



Royal mess

Royal Nepal Airlines' nosedive has come to this: cancelling its trunk routes at the beginning of the autumn tourist season. European routes, Singapore and Dubai were haemorrhaging cash and have been stopped. A tourism slump after the royal massacre did take its toll, but the airline suffers from chronic political interference and mismanagement. The two jets it had leased have been returned, and the airline is now down to just two 757s. They have to service 24 weekly flights to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Osaka, Delhi, Bombay and Bangalore. One way Royal Nepal can stay afloat is to invest in another jet immediately for the tourist season. Given the political sensitivity of such a move, it is difficult to imagine it happening. RNAC knows which plane it needs, but government officials will want to make the decision so they can pocket a kickback. It is such malfeasance that has ruined the airline.

In 1991, Royal Nepal had 19 aircraft, including four jets and a fleet of ten aircraft for its domestic routes. Today it has just seven operational aircraft. Fleet size has shrunk, but staff has grown. No surprise, then that the airline is in deep red. Total debts: Rs 2 billion.

BINOD BHATTARAI

The method is psychological warfare: intimidation, threats and panic. The result: the Maoists' ban on alcohol sales and consumption nationwide from 18 August is a move that will cost the already cash-strapped government Rs 10 billion a year in revenue alone. More than 500,000 people directly and indirectly dependent on the brewery and distillery industries will be affected. Some 50,000 retailers and wholesalers across Nepal will be hit.

The underground Maoists have pushed their anti-alcohol campaign through the above-ground All Nepal Women's Organisation (Revolutionary) and their intention is clear: to starve the government of taxes from alcohol. On a high after their victory in declaring Chitwan district and some other areas alcohol-free last month, on Monday the women went to meet Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. They were in a defiant mood, and according to sources present at the meeting, put forward a 22-point manifesto, threatening "severe action" if their demands were not met.

Besides a nationwide ban on alcohol and gambling, the other demands include stopping the sex-trade in hotels and restaurants and shutting down 'cabin' restaurants, reserving 40 percent government jobs for women, banning pornographic publications and giving women equal property rights. That wasn't all, the women also wanted the Public Security Regulations and the Integrated Security and

HIGH AND DRY

Despite the truce, the Maoists are going for the state's economic jugular.

Development Programme (ISDP) scrapped. And last but not least, they wanted all "unequal treaties" (presumably with India) abrogated.

The Maoist paper, *Janadesh*, quoted Deuba as telling the women: "Your demands are legitimate, I will try to fulfil them within the constitutional framework." The prime minister's office has not denied the statement.

Deuba also met a team from the FNCCI this week that wanted to warn him of the trouble ahead. One business leader told us the prime minister appeared to be underestimating the seriousness of the crisis. "Directly or indirectly the government stands to lose billions a year, besides the loss of employment," said the businessman. "This has now become an economic war."

Brewery and distillery owners are preparing to slow down and even stop production, but they are hoping against hope that the threat will be lifted. Deuba tried to assure business that the government would provide security and requested them not to close. But factory-owners do not trust the government, and feel vulnerable to Maoist sabotage. Fumed one distillery owner: "They are becoming like the Taliban."

Maoist leaders have said they are

not out to wreck the economy, and deny that they are trying to Talibanise Nepal. Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai told us in an interview (#51) last month: "Please do not mistake us for religious fanatics like the Taliban... we have no agenda for puritanical fads like the alcohol ban. Please note that the campaign against 'alcoholism' is not the same thing as an alcohol ban."

It has been standard operation procedure for the Maoists to say one thing and do another. Their strategy while the truce holds appears to be to keep the public confused and frightened, sow a general sense of panic and hit at government revenue sources. "Not only are their demands contradictory, they are impossible to fulfil even for a Maoist government," says another worried distillery owner.

Many expect their next target to be the tobacco industry and foreign multinationals. All these have already faced the brunt of extortion and threats by Maoists and criminals pretending

BEER FACTS

- Rs 3 billion rupees have been invested in breweries, 15 percent of it foreign capital
- Breweries contribute three percent of the Gross Domestic Product, almost as much as the tourism industry
- The industry pays about Rs 1.5 billion as taxes and duties, four percent of government revenue
- Over 1,200 will lose jobs and another 25,000 in packaging, transport, etc. would be hurt
- Nearly half of the beer produced is consumed by tourists.
- Nepal produces 23 million litres of beer and 4.2 litres of alcohol a year
- Nepali breweries export Rs 100 million worth of beer annually to India.

Prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is still not talking. But just about everyone else is talking about talks. What's going on? There are two explanations. Deuba is keeping his cards close to his chest so close that not even his closest aides know what he has up his sleeves. The second explanation is that he has nothing up his sleeves, and his government is just coasting along waiting for the Maoists to make their next move.

To be sure, Deuba has done his rounds to strike an all-party consensus on the agenda for talks. He seems to have the crucial backing of his own party, and the UML has made reassuring noises about its commitment to parliamentary democracy. But Deuba hasn't uttered a word, and probably won't until an all-party meeting to hammer out a peace strategy.

This waffle approach has partly paid off: the anti-Maoist Armed Police Force ordinance is a step closer to its ratification by parliament. Deuba even managed to hand the Maoists a lollipop, saying the paramilitary ordinance had to come because it was already there—meaning not intended to be used against them. They probably don't believe him, but for the moment they have to pretend to.

"He was busy trying to get support for the ordinances, now his focus is on the meeting, which he wants to hold as early as next week," one source close to the prime minister told us. "He wants a common plan before making his next move."

If that is true, it could mean that Deuba is smarter than the pundits give him credit for. He is said to be in direct communication the Maoists, and is not using the proxy human righters any more. Deuba's rough peace plan

What's up Deuba's sleeves?

has the support of the UML, which is privately said to favour a hardline approach to force the insurgents to negotiate. The UML has also come out strongly against authoritarianism of the left and right, and has proposed talks for left unity. A united left would be a political bulwark against the Maoists. UML supremo Madhav Kumar Nepal has even gone on record to say that if the king doesn't seem to be worried about the monarchy, then a republican constitution may not be such a taboo subject after all.

Even donors are upbeat about the possibility of peace, but they want to be sure it's not a sham. On Monday they told finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat this was Nepal's best—and possibly last—chance. They reminded him Nepal's future hinged on a workable peace plan: for development, investment and tourism. Japanese ambassador Mituaki Kojima was uncharacteristically blunt: "We are watching very carefully the political process to address the issue." The Norwegian ambassador Ingrid Olstad said the road was long and there could be setbacks, but her government would back a peace initiative.

While Deuba is working behind the scenes, the Maoists are now almost above ground. They have declared "peoples' governments" in 10 districts. They have stepped up public meetings, extortion and "tax collection" from businesses, and have threatened the economy with a nationwide alcohol ban from 18 August (see main story and p 9).



one world...



...one link



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It's that time of the year again: a season of slogans. Every year, when flood waters rise in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the cry goes up across the north Indian Plains: "Nepal is flooding us". And right on cue, a STAR News broadcast this week quoted officials in India blaming Nepal for "releasing water to make the floods worse." And there was equal and opposite jingoism on our side. This year, our limelight is on Lumbini, and we've worked up a self-righteous fervour of pop patriotism. Both sides need to cool it.

How can Nepal "release" water when there are no dams in the Himalaya and the two border barrages on the Kosi and the Gandaki are actually controlled by India? Our rulers sold out those two rivers to India long ago.

As politically-inspired jingoism magnified by media gets louder on both sides, few have time to think of the Tajmahls and Kurmis of Marchawar whose homes have been submerged. Or the farmers in Bihar who riot out of sheer frustration at official apathy and corruption. The tarai has traditionally been neglected by Kathmandu, just as the Bihar plains have been by New Delhi. The hardships faced by their inhabitants becomes an issue to the agitating classes in both capitals only once a year: during the monsoon.



COMMENTARY

by PRATYOUSH ONTA

What to do when Big Brother knocks



Kneejerk reaction to foreign investment in media shows schizophrenic nationalism.

discussion organised by Nepal Patrakar Mahasagha on 2 August, the following reasons were reportedly given to support the argument against FDI:

- Since media is the watchdog of nationalism in any country, which nationalism will a foreign-owned media support?

- Media is related to *bichar* and if foreign investment is allowed, *bideshi bichar* will spread.

- Nationalistic considerations have forced even countries like India to stop FDI in their media sector in its entirety.

For now, I think that if FDI will result in the enhancement of the capacity of our reporters, feature writers and copy editors, then it is a good idea. I am also open to be persuaded otherwise. But opponents of FDI in media will first have to abandon all factual errors. For instance, it is incorrect to say that India still bans FDI in media.

India has already opened its electronic media market to foreign investors. The most direct impact of this decision has been seen in the dramatic rise of private sector Indian and foreign television in the last few years. The decision to not allow any

FDI in the print media was taken by the Indian government in 1955 and several attempts have been made to revise it, most recently during the past year.

Although the Indian government has once again decided to not revise this policy, its decision has not gone unchallenged as is being portrayed by our media bosses. For instance, Swapan Dasgupta, managing editor of *India Today*, published a sharply worded critique of this government position in his newsmagazine on 4 December 2000. Former Indian finance minister P Chidambaram writing in the same magazine has pointed out the irony of the print media in India being an articulate promoter of foreign direct investment in services, industry, agriculture, and electronic media while opposing the same in its own sector.

How exactly is foreign investment in media in Nepal detrimental to our "national interests"? The general consensus with which our editorial bosses have opposed FDI is a syndrome of the schizophrenia that characterises our dominant national culture whereby evocation of nationalism has been

an effective strategy to prevent further debate and scrutiny of the concerned subject.

Nepali society is not so weak that some media products supported by foreign investment will break its back. What really is at work behind this bogey of nationalism is fear that the mediocrity of those who rule the Nepali media world will be further exposed. But will this really mark the end of Nepali-language based *bahunbad* that is dominant in our media?

The argument that if FDI were allowed in Nepali media, it would lead to anti-Nepal editorial practice, does not address the logic of the advertisement market. If foreign investors in Nepali media want to make money, then they can only do so by capturing an adequate portion of the Nepali advertisement market. Advertisers can only thrive if they respect the sensibilities of the consumers. And if media products are seen to be "anti-nationalist" in its contents, consumers and advertisers will abandon them with haste. The jingoistic strain of pro-India nationalism in satellite channels promoted by international finance in the Subcontinent must be under-

actually made them worse.

We strongly doubt that officials in New Delhi sit around the embankments they build submerge huge tracts of both Indian states, pauperising the people who live there. The cause is simpler and closer home: the sheer incompetence of the governments of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and their kick-back driven and mafia-infested politicos. It is when the bunds are close to the border that the impounded water also affects Nepal.

To address this perennial problem, the District Boards of India and District Development Committees of Nepal need to sit down with the technical line agencies of both countries—irrigation departments of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal operating in the international border region. This exchange should be institutionalised and carried out in a spirit of mutual trust. Areas of possible conflict can thus be thrashed out in advance. At the national level, the Water and Energy Commission in Kathmandu and its counterpart in New Delhi must begin to monitor the flow of our rivers so they can better manage the extremes of droughts and floods.

Crying wolf about India gobbling up Nepal after every flood event does more harm to our nationalism than good. Millions of poor Nepali and Indian peasants suffer every monsoon because of the folly of the flood control mafia. Corrupt officialdom on both sides of the border that promote this failed paradigm should be our common enemy.

MAO BUDDIES

Your interview with Dr Baburam Bhattarai (# 51) glorified him not only to me, but also must have done so for the whole world. His replies to your questions were imaginative and praiseworthy. The way Dr Bhattarai has deftly and effectively answered your questions touched everyone's heart. He has laid out the truth directly for everyone to see without fudging. He described today's "democracy" but I think what we have today is not even a fake democracy. May the whole world support Dr Bhattarai in his epoch-making revolutionary tasks.

Apil Dev Neupane
Sisuwa, Kaski

Baburam Bhattarai in your interview comes across as a thoroughly committed revolutionary. He has genuine hopes and aspirations to liberate the Nepali people who have stoically suffered centuries of oppression by the ruling elite in Kathmandu. Dr Bhattarai's arguments are strong, sharp and logical. The only thing I disagree with is the violence. There is madness in that method. If he came above ground and stood for elections, I would be the first to vote for Dr Bhattarai.

J Thapaliya
by email

MAO BADDIES

After reading Comrade Hari Roka's rejoinder to Baburam Bhattarai "Sorry Comrade, this is not Marxism" (#52) I felt like somebody took the words right out of my mouth. Dr Baburam Bhattarai is nothing but a loser. If he was a smart person (a lot of people think he is) he would have never taken the path that he is taking right now. Killing other Nepalis is not going to solve the problem. Does Baburam understand this? If he had any common sense, and took some lessons from history he would have realised it by now. His dream of utopia is not realistic, especially not with the path of violence. If he had spent the past 6 years in mainstream political work, Baburam would have been appreciated by the people a thousand times more. Please, Baburam, come out of your coma and try to be realistic. If you need threats and violence to make people follow you, then stop right there and save our country from ruin.

Kumar Regmi
University of Toronto
Canada

Your editorials "Give peace a chance" and "Tale of two monarchies" (#54) were commanding and timely. They have been published just when there is so much probability of peace talks between the HMG and the Maoist rebels. It must have made both sides think about the question: "Where do we take Nepal next?" The Maoists must realise that if Nepal becomes a peoples' republic it will be poorer, more backward, unstable politically. It would be isolated and shunned by the outside world, like Afghanistan is. The Maoist way will take us to chaos and destruction. In the past 11 years we have lost much more than we got from democracy. We squandered the gains of the 1990 peoples' movement. And we are paying the price now in the birth of this monster called Maoism which threatens our very existence as a nation.

Suyog Sanjog,
Kathmandu

I want to congratulate you for the issues raised in your editorial and in Binod Bhattarai's "Thinking of Talking" (#54). Let us hope and pray that Comrades Prachanda and Baburam, in all their wisdom, will realise the ruinous path of continued insurgency and give the peace talk their sincerest consideration. More importantly, let us also hope

abolish his dynasty was started when he was alive is the height of Maoist bigotry. Whatever their ideology, the actions of the Maoists are crimes against humanity.

At present, nowhere in the world, neither in Africa nor in the Balkans or in Russia has a political movement ruthlessly killed so many innocent people. The terror they have unleashed has begun the destruction of Nepal. Fear and terror have not reformed any society on earth. If Maoism is a political movement, nobody has stopped the comrades from creating a people's peaceful movement and change the political structure to form a government of their own.

On the other hand, the biggest irony is that our political leaders and so-called enlightened people of Nepal to call this a "political problem". It is not. This illusion is due to two reasons: out of fear of their own life, and to score political points by blaming each other. This utter naivety and short-sightedness of our political leadership is leading our country to total destruction, from where it will take decades to recover.

It is already late but not too late. Today's fundamental question is to survive as a people and country. I caution Sher Bahadur Deuba: do not live under the illusion of negotiations. Read history and find that no winner of any terrorist movement has ever come to the table when they seem to be winning. The Maoists have time and again said that they will never become a parliamentary political party. They are demanding a peoples' republic, nothing less. Are you in a position to give them that? If not, first crush them. Then maybe they will come to talk to you in your terms.

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LETTERS

interesting to analyse these contradictory trends.

Albert Grella
M&E Specialist
Kathmandu

DANGEROUS PYRAMID

Manisha Aryal has done a great public service by exposing the dangerous scam of the pyramid scheme in "Scheme/scam" (#54). As someone who was once convinced that this was a great way to get rich quick, I now realise that it is only a way to ultimately take from the poor and give to the rich. The Nepali promoters seem to have convinced themselves that this is OK because they are funding a social service organisation with the proceeds. It is not OK because it is fraudulent and illegal. Unfortunately, not enough is coming out in the Nepali language media about the dangers of the pyramid scheme. If educated and intelligent people fall for this sort of thing, can you imagine what will happen if it spreads in the general population?

Jaya Rana
Kathmandu

Congratulations to Manisha Aryal for her cogent article on "scheme/scam" presenting the dangers and ethical and legal questions involved in pyramid schemes. ICIMOD has for some time shared these concerns and been active in informing our colleagues on their potential for harm to society, notwithstanding any good motives that may underlie some of them. Additional websites that may be of interest to your readers that we have circulated include the following: <http://www.crimes-of-persuasion.com/Crimes/Delivered/pyramids.htm> <http://www.pyramidschemealert.org/schemes/schemeindex.htm> One small correction to the article: Archana Karki resigned from her staff position as

Communications Officer with ICIMOD in May, 2001 and left in June after completing many years of outstanding service to this institution.

J. Gabriel Campbell
Director General
ICIMOD

Manisha Aryal's "Scheme/scam" should be eye opener for many people. It is not a scheme, it is a scam. In first place why should some people make money at others' cost. My mother has become a victim of such scheme in India. The man who started it is still absconding and his assets are not enough to pay the claimants.

M Tamang
by email

BETTER TO EAT KODO

Kunda Dixit's "After Kali Gandaki" (#53) clearly reveals the reason why the country with the most abundant hydropower in the world is paying the most for it: donor policies, tied aid, lack of competitive bidding and high level corruption due to political interference. We are paying most expensive tariff rate for electricity and its primary cause is the high dollar-denominated price paid by NEA to purchase the power. Why are we still installing large hydro projects by foreign investors when our rupee is depreciating so steeply? Why aren't we promoting small (1MW-10MW) or medium (10MW-50MW) scale hydropower projects with our own investments? Chilime(20 MW) and Puwa (14 MW) have already proved to be cheaper and more cost-effective. Last week, the price of electricity was jacked up again. NEA should instead have looked at more efficient management, minimising losses, eliminate high level corruption and political interference and install cheap hydroelectric projects with our own investments and technicians. Nepalis have always known that it is more worthy to eat *kodo* than to buy expensive rice with loans. But our corrupt ministers and bureaucrats are too blinded by greed.

Shanta Dixit
Patan

As Hemlata Rai says in "A generation of failure" (#53) the SLC results were a disappointment to large numbers of students all over Nepal. Many schools and colleges had taken provisional admission even before the results were out in order to grab best students. The total number of schools and 10+2 colleges have increased dramatically in the last few years. Despite such a dramatic increase in access to education, has the quality improved? Has anyone bothered to look into the quality all the 10+2's give to students? If not why the apathy and indifference? And why is a student who comes in the top ten position not able to do as well in a 10+2? Students with 1st division are only allowed to take Science as a subject in almost all the schools. Is it that the students who fail to get 1st division in SLC are not allowed to study science? Should not the students who secure 2nd division given chance to study science? If not, why not? Or is it a deliberate and intentional government policy to force them to go to India to study science?

Himal Kafle
Institute of Engineering
Pulchowk

STOPPING FRANKFURT

We just came to know that Royal Nepal Airlines is terminating its flights to Europe. After the royal massacre this is another massacre—of the economy. Our office alone sends over 1,000 tourists to Nepal in a year and almost half of them fly Royal Nepal. It is obvious that our politicians have no thought for the country but to amass wealth and collect kickbacks on helicopters and guns for the police and army. If they just allowed the airline to buy or lease an aircraft without interfering with their greasy palms, our tourism industry may stand a chance. But are there any leaders like that? Is anyone even worried about it? What is Nepal's travel industry doing about this? Once Royal Nepal loses the coveted landing slot in Frankfurt, it will be difficult to get it back. Wake up, politicians, and think of your country's future for once.

P D Pande
Nepal Tours
Bielefeld, Germany

SCHOOL LIVID CERTIFICATE
C Stone's letter on SLC failures (#54) in response to "A generation of failure" (#53)

makes a strong point about this year's SLC results. There was perhaps much less opportunity to cheat this year due to parallel question papers particularly in Mathematics. But there are other reasons for the abysmal results this year:

- The short academic year for SLC students. Within eight months (July to February with holidays in between) the 10th grade course has had to be completed and the sent-up exams finished. Earlier, there used to be a full 12 month for preparation: February through January.

- Many text books were not in the market till well into August.
- There was a change in the curriculum. Two totally new subjects: Health Environment and Population and Social Studies were added, and there was hardly any teacher preparation for this.

- The Mathematics curriculum saw major changes, again without accompanying teacher training.

- But the most obvious reason for the failure (and it is very surprising that there is hardly any mention of this) is that students have to now pass in eight subjects rather than seven. With all these factors, how do you expect better results? I am shocked to hear that because 54 out of 81 schools in Morang District did not get the 15% pass rate that the government expects, there is going to be action against these schools. Why punish the schools for the government's bungling?

Shanta Dixit
Patan

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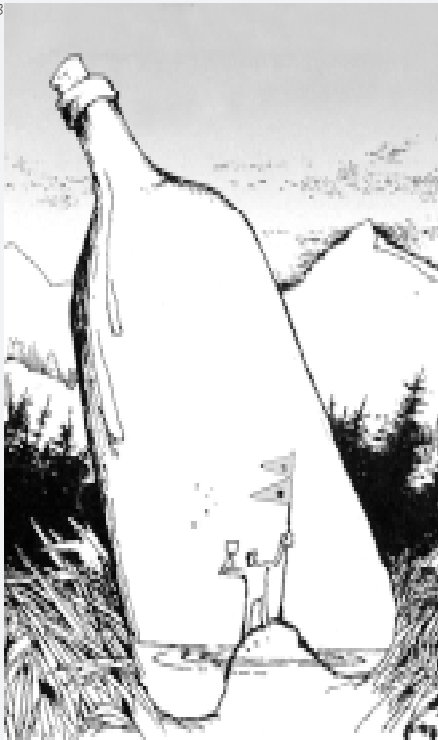
Aashish Sharma
Boudha

LET HIM EAT CRICKET

Kunda Dixit, watch out for stink bombs ("It's not cricket, #54) lobbed by irate Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Indians (who, poor things, are feeling particularly misanthropic after the last trouncing they got).

careful, funny man.

B Shah
Hong Kong



True to our salt

HEMLATA RAI
Salt, Nepal. Evokes images of caravans, wealth and success stories. But it used to also remind us of goitre and cretinism.

Iodised salt may not be a glamorous subject, but Nepal's 28-year-old salt iodisation programme has been considered one of the most successful in Asia. Goitre and cretinism, caused by an iodine-deficient diet, used to be endemic. In parts of Gorkha and Rasuwa district, up to 80 percent of the inhabitants once had goitre or suffered from severe iodine deficiency. But three decades after launching a campaign to iodise salt, Nepal has beat this problem. The achievement cannot be quantified in dollars and cents, but if one could put a price tag on raising the intelligence level of a population then Nepal will have gained billions of dollars over the past three decades with its iodisation programme.

Now, this success is under threat. India, from where almost all of Nepal's salt is imported, decided last year to lift the central government ban on non-iodised salt and leave the decision to iodise or not up to state governments. In many parts of India you can now buy plain sodium chloride without iodine.

This becomes a problem for Nepal because despite the efforts of the partially state-run Salt Trading Corporation, Indian salt trickles through the open border and is widely retailed, especially in the tarai. Matters will worsen next year, when private organisations will once again be allowed to import and distribute salt.



Nepal's little-known success story with iodisation of salt is threatened by cheap non-iodised Indian salt.

Health specialists say past experience has shown that when this happens, it is difficult to monitor levels of iodine.

Iodine is essential for normal growth and development in humans. Iodine deficiency causes under-production of the thyroid hormone, a condition called hypothyroidism. People who suffer from hypothyroidism have a depressed metabolic rate, which among other things means improper assimilation of vital nutrients. When the

deficiency is serious, as it inevitably is if a modern lifestyle does not include iodised salt, it causes goitre and what has traditionally been called cretinism. Iodine Deficiency Disorder, to give it its proper name, comprises psychomotor defects, impaired mental functions and slow cognitive development. Pregnant women, fetuses, infants, and children are always at higher risk of developing IDD.

Given a daily intake of 10 grams of salt, standard in most

parts of the world, an iodine concentration of 15ppm (parts per million) satisfies physiological requirements. This is minute amount—a teaspoon of iodine over a lifetime, but it keeps you healthy.

New Delhi's policy shift on iodised salt in India has already started affecting Nepal, with substandard salt making its way here. Settlements along Nepal's southern border with India were always vulnerable to substandard salt. The Nepal Micronutrient Status Survey 1998

(NMSS) showed that half the salt consumed in the tarai had either no iodine or very little. This, despite the fact that refined iodised salt is more easily available here than in the hills.

Parameswar Mahaseth, general manager of the Salt Trading Corporation, the sole authorised dealer of salt in Nepal, puts it bluntly: "After the Indian government's decision became effective, we have noticed that substandard salt that is unsuitable for human

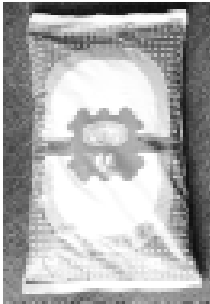
consumption is being sold in tarai markets." A UNICEF conference of South Asian countries held last November in Kathmandu also acknowledged that the flow of non-iodised salt into Nepal has increased after India lifted the ban.

Salt produced in the Indian state of Rajasthan is made from underground water which is particularly low in sodium chloride—salt containing less than 96 percent sodium chloride is considered inedible. Salt with less than the minimum sodium chloride content is meant to be disposed of by burying. Not surprisingly, it often finds its way into unwary consumers' houses masquerading as some popular brand or another. To avoid the additional charges involved in burying substandard salt, producers and distributors prefer to simply sell it—at sixty percent the cost. After the STC discovered six months ago that salt consignments failing the standards test of the Office of Salt Commissioner of India is sold freely to poor villagers in both sides of the border, it decided to carry out more raids.

Monitoring iodine in salt in Nepal has always been challenging, because what we use is made in India and so cannot be controlled at the production level. The picture is complicated by a poor transportation infrastructure within Nepal, which makes access to consumers difficult, and by Nepal's landlocked location. This means Nepal needs to keep in store its salt requirement for six months to one year. Salt over time loses iodine content, and to maintain a healthy level of the mineral by the time salt reaches our tables, the original product needs to



ALL PHOTOS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

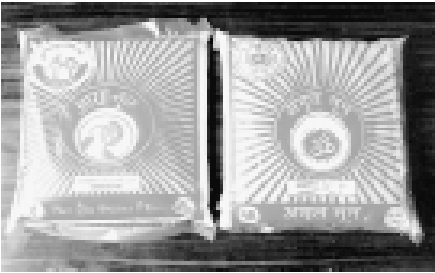


An STC godown in Kathmandu with sacks of iodised salt waiting for dispatch to the Kathmandu market (opposite page). Above: crystal salt and ordinary salt from India with low iodine content and Nepali Mustang salt. STC's most popular brand 'Ayo Noon' and its counterfeit 'Amrit Noon' made in India (right). Dugar Group's brand 'Gyan Noon' (left).

have 50ppm of iodine. India, in contrast, only requires 30ppm.

There are problems on the domestic front. Consumers here unfortunately prefer large crystal salt, whose iodine content tends to evaporate fast,

particularly during transportation and storage. Moreover, many consumers wash the crystal before they use it, which further lowers the level of iodine. The preference persists because crushed, refined salt is perceived



to be less clean (as it cannot be washed) than crystal salt.

Salt Trading Corporation data shows that Nepalis consumed 133,000 metric tons of salt last year, of which 63 percent was the crystal form commonly called *dhikhe noon*. In the coming fiscal year (2002/2003), the STC aims to ensure that half the country will use refined, iodised and packaged salt. But these figures can be misleading because salt imported from Tibet, the small amount of salt produced in Nepal annually (six metric tons), and Indian salt that comes in clandestinely are not accounted for. The real figure is probably around 160,000 metric tons. The NMSS estimates that about 65 percent of the population has access to adequately iodised salt, 18 percent gets inadequately iodised salt, and a huge 17 percent of Nepalis consume non-iodised salt.

A collaborative effort of Nutrition Section of the Ministry of Health, the STC, the Indian government and

UNICEF was launched in 1973 to increase the availability and demand of iodised salt in the country. The project ended in 1998. To ensure proper levels of iodisation, refined and crushed salt in sealed 1 kg bags was introduced. But even after almost three decades of campaigning, the most successful iodisation programme in Asia has not ensured lasting faith in its product. That, says STC's Mahaseth, is because of a poor marketing strategy. "We concentrated on reducing goitre prevalence rather than making refined salt popular," he explains.

The proportion of low UIE (urinary iodine excretion) values has declined from 52 percent in 1985 to 39 percent in 1998. Not surprisingly, the lowest UIE values are found in rural areas and in the tarai.

Government thinks one way to deal with possibly plateauing levels of awareness and iodised salt consumption is ending the monopoly of the STC and allowing the private sector to participate in the salt trade. The Iodised Salt Distribution Act was drafted two years ago and a proposed regulation allows the formation of a committee to decide who will be allowed to import salt and distribute it.

The failure of Nepal's last experience with privatising salt when the official programme ended in 1998, which led to the four-year moratorium on private salt trading, should be ample warning of the pitfalls of such an approach. Four years ago, Nepal's Dugar Group was allowed to deal in iodised salt but the business house failed to supply the promised amount on time, and when NGOs tested the iodine level in Gyan Noon, the Dugar Group's brand, the iodine level was found to be as little as seven 7ppm. "Monitoring mechanisms are poor in Nepal, it is easier to monitor one dealer of salt than multiple dealers," said Macha Raja Maharjan, National Programme Officer with The Micronutrient Initiative.

Substandard salt flooding the tarai aside, India's own experience should give us pause. The competition in the Indian market after the entry of the private sector has not benefited consumers there—they pay NRs 11.20 for a kg of iodised salt, 20 percent more than they used to until last year, and 40 percent more than what Nepali consumers pay.

Friends, comrades ...

The main opposition UML has removed a stumbling block on the road to possible reunification with its breakaway Marxist-Leninist faction, by agreeing to recognise it as a "political force" and not the bunch of "rowdy elements," its spokesman Pradip Nepal used to refer to them as earlier. The party's central committee earlier this week endorsed the plan to ease the way for possible reunification, and agreed, among other things, to press demands that parliament define royal succession laws and debate ways to make the process more transparent. Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the UML, said the decision was an historic attempt to consolidate Nepal's communist movement. Nepal presently has about 10 communist parties, some with no more than a roomful of followers. The larger ones, other than the Ma-Le, which whom possible unity will be explored are the Nepal Communist Party-Masal, the NCP Ekata Kendra (Unity Centre), the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party (Nepal Workers' and People's Party), the NCP United, NCP Marxist and even the Marxist-Leninist-Maoists. Following are some major UML decisions:

Explore the possibility of bringing the communists under one umbrella. Bharat Mohan Adhikari, Amrit Bohora and Keshav Badal will take this up and hold discussions with other parties, within and outside parliament. Press for the dismantling of embankments built by India along the border near Rupandehi district and demand compensation for those affected by natural calamities. Also discontinue India's unilateral constructions at Dhauli Ganga hydro-project at Pithauragad. Continue to appeal for a peaceful and honest dialogue between the government and the Maoists.

Beetle thieves

A few weeks ago we reported a new kind of beetlemania in Japan—watching beetle fights with Nepali contestants. Then two Japanese were caught at the airport a fortnight ago, trying to sneak out a box of beetles. Now, the Kathmandu District Forest Office says it has arrested three Nepali men, accomplices of the Japanese duo. In Japan the micro-rhinceros-like insects are even prized as pets and fetch anywhere between Rs 30,000-40,000 a pair. Five of the 300 species of the bugs found at 1,800-2,500 m in Nepal are especially popular.

Citizens, once again

The government is to begin redistributing citizenship papers to the 34,000 Nepalis whose citizenship certificates were annulled by the Supreme Court decision some weeks ago. The citizenship papers had been distributed four years ago, under a coalition government in which Bam Dev Gautam of the pre-split United Marxist-Leninist party was home minister. Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka informed parliament about the redistribution plan after Sadbhawana Party MPs boycotted sessions to protest the Court decision, which is said to have affected NSP constituents in the tarai the most. The court had ruled the citizenship papers held by the 34,000 void due to procedural lapses in the distribution. The government then ordered the Chief District Officers (CDO) of 20 districts to seize the void citizenship certificates and to freeze all property acquired using these papers.

Body count—mid-West

Rukum has lost the most men and women to the people's war: 215 killed by police: 97 by Maoists. The database at the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), which records the headcount at the district level, put the toll for the mid-Western region at 1,132. The Maoists are strongest in a large swathe of the country's mid-West, where the insurgency began in February 1996.

INSEC's count shows that at least 126 people have been killed between January and July 2001. The Maoists killed 288, and the police 64. Insurgency-related deaths have occurred in all 14 mid-Western districts in the past six years, except Humla, the remotest district, also said to be the stronghold of a different communist faction. INSEC's hostage count shows that Maoists have abducted 130 policemen and 128 civilians. The official estimate for deaths since February 1996 is just over 1,800.

Dole warning

Suryanath Upadhyay, head honcho at the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has for the second time pointed out the propensity of the state to dole out cash to politicians and has asked the government to go slow. In the last 10 months of fiscal 2000, government handed out about Rs 100 million to politicians and their cronies—including former chief justice Biswonath Upadhyaya, politicians Mohammad Aftab Alam, Ananda Prasad Dhungana and spouse, Gajendra Narayan Singh, Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, Raghuji Panta, Dr Bansidhar Mishra, among others, and also journalist groups including the Editor's Society, the Reporters Club and the Nepal Journalists Federation. The money was given out as "financial assistance", "donation" or "reward"—for reasons that are never transparent. The CIAA has warned that it would have to examine accounts if the practice is not stopped.





The grass is always greener...

The times they are definitely a-changin'.

doesn't mean bikinis on Baywatch babes, it means ordinary citizens with pot bellies, like your correspondent. Not a pretty sight. Trust me. There have also been the usual array of boring white men in suits practising politics so arcane and intricate that Nepali Congress infighting seems transparent and logical by comparison.

But what grabbed me most, in my chosen role as columnist in exile for the Nepali Times, was a rather innocuous photo of a middle aged man wearing spectacles, gazing nonetheless nearsightedly through a lush canopy of foliage. He had a carefully neutral, bland, perhaps benign expression on his face, Canada's national "look", I suppose. Men in white lab coats stood alongside, caught in the act of explaining something by the shutter. It was all somewhat banal and at first glance an odd choice for a front page photograph of a newspaper blessed with the bounty of alternatives above.

Then you read the caption. The man with the specs is Canada's health minister. He's standing deep underground in an abandoned mine shaft, a federal government agriculture research laboratory where Canada is busily growing its first-ever crop of officially sanctioned marijuana. Those leaves that loom in the foreground, artistically framing the minister's face, are *cannibis sativa*, Indian hemp to the botanist, a plant illegal in 167 countries around the world.

In this summer of biblical bug plagues, perpetual political nastiness and Queen Mums starting into their second century, Canada has added

its name to the list of sensible states that want to decriminalise marijuana. Cautiously yes, but that's the Canadian way.

My friends from the Netherlands will wonder what all the fuss is about. But they have almost always had one of the world's most sensible societies so their bemusement is understandable. The British won't care; they've long since thought cannabis wasn't worth worrying about, though as arch conservatives to the core, they refuse to legalise it, preferring instead the classic approach of fudging, saying one thing, doing another.

No, it's the Americans that worry me. Every time my country tries to do something sensible, Washington gets its shorts in a knot. And Lord knows, nothing twists American government undergarments more than DRUGS! The nation that consumes greater volumes of narcotics than any other is also the most overbearing when other societies attempt to liberalise drug policy. A growing gaggle of US states have effectively legalised marijuana for home use but Washington has little power within stoutly defended state jurisdictions, so it leans on other—less defiant—lands.

Now with even Canada reaching for the rolling papers, as Bob Dylan put it far too many years ago, the times are definitely a-changin. It's not so much that I hold any personal brief for marijuana. Like Mr Clinton, I smoked some pot in my younger days. Unlike him, I admit to inhaling, often deeply. Now I'm far more interested in a glass of wine and a view of the Himalayas than the giggly fits or self-centeredness brought on by cannabis. But a sensible approach to something like marijuana might just spread outward like ripples in a pond.

by DANIEL LAK





Half-baked ISDP

Ambiguous and weak rules of engagement could be fatal because excessive army casualties during initial engagements with Maoists could give insurgents an aura of invincibility

Right from the outset, the launching of the Integrated Security and Development Package (ISDP) has been a controversial decision. The Royal Nepal Army has now been deployed in eleven Districts as a part of the ISDP. In places like the hinterland of Gorkha they are a very visible presence. But scrapping the ISDP and other initiatives like the Armed Police Force aimed at containing the Maoist insurgency are some of the demands Chairman Prachanda put forth in his 23 July call for a truce.

The army chief himself has been repeatedly embroiled in controversy because he has called for a political consensus before agreeing to deploy the military. The Rolpa fiasco was final proof about the inability of the government to order the army. Surely, there will be questions now

about how come the army is committed for custom duties and frolicking on Tundikhel, but not for counter-insurgency.

When the army was sent to rescue policemen in Rolpa in mid-July, it raised doubts about the sort of political consensus that was or was not reached. Was there was a secret agreement about deploying the army, or was the army chief forced to act by the political leadership? Whatever happened behind the scenes, it is clear that it precipitated Prime Minister Girtija Koirala's resignation. Such confusion over command and control of the army cannot be allowed to persist.

Now that troops have been deployed as part of the ISDP, it will be intriguing to see whether the government intends to achieve its aim by launching a "consolidation" campaign, a "strike" campaign, or both. The haste with which the army has been rushed indicates that this is going to be primarily a strike campaign, even though politicians maintain that the army is just providing security so development work can go ahead.

Only a consolidation campaign can help demonstrate that the government is intent on exercising its responsibility to maintain law and order and to meet the legitimate needs of the people. Consolidation would mean winning the hearts and

mind of the people, and thus helping quell the roots of the insurgency. Such campaigns have four stages: Preparation, Offensive, Development and Completion.

In military jargon, a consolidation campaign is usually organised in priority areas as an interdepartmental civil-military effort. All elements taking part in this are trained and indoctrinated on a team basis. This has definitely not happened with the elements participating in ISDP. Consolidation campaigns can be conducted during any phase of an insurgency, but success is more likely if it is mounted during low levels of insurgent activity.

If the ISDP has been launched as a consolidation campaign, the preliminary stages have been skipped. For example, the preparation stage when all participating civil and military forces plan, train, organise and equip for operations was practically disregarded in the hurry to get the ISDP going.

The ISDP has now entered Stage Two—the offensive stage—with the army being deployed in contested and insurgent-controlled zones. Yet the security forces do not seem to have either an effective intelligence system addressing all aspects of the insurgency, or a reliable database. A unified, centralised intelligence system to effectively conduct ISDP operations

is not yet apparent. There is also no single agency responsible for coordinating psychological operations at the national level to avoid conflicting themes and programs.

The capability of the army to conduct effective civil affairs programs have never been tested before, and the resources at their disposal to do this is extremely limited. Whether a demoralised police force will be able to support the ISDP is also doubtful. And if violence flares, the ability of the army to conduct successful tactical operations to find, fix, destroy or capture the insurgents will face an acid test.

In its effort to show that everything is going according to plan, the civilian leadership has prematurely kicked off Stage Three—the development stage—by inaugurating a power substation in Gorkha. But this may be putting the cart before the horse. Initial success in offensive operations will be crucial in implementing Stage Three which will address the core issues of the insurgency. Political, economic, social and psychological activities must be sequenced and synchronised under a secure and stable environment.

Stage Four—completion stage—of the ISDP will depend totally on the ability and the success of the security forces to conduct

effective internal defence operations, the capacity of the development programs to deliver basic services and the re-building of local administration and infrastructure.

The performance of the army in the impending counter-insurgency operations will directly reflect the quality of top military leadership and its ability to forge unity of all agencies involved. The manner in which the campaign is supervised by middle level officers, and the proficiency of the officers will also determine the success or failure of the entire campaign.

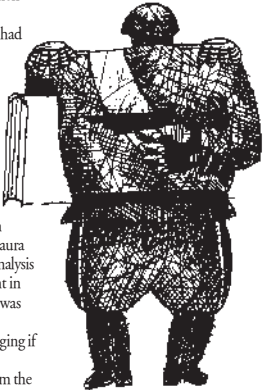
A weakness or shortfall in any one of the above factors will have a direct bearing on the morale as well as the motivation of the troops and on the long run, the campaign as a whole. If the troops have been treated and trained as professionals, their performance will undoubtedly be second to none. However, if they have been abused and exploited, the officers will come face-to-face with the pent up frustrations of the men under their command.

If the top leadership has had the foresight to provide the troops robust rules of engagement, then it would be prudent to expect the troops to perform well. Ambiguous and weak rules of engagement could be fatal because excessive casualties during the initial engagements with the Maoists could bring down morale, giving the Maoists an aura of invincibility. An objective analysis of the recent army deployment in Rolpa seems to suggest that it was the army that shed first blood. Nothing could be more damaging if this happened again.

The resultant violence from the

offensive stage of ISDP could be exploited by groups intent on targeting the geopolitical interests of either India or China using Nepal as their base. India is concerned that Nepal has turned into a hotbed of ISI activities. The variety of distorted news coming out of the Indian media at regular intervals cannot be considered a coincidence. Similarly, it is absolutely clear that the Chinese have zero tolerance for Free Tibet activities being conducted from Nepali soil. Any attempts to do so will surely be met with swift, effective and brutal countermeasures from the north. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal can be virulent by itself, even without the neighbouring powers meddling. We don't need the quagmire of a proxy war.

(Gyan Jung Thapa was still last year a Colonel in the Royal Nepal Army. He has a Masters in Military Arts and Science from the US Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.)



The new battleground

The legendary Gurkhas are engaged in combat of a different kind—a war of wits with their British paymasters.

Such an exercise was repeated again twice on a smaller scale. In 1986, 111 Gurkhas soldiers on training in Hawaii were disciplined, ostensibly for mutinous behaviour and dismissed en masse. Some were at the Kathmandu conference to give their side of the story. They said they were sent home without compensation and the right to appeal. From their testimonials it was clear the soldiers were unsure of the facts leading to their dismissal. GAESO has to ensure it gets its facts right.

In addition to issues of pay and pension, GAESO is also focusing on promotion, service facilities, privileges and post retirement benefits. Only three Gurkhas have made it to Lt Col rank and only one commanded a Gurkha battalion. The discrimination against Gurkhas was highlighted when Sgt Baliram Rai and his British officer were killed during mine-clearing operations in Kosovo. The initial compensation awarded to Rai was about one-fifth that given to the British officer. But thanks to the uproar in the British media the disparity was corrected.

The gap is closing, if slowly. The 2,500 serving Gurkhas are being brought at par with the British soldier by hiking various allowances without disturbing the parity with the Indian pay code. The British Army is facing severe shortages in recruitment and has been forced to enroll additional Gurkhas to make up the shortfall in British Infantry regiments. A separate company of Gurkhas has been attached to several British units. The pay and allowances given to Gurkha soldiers are still the best they get anywhere. GAESO has to be careful that does not undermine the reputation of Gurkhas in service, and the prospects of those in the very long pipeline of recruitment.

With precisely this intention, GAESO is keeping its struggle legal and peaceful. It has presented the British government with four demands:

- Pension for Gurkhas made redundant,
 - Parity of pension with British soldiers of same rank and length of service
 - Education for Gurkha children and
 - The right to a work permit in the UK after retirement.
- The British have pegged the pension differential to the lower costs of living in Nepal. Now, a Gurkha soldier has married an English woman and has moved court in UK for equal pension. This will become a test case.

The British are being cagey about their planned response. Privately

their officers are saying that GAESO is 'budmash', extorting money from pensioners and are a front for a Nepali communist party. They also say the question of parity of pension does not arise due to the difference in terms of engagement and duration of service. The British soldier has a colour service of 22 years compared to the Gurkha, enlisted for 15 years.

The British public holds the Gurkhas in high esteem and with huge affection. It is impossible the British government or GAESO will want to do anything that will dent this public image. The battle is as much over dignity as it is to do with money. Gurkhas have been cash-strapped Nepal's most secure earners of foreign exchange. In their heyday, Gurkhas used to send up to \$40 million a year home.

While the Nepali government is reluctant to push the British on this issue, it is keen to have the problem resolved amicably before it becomes a political football, used by left- and right-wing parties in Nepal. Some government leaders in their talks with the British have been speaking about equitable, not equal treatment. This is not what the Gurkhas are demanding.

GAESO's war of words is gathering confidence and finality. Its publicity wing has produced a documentary film called *Gurkha Blues*, showing their wartime heroism and their abysmal post-retirement plight. The Kathmandu Declaration ended with the formation of an international committee of eminent persons to guide GAESO on winning the war without exhausting itself. GAESO must also open an informal line with the British Army and the government. The organisation's performance in Geneva was most impressive. The plight of the Gurkhas was projected with substance and sobriety. The main issues brought up related to the legality and validity of the 1947 tripartite agreement and discrimination. The options GAESO outlined to advance its case range from filing lawsuits in UK against discrimination, to placing complaints with the ILO and UNESCO, moving the European Court of Human Rights and seeking dialogue with their paymaster.

Gurkhas, famous for their war cry, "aayo Gurkhal", are now preferring discretion to valour.

(Ashok Mehta is a retired general from the Indian army who has commanded Gurkha troops.)



Silent state violence



So long as abortion remains illegal, poor women will continue to die.

terminate pregnancy.

According to the husband, the old woman had given his wife something to eat and then inserted herbs into her vagina. The foetus was expelled after 24 hours, but the woman started running a high fever. They hoped the fever would soon subside and bleeding would stop. But she didn't get any better. The husband consulted the old woman again, but she brushed him off, saying his wife would be better soon. She started getting worse. By the third day after the abortion, the woman was bleeding heavily and had lost consciousness. With the help of other villagers, the husband brought his wife to the maternal hospital, only to have her die before his eyes.

The situation has not changed much since. Women are still dying because of illegal, clandestine, back-street abortions. If they manage to survive the sloppy, often ignorant and dangerous procedures, they often suffer from diseases and disorders for the rest of their lives. The UN's 1996 Human Development Report says that Nepal's Maternal Mortality Rate (1,500 women per 100,000 live births) is one of the highest in the world. Many people disagreed with this data and said that the

situation was "not so bad." Around the same time, Dr Rita Thapa, a public health specialist formerly with the WHO, presented a paper in a workshop organised by a Nepali NGO on gender issues and women's health in Nepal that said: "About 50 percent of maternal deaths in Nepal are due to abortion-related complications."

Death related to badly performed abortions has not declined in recent years, and will not in the near future, because Nepali law does not allow women to have abortion under any circumstances, even if the pregnancy is result of rape or incest. Nepali law does not allow this basic, some might say common-sense law, but instead suggests vengeance: a woman may kill her rapist within one hour of the rape.

What choices does this leave the woman? Should she continue the pregnancy, or see it to term, and then kill the child after it is born if it is the result of rape? Should she go to an old woman or a quack to terminate the pregnancy, and possibly be killed herself, or at best live with the resultant

complications, maybe even for the rest of her life? Whatever happens, the woman suffers.

If you do not believe me when I say that abortion (mostly illegal and unsafe abortion) is the cause of high maternal morbidity (diseases pattern) and maternal death, consider this data of hospitals from Kathmandu and Dharan—in the five years from 28 May 1995 to 28 May 2000 in the maternity hospital in Prasuti Griha total gynaecological admissions were

16,150. Of these, 6,671 (about 41.3 percent) were abortion-related. Of course, not all abortion-related complications examined were because of induced unsafe abortion. Still, Dr Sarshwati Padhey director of Prasuti Griha says, "Many women come to hospital with abortion-related complications. And most of them are because of abortion conducted by unqualified personal and by unsafe method."

Grassroots public health organisations and women's welfare groups realise that there is a problem and are doing their best to see find solutions within the existing situation. The Nari Bikas Sangha and Kathmandu's Centre for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities brought together people last month to discuss exactly this. Dr Dhruba Uprety, a gynaecologist from BP Koirala Institute of Medical Science's Dharan Medical College presented a paper asserting that: "Unsafe abortion is responsible for 13 percent of maternal mortality in the world. In some developing countries, it is responsible for more than 50 percent of maternal deaths. This statement is true in our context. In the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (BPKIHS) hospital in Dharan unsafe abortion is the biggest cause of maternal mortality. It accounts for

44 percents of maternal death in the last four years and 58 percent of maternal deaths in the year 2057 (April 2000- April 2001)." Dr Uprety's conclusions were based on a study on septic abortion conducted in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the BPKIHS hospital from April 2000- April 2001.

After Dr Uprety presented his paper, my first comment was: "All my ideas that when a woman with abortion-related complications comes to the hospital (and specially to a the highly specialised hospital like that in Dharan), she is lucky, because she does not need to fear for her life. But this study shows that most of the time women are brought in such a critical condition, that even specialists, modern medical facilities and modern medicine can not save their lives."

In the 21st century our women are dying because the law does not allow them to have abortions. But, only illiterate, poor women who do not have access to qualified health personal to perform (illegal) abortions are dying. What I conclude from this is that if you have money and you can afford go to any doctor in a private clinic and get safe, if illegal abortion, you will not die or suffer any problems. Is our state is responsible only for citizens who are rich and knowledgeable, but not for those who are voiceless.



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Pull-up, RNAC

Plagued by corruption, shortage of aircraft and an empty cash box, Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation is to stop flying to Europe and the Middle East from September. The European flights will be stopped from 1 September, just when the tourist season—and full flights—kick off. The corporation has also decided to end its B-757 lease with China South West Airlines (CSWA), two months before the deal expires anyway. The RNAC says the Europe flights are being terminated because of mounting losses on the sector. Yet, all other airlines flying from Europe and the Middle East are either increasing flights or adding extras at this time to meet the demand of the tourist traffic. The flag carrier says it is cancelling the CSWA deal because of dwindling tourists and because it does not anticipate an upswing in arrivals in the short term.

More bad news

Tourism arrivals continued to slide in July, dipping by about 29 percent, compared with July 2000, which wasn't a very good time either. It was an improvement over June, though, when arrivals fell by almost 57 percent. About 15,000 tourists came by air in July, down from the roughly 21,000 who were here last year. The Indian arrivals—Nepal's June through September tourists—were down by about 42 percent in July. But even that was an improvement over the June numbers, when arrivals took a 72 percent nosedive. About 4,400 Indian tourists flew in this July, down from last year's 7,600. The tourism statistics are compiled by the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), based on immigration data of tourists coming by air. Indian arrivals this year have fallen by about 20 percent compared with last year's season, which was marred by the December 1999 hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu and the subsequent five-month suspension of flights by IA. The NTB is to extend its special promotional "Festival of Life..." campaign to September. The programme was launched in May and suspended after the June 1 massacre.

More places to pay

The government is to open 13 "windows" to collect taxes in districts where there are no offices of the Internal Revenue Department—the new institutional set up created by merging the Income Tax and Value Added Tax departments. The government recently merged 40 such offices to form 21 internal revenue offices.

Bike race

Hansraj Hulaschand and Company has begun selling yet another motorcycle, one you can have for Rs 94,900. The Kawasaki Croma is a collaborative product of Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries and India's Bharat Bajaj Auto. The Croma comes with the Radical Aluminum Combustion Engine (RACE), a technology, which the company says is used in airplanes and racing cars. The bike also boasts special "zapper tyres" and a 45-watt trapezoidal headlight. Hansrj Hulaschand says it has upgraded its after-sales services centre at Teku to promote the new bike.

Uncle Sam's crockery

Nepal Overseas Marketing (NOM) has begun promoting crockery from World Kitchen Inc, USA including well-known brands like Corning, Corelle, Vision and Pyrex. On offer are Corelle's break- and chip-resistant crockery, Corning cookware, Vision's see-through cooking pots and saucapans, and ovenware from Pyrex, including small bowls, cake dishes, mixing bowls, measuring jars, tea and coffee-pots, storage wares and casseroles. The products are already on the shelves at all leading retail outlets.

Cool option

Voltas, India's air-conditioning giant, opened a showroom in New Baneshwor last week, offering some 45 models of window, split air and water coolers in Nepal. The window range starts with 0.82 tonne air-conditioners tons and the split range is available between 1-4 tons. The coolers start at 3.2 litres and go up to 150 litres. Antarctic House, which sells Voltas products in Nepal, says it will appoint dealers around the country to market its ACs at the same prices you'd pay across the border.

Hyatt Club

Hyatt has introduced a special privileges offer, including discounts, to members signing up for the Club at the Hyatt. Members get a 20 percent discount on all beverages at any restaurant on the premises, an equal cut on all food and beverages at its Rox Bar, and a discounted \$120-plus-tax rate on all rooms. And privileges are fully transferable to other Hyatt hotels.

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Questioning its basic principles will strengthen the trade treaty.

This Beed noted with some petulance the attention the media gave last to, among other Nepal-India matters, the trade talks. Petulance because my comrades in the press should know what their counterparts in bureaucracy are like—delay, delay, delay, until wild horses finally have their way and suddenly you are eyeball-to-eyeball with the problem.

The trade treaty runs out on 5 December. If neither sides expresses a wish for change or termination by 5 September, it is automatically renewed. We are making few moves to ascertain what India's intentions might be—if they tell us shortly before this date that they want changes, we will have very little time react or negotiate.

Nepal needs this preferential trade treaty more than India. We know what an impasse in renewal can do—we managed to get amendments in the constitution through in 1998, but surely we don't need to go through such a situation again. As early as January institutions and individuals were urging the Nepali government to get its proposals ready. Two words: lousy negotiators.

India still has a major problem with Nepali exports especially the big five—vanaspati ghee, copper wire, acrylic yarn,

zinc oxide and steel pipes. Nepal made a gesture of sensitivity to these export control concerns by imposing higher duties on these items. But India's rhetoric is a clear sign of its nervousness about the WTO regime. When they get an attack of jelly legs, nothing seems to calm them better than having a good go at Nepal—whether about cheaper Chinese tea entering India or the understandable clamour for competitively priced Taiwanese computer parts assembled in Nepal. India has failed to curb informal trade with its neighbour, but hurling the axe with such vigour at formal trade is hardly the solution.

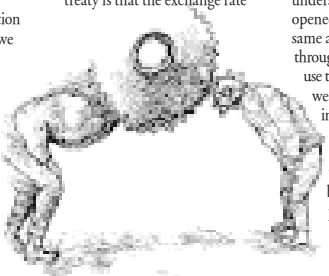
We should, on both sides, be looking at things that seem less contentious, more stable—like the fixed exchange rate regime. The basic assumption of the trade treaty is that the exchange rate

will remain fixed at the current levels—till kingdom comes, it seems. This is another Beed staple, but here goes: What is the economic reasoning behind the untouchable magic 1.6? If India feels a surge in Nepali exports is a problem, why not agree to bring down the rate to 1.3. This could take away the competitive advantage. For Nepal, the benefits of the lower fixed rate and lower implied rates on all currencies would outstrip losses on account of a decline in exports. It is basically a matter of examining the *political* exchange rate to understand the *economic* one.

For Nepal, a key issue is the rail link to Birgunj. It is imperative the rail link becomes operative before the equipment at the dry port does a vanishing act. The Nepali government needs to understand that the newly-opened Mumbai port is not the same as the Kandla port. Let's get through the paperwork, and then use these other ports to say that we will not put up with the inefficiency of the Kolkata port.

The trade treaty deserves to be discussed in the spirit of better business and trade, not petty politics.

Readers can post their views at
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Nepal on the wagon

Who is going to stop the Maoists from getting away with a beer ban?

KIRAN NEPAL

In terms of investment and contribution to the economy, Nepal's alcohol and beer industry is the biggest success story of the 1990s. The production of both beer and alcohol has doubled in the past 10 years, and because there is still unused capacity there is tremendous potential to grow.

All this is now threatened by Maoists who want a blanket ban on alcohol and beer from 18 August. This is a threat not just to the industry, but because of the revenue it provides to the government budget and the jobs and ancillary industries it is a serious threat to Nepal's economy as well.

Business confidence in Nepal started falling after political instability since 1995 affected the healthy investments that had been built up after democracy. Today, investor confidence is at its lowest ebb. The reason: Maoist extortion, threats and the latest action against breweries and distilleries. Business sources told us that unless the government works magic, Nepal's industrial sector which took 50 years to build is going to be face a catastrophic blow.

The Maoists have spear-headed this puritanical anti-alcohol drive through their front organisation, the All Nepal Women's Organisation (Revolutionary) which launched its drive in Chitwan in June, then in Nawalparasi in July. It tried out shorter bans in other townships. Emboldened by the "success" (businesses simply stopped selling alcohol because they feared punishment) they now want the government to announce a ban on alcohol throughout Nepal.

Alcohol and beer sales have already dropped to nearly nil in many hill districts such as Dhading, Gulmi, Palpa, Tanahu, Syangja and Argakhanchi. The Maoist propaganda machine has also begun warning retailers and distributors, even in Kathmandu Valley, to stop stocking liquors. Stores in many shops outside the Ring Road are emptying their racks, and it may be a matter of time before inner-city shops begin doing the same. The reason the Maoists can get away with it is the total lack of government authority and law enforcement.

"We've been told we will be provided security and have been asked not to stop production," says a brewery owner. "Is the government telling us it will post policemen at every retail and distribution outlet?"

Almost all of Nepal's major alcohol and beer brands are sold in Kathmandu Valley and other major townships along the highways. Barely 20 percent is sold in the rural areas. Besides, most Nepali indigenous groups need alcohol for their religious and social rituals. Maoists have in some places even stopped the

production of home-made liquor.

Across Nepal, despite a stagnant economy, alcohol sales till recently were booming. Most of the demand is met by domestic production, but higher purchasing power in urban areas has also created space for many international brands, sold mainly through up-market outlets.

Beer and alcohol industries pay about Rs10 million in revenues and taxes every day, adding up to a whopping Rs5.5 billion annually. The industry employs 5,000 people directly and another 100,000 indirectly make their living off the alcohol industry from transport and packaging to printing and even poultry. Poultry sales and prices have come down by as much as 50 percent in Chitwan, since the ANWO launched its campaign. The recycling industry, which does business worth about Rs500 million annually, revolves mainly on buying and re-selling beer bottles.

The Maoist women may have a point when they say that they are trying to address the negative impact of excessive alcohol consumption, but that has to do more with awareness at the consumer level and government controls, rather than a total ban. They want the industry to shift investment into other productive sectors in 15 days, or else. It is clear that this uncompromising stance hides a strategy to directly deprive the government of revenue from alcohol taxes.

"How can you shift your investment in 15 days, this is just not rational," said an angry brewer, who like most people interviewed for this article did

not want to be quoted by name. His brewery has seen sales drop by as much as 30 percent in the past few months. What puzzles many political and business analysts is why the Maoists would take on such an unpopular cause. Aside from women's groups who have always been agitating against alcoholism, most do not agree with a blanket ban on alcohol.

Lax enforcement is partly to blame for alcohol abuse in Nepal. There is almost no monitoring of licenses and sales, and even a minor can walk into a store and walk away with a crate of the most potent liquor available in the market. There are laws that allow alcohol sales only between 2pm and 8pm, bans sales to minors, and stipulates that such stores should be at least 100 meters away from schools, temples and other places frequented by children. The government had no interest in monitoring because it takes away as much as 70 percent of the price of a bottle of beer or spirit as tax.

Any disruption of production will also affect the banks that have invested about Rs1 billion in the two industries—about Rs500 million in breweries, about Rs250 million in distilleries and another Rs250 million in ancillary industries. Banks saw a lucrative industry which has shown steep growth since 1990/91, and they cannot be blamed.

Nepal has five breweries which meet local demand and also produce for export to India. There are over 30 distillers producing hundreds of brands, including the low-end ones sold in plastic pouches. The government banned production of the easy-to-use pouches last year, but

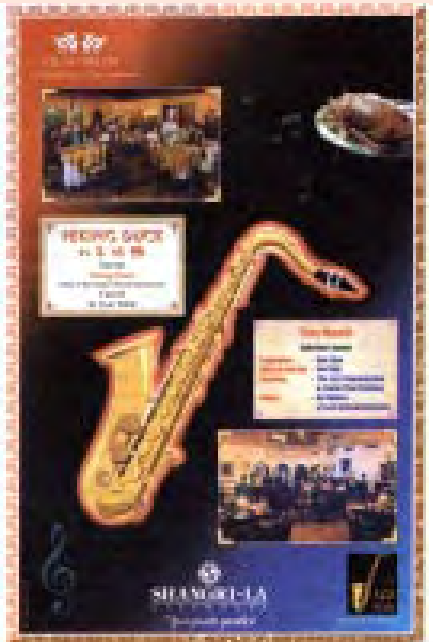
the product is still available in the market—sold as old stock. Most would agree that it is this lax control and monitoring that should be stopped, not the production of beers and spirits.

The alcohol industry also has backward linkages with sugarcane farmers along the tarai who sell cane to sugar factories, which in turn sell molasses to distilleries. The price of both cane and sugar are determined by the money sugar



Nepali brands

Gorkha Brewery, *Carlsberg* and *Tuborg* (Khetan Group)
Mount Everest Brewery, *San Miguel*, *Golden Tiger*, *Guinness* (Amatya Group)
Singha Brewery, *Hayward* (for export only) (Chaudhary Group)
United Brewery, *Kingfisher*, *Kanyani Black Label* (for export only)
Himalayan Brewery, *Iceberg*, (Shahi & Company)
Nepal Liquors, *Bagpipe*, *McDowell's* (UB Group)
Himalayan Distillery, *Royal Stag* (Jawalakhel Distillery & Sagram)
Highland Distillery, *Challenger*, *Virgin Rum*, *Mirnov Vodka* (Shaw Wallace and ICTC)
Nepal Distillery, *Khukuri Rum*, *John Bull*
Shree Distillery, *Mount Everest*, *King's Pride*, *Special Number 1* (Maskey Group)
Jawalakhel Distillery, *Ruslan Vodka*, *Dry Gin*, *Rangela* (JD Group)
Tribeni Distillery, *Sea Pirates*, *Jay Rum* and *Dudhia* (Rohit Group)
Sumi Distillery, *Gill Mary*, *Dark Rum*



Uncommon valour...

DIGANT GURUNG

This week marks 56 years since the end of World War II. A war in which more than 43,000 Nepali soldiers serving in the British Army laid down their lives in the jungles of Burma, the slopes of Monte Cassino in Italy, or in Tunisia. Almost as many died in the trenches of Flanders in World War I. Some 400,000 young Nepali men left their homes and families in the hills to fight in both world wars of the last century.

Many of the soldiers died valiantly while rescuing wounded comrades, or throwing themselves at enemy positions with no concern for their own safety. Some of those of whose bravery we know received the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration of valour in the British Army. Nepali soliders were awarded two Victoria Crosses in WWI, ten in WWII and another one during the British anti-communist Malaya campaign in 1965.

One of the more unexpected fallouts of General Amarsingh Thapa's defeat by the British in 1814 after a particularly fierce engagement was the inclusion of Nepali—Gurkha—troops in the British army. Nearly 100 years later, the legendary alliance was strengthened when Prime Minister Chandra Sumshere Jung Bahadur Rana announced the day before World War I broke out: "The whole military resources of Nepal are at His Majesty's disposal, we shall be proud to be of any service, however little it may be."

The sacrifice of the brave Nepalīs was not little. And however politically incorrect it may seem in hindsight that Nepali soldiers served in a foreign colonial army, or whatever the controversy surrounding the issue of Gurkha pensions (see commentary by Gen Ashok Mehta on p. 7) the story of Gurkha deployment is now a part of Nepal's historical heritage and folklore. We present short biographies of Nepali soldiers awarded the Victoria Cross. Some of these oral testimonies and of other less well-known soldiers will appear in a soon-to-be published collection by Himal Books.

Havildar Kulbir Thapa Magar, VC (1888-1956)

Place and date of action: France, 25/26 September 1915



Kulbir Thapa Magar was born at Nigalpani in Palpa. He joined the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles.

During operations against the German trenches south of Mauquissart, the Garhwal Brigade and the 3rd Gurkhas suffered severely. Rifleman Kulbir Thapa Magar was himself wounded when he found

another badly wounded soldier behind the first line German trench. Although the British soldier urged Kulbir to save himself, the Rifleman remained with the soldier until the next morning and then carried him and two wounded Gurkhas out to safety under enemy fire in broad daylight.

After Kulbir recovered from his wounds, he was promoted to Havildar and proceeded to Egypt with his regiment. At the conclusion of the war, he returned with his battalion to India.

Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa Magar, VC OBI (1906-1968)

Place and date of action: Tunisia, 5/6 April 1943



Lalbahadur Thapa Magar was born in Aijiya Simsa Village, Baglung. He joined the 1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Rifles.

During the silent attack on the Rass-es-Zouai, Lalbahadur was in charge of two sections that needed to secure a passage to their objective. They first advanced up a narrow cleft thickly scattered with a

series of enemy posts. He and his men killed all the garrison of these posts using their khukuris or bayonets. As Lalbahadur then began to lead his men up a narrow enclosed pathway, the enemy bombarded them with heavy machine gun fire and grenades. Lalbahadur continued to fight his way forward, killing two men with his khukuri and two with his revolver. Eventually he and two of his riflemen reached the crest, where he killed two more men with his khukuri. His riflemen killed two, and the rest fled. After securing the feature they were able to cover the company's advance up the defile.

Captain Ganju Lama, VC MM (1924-2000)

Place and date of action: Burma, 12 June 1944



Ganju Lama, of Samgmo Basti village in south Sikkim, was in the 1st Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles.

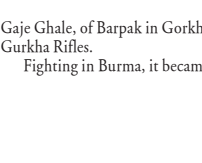
While in Burma, the Japanese launched a major attack upon the 2/5 GR and so the 1/7 GR was ordered to counter-attack. The enemy began with heavy artillery fire followed by a strong attack supported by five medium tanks. Eventually, three tanks

broke through the defence. Rifleman Ganju Lama already had a broken left wrist and wounds on his right hand and his leg from the crossfire, but he still managed to knock all three of them out single-handed, using his gun and an anti-tank gun. He then continued forward with grenades, killing or wounding all the enemy tank crew attempting to escape, thus enabling his company to push forward.

He received the VC in Delhi from the Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell. Ganju Lama remained with the Indian Army and was promoted to Subedar Major and in 1965 was appointed ADC to the president of India. He was later granted the honorary rank of Captain in 1968 and appointed Honorary ADC to the president of India for life.

Captain Gaje Ghale, VC (1919-2000)

Place and date of action: Burma, 12 June 1944



Gaje Ghale, of Barpak in Gorkha, joined the 2nd Battalion, 5th Gurkha Rifles.

Fighting in Burma, it became essential to capture a position



Lt (QGO) Tulbahadur Pun, VC (1923-)

Place and date of action: Burma, 23 June 1944



Tulbahadur Pun was recruited from Banduk village, Gulmi in 4,000 Parbat District, west of Kathmandu to the 3rd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles.

While in Burma, the battalion was ordered to attack the Railway Bridge at Mongaung, but were forced to the ground by heavy gunfire from a position known as the 'Red House' and a strong enemy bunker to the left of it. Rifleman Tulbahadur Pun's whole section was wiped out leaving just him, the section commander and one other man. As they continued advancing, the officer and the other man were so badly wounded that Tulbahadur seized the Bren Gun and charged forward alone, firing from the hip. With dawn rising behind him he presented a perfect target to the Japanese who kept firing at him. After running through shell holes, ankle-deep mud and over fallen frees, he finally reached the 'Red House' and captured it, thus being able to support the rest of his platoon.

He received the VC from the Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell in Delhi on 3 March 1945 and retired as the RSM with the honorary rank of Lt (QGO) on 14 May 1959. Lt (QGO) currently lives in Pokhara.

Lt (GCO) Agansing Rai, VC (1920-2000)

Place and date of action: Burma, 26th June 1944



Agansing Rai, from Amsara, Chisankhu in Okhaldhunga district, joined the 2nd Battalion, 5th Gurkha Rifles.

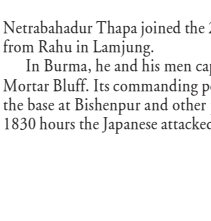
While in Burma, his company was sent out to recapture two posts known as Water Piquet and Mortar Bluff. As the company attacked, they were pinned down by machine gun fire from Mortar Bluff and a gun from the jungle, but Naik Agansing Rai carried on in front

of his section, killing three enemy crew. He then led his section straight onto Water Piquet, again killing three. When the section returned to Mortar Bluff for a final assault on Water Piquet, the platoon came under heavy machine gun fire and grenade attacks from an isolated bunker position. Agansing Rai, covered by his Bren Gunner, advanced to the bunker alone, armed with one grenade and a gun. He killed the occupants and Water Piquet was captured.

He received the VC from the Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell on 23 January 1945. He retired as Subedar Major and was granted the honorary rank of Lieutenant (GCO).

Jamedar (acting Subedar) Netrabahadur Thapa, VC (1916-1944)

Place and date of action: Burma, 25/26 June 1944



Netrabahadur Thapa joined the 2nd Battalion, 5th Gurkha Rifles from Rahu in Lamjung.

In Burma, he and his men captured the isolated piquet called Mortar Bluff. Its commanding position was vital for the safety of the base at Bishenpur and other posts further down the ridge. At 1830 hours the Japanese attacked it and Subedar Netrabahadur and



his men were forced to hold their ground against heavy odds. Netrabahadur went from post to post, encouraging his young non-commissioned officers and riflemen, and tending to the wounded. He then reported by telephone to his Commanding Officer, requesting more artillery defensive fire. As firepower began to run out, two main firearms suddenly jammed and the enemy were able to force an entrance, killing or wounding

over a dozen men. Without hesitation, Netrabahadur went forward himself, using grenades to halt the enemy's advance. He continued commanding his men and called for more ammunition. At 0400 hours a section bringing the ammunition finally arrived, but were wounded as they were entering. Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa retrieved the ammunition himself. Later in the battle, he was killed by a grenade.

The next day his body was found, khukuri in hand, a dead Japanese by his side. The Viceroy, Field Marshall Lord Wavell on 23 January 1945 presented the VC to Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa's widow.

Rifleman Sherbahadur Thapa, VC (1921-1944)

Place and date of action: Italy, 18/19 September 1944

Sherbahadur Thapa, of Ghalechep in Tanahu district, joined the 1st Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles.

In Italy, his battalion was advancing into the state of San Marino and facing tough opposition from the Germans. Just before dawn, the company came under small arms and mortar fire. Sherbahadur and his section commander charged an enemy post, killing one occupant and putting the rest to flight. However, another party of Germans attacked the section, killing the commander. Sherbahadur quickly charged back at them and put his gun into action, silencing several enemy machine guns and killed many other German soldiers with remarkable accuracy. After a two-hour battle, both forward companies had exhausted their ammunition and so Sherbahadur remained alone at his post, providing covering fire as they withdrew. After his ammunition ran out, he attempted to carry two wounded comrades out of danger, but was killed when returning for the second.

In March 1945 at the Red Fort in Delhi, the Viceroy, Field Marshall Lord Wavell presented the VC to Sherbahadur Gurung's mother.

Rifleman Thaman Gurung, VC (1924-1944)

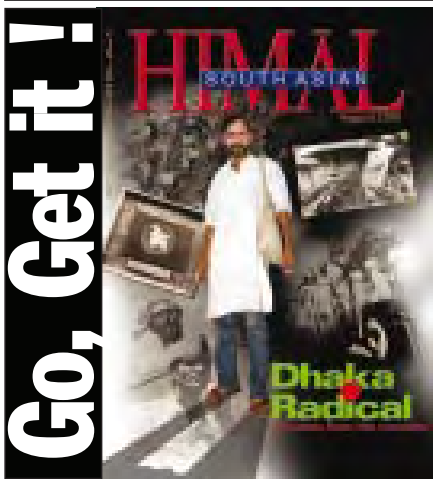
Place and date of action: Italy, 10 November 1944

Thaman Gurung joined the 1st Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles from Singla, in Gorkha.

While in Italy, a company of this battalion was ordered to send a fighting patrol to Monte San Bartolo, with Thaman Gurung as one of the scouts. As the scouts moved towards the summit, they saw German soldiers preparing to fire on the section below. Thaman immediately charged at the enemy and they surrendered. He then continued up to the summit and began firing at the German positions to allow the forward section to advance. However, the platoon was forced to withdraw due to heavy enemy machine gun fire. Rifleman Thaman Gurung then fired into the German slit trenches until his ammunition ran out, and then threw his two grenades at them. He rejoined the section to collect two more grenades. The remaining section, that had been giving covering fire for the withdrawal, were still on the summit, so Thaman shouted to them to leave. He then seized a Bren gun and ran to the top of the hill in full view of the enemy and emptied two magazines at them. In the process, he was killed.

On 19 December 1945 in Delhi, the Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell presented Thaman Gurung's mother with her son's VC.

See p. 12



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from p. 11

... was common virtue.

Rifleman Bhanbhakta Gurung, VC (1921-)

Place and date of action: Burma, 5 March, 1945



Havildar Bhanbhakta Gurung of Pahlpu, Gorkha, enlisted in the 3rd battalion, 2nd Gurkha rifles.

Bhanbhakta's platoon was attacking an enemy position known as Snowden East, when they were forced to the ground by heavy machine gun, grenade, and mortar fire. From 75 yards away, a Japanese sniper began inflicting casualties on the section. Without orders, Bhanbhakta Gurung stood up, fully exposed, and killed the enemy sniper with his rifle. In front of Bhanbhakta's platoon was a Japanese trench connected to a series of underground tunnels. He crept forward and lobbed in two grenades, ordering his gunner to fire at the escaping Japanese. The gunner was already dead, so Bhanbhakta ran forward, again without orders, and under continuous machine gun fire, killed the Japanese soldiers occupying enemy foxholes with grenades and bayonet. Then, he took on the Japanese machine gunners. Bhanbhakta threw in smoke grenades, killed two

Japanese with his khukuri as they ran out. One gunner remained, firing away, so Bhanbhakta crawled in and killed him.

After the battle, Bhanbhakta returned to Manipur, and six months after the war was over, he received his VC at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace. In 1945, he was awarded the Star of Nepal. Rifleman Bhanbhakta Gurung took his discharge in 1946, and was given the honorary rank of Havildar. He currently lives in Pokhara.

Havildar Lachhiman Gurung VC (1917-)

Place and date of action: Burma, 12/13 May 1945



Lachhiman Gurung was born in Dahakhm in Chitwan. He joined the 4th Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles.

At Taungdaw, on the western banks of the Irrawaddy, Rifleman Lachhiman was manning the forward-most post of his platoon when 200 Japanese soldiers attacked his company. The enemy began with hurling grenades, three of which landed in Lachhiman's trench. He threw them back, but the third grenade exploded in his hand, blowing off his fingers, shattering his right arm and wounding him severely in the face. Two of his comrades were also badly wounded. Regardless, he fired back at the advancing enemy using his left arm and held his position alone for four hours. The enemy failed to advance past Lachhiman's post. At the end of the battle, Lachhiman had lost the use of his right hand and right eye.

He received the VC from the Viceroy, Field Marshall Lord Wavell on 19 December 1945 at Delhi's Red Fort. His 74-year-old father was carried for eleven days from their village in Nepal to be

present at his son's decoration. Havildar Lachhiman Gurung now lives in Chitwan.



Captain (GCO) Rambahadur Limbu, VC (1939-)

Place and date of action: Borneo, 21 November 1965

Rambahadur Limbu was born in Chyangthapu in Yangrop Thum, Eastern Nepal. He joined the 2nd Battalion, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles.

While in the Bau District of Sarawak, Lance Corporal Rambahadur Limbu was with his company when they discovered and attacked a strong enemy force in the border area. As he led his support group towards the Indonesians, he gained first blood by killing their sentry. They immediately responded with heavy gunfire. He then led his group to a better position but was unable to communicate his intentions to the Platoon Commander because of the deafening noise of grenades and continuous artillery fire. So, he reported personally. As he left his group, two men were seriously wounded. He quickly ran back through a hail of gunfire and carried both men out of danger. Afterwards, he returned to the abandoned machine gun and killed four more enemy men attempting to cross the border.

He received the VC from Queen Elizabeth at an Investiture ceremony in Buckingham Palace in 1985 and was later appointed as a Queen's Orderly Officer. On completing his term of duty, he was made MVO and retired with the honorary rank of Captain. Captain (GCO) Limbu now lives in Dharan.

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Nazis? No, voodoo



Zairean women mourn five killed in an arson fire in Lubeck, Germany, in which neo-Nazis were suspected.

PETAR HADJI- RISTIC

IN SCHILDOW, GERMANY

Three statues of Ganesh collected during diplomatic travels stand in their house in Schildow, a small village just outside Berlin. Just the sort of thing in diplomatic households? Apparently not. Police think the Malaysians wife of German diplomat Michael Köhler was practising voodoo.

Veronica Köhler is the perfect Foreign Service wife—charming, friendly, personable. But in January, police officers investigating how she came to be lying in the carport of her house—delirious, disoriented and bleeding from cuts and bruises—immediately concluded it was the result of cult practice.

Köhler insisted she was the victim of a brutal racist abduction and attack. Wisely, Brandenburg police dropped its theory. But it did question the veracity of Köhler's claim. The race row in Schildow, a little-known village in Brandenburg state, is national news now.

In Brandenburg, rightwing attacks on people dropped to 20 in the first half of this year compared with 36 in the first half of 2000. But across Germany there were 999 such attacks last year, one-third more than in 1999.

The alleged attack on Veronica Köhler was particularly vicious. Köhler says she was bundled into a van by three masked men on 24 January. She was driven to a

shipping container where four neo-Nazis surrounded her, forced open her mouth with scissors and dropped pills into it. She was gagged, her feet were bound and she was ordered to make a Hitler salute. The skinhead gang leader sexually assaulted her, shouting racial insults, as two female accomplices pinned her down.

Köhler lost consciousness and came to outside her front door. Two weeks earlier she had been attacked by a young skinhead wearing a jacket saying 'Proud and White' who kicked at her face, shouting in German "Get lost. I will kill you." She gave police a detailed description of the man and three witnesses who heard her being racially

insulted corroborated her story. Soon after, some Schildow residents scheduled a march for tolerance. A day before it, Köhler was abducted.

"The police told me that there are no Nazis, it's my imagination," Köhler said after five hours of gruelling and, she says, insulting police questioning aimed at making her drop her story on neo-Nazis. Right after the incident, Brandenburg officials briefed the media. *Der Spiegel*, Germany's leading newsmagazine, published three stories on its Internet version praising the official response and raised questions about Köhler's story. The influential newspaper *Bild Zeitung* gave prime space to a story saying investigators ruled out a race attack. Only the Munich-based *Süddeutsche Zeitung* asked why the police never showed Köhler pictures of known rightwing extremists and associates of the first alleged attacker.

Köhler had seen two of the men when they removed their masks but she was never asked to describe them for Identikit pictures.

A psychologist called in by Brandenburg police suggested a foreign wife out of place in a village so different from the glamorous life the couple had earlier led. She was likely appealing for help and had entangled herself in a 'web of lies'. The 'expert' had never met her and ignored statements from friends and neighbours that she was happy.

Köhler has filed complaints and criminal charges against the Brandenburg police and the public prosecutor's office. Over seven million foreigners live in Germany, a vast majority from outside Europe. (Gemini)

OPINION

by NINA KHRUSHCHEVA



Episode Two

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has been pushing his big diplomatic idea. Either the great powers forge new security and arms control agreements with which all can live, or the world will face renewed instability and possibly a new arms race. A corollary to this is his idea that either NATO transforms itself into a security structure Russia can embrace, or suspicion will again increase defence spending in Europe higher than anyone needs.

Putin's ideas don't sit easily with his reputation in the West as a KGB apparatchik or his internal reputation, born of Chechnya, as a hardliner on defence. Coming so soon after NATO planes pounded Yugoslavia, Putin's suggestion about Russia's membership in NATO were shocking: "How could we join NATO after that?" peaceable, ordinary Russians asked.

Most in the West scoff at the suggestion. But Putin is not joking. He is patiently and persistently articulating a coherent vision of the post-Cold War security environment, and is doing so in the face of the most revolutionary proposition international diplomacy has faced since Stalin and Mao.

In proposing to build a defensive system for the US against a rogue missile attack, President Bush is challenging the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of nearly thirty years ago, the very foundations of arms control, international security, and diplomacy itself. Bush's argument is that treaties and detailed arms control and balance of power agreements are superfluous now that Russia and America are no longer enemies. Between friends, apparently, an informal understanding of what people desire is sufficient.

Of course, it is not. The point of security agreements for settled



A former KGB spy is the most credible challenge to DUBYA's bid to be a lawless autocrat.

democracies like those in Europe and America, as well as for infant democracies like Russia and dictatorships like China, is to establish predictability, reducing guessing and the risk of war. Treaties are signed not just because they provide the signatories with standards and means of verification, but also because other countries benefit from knowing what to expect. Economists call this the "reputation effect." Everyone is better off because everyone knows what is promised.

President Bush wants to throw these benefits away. He wants to nullify and avoid not just arms control treaties, but international treaties in general. The Kyoto Protocol might require sacrifice by America's energy guzzling consumers? Undermine it. A permanent international court might indict American soldiers or officials for war crimes? Prevent the UN from establishing it. The international nuclear test ban treaty might prevent the US military from developing new weapons? Don't sign it. Ditto the international convention on germ warfare. Even an international treaty to control trade in handguns seemed to insult the American "right to bear arms."

The Bush administration seeks unbounded diplomatic freedom. When it suits American interests, the US will even embrace multilateral agreements. US State Department's director of policy planning, Richard Haass, last week named this US attitude: *à la carte* multilateralism. Given America's preponderant power today, most of the world sees this as extreme arrogance when they do not, like China, see it as outright dangerous. What is national missile defence good for, but to increase America's freedom? After all, conventional deterrence still works. Leaders in all the "rogue states" know their societies would cease to exist if they attacked America. The Gulf War demonstrated this. Saddam Hussein possessed missiles and deadly biological agents but did not use them because he was deterred by the implicit threat by former US Secretary of State James Baker that the US would retaliate with all necessary means, even nuclear weapons.

The Bush vision of diplomacy proposes a lawless, arbitrary world. That combination of maladies is usually only associated with despotism—the anarchy of lawless rulers. The leader of the world's most powerful democracy seeks an autocrat's freedom from restraint. Our world has become a strange place when the only person credibly challenging the premises behind such a lawless vision is a former KGB spy. (Project Syndicate)

Nina Khrushcheva is a senior fellow of the World Policy Institute.

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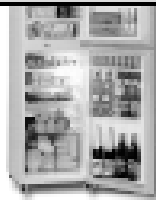
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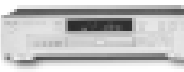
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A new economic geography

JOHANNA SON IN BANGKOK

Hurting from the 1997 crisis and now the US economic slowdown, Asia needs to harness its strengths and learn to tackle liberalisation, said a group of experts—the Asian Wise Persons Group, under a regional think tank—who met in Bangkok last week.

There is potential for a more integrated Asia in the future and greater trade, given the increased trade interest by Japan and the rise of giant economies like China and India, Supachai Panitchpakdi, director-general designate of the WTO and a member of the Asian Wise Persons' Group, said at the end of its first meeting. "The 'economic geography' of Asia is certain to change with the evolving situations in China and India," says Cesar Virata, a former Philippine prime minister. "Their increased participation in regional and global networks will drive change," explains Virata, chair of the seven-member group of former top government and other officials from Asia, formed by the Bangkok-based Asia Strategy Forum.

Liberalisation by China and India could create economic, trade and export potential for neighbouring countries in Asia. That is, they might be economic engines and markets, not the rivals they are often predicted to be. Asia is discovering that the export muscle

that drove its boom for decades can be a weakness. For countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan, some of whose technology exports make up more than a third of total exports—the downturn in this once-booming sector has slashed growth figures for 2001. Half of Asia's trade now occurs within the region.

To take advantage of opportunities that the presence of bigger consuming economies in Asia will throw up, the region must learn to survive in a more globalised economy, experts say. "What was wrong (in 1997) was not openness. What was wrong was the kind of gap between the openness of things like capital accounts and domestic weaknesses in sectors like banking," explains Mitsuo Sato, ex-president of the Asian Development Bank and a member of the Wise Persons' Group.

Virata says it is too early to predict what Asia's economic map will look like, but the emergence of India and China, the only Asian nation unscathed by the current economic downturn in the US, and Japan's recovery are key elements. There are fears that China's joining the WTO would mean more competition for smaller Asian nations. But Virata explains, if China produces more, it would need to import more goods and consume more, presenting an economic opportunity for other



China and India could be Asia's new growth engines.

Asian producers. China, which posted 7.5 percent growth for the first quarter, expects this trend to continue. Gao Shangquan, president of the China Research Society for Restructuring the Economic System, says the country expects growth to hover between 8 to 10 percent in the next decade. Virata also quoted him as saying that the growth of China's imports from Asia has been bigger than its exports to Asia.

Supachai also says that despite its recession, Japan has been showing greater interest in trade-promoting measures, suggesting "more support for more intra-Asian

trade" from the world's second largest economy. Prospects for a "widening marketplace" will improve in China as it gets Most-Favoured Nation status with WTO, and also India in coming years.

Supachai also says the region needs an institution like the proposed Asian Monetary Fund as a lender of last resort to prevent a repeat of the 1997 crisis. Western nations and the IMF opposed it a few years back, fearing it would not be run with fiscal discipline and could displace the IMF. But a currency swap agreement is already being used by Asian countries in need of foreign currency. (IPS)

NATIONALISM GOES TO THE MOVIES



TEENA GILL IN CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

When Thailand's most expensive film, *Suriyothai*, opens 17 August, audiences will see scenes of epic battles against marauding armies from neighbouring Burma.

In times of economic crisis, diverting attention to imaginary enemies has become a national pastime in Thailand. Since the 1997 financial crisis, the economic situation has worsened, with rising unemployment, poverty and cost of living. Over 1.5 million have lost their jobs, an additional three million are living in poverty, bringing the national total to 10 million or one-sixth of the population. Within two years of the crisis the income of the poor had fallen by 25 percent and the cost of living risen by 40 percent.

But that's not what you see in Thai cinemas, or read in the Thai media. Two movies in the last two years and one now in production depict Thai heroism against bellicose Burmese and Laotian armies. The \$6.5 million *Suriyothai* portrays the heroism of the mid-16th century Queen Suriyothai, who dies in battle helping her King Chakrabhat fight the invading Burmese army. *Bang Rachan*, last year's big hit, is about Thai villagers fighting to protect the ancient capital Ayutthaya, 74 km north of Bangkok, which was ransacked by the Burmese in 1767. *Thao Suranaree*, now in production, glorifies the wife of an early 19th century Thai governor and her supposed role in defeating the most revered Laotian king, Chao Anuwong.

When Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra visited Laos last May, Lao leaders conveyed their displeasure over the film and in July, the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party's central propaganda committee threatened to ban all Thai goods and publish a new textbook telling "the truth."

In lavish films and the pages of the popular press, "history" is helping restore Thailand's bruised confidence.

The Thai broadcast and print media have extensively covered and glorified these popular films, and also played a pivotal role in perpetuating existing prejudices about 'other' populations, including hill tribes and Burmese migrants. Of Thailand's over one million migrant workers, 800,000 are from Burma and hill tribe communities number over 900,000. Most have lived in Thailand for generations, but have no citizenship rights. The question is always: are they with us or against us? Stereotypes of Burmese and often Laotians as cruel and aggressive have

been part of popular culture since the late 19th and early 20th century when the modern Thai nation-state was being created.

A Thailand-based Burmese journalist, Min Zin says the Thais are fearful of losing their identity because of the economic downturn and are looking to lay the blame elsewhere. "The 'fact' that Burma is our arch enemy has been institutionalised and fictionalised in movies. Today this fictionalisation is out of control," says Dr Sunait Chutintaranon, historian and respected Burma expert at Chulalongkorn University. Dr Thanet Aphornsuvan, a history lecturer at Thammasat University, Bangkok, says "We are entering a new era of media nationalism." Pranom Somwong, a law student and activist for migrant workers' issues in Chiang Mai, said when he went to see *Bang Rachan* he saw most viewers weeping. "To them this was for real. The misunderstandings about history and people that such films can create is enormous."

Especially when the historical validity of these films *Suriyothai* and *Thao Suranaree* is itself often questionable. Academics have deconstructed these legends in the past, and suggested that there is little historical evidence to support them. The film's director Chatrichalerom Yokol admits no one knows what actually happened almost 500 years ago. "Anything to do with history is open to interpretation and criticism," says the 57-year-old director. "It's impossible that everyone will have the same interpretation of events, reach the same conclusions." Pranom Somwong disagrees: "All history comes from somewhere," she says. "We need to ask 'who owns this history?'" (Gemin)

In the Khmer web

PHNOM PENH - Finally, the Cambodian Senate has approved a draft bill creating a UN-assisted international tribunal to try former Khmer Rouge leaders for their role in the deaths of an estimated one million Cambodians between 1975 and 1979, due to executions, forced labour and famine. Among the sticking points between Phnom Penh and the UN are the selection and quota of international judges, guarantees for the carrying out of possible sentences handed out by the special court and the applicability of amnesty given to key Khmer Rouge leaders accused of crimes against humanity.

Lao Mong Hay, director of the Khmer Institute for Democracy, says there are too many people within the ruling coalition government of Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP), as well as the royalist Funcinpec, who would be embarrassed by any revelations of the various deals and counter-deals they have struck with the Khmer Rouge over the years. And CPP officials like to point out that the UN and the US have little credibility because of their past support for the group—the Khmer Rouge occupied Cambodia's seat in the UN General Assembly when western governments refused to recognise Hun Sen's Vietnam-supported government. Researchers say Cambodia has witnessed other crimes against humanity—pogroms against migrant Vietnamese by US-backed dictator Lon Nol in 1971, and US/ UN carpet bombing of the Cambodian countryside between 1970 and 1975. (IPS)

Deuba has already said that he's there to see through Koira's 14-point agenda. Do you (Maoist leaders) want to face reality or are just going to sit back in the hope that Deuba will make you the president of a republic? True, honest communists should study the agenda and analyse it honestly. I am an ordinary member of the Maoist organisation and feel that I should ask my leaders to at least find out what the followers of their party think about dialogue between the government and the Maoists.

It was in Deuba's earlier term as prime minister that the Maoist uprising began in Rolpa. The oppression under Deuba's government drove the peace-loving, free and open Maoist organisation underground. Party members still remember vividly the oppression and the cruelty of Deuba's regime. The Maoist organisation spoke against the locals supported us.

Even Singapore

Singapore - As Singapore's economy suffers from an overseas slump in demand for its key products, including electronics and e-commerce solutions, job openings here have fallen 11 percent from December 2000 to March 2001. Facing a "technical recession"—some say statistics do not yet show a "real" recession, economic contraction for two successive quarters on a year-to-year basis—the Singapore government last week introduced a \$1.3 billion (1.4 percent of GDP) "off-budget" package to help businesses cut costs and increase job prospects for workers. Finance Minister George Yeo said the measures are considerable but not as drastic as the \$6.2 billion given out in November 1998 to counter the effects of the Asian crisis.

Singapore Confederation of Industries (SCI) President Robin Lau told the *Straits Times* the government should consider doing more as "today's situation is much worse than 1998." Unlike other countries in the region whose economic and financial problems are obscured by political and social issues, Singapore's second economic recession since independence is a consequence of the sharp reduction in external demand. "No package of government spending can neutralise the global downturn, the electronics slump, or the regional problems which are the root causes of the slowdown," says Minister Yeo. (IPS)

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"Sacrifice for what, comrades?"

Deshanter, 5 August

Right now, everybody—the opportunists, the South-leaning, the Congress, the UML, the Maoists—are saying publicly that Deuba just needs to wave his magic wand and all our problems will be solved. Perhaps they just want to prove that and it was why they were clamouring for Koira's resignation. They are certainly leaving no stone unturned in trying to prove their point.

But the real question is: Are we in this situation because of Koira or because of the state of our politics? Is it possible that Koira's exit and Deuba's entry will solve everything? Because, after all, the political configuration remains pretty much the same. The party that Koira led continues to remain in the same position, only now it is led by Deuba. The changes that Deuba will want to bring in, won't they be formulated, studied and passed by the Congress? Or will they be things dreamt up by the palace, the UML and the Maoists?

Deuba has already said that he's there to see through Koira's 14-point agenda. Do you (Maoist leaders) want to face reality or are just going to sit back in the hope that Deuba will make you the president of a republic? True, honest communists should study the agenda and analyse it honestly. I am an ordinary member of the Maoist organisation and feel that I should ask my leaders to at least find out what the followers of their party think about dialogue between the government and the Maoists.

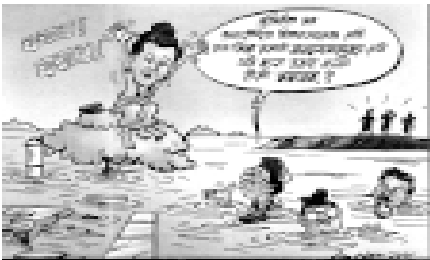
It was in Deuba's earlier term as prime minister that the Maoist uprising began in Rolpa. The oppression under Deuba's government drove the peace-loving, free and open Maoist organisation underground. Party members still remember vividly the oppression and the cruelty of Deuba's regime. The Maoist organisation spoke against the locals supported us.

The peoples' struggle and the Maoist campaign started in February 1996. The campaign was started to wipe out the present political structure. Dil Bahadur Ramtael was martyred in the second week of February and this was followed by a long list of martyrs, leaders and followers including alternate central committee member Suresh Wagle. The entire party was attracted by the idea of a "Republic of Nepal" and we were all willing to sacrifice our lives for it. It is because of these sacrifices that the party has managed to reach the high position it finds itself in today.

Between 1996 and 2001, a lot of water has flowed in the Mechi and Mahakali rivers. On the one hand, during this time a great struggle took place between the present political forces and the Maoists. On the other, the Maoist leadership started cheating the very people it was supposed to represent and started taking one wrong decision after another. The party used the people to strengthen itself, but at the same time made many wrong decisions based on certain party members' selfish and personal judgements and requirements. The philosophy that leadership needed to be centralised, Prachanda's photo sessions, making ordinary people quote his aphorisms and swear by them—these actions have created a cult.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Why are some people saying that they won't talk without a constitutional monarchy and multi-party system, while others are arguing that they will not talk unless there is a republic. Huh Bamdev?"
-Question that CPN-ML general secretary Bam Dev Gautam says King Gyanendra asked him. Kantipur, 8 August.



"Help! Help!" cries the Buddha.
"My lord," answer the politicians, "isn't it time we think about begging for funds to make a harbour alongside the international airport?"

Nepal Samacharpatra, 5 August

Maoist logic

Haank, 1 August

Excerpts from an interview with Narayan Sharma, MP Humla, RJM

Is it true that the Maoists kidnapped you in Humla?

Yes, they kidnapped me on the night of 24 June in Humla. I was sick at the time and was sleeping at home. I had been advised complete bed-rest, but they did not care. They dragged me to a place some distance from my home and began a political discussion. Since they could not convince me with their arguments, they threatened to kill me. Their arguments were crude, they were ill-mannered and illogical and it occurred to me that I was speaking to hoodlums and not people who have mastered politics. I did not realise that I would have argue with crude hooligans. That day I witnessed an inhumane and anti-national group at work.

A 'dry' nation

Janadesh, 31 July

The All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) is preparing for its fourth national convention. One of the group's objectives is to make this an alcohol-free country starting 18 August, Nepal must be made an alcohol-free nation.

They have requested people with investments in distilleries and breweries to withdraw and invest their money elsewhere. A party press release says: "We have decided to make national this program that was until now restricted to the local levels. We would like to inform people that if they do not heed this directive, action will be taken against them."

At a recent meeting of its central committee, the ANWA (R) announced that it would work for the economic uplift of the people by carrying out awareness programs, plans to increase the income levels of the poorest, and adult literacy programs. The group will also open childcare centres, construct health posts, and train health assistants. They will strengthen family courts and make them more effective.

The ANWA (R) convention is to be held in mid-November in Chitwan. The association wants to form district committees in all 75 districts before the convention and hopes to have 600,000 women members and 8,000 volunteers. It estimates that there will be roughly 500 participants and observers.

Defence clueless

Where has the army sent to rescue 69 policemen and capture the arms looted by Maoists gone? What are they doing? The people are curious and the government does not tell. Is the information blackout planned?

As long as Koira was prime minister, we were kept informed about the mobilisation of the army and its various activities through daily press releases by the Home and Defence ministries. Since Deuba has taken over, there has been a total news blackout. No one knows anything about the kidnapped policemen. No one knows if the army is still there or whether they have returned to their barracks. If they are still there, what are they doing? The government



does not think it necessary to inform the people.

Sources tell us the army is still in Budagaon, but apparently the Defence Ministry does not know what it is doing there. Ministry officials say the army has not given them new information. Even the Defence Ministry's spokesperson has no clue. He says the army is now in the areas where the IDSP is being implemented. But he does not know anything about the army that was sent to rescue the 69 policemen.

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ML-UML, unite

Jana Aastha, 1 August

...It is said that the UML and ML will soon unite, although this may take some time because of the personal differences and vested interests of leaders. Many people in the UML and ML want the parties to unite.

The split has hurt both parties badly, as frustrated grassroots workers have moved towards the Maoists. Their vote banks have also been seriously affected. General consensus is that if the two cannot unite before the next year's local elections, the few party workers they have left will join the Maoists.

The UML is much larger than the ML in terms of the size of its cadre, but it does not have strong leaders and consequently, its followers are either plain ineffective, or defectors from other parties. The ML also feels the need for new followers—it cannot carry on forever with a few die-hard leaders like Sahana Pradhan, Bam Dev Gautam, CP and RK Mainali, Ashok Rai—even if they are workaholics. Bam Dev still has the power to motivate workers, people still flock to hear his speeches. The UML won the 1996 local elections because of Bam Dev, this time it may lose because he is not around. This is why the UML is ready to bring the ML back to the fold, whatever the cost. They have realised they cannot take on the Congress single-handedly.

The communists have a majority, or at least a foothold in many organisations. Despite this, they have never been able to fully control any of them, because of fragmentation and personal interests. If they can come together again, they will be a party to be reckoned with, and everyone will benefit.



LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Subject: SAVE LUMBINI - THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Right Honourable Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee

Government of India

New Delhi

India.

The entire Nepalese community is deeply disturbed by reports that India started building a Rusiawal-Khurda Lautan barrage over the Dano River just 200 meters away from the Nepal-India border, and about 6 km south-east of Lumbini around four months ago. The water level of the river at the barrage area is just 2 meters lower than the surface height of Lumbini. The blockade of the river flow could inundate the Lumbini areas any time after the barrage is constructed.

Nepal Heritage Society a nonpartisan and non-political organization is working for preservation of cultural heritage through the teachings of Lord Buddha-the light of Asia.

The entire Nepalese community is particularly concerned about the draft of an official report on the probability of the 2,500-years old Buddhist relics being submerged. This report has further been substantiated by the on-the-spot study being carried out recently by two experts of UNESCO who came to rebuild Mayadevi temple under Nepal-UNESCO cooperation programme.

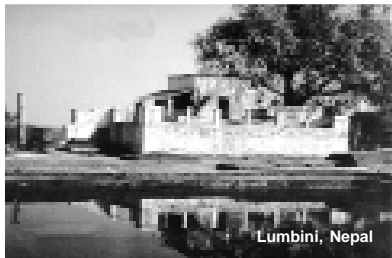
Nepal Heritage Society and several other conservation oriented agencies and Buddhist organizations associated with it has information that Lumbini - the birthplace of Lord Buddha which has been inscribed by UNESCO in the World Heritage List in 1997 is under serious threat, of submersion following construction of Risiawal-Khurda Lautan barrage.

Paragraph 24 of the joint communique issued at the close of our then premier Girija Prasad Koirala visit to India on August 3, 2000 clearly said "Nepal and India shared a rich cultural heritage and there were a large number of cultural sites which were of importance to the people of the two countries, the two Prime Ministers agreed that joint efforts, both at Governmental and non-governmental levels, to conserve such cultural heritage sites would be mutually beneficial."

The entire Nepalese community understands that the people in both sides of Nepal and India are opposed to the construction of this barrage which threatens their live and properties. Moreover, the

construction of the 10-Km long earthen embankment east of Russiyal-Khurd Lautan barrage and south of Bhairahawa, the district headquarters of Rupendehi district of Nepal, will block the natural flow of waters in the Dano, River and its tributaries like Dandakhola. Experts fear that the barrage and its supportive embankment

Rules and the United Nations Convention on River and International laws and practices which require consultations between two countries before any construction is undertaken within the range of 8 kilometer from the international border."



Lumbini, Nepal

territories have been inundated and people living in that area have been rendered homeless resulting in great hardship and difficulties to the resident of that area. We, therefore, demand that all activities relating to the unilateral construction of the barrage should be stopped forthwith to prevent submergence of Lumbini the World Heritage site and the adjoining villages of Nepal .

Nepal and India enjoy the best of relations since ancient time . Religion and culture are the hallmark of our traditional and close friendly ties. Lumbini- the birth place of Lord Buddha, the great son of Nepal, Who is also the light of Asia and perhaps of the whole world. Any attempt to change this historical and cultural structure will be considered by international community as a crime 1,000 times greater than what the Talibans did in Afghanistan by destroying the Buddhist statues there some time back for which both Nepal and India had strongly condemned it.

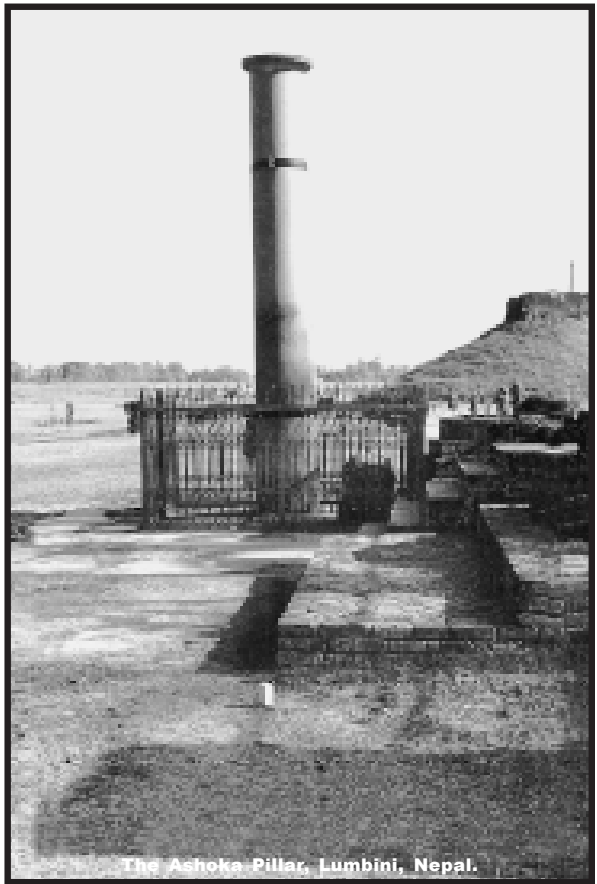
In view of our close, cordial and traditional friendly longstanding bonds of friendship through thick and thin between Nepal and India, it is extremely sad and painful that this unilateral construction of Ressiyl- Khurd Lautan barrage to threatens the very existence of Lumbini itself- which is the cultural property of not only Nepal but of the whole world. This action in any case, can not be considered as a friendly act nor in accordance with the professed declaration of friendship by India.

It is indeed unfortunate that the relationship between Nepal and India received a setback by this unilateral action of Government of India despite the strong and age old bonds existing between the people of two countries.

Finally, we urge Government of India to take Immediate and decisive action to dismantle that barrage and ensure once again the age old ties of lasting friendship based on mutual trust, and friendship and respect for each other's feelings of brotherhood between the people of our two countries and their cultural heritage.

The entire Nepalese community therefore, strongly urge the Government of India to immediately stop the construction of that barrage and dismantle those already constructed to bring about a peaceful solution of the present crisis.

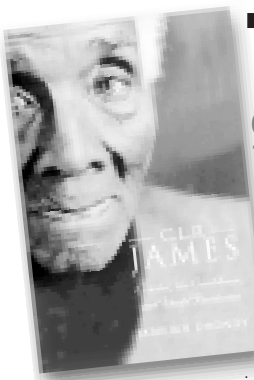
The entire Buddhist community has confirmed that thousands of hectares of



The Ashoka Pillar, Lumbini, Nepal.

will inundate over 200 villages of the 18 Village Development Committees effecting one million people in Marchawar. Majority of the densely populated and fertile area of the district will come under the water after the construction of the barrage.

We understand "The unilateral construction of the said barrage is against the Helsinki



THE GREAT LIBERATION FARCE

CLR James, one-time Trotskyist, full-time connoisseur, came to realise that in the third world, communist—and Maoist—promises are a confidence trick.

content themselves with boasting about the score in yesterday's Sharjah match, amongst people who study Marxism, and not many others.

Books are still a marginal interest in the west and I am interviewed on radio and by the dailies and weeklies of Britain. They ask about his philosophy of cricket as civilisation, politics, the basis of democratic discipline in the colonial world, and art and then they ask: was he really a Marxist?

The answer is yes, the best! CLR James was born in 1901 and died in 1989. He was a Trinidadian Negro. He came to Britain in 1932, got involved in anti-

colonial politics, became a Marxist without reading any Marx, had enough sense to reject the Communist Party as beneath intellectual contempt and joined, God help us, the Trotskyists of the time. He wrote a couple of very important books before 1938 when he was sent by the British Trotskyist movement to the USA on a lecture tour for a few months. He stayed 15 years. He had a conference with Trotsky himself in 1938 in Mexico.

All that's in the book, but there's more. He got fed up of Trotskyism and began to read Marx. He came to the conclusion that parties that purported to be communist and socialist were no

more than bourgeois bureaucracies seeking to gain a foothold in the power structures of failing democracies. He thought the only really Marxist revolution would happen in highly developed capitalist societies such as America. He dedicated books to reading and interpreting the signs and the potential. In Grenada or Bengal, all that a communist party could offer the people was good government and all talk of socialism and communism in those circumstances was a confidence trick on the people. He predicted the fall of the Soviet Union because collective agriculture was a new form of slavery and the workers ownership of the

means of production in the Soviet republics was a sick joke. His one practical tenet was a maximum democracy—the people must say though their cultural instincts, their spontaneous actions and their concerted assemblies. It makes him unique, I say in the interviews, a real Marxist, a rare thing. The partywallahs of surviving communist states and enclaves have contributed nothing to Marxism or our understanding of where this world will go.

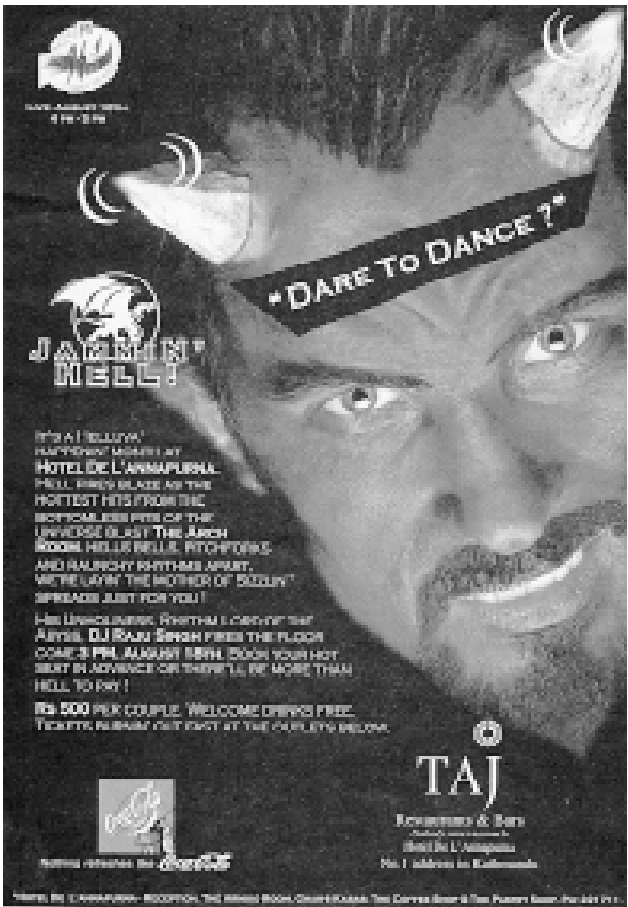
Yes, there are dumb idealists. My heart bled this week when I heard of Comrade Si Zalvo of the Nepalese Maoists who spoke to the BBC. He said he was not simply fighting for the liberation of Nepal. That was only the beginning. He was fighting for the liberation of whole world.

Good stuff, Si, I would love to be liberated. God knows I suffer

from several oppressions that bourgeois society imposes on me, but I have no faith at all in your doing anything for the British working class or for the writers of Indian origin with children to feed in Britain. What's more, I think that comrade Si Zalvo would have difficulty operating in Mumbai or convincing the oppresses of that city that he and his philosophy were their saviours, leave aside coming to the UK and liberating me. Would he get past immigration? I realise it is futile for me to advise him to pack it in and get a life. He and his party could win in Nepal and then he could be a minister and have a chauffeur driven jeep and free trips to Beijing on an aeroplane. The peasants of Nepal would revere him as a liberator and then he'd forget all about liberating me and the rest of us in the UK. Sob! (TO)

FARRUKH DHONDY

This week Weidenfeld and Nicholson published my biography of CLR James, a man known in Britain, in the Caribbean, in the circles that perpetuate Black Studies in America, amongst people who care about the history, lore and literature of cricket and don't



LANGUAGE LESSONS

by LEAH SCHULTE



Do you say *khaanu* too?

The #1 Most Commonly Used Nepali Word.

In all languages, certain words are far more frequently used than others. I'm sure a panel discussion from eminent psychologists, sociologists, and linguists would result in extremely variant and interesting reasons for this phenomenon. In Nepali, discounting the ubiquitous *Namaste*, I believe the most common word is the verb *khaanu*, in its conjugated forms (not to be confused with a close kin, *khaannu*, to dig, which wouldn't even make top ten). Recently though, *khaanu* is getting some competition from fast risers like *Maobadi* and *bhuinchhaalo* (earthquake).

In the village, there is the routine "Khaana khaanubhayo?" Initially, this question irritated me to no end. Should we also ask passers-by if they've attended to other bodily functions? Then I realised the query actually approximates something "Hey, how are you doing?"—more an acknowledgement of someone than an attempt to gather information. A civility, I believe such things are called. No one expects you to discuss your *tarkari*, how great or horrible or nonexistent the *achar* was, the price of kerosene, or the difficulty of collecting firewood for cooking.

As eating is a popular and income-generating activity amongst the tourist population, *khaanu* also gets a big workout with visiting bidesis. "Ke ke khaanuhunchha?" (What will you eat?) is likely not understood by short-term trekkers. But the meaning is implied when patient lodge-owners hand a stained menu and battered notebook with dot pen for trekkers to write their order. Multiply that event by the number of meals or snacks per day per visitor head and it is obvious (despite the declining tourism industry) that the *khaanu* frequency is pretty high. Further multiply that value of *khaanu* usage by the kitchen staff, the wait-staff, and the clean-up staff and it's easy to see what a record-breaker *khaanu* is in Nepal. Factor in all the *khaanu*-inclusive conversation from tea-serving peon staff and tea-imbibing officials and

guests in offices throughout the country and it is simply mind-boggling. Another angle for that panel discussion would be the popularity of *khaanu* over *pinu*. Even cigarettes and drugs get *khaanu*-ed! It is even applied for some non-oral activities. Once at a shop in Kathmandu, I rubbed on lotion and the *sahuni* commented, "khaayo", as we watched my perpetually dry bideshi skin absorb it.

Khaanu also pops up in countless non-human contexts. During monsoon, the kids shout "Juka khaayo" (leeches ate), we apply stain to furniture in field offices because "Dhusi khaancha" (mold eats), someone with a swollen cheek says "Kira khaayo" (bug ate) in profound misery. Recently, when joking with a lodge owner after discovering she had a solar system installed, I asked when she was next going to get a television set. She responded she'd stick to the radio as "TV dherai bijuli khaanchha."

Khaanu is also frequently spoken in combination with *paisa* or *rupia*. The headmaster/policeman/leader/government official/committee member/consultant/priest (subject) + from or for the commission/school fee/processing service/ donation/building project/unfinished temple (object) + conjugated form of *khaanu* (verb) is proper grammatical structure in Nepali. The buzz about *Maobadi* is old hat, and *Khaobadi* comes close. This political entity threatens, scares, extorts, loots—eats—falsely under the guise of being Maoist.

So, what is the significance of having *khaanu* as the #1 most commonly used Nepali word? As the panel has curtailed their debate because they are *khaanu*-ing tea, it's futile to wait for their outcome. But I think it reveals some innate wisdom. Living things consume, they consume different things and in different ways, and some times more than their fair share. Fancy language won't hide this basic fact of life.



NEPAL HERITAGE SOCIETY

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

SNAPPING OF PHOTOGRAPHY STRICTLY IS NOT ALLOW

While flying back to Nepal these days, it is indeed deeply satisfying and reassuring to see that His Majesty's Govt has taken full cognisance of the changed law and order situation in our country, and has put into force its new Public Security Regulation 2058 and banned the taking of video or still photographs "at Tribhuvan International Airport and above Nepal". A notice to this effect was mandatorily read to passengers just after the flight attendants collected our headsets, even though the movie *Shrek* had not yet finished. So mean.



On landing, I was happy to note that the Department of Immigration has also tightened entry procedures into Nepal so that only the stout-hearted will henceforth want to come in. Terrorists without visas have to wait in three lines each lasting 30 minutes on average: one to change money, the next to apply for a visa, and third to clear immigration. They have to fill out many forms with deeply private questions like:

Name:

Nationality:
Date of Birth:
Date of Expiry:

What this means is that most tourists who want to destabilise Nepal and push it into a state of anarchy will be frustrated enough to give up after the first queue, and head back home in the same plane that brought them here.

Downstairs, the Department of Strange Customs is also doing its bit to make Nepal a safer place. Its new Customs Declaration Form now has a list of contraband items that His Majesty's Govt regards as being a threat to national security, and will not allow into the country. For instance, you are not allowed any longer to bring in more than one each of the following items: a tricycle, a perambulator, a binocular, used linen, and a Molotov cocktail. Walking through the green channel with more than one of each of these items will result in the immediate confiscation of the tricycles in question which will be destroyed later in a controlled and safe explosion. Perambulator smugglers will then be forced to eat another helping of tapioca pudding.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Jivan's Humla



something about it, and the fastest way he knew how was to join politics.

Today, Jivan is the elected chairman of the Humla District Development Committee. While campaigning for local elections, Jivan promised two things to his voters: a road linking Simikot to Tibet so that basic needs would be cheaper and more accessible, and building latrines. "We needed to do first things first."

an.

When Jivan Shahi graduated from Budanikantha School in 1982, he wanted to desperately to become a pilot. A few years later, one of the proudest moments in his life: getting a private pilot's license from a flying school in Seattle. Jivan returns to Nepal, finds there is a long waiting list to join Royal Nepal Airlines (this was the days before private airlines).

And by this point in his life, Jivan had got tired of Nepalis who didn't know where Humla was, or confused it with Jumla. And there was always an undercurrent of condescension, as if to say, "Oh yes, that remote place where there is never enough food to eat." Jivan decided he would do

explains Jivan.

Humla used to have one of the lowest development indicators among Nepal's 75 districts with an infant mortality rate nearly three times the national average. The reason so many children died was because of infections caused by poor sanitation, and respiratory illness due to breathing sooty fires indoors during four winter months of the year. So the next thing Jivan pushed were smokeless stoves, and now he has installed a 10 kilowatt microhydro plant near the district headquarters.

"We have the resources, we have the people, with a little bit of help from outside we can make Humla self-sufficient,"

says Jivan. Half the 65 km highway to Tibet is complete and work is progressing with help from a UN food-for-work programme. After that, Simikot can be the base camp for a much shorter route for tourists and pilgrims to visit Mt Kailash and Mansarovar. Jumla's steep and arid mountains will always make it a food deficit area, but with income from tourism and other cash crops Jivan thinks Humilis don't have to depend anymore on handouts.

Jivan is in Kathmandu this week on an emergency mission because food supplies are running dangerously low, and flights carrying grain have been hampered by bad weather.

Jivan is that rare breed of educated Nepalis who refused to emigrate or live in the comfort of Kathmandu. He has chosen to return to his village to uplift his people. Jivan is modest, and he speaks softly. But his voice carries the conviction of his belief: "After



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