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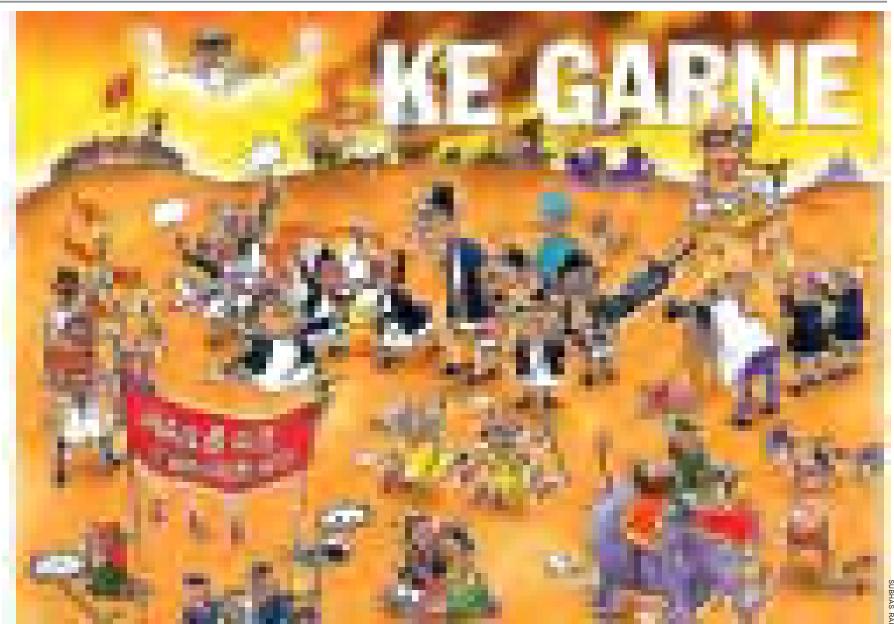


War budget

Finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat had no choice but to give the army and police hefty increases in the budget. The army got a 17 percent raise to add up to Rs4.52 billion, about Rs445 million of which is to be spent on hardware. The police (including the armed police) allocation went up even more: 27 percent over last year to Rs5.79 billion. Of that, Rs500 million is for equipment like guns and helicopters. The total security budget is now Rs10.31bn—ten percent of the total. "I had little choice," Mahat told us. "The Maoist activities have been harming the economy, they have targeted industrial production.

What this means is less money for health, education and other services. It is a Catch-22, the most effective weapon against the insurgency is development, but there is less money for it because more is diverted to fighting rebels. The test of the budget is the implementation. And that depends entirely on the insurgency. On that also hinges the ability of the government to keep investors that are already in the country, and attract new ones.

Despite pressures to keep the deficit narrow, projected to be about a third of the total Rs99.79 billion, Mahat has managed to address one of the main problems faced by exporters. He has decided to introduce the "pass book" system and make duty refunds at the customs points rather than from the central coffer—a system that has been a total failure. Back payments are to be handled by issuing exporters five-year debentures at a five percent interest rate.



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"You will enjoy more democratic rights under the New Democracy than you are enjoying today."



Baburam Bhattarai, Politburo Member and Chief of the Foreign Relations Department of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) replied in English to written questions sent last week by Nepali Times. The Maoist leader replies forthrightly on issues such as the royal massacre, future of the peoples' war, policy towards development aid and trade, the Nepali monarchy, and the "donations" his party is raising from businesses. Following is an unedited transcript of the faxed response:

Nepali Times: After six years of the peoples' war and over 2,000 Nepalis dead, do you think it has been worth the price paid so far?

Baburam Bhattarai: Though it is anachronistic to attach a "price" tag to an epoch-making

revolutionary process in terms of human casualties, we feel the "price" paid by the Nepalese masses so far in the six years of the people's war has been rather on the lower side. Such "prices" in genuine revolutions are paid in millions, and not in thousands. Do you remember the French Revolution? Considering the power and prestige gained by the poor and oppressed masses of the Nepalese countryside during the past six years, the "price" paid for has been definitely worth it.

NT: Is your armed struggle going to be a continuous strategy or do you see the real possibility of that ending for, say, a negotiated settlement?

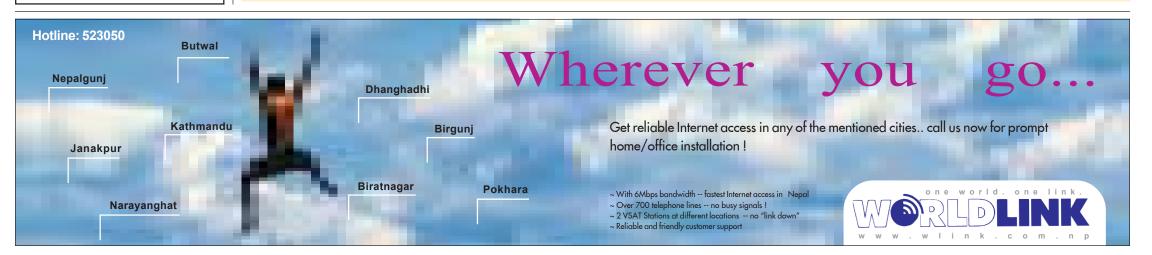
BB: Whether the armed struggle will be waged till the very end or not, depends not on our pious wishes but on the objective and subjective conditions of the revolution, particularly on the policy of the ruling classes. Our openly stated goal is the total state power for the oppressed masses.

Nothing more, or less. Will the reactionary ruling classes hand over state power through a "negotiated settlement"? You should ask them.

NT: The government says your party is not serious about dialogue, how can we be convinced that you are?

BB: Our Party has time and again expressed its readiness for a meaningful dialogue if the government creates a conducive atmosphere, at least by making public the conditions of the more than 200 "missing" persons from the government custody, among other things. But the government has repeatedly backed out of it. Rather, it has resorted to more fascist measures like the promulgation of the so-called "Public Security Regulations 2058 BS", which practically negates all the fundamental and democratic rights won by the people in 1990. So how can you blame us on the question of dialogue?

See p. 3 □



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From p. 1 \Rightarrow

"The 'price' of the people's war is worth it"

NT: So, do you see a possibility of the CPN (Maoist), as was the case of the JVP in Sri Lanka, being a powerful parliamentary party?

BB: No, the CPN (Maoist) is not the JVP of Sri Lanka. There is absolutely no possibility of the CPN (Maoist) turning into a parliamentary party. That would be a great betrayal to the revolutionary aspirations of the masses.

NT: Your party has put forward the theory that Indian and US intelligence agencies conspired to encircle China. Is that a credible hypothesis to explain the palace murders?

BB: That is not our "theory", but an objective fact, acknowledged by US imperialists and Indian expansionists themselves. You should read the CIA-sponsored reports that forecast China as another superpower by 2025 and the main rival to the US. Also, you should recollect the much-discussed statement of the then Indian defence minister George Fernandes that China was the main danger to the security of India. Everybody knows the hasty ganging-up between the US and India, specially after the collapse of the USSR, primarily designed to encircle China. In this changing global and regional geo-strategic calculus Nepal occupies an important place due to its geographical and historical setting. Hence the imperialists and expansionists would not tolerate any regime, political force or leader in Nepal that refuse to dance to their tunes. They are dead scared to the prospect of a Maoist communist revolution in Nepal, and King Birendra had to pay the price with his life for his liberal attitude towards the people's war led by the CPN (Maoist) and for his traditional closeness towards China. This is the hidden truth behind the palace massacre on June 1,2001.

NT: Also, isn't it premature to declare a republic in Nepal now, especially after the genuine and spontaneous display of support for Constitutional Monarchy in Nepal after the royal tragedy?

BB: It is not premature but rather too late to declare a republic in Nepal. The institution of traditional monarchy has collapsed, partly under its own weight and partly under the pressure of the imperialist and expansionist forces. It is just ridiculous and historically out-dated to attempt to raise another monarchy for the benefit of the imperialists and the expansionists. The spontaneous mass protest after the murder of King Birendra and his entire family was primarily against the conspiracy behind the killings and partly for King Birendra's liberal attitudes and patriotic leanings, and not in favour of raising another fake dynasty. That is why our Party, the CPN (Maoist), has called for institutionalising the newly born republic, which is gaining wide support among the people all over the country.

NT: Many genuine and honest Nepali politicians, education and development workers have been attacked by your party just because they don't agree with you. Is that the future you are looking at for governing the country?

BB: This is a canard spread by the enemies of the people and the country to malign the ongoing revolution. We challenge you to prove with facts such baseless allegations. When the whole purpose of the revolution is to establish genuine people's democracy, or a New Democracy, for the overwhelming majority of the people, how can we prosecute somebody just because he disagrees with us? Please be assured you will enjoy more democratic rights under the New Democracy than you are enjoying today.

NT: And do you think the approach (of suppressing dissent) will be sustainable especially when openness and debate are values Nepalis regard

BB: The "openness" and "debate" you talk about today are monopolised by a miniscule majority of the privileged and the opulent classes, and the vast majority of the people are totally deprived of them. The ongoing people's war is meant to ensure such openness" and "debate" to all such deprived masses of people, and not only to the privileged few. Hence be assured that the New Democracy, or the people's democracy, will be more "sustainable" than this fake democracy you see today.

NT: You have not attacked tourists directly or targetted tourism, but it is being hurt badly by publicity of the insurgency. Once tourism suffers, hundreds of

thousands of Nepalis are going to be affected. Why are you out to wreck the economy?

BB: This is another sinister propaganda fanned by the enemies of the revolution. It is quite amusing that the reactionary ruling classes who have wrecked the country and the economy beyond repair are accusing us of the crime they have shamelessly committed. Are we Maoist communists responsible for reducing the country to the second poorest status in the world? Are we responsible for the rampant poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inequality, backwardness and corruption? Are we responsible for the industrial decline, trade deficit, debt trap and foreign dependency? When the whole economy is sluggish and declining because of retrograde production relations, how can only tourism flourish?

NT: Related to this is a question on the puritanical drive your party is enforcing to ban alcohol, or the demands like the nationalisation of schools. Do you really believe such actions will be sustainable in the long run?

BB: Please do not mistake us to religious fanatics like the Taliban. Our guiding philosophy is dialectical and historical materialism. We have no agenda of puritanical fads like the alcohol ban. Of course, we occasionally launch campaigns against social evils like alcoholism, gambling, prostitution, pornography, etc. Please note that campaign against "alcoholism" is not the same thing as "alcohol ban"! As regards to the question of nationalisation of school education, everybody would agree that this too is no "communist" agenda. When most of the advanced capitalist countries have nationalised

school education, why should not a poor country like ours do the same? If you agree that education is not a privilege but a right to every citizen, it is only logical that the state should provide equal access to education for everybody. This is not only "sustainable", but a must for every civilised society.

NT: You advocate national industry and end to multinationals. Can this approach be defended in the age of economic globalisation? Or is your aim to create a state like North Korea? You are also said to be raising "donations" from the same industries you oppose.

BB: If your are familiar with economic history, there is no separate age called the "age of economic globalisation", but only the age of imperialism. We are in the age of imperialism for the past 100 years now. So we need not be over-awed with the imperialist propaganda of the so-called globalisation. And we have only said we are for self-reliant economic development, like all the developed countries are. Self-reliant development does not mean an anarchic development. Self-reliant development is not only sustainable, but it is the only economic development model that is sustainable. And why should you pose North Korea as the only negative example? Are not there more than 100 countries, that too are very "democratic", which are much worse off than North Korea economically? Is not North Korea or Cuba much better off than the banana republics patronised by the World Bank or the USA? As regards to the bogey of "donations" from the industries, we could certainly like to break the monopoly of the reactionary forces to

LETTER

raise taxes from them and make a much better use of them.

NT: The little we know of the NCP(M) economic and development strategy is what you wrote in a booklet Politico-economic rationale of the Peoples' War some years ago. What is your present policy regarding the economy, development aid and trade?

BB: The basic outline of the New Democratic economic development strategy is provided in the booklet cited by you and other documents of the party. To recapitulate it very briefly, we intend to usher in vibrant, self-reliant, independent, balanced and planned economic development in the country primarily through a radical land reform programme based on the policy of "land to the tiller" and national industrialisation. Our basic thrust would be to completely dismantle the retrograde semi-feudal and semicolonial production relations in agriculture, industry and trade, and to develop a new type of national capitalist relations oriented towards socialism. We would definitely maintain trade and financial relations with all the countries in the world based on equality, mutual benefits and national needs.

NT: Where is the "peoples' war" headed from where we are now?

BB: Given the acute crisis faced by the ruling classes and the rising mass support for the revolutionary forces, the people's war is definitely heading towards greater success in the days to come. If the current trends of staggering military victories and surging mass support continue, the revolution will achieve final success sooner than expected. Of course, the danger of external military intervention, particularly from Indian expansionism, is also looming large. But we are confident, ultimately the people's war

NT: What support and links do you have with fraternal revolutionary parties elsewhere in the world and in what ways are they helping you in your

BB: We enjoy good political and moral support from all the Maoist parties and organisations of the world, particularly those united in the RIM (Revolutionary Internationalist Movement). Also we enjoy moral support from many other antiimperialist and anti-expansionist forces in the region.

NT: What is the committee you have formed for South Asian Maoist coordination expected to do, launch a South Asia-wide struggle?

BB: Yes, a Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) has been launched on July 1,2001 to unify and coordinate the revolutionary process in the region. As South Asia is developing into one of the post potent volcanic centres of revolution in the 21st century, this initiative of CCOMPOSA has been very timely and significant. We are all strengthening and expanding CCOMPOSA which is destined to play an historic role in the South Asian region.

NT: How are your present relations with the communist parties in Nepal: the UML, ML and the nine smaller left parties?

BB: We have a good working relationship with all political forces in the country which are opposed to anti-national and fascist Girija Koirala and Gyanendra Shah cliques. We are trying to further consolidate that relationship.

NT: Can you give us more details of the "contact" with King Birendra, through Dhirendra Shah, which you had mentioned in your previous statement?

BB: Yes, Dhirendra Shah had approached us on behalf of his brother King Birendra, to express concern about the impending danger from Indian expansionists and to try to build an understanding among the patriotic forces in the country. Our Party representatives had several rounds of talks with him. It would be historically important to record it publicly that, in his last meeting with our representatives just weeks before the royal massacre, Dhirendra Shah had expressed danger to his and other royalties' life. This is one of the concrete proof we have about the larger conspiracy for the royal massacre on June 1,2001. History will definitely unfold the real truth some day... ♦

CK Lal's venture out of town to get some first hand hint of the ground reality in the "unquiet hills" is appreciated (State of the state, #49). Let's hope he will now venture into Maoland so we keep getting more insight and factual information about how fellow Nepalis are caught up between the policemen and the insurgents. I also agree with the writer's view about the idle intelligentsia of the Kathmandu elite who have proven themselves to be true followers of Bhupi Sherchan's poem. But, Mr Lal, do you really believe implementing the Public Security Regulation is the right direction towards solving the "terror of unfreedom" or you are just being your pro-government self? Many conscious Nepalis believe it is not yet too late to resolve the Maoist insurgency with a carrot and stick policy.

> Tilak Lama Lainchaur

When public protests against the Public Security Regulations (PSR) started, we organised a reading of its text at Martin Chautari and then a second meeting where the Act on which it is based was discussed in historical terms. We listened to interpretations of the

Regulations and the Act by legal practitioners who know what they are talking about. Although supposedly targeted against the Maoists, the legal experts say the PSR will do very little to curb their activities. Instead they are afraid the PSR will be used against journalists, dalit and *ianaiati* activists and mainstream politicians by local government authorities (especially Regulations under 3(2)). We have also participated in public protests held in Kathmandu against PSR.

That is why we were surprised that CK Lal seems to think these protests are being led by "the idle intelligentsia of Kathmandu" (State of the State, #49). While we ourselves have not done enough, those leading the protests against PSR are doing everything within their reach to also criticise the activities of the Maoists. They are anything but "idle" or "empty minds" as Lal calls them. Invoking Orwell, Lal says this is an idea that is so absurd that "only an intellectual could believe" in it. It is good to know what your friend thinks of ideas you support, and the work you do to implement them.

Pratyoush Onta, Martin Chautari Kathmandu

As a longtime reader and fan of CK

Lal, it was interesting to read his "An unquiet peace" (#49) not for what it said but more as evidence of his inconsistencies. First, after arguing for years that Nepal's tourism industry had contributed nothing to its rural economy, he now states that the absence of trekkers in Sindhupalchok is "depriving rural Nepal of one of its sole sources of income and employment." Second, Lal bashes Kathmandu's intelligentsia as "idle". However deficient the work of the Kathmandu intelligentsia might be in general, Lal cannot deny that it has been their critical work toward the creation of more democratic public space in Nepal that allows columnists like him to fully flaunt inconsistent arguments week after week. Third, Lal accuses Kathmandu intelligentsia for not protesting while Maoist "kangaroo courts" dispense "Taliban-like quick justice". This is a totally unfair characterisation of the existing

Fourth, Lal states that the Public Security Regulations (PSR) are being implemented to just tackle the Maoists. Sure, because he is unable to see how PSR is already being misused by local

responses to Maoist excesses by

Kathmandu's intelligentsia.

government against journalists, human rights activists and politicians who have nothing to do with Maoist terrorists. And the next time Lal repeats his pro-madhesi and anti-pahadi analysis (one of his staples over the years), the authorities would put him behind the bars for "exciting communal activities" as defined by PSR 3(2a). No doubt Lal writes well, but he needs to ask himself if his enhanced visibility and reputation has all gone to his head.

Umesh L Tuladhar Tyodha Asan

DR MAHAT Binod Bhattarai's coverage of the economy on the eve of budget session was an eye opener ("It's the economy, stupid", #49) . Whatever our Finance Boss says, we have very little reason to believe him or his ilk. We have been hearing commitments like full security to industry, a simple and reliable taxing system, investment friendly law and rules and regulation for a long time now. The Maoist are collecting more revenue than the government, and Dr Mahat still wants to "verify" that! Does he want the Maoist come to him and show receipts? Enough said, let's see

some action this time. And we can start with our tax office staff who are millionaires many times over.

> Name withheld on request Chhetrapati,

VOLATILE

Rupa Joshi's article on the TV iournalists hit the bull's eve ("Tears and roses", #49). Being in the same line of reporting for television networks, I was aghast at the way foreign TV crews were going about their work in early June in Kathmandu. In front of King Mahendra's statue in Durbar Marg, I heard a reporter for STAR TV saving on camera that there was a crowd of 2,000 behind him brandishing swords and knives and had mishandled Indian journalists. In fact, there were hardly 200 people and they were not aggressive at all—that is, until they heard him say that, and that is



Indian TV journalists were instigating riots by their very presence. The crew I was working with were also time and time again asked menacingly whether they were STAR TV or Zee TV. I had to convince them that they were not. There is obviously a need to regulate such reporting which gives Nepal nothing but bad publicity, and makes a

volatile situation even more

when the crowd really went wild.

Kathmandu

SILLY

volatile.

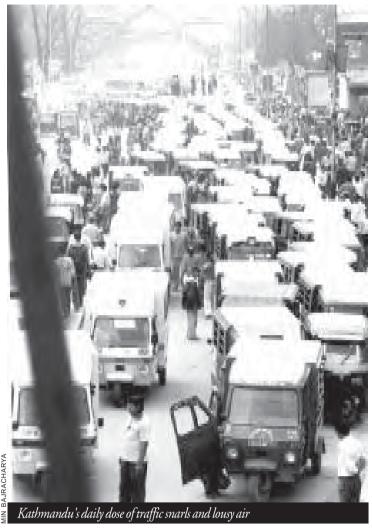
It is frustrating reading Kunda Dixit's shallow and silly remarks in his regular column "Under My Hat".

I have often wondered about the purpose of this column—is it a satire? Is it an attempt to be funny? Is it a light-hearted discussion of a more serious issue to get people interested? His choice of topics and areas of discussion is vague, his language and style are pathetic. It is perhaps best to leave the writing bit to serious people like Binod Bhattarai and CK Lal.

Suresh K Kafle Manchester, UK.

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Air, gas and electric



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

hen the budget was presented on 9 June, environmental activists and proponents of clean energy had been hoping Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat would come down strongly on gas-run vehicles. When the 3,000 Vikram tempos were taken off the streets in 1998, their owners were allowed to import petrol- and diesel-run microbuses as replacements. They were given

massive waivers on import duty and did not have to pay VAT. Similar waivers were announced the next year for gas-run public transport vehicles. As it has turned out, gas-run vehicles are not quite as clean as they were made out to be, and electric vehicles, which are, were never granted similar subsidies for some unfathomable reason.

Mahat addressed the issue in the budget—by removing gas-run

This is a tale of broken promises, corruption and botched attempts at providing Valley residents safe, reliable and clean public transport.

vehicles, but not those that use petrol or diesel, from the list of imports eligible for the 99 percent customs and 100 percent VAT exemption. "The government realised its mistake but has chosen to admit it silently because of the massive corruption rule allowed," says Bimal Aryal, a member of the Martin Chautari anti-pollution public interest group.

Private entrepreneurs and green activists say the root of the problem lies in corruption—officials at the Department of Transport Management (DOTM) and the Ministry of Population and Environment (MOPE) are so busy lining their pockets, they say, that they don't seem to have noticed that the policy they wrote and relied on contradicts their own guidelines.

Transport sector watchers say it is too early to celebrate the victory in the budget because a larger problem remains completely un-addressed. "The government needs to immediately address the massive, open corruption that takes place at the Department of Transport Management. Without that, the problem of air pollution cannot be solved," says Aryal, who says he has heard details of the graft from the horse's own unrepentant mouth. "If it does not, we will expose every last corrupt official there."

Sushil Agarwal, technical director of the DOTM, the man in charge of regulating tempos and microbuses, was on vacation and not available for comment.

In December 1999, the MOPE, under pressure from Vikram owners, announced 100 percent VAT exemption for Vikram owners who wanted to import four-wheel microbuses and a 99 percent import duty waiver for petrol-run autos and 75 percent for diesel-run. The regulation was silent on maximum passenger load, which is the other major factor affecting emission levels, and soon the microbuses were squeezing in up to 20 passengers—almost 25 percent more than they are designed to carry.

Then came the next waiver, A few months later another concession—a 99 percent waiver on import duty and 100 percent waiver on VAT—was given to four-wheelers that could be converted to run on gas. To qualify, three- and four-wheelers had to be converted to run on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) or Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). Importers had to present proof of conversion either from the country of manufacture, or by a government department (which department was not specified) within a stipulated period of time

after the vehicle had been imported.

The standards of conversion were not specified. LPG-run vehicles reduce pollution effectively only when they use of catalytic converters. The equipment generally used abroad is sophisticated, and costs about \$2,000-3000. In Nepal, operators of such vehicles install substandard equipment, which don't do what they're expected to. Operators decided to go for gas because of lower running costs than petrol or diesel and also because there were no pollution standard until very recently.

We are told an industrialist from Birgunj, said to be very close to senior Nepali Congress leaders, used the rule on gas four wheelers to import three-wheelers, which activists say cannot happen unless you pay fixing charges to government officials and politicians. One company, Kathmandu Tuk Tuk, imported 18 LPG-powered engines, duty and VAT exempt, reportedly claiming that they were four-wheelers. The Tribhuvan University Institute of Engineering in Pulchowk conducted tests on the engines and warned the government that they were not suitable for use in public transport because they could cause serious health and safety hazards. The government pretended it did not hear what the technicians had to say.

And then in October 2000, the MOPE issued yet another order clarifying emission standards for tempos and microbuses. The emission standard for "gas run three wheelers" was being heard for the first time. Public utility vehicles were allowed a maximum carbon monoxide (CO) level of three percent by volume. Four-wheelers were allowed 1,000 ppm (parts per million) of Hydrocarbon (HC), and three- and two-



by **DANIEL** L

HERE AND THERE

When the going gets tough



Nepal isn't a bed of roses, there are many things to be gloomy about. But the blessings and potential are still on the positive side of the ledger

t's become a habit almost everywhere for politicians and leaders to confront crisis with a call for introspection, for people to assess themselves and what's around them. The motive is usually evasion of responsibility by the politico, or frantic buying of time to see if events will sort themselves out.

Me, I long for a different sort of call from the public podium. When the going gets tough, I want someone to tell us all to stop thinking about ourselves and our little microcosmic points of time, space and attitude. I wish someone, sometime would tell the people to get real, grow up, get a life and start making the best of what they've got.

Even here in Canada. We hear it again and again and again. Oh how dreadful things are in Nepal. The Royal massacre on top of bandh after bandh after bandh. The Maoist rebellion swelling and smouldering over the dreamy western hills and the foreign investors charting a steady course away from our shores; our deteriorating environment and the ever-gloomy aid community waxing bearish over beers during their paid home leave each sweaty monsoonal summer.

Well I'm tired of it. It's time to count some blessings Start with the basics. This is the world's most beautiful country. Bar none. Along the splendid heights of the Himalayas from Kangchendzonga to Api-Saipal this is a land of unmatched natural splendour and beauty. Not just the peaks and high valleys, the middle hills with their rice terraces and impossibly situated villages put other countries to shame, even the fabled Philippines or Bali.

The Kathmandu Valley is a lush cradle of civilisation, a natural temple to human creativity, whatever the depredations wrought by modernisation and growth. And the tarai is sheer bliss. It's what north India would be without so many people and a stultifying caste system,



a neat, green patchwork of sustainable farms and scrubbed villages. The Nepali people are a truly phenomenal bunch, however full of self-loathing and angst the tiny intellectual elite may be.

The plains, don't forget, were feverish jungles of death not two generations ago; the middle hills had no development, new crops or foreign ideas. Now, whatever the drawbacks and social challenges, there's a ferment of change and development that doesn't come from a northern European aid agency boardroom or a document written

in gobbledygook by a multilateral organisation or a foreign government "expert" dispersal department.

Whatever one may think of the Maoists and their tactics, trying to see their activities as at least an attempt at self-help by a people denied development and you'll perhaps begin to understand what I mean. As for the hill folk, does anyone have to hold out begging bowls for the Sherpas, Manangis, Thakkalis or others? I think not.

But oh, I hear you say, Kathmandu is a wretched mess, a blot on the landscape full of parasitic, bloodsuckers and corruption. Frankly, what national capital isn't seen that way by the citizens. Washington DC certainly has such a reputation, and deservedly so. Me, I see Kathmandu as the nation's best hope, an urban cauldron of ideas and lively young people, where an entrepreneur or an activist with an idea can break the chains of caste, tradition and rural poverty; where democracy is still in its infancy, and doomsayers get paid by the predictions, and where everyone forgets that it has only been eleven years since democracy began.

I write from Canada, another nation prone to introspection, gloom and squabbling over things that seem meaningless to outsiders. There are many here who lack perspective and ponder whether, after 134 years of existence as a modern nation, this place somehow lacks relevance. It seems ludicrous to someone familiar with Nepal's travails, but ask a citizen of Sierra Leone or Guatemala if they wouldn't prefer Nepal's problems to their own. You'll get a flood of requests for visas.

No, Nepal isn't a bed of roses. Yes, there are many things to be gloomy about. But my calculator tells me that the blessings, the attributes plus potential, factoring in the amount of time allowed for development, are still on the positive side of the ledger. And that's where the introspection should end.

ing gets tough

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wheelers were allowed 7,800 ppm. The levels specified were the same for petrol-run autos as for gas-run. The government apparently counted the number of wheels to fix the standard.

But, say environmental activists, if gas-run vehicles are cleaner, they should have lower emission ceilings. If they are not cleaner, why subsidise them? "Government charges import duties as well as VAT on petrolrun vehicles, while giving large concessions to LPG-run ones, which now turn out to be subjected to the same criteria of performance," says Dr Usha Sharma of Clean Energy Nepal (CEN). CEN, Martin Chautari, Explore Nepal, Leaders Nepal and

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Pro-Public worked together to lobby government to take back the duty and tax exemptions for gasrun vehicles. Taking back waivers on petrol- and diesel-run vehicles might prove more difficult, because they are not touted as "clean"—by replacing the Vikram tempos, they simply provide much-needed public

On 24 April, the Valley Traffic Police randomly tested 35 LPGrun vehicles at the request of the CEN. The results were what the environmentalists had been saying all along: 55 percent failed the emission test for Carbon Monoxide (CO), spewing an average of 7.2 percent by volume, more than double the maximum three percent allowed. The vehicles did pass the

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HC test, mainly because the MOPE imposes the same high level on "clean" gas- and "dirty" petrol- and diesel-run autos.

On 1 June the Supreme Court ordered a ban on the operation of LPG-run vehicles not meeting the emission standards in response to a public interest lawsuit filed by advocate Bharat Mani Gautam a year ago. The government is yet to begin enforcing the court order. "Such inactivity can only be explained by corruption, or else why is no action being taken against the polluters," says Amod Pokharel of the CEN. "All the faulty decisions were taken by mid-level DOTM officials who thought of nothing but filling their own pockets."

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And so, until this year's budget is passed by parliament, gas-run vehicles, the centre of this whole fracas, will continue to receive duty and tax waivers, regardless of compliance with safety measures, and with no realistic emission ceilings in place. The country has lost about Rs 450 million in revenue due to exemptions given to the LPG vehicles, and another Rs 600 million on exemptions to petroland disel-run microbuses. The gas-run vehicles guzzle 400 tons of the already scarce cooking gas supply each month, the government loses another Rs 306 million in revenue in the form of the subsidised gas the vehicles burn.

The ideal gas to run public transport on would be CNG, but it would have to be imported. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, all of which use the gas, have trouble meeting their own demand, and the economics would not work out if it were brought in from anywhere else. LPG use in transport reduces pollution, but does not eliminate it, as Nepal's zero-emission labels misleadingly suggests. Vehicles running on cleaner fossil fuels are categorised as either low-, ultralow or and super ultra-low emission vehicles in many countries, including India.

This depressing story of pollution and corruption does not end here. The truly ironic part is that while all attention is being lavished on gas-run autos, the real zero-emission mobiles, electric vehicles (the battery-operated Safa tempos), get no similar concessions. They are required to pay VAT and only get a one percent exemption from the 15 percent import duty on batteries.

If we are serious about having the cleanest possible vehicles on our roads, the government should be concentrating on producing EVs. "But it is not interested, and we cannot mass produce electric vehicles cheaply without government support," said one electric vehicle producer who did not wish to be named. Industry experts tell us that batteries, their disposal and recycling facilities are not as big a problem as the drain on government revenue due to mis-targeted subsidies and increased pollution. Nepal produces about 2,000 tonnes of lead from used batteries, which are recycled in India. It is not economical to set up a recycling plant for less than 3,000 tonnes of lead from batteries annually, but once we reach that level, there will be investors coming forward to do that, the same industry source added. But that, of course, depends on whether the number of EVs will increase in the first place.

How importers will take this quiet change in the budget is unclear, as is the government's ability to implement the June Supreme Court ruling. Is there any way out of the impasse? ♦

Beetle mania

It isn't an endangered species like the tiger or snow leopard, but Nepal's common stag beetle is gaining a similarly cult status abroad. The beetles are in high demand in Japan where people fork out many yen to watch them fight and reportedly pay \$30,000-40,000 a pair. Five of the 300 species of the bug in Nepal are especially popular. The insects, found all along the Mahabharat Chure range, from Ilam in the east to Dadeldhura in the west at an altitude 1,800-2,500m, are smuggled into Japan. Says Janardan dhakal, a CITES consultant with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks: "They're not listed in the Convention Against International Trade in Endangered Species but that does not mean it's legal to carry out a trade in them without informing the Nepali authorities." Wildlife officials suggest the beetles can be exported after the sustainability of the species is ensured and matters of revenue sorted out.

Piqued PAC

The Public Accounts Committee is not amused. In the last 10 months the government has sanctioned nearly Rs 110 million as "financial assistance" and "medical expenses". But it has failed to clarify the details. The committee had asked the Ministry of Finance for a detailed report so it can investigate the basis, the process, and the justification for sanctioning the funds. The recipients are largely top government officials, politicians and parliamentarians. After finding discrepancies in the disbursement of funds from the national treasury, three years ago the PAC ordered the Home Ministry to stop sanctioning funds under the item "financial assistance". Since then, funds are directly sanctioned by the Council of Ministers. The PAC is still waiting for the finance ministry to provide a detailed report on funds disbursed under items other than financial assistance.

Heir today, gone tomorrow

Prince Paras better behave himself. If Nepal's parliamentarians have their way, the prince's female relatives may one day be able to claim the crown. First they demanded equal property rights for women, now some progressive MPs are clamouring that parliament be allowed to amend the Act relating to the royal ascension. They say the current law, which allows only the eldest son of the king, or the nearest male relative to lay

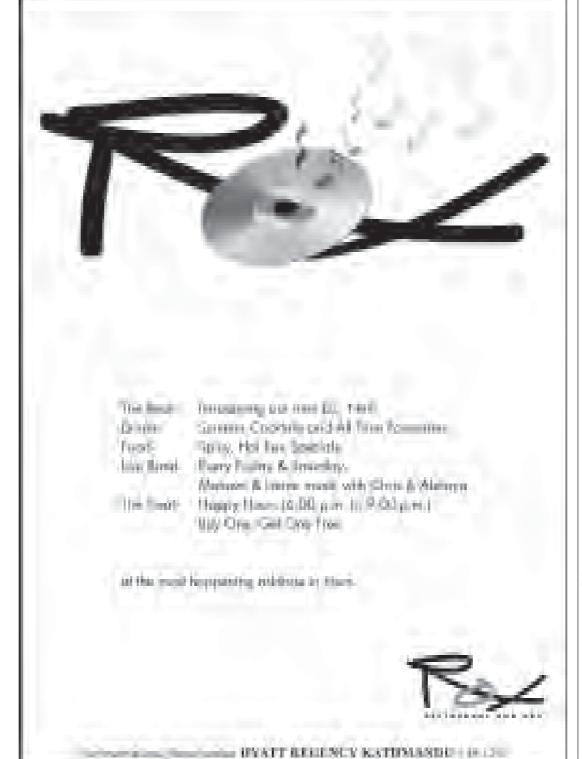
claim to the throne is backward, biased, and obsolete.

Sensitive strain

While others talked at length about the blood and gore and reported with relish the death toll this week, one private FM broadcaster in the Valley, K.A.T.H. FM, rose above the rest of the radio pack and displayed a sensitive streak. Following the news of the gruesome massacre by the Maoists early on 7 June, the station announced that it would not broadcast the usual FM trivia—chirpy songs, declarations of love—but instead requested listeners to phone in condolences and messages of a more sombre nature. It was a fitting gesture.

Piety for peace—backwards

In a pious gesture to appease the gods, two drivers are going the extra mile. Believers Sampurna Shrestha from Makwanpur and Jhalak Bahadur Thapa from Dolakha have started a painstaking drive from Pashupatinath in Kathmandu to Bhimsenthan in Dolakha—in reverse gear. The effort is not to establish a record, say the men, but to save the country from the conflict, death, and destruction that is spiralling out fo control. They hope to cover 136 km and several hair-raising bends to Dolakha in three days.





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6 NATION

Stepping up the ante



BINOD BHATTARAI

here is no sign of a letup in Maoists violence: some 50 policemen and locals were killed in the violent attacks last week and rebel supporters have continued to spread panic in the urban centres by detonating

explosives and carrying out arson

But even the upsurge in violence has failed to break the political standstill in government. The demoralised police is paralysed, and the army is reluctant to get involved in a messy war in which it sees no

end. But the military has now been deployed in some seven districts and four more have been added for deployment this week after the latest attacks. Senior government officials told us they suspect the sudden spurt in Maoist activity in the towns and cities is a direct response to army's arrival in some mid-Western districts that the Maoists have declared liberated areas.

For example, the Royal Nepal Army now has a sizeable presence in Bafikot in Rukum, one of the eight districts where the Maoists have declared their "people's government". The army has also already moved into the hinterlands of Gorkha, home district of Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhatarai. Everywhere the Army has gone, it is now engaged in hearts and minds



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operations like health care and road-building. In some cases the army has been involved in providing relief to villages hit by landslides and taking on the job of the local police who have abandoned their posts.

The new paramilitary unit the government is training to fight the Maoists is expected to be ready for action in another 3-4 months, even though it is uncertain whether the government can get parliament to approve the law to form the Armed Police Force (APF). Failing that, a government source told us, it would be forced to rely on the Army itself for counter-insurgency. Army, police and senior government officials held a brainstorming in Nepalgunj last week in which they reviewed progress.

However, army sources interviewed for this article, say it would be difficult to deploy fully without a clear cut objective and a chain of command. Privately, the military sources say, they don't see themselves taking orders from fractious and confused civilian politicians.

Prime Minster Girija Koirala's effort to get the opposition on board to support the APF through parliament—as part of his 14point agenda—remains stuck. The UML insists that he first give them a date for resignation. "If only the UML would make a commitment on fighting the Maoists and agree on strengthening the position of the Prime Minister, I think the prime minister would resign even if the opposition wasn't forcing him to," a source close to Koirala told us. "They just want credit for his resignation."

The government's strategy is

to restore its presence in districts where police have been forced to withdraw, and with the army's backing, implement development programmes to "win" over the locals. The Integrated Security and Development Programme (ISDP) is being tried out in seven districts and discussions are on for expanding it to another four. But there are logistical problems with getting the plan underway. Besides, say critics, the situation is now too far gone for just the ISDP to resolve the threat. The Maoists have already read that, and have stepped up their campaign in urban centres and the hitherto peaceful eastern regions.

The main opposition remains trapped between its "prestige' demand for Koirala's head and the need to hold a radical face to prevent its cadres joining the Maoist ranks. "We tried to discuss their support for the APF during meetings but the UML doesn't even want to touch the issue before they are given a date," a minister told us. "They've not even made any public statement on the possibility of having to sooner or later fight the Maoists."

The Maoists on their part seem better at the strategic game. They've succeeded in isolating the government, prevent the opposition parties from getting together to form a joint force, and are already into their preparation for their "mass uprising" by sowing terror in towns while the army heads to the hills. In this, their best allies seem to be the confused and bickering parliamentary parties who can't seem to take the threat seriously enough to agree on a joint strategy. ♦

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NATION 13 - 19 JULY 2001 NEPALI TIMES

OPINION by SIMON MOLLISON

"Uplifting" "backward" "beneficiaries"



Real social development arises out of the peoples' own understandings and agreements of their situation, and their own aspirations for the future.

very so often a social development project achieves remarkable results. But such examples are astonishingly rare. Perhaps this just goes to show how difficult social development is and we development practitioners can relax (if that is the right word to describe our frantic activity—for we are, on the whole, a hard working and dedicated bunch) assured that we can rarely expect to get it very right. The development endeavour, we tell ourselves, is a continuous struggle but, unlike the labours of Sisyphus, it is not hopeless. It is surely a noble struggle. But even if good examples are remarkably rare this still does not explain why we do not learn from the notable exceptions. Why is it that the evolution of an effective response to a social problem cannot lead to much better responses thereafter? The answer may perhaps be found in certain tendencies within the international development endeavour.

Let me focus on one particular tendency amongst development institutions. We seem to construct the world of our "beneficiaries" as backward and hopeless, while simultaneously living well on the resources intended for these "backward" people. My sketch is an unpleasant one but I make no apology for that, for it is surely criminal that so little social development practice lives up to the promises that a few shining examples seem to offer us.

Many relatively well-educated people find a better living than they might otherwise expect while they struggle to "uplift" or "teach" people who are said to be "backward" and "ignorant". To make this work, a sort of patronage network is constructed. Donors fund intermediaries—often international NGOs which

openly claim in their publicity material to be showing people how to live—who then fund local organisations, usually staffed by otherwise unemployed members of the local elite.

The mission to show the people how to live may not be especially attractive to the people themselves, and so those at the ends of the chains of patronage must also receive some tangible benefit from the process. They are paid just enough to ensure their compliance and good will. Thus, visiting managers or monitoring and evaluation staff see and hear exactly what they should. Far from empowering people, the project is another example of how people can be kept securely in their place.

I he more tangible the

benefit given out at the end of the chain is, however, the more likely it is that the very poor will be excluded from the process and that relatively comfortable, if still picturesque, villagers will be the main beneficiaries of the programme. All seems to go well until the work is stopped because of the withdrawal of funding. Then, no one has any reason any more to continue with the pretence which they have been engaged in, and no one asks why five years of good work seems to have come to nothing in the end. But, as the donor's interest in the project has ended, no one cares very much about this. It looked good while it was running.

There is a test of whether something of this sort is happening in a development project. When a project is merely a form of patronage, expansion of the project will require an equivalent expansion of funding. Thus if it costs 100 money units to work with 100 people it will cost 200 money

units to cover 200 people. This is because the first 100 people require the same "support" as the newly added 100 people. Where people are being truly "empowered", however, we should expect that an expansion of the process that empowered them should cost no more than the original process. Indeed an exponential expansion might be aspired to.

This is so because (a) the

first 100 people have been empowered and so do not need the resources that they originally did and (b) because the first 100 people will tend to help the next 100 people so that the original budget may now serve many more than 100 new people. Many development workers know this but it remains an ideal that we rarely realise ... it is always just around the corner. This is an indicator that patronage rather than empowerment is what the project is achieving.

Let us be clear just who is dependent in this sketch. The people—who recognise that their part in the game might often be to claim dependence—are probably the least dependent. On the contrary, the rest of us are dependent upon them. But elsewhere in the patronage chain, numerous otherwise unemployed men and women are dependent upon the continuance of the activities and desirous of their expansion. It is a vital aspect of this style of development that the poor and marginalised should be presented as fatalistic, ignorant, backward and generally useless. We are asked to believe that they will do nothing for themselves and that it is necessary to recruit middle men (and now women) to, almost physically, "uplift" them. If things go wrong, this is likely to be explained as a product of the people's

backwardness.

We give this syndrome the name "aid-dependency"—the name itself seems to put the people down—and often we are told that the people will not "participate" unless we make it worth their while. But when we look at the rare shining examples of inspiring social development, what we find is that the people participate creatively and energetically. They often even make sacrifices to do so. But the activities that they participate in so enthusiastically are not dictated to them by patrons. Rather, they arise out of their own understandings and agreements of their situation and their own aspirations for the future.

What should social development practitioners learn from shining examples? One lesson is clear: if the people need to be pulled or pushed, it should suggest that they are doing it for us rather than for themselves. This will only work when there is enough money to pay everyone (for ever) and to pay most to the overseers who will ensure that the people do what is required of them. To conceive social development in this way is indeed to conceive it as a Sisyphian struggle. ♦

Simon Mollison works for Save the Children (UK). The views expressed here are personal.

VILLAGE VOICE

by KABINDRA PRADHAN



Do we need a Ministry of Agriculture?

BUTWAL — A recent official pronouncement mentions that Nepal has doubled its agriculture production in the past three decades. Oh? The item goes on to say there has also been a further 60 percent increase in the land under cultivation in the same period. Double-oh.

So, this increase in yield had nothing to do with the Ministry of Agriculture and all to do with the Ministry of Forestry providing additional land for cultivation under the government sponsored resettlement plans, politician-sponsored squatters' plan or just good old fashioned land grabbing.

Half-seriously, I now propose an alternative plan to develop agriculture in Nepal since it seems the billions spent by the Ministry of Agriculture over the years have not made any difference at all. I have been farming for 20 years now, and I know it for a fact that the only thing green that our rulers recognise is the Rs 100 note.

If a fruit tree becomes barren, we don't just curse it as a certain mythical man in the Middle East once did. We chop it down. If our water buffaloes become terminally ill we call in the butcher. Even our holy cows are pragmatically trucked across our south-eastern border where there are people who find the oxen nutritious. Similarly, closing down the Ministry of Agriculture, far from hurting the country, would actually benefit us. There are many ways to evict employees: the golden handshake, the boot on the backside, or for those who covet their chairs, a quiet posting in one of the midwestern hill districts where an alternative form of government is being tried out. But we must spare the ministers—we need them to sell us dreams of turning Kathmandu Valley into Singapore and washing the streets of the capital with the stolen waters of the Melamchi. After all, if we can have ministers without portfolios, why can't we have a ministry without employees?

There are numerous advantages of having a ministry without anyone in it: consider first the enormous savings in wages, allowances and overheads. This will free up resources to allow the prime minister to actually appoint more ministers in his next reshuffle. The employees themselves will now have more time to devote to moonlighting for NGOs and take on lucrative consultancies. After all, there are more and more donor resources going into non-government than government. The recently retired agricultural apparatchiks can then speak and write the latest mantras of sustainable agriculture in English and attend seminars and workshops which go on in the virtual world of development that has no bearing whatsoever on reality. All our experts who have proved to be helpless in helping farmers because they were helping themselves to greater harvests of greenbacks can then contribute to the country's GNP.

The cleaning up of the Ministry of Agriculture will also help donors who have the tendency to function like the mosaic virus that sometimes infects my potato crop. By itself, the virus is just a string of genetic material, a chemical code in a sheath of protective protein. But once it gets in the DNA of my potato, it takes over the functioning of the cells and forces it to produce more virus than tuber. Once infected with the donor virus, our politicians and elite begin to act and speak like the Nepali version of World Bank bureaucrats: "free market... privatisation... market forces... no subsidies... no welfare... no safety net..." We've seen it happen everywhere, politicians who forget the mandate of voters and citizens and become the implementers of donor policy. So they stop sending grain to food deficit areas, they put irrigation beyond the reach of most farmers by scrapping the subsidy on shallow tube wells. These wells could be the cheapest and most tangible form of irrigation for most of the tarai, and could be the viable alternative to grandiose donor-backed tarai irrigation projects. But we have put them out of the reach of the poor. Without a body of agricultural bureaucrats to infect, the donor virus may actually wither away. And once they move away from government, our afflicted leaders can begin the journey to detoxification so that they remember who they are actually supposed to work for. Those seriously addicted to the donor virus can be sent for rehab to the western districts. In fact, such rehab centres should be opened in all parts of the kingdom. Only then will they begin to see the citizen farmers as their ultimate masters, and not just a means to get periodically elected to office.

So now, we have a community of resource-rich, voter-sensitive ministers and a large population of resource-poor farmers. What next? I have a gosling in my farm that latches on to the first moving thing, taking it for its mother. Our politicians have similarly been brought up exposed to feudalism and life in opposition: leading strikes, hijacking planes and beheading people they didn't like. It will take time for them to learn the ways of parliamentary democracy, to learn their responsibilities towards present and future citizens of Nepal.

We farmers don't expect our chicken to go swimming or our cows to lay eggs. We treat poultry and livestock according to their nature. Our present crop of politicians from all parties are feudal in their habits, and they have to be treated as such—not as the parliamentary democrats they pretend to be. ◆

(Kabindra Pradhan works on his farm in Butwal.)



Time & Stress Management

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BIZ NEWS

Glad GDP tidings

The government estimates Nepal's Gross Domestic Product grew by 5.8 percent in fiscal 2000/01 down by 0.6 percentage points from the previous year. Agriculture grew by about four percent and the nonagricultural sector by 6.9 percent. The GDP growth in 1999/00 was 6.4 percent (agriculture five percent and non-agricultural sector 7.4 percent). The projections in the Economic Survey are based on the performance in the eight-months of fiscal 2000/01. Agriculture accounts for about 40 percent of the GDP and a drop in food grain production, down to 2.7 percent from eight percent last year, was the reason for the decline. Production of cash crops grew slightly, by 7.3 percent compared to the seven percent growth in 1999/00.

Leanest summer yet

Nepal Tourism Board reported an overall 57 percent drop in tourist arrivals in June compared to the previous year. This is the leanest summer yet and caused by upheavals and bad publicity in the wake of the 1 June murders at the royal palace. Indian arrivals were down by a whopping 72 percent. despite the new NTB "Festival of Life" package marketed in India. NTB officials say the promotional efforts in India were overshadowed by news reports on the royal palace massacre, increased Maoist activities and continued political uncertainty. The June slump came just when overall arrivals were looking good and the NTB had been hoping its costly marketing effort in India would fill hotels from the June-September, the traditional low season for Western tourists. Only 10,238 tourists came by air in June, 4,101 Indians and 6,137 others.

The low arrivals caused occupancy of hotels across Nepal to drop to the low 20s. Sources at the Radisson Hotel in Kathmandu said June occupancy was about 18 percent and they were hoping it would crawl up to the 40s this month. "We can spring back only if we could have some stability," said Kent Davidson, general manager at Radisson. "But there is no reason that the high season beginning in October will not be good." Overall arrival figures for the first six months were pretty good. Arrivals for the first six months of 2001 were almost similar to that of the past year.

Standard Chartered Grindlays

From 16 July, Nepal's largest corporate taxpayer will have a new name. Standard Chartered PLC (Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank Ltd) bought out the 50 percent stake the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited had in Nepal's ANZ Grindlays Bank in July 2000. "It's just a change in name. The services will be the same, even better," says Rajeev Kulkarni, general manager of the newly-named Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Limited. Nepal Bank Ltd owns 33 percent and the public, 17 percent of the bank.

After this acquisition, Standard Chartered, which focuses on emerging markets in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, is a leader in banking in the Middle East and South Asia Region. The acquisition is a win-win situation, says Jeffrey Cox, CEO of Nepal Grindlays Bank Ltd. "While Standard Chartered Bank's expertise is in the emerging markets, ANZ, focussed on Australia and New Zealand, had limits in understanding the markets." Standard Chartered has a network of 570 offices in more than 50 countries. "Almost 70 percent of the bank's income is from emerging markets so our commitment is strong," says Kulkarni.

Scoot off

Kinetic Engineering has launched a 100cc 4-stroke two-wheeler in Nepal and says it has plans to introduce six other models into the market soon. The company says the new launch, Challenger, has "lean-burn" technology which gives the bike excellent mileage, the turbo induction gives it good pickup and a large wheel base, more stability.

Care for kidneys

Shanker Traders Company has re-introduced a Sri Lankan herbal tea brand which it says has medicinal properties that helps overcome different renal, gall-bladder and gastrointestinal problems. Kidney Tea is a concoction of herbs grown in the island nation and is said to also have blood-purifying properties.



ECONOMIC SENSE

Everybody says ho-hum



The budget takes away from its own authority.

morose Beed sat staring at his computer screen, wondering what on earth one could write after the finance minister had droned his budget speech. Aha! Turn in last year's column. On second thoughts, the better solution might be to leave a blank space on p.8, where worthy readers are used to genteel discussion on matters economic.

Of course, these were only the dreamy workings of a mind affected by the same overwhelming lassitude and petty deception our Money Men (they are all men) in government seem to suffer from. Our parliamentarians present at the festivities seemed either disinterested or restless. The annual fete has come and gone, leaving the economy to pretty much fend for itself. No doubt the rituals on analysing and commenting on the budget will be well underway by the time the Beed makes his weekly appearance. So, methinks, one must instead examine more fundamental issues, ask what the philosophy behind our budgets are.

The first, and most basic questions—Who believes in the budget? To what end is it prepared? The experience of a decade of making and presenting budgets, instead of sharpening our planning skills, has been so devoid of lessons that the document is now losing its credibility. The budget has become little more than a compilation, a steady twitter of numbers with interludes of percentages. And what appears to be deception. New budget allocations are announced in manner that bespeaks

definite increase over the previous year's estimates. The reality of these numbers is often different. For example, the finance minister said that this year's allocation for irrigation—Rs 4.89 billion represents a 20.4 percent increase over last year's estimated actual. In fact, the amount budgeted for the irrigation sector is less than last year's budget allocation of Rs 4.94 billion. These tiresome discrepancies need to be explained.

The purpose of the budget is also elusive. The document is once again a grab-bag of promises of regulatory measures and reforms—all to be put into effect through legislation. Do we really need to drawany more attention to how many days parliament meets in this country and how many laws it passes each year? Given this, what can one say about a budget that shifts the responsibility for formalisation of its contents on to a virtually legislature. The budget shares with the government of the day the unpleasant whiff of mediocrity, in terms of commitment.

We have learnt that one year is too short to deliver much. It is time we

adopted a system of rolling plans with a three-year perspective. The budget document should stop resembling

election manifestos and only talk about objectives it can meet. There is no point talking about poverty alleviation programs that the budget cannot even kick-start. It is not necessary for the budget speech to be long to demonstrate that the government has lots of things in mind. How about, instead, focusing on critical issues that can be implemented.

There is something to worry about related to this year's budget—the mix of regular to development expenditure. We must take note of the repeated recommendations to privatise and end the dole to state-owned enterprises. And the government must bow out of areas it has no business being in, like the power sector. It is ridiculous to see over Rs 9 billion allocated to the power sector, and only Rs 3.5 billion to the education sector. What are the government's priorities?

As for revenues, we live for the day when the budget will actually be met. Everyone agrees that the problems in interpreting and implementing the tax laws in Nepal are as diverse and various as the nation itself. As long as no link is recognised between the assets one holds and the income one reports making, no tax laws will be successful.

Countries never plan to fail, but they generally fail if they fail to plan. The planning process needs to wake up to this. Budgets are not inherently "good"

or "bad"—we need to start evaluating budgets on whether or not they work and are credible. •

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com



0 E > ×



all the people

all the time..."

You're about to leave the FNCCI, what are you leaving behind? Pradeep Kumar Shrestha: I was elected for a two-year term The constitution does not stop me from contesting for a second term but I said I would step aside and make room for the first vicepresident to take over. I gave my word that there would be a consensus president because the business community needs unity. Time will show what I have left behind. In the past we had much politicking to be president but we felt that was a lose-lose situation for the community. Some people the FNCCI needed we left out by electioneering. I tried to be more accommodative and work with people who wanted to give something to the FNCCI, not just get something out of it. I consider myself quite successful and we were able to

How would list your achievements?

start a lot of new activities.

Here are some: The first activity we did jointly with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce was focus on exports—the Expo 2000. Our honorary councils abroad and businesses now know what Nepal can offer. To build the FNCCI's image, we organised the Industry and Commerce Day. It will be held on 10 April every year. We tried to recognise the contribution of all those who have helped build Nepal's economy. We have become more proactive, focusing on what the FNCCI needs and wants. We've had a lot of unfortunate events in the past year—I was unlucky. But we managed to get over them. After the Hrithik Roshan incident we organised a countrywide rally to bring the nation together against the communal nature of the riots.

But you're charged with not being able to address the concerns of larger businesses, the major employers and taxpayers...

There has been no FNCCI election where we have not made news. This year there was nothing else to talk about and thus the CNI came about. It has been discussed at election time for five years. We have been charged with focussing on the districts. That is not true—I can guarantee that 80-85 percent of our work has been addressing the concerns of larger businesses. Most FNCCI presidents have been associate members. I too

came from a district, because only a general member can be

president, and associates can only be fourth vice president. We have to contest from the districts, Rabi Bhakta Shrestha comes from Hetauda, Binod Chaudhary came from the Kathmandu Chamber, Padma Jyoti came from Birgunj.

Large businesses face two major problems, duty drawback and export to India. Duty drawback has been pending for years now, and those pointing fingers should not forget the thumb is pointing towards them. We have taken up the issue and are confident it will be addressed. The trade treaty was signed at the FNCCI's initiative, when Padma Jyoti was president. There is a provision for automatic renewal, India is concerned about manufacturing and surge. We've visited India almost 15 times to discuss the treaty. Was that not addressing the concerns of large businesses? We were also instrumental in getting the Special Additional Duty abolished. We've been following up industrial security issues and changes in the labour act.

Do you see CNI only as a divisive force?

Divided we won't remain a force. It will benefit nobody and is a lose-lose situation. We know we cannot stop a new organisation from being formed. But who will be its members? The CNI, with vested interests, is not going to solve the problems faced by businesses. Everybody has the right to fight elections, so why should any one feel left out. You can fool some of the people all the time, but not all the people all the time.

But don't you think issues proponents of the CNI raise about professionalism valid and the corporatisation of the institution are valid?

I would be the happiest person to see that work but unfortunately with a man who cannot stay idle (at its helm) and

FNCCI vs CNI

The FNCCI will elect new office bearers next week and Rabi Bhakta Shrestha is to be the new president. Pradeep **Kumar Shrestha, FNCCI president is not contesting for a** second term, because he says, he had given Rabi Bhakta a "businessman's word" two years ago when the first vice president stepped aside to make way for Pradeep.

But even as FNCCI constituents jostle for votes to other positions, a group representing some of the largest businesses is trying to set up another institution, which it says will tackle what has left undone by the FNCCI. Leading the formation of the new group—called the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI)—is Binod Chaudhary, a former FNCCI president, who feels FNCCI can no longer serve the interests of all constituents, especially large groups and those representing growth areas.

The business community is divided over CNI's emergence, with opponents charging it with being a "big boys" club, and even having "communal" undertones. Another charge is that it is just election-time posturing. Praddep thinks the CNI idea will die after the FNCCI elections, as similar initiatives have in the past.

CNI proponents don't think so. They say they're trying to set up an institution that would be professionally run, would not bother with elections but devote itself to larger businesses and growth industries and complement the work being done by the FNCCI.

Chaudhary claims he stands for change, Shrestha for continuity of FNCCI with necessary reforms. Nepali Times met the two leaders of industry to talk about the FNCCI, the **CNI** and the charges and counter-charges now circulating.

always needs a platform, I don't think that can happen. Managing an institution professionally is good. But to see if that is possible we need to look at how these same people run their businesses and their staff turnover.

So personally you believe the FNCCI has more promise? The FNCCI has a future, we

have the economic and political strength. There are areas we need to correct. We have an advisory board and Mr Chaudhary is a member. But how many meetings has he attended? The issues being raised could have been discussed in-house. This is not the right time to have the CNI. Let us first make one institution strong. As president it is my job to keep the family intact. •

• What is the CNI and why do we need it now? Binod Chaudhary: The CNI is not a new concept, it has been

debated for the last five years. People associated with the private sector in a professional manner and knowledgeable and concerned about it have always recognised the need for an organisation which would truly represent the real stakeholders.

The existing institution is not representative enough?

The FNCCI, the 50 other commodity association and 85 district and municipal bodies are all involved in economic activities. Twelve years ago, when I joined the FNCCI it had 40 district chambers whose involvement with the FNCCI was ilimited to attending the Annual · General Meeting and other functions.

The FNCCI had not been able to reach out to its real constituents. There were also associates, which included all kinds of businesses. We felt the need to support larger businesses by making the FNCCI more professional, capable of supporting potential growth areas while building up the district units.

You have visibility and respect, yet you want a new organisation. Isn't FNCCI serving you well?

Doing business is very tough today, and the community has grown substantially. All the FNCCI constituents have grown and they face different problems. The FNCCI was right to bring everybody under its umbrella, but it isn't relevant today. We want specialisation. Every business organisation has to identify its core competence—you cannot be master of everything. Garments today survive on quotas, which will be phased out and Nepali industry will have to compete with India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Unfortunately, because of its increased size, there are too any demands on the FNCCI. Its core constituents are the district chambers and their needs rightly come first. Take the VAT, larger businesses pay it, smaller ones don't because. Joint venture industries have their own problems—Kodak, a brilliant example of attracting investment in Nepal had to leave. If there were issues about the extent of processing and value addition had been raised earlier, this situation would not have arisen. If the major taxpayers and employers lose confidence and stagnate because they aren't getting the desired level of support, that is bad for the country. I think it is humanly impossible for the FNCCI to provide all the same degree of importance and consistent attention. Industry needs a larger, more effective support mechanism. A stagnating FNCCI secretariat has been unable to focus consistently at all levels.

Why?

It has become election oriented. When the constitution was amended we felt it would help integrate the district chambers better. But they have become vote banks and people have forgotten winning means serving all constituents in a balanced manner.

Will the CNI have the core competence you say the FNCCI lacks?

Even the CNI cannot serve everyone, so we have to identify our core areas. Our focus will be the larger stakeholders, larger taxpayers, companies who have large investments, the ability to generate more investment, who are providing more jobs and also areas with growth potential. Financial services, infrastructure, export industries and tourism. We will reach out to countries that are our real buyers and sellers. The CNI will be professionally run and have sound corporate governance. Businesses with a corporate culture and professional management are moving forward. So business organisations that represent their interests will also have to corporatise. That will be CNI's biggest challenge—office bearers are not supposed to spend all their time running the organisation. To be



blunt, if somebody can spend 100 percent of his time running a business organisation, if he has no business of his own to worry about, then I don't know how much business experience and calibre he will have. CNI members will be like shareholders, office bearers will make policy but the organisation has to be driven by professionals.

Is the CNI some sort of "big boys" club?

No. Big is relative. We want to make it a representative body of the real taxpayers, employers and enterprises that have substantial investments. Focus will be on the growth sectors and how they can add value to the umbrella organisation. We expect to make a substantial investment in running the CNI, we intend to bring in some of the best brains with credibility and a proven track record. It should be inconsequential who is leading the organisation.

Will it interface with the FNCCI? How?

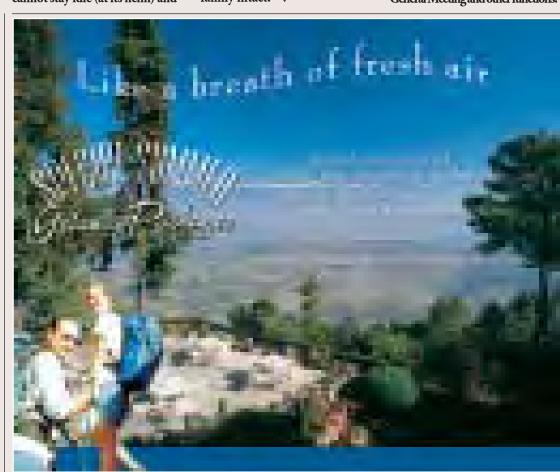
The FNCCI's core constituents are the district and municipal chambers, the main channels of distribution for manufacturers. They have to be strengthened, so we can never be far from the FNCCI. We are also going to remain individual members of the FNCCI, because we have problems in common. We will keep politics, personality and ego out and electoral divisions minimal. If another organisation gets a job done that is one thing less for us to tackle.

How do you plan to structure the CNI?

We will have 100 sponsors and 300 members contributing about Rs 4.5 million as annual membership fees. This money will run the organisation. Quality service costs money. Some sections have tried to stir up unnecessary tension between the FNCCI and the CNI, but we are talking with everyone. The timing and election of the FNCCI has led people to look at the implications of their electoral pursuits—some even want us to help negotiate and consolidate their positions. We don't want to delay the organisation. FNCCI elections will be over next week and so will the confusion.

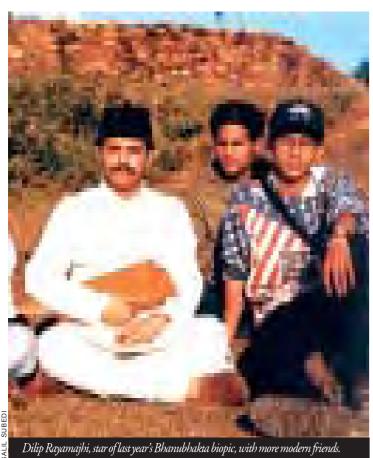
How soon will you set up shop?

Our biggest task is to identify a CEO, the membership and infrastructure issues are being dealt with, the bylaws are being prepared. We want to develop a mechanism that avoids the election process. The office bearers' role will be limited, so there will be no reason to fight. The challenge then is to identify a team of highly-paid professionals—if you give peanuts you will get monkeys. ♦



10 arts

(De)constructing a Nepali icon



SALIL SUBEDI

oday, 13 July, 2001, is the 188th birth anniversary of Adikavi Bhanubhakta, the poet who is credited with singlehandedly cementing the Nepali nation with its unifying language His translation of the Ramayana from Sanskrit into lilting Nepali verse made the poet a household name throughout the Nepali speaking world. Ironically, he was embraced first by Nepali-speakers living in India for whom the Nepali language had become the symbol of their separate identity. Within Nepal, even for Nepalis for whom the language was a mother tongue, there was more of a ho-hum attitude about Nepali and many from Bhanubhakta's time to today took the language for granted.

The bust of this poet from
Tanahu was installed in
Darjeeling in 1949, eighty three
years after his death and four
years after his birthday was first
marked in 1945 also in
Darjeeling. At that time
Bhanubhakta was hardly heard of
in his own homeland.
But there was something

potent in the idea that this poet, an apparently apolitical man of letters, could symbolise something larger than his workno less than a generic "Nepali" identity, with the Nepali language as a cornerstone. Bhanubhakta would not remain a poet for long. For official dom that began to define Nepali nationhood in the 1960s, Bhanubhakta became too tempting a symbol. Panchayatera bureaucrats turned the poet into an icon of national identity and unity—right alongside the monarchy. Bypassing the richness and diversity of Nepal's many languages and cultures, undercutting with a broad sweep of ceremony and rhetoric the possibility that the people brought together by Prithvi Narayan Shah could have evolved their own common reference points, of which the Nepali language was only one.

Getting the stamp of approval of officialdom in a sense discredited the poet's worth. And instead of celebrating Prithvi Narayan's famous dictum of "a garden with many flowers" there was the danger of elevating one language to the level of a national symbol at the cost of others.

Bhanubhakta's legacy finally

returned to Nepal in 1946, when a group of writers in Dharan took a fancy to the celebrations in Darjeeling and that year celebrated Bhanu Jayanti, as they called it. In 1951, Bhanu Jayanti, which had already started taking on the air of a tradition, made it to Chudi Ramgha in Tanahu, where Bhanubhakta was born in 1814, and resulted in the establishment of a library. Another birth anniversary also fell on this day in 1951, that of Tulsidas who is credited with translating the Ramayana. In Birgunj that coincidence was reason enough for quite a clamour, and doubtless imbued this "Nepali" Bhanubhakta to stand for with the additional characteristic of Hinduism.

Kathmandu was slower to catch on, here were a couple of years of low-key celebration by writers, and in 1953, the poet finally arrived in the capital when Darjeeling writer Gopal Pandey Asim's Nepali Siksa Parisad (NSP) funded a large celebration. By 1959 King Mahendra was unveiling the first of many Bhanu busts outside the Durbar High School opposite Rani Pokhari.

The by-now state-supported annual event was slowly pushed in different districts and along the way, many towns and villages named local sites after Bhanubhakta, and Bhanu Jayanti slowly incorporated nationalistic slogans. Krishna Bhattachan, Tribhuvan University sociologist and janajati activist calls this "the manufactured reality of Bhanubhakta", and says it was not always accepted unquestioningly. There was an undercurrent of suspicion among the diverse ethnic groups of Nepal, and also among feminists, who said Bhanubhakta's work is too patriarchal for him to be a source of national pride.

After the People's Movement in 1990, much of that anger and dissent has found expression.

Bhanubhakta has been credited with making Nepali a unifying lingua franca, but some are not sure.

There is now lively—sometimes heated—discussion about this "national figure". Bhanu Jayantis themselves have become staggeringly boring affairs. Historian Pratyoush Onta has studied the Bhanubhakta phenomenon, and suggests that the elevation of the poet as a central figure in established stories of Nepali history was driven by more complicated motivations. "Perhaps those promoting Bhanubhakta wanted to bring to life a national symbol and culture that, in its distinctiveness, would provide them with a recognisable national identity in the international arena," he says. "But alternatively, their motivation primarily came from their role as brokers of the national culture." Once Bhanubhakta had been inducted into national culture, Onta adds, it became even easier to pull out all stops, use school books, posters, and film to "make Bhanubhakta every Nepali's ancestor". But he wasn't and TU's Bhattachan points to the rich story-telling cultures of the Maithili and Magar languages, and asks: "Why aren't there laureates of the other different

castes and classes?" Today, many children in government schools across Nepal who read Mahendra Mala can recite the first line from Bhanubhakta's Ramayana by heart: "Ek din narada satyalok pugigaya garu lokako hita bhani" Ballav Mani Dahal, a social scientist and authority on Nepali literature, says: "In the guise of giving uniformity to Nepali society, the Panchyat rulers and bureaucrats deprived other languages and cultures their rightful place in the mosaic of Nepali identity. This is hardly acceptable in a pluralistic society."

At the very least, believes Dahal, the official version of Bhanubhakta that we receive is guilty of distorting the poet's admittedly difficult-to-pinpoint intentions. Bhanubhakta, he says did not undertake his epic translation to serve the Nepali language. "He was simply a poet who enjoyed the flavours of folk culture and local dialects. It was sheer coincidence that his translation (of the Ramayana) emerged at a time when the Nepali language was only just developing as the lingua franca."



Even so, the canonisation of Bhanubhakta continues. Last year, the first full-length feature film, Bhanubhakta was made on the life and times of the poet. And Yadav Kharel, its director, defends the effort: "The cultural context was different then and Bhanubhakta's contribution is purely towards literature and the Nepali language." The mixed reviews of the film reflected just how complicated the webs of identity, language, religion and notionalism are in Nortal

nationalism are in Nepal. "What Prithvi Naravan Shah did for Nepal's political unification, Bhanubhakta's legacy is the Nepali identity," says Kamal Dixit of Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya. "This sense of national identity need not necessarily detract from Nepal's rich linguistic and ethnic diversity.' Another important factor that helped turn the Nepali language into a lingua franca was the return of ex-Gurkha soldiers from the British and Indian armies into the Nepali hinterland. Various ethnic groups in the military needed Nepali to communicate among each other.

And yet the resonance of the Nepali language in the diaspora, combined with a more urgent need for a symbol of togetherness was precisely what drove the conception of Bhanubhakta as an icon of Nepali unity. Says noted Darjeeling-based literateur, Indra Bahadur Rai: "The beginning of Bhanu Jayanti here was very symbolic in the Nepali diaspora's fight against the oppressive West Bengal government which had been denying us our rights. The strongest unifying factor of our diverse communities here is the Nepali language. And Bhanubhakta's presence subtly knits us together."

The transplanting of sociallyrooted phenomena is tricky, and if
there is growing debate on the place
of Bhanubhakta in Nepal, the
different cultural needs of Nepalis
in India ensure that there Bhanu
Jayanti grows bigger every year.
This year, says Rai, celebrations will
go beyond Darjeeling and
Kalimpong to other parts of northeastern India.

Bhanu Jayanti in Kathmandu this year will be the same predictably rigid celebration it has been for the last few decades. Students from government schools will be made to line up outside the Durbar High School in Rani Pokhari, politicians will garland the bust of Bhanubhakta, give a speech extolling the poet we will all forget for another year. Perhaps the best way to celebrate Bhanubhakta the poet is to forget about symbols for a while, and buy a collection of his tapes produced by Music Nepal which contains the entire recitation in soothing Nepali folk chhanda of the Bhanubhakta's Ramayana. 🔷

Music Nepal has produced a complete recitation of Bhanubhakta's Nepali Ramayan in tapes, available for Rs 550 (11 tapes).

Nilo,

SALIL SUBEDI

t is difficult to pinpoint exactly when it all started. Some say it was after the explosive arrival of FM radio in Kathmandu, others say it came with Nepal's own young MTV generation exposed to good music and good lyrics on cable. Whatever the case, Nepali music has arrived. And unlike Hindi music which is largely driven by Bollywood, modern Nepali pop has evolved largely independent of cellulloid. Which means the songs are a little "popish" since it does not have to appeal to the box-office's preoccupation with the lowest common denominator.

The new genre called Nepali Adhunik music has now got the maturity, self-confidence and world class professionalism and a growing body of young fans who demand that quality from our singers, musicians and lyricists. These are discerning afficionados and they are no longer satisfied with mediocrity. And having been exposed to professional production on the cable music channels, they can tell when something is fake, a copy, or plain bad.

But not all is hunkydory. With commercialisation has come the rat race which means only those who can afford the exorbitant costs for studio and



arrangement can afford to get there. It is a catch 22, you need a break to make it big, but you need to make it big so you can afford a break. Gone are the days when asprising singers lurked outside the Radio Nepal studios in Singha Darbar fishing in the small pond before their turn to sing finally arrived. They got paid the grand sum of Rs 10 per song.

Today, everything can be done for you. Fast. Make an appointment with a composer/ arranger at a private recording studio. Hand him your lyrics and tell him what genre you prefer. Sit back and relax. (But have your hard cold cash ready.) In a couple of hours, your music track will be ready. Take the track home, practice your vocals and come back for the final recording and mixing, and you're done. In the meantime, you would have surely organised your TV appearance, at a mere Rs 10,000. The cable channel will escort you to the location of their choice and shoot you with dancing girls galumphing around you. In a couple of days you're on air. Friends and family will watch you and you will become a superstar. But—no

offence—are you, really?

That's what serious musicians are worried about—that the industry will be overrun with musicians with questionable talent. Composer Bulu Mukarung has seen Nepali Adhunik and pop change dramatically in the last 22 years. "Ignorant people with the means, for whom music is a hobby, are ruining the Nepali music landscape. The new songwriters can't even explain their own songs," he sighs, pointing to soundtrack and pop songwriters. Mukarung and his past contemporaries enjoyed some of the best Nepali lyrics of the century in the 1960s and 70s. The consensus seems to be that the gradual erosion of standards has been in large part due to the film industry which abandons the real in all areas, including music.

But, say some like popular Adhunik singer Kunti Moktan, it is too early to start writing weepy dirges for Nepali music. "You can't have good music without good lyrics, and without both together, you can't sing a good song. And right now, Nepali music is right there." Nepali singers and musicians who matter have, in a sense, gained—freed from dependency on the bureaucracy of state-controlled media, and with more flexible production houses. Says Moktan: "Nepali music, and attitudes have have opened up greatly. Singers must now season each new song with a different taste."

After the annual Hits FM

Music Award in March, many critics and lovers of Nepali music were talking about the dawning of a "golden age of Nepali music". The buzz has been that lyrics, composition and vocals are all coming together in new and wonderful ways. "Good lyrics have simple and soft words, they need to have depth of feeling and, most importantly, the need to portray a vision. Popular songs in Nepal have always had these elements. The new generation of songwriters have taken the work of the past as their model. This has certainly helped Nepali music rise to new heights," says 51-year-old Deep Shrestha, who made a brilliant comeback in 2000 after a 16 year hiatus. "The only problem I see is that the works of some better-known lyricists is deteriorating as they try to adopt the style of newer writers," says Deep. But he is certain this will not bring down the house Nepali Adhunik has built—after all, says Shrestha, a good song written in any style will always be beloved, regardless of its genre. "We are getting good lyrics these days. And there's a demand of good songs from the listeners, too. And we are working hard," says crossover Adhunik/pop singer Nalina Chitrakar.

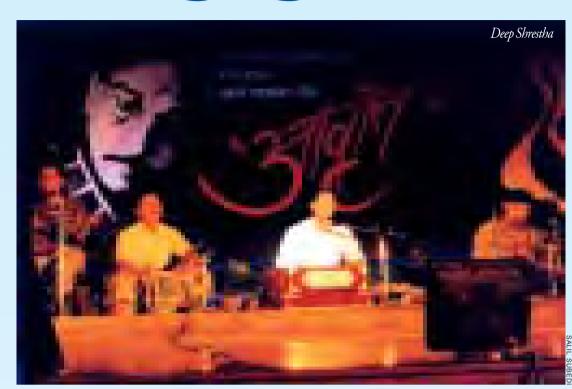
The kind of Nepali music we are talking about doesn't go too far back. Until Radio Nepal was established in 1950, for most Nepalis music was an ephemeral affair. The state-owned station set up recording facilities in the late 50s, but it was not until 1965 that it gave up transmitting most of its musical programmes live from the studios, launching the careers of such artistes as Hari Bahadhur

nilo gagan ma

13 - 19 JULY 2001 **NEPALI TIMES** ARTS 13 - 19 JULY 2001 **NEPALI TIMES**

Nilo,

nilo gagan ma



Nepali music-lovers are no longer satisfied with mediocrity. And our singers, lyricists and musicians are responding.

Ranjitkar, Uhi Govinda Bahadhur and Bhairab Bahadhur. Nepalis got their first taste of Adhunik as popular, mass culture in 1961, when Radio Nepal started broadcasting Bachu Kailash who was the first Nepali singer to record his own LP (long play, remember?) with a Calcutta-based orchestra. This was quite radical in itself,

because until then only aristocrats listened to recorded music—78s (78 rpm singles) with love songs by singers like Master Mitra Sen, Melwa Devi, Stulal Shrestha and Master Ratna Das Prakash. Bachu Kailash's winning combination of good vocals, a hint of classical melodies, a folk flavour, simple and sweet lyrics, and good arrangement meant success for him and increasing public demand for Adhunik.

The decade starting 1968 was Nepali Adhunik's most inspiring, productive period, with lots of experimental and avant garde music being composed by people like Nati Kaji, Amber Gurung and Gopal Yonzon, all of whom were well-

versed with a range of western and eastern music. Here, the Darjeeling Diaspora stood out: Sharad Pradhan, Karma Yonzon, Jitendra Bardewa. There were locals too: Prem Manik, Pushpa Nepali, Prakash Gurung and Deep Shrestha. But in the decade 1985-95 Nepali Adhunik lost steam as singers seemed to go into mass hibernation. But now, like a phoenix, it has risen again spreading its wings.

Until Adhunik arrived on the scene, folk songs were the logical medium to express individual and underclass angst, but the power of these new lyric forms changed all that, and people now had new ways to react to romance and social situations. Dharma Raj Thapa's 1960s ballad "Nepali le maya mare bari lai", for example, spoke about the growing number of Nepalis migrating to India for work. A contemporary hit, Bidesh jane mayalu teeme lai ("For a love going abroad") talks about a similar theme—Nepalis migrating to Hong Kong and the Middle East and the broken hearts they leave behind. They tug at the heartstrings of individuals separated by the cruel globalised world of migrant workers.

Today, music is a Rs 150 million industry, with some 250 albums of all genres from folk to native rock being released every year. Regular demand of stage shows has equally helped the musicians earn extra income. Kunti Moktan and Nalina Chitrakar whom we interviewed are also busy working for their new album to be



released in the next few months. Many contemporary singers are suspicious of digital synthesisers. "Upcoming musicians know the importance of acoustic sound and so they won't completely rely on the digital sound. But it has certainly amde the existing musicians fine tune their skills and look for good songs," says Sanjay Shrestha, musician and recordist at Omni Phonics studio in Balaju.

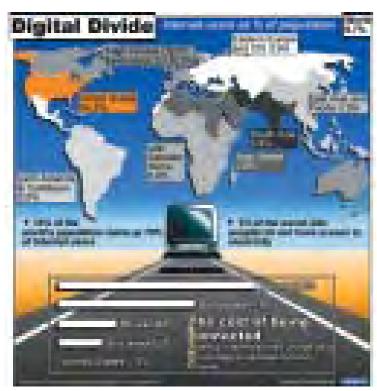
The Music Nepal, one of the foremost private run studios and music distributor started from two small rooms 15 years ago when the Hindi music had a grip over 90 percent of the market. Today Music Nepal produces 120 songs a year with an annual turnover of Rs 40 million. Meanwhile, the share

of Hindi music in the market has gone down to 40 percent.

The growing fame of Nepali music is also marked by the music distributor's rush to buy the copyright from popular artists. The prices ranges from Rs 40 thousand rupees to Rs 300,000 (Nabin Bhattarai's Smriti). All said and done, but what the senior Nepali songwriters and musicians have to be proud of is the impact their hard labour of long years has brought about. For Nepali Adhunik listen to the young voice of the 22-year-old song writer and musician Prabin Shrestha of Tantra which recently debuted the emotive word music of Nilo nilo gagan ma. It is a prayer for peace and goodwill.



Worldwide web of domination



Internet portal designed to bring

together "communities, organisations

The launch will come on the

and individuals" in order to reduce

heels of the latest UN Human

Development Report (HDR), the

annual publication documenting

improving their peoples' quality of

life. The HDR for 2001 argues that

"information and communications

technology... can actually make

major contributions to reducing

world poverty." That is also the

premise that the Gateway is working

upon. But it is no simple issue: The

HDR notes that most of the potential

benefits of technology actually bypass

poor people, because of a lack of

progress made by nations in

TANYA BIRKBECK IN LONDON

hen it comes to the Internet and its role in promoting development, it seems that everyone is sure of the goal, but few agree on how to reach it. The World Bank, the United Nations and various NGOs all say they want to transform the lives of poor people. And, from the point of view of those working in computer and Internet-saturated developed nations, technology appears to be the obvious answer.

On 30 July, the World Bank will be launching its ambitious project, the Development Gateway (www.developmentgateway.org). The Gateway bills itself as a place where "worlds of knowledge meet"—an

market demand and inadequate
public funding. "Technology creators
in the private sector respond to the
needs of high-income consumers,
rather than the needs of those who

have little purchasing power."

Will the new World Bank development

portal overshadow the diversity of

opinions on the Internet?

With less than one-half percent of sub-Saharan Africans and South Asians using the Internet, it's easy to see why critics doubt that a project such as the Development Gateway will succeed in bridging the digital and other divides between the wealthy nations of the North and the poor of the South. "Disembodied, globally stored information is not a development tool," argues Alex Wilks of the Bretton Woods Project, a Britain-based campaigning group that monitors the World Bank and the IMF. Wilks, who has been following the evolution of the Development Gateway since the inception of the idea, has many reservations about the nature of the project. "A lot of people will feel alienated by the way the site is set up," he says. Wilks is concerned that the structure of the Gateway Website is too hierarchical and that it will act as a filter rather than a disseminator of ideas. He compares the Gateway to an "Imperial gated community". He adds, "It's not your right to be there, it's only if you are granted access by the gatekeeper."

Now in the hands of the World Bank, the Gateway will soon be passed over to what will be known as the Gateway Foundation. While the Foundation will technically be independent of the World Bank, seats on the board of directors can be bought—at a high price. Those wanting to be in on decision-making will be required to make a \$5 million contribution. Major corporations like Microsoft, IBM and America Online (AOL) have already had a hand in the project.

In the interest of avoiding a topdown structure, the Gateway will have locally-run 'country gateways', but, says Wilks, "some unpopular choices have been made" over who will be running the gateway in each country. And with some successful country-sites already up and running, such as Uruguay's www.uruguaytotal. com total. Wilks argues that it may be counter-productive to put up more. "In the end it will just give more prominence to those who are already having no trouble making their voices heard", thus widening the existing digital divide.

Already, some organisations in developing countries are saying they will stay out of the Development Gateway. One such, the South Africabased Association for Progressive Communications (an Internet site that focuses on the "environment, human rights, development and peace") has opted for what it calls "constructive disengagement" with the Gateway. "We have talked with

[the World Bank] about the initiative, and will continue to do so. We value any shared learning with development information initiatives," Anriette Esterhuysen, APC's executive director, told us. "However, we feel that the Development Gateway, to put it simply, is trying to be too much, for too many, at too great a cost."

In a policy paper, Esterhuysen notes that other examples of knowledge sharing over the Internet, such as the World Bank's Global Knowledge mailing list, launched in 1997, have been unable to shake off their identity as projects that are initiated and mediated by rich industrialised countries. "This is not to say that access to information and communications technologies are not an important tool for development," she writes. "But it does not create development." Esterhuysen, like Wilks, worries that the Gateway may unintentionally end up competing with local initiatives. "The Internet is a very public space," adds Wilks. "For the World Bank it is a nightmare. Any small organisation can set up and publish. The World Bank has for a long time been very dominant, and now it's threatened by the pluralism."

Dr David Gauntlett, a lecturer in social communications at the University of Leeds in Britain, notes that it is the very nature of the Internet to be pluralistic. "The World Bank may well want everyone interested in development issues to use their gateway. But the good thing about the Internet is that users can always look for, and usually find, alternatives," he says. "The web contains many voices and, whether the World Bank likes it or not, people will access those more challenging sites." Gauntlett feels that whenever an institution with particular political or ideological leanings sets up a

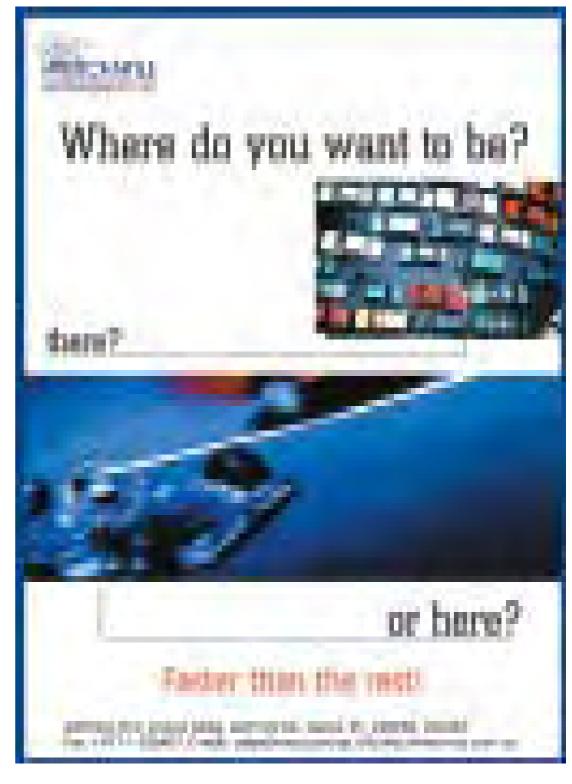
supposedly authoritative website, it should be clearly stated. In Development Gateway's prototype edition, only a tiny World Bank logo can be found – at the bottom of the main page.

Development Gateway's head of communications, Connie Eysenck, says the whole debate over the Bank project has been blown out of proportion. She says this month's launch is part of an on-going phasing-in process. And John Garrison, Gateway's head of Civil Society, adds that the Development Gateway "doesn't want to be a super gateway in which everyone has to come to our platform. We want to be one more portal... that hooks into existing portals."

Neither does the Gateway want to put other portals out of business, says Garrison. He points to the independent Latin American portal ALOP (Latin American Association of Promotion Organizations): "They didn't want to work with Gateway because of the World Bank. We're very comfortable with that, and we have given them a grant," he says. Garrison and Eysenck know the Gateway is challenged by many people's suspicions about the World Bank, especially in light of growing anti-globalisation protests. They claim that they are trying to make the institution more transparent in an effort to quell fears.

But when asked how the Development Gateway will maintain editorial independence when large corporations can buy a seat on the Gateway Foundation, Eysenck admits she does not have an answer. "It hasn't been put in place yet," she says. "You have to see this very much as something that is being developed." • (GEMINI)





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From red to green?





since its founding eighty years ago, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been obsessed with red. As the "vanguard of the proletarian," CCP claimed its mission was to eliminate capitalist exploitation. This is understandable—the CCP was originally an organisation of peasants, workers and Red Army soldiers. After seizing power in 1949, Mao warned that the Party should never "change its colour."

ANALYSIS

In a recent speech by Jiang
Zemin, secretary general of the Party,
said the CCP should permit private
businesspeople (capitalists) to
become party members. This is not
surprising. Over 110,000 CCP
members run private businesses, and
about three hundred work for
Motorola, for example, in managerial
and technical posts. Today, the
colour of China's social and political
values is not the red of class struggle,
but green, the colour of money. An
illuminating Chinese joke says that in
the early years of Communism, the

ANALYSIS

popular slogan was: "Only the Chinese Communist Party can save China," fifty years later, the slogan is: "Only Capitalism can save the Chinese Communist Party."

Can the CCP adapt to China's

new socio-economic environment and maintain the one-party system? The Chinese Academy of Sciences says over 46 million workers in State-owned and collective firms have been laid off since the mid-90s. Unemployment is expected to increase in the next five years when China enters the WTO. These statistics are damming in a communist state. Economic disparities between coastal and inland regions, urban and rural areas, private firms and State-owned enterprises are phenomenal. The difference in GDP between Shanghai and Guizhou, for example, increased from seven times in 1990 to 12 times in 2000. Millions of surplus rural labourers migrated to cities where many cannot find jobs. This explains the Falun Gong.

Rampant corruption is the most

formidable challenge to the CCP's legitimacy. The smuggling case against the Yuanhua Group, for example, involves illicit money totalling 80 billion yuan (\$9.7 billion). Several hundred officials, including 70 highlevel officials, have been arrested. China's top leaders call corruption a "cancer within" and a "life and death" issue for the CCP and China. Yet, "To expect the Party to eliminate official corruption is like asking a surgeon to operate on his or her own body—it is impossible," said He Qinglian, an outspoken Chinese economist. CCP leaders have launched a vigorous image-improvement campaign. At a recent high-level party meeting Jiang spoke of learning from Communist and ruling parties that have lost power in recent times—the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Kuomintangin Taiwan, and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional of Mexico. Jiang says internal problems caused such failures, like the inability to respond to new challenges.

The CCP now intends to represent "the developmental need of production," "the forward direction of advanced culture," and "the fundamental interests of most of Chinese people." The Party's base thus broadens to include entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and technical specialists. By bringing talented people into the system, the Party prevents an antigovernment force from forming. Execution of corrupt officials is also aimed at improving the party's image. Among the executed were the former vice chairman of the National People's

Congress and a former deputy governor of Jiangxi Province, the highest-ranking officials ever executed in PRC history. A few members of the CCP's Central Committee were dismissed from their posts for corruption, including the justice minister. But the most important initiative is the "greening" of the Party. One-third of China's 1.3 billion are under 21. The CCP targets this age pool, especially the college-educated. More importantly, the so-called fourth generation, will succeed Jiang Zemin's generation as CCP leaders. Growing up during the Cultural Revolution and were ideologically disillusioned. Many were sent to rural areas to do manual labour. Great physical hardship and an ever-changing political environment nurtured valuable traits—adaptability, endurance, political sophistication.

This generation is the least dogmatic of elite generations in PRC history. These new leaders will accelerate political reform, consolidating China's legal system and developing "inner Party democracy." They will consolidate reformed institutional mechanisms, like elections within the Party, term limits, age limits for retirement, and regular reshufflings of provincial and military leaders. A more institutionalised political succession will be essential to the CCP's future. The best news for the CCP is that no rival institution exists to replace it. ◆

Cheng Li is the author of Rediscovering China: Dynamics and Dilemmas of Reform and China's Leaders: The New Generation.

by MARK SOMMER

The age of spin

BERKELEY-"Truth is a liquid," said Edward Bernays, who in the interbellum years invented the modern art and profession of public relations. An alchemist of mass consciousness, Bernays blended sordinary reality with lies and half-truths so seamlessly that even sceptics could not discern where the real ended and deception began. Bernays, Sigmund Freud's nephew, applied his uncle's insights into the individual psyche to the manipulation of mass psychology.

Today PR is global industry with annual profits of tens of billions of dollars and 40-60 percent yearly growth. Many PR companies are independent practices legitimately seeking greater visibility for their clients with press releases, press conferences, and author tours. But the larger firms exert massive influence using a wide range of intrusive and manipulative tactics largely invisible to the public. The world's leading PR companies—Fleishman-Hillard, Burson-Marsteller, Hill and Knowlton, Weber Shandwick—are based in the US and UK but maintain offices in scores of countries. Most couple PR operations with larger advertising divisions, offering "integrated communications strategies"—ads project irresistible images and PR massages the messages from behind.

Much corporate public relations is neither public nor relational but stealthy and manipulative. Its effectiveness is in its invisibility. "The best PR looks like news," says a prominent practitioner. "You'll never know when a PR agency is effective; you'll just find your views slowly shifting." Media researchers estimate that 40 percent of what Americans see, hear, and read as news is lightly edited press releases. Publicists also place voices and faces, supplying journalists with ready-made stories. PR agencies promote and protect corporate and partisan agendas, democratic pols and image-challenged dictators. PR boosts or blasts public policies by targeting constituencies with a strategic blend of paid ads, 'earned" (PR-prompted) media, and "reputation management" strategies to industrial espionage, damage control, use of third party authorities, clandestine censorship, and infiltration of groups opposing their clients' interests. Most clients in such a high-stakes, high-priced industry are wealthy—major corporations, political parties and celebrities with a powerful interest in advancing their agendas or maintaining a positive public image to camouflage dubious motives or personal and institutional misconduct. Many PR clients spend more money rebuilding their images than redressing the problems that first tarnished them. Energy companies, for example, have pumped vast sums into PR tactics in recent years to dissuade US policymakers from trying to reduce America's greenhouse gas emissions. Through an industry-sponsored Global Climate Coalition, they seek to discredit the UN's esteemed Climate Change Panel' conclusions by feeding the media a few scientists (mostly in the pay of these corporations) dissenting from the overwhelming opinion that rapid action is essential.



Truth and its PR counterfeit are insidiously destroying democratic culture.

Corporate PR is so successful that often its chief victims—progressive politicians, environmental, labour and social justice movements—turn to the same techniques (and often the same firms). On behalf of global population organisations, a US foundation recently granted a major PR/ad agency \$16 million to inundate eight second-tier US cities with paid ads and PR strategies to "brand" international family planning like Coke and Toyota. Can a social cause be effectively marketed like a soft drink? Is something vital lost in the process? Like advertising, PR can be dismayingly effective in inducing people to do and believe things they otherwise might not choose, like smoking or voting for a corrupt politician. But can PR induce people to think for themselves or be better citizens? Does it even want to? What happens to a democracy whose citizens have been steadily and artfully deceived so they no longer detect any difference between reality and its counterfeit—or even care? PR's tacit assumption is that most people are incapable of intelligent, independent thought and action and must be programmed en masse to act in prescribed ways "for the greater good". "It is now possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it," wrote Edward Bernays. "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society." Bernays' chilling vision has come to pass. And it has so brain-damaged democracy that the "masses" being manipulated and the invisible hands manipulating them have surrendered their responsibilities—and possibilities—as free, conscious beings. Only by refusing to be "spun" and reasserting our independent judgment can we reclaim our citizenship and revive a diminished democratic culture. ♦ (IPS)

Mark Sommer is an author and columnist who directs the Mainstream Media Project, a US-based effort to bring new voices to the broadcast media.

Closer to home

BRUSSELS - The EC has announced reforms in its aid and trade functions to increase efficiency. The announcement followed reports that EU spending on aid programmes had grown three-fold during the 1990s, reaching some \$11 billion in 2000. The Commission admitted it is not equipped to manage this volume of aid and the speed of delivery and quality of its projects have been "suffering badly." Decentralising management if external assistance and devolving greater responsibility for the functions of its External Service to field offices are the main aims. The transfer of responsibilities is expected by end-2003. "Anything that can be better managed and decided on the spot, close to what is happening on the ground, should not be managed or decided in Brussels," where the EU is headquartered, said a communique from the EC's Europe Aid Cooperation Office, set up to improve internal management of its aid budget. The reforms, pending approval by ministers from the 15 EU member states and the European Parliament, include reducing red tape by opening several new EU delegations and offices throughout the world. "The cost of an official serving in a third country is approximately double that of one at headquarters," said the communiqué. The decision on where to place delegations will therefore be "based on a set of criteria comprising volumes of aid and trade, political significance, workload and management responsibilities," the paper said. The Commission's proposal is 'budget neutral', meaning it is not intended to increase overall spending. So to increase its representation in the Balkans, a key area of security concern, and areas deemed to be of increasing economic importance, cutbacks will be made elsewhere. The Commission intends to open a delegation to Nepal with a non-resident head of delegation

First Nations, then self rule

OTTAWA - The Canadian government is working to overhaul the Indian Act and hand much of its authority over aboriginal affairs to First Nations, or indigenous communities. The Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development says the government will consult the country's 600 indigenous communities in coming months before tabling amendments to the Indian Act in Parliament. But Native leaders across Canada are sceptical and say they have not been shown the draft legislation. Although the power of Native local government has been strengthened in recent years, the 125-year-old Indian Act has not been amended in 50 years. Native groups have often condemned the law; despising everything from its name to the veto power it gives Canada's government over decisions made by Native governments. One sticking point concerning the proposed changes is that the government will not give up its powers over Native governments' status and treaty rights. The issue of voting rights and access to Native-run services has been particularly contentious, with several cases now making their way through the courts. First Nations governments operate under the Indian Act, but some have made land claims or administrative agreements that give them greater power over local government, law enforcement, health and welfare. Robert Nault, Minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development, acknowledges that such legal challenges to the Indian Act are driving the legislative process. The powerful Assembly of First Nations, which works with the government to improve the quality of Native self-government, has not taken a position on the proposal yet. The government's proposed changes to the Indian Act fall far short of a recent Royal Commission recommendation for full self-government for Canada's Native peoples. (IPS)

Born Free, to Survive?

Archer's Post, Kenya – Somewhere in a secret location in the cone-shaped hills and volcanic rocks of the Shaba Game Reserve, 350 km north-east of Nairobi, American TV channel CBS is shooting *Survivor III*, the latest instalment of the popular television series. The road into Shaba is guarded 24 hours a day by armed game rangers from the local Isiolo County Council, which lent two-

thirds of the park to CBS for two months for 18 million Kenyan shillings (\$228,000). Shaba, the location of the feature films Born Free and To Walk With Lions, is loved by the local Boran tribe and filmmakers because



of its teeming wildlife, scenic beauty and eerie atmosphere. The CBS crew has cleared 20 km sq of vegetation in the 250 sq km park, and pitched 2,000 tents and other semi-permanent wooden structures inside the reserve. Heavy crew trucks cruise on and off the road. Says Guyo Mokku, an Isiolo MP, "I do not think the Americans would allow such a thing in a fragile environment." Angry locals want CBS to pay for the environmental destruction, and want the contract between CBS and the County Council made public. Others are also resentful. In late June, five journalists, eager to get to the bottom of the story, were detained for more than four hours by armed rangers. A reserve warden said he had "strict instructions from the movie company" to keep journalists from following the story. And tour operators are furious that their guests can only see one-third of the reserve. CBS and Isiolo County Council have not yet commented. (GEMINI)

COMMENT

Be pragmatic



ISLAMABAD-With media hype building up, leaders of archrivals Pakistan and India are busy doing their homework ahead of the 14 July summit. This will be the 19th summit of the two adversaries in the last 50 years. There have also been 65 meetings of the two countries at the level of foreign secretaries to discuss their still unresolved, core cause of contention: the dispute over Kashmir, with its armed insurgency since 1989 and three wars in the past. Both sides, eager to make the summit a success, unveiled their pre-summit perspectives last week. On 29 June, the Washington Post carried General Musharraf's view of how the two sides could move forward, and the same day The Times of India promoted

Vajpayee and Musharraf need to weave peace around the aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

settlement.

Vajpayee's remarkably similar

Musharrafsaid that "if both sides stick to their stated positions too rigidly, there will be no progress" at the summit. But if both are "sincere and open-minded,"there can be a settlement on Kashmirin "less than a year." The Times of India talked of Vajpayee's "new vision and strong sense of realism, addingsignificantly

that he would be prepared to discuss "how best to meet the aspirations of the people" of Kashmir. He was also said to be admiring what the Indian newspaper termed General Musharraf's "sincerity, frankness, warmth and straightforwardness." Besides the sudden personal admiration between their two leaders, both countries now apparently understand that 12 years after the guerrilla war in Kashmir, they have failed to achieve their maximalist positions. Pakistan, for instance, did not succeed in trying to internationalise the Kashmir issue by involving the UN or other sections of the international community. And India failed to Pakistanise the conflict by trying to reduce the Kashmiri

upsurge as simply a by-product of 'cross-border terrorism' allegedly fomented from Pakistan. Over the course of the decade-long Kashmiri insurgency, the character of the conflict has itself been transformed. It is neither wholly bilateral nor entirely international. Rather, it has become trilateral. A third party, the 12 million Kashmiris, two-thirds living under India and the rest with Pakistan, has been injected as the vital factor indispensable to any enduring

Musharrafand Vajpayee have been busy in consultations with politicians and foreign policy experts. Consultations are a political plus for governments handling sensitive security or foreign policy issues. They help in forging a political consensus, convey a perception of domestic political 'strength' prior to negotiations since most of those consulted support 'unity behind the government' and neutralises potential critics by providing them a sense of participation in the decision-making process.

Since the last Pakistan-India summit in February 1999, when Vajpayee rode a bus to Lahore at the invitation of now-deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the international political environment has become a different one. Then, Pakistan was somewhat better placed with President Clinton pushing the Pakistan-India dialogue, and trying to maintain a policy of parity and balance

India Pakistan

The most sensible option for the

Indian and Pakistani governments

is to tackle their issues as friends.

Partition

in South Asia. Today, internationally, India's support stems primarily from the US, which in keeping with the Bush administration's desire to promote India as a counter to China has taken an "India First" approach. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, visiting South Asia in March 2001, also made it clear the UN is not going to get involved in mediation on

Kashmir, and prefers bilateral talks.

by MUSHAHID HUSSAIN

Despite the media hype, this month's summit is different than, say, other 'historic' summitry, like Camp David 1979 ('land for peace'), the US-China 1972 breakthrough (to counter the common enemy, the Soviet Union) or last year's summit between the two Koreas (healing of wounds 'within the family'). This summit pertains to the Kashmiris, principles, their right to determine their destiny, and peace between two nuclear armed neighbours. The urgency of any settlement stems from the high stakes involved. The insurgency of Kashmiris is destabilising for the region, leading to death and destruction, and poses a real threat to peace. After the May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, Clinton called South Asia "the most dangerous place in the world" since any future India-Pakistan conflict could easily develop a nuclear edge. The failure to resolve this dispute would ensure that 1.1 billion people remain hostage to the 53year-old status quo. If India and Pakistan can agree that the status quo in Kashmir is no longer tenable, and that any settlement must incorporate the aspirations of the Kashmiri people, the summit would be presumed a 'success' and the peace woven around this

Mushahid Hussain was minister for information in Nawaz Sharif's government.

principle could endure. ♦ (IPS)

Closing the gap

CANBERRA – East Timor's prospects of economic independence improved after the signing of an agreement last week guaranteeing it a greater share of income from oil development in the sea between its territory and Australia. The Australian government relented from its initial insistence that the revenues from the 75,000 km sq zone be-

tween Australia and East Timor, known as the Timor Gap, be divided evenly. The Australian government says that over the 20 years of the agreement, from 2004 East Timor could receive more as much as \$7 billion in revenue from existing and future developments in the area. Income from oil and gas developments would be split between the oil companies, Australia and East Timor after deducting the costs of production. Both countries will



share the revenue evenly for the next three years. After 2004, East Timor will receive 90 percent of the total income. While estimates of the oilfield's resources vary, the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) estimates it could conservatively contribute \$103.6 to the threadbare \$57 million East Timor budget. Peter Galbraith, UNTAET Representative, said the agreement was not as generous as Australia claimed. "Australia is getting some of the oil and gas production north of the mid-point, which it would not normally get, and will also receive the benefits of downstream activities," he said. Other activists say it is important to keep an eye on the process of determining and accounting for the costs of production. Australia's interest in gaining control over the oil resources was a major reason for giving tacit backing to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975 and later recognising Indonesia's claim to East Timor. (IPS)

Almost globalised

GENEVA - China is a little closer to accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), after last week's multilateral negotiations, which the WTO said allowed both sides closer to agree on a number of issues. WTO authorities hope China's admission can be approved during the WTO's November meeting. The next meeting will be 16 July and if further deliberations are necessary, they will take place in September after the WTO's summer recess. China's assistant minister for Trade, Long Yongtu, though upbeat, stressed that there is still much work ahead. During the admission talks over the last 15 years, China has been firmly implementing a national policy of reforms and market openings. However, a sticky point remains: agriculture. China maintains it should be considered a developing country, and seeks the benefits afforded such countries by the WTO agricultural accord, including permission to grant subsidies for 10 percent of agricultural production. But the US says China is included in the category of industrialised countries, which must limit their farm subsidies to just five percent of agricultural output. A final hour bilateral treaty between Washington and Beijing established that China would set a ceiling of 8.5 percent for its subsidised farm production, dissipating the last of the storm clouds hovering over the talks. In addition to certain points related to services and tariff contingencies that have delayed the multilateral agreement under discussion by the working party. China must also finalise its bilateral talks with Mexico, the only country with which it has not signed a protocol of understanding. (IPS)

Make up

URVASHI BUTALIA

New Delhi - In the small lanes and alleyways of Turkman Gate in Old Delhi, the legend of Nina and Daman lives on. In 1947 when India was partitioned and millions of people chose—or were forced to choose—to become citizens of one or other country (India or Pakistan) Nina and Daman, legendary couple and head eunuchs, also split up.

Nina went to Pakistan and Daman stayed in India. But unlike many others, Nina, Daman and their followers remained in touch, visiting each other virtually every year. The border between India and Pakistan had little meaning for them: they were eunuchs, the 'third sex' for whom the quest for identity lay at the borders of gender, not religion. For many others this wasn't so easy. For Bir Bahadur Singh, a Sikh who migrated from Rawalpindi in west Punjab, it took more than 50 years before he was able to visit his home village again. Why was he so anxious to go back? "Because," he said, "we

came away in fear and enmity. Besides, once you have fought, what is left but to make up?" I was struck by the simple truth of this statement and think that President Musharraf and his colleague across the border, Prime Minister Vajpayee, would do well to learn from this in their summit meeting.

Hundreds of journeys like Bir Bahadur's are made every year, people going back to find their roots, to locate friends or family members, or simply to look at their old homes. My own journey began some years ago when I tried to track down my uncle, who had stayed on in what became Pakistan at the time of Partition and subsequently converted from Hinduism to Islam. Ranamama had been persona non grata in our family. For 40 years there was no contact with him. And then I became interested in the Partition and its impact on the lives of ordinary people, and acquired friends in Pakistan. The 'other' country no longer seemed so intractable. I was enormously moved by my first visit to Pakistan. The experience was deeply emotional. I felt a strong sense of homecoming, of

belonging. I could sense the difference between me and my Pakistani friends and cousins. But we spoke the same language, wore similar clothes, shared a culture and history. Enmity and nationalism seemed a long way away.

It was on that visit 10 years ago that my family and I acquired a new family

across the border. We were not unique in this. Despite the difficulties created by the Indian and Pakistani governments for people who wish to travel across the border, their numbers grow every year. So do the strategies to defeat the

machinations of government. Generally, it is virtually impossible for Pakistanis and Indians to get visas to each other's countries. When they do, they are granted a visa for a city (or a maximum of three cities), not a country. But in recent years, people have started forming themselves into a group, say of doctors, lawyers, journalists, students... and apply for permission to visit as a group. The governments can refuse individuals visas, but it's much more difficult (and embarrassing) to refuse groups.

When the British got Cyril Raddiffe, an English lawyer, to draw a boundary separating India into two countries—India and Pakistan—they cut open people's hearts, divided up their lives, turned friends into enemies and left behind a legacy of hatred and enmity. It's this enmity that is kept alive by the two governments today as they do their best to deflect attention from their own shortcomings by casting the other into the mould of villain. But over the years, at a people-to-people level,

the constant movement across the border, the desire to restore and maintain friendships with the 'other side' has led to the beginnings of a process of healing the bitter wounds of the partition. Those who manage to get to the 'other side', come back with hundreds of stories and others live off them for days on end.

There's no romanticism about this – no one really thinks that the partition can be undone, or that the two countries can easily get together as one. But there is a realism: there's a desire for friendship. The substantial issues that remain to be resolved can be better tackled as friends. For Musharraf and Vajpayee there could be no better point from which to start. • (Gemini)

Urvashi Butalia is the author of The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. She is director and co-founder of Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house.

VACANCY

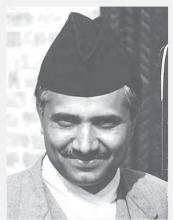
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'Parliament must have the power to question and keep a watch on the character of the heir apparent'

Narahari Acharya, former NC spokesman Kantipur, 26 June



...The (royal palace) incident has raised some fundamental questions. It has shown that it is time to analyse all political bodies, all institutions of governance, all national agencies and all other organisations that are in any way related to the fundamental issues of survival of this nation and state. However important a person may be after some time he or she would cease to survive, but a nation is an entity that will continue for ages to come. The life of a nation will not

stop. The people have always accepted the fact that the monarchy was the strongest aspect of this country. It was the very essence of the nation. It was what gave this country its character and life. The 1 June incident has raised many questions concerning this. Twelve years ago Nepalis changed absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy.

...Nepalis proved that they had a lot of respect for the monarchy and so it was never questioned, not even in parliament or in the courts. Such was the peoples' belief in the institution of monarchy and the monarch. All issues concerning the monarch and the institution of the monarchy were left to His Majesty's pleasure. This all proves that the people had a lot of faith in this institution and held it in high esteem. The 1 June incident has raised some fundamental issues and we are now forced to review all this in a new light...

...At such times, it is necessary for all national agencies to keep their cool, not keep anyone, including themselves, guessing, or build castles in the air. Since the NC is the largest party and is in power, it has a larger share of responsibilities and duties. The UML, as the main opposition party, also has its share of responsibilities and likewise all other parties too have to play.

Immediately after the 1 June incident, all Nepalis had hoped that a meeting of all their representatives would be called, meaning parliament would sit down and take stock of the situation. It may not have been required by constitution, but the people of the country had, in their honesty and innocence, hoped for this. By this time it had already been proved that the Privy Council was incompetent. The royal family had been massacred and even after 12 hours, it was unable to give definite answers. ... The people wanted an emergency sitting of parliament and they were curious why this esteemed body did not convene ...

...The many questions about the monarchy raised by the incident will have to be looked into by parliament. Some of the major concerns are:

- The laws and regulations concerning accession to the throne.
- 2) The issue of parliament not empowered to discuss the character of the heir apparent.

...The constitution gives the powers governing all issues concerning the heir apparent to the king. The 1 June incident has forced the citizens of this country to reconsider this. The monarchy is the oldest and strongest institution here. Most people thought it was but natural that the issue of the heir apparent should be left in the hands of the king. The incident has swept the house clean of the old thinking. Our historical institutions face many problems now and thus for the preservation of the institutions, parliament has to take matters under its wing and be directly involved.

Similarly, parliament has to rethink its policy of not questioning, or speaking aloud about the behaviour/ character of the heir apparent. It is a national insult that the abuse of illegal drugs has reached the royal palace and members of the family. A bigger tragedy is that such an abuse has all of a sudden exploded in the face of the people of this nation. To ensure that such an incident does not occur again, the people and parliament must have the power to question and keep a watch on the character of the heir apparent and other members of the royal household. ...In many ways our society is still backward. We cannot move forward if we do not study or rectify our weaknesses. We will have to learn from our mistakes and from history.

Maoists Lies

Budhabar Saptahik, **4 July**

The Maoists announced the formation of the peoples' government in Dailekh on 26 June at a public function at Naumule (the place where police were massacred in April). All three top leaders of the janasarkar, including its chief, are not Dailekh residents but have been brought over from neighbouring Jajarkot. Maya Prasad Sharma (Acharya), the head of the peoples' government, Dailekh comes from Jitpur Village Development Committee (VDC) in Jajarkot. The woman representative, Puspha Gharti, is from Jajarkot's Dandagaon VDC and the chief of its armed wing Nanda Bir Gharti is also from Jajarkot. This is why some have labelled this janasarkar as a "government on hire." Acharya said he had the support of 95 percent of the people of Dailekh. He added that since the formation of the peoples' government, all elected district institutions including the District Development Committee had been declared illegal and had no right to function....Why was it necessary for the Maoists to import leaders from other districts to announce the formation of a government in a district where they hardly have any influence? This is a serious question being raised by intellectuals. Another interesting fact is that the Maoists have also announced village committees. In Rom VDC they forcefully made a UML supporter, Khadga Bahadur

Maoist Do's and Don'ts

Shahi a member of that committee.

Shahi has said the Maoists had

threatened and tortured him and

asked him to be a member of the

committee. It has been over two

weeks since Shahi was abducted.

Saptahik Jana Aadesh, **3 July**

The following has been excerpted from the book entitled The Basis of the Prachandapath adopted at the second Maoist convention in Dangin February.

"... In the present circumstances, it is felt that the peoples' war can be turned into a total war and for this to take place certain guidelines have been put in place.

The work in village be given utmost attention and top priority, but do not neglect the work in the cities; prioritise unconstitutional struggle (people's war) but do not neglect legal possibilities. Prioritise particular strategic areas but don't neglect others as well. Prioritise the war effort, but

don't neglect the work of the (larger) people's war. Prioritise underground activities but don't neglect work that can be done openly. Make the rural dass struggle a priority, but don't neglect the nationwide struggle. Prioritise guerrilla activity but don't neglect exposing political activities and publicity. National level publicity is important, but don't neglect international publicity, prioritise building the armed forces, but don't neglect the formation of local level groups (and militias). Prioritise relying on strength of your own group and organisation, but don't back out from working alliances, support of international public opinion. It has always been held that these ideas will help make the peoples' revolution successful, it has now been proved to be a scientific approach."

"We have lost our morals"

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai in Nepal Jagaran, 2 July

... "We have seen a majority and a minority Congress government. We have seen UML rule and the RPP too. Our widespread poverty has not resulted from the NC or the UML, it is there because of ignorance and illiteracy. That is not the fault of the system. More than 50 percent of our people are illiterate and that is where the fault lies.

In the last 10 years, decadence and corruption have spread. Our political leaders have lost all respect, and morals and political values. Until the politicians do not earn back the respect, and regain their moral and political values, this society will not develop, this country will not progress. For 30 years the monarchy actively ruled this country and the people did not get a chance to practice the art governance. If anyone raised the issue of justice and equality, they were locked up. Those were very difficult, complicated and trying times. We have our own compulsions. In this decade-long period (of democracy) we have not set in place good systems, we have not put in place rules, laws, practices. We haven't even done the groundwork. Today is the result of all that we did and did not do. The country is passing through a serious crisis. To get out of this situation, it is necessary to form some sort of a consensu between all political parties.

For society to move forward, all democratic forces must unite and forge ahead together. It is necessary for everyone who fought for democracy to give a thought to the development of our society. How did we become poorer by the day? Why? Political leaders and people in power must search for the truth behind this... Only by looking back and analysing the events of the last 10 years will we be able to truly move forward. Politicians must give this serious thought, but right now all political parties are engaged in infighting. It is time political parties

gave up their personal interests and started taking an interest in the nation. Only people interested in the welfare of the country should be in charge of government. For 30 years, the reins were in the hands of one person, the king, but it is difficult to believe that he knew about the situation of the people. Whatever his coterie wanted, the king, in most cases, did.

These days, no one trusts the government and this is our fault. We have been proved unsuccessful. We need to correct our political shortcomings. If we are unsuccessful, democracy will be in great danger, and this nation will not develop at all. It is necessary for us to realise we have shortcomings, study and rectify them. . All parties will have to rise above their pettiness and work for the benefit of the nation.

Royal purge

Saptahik Bimarsa, 6 July

शुप्ताहिक विमर्श A high-level committee formed under the chairmanship of retired Military Secretary Shanta Bahadur Malla to analyse the incident of 1 June has presented its findings to the king. The first action after the committee's report was the sacking of the ADCs to His Late Majesty King Birendra, and Her Late Majesty Queen Aishwarya, and ADCs to His Late Majesty King Dipendra. On the committee's recommendation, King Gyanendra has closed down the secretariat of His Late Majesty King Dipendra.

Palace watchers interpret this as a sign that the palace is wielding the axe. At a time when the palace and thegovernmentareworkingin tandem, people are curious to where the axe will fall next. Both committees, one formed by the government and the other formed by the palace, have pointed out serious lapses in security. They demanded action against all who didn't carry out their duties and have been assured all their recommendations will be carried out. Still, some people are raising concerns about the modalities under which action has been taken so far.

Questions are being raised asking whether the army deployed in the palace is under the jurisdiction of the army or the palace? Does the palace employ them or does the army post them there? If the army deputes them, then should the army or some other agency take action against them?

The constitution clearly states that the king, on recommendation of the Security Council, will be in charge of deploying the army. Another subclause states that the enlisting, management and deployment of the army will be done according to existing laws, rules and regulations. The constitution does not give the king extraordinary powers. But there are some rules and laws formulated before the present constitution became effective that do give him special powers, like deciding the tenure of the army deployed in the Royal Darbar.

"Birth of a Republic—Ha!"

Madan Mani Dixit in Space Time, 7 July

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

Amonarch's "order" and Baburam's "conviction" both mean the same thing. After they lose their power of reasoning, reliance on order or conviction, leave those that order no escape route. In his article in Kantipur (see "From the Nepali Press", #50), Baburam, says "with conviction" that a republic has been born and is trying to force people to go along with his logic. Hitler and Stalin tried similarly to prove that they had replaced God and that led to their downfall.

Baburam is trying to rewrite history when he says that Prithivi Narayan Shah committed a lot of atrocities against the common man. Is this all that Baburam studied about Prithivi Narayan and his Divyaupdesh?

I pity Baburam. For the establishment of a republic he had to bring forth Dhirendra Shah (now dead) as his witness. Long live such a republic. After exhausting his sense of logic and reasoning, Baburam raves and rants that this is the truth and we have to believe it. Was this how he acquired his PhD? Jawaharlal Nehru University should take note of this.

People who have nothing to do can waste time reading Baburam's thoughts and they can then abuse anyone they feel that deserves it. This is the manner in which Baburam is abusing the UML and the ML. It was interesting to note that Baburam's advice to the armed forces, printed in Kantipur, was missing in his write-up in another daily, Rajdhani. Maybe Baburam heard that the army does not listen to such speeches or advice. In the same way he did not utter the names of Jigme Singye Wangchukor Lendup Dorji. He must have realised that Nepali citizens do not want to hear that.

What can be more amusing than a left-wing leader saying that a republic has come into being all of a sudden? Baburam's article was like a bolt of lightning on a clear day. What more can be said when it is presumed that the demise of just one person has led to the birth of a republic. Does the great Marxist-Leninist-Maoist leader Baburam want to establish a republic through a revolution or through a miracle? Has Baburam become a leader by talking rubbish? It is my tracedy that I am writing this arti instead of helping to send a mentally ill person to an asylum.

All this one has one positive repercussion. Through his two articles, Baburam has insulted all Nepalis who had said we needed a dialogue with the Maoists. For Baburam the monarchy is dead and a republic has been born. It is time all those negotiators came to their senses and realised they do not need to waste their time. Instead of starting a dialogue with him, they should have pity on him and take him to a mental institution. Maybe after he is treated and recovers, and then we can start a dialogue.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Development does not just depend on the economy.

- Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, Finance Minister at a Reporters Club Press Meet, 10 June.



Sign: Resignation
Arrow: Parliament's 20th Session

नयाँ सडक Naya Sadak, 9 July, Monday



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Sparring for the good life

GAVIN EVANS IN LONDON

ou can't go far these days in Britain without being presented with the beaming smile of Audley Harrison. The nation's undisputed 'Face of the Sydney Olympics' has been effortlessly transformed into a face on billboards, on television quiz shows and even in newspaper business features. His handsome image is invariably larger than life, even for a man who stands 6ft 6in and weighs 260 lb. (118 kg). But it's certainly not the usual image of the novice professional boxer. He doesn't quite fit the bill.

For a start, he's a bit old. Turning 30 this year, he is 10 years older than Mike Tyson was when he won his first professional world title. He's also a bit more educated than boxers usually are, boasting a Bachelor of Science with Honours degree from Brunel University in London.

But more than all this, it's the way he has approached the business of his new profession business being the operative word. Audley was one of Britain's most popular Olympic medallists beaming, articulate, loveable, handsome, good and gracious: the acceptable face of British amateur sport. Ever-conscious of his image, he retained the services of a leading public relations company before leaving for Sydney, just to make sure he got it right. Afterwards, he set up his own company, A-Force.

Britain's super heavyweight Olympic medal-winner boxer Audley Harrison is moving from amateur athletics to the world of billboards and celebrity.

Former heavyweight boxer Jess Harding is doing the promotion, Harrison's friend and former WBO (World Boxing Organisation) featherweight champion Colin McMillan is taking on the management, while American trainer Thell Torrence is tackling the physical side. Harrison then signed a £1 million ten fight-deal with the British Broadcasting Corporation to maximise his exposure, increasing his bargaining power with sponsors, advertisers and ultimately, rival television networks. Clearly, there is a wise old head on those massive shoulders.

Looking back a bit further, however, the same credentials that most professional boxers tend to thrive on can be found here. Harrison may not have come from London's slums, but he's certainly seen a bit of rough. He spent 16 months in jail for his part in a brawl, and was then fined for another assault, making him not just a loveable, well-educated softy, but also a fighter with a violent 'street' past. He made his professional debut, amid much fanfare, on 19 May. Heading a BBC televised bill at Wembley, London, Harrison was slated against American Mike

Middleton, a 33-year-old private investigator whose professional boxing record showed eight wins and nine losses. The problems with the bout began when McMillan neglected to delete a clause in the contract. Middleton, who was offered £4,000, dued into a regulation that allowed him to claim a 22.25 per cent share of the television revenues. Harrison ended up having to pay Middleton £40,000—an expensive mistake, but one that he says serves as a lesson.

The other big problem with Harrison's debut was the bill header. Even Olympic champions are entitled to undemanding career launches, but this usually takes place somewhere near the bottom of the bill. Middleton simply wasn't up to the task of heading a bill viewed by a crowd of 6,000 and a television audience of over six million. It wasn't much of a fight: Harrison won it in 2 minutes, 45 seconds. Still, Torrence's verdict was generous. "I was quite satisfied and I'm more critical of my fighters than anyone else," he said. "Audley has a long way to go, but he has the ability. We are trying to build a foundation, and once we get that foundation the advance stuff is very easy. If we stay on our programme and don't get off track, you'll see

him performing with some of the top Americans.

But for Harrison's next outing, the public—or at least the press will demand something tastier. Harrison has talked of winning the British title in five fights and the world title within five years. As he put it, "By the time I'm 34 I'll be a fully fledged, experienced heavyweight and that's the time I should be challenging for world honours."

So what are his chances? His assets are impressive—size, natural athletic ability, impressive speed of hand and foot, a quick, accurate left cross, a southpaw stance that can be switched to orthodox, great balance, sharp reflexes and a proven ability to rise to the big occasion. But there are also several factors counting against him. First, quite literally, he has no time to lose. Most great champions of the past have suffered setbacks, learnt from them and bounced back. Harrison has no such luxury. Second, it is not clear that Harrison has the consistent dedication to go with his ambition. With his eye on the big picture he sometimes seems to forget the here and the now. Third, there are gaps in his technique. He has yet to learn the art of infighting, he tends to throw single punches rather than combinations and does not use enough head movement. Then there's his stamina. In several amateur fights he was blowing heavily by the end. "He will really have to work on his fitness," commented British and Commonwealth professional champion Danny Williams after several sparring sessions with Harrison. Finally, he may not have the power to stop the heavyweight elite. "When I sparred with him I could tell he's a tremendously skilful boxer with beautiful hand speed and a great boxing brain, but he doesn't hit hard for a big man and a lot of strong guys will walk through him because of that," notes Williams. So, Harrison for world heavyweight champion in 2005 is a long shot, but then again, as he has shown us before, he has a way of making his dreams come true. ♦ (Gemini)



A private marketing and distribution company invites applications from competent candidates to fill up the following positions immediately for a year for its social marketing project aimed to improve the consistent use of condoms among high-risk population along the highway of selected 16 Toral districts of Nepal through improved accessibility, and promotion of condoms among the larget population

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Responsibilities: This is the key strategic position responsible to provide necessary technical assistance, coordination and leadership to the entire project team in performing duties in timely and proper manner. This position is based in Kathmandu but needs to spend 70 % of the time in field.

Qualification. The minimum competency level required to perform the above responsibilities includes: I) Master degree in Business Administration II) 5-7 years of experience in social marketing distribution and community based programs III) Negotiation and people skills IV) Some skill in designing and conducting training for rural level community V) minimum 2 -3 years of work experience in HIV/AIDS prevention VI) Computer literate

2. Administrative/Financo Officer (One)

Responsibilities: The Administrative /Finance officer will be responsible to plan, implement and manage the overall administrative and financial functions of the project

Qualification: The minimum competency level required to perform the above responsibilities includes i) Master or Bachelor degree in commerce/business administration with 3.4 years of experience in accounts and finance ii) Preferably familiar with reimbusement system and dealing with International organization (iii) Should be able to prepare periodic financial and other report independently in English iv) Familiar with computerized financial and accounting system v) Valid motorcycle driving ficense.

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Responsibilities. MIS Officer will be responsible to design, manage monitor and maintain overall information system that will guide the project activities. This includes but "not limited to" proparing periodical project reports, designing and conducting small market surveys, proactively exploring data/information useful for the project. This position is based in Kathmandu but needs to seaw! 30% of the time in the field.

spend 30% of the time in the field spend 30% of the time in the field apend 30% of the time in the field Qualification: The minimum competence required to perform the above responsibilities includes i) Master or bachelor degree in any discipline and three years experience managing MIS ii) Previous experience in writing analytical reports and proposal in English. III) Familiar with Computer data processing IV) Familiar with market survey. V) Comfortable and ready to work in the field VI) Valid molorcycle driving license desirable.

4. Training Officer (One)

Responsibilities: Training Officer WIII be independently responsibilities: Training Officer WIII be independently responsible to assess, design and conduct training programs for various target groups including malc/femals sex workers, their clients, outlets, NGOs and CBOs within the high-risk area. This is a professional position based in Kathmandu but demanding 70% of time in the field. Qualification: The minimum competence required to perform the above responsibilities include i) Master or Bachelor degree in any discipline ii) A minimum of 5.7 years of experience in designing and conducting training at community level independently iii) Negotiation and people skill to work in diverge group

The above positions offer excellent working environment. Salary is commensurate with experience and skill level. Please send complete application and curriculum vitae including email address if available, and recent passport size photograph within or before July 20, 2001 to the following address:

Personnel Manager P.O. Box: 21413 Kathmundy, Nepul

Applications can also be submitted electronically through the following enout addressys darsal@ which monop Only short-listed conditates will be enumered the ingesties. Both min and someone equally enumered in apply in all previous Tytephane and previous tyreference will not be entertained.

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MISS MANNERS

difficult

by JYOTI THAPA

Eating made

"Kuires" are not the only people who have trouble with Very Proper Dining Etiquette.

fter our marriage, my husband (who is Australian) and I have both had to compromise on a large number of issues. I hear you say, "But isn't marriage all about compromises?" Yes, it is. However, a cross-cultural marriage demands more than what I would call a normal dose of compromises. I could give dozens of examples of underlying differences between us, differences that have their roots not in our individuality, but the disparity of our cultures. One prominent area where both of us have had to understand and accept each other's culture is eating.

I was brought up learning to eat with my right hand fingers. In my opinion, food always tastes better eaten with fingers. (I heard a good explanation for it the other day. As we all know, smell contributes to taste—that is why food does not taste half as nice as normal when one has a cold. Likewise, touching the food introduces yet another sensation to the experience and complements the pleasure derived from it.) My husband, R, has had to acquire the art of eating with fingers. The initial attempts resulted in his shovelling food into his mouth in the most unattractive fashion. He has slowly learned to manipulate his digits to be able to effectively transfer nutrients from the plate into his oral cavity in a more graceful manner. It no longer gives me an eye-ache watching him eat.

The most difficult chapter in the book of Nepali table or rather, floor etiquette (mindful of the fact that most Nepalis sit cross-legged on the floor at meal-time) for R to grasp was the idea of "jutho". I explained that the closest English translation of the word would be "to soil" but jutho carries a bigger load of meaning than its English counterpart, in a sense. I had never appreciated how complex the concept is in its entirety. It is easy enough to understand that you do not touch anything with the hand you have been eating with because everything that comes in contact with the jutho hand automatically becomes jutho and remains so until washed. If you have been using cutlery instead of fingers, the same rule applies except that then, the fingers are considered clean and the cutlery jutho. The practice of observing jutho requires a tremendous amount of commitment. R tries very hard to play by the jutho rules but once in a while, I still catch him tasting food from a saucepan with a stirring spoon! I have learnt to not go hysterical over it.

I myself have also had to undergo a fair amount of education in Western table etiquette as observed in my British mother-inlaw's dining room. In Nepal, I knew how to manage my right hand to hold a spoon or a fork whilst eating untraditional foods such as noodles. However, the complication of using the full range of "kuire" cutlery was beyond me. R has patiently taught me almost all that I needed to know, however he did skip the bit about politely abstaining from drinking if people are toasting you. This piece of information would have saved me a lot of embarrassment at my wedding reception where I ended up toasting myself. I now know what to do in the unlikely event of being toasted again.

Challenge number one to be tackled was working out exactly what shaped and sized piece of apparatus to use at what stage of the meal. The rule of using cutlery on the outermost position of the setting as one goes through the different courses has been like a magic mantra. Then there was the challenge of using the implements in an apt fashion.

Fork on the left hand and knife on the other (unless you are lefthanded, in which case it's the other way around. You can never win!). Fingers at precise positions (one centimetre up or down has you branded as uncouth). The cutting technique (lest the elbows fly too far away from the body and poke the neighbours). The consuming of hot soup without a trace of a slurp technique (tip the contents of spoons sometimes the size of elephant ears into one's cakehole). The eating with the left hand technique (especially difficult when you start getting an attack of ethanol-related tremor). And the culmination of it all, the "eat the pea balanced on the back of the fork technique" (a fine balance, indeed).

Americans are thought of as a rather uncultured lot (to make a broad generalisation), but now I think that their "cut the steak into pieces first, then eat with a fork held in the right hand" philosophy makes far better sense than the at-times-absurd table manners observed by finicky Brits.

Now let us take the social side of the eating game. Personally, more than the logistical challenge of mastering how to eat what, I mind not being allowed to replenish my body unbridled and unhindered, no matter how famished the physical state. One has to watch the size of one's morsels (dainty mouthfuls please!) and worst of all, make polite conversation with "the family friend from Perth no-one has seen for 20 years" in whose honour the dinner party has been hosted. For god's sake, can't small talk wait until the business of eating is over and done with? Why interrupt the prayer to Anna Devta (the god of food) with idle chatter?

One intriguing post-dining etiquette (explanation would be highly appreciated) is the bit about not stacking dirty plates on the table. What useful purpose does it serve except to make extra work for people? Many a time have I felt like an idiot making countless journeys between the dining table and the kitchen sink, carrying only two plates at a time.

The subtleties of "fraffly propa" British table etiquette might never be conquered by a mere mortal like me. I still make many mistakes in the dining room, but hey, I have a good excuse. I am a foreigner! ♦

SAVING FAITH

ow to build a house for a

Temples, mosques and churches the

problems, but they are only houses of

prayer. In Kathmandu, when a king

Living Goddess, his architects, mere

mortals themselves, designed a house

windows of outstanding beauty. It

faces onto Darbar Square, a road's

platforms on which kings once sat to

The entrance to the building is

sometimes be seen and from where, in

olden times, she gave darshan, is two

stories above, exquisitely carved and

adorned with deities, garudas, strange

water monsters and dancing peacocks

adorn the plain white façade. A triple

finial rides the tiled roof like a golden

Carved windows and verandahs

open onto the courtyard. Nowadays

appearances at one of these inner

windows for crowding tourists. A

top floors warns—'For Hindus

notice near the stairs leading to the

Only'—who are permitted to enter

an audience chamber where they may

receive tikka from the Living Goddess

herself. Here, during the Indra Jatra,

which coincides with the Kumari

Jatra in early September, the king

Kumari and obtain from her the right

to rule another year. In exchange he

presents her with a golden coin and

Kathmandu of how the Kumari has

failed, for one reason or another, to

tragedy has resulted. There is the tale

soon exiled by his avaricious brothers.

treating the Kumari for some minor

ailment, somehow offended her. He

no longer lives to tell the tale. Such

Though worshipped and revered

an aura of mysticism understand-

ably attaches itself to a child of

as a Hindu goddess, the Kumari is

selected from the Newari caste of

among which are an unblemished

duck. She must never cry or show

fear, nor bleed at puberty or as a

normal children experience. Her

king in every detail.

horoscope must match that of the

for more than a few years, for at the

she is relieved of her high status and

retired into the world from which she

came, rich but no doubt transformed

experience. Free to marry she seldom

and unsettled by her extraordinary

finds a husband because tradition

decrees death to any man who ends her virginity. However, there now

first sign of approaching menstruation

Sakya goldsmiths, who are Buddhists.

She must have the thirty-two virtues,

body, the voice of a bird, the neck of a

result of any of the small injuries that

This means that no Kumari reigns

such singular importance.

of a Rana maharaja who, failing to

receive the Kumari's blessing, was

Another describes how a vaid

bless a suppliant king, and how

Many are the stories current in

touches his forehead to her feet.

comes to receive tikka from the

the Kumari makes obliging

gilded. Several other windows,

guarded by large stone lions. The

window at which the Kumari can

ordered a fitting abode built for a

about a courtyard with carved

looking out onto temples and

give royal audience.

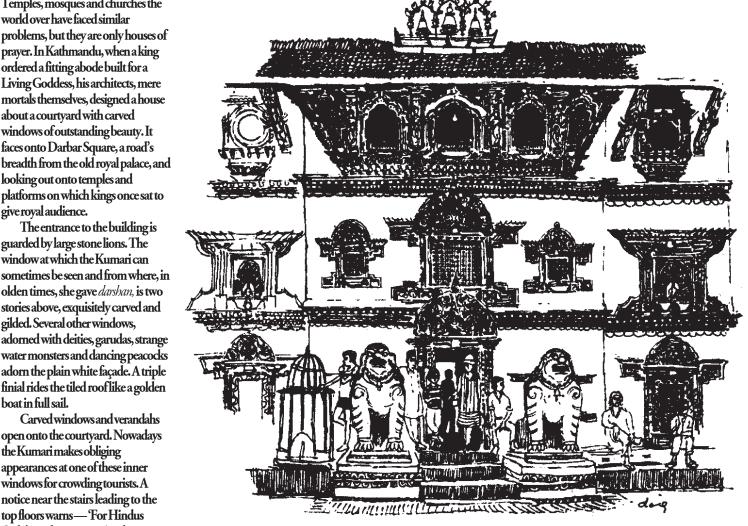
boat in full sail.

world over have faced similar

goddess? What magnificence can match a deity's supreme importance? What provisions to make? What skills to employ?

by **DESMOND DOIG**

The house of the living goddess



She must have thirty-two virtues, including an unblemished body, the voice of a bird, the neck of a duck.

exists the precedent of a married Kumari, so the future may be happier for these briefly privileged girls.

The tantric rites surrounding the selection of a Kumari are so well guarded that few know really what passes. The child is only three or four years old when discovered, much too young to have the capacity to put on an act taught by her parents. One of her many required virtues is to have an emotional control that would be the envy of most adults. To test her courage, for instance, it is said that the child must spend the night in a temple surrounded by the severed heads of sacrificed animals. Grotesquely masked men leap and scream about her. Amazingly, she emerges from her ordeal without a trace of fear.

The festival of Indra, the Lord of the Heaven, who once visited the Kathmandu Valley in the guise of a handsome mortal, and Kumari, the Living Goddess, blend together in early September. All Kathmandu gathers from earliest dawn to watch the procession of *raths*, crowding nearby temple plinths, windows, balconies and roofs. The king, himself considered a reincarnation of Vishnu, his ministers, officials, and foreign

dignitaries, appear on a balcony of the old palace, from where the king showers coins upon the Kumari and her attendants, two virgin boys, who represent Bhairab and Ganesh. Each is enthroned in a rath of his own. A goat is sacrificed in front of the Kumari's chariot, muskets fire a startling volley and the procession moves, the young Living Goddess dressed in gold and fine silks, bejewelled and exotically painted, sitting serenely among her attendants. Masked dancers leap and brandish swords. Colourfully dressed tantric

on the chariot rope. Small child that she is, the Kumari rides out the clamour and excitement of her jatra with a face

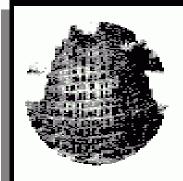
Buddhist priests chant mantras. The

crowds press forward to take a turn

remarkably composed. Sometimes, just sometimes, there is the trace of excitement that any child would feel. Could it be that she remembers a similar jatra two centuries ago, when the goddess Taleju's dire prophecy came true? As the people of Kathmandu celebrated the festival with great joy and excessive drinking, the Gorkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah attacked and easily overcame the city. The Malla king Jaya Prakash fled, his dynasty at an end. The Gorkha king ordered the festival to continue. It is said he himself lent a hand to pull the Kumari's rath. ♦

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





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8 city 13 - 19 JULY 2001 **NEPALI TIMES**

ABOUT TOWN

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

- ❖ Breakfast with birds Lunch with butterflies, dinner with fireflies. Traditional Nepali, Indian and Chinese cuisine. Farm House Café in the Park Village Hotel, Buddhanilkantha.
- **Curry Factory** Veg and non-veg curries. Dessert of the day. Rice, naan, salads, and one draft beer or soft drink free. 7pm-10.30pm. 15-22 July. The Fun Cafe, Radisson Hotel.
- Dwarika's Saturday Escape Afternoon tea, cocktail, dinner, room, massage and breakfast. Every Saturday until end-September. \$130 per couple. Dwarika's Hotel
- ❖ Weekend Brunch Use of pool, welcome drink, buffet, a la carte, kid's menu. Hyatt Regency. 491234
- LaSoon 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 plus tax. Hotel Shangri La. 412999
- ❖ Wet and 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 food and beverage outlets.
- Exotic Nepali Food. Mongolian Restaurant and Bar. Exotic Nepali food, dhindo, gundruk, good family environment. Putalisadak, 425454
- Saturday splash Swimming and brunch. The Cafe & Poolside, 11am onwards. Rs 555, Rs 299 for children under three ft. Everest Hotel. 488100



MUSIC



- ❖ For The Love of Rock! Re-scheduled 2 July concert. Old tickets still valid. 25 percent discount on tickets bought at Suwal, New Road and Lazimpat before 15 July. Scout Headquarters, Lainchaur. 3pm, 21 July Rs
- Rox Bar Happy hour 6pm-9pm, buy one, get one free. Family-style dining, cocktails, music. Hyatt Regency. 491234.
- ❖ Himalatte Café Live acoustic music by Dinesh Rai and Deependra every Friday, 7pm-10.30pm. Free. Thamel.
- Romance at the Jazz Bar Happy hour 6pm-8pm. Thursdays with The Jazz Commission, Other days with An Fainne. Hotel Shangri La. 412999
- Live Band at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. Everyday 2pm onwards. 416071

TALK

The Vagaries of Travel Writing: travellers who get carried away or travellers who wonder where they are. Dr Chloe Chard. 17 July, 6pm, British Embassy Hall. Organised by the Nepal Britain Society (410555, 227749) and the British Council (410798).

EXHIBITION

- ❖ Free Exhibitions Art and craft by four students of the Alliance Française. 10-20 July. 9am-6pm, except Saturdays. Alliance Française.
- Contemporary Jazz Dance Classes at the Alliance Française by Meghana Thapa. Thrice weekly, starting 26 June. Alliance Française. 241163, 242 832.
- * Weekly cocktail, monthly beer Buy one get one free. The Radisson Corner Bar. 411818
- ❖ Disco party Buffet dinner, dance with DJ Raju. Hotel Shahenshah, Dhapasi. 13 July, 7pm on. Rs 600. Tickets at Irish Pub, Pub Maya, Hotel Red Planet, Thamel; International English Language Centre, Dilli Bazaar, Koshi Tours and Travels (Nag Pokhari) and at the door.
- ❖ Yoga and Breakfast Six-week course in Hatha Yoga for beginners. Rs 400 per lesson, includes breakfast. Dwarika's Hotel 479488
- Nagarkot Escape Weekends in cottages, views of valleys and forests. Special rates for Nepalis and resident expats. Hotel Keyman Chautari. keyman@wlink.com.np. 436850, 423128

Friends of the Bagmati River Monday, 16 July, 3pm at Dwarika's Hotel. New membership is open to all. 479488

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

BBC on FM 102.4

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



Security in South Asia Policy Study Series Institute of Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu, 2001

The seven SAARC countries "share a common geography, a common ecosystem and, except for the Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan, a common history of colonial rule." This volume analyses the region's many political disputes from Kashmir to Bhutanese refugees, the ULFA to the LTTE.

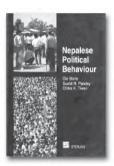
> Nepalese Political Behaviour Ole Borre, Sushil Panday, Chitra Tiwari Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1994 Rs 320

This study registers the political attitudes prevailing in Nepali society, the voters' perceptions of political problems, their evaluations of party differences, their participation in the election campaign and eventual partisan choice.

John T Hitchcock, Rex L Jones, eds

observations.

Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas



Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976 (1996) The result of fieldwork by 16 anthropologists, this anthology contains accounts of all forms of spirit possession and shamanism found in Nepal. The social religious, psychic and therapeutic aspects of spirit possession are dealt with on a broadly regional and ethnic basis and contains contributions on lamaist spirit possession and historical

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Penguin, New Delhi, 2000

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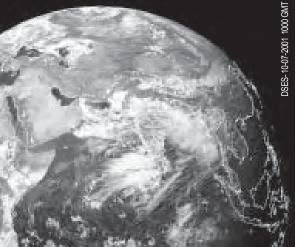






by **NGAMINDRA DAHAL**

NEPALI WEATHER



satellite picture shows a series of clouds rushing towards from Arabian Sea across Indian peninsula to the Bay of Bengal. The moistureladen clouds, struggling against northerly winds, are being moved towards the Nepal Himalaya

The monsoon is back after a little break. The

by a powerful cyclone in the Bay. That, and a low-pressure trough in north India means one thing: rain. Expect stormy rainfall, and possibly cloudbursts in the southern hills, similar to the storms in previous weeks in Dhading which killed 35 people in flash floods and landslides. Valley residents will stop experiencing hot flashes and cold chills, since the increased rainfall will bring down the variation between the minimum and maximum temperatures to 10°C or under.

KATHMANDU





Tue 2 30-20





THE MID-WEST IS RED

Does nothing shock us anymore? It was the highest casualty on a single night during this whole mad war: 41 policemen slaughtered, nine attacking Maoists killed and three non-combatants dead. It was the largest number of Nepalis killed by other Nepalis in a 24-hour period in our nation's entire history.

How did we react? In Kathmandu our elected leaders were in their narrow corridors of power, bickering endlessly. The guardians of our human rights were busy ringing Tundikhel. The commander-in-chief was on a junket to Britain and saw no particular reason to hurry home. Some argued cautiously that getting the army to fight the insurgency would invite civil war, but many asked: aren't we already in the midst of a civil war? Coming a month after the other slaughter in the royal palace, there was a numbing sense of fatalism, an apathy and silence that came close to condoning the killings.

Elsewhere across the country, terror-tactics and intimidation magnified by media spread low-intensity panic. The Maoists, building up to a bloody week that could see the declaration of their parallel peoples' republic and regional government in the mid-west, appear to think that killing any fewer than 40 people doesn't give them the headlines anymore. So they make canon fodder out of recruits driven to police jobs out of sheer desperation.

The police, whose initial atrocities during Kilo Sierra Two in 1998-99 unleashed this savage revenge, has already lost the war physically, psychologically and morally. When bad blood flows so freely, and society is brutalised by violence and fear, it is difficult to think of solutions. Our parliamentary parties utterly failed to unite during the national calamity of the royal tragedy, they are now failing miserably to evolve a joint plan to respond to the insurgency and offer a negotiated solution. It is at times of national crisis like this that the constitutional monarch is required to use constitutional means to seek a settlement. But

the king is handicapped by an image problem. The Maoists don't even need to be brilliant military strategists when the enemy is so feckless, corrupt and self-centred that it sends under-armed, under-trained and under-motivated young men to be butchered in cold blood. We have said it many times in this space in the past year: there is no military solution to this emergency, the only solution is political. The government knows it, and deep down in their heart of hearts the Maoists leaders must know it too.



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STATE OF THE STATE

Borderline hope

After the dreadful calm of the capital valley and the merciless massacre of

BIRGUNJ—It is not the best time of the year to be here in the tarai. During the day, it is hot and humid. Flies flit between open drains and my mango lassi in swift roundtrips, and emptying the whole glass in one breath is the only sensible option. At night, sweaty bodies attract swarms of mosquitoes. Sleeping inside the mosquito-net reduces air circulation but it is still a lot more bearable than the repulsive smell of repellents.

Despite the physical discomforts, it's reassuring to be in tarai these days. The oppressive silence of the valley at night can be maddening, here you can sleep under the stars out in the open and still feel safe. Unlike the ominous peace of the insurgency-hit hills, the tarai thrives with the usual confusion of everyday life. On the chaotic bus-stand, the haggle to settle the correct fare before jumping on to a rickshaw is still a necessity. Near the freshly painted Ghantaghar, a drunken brawl between two tangawalas attracts a crowd of bemused onlookers. A traffic police gives an irritated glance as a motor-cycle zigzags its way through the jam overtaking rows of rickshaws, tempos, tangas, trucks and cars waiting for a marriage procession to pass. It is this commotion of normality that is remarkable after the dreadful calm of the capital valley in the wake of bannerbomb terror and the merciless massacre of policemen in the hills.

If you have a choice between either the Maoists or mosquitoes, buy yourself a net and head for the tarai. Award of caution here for the ultra-nationalists though: Nepalis of the tarai are dhoti-clad, pan-chewing madhesis who don't understand the fuss over Comrade Rohit answering Indian journalists' questions in Hindi.

Being relatively free from the scourge of Maoism is not the only attraction of Birgunj, though. Its other asset is that it has a mayor who cares. Bimal Srivastava may be a controversial person for the Kathmandu media (having got himself embroiled in a controversy over the citizenship of an engineer), but he has succeeded in transforming Birgunj from one of the dirtiest towns of Nepal till a few years ago to what is perhaps the deanest ones today. Roads are paved, footpaths are clean, drains are functional, garbage

is picked up several times in a day, and there is even a musical fountain.

policemen across the hills, the tarai's commotion of normality is a welcome relief.

Srivastava's success shows how easy it is if just one person takes his responsibilities seriously. Democracy also brings out the best in a person the mayor's tenure as the Pradhan Pancha of Birguni before the advent of democracy was riddled with charges of corruption. This same man is now setting new standards of performance and efficiency.

Under Srivastava, Birgunj is now the first municipality in the country to have a school for dalits. But segregated education to the students of disadvantaged castes and communities has its critics. Dr Kulananda Das, professor of educational psychology at the Thakur Ram Bahumukhi Campus here, says students in such schools grow up with a rage towards society that treats them for what they are rather than what they could be. Citing the experience of differential treatment for blacks in the United States (where Das was a Fullbright scholar in the sixties) he says integration of the disadvantaged into the mainstream is a more worthwhile objective for community schools. While outright assimilation can cause resentment, integration through the process of socialisation helps produce more tolerant citizens attuned to the reality of unity in diversity. Even so, Das is jubilant that his longstanding call for Birgunj municipality to do more for education than merely dispensing annual awards to teachers have been answered.

The shadows of Maoist killings in the hills can be seen in the industrial belt between Birgunj and Pathlaiya where people from troubled districts find it difficult now to get jobs. Of course, no entrepreneur cites insurgency as the real reason—



it's easier and safer to blame the glut in the market—but a job-seeker from Sindhuli now has less chances of being employed if a suitable candidate from Sarlahi is available. It used to be just the opposite—workers from the hills were preferred for being hardy and loyal.

by CK LAL

In public, industrialists bicker about exorbitant 'donations' demanded by Maoists, but in private they frankly admit that such regular outflows of cash have been adjusted to the usual costs of doing business. A businessman, who must remain unnamed for obvious reasons, confided that bribes to government officials and ransom paid to Maoists are settled from the same account, and both of these have the same effect they reduce the taxes he would have paid had the situation been normal. The bottom-line may dip a bit, but there is no undue worry.

The other reason behind the economic vibrancy of the tarai is the competitive advantage it has over Bihar across the border. North Bihar is an industrial cripple. It survives on subsistence agriculture and money-orders sent home as remittances by millions of its workers outside the region. One Birgunj businessman who has interests on both sides of the border says sardonically: "Herewe are dealing with an organised group. In Bihar, everyone with a gun is an independent Maoist." And that's exactly the risk: if Comrade Prachanda does not come into the political mainstream quickly, can he hold on to his command over men and women with guns who have seen its deadly power?

Even the pollution by industrial effluents of River Sirsiya that flows past Birgunj is a sign of the region's economic life. The river is dead because the economy is alive. Reporter Chandra Kishor was recently awarded the Environment Journalist Award of the year for bringing Sirsiya's plight into the public, and there is a story there somewhere about the inverse relation between the economy and ecology. The Sirsiya can be saved if ecological awareness grows among the industrialists and inhabitants of the area. But for now, better industrial pollution than the blood of innocents.

I board the bus for Kathmandu with trepidation, and a sliver of hope that the tarai holds for the future of Nepal.

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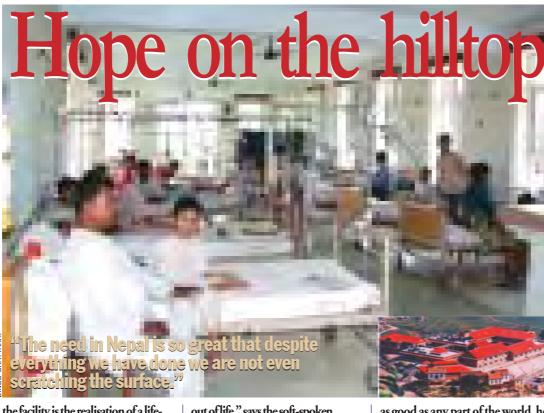
BINOD BHATTARAI IN BANEPA hen he was four, Krishna fell off the window of his house and hurt his knee. The bones inside never healed and he has limped ever since. Krishna is now 16, and his parents brought him to the Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children (HRDC) at Banepa. Doctors there found that the knee injury had affected the boy's thigh as he grew. Last month, the deformity was corrected by surgery and Krishna wears a special ring fixator to lengthen his short leg. He will soon walk normally.

Like thousands of Nepali children born with clubfeet, Sunita, 11, was told she had the curse of the gods. But Sunita always dreamt of the day she would walk normally. Her dream has nearly come true: after surgery in Banepa, a year or two of physiotherapy and she will be back on her feet again.

Sunita and Krishna are two of thousands of children who, after living with physical deformities for years have a chance now of beginning a new life. And all this thanks to a unique charity for treating disabilities with world-class orthopaedic surgeons right here in Nepal.

Nearing Banepa on the Arniko Highway, a cluster of elegant tile-roof buildings on a thickly forested hilltop comes into view. From the road, the complex looks more like a five-star resort. Spreading across nine hectares, the hospital at Adhikari Gau is situated in idyllic surroundings, the facilities are clean, bright and airy, functional and well-managed.

The hospital is the brainchild of Nepal's most-famous orthopaedic surgeon, Ashok Banskota, for whom



the facility is the realisation of a lifelong dream. "In Nepal disability is a problem of the poor, and what we are doing is giving them the best possible care and making that treatment affordable." The hospital is supported by Terre des homes (Tdh), a Swiss charity and grants from even boy and girl scouts in Luxembourg. The construction of the \$2.6 million 71-bed hospital was completed in 1997, and inaugurated by the late King Birendra.

After finishing medical school in the United States and specialising in orthopaedics at Johns Hopkins University, Banskota could have stayed on and become a well-off doctor in America. But a sense of giving back to Nepali society what society gave to him brought Banskota home. "It all depends what you want out of life," says the soft-spoken doctor. "The practice in America would have been well-paying but routine. Here I face challenges every day, the need in Nepal is so great that I know that despite everything we have done we are not even scratching the surface."

And Banskota has given this project his heart and soul. And the idea was to build a centre of excellence in orthopaedic surgery,

as good as any part of the world, he says Banskota. The hospital has 10 visiting specialists, 120 staffs and a workshop where low-cost orthopaedic devices—from crutches to custom-built shoes—are fabricated.

HRDC also has a way to fulfil its stated promise: no child with disability ever goes back without treatment. The costs are subsidised, and the really poor patients are paid



out of funds from an employee contribution kitty.

Statistics on childhood disability in Nepal are sketchy. One estimates says that as many as a quarter of all Nepalis have some form of disability or other, and 30 percent of them are preventable. HRDC's own data from patients offers a clearer picture: 34 percent have congenital disability, in 27 percent it is caused by infections (for example polio), 11 percent by burns and another 11 percent by untreated trauma.

"Every case you get there is a challenge. It is a medical challenge to treat, and it is a social challenge to ensure that those who can't afford it get that treatment, and to make sure that there is followup,"

says Dr Saroj Rijal who carries out surgery everyday in Banepa. HRDC functions as a referral centre for hospitals across Nepal, and a teaching extension for the Kathmandu University. It also does its own scouting for disabled children through mobile clinics and following up on patients in about 30 districts.

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All of that costs money: HDRC's annual budget of Rs 40.5 million comes mainly from charities abroad. The average cost of treating a patient is high (Rs 30,000) because the children need to stay for at least three weeks for physiotherapy and follow-up. "Our major worry is continued funding," admits Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Director at HRDC. "We've tried to raise money locally, but with little success." Tdh has begun downsizing contributions, which means the hospital would have to generate more money locally each year. At present, the hospital's income is only Rs 6 for every Rs 100 it spends on treatment. There is therefore no option but to take fund-raising into high gear.

But Banskota is optimistic: "We've already accomplished what we thought was impossible, we will find a way out."

HRDC, GPO Box 6757 fodhrdc1@wlink.com.np



CONGRESS PHALANX: The prime minister, flanked by the finance minister walk with the rest of the cabinet from Singha Durbar to parliament to present the budget on 9 July.



UML PHALANX: Opposition stalwarts led by UML supremo Madhav Kumar Nepal march to parliament on 8 July to demand the prime minister's resignation.



HAND-IN-HAND: A human chain made up of rights activists rings Tundikhel to protest the government's new Public Security Regulation 2058 on 9 July.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Visit Nepal: You Have It All To Yourself



he best-kept secret in the Asia-Pacific tourism industry this season is not what you may be thinking: it is not the unspoilt rustic charm and local colour of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of North Korea. It is in fact our very own land of the Danfe, Monal, Everest and Arniko. Unbeknownst to the rest of humanity, this is actually the best time in recent history to visit Nepal. If you come now, you have the country all to yourself. The Nepal Tourism Hoard has now finally woken up to the enormous untapped potential for the visitor industry and our unique selling point this season, and has come up with another of its catchy slogans: "Visit Nepal While It's Still There".

Nepal's comparative advantage is apparent right at the point of departure, where, being the single passenger on the flight to Kathmandu, you get the undivided attention our valued clients deserve. You will be treated as a CIP (a commercially important person), which as we know from the Deficit Finance Minister's budget speech, is a new category of important persons reserved for those who contribute directly to the economy. CIPs are entitled to special treatment on arrival at the Tribhuvan Multilateral Airport. And that means, being the only passenger getting off your Airbus, you are allowed to walk to the arrival terminal instead of being forced to take a 9.7 second ride in a Sajha Bus.

At the terminal itself, a CIP is greeted by pancha kanyas and accorded a 18 gun-salute by underemployed friskers. You will then inspect a guard of honour of assorted airport personnel as you are whisked through the pier to immigration. Here, you will not have to wait in any queues, for the simple reason that there are no queues anymore. We've done away with them. The immigration official is not the grumpy guy you remember from your previous visit, he will actually engage you in detailed chit-chat inquiring into the general health situation of your extended family, and your estimated gross annual pre-tax income. This may sound like an interrogation, but he is just making small talk so he doesn't fall asleep at the desk while stamping your passport. After fast track through immigration you will find that for the first time since Nepal opened up to the outside world, you actually beat your luggage to the carousel.

And so it is on to customs, where it used to be a custom to x-ray all incoming baggage. No more. All x-ray machines have been redeployed in the public health sector. As an arriving CIP, you have access to special transport to the city in a Big Blue Bus with police escort and outriders. On the drive in, you will notice that the city (indeed the whole country) has been cleared of all traffic of your arrival, and a special two-day bandh has been declared for the duration of

The great thing about a Nepal holiday these days is that the rest of the world doesn't know about it. Why go to Pyongyang? The important thing, however, is to keep your stay here a closely-guarded secret so that others don't come rushing in. Promise not to tell anyone?

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week

NEPALI SOCIETY

Mathema-san

inding his diplomatic "Ps" and "Qs" is a 24-hour job, but it hasn't kept Nepal's ambassador to the Chrysanthemum Throne, Kedar Bhakta Mathema, from trying his hand at verse. Mathema writes haiku to relieve stress. One of his own:

Sun rises Behind tall buildings Silently a new day

Seated in his tastefully decorated apartment in suburban Tokyo, comfortable in casual trousers and a cheerful shirt, Mathema admits that he is an odd man out. "I'm an intruder. Unlike career diplomats, I'm not so correct and proper," he says. But after four years in Japan, from where he looks after Nepali affairs in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Koreas, the former Tribhuvan University Vice Chancellor admits he has learnt to be more tactful and slightly subdued.

For the last month Mathema has been observing the mourning period following the death of Nepal's royal family. Nepalis in Japan, the Japanese imperial family and the Japanese people were shocked and like Nepalis everywhere, they are trying to come to terms with the loss. In May, Crown Prince Dipendra had made an official visit to Japan. "He was extremely gracious, the visit was a huge success," Mathema remembers, shaking his shorn head.

But it isn't only princes and prime ministers who enjoy the ambassador's hospitality in Japan. The odd Nepali visitorathletes, bureaucrats, are often served delicious daal bhat,

and a drink at the Mathema residence. The academicturned diplomat is a great host. But his memories aren't always pleasant. "I invited a group of athletes here for khasi ko masoo and beer. Next I hear, a few don't make it on the plane back to Nepal," says the envoy. Mathema has to



do all he can to discourage Nepalis overstaying in Japan. An estimated 8,000-10,000 Nepalis live in Japan, many

of them illegally. Japan's ties with Nepal are strong, and there is a common affinity for mountains, monarchy, and Buddhism that binds the two countries. Mathema is keen to revitalise Nepal's tarnished image and organise a positive media campaign in Japan. •

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