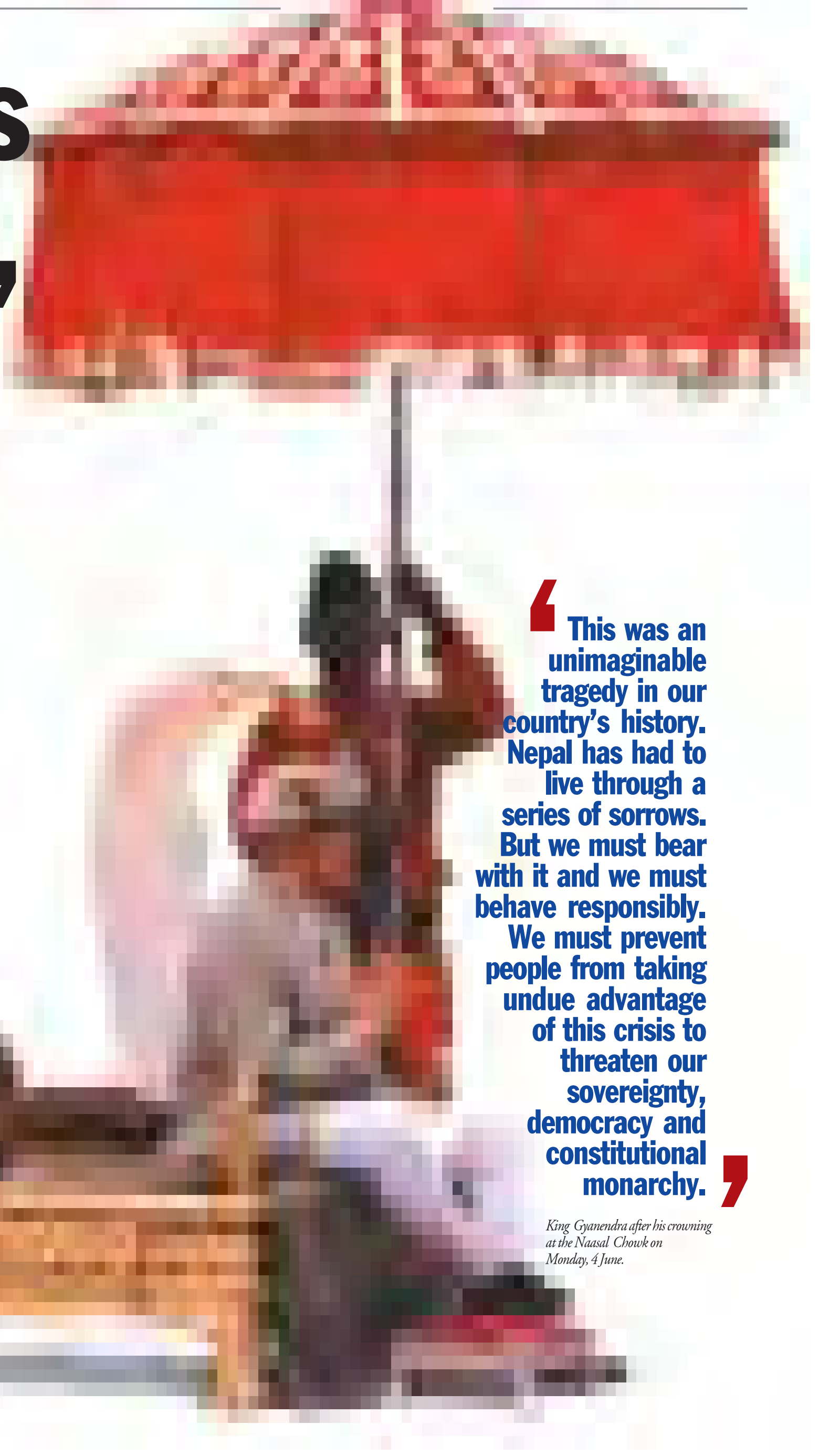


This is a Special Edition of the Nepali Times. The next issue will be our regular #47 on Friday, 15 June.

# The kings are dead, long live the King



**“ This was an unimaginable tragedy in our country’s history. Nepal has had to live through a series of sorrows. But we must bear with it and we must behave responsibly. We must prevent people from taking undue advantage of this crisis to threaten our sovereignty, democracy and constitutional monarchy. ”**

*King Gyanendra after his crowning at the Naasal Chowk on Monday, 4 June.*



Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit  
 Editor: Anagha Neelakantan, Design: Swosti Rajbhandari, Kiran Maharjan  
 Editors: nepalitimes.com, www.nepalitimes.com  
 Marketing: Sunaina Shah, Anup Adhikary marketing@himalmedia.com  
 Circulation: Sanjeev Pradhan circulation@himalmedia.com  
 Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Lalitpur  
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal  
 Tel: 01-543333-7, Fax: 01-521013  
 Printed at Jagadamba Press: 01-521393



## “I MAY DIE, LET MY NATION LIVE ON”

That is a line by the late King Mahendra that was turned into a patriotic song. Words particularly prescient in a week when two kings died in a carnage that nearly wiped out Nepal's entire royal family. Yet (and this will come as a surprise to those who see only the shroud of death that presently covers the country) the institutions of democracy have held.

Confusion prevails among commoners about this mass murder of their royals. This was an aloof, but respected clan in a country of multiple ethnicities, castes, faiths and languages. The monarchy is one of few symbols that hold this diverse country together. The Nepali royalty lost its authoritarian edge in 1990 when King Birendra let go of the reigns of absolute power and became a constitutional monarch. He learned to grow comfortable in this role, and genuinely believed that it would give Nepal the suppleness to deal with its democratic transition and development agenda. In the past eleven years, he played a low-key but effective role, providing continuity to a land going through the stress of change, a near-feudal country pushed headlong into a globalised era with little preparation.

We tried authoritarianism for 30 years, it didn't work. Parliamentary democracy was seen as the only alternative to bring social and economic progress. Unfortunately, the insular political chieftains who took over were not able to rise above personal and party interest, and wasted a full decade in factional infighting and corruption in high places. We experimented with every permutation of political coalitions between the left, centre and right, but the country fell ever-further into an abyss of mal-governance. It allowed the Maoist insurgency to burst forth with surprising speed and vigour.

In this mess, the one institution that lived up to its role was the constitutional monarchy. King Birendra was correct to a fault, as the political parties in power came and went in a welter of crises. It is the precedent that he set over the last decade of his reign that strengthened the foundations of our democracy. And that is what will allow it to stand after his tragic departure. The legacy King Birendra bequeathed his Nepali subjects is a parliamentary democracy backed firmly by a constitutional monarchy. He had made it easy for his son Dipendra to follow, but Dipendra too is by now reduced to ashes by the banks of the Bagmati. It now rests on the survivor, Gyanendra to make up for his brother's absence.

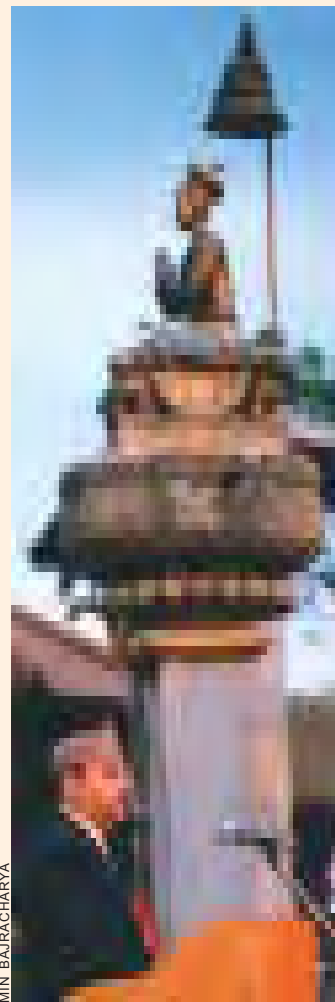
Nepal, it is said, is a 'soft state'—one that is spectacularly mismanaged and only keeps standing through times of stress because of the resilience of its polity. This has perhaps to do with the fact that Nepal is the oldest nation state in South Asia. All of the others were born after 1947, but Nepal was unified by King Gyanendra's eleventh ancestor in the mid-1700s. And so, even with this catastrophic decimation of our royal family, the country's parliamentary democracy has held. Girija Prasad Koirala is shaky but still prime minister, the army remains in the barracks, and the succession to the throne has been done by the book, passing through Dipendra and within two days to Gyanendra.

However, all will not be smooth for the newly anointed king. To begin with, Gyanendra will have to win the confidence of the people on two counts: first, he will have to convince conspiracy-obsessed citizens that the kingship was thrust upon him. In the past, violence and killings among Nepal's ruling classes were never properly explained, with historians forced to leak information by writing novels and making oblique references. King Gyanendra broke with this obfuscatory tradition in one of his first acts as monarch, by announcing a high-level independent enquiry lead by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The confusion arising from debates within the UML will first need to be sorted out.

Second, there is the matter of Gyanendra's son, Paras. With his reputation for lawless behaviour, the fact that Paras could be crown prince is unbearable for many Nepalis, who are additionally suspicious because the young man remained unscathed in Friday night's slaughter. This will be a tough one for King Gyanendra: he may well have to choose between the people and his son.

The larger problems regarding the state and society will remain. They require King Gyanendra to work with the prime minister and the government of the day under the umbrella of the parliamentary system. Democracy has not yet brought long-suffering Nepalis the relief they need, but the ideologically rigid path proposed by the Maoist insurgents is not the magic wand either. The insurgency has led Nepal up the path of unprecedented political violence over the last five years.

King Gyanendra must support the elected government and parliament to find a peaceful solution to this raging problem, and our squabbling elected leaders must support him. They must remember that they need to first save the country. If the nation ceases to exist, they will have nothing to fight over.



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# A tribute to history

Having suffered the heart-breaking deaths of our royalty, the challenge now is to get on with the life of the nation.

Friday night, faith died. Belief succumbed to the cruelty of history. Impregnable walls could not stop the flight of an age towards eternity. The king is dead, may his soul rest in peace. Long live the king, the symbol of Nepali unity and cultural identity. It is with this mixture of grief and hope that we are coming to terms with a tragedy too painful and complex to comprehend.

When telephone calls with the 'news' woke us in the dead of the night, we checked the time. First there was disbelief, "This cannot be true." We checked the date. There was horror, "This is far too serious to be a prank." And then the shock sunk in, numbing us. That numbness still persists. And with grief there is now fear for the future. The question on everybody's mind, that nobody dares speak, "What now?"

The unpredictability of the future is frightening. King Birendra was a link with the past. He offered a reassuring continuity with the hoary traditions of an age when the king was not just the provider and protector of his subjects, but the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He carried the duality of a god-king and a constitutional monarch with nary a trace of contradiction visible in his demeanour.

King Birendra ascended to the throne during that stage of conflict between tradition and modernity when every step forward is followed by two steps backward. Nepali politics in 1972 was tightly controlled by the palace. The kingdom still resembled a mythical Shangri-la, good for the mind and spirit, but with few physical amenities. Development was the dream of Nepalis in those days; and the young, western-educated monarch promised us all that and much more.

From his coronation platform, King Birendra called for Nepal to be declared a Zone of Peace. It is a paradox of history that he himself was destined to fall prey to an act of violence. Apart from that one instance of trying to redirect the course of history, King Birendra preferred to respond to events and facilitate the march of time. He seldom made a conscious attempt to determine the pace of change, but was always there at the head of the caravan as the nation moved forward. This is what made him a peoples' monarch—loved by all, adored by few, but feared by none.

Perhaps the hard-liners of Panchayat were less than happy when King Birendra called for a referendum in 1980 in the wake of a students' agitation. But he went ahead with it, and initiated a gradual process of political openness. It was this process that culminated in the Peoples' Movement, and finally the promulgation of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1990 that has guaranteed me the freedom to write and publish this tribute, apart from ensuring other liberties.

King Birendra will go down in history as the sovereign who made his subjects sovereign, and transformed them into citizens of his own accord. He was, in that sense, the very personification of history. Not many rulers of the world can lay claim to have guided the journey of a nation from autocracy to democracy with relatively few setbacks along the way. If there was a price to pay, he ultimately paid it with his own life and the lives of his immediate family members.

But that does not mean we can absolve ourselves of having been a part of it, no matter how marginal our roles were. We may have been mute spectators as the tragic drama unfolded, but we are collectively responsible for building a society that allows a tragedy of this magnitude. Where have our religious moorings gone? What kind of values have we established? What sort of education system we have we adopted that prompts people to run amok with guns? It is the decadence of the middle-class that is on display, in exaggerated form, in the lifestyles of the power elite. The

truth about what really happened behind the four walls of Narayanhiti on that fateful Friday night is yet to emerge, but what is most certain is that the values of Nepali society have crumbled, leading to the death of our faith and beliefs.

That said, let it be remembered that cruelty is not unique to Nepali society, as the ill-informed recklessly suggest. Throughout human history, killings have been a favourite way of choosing heads of state. Somewhere deep down, we are all savages. Rather than freeing us from the vagaries of nature, technology often makes us greedier, more envious of our fellow human beings, and hence more barbaric.

Savagery, as indeed all human failings and tragedies, is independent of time and space. Nepal's history is replete with "crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind". The execution at Makawanpur, the cruelties at Kirtipur, the massacre of Kot Parba, the barbarity of Bhandarkhal Parba, or the massacre of Alau

Parba scream out from our history books. It is said: the only lesson of history is that no one ever learns anything from it. Every generation has to bear the agonies of human failings and death all over again in order to learn to live with the pathos of the politics of power.

Having borne the brunt of heart-breaking deaths, the challenge now is to get on with life. The departed soul of our beloved king does not need copious tears, it needs our commitment to the cause he personified: the sovereignty of every Nepali citizen through equality in politics, equitability in economic opportunity, and respect for each other in society. Coming to terms with painful realities is so difficult that we often tend to take recourse to philosophies that suit our mood. At times like these, fatalistic philosophies that point towards the inevitability of history are most appealing. This was evident in the shouts of a section of the crowd during the royal funeral procession. But as Marx said: "Philosophers have so far interpreted the world. The point is to change it."

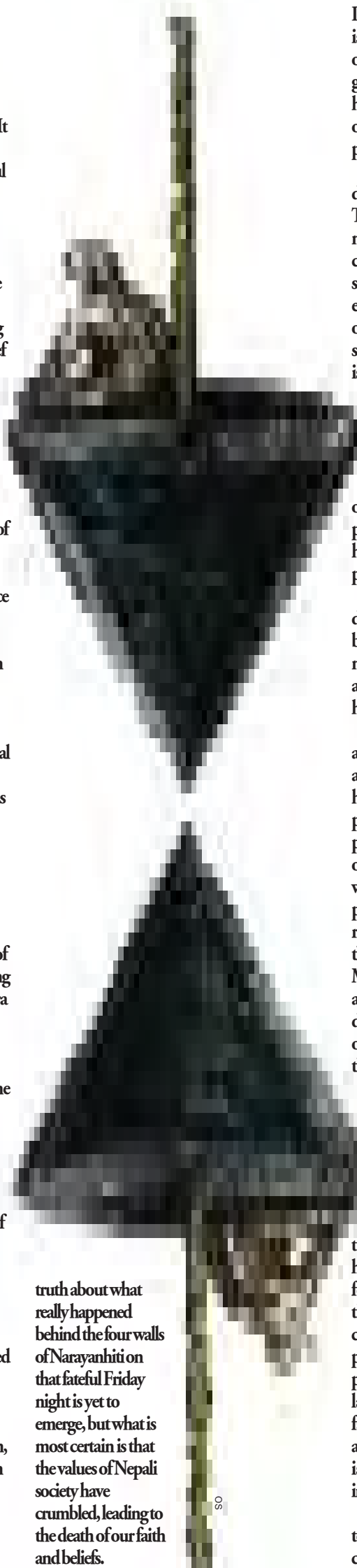
The most lasting tribute we can pay to our departed monarch is to devote ourselves to building a just Nepali society. We can, and we must do so to atone for the sins of having been a part of a decadent society. The march of history does not allow long periods of grief.

As I write this, King Gyanendra has just ascended to the throne after it was officially announced that King Dipendra "left for his heavenly abode". King Dipendra became perhaps the only monarch in the world who passed his entire reign in a coma. The throne of Nepal is not new to King Gyanendra. He was crowned king in 1950 by the last Rana prime minister, Mohan Sumshere. People refused to recognise the infant-king, as the then King Tribhuvan and Crown Prince Mahendra were both alive and well, though in a self-imposed exile in India. This time, it is a different story altogether. After the decimation of King Birendra's family, King Gyanendra is the legal heir to the throne sanctioned by the customs and traditions of Nepal.

The challenges faced by the new king are enough to keep his sharp intellect on edge. As expected, Maoists see a conspiracy behind the tragedy and Comrade Prachanda has called on people to intensify the People's War. Though all the major political parties of the country have shown surprising maturity in calling for restraint, there is no saying which of them will succumb to the fatal attraction of cheap populism and fall prey to conspiracy propaganda. King Gyanendra has already promised to bring to light the truth behind last week's tragedy. There is a chance that facts will emerge as some of the survivors are now said to be out of danger. Restraint is what we all need, not rumour-mongering.

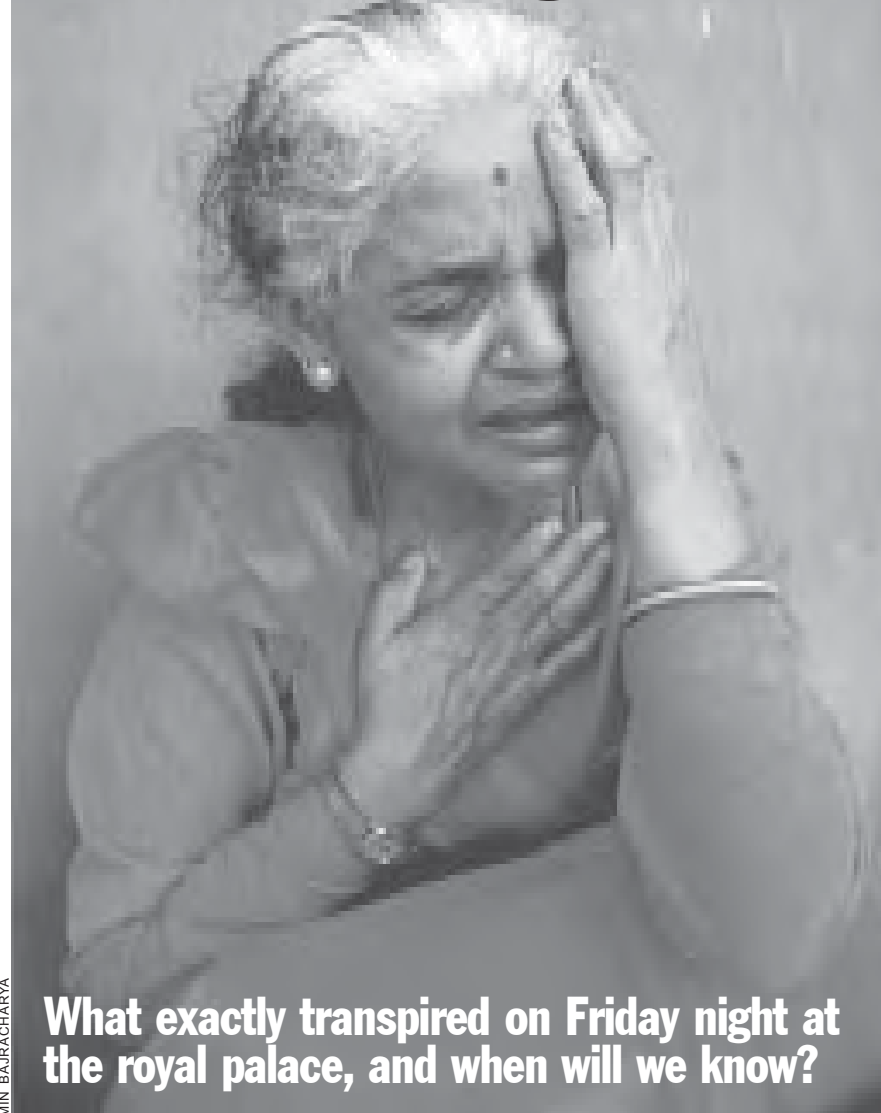
The most important challenge before us is to start building a culture of peace. This is the country of Buddha. Peace is never a legacy of ancestors and ancients, we must build peace by ourselves. The creation of a culture of democratic values, tolerant beliefs, and responsive social institutions through the stable mechanism of universal suffrage and constitutional governance may sound like well-worn clichés, but salvation lies in living by these canonical beliefs rather than simply parroting them. Lord Buddha is an inspiration, late King Birendra was an example, but each one of us has to start building peace by being not just a believer, but a practicing democrat.

History is a resource that enables us to endure the present and face the future. A tribute to the memory of King Birendra is a tribute to the march of Nepali history for over two centuries. The grief is debilitating, but together we shall overcome. We must for





# Between grief and anger



What exactly transpired on Friday night at the royal palace, and when will we know?

**BINOD BHATTARAI**

As if the catastrophic curse that befell Nepal this weekend was not bad enough, the information blackout that followed it made matters worse. Deprived of accurate information, Nepalis from all strata of society began to construct and believe their own wildest theories about what happened at the royal palace that gruesome Friday night.

Numerous royal family and army sources have confirmed to us the original account of the tragic calamity (see [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)). There are slight discrepancies in the exact sequence of events: where precisely were the members of the royal family during the first and second bursts of automatic weapon fire, where were the wounds on the bodies, where were the ADCs, where exactly was Queen Aishwarya, did Paras leave the room? But on the question of who was involved, what emerges from extensive interviews is confirmation of a family

quarrel gone horribly wrong. The whole truth may take weeks, if not months, to become public, but the inquiry commission set up by King Gyanendra in his first proclamation is expected to bring at least preliminary facts to light.

Curfew-bound Kathmandu listened to their new monarch on television Monday evening as he announced the formation of a three-member probe consisting of the Chief Justice, the House Speaker and the leader of the main opposition party. The inclusion of UML general secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal, was unanimously hailed as a very astute move—the devastated royal palace had taken the unprecedented step to open up.

But it may have been too astute to work: it hadn't taken into account the Byzantine world of Nepal's left politics. In a bizarre twist, Madhav Nepal decided to pull out of King Gyanendra's inquiry commission citing "a procedural

lapse" in the formation of the probe. The party says that in keeping with the constitution, a committee should have been formed by Singha Darbar, and not by the palace. Latent feuds within the party, the latest having to do with the still-warm aircraft leasing scandal, made KP Oli and Subhas Nemwang challenge Madhav Nepal's agreement with the prime minister and the king at Naasal Chowk at Monday's crowning ceremony to be a part of the probe. (Nepal later publicly denied ever making such an agreement.)

The UML seemed once more to be putting its politics before the national need to avert deep crisis. The inquiry commission is a pivotal effort to cool down heated passions about the royal succession, and to defuse conspiracy theories. The communists may have defended their move by referring back to the constitution, but many are baffled: why did they not take the opening provided by the royal palace statement and instead rely on sophistry? "They are haggling over legal niceties when the important thing is to have a commission with credibility that the people will accept," said a leading leftist from within the party. Nepal himself told a BBC interview on Tuesday that he had to leave for "personal reasons", but upon being grilled from London failed to explain what they were, and why they were more important than the national interest.

The UML appears to have been pressured by two members of its alliance (the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party, and the Popular Front), which had decided that the royal crisis was the right time to activate the long-pending strategy to oust Prime Minister Koirala. "We didn't like this being done by royal decree, the government should have proposed the committee and we would have assigned a member instead of the king naming an appointee," was what a party official told us. "This was a typical ploy by the king, a conspiracy, to get us bogged down with a possibly predetermined outcome to the inquiry," said another UML parliamentarian.

➡ See p. 6

## The Valley of Halla

*if one were to dig up the foundation of each house here only hearsay and rumours would be heaped up there that's why this is a country of hearsay and rumour this is a country standing on hearsay and rumour this is a country founded on hearsay and rumour this is a country of hearsay and rumour*

-Bhupi Serchan in "Hallai halla ko desh"  
(Excerpt translated by Manjushree Thapa)



Rumour has its origin in the absence of information and in intellectual mediocrity which disallows creativity and kills empathy. There has been an absolute and continuing dearth of information about what happened on that fateful Friday night within Narayanhiti Royal Palace, and it is not hard to understand why rumour—*halla*—is flying. The public is in the dark, and the intelligentsia too busy manufacturing rumours and conspiracy theories.

Why is no information being provided? The Narayanhiti Royal Palace has always controlled access, and in the midst of this horrific crisis it would have been impossible for Singha Darbar to step in to fill the information gap. Decimated at the top, the Royal Palace itself was hardly in a position to provide information even if it was inclined to do so. With the tragic progression of dying kings and other royals throughout the weekend, there was no one to instruct palace underlings—miserly with information at the best of times—to open up. The events of last week also made clear that the structure of Nepali society has remained essentially feudal, with even the topmost political classes having nil access to the palace and therefore believing wholeheartedly in hearsay.

With no explanation available, the public would be forgiven for thinking the worst of the successor to the throne, former Prince Gyanendra. All the survivors of the shooting were royal relations. The only people they shared the story with were close family and friends, and that is where the truth remains locked. While a section of the public will continue to think conspiracy no matter what, the country may be able to pick up the pieces and move on if and when this group of witnesses begins to speak up. Even the supposedly alert and aware fell for political or successional conspiracy as the most plausible explanation for the massacre. With Paras Shah having the history he does, and the new king himself with the reputation of a royal hardliner, it was a convenient leap to think the worst of them. As the curfew took effect and idle minds were forced to stay indoors, the rumours entered other, wilder dimensions: poisoning of the water mains or milk supply, the supposed death of the queen mother or Krishna Prasad Bhattarai by heart attack, and the murder of the surgeon who attended to the stricken royals. Had the government not pulled the plug on satellite television, the producers and the avid consumers of all this *halla* may well have been happy watching Hindi soaps.

But paucity of information hardly explains everything. It is the gullibility that comes with a lack of intellectual curiosity that makes Kathmandu succumb so easily to rumour raj. Vacant minds easily ingest rumour, and this is the case of the Kathmandu intelligentsia, whose members have so little self-respect that they are willing to impute their own worst motives to others. Their tendency is always to be certain of a conspiracy when a simpler explanation may suffice. To stick to a straightforward explanation would require too much rationality. ♦

Kanak Mani Dixit

# “Very sharp, and a good listener...”

King Gyanendra, 54, grew up alongside his elder brother late King Birendra and had a close view of the conduct of state—both during the days of absolute monarchy and after 1990. Gyanendra has chaired the

Council of Royal Representatives several times when his brother went on state visits abroad. In a sense he has seen it all.

And King Gyanendra, the 12<sup>th</sup> ruler of Nepal's Shah dynasty already has his hands full. On Monday, in a

nationwide proclamation Nepalis were given a glimpse of his style: forceful, authoritative and someone who got straight to the point by announcing a three-man committee representing the judiciary, parliament and the opposition party to probe the palace killings.

People who have worked with King Gyanendra in the past say if there is someone who has the ability to bring Nepal out of the confusion it is now in, it is he. "Even though this is a sad and sensitive time, I think he can provide us the leadership we now need," a former colleague told us.

King Gyanendra has been chairman of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) since its establishment in 1982, besides heading the Lumbini Development Trust (1986-1991), a non-profit trying to restore the birthplace of Buddha. An avid

**King Gyanendra is said to be decisive and no-nonsense, and these qualities were on display when he addressed the public after his coronation.**

hunter-turned-conservationist, King Gyanendra believes that the environment can only be preserved when communities living near national parks support it. He told *Nepali Times* in an interview in November: "If the people do not want conservation, no amount of effort will succeed." A model of this has been the KMTNC's Annapurna Area Conservation Project, regarded as a model ecotourism project.

Gyanendra's colleagues at the KMTNC say that contrary to his authoritative public image, he is very democratic at meetings. "He literally prods you

for your opinion and even explains why a decision was reached to satisfy minority opinions," said a source who has worked with the KMTNC. "The only thing I would advise him is to smile a bit more in public. Someone seems to have drilled it in him that maintaining a scowl in public is what a prince should do."

Others who know the new king closely say that he has a decisive and no-nonsense personality. King Gyanendra has already shown that by responding to public demands for a probe into Friday's shootout. He was brief and to the point—said to be

typical of him. In Monday's statement he said he would continue his brother's strong commitment to constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. He also said Nepal would work to maintain the good relations with two large neighbours India and China.

Off work, sources said, the king enjoyed sitting around campfires with colleagues with a drink or two, and also occasionally lit up at meetings. He is said to be an avid reader, and "very sharp". Belying his proud, authoritarian public image, he is said to be "friendly and affable, and a good listener".

For King Gyanendra, this is his second time on the throne. He was crowned king at the age of four by the last Rana prime minister in 1950 and was king for a few months before Shah Dynasty rule was restored in 1951. ♦



The same crown being placed on King Gyanendra in November 1950, and again in June 2001.





# King Birendra's 30-year reign

SHIVA GAUNLE

King Birendra had just completed 30 years of his reign. It spanned the decades of Nepal's development from when this once-sequestered kingdom was getting accustomed to the big wide world, up to the present muddled foray into parliamentary democracy.

In 1971, the country was still largely roadless, and travelling from one part of Nepal to another invariably required crossing over into India. Today, the 1,000 km Mahendra Highway named after King Birendra's father, links the country from east to west. The

**The most important gain of the past ten years is the conviction of Nepalis that a constitutional monarchy and democracy can not only co-exist, but is also perhaps the most desirable polity for this multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nation.**

network of roads in Nepal has increased four-fold in that time. The annual budget in 1971 was barely Rs 1 billion, today it has crossed the Rs 80 billion mark. Nepal's infant mortality rate has been slashed from 172 per 1,000 live births to less than 90 today, and the literacy rate has risen from 15 percent to nearly 50 percent. Annual per capita income has gone up from \$80 when King Birendra came to the throne in 1971 to \$210 today, even though the

population has also doubled from 12 million to 24 million. During his coronation in 1975, King Birendra announced free primary education through the country. The National Planning Commission was set up in 1974 and the National Forests and Parks Act for protecting wooded commons was promulgated the same year. In 1975, National Forest Development programme was begun. King Birendra also gave directives to establish the Nepal Press Council to oversee the development of media, and set up a commission for judicial reform.

But the biggest change has come in the transformation of the political structure since the People's Movement in 1990. A violent and cathartic upheaval, which threatened the institution of Nepal's monarchy, ended up not only restoring democracy, but also in rejuvenating the prestige of the king as a constitutional monarch. But this has been a mixed blessing—the last decade has been messy, elected officials have largely proved to be as venal and irresponsible as the people they replaced. Yet, the most important gain

since 1990 is the Nepalis' conviction that a constitutional monarchy and democracy can not only co-exist, but also is perhaps the most desirable polity for this multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nation. Not only is the institution of monarchy part of Nepal's tradition, but it is also the most important symbol of Nepali nationhood. The Nepali people have time and again shown a genuine affection—almost devotion—for their kings. The queue to receive *tika* from the monarch grows every year. The grief, sadness and shock of Nepalis this past week comes out of genuine affection—it is not put on, or forced.

No doubt, the reputation of the institution of monarchy has suffered setbacks as it did after the dissolution of the BP Koirala government by King Mahendra in 1960. King Birendra inherited the Panchayat system that his father had put into place. After the student unrest led to the 1979 referendum, he introduced direct elections of the Rastriya Panchayat and made the prime

minister directly responsible and accountable to the House. Despite the party-less nature of the Panchayat, the amendment gave it a democratic veneer. This experiment did not last, and in ten years public demands for full-scale democracy boiled over. The king's absolute powers were dismantled and replaced with a constitutional monarchy. Democratic leaders, many of whom suffered long years in jail and exile, soon assumed power and almost immediately began to experience first-hand the challenges of Nepal's governance. It became apparent that many of them were poor managers, the level of corruption escalated, and political infighting gradually brought governance to a standstill. Ironically, as the government's image plummeted, the king's stature grew. Even though the constitution had taken away his executive powers, King Birendra's standing among Nepalis grew enormously, because he played the role of constitutional monarch by the book, never overstepping his bounds and preferring to be guarded, despite pressure from hardliners to resume his previous autocratic role. And now, ten years later again, the euphoria has worn off and just as in many newly-democratic nations around the world there are stirrings here, too, of nostalgia for strong-man rule.

King Birendra erred on the side of cautiousness, as shown by his asking the Supreme Court for advice on the constitutional crisis caused by the dissolution of parliament in 1994 and 1995 on the recommendation of prime ministers Girija Koirala and Man Mohan Adhikary respectively. Legal experts debated whether he should have taken the matter to the courts, but most felt he acted legally and maturely to defuse the situation. The relationship between the monarch and elected prime minister represents the relationship between the constitutional monarchy and the people in a democracy. King Birendra's personal thoughts on the state of the nation are hard to come by, but he does give tantalising hints, as he did during a dinner for the diplomatic community last year in the course of which he said: "Only if people in responsible positions carry out their duties with care and accountability and treat all Nepalis equally will the people of this country believe completely in democracy." This comment triggered a reaction—one MP felt that even such a mild reprimand should not have been aired publicly and should have been conveyed to then prime minister Bhattarai in person. There is no doubt that King Birendra realised the extreme public sensitiveness to every

## LETTERS

We share the grief of our Nepali brethren. May god almighty grant peace to all the departed noble souls. It is better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all

**Shishir Mehrotra**

Let our beloved King, Queen, and Princess Shruti and Prince Nirajan's souls rest in peace. We will always love you and you will be in our hearts. We will always remember the good deeds you have done all over Nepal.

**Namkha Sherpa,  
Nawang Sherpa  
and Calvin Sherpa**

I am a student of class 12. As a Nepali, I, and all Nepalis, should be given proper information about our royal family. I am among many who feel that the newspapers and the palace are not giving proper information. At this time of great shock and grief, some of our people are slandering the palace. What we don't know or understand is that other members of the royal family were also present at the site of murder and were also shot at and wounded. The royal family is important to all Nepalis and we have a right to know what happened. Times have changed and we cannot still have a bunch of sycophants covering the palace and hiding the facts. Can't these sycophants see that they are responsible for a massive security lapse? I hope your newspaper will give us the detailed truth unlike the other papers.

**Shavana Rana**

I was stunned, shocked and

personally bereaved on hearing the horrible information on the death of Their Majesties and other members of the royal family. For Nepal, and its friends in Russia and elsewhere, it is a tragedy of Himalayan and Shakespearean dimensions. Please accept my most profound and heartfelt condolences in this hour of grief. My four years as the Russian Ambassador in Nepal will forever remain in my mind as the best period of my professional life. Never could I conceal the fact that I have always had a soft corner in my heart for your beautiful country. As dean of the diplomatic corps, I had so many occasions to meet Their Majesties and all the slain members of the royal family. I am proud to say that we became good personal friends. That is why the tragedy is of great resonance for me. As a mark of Russia's and my highest esteem, admiration and affection for the memory of Their Majesties, the national flag of the Russian Federation will fly half-mast for three days at our Embassy in New Delhi. Let God give your wonderful people the power to overcome the tragedy in wisdom and harmony.

**Alexander M. Kadakin,  
Ambassador of the  
Russian Federation in India**

As a friend of your beautiful country, I am choked by the tragic death of your king and queen and members of the royal family. I hope happier times will return to the Nepali people and that this karma will be purified. I pray for you to

Lord Buddha . May better times return and may the souls of the killed have peace.

**Leo Leemans (Jampa  
Gyatso)  
The Netherlands**

I want to pay my respects to all the royal family members who were shot dead. I was shocked when I read the news in the *Washington Post*.

**Unhappy in the USA**

I was shocked by the news, as every Nepali is right now. King Birendra was a thorough gentleman and Nepal won't get a better king than him.

**Rajeev Mishra**

While all the dailies went to sleep or to mourning the fifteen hours after the royal family was killed, you did a great job by putting at least three bulletins on Saturday. But Dipendra, the king? The person who, according to CNN, the BBC and everyone, was responsible for the tragedy? Just imagine: If I were the king of Bhutan, would I send congratulations to the new king for ascending to the throne after having allegedly killed his father? Is Nepal turning out to be the biggest joke on earth? The biggest yoyoland?

**Too ashamed to use my  
name in Thailand**

Thanks for keeping all of the far-flung Nepal community informed about this unbelievable tragedy. As we receive bits and pieces of this horrible news in our various distant lands, it is encouraging to know we have a credible and sensitive source of intelligence.

**Jeff Greenwald  
Oakland, CA**

This is just to say "Thank you" for providing the updates on the massacre... I followed nepalitimes.com all Saturday, and am simply grateful for being able to access the most reliable source of news at the most shocking of moments.

**Jane Ong**

At this hour of extreme shock and despair over the news of the tragic massacre of our royal family in Nepal, there is hardly any newspaper on the net with this news. You are the only ones who covered this online for us Nepalis living abroad. Thanks for serving your purpose well and making us part of the broad Nepali community in Nepal and abroad. My sincere thanks to you for this commendable contribution.

**Pradeep Bhandari  
UK**

My heart goes out to the decent, hardworking people of Nepal who have had to endure so many problems over the last decade and do not deserve this tragedy.

**Carol Pavesi  
USA**

I would like to thank the Nepali Times for its highly professional coverage of the tragic death of King Birendra and so many members of his family, and for making the coverage accessible on the web. I would also like to express my sincere sympathy to you in this time of sadness. I have every confidence that the magnificent Nepali people will survive this crisis, and will merit





# Birendra's 30-year reign

word he uttered. Former Speaker and legal expert, Daman Nath Dhungana, attributes this to the hangover of the 1961 putsch and the hobby of Nepali intellectuals to look for historic parallels. Kirti Nidhi Bista differs. "If the people appeal to the king to step in, he will still have to think very, very carefully," says Bista.

In the last decade, the king called for over 20 ordinary or special sittings of parliament. Parliament has made or passed more than 500 new laws—all signed into law by King Birendra, except the sensitive Citizenship Bill, which he sent to the Supreme Court on a technicality. King Birendra had the power to send acts back to parliament for re-discussion, but rarely used it. In the past ten years we've had ten prime ministers: Koirala (twice), Bhattarai (twice), Adhikary, Thapa, Chand, Nepal and Deuba. None felt that King Birendra did not heed their advice or created problems for them. Besides in matters that affect them directly, no party publicly protested King Birendra's role.

In recent months, as the Maoist insurgency escalated, King Birendra found himself increasingly ambivalent about allowing the Royal Nepal Army to be used for the Integrated Security and Defence Package. But most Nepalis also know that the armed

forces are more loyal to the palace than to the elected government. This ambiguity is most apparent in the friction between the government and the palace and army about how to deal with the Maoists, whose avowed goal is to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a peoples' republic. The army is reluctant to accede to command by a confused civilian bureaucracy, but the civilian government and its police are fighting the insurgency with one hand tied behind their back. King Birendra did not make his views known, but it is clear he was worried that the army would be sucked into a wider civil war.

For the last 10 years the palace was playing by the rules set for it by the constitution, and is now slowly trying to create its own space. Other voices are asking for the role of a constitutional monarch to be redefined. Some want the monarch to reassert himself, while others want him to stay aloof and leave matters to the elected government. The compromise seems to be that most Nepalis would like to see their king play a more active part and be a role model in the development arena—much as he did during the winter visits he made to the various parts of the country during the Panchayat years. ♦

## Birendra's Nepal: the once and forever kingdom

### DUBBY BHAGAT

After the funeral of King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah on Saturday night, the immediate grief that swept the country turned to mourning and a degree of introspection. Old stories were retold.

On a visit to Germany as crown prince, Birendra broke protocol and asked his German liaison officer to show him "typical" Germany. The protocol officer called Bonn, told them the prince would not be showing up for his scheduled opening of an art gallery, and took the youth instead to his farmhouse. After spending several days there Birendra confided to his host, "Some day you will help me to make my country like this." The protocol officer retired, became an expert on containing leprosy, but continued advising Birendra, by now king of Nepal.

It was King Birendra who asked the Germans to restore the city of Bhaktapur when asked what he wanted as a wedding gift. The city, which won a heritage award, is regarded by the Germans as a leading project in their 50 years of international aid.

And it was King Birendra who insisted that all master's-level students do a stint of teaching in the villages of Nepal, before they graduated. Every years the king would take his court out to different parts of the country to get to know the problems of his people better. His courtiers did not always approve of such initiatives. It is rumoured that once when the king insisted he see an experimental farm he opened some years earlier, cauliflowers were uprooted from elsewhere and planted in time for the royal visit.

Other royal reforms included an effort towards transparency in the social system as well as in the role of royal family members and their business ventures. Such controversial steps could not succeed at the time and the king found that the palace as an institution that enveloped him was often quicksand for the ideals he stood for.

Back then, the king set himself a punishing schedule. Courtiers saw him working late, as he answered petitions or asked aides to inquire into cases requiring his attention. Palace protocol came between him and those he wished to talk to but sometimes he forced a gap in the wall around him and became for a brief moment his "friendly, outgoing" self, as a friend from his school days described him.



In those early days, an air of Camelot prevailed. Harvard-educated King Birendra gathered about him a Brains Trust who advised and supported him. One among them met the Indian press Saturday to pay his tributes to the slain king. He barely started to relive those times, when tears choked him. He is Nepal's ambassador to India, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa.

"He was too kind, and kindness and kingship don't go together," said one long-time Kathmandu resident referring to the time the king acceded (some say too easily) to the will of his people who wanted a constitutional monarchy and democracy. And as that nascent democracy floundered and many

nostalgically harked back to the past, almost everyone agreed that, "His Majesty is the only one in Nepal who abides by the constitution."

Nepal, since the king was crowned in 1975, has always made the distinction between the palace and the king. In that difference lay the realisation that all that emanated from the palace was not the king's desire, wish or aspiration. Indeed, once an aide to the king remarked, "What are we going to do about all the king's men?"

Seen as Vishnu in his Hindu avatar and Lokeswar by his Buddhist subjects, King Birendra probably leaned towards the Buddhist deity, who rather than hurt anyone would retire within himself.

At his coronation, the young king asked that his friends be interviewed rather than himself. The picture that emerged was of a sensitive man concerned about his subjects, aware of their poverty and determined to serve them as against ruling them. Court intrigue that swirled about him had him first bewildered and then withdrawing. But his concern for his subjects remained even as recently as a few months ago when he visited a restaurant and apologised for being late.

King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah has found peace from the wrangling and "fitful fever" that had him more and more isolated. In Nepal, it is believed that good kings will be reborn: As the dust slowly settles on the tragedy, Nepalis gather beneath the *pipal* tree (the pipal where newspapers have traditionally been sold) and reassure themselves that King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah, like one of his ancestors, will be reborn and another golden page in Nepal's history will be written. ♦

the world's admiration for their strength in the face of disaster.

**Robert L. Miller**  
**Chicago, USA**

Thank you very much for telling first what is happening in Nepal today. Your pages told us here in Europe what happened last night the royal palace. All friends of Nepal abroad are with you.

**Reijo Härkönen**  
**Finland**

Our condolences to the people of Nepal. This is a big tragedy. We are very sorry.

**Abdullahi and Jeanet**

This is a national crime that all Nepalis must protest. We are among those who live in foreign countries and expect the media will be faithful, and not allow a repeat of 1846. The news media should stay faithful to the people and the nation and tell the truth about this crime.

**All Nepalis in China**

We will be sorrowful about this national tragedy for some time. We expect a thorough investigative report on this tragedy. We await your forthcoming issue, and request you to not be affected by circumstances that may arise due to the untimely demise of our beloved king. We hope no one will forward their selfish motives in this time of crisis when we face the most unfortunate dilemma of our age.

**Surendra Raut Chhetry**

Our heartfelt condolences on the sudden and untimely loss of our king, queen and other members of the royal family in Nepal. May the departed souls rest in peace.

**Nepalese Association of**  
**South Africa**  
**Eastern Cape**

I wish to mourn with my countrymen over the sudden death of Their Late Majesties in a killing spree. As everybody else, I am deeply shocked and horrified by

the news. I have wept on and off after hearing what is the saddest news for me, and all people who love the king and want the institution as a symbol of national unity and integrity. This is a time to be united, and bury our differences if there is to be a ray of hope and dedication to the future. The road ahead is challenging. It demands courage, hard work, and perseverance. We need to hold on to our dreams of freedom, civilisation, development. Let us give all our support to the king and the government.

To our king: This is the time to uphold the system within the framework of our constitution and to continue what has already been done and what needs greater attention.

To the government: Pardon the Maoists. Contain corruption, take the opposition parties into confidence and pay a real tribute to the late king through efforts to uplift the people.

To the Maoists: Try to see

hope without a weapon. See what others want and have to say.

To the UML and other opposition parties: be mature enough to form the government by winning the confidence of people and not merely by street demonstrations, chakka jams and Nepal bands.

Let us pray to God to give us hope and ability to transform our dreams into reality. This will be the greatest tribute to our late king.

**Ramesh Chandra Khanal**  
**Utah State University, USA.**

Nepal is going through the worst crisis it has ever faced. The only way we can come through this is by trusting and working with each other. The 22 million Nepali people have the right to know the details of Friday night's palace killing. If the government and the king keep 22 million people in dark then there is no trust. I hope and pray that the truth will come out quickly.

**"Mero Babu"**

We learnt the news of the King and Queen's death after about 30 attempts to read our email in the town of Xam Neua in northeastern Laos. Xam Neua is a little like Mugling amidst hills with *khoriyas*—just a little larger. It was around 6.45 am Nepali time when the news stunned us. Now, everyday, one of us goes to the neighbour's telephone and tries for about an hour to get on the Internet. Opening the Nepalnews site and saving it as quickly as possible had become part of our daily ritual.

We wondered who was responsible for this? Tuning in to a news station on a Chinese-made radio with compressed shortwave was no less an effort than connecting to email. We managed

to tune in to the BBC for the 11 o'clock news. And immediately we felt inferior, let down. This was another event for the Northern media to cover the South the way they are used to. We were ashamed that this person they said was responsible for the killings was to be our king. Our thoughts turned to the crown prince's love: we were concerned for the girl's security and the horrific situation she is in.

We talked about royal families. Will the institution of royalty ever be liberal or open? Is it outdated, and so on. Nepal is unprepared for a constitutional crisis without a king. We don't have a problem with Gyanendra, but are not too positive about King Gyanendra's notorious son Paras, who will probably be the crown prince and future king if the monarchy continues.

Is there greater feudalism and conservatism than we have seen in Nepal in the last few days? As we heard the news, we thought, "we never improve": the silence from the palace, our deputy prime minister not being accountable to the people and keeping the truth from them when the foreign media was giving the whole world the same story. At least he could have told us that the media may not be telling the truth. Even the Maoists were hesitant to tell the truth—that it was an accident with consequences for our political future. This crisis has revealed to us what we are as a nation, whether royalty, Maoist, or people like us who get worked up in vain. From the bottom of our hearts we send our condolences to our chaotic home nation.

**Teeka Ram Bhattarai,**  
**Samita Pradhan,**  
**Bideha Agam and Srijana**  
**Shrestha**  
**Laos**

I'm very sorry to hear about the death of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya. I am shocked and sad. I believe that the family didn't die. They went back to the paradise they came from some years ago and they will live forever there. May the lord Pashupatinath bless us all!

**LongQi**  
**Hainan Province,**  
**China**

Deepest regrets for this terrible tragedy, and prayers for peace in Nepal in the troubled days to come. Jaya Nepal.

**Thomas Lloyd**

We send our heartfelt condolences to all the Nepali people. We should wait with patience for the outcome of the investigation. We expect a truthful, honest and clear report from your publication.

**Beena Pant**  
**Philippines**

The last few days have seen an erosion of public confidence and every Nepali citizen's constitutional right to information of public importance. An impartial and trustworthy investigation by the official probe panel depends upon preservation of all evidence, even if religion dictates otherwise. In a situation of national emergency, the citizens' trust is paramount, and cannot be gained through news blackouts and curfews.

**Nepal Chintan**  
**Concerned Nepalis in**  
**Boston**



NIHUNGHE MAN DANGOL

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS



# Lets talk

If the situation in Nepal were not so potentially and terrifyingly explosive, one could rejoice in the emergence of a few encouraging signs amid the potentially and terrifyingly explosive period in Nepal's history. One is IGP Pradeep SJB Rana's frank and courageous disclosure recently of police brutality in the Maoist areas, during the tenure of his predecessor, Achyut Krishna Kharel.

"Police killed innocent people, discriminated against ordinary people based on their social status, and maltreated the locals during their patrols," he is quoted as saying. This is an unprecedented admittance by the chief of police that the offensive was a major cause for the rapid spread of Maoist support. Seen in this perspective, the killing of police in Rukumkot and Dailekh two months ago were revenge attacks against a force seen as the oppressors.

Pradeep Sumshere's statement gives us a glimmer of hope that recognition of responsibility of those who gave orders to the police, and the police themselves, will lead to a thorough investigation of those in power who allowed these atrocities to take place. Many say that if the recommendations of the Mallik Commission report had been carried out after the 1990 Jana Andolan, and perpetrators of "crimes against humanity" including Kharel himself been punished, then the atrocities in the mid-West may not have been carried out, we would not have seen the insurgency taking such a brutal turn, and the country spared much of the anguish it has suffered since.

The other potentially explosive development is the expose by ex-servicemen of the exploitation of lower ranking army personnel by officers as household orderlies. Tied in with this is the issue of anomalies in the system of payment for Nepali peacekeepers serving in the United Nations—where a bulk of the money is

**The whole dangerous plan has been hatched by the Prime Minister and a handful of his hard-line anti-communist *chelas* to solve the Maoist problem by force and not through negotiations.**

kept by the Royal Nepal Army. The two issues present a pandora's box of problems which if not properly addressed could affect the armed forces—the institution that the government thinks can save the country from the Maoists.

The threatening news concerns the deployment of the army in Maoist areas. It is still not clear to anyone I know, except maybe army officers (and they ain't talking) exactly what the rules of engagement are and what the army's role will be in the much-vaunted Integrated Security and Defence package (ISDP). By the time I return from a trip to the US in a month or so, one fears Nepal may be drifting dangerously in the direction of full-scale engaged in a civil war. The government thinks this will solve the problem, or at least divert the people's attention away from real crisis. A recent discussion programme starring the UML's Jhal Nath Khanal, Kamal Thapa from the RPP and defence minister Mahesh Acharya was interesting. All three gentlemen said the right things—agreeing that the "Maoist problem" is a national problem and not just a problem of the ruling party.

One of the questions the host then asked Mahesh Acharya, was how he could reconcile this with the fact that all decisions regarding "solving the Maoist problem" including the ISDP are made unilaterally by the ruling section of the Congress Party without discussion with the parliamentary opposition, the public, the Maoists, or even the upper house of

Parliament. Mahesh Acharya was at a loss for words.

Come to think of it, the whole dangerous plan seems to have been hatched by the Prime Minister and a handful of his hard-line anti-communist *chelas* to cope with a country-wide problem, which the entire country thinks should be solved politically, not with force. The Nepali newspapers cannot make up their minds whether the three-pronged Congress force to suppress the Maoists is really going to make matters worse. My guess is that the Congress pundits presently in power will set off a dangerous confusion in chain of command, and bring up ambiguities regarding the assigned roles of the army, police and paramilitary as they barge brazenly into Maoist-controlled areas.

No one in his right mind can imagine the army enjoying being told that it has to take orders from the reigning Chief District Officer. Knowing the officially confirmed hatred for the police, which pervades the Maoist areas, it is not hard to imagine how the people will react to seeing heavily armed paramilitaries marching into their villages under the protection of the army.

The army, aside from being considered the right arm of the Monarchy has up until now been largely untouched by the scandals which have rocked almost every other national institution. The people in general think well of the army. This may change faster than we can imagine, if the government's plan goes ahead.

Then there is, one supposes, a kind of symbolic

significance to the fact that the first deployment is to be in Gorkha, the ancestral home of the Shah dynasty and from where Prithvi Narayan Shah ventured forth to unite Nepal. It is also possible, that Gorkha has received first priority because it is also the home of Babu Ram Bhattarai, the Maoist leader best known to Kathmandu's intellectuals.

Five years ago, in Gorkha I was struck by how well locals spoke of their brilliant native son, Babu Ram Bhattarai. His family home is perched on a hilltop, and the villagers would point it out to us proudly. One year later, it was in Gorkha that we interviewed students and teachers tortured in the local jail who told us chilling tales of police terror, and the killing of innocents.

Today, large parts of Gorkha district are at last peaceful and free of police harassment. The Maoists have held local elections and are carrying out grassroots development in the poorer villages. People are happy they receive quick justice in the "People's Courts", and proud of the way they have been at the vanguard of a new kind of revolution. Now, with the ISDP going into force in Gorkha, Rukum and Rolpa one trembles to think what might happen when the army and paramilitary move in soon. ♦



# Princess Shruti and Prince Nirajan

HEMLATA RAI

The late Princess Shruti only recently became active in the public sphere, but interest in her had been growing for some time. As a college student at Mayo Girl's College in India, she was once publicly criticised for lack of 'royal etiquette' when photographs of her with an Indian film actor were carried by various gossip magazines.

The late princess had an uneventful childhood. "She was a patient, quiet and obedient pupil. She was very disciplined," said Lt Col (retired) Shishir Chandra Shah, her horse-riding instructor. According to him, though she was not a "technically perfect" rider, her love for the animal never allowed her to quit horse riding. The 24-year-old princess continued her lessons between two pregnancies, and her school exams. She was one of the finest horse riders at Mayo Girl's College in India when she was there for two years.

Princess Shruti's passion for art marked her as papa's girl. Unlike her mother, grandfather and paternal uncles

whose aesthetic forays were mostly literary, Princess Shruti was more inclined to painting like King Birendra, whose art has been published in book form. Critics have sometimes said her style is strongly influenced by her father's, but it is her teacher, Govind Dongol, whose mark was more visible in her art. But she wasn't only a painter, she was also painted. Dutch painter Ed Vanderkooy who painted the princess in May this year told us his impression of her: "She is a thoroughly modern woman of the world. She is shy but not formal, and she is very knowledgeable about art. It was a pleasure to paint her."

"Hardworking" is an adjective former instructors often use when talking about the late princess. In high school, she displayed a flair for sports that remained with her even after the birth of her daughters. In March 1999, she did her judo teachers Om Bahadur Thapa and Maha Laxmi Shrestha at the National Police Training Centre proud by earning a black-belt following ten years of training. Princess Shruti made remarkable strides in her academic endeavours late in her student life, at Kathmandu's Padma Kanya Campus. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree with distinction. At St Mary's High School in Kathmandu, a former classmate recalls, "she was just an average student." After finishing her SLC examinations in the capital, she went on to finish her senior secondary education at Mayo College, where her mother Queen Aiswarya studied two decades earlier.

Public speculation about her marriage started growing as she was finishing school, but that ended in May 1997, when she married Kumar Gorakh Sumshere Jung Bahadur Rana. The princess passed away on Friday, 1 June 2001. She is survived by two young daughters, and her husband, who is undergoing treatment at the Birendra Military Hospital.

Prince Nirajan, friends and teachers say, was like any other young urban man—he enjoyed sports, driving and partying. The rumour mill is rife with speculation that it was only late last Friday that he decided against attending a gathering

with friends at Nagarkot, in favour of the family dinner.

People who knew the 22-year-old prince, remark on his passion for conservation and wildlife. Inspired by his uncle, King Gyanendra, the late prince wanted to start a crusade to protect endangered freshwater Gangetic dolphins, which are rapidly disappearing from the Karnali and Narayani rivers and Chisapani Gorge inside the Royal Bardiya National Park (RBNP). He had already visited these areas and talked to residents—and, apparently, had already decided to do all he could to reverse the present administrative arrangement that issues annual fishing licenses to businessmen inside the RBNP. "But he remained sensitive to the plight of poverty-stricken locals, and wanted to ensure that traditional fishing rights of the indigenous communities remain secure," said a friend.

Friends and teachers of the late prince remark on his sporting abilities. He was a junior swimming champion at Kathmandu's Budhanilkantha School and his former horse-riding instructor Shishir Chandra Shah says the prince had more talent for the sport that he was inclined to develop. "His alertness and physique were perfect for riding... if he'd tried, he could have made real achievements," says Shah. The late prince's attentions had turned to football in recent years. He was reportedly seeking a role at the National Sports Council for the development of football in the country. Following his brother's much-lauded involvement in the SAF Games last year, Prince Nirajan also wanted to aid in the development of sports in Nepal. His friends say he promised his brother, then the crown prince, to get personally involved in organising and managing a proposed international karate championship in Nepal.

A close friend of the prince, who did not wish to be identified, says: "The two brothers were close, but the prince was more attached to his father, King Birendra." His friends say the late prince had little interest in governance and politics, but was aware of what was going on in the country. "He used to have regular discussions on these issues with his father," said another



MIN BAIRACHARYA

friend of the late prince.

Prince Nirajan attended the Kanti Ishwari Shishu Vidyalaya, Budhanilkantha School and St Xavier's School. He briefly attended Eton College in England and returned to Nepal to take a Bachelor's in Business Administration (BBA) at the Kathmandu School of Management. He was preparing for his final exams later this month, when he passed away last Friday, 1 June, 2000. "The prince was a fantastic person. Though he had royal titles, he was a commoner at heart," said a classmate of the late prince at the Kathmandu School of Management. ♦

## "A gem of a person"



**Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah's family and colleagues remember an erudite and intelligent man who did not like to put on airs, or flaunt his royal status.**

RAMYATA LIMBU

The late Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah spent most of his lifetime buried in books or cooking. Just last week, the 58-year-old academic and sportsman had finished reading Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *Unvanquished*, a candid look at the UN system. Kumar Khadga was among those killed in Friday night's royal palace shootout.

Just a week prior to his death, he had invited family members to a dinner at his home where he served Chinese food. "That was the best Chinese I've ever eaten," says Neer

Shah, Khadga's youngest brother who is now mourning three deaths in the family—Kumar Khadga, his wife Sharada and the brothers' mother, Bodh Kumari Shah, who died of a heart attack on Saturday.

"Thulu was an extremely good cook who would spend hours in the kitchen. He was a gem of a person," says 57-year-old Lalit Bikram Shah, the middle brother. "The study was his favourite room. He would come here and constantly arrange and rearrange his books," another family member told us. Kumar Khadga was interested in development

issues, which preoccupied him while he was with the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) at Tribhuvan University.

The family showed us his study: hundreds of books on politics, geography, history, international relations, mountaineering and a select choice of fiction. Says Neer: "He was an all-rounder from every point of view. Within his constraints, he tried his best to make substantial contributions in the academic and sports areas and was always concerned about the country."

By all accounts Khadga was a



*The last family portrait of Bodh Kumari Shah (on bed, centre), Lalit Shah, Kumar Khadga, Neer Shah and Princess Sharada (standing at back) and grandchildren taken two weeks before the tragedy. An intimate moment by the fireplace, and with grandchildren.*

liberal thinker, he was optimistic about democracy, but had grown increasingly frustrated with the way things were going in the country with political infighting, chronic instability and the lack of development.

Kumar Khadga was director at CNAS 1984-89. His appointment there was initially looked on with suspicion by academics who now had a royal relative as a leader. But their suspicions were put to rest once he began to take charge and is now remembered by his contemporaries as a dynamic director who was able to give the institution—still one of the most respected in Nepal—a much-needed push forward.

"Initially, when he was appointed CNAS director there was great reluctance to accept him," recalls Prof Dhurba Kumar, a researcher at CNAS. "Sceptics scoffed. They felt he had got the job because he was a royal relative." But that was not the case—after they got to know Khadga's passion for learning and



pursuit of knowledge, no one questioned the choice.

The CNAS took a big leap forward after Kumar Khadga took over and helped define its scope of work with clear-cut programmes. His priorities were research, human resource development and he encouraged researchers to specialise in different countries in the South Asia region and Japan and China.

"For most of the decade, the Centre functioned as Nepal's premier thinktank on current international issues," says Sridhar K Khatri, who teaches political science at Tribhuvan University. "Kumar Khadga was able to transcend politics when it came to research."

Both Lalit and Neer remember Khadga as an affectionate and responsible older brother who took charge of family responsibilities from a young age. His first job was at the British Embassy, and with his salary, Khadga supported the education and upbringing of his younger brothers. Says Neer: "He made us what we are today."

For 57-year-old Lalit, who is now regional director of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (Asia-Pacific), he was more: "a friend and a gem of a person". The bereaved brothers are at their home mourning the deaths of their brother, sister-in-

law and mother.

Khadga and Lalit went to St Xavier's high school at Godavari together, and then to St Xavier's College in Calcutta. Khadga graduated in political science and studied law in Kathmandu.

A keen sportsman, Khadga was captain of the hockey and cricket teams, and was also a footballer, playing with the Mahabir Club until a leg injury forced him off the field. That did not take him far from sport though, he was the first member secretary of the National Sports Council where he gave Nepali sports a solid foundation by helping the construction of the Dasrath Stadium. He stayed there as long as he was able to keep sports out of politics, something on which he differed with the then rulers. The sportsman in Khadga soon found him promoting another quest by founding the Nepal Mountaineering Association.

"His loss is irreparable because his full potential was never realised," says Neer. "Maybe he could have contributed a great deal more if he had not been a royal relative."

The Khadga ancestral household in Gyaneswor wears a solemn look this week, the two brothers dressed in white mourning cloth, and grim-faced and teary-eyed visitors lining up to sign the condolence book. ♦

# NEPALI Times

NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER



King Birendra  
1945-2001



# Falling for flats

MIN. BAIRACHARYA



**Kathmandu's apartment craze is catching on as a new surge in housing complexes tries to keep up with demand.**

## MUKUL HUMAGAIN

If necessity is the mother of invention, then the denizens of Kathmandu may finally be looking forward to an end to their housing woes. For too long, the Valley has coped with explosive urbanization, malignant, unplanned growth of improvised concrete structures that added floors to accommodate the influx. Zoning laws were flouted, building codes violated, safety sacrificed.

Now, housing estates and modern apartment complexes are at last making their way in. For now restricted to the upper middle class, the trend is already showing signs of trickling down to low-income housing as well. And Kathmandu is following the South Asian trend that makes an apartment a bigger status symbol than a bungalow. Already, surprisingly affordable apartment complexes are coming up promising a "European lifestyle".

Building a house can be one big headache, from getting the raw materials, hiring an engineer and contractors, getting the necessary permits (through underhand methods if necessary) fixing up water, electricity and phones. All this can be avoided by paying the little extra for an apartment. Hassle-free housing seems to be the new slogan. And since there is a demand, the supply has suddenly come up in the past five years.

Last year, when Ansal Choudhary Developers came up with the idea of Kathmandu Residency, some scoffed. A joint venture of the Choudhary Group of Nepal and Ansal BuildWell, Ansal Choudhary Developers was the first to launch an apartment based housing project in Nepal. With a total of 180 apartments with price ranging from Rs 900,000 for a one bedroom apartment to Rs 1.9 million for a three-bedroom one, the apartments were surprisingly affordable. People stopped scoffing and started taking the trend seriously.

Kathmandu Residency will be completed by October next year, and Ansal Choudhary has already started a new housing project named Mount View Residency at Harisidhi outside Patan. Spread over nearly two hectares of former paddy fields, Mount View Residency is a townhouse concept with Duplex and Individual Homes. Aimed at the middle to upper income brackets, the price of a duplex home is Rs 1.9-2.2 million, while an individual home is Rs 2.6 million.

Launched in mid-May, the apartment complex has attracted hordes of prospective home buyers. "We get up to 60 visitors a day coming to inspect the houses," says V Rajgopalan, technical head of the project. "More than half the apartments have been booked so far."

One visitor at the Harisidhi complex is Basu Shrestha, a businessman who lives in Kathmandu's inner city Indra Chowk area. He says: "I want to take my family out. It is getting too congested to live in the city." Others inspecting the interiors are happy that there is now an alternative to buying expensive property, supervising unreliable labour and fixing the utilities. Does this presage the age of suburbia in Kathmandu? Some would hope not, but it will surely make urbanization slightly more planned. The only real estate development so far had been targeted at the super-rich in areas like Bhaise Pati with its large plots for villas.

Given the Nepali penchant for copying anything that is successful, urban planners hope other developers will copy this model and take the pressure out of inner city Kathmandu. Eyeing the potential bonanza that Ansal Choudhary will make, others are already joining the bandwagon. Kantipur Development Pvt Ltd is preparing to start a housing project at Balkumari, Thimi with 107 single homes, 16 2-bedroom apartments, and 14 3-bedroom apartments. The price of a single bedroom home is Rs 2.2 million and that of two- and three-bedroom apartments is Rs 1.4 million and Rs 1.6 million respectively.

Suraj Apartment at Tangal and Priyanka Apartment at Chabahal are the two complexes already in operation in Kathmandu. Half of the flats of Suraj apartment have been sold while rest are on rent. At Priyanka, all 16 flats are on rent ranging from Rs 14-16,000. Most tenants are businessmen from outside the Valley. Other luxury apartments and flats cater to expat clients and are out of the reach of most Nepalis.

Although demand is growing, many Kathmandu inhabitants have not outgrown their initial reluctance to living in flats. And despite the relatively low cost, it

Stupa's Jitendra Shakh. Ansal Choudhary, for its part, is collaborating with the Agricultural Development Bank and United Finance for housing loans.

The private sector has stepped in where the government has failed. And the government has not even been able to fulfil its role of regulator. It has yet to introduce necessary regulations even though parliament passed the Joint Apartment Ownership Act in 1997. There is also no separate building code for apartments, and no rules on safety features like fire-escapes being implemented.

The apartment boom has also perked up the real estate market which was going through a slump. The price of small plots have risen in the past six months, and part of the reason is the demand for apartment complexes. But the main reason is still the Sanchaya Kosh's announcement of housing loans for civil servants which has brought a surge in new construction in Kathmandu Valley. "It was an encouraging year for the construction

entrepreneurs," says Ram Prasad Maharjan, chairman of Construction Material Entrepreneurs Association. The price of per thousand bricks has soared from Rs 1800 to Rs 2900, and Maharjan says it may even top 3,500. Brick kilns have not been able to meet the increased demand. Cement and steel rods have also seen a rise in price.

"The demand for cement has increased by 50 percent this year," says Bimal Chandra Poudel of the National Trading Center. As the Nepali cement industry is unable to address increasing demand, the import of Indian cement has risen. Due to this huge demand, Indian cement importers have hiked the price by Rs 11 per sack.

In the last fiscal year, Kathmandu Metropolitan City has issued Building Construction Permission for 2,347 houses. This year, the number crossed that mark by April. It is estimated that 3,000 construction permits will be issued in Kathmandu and 1,000 in Patan. ♦



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

is still out of reach for the salaried class—since there is really nothing for less than Rs 1 million. The two-bedroom apartment of Stupa Houses at Budhhanagar is one of the few low-cost apartments, but even these are at Rs 700,000. "We targeted civil servants, and we will offer financing in a tie-up with the Sanchaya Kosh," says

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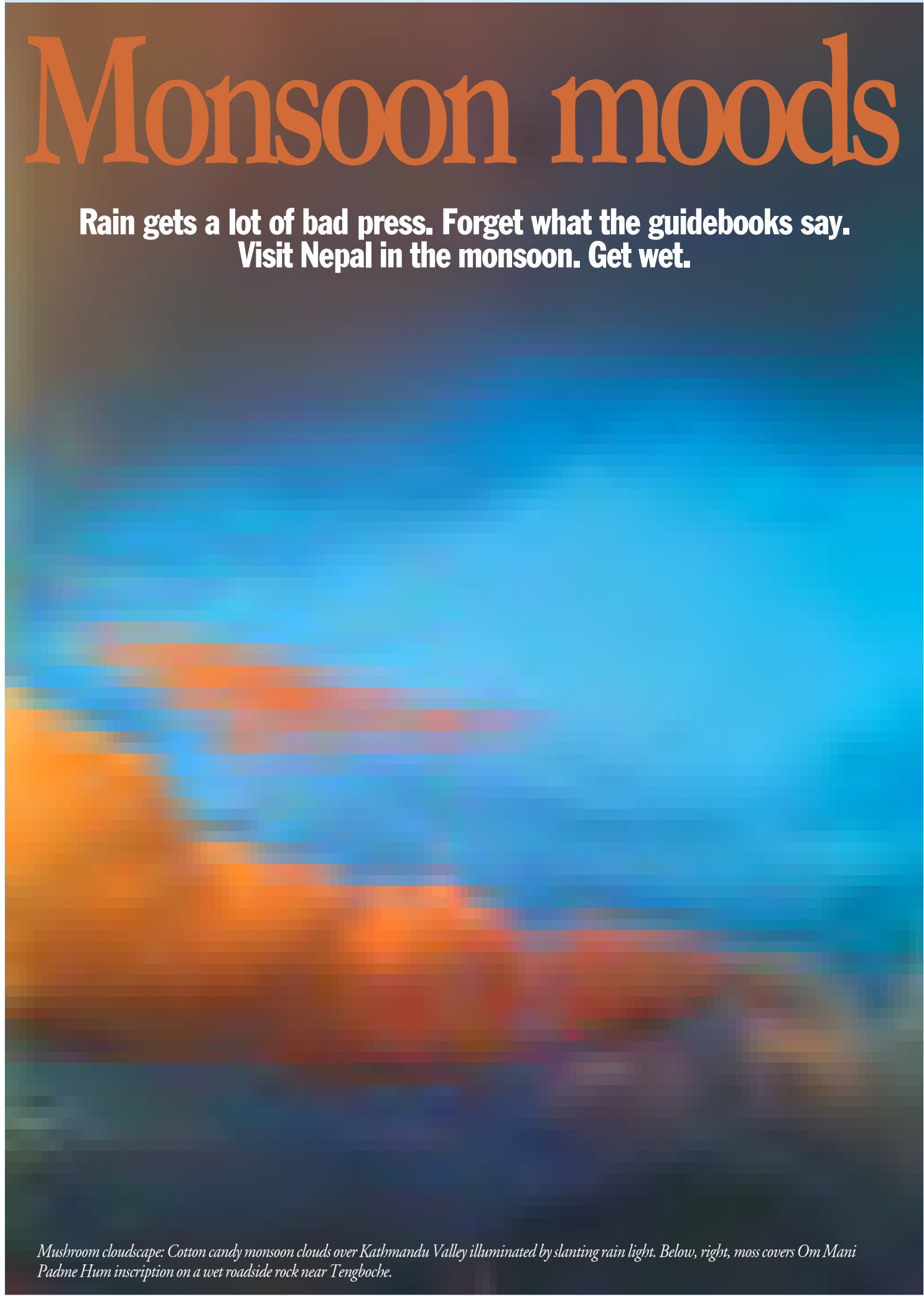
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PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

Mushroom cloudscape: Cotton candy monsoon clouds over Kathmandu Valley illuminated by slanting rain light. Below, right, moss covers Om Mani Padme Hum inscription on a wet roadside rock near Tengboche.

# Monsoon moods

Rain gets a lot of bad press. Forget what the guidebooks say. Visit Nepal in the monsoon. Get wet.

**KUNDA DIXIT** . . . . .  
True, rivers are swollen, there is a danger of landslides, highways are blocked, flights cancelled and in the tarai there are floods. But rain is life. More than 90 percent of the farms in Nepal are rain-fed. Weather forecasters on Radio Nepal sound upbeat when they report “rain throughout the kingdom”. The GDP growth rate for the subcontinent is dependent on the timely arrival of the monsoons, stock markets take a plunge if there is a delay.

It is time we discovered our country in the rainy season. Time we wet our dry and dusty souls with water from heaven. In a week or two, we will witness that annual meteorological miracle that makes prevailing winds over Nepal suddenly make a u-turn. Moist and warm air from the Bay of Bengal will travel up, deflected by the Himalayan foothills where it will billow up and condense into thick wads of rain. For three months in a year, the Himalaya from Kashmir to Assam act as a gigantic atmospheric dam to store this water vapour. The mountains are such an effective barrier that the Tibetan plateau to the north is left literally high and dry in the rain shadow.

These weeks before the arrival of the monsoon are hot and muggy. Rivers run dry, fields are parched, and farmers stage elaborate frog weddings as rites of rain. The pre-monsoon showers are catadysmic events. Pumped by the heat, huge convection currents send cauldrons of cumulus rising vertically into the atmosphere, sometimes more than 50,000 feet. Up there in the stratosphere, the jet stream smears their tops into wild angry cobra heads. On one pre-monsoon afternoon, I once watched the entire Ganesh massif dwarfed in the shadow of one of these cauliflower-like clouds of moisture penetrating the edge of space. The convection system rose out of the Buri Gandaki Valley to ride on flashing neon legs of purple lightning. From high up on a ridge above Dhunche we watched transfixed as the afternoon sun was blotted out, and the snowy slopes of Langtang Lirung lost their light. It suddenly became dark and silent like an eclipse. Animals, humans, and even the thirsty plants waited nervously as a veil of violet rain advanced from the west.

The wind picked up, the poplars bent like bows: their agitated leaves

giving the quickening air a voice. Plastic bags, startled birds and leaves were snatched by the flying yellow dust. The storm edged closer until the flash and crash became simultaneous. The roiling blue-black clouds overhead muffled the guttural roll of the thunderbolt as it travelled away over the mountains into Tibet. Another, more delicate din approached as the hailstones hit corrugated roofs of the houses in the bazaar below. By evening, the pyrotechnics were over, the storm had moved over to the east briefly framed in a double rainbow over the holy ridges of Gosainkunda. The varnished leaves dripped, the tree trunks sweated, the wet water buffalos were shiny.

If a pre-monsoon thunder shower is an opera, then the arrival of the monsoon itself a few weeks later is a Smetana symphony. You can smell the rain long before it actually arrives. From the pass above Pokhara, the clouds move about among the Annapurnas like the little curly puffs you see on thangka paintings. They ride the westerlies across azure skies, and suddenly stop, hesitate, and turn around. That change in high-altitude wind direction precisely between June 10-15 over central Nepal every year is the first sign that the monsoon will soon burst.

By evening, the air suddenly turns humid, a smell of warm wetness swells up from the valley below. A yellow moon rises from behind a range of mountainous clouds to the east. They glow in the moonlight, and the inside of the clouds are incandescent with silent lightning. By nightfall, there is a sudden sharp coolness as the moisture turns into mist, and the mist in turn into a fine gauze of rain. The Nepali vocabulary has at many onomatopoeic words to describe different kinds of rain: at midnight it turns from drizzly *sim-sime* to heavier *darkane* and by early morning it is a torrential *musal-dhawe*.

There is nothing like the simple pleasure of lying dry and drowsy inside a sleeping bag on a bed of straw below a shingle roof of a Nepali farmhouse while the monsoon beats down outside. You can analyse the individual sounds: of rain drops falling on the trees, tapping on the stone tiles above your head, gathering in the gutter to splatter on the street below. When you wake up, you find it is still raining through the mist. The ridge

## Just singing, dancing in the rain...

**DESMOND DOIG** . . . . .  
On one of my earliest visits to Nepal I walked across the border. I came with a Hungarian artist who lived in India, her companion a French artist-adventurer, a Nepali male dancer friend and a small dog of no particular breed. Together we were visiting places where Gautama the Buddha had lived and preached and died. We ended the pilgrimage where we should in fact have begun it— in Lumbini. The lady artist had insisted that we travel humbly and cheaply like true pilgrims. So we carried nothing but our paints and a change of clothes which consisted of

little else than a *kurta*, a *lungi* and a pair of slippers. Even the slippers were a recent acquisition as we had begun the journey barefooted. The monsoon was expected to thud down on Kathmandu any day: the Indian plains had been scorching and still, as they are just before the monsoons. I like to think we were the first hippies who hit Nepal. Sans hash we looked the part, so that even Boris Lissanevitch was briefly hesitant to take us in. There were few rooms at The Royal Hotel and its growing reputation had to be protected. Boris suggested in our interest, and I suspect his own, that we share a single room which turned out to be one quarter of the original ‘Number One’. Gone were the cherubs and

the blue ceiling. Gone too the wallpaper and, alas, the great loo. We’d once again arrived in time for Yak Tails and we sat being eyed rather suspiciously by the other guests through a long evening and the first real dinner we had had in weeks. Even Boris tired when Elizabeth, the Hungarian artist, kept urging us to have one more before going to bed well after midnight. She herself didn’t drink. At last Boris had the bar closed and more or less ordered us to bed. When we got to the door of our room we understood Elizabeth’s reluctance to retire. She stood outside and said piteously, “I have never done this before.” Which was remarkable considering we had shared train compartments, rest houses

and space under trees together for at least a month. But psychology was at work. A bedroom was a bedroom was a bedroom, and those four beds placed rather close together did suggest orgy. Elizabeth overcame remorse by taking a quick dash for her bed and bundling in under blankets, clothes and all. We were soon asleep. At some ungodly hour we were wakened by the most frightful din. The skies over Kathmandu were exploding. The monsoon had arrived. But where was Elizabeth? It was the Nepali dancer who saw her first and shouted, “God, she’s gone mad.” There in the courtyard with apparently nothing on was a figure dancing in the pouring rain. Continuous purple

lightning made her seem strobe lit, so that flash, flash, flash there was Elizabeth leaping, gyrating and spreadeagled against the night. For a while she ignored our entreaties to come in and then all of a sudden was inside splashing cold rain on us all. Her French companion’s loud complaints were literally drowned by a bucket of freezing water brought from the loo by Elizabeth and emptied over him. Kathmandu does strange things to people the way Shangri-la did to the old, the young and to those in love. ♦  
(Excerpted with permission from *My Kind of Kathmandu*, Harper Collins, 1994)





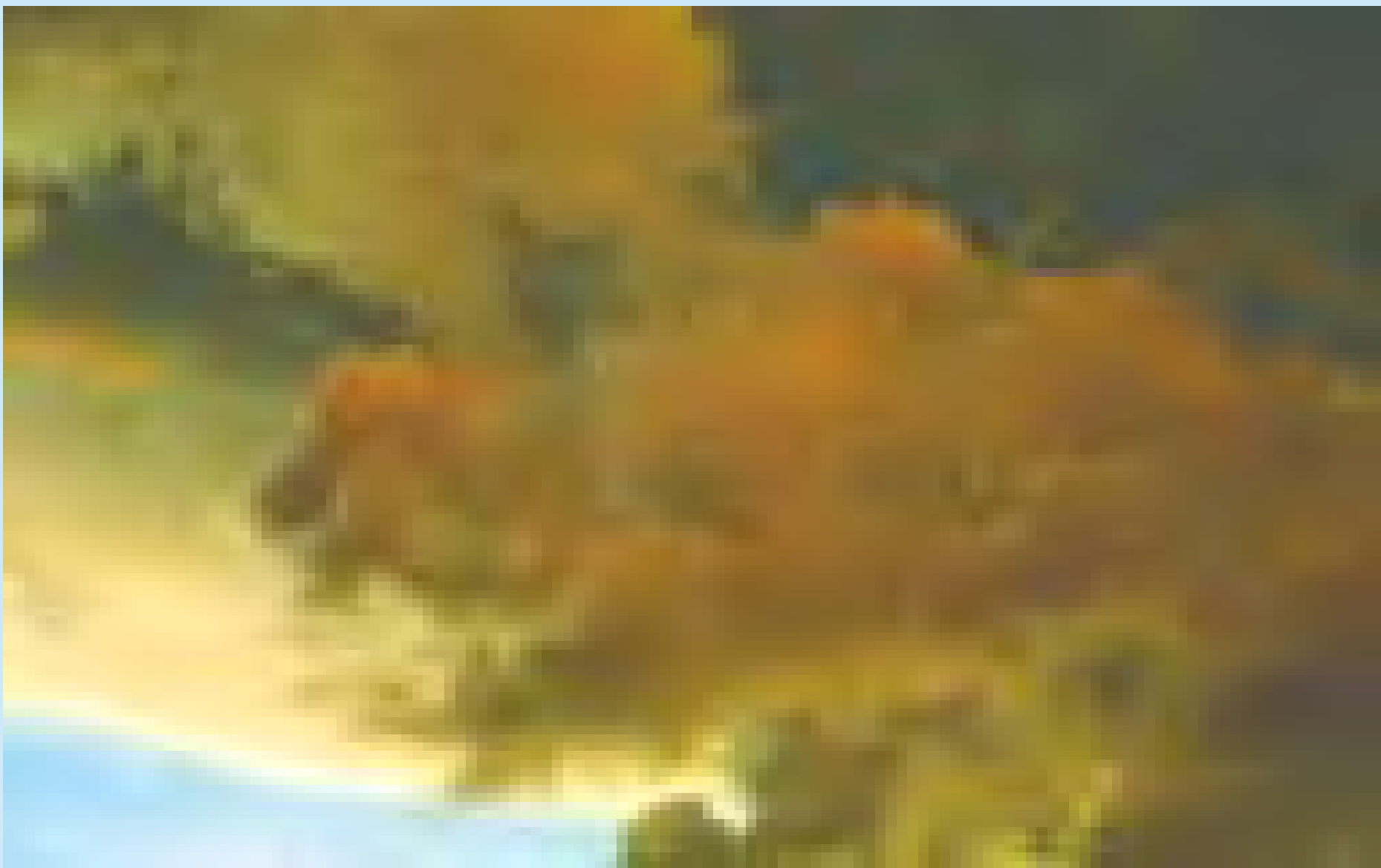
track has by now turned into a torrent. There is commotion on the trail as men and women shrouded in plastic and bobbing umbrellas get their hoes ready to move down to the paddy terraces for the transplanting.

Forget what the guidebooks say. Visit Nepal in the monsoon. Get wet. See the denuded slopes burst with foliage as nature gives Himalayans one more chance at regeneration—another hope to set things right. Watch Kathmandu Valley reclaim the green and turn emerald once more. Gaze down from the Jiri highway at three thousand vertical feet of staircased rice fields mirroring the gray sky. Today, most tourist areas are accessible by air even in the monsoon. There is a chance your flight will be cancelled a few days in a row, but you will get there. You gather at the domestic terminal in Kathmandu as the rain thunders on the metal roof. Drenched helicopters squat grounded on the tarmac like wet dragonflies. But, surprise, the flight to Syangboche is called.

The pilot ducks, leaps and sidesteps the monsoon stratus. The Sun Kosi, swollen brown, plunges eastwards in a series of rapids. Red scars of recent landslides maul the slopes near Rumjatar. Lamjura is closed up by clouds, so we fly around it, sometimes grazing the steep flanks as goats and cattle flee for cover in the high meadows. The mountains get steeper, meaner. Long tendrils of waterfalls tumble over cliffs and dissolve into mist half-way down in their journey to the valley below. The tops of mountains disappear into a dark ceiling of cloud.

Up here in Syangboche the air is more humid than Kathmandu. The next morning Mt Everest, the Lhotse-Nuptse wall, Thamserku and Kongde gather around like old friends. They look fresh with a coating of new snow, but the snowline has receded up their flanks—exposing wet shoulders that look like they are carved out of ebony. The difference in the monsoon is the greenery. The flowers are in full bloom, alive with butterflies and birdlife. The grass creeps up right up to the moraines and the snowline.

Everywhere, there is the sound of falling water: big waterfalls that thunder right across the Imja valley, little ones that gurgle behind every



bend in the track to Tengboche, the deep drone of the Bhote Kosi relentlessly cutting ever deeper gorges. These rivers are older than the mountains and they have been slicing through the rising rock for 60 million years. Hydro-powered waterwheels chum energetically spreading the prayer about the jewel in the lotus in all directions. Monsoon is the time when the trekking trails mostly only have Nepalis on them. There is not a backpacking tourist in sight.

By ten in the morning, the first clouds are chugging up the Imja Khola—the forerunner of an ocean of clouds that can be seen lapping at the ridges below Namche in the distance. They move up silently through the junipers, soaking the swaying lichens with droplets of condensation. By eleven, when we are safely inside the Ama Dablam Lodge, the rain starts falling steadily in that marathon-like pace of nonsense, long-term rain. It falls continuously into afternoon, all

night and stops abruptly at dawn. Mountains are like the centrefolds of girlie magazines. After a while, you wish they had some clothes on. Mountains look infinitely more interesting when there are clouds hovering around them. And the sight of the first rays of the sun illuminating the summit seracs of Kangtega would look incomplete without the wisp of pink plume moving across them. Clouds give an added dimension to the rock and ice—the dimension of movement, of flight, and of matter in its vapour state. And because they are visible so fleetingly, the monsoon makes you treasure the rare glimpses.

By late August, you notice that the relentless rain is ebbing as the monsoon starts to lose its momentum. The water buffalos start making their treks up from Hetauda to the slaughter houses of Kathmandu for the post-monsoon Dasain feasts. Many of these animals are now crammed into lorries, but some still trek up the trail

that once used to connect Kathmandu Valley to the plains. In the village of Chitlang overlooking the Kulekhani Lake they gather for their last day on the trail. Tomorrow they have to make the climb up to the Chandragiri Pass at 8,000 feet before the steep descent down to Kathmandu Valley on the other side. By the time we enter the oak forest the next afternoon, the clouds move in. The buffalos are single file, disappearing

into the misty undergrowth. They wear straw slippers so their hoofs don't wear off on the stony trail. The rain comes down in fat drops, and that is when the leeches decide to ambush the convoy. Suddenly they are everywhere, dropping down from the lower branches, flailing out from wet rocks, sucking the buffalos without mercy. At the pass where we rest while the buffalos straggle past, I pick out fifteen leeches from inside one of

my shoes. The buffalos are faring worse, they are bleeding from their snouts and eyelids. In the black-and-white world of a monsoon forest the crimson streaks on the buffalos look like fluorescent graffiti.

By mid-September, the sun returns. The dasain revelries begin, the buffalos are massacred at the Kot. The sky is navy blue and dotted with kites. At Kathmandu airport, the tourists start arriving again. ♦



# Shangrila

**CHILD PORNOGRAPHY ON THE NET**

- Children are sexually exploited through child pornography and sexual contact via internet chat rooms
- Pedophile Chatrooms exist (80 arrests in Operation Callisto in 1999 in the largest crackdown on an internet chat room)
- Most countries rely on voluntary and production bans to combat pedophilia from their regulating the Internet
- Over 100,000 children are sexually abused in the U.S. each year
- Over 100,000 children were abused in the U.S. each year

Source: FBI, UNICEF, UNICEF, UNICEF

[illegible]

One of the defining characteristics of the Internet is that you never know when it will startle you. Virtually every crime is possible here. There is paedophile racketeering, stalking, high security systems hacking, and child pornography. The net can be a dangerous place for a growing mind to experiment. There was the 20-year-old Israeli who hacked into the

One phenomenon of particular concern in Kathmandu is chatting, and it isn't restricted to children. In corporate offices that use leased lines, there is almost always someone chatting. Eavesdrop on any teenage conversation and the words "this guy/girl I met on the net" are sure to pop up. It's fun: the chatter can assume any identity. "I go to general chat rooms because I

And it can be, but you must know that when you chat, your system is open to the whole wired world. Operating systems like Windows 95 or 98 are insecure and have technical loopholes any experienced hacker can work their way through. "Linux and Unix are more secure compared to Windows, but due to their complexity only experienced users use them," says Deepesh Pradhan, director of Yomari Inc which designs web pages and develops software for companies. Hackers have countless ways to enter your life through your computer. Cookies are small files that websites use to identify visitors. It's a tag that identifies your personal computer and this can also be used to retrieve information from your system. The possible material damage is insignificant compared to the emotional, mental, and physical trauma this can result in.

Nepali users are still in the dark about what can go wrong on the net,

user and chatter is lucky: her parents ensure there is always someone to guide her when she is online. No one here is thinking yet of laws against crimes in cyberspace. Will we wait for the first big crime to happen before we think about safety on the Internet? Talk to your children and ask them where they are clicking and for the consequences. Before we have our first juvenile right to a provocative cyber criminal or victim I just to back on a bit and not (Names have been changed to protect the identity of minors.)

- Don't respond to flaming (provocation online)
- Choose a gender neutral screen name
- Don't flirt online, unless you're prepared for the consequences
- You have the right to flirt and the right to a provocative nickname, but sometimes it's better just to back off a bit and not exercise all your rights all the time.
- Save offending messages and report them to your service provider.
- Don't give out any personal information about yourself or anyone else.
- Get out of a situation online that has become hostile, log off or surf elsewhere.
- Change your password regularly.

- Keep the computer in a central family location, not in the child's room. The computer shouldn't be an escape for the child, but a family activity.
- Get to know your children's online friends. You wouldn't let them spend loads of time with a new friend in the neighbourhood until you've met them. Online friends are no different.
- Screen e-mail with all younger children. Many paedophiles attach child pornography to e-mails sent to children. The child pornography is used to convince the child that other children are performing sexual acts. Make sure you screen all attachments or limit e-mail through parental control features or software.
- Help your children keep being online in perspective. Too many children get compulsive about computing and forget to play with real friends, and ignore physical activity.
- If you can't be home with them when they're online, use a net nanny—child protection software to help keep an eye on them. Some software keeps them from sharing personal information with others online, like their names, addresses and telephone numbers.
- Make sure they understand that they should never meet anyone in real life that they met online without parents in attendance, and that people online are often not honest about who or what they are.

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COMMENTARY

by DONALD A GOLDMANN

# WARNING: Hospitals may be unsafe for the poor

Most public health initiatives in developing countries focus on controlling infectious diseases in the community. The morbidity and mortality caused by diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, schistosomiasis, pediatric pneumonia and diarrhea justify such priorities. But another aspect of the public health system in nations with limited healthcare resources—*hospital-acquired* infection—has been largely ignored by the public, press, and funding agencies.

Developing nations lavish their limited resources on hospitals, which in some countries consume over 50 percent of healthcare budgets. Regional or national tertiary care centres in these countries offer as much high-tech diagnosis and treatment as the country can afford (or persuade industrialised nations or philanthropists to provide). The craving for expensive, technologically sophisticated care is noteworthy. Poor countries make these large investments to improve the quality of diagnosis and treatment, but also to keep their best physicians, who return from training in advanced countries with a keen desire to use their skills, only to find outdated radiology equipment, a limited range and unreliable supply of drugs, and primitive life-support technology. And industrialised countries that build and help fund these projects may be motivated, at least partly, by pressure from high-tech equipment and supplies companies.

But these huge investments are frequently counterproductive. Many patients enter hospitals only to fall victim to largely preventable, potentially fatal, antimicrobial-resistant infections. These infections prolong hospitalisation and require additional diagnosis and treatment, generally with expensive, difficult-to-obtain antibiotics. The more advanced (and expensive) the care, the higher the risk. Danger is greatest in intensive care units (ICUs), where patients are colonised rapidly with hospital bacterial pathogens, which often are resistant to antibiotics. ICU patients are infection-prone because they are exposed to invasive devices (like intravenous or arterial catheters and mechanical ventilation), complex surgical procedures, and drugs that weaken the immune system. ICUs in developing countries not only have high rates of infection, but also are subject to devastating outbreaks of lethal bloodstream infection and pneumonia due to contamination of equipment, medications, and other supplies.

The widespread lack of appreciation of the importance of hospital-acquired infections among care-givers and policymakers in developing countries is disheartening. The thirst for technology is not accompanied by an appetite for infection control. On one occasion, my colleagues and I were invited to a public hospital in a developing country to investigate why the death rate in a paediatric ICU for patients with dengue hemorrhagic fever was so high. The prevailing theory held a virulent strain of the dengue virus responsible. But most children

were dying from hospital-acquired bloodstream infection caused by the very devices that were supposed to save their lives—intravenous catheters, mechanical ventilators, and bladder drainage catheters. Though the equipment was adequate, infection control and staff training were not. A damp towel teeming with hospital bacterial pathogens was used to dry hands. Intravenous and bladder catheters were neither inserted nor maintained properly. Tubing for ventilators (hung to dry over a hole in the floor used to dispose of urine and wastes) was not disinfected correctly. We found innumerable other violations of basic infection control technique. A bone marrow transplant unit, financed largely by Japan, had just opened in the same hospital—placing the most vulnerable patients at the mercy of deadly infections.

Sound infection control costs a fraction of even basic medical technologies. Granted, countries with limited resources cannot supply their hospitals with the full repertoire of infection controls available in wealthier nations. But infection control principles, such as effective hand hygiene and good aseptic technique, are simple and easily taught. Where safe water is unavailable, effective decontamination of hands takes a few seconds with a water-less, alcohol-based gel that costs a few US pennies if manufactured locally. Gloves, locally manufactured, can be reserved for high-risk activities to prevent cross-infection among patients and protect care-givers from blood-borne infections. Proper disinfection of equipment is generally affordable (especially in comparison to the cost of equipment itself), and contamination of medications and solutions can be avoided through training and vigilance. Deadly outbreaks of Lassa fever and Ebola have occurred among patients and care-givers in rural facilities simply because gloves and other personal protection necessary to prevent the spread of these blood-borne viruses were unavailable or, if available, not used properly. Hospitals that have invasive devices like intra-vascular catheters, ventilators, and bladder catheters tend to overuse them and leave in place longer than is medically necessary. This is the worst-case scenario—expensive material is wasted and the risk of infection increased.

Healthcare policy leaders and funding agencies should remember that even the most fearsome contagious diseases can yield to basic infection control training and equipment. But hospital-acquired infections must be given proper priority. If not, many investments in costly hospital facilities in the developing world may do more harm than good. ♦ *(Project Syndicate)*

*Dr. Donald A. Goldman is Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Immunology and Infectious Diseases at the Harvard School of Public Health and has worked on improving infection control in many developing countries.*



# Reinventing Beijing



**ANTOANETA BEZLOVA**  
IN BEIJING

In their zealous bid to win the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, Chinese leaders may be pushing for more changes in Beijing than the city can take without surrendering the last bits of its ancient identity. Beijing is now touted to become a financial capital, adding a glitzy Wall Street-style financial area at the foot of the ancient imperial city.

Authorities want to reinvent Beijing's image from that of a prohibitive old city of emperors into one of a futuristic metropolis. They are evicting 20,000 families and pulling down thousands of old courtyard houses to make way for its showpiece Wall Street—104 ha next to the city's second ring road, which was approved by the State Council as the capital's financial centre in 1993. Over the past eight years, the city government has financed and completed the first third

of the project. A regiment of skyscrapers has risen on the site of the former maze of courtyards and old lanes in Xicheng district. Authorities say that so far, some 300 firms, including state banks, insurance and securities companies, have settled in the finance area. The second phase, which will include office buildings, five-star hotels, convention and exhibition centres, will take another five years to complete. "With China's pending accession to the World Trade Organisation, the state will open the financing industry wider to the outside world," says Cao Zengsen, executive chairman of the Beijing Xicheng District Government where the area is located.

But China already has two bustling metropolises—Hong Kong and Shanghai, where most of the country's financial and business transactions are concentrated. Beijing cannot mount a serious threat to either

**In their bid for the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese want to turn Beijing into a futuristic metropolis and business centre.**

of them because foreign banks are not allowed to do local currency business in the capital. Despite the cluster of state-level financial institutions in the Beijing finance area, it has attracted only three foreign banks which have set up representative offices here. Even within the capital, the government-approved finance area faces stiff competition from the Central Business District in eastern Chaoyang district where most of Beijing's foreign companies and their expatriates are located. But Xicheng district officials brush aside doubts about the future of Beijing's Wall Street. "Beijing Finance Street is the only place in Beijing that is devoted to financial business," argues Cao Zengsen. He says that in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), the place was known as Jincheng Fang or Gold City Lane because many gold and silver workshops were there. Adds Liu Jian, deputy governor of the Xicheng district: "Today all of the state-level financing bodies are located in the area. If foreign companies want to make money, they will move in here because their domestic partners are here."

City officials could make a faux pas to match that of Chairman Mao Zedong's. He altered Beijing's core irrevocably, saying the capital of a workers' state needed to be an

industrial stronghold as well as a political and cultural centre. Ten years after the Communist takeover in 1949, there were 700 factories and 2,000 blast furnaces belching soot into the air. Today, there are more than 1,000 industrial enterprises in the city, employing millions of people. In 1957, the old city walls with their turrets and battlements were torn down. Since then, most historic buildings have been razed. Ancient temples, tombs, courtyard homes and narrow lanes have been bulldozed to make way for high-rise apartment blocks, highways and shopping malls. Ironically, the goal of making Beijing the host of 2008 Olympics has made authorities quietly reverse Mao's policies. Over 700 industrial plants are to be pushed out of the city in the next three to five years. The city government has also announced plans to invest nearly 100 billion yuan (\$12.5 billion) in a huge clean-up campaign, aiming to reduce air and water pollution and plant 40 percent of the urban area with trees, all by 2007. But conservationists say the enormity of the destruction to the city is irreversible. While the clean-up campaign might improve the city's image enough to host the Olympics in seven years' time, it would be difficult for athletes and guests to find a cultural environment that really represents an ancient capital. ♦ (IPS)

## COMMENT

# Thailand punches below its weight

In the past 100 days, the Thaksin government has punched below its weight on foreign policy. Instead of matching or going beyond its weigh-in status and capability, the government is content with pathetic diplomacy under the amorphous banner of "forward engagement". Worse has been the government's enthusiasm for a nationalistic agenda which clashes with the policy objectives outlined by the Foreign Ministry. Certainly, that position has won Thai Rak Thai a lot of domestic support. But it was painful for the government to find out that the foreign community did not buy it. After Thaksin's disastrous speech at a UN meeting in Bangkok recently, which shocked the Bangkok-based diplomatic community, the government took a series of damage-control actions and came out with the message that Thailand would remain open to global investment and trade. That demonstrated the imperative of external exigencies, which have shaped Thailand in more ways than one since the Western colonisers knocked on its door some 150 years ago.

To move forward, Thailand needs pragmatic domestic policies that will strengthen its social fabric and democratic foundations. At the same time it requires forward-looking policies that boost the national interest and elevate its position in international contexts. Somehow the external part of this equation has been missing or misplaced in the first 100 days. No one can deny that the dominant issues of the coming decades for Thailand will include drugs, refugees, migration, disease, environmental degradation and international crime as well as democracy and human rights. Thailand cannot deal with all these issues alone. To be fair, the government has been intensifying its anti-drugs efforts both domestically and regionally. China's willingness to call a summit meeting to discuss drugs among the Mekong countries was laudable. Like many other pledges, it must be judged in a long-term perspective. But unfortunately Thai foreign policy has failed to maximise the country's newly found leverage in international relations. The Thaksin government has chosen to dwell on traditional issues and zero in on neighbouring countries. The government wants to strengthen trade and economic opportunities with neighbours who are less developed but rich in natural resources. So there has emerged the not-so-new concept of economic policy, which puts the emphasis on economic imperatives rather than political and social ones.

Here lies the government's biggest pothole. Take the issue of human rights and democracy for which Thailand has been fighting for the past five decades. It is only in the past decade that we have enjoyed the fruits of this long struggle. Political reform since 1997 has created a new domestic environment with increased political participation from non-governmental and civil-society organisations. This element used to be part of the country's diplomatic posture: foreign-policy outlook then reflected domestic development. It is incomprehensible why this government is constantly in a state of self-denial about democracy and human rights. These values are not make-believe norms implanted by the West. Ironically, the government views this hard-won creditability as a liability. Thailand's recent voting in the UN Commission on Human Rights is a big



**Thaksin's first 100 days have not done much for a forward-looking foreign policy.**

disappointment. Bangkok decided to go for a non-action vote against the US-sponsored resolution to condemn China's human-rights violations. It could have abstained, which was the position it took on a similar resolution on Cuba. That way Thailand would not have alienated either side. It was understandable that the Thaksin government voted the way it did, given the circumstances and excellent ties with China. But the voting also shows the government's true colours: it does not care about the issues in the hearts of the Thai people. This sentiment is being reinforced by a proposal currently under consideration to withdraw from the UNHCR, to which Thailand got elected last year on the Asian roster. Somehow the government believes the policy of appeasement and denunciation of human rights and democracy are requisites to improve ties with neighbouring countries. The ongoing Thai-Burmese squabbling shows otherwise. If the Foreign Ministry decides to pull out from the UNHCR, it will do irreparable damage to the Thailand's international position and reputation and trustworthiness. It will lose friends in liberal democracies that have been helpful in the country's social and economic development over the past decades.

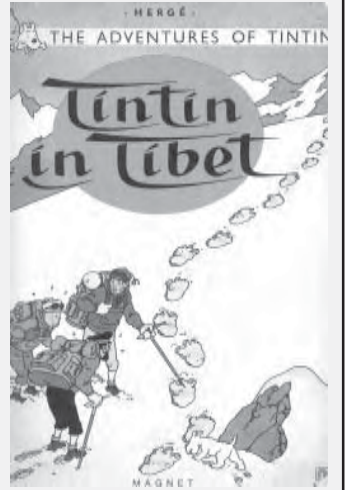
Thailand applied to the UNCHR because it had confidence in its democracy and protection of human rights. Others countries might join the commission for the self-serving purpose of defending their own dismal human right records, but Thailand wants to share its experience in nurturing and strengthening human rights with the rest of the world community. The Thaksin government can take credit for bringing new thinking into Thai politics and problem-solving in the domestic arena but definitely not in foreign policy. In the age of globalisation, only a foolish nation will punch below its weight. ♦

(Editorial in The Nation, Bangkok)

## Tintin in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the Peoples' Republic of China

BRUSSELS - Tintin, the intrepid boy reporter of comic strip fame, was at the centre of an embarrassing diplomatic incident last week after politically correct Chinese translators renamed his adventures in Tibet *Tintin in Chinese Tibet*. Known as simply *Tintin in Tibet* since 1957 when it was first published in the west, the translating "error" has caused untold problems for the Belgian publisher Casterman, which has just negotiated a groundbreaking and lucrative deal to bring the adventures of the quipped boy journalist to China for the first time. The overly orthodox translation also caused a good deal of awkwardness for Belgium's foreign minister, Louis Michel, a self-styled champion of democracy, who was in Beijing last week to toast the historic deal only to discover that he had walked into a diplomatic minefield. "I am not a translator or a publisher and I don't speak Chinese," was all the minister would say, urging the matter to be settled privately between Casterman and their local partners, the China Children Publishing House.

But Casterman signalled last week after a hastily convened meeting in Beijing that it would be insisting that the word "Chinese" be dropped from all future editions. The publisher also sought to play down the seriousness of the incident. "We are interested in the Chinese market but we are not interested in getting involved in politics," Casterman's Willy Fadeur said. Fadeur added: "We have asked our partners to rectify the album, not for political reasons but simply to defend the authenticity of the original and they have agreed." Fanny Rodwell, the widow of Tintin's Belgian creator Hergé is reported to be a personal friend of the Dalai Lama and she did not attend the launch ceremony in Beijing for that reason. Chinese censors have already ensured that the most populous country on earth will be deprived of *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* (anti-communist) and *Tintin in the Congo* (too racist and imperialist) although 21 of the original 23 books will be available officially for the first time. Pirated albums of Tintin have circulated for the last two decades but they are of such poor quality that Chinese readers have been under the impression that Tintin (Dingding in Chinese) was asiatic rather than from Brussels. (Guardian)



## UNICEF rapped for HIV report

NEW DELHI - The portrayal of an Indian caste as being inherently given to prostitution, in a government report on HIV/AIDS funded by UNICEF, has drawn condemnation from human rights and women's groups. UNICEF has asked the Human Rights Commission in central Madhya Pradesh state (MPHRC), which carried out the study *Caste-based Prostitution in Madhya Pradesh*, to withdraw the report. "The concept of such a caste-based survey is repugnant to human rights and democratic thinking, being premised on a belief that there is something intrinsic to the caste which makes women prostitutes and men pimps," said Brinda Karat, general secretary of the All-India Democratic Women's Association. Karat pointed out that the 80-page report was "replete with shocking generalisations", like one that said 50 percent of the women of the Bedia community were HIV-positive. "There are no substantiations for such statements nor any details of the studies conducted, the number of people interviewed, or the details of the questionnaire," she said. The Bedia community has demanded withdrawal of the report.

This is not the first time a publication to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS has offended the sensibilities of a particular community. Last year, Abhijeet Das and his wife Yashodhara, founders of the well-known NGO Sahyog, narrowly escaped being lynched by a mob in the Himalayan town of Almora for suggesting in their pamphlet titled *AIDS and Us* that incest was rampant in the region. Such incidents have led to growing public scepticism about the rather well-funded programmes to fight HIV/AIDS even as the government is steadily cutting funds for a tottering public health delivery system. Human rights groups have slammed the government for flaws in its vertical, anti-HIV programme funded mainly with a \$544 million World Bank loan. India's health minister, CP Thakur, defends the programme, but accuses UN agencies of "misreporting facts and creating confusion," especially by putting out estimates and projections that there were nearly four million people living with HIV in this country of one billion people. "In the Indian context it is difficult to estimate the exact prevalence of HIV because of the varied cultural characteristics, traditions and values with special reference to sex-related risk behaviours," he says. (IPS)



# A suitable prince



Kishore Nepal in *Naya Sadak*, Sunday, 27 May

Preparations are underway to celebrate the 31st birthday of the heir to Nepal's throne, Crown Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. With this royal birthday around the corner, people's attention is focused on the crown prince. People are asking why the crown prince is unmarried at this age, and whether his future as the heir to throne is in danger. This is not an uncommon worry for the Nepali people, who have a lot of faith in and respect for the royal family. Crown Prince Dipendra is perhaps the first member of the Nepali royalty to break tradition and not be married even at 31.

The Royal Palace is also concerned about the Crown Prince's marriage. But many do not know where the crown prince's heart lies. People close to the crown prince speak of two women he has an emotional relationship with. According to them, one is a childhood sweetheart, while his relationship with the other began when he was older. "It might be that the crown prince is finding it difficult to choose between the two," jokes a palace

employee, adding, "But he does not support bigamy." Crown Prince Dipendra is romantic in nature, and he loves to joke and be open. His professors say he is uninhibited and has the poetic talents of his grandfather, the late King Mahendra, although his poems have not been published yet. Some people say the crown prince is against parliamentary democracy, but in reality he supports it wholeheartedly. He wants the Nepali people to have social discipline and responsibility. The crown prince is also very studious, his favourite subject being Nepal's geography. He does not read a lot of fiction but devours non-fiction. He also painstakingly reads all the major newspapers. Crown Prince Dipendra also engages in discussions about how to boost the nation's economy. He often quotes *slokas* from the Gita during discussions, but has a vision for the future. The crown prince usually likes to dress in informal and colourful clothes. His favourite is a brown *daura-suruwal*, says a source close to him. According to him, the crown prince is very conscious of the Nepali *dhaka topi* and if he particularly likes one, will wear it until the colours fade. Crown Prince Dipendra's most gentlemanly quality is that he never leaves if someone is speaking to him, even though he is often constrained for time. He is only satisfied once the discussion ends. Although he is very interested in matters of governance and state administration, he does not wish to see the monarchy heading the politics of the country. He maintains his stand that the monarchy must play a major role in social development. The enthusiasm he displayed in the SAF Games is proof of his belief. Another professor close to the Crown Prince says Dipendra views his grandfather, the late King Mahendra as the biggest "communist with a crown". He does not believe any of the communist parties are real communists, except the extreme leftists. The crown prince likes to talk with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and admires his wisdom and ability to be light-hearted even at the most serious times. His relationship with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is, however, just cordial. Crown Prince Dipendra turns 31 on 27 June. It is high time His Royal Highness got married. The Nepali people wish to celebrate his marriage soon and in the grandest manner. Everyone is worrying about when this will happen.

# Life in Maoland

Chetan Kunwar in *Saptahik Janadesh*, 22 May

In teh villages, all issues related to land and property are looked after by the *Gaon Janat Samitis* (GJS) (Village People's Organisations). It approves transactions only after the buyer and the seller have come to an agreement. The cost involved is a two percent registration fee and Rs 5 for obtaining a form. People in villages are very pleased with this system. They no longer have to spend large sums of money to bribe officials at the Land Revenue office or bother with government bureaucracy. The GJS has stopped a lot of money from going to the government's coffers—land is an important source of government revenue. The judiciary of the People's Government is simple and practical. All cases are dealt with locally. Crime has been divided into three categories, the "very serious", the "serious" and the "ordinary". After a case has been filed at the people's court, a verdict is passed only after it has been thoroughly investigated. Those found guilty might be sentenced to death, labour camps or be fined, but they can also appeal the verdict. In all cases dealt with by the People's Courts, the participation of villagers is the overriding principle, and they do participate. The villagers provide practical rather than technical solutions, unlike those handed out by the courts of the reactionary forces (the government). Major changes are also taking place on the economic front. A new people's economy is being formed, with an emphasis on communes. In a war situation like now, the economy must be made self-sufficient. All production systems are being transformed into collectives or communes, whether for farming, cattle rearing or manufacturing. Financial institutions are also being established in many villages. This process is being hastened because most banks have pulled out from villages. The new financial institutions have been teaching villagers about the working of the proposed economy and how to be involved. They also provide loans to the needy. The prices of commodities are being regulated and guidelines

concerning them are being formed. Plots of land are being pooled and these are being cultivated to provide employment to families of martyrs, and to feed the people's army and volunteers. Cottage industries are also being promoted. Weaving is a major component of such industries and training is being provided to those who need it. In winter the weaving and textile set-ups provide the woollen garments needed by the people's army and villagers. Collectives for cattle farming are also being encouraged, particularly in the higher Himalaya. This is being extended to the tarai and hill regions too. Community forests are another important issue the people's government is looking into. Forests that were cut down in the last 10 to 15 years are now full of trees. Massive reforestation is being carried out. Community forests are being developed in all villages, and committees are being formed to deal with the issue appropriately. The forests are an important source of revenue of the people's government. Alcohol has been banned. Decadent lifestyles are not allowed, although people can enjoy themselves within limits. All music and songs under a people's government are based on the philosophy of the party, and about the working class and a progressive society. The people's government is taking strong corrective measures against the present educational system. Education is free of cost until standard ten. Sanskrit is no longer taught and the singing of the national anthem has been stopped. Teachers are being asked to be more careful and regular, and school management is being strengthened. There is Education for the elderly in all villages, to enable them to at least read simple letters and notices. All health centres are being put in order and irregularities in the distribution of medication are being rectified. Action is being taken against corrupt officials. Awareness programs are being conducted and health officials are always on the move to check on health centres. Roads, bridges, waiting rooms, martyrs' memorials, drinking water systems and other infrastructure is being built. Villagers are no longer dependent on others, but are carrying out development work themselves. The people's government formulates programmes and the villagers implement the plans.

BP (BP Koirala) died. *You've spent your lifetime in politics and have not started a family...* By starting a family, do you mean marriage? I did not have the time to marry. When could I have got married? Even when we were in exile, I had to work to make a living. I fought for democracy, don't you think I'm happy now that the object of my desire has been realised. I married democracy.

## A lovely mouthful of paan

Kedar Bhattarai in *Gorkhapatra*, 24 May

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai has confessed that he still chews 30 *paans* (beetle leaves) a day. He made the admission while addressing a recent convention of the Paan Business Association of Nepal. Bhattarai also said this was the first time that the chief guest of a function complemented the occasion, and that he was very happy to be addressing the association. Sambhu Prasad Chaurasiya, a *paan-wallah* told all present that Bhattarai was a true *paan* connoisseur after which the latter was presented with a bundle of *paan*, which he graciously accepted. He chewed *paan*



throughout the function. Bhattarai started chewing *paan* when he was living in Benaras. He spent 14 years in Sundarilal prison, where he did not get to chew *paan*. But he has compensated for the discomfort after he was freed. He said perhaps the administration of the time thought they could break him if they did not provide him with *paan* at regular intervals. It didn't work, he said. He added that all *paan* lovers shouldn't just pay for the *paan* they consume, but should also invest in the business. Bhattarai, who has been living in Kathmandu for 50 years, said he had given loans to many people to begin selling *paan*. In 1951, he said, Rs 100 was enough to open a *paan* shop. He might as well have opened a *paan* shop himself—Bhattarai says he once paid over IRs 100 for a mouthful of *paan*.

## Missing files

Jana Aastha weekly, 23 May

The pension records of Nepali soldiers who died fighting in the Indian army are mismanaged and there is much bungling in the distribution of pensions. In fact, money is siphoned off. According to sources at the foreign ministry, as names, address and their verification are often inaccurate, a lot of the money does not reach the people it is supposed to, but remains instead with the Indian

Embassy. The Indian Embassy has not released the names or even the number of Nepali soldiers who have died fighting for the Indian government. Sources say that in order to be employed by the Indian army, many Nepali youth lie their age, name and place of residence. Since Bahuns are not enlisted into the Indian army, they also lie about their caste. This has been a practice since the days of Rana rule. It is when these people are killed in battle or die while on duty that the trouble starts. Since they have lied about their identities, their bodies cannot be identified and their families do not get the money that is their due. According to sources, there may be as many as 4,000 people that have lied their identities but are still serving the Indian army. These problems grew in magnitude under King Mahendra's reign, and so he set up the Gorkha Recruitment and Pension Unit under the foreign ministry. The main duty of this unit was to keep proper records of all Nepali soldiers killed on duty in the Indian army and to collect their pension payments from the Indian government for proper distribution to their families. But India did not let this unit function. The Indian side threatened that if Nepali authorities began distributing pensions, they would close all pension offices in Nepal and the Nepali authorities would have collect to the money from Gorakhpur, India. Today there are no signs of whether that the foreign ministry is aware of the unit or not, and no paperwork on it exists.

## Deer-killer Colonel cleared

Jana Aastha weekly, 23 May

Colonel Dilip Rana who was caught hunting deer in Chitwan has been cleared of all charges. Colonel Narendra Aryal of the Royal Nepal Army, who is in charge of the army's legal affairs, said that RNA's image was being tarnished by unconfirmed and false reports. The RNA is deployed to protect wildlife, but ironically, soldiers have been caught killing endangered species. And now the RNA's image is tarnished further—by the brass' decision to give Colonel Rana a clean chit. Even the government has proved ineffective in the face of the army. Earlier, it had issued a press release stating that those found guilty of hunting in protected areas would be punished. The assistant minister for forests even stated publicly that the guilty would not be let off lightly. But even the assistant minister has been proved helpless by the army's decision. Rana is said to have good connections with the army top brass. In fact, he has already served as secretary of a very important unit in the army hierarchy. Rana is also the son-in-law of former army chief, Dharmapalbar Singh Thapa. The former chief is said to be involved in an arms-selling scandal, and this new incident only proves that he still calls the shots in the armed force. The district forest officer who caught Rana hunting has been promised that he will be sent to Switzerland for "training"—or maybe to keep his mouth shut.

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

All I can say is that the prime minister should have been implicated based on the conditions imposed by the CIAA, but it will not be appropriate for me to say why this did not happen. Subhas Chandra Nemwang, Chairman Public Accounts Committee in an interview given to the Tarun National Weekly, 29 May 2001



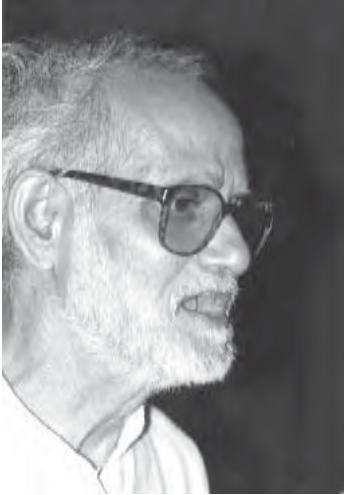
'We will expose the corrupt!' Banner: Lauda PM resign! Flying suruwal: China South-West

Himalaya Times, 27 May

## “Married to democracy”

Excerpts from an interview with Sushil Koirala, MP, Nepali Congress, Gorkhapatra, 24 May

*You have been in politics for a very long time. What were your happiest and saddest moments?* My happiest moment was when democracy was restored in this country, my saddest moment, when





# Mud and Bike championship



SALIL SUBEDI

**The NMBA championship is the only recognised national level international-class mountain bike championship in Nepal.**

## SALIL SUBEDI

Under blue skies interrupted by the wispiest of clouds, 72 off-road mountain bikers from seven countries, waited for the shotgun to begin the fifth National Mountain Bike Championship. The contest, an annual event of the Nepal Mountain Bike Association (NMBA), was held on 26 May this year, beginning at Gairi Gaun, a deserted stone quarry on the southern flanks of the Swayambhu section of the Ring Road.

Chimmi Gurung the chairman of the NMBA was saying: "This is the last call, if anybody has any queries about the circuit and the race, please ask now... Some parts of the trail have been washed out by the rain. Expect a lot of mud on your tyres... All right, everybody's clear." This is serious stuff—the NMBA championship is the only recognised national level international-class mountain bike championship in Nepal, and it is slowly gaining international recognition as a contest to be reckoned with.

The 46 competitors in the senior division were deadly serious. Only a slight smile on some faces belied the sense of anticipation in the air. The contestants were a mixed lot, from tattooed Thamel folk to a lone female participant wearing a strange contraption to

protect a sprained foot. As soon as the pistol resounded, the bikers shot off, only to navigate a hair-raising hairpin bend to get to the south hill of the circuit gate and then whizz down a dirt track leading north. There are a few obstacles on this path, which after one-and-a-half km goes west towards Nagarjun hill. There's an uphill one km slog past a gompa, where the path was particularly, well, muddy. It was on this segment that most of the racers tasted mythical Kathmandu mud, after which they careened down a bone-shaking gravel path. They went around this 4.5 km track not once, but five gruelling times, covering 22.5 km most of us hope we never have to walk across, leave along race.

Predictably, most racers lost speed on the uphill, but there was plenty of opportunity to do so on the downhill, too. And this was shown to full advantage by Kiwi John Thompson, described by spectators as "the crazy one." Descending at approximately 50 km/hr from the highest point on the course, he hit a rock and flew right off his disc-brake bike. The children up the hill fell down laughing. Thompson, who went on to win the senior's title in just over an hour, enjoyed it thoroughly. "That's how I got my energy. I

loved each moment of this bond I had with the kids out there. And many thanks to Philippe who lent me his bike," he said, pointing to a French racer in the junior division who offered Thompson his bike when he saw him with a flat tyre near the circuit gate. But there were also other lucky factors in Thompson's win. His nearest competitor, Chandra Bahadur Chettri, was barely a minute behind him—until, that is, he got a flat. "I was in the middle of nowhere. I was helpless," sighs Chettri.

The first runner-up, Canadian Richard Torgen had a less dramatic, but very consistent ride. Suresh Dulal, who finished third, had three rough falls, but managed to maintain his position. "I lost so much speed recovering from the falls, but I did my best," he said. Not a single contestant dropped out because they were tired and couldn't hack it, including Erin Ryan, the Canadian woman with a splint on her sprained foot. In the senior division, 34 bikers finished the circuit.

Also exciting and equally "do or die" were the 26 under-18s in the junior division. They did two laps on the circuit instead of five, and were wildly excited. Young Sanjay Shrestha from Samakhusi, who finished in tenth place, had quietly skipped breakfast and slipped out from home with his heavy bike. One of the fastest juniors, nine-year-old half-Australian half-Sherpa Sunny, was the pre-race crowd favourite, but unfortunately took a bad spill at the beginning of his second lap. Many juniors fell, but there were no serious injuries. Ten-year-old Heman was unfazed by the rough trail. This student of Little Angel's School who bicycled all the way from Sat Dobato, seven km from venue, won the trophy for the youngest to finish the circuit.

Eighteen-year-olds Arjun Ghale (first position, 24 minutes 46.82 seconds) and Sanjeev Thapa (second, 25 minutes 37.02 seconds) showed what the younger participants could do given a few years of experience. Thapa was the winner last year of the Himalayan Mountain Bike Championship held at the same venue. But he wasn't doing too well, and only barely put Ravindra Adhikari (25 minutes 58 72 seconds) in third place.

These precise times come courtesy the organisers, who made sure every participant went back with a formal notification of their timing and position. This may seem like the obvious thing to do, but previous mountain bike championships in Nepal have not bothered to actually keep any such records. "We don't want anybody to go back without knowing and having official proof of their timings and position—they have worked so hard just to even participate," says Sanjeev Pandey, the director of the race and a member of the NMBA. The chief time-keeper was none other than Nepal's record-breaking senior marathiner, Baikuntha Manandhar. "The boys are good," he said. "They're committed and that's what I like about this whole thing."

While the racers were struggling on the track and the timekeepers were watching, eagle-eyed, there was plenty of excitement among the

## Vital statistics

### Junior Division (9 km):

|                   |                  |       |                     |
|-------------------|------------------|-------|---------------------|
| Arjun Ghale       | 24 min 46.82 sec | Nepal | 5,000 cash & trophy |
| Sanjeev Thapa     | 25 min 37.02 sec | Nepal | 4,000 "             |
| Ravindra Adhikari | 25 min 58.72 sec | Nepal | 3,000 "             |

### Senior Division (22.5 km):

|                   |                    |             |                      |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| John Thomson 33   | 1 hr 00 min 59 sec | New Zealand | 10,000 cash & trophy |
| Richard Torgen 35 | 1 hr 02 min 4 sec  | Canada      | 7,000 "              |
| Suresh K Dulal 21 | 1 hr 04 min 11 sec | Nepal       | 5,000 "              |

**Top Female Racer (22.5 km)** : Erin Ryan, Canada

**Youngest Racer (9 km)** : Heman Pun, 10, Nepal

**Oldest Racer (22.5 km)** : Sonam Gurung, 52, Nepal

**Time keeper** : Baikuntha Manandhar, marathoner, and Sushil Nar-singh Rana, a coach, both with the Nepal Athletics Association

**Race Director** : Sanjeev Pandey (NMBA)

spectators. They were kept entertained by a multitude of things—

whistling time-keepers, first-aid squads rushing hither and thither on motorbikes, kids cheering vociferously in between scarfing down vast amounts of ice cream, a Manangi and Sherpa volunteer family distributing a Nanglo lunch box and bananas to the racers and volunteers, and a swarm of monkey-like children grabbing at the fruit.

Mountain biking began gaining popularity in Nepal about a decade ago. The Himalayan Mountain Bike Tours and Expedition organised the first MB race here in 1993. It was a 32 km race starting from Kakani

finishing at Budhanilkantha, and attracted 72 mountain bikers from Scotland, England, Australia, Denmark, Belgium and Nepal. The NMBA, which was formed and recognised by the National Sports Council in 1995, is an active member of the Asian Cycling Confederation and Union Cyclist Internationale. This year's Nepal Mountain Bike Championship was the association's fifth.


"Our objective here is to promote mountain biking in Nepal. We want to attract a large number of domestic racers and turn them into professionals, and make Nepal an international mountain biking venue," says Umesh Rimal, a

member of the NMBA "The NMBA is confident that such races will help promote tourism in Nepal—plenty of people love to mountain bike in such wild terrain and enchanting landscapes," he adds. "We plan to send the Nepali mountain bikers to participate in the seventh Asian Mountain Bike Championship to be held in Korea in October this year. But we are trying to raise funds," says Chimmi Gurung.

Whether that happens or not, even as the dust was settling on the track at the end of this race, NMBA members were already scheduling for an international race at a similar venue in Nepal next March. ♦





SALIL SUBEDI



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## The club



# A monument to an Indian princess

History is uncertain: it is a long time ago. Deupatan was either a flourishing city spread about the most holy shrine of Pashupatinath, or the sacred land waiting for a city. Certainly there must have been a settlement, a centre of pilgrimage already. The king, according to early travellers, lived near the temple where he worshipped daily.

There was a palace on a mound above Pashupatinath. And a road led to distant Swayambhunath on its sacred hill. Tradition, legend, natural surmise, has a sprawl of habitation about the sickle of the Bagmati that flowed through the Kathmandu Valley. It was called Manjupatan after Manjushri, who drained a lake to form the Valley. In the morass of time, dates have small meaning but a halo is forever cast about the time when Gautama Buddha was born. Scholars will forever debate whether he visited the valley of the gods or not: tradition says he did. He visited the city or town of Patan, where he bestowed the favour of his name upon the blacksmith caste by elevating them to Sakyas. After visiting Swayambhu he sat upon the lion throne made by Viswakarmman, and read from the *Puranas* to the large company of people who had gathered to do him honour.

What concerns us more is the coming of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka in the footsteps of his master. He raised or added to existing stupas wherever the Buddha had tarried or preached: four about the city of Patan, one on Swayambhunath hill, one at Baudhanath and one at Kirtipur.

There exist other stupas that may be Ashokan, overlooked by historians and scholars both. One is on the hill of the thirty-two butterflies, not far from Pashupatinath, another beside the new ring road below Swayambhunath and a third to the north of Bhaktaphr. But even these are outside the limits of my concern with Ashoka's daughter Charumati.

They merely substantiate the visit to the Kathmandu Valley of her forever famous father.

She must have travelled with him, and either it was love, a political arrangement or a strange fascination that had her married to a prince, Devapala, who is historically connected with Deupatan, near Pashupatinath. Hearsay history has him either living in the palace above the temple and administering the township of Deupatan, or founding it together with Charumati.

One fairly authenticated version of shadowy history has the impetuous Charumati—her beauty, her graces are left to imagination—deeply impressed by a display of sorcery and black magic. Water was turned to oil, water burned, an iron arrowhead was changed to stone and a wooden staff into a writhing snake. The Indian princess begged her father to marry her to the young prince Devapala—handsome, courageous, himself possessed of mystic powers?

It was done, and Charumati remained in her new homeland, helping to found not just one new town, but two, because beside Deupatan she herself lavished patronage on a Buddhist settlement

called Chabahil. There, inspired by her father, she raised and about it a *vihara*. Apparently she herself took more and more to a religious way of life and finally renouncing regal living, became a nun.

My sketch is of the Charumati vihar or *bahal* as it is today: old, very old, but obviously not original. Perhaps it stands on ancient foundations, for the people of Chabahil are firm in their belief that it was Charumati who built it. The *pujari* doesn't even know who Charumati was: a goddess, he told me.

Three shrines occupy the square building. Beside the entrance, in the spirit of Buddhist-Hindu coexistence, is a small shrine to Bhairab, the terrifying protector. The main shrine is occupied by a standing Avalokeshwar, and immediately above, in a shrine forbidden to most visitors, is an Ajima, or grandmother goddess worshipped by Buddhists and Hindus alike.

Before the main shrine is a *chaitya* carved with four Buddhas that date to earliest Licchavi times (AD 300-800). Although still remarkably preserved, this historic monument is in urgent need of restoration. The *pujari* told me that some foreigners—he thought Americans—had come some years ago with promises to repair the building, but they never returned.

Nearby is the stupa Charumati built, painted with large, all-seeing eyes and surrounded by small votive *chaityas*, stupas and images. A beautiful Licchavi Buddha that had stood out the centuries, was briefly stolen but returned. All trace of the



monastery that stood about the shrine has disappeared. Modern building begins to encroach upon the old Chabahil and its ancient neighbour Deupatan, are but names; only a few old buildings indicate where they once stood: in Chabahil, the stupa and the courtyard named after Charumati; in Deupatan, a tantric temple and a stone bath fed by carved water spouts. Where the prince and princess might once have bathed, and some ancient paving stones.

There is still the strong sense of tantric mysticism that attracted Charumati to the place. Legend has it that a tantric was locked for days in religious debate with a visiting Shankaracharya from south India in the small courtyard of an existing temple courtyard. The debate ended only when the Shankaracharya discovered that the temple goddess herself was aiding the tantric sage. And residents of the area are given to saying that they hear strange and often

terrifying noises in the night, coming from the direction of a tantric shrine that flows stands beside the new highway that rings the Kathmandu Valley. Perhaps in the solemn and darkest darkness of the night, sorcerers still meet to change metal into stone and water into burning oil. ♦

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



## ABOUT TOWN

## MOVIES

- ❖ **The Club, Bhatbhateni** Latest Hindi movie and latest top-ten English movie, 7pm, free.
- ❖ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at [www.nepalshop.com](http://www.nepalshop.com)

## EATING OUT

- ❖ **Sekuwa (BBQ) Night** Dwarika's Hotel. Starters, meats, vegetarian selections, dessert, complementary drink. Traditional dance in lamp lit Newari courtyard. Rs 699. Friday nights. 479488
- ❖ **La'Soon Restaurant and Vinotheque** Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchowk. 535290
- ❖ **Brunch with swimming** Shangri La Kathmandu's award-winning garden. Rs 700 + tax. 412999
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Mango Tango** Exotic mangoes desserts Hotel de l' Annapurna. All day, all food and beverage outlets.
- ❖ **Movenpick** Exotic desserts at the ice-cream lounge, Darbar Marg.

## MUSIC

- ❖ **2:001 For the Love of Rock** Vibes Entertainment presents the third annual rock festival with Robin and Looza, Flower Generation, Axata, Albatross, and Hybrid Pressurize. Scout Headquarters, Lainchour. Rs 200. 2 June. Win free tickets online at [www.vibes.com.np](http://www.vibes.com.np)
- ❖ **Cadenza Jazz** at the Upstairs Bar, Lazimpat, Wednesday, Friday 7.30pm. Rs 200



## DANCE

- ❖ **Sounds from the Underground** Dance party at Simply Shuttters Bistro, Baber Mahal Revisited. 1 June, 8pm onwards. Rs 300.

## EVENTS

- ❖ **Fanta Grand Fun Fair** Live music, games and food. Godavari Alumni Association and Cohort 1,2,3 June. Jawalakhel Grounds.
- ❖ **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](mailto:sales@hotelshangrila.com), 412999
- ❖ **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](mailto:spinybabbler@mos.com.np). 542810, 546725
- ❖ **Poetry, Meditation, Music** Learn practical techniques of meditation to find peace for positive living Live meditative music, poetry, short lecture on spirituality. Sri Chinmoy Centre and Budhanilkantha School. Buhaniikantha School Assembly Hall. 2 June, 9am-11am. Free.
- ❖ **Discourse** Swami Subodhananda, Jain Mandir, Kamalpokhari. Chinmaya Sangh Nepal, in Hindi. 1-7 June, 7.30am-8.30am (Driga Drishya Vivek), 5.30pm-7pm (Ram Charitra Manas). 521379
- ❖ **The Club, Bhatbhateni** Rusty Nails play Friday nights, 7pm, free. Saturday poolside BBQ, bingo, music. Rafting, 2 June. Includes one night at the Riverside Spring Resort, BBQ, breakfast. [theclub@ntc.net.np](mailto:theclub@ntc.net.np). 426238, 416430

## EXHIBITION

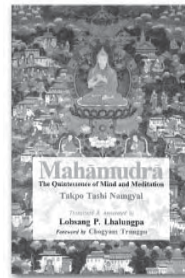
- ❖ **If Bodies have Voices** From the Street: Kathmandu 1985-1995. Photographs by Wayne Amtzis. 25 May-11 June. Amtzis reads from his collection City on His Back. 3 June, 4pm. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 411122
- ❖ **Mani: Jewelled Words of Tibetan-Buddhism on Flags, Wheels, and Stones** Fulbright Scholar Katherine Anne Paul's research on the popular use and manufacture of Tibetan religious artefacts in Nepal. Until 2 June. Bamboo Gallery, Panipokhari. 412507

## MARTIN CHAUTARI

- ❖ **Formal and Informal Judicial System and VDC's Judicial Rights Pundits:** Advocate DN Parajuli, Dinesh Prasai CVICT. Unless otherwise noted all discussion are in Nepali. 5 June, 5.30pm Martin Chautari. Thapathali.

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)

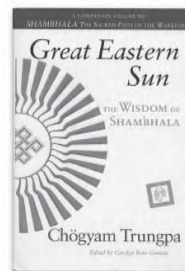
## BOOKWORM



**Mahamudra: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation** Takpo Tashi Namgyal, trans. Lobsang P Lhalungpa  
Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1993/2001  
Rs 792  
The first English translation of a major Buddhist manual detailing the various stages and practices for training the advanced student of Mahayana and Vajrayana meditation. The original Tibetan text was composed by Namgyal (1512-1587), a great lama and scholar of the Kagyu Buddhist sect.

The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra GW Farrow, I Menon  
Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1992/2001  
Rs 632

The Hevajra Tantra is a non-dual Yogini tantra of the late Mantrayana Buddhist tradition composed in north-east India in the late eighth century. This text constitutes the essence of sophisticated, but controversial, tantric methods and is an authoritative account of the classic tantric period of India in religious history (5-13 century).



**Great Eastern Sun: The Wisdom of the Shambhala**  
Chogyam Trungpa  
Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1999  
Rs 1,875

The follow-up to **Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior**. Trungpa addresses our deepest fears: the alienation of modern life, depression, materialism, aggression, anger, anxiety, and lack of self-worth. He says we are all powerful and genuine individuals who need to ignite the warrior within.

Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat: Land of Medicine Buddha,  
February-April 1999 Lama Zopa Rinpoche  
Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Weston, Mass., 2000  
Rs 1,500

"Doing Vajrasattva retreat is not simply about reciting the mantra and saying some prayers. It is about making the practice effective for your mind, making it the quickest, most powerful way to transform your mind." Lama Zopa Rinpoche



Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

## CLASSIFIED

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For insertions ring NT Marketing at 543333-36.

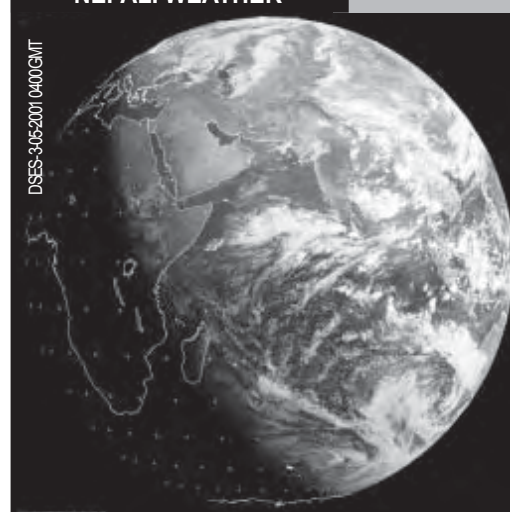
## YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



## NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



This satellite picture shows a fine series of southwesterly trade winds building up from the southern Arabian sea right up to the east coast of Thailand—indicating that the monsoon is off to a healthy start. These winds will in the next weeks head towards Bangladesh and take a sharp left turn to be over eastern Nepal by 10 June. Till then, we will see a series of weather cells moving from west to east bringing thunderstorms and occasional heavy bursts of rain characteristic of pre-monsoon showers. Finally, monsoon winds will chase the westerlies away and that is when the rainy season will officially start. (See "Monsoon moods" p. 10-11). So far, the onset of the monsoon is right on schedule. Long-term forecasts also show a healthy advance of the monsoon over June and July.

## KATHMANDU

| Fri   | Sat   | Sun   | Mon   | Tue   |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 30-19 | 29-18 | 29-19 | 30-18 | 30-19 |

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| Sun     | 0615-0645 | BBC Agenda            |
| Daily   | 2045-2115 | BBC नेपाली सेवा       |
| Daily   | 2245-2300 | BBC नेपाली सेवा       |



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# If bodies have voices



poet Wayne Amtzis' photographic exhibition currently on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery compels its viewers to acknowledge the difficult socio-economic circumstances experienced by Kathmandu Valley child laborers, abandoned women, petty traders and porters. The collection of 43 black and white photographs is an uncompromisingly harsh portrayal of the vicissitudes of modern urban life. It depicts the drudgery of physical labor, moments of hopeless respite from work, solitary mad women, dejected street vendors, and

elders whose furrowed brows bear testament to their struggles to earn a daily wage. What is remarkable about this ten year retrospective is the intimate engagement between the artist and his subjects. Those photographed are aware they are objects of the camera's gaze, yet there is an unusual degree of consent, albeit momentary, to allow Amtzis to penetrate their lives. Both parties tacitly acknowledge that a kind of intrusion is occurring, but somehow appear to recognize that this intrusion, on this occasion, with the sympathetic nature of this camera lens, must happen. Thus do the subjects engage directly with the viewer, unapologetically offering a piece of their troubled lives. This frankness reveals itself more the longer one spends on each photograph. Take for instance, the *Youth at Indrachowk* (#9). This handsome boy is seated for a brief respite from his work as a porter. At any moment, his name will be called out to haul a load probably beyond his capacity. His facial expression is one of explicit engagement. He seems fresh, still innocent, but his eyes have begun to ask "why me?" As viewers, we can weave a narrative as we move on to the young man in *National Refrigerator, Gairidhara* (#12). He seems to designate the future of the boy from #9. Yet a sense of determination still emerges in his face and eyes. This young man knows his life is hard, but he hasn't succumbed to resignation and despair.

The people whose portraits appear in this exhibit are cornered by the walls and streets of Kathmandu. The barbed wire they hang to, the ropes looped around their bodies and hands tell us how bound and limited are their lives. Representing "everyman"—they symbolize the drudgery carried out daily by millions of Nepalis. In a wider sense Amtzis' photographs provide a global commentary of on-the-edge urban workers and denizens of the street. Giving themselves the time these portraits deserve, the viewers can move beyond cursory impressions and appreciate the exhibition's complexity and subtlety. With patient scrutiny, what emerges are highly personalized "voices" which convey narratives specific to each individual. The serendipitous timing of the taking of these photographs (1985-1995) makes for disheartening political commentary. In today's Kathmandu "democracy" has arrived. Civil sector groups and NGOs flourish; politicians wax eloquent while expatriate and local development *wallahs* continually reproduce new 'agendas.' Meanwhile, life for those depicted here remains unchanged. As a complement to this exhibit, Amtzis will read at the gallery from his poetry collection, "City on his Back" at 4 PM on Sunday, June 3. ♦

From the Street: Kathmandu 1985-1995 Photos by Wayne Amtzis Siddhartha Art Gallery May 25-June 11, 2001 Babar Mahal Revisited



DAY ONE: Tourism entrepreneurs fielded Volkswagen Vans with "Tourist" banners to ferry tourist groups to and from the airport as the strike got underway on 27 May. For individual travellers, rickshaws were the best (and most expensive) way to get to town. The cheapest way was to walk.



DAY TWO: Bhaktapur shops wear a deserted look as tourists stay away on the second day of the strike.



DAY THREE: No one is left out of this public meeting organised by the organisers of the bandh. Ratna Park on 29 May.

# KIRAN'S WINDHORSE

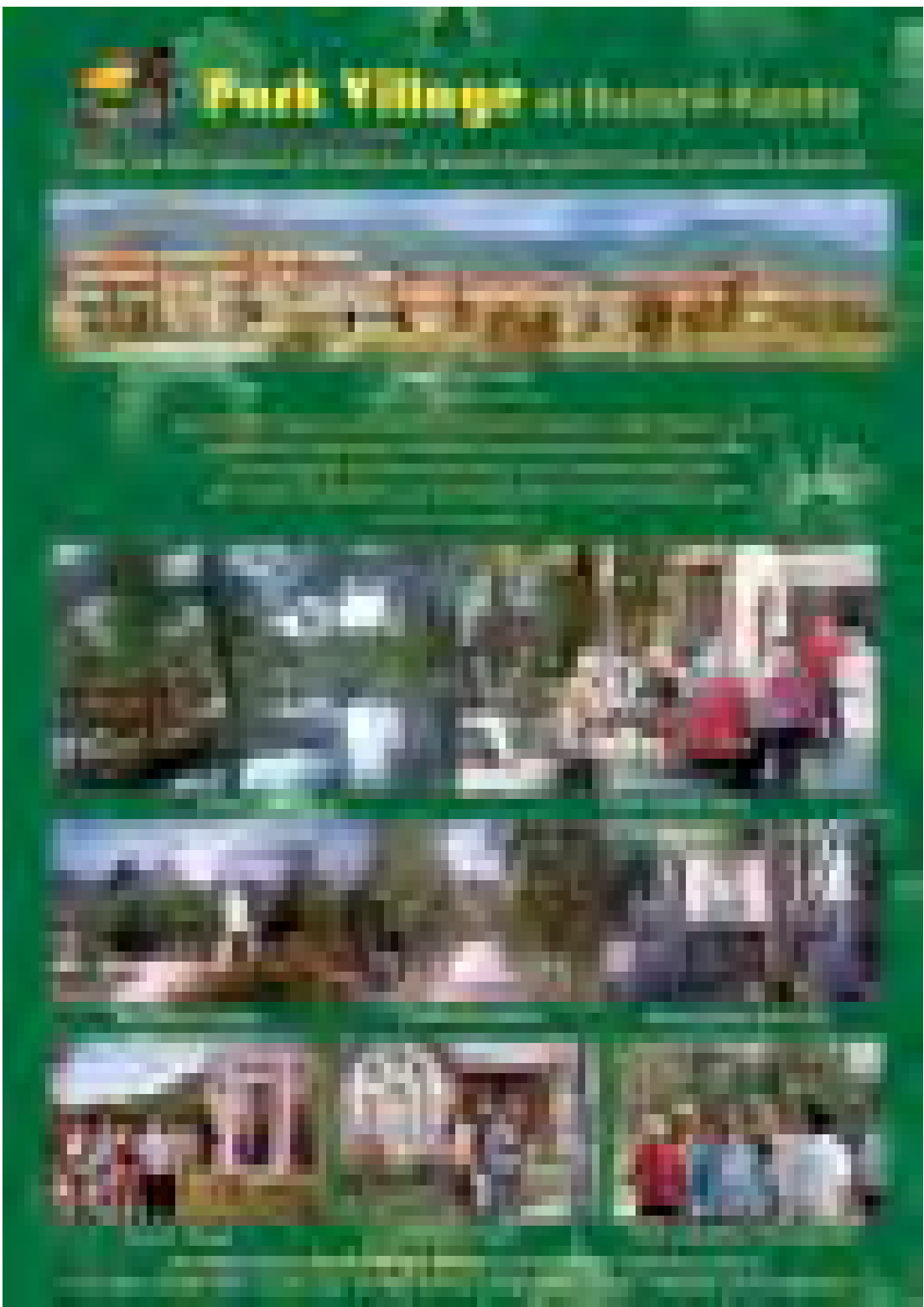
Kiran Manandhar, a prolific and versatile painter known for his celebratory use of color and stroke, has taken a new departure. A recent stay in Tibet, traveling and leading workshops in painting has introduced a collage-like element to his work. His current exhibit at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Thamel incorporates in each painting a Tibetan prayer flag with a windhorse and a wish-fulfilling jewel rising from its back.



strokes cannot break free of. These new limits set on the artist's freedom of expression allows for an honest contemporary reading of place. The brooding figures of woman or lovers that appear in many of Kiran's canvasses are here as well, and their juxtaposition to the prayer flag adds a personal

dimension. In #6 and in # 26 we see these figures with the prayer flags. In one, a woman turns towards the flag and the viewer senses encounter; in the other, two figures, mutually engaged, seem not to notice the flag's presence. Interest and indifference, an emotional opening towards commitment and a troubled emotional entanglement, set the parameters of engagement with a wider world. Kiran is persistent in his use of the Tibetan prayer flags. Whether the windhorse flies above, or lies submerged, or even fails to enter into or modify Kiran's abstract landscapes, their presence must be accounted for in whatever aesthetic conclusions the viewer may draw from his work. ♦

Kiran Manandhar, Everest Contemporary Art Gallery, Arcadia Building, Thamel.





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

It must have finally dawned on each and everyone among us by now that we have just voluntarily and out of our own free will stayed at home for three straight days in a spontaneous gesture of support for one bunch of jokers (which we shall for the time being call Team A) to topple another bunch of jokers (which we shall call Team B) to be this country's Numero Uno Clown-in-Chief. We must collectively thank

- live to see another day
  - 5,678 marriage processions dispersed nationwide
  - At least 3.2 litres of Single Malt allegedly consumed in one newspaper office alone.
- If all this could be achieved in three days, how much more could be done in a week...two weeks...a month. Insider sources tell us Party HQ is now inundated with congratulatory messages of heartfelt felicitation and

One Great Leap Forward, Two Leaps Back

Team A for this opportunity to express our heartfelt, unquantified and air-conditioned support for their bid to be head honcho of this circus by allowing us to enjoy a totalitarian bed rest and to adhere to a strict liquid diet of Single Malt for most of this past week. Ladies and gentlemen, let us give the organisers a big hand.

That the three days have been a grand all-round success there is now no doubt—because Team A says so. But if you asked me (not that you have, but here I go anyway) what the biggest achievement of the three day national sleep-in has been for our nation, it is that at the end of it Team B is still in charge. Which means it leaves open the opportunity for Team A to once more request us to please consider voluntarily taking another week bed rest with liquid diet before the budget session.

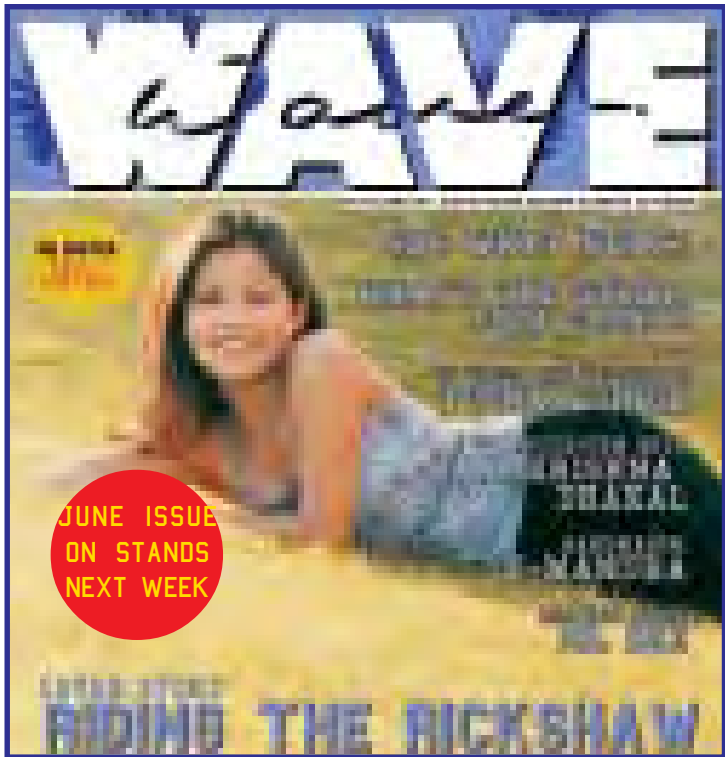
Over at the HQ of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unfit Marxist-Leninists) they have been engaged in marathon debriefing sessions and have unanimously decided that last week is sure to go down in the annals of the Great International Proletarian Revolution as One Great Leap Forward for Mankind and Two Leaps Back. Here is the latest tally of achievements:

- 3,108 bicycle tyres deflated
- 7.3 million litres of petrol and kerosene-laced diesel saved
- 35 goats, 57 ducks and 403 chicken which would otherwise have been lost to road kill on our highways



From Kim Jong-Il: You have just received a Blue Mountain Internet greeting card from Dear Leader in Pyongyang, and it goes: "Comrade Nepal, you still have a lot to learn about Juche, but you are getting the general idea. In North Korea, our streets are empty of cars all year round, our huge hotels are always empty. If you continue at this rate, you will also be able to attain Juche. Keep it up. Yours in solidarity and camaraderie, Kim the Last of the Reds."

MSN Hotmail from Fidel Castro: "Bravo. You have just struck another blow at the heart of global imperialism. Sending cigars by DHL." ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Thank you, Dr Tej

1980. The Karnali river at the Chisapani Gorge. It was the first time we dolphins saw a real scientist. Our cousins in the Narayani had told us a strange human wearing glasses, a big camera and a funny hat had been giving them the eye. They said he would jump and point his camera at the smallest movement of water. But our relatives couldn't get to know him too well, because the dirty water from the beer factory and paper mill at Narayanghat forced them to move.

When he came to Chisapani Gorge inside the Bardiya National Park, our mammalian proximity sense told us he had pitched camp near a big cliff and had befriended an old fisherman. The two used to row upstream to reach the tranquil waters in the middle of the gorge. It was all very amusing for us. We jumped up for fresh air often and looked over at him, but we were too quick and he never saw us. We liked him. We learnt that he was quite a rare specimen—a Tribhuvan University-trained zoologist honoured by over 20 international scientific organisations like the Institute of Biology UK, the Linnean Society of London, and the British Ornithological Union. After about a month, we decided to surprise him. It was a beautiful early morning. "Doctor sahib, go home. Only sanyasis wander around like this," the fisherman was telling Dr Tej Kumar Shrestha as they



SALLY SUREDI

made their way upstream. Suddenly, one of us jumped right up in front of these two humans. The doctor almost fell off his boat with excitement. He took off his glasses and said: "I was right. There are Gangetic Dolphins (*Platanista gangetica*) in Nepal's rivers."

We certainly didn't mind word of our presence getting out. Over the years we had lots of visitors, but they were mostly tourists. We migrate in winter from the Karnali and Kosi, we don't spend much time in the Narayani and the Mahakali. And there are only 20 of us left in Nepal. So, very few of you will get to see us unless you approach with love and care, much like Dr Tej does.

We knew Dr Tej campaigned to create an aquatic wildlife preserve for us while everyone wanted to focus on terrestrial mammals—tigers, rhinos and elephants. We live in a complex ecological system, and though we are labelled endangered, locals still sell our meat. They call us *bhagirath* or *sonsh*, thinking that we arrived when Shiva sprouted water from his hair to create the Ganga. People hang our bones in doorways to drive away evil. Ayurvedic doctors extract oil from us for its supposed aphrodisiac, analgesic and antiseptic properties. But nobody except this doctor, who also knows all about Nepal's birds, has bothered to truly get to know us. Thank you, Dr Tej. ♦

Pepsodent