. Others hate Koirala because they think his nose is too long. And yet, there is Koirala, still in the eye of the storm, unruffled like an old banyan amidst the swaying trees. Or as his detractors put it: stubborn as a mule.

But the political longevity of Koirala has nothing to do with his strength and stamina. His survival is a damning indictment of the Nepali bourgeoisie. Despite seeming to be at the nadir of his career, Girija Prasad Koirala is still the tallest among the political pygmies of Nepali politics and society. For the getrich-quick bigots in the bourgeoisie and the hypocritical NIMBY elite, Koirala continues to remain the least unacceptable option. The least rotten of the apples in the barrel.

Despite a bout of motorcycle burning

the ploy of a fox preaching a bull the virtues of vegetarianism, and hoping for its hump to fall off so that it can relish the meat.

The clamour for Koirala's head in a section of Nepali press is based on an accusation that is almost impossible to prove in a court of law. A politicallymotivated media is flogging the deadhorse of a controversial aircraft lease to own slime.

display of political promiscuity during the shameful days of coalition governments recently? By asking for Koirala's ouster, the Panchas do him a favour.

And of Koirala's detractors within the party, the less said the better. Unwilling to fight, incapable of taking defeat with grace, and unable to chart an independent course, NC dissidents have joined the chorus of the opposition parties. Antagonism between septuagenarians can be attributed to a clash of the hubris that seeps in with senility. But why do "youth leaders" waste all their youthful energy in this internecine war of self-destruction? Perhaps Shailaja Acharya is right—the Nepali Congress really does have no future. This man is not going to resign in disgrace. Leave him alone, and he just might.

Slandering Koirala is the favourite past-time of social-climbers with intellectual pretensions. To prove that you are a true-blue satin socialite—and not just another Kazi-come-lately—you must indulge yourself in the game of character assassination with each sip of red wine and every puff of cigarello. Koirala is easy prey for crude caricatures by budding commentators. Writers with more ambition than talent piggyback on his popularity and pillory him for instant fame. Koirala is right in his prognosis. If he capitulates to the clamour of a notoriously selfish and vengeful bourgeoisie, no prime minister in the future will be safe from such blatant bullying.

continuation in the prime minister's chair is not the right answer. The solution lies in devising an honourable exit as soon as possible. It is time Koirala the citizen and Koirala the president of the ruling party asked Koirala the prime minister to step down. But the bourgeois takeover of Nepali public life is so complete that no one has the strength of character to force him out. Koirala may not be a quitter, but he has passed the stage of having to prove himself. After all, despite all his failings, Girija has never lost an election. His control over the party apparatus is near-total, and he still enjoys the support of the majority of the ruling party lawmakers.

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OPINION by AJIT N S THAPA

Girija must take the leap

ot since the restoration of democracy has the nation faced a crisis of the magnitude and intensity that it does today. The list of woes is long: plummeting government revenue vis-a-vis expenses, stagnant economic growth, rising unemployment and dwindling foreign investment, and the most serious crisis of all: security. The Maoists have taken over complete control in many mid-western districts, and have sowed fear and insecurity throughout the kingdom. People who resist, especially Nepali Congress workers, are threatened, abducted, or slain. The Maoists are active on two fronts: furthering the armed struggle, and carrying out a social revolution Robin Hood-style. Any move to counter the Maoist movement has to come to terms with this duality. The Maoists have been building up their strength, and at this rate the days of totalitarianism are not far. Many people are openly wondering if that honest abider of the constitution, His Majesty the King, should not take a more proactive constitutional role as the country sinks into anarchy.

The government has finally woken up to the reality of the Maoist movement and started to take some measures to counteract it. The National Security Council is mobilising the army in Maoistaffected areas, and simultaneously launching the Integrated Security and Development Package (ISDP), which would be implemented initially in seven of the most seriously Maoist-affected districts of Nepal with the army providing security. While the ISDP has been approved by most ordinary citizens, left-leaning political parties especially the UML and the five-left combine, have rejected it. And despite the brouhaha over the Army Chief's statements, it is now clear that his remarks about consensus were blown out of proportion. Apparently, it was not the intention of the chief to seek

political consensus as a precondition for the mobilisation of the army. But it is important that the government start serious dialogue with all the political parties and the people before the ISDP is implemented.

On the political front, the

left has been capitalising on the Lauda Air deal to push for the prime minister's resignation. And within the party, unsatisfied elements are waiting impatiently for his departure. Girija Koirala vacillated over his much-awaited resignation, but has now decided not to leave and to fight to the finish. He is being egged on by supporters, who in a manner reminiscent of the Panchayat, are misusing state-controlled media to bolster the beleaguered prime minister. He could be making history if he turned away from the advice of his self-serving coterie and used his own conscience and judgement in the interest of the nation and the party. But, alas, he is a prisoner of his own indecision.

Koirala is determined not to resign under opposition pressure over the Lauda Air deal. And the opposition is hell-bent on replicating an Estrada-style ouster. In a televised address last month, Koirala said he would not stay in his chair for a single minute if the Committee for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) or the Supreme Court hinted at his involvement. The prime minister went against his own words after he received the CIAA's sealed letter by hanging on to his chair as if the nation's life and the future of democracy rested on his premiership.

The Maoists have laid down some conditions for a resolution of the crisis: formation of an all-

party government, election of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, and no negotiation with a government led by Koirala. But these provisions are unconstitutional, and would not be acceptable under normal circumstances. The question is: are these normal circumstances? The lack of decisive action to curb the Maoist movement has strengthened the hand of the

Girija Koirala must step down and hand over to a

younger generation of leaders. Time is running

out. The party must act swiftly and prudently in the national interest.



rebels. Koirala is under pressure from the opposition, the army is reluctant to go to Maoist areas, and the Maoists will not negotiate with the prime minister. So, it looks like the political stalemate will drag on as long as Koirala is in power.

Herein lies the challenge for the Nepali Congress: can the party break the impasse? The NC Parliamentary Party must be called immediately to evaluate the crisis. If the meeting finds that Girija Koirala's voluntary withdrawal from the party leadership would pave the way for a fresh round of talks with both the opposition and the Maoists, it would be in order for him to

voluntarily step down. Koirala will certainly understand that real victory will be in persuading the Maoists to join the mainstream. Being, or not being, prime minister is only a means, not the end. He might lose a battle, but he has the chance to win the war. And if that happens, Koirala can always stage a political comeback if he wishes. Resolving the present crisis by breaking the deadlock is more important for the party and nation than the prestige of the party leader. After all, politics is the art of the possible.

The alternatives are: stepped up street protests by the left opposition, a stalled budget

session of parliament, Maoists launching offensives in areas where the Army has not been deployed, the possibility of the Army being dragged into the conflict. A deteriorating law and order situation, worsening economic and social conditions and continuing disruption of the House proceedings might eventually force the prime minister to recommend to His Majesty the King to proclaim a state of National Emergency. This would curtail freedom and civil liberties and would be a major setback for our fledging democracy.

A midterm election is another alternative, but may yield a hung parliament, or the left parties securing a two-third majority in parliament, with the possibility of making dramatic changes in the constitution, including even the abolition of the institution of monarchy.

It is the duty of every responsible NC lawmaker to persuade Girija Koirala to step down and hand over to a younger generation of leaders. Time is running out, and the party must act swiftly and prudently in the national interest. Otherwise, it might just be a party with a glorious past and a bleak future.

(Ajit NS Thapa is a General Committee Member of the Nepali Congress)



It was very interesting to read that Ramesh Shrestha ("Maps in a difficult terrain", #39) from the Himalaya Map House blames the lack of copyright ethics in Nepal, because his company has been

copying our maps.
Karto-Atelier is the company that did the first high quality maps of Pokhara and Kathmandu. At that time there was no good map base and no information about infrastructure available. We did all the research ourselves—

hundreds of hotels, restaurants, shops, ministries, temples and infrastructure. The Pokhara City Map of the Himalaya Map House is absolutely identical to our map. In Europe, the sale of such products would be forbidden by law. The "new" Kathmandu Map of Shangri La Maps is proof of this thesis. Bidur Dangol is using our map content, but he is afraid of adding more information to make a better map because others could copy him! Without



copyright there is no progress possible. Cartography is a serious profession, just making a copy of the Schneider Annapurna map is no cartography.

Arne Rohweder Karto-Atelier, Switzerland

MULE

Kunda Dixit is right that prime minister Koirala is not a quitter ("Going going..." #41, and "...not yet gone" #43). He is as stubborn as a mule. And yes, it does not really matter to the rest of the country if he goes or stays because either way, the nation is heading towards disaster. "Morality" does not seem to exist in his lexicon. But he has 50 years of experience in politics and understands Nepali minds. It is meaningless to show him the CIAA's sealed letter because he didn't see an honourable exit when it was staring him in the face. I suppose we just have to wait, since the unofficial law for the truth seeker is patience. Optimistically yours.

Sudan Shrestha Dharan

PARAS

A long time ago was talking about Paras Shah. Your paper carried articles about his involvement in an accident in which a musician was killed (#5). Since then, nothing. Why no follow-up? What was the outcome of the report the king asked the prime minister to make?

Rolf Schaefer by email

BUDDHA

LETTERS

Excellent writing on the Buddha by Rajendra S Khadka ("2,545 years later..." #41). Very relevant, timely and thought provoking.

KR Rai England

EXPAT=EXPERT

Just thought I'd share this with you. In UNDP's recently published "Nepal Development Cooperation Report 2000" under the "Key Definitions" section the word "Expert" is defined as:

"A long-term (12 months or more) expatriate resident of the recipient country filling a position created and/or funded by an external donor." It looks like you don't need expertise.

Name withheld on request by email

INDIAN TOURISTS

CK Lal ("Nepal fizzles as India sizzles", #42) has rightly pointed out that without Indian tourists, Nepal's tourism industry will be in grave danger. Similarly, unless Indian investors come to Nepal, industrial activity cannot get a boost. But I disagree that we can look forward to Chinese tourists because Beijing has recognised Nepal as an outbound destination. I think the Chinese would prefer Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore to Pokhara, Pashupatinath or Chitwan.

> R P Chaudhary Kalimati

Your columnist CK Lal is right in questioning the possibility of success of the Nepal Tourism Board's Festival of Lights promotion programme in India. As things stand, no Indian in his right mind will think of visting Nepal which is protrayed as an ISI-infested country by the Indian

media. Nepal must strive harder to create an environment more conducive to Indian tourism and investment if it is to grow economically.

> Rakam Rai Delhi University

CORRECTIONS

• Due to a layout error, several words were missing from the first paragraph of "...not yet gone" on page 1 of #42. The first paragraph should read as follows:

"Last Wednesday, Girija Prasad Koirala got his Chief Secretary to draft his resignation letter. His aides cleared out their desks. The prime minister was at peace with himself: he had made up his mind to quit."

• The picture accompanying "Maoists in the mist" on page 1 of #42 was by Sagar Budathoki.



4 NATION 18 - 24 MAY 2001 NEPALI TIMES

Lost in Space and Time



Space Time's plans to go into orbit with Nepali first satellite programming has fallen victim to behind-the-scenes Indian pressure.

RAMYATA LIMBU

epal's first company to get permission to uplink via satellite was to begin transmission on Nepali New Year, 14 April. Space Time Network had announced transmission schedules, even taped interviews to fill programming slots. Suddenly, two days before broadcasts were to begin, the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) told Space Time's Channel Nepal it couldn't uplink because of "incomplete tests of

equipment". More than a month later, Space Time's chairman and managing director Jamim Shah is still waiting for permission, and is running out of patience.

"I'm losing Rs 100,000 everyday paying for renting the transponders," Shah told us. He has written 18 letters to the ministry asking for reasons for the delay. The standard reply has been that the files are now gathering dust on the table of minister Shiva Raj Joshi. "If they don't give us permission soon, we'll uplink programmes from outside the country," Shah said curtly.

We asked Shree Ram Poudel secretary at the ministry to comment, and he answered in bureaucratese: "We're looking into the process. I don't want to expand on that." However, Poudel had earlier informed the Parliament's Development Committee that his ministry saw no reason to stop transmission of Channel Nepal as the network's documents were in order. A member of the committee, Raghuji Panta of the main opposition UML also saw no problems. "We've reviewed the case. Everything, all the documents, tax

papers are in order. The company has paid Rs 90 million in taxes so far. There's no valid reason to stop transmission," he said. Despite the committee's directive to the MOIC to allow satellite broadcasts immediately after completing equipment tests, the green light from government has yet to come.

So, what is holding things up? The delay has strengthened reports that the government is under pressure from India which has expressed security concerns about Space Time. Jamim Shah himself figured on a list of

Nepalis that Indian intelligence charged of being on the payroll of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in a report leaked to an Indian magazine. India is said to have leaned on the government during the visits here two months ago of former Indian ambassador to Nepal, KV Rajan, and of the veteran Indian actor, Amitabh Bachhan. Sources said even the Indian prime minister's powerful security adviser, Brajesh Mishra, casually questioned several government officials on the decision to allow Jamim Shah to go on air.

"The technical incompatibility of Channel Nepal's satellite equipment is just an excuse to keep the network lingering so they'll lose heart and pull out," confirmed one ministry insider. "The real story is Indian displeasure." But Shah is determined not to give up without a fight, he says he has been arbitrarily singled out. "Why don't they worry about technical tests of say all the 13 V-SAT operators, after all they are also using satellite. If they cancel my permission, I will go to court. I've invested so much already," he warned.

Asked if he is fronting for Pakistan, or if his network would promote anti-Indian sentiments, Jamim Shah denies the accusation. "They've been telling me that for the last eight years. Look, this is not about India, China or Pakistan. It's not about Jamim Shah or Space Time. This is about 24 million Nepalis. This is Nepal's voice and it can't be stopped," he says. Channel Nepal's satellite footprint would extend from the Gulf, across South Asia to Thailand and Malaysia. It would therefore be able to reach Nepali-speakers outside Nepal, and Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf and southeast Asia. Those who know Jamim Shah well say that whatever dealings he may have had in the past with his Dubai friends, he is now trying to make money from his satellite venture, and that is all he is interested in. But his bravado and blunt talk does not endear him to the Indians.

Nepali television viewers today watch mainly Indian channels through their dish antennae or through cable networks like Space Time. Shah's cable network has more than 50,000 households connected in Kathmandu alone, and a few thousand more in other urban centres. And for someone who is

by DANIEL LAK

HERE AND THERE

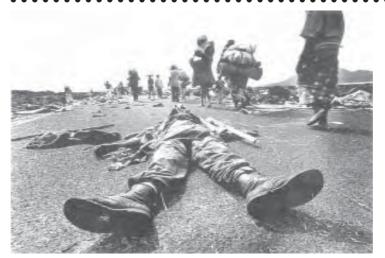
Hacks in the mist

Nepal has hit the big time of world conflict reportage. Welcome. With luck, we won't stay long.

t's bound to happen sooner or later. And it will be bloody. An encounter between the opposing forces in the hills of far west Nepal could take place innocently, or by design. Both sides are well equipped, motivated, purposeful. They're pursuing their respective missions with single-minded zeal. Once they run into one another, perhaps along a riverside trail or in a hitherto obscure village, all hell with break loose.

I could be talking about the Maoists and the army but I'm not. The hills of this fair land are alive at the moment with squadrons of foreign journalists in search of a story. Nepal has hit the big time of world conflict reportage, and the rogues' gallery has arrived. Hell hath no fury like a front-line, battle-loving, hack beaten by the competition. That's the new war that threatens to destabilise the increasingly "liberated" western Middle Hills. If the Washington Post and the New York Times should fall afoul of each other, or, heaven forbid, the BBC and CNN, then stand back and sell tickets. It's the Rumble in the Jungle. Just the BBC alone can usually provide a battle or two among its own hacks jostling for position on the main news bulletin. Trust me, I know.

Of course, as usual, the BBC has beaten CNN to this story but there's still potential for a serious confrontation. The Australians beat all of us, as Kathmandu-ites are seeing at venues around town, with their documentary from 1998, Nepal's Secret War. Pedestrian and cliché-ridden, perhaps, but first off the mark and therefore of great merit. I can exclusively reveal to readers of the Nepali Times that plans to make a documentary for the BBC programme Correspondent that same year had to be abandoned when the man in charge—me—put his back out. "No walking on rough terrain or driving long distances on bumpy roads," my doctor told me. You can see why we had to cancel. But spare me no sympathy, a well



planned film that's never made is right up there with almost scoring a goal, or kissing your sister.

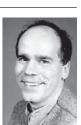
Now that the question of "first" is out of the way, the competition among visiting hacks will be for colour, access and insight. Those of us who pay for our technology on a daily basis are at somewhat of a disadvantage here

We need to get in, get the story and get back so the meter stops running.

That's why portable, locally knowledgeable journalists will always be at an advantage. As I found out at the beginning of this month, it's not easy to meet actual insurgents if you don't have the time. You can go to the affected area, but you must be prepared to wait. And wait, and wait. Those without time, or money, will either make do with what they can get, or make something up. As we saw in Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and other places, a breed of media person—we call them "war junkies" in the trade—always pops up and makes free use of the resources and hospitality of others.

Stories about the insurgency will start to appear with monotonous regularity now in the world's media. And Nepalis and foreign residents will probably be perplexed, should they come across one of these. They may not recognise much. Because something tells me that a lot of our visitors will go home with a more complex tale than they'd hoped for, and to be quite frank, we're not a breed that handles complexity well. Shades of grey don't sell or get past editors. So there'll be a bit of blackening and whitening going on.

Having the heavyweight hacks on your turf is at best a mixed blessing. A story on a big media outlet—even one that shows how bad things are—can be oddly gratifying at first. They're paying attention to us, perhaps something will change. But in the end, the sad truth is that your conflict is just content to fill the spaces in a publication or news bulletin. It's that simple. So welcome to the big time. With luck, we won't stay long. ◆



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differences between two individu-

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innuendos of Indian high-

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satellite in 1993 when Bijaya

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Space Time Network initially

received a license to operate cable

accused by the Indians of being a Pakistani spy, Shah's network offers mainly Indian movie, music and news channels. It was only during the Hrithik Roshan riots that Space Time suspended Indian programming for a week. If he gets his satellite license, Channel Nepal would be beamed to 52 countries in Asia.

Ever since Nepal became the first country in South Asia to grant licenses to independent radio in 1997—satellite uplinking permission was given in 1993—there has been no looking back. "We can only move forward," says Narhari Acharya former NC minister and chairman of the task force that drafted the **National Communications Policy** 1992 that made the licensing possible. "Of course a government always has to look after the nation's interest but in this case I think it's the vagueness in policy that has allowed space for such contentions." Acharya feels that ten years later, it is time to review the policy.

Despite the early pioneering work with private FM and cable, the development of electronic media in Nepal has been stagnant compared to the print media which has gained professionalism and stature in the 1990s. An uneasy truce exists between the government, the licensing and monitoring authority, and independent broadcasters, whose technical and professional knowhow still needs improvement. The MOIC is entrusted with implementing the law, but it has been unpredictable and arbitrary about the terms and conditions it imposes on licensees, which have changed with the whims of the sitting minister.

So, whether or not Space Time will get the green signal is for the politicians to decide, and for the give-and-take that takes place at that level. "When matters take a political turn, you can't deduce by logic," says the MOIC insider. With parliamentary committees now scanning through MOIC decisions, he foresees the battle erupting into another political hot potato. What started off as

quietly licensed Shah's company and another one by the name of South Asia Broadcasting to uplink via satellite. South Asia Broadcasting still exists in the ministry files, even though it has not done as much preparation as Channel Nepal to actually begin broadcasting.

Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta, another NC Communications minister, revoked Space Time's licence in January on grounds that the network had not paid its dues. Shah announced he was going to court but was later about to get his licence re-issued by another NC Communications minister, Shiva Raj Joshi who joined cabinet in February. Again there was no bidding. Gupta who had been shifted to the Agriculture and Cooperatives ministry in the February reshuffle resigned to protest Joshi's decision.

Many MOIC insiders suspect the delay in allowing Space Time to go ahead with its transmission reflects a business dispute within the Koirala inner circle, between those who are piggybacking on the Indians and those who are not. Some are even said to have business interests in Shah's Channel Nepal.

And for this purpose, delaying Space Time using a security bogey is a good ploy, says one government source. The government may have yet another reason to delay private satellite broadcasting: the state-owned Nepal TV is also planning to begin broadcasts via satellite by June. Interestingly, no one has heard of technical tests of NTV's equipment similar to the ones demanded of Space Time, nor questions about financial viability. •

DHAKA WEAVES



Buddha was born here

And we thought the debate about where the Buddha was born was over. Not so for an Indian diplomat who recently visited Lumbini. Ashok Kumar, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Indian Embassy, told a gathering at Lumbini last week that "Siddhartha was born in Nepal, and the Buddha in India". Kumar's logic: Siddhartha attained Buddhahood in India, while he was physically born in Nepal. His thesis apparently didn't go down too well with those in the audience who took it as more example of Indian hegemony. Quipped one: "It's like saying Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in India, but Mahatma Gandhi was born in South Africa."

International conservation experts, based on excavation findings in Lumbini, have determined that the Buddha was born in Tilaurakot, Lumbini. Some Indian archaeologists, however, claim that he was born in Pipprahawa in India, about 600 yards south of the Nepal-India border and four miles from Tilaurakot.

Of course, Nepal and India in their current geopolitical configurations did not exist-two-and-a-half millennia ago, so it would seem this argument is an exercise in sophistry.

Women move mountains

They're warming up. Nearly a decade after mountains were placed on the international agenda at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and after the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 called for special attention to mountain women, African, Asian, European, Latin American, and North American women descended on Kathmandu last week to finalise a plan of action to develop a mountain women's agenda. Their plan: holding a global meeting in Kathmandu in May 2002, the International Year of the Mountain, bringing together 300 participants—"mountain entrepreneurs", NGOs, researchers, parliamentarians, funding agencies and women from the world's major mountain ranges.

Anti-Maoists demo

Perhaps for the first time, villagers in Nepal have expressed their displeasure against Maoist tactics. Angry villagers of Chatara, Bayarban Bazaar in east Nepal organised anti-Maoist rallies three days in a row after a group of insurgents chopped off the hair of students at a higher secondary school. Among the victims of the Maoist "People's Action", was a married woman accused by the Maoists of colouring her hair. Younger students were not spared. Following the rallies, the villagers say the Maoists retaliated by issuing a round of gunshots in the jungles north of Bayarban. They're not scared. The village has submitted a protest letter against the Maoists at the local Village Development Committee and local youth have volunteered to assist a beleaguered police force carry out security patrols. Villagers in Gulmi and Argakhanchi are also angry at Maoists for torching an EU vehicle prompting the organisation to suspend a big development projects in the two districts.

Red alert

Sales of Red Potatoes, imported from India, have dropped in Nepal as a result of a recent scare that began in Biratnagar. The spuds are supposed to contain high quantities of chemical fertilisers and pesticides like DDT. The reports are conflicting—some say they're contaminated, others say they're not. Just to be sure, consumer groups and Biratnagar municipality officials sent potato samples to be tested at the local Food Laboratory. They tested negative. But consumers are still on red alert.

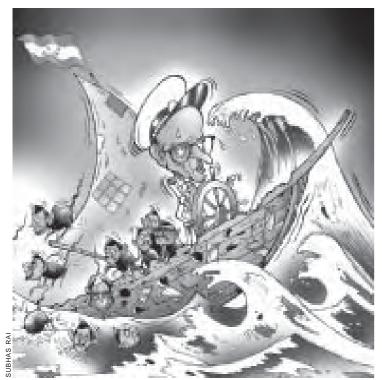
RPP's concept

The two-day (19-20 May) Central Working Committee meeting of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) passed a resolution demanding a 'general national consensus' on six national issues. The consensus was demanded for the formulation of a working plan to resolve the Maoist issue, ensure economic, social and political development, good governance, and the control of corruption, the establishment of a code of conduct for political parties, and the improvement in election system. The nine-point resolution suggests that the consensus be reached through all-party discussions and stresses the involvement and approval of the king in its consensus. However, the statement cautions that the demand for a national consensus should not be interpreted as RPP's wanting a share in the government.



SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL by PUSKAR BHUSAL

The political economy of corruption



iven the way our politicians are being subjected to calumnies of all sorts for strictly adhering to the principles of their profession, the country may not be far away from a national calamity: an entire leadership class up in arms against the people. Our leaders have been patient enough for a decade to let reality dawn on the people. The language of politics contains an equal measure of prevarication and posturing irrespective of the nature of the polity in place. If we still fail to grasp this premise of political reality, we do so at

our own grave peril. When interim prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, days after taking office in 1990, announced in public that it would only be a while before prices fell by a third since multiparty democracy had finally been restored, our saintly chieftain was only following the book. When ministers representing the right, centre and left in his cabinet started promising to turn Nepal into a Singapore, they were trying to be a little more specific than the panchas, who had long pledged to place the country in the ranks of the more

This is the paradox of democracy in Nepal: you have to be corrupt to uphold the system of multiparty elections.

advanced Asian societies by the turn of the century.

Things haven't turned out that way, because they weren't meant to be. The accumulation of false promises, vital to the nation's smooth transition to a truly participatory democracy, represents just a fraction of our frustrations. As we try to recover from the collective trauma induced by misplaced hopes, perhaps a little dose of realism might help. How long do you think the interim cabinet in 1991 would have survived had it started by warning us of the machinations a hung parliament would engender and the social polarisation the Pajero culture would institutionalise?

That's why while delving into how corruption has skyrocketed with the advent of political pluralism, we need to view the matter from a broad national perspective. To begin with, the panchas could afford to accept smaller commissions because it was virtually a winner-takes-all deal. All the "anti-social" elements that could have given the votaries of partylessness a run for their money were either locked up in jail or were languishing in exile. Granted, elections used to be expensive then, too. However, making prudent investment decisions was

easier. If your fortunes were not secure in several power centres, no amount of money could guarantee you a seat in the unicameral national legislature. In essence, your limitations were laid out for you and your options were clear.

Next comes the humanitarian aspect. Don't you think our leaders are entitled to reparations for their years of incarceration just because they refused to believe that politics could ever be complete without parties? True, the Political Sufferers Fund set up after the People's Movement was a positive move. However, it couldn't do much to ease the pain of newly liberated leaders and activists. For one thing, the case officers began by counting the limbs, fingers or toes you lost in the anti-panchayat struggle. Then they started pounding you with questions about your political affiliations, casting occasional glances for any traces of bodily torment. Adding humiliation to the physical and psychological scars of the new power elite, the fund soon started handing out money to some prominent ex-panchas in compensation for the few months of suffering they had to endure before they eventually signed pledges of loyalty to the partyless system.

We must not lose sight of the fact

that the business of politics has undergone a vast transformation in the past decade. Those seeking to enter public service today have to make clear investment choices all the way from capital budgeting to funds flow analysis. A candidate's election budget has to carefully allocate resources for every contingency, including bribing competitors to stay out of the race and mustering enough strength to manipulate the mandate in swing constituencies. The competition unleashed by the proliferation of parties has enshrined such tactics as capturing booths and stuffing ballot boxes as crucial elements of measuring the people's preferences. And let's not forget that these itemised expenses do not include the wads of cash candidates have to spend on pampered supporters who refuse to budge without a bottle of beer.

The fluidity of the political scene raises additional liquidity concerns. MPs don't have a clue whether they can expect to serve out their five-year term even under a majority parliament these days. When they can't even hope to break even in terms of the capital they have put into getting elected, you can't blame them for becoming pals with the commission agents they find hovering around them

the moment they take their oath. For many of our politicians, corruption is a compulsion. Blame the system, like we used to do in the bad old days, if you think it would help. From a macroeconomic standpoint, take a close look at the cost of living index and the composite of leading economic indicators, and do the math. In terms of constant 1990 rupees, the Lauda Air commission money turns out to be peanuts after deducting expenses for your party conventions and allocations for your own coterie. In real terms, the millions today's powerful politicians appear to amass may actually amount to less than what the panchas hoarded. Well, you would say, the panchas represented a filthy culture, which is why the people sent them packing in 1990. (Actually, not all walked out the door. Some of them still form the third largest force in parliament and are trying to forge a national consensus on what corrupts Nepali politics.)

So the burning question of the day boils down to something like this: politicians in a multiparty system are not supposed to lie or get involved in corruption. To be fair to our politicians in the Nepali Congress and the erstwhile United Left Front, that was a promise they made during the People's Movement that they knew they had to break to bolster our hard-won democracy.

OPINION

Hurt, frustrated and hopeful

s I sit to write this letter of protest, one thing bothers me: the present state of Nepal. Is the abusing of its innocence and vulnerability what Prithvi Narayan Shah pictured for Nepal's future when his dream of unifying the country came true? Terror and intimidation surround us. We fear going to work, or to school or even walking on the street because of 'bandhs'—forced closures that compel you to agree with someone's expression of dissatisfaction (or power)?

We, the people, are being treated like dirt in the game of politics. History suggests politics is a game for power. But somewhere, there have to be some hidden good intentions. Politicians must want to develop and improve their nation and not ruin it to suit their interests. The degree to which present day politics revolves around selfishness and power is not just pathetic but also frightening. No one bothers to ask us what we want. Where do we draw the line between anarchy and democracy? Or does that not even matter anymore?

With time comes development and change in everything, including education. There are great inequalities in our society, and it is not fair that the disadvantaged are not provided the opportunity for quality education. So what do our great revolutionary politicians do about it? They close down private schools. Now, how does that benefit anyone? Not only do the disadvantaged not get a quality education, but nobody else does, either!

Yes, the governments we have had are undoubtedly responsible for the sorry state we are in. There would not have been a need for private schools if government schools provided a first-class education. Most of the time teachers in government schools aren't there to teach but to do Where do we draw the line between anarchy and democracy? Or does that not even matter anymore?

politics: and once again, it's us, the people, who suffer because some greedy, amoral politicians are playing games with us. In the last session of parliament, the government was planning to pass an education bill to

have three categories of schools: government, private commercial, and private non-profit. The

private commercial schools would pay taxes just like any other business, and the money would be used to subsidise quality education in government schools. At present, we know that the education provided in government schools and private schools do not match at all. The SLC results say it all: private schools get 90% of the total successful results. That is not fair. But it is also not fair that private schools are to be closed and hundreds of thousands of us are to be deprived of

the quality education we have the right to, and we are lucky to get. The education bill never got a chance to be passed or even debated because of the house boycott.

It is pointless closing down private schools when those who actually go there find the quality is good value. If we thought the fees were exorbitant, or the quality was not up to mark, we'd go elsewhere. This is our democratic right of choice. We choose education in private schools, and

by **SAUNDARYA THAPA**

we want to sing our national anthem because we are proud of our nation and respect our king. I don't see anything wrong in feeling loyal and proud about our country and the symbol of our nationhood. That's my opinion, but I don't force it on anyone. Hiding behind the mask of politics thugs are

abusing democracy. Whatever happened to hunger strikes, and rallies without the threat of violence that don't force everyone to agree with you? Before asking us to give up the very thing that is going to affect every part of our future, can whoever you actually are who are trying to close down schools, assure us students that we are going to get the same kind of education we have chosen, and are getting? Convince us, before you start vandalising schools. Explore the possibilities at least. (One question has been nagging me: where do the sons and daughters of Maoists leaders study?)

If you look through all the propaganda and intimidation that surrounds us, this isn't even about education. If it were, then why is the party in power not doing anything about it, and why are the parties who claim to want to bring reforms only waiting to get to power? It's true: politics is all about power, isn't it?

If you want to reform education, start with the schools that need it. Be constructive in your protests, not destructive. Bringing down the quality of all schools to the level of government schools does not solve the problem. Raising the quality of state schools will.

We love this country. It's ours, remember? So let's start doing something about it. Maybe all this is happening because we, the people, have never been asked. Maybe we have never said what we really want. Maybe it is time we raised a voice. For how long do you want to remain silent? Don't close schools, not for a week, not for a day. It's about time we showed that we care. I do, and I know you do too. ◆

Saundarya Thapa is a 15-year-old student of grade nine, and wrote this as a class essay.

Godavari

NATION 18 - 24 MAY 2001 NEPALI TIMES

We don't need no education?

⇒ from p. 1

This could be posturing, but it is clear that the climate is too polarised for a meeting of minds.

Minister Upadhaya now seems to recognise the gravity of the situation, but is torn between not wanting to negotiate with students under threats of violence and the need to assuage the private schools. "We are always willing to talk about education reforms. But the unions can't bring politics into talks just to embarrass the government. The student leaders have now been released, I am confident there are now no obstacles to talks," he said Tuesday.

For the Maoists, this week's strike is a major foray into the capital and an integral part of the strategy of making the rest of the country notice their "peoples' war". Maoist students say it is not their short-term interest to close down schools, but admit that in the long term, they do want to nationalise all private schools and introduce a "people-oriented education". Maoist leader Chairman Prachanda's pronouncements on education recognises students as the "reserve force" in a future "mass uprising", a strategy the party adopted in February to buttress its armed struggle.

Progressive

The student wing of the Maoists is at the forefront of destabilising the government through a crisis in education. Another Maoist leader, Baburam Bhattarai, wrote recently about schools: "...the old, reactionary (system) must be demolished to building anything new and progressive". Private school administrators argue that if the Maoists want to reform education they should start with pressuring the government to improve the quality of public schools.

But the Maoists have seized on a popular dissatisfaction with the way schools are run. And this is something on which everyone from Baburam Bhattarai, parents, Nepal's donors, and even the government agree. However, instead of pushing the government to reform government schools all three student unions have targeted private schools to make their point. They think it is a populist move since most parents complain about high fees, but some analysts say that because of the sheer numbers of parents involved the agitation could backfire on the left if the strike is prolonged or indiscriminate. Many are convinced the Maoists don't really care about what happens to education, this is just a plan to sow panic, embarrass the government.

Private schools provide better SLC exam results, they have better motivated teachers, and in most cases ensure better all-round development of the child—and they are also more expensive than public schools. Says a private school principal in Kathmandu: "We agree that not all private schools are genuinely interested in quality, but will shutting them all down improve education?" Without trained teachers, resources, curriculum and infrastructure upgrading there is unlikely to be any improvements in the public school system.

More than anyone else, it should



be Baburam Bhattarai himself who should know about the quality provided by private schools. A brilliant student, Bhattarai topped nationwide grade ten exams at the missionary-run Amar Jyoti Janata High School (or Luitel School) in Gorkha. He should also know how much motivated teachers can make a difference: his guru was a selflessly dedicated educationist from Kerala. Ironically, Bhattarai's student warriors are targeting missionary schools and Indian principals. After he graduated, Baburam's alma mater, Luitel School, itself fell victim to another radcial "reform"—the Panchayat's New Education Policy—and its quality has gone down steadily since.

Things were not as bad until about a year ago when the school used to collect annual admission fees from its 700 students. But the Maoists forced the school to return the fees, and today it is nearly bankrupt. "I tried request them not to make us do that, but they would not listen," says Guna Prasad Neupane, headmaster of Luitel School told us in Gorkha.

Tragedy

St Joseph's in Gorkha (set up in 1994) had 500 students. The highest fee it charged was Rs300 a month in grade nine. It had 45 scholarships and took in students from the indigenous kumal (potter) group for just Rs 100 a month. Another school, St Mary's Gorkha, was teaching 275 girls. Its tenth graders paid Rs 374 a month and it also had 175 scholarships for underprivileged locals. Bandipur's Notre Dame had 609 students, and those in the highest fee-paying category paid just Rs 320 a month. Contrary to Maoist claims, all three schools were non-profit, and in fact suffered losses that were subsidised. All three schools are now closed. Says a dejected educationist in Kathmandu: "This is the tragedy: the three schools that come closest to what the Maoists themselves say they want to do with peoples'education are the ones to be closed down."

And this is where the arbitrariness and indiscriminate attacks on private schools will hurt the most: in the Maoists' inability or refusal to distinguish between non-profit schools run with

dedication and vision, and schools run as pure businesses. Closing private schools will also send Nepali schools students flooding back to hill stations in India, which used to be the case before quality schools started opening in Nepal. Already, flights to Bhadrapur (gateway to Darjeeling) are booked because of parents flying out on recee trips. Some schools have been issuing abnormal numbers of transfer certificate to students who want to go to India.

Said one principal: "This is the irony, by attacking so-called Indian schools in Nepal, the Maoists will drive Nepali students to India to study." A large chunk of the Rs 5 billion that is spent by parents in sending their children to private schools could end up in India if the agitation drags on.

School administrators blame the government for not standing up to the pressure and threats from the leftist student unions, and say the problem could have been resolved if only quick decisions were taken. For their part, the UML, ML and Maoists unions are vving with each other to win over students and parents with their campaign for free reduction. They are gambling on the fact that middle class parents will be thankful to anyone who will bring down fees. And as for the Maoists, by admission of their own leaders, this really not about education at all, but part of a longterm strategy to prime students for their forthcoming "hammer and anvil" offensive in the cities.

Explains sociologist Chaitanya Mishra: "The long term goal of the advocates of free education is to disempower communities and make them disinterested in the system, which will happen once government starts playing the role of the giver. They will then cease to demand quality and education will go to the dogs." Mishra says free education benefits those that can pay for schooling more than those that cannot.

In the quiet corridors of a private school in Kathmandu this week, the principal showed us empty classrooms, and said: "We are waiting to see what happens. We may have to cut fees, but we can't go beyond a certain point where our school ceases have its soul." •

with reports by Shree Bhakta Khanal in

Gorkha and Tanahu

Bandipur's sorrow

ROBIN PIY

After the district headquarters shifted to Damauli in 1968, Bandipur became a ghost town. The economy collapsed and the whole demographic profile changed. Most people migrated to places like Narayanghat, Dumre, Kathmandu, and Damauli. The revival of Bandipur came in the form of a missionary school called Notre Dame opened by Japanese nuns in 1985. The school provided quality education for over 15 years. But it has been forced to close down because of threats from the Maoists. Bandipur now has an uphill battle ahead, the future of the local economy and even the town are uncertain.

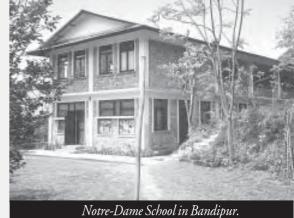
Notre Dame School had 609 students, half from Bandipur and the rest are from neighbouring towns. The school provided full and partial scholarships to about 120 students, and fees were affordable. Maoists demanded that the school close down citing three reasons: it was an attempt to "colonise" students, it was private, and it was a for-profit institution.

Notre Dame is indeed a private institution, as are so many other schools. But there is no attempt at "colonisation"—adherence to Christianity was not an obligation. As for it being a business venture, the heavily subsidised fees meant the school ran at a loss—up to Rs 80,000 a month--which was covered by donations from abroad.

The school actively gave back to the community, while holding the Bandipur economy together by the mere fact of its presence. There are eight hostels in the town accommodating 200 students and there are many who rent flats. The presence of Notre Dame has allowed

people in Bandipur to invest huge amounts of money in hostels, shops, dairy farms, orange farms etc, and many wholesale shops rely on their product being purchased by the hostels. The residents of Bandipur were hopeful their town would grow again, thanks to a strong economy.

The school helped locals hone animal husbandry and dairy farming techniques. The support staff are all from the area, usually underprivileged people like widows who would otherwise find it hard to make ends meet. Children around the school didn't



need to send their children to Kathmandu or a below-par government school which, as it turns out, will now be unable to absorb all of Notre Dame's students.

Teachers—Nepalis—will lose their jobs. With schools outside the Valley closing down, chances of teachers and merchants finding new avenues are none too bright. After the closure, unofficial estimates say migration out of Bandipur will decrease the population by 30 to 40 percent. Because the school was there, there were three bus connections a day between Kathmandu and Bandipur—without it, who knows. The school brought telephone lines and newspapers. The only thing left now will be the slate quarries and the orange orchards. People in Bandipur do not want Notre Dame closed.



RIZ NEW

Stocks tumble

Commercial bank shares took a downturn last week, causing the Nepal Stock Exchange Index (NEPSE) to fall by about 20 points to 331.7 on 18 May, down from 351.1 the week before. Commercial banks are the most heavily traded stocks on the NEPSE and so any change in prices is directly reflected in the NEPSE. The only bank whose prices did not fall was the Nepal Arab Bank. Brokers say one reason for the drop in prices and demand for banking sector shares is the new regulation that comes into force mid-July (NT # 00). Among others, the regulation requires banks to hold more money as provision for losses and capital adequacy. The prices of banking stocks were bearish since an earlier central bank directive requiring banks to increase paid-up capital to Rs 500 million, which most banks met by issuing bonus shares. Investors bought bank shares because of the possibility of getting bonus shares and also because of the low interest banks offered on savings. Banking sector shares dropped by a total of almost 30 points last week. The NEPSE last took a similar fall in early March when insurance and finance companies—the other major group traded—went into a tailspin and caused the index to fall 22 percentage points. The group continues to remain low, and dipped one percent last week. The manufacturing group did not fare better-its index dropped three points.

Aqua vs Aqua Smile

A battle royal is brewing between Aqua, one of Nepal's most successful bottled water companies, and a rather cheeky new competitor that has begun selling a product with a name many find too similar to the older brand, to be a coincidence. The new entrant, Aqua Smile, also claims to use a similar purification technology—the reverse osmosis that Aqua promotes in its ads. Sources at Aqua say the company, which has spent millions on publicity is so angry at the government for permitting a new product with such a similar name, that they might sue the government for losses. KB Ghimere, managing director, of Asian Drinks P, makers of Smile, is unconcerned. "Aqua is generic for water and our brand has a Smile, that's how we are registered," he says.

Visit Nepal for a Maruti

The Nepal Tourism Board has changed gears. Look at this ad which appeared in the *Times of India* on 18 May, and you'll know what we're talking about. Maruti is offering a free holiday to Nepal to anyone buying a Maruti 800 paying IRs125 a day—that



something about the financing plan it offers. Good start NTB

OPINION

by PAUL D. GROSSMAN

To whom it may concern

ince my first visit to Nepal in 1991 I have not seen a level of discontent with the current political and social environment as I am seeing in the last year and especially the last six months. In the last week alone I have seen bandhs which closed traffic and the entire city, and attacks on schools, individuals and police, there appears to be an overwhelming need, often competitive, to demonstrate and consolidate power among political groups in a negative and destructive way. Obviously, there is overwhelming anger and frustration, but these are negative ways of dealing with this: strikes and bandhs which demonstrate no positive vision, no effort, and result in . . . nothing.

Attacks which are violent and destructive prove that the acting parties are frustrated and have gained some power, but that is all. Strikes affect all people, but considering that the communist groups' greatest support comes from rural areas and the poor who live hand to mouth as it is, these actions have a profound effect on those they are intended to help. Being unable to work for one day brings them one day closer to disaster. Crippling the economy is not a viable method of bringing the current administration to its knees. Members of the government are the least likely to be affected while members of the police force, for example, who are not rich or powerful and likely have taken a dangerous job to support their families, will be affected greatly.

A viable political movement must act not only out of negative impulses, but also according to their values and in a manner which demonstrates something about their ability to use power. It is about character. It is about "walking your talk", brothers It is easy to destroy. Harder, and more important, is building a vision for the future and acting on it.

and sisters. Imagine a political group calling a nwe kind of bandh as an act of positive change: cleaning up Kathmandu's streets, a music concert in which the proceeds benefit some worthy group or area, repainting schools, planting gardens, a bicycle repair workshop, a day of repairing auto rickshaws and motorcycles to make them less polluting. Such actions are not concessions to the government, they are acts of leadership and civic mindedness. A true leader is one who sees what needs to be done and does it, one who does not wait for conditions to be perfect or expects it to be easy, or waits for others to begin first. Someone who acts according to their values and demonstrates strength and vision that others can believe in. Some of the greatest leaders of the last 40 years—Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama—have demonstrated this through lifetimes of positive action. What do Nepal's leftist political organisations display? A predilection for destruc-

It may be true that agents of meaningful change must necessarily begin with demonstrations of discontent and expressions of frustration. But such things are merely an early stage. After that, organisations must move ahead with the far harder work of creating something new. The power achieved is far more solid and profound. Anger is a deep yet fleeting emotion, but the forces that drive positive change are vision,

willpower and tenacity, elements of character, not temporal emotions like anger or frustration. If a day should come when the current political landscape includes representation or government from communist groups, they will have to contend with the far greater task of providing for a constituency with a completely destroyed economy and much-reduced foreign aid. And that will be difficult to handle unless they start building a positive agenda and demonstrate that publicly now.

In fact, there has never been a better opportunity for political parties to demonstrate positive political will and leadership. No one wants Nepal to become a blank spot on the tourist map like Kashmir, or be like Bangladesh where too-frequent bandhs have become a barrier to foreign investment. But that may be the future. Destruction is an easy way to temporarily feel the power and potential that we have when we organise into groups. My interest and one I believe is shared by all political movements, is creating positive social change. I have no interest in which movements gain power and lead this country; only in that whoever does so leads Nepal down a positive path in accordance with their values and with the legitimate support of their constituents. We need leadership based on a persuasive vision for the future, not on fear, violence, coercion, destruction and shortterm thinking. ♦

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Private education, public diktat



The conditions that make educational institutions an easy target for Nepal's revolutionaries are the very ones that would have failed us anyway, in ten, fifteen, twenty years.

t is difficult for your Beed to be amusing this week. It seems to me as if the vendetta against an ungoverning government has found in schools one of its most singular and effective targets. This is terribly depressing-hereweare, banking on an educated generation to come so we can all move on in tangible, important, necessary ways, and this is how we have been safeguarding and developing our resources. Are the developments of the last few weeks what it takes to shake us out of our complacence and make us realise that those conditions that make educational institutions an easy-and almost defensible—target of Nepal's revolutionaries are the very ones that would have failed us anyway, in ten, fifteen, twenty years.

Private education isn't some newfangled institution we don't know what to do with. Until the government intervened in the seventies and the eighties, it was the only kind there was. Of course, what the state's intervention really did, due to the ineffectiveness of the National Education System Plan, was encourage the growth of private schools. In 1984 the ratio of public schools to private schools was 30:1 at the lower-secondary level and 5:1 in the secondary level. This is now 1:1.

As this dependence grew, private schools mushroomed virtually unregulated. No five-year plans dealt

with them and they inspired no policy tomes concerning their number or the quality of education they offered. People will often say to this "Ah, but you see, the growth of private schools has helped in keeping resources within Nepal that would otherwise have flown out with our students." This is a fine sentiment, but let's be a little hard-nosed: at what cost to the quality of education was this happening?

A cost far too high to justify. Private education is a sellers' market, and even parents who would like to form associations and engage with their children's schools on these and other issues are scared to imperil their children's school careers by appearing to be nosy troublemakers. Every admission season parents must call anyone they know, including this Beed, and anxiously keep at them to help in their children's admission. Parents—the customers in the economic sense—can't ask for a price-cut. Once again it is the issue of regulation. Of course I also know of schools that charge high fees, but also incur high costs and after being in operation for a decade, still barely break even.

If schools are to be run like businesses, then they ought at least be run like *good* businesses. The fee structure should be determined on the "rate of return" principle. If a private power developer is asked to assume a certain rate of return on its

investment, why shouldn't an imagined school-fee structure be similarly regulated. Regulation and scrutiny would ensure schools couldn't charge lab fees or computer fees in the absence of either. At least fly-by-night private operators would have to realise that they are held responsible for the delivery of an important social service.

And it isn't just the fate of students at risk, also the investments in over 8,000 schools. Even at an average of Rs 2.5 million per school, there's an approximate investment of Rs 20 billion in the sector as a whole, not even beginning to count the financial institutions, service providers and intermediaries linked to it.

There simply must be an end to this impasse. There must be regulation by the government and selfregulation by associations. We need to finally talk about minimum standards of quality and facilities, and what constitutes a reasonable fee. The aspect of charges of fees needs to be addressed and of course the system of discouraging rampant mushrooming of schools. And private schools need to metamorphose from family enterprises to socially responsible institutions with avenues of public participation, whether in the form of trusts, or even public equity participation.

Readers can discuss issues at arthabeed@yahoo.com

Shangrila hotel

NEPALI ECONOMY

Caught reading

A new generation of Nepali readers, writers and illustrators are prodding publishers.

the demand for children's books grow across the country. Awareness campaigns, the promotion of informal education and teacher training programs have all helped. But the single largest factor have been exhibitions of children's books in 18 towns across Nepal organised by Bal Sansar, a not-for-profit clearinghouse run by the Himal Association. "In most places people had no idea so many books were published for children," recalls Dadin Pandey, marketing manager of Bal Sansar. The organisation says some 70,000 books worth Rs 500 million changed hands as a result of its 2000/2001 exhibitions. "Distributors in places like Dang, Bhairahawa and Surkhet now sell over Rs 8,000 worth children's books a month," says Pandey. Nepal has twelve children's literature publishers and around 170 titles from all these houses are available through Bal Sansar. The organisation has also put together a children's book bank with more than 300 titlesvirtually all the children's books published in Nepal in the last ninety years. Govinda Shrestha of Ratna Pustak Bhandar, one of the oldest private publishers in the country says his firm actively reviews books once a year, discarding some, and adding six new titles.

Unsurprisingly, for an industry not known for its production values, straightforward prose is the most

common genre. "More than 80 percent of the trade books for children are collections of stories or of poems and songs," says Manesh Shrestha, coordinator of Bal Sansar. Forget about buying your children books with essays or about science, or travel subjects like these are ignored, with only two travelogues for children written in Nepali. As for illustrated books, a staple of children's publishing in other places, Shiva Shrestha of the Himalayan Book Centre says: "Children love colourful books and comics and that is what I sell most. But all in English or Hindi." Shrestha remembers a pretty popular attempt at producing Nepali illustrated books 15 years ago—the low quality two-colour comic books published on leftover paper from the stock acquired for educational materials by the government-run textbook publisher Janak Sikchhya Samagri Kendra.

Part of the reason the market is so dismal is that writing for children here is generally awash with narrow and outdated portrayals of ethics, morality and beliefs. "We need to produce good writers and illustrators and ensure quality. Most Nepali children's books are sexist, classist and too didactic. Why all the heavy moralising and boring 'messages'?" asks Bimal Nibha, a researcher at Bal Sansar. To this end, Bal Sansar is reviewing its collection to resurrect good titles and banish the bad. And to ensure

better books in the future, it organises training, interaction and networking programmes for authors, illustrators and publishers. Other organisations are doing their bit: the Nepal Children's Literature Society (NESCIL) has an annual award for children's writers and illustrators, Akhyan gets children excited about books via performance art, and the Hatemalo Sanchar has built a network of young readers across the country through its magazine. Ram Babu Subedi, a Nepali teacher and poet, has been looking closely at the development of the industry as well as children's reading habits. "I'd guess that around 15 percent of children between standards four and seven are regular readers and purchasers of books directed at them," he says. Subedi adds that increasingly, parents are also encouraging their children to read in Nepali.

General consensus is that a market good for Nepali children will also be good for writers. "We have the latest technology here. There are already benchmarks for quality printing in Nepal. Now we need to develop a culture of books here," says Govinda Shrestha, of Ratna Pustak Bhandar. "And", adds Shiva Shrestha of the Himalayan Book Centre, "to aid in this, publishers must do their bit like is done in India—there you can get quality story books for Rs 25." The way things are going, distributors won't desperately have to wait for books coming in from Banaras anymore.

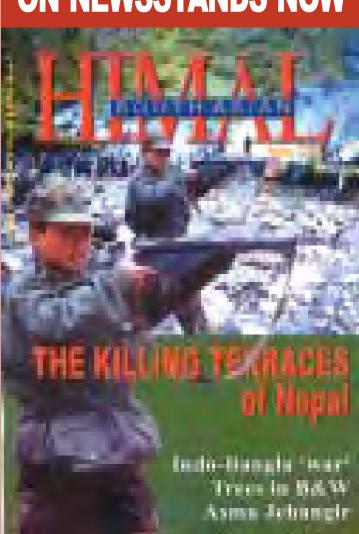
SALIL SUBEDI

very Saturday in a traditional Newari house on Jochhne, sixty-something Shanta Das Manandhar listens, reads and laughs with 20 schoolchildren who share their poetry, prose and essays. The children take their work home and to various publications, and Shanta Das,

writer, translator, illustrator, and publisher of Bal Koseli publications established in 1979, waits for the next weekend. "Nepali kids have been denied both respect and books for long," says Manandhar. "The economy doesn't support children's literature and we lack a reading culture," he says. Even so, he agrees, things are rapidly looking up.

The last few years have seen

ON NEWSSTANDS NOW



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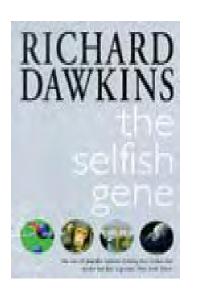




The UK's Royal Society is getting less stuffy—this week, they admitted the inventor of the Internet and a very popular science writer.

JAMES MEEK

he British inventor of the world wide web, Timothy Berners-Lee, has been awarded fellowship of the Royal Society, the UK's highest scientific honour, in a move suggesting Britain's most exclusive club is heeding criticism that it is out of touch. Professor Berners-Lee, now based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US, invented the web's address system and layout in Switzerland in 1990, revolutionising the way



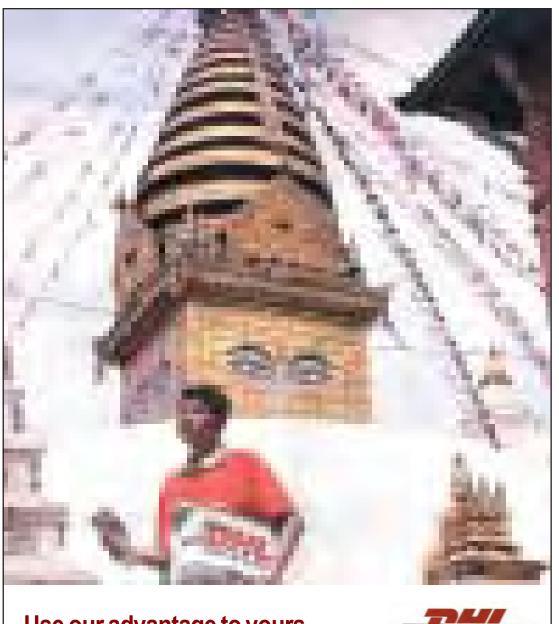
information is presented and accessed. Yet the 360-year-old Royal Society, notoriously rigorous and traditional in its determination to admit only the elite, failed to consider him for membership. In March, the new president of the society, Sir Robert May, complained that the organisation had given Professor Berners-Lee a medal, but it had not occurred to any of its members to put his name forward for the ultimate accolade of fellowship itself.

Prof Berners-Lee is among 43 fellows whose election to the Royal Society was announced earlier this week. The citation says that his work has "revolutionised communication via the Internet, enabling universal access to information placed on the web, and has had a profound economic impact." This is not the only sign that the Royal Society is taking more account of scientist's success in catching the public imagination, as well as their academic prowess. Biologist Richard Dawkins, author of The Selfish Gene, will also be awarded fellowship, along with Ian Stewart, the mathematician and expert in chaos and complexity.

Professor Dawkins, who holds the chair in the public understanding of science at Oxford University, said he is delighted. "I'm grateful for what is still a genuine honour, one which has not been devalued, as, for example, knighthoods have by honouring the likes of Elton John and Cliff Richard."

(Guardian)



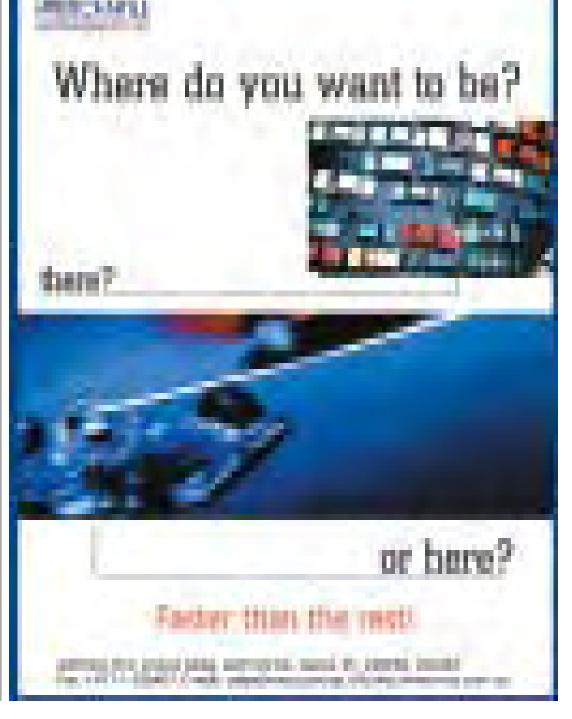






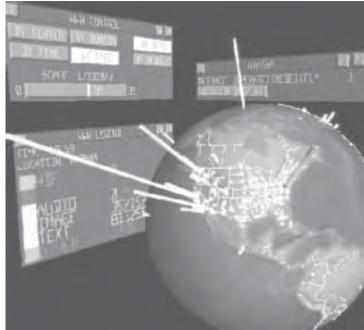
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Electronic espionage and the EU



GUMISAI MUTUME IN WASHINGTON

European parliamentary committee hit a brick wall this week in their efforts to question US officials about alleged economic spying. The group was in Washington to investigate the existence of an electronic spying network codenamed Echelon. The United States denies its existence, but Australia has admitted to being a partner in the effort, which reportedly also includes Britain, Canada and New Zealand. The network allegedly monitors global telephone, fax, and email communications.

The committee had been eager to test suspicions that intelligence gleaned this way is passed on to US corporations to enable them to beat their European competitors to business contracts. Carlos Coelho, who headed the European delegation, charged in a statement that the

OPINION

group's meetings with the State and Commerce departments were cancelled at the last minute, and that

US intelligence officials declined to

meet the committee although

made in advance.

arrangements to do so had been

The Central Intelligence Agency denied the accusation. "There was never any commitment with the CIA to meet with them," CIA spokesperson Anya Guilsher said. "The US intelligence community has basically said everything that it can say on this issue and would not want to go into it any further with a foreign committee." Officials at the US National Security Agency (NSA), however, confirmed that they had refused to meet the Europeans because they had nothing new to say on the matter. "We believe that [NSA Director] General [Michael] Hayden's testimony before the US intelligence oversight committees last year provides a

After the Cold War comes Echelon, an electronic spying network.

synopsis of the NSA's position on the issues at hand," the agency said. Hayden told a Congressional intelligence committee last year that his organisation collects information only for foreign intelligence purposes and provides it only to authorised government recipients.

Last August, however, US Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney told Britain's Oxford Union debating society that Echelon indeed monitors global communications. McKinney acknowledged that EU fears about the use of Echelon for corporate espionage were founded and that information gathered by the network had been used "to defeat an Airbus bid to supply jumbo jets to Saudi Arabia in favour of a Boeing tender. Boeingwon the multi-billion-dollar contract thanks to stolen information supplied by Echelon." On the strength of similar admissions and numerous investigations, the European parliament mandated a 36member committee last year to verify Echelon's existence, determine whether Echelon contravenes privacy laws, and assess the risks to European industry.

"The Europeans probably know more than enough already about Echelon," said US author William Blum, who has written about the network. "And there is no question that the US is using it for commercial advantage, but the Europeans are doing it too." According to the Europeans, Echelon monitors the international telecommunications satellites used by telephone companies

in most countries, regional communication satellites, and land-based and under-sea telecom systems. The network is said to monitor traffic randomly and zero in on conversations and messages containing keywords programmed into Echelon's computers. Those conversations and messages are then recorded and forwarded to the countries doing the spying.

The US and Britain have repeatedly denied the existence of such a programme despite admissions by another member of the group, Australia, that its Defence Signals Directorate forms part of the network. The NSA was required to report on the legal basis for Echelon and similar activities under a law enacted by President Clinton. But the agency's subsequent report gave few details about the system's operations and legality. In a series of studies released last year, the EU noted that unlike many electronic spy systems developed after the Cold War, Echelon was designed primarily for non-military targets, including "governments, organizations and businesses in virtually every country." Because most economic information is now exchanged electronically, privacy protection is of increasing concern. Almost every advanced nation practises intelligence involving the covert interception of foreign communications, experts say. Echelon is widely believed to be the largest effort of this kind, followed by a programme run by Russia. ♦ (IPS)

by CHARLES GESHEKTER

AIDS by any other name

he United Nations calls AIDS the "worst infectious disease catastrophe since bubonic plague". US President George W Bush last week pledged \$200 million to a UN fund to combat AIDS globally. The money will go into a \$7-10 billion kitty UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is putting together for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. But scientific data do not support the view that what is called AIDS in Africa has a viral cause.

Let's start with a few basic facts about HIV, AIDS, African record-keeping l socio-economic realities. What are we counting? The WHO defines an AIDS case in Africa as a combination of fever, persistent cough, diarrhoea, and a 10 percent loss of body weight in two months. No HIV test is needed. It is impossible to distinguish these common symptoms—I've had all in Somalia from those of malaria, tuberculosis, or the indigenous diseases of impoverished lands. In North America and Europe, AIDS is defined as 30-odd diseases occurring in people who test "HIV-positive." Dressed up as HIV/AIDS, old sicknesses have been reclassified—since 1994, tuberculosis has been considered an AIDS indicator disease in Africa. The Global Burden of Disease Study says Africa maintains the lowest levels of reliable vital statistics for any continent—1.1 percent. When experts are asked to prove actual cases of AIDS, terrifying numbers dissolve into vague estimates of HIV infection. The most reliable statistics on AIDS in Africa are in the WHO's Weekly Epidemiological Record. The total number of AIDS cases reported in Africa since 1982, when AIDS record-keeping began, is 794,444—starkly at odds with the latest scare figures which claim 2.3 million AIDS deaths in 1999 alone. More reliable local statistics rarely exist. I asked Alan Whiteside of the University of Natal, a top AIDS researcher in South Africa, for details of the alleged 100,000 AIDS deaths in South Africa in the last year. "We don't keep any of those statistics," he said.

And South Africa is more advanced than most African countries in that it conducts HIV tests in surveys of about 18,000 pregnant Africans annually and then extrapolates the HIV-positive numbers. There are two problems with this: The women are given a blood test called ELISA, which frequently gives a "false positive" result (pregnancy can trigger a false alarm). Secondly, many endemic infections trigger the same antibodies that cause positive reactions on HIV antibody tests. Beauty Nongila, principal of a rural school in north Zululand, said to me that having more toilets would improve the health of her 408 students. She struggles to provide her underfed kids with a spartan lunch on eight cents a day. As for the AIDS crisis, she believes dental problems, respiratory illnesses, diarrhea, and chronic hunger are far more vexing.

Figures about children orphaned by AIDS also bear closer examination. The average fertility rate among African women is 5.8 and the risk of death in



Wearing red ribbons and "condomising" the continent will do little for the health of Africans.

childbirth is one in three. The African life span is not long—50 for women and 47 for men—so on a continent of 650 million people, it is possible that over 10 million children have lost their mothers before they reached high school age. Long-standing ailments largely the product of poverty are blamed on a sexually transmitted virus. Zealously but without evidence, condom manufacturers and AIDS fund-raisers attribute those symptoms to an "African sexual culture."

Wearing red ribbons or calling to condomise the continent will do little for the health of Africans. A 1998 study of pregnant, HIV-positive women in Tanzania showed that providing them with inexpensive micronutrient supplements was beneficial during and after pregnancy. AIDS activists need to consider the non-contagious, indigenous-disease explanations for "AIDS". But dysentery and malaria do not inspire headlines or fatten public health budgets. Infectious "plagues" do. Traditional public-health approaches, clean water, and improved sanitation can tackle the underlying health problems in Africa. They may not be sexy, but they will save lives. ◆ (The Globe and Mail, Tornoto)

Dr Charles Geshekter is a three-time Fulbright scholar and adviser to the US State Department and several African governments. He is an African history professor.

World Bank's Tower of Babel

WASHINGTON - Citizens' groups are deriding a World Bank effort to build the Internet's premier portal on poverty and sustainable development. The website, scheduled to open in July, will encompass over 130 topics and be the most prominent web entry point for people interested in development issues. That is the problem, say civil society groups: the project threatens to drown out smaller development players whose resources don't allow them to rival the Bank's web presence. What's more, says Alex Wilks of the Londonbased Bretton Woods Project, which monitors the Bank, the project risks becoming "an electronic tower of Babel" by trying to involve everyone and everything related to development. The Bank has got governments and the private sector on board and is now luring civil society groups in what many see as an attempt to lend credibility to an initiative that will cost \$7-10 million annually. The site aims to draw five million visitors a month by 2003. The Development Gateway will feature electronic bookstores, electronic marketplaces for the sale of goods and services, and a system to announce and award contracts. Last year 300 organisations joined Wilks's in asking the Bank to address certain questions. They say the Bank ignored their issues, including the concern that the Gateway will not be run independent of the Bank. Carlos Braga, director of the programme, says the initiative will be run by a separate foundation. Founding members—all donor governments—will be expected to contribute at least \$5 million to the project for a seat on the board and won't influence the project's editorial policy, he adds. The Bank's critics also question the institution's fitness to assume the position of principal provider of development information resources. The lender's record in poor countries, detractors say, hardly qualifies it as an expert in the field. (IPS)

Asylum in central Europe?

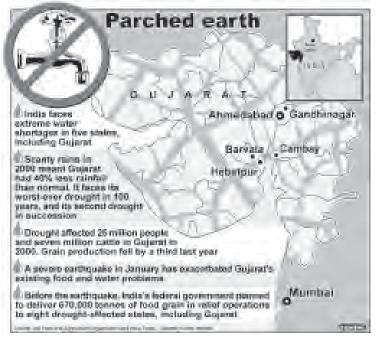
PRAGUE - Central European coutnries, which until 1989 were exporters of refugees, now receive increasing numbers of applications for asylum. The Czech Republic, which has received about 34,000 requests for asylum during the last decade, had 2,018 recognised refugees in October 2000. About 1.5 percent of the applicants in 2000—134 people were granted refugee status. Like Poland and Hungary, also candidates for EU membership, the Czech Republic is seen more as a "transit country" both by asylum seekers and socalled "economic refugees", rather than a destination country. "Unofficial estimates put the figure of those who leave after a couple of weeks or months at 60-70 percent," says Pavel Tychtl, director of Prague-based NGO Organisation for Aid to Refugees (OPU). Provisional UNHCR numbers for 2000 show Hungary received over 7,500 requests for asylum in 2000, while in 1999, the year of the Kosovo crisis, the figure stood at 11,499. Tychtl has no idea when the "transit" status will change. "It usually happens when the country goes through an economic boom and has a strong tradition of a good social system," he says. Although part of the EU, Spain and Italy are also considered transit countries. Citing a German secret service document, a recent issue of Der Spiegel reported an estimated 200,000 refugees in the Czech Republic are planning to enter the EU illegally via the Czech-German border. NGOs fear tougher measures could limit refugees' access to the asylum procedure. "The refugees have to have access to the asylum procedure, therefore, they have to have access to the territory," Tychtl says. "If they don't, there's no point in having a good reception and integration system for asylum seekers and refugees." (IPS)

Cannes conscience

CANNES - The Cannes Film Festival was denounced by the Rev Jesse Jackson earlier this week. "The cultural apartheid here reflects money rather than talent. There must be more African-American films here—there are none this year. And there must be a greater commitment to those small and poorer nations who have great stories to tell but limited means to tell them," said Jackson, founder of the Rainbow Coalition and still the most prominent black voice in US politics. Jackson, 59, came to Cannes for the world premiere of the film The Country Preacher: Keeping Hope Alive, a video diary about a year in his life from 1999 to 2000. It includes footage from his days as a student leader 40 years ago. While organisers will be aware that not one of the 23 films up for the Palme d'Or is made by a black film-maker. Jackson's attack on Cannes was widely ignored in this citadel of privilege. European, American and Asian cinema are well represented at Cannes, but black filmmakers are not. Still, the festival can't be accused of peddling trite cinema on well-worn themes: Iranian Abbas Kiarostami's documentary about AIDS in Uganda was screened for the first time here last week as was Claude Lanzmann's Sobibor, October 14, 1943, about the only successful uprising in a Nazi death camp. And finally there was the world premiere of Hijack Stories, a "social" film made by a white Afrikaner set in Soweto. (Guardian)

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Laughing their woes away



KHANAK PAREKH

ebatpur, Gujarat, India-Gambhirsinh Rajput proudly points to a muddy pit. It is not easy to locate immediately—many similar pits pockmark the bottom of what was once a pond. He picks up a rusty tin container. Tying a string to it, he lowers the can into the hole and draws out some water. It is so muddy, dirty and polluted that only a very thirsty person would drink it. Gambhirsinh Rajput does.

"This is how we get water," he says with a chuckle. It will take another hour or so for the water to be replenished from the springs. This traditional method of obtaining water from a dry river or pond by digging pits is called virdo. It is a slow

process—only a few litres are collected at a time. Rajput's predicament epitomises life in the village of Hebatpur, three hours by road from Ahmedabad in prosperous Gujarat.

Large parts of Gujarat's Kutch district were devastated by an earthquake 26 January, killing over 20,000 people and attracting much international aid and media attention. But Gujarat's current drought, the worst in 100 years, which is particularly affecting the regions of Saurashtra and Kutch, has not hit the headlines. The state government's much-publicised response, the Saurashtra Pipeline Project, passes barely five km from Hebatpur, whose population of 8,000 lives on a few tin **Conditions in drought-hit areas of Gujarat** are so bad, that many villagers find laughter the most appropriate response.

cans of water everyday.

Once an agricultural community, the people of Hebatpur can no longer grow crops or look after their few head of cattle. "Since our troubles began we have been writing, meeting, demanding, even rioting at the office of the Water Supply Board at Barvala [the nearest town with government offices]," says Madarsinh. "We asked for water to be supplied by tankers, but nobody pays any attention to our problems. Until last year the Board sent us two tankers of water [per day] for the entire village. On paper they showed five. Our politicians have disappeared. Not even media persons care to come here."

Sixty-year-old Kanjibhai points to a disused plastic pipe at the edge of the pond. It was installed by government engineers from the Saurashtra Pipeline Project and meant to bring water. This forlorn pipe sums up the situation in the village. Officials of the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board claim the pipeline provides them with as much as 50,000 litres of water per day. "This they say is 50,000 litres of water! It flows like cow's urine," says Kanjibhai, pointing at the pipe and breaking into uncontrollable laughter. The drip-drop from the pipe lasts for an hour or two-maybe once a day or maybe once a week, no one really

knows. With no other source of water in the vicinity and no livelihood possible, thousands have migrated with their families and cattle to other regions of Gujarat in search of water, food and perhaps work. One way to access water is to travel 10 km to the village of Devpara where the pipeline is breached and water leaks continuously. The accidental water-hole serves as an oasis where people fill up pots with dean water and, every now and then, engage in the luxury of bathing and washing. Even here, the wait for water can be long and tedious.

Water is not the only scarce thing in Hebatpur. Anything one commonly associates with a village of similar size in a country like India is absent here. There is no approach road to the village—only mud tracks leading to farms. Electricity is rarely, if ever, available. A village telephone remains an elusive dream. There is no primary health centre, and no bank. This is a village with a long list of no's. Still, the one thing Hebatpur does not lack is the ability to laugh. Referring to the much worse conditions in villages such as Mingalpur, Jhankhi, Bhangadh and Bavaliyala, lying in the east towards the GulfofCambay (Khambhat), one villager said, "We can at least shave and change. There they look like pre-historic people or even worse." ♦ (Gemini)

ANALYSIS

by DAVID WALL

Missiles, Mickey Mouse, and North Korea

PYONGYANG: The most predictable thing about North Korea is its unpredictability. One day last week saw the son of its Dear Leader Kim Jong II arrested while entering Japan on a false passport (supposedly to take his son to Tokyo's Disneyland), the next day brought a promise to maintain its moratorium on missile testing until 2003 as well as continue sales of missile

technologies to countries like Iran. But there is a second, unchanging element in North Korean affairs: its basket-case economy.

One million people may have died in the North Korean famine of 1995 to 1997. Now the World Food Program fears another is looming the country's agricultural output will likely fall to l .8 million tons of grain, far short of the 4.8 million tons needed to supply the meagre ration of seven oz a day (half the daily allowance for those in UN refugee camps) ordinary North Koreans receive. National food stocks ran out in January and South Korean food aid will run out this month.

While the World Food Programme feeds North Korea's six million children, 17 million adults must fend for themselves. (A"military first" programme diverts most supplies to the country's huge standing army and bureaucracy.) To survive, many North Koreans forage for edible roots and leaves and make soups from cabbage stalks and vegetable waste. Those who survive will be more malnourished than ever, and the percentage of children whose growth is stunted will increase from today's two-thirds.

North Korea's next mini-harvest, not due until late June, will not even be as good as last year's abysmal one. At the same time, South Korea will reduce the amount of fertiliser it provides for rice planting from 300,000 tons to 200,000 tons. Even the reduced aid was disputed by people in Seoul who argued for conditions on improved North/South relations.

This appalling situation results from North Korea's bizarre form of socialism, juche. Kim Jong II, North Korea's current leader continues to promote juche, his father's brainchild, in almost 900 books and articles. Despite shunning Marxism/Leninism in favour of juche in 1967, Soviet subsidies kept North Korea's economy above water until 1991. After the collapse of the USSR the economy went into a tailspin with floods and droughts in 1995, 1996 and 1997. He avoids talking about it at home, but Kim may now believe that juche is a losing philosophy. So he's turned to China for advice.

During his first of two missions to China last year, Kim Jong Il asked President Jiang Zemin about how to move towards a market economy yet maintain an authoritarian dictatorship. My pleasure, said Jiang. First, firmly suppress political dissent as soon as it emerges. Second, examine our stock exchanges and special economic zones. On his second trip to China, which

North Korea's appalling conditions owe a lot to the country's bizarre form of socialism, but can asking China for advice help?



followed Kim's historic meeting with President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea last June, North Korea's leader was taken to Shanghai by Premier Zhu Rongji and shown its stock exchange and the vast Pudong development zone No one doubts that Jiang Zemin knows how to maintain an authoritarian regime. But is he the best source of advice on how to revive North Korea's economy Probably not: the policies that transformed China over the last two decades are unlikely to work in North Korea. It will be along time before the Dear Leader can convince his followers that a stock market, with its demand for corporatisation, even privatisation, is at all connected to the primary stage of juche.

Convincing themselves that reform was unavoidable was one of the major feats of China's leadership under Deng.

In China, economic zones—especially the five Special Economic Zones and the Pudong area of Shanghai—work because they were envisioned as laboratories with a controlled environment for economic, social, even political experiments. Deng Xiao Ping, who gave the zones the go-ahead, understood that opening China's economy to the outside world to improve the welfare of ordinary Chinese would inevitably attract "mosquitoes." Mosquitoes did fly in, bringing corruption, criminal activities, progressive and liberal ideas and an awareness of what life is like in the rest of the world.

Life in North Korea is hermetically sealed. The only radios permitted in North Korea can only be tuned to North Korean stations. Few North Koreans are allowed to visit Pyongyang, whereas millions of Chinese travel and study abroad each year. When North Korea approached Swedish academics to request training in business management, they insisted it take place in conditions as near to those in North Korea as possible. So the training will take place not in Stockholm, but in communist Hanoi.

Unlike Deng, North Korea's leadership from Kim down shows little awareness of such "mosquitoes". They will not find them acceptable. Cabbage stalk soup and grass salad are likely to dominate the diet of long-suffering North **Koreans for a long time.** ♦ (Project Syndicate)

David Wall is senior research fellow for Asia at the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

The lungs of the world

JAKARTA - Desperate to stem the alarming logging in Indonesia, environmentalists want donors to make a moratorium on industrial logging the prerequisite for fresh borrowings. Indonesia's donors have already been asking the government to take action—when donors pledged \$4.8 billion in loans for Indonesia's 2001 budget, the government promised a moratorium on primary forest conversion, ending illegal logging, restructuring the wood processing industry, decentralising the forestry sector and developing a forestry programme. But even forestry minister Marzuki Usman admits the government has failed to carry out these reforms. Indonesia's forests, considered the world's lungs, have been shrinking by 2.4 million hectares in the past two years, more than in previous years. 72 percent of Indonesia's tropical forests have vanished, and over half the remaining 28 percent are threatened by illegal logging. The country suffers an annual deficit of \$2.5 billion from the forestry sector on lost revenues from illegal logging, say NGOs and government agencies. The overcapacity of Indonesia's wood processing firms is one reason illegal logging is rampant. International environment groups accuse donor countries of indirect support for Indonesian pulp and paper facilities, which in the 1990s were responsible for widespread deforestation, the destruction of local people's rights to land and livelihood and the armed suppression of dissent. Indonesia can learn from its neighbours. Thailand banned all logging in 1998 after years of blockades by rural communities seeking to protect their forestbased livelihoods, and following devastating floods and landslides linked to logging. China banned logging in its remaining native forests in 1998 after major flooding in lowland areas near the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. In 1999, the government of Papua New Guinea placed a moratorium on the grant of new logging concessions due to social and environmental problems. (IPS)

Ethnic row in Malaysia

PENANG – As in many places, university admission in Malaysia depends on grades, involvement in sport and in student societies and ethnicity. Now, there's a growing controversy over ethnic quotas for university admissions that mandate a ratio of 55 bumiputra (ethnic Malay and other indigenous communities) to 45 Chinese and Indian Malaysians. Of Malaysia's 24 million people, bumiputras are 60 percent, Chinese Malaysians 25 percent, and Indian Malaysians about eight percent. Earlier this months an education ministry official said intake into universities had dipped by 15 percent due to a shortfall of qualified bumiputra science students. A few days later, Prime Minister Mahathir announced the government was prepared to abolish the quota policy if that was what the people wanted. Then the same official produced new statistics showing that all available places in public local universities were filled and there were over 10,000 eligible bumiputra pupils who failed to secure admission. Finally, Education Minister Musa Mohamad said the government was considering raising the bumiputra quota to 66 percent to reflect the latest ethnic composition of Malaysia. Only a few universities closely reflect the 55:45 formula, while the bumiputra intake in other institutions may be higher. Statistics are difficult to obtain, and few are prepared to probe deeper into the woes of Malaysia's education system. These include low teacher morale caused by poor salaries, and lack of opportunities for promotion. Many top students who fail to enter public universities and cannot afford private education locally are offered scholarships abroad. Many work and settle overseas—a brain drain Malaysia can ill afford. The debate sheds little light on how far these policies have helped economically disadvantaged groups—the rural and urban poor, the Orang Asli or indigenous people, plantation communities and squatters. (IPS)

What not to eat in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka has a brave new regulation—a sweeping

ban on any type of genetically modified (GM) food, organism, culture, additive or preservative. Foods that may now only be imported with a permit include soybean and its products, corn and maize flour, tomato and tomato products, potatoes, cheese, beet sugar, bakers' and brewers' yeast. There's a major omission, though: wheat. Sri Lanka's agriculture is largely ricebased, but fewer Sri Lankan meals revolve around rice today. People are turning to a cheap and convenient staple, breads made



from refined American wheat flour. Health Ministry officials say there's no overwhelming evidence of GM contamination in wheat crops and that imposing restrictions on wheat could seriously affect food supply to the country. The world's most startling and controversial genetic modification 'successes' were reported in corn, maize, soya and tomato. The WHO will release its report on GM food and testing by 2003, by which time Sri Lanka will be ready to review its ban. But genetic modification has already arrived in Sri Lanka— a type of GM carp has been introduced to its inland lakes. This carp's huge appetite, dominating size and feeding habits, environmentalists fear, will soon see other types of fish disappearing from their natural habitat. (Gemini)

Schools: The UML Line

Budhabar Saptahik, 9 May

...We have now listed the problems faced by schools and have taken up the struggle. Government schools are very disorganised, have poor standards and not attractive anymore. They have failed to develop because because of many problems including the lack of quality teachers, proper guidance, resources, and motivation, and finally, a lack of commitment and responsibility. Because of these problems, private schools have mushroomed in towns and cities, and even in villages. The government has not opened any new schools, and since the number of children who want education has shot up, private schools stepped in to fill the demand. The main problem with the private schools is that they have not been set up with a sense of duty or responsibility (as government schools are), but to make a quick buck. As a result, they do provide education, but at too high a cost. How can poor citizens of a very poor country afford such expensive education? It is vital to address the complex question of what sort of education we need and how it is to be provided. That is why our organisation, the All Nepal National Federation of Students' Unions (ANNFSU) has taken up the cause.

Abolish tuition fees in government schools

The government promised to abolish tuition fees up to the high-school level but has not taken any steps in that direction. But schools have been charging admission fees. Is it not the responsibility of the State to provide education to citizens. Education is the fundamental building block of any country. Without an educated class, no nation can move forward. But in our country, the government is just not concerned. It is an irony that education is both expensive and beyond the reach of the people in a country where over 50 percent are illiterate. Left as it is, education will remain the privilege of only the rich few. Since the nation needs and utilises educated people, it should also take responsibility for their education. We realise that right now Nepal cannot afford to provide free education at all levels. We only demand that free education be provided until middle school. We have presented our demands in a very responsible manner and if the government does not take note, then the outcome will not be good. Why can the government, which can spend billions when it comes to security, not invest in a good education system?

Reduce the high fees in private schools

The motive of private schools is to earn high profit in a very short time. Only a small percentage of these function with a sense of responsibility. They hook parents under some pretext or the other and the facilities they provide do not match the fees they charge. The students are also burdened with beliefs that do not reflect our society, our environment or our culture. They ape Western culture and society, and that makes our youth shun their responsibilities. Parents are happy when their children speak in English, even broken English. Ability to speak in English is the standard against which education is measured in our country. It is time these institutions changed from profitmaking machines to responsible society members

providing quality services. Government schools cannot meet the demand for education and it is also very difficult to imagine all private schools being nationalised immediately. So we only demand that private schools be regulated and their fees reduced.

Abolish compulsory Sanskrit

The truth is always bitter, but it must be accepted: The youth are not interested in Sanskrit. People may learn Sanskrit because they have to but they do not enjoy doing it. We are not letting our children develop properly if we force on them such a subject. It is a dead

language. Despite what Sanskrit scholars might say, mass propagation of Sanskrit is unlikely to

Abolish the National

Our national anthem is inappropriate. It actually sings praises of a person and encourages the growth of cults of personality. It also advocates population growth when what we need is family planning. It says the population should continue to grow untrammelled. This song does not make the students nationalists or patriots, or responsible and responsive towards the needs of the nation.

Increase government funding for education

The government should open more schools. The schools are already overburdened having to serve too many students. The government has been unable to invest in infrastructure and quality teachers. It should take an active interest in schools for improving which, investment is crucial. On the one hand you have parents who can't pay fees, on the other, you have an indifferent government.

Fulfil the 46 demands

We all agree the quality of education in government schools is getting from bad to worse. This can be reversed by investment in the education sector-producing qualified teachers, infrastructure and good study materials--then things will start improving. After the restoration of democracy, our organisation had submitted a list of 46 reforms concerning the education sector to the government. The students' union, with great restraint and responsibility, continues to ask the government to fulfil them. We have also put forward the solutions. We had given the government until mid-May to find solutions. Now we will have to take matters into our own hands and punish those schools and school principals who refuse to act responsibly. If the education system does not still improve, the union will devise a bigger and more powerful agitation. (Khim Lal Bhattarai in Budhabar, a weekly said to mouth the UML line)

Nepal's Talibans

Kantipur, Tuesday, 15 May



More than 8,000 private and boarding schools around the country shut down after the ANNFSU (Revolutionary), the ultra-left student body affiliated with the underground Maoists called for their closure, leaving uncertain the future of one million students and 75,000 teachers. Businesses catering to the needs of the schools, like stationers and food suppliers have also been affected.

Some points of the 15 demands that the ANNFSU (R) has put forward are valid. Parents have been raising the need for uniformity in the education standard and discontinuation of annual reenrollment fees. Of course, dialogue can be held regarding the discontinuation of the National Anthem and teaching of Sanskrit in schools, but is the ANNFSU (R) serious about talks?

The criminal nature of their actions—vandalising two schools and trying to set the principal of one of the schools on fire even as

> talks were in progress—clearly reflects their intentions. Parents have been compelled to send their children to school in India. Also ANNFSU's decision to close schools during the Chinese Premier's visit and attempts to antagonise India by targeting educational establishments

run by Indian nationals just before his arrival can't only be a coincidence. China has already indicated that it does not support the Maoist movement.

By arresting the representative of the ANNFSU (R) who had come for negotiations, the government is also open to criticism—it flouted widely accepted norms and principles that create an environment for dialogue. But even that does not compare with the deplorable ANNFSU "action" against Rupy's International and Elite's Co-Ed.

Coinciding with the school closure, the Maoists have closed the GARDEP Project in Gulmi. They have announced a dress code for women. In short, the Maoists, in the name of the movement, have revealed they are anti-education, anti-development and in favour of the oppression of women. These lead to the question: Are they going the Taliban way?

The support Maoists' have gained for thier stand against social, economic and regional inequalities and widespread corruption is faltering. They have begun outdoing government in human rights violation, there's no sign that the Maoist leadership is taking concrete steps to stop the crimes associated with the insurgency. The silence of the leadership about the parallel programmes of the Maoists—extorting money from school managements and closing them down—reflects either their helplessness or support...

Endless struggles

Janadharana National Weekly, 10May

Demands for the prime minister's resignation and the struggle to reform the education sector will affect life this Jestha [mid-May to mid-June]. We will have a lot of bandhs. The UML, with the four left parties plans to shut down the country from 27-30 May because they want the PM to resign. The Jatiya Morcha, which is close to the Maoists, is calling for a bandh on 31 May, calling it a "Black Day."The student group the ANNFSU is calling for reforms in the field of education and demands that schools be closed 14-20 May. The students' wing of the ML is doing the same from 20-31 May. Despite all these calls for bandhs, school shutdowns, struggles and agitation, the government does not seem to be doing anything.

PM, get your cash

Naya Sadak National Daily, 10 May

In Morang district there are 65 Village Development Committees (VDC) but 68 government appointed VDC secretaries. One of them is posted at the District Development

Committee (DDC) and another at the municipality but there is one who does not have an office to go to. Sources say the secretary of the Pathari VDC, Surva Mahatara, has not reported to Bhojpur where he is posted but is staying put in Pathari. Our source asks, "if the regional office of the local development ministry in Biratnagar, cannot place one VDC secretary, what is the point of having such an office?"

Meanwhile, Khadga Kumar Basnet, Chairman of the Morang DDC, has asked the prime minister to resign and come to Biratnagar to collect his old age allowance. About 10,000 people are listed for the allowance in Morang, but they have not been paid since November. Despite repeated requests the DDC says the concerned ministry has not disbursed the money.

Which gun?

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 9 May

े घटनाः विचार The government has already decided

to mobilise the army against the Maoists in some districts. The armed forces need modern arms and ammunition and there are many arms dealers who are happy to oblige. Rather, they will do almost anything to bag such a profitable contract.

Rohini Thapaliya is one of the largest arms suppliers in the country. People in some quarters say Thapaliya's offer of a deal has been rejected, but he isn't giving up without a fight. Thapaliya, the local representative of a German arms company, is using all the pressure and influence he can muster. The crown prince, who apparently tested the weapon in Chitwan in the presence of his security personnel, is said to have rejected it, but Thapaliya's file is still sitting on Defence Minister Mahesh Acharya's table. The weapon in question is the German G-36 rifle. The defence minister cannot reject those weapons or simply ignore the file because of the huge commissions that will come with a delivery of the guns. The German weapon costs \$735, but another group of arms dealers want to supply a different weapon, made in Israel, that costs just \$540. Kishor Bhakta and Ravi Bhakta Shrestha are the local agents for the Israeli company and are using all the political influence they have to clinch the deal. Even the Israeli embassy is helping. The Israeli offer seems a little more attractive than the German one. The Israeli firm's package promises to buy old weapons of the Royal Nepal Army and Nepal can pay for the new ones over a 10-year period. They are also to toss in a Puma helicopter. Sources say the army chief is also in favour of the Israeli guns. The prime minister's private secretary Gokarna Poudel is lobbying on behalf of Thapaliya, who was also involved in the army's (aborted) atempt to buy a RJ100 jet.

No food in Humla

Humla district is once again facing a

National Daily Naya Sadak, Wednesday 16 May

नयाँ सडक

food shortage. Long dry spells and hailstorms destroy the food crop there every year and push the people of Humla to the edge of starvation. The people of Humla, Jumla, Kalikot, Dolpa and Mugu districts, all in the Karnali zone, face food shortages and starvation every year, and countless people have died. Due to the high altitude and the cold weather, only a few food crops can be grown here. Add to this the limited space, their produce does not even last five months. The only way food can be transported to these regions is by air because there are no roads in Humla. In the past years the government provided a subsidy on food flown in from the tarai, but this was stopped three years ago. After the government started the long term agricultural policy, all food depots of the Food Corporation in the region have been shut down because there was no reliable way to supply food. The long-term agricultural policy was implemented, but it lacked a clear vision and goal. The policy, which aimed to produce enough food locally to meet the needs of the country, could not provide farmers with improved species of seeds, or teach them advanced farming technologies. In a district where food production is low, people will starve if alternatives measures are promised, but no is delivered. If the ratio of fertile land to the number of the people depending on that land is skewed, government plans will probably fail. The government must resume transporting food until the longterm agricultural policy reaches its goal. Otherwise, it must take responsibility for people dying of starvation.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

I haven't met with Babu Ram Bhattarai and Prachanda. But in the process of getting the government and the Maoists to come to talks, if it becomes essential that I meet them, I will surely meet them.

- Padma Ratna Tuladhar Jana Bhawana National Weekly 14 May.



Government-Maoist Talks: After its huge success and repeated requests from the audience, the grand show will be put on again. न्या सडक Naya Sadak, 14 May 16 sports

Tyson sues King as saga grinds on

JOHN HARRIS

he Lennox Lewis-Hasim Rahman rematch saga took yet another twist this week when, as expected, Mike Tyson filed a lawsuit against Don King Promotions seeking \$75million in damages and a guarantee that he be given the right to fight Rahman for the WBC title as the top challenger. Lewis took similar action last week, filing a lawsuit to try and force King to arrange a rematch against Rahman, as agreed in the original contract for the fight in April. The American knocked Lewis out in the fifth round of their bout in Johannesburg to claim the world heavyweight crown. To his immense delight, King has reentered the heavyweight fray as Rahman's promoter, replacing Cedric Kushner. Rahman seems content for King to call the shots as he weighs up a number of options, but Tyson is determined to have his say in the courts.

Tyson claims that as the recognised WBC No.1 challenger he has a legal right to a title bout against the champion by 11 November. According to fightnews.com, the former undisputed champion is also claiming "injunctive relief," which in America means that Rahman must "cease and desist from engaging in any title defence of his WBC championship against anybody but Tyson." WBC rules state that Rahman must defend against the No.1 challenger, and



Tyson is using the courts to defend his rights. Lewis has already lost his right to a rematch against Rahman for the WBC belt because, after a lawsuit filed earlier by Tyson, the WBC decided that under no circumstances would they sanction an immediate rematch between the former undisputed champion and Rahman for their title. There is not much love lost between King and Tyson who are already suing and counter-suing each other over previous allegations of mis-management. Meanwhile, King is back in a very influential position in the heavyweight division. He controls Rahman, the WBC and IBF champion, as well as WBA champion John Ruiz.

However, Tyson could circumvent King by not dealing with him and waiting until November when the WBC rules make it certain that the No.1

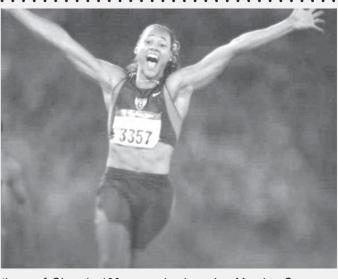
challenger, Tyson, fights the champion.

Nonetheless, if King arranges another challenge for Rahman, and Rahman loses, then the new champion could put a whole set of new obstacles in the way of Tyson. How Lewis must be kicking himself. It was all so simple back in April when the Briton was the undisputed champion, Tyson was a has-been, and King could only reflect on the days when he used to control heavyweight boxing. Rahman's right hand in the fifth round could probably be described as "the punch that changed world heavyweight boxing." And took it back to the 1980s. ♦



False start and you're out

Triple Olympic champion Marion Jones has branded a proposal to disqualify sprinters after one false start as "ridiculous." Jones false-started once in last week's Princeton meeting before going on to win her first outdoor 100 m race of the year. But under a change the International Amateur Athletic Federation plans to test this year to discourage false starts, Jones would not have had a second chance. Jones said: "I've signed a petition totally against it,"



and her signature is alongside those of Olympic 100 m men's champion Maurice Green and Ato Boldon. "If you knock the bar down in the high jump they don't kick you out of the competition," added America's golden girl who won the individual 100m and 200m events in Sydney along with the 4x400m relay. "So why are they doing this in the sprints?" Double world 100m champion Jones did not offer a cautious second start as an explanation for an uncharacteristically slow time of 11.12 seconds. "I'm not making excuses," she said after seeing Olympic bronze medallist Melissa Morrison disqualified from the 100m hurdles earlier in the meet for two false starts. Jones won support from US Track and Field Chief Executive Officer Craig Masback who said: "There's definitely a need to look at changes and innovations. Personally I think the change in false starts is not one of the changes I would like to see."

\$400,000 for Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: FIFA chief Joseph Sepp Blatter announced a grant of \$400,000 (SLRs 36 million) this week to develop soccer on the island. FIF's partial sponsorship has come under its "goal project," under which it funds schemes to develop the game across the world. Calling for a new awakening in Sri Lanka, a somewhat somnolent soccer nation, he asked the youth of the country to get into the game. He was speaking on the occasion of the inauguration of the new headquarters of the Football Federation of Sri Lanka (FFSL). "Football House", the new headquarters in the heart of Colombo, will house the FFSL office, dormitory facilities, auditorium, library, audio-visual centre and a gymnasium. Blatter also laid the foundation stone for a national football training centre at Beddagana in Kotte, a suburb of Colombo. The centre will cost SLRs 60 million and be the first of its kind on the island, said Manilal Fernando, organising committee chairman and vice-president of the Asian Football Confederation. It would comprise a football ground, accommodation for 100 trainees and a swimming pool, he said. Speaking on the occasion, Sri Lanka's sports minister Lakshman Kiriella said FIFA's grant is a "vote of confidence" in Sri Lanka. He asked administrators and players to aspire to qualify for the next World Cup. (PTI)



Soaltee

SAVING FAITH

Village of the Dancing Durga

hecho, sat astride the old trade route to India, wears a well-todo-look of prosperous farmers living in prosperous houses but conservative enough to have so far shunned concrete. The stout brick houses that line each side of the road are built one against the other, their windows carved of wood, their eaves hung with garlands of vegetables and chilies. The buildings stand respectfully back from the road, or perhaps they keep the bustle and dust at arm's length. But no Newari farmer will waste good land, so between road and houses are a continuous line of small temples and, shrines, mostly Buddhist. There are some incredibly filthy water tanks in which women wash clothes and cooking utensils that look remarkably clean after the ordeal. I asked my driver if his wife used the likes of these village ponds to wash his belongings. He replied abruptly that he would beat her up.

The goriest was the mask of Durga herself, like a decapitated head washed in its own blood its eyes still seeing, its mouth gaping open.

their way through knots of people idly sunning themselves outside their front doors. Women naked to the waist, oil themselves and their new born infants as they take in the sun and leave it to elder relatives to hoosh cameramen away.

Thecho was founded in the sixteenth century by a Malla king of nearby Patan who designed it as a Convenient shield for his city. At first, stout farmers resisted invaders or gangs of dacoits using the road from India. But it was not long before the village, almost large enough to be a town, prospered and developed a character of its own. How it began no one knows and even legends are at variance, but Thecho became renowned for its

earliest performances, a great tantric sage caused the many manifestations of the goddess Durga to possess the dancers. Imagine the scene. Lithe masked bodies suddenly charged with the awesome majesty of the mighty goddess. Human arms multiplying, papier mâché masks becoming divine faces, tinsel costumes transformed to the raiment of heaven.

Then leaping and swirling, these bodies possessed, danced through the fields to Patan and the very palace itself. The king, a great patron of tile dance, was so awed, deeply moved, he invited the dancers into the most sacred courtyard of the palace and there for one holy, unforgettable night the goddesses danced. Ever after, the dancers of Thecho perform once a year at Dashain in the Mul Chowk of Patan's old palace.

In search of these famous dancers, I was unexpectedly shown into a house which I had been told was closed to al visitors. We mounted a narrow dark stairway and entered a room heavy with the scent of incense, wax, decay and damp. There, by guttering candlelight, I was shown a collection of masks hung on a smoke-blackened wall. They were smeared with saffron and vermilion and I believed blood, and imagination-on-edge gave them life, so that sightless eyes and painted

looked stern, pathetically sad, angry, demanding and lustful. The goriest was the mask of Durga herself, like a decapitated head washed in its own blood, its eyes still seeing, its mouth gaping open. An old drum hung from the rafters. I was told it was

mouths

the drum of the death of ten generations. When I asked what exactly that meant, my question hung unanswered as if my informant had been mesmerized. But after a while he told me in a harsh whisper that the dancers who wear these masks become so possessed by the goddesses they represent, they drink the blood of sacrificial animals.

Once in ages past, they consumed the blood of human sacrifice.

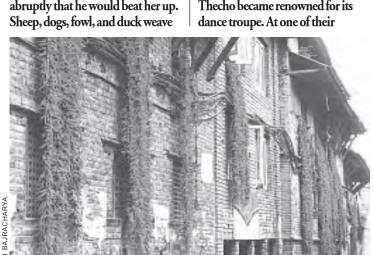
Was it then that the drum sounded? The women of Thecho apparently still threaten their children by saying that the Nava Durga will get them if they are naughty.

Near the temple of the Nava Durga is a dilapidated oil press filled with a luminous gloom and the smell of freshly ground mustard. The machinery is primitive and much of it I suspect, once belonged to an antiquated car whose shell still hangs in a corner. The press once belonged to a single family but is now owned by a commune. Thecho today has some twenty oil presses and oil goes mostly to Patan. So mustard oil, pressed from the gloriously yellow fields that reach in terraces about the village, replace the riches that once flowed up and down the old trade route. And there

by **DESMOND DOIG**

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

are, of course, the dancers.♦





Gopal Prasad Rimal

Depicting women locked always into one particular role, and as a one-dimensional symbol of a certain sentiment, rather than as an individual, misses the complexity of women's identities.

Perhaps the most well-loved verse on motherhood in Nepali literature comes from Gopal Prasad Rimal, known as the father of Nepali free verse. In 'A Mother's Dream,' translated below, Rimal depicts the traditional mother-son bond in Freudian terms—the mother seeks from her son the means to fight the traditional powers, she seeks from her son an equal power, or, in Freudian terms, the phallus. (In the Nepali original, it is clear that the child is a son, something not apparent in the English translation). In this case, however, the son is sickly and weak, and unable to provide his mother the power that she seeks:

A Mother's Dream

Through all my youth

Mother, will it really come? Yes my dear, it'll come. Like the morning sun it'll spread brilliance as it comes. You'll see a weapon glittering like mist at its waist; with this it will fight impiety. When it comes you'll first take it for a dream You'll start feeling about, but it will be more effortless to touch than snow and fire. Really, Mother? Yes, I'd hoped to see its shadows in your tender face when you were born, its beautiful reflection in your endearing smile, its gentle tones in your childish lisp; but that sweet song didn't turn you into its flute. I dreamed it would actually be you. But no matter what, it will come: I'm a mother, becoming the voice of all creative energy I can declare it's coming, this isn't just an idle dream I'm seeing. After it comes you won't remain curled at my lap like this; you won't listen, stuck like a magnet, to that truth as you listen to stories; you'll be able to see it for yourself, bear it yourself, take it upon yourself; Instead of my offering you patience you'll leave for the battlefield offering consolation to a mother's heart which refuses a hundred thousand explanations; I won't have to keep patting your hair as one does for an invalid. We'll witness it—it'll come like a gale, you'll become a leaf and rush after it. Long ago, when it alighted from the living world and overflowed like the moon, all in stupor began to stir, dear; it'll come, and then you'll rise. Is it coming Mother, the thought that it's coming tickles me the way the soft dawn tickles the throats of birds. Yes, it'll come, Like the morning sun it'll spread brilliance as it comes. Now I'm getting up, I'm going—

Yet through all my youth I dreamed it would actually be you.

Undoubtedly a remarkable work that echoes the sentiments of many Nepali readers, this poem however puts forward a particularly male view on motherhood. For it grants the son a special place of power (at least in terms of the mother's expectations) which corresponds to the traditional view that a woman may ascend to power only through a man—her father, husband or son. Lacking, in herself, the phallus (again in Freudian terms), she relies in this case on her son; and with the failure of the son, she remains forever frustrated from her dream of "fighting impiety". The poem thus denies woman any independent capacity to engage in moral battle, even by taking up traditional Hindu identity as the generator of shakti, or female power. Indeed, many of Rimal's poem ascribe to women the remarkably passive role of waiting for warrior men to return triumphant from battle: women's own ethical duty is, then, to nurture men.

That this poem's view of motherhood has not been challenged by women's own writing on motherhood is a serious issue which bears critical examination, and which reveals, in my view, a hesitation on the part of women writers to lay claim to their own experience. It is not unfair to say that motherhood in Nepali literature remains the pet topic of men writers. In most of the writing by men, motherhood is presented in purely sentimental terms, and in largely cliched terms: there is the suffering mother, the selfless mother, the devoted mother, the mother whose love knows no bounds. Mother's milk is a symbol of pure, immeasurable love. The body of the mother is as sacred as the soil of the nation. Infertility is represented as a punishment for women who are not feminine enough; or a woman who is not a mother is incomplete. Motherhood in Nepali literature is thus heavily romanticised.

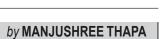
What is glaringly missing in Nepali literature is the bodily experience of motherhood, a perspective that women writers can best provide. But to discuss the bodily experience of motherhood, women must be willing to write openly on sexuality, something rare in Nepali literature. That motherhood is inextricably linked to sexual experience, desire, and fulfillmentor lack thereof—cannot be overlooked by Nepali

writers; motherhood is not just exalted sentiment, but also the movement of fluids, the play of hormones, the changes of a body in the grips of nature. The experience of pregnancy, in all its stages, is also absent in Nepali literature, as are fertility and infertility as bodily experiences, the experience of miscarriage, birthing, and breastfeeding.

Also missing in Nepali literature are the darker emotional aspects of motherhood. The ambivalence that all mothers surely experience, postpartum depression, the experience of unwanted pregnancy, the selfish, resentful or reluctant mother, the careless mother, the single mother, the woman who is happy to not be a mother—all the subtle and difficult emotions attached to motherhood are absent in Nepali literature.

Additionally, motherhood is also an economic and legal issue, but it is rare to find any literature written on these aspects. The lack of citizenship rights through mothers, women's lack of inheritance and ownership rights are aspects of motherhood which remain beyond the representation of Nepali literature. Other social and cultural aspects of motherhood also bear examination.

Finally, the independent woman is missing in Nepali literature's depictions of motherhood. And this is where Rimal's poem, above, fails. Women take up a slew of roles throughout their lifetimes, sometimes shifting identities from week to week, day to day, even moment to moment. Their individuality remains alive through these shifts. To miss this fact, and to depict women locked always into one of their many roles—to depict a mother as a one-dimensional symbol of a certain sentiment, rather than as an individual—is to miss the complexity of women's identities. It is not that men cannot write insightfully about experiences such as motherhood. But it may be time for Nepal's women writers to voice the many rich physical, psychological and social aspects of women's experience.



ABOUT TOWN

Children of Heaven by Majid Majidi, Iran, 1998. Sunday 20 May, 5pm Russian Cultural Centre, Rs 100. Inter-Cultural Film Society. icfs@wlink.com.np

EATING OUT

Padharo Hukum Rajasthani Food Festival, traditional dances and music. Chefs Kanwarni and

Kanwar Vijay Singh Bedla of Udaipur. Complimentary starters. 18-27 May, 7-11.45pm, Far Pavilion, Everest Hotel. 488100

- Singapore Food Festival Special artists, entertainers, and musicians will perform. Daily draw for a couple—free trip on Singapore Airlines, two nights complimentary hotel stay. 24-27 May, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 248999
- Wet & Wild Summer Swimming in a cool pool and a buffet lunch. Saturdays at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Taxes extra. 560675, 560775

❖ 1974 AD The Club, Bhatbhateni. Saturday, 19 May, 7.30pm. Entry Rs 200.

DANCE

- ❖ Bharatanatyam recital by Alarmel Valli. Passes 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). Friday, 25 May, 6pm. Royal Nepal Academy Hall Organised by the Indian Centre for Cultural Relations and the Embassy of India
- Spring Waltz Dinner and ballroom dance workshop, May 19, 7pm, Durbar Hall, Hotel Yak and Yeti. Rs 1200 per head. 248999.

EVENTS

- ❖ Stress Free Weekends Overnight stay at the Hyatt, dinner for two at the Rox Restaurant. use of pool, health club, spa and outdoor jacuzzi, ayurvedic massage for two, weekend brunch, late check out Sunday. Rs 9000 plus tax. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- Pheri Jaun Hai Pokhara Free airfare, room, breakfast, airport transport, use of health club and lots more. Rs 1500 for Nepalis, \$45 for expats. Shangri La Hotel & Resort; sales@hotelshangrila.com, 435741
- 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
- Friends of the Bagmati River Meeting to discuss bringing life back into the waters of teh Valley. Tuesday, 22 May. 479488

- **❖** Mani: Jewelled Words of Tibetan-Buddhism on Flags, Wheels, and Stones Fulbright Scholar Katherine Anne Paul's research on the popular use and manufacture of Tibetan religious artefacts in Nepal. 20 May-2 June. Bamboo Gallery, Panipokhari.
- * Nepal Vision II Paintings by Roy Breimon and Vaclav Pisvejc on exhibition. Breimon uses a technique called "reverse image", acrylic on Plexiglas. Until 29 May, 8am-6pm, Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- ❖ Dhaka fabric and products Exhibition and sale. Dhaka Weaves, Kupondol. 20 May 10am-5pm, 525095

SPORTS

Himalayan Hash House Harriers Starts beside the Bajrabarahi Temple east of Chapagaon at the south end of the Valley. 19 May, 4 pm. davidpotter@apon.wlink.com.np

❖ St. Xavier's School Golden Jubilee Walkathon Postponed from 19 May to 26 May. Participation open to all. St. Xavier's School Jawalakhel. 26 May 8am. Reporting time 7.45am.

What can be done to improve the research scene in Tribhuvan University? Dr Bidyanath Koirala, Dept of Education, TU and Dr Lokraj Baral. Tuesday, 22 May, 5.30pm, Martin Chautari, Thapathali. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. chautari@mos.com.np. 246065

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

BBC on FM 102.4

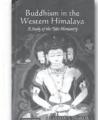
Mon-Fri 0615-0645 **BBC World Today BBC Science in Action** Sat 0615-0645 Sun 0615-0645 **BBC** Agenda BBC नेपाली सेवा **Daily** 2045-2115 BBC नेपाली सेवा 2245-2300 **Daily**



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BOOKWORM



Buddhism in the Western Himalaya: A Study of the Tabo Monastery Laxman S. Thakur

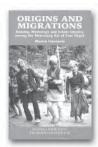
Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001

Rs 1,112

A multi-disciplinary study of the Tabo monastery in Himachal Pradesh, India, historically important as a centre of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. The study covers 1,000 years, and traces the evolution of Buddhism against the backdrop of the economy and culture of the region.

Origins and Migrations: Kinship, Mythology and Ethnic Identity among the Mewahang Rai of East Nepal Martin Gaenszle Mandala Book Point and The Mountain Institute, 2000

The first anthropological monograph on Kiranti mythology in its social and historical context. Based on fieldwork in the Arun Valley, it examines the narrative tradition of the Mewahang Rai and its intrinsical links to the idiom and practice of kinship—detailing ethnographically an identity that is multi-layered and contextual rather than monolithic.





Ladakh: Culture, History, and Development between Himalaya and Karakoram Eds Martijn van Beek, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen and Poul Pedersen Aarhus University Press, Denmark, 1999.

Rs 1,200

A compilation of the proceedings of the Eighth Colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh Studies at Aarhus University, June 1997. A comprehensive selection of essays including studies of the Tibetanisation of European steel stoves, Muslim-Buddhist relations, the observation of solar and lunar eclipses, language, gender, modernisation and change.

Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery

Piers Blaikie, John Cameron and David Seddon Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, 2001 Rs 800

The result of a research project supported by the British Ministry of Overseas Development, this volume is a socio-economic study of the west-central region of Nepal, with special reference to the effects of road construction. It goes beyond this to explore issues of dependency that hold between the First and Third Worlds, and within a single country.



Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

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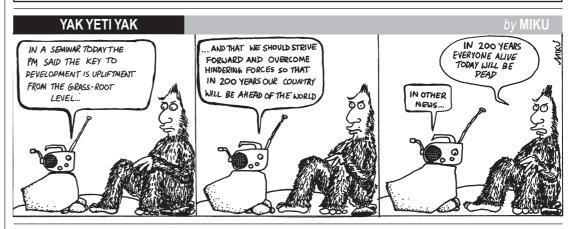
Himalaya International Clinic Western setting, MD and general

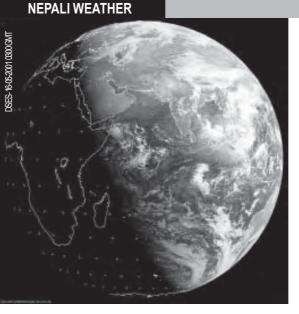
practitioners, imported vaccinations, lab test, minor surgical facilities, information about mountain sickness. Parking available. 9am-5pm. Jyatha, Thamel. Near Utse Hotel. 225455, 223197

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by **NGAMINDRA DAHA**

Thanks to a build-up of low pressure over the Indian desert state of Rajasthan, clouds continue to pour in over the Himalaya from the Tibetan plateau. This is likely to keep the air clearer and cooler than usual this time of year over Nepal. And since these are moisture laden clouds, expect thunderstorms and monsoon-like drizzles. Accumulated afternoon snowfalls have given more than usual snow cover on Himalayan passes. The jet stream is now migrating northwards, and the circulation is starting to build up from the southeast. With a month or so to go for the monsoon, heavy rain is still some ways off. Afternoon thunderstorms in the tarai and lower midhills will be of lower intensity next week. Greater cloud cover will stabilize the maximum temperature and raise the minima.

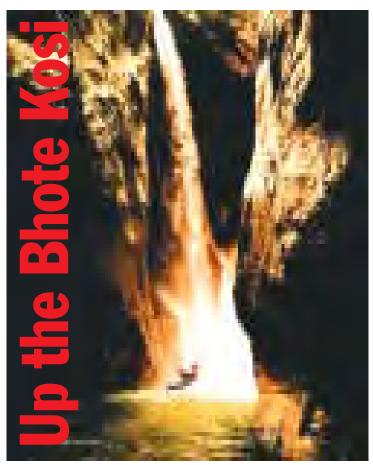
KATHMANDU



Mon 2

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27-17 29-18



SAMUEL THOMAS

afting, kayaking, mountain biking, canyoning, trekking and hiking, all in one place. This is one of the most exciting and unexplored adventure destinations in the country—Borderlands on the upper reaches of the Bhote Kosi, along the border with China. It is well situated, a good four-hour drive from the capital, up the historic Arniko highway.

It is arguably one of the best rafting sections anywhere in the world and the site for an annual river festival that brings in river runners from all over. And three years ago Borderlands pioneered canyoning in the deep gorges and ravines cut by the river through steep valley sides. Canyoning requires a variety of skills, in addition to peak physical fitness, like navigation, abseiling, swimming, jumping, wading, and climbing. Out here are also trekking routes yet to be explored to their fullest—a couple run to Bhairav Kund near Langtang National Park and to Dugunagadi, a fort built during a Nepal-Tibet skirmish in the mid-19th century. Other reconnaissance trips to find alternative routes have been carried out to the areas around Langtang and Gauri Shankar. Upstream is



BUDDHA FOR ZHU: Patan mayor Buddhi Raj Bajracharya gifts a symbol of peace, a bronze image of the Buddha to visiting Chinese premier Zhu Rongji during his visit to Patan on 15 May.



TOM YUM YUM: Hotel Hyatt celebrated a well-atended Thai food festival with ingredients flown in from Bangkok. behind the scenes, chefs (above) are busy doing the needful with their woks.



THIMI THEME: The closing day of the Thimi Exhibition as the mayors of Thimi, Kathmandu and Banepa break into smiles at an exhibition of traditional jewellery on 13 May.

also located Nepal's only bungy jumping site. The resort is diverse—there's also a "learning centre" where Nepal's corporate and development worlds come for professional development programmes and adventure. The activities are relatively expensive, but operators say the emphasis on quality, professionalism and good safety equipment makes operations costly.

Plans for a power plant now threaten to destroy the best part of this brilliant site. Many fear the upper Bhote Kosi project will turn this multi-use river segment into a "dead stretch". "We are not against exploiting Nepal's water resources, but there has to be a judicious balance between power projects and tourism on Nepal's rivers," says Megh Ale, co-owner of Borderlands and founder of the Nepal River Conservation Trust, committed to conserving the wild rivers of the Himalaya. The river is already dammed at two places—upstream at Chaku and downstream at Lamu Sangu. But in between, there is an

entire ecosystem and a thriving tourism industry.

Just when entrepreneurship has helped diversify the tourism potential of the region and created opportunities for the local economy, it looks like the future of the best stretch on one of the world's most beautiful rivers may be damned.

Kilroy's

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here is nothing like the visit of a foreign dignitary to bring tranquillity and calm to our succulent yam between two stones. To honour Zhu Rongji, Kishunji called a cessation of hostilities with Girijaji. Deubaji observed an armistice. Madhavji suspended the barricading of Singha Durbar. All back-stabbing was put on hold, 24-hour relay hunger strikers decided to keep body and soul together for the time being, arsonists took a well-deserved holiday, chukkas were unjammed for the duration of the visit, and schools were closed indefinitely in a spontaneous gesture of goodwill, friendship and amity between the peoples of Nepal and the peoples of the People's Republic of China. Kathmandu has not seen internal peace and

we have a high-level foreign dignitary on an official visit to Nepal. Here is something that Shitall Niwas must start working on right away without much ado around the bush. It must send out official invitations to leaders of all countries great and small to visit Nepal at their earliest convenience. Heads of state must start rolling in. Then all we have to do is pick 52 confirmations a year to fill up the year planner wall chart at the Ministry of Mostly-foreign Affairs. (Dispatcher at MOMA Reservation Control: "Sorry sir, we cannot accommodate His Excellency the President of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the third week of April 2004, we already have the state visit of

End of the ceasefire

harmony breaking out on this scale since the Royal Visit of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1961.

The other great advantage of official visits is that things actually happen. Ghanta Ghar is painted lavender for the first time since the Great Earthquake of 1934, garbage along the main thoroughfares gets collected and is dumped along the not-so-main thoroughfares, road cavities get temporary fillings, 25-year projects like the Eastern Tundikhel Autobahn gets telescoped into five days before the distinguished dignitaries arrive.

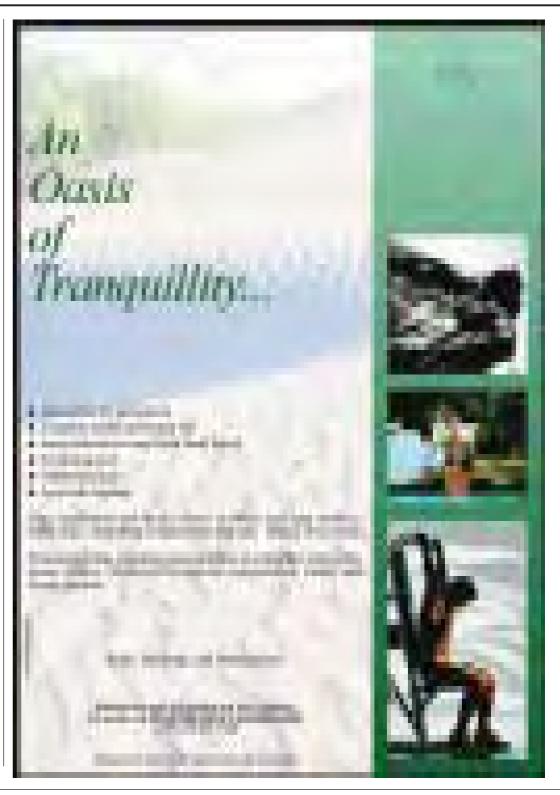
We may have inadvertently hit upon the answer to all our woes in one swell foop here: the cure-all for this country's chronic problem of political instability and lack of development. All we have to do is to make sure that at any given time in our country's glorious history the Prime Minister of Sao Tome and Principe. Nope, June is also taken, we have Queen Amidala of Naboo slotted in already.")

The Ministry of Potholes and Hard Labour is now coordinating with MOMA so that it can sequence urban development projects in time for each visit:

• July 2001: State visit of Count Dracula to the Kingdom of Nepal. Project: Finish paving the stretch of Ring Road between Narayan Gopal Chowk and Sifal.

- August 2001: Official visit of Gen.
 Voldemort of Hogsmeade at the friendly invitation of whoever-is-in-power.
- Project: Complete the Tin Kune Turnpike.

 September 2001: Visit of Their Excellencies
 Batman and Robin to Rid the City of Crime.
 Project: Deodorise the Bagmati with Lilly of the
 Valley fragrance.



NEPALI SOCIETY

Asta's world

sta Raj Bajracharya is a cornerstone in the unwritten history of neo-classical architecture in Nepal. There were once many artisan-masons like him who moulded with their bare hands some of the most intricate and extraordinary designs in the Valley's palaces, gardens, memorials to rulers and other institutions. "There are only six of us left," says Asta, who is in his mid-sixties.

Some of his most prominent works are the big peacock window at

the RNAC building, the cement cow standing on the logo of the Social Welfare Council building, and the six-foot high Saraswoti idol at the city hall in Biratnagar. In 1991, he and six other Newari artisans got together to create a miniature Swayambhu in Gyompa town in Japan.

Asta was born in Ikhache in Patan to a family of traditional artisans who had a special place in the houses of the ruling class. "I don't know how I got into this—a family thing, I guess," he says. He spent quite some time as a wandering artisan, working on the summer and winter homes of kings, princes and other influentials who were enamoured of European neo-classical architecture. At one point hadn't been home in three years. He spent that time working at King Mahendra's palace in

Gokarna, by the dam on the Trisuli river and who knows where else. Asta feels strongly about his traditional building arts and the traditional crafts of the Valley. He's encouraged his only son, Surendra, to pursue metalwork. And he's really happy to see a new interest in different kinds of architecture, especially when artisans like him are in danger of dying out. And, at the end of the day, he's content to just sit back, in his own space. "I have seen a lot of big palaces, big dams, houses and lots of shapes and designs. But what I like best is the small courtyard of my home in Patan," says Asta. He plans to spend the rest of his life with old friends, telling stories of the past. And recalling

Thompson

memorable monuments.