



The Maoists and their mentors now have a choice: come above ground, or fight to the finish.

Maoists leaders entered Rolpa through Dang avoiding the motorable road, and trekked through Holeri and Ghartigaon to Mirul. The rebels had hired three horses for their leaders. All senior Maoist party leaders and chiefs of front organisations are in Rolpa this week for the equivalent of a party

- an interim government,
- a new constitution, and
- the institutionalisation of a republic.

At the same meeting the Maoists had decided to intensify the formation of village and district level "peoples' organisations", and also regional and central level cells. The other decision was to try to secure the support of all leftist parties to set up a republic. The peoples' organisation has expanded, but efforts in Siliguri to unify the left into one force faltered as all leftist parties except the

"It is unusual for the high command to go to the larger party to get its decisions endorsed," a leftist analyst told us. "The decisions in Rolpa will show which way the talks with government will go." So far, gauging from the outcome at Godavari on 30 August, the mood is surprisingly conciliatory.

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Yes they have been changed but some things are still around. Like the nails I had struck on the wall (laughs). I felt nostalgic and said to myself, "Oh! This was where I used to hang my *pote* six years ago". But all this reflects on the system not on the inhabitants of

A candid talk with Arzu Rana, prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's wife, on everything from the curtains in Baluwatar to land reform.



the house. If they'd take my advice which my husband thinks is too frank, the job of upkeep should be contracted out to a private group. Now in Baluwater there are more than 50 support staff but nobody to supervise them. It depends entirely on the prime minister's wife or daughter to get them going.

Sounds like our country in a microcosm...

Yes, if this is the state of the prime minister's residence, it reflects the state of the country. Wires running all over the place, things broken, never repaired, hundreds of old things lying around. These are small housekeeping points but they tell a lot. The old dish antenna is on the lawn because as I was told you can not dispose it as trash but have to put it on a truck, take it to some government storehouse and account for it. I told them that all the costs involved doing that was a waste, but rules are rules, and the old things continue to pile up.

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ANIMAL FARM

We are outdoing Orwell. This is getting to resemble Animal Farm. And the doublespeak is getting out of hand.

Rightist parties like the RPP are calling for an asset limit, the centre right has announced revolutionary land reform. What are the poor Unified Marxist-Leninists to do? Its supremo whose name is synonymous with the country had the brilliant idea to call for a Rs1 million cash cap on citizens.

With Nepali capital flowing out of the country like our monsoon-gorged rivers, these shenanigans spooked an already panicked business community. Nepalis have once more shown that they are their own worst enemy. If the politicians all meant what they uttered, you could at least say: right, these guys really want a socialist paradise. But they don't mean what they say. Like the rhesus alpha males at Pashupati, they are competing with each other to show who has a redder butt.

The Maoists, who triggered this paroxysm of political fundamentalism in the mainstream, are in a retreat to think things over in their Rolpa redoubt. They have a lot to think over. The revolution has gone much better than they had imagined in their wildest dreams. Too well, in fact. The main problem for the top leadership now is to sustain the momentum, keep things under control and have viable fall-back options in case the chain-reaction leads to meltdown.

If such things are allowed in a Maoist milieu, some soul-searching must be going on in Rolpa. Was the Prachanda Path a mistake? Was the post-massacre effort to incite an urban uprising too hasty? Did the Siliguri reunions undermine the party's carefully nurtured anti-Indian image? It is now clear that the Maoist movement is not as monolithic as it has been made out to be. There are at least three broad categories of cadre:

- well-read doctrinaire ideologues at the top who are mostly hill bahuns
- mid-level comrades mainly from the janajatis for whom the .303 gives a heady sense of power they never had before
- grassroots goons who have joined the revolution because they were on the run from the system anyway

The top leadership feels it is not entirely in control of what happens at the local level. When the revolution was young, most actions were populist. Punishment was often brutal, but villagers nodded silently when heartless loan sharks or ruthless zamindars were targeted. As the network grew, the leadership lost more and more control of what its cadre did. Part of this was a result of the underground party's loose and decentralised structure, put deliberately in place to lend flexibility and prevent infiltration. Lately, it is getting difficult to distinguish between a maobadi and a khaobadi. In the hinterland, villagers have stopped trying to figure out who is who.

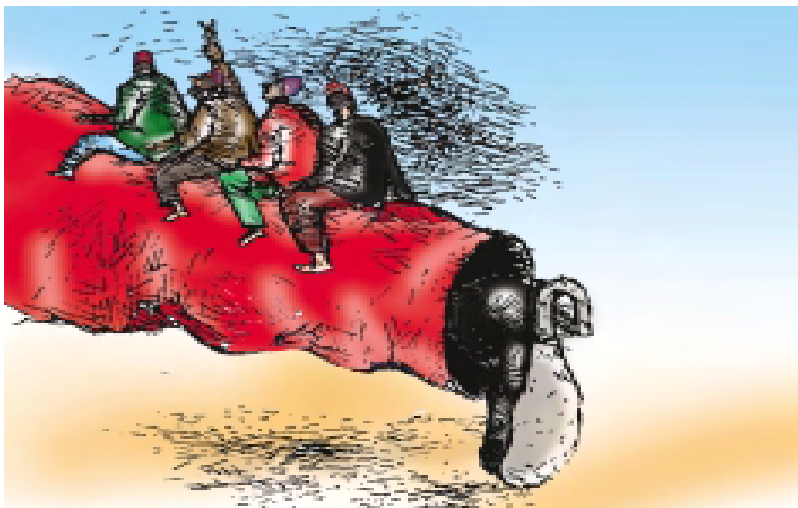
Extortion is indiscriminate, Maoist platoons have to be fed by subsistence farmers, anyone walking on a village trail can be the victim of intimidation. The build-up to the Kathmandu rally on 21 September has come to resemble an open door-to-door donation racket.

Many of the official pronouncements by the Maoist leadership now seems to be targeted at mid and lower level cadre. The message is: we are not giving up the revolution, and you will enjoy the fruits when we come to power. The exaggerated sloganeering about a peoples' republic in speeches at Maoist mass meetings also point to internal posturing.

One thing the Maoists have done is pulled the entire political spectrum to the left: exposing middle- and upper middle-class bigotry and insecurity. The Nepali Congress was forced to come back to its prototype socialist agenda. Its land reform proposal pinched where it hurt, and it brought out the truth in more ways than one.

The UML and ML have now given up trying to re-unite. But the UML leadership post-Siliguri has been surprisingly vocal in exposing what it says is the backing that the Maoists and their republican agenda are getting from India. With this, the UML hopes to win back its cadre from the Maoist fold by showing that the comrades were Indian puppets all along.

We will get some indication of where all this is headed on 10 September when the Maoists are expected to announce the conclusions of their party plenum at a big gathering in Libang. But there can only be two outcomes: continue the talks, or resume the bloodbath. For the Maoist leadership, negotiations offer a face-saving exit strategy and a realistic stab at power in some kind of an interim government. Prachanda and Baburam know better than anyone else that the alternative is a final and bloody showdown with the king and his army.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Greatness and goodness

Some leaders are born great, some achieve greatness, and still others have greatness thrust upon them. Others just try to be good leaders.

Where BP Koirala alive, he would have been two years younger on his 87th birthday than Dr Dilli Raman Regmi who died last week. Regmi never forgot to mention his biological seniority whenever BP's name cropped up in conversation. And BP's name came up quite often because the two had worked together to establish the Nepali National Congress in 1947 in India. When it merged with the Nepal Democratic Congress to form the Nepali Congress, Regmi chose to remain alone and named his outfit Nepali National Congress Party—an organisation that he headed until his death on 30 August.

BP and Regmi were a study in contrasts. Regmi craved the limelight, while BP seemed to hog it without ever making a conscious effort. Regmi made his throne-like chair and the sterling silver cup-holder from which he sipped tea amused visitors no end. BP took tea from ordinary glasses like everyone else. Regmi made his peace with monarchy and lived to see the reign of five kings. BP fought to keep kingship all his life, but was rewarded with prosecution by three generations of Shah kings. When BP passed away in 1982, the tone of King Birendra's message was almost taunting: "It is natural for us to feel aggrieved at the death of any Nepali." The condolence message issued in the name of King Gyanendra at the death of Regmi was much more dignified, though equally impersonal.

BP had a tumultuous relationship with all the kings he knew and had to work with. King Tribhuvan respected BP, but never trusted him. When the time to appoint a Prime Minister arose, Tribhuvan chose BP's elder brother. King Mahendra envied BP because he thought BP had more popularity at home and higher visibility abroad.



This realisation rankled the king so much, he cultivated BP in private, but worked to undermine him politically. It was BP's resistance that prompted the king to put him behind bars by suspending the constitution and dissolving parliament in December 1960. BP was mystified by this dualism in King Mahendra's behaviour. But there was no personal malice behind Mahendra's moves. To quote Mario Puzo: "It was just business."

Those who wish to rule have to follow the dictates of their ambitions. Mahendra chose his henchmen for loyalty to royalty rather than competence. King Birendra's vision was inspired by Harvard's management gurus. He was hugely impressed by the "development before democracy" model fashioned for the countries of Third World by think-tankers on the Eastern Seaboard. He needed men of competence to establish a royal technocracy. This technocratic school of thought contends that economic growth takes precedence over personal liberty, that economic planning must be performed by experts, that mass mobilisation without the messy process of public participation is possible, and that such policies can best be pursued by an authoritarian but progressive government free from public pressure. In short, it advocates a benevolent dictatorship supported by technocracy a la Lee Kuan Yew. A galaxy of ambitious young men—predictably enough, there was no woman—gathered around the king. The state apparatus came to be guided directly by the re-structured royal palace secretariat. All the king's men were the likes of Dr Mohammed Mohsin, Dr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, Dr Harka Gurung, Dr Ratna Shamsler, Dr Dambar Narayan Yadav, Dr Mohan Man Sainju. They pursued with vigour the Panchayat-era ideology of "let's break open the fountainheads of development."

For these pillars of King Birendra's technocracy, BP was history. The future belonged to the past—the concept of philosopher king guided by the best and brightest of the land selected for their ability. Elections were thought to be an avoidable nuisance in a largely illiterate and extremely poor country. The wretched needed to be pulled out of their misery by the people in the know. Or so thought the ones who thought that they knew how.

King Birendra may have been sincere when he called for the referendum of 1980, but his establishment had become too strong by then to allow him to have his way. BP believed that the king had to play a positive role in the development of democracy in Nepal, which is where he thought the monarchy fit in and where he derived his faith in kingship. But he opposed the paraphernalia of monarchy, and detested the rule of men without ART (accountability, responsibility and transparency) in the palace.

He wanted 'king in parliament' while the courtiers proffered 'king in the palace'. The more BP tried to join hands with the king, the wider became the chasm between him and courtiers who felt threatened. BP proclaimed that the king's neck and his were tied together (perhaps alluding to the dangers of Indira Gandhi's designs in the region). But the palace mandarins denied him entry into the palace—once even on the grounds that his jacket was not the right colour.

King Gyanendra may be tempted to have a go at greatness by restoring the primacy of monarchy. But this may have the unintended effect of undermining the monarchy's longevity. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is aspiring to be great by making all compromises in order to establish peace. It is rather early to pass judgement, but history is replete with examples of unpalatable compromises themselves threatening peace.

Matrika Prasad Koirala and Tulsi Giri too tried to make history, but they ended up being forgotten parts of it. It is Comrade Prachanda's dreams of leaping on to the republican rainbow that we need to be most wary of. A young nation's evolution through the processes of history cannot be artificially compressed. It isn't as easy as a young boy jumping classes from three to seven, and then on to nine, as Comrade Prachanda is reported to have done in school. It can make him either a Kaji Lendup Dorje, or just another Dr Keshar Jung Raymajhi. In either case, the nation stands to lose. BP scrupulously avoided moralising or being judgmental. The lead character in his novel *Modiah*, the grocer's wife, says: "Don't be great." Illusions of greatness prompt people play God, and invite holocausts. Being good exacts a price not everyone is willing to pay, but those who do become truly great. ♦

"Unless we get the systems in place all these progressive new laws are not going to work..."



from p.1

Is it true you are into astrology?

To a certain extent, yes I believe in good vibes. As for astrology, I am a selective believer, I believe when I want to and don't when I don't.

Is Mr Deuba also into it?

Which politician isn't? In Nepal and India, even China. I think most Asian cultures believe in the supernatural. I am not a total believer but have had astrologers telling us our fate from childhood.

What will happen to your social service work now?

This time I thought I will stop working, and even stayed home for one week. But I nearly went mad. There was nothing to do, so I decided to go back to work.

Were you surprised about the result of your recent study on violence against women?

It is very sad, we didn't expect to find such horrible results, like most rape victims being under 19, victims of polygamy being under 40. Those were not our assumptions. We could not say why all that was happening. The incest cases were highest in the so-called higher castes. We've seen that class, caste, education do not make you an exception.

Will the new law relating to property rights change things?

It is a very long road, I don't think major change will come overnight. If the legislation does pass, some things will change. The last time we did anything for women was in 1975 when we changed a rule enabling daughters to inherit. In my own family, my grandfather had many wives, and some of my aunts were the only daughters of the wives and they could not inherit anything. Some had miserable lives while sons from other wives got everything. They changed that, and a lot of daughters benefited. Of course awareness helps, but strategically legal change makes a lot of difference. In the last 10 years, Nepali women have become more vocal. To talk about incest is not easy. We wanted

to do this study when we began Sathi in 1992 but we were too scared that people might call us perverted or mad. We didn't dare do the study then.

You grew up in a Rana family with a sequestered upbringing. How difficult has it been to adjust?
 School was St Mary's and it had a selective crowd, my parents would not send me even to a friend's home until their parents were known. Then I went to another elite college in India, where they had roll calls thrice a day, just to make sure girls were still there. We were served by gloved waiters. Then at 21 I went to Punjab University, and it was the biggest shock of my life. This was the real world. They served food in steel plates, aluminium spoons. There were flies everywhere, they threw chapattis on your plates as if feeding dogs. The bathrooms had cockroaches. It was a real education. When I started working I came across guys who thought I got my job because I was a Rana girl with a pretty face. As long as I was just Arzu everything was fine, the moment I said Rana there used to be a glass wall. It was not easy to make people accept me.

My social work has helped me. It brought me into contact with different kinds of people, and I like meeting them and finding out about their problems. But sometimes I do feel hemmed in, especially returning home after a long hard day and finding a large number of people in front of my house and a drawing room smelling of socks. But I have learnt to live with it.

They're calling you Nepal's Hillary Clinton. Do you have a say in policy-making?

Not much. My husband is very liberal, but is a typical far-West man. Which means you don't ever listen to what your wife says. That is their bottom line. Unconsciously maybe my concerns filter through, but consciously he never listens to me. I have also learnt that if I want him to do something, I must never say this is right and this should be done. He says sarcastically: "Are you saying that because you have a PhD?"

You must have a lot of people coming to you for favours.

Yes, but he never listens.

How about your social service and gender work?

To an extent, on things like caste, gender and discrimination, I talk to him. He will listen. When I went to his district for the first time I was horrified by the caste system. I talked to him about it and he asked me what should he be doing about it—as a social reformer and politician? Now he has helped dismantle many caste barriers. If you know how conservative the far west is, you'll realise what a very bold decision it was.

Did you have a say in the decision?

I don't know whether I had a say because he never told me he was taking that decision, but he had been getting earfuls from me. I used to ask how could this be going on? There has to be a conscious effort to eradicate such beliefs. But it can be an uphill battle. I

think many of our family members are angry with the decision back in Dadelghura. I used to tell them frankly that because my grandmother was a Newar and we Ranis did not care much about caste, I did not care about it. Things have been easy for me because I am an outsider in the family.

You've been with your husband in the highs and lows of his political life. How has he handled it?

I think he has immense internal strength. I say that because I have human failings I get angry at times, and I don't think I have a very large heart. He is ready to forgive anyone for anything. It could be because he was tortured in jail, although he hardly talks about it. He sees only the positive things in life, and it must not be easy for him. It was real battle as you all saw. He didn't have an extensive family to help him, he doesn't have a lot of money but he always had this belief "because I have done a lot for the party, people support me". I used to tell him at times, why don't you break the party and go on your own. His reply was that it took a lot of effort to build it I can't just walk out of it. He's not an extreme personality, he likes to talk to both sides and this makes some people think he is too lenient or forgiving. He thinks there can be no productive gain from being extreme.

Who is advising your husband on day-to-day decisions?

Nobody. He is advising himself. He listens to everybody, to cabinet members, his friends in the Congress but does not take any formal advice. He is a political animal. There is nothing else but politics: no wife, no children, family, house and wealth. He has only one aim in life, he wants to be a good prime minister and leave his mark. He wants to be a man of history. Wealth does not make a difference to him. He does not care where he stays, what he eats. He is ok with saag and

bhat, or with five-star cuisine. The material part is beyond him because after you have suffered a lot I think all that becomes immaterial. So I am surprised when his other colleague are not like him because they have shared common problems and sufferings.

Since he doesn't seem to listen to you about politics, is there a question you want to ask your husband through us?

My only concern for this country is that if systems are not in place—the ideology may be there, the will may be there—implementing what politicians promise will be very difficult. You need to set up a system, a delivery mechanism that works efficiently. So they better start doing their housekeeping. Otherwise all these progressive new laws are not going to work, and nothing will change, no amount of foreign aid will help. My husband says look so far the papers were writing good things about us and bashing the old prime minister, now we are in the hot seat and anything we do will be criticised.

But you're getting a good press...

So far yes, except the Samrakchhan (NT #54) thing in which I was involved. I have resigned now, but my god what a disaster! It is a lesson in how good intentions can go really bad. I think the media reports were also politically motivated. I am very impulsive by nature, and the satisfaction now is that I was not the only one duped, even businessmen were fooled. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Now I realise that to profit from it you have to get into it in the beginning. We have a big problem on our hands with about 5,000 people in the scheme. We are telling the government you better have regulations because we went to the company registrar. We were registered and thought it was fine. I had asked the lawyer if it was legal and he said yes. Personally I did not buy it, because I am a very bad salesman and knew I could not sell to three people.

So your husband doesn't need your help?

In Nepal people don't like to see women meddling. In our country patriarchy is seeped in hearts and minds. ♦

LETTERS

KHANE MUKH

I have to agree with Daniel Lak in "Last orders, please" (#58). The Maoists' agenda is close to that of their much-hated American brethren during America's prohibition era. Washington passed the Prohibition Enforcement Act of 1923 banning the production and sale of alcohol due to pressure from puritanical groups citing social evils. This social experiment did not eradicate the production or sale of alcohol or change the consumption habits of people. It just went underground. Let's not forget the good old Nepali adage, "Khane mukhai junga le chekhdaina" (a moustache doesn't get in the way of eating). When people want to drink and there is money to be made, there will always be somebody to supply them. I wonder what would have happened if Comrade Stalin had banned vodka, or Chairman Mao, rice wine. Both understood the

true meaning of "the opiate of the people."

SN Singh
USA

CAPITAL CAP

A cap on personal property and capital ("Capital fright", #57) can hamper the overall economic development of the nation. Individual initiative is based on personal capital gain: without it there will be brain drain. If political parties in Nepal can distinguish between personal property and liquidity then perhaps we can come up with some taxation methodology. There is a tax on property collected by local government and a capital gain tax i.e. a tax on the interest of liquidity investment, savings in the bank, shares, or bonds collected by the central government. A reasonable tax on capital gain is necessary to manage the national revenue to run a country. If you put cap on the property and capital gain then you

make the country poorer. Think taxation rather than caps.

Prakash Bom
by email

CHICKEN NECK

In criticising Comrade Prachanda ("The Chicken Neck", #57) for taking refuge in the safety and comfort of the stable of his Indian overfords far away from the killing fields authored by himself, CK Lal ignores what Camus once said about Sartre, "It's always easy to be a revolutionary in the bistros of Paris."

Ram Limbu
Manly, Australia

CORRECTION

Samrat Upadhyay never worked at Kathmandu Post as stated in Manjushree Thapa's interview with Samrat Upadhyay "Transcendence in physicality" (#58). -Ed



Not enough to eat

Nepal has seen 15 agriculture ministers, 8 directors and 8 secretaries in the past 11 years. The result: grain production is declining, food imports are growing, and 55 of 75 districts are food-deficit.

National food security takes into account factors like increased food production, better physical access to food and markets, increased and diversified income and employment opportunities and better health and nutrition. The production and distribution imbalance of the food deficit areas are what concern planners most.

"Food is available but in many areas there are problems of access and affordability, important aspects in ensuring household food security," says Gyan Prasad Sharma, an agriculture economist with the National Planning Commission. "Then there is the nutritional aspect to consider. You may have enough to eat but you may not be getting the proper nutrition."

Despite being a food deficit area, where local production is sufficient for only six months of the year, Solu Khumbu does not suffer from food shortages owing to off-farm work opportunities like tourism which have raised living standards. Kathmandu Valley has lost most of its fertile fields to urban expansion and has become a food deficit area, but its higher

living standards means the capital meets its requirements by importing grain.

In cash-strapped communities like Humla, however, local food production is sufficient for only four months of the year and there are few off-farm opportunities. Despite its low population density, Humla has a chronic food deficit that affects every household. The government has established food depots at strategic points in the district, and flies rice to remote Humla villages. But these flights are affected by weather or bad logistics, and food shortages become acute as they have this month. Large portions are consumed by government employees. In some villages, the Village council has to spend its development budget of Rs 500,000 to pay for food supplies.

An ex-MP from Humla, Chhakka Bahadur Lama told us: "Since the airport was built two decades ago, the government has been adopting emergency measures flying in food. How long can it make people dependent on subsidised rations. We need alternatives, long term measures."

Ironically, Humla can be a food surplus area because of its low population and fertile valley floors. But social factors, changing food habits, reliance on subsidised white rice, failure to improve local crop production, and costly transportation has turned Humla into a chronic food deficit area.

The World Food Programme funded Food for Work Project is trying to help. The project, since late last year, is supplying food in return for labour contributed to building the Simkot-Hilsa road. The project cites 300,000 beneficiaries, a food basket of 37,500 metric tons of rice, and a budget of more than \$16 million. It is implemented by the Rural Community Infrastructure Works (RCIW) which has tried since 1995 to ensure food security combining support for building roads, mule racks, small-scale irrigation and bridges.

The WFP Country Programme has shifted focus to food deficit hill and mountain districts in the mid- and far-western development regions and it also operates a Food for Education programme in 12 of

Edible Cereals Production and Requirement in Nepal 1991/92-1999/2000									
	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
Production	3373448	3292126	3585112	3397760	3913878	3972487	4027248	4097612	4451939
Requirement	3561838	3633724	3723722	3882915	3948229	4079135	4178077	4279491	4383443

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Monsoon mould and mud

The splatter of raindrops is a constant backdrop. A ruffle-feathered pigeon, soaked and feeling sorry for itself, perches on a balcony rail. Cars and safas tempos slalom among the potholes, splashing people on foot when a wheel drops into muddy water. Mould spores seem to be the only thing that can dodge the raindrops. Shoes, clothes, car seat-covers all sport a fine, fuzzy skin and have to be rubbed periodically with disinfectant. Kathmandu nestles down under bleak cottony skies, somewhat like that pigeon on my office balcony. As the end of the monsoon approaches, we're well and truly tired of rain.

Mind you, there are worse places to be in the rainy season, many in India. Ask anyone who has ever lived in Calcutta. The sight of a Writers Building *babu* nonchalantly wading through waist deep floods across BBD Bag springs to mind. So does the less lugubrious picture of rats, swimming past several policemen trapped on a traffic platform in the centre of Chowringhee. Downstream from Nepal, in north Bihar, this is the dreadful time of year. In the Maithili-speaking heartland around Darbhanga, the waters of the Arun, the Sun Kosi and further west, the Bagmati, debouch onto natural flood plain. Huge embankments, built forty years ago to protect local farms, instead trap the waters. More than three million people own land that is underwater for nine months of the year.

Mandarins in Patna and Delhi murmur about deforestation in Nepal but they know that the late Jawaharlal Nehru's deification of science and technology are to blame. The embankments were built because the great man favoured mega-projects. No study was done of their effect, or the pattern of flooding in this silt-rich region between the Himalayas and the Ganges. Now the farmers of Darbhanga drive taxis in Delhi, sell fruit in Bhaktapur or pole boats past embank-

The monsoon renews the life cycle—even as the constant rain gets well and truly enough, after a while.



ments where soaked shantytowns sit amid mosquitoes and waterborne disease. Bihar's water secretary once told me—with total seriousness—that she was suggesting that people take fish farming as an activity. A long campaign for compensation, run by the Inspector General of Police in Patna, who owns 26 flooded acres near Jaynagar, ebbs and

flows but like the flood waters, seldom seems to go anywhere.

Then there is Bangladesh. The subcontinent's two greatest river, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra merge at Goalundo Ghat, one of the most remarkable places I have ever seen. I travelled there with the head of the Bangladesh Red Crescent. We drove until the road was washed out and hopped into a country boat to complete the journey. The Ghat was still a few hours away, through flooded fields and past inundated villages. Then suddenly you round a bend and your jaw drops in wonder. Huge ocean-going ships ply the river here, now called the Meghna. Our little wooden barge had to scuttle for cover as one leviathan steamed by us, hooting a warning from the bridge. An all water horizon makes you think you're offshore, out on the Bay of Bengal. But no, this is just forty km north of Dhaka, well inland on what the map says is just a river, flowing through villages and past places like Goalundo Ghat.

Here the problem is erosion. As you drift with the current, it's possible to see huge chunks of earth fall into the river, someone's land, gone for good. Villages become peripatetic in such circumstances. People shift back from the riverbank until they run into someone else's property. Then they go to the city to pedal a rickshaw or work in a garment sweatshop, stitching shirts for The Gap. Meanwhile, downstream the silt-laden waters deposit mounds of dirt and islands emerge from the flood. Within a few hours, a banana tree is planted, a paddy field is staked out and emerald green seedlings are shoved into the rich, alluvial muck.

As I sit high and relatively dry in my eyrie in Kathmandu, the rhythmic rain drops fall and start the long journey south. The life cycle is renewed: one family's misery is another's new hope. But I wish it would stop raining. My brain is getting mouldy. ♦



the grain-deficient districts. The project runs primary school feeding programmes that enables families without enough food to send children, particularly girls, to school where they are fed fortified blended food.

While these short-term measures are needed, analysts say it is much more important to increase agriculture productivity, improve access and affordability. They say indigenous crops like millet and barley should be pushed to counter declining trends and crops like potatoes, pulses and vegetables should be encouraged for their nutritional value or to enhance farmer income.

The government's proposed land ceiling and redistribution of farms to landless and subsistence farmers can improve production and nutrition levels within households. Large landowners prefer to leave their land fallow rather than grow rice—it just does make economic sense because of cheap Indian rice in the market.

However, if the land belonged to small farmers they would plant paddy, since it is for their household consumption and not for sale. However, fragmentation of large holdings due to inheritance or land reform will affect productivity as food production will not have the economy of scale to make large-scale farming viable.

Says the NPC's Sharma: "It is natural for grain prices to fluctuate because of natural factors, especially in a country like Nepal where most farms are rain-fed. But Nepali farmers are at a disadvantage as the cost of production is higher here and they don't enjoy support prices like in India."

There is no doubt that Nepal's price mechanism has to be made more effective, and despite Singha Durbar's assurance that it will find markets and will direct the Food Corporation to buy surplus rice from local farmers there is little chance of that happening quickly.

The Food Corporation has inadequate and decrepit food storage capacity—much grain is lost to improper stacking and pests. And even corporation insiders allege that there is a complicated and corrupt nexus that leads to serious leakage of precious grain along the supply chain.

The other perennial problem is the open border. India released its old rice stock at 30 percent lowered prices last year, and a backlog of Indian rice entered Nepal devastating last year's harvests. This trend is expected to continue this winter as well. Unclear and shifting government

policies haven't helped. Some years ago, the government opened grain exports, in the hope that it would get support for a long-term agriculture plan from the Asian Development Bank. But before it could be implemented properly, the government reversed its decision, which killed exports to Bangladesh that were just getting off the ground.

Agriculture in Nepal has been support-driven rather than demand-driven. The effect of this has been magnified because the government's inefficiency in support and extension has failed to take into account the needs of Nepali farmers who make up 80 percent of the population. Example: small farmers around the country have been asking for irrigation facilities. But the irrigation department, under the Ministry of Water Resources, provides irrigation schemes for land not less than 25 hectares.

Despite government and

that is required. It needs seriousness about governance. The ADB-backed 20-year Agriculture Perspective Plan, addresses issues of irrigation, technology, fertiliser, markets and roads, and targets a five percent growth in agricultural production, largely cereals.

In its fifth year of implementation, the plan is ambitious: it hopes to reduce poverty in the country dramatically from the present 42 percent to 14 percent. It seeks to raise current per capita agricultural income growth from 0.5 percent to 3 percent, to ensure food security by increasing the current per capita food availability from 270 kg to 426 kg, and to contribute to narrowing the gap of regional imbalance.

"Policy is one thing. Implementation is something else. The planning is superficial and more geared towards commissions," says Dharma Raj Shrestha. "The APP has a bird's eye view which doesn't encompass the majority of farmers."

A member of the Agriculture Concern Society, a pressure group of environmentalists, agricultural scientists, and foresters, Shrestha cites an example. "Farmers get a two-day milk holiday in a week. And then powder milk is imported from India."

Food experts complain that agriculture has never got the attention it deserves in Nepal, and attention has been hijacked by a sector like tourism that contributes only four percent of the GDP, but is fickle and depends on external factors. ♦

From left to right: Subsidised food supplies being distributed in Mugli. Outside the airport: Improper storage facilities lead to loss of grain.

Guns and the army

The Royal Nepal Army didn't buy the G-36 after all. The army was close to closing the controversial deal for the highly sophisticated German rifles manufactured by Heckler and Koch in late May. But a faction within the army felt that the high tech HK rifles that come equipped with built-in telescopic sight were not best-suited to Nepali conditions. The top brass has changed its mind and now wants to follow more transparent procurement procedures. It has already written to pre-selected arms dealers asking them to submit fresh bids to help it upgrade its arsenal. The plan is to buy 50,000 new assault rifles over the next five years. The G-36, US-made M16s used by Nepal's army on peacekeeping missions abroad, and Israeli Galil were some frontrunners in the earlier process. Suppliers had also proposed Belgian, Korean, Indian and Singaporean models.

Tenzing in Mongolia

Tenzing Norgay lives—in Mongolia, in the form of a peak recently named after the first man to step on Everest. A joint Mongolian-Nepali climbing expedition recently named a 4,030m peak in Mongolia's Altai Mountains after Tenzing to mark forty years of friendship between the mountain kingdom and the desert republic. Last month, eleven-time Everest summiteer Appa Sherpa and Iman Gurung, Everest summiteer and instructor at the Nepal Mountaineering Association, conquered the peak with four Mongolian climbers. Together, they planted the flags of both countries, placed a photo of Tenzing, and named the mountain after the late climber.



Tenzing Norgay on Everest

GAESO goes to court

The Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) has filed a lawsuit against the British Army's area welfare office challenging its decision to prevent GAESO members from entering its premises. In another lawsuit, the ex-servicemen are seeking an order to get the home and defence ministries to begin talks with the British government on its longstanding demand for pension parity.

GAESO says its members will begin filing lawsuits against the British government in UK courts demanding parity in pension and other welfare privileges. GAESO president Padam Bahadur Gurung said many individual soldiers were preparing cases against the British government claiming they have been discriminated on the basis of race. GAESO already has a discrimination complaint against the British government at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which comes up for investigation in November and will be decided by March 2002. It is also putting together information on Gurkhas killed, wounded and missing in World Wars I and II from the International Red Cross.



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Political definitions

In the wake of 1 June, we must fine-tune our understanding and expectations of democracy in Nepal.



Post-Panchayat calls for a more active monarchy have been invariably equated with an invitation to resurgent authoritarianism. Over the past three months, the prospect of an emergence of a more assertive king has transformed budding anxiety into deepening paranoia among the major political parties.

The Nepali Congress suffers most acutely from this malady. Part of the psychosis is rooted in its past. The party provided Nepal's first elected government, which succumbed to royal assertiveness in a country struggling with the internal dynamics of change amid the chill of the cold war. The Nepali Congress takes pride in claiming that it is the only party that has unequivocally supported the monarchy in good times and bad. But it is also the only party that has made attempts on the life of the personification of the institution. Congress leaders can sing praises to the crown in the same breath they exalt the man executed for hurling that grenade at the king's jeep in Janakpur 40 years ago. Deep down, Congress leaders know it is this dexterity that drives much of their dread.

Communists cannot afford to renounce their ultimate objective of republicanism without risking their identity. When UML leaders appear to be able to work comfortably with the palace or lend critical support to the constitution they helped draft, they may look like hypocrites. But you have to remember they are also incorrigible idealists striving for state-sponsored internationalism in an era of capitalism-driven globalisation. As long as a world without political borders remains a mirage, the communists' obsession with republicanism should not restrain their ability to act as responsible participants in today's polity.

To be sure, the tragic circumstances that led to King Gyanendra's accession have widened the scope of public debate on republicanism. But let's not forget that it was his grandfather, King Tribhuvan, who introduced the word 'ganatantra' as the guiding philosophy of post-1951 Nepali politics. (For the record, it must be stated that BP Koirala later recalled that he thought he was using the correct Nepali word for democracy while drafting the royal proclamation, and took full responsibility for this "honest mistake.")

The convoluted commentaries and conflicting conspiracy theories that have convulsed Nepal after the Narayanhiti tragedy may eventually prove to be beneficial in healing the national psyche. People used

to hearing good things about the late heir-apparent refuse to believe he could have carried out the killings. Those brought up hearing bad things about the survivors refuse to believe that it was only good luck that saved them. People who have already made up their minds so decisively either way cannot be expected to condemn or absolve anybody based on rational judgement. Even in a mock trial by peers, this case almost certainly would have led to a hung jury. Since a defining feature of monarchy is continuity, conspiracy theories make it easier for those who want to make a speedy recovery from the trauma and then move on.

Supporters of the current polity ask the Maoists to look at the monarchy and multiparty democracy within Nepal's geo-political context. No matter how much we deride the "air-and-water compatibility" theory Panchayat ideologues tried to force down our throats for three decades, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is using similar arguments to exclude the monarchy from the agenda of talks with the Maoists. When Comrade Rohit says he sees no material difference between having a king or a president in the Nepali context, you can figure out which side he's on. For someone who talks for hours each day with people from different walks of life, it isn't difficult for King Gyanendra to measure the challenge he faces in winning the hearts and minds of Nepalis. For most Nepalis over the age of 25, it shouldn't be difficult to conclude that the ground the new king stands on is no more fragile than where his brother stood for the first two years after the restoration of multiparty democracy.

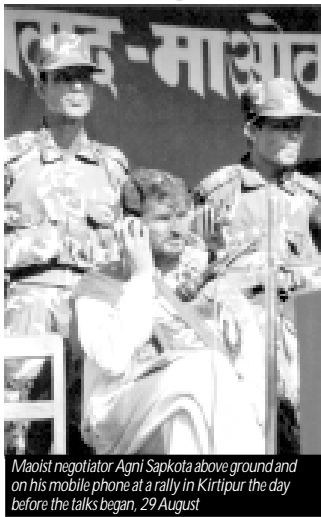
King Gyanendra has been quoted by many who have met him as saying that the personality of the person wearing the crown goes on to define the role the king plays. That is a harmless statement when you consider that today's constitution provides enough room for an active monarch. By exercising his prerogative to be consulted, the responsibility to warn and the right to encourage, King Gyanendra can help politicians drive democracy and development together without stepping out of the constitution. While standing aside from politics, the monarch can intervene to break the deadlock that seems to grip every form of government—majority, minority and coalition—with the same venality. If the king crossed the red line to provide the last line of defence in a politically fragmented country, the people would understand.

The problem is with our politicians, who prefer to see our democracy sculpted in the Westminster image. A more relevant model may be Thailand's. King Bhumibol Adulyadej once said, "In order to be King, you have to be King 24 hours a day." Such activism has represented stability amid Thailand's tumult. And that may be why the fact that the 18-year-old Bhumibol came to the throne in 1946, after the still-unexplained gunshot death of his brother, King Ananda Mahidol, is hardly brought up for discussion.

Nepalis know they have the ultimate right to choose between keeping a constitutional monarchy and turning the country into a republic. The problem arises when politicians want the people to retain the monarchy as well as the right to choose the person who sits on the throne. The Narayanhiti carnage continues to test our understanding of the limits of democracy. ♦

from p. 1 ⇨

Rolling thunder in Rolpa



Maoist negotiator Agni Sapkota above ground and on his mobile phone at a rally in Kirtipur the day before the talks began, 29 August



Government negotiators leave Godavari after the first round, 30 August.

Even a government source at the talks couldn't tell us whether the conciliatory mood was genuine or a ploy to buy time. "They did not directly say they wanted a new constitution, and even admitted the call for a republic was only a 'practical' bargaining position," he told us. Others have an even more convoluted explanation: that the talks are just a red herring for real negotiations going on at a higher level behind the scenes.

Whatever the case, Godavari seems to have been atmospheric. Neither side put its real cards on the table. The government's strategy is to stretch the ceasefire as long as possible and try to woo as many of the top Maoists as it can into open politics. The Maoists for their part are buying time to recruit, regroup, train and use mass meetings for a show of strength. The government and the Maoists both know public opinion is for peace and there will be a backlash against the first side to break off the talks.

They are also accelerating the setting up of peoples' committees and peoples' governments in districts neighbouring the Valley—following Mao's dictum of surrounding the cities from the countryside.

The question doing the rounds is: who are the Maoists' true backers? The Nepali media is awash with reports that it is either a section of the palace, or Indian intelligence, or both. Especially after Siliguri, leftist leaders have openly stated their belief that the Maoists are taking orders from their Indian handlers. Last week UML's Madhav Nepal told a meeting of Kathmandu's intelligentsia: India may be backing the Maoists in an attempt to keep Nepal under its "security umbrella."

Nepal says he suspects a "foreign hand" in the call for a republic to ensure long-term instability, although he does not explain how this would benefit India. Senior UML leader Ishwor Pokhrel was in Siliguri for the talks with Prachanda and says he cannot believe that the Indians don't know of the Maoist base in its sensitive "Chicken Neck" area. "There is reason to suspect that India may have pretended not to have noticed anything, hoping to use the Maoist card at some point in the future," he told us.

In Godavari, the Maoists had pressed for the next round of talks to be held in Rolpa to coincide with the mass meeting in Libang, a high profile event for which they have invited a throng of mediapersons. They want this to be a "reciprocal" visit to give the impression that the talks are being held between two "governments". Government has so far refused.

Independent leftist analyst Hari Roka doesn't have much confidence in the talks yielding any results. "These are fake talks," he told us. "The real talks should be between the palace and the Maoists. By giving up its command over the army the elected government has shown that it is just a pawn in this game."

Here in Libang, it is evident that some in the Maoist rank and file are itching to resume a war they thought was going well. "The leadership and the educated cadres seem positive about talks but the armed fighting forces feel their role will end with the talks," a senior police officer here told us. Some analysts doubt the rigid postures of both sides could ever be reconciled. "I don't see any point where the two sides could agree, a few more rounds of talks and

we could head right back into war," says Govinda Neupane a former headline communist and analyst.

The optimists see room for a settlement. The Maoists could give up the constituent assembly demand or the government could agree to a new constitution.

ML leader RK Mainali thinks the Maoists know that they cannot have a republic without support from the moderate left, which was why they met in Siliguri. "But the other communist parties think they will be dumped once Prachanda gets his republic," Mainali told us. "We believe the republic would be counterproductive and even put Nepali nationhood at risk."

Even here the Maoists are already talking about the mammoth rally they have planned in central Kathmandu on 21 September.

Meanwhile, extortion has again hit the capital's businesses as front organisations work to ferry and feed the 200,000 people they want to bring into the Valley. The government has asked Maoists not to have the rally. For the first time, Prime Minister Deuba has been uncharacteristically blunt in warning the Maoists against the rally, saying it might jeopardise the talks.

At a recent meeting of the National Security Council, the army brass also voiced its misgivings and discussed how it cannot tolerate matters getting out of hand on the streets of the capital. The Maoists say this is going to be a peaceful rally, and they do not want to provoke violence but have been calling its cadre to come out in force. ♦



In the spirit of alcohol, gender and state

The government's new rules for alcohol control are positive, but the real test will be their conscientious enforcement in the long run.

At the core of the women's struggles to control alcohol lies not ideological fanaticism or religious Puritanism as the recent media coverage ("High and dry" #55) charges. The women's initiatives are experiential in nature—born of personal suffering and hopelessness in a domestic and social space wrecked by alcohol abuse.

Local communities throughout Nepal have borne the brunt of the alcohol epidemic in the past decades, and began grassroots movements to defend their families and communities lives long before Maoists came onto the scene. The government and the industry either ignored or brutally suppressed the early local pleas.

Liquor barons given free reign came out with a spirited media campaign not only to defend against the Maoist women's modus operandi of burning the distilleries, but also to discredit the genuine issues brought out into the open by the present alcohol controversy. The pro-liquor media has been awash with highly questionable statistics regarding the alcohol industry's contributions to the economic health of the country. These claims range from Rs 1-10 billion to the national coffers per year and the creation of anywhere from 100,000-500,000 jobs. But there is no reliable data on production, distribution and consumption of spirit in Nepal.

Even assuming for a moment these claims of benefit to the "economy", what about its costs to the Nepali public? While there is no doubt that alcohol generates

super profits for a small group of capitalists, commission to the officials and some revenue to the government, it is the people who have to bear the brunt of this addiction trade. While there are no alcohol studies done in Nepal to quantify the social costs of liquor, most Nepalis personally know a few who have died from alcohol and homes turned into living hell because of drinking. The medical consequences of alcohol are equally serious. Alcohol is responsible for serious heart diseases, cirrhosis of the liver and gastro-intestinal complications. Addiction leads to mental health problems of not only the adults but also arrests the mental growth potential of unborn children. Like tobacco, alcohol remains one of the major burdens on public health services around the world. For each alcohol revenue dollar the society has to pay five dollars in the way of lost worker productivity, economic ruin for families, violence against children and women, crime, and public health costs. How can the society balance these public costs against private profits for the alcohol industry? This is a political and moral question which the Nepali state has evaded for too long.

The alcohol issue is central to the class and gender concerns of Nepali women's activism. The past decade has been characterised by the proliferation of rural women's activism against alcohol at the grassroots level. These small acts of resistance and revolt have largely gone unnoticed by the Kathmandu elite. During the same period, urban feminists have devoted themselves to securing property rights for daughters through legislative reforms. But then, among other things, isn't the attempt to control the man's drinking also a desperate act of a

housewife to reallocate limited family resources away from liquor to food, medicine and school fees for the children? It is unfortunate that the two currents of women's activism have not found a meeting point to assist in each others initiatives. Secondly, a lot of the urban NGO's working on violence against women and children would do well to remember that alcohol remains one of the major factors behind any violent act, so supporting the rural women's call for alcohol control would also strengthen their own cause. It is not that there is no alcohol abuse and pain in urban, middle-class homes—it is just that bourgeoisie respectability prevents acknowledging alcohol as a domestic problem and publicly acting on it. Thankfully, much of our rural peasant sisters are not crippled by such feminine pretensions.

Genderwise, alcohol is also one of the quintessential bastions of male privileges. Liquor remains a potent vehicle for the expression of machismo culture that often brings in aggression and violence in its wake. For feminists and activists who seek to reform the substance of gender relations supporting their village sisters to control alcohol makes a lot of sense.

Alcohol capital is paradoxically expropriating culture as a bulwark against the women activists. The non-commercial spirit tradition of the ethnic groups is being turned into a reactionary mass marketing Trojan Horse. If the women are wrong to ask the Matwalis to rein in their alcohol a little, how can we ask the Bahuns to do away with caste or untouchability? Similarly, the scare that alcohol control will dry out tourism is less than convincing. When ganja and hashish were made illegal to

the hippies in the 1970s, some predicted the end of Nepal's budding tourism industry. Tourism has grown four-fold since.

Rather than promoting liquor as the pillar of Nepali economy alcohol and tobacco should be dealt with as necessary evils, to be consciously minimised and regulated by the state and society. While a total ban is neither feasible nor desirable, the society must reduce the production, access and consumption through proactive policy and effective administrative mechanisms. Public health, not profit should be the bottom line on this issue. In areas where some control over alcohol has been exercised either through local initiative, administrative involvement or under Maoist auspices, the social consequences have been positive. Crime rates have plummeted, violence has decreased and food has become

more affordable in food-deficit districts as less foodgrain is diverted to brew houses. These experiences could be the basis for new policies.

In recent years the traditional liquor lobby—comprised of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and the liquor capitalists—has been joined by the corporate media that passes as free press. The liquor and tobacco industry use the media not only to glamourise its products and make them acceptable to younger and wider sections of society (advertisements), it is also using it now to silence the calls for reforming the harmful alcohol regime in the country (pro-industry news reports and editorials) without giving a fair hearing to the cause of women activists.

The new rules just announced by the government for alcohol control are definitely positive, but the real test will be their conscientious enforcement in the long run.

After all, it is not as if the government had no inkling of the ravages of alcohol all these years. In fact the existing industrial laws classify alcohol in the same category as explosive and arms industries requiring stringent rules for their supervision and control. In a way the grassroots backlash against liquor is a simple reaction against the complete success of the liquor lobby in dismantling all state and social regulations in the production and promotion of alcohol in Nepal. Hopefully the government will maintain its commitment to regulate alcohol in the public interest and not fall prey again to the corrupting wiles of the liquor barons once the present heat is over. ♦

(Saubhagya Shah is currently completing his PhD research on state, development and social movements at Harvard University)

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO) supports the planning and delivery of Canada's Official Development Assistance in partnership with Nepal in order to attain equitable and sustainable development through capacity building both at and between local and central levels. The CCO envisions an environmentally healthy country with self-reliant, equitable and empowered communities, which practices good governance and maintains a strong socio-economic, political and developmental relationships with Canada.

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Interested applicants meeting the above requirements are requested to send their applications along with a CV, two relevant references and a short covering letter stating how they meet the qualifications and capacities required for this contract. The selected candidate will be given a one-year renewable term contract with a six-month probation period. Salary will be commensurate with experience. Applications marked 'Application for CIDA Program Officer' must be received at the CCO before 16:30 Friday September 21, 2001. Applications can be submitted by fax, E-mail or hand delivered. Only short listed candidates will be notified and called for a written test and interview. Telephone inquiries will not be entertained.

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BIZ NEWS

Slowdown

Things are starting to get bad on the economic front. Government spending has grown fast, revenue collection is slow and trade is shrinking. That summarises the Nepal Rastra Bank's assessment of the past fiscal year, ending mid-July. Add to that the recent upheavals in industry—from the Maoists' anti-alcohol campaign, to *janakarahis* (people's actions) against carpet and garment makers, and fresh demands by pro-Maoist trade unions. And expect worse in the coming days.

There has been a general slowdown in savings. Low interest rates throughout 2000/01 is the main reason why time-deposit growth was almost 10 percentage points slower than the previous year. Here's how this happens: banks have more money to invest and fewer people willing to borrow, so they offer less interest to those with money to save. NRB figures show that domestic credit grew by one percentage point, but most of that was hogged by government, but private borrowing was down by almost four percentage points to about 17 percent in 2000/01 because of slackening demand for import credit, mainly.

The government went on a spending spree last year, getting rid of Rs 67.83 billion, almost twice as much the year before. And it did this even as revenue growth decreased to Rs 48.86 billion, two percentage points from 1999/2000. Foreign grants did help plug some of the deficit, but the overall year-end shortfall was Rs 14.94 billion. The government borrowed Rs 3.79 billion from foreign sources and issued treasury bills, development bonds and savings certificates worth Rs 5.58 billion. Still short of cash, it overdrew Rs 5.57 billion from the central bank—five times more than its legal limit.

But the last year was not all bad: inflation fell as the urban consumer prices nationally grew by 2.4 percent, compared to 3.5 percent the year before. The prices were kept down by low food and beverage prices, even though those of imports, recreation, education, etc remained on the high side.

Foreign trade has also slowed down—overall exports grew by only about 15 percent, down from 40 percent growth the previous year. Exports to India have slowed down, and carpet and garment sales to other countries have also dropped. Pashmina sales last year hit a high of Rs 6.85 billion, but exports have slowed down since. However, because imports also slowed down considerably, affected by increased transport costs and a dearer dollar, the trade deficit narrowed by 4.3 percent to Rs 53.14 billion. The 12-month Balance of Payments estimate, based on monetary statistics, increased by Rs 5.76 billion. Foreign exchange reserves stood at Rs 105.16 billion, about 24 percent of it as Indian currency.

Nepal Oil Corruption

There was news last week that Ministry of Commerce and related departments had actually conducted a surprise inspection of roughly 70 g stations and recommended action against eight petrol pumps found dispensing adulterated oils. The samples were tested at government laboratories. Among the errant gas stations, three are to be fined Rs 75,000 each, and one is to be barred from doing business for six months. It also plan to press formal charges against the others. The maximum punishment for offenders under the consumer protection act is a fine of Rs 100,000, imprisonment for two years, or both.



Tax scare

The new Income Tax bill in parliament has rattled business and industry. They say they will agitate—as political parties do—if the new bill becomes law without major amendments. Industry feels it is being unfairly targeted with the proposed regulations that envisage strict enforcement. And, they argue, because the bill is complicated, tax officials will have the upper hand in interpreting it. The threat of agitation was articulated strongly by Nepal Chamber of Commerce (NCC) officials who, when faced with the new Value Added Tax back in 1997, shut down their stores for 11 days. Government says the draft bill, which has been in circulation over a year, will make tax more straightforward and transparent. The bill has been thrown around for a while, but industry did not get worked up until it was finally tabled in parliament last month.

The draft, which business now blames on the foreign consultants who were hired to prepare it, has new provisions such as taxing capital gains and pensions. But it also lessens the discretionary authority of tax officials. Finally businesses also think that the punishment for non-compliance is too harsh. But for the majority of businesses that claim to operate within the law, that really shouldn't be an issue. Or should it?

Back to Bangalore

Royal Nepal Airlines resumed its twice-weekly hops to the southern Indian city Bangalore last week. Royal Nepal flies to Bangalore from Kathmandu on Sundays and Wednesdays and returns to the capital the same day. Some weeks ago, RNAC decided to cancel flights to Europe and Middle East on its Boeing 757 and decided to deploy the aircraft—uneconomical for long-haul, low-frequency flights—to strengthen regional connections. Royal Nepal is also exploring the possibility of flying direct to Seoul.

Furniture land

There are now more choices if you want a makeover for your home—10,000 sq ft of them. Furniture Land's new showroom in Teku features exhibits on sleeping, living, office and garden space, all in a variety of materials, ranging from leather to aluminium and pressed steel. The company says its products are versatile and aimed style- and budget-conscious shoppers.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Free the Nepali Rupee

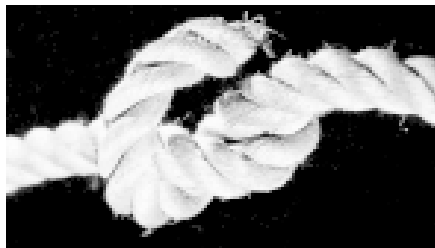


On the fixed exchange rate, again. And again.

As this is the land of rumours, this Beed as a good Nepali feels obliged to pass on to the public the latest one. So, have you heard, the Nepali Rupee might be devalued?

The immediate impact of this whisper floating around was that in the informal market the greenback was being exchanged for as much as Rs 80. The spurt in gold imports coupled with an hysterical rise in the demand for foreign currency made everyone conclude the Nepali Rupee would be devalued against the Indian Rupee. People started placing bets, as if at a roulette table—170, 180, 200. The government had to intervene and tell the huddled, whispering masses that no such devaluation would take place. This topic is particularly close to your Beed's heart, so I will once again examine whether there is any hint of rationality behind having a fixed exchange rate.

This is the history of this practice: On 13 April, 1960, the Nepali government adopted the policy of unlimited convertibility of Nepali Currency (NC) to Indian Currency (IC) in Nepal. The argument for the fixed exchange rate with regard to Indian currency was to help lower the fluctuation in the price level of Indian products, as the consumption basket of poor Nepalis consisted mostly of items imported from India. In the last forty years there have been only seven adjustments in the NC-IC exchange rate with the last change on 1



February 1993. Since then, the magical rate of 1.6 has not changed.

It is surprising to see a country's currency not change its value in eight years despite major changes in economic activity. The assumptions that dictated the pegging of a fixed exchange rates may not be valid any more, but that 1.6 fetish is alive and kicking us in the teeth. All figures show that India does not dominate Nepali trade as it used to, so it is puzzling that we are stuck with the old exchange rate.

What's more, today remittances from Nepalis working abroad equal the value of exports from Nepal. These remittances enter Nepal through official and unofficial channels. This also has a strong bearing on the rate of the US dollar vis-à-vis the Nepali Rupee.

It is important to accept that the ultimate parameter for any economy in the world is the US dollar, whether to measure GDP or per capita income. Unfortunately, Nepal's currency does not have a direct relationship with the dollar, but only

an implied one through the Indian Rupee. A fall in the Indian Rupee against the US dollar means fall of Nepal's GDP. Ridiculous! How can we truly judge the progress of the Nepali economy?

This issue of the exchange rate needs to be brought into the ambit of economics rather than politics—like so many other things. When trade and transit issues are being discussed, why not talk about this too. If the Nepal Rastra Bank does not bring this up, or explain it to the public, it is not doing its job. Why not push for 1.3 parity with Indian Rupee to start with? The dollar will come down to NRs 60, our purchasing power will increase by 20 percent and so will our GDP and per capita income. ♦

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

ISSUE NO.69
ON THE STANDS NOW

Rice basket to basketcase?



CHANDRA KISHORE JHA IN BIRGUNJ

Many farmers in the tarai left their fields fallow last year because agriculture had stopped being cost-effective. Fertiliser was expensive, irrigation pumps were uneconomical, the minimum wage for farmhands added considerably to costs. Then cheap rice in India depressed paddy prices on our side of the border to all-time lows. Now, uncertainty over land reforms and increasing pressure from opposition parties on land

ceilings has sapped whatever morale remained among tarai farmers.

The tarai has traditionally been Nepal's breadbasket. And people in the plains are dependent on agriculture for everything—not just food. They sell produce for cash needed to meet the costs of education, medical care, weddings and other social obligations. When the harvest is not enough, they mortgage land and borrow the cash they need. Because this is all the asset they have, any profits are ploughed back into the land.

All that has changed in one fell swoop with the prime minister's announcement of land ceilings. "Unlike people in other professions, farmers don't have many options and tend to reinvest in lands. Now they are unsure if they can keep land, and so will not even do that which may reflect in next year's productivity," says Rameshwor Rauniyar, chairman of Pokharia village council in Parsa district.

The land reform also threatens the tarai's delicate social chord. People all over the tarai are flocking to the courts

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's "revolutionary" land reform has stirred Nepal's rice basket. Whatever the outcome, it has changed ties between landowners and farmers forever.

to file false litigation against their parents and husbands, only to make sure that they get their share of parental property held in the name of the head of household

"The government is trying to take away the land we have managed to put together by saving our earnings," says Lalbabu Yadav, whose family has about 24 bighas of land. "Now, why should anyone try to work hard to increase their assets?" Like so many others, Yadav has been running around from room to room at the Parsa district court to file a case in the hope the court will order that he and his brother's divide the property equally and the property remains within the clan.

Families with children abroad have even begun looking for ways to transfer assets to "trustworthy" relatives, in order to prevent having to hand over land to the government. Others are preparing backdated contracts to show that ownership has changed and only the legal paperwork remains to be done. "Usually most farmers with up to four or five bighas have mortgaged their lands as collateral and are not actually rich in real terms," says Ram Krishna, a lawyer from Kalayia. "They've never been able to get good returns from agriculture or change their vocation." He adds: "Now people are building up forests of legal paperwork, in fear of what could happen next. I just cannot say where all this will end."

Investment in land has always been considered the safest way to put away your wealth, and in the tarai, that was where Nepalis working in India usually invested. The land reform plan has offset that relationship. Politician Dwarika Prasad Kurmi told us: "Earlier people with relations in India took their earnings there, then they began to invest in land." Immediately after the Deuba



announcement in parliament on 16 August, there was panic, a run on the banks along the border towns.

The new landed classes who invested in land from the spoils of politics or through smuggling will also be affected. For instance, these are some of the larger landholders in the Simara area. They've not only "legalised" their wealth by investing in land, but have also been able to access bank loans through property collateral. This class will fight tooth and nail to make sure ceilings are not drastically lowered: including consistently putting forward the argument that fragmentation will further reduce farm productivity.

Perhaps the most compelling reason against land ceiling is that of implementation. Underprivileged groups like the Tharus, landless Dalit families have never managed to figure on land distribution rolls before. They are unlikely to benefit this time either. Complicating their claim to government dole is the fact that most of them don't have citizenship certificates. "For how long do we have to work other people's lands?" asks Bhikhar Sahani, an agricultural labourer from Balara, Sarlahi district. "We've been promised land many times."

But as word spreads, many desperately poor families and the

landless, say they hope it will be different this time. And the Maoists are always on the wings to take advantage of the chaos and push for land-grabbing that has happened elsewhere. This uncertainty will remain until a bill is actually approved by parliament.

What the government decision has already done is sow the seeds of distrust between those with land and those without. The landless think it is because the landed have land they don't and landholders think the poor are out to snatch their lifelong savings. "People will prefer to keep lands fallow rather than sharecrop, since tenant farmers will be more demanding now," says an agricultural labourer at Simara. "I don't know how I will feed my family until I get whatever land the government may give."

While tensions between the rich and poor is not new, what is most worrying is the false hope the government decision has created among the poor because it is likely to be dashed one more time. Mallu Mahato is from Baryapur in Bara district and pulls a rickshaw in Birgunj. He wipes the sweat from his brow with his shawl and says: "Soon I will also work on my own field. We'll see how the government will not give us land." ♦

The wilderness returns to Nepal's wild west

In Nepal's remote western hills, the forests are back. And with them leeches, monkeys and leopards.



RUPA JOSHI IN DADELDHURA
Here in Nepal's far-west, it is a feast of monsoon green.

Verdant mountains, roadsides overflowing with weeds and grass in every shade of green from emerald to jade. The rains have brought life back to this rugged dry region, and from the tarai to the mountains the plant life has exploded in an immense splash of chlorophyll.

We rush past the choking reeds lining the highway cutting through the Royal Bardia National Park up the winding roads to the tall, cool

and serene pine forests of Dadelghura. The green never leaves us, it soothes our monitor-weary eyes and calms our souls. After the cynicism and apathy of the capital valley, the people of the far-west exude a sense of vigour and hope. The tea-shop owner in Chisapani, the community health volunteer in Nawadurga, the policeman on duty atop Amar Singh Gadi—all alert, self-assured citizens with a refreshingly positive outlook on life. Despite all odds, despite the lack of help and support, they help

themselves and their communities. A cool breeze blows down with the swollen grey swells of the mighty Karnali River at Chisapani. It shifts wisps of hair over Sahuni's face as she stokes up the fire to prepare tea. Pointing to the jungle across the highway she tells us: "There are many more *bandels* (wild boar) now thanks to *thuldai* (big brother) confiscating all the guns." When we inquire how come she is minding the store alone, she lets out a gurgling laugh. Her husband is away somewhere

minding his own business. If he is doing what most other men these parts do, then he is drinking and playing cards. These days, because of the *thuldai*, the drinking and gambling has gone semi-underground. Sahuni hands over our tea, and adds with a men-will-be-men tone: "They won't stop drinking, dry zone or not." In Nawadurga village in Dadelghura, we ask the menfolk how things are going. "*Bharat nabhai gujara chuldaina*," says one. India is across the border, and most



here migrate to work part of the year to work as porters or to sell produce. Most cannot imagine a livelihood without India. But their wives do not understand why they go across the border for back-breaking work if they spend most of their earnings in drinking and gambling. "Our communities tried to launch several anti-alcohol and gambling campaigns, it didn't work," says Mandari Devi Bhatta. "Now due to the *maobadi* *meherbani* they have finally stopped drinking." But prohibition courtesy of the Maoists doesn't impress other men here, they don't understand what the big fuss is all about, they say forcing men not to drink will never work.

Nearby is the thick forest of the once denuded hill of Bandanda. Wild animals, including deer, snakes and leopards, have staged a comeback. Up in the hills around the district headquarters, hugging the ridgeline and the main bazaar, is a prize-winning community forestry run by women. "After the CDO's office confiscated the guns we no longer hear gunshots of poachers," says a villager in the aptly-named Bagh Bazar where leopards now roam the streets at night. Few dogs remain, the ones not taken away by leopards. Parents are careful not to let their small children stray after nightfall.

Half an hour's walk downhill from Gaira on the ridge that separates Doti from Dadelghura is Nikaney village. Ripening terraces of maize hug the contours of the hillside. And here too, the spreading community forests have brought their woes. "It's the monkeys and leeches that bother us this time of the year," says Kallu Gurung, as she deftly flicks away a leech from her ankles with the tip of her sickle. "We have to take turns staying awake all night in the *machans* to chase the monkeys away." But Bir Bahadur Dang has nearly given up: "Nothing can stop these monkeys rampaging through our maize crop." With no guns, the farmers have turned to observing monkey behaviour and use counter-psy-war tactics. "We noticed that the leader of the pack usually comes in to scout the field," explains Bir Bahadur. "The others come only if

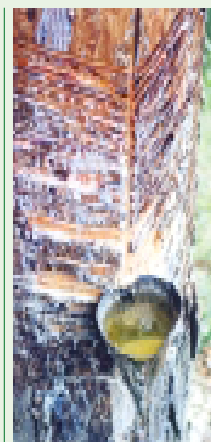
he gives the green signal. So the trick is to scare the leader away." Back on the highway in Gaira, we peel off scores of leeches from our legs and arms. The tea-shop owner doesn't allow us to flick them into a drain by the highway. "No, they will multiply and make our lives unbearable," he says, and proceeds to roast them with smouldering firewood from his kitchen. The smell of barbecued blood wafts in the air as we gulp our tea.

The highway is lined with hundreds of tins filled with pine resin, waiting for collection for the turpentine factories in the plains. The tapper cuts trees with girths of more than three feet for sap and sells each tin for Rs80. The monsoon mists move in silently through the high pines. Further along the road, we look eastwards towards Matela, a small cluster of houses over the Ruwakhola which is the home-town of prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Several hours' walk away from Matela is the school that Deuba attended. Certainly a long hike from Matela to Baluwater for Deuba.

A spate of construction seems to have gripped Dadelghura ever since the highway got black-topped two years ago. A trip that used to take six hours over bumpy dusty or slushy road from Atariya on the Mahendra Highway is now a smooth three hours away. After the road was built, many Dadelghurans have migrated back up from the plains, drawn by the cooler climate and spectacular views of Api and Saipal to the north—the westernmost mountains in the Nepal Himalaya on the tri-junction of Nepal, India and China. With improved transportation, and the opening of small hotels, Dadelghura is bracing itself for a tourism boom.

And it is not just the views that will bring visitors. Dadelghura also has a great potential for historical tourism. The region has great significance and is littered with landmarks from Nepal's westward expansion 200 years ago—famous forts that the Gorkhali forces established and fought to defend against British invaders in the 1814-16 wars. Amar Singh Gadi outside Dadelghura is named after the famous general who showed courage and endurance in the famous battles against the British. The fort offers a 360-degree view of western Nepal and the hills of Garhwal in India. It used to be sentried by the army, today it has four posts manned by police. Some are still in their teens, with heavy rifles slung across their shoulders, as they peer down from their bunkered posts.

Inside the fort, the only well maintained structure is the altar of Bhairab. Overgrown weeds choke up the rest of the fort, including the ruin of a two-room structure near the altar where Amar Singh may have once lived. Where did the soldiers live? The fort as it stands seems ridiculously small to have



(From l to r): Thick forests cover the Dadelghura hills again, the bridge over the river Godavari in Kailali, woman from Nawadurga VDC, tapping turpentine in pine forest, ripening paddy terraces with Mastamandu in the background.

housed an army. Were there underground chambers? But there is no one to answer these questions. No guide, no brochures. Nothing other than the general text from the pages of a history book on a faded signpost near Amar Singh's garishly-painted statue which sports a walrus moustache. Amar Singh looks westwards, towards Almora

and beyond which once used to be Nepali territory. The border of Nepal lies on the banks of the Mahakali a day's walk from the district headquarters. Kathmandu seems very far away from here. Two days by bus, if the roads are clear. There is so much to see here, so much to feel, as Nepalis. If only it were more accessible by

air through airports large enough to handle bigger airplanes at Mahendranagar or Dhangadi. The resulting boom in tourism, both internal and external, every third man in Nawadurga and Gangkhet village would probably not have to head west to earn a living. ♦

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The ravaging of cyberspace



NORMAN SOLOMON
The vast Internet is many things to many people. Accustomed to their own routes through cyberspace, individuals may assume that what they see is fairly typical. But in society as a whole, what are the Web's dominant traffic patterns?

While some view it as an expansive bastion of decentralised communication and democratic discourse, the Internet now functions quite differently overall. In total, the World Wide Web is scarcely more civic-minded than your local bank.

Consider the flat-out judgement rendered by America's leading organ of capitalism a few weeks ago. *The Wall Street Journal* tilts toward the delusional on its ideology-laden editorial pages, but its news reporting is—out of investor necessity—right on the money. And the paper was on target with a 23 July piece by reporter Thomas E. Weber, who scrutinised the evolving role of the Web.

Back in the summer of 1993, "cyberspace had remained practically free of advertisements, but marketers were beginning to eye the medium." Eight years later, Weber wrote, "it's difficult to remember that quaint, commercial-free Internet. Marketers didn't just eye the medium—they conquered it." He added: "The Internet has been transformed largely into a place of commerce."

But the Internet remains, for many, an object of illusion.

As if looking backward through the wrong end of a telescope, some observers are dazzled by the virtues of their personal treks online. But whatever cyber-stars are in the eyes of certain individuals, the business calculations of hard-nosed number-crunchers are focused elsewhere. And the documented trends are enough to make the most voracious media tycoon grin.

Websites operated by just four corporations account for 50.4 percent of the time that US users of the Web are now spending online, the authoritative Jupiter Media Metrix research firm reported in early summer. At the top of the heap were AOL Time Warner's sites, with 32 percent of all minutes spent online in the nation, followed by Microsoft (7.5 percent) and Yahoo (7.2 percent).

Jupiter senior analyst Aram Sinnreich said the figures "show an irrefutable trend toward online media consolidation and indicate that the playing field is anything but even." He cited the data as refutation of the still-popular notion that "severe market dominance is impossible on the Internet."

The most heavily trafficked sites

search-engine listings. "Eighty-five percent of all traffic is generated via search queries and

over 90 percent of that traffic is driven to the top 30 results. If you're not in the top 30, you're not in a position to compete!"

But faith in the democratic character of the Internet is resilient: a myth that will not die. And the more that huge outfits ravage cyberspace, the more useful the mythology becomes, laying a thick fog over the realities of mega-media domination.

The spectacular dot-com plunge has caused many corporate managers to sharpen their cost-cutting knives, endangering just about any media content that doesn't seem to directly correlate with boosting revenue.

Before the Los Angeles Times cancelled his long-running and insightful column "Digital Natio" in mid-July, scholar Gary Chapman gained many readers as he tracked digital trends. Four months ago, he was citing informed predictions that Web browsers will become outdated within five years, giving way to "widespread use of interactive TV network managed by large media companies."

The dot-com flameouts have sped up the Net's commercialisation—as quests for cash-flow, market share and multimedia synergy become more voracious. "The idea that anyone with an e-commerce Web site could sell anything under the sun seems

completely dead now," Chapman noted last spring. "The alternative seems to be a move toward closed networks, not unlike America Online, in which the user experience is guided, shaped and far more controlled—something advertisers and online retailers are demanding. In other words, there is a growing

It is hard to accept that the democracy and openness of the Internet are illusory. But it is true.

sense in the high-tech industry that consumer networks of the future will begin to look more like television—indeed, some believe interactive digital TV is the true wave of the future."

For a time, the Internet seemed to elude the profit-driven matrix squeezing media and public life.

Some illusions die hard. But hopefully we can move forward with new resolve to fight against corporate power—and for truly democratic media. ♦

Norman Solomon's latest book is *The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media*.



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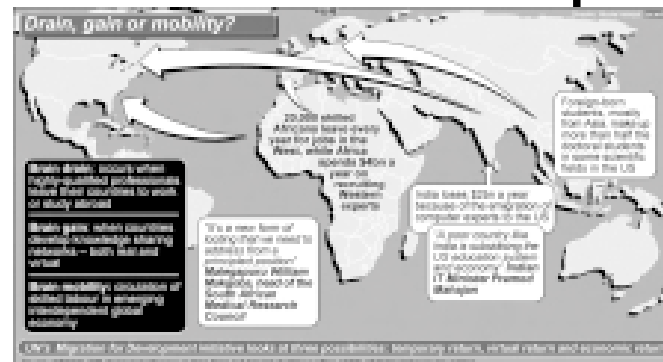
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Greener pastures



South Africa's professionals, especially doctors and nurses, are practising anywhere but at home.

THEMBA MATHE IN JOHANNESBURG
Soon, Debra Pretorius and her husband, a Johannesburg doctor, will leave South Africa, joining the ever-growing ranks of professionals working abroad. "Government hospitals are on the brink of collapse. Even sixth-year students and interns are over-worked, rather than being allowed to broaden their education," Pretorius complains. Her husband's call-out rate—day or night—is \$14.40. Her plumber charges about \$24.

Senior officials and ministers are accusing Britain and Canada, although local newspapers are also full of job advertisements from other countries, like Australia, the UAE and Ireland. On 5 June, David Ams, head of recruitment at Britain's National Health Service, said Britain's health department

would publish a code of practice to halt the organised poaching of medical professionals from developing countries. His statement followed consistent criticism by South African ministers of wealthy countries that employ highly-skilled South African professionals. In February, Malegapuru Makgoba, head of the South African Medical Research Council, said Canada should compensate South Africa for "looting" doctors. Education Minister Kadar Asmal said British head hunters are "raiding" South Africa's human resources at a crucial time in the nation's development.

The problem is serious. More than a quarter of all South African doctors who graduated between 1990 and 1997 are currently working overseas, according to the

South African Medical Association. For instance, the Canadian Medical Association Journal reported in January that one in five doctors practising in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan earned their first medical degree in South Africa. South African Health Minister Mantombazana Tshabalala-Msimang told parliament that the direct cost to South Africa from the emigration of about 23,000 doctors and dentists over 1999/2000 was about \$9.5 million.

But doctors—and other highly-skilled professionals like teachers, psychiatrists, pharmacists and chartered accountants—talk about low salaries, involuntary community service (all medical graduates are expected to complete two years of compulsory community service), affirmative action and deteriorating health infrastructure.

An already low reservoir of health personnel is being depleted. Nationally, there are six doctors per 10,000 patients. In the poorest province, Eastern Cape, the figure plummets to one per 10,000. Eastern Cape's health department has had to recruit over 100 Cuban doctors to work in the vast province's rural hinterland.

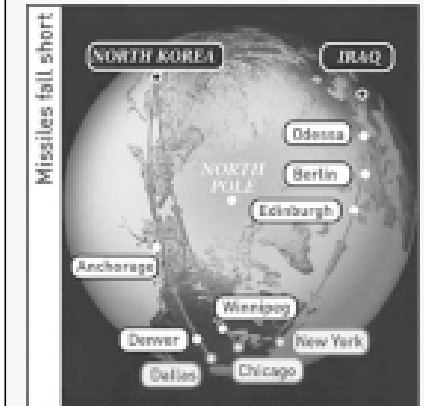
South African doctors are being joined by nurses in their flight abroad. Last year, says the South African Nursing Council, 3,300 left. This year, some 300 specialist nurses are reportedly leaving every month. Fully trained public sector nurses can earn a maximum of only \$860 a month, unless they move into management. Their starting salary after four years' study is \$340.

Doctors and nurses aren't the only ones leaving. The rate of skilled mainly-white emigration is officially 10,000 a year. But many leave without officially declaring it. Rob Lawrence, an emigration consultant, says unofficial estimates say there are 25-35,000 emigrating professionals every year.

Meanwhile, Netcare, one of South Africa's biggest private hospital companies, has announced its own drive to hire 1,000 British nurses, offering a free return flight, subsidised accommodation, a monthly salary of about \$1,013 and an expense-paid two-week African safari, the London *Times* newspaper reported. Netcare general manager John Von Klemperer was quoted saying: "The salary is not great in sterling terms, but when you take into account South Africa's low cost of living, and the year-round sunshine, it's not bad at all." ♦ (Gemma)

Collateral damage

WASHINGTON - Missiles targeted at US cities and intercepted by President George W. Bush's proposed missile defence shield could fall on Europe, Canada or central America instead, arms researchers warn. The proposed National Missile Defence plan includes a system to intercept intercontinental ballistic missiles minutes after launch, while their rocket boosters are still burning. This "boost-phase interception" is easier than targeting missiles in mid-flight as tracking a flaming rocket is easier than homing in on a relatively cool and easily disguised warhead sailing through the atmosphere. But destroying only the booster could leave the warhead zinging across the sky, says Ted Postol, a physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The warhead will be stopped short, but not stopped, and could hit anywhere between the launch site and the target city, Postol says. A nuclear missile fired at the US from North Korea could explode over Alaska or Canada, one fired from Iraq might strike Britain or mainland Europe. Researchers disagree on whether such a system could be judged a success or a failure. If it hit



land, the warhead would most likely hit relatively uninhabited area and kill far fewer people than intended, says veteran physicist Richard Garwin, who helped develop the American H-bomb. That should act as a deterrent, he says. But Geoff Forden, an MIT physicist, questions this: "The guys who might launch this thing won't care if it doesn't hit New York." George Lewis, another MIT physicist, suggests the shortfall problem could cause tensions between the US and its allies. "If you ask how many people will be killed, you're clearly better off having the warhead fall short," he says. "But the people who it's going to land on may have a different view." (New Scientist)

The case for a growing role

GEOFFREY E. WOOD

As growth slows around the world, fighting inflation appears to be going out of fashion. Nowadays, any number of politicians, businessmen, and even a few economists in Asia and Latin America object to central banks attempting to achieve a high level of inflation. They look at the actions of America's Federal Reserve Board in the 1990s and argue that central banks should focus on growth. But growth is not distinct from inflation.

Low inflation helps maintain financial stability by making it easier to appraise the value of investments. When inflation is high, it is harder to separate the change in prices of one good relative to another, from changes in the value of money. All investments look good—for a time. As money values rise it is difficult to see which are maintaining their real value or increasing it. When inflation is high (and if it is high it is usually also variable, making things worse) financial institutions make more mistakes.

Low inflation promotes growth in three ways: High inflation is unpopular—with the electorate in democracies, and with the wealthy ruling elite in non-democracies. Both seek to stop inflation by tightening money, causing an economic slowdown, possibly a recession. That deters investment, hampering growth.

• Inflation incites confusion about the meaning of price changes. The change of one good's price relative to another is what affects resource allocation. If the price of one good rises relative to that of a substitute, consumers will buy the substitute, while producers of the good becoming more expensive will increase production. Consumers use their incomes to make themselves well off, producers increase the efficiency with which they use their resources. These joint actions make economies and people better off.

• Low inflation promotes financial stability and financial stability promotes growth. If financial institutions are vulnerable or failing, they do not function well in transmitting funds from savers to investors. Many perfectly viable investment projects do not take place and growth is impeded.

Low inflation—something approximating a stable value in the purchasing power of money—promotes growth.

Why not give central banks responsibility for low inflation and for directly encouraging growth? Because central banks can do nothing directly. Monetary policy can have effects on demand, affecting inflation, but cannot stimulate innovation, enterprise, or anything that affects long-term growth. Attempts to do so are counterproductive, for they involve the central bank easing money,

Central banks must promote growth—by fighting inflation and acting as Lenders of Last Resort.

causing inflation, and inciting the associated problems alongside the pain of recession which comes about when inflation must be stopped. So, the central bank should provide the low inflation environment that promotes financial stability and be ready to act as Lender of Last Resort. Together with maintaining price stability, it can do no more for financial stability or economic growth.

South-east Asia's 1997 crisis demonstrates these general principles well. Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia were booming. Inflation was low, exchange rates stable. Overseas funds poured in.

Foreign investments were not a problem, but they allowed a problem to happen. Money growth accelerated, spilling into asset prices. Property prices surged. Banks borrowed and converted foreign money to lend to local borrowers, paying no heed to exchange rate risk. When property and equity booms began to slow, investment projects stopped looking so good and the inflow of funds dried up, threatening exchange rates. Devaluation occurred, and banks ran into difficulties because their liabilities had risen in foreign currency terms while their assets had depreciated in their domestic currency. Banking collapses followed, and recession.

To say these central banks neglected their responsibilities is unfair, because they were often over-ridden by politicians. The dangers of allowing lending to surge based on foreign borrowing by banks with little spare capital were neglected. Inflation in traded goods prices was low, but inflation in wider price indices was allowed to rise. When problems arose, the central banks could do nothing, because they only supply domestic currency. Governments neglected monetary and financial stability and brought severe economic problems upon themselves. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Geoffrey E. Wood is Professor of Economics City at University Business School, London.

Malaysian spin

PENANG – Malaysian media is filled with stories of Islamic extremism and militancy, even as the public tries to figure out what is behind this increased focus. Even Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines have begun expressing concern about a region-wide network of “militants.” Last week, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad said Islamic extremists were using religion to ignite hatred against the government, and that a network of extremists wanted to establish a union of Islamic governments in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. His remarks were the latest salvoes against a so-called Malaysian Mujahideen Group, KMM, which has been accused of a series of crimes, including the bombing of a Hindu temple and a church. About twenty Malaysians have been detained without trial under the Internal Security Act in recent months for suspected involvement in the KMM. Some claim over 2,500 students are also involved in such underground movements, and Education Minister Musa Mohamad has asked university heads to investigate immediately.

The persistent media coverage of alleged religious extremism has provoked two reactions. There is concern, especially among non-Muslims. “The emergence of this group is very worrying,” an Indian Malaysian government executive in Penang says of the allegations. But others are sceptical, cynical even—there is a sense that the allegations might actually be aimed at discrediting the opposition Muslim-based Islamic Party(PAS). The use of the ISA, which denies the accused a court appearance, has fuelled such scepticism. Since making sharp inroads in the last general election in November 1999 at the expense of Mahathir’s United Malays National Organisation ruling coalition, PAS and other opposition parties have had to contend with a string of restrictions, including a recent curb on political gatherings. (IPS)

The revolution will not be televised

TEHRAN - Iran has a potent new weapon against the west: 29-year-old Shadmehr Aghili, a handsome singer and songwriter and the country’s biggest pop star. Western rock is banned as corrupt and immoral, but Iran’s youth through the black market for CDs by western artists, and expatriate Farsi pop (“LA pop”). LA pop is enormously popular and in response to this and other Western music, Iran has created its own officially sanctioned rock-and-roll industry, with the most successful homegrown artists those picked to mimic the best Los Angeles ones. Aghili, a Pink Floyd fan, has been its greatest triumph. But even he is rebelling. He has never been allowed to give a concert because it would be a “national security threat.” His music was officially banned and he was prohibited from recording songs for 14 months, apparently because his popularity grew too fast for the government’s liking. Aghili, who plays violin and guitar, has made three albums and his fourth is finally being reviewed by the Culture Ministry. Some in the industry say his run-ins with the system were carefully contrived to boost his fame, but Aghili insists the fights and banning were genuine, prompted by his surging popularity. Still, he does understand the classic mechanism of rock-stardom—because television here is state-controlled, he says, “being on TV in Iran is like antibiotics: The more you appear, the less popular you are.”



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SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI
TOKYO - Reeling from the shock of rising unemployment and the recent ferocious stock market dip, Japan’s much-touted economic reforms package under popular Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is losing steam. “The economic situation is so bad he will have to water down most of what he has pledged to do,” says Harumi Arima, a political writer.

The Japanese public and much of the world saw Koizumi’s reform package, outlined when he came to power six months ago, as the answer to Japan’s decade-long economic woes. “I will conduct sweeping reforms to create an effective but smaller government through increased corporate productivity to revitalise the Japanese economy,” he said. The reforms centred around tackling the huge bad loans in banking, streamlining the construction industry and structural reforms by privatising public sectors like the debt-ridden postal services. Koizumi spelled out a three-year timetable to meet his reform target.

That is already history, contend analysts. A major stumbling block is Japan’s growing unemployment which in July climbed to a record five percent—3.3 million people, which ten years ago was one million. This rate is predicted to possibly reach 10 percent of the 120 million Japanese citizens, says Asahi Mutual Life Insurance as more companies announce layoffs. Fujitsu announced plans last week

to cut 16,400 jobs, while Toshiba announced more than 17,000 layoffs, mostly in its domestic labour force.

Experts see little or no growth, bordering on contraction, for the economy in the near future. The Bank of Japan lowered its growth estimates for the country for the third straight month in August, citing the slowdown in the US and European economies, and the deterioration in exports and personal consumption. The Japan Research Institute, a private research company, predicts a 0.9 percent drop in GDP between April and June, a one percent decline from the previous quarter. The drop in the stock market last week—the Nikkei index plunged to 17,000 points, close to the worst mid-nineties level—also reflects serious problems for Japanese corporations.

Koizumi is now facing criticism even within his own party. Shizuka Kamei, a senior policy maker in the Koizumi-led Liberal Democratic Party, accused State Minister Heizo Tekenaka, responsible for economic affairs, of being an amateur economist dragging Japan into a quagmire. Kamei points to a recent study by the Japanese Association of Corporate Executives that shows 1.5 million workers will lose their jobs each year due to structural reforms in the construction industry alone. The direness of the situation has hit home. Last week Koizumi announced a supplementary budget



Koizumi may have to break promises he made six months ago, and look to Europe’s social security nets.

in the form of new government bonds to boost the economy, which analysts say is a retraction of his earlier pledge to not use public money to help the economy. Supplementary budgets are typical of Japan’s old pork-barrel politics—conservative leaders poured money into public works to boost the economy, the very system Koizumi wants to change. Richard Koo, senior economist at the Nomura Research Institute, says the new budget is a positive sign. “As a taxpayer, I am against building more roads and bridges, but boosting construction industries helps create jobs,” explains Koo.

But, analysts argue, reforms must go together with new jobs, and this is not happening. Koizumi is being urged to increase spending to set up new industries in nursing care, information technology, placement services and other service industries. There is also a call for new employment policies and a larger safety net of ¥2-3 trillion yen (\$20-30 billion) to maintain peace and boost security. The hot topic these days is the European way of tackling unemployment and providing safety nets for those affected by recession.

Koizumi must go slow until he is absolutely sure he can protect the people from the repercussions of his reforms—economists suggest the package will cause growth to stay below one percent for two to three years. Koo cautions: “He must be careful not to make things too painful, otherwise Japan will not reform, but only shudder and die.” ♦ (IPS)

by MUSHAHID HUSSAIN

Try, try, try again

ISLAMABAD - Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sprung another surprise last week, saying that despite the stalemate at his July summit with Pakistan, he would be ready and willing to meet President Pervez Musharraf this month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York.

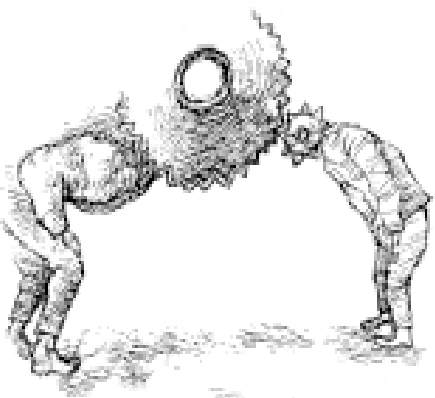
The official announcement from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said Vajpayee would “pick up the threads from discussions at Agra and give guidelines for further interaction.” Actually, the first signal for this announcement came from Vajpayee’s address to the Upper House of the Indian parliament on 16 August, when he proclaimed that “the process of dialogue with Pakistan would continue. We have reached an understanding on the broad framework for future talks.”

These two statements indicate that apparently, substantial progress was made mid-July Agra summit, which many termed a failure or at best a stalemate. After the two sides were unable to reach agreement on a joint declaration at Agra, Vajpayee, who has a Nixonian sense of the grand gesture of reaching out to adversaries and surprising them with his flexibility, declared his willingness for another encounter with Musharraf.

What factors may have impelled Vajpayee to seek another initiative for a summit with General Musharraf? Vajpayee, at 77 in poor health, has been under pressure from his allies in the 20-party National Democratic Alliance coalition government as well as hawks within his ruling BJP. Second, given the upcoming state elections in Uttar Pradesh, India’s largest state, in March 2002 and that the situation on the ground in Kashmir shows no sign of improvement, Vajpayee badly needs a foreign policy success to shore up his domestic position. Third, Vajpayee addresses the UN general assembly in New York on 25 September, and is also scheduled to meet US President George W Bush. A summit with President Gen Musharraf would embellish his international credentials of a ‘statesman seeking peace with Pakistan.’

The American factor is a key one in prodding Pakistan and India to settle their differences bilaterally through negotiations. Three broad factors define America’s interest in defusing tensions and building close ties with South Asian states.

First, with regard to India: the *New York Times* reported last week in an article aptly titled “United States Ready to End Sanctions on India to Build an Alliance,” the Bush administration is “moving on a broad front to strengthen relations with India.” This includes India’s potential role as a possible counterweight to China, now increasingly perceived in Washington as America’s principal political and military adversary. India was the first on board the Bush administration’s major foreign policy goal, missile defence and was among the four Asian ‘allies’—the others were Japan, South Korea and Australia—consulted on the issue through presidential special envoy



India and Pakistan are preparing for Summit 2001: Part II.

US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Further, news reports suggest that India and the US both have an interest in countering Islamic extremism, and the US has indicated a willingness to lift sanctions imposed after India’s May 1998 nuclear tests.

Second, the US’s primary interest in Pakistan, as enunciated by Armitage in Sydney last August, is negative: “The US is not interested in Pakistan becoming more under the influence of Afghanistan. There has to be a way out for Pakistan. We’re going to play an effective role.” That includes political engagement with the military regime, keeping open the option of partial lifting of sanctions, and continued cooperation on terrorism. The “way out” that Armitage talked about includes US support of World Bank and IMF efforts to stabilise Pakistan through a financial bail-out and endorsing the military regime’s devolution plan and road map for 2002 polls.

Third, the US is keen to maintain pressure on Pakistan and India regarding nuclear and missile proliferation.

It is in this regional and international political context that Vajpayee and Musharraf will have their Summit II in New York this month. Both know the military option is out in their quest for a Kashmir settlement, that no international mediation is forthcoming, and that there are economic and strategic stakes for Islamabad and New Delhi in seeking peace. ♦ (IPS)

FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

THIS PAGE CONTAINS MATERIAL SELECTED FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

The India-factor

Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-16 September
Pushkar Gautam



...The Maoists have not uttered a word against India after the opposition to the Mahakali Treaty. It is not a coincidence that Prachanda did not say anything against the Laxmanpur Barrage, against the infamous “Nepal Game Plan,” or against the Rasiyawal Khurd Lautan barrage. After the 1 June incident, the Maoists stated that the killings were associated with the “Gyanendra-Girija Nexus.” They were blamed for carrying out the massacre and the Maoists even went ahead and announced the end of monarchy and birth of a republic. Sections of the Indian media spread rumours that the Maoists were surrounding the capital immediately after the massacre. Also, around this time, the meeting to decide on the “institutional development of the republic” was held in

Siliguri.

The republic, it had already been decided, was in existence. So to institutionalise it why could the Maoists not have held a meeting in Rolpa, Rukum or any other part of Nepal? Why did they have to pick the spot where the Indian Naxalites were born and crushed? The Indian police in the past could easily enter a house in Baneswore and conduct a search, so how can you believe they were not keeping an eye on a house in Siliguri? The Indian government has been suppressing the Indian Maoists, but surprisingly it has not uttered a word against the Nepali Maoist forces now taking refuge in India. A serious question thus arises: “Are the Maoists and their movement being controlled by a third party?”

The Maoist have said that nationalism and a republic are two wheels of the same chariot and that both must be established in Nepal at the same time. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, for his part, has requested that the monarchy not be called into question. How can the Siliguri meeting and the prime minister’s request match? In what way is Prachanda’s process for establishing a republic from Siliguri different from BP Koirala’s methods of sending troops from India to capture Okhaldunga? Does the process fall within the parameters of the international communist movement? If the South Asian Federation has been formed for such actions, then political analysts are correct in saying that this movement is anti-nationalist and detrimental to our nationhood. Rumours had it that there was a plan by some communist groups to form a “government-in-exile” during the 1990 movement. The forces of nationalism were successful and so that could not happen. Will the proposed Maoist (parallel) government also be announced at Siliguri? Will the success of the peoples’ war and the “institutionalisation” of the republic depend on India’s generosity and kind-heartedness?

The Maoists say that the relationship between leaders and followers is like water to fish. Their leaders stay in Delhi and Siliguri and formulate their plans there. What type of relation do they have with their followers who are fighting in Rolpa and Solu? Isn’t it contradictory to say that “leadership should remain with the war group” and then make decisions in Siliguri? The only explanation the Maoist leaders may have for their followers is that everything had to be done to take advantage of the infighting within the enemy camps, which is itself possible because of the greatness of the Prachanda Path and the success of its political philosophy. They are going to confuse the rank and file by comparing their words

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The Maoists have been instigated by India to weaken Nepali nationalism, they’ve been instigated by the palace to weaken democracy, and by the Congress to weaken the UML.”

UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal in *Space Time Dainik*, 3 September.



Bowl: Talks

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 2 September

JANADESH charges, BUDHABAR responds

Nepal sells out

—Janadesh, 28 August

“Monarchy is necessary in Nepal. The Maoist demand of a republic, a constituent assembly and a republic are all detrimental to the nation.” This is what Madhav Kumar Nepal and his party is now saying publicly. And people are taking these statements seriously. Political analysts say Nepal is going the Rayamajhi way, giving rise to a new nickname for the UML supremo, “the second Rayamajhi.”

Sources say that at Siliguri Prachanda told Nepal that if the left forces were to unite, then it was possible to establish a republic in Nepal immediately. This could be either through the use of force or through the formation of a constituent assembly. Immediately after he returned from Siliguri, Nepal went to meet the king. He then stated that the monarchy was still needed in Nepal and that the call for a republic, a constituent assembly and an interim government were detrimental to nationhood. People suspect that Nepal told the king all that had happened in Siliguri.

Keshar Jung Rayamajhi is now the chief of the Privy Council. In 1960-61 he was the general secretary of what was then the Nepal Communist Party. He discarded the calls for a republic and publicly said that monarchy was needed in Nepal, which Puspa Lal and the other communists disagreed with. When Mahendra established a dictatorship, Rayamajhi welcomed it saying that it was in line with Marxist-Leninist principles. Rayamajhi said because the nation was in danger, what Mahendra did was in its best interest. Now Nepal, too, is saying the same things. Rayamajhi left the proletariat and moved towards the capitalists. In the same way, Nepal is leaving the poor and moving towards the capitalists. He has forgotten that organised and collective strength is the only protector of a country’s independence and nationalism.

True colours

Deshtar Sapthahik, 19 August

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The UML split into the UML and the ML almost four years ago. Now efforts are being made to re-unite the two parties, but the last round of talks between them has failed. This shows that the faction led by Bam Dev Gautam, which is in favour of uniting, is weak. All this supports the theory that the ML was never for uniting the various communist factions. After Bam Dev publicly showed an interest in returning to the UML, the UML put forward the idea of having a dialogue to start the process. But the conditions put forward by the ML for re-unification clearly show that it is not interested in doing so, and that the faction that is interested in uniting does not have a majority in the party. The UML has nothing to lose and it is a bit worried that there could be trouble if they accept people who do not agree with the party’s philosophy as spelt out in its sixth convention.

Still, the UML is prepared to accept all comrades who are willing to publicly accept that decisions they took in the past were wrong. The ML was quite active for some time after breaking away from the UML, mainly because it had the backing of the Congress. But in the last general elections, they were decimated. Today, it is not even

capable of holding its convention. ML leaders stay in Kathmandu and have no idea where their district level followers are. Most of the local ML workers have returned to the UML fold. These cadres have realised their mistakes. Even the leaders who were active in splitting the party have publicly accepted that their decision was wrong, and many have re-joined the UML.

... This breakaway faction did not get the 40 percent seats it wanted in the Central Committee earlier, which was reason it headed its own way. Now ML wants a 50 percent share in the Central Committee.

Questions for Prachanda

Sapthahik Birmesa, 31 August

महेश मणि दिक्षु साप्ताहिक बिमर्सा

... Here are some questions Dixit wants Prachanda to answer: 1). What is the mysterious understanding reached between the palace and the Maoists in not deploying the army against the Maoists? Without even engaging the army, how could Prachanda proclaim that he had achieved a military victory? 2). By calling the Constitution of 1990 reactionary and capitalist, Prachanda shows that he is interested in bringing about a socialist revolution. Are the Maoists interested in bringing about a socialist revolution?

3). The Maoists have been publicly stating that since the UML, the ML, Masal and other leftists did not support their idea of a republic and a constituent assembly, they will now begin training their guns at them too. To counter this, should the other left parties also arm themselves? 4). How can the communist people’s war be successful in a small country like Nepal, which is surrounded by neighbours that are themselves

Gutless Maoists

—Budhabar, 29 August

Prachanda is the sort of person who at times can churn out four or five press releases a day. But he did not have one after Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba presented his eight-point programme on 16 August. Why is Prachanda not speaking out now? It is over two weeks since he last issued a statement, and people are taking this as a sign that the Maoists have no agenda left.

The Maoists do not have the guts to support the radical land reform program announced in parliament, and they do not have the chutzpah to oppose it either. Now parliament is moving to bring about radical social change while the Maoists have been caught engaging in personal agendas and wish lists. Prachanda does not say a word about these radical social changes, but instead puts forward ideas about a republic, an interim government and a constituent assembly. Why is he doing this?

Since the Maoists do not have an agenda and cannot form a republic, it seems the Maoist leaders have become agitated and irresponsible and are indulging in character assassination. There is a vast difference between what they say and what they actually do. Their sloganeering about a republic will destroy this country and all that was achieved through the *Jana Andolan*. Clearly, their only aim is the formation of an interim government and a constituent assembly.

All parties that do not agree to its agenda are openly abused and their character is being questioned. It seems TN Pradhan (infamous for concocting conspiracy theories about the death of Madan Bhandari of the UML) has taken over their publicity department. In the recent meeting in Siliguri, the Maoists proposed a republic, but Madhav Kumar Nepal had pushed it aside stating that this was not the right time for that...How responsible are people who hide in India but want to establish a republic in Nepal? Janadesh, which is close to the Maoist party, says in its recent issue that Prachanda met Madhav Nepal in Siliguri recently. It further says Prachanda wanted left parties to unite to establish a republic. Madhav Nepal is said to have responded that this was impossible right now. The Maoists saw red and made public a fictitious meeting between Nepal and the king.

Peoples’ Governments

Jana Bhavana Weekly, 27 August

जाना भवना

A ceasefire is in effect in the government-Maoist war, but the Maoists have taken to holding as many public meetings as possible. Before (Sher Bahadur) Deuba became prime minister, the Maoists had formed local peoples’ government in eight districts. After the ceasefire came into effect, they have formed six more *jana sarkars* and have organised public meetings in 73 of the 75 districts.



ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

- ❖ **Tahadder Juddho** ("Their War") A film by journalist and poet Afsan Chowdhury on Bangladeshi women in the 1971 war, 50 min. 9 September, 5.30pm, Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Seema Chhetri at 542544, info@himalassociation.org.
- ❖ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

EATING OUT

- ❖ **Dinner and concert** Dine with famous Nepali singer Sapna Shree Pariyar and Suresh Manandhar. 8pm-11pm, except Tuesdays. Far Pavilion, The Everest Hotel. 488100
- ❖ **Regal Specialities of Nepal** Chef Govind KC's menu featuring Nepal's culinary heritage, with Nepali cultural programme. 1-15 September. Himalchuli Restaurant, Soaltee Crown Plaza. 273999
- ❖ **Naachghar** New menu with kababs and biryani daily. 7pm-10.30pm. Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ❖ **Friday Night Sekuwa (BBQ)** Appetisers, momos, salad, main courses and desserts, one complimentary beer. Rs 699 per head. Throughout the monsoon at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **Saturday lunch** at Restaurant Kantipur, Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. BBQ buffet Rs 500 per head. 410432, 414432
- ❖ **La Soon Restaurant and Vinotique** Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchowk. 535290
- ❖ **Wet and Wild Summer** Swimming and buffet lunch. Saturday and Sunday at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Taxes extra. 560675, 560775
- ❖ **Juicy steaks, chilled beer**, Mexican cuisine, great breakfasts, sports bar. All week long. Live band Wednesday, Sunday evenings 6.30-10.00. K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043
- ❖ **Saturdays at the Malla** Swimming and French chef's barbecue lunch. 11am-5pm. The Malla Hotel. 418385, 410966

MUSIC

- ❖ **Great coffee, live music** by the Heartbreakers. All September Fridays (7pm-10pm) and Sundays (6pm-9pm). Himalayan Java, Thamel. 416692
- ❖ **Weekends at The Jazz Bar** The Jazz Commission on Thursdays, Chris Masand's Latin band on Fridays and on Saturdays An Fainne. 7pm onwards. Hotel Shangri-La
- ❖ **DJ Neil/ Live Bands** Every Friday and weekends. Daily happy hour. Rox Bar. Hyatt Regency. 6pm—9pm. 491234
- ❖ **Caribbean Night** Drinks, dancing with top models from India. 8pm onwards, 7 September. Galaxy Club, The Everest Hotel. 488100

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Gourmet weekend** for Nepalis and expats. Includes one-night accommodation, international gourmet three-course dinner and breakfast, transport both ways. Rs 1,100. Naked Chef, Nagarkot. 417386, 680115
- ❖ **September at Shangri-La** Swimming and lunch for Rs 600, earn Rs 300. Hotel Shangri-La 412999.
- ❖ **Dwarika's Anytime Escape** Overnight accommodation with afternoon tea, cocktail, dinner, breakfast and massage. \$130 net per couple. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **Chiso Chiso Hawama** Summer BBQ package for Nepalis and expats. Rs 1,250 per head. Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 410432, 414432
- ❖ **Nagarkot Escape** Weekends in cottages, views of the Himalayas, valleys and forests. Special rates for Nepalis and resident expats. Hotel Keyman Chautari. keyman@wlink.com.np 436850

EXHIBITION

- ❖ **Ghatana: Installation on an incident** Sudarshan Rana, featuring Nepathya. 8 September, 5.30pm onwards. Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal. Free.
- ❖ **From the Bodhi Tree** Meditative paintings by Prakash Chandwadkar. Until 10 September, 11am-6pm except Saturdays. Autumn Exhibition Series, Siddhartha Art Gallery.
- ❖ **Life and Times of BP Koirala** Photo exhibition to celebrate the 88th birth anniversary of BP Koirala. 7-9 September, 10am-5pm. Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap, Rs 10.

TALK

Mandalas and Yantras in the Indian Smārta Tradition Prof Gudrun Buhnemann, Professor of South Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. 10 September, 5pm, Library Hall, Royal Nepal Academy, Kamaladi (231791). The South Asia Institute (271018, saiktm@mos.com.np)

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

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Get ready to be rained on. There are two low-pressure areas giving the monsoon its second wind—one moving down from eastern Tibet and the other over the north Indian plain. The moderately strong north Indian trough is drawing some of the massive clouds over the Bay of Bengal towards Kathmandu Valley, while the Tibetan trough is in the process of concentrating clouds over the central Himalaya. This means the Kosi catchment in eastern Nepal will be replenished, but the Kulekhani, unfortunately, will go thirsty. The city will see thunderstorms this week, and the mercury will drop by another degree. Soon, it will be autumn, but for now, it's simply wet.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
27-19	27-19	28-20	28-20	28-19

YAK YETI YAK



BOOKWORM



Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism Judith Simmer-Brown
Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2001
Rs 2,380

An exploration of the primary emblem of the feminine in Tibetan Buddhism, the dakini, a "sky-dancer", a semi-wrathful spirit woman who manifests in visions, dreams and meditation experiences. Simmer-Brown argues the dakini symbolises levels of personal realisation: the sacredness of the body, the meeting of mind and body in meditation, the visionary realm of ritual practice and the spaciousness of the mind itself.

Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path Bhante Henepola Gunaratna
Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA, 2001
Rs 1,345

In an engaging, endearing manner, Gunaratna delves into each step of the Buddha's most profound teaching on bringing an end to suffering: the Noble Eightfold Path. He offers skilful ways to handle anger, find right livelihood, cultivating loving-friendliness in relationships, and tools to overcome the mental hindrances that prevent happiness.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711,, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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Radisson

A bitter sweet problem

Diabetes is a result of the body's inability to regulate blood sugar levels. Under normal circumstance a substance called insulin carries out this function. However when a person is unable to produce insulin, the result can be very serious. In the early part of the century, scientists discovered how to produce insulin artificially, and now millions of people, who would certainly have died, are able to control their blood sugar levels themselves. They can do this either through intravenous injections or tablets.

It is thought that diabetes doubles the risk of heart disease. Consequently, a cardiovascular exercise is extremely valuable, because of the effect it has on weight loss, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Regular exercise can provide an enormous boost to the self esteem of those who have previously missed out on the joy of physical activity.

Most diabetics find it easiest to develop a regular, moderate and predictable exercise pattern, i.e., burning the same amount of calories at the same time each day. This is very important in terms of ensuring a consistent sugar balance. The ideal diet for diabetics combines carbohydrates, fats and proteins in a way, which will reduce heart disease and promote good health. Most authorities agree that foods should be split into groups according to their nutritional composition, i.e., vegetables, meats, breads and fruits. A certain amount of food should be taken from each group every day.



Sanjiv S Soreng
Manager, Clark Hatch Fitness Centre
Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu

Mathi, mathi, mathi...



Sambhujeet Baskota's star is on the ascendant.

SALIL SUBEDI 11.30am, the Royal Nepal Academy green. The music director of the academy is half an hour late. He shows up soon enough, though.

"Sorry *bhai*, I was recording till four in the morning," confesses Sambhujeet Baskota, red-eyed and a little distant. His charming trademark smile is in place, though, which makes it all right. And then there is the unmistakable voice. The merest whisper takes you right back to "Tala tala gairi khet ma dhan jhuliyoo..." or "Sangeeta...". Tired or not, Sambhujeet leads us up to his office, which has in the past been occupied by luminaries such as Ambar Gurung.

Sambhujeet Baskota, forty-something, is one charming man— but liked and, well, not-so-liked, in similar proportions. Critics say he is a little too far away from the anxiety of influence for comfort, using freely music he feels an affinity with. There are also some who dislike the new form he is giving Nepali music, with his blending folk and contemporary music and experiments with technology.

But that, fans will tell you, is exactly what they like about Sambhujeet—that he moves with the times, that he creates a body of work that they can appreciate on different levels. And not even critics will deny that his music is catchy and captivating. One long-time admirer put it this way: "Sambhujeet is what the grassroots likes. He provides sweetness to difficult lives."

When a film with a Sambhujeet soundtrack is playing, his limpid voice echoing off the silver screen, the theatre often resounds with clapping, cheering, singing-along. People have been known to even dance in the aisles. Maybe this is impure music, but for the urban and suburban working class, the heart of Nepali modernity, this is just the ticket to a groovy time.

And that is what Sambhujeet likes. He is intense about the work he does day in, day out, in the studio. But this intensity manifests itself less in pontification and crazy dreams about changing Nepali music and more in action. Sambhujeet walks his talk. And he

does it with wit—many of his lyrics and compositions are funny, but some are positively absurd and it might just be that subversive streak that makes him so popular and a staple sound on the local party circuit. He even gets to people who don't understand a word of what he is singing—at trekking gatherings and in Thamel, Sambhujeet's songs are an instant hit, with tunes like "Ghumna jau Dhulikhel..." played and replayed.

Sambhujeet did not set out to be a musician. In 1971, when he was a student at the Bhanubhakta High School who excelled in gymnastics and football—his well-toned body is still his secret pride—a voice test for Radio Nepal came his way, and that was where it all began. He was singing and trying his hand at composition even when he earned a bachelor's degree in political science. He went on to earn another bachelor's this time in music from the Sangeet Bisharad. Sambhujeet made his career in music rather than sport, but is still active and takes care of his health. He doesn't drink or smoke and in the tradition of yogis, says he sleeps barely four hours a day.

It was only in 1985 that Sambhujeet got into the crazy world of film soundtracks. He mainly got in because he'd been noticed singing parodies and whacky satires about corrupt political leaders and the authorities. "That was the need at that time, and I did what my skills allowed me to do," he says with

surprising seriousness when reminded of how he used to appear on stage, dressed up like a leader, covered in vermillion and flowers, and singing parodies mocking the most notorious Panchayat leaders. And his point was well taken. The late King Birendra even invited him to the palace and said to him: "Keep up your good work."

Sambhujeet has come a long way—from Nati Kaji to Devika Pradhan, and now Nabin Bhattarai. He now works as music director on many productions, composing and arranging songs and background scores, and working with singers and musicians. And most of this has to be done fast—the longer the production time, the more expensive a film. He accepts that he often works under unreasonable deadlines, but it doesn't the criticism that it affects his work. "I can't really express how I do it, but I can really drown myself completely in the work until I can produce something good, in minutes, hours or days." Sambhujeet says he has sometimes produced a whole soundtrack at what is by any account short notice—he scored the film *Thuldai* in about four hours. And it was a hit! He gets excited, a little boastful even, as he talks about composing Devika Pradhan's "Estai Rahecha Yahako Chalan" in one hour, Asha Bhosle's "Gairi Khet Ko Sirai" on the flight from Kathmandu to Mumbai. He manages such a punishing schedule, he says, because his family supports him through frenetic and calm times.

Sambhujeet has composed the soundtracks to more than 120 Nepali movies and some 2,000 modern, folk and devotional songs, and has lost track of the number of jingles he's tossed off. No surprise then that he is the largest-selling composer in Nepal today and had 14 national awards come his way over the years. But none, curiously, for his biggest hits—*Banjo Khet Ma Chakke Salam Cha*, or *Meri Basanti*, or *Chatta Ruma Kya Malum*. But none of that matters now, after he received three awards from the new prime minister, including the big 'un—the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Nepali Motion Picture Association ceremony last week.

Sambhujeet is happy and says he's inspired to keep on expressing himself freely. ♦



LANGUAGE LESSONS

by LEAH SCHULTE

Phone chat, Nepali style

In Nepal, I have a love-hate relationship with my phone. After finding my own place with my own line, I honoured my prize possession. I didn't cover it with a doily or apply sindur on it during puja, but it commanded centre stage on the office desk.

But then I saw the downside of a phone. The dreaded incoming call. Like Pavlov's dog, the ringing phone soon began to trigger an automatic autonomic reaction—the quickening pulse, sweating, pupil dilation, and most importantly, the priming of the ear drum. It would start with a meek "Hello" as I kept my hopes up for a successful phone encounter. If I were lucky, it would be a friend or a hang-up at the sound of my *bideshi* voice. Otherwise, the onslaught would begin. "*Kaha paryo?*", "*Ko bolnubhaeko?*", "*Yo office ki ghar ho?*" all came hurling at me while I tried, in limited Nepali, to answer their questions and fought for an opportunity to get a few of my own in. Sometimes I felt like I had given out all basic information on myself except passport number and clothing size. Shouldn't the caller, the disturber, identify him/herself prior to drilling me, the receiver, the person being disturbed?

Then I found out that "*Kaha paryo?*" is a remnant from the advent of phone systems in Kathmandu when calls placed often went through to incorrect locations. Many callers were abrupt and demanding almost to the point of rudeness. I found this irritating but also fascinating, and in complete contrast to the warmth, politeness and leisurely introductions and civilities in most face-to-face encounters here.

I developed and attempted different strategies for tackling callers. I tried identifying myself and our office when answering the phone. Sometimes I tried unsuccessfully, to sideswipe the interrogation and not divulge information on myself by asking "Where or what number are you trying to reach?" Or, "Whom would you like to speak to?", though initially with my poor Nepali, who

knows what I did ask. Some frustrated callers, hung up and redialled, only to realise their fate of having to have another painful phone exchange with me. A few callers got high marks for persistence for demanding me take a message for so-and-so. While I thought my repeated "*chhaina*" response to their demand to give the phone to so-and-so clarified it was a wrong number, many assumed it meant so-and-so was just temporarily out. Other times, when feeling cantankerous, I got into a repeated "Hello?", "Hello?" stalemate with the caller.

Finally, I confessed my phone fears to my tutor. We practised phone scenarios. However the clear pronunciation, slow delivery, and set-ups for incorporating our practised phrases occurred only in our simulated calls never in reality.

My confidence and phone skills only marginally improved and I resorted to eavesdropping. I felt no guilt, as this was part of the homework assignment in my language course. I started carefully monitoring my assistant's phone skills when she was in the office. I began dilly-dallying in the busy but dreaded communication centre of my former existence. I became a lingering showcase-shopper at stationery shops with phones that were patronised by Nepali rather than *bideshi* clientele.

I am still not 10 out of 10 for those incoming calls, they are slightly less stressful now. The phone rings. I count my blessings for having it. I rally up a light-hearted attitude. I arm myself with those key phone phrases, and once again enter the world of *phoneko kura garni*. ♦



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ART REVIEW by AJIT BARAL

Meditating on the bodhi tree

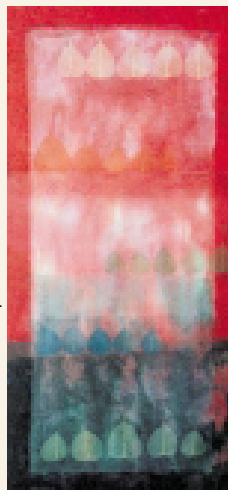
India's art scene is vibrant, experimental. Nepal's can be most kindly described as nascent. Is it possible that someone from the Indian milieu can find enough inspiration and artistic impetus to live and work here. Well, Prakaash Chandwadkar can. He has been living here for the last three years, creating and exhibiting his constantly-evolving art. His latest exhibition titled "From the Bodhi Tree" is on until 10 September at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal.

"I don't like to stick with one thing, one idea," says Chandwadkar. And sure enough, the work on display here is markedly different from his abstract paintings that were part of the show at the Nepal Art Council earlier this year. This time, Chandwadkar's mixed-media paintings have a lot more identifiable images, the most prominent of which are pipal leaves, lokta pasted on canvas. But Chandwadkar has not really made a transition from formlessness to form—even the images he creates here are part of a larger design, a pattern that is essentially abstract.

If ubiquitous pipal leaf doesn't instantly put you in mind of the Buddha attaining enlightenment, the title, "From the Bodhi Tree," will do it. When asked about this Buddhist leitmotif, Chandwadkar says unpretentiously that he hasn't really gone deep into Buddhism, or the symbol. Which is fair enough, as here the representations are effective enough to stand on their own. The cool greens and blues delineate multiple planes on the canvas, drawing you in as if into a serene, expansive house with many rooms. Or the space of an imagined bodhi tree.

In this show, as in his others, Chandwadkar is not over-concerned with leitmotifs, but with painting at its purest—how colour is mixed and spread across a surface. And as it turns out, the gentles yet assertive sensuousness of his colours, the firmness with which they stand their ground, achieve an effect not too different from the serenity and clarity of meditation, the quest for nirvana under a bodhi tree. And that suffices.

In some of the paintings on show, alongside energetic brush strokes of vibrant red, yellow and orange, there is something like a window, through which there is a gentle reminder of mindfulness—a pipal leaf coolly reposing in space that seems unbounded. But Chandwadkar is not really too worried about whether viewers see it this way or not. Like Valery says of his poetry, Chandwadkar deliberately only creates half his paintings. Feel free to interpret the other half and draw it in your mind. Any way you like. ♦



MUSIC



Nepathya is back with its innovative, folksy pop.

YUBAKAR RAJ KARNIKAR

All Amrit and his friends wanted to do was play the kind of music they would have liked to hear—if it existed. So they got together in 1990, called themselves Nepathya, which means "Backstage", and threw together a pretty unusual sounding mix—Nepali folk tunes with a western flavour—giving rise to a distinct new sub-genre of Nepali popular music, lok pop or folk-pop. Wherever the fresh young band played, people couldn't sway to their beat. Nepathya went back to the studio this year—for the fifth time—to record their new album *Resham*, which they promise brings the sound of the stage to the studio.

Nepathya's eponymous debut album was released in 1993 to popular acclaim. But despite their considerable fan-following, some still demurred: they were just there at the right time, there were so few Nepali bands, it wasn't too hard to get noticed. Nepathya's third offering, *Minpachasma*, silenced naysayers. Critics and fans raved and erstwhile sceptics stared open-mouthed as some 120,000 copies of it flew off the shelves. Everyone was humming the hit song "Chekyo, chekyo" and

Nepathya was sailing. The band was playing everywhere, and had a tour in Japan lined up.

But pride, as is said so commonly of showbiz, comes before a fall, and the band's fourth album *Shringar* was an unmitigated disaster. Amrit puts it down to that heady "star" feeling the band had, which made them take their music for granted. He wishes Nepathya had practiced more and worked harder on the album, instead of getting swept away by celebrity. The band was so disappointed with the album that they pulled all but 15,000 copies of *Shringar* from the market. But this was a learning experience and the band has moved on. Now, far more than being chart-toppers or international stars, they are concerned with making music their audience likes and that they are fully satisfied with. "An artist should remain an artist," says Amrit. "Being a star is not a big deal—any good artist is that anyway." This time around, the band spent a lot of time refining the tunes, recording, improvising, re-recording and basically pegging away in the studio.

The composition of the band has changed over the years, their most recent addition is Naresh, who used

to be with the cover band Crisscross, but found the idea of working with Nepathya intriguing. The band credits Naresh with the "raw", stage-in-studio sound of the new album, which they say works better with their music, which has become more complex over the years, than the smooth, "finishing" technique of studio technicians.

Nepathya is quite excited about an epic 13-minute track on *Resham*, but say they'd rather wait for feedback from readers than pontificate on it at this stage. They're quite happy to talk about the other songs, though. They range from new interpretations of folk songs from eastern and western Nepal, Nepathya's spin on the adhunika style, and a new rendition of the song *Yo Zindagi*, to the exciting-sounding *Dhak Dhak*, which might just become an anthem of Kathmandu residents.

With *Resham*, Nepathya hopes to break new ground in contemporary Nepali music. The band's mature music could almost be a roadmap of today's music scene—it nods to the past, particularly the era of Ambar Gurung, Narayan Gopal and Gopal Yonzon, traverses the breadth of

Nepali folk music traditions in search of catchy melodies and memorable lyrics, and sometimes has the feel of that vague but identifiable entity "world music." But eventually it produces something totally different, very Nepali and very listenable. Naresh talks about how they are comfortable using acoustic drums in conjunction with amplified bass guitars. The band's philosophy keeps it simple: use instruments the way they are meant to be. After all, they come out of traditions, and people have figured out the best way to play them. Hence, they say, the "raw" feel of the recording, the improvisation—you hear what the music really sounds like when it is played live.

Nepathya likes a lot of current Nepali musicians, particularly Cadenza, Mukti and the Revival, and Robin 'n' Looza. What they like less is the gratuitous use of instruments like the madal and the sarangi, and the way contemporary recordings are filled with cheesy digital effects.

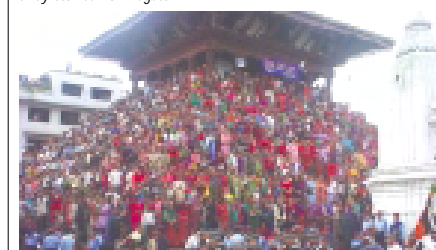
Nepathya is doing all it can to up the musical ante. Their lyrics are simple and their music light. They make it look almost easy to touch the hearts of thousands of young people. And that effortless sweetness, say fans, is why they are one of the biggest names in contemporary Nepali music. ♦

(*Resham* comes out on 10 September. Nepathya will play at the Royal Academy, Kathmandu on 15 September, and at the City Hall, Pokhara on 22 September. Both shows will be web-cast live. For more information, visit www.wavenep.com.np)

HAPPENINGS



REGMI AT REST: Senior politician Dr Dilli Raman Regmi's contributions to Nepali democracy and development were remembered when he passed away last week. 31 August.



PYRAMID OF HUMANITY: Every available inch of space was taken at Basantapur Square when King Gyanendra came to flag off the rath yatra at the start of Indra Jatra on Saturday, 1 September.



RARING TO GO: In Nagarkot at a curtain-raiser for next month's international mountain bike contest, Peter Stewart of Himalayan Mountain Bikes (HMB), Radisson's Kent Davidson, HMB's Geoff Stewart, Yak & Yeti's Craig Newton, NT's Kunda Dixit and Lyall Crawford of the Australian Embassy. Sunday, 2 September.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

The tooth, and nothing but the tooth

In all the hullabaloo last week about the discovery of the Tibetan Wild Ass (Latin Name: *Equus asinus*) in Upper Mustang, one small bit of news that was tucked away in the inside pages went largely unnoticed by the seething masses and the international community. It was the fact that Nepal has just overtaken the United States as the most litigious country on earth. And we have no one else to thank for putting our up-and-coming country in the Guinness Book than our prime-time minister who, in a far-sighted and statesmanlike move, declared that instead of a roof over every Nepali head, he would first put a ceiling. Architecturally, this is a sound move. Legally, it is a masterstroke. Politically, it was either a *coup de grace* or a *coup d'etat*. We'll let you know as soon as more information becomes available.

Be that as it may and notwithstanding the where-to's and who-so-for's that are nagging everyone in Kathmandu's cocktail circuit, it was on the way to my dentist for the monthly instalment payment of a root canal I had done in 1984 that I noticed a long line outside the Bhattarai, Bhattarai and Bhattarai Law Associates, (Pvt) Ltd. Being a naturally inquisitive person, I went up to a three-year-old toddler waiting patiently, all by himself sucking a pacifier, and asked him what was going on.



"I'm suing my Dad."

"Whoa. You sure you want to do that, what does your mum think?"

"She's suing him too."

"Did you ask your grandparents for permission?"

"No. But they are suing my great-grandparents."

"But aren't your great-grandparents dead?"

"Yeah, but Atty. Bhattarai says it doesn't matter. He says he'll sue anyone dead or alive."

Shaking my head, I walked on to the dentist's to find there was a queue there too. It had snaked out of the clinic, past Ghanashyam Ghee Bhandar, and ended in the vicinity of the Bagalamukhi Cold Store and Supermarket. I joined the line, prepared for a long night out in the open. Being a curious kind of guy, I struck up a conversation with an elderly woman slightly younger than me. She was carrying a large sack, and I inquired as to its contents: "Stocking up on spinach, I see?"

She glared at me, the kind of look that Helen of Troy would have reserved for Agamemnon, the brother of Menelaus, King of Sparta. She spat out: "No, I sold all my land and withdrew all my money from the bank." She didn't have to tell me how expensive dentists are these days, but had it got so bad that you needed a sackful of cash to pay for tartar removal? "Don't you understand, I'm going to put all this money where no one else is ever going to get at it: gold teeth."

I wished her well, but didn't want to tell her that usually unreliable sources in government had told us Singha Durbar's next move would be a ceiling on the number of teeth an average head of household is allowed to possess: 26, of which 6 incisors, 4 canines, 6 pre-molars and 10 molars. We don't yet know what the democrats want, but the republicans even want a cap on all crowns! ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Look, no hands

Sudharshan Gautam has a message for those who have limbs intact: "It doesn't make a difference what you have and what you don't. If there is a will there is a way."

Sudharshan came to Kathmandu as a lad of 16 from his village in Ramechhap. He was flying a kite from his roof when he fell right on a high voltage wire. Rushed to hospital, doctors had to amputate both his hands.

While recovering from the accident, Sudharshan taught himself to write, eat, and drink with his toes. He gave his SLC exams from his village in 1996, and passed

in second division although the rest of his class failed. "I felt as though I had conquered the world," he recalls. Since then there has been no stopping Sudharshan. He is in his third year in a Bachelor in Business Studies program in Kathmandu. "I had no choice, I decided to teach myself to use my legs as my hands," he says.

But even with all his will power and strength, things have not been easy. There were many dead-ends, and days of despair. But now with Only At Nepal, a private internet outfit that promotes social causes (www.onlyatnepal.com) he approached Toyota for help.

On Saturday, 7 September,

Sudharshan will take off in a brand new Toyota Echo from the Birendra International Convention Hall and drive along Baneshwor using his legs to establish a record in the Guinness Book of World Records. "If others can do it, why can't I?" asks Sudharshan who took a month to learn driving with his feet.

He doesn't have a license yet, but Sudharshan already thinks the sky is the limit. His next goal: to fly an aeroplane with his legs—something he has dreamt about all his life. "More than ever, I want to be able to do it now," he says.

Sudharshan wants to show he doesn't really need hands and has rejected offers to try out artificial limbs.

Sudharshan always had an activist streak, and he wants to dedicate his life to improve living standards in his village of Gursie in Ramechhap. But isn't having no hands a disadvantage? "No way. I don't feel I don't have hands at all." ♦



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