

Times

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GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Picking up the pieces after a war has now become an art. People do PhDs in conflict studies and peace brokering. Others get premature Nobel Peace Prizes even if the peace they make falls to pieces.

George W Bush should take a page out of Sun Tzu in which the Chinese praetorian guru wrote that the ideal war is one that is won before the fighting even begins. He could even paraphrase *The Art of War* to find a lesson in how ill-considered demonisation can lead a country into a war it doesn't really want. Super powers and regional powers all do this: put a face on an external enemy, whip up a frenzy that forces them to unleash the dogs of war. This is probably what Sun Tzu was saying: it is easier to keep a peace than to win a war, so don't start one. We know only too well about the one big guns are un-sheathed, and war gathers its deadly momentum, it is much harder to stop. If 1990 was Francis Fukuyama's "end of history", then 2001 is turning out to be the end of the end of history.

Americans have called this undeclared war against an invisible enemy "the first war of the 21st century" (Really? How about Macedonia, Sierra Leone and the Congo?) or "a new kind of war". Actually the New War was a phrase used by Mary Kaldor of the London School of Economics long before the terrorist attacks last week. She described the New War that followed the end of the Cold War.

Media is mobilised to mobilise publics to support wars. In this info war both sides will use media equally ruthlessly. Those with a tradition of free press and democracy will do it in a more sophisticated way. Example, of course, is the Gulf War where manipulation of global multimedia was carried out with military precision and on a war-footing. There was no way people were going to be seeing blood on the screen, this was going to be the techno-pornography of a video game with the public allowed peeps of smart bombs hitting crosshairs.



Kaldor's definition

of a New War also looks at how intelligence against civilians has now become a part of military strategy. In conventional as well as guerrilla wars, no one has time anymore for winning hearts and minds. As we saw in Bosnia and in Kosovo, you rule the population by fear and fear alone: mass rape, massacres, ethnic cleansing. Crimes against humanity now seem to be at the heart of military strategy, not just the side-effect of a war.

Then, there are the ethnic conflicts which get support from the diaspora. Extortion, looting and forced taxation are justified in the name of sustaining the war effort. Civil wars, therefore, are not "domestic" any more. They have become conflicts without borders.

New wars are even more difficult to end than old wars. Once they set in motion the mass killing of civilians, it builds up so much bad blood so quickly that it ensures enough revenge to last generations. Joblessness and poverty find attractive new outlets in fundamentalism, racism and xenophobia—all disguised as nationalism and patriotism. And vested interest groups who profit from the war economy of weapons purchases, the arms dealers and the military-industrial complex all ensure that the fighting never stops.

Wars therefore worsen the conditions that led to the wars in the first place. And it is precisely these conditions that prevent peace-making have to focus on. Like oil fires that burn out because they starve themselves of oxygen, these virulent conflicts simmer down occasionally as both sides regroup. That is the opportunity to move in to try to work on a truce. There is limited time to try to address the root causes: unemployment, inequality, and meeting basic needs. A strategy for development is a strategy for prevention.

But this is not something that can be implemented in the lackadaisical ways of old government. It needs a Marshall Plan of logistics and delivery through efficient and honest government.

We in Nepal are in the middle of a shaky peace process. A truce has held for two months, it bodes well that both sides know and respect public opinion for an end to the conflict. A peace process is accumulative, each step forward leaves a residue even if it is marred by violence. Leaders need to keep the people on their side, and deliver what they promise. The peace process must include rebels who have the capacity to destroy the process: hardliners must be included otherwise they will spin off into a radical faction that will keep on fighting. There must be post-conflict roles for the militia in the security forces.

A realistic truce is more desirable than an unrealistic peace agreement. But deep down there is only one thing that will make or break a peace effort: both sides must want to end the war.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

The eagle is wounded

George W's call for vengeance may sound cathartic, but the strong end up fuelling the fire of revenge in the weak.

Emotions are older than the invention of language. A child starts to have feelings much before she learns to speak. Words capture our responses to outer stimuli—anger, hate, hope and happiness. But when it comes to inner human feelings, words almost always fail.

To express love and loss, we have no recourse but to fumble with poetry, or lapse into the comforting embrace of silence. The horrendous tragedy of Black Tuesday in New York and Washington sent thinking people everywhere into that state of speechlessness where tears dry before completing their journey from the heart to the eyes. All over the world, more people grieved at the loss of thousands of innocent lives. Had the spin doctors of President George W Bush understood the enormity of shock and horror among people not just in America, but worldwide, they wouldn't have poisoned the universal anguish with their rants of war.

Pearl Harbour, to which parallels are being drawn, was indeed an act of war. The Japanese flew with their flags, and Americans knew who their enemies were. But the planes that crashed into the twin towers of World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, were civilian airliners with innocent passengers on board. To call these attacks an act of war was tantamount to declaring their unfortunate victims "collateral damage"—an anachronistic euphemism of pure callousness coined by Americans themselves during the Gulf War and the name of a movie starring Austrian bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger which postponed its premier this week because of the crisis.

Even the worst wars have terms of engagement. They have a purpose, however abhorrent—for which victory is sought. But the only purpose of Black Tuesday appears to have been destruction for its own sake, driven by a blinding rage. No victims emerged out of these fires of

fury. It consumed both the victims, and the guilty.

More bellicose is the tendency among the likes of Henry Kissinger to fall for Samuel Huntington's racist and self-prophetic theory of "Clash of Civilisations". Americans don't seem to realise that for nearly four-fifths of humanity, they stand for all that is evil in this world—racism, hypocrisy, inequality, wasteful consumerism, immorality, war, destruction, decadence and death. United States of America, along with its satellites like Britain and Israel, are considered universal perpetrators of injustice. The countries they have declared rogue states reciprocate by calling them pariahs.

The carnage of September 11 is not even an act of terror in the usual sense of the term. As terrorism, it was an utter failure because it created revolution, not fear, in the minds of people worldwide. War warners in Washington, London and Jerusalem are trivialising the impact of this human catastrophe by reducing their responses to the level of self-righteous anger. They don't seem to realise that *jihadis* sacrifice themselves on the promise of a heaven that can come only after apocalypse. Annihilation of an unjust world order—no less—is the purpose of those who opt for self-extinction. The *jihadis* behind the Black Tuesday were like kamikaze ("drive wind" in Japanese) warriors in Bushido tradition, an ancient philosophy and warrior ethic based on non-attachment principles of Zen Buddhism.

A Bushido warrior is said to have achieved his spiritual peak when he is emotionally desecrated, free and fluid, adaptable and relaxed, totally focused, ready to die, and a master of his craft. Physically, "he empties himself and becomes a weapon" for the cause of his "loyalty, self sacrifice, justice, a sense of

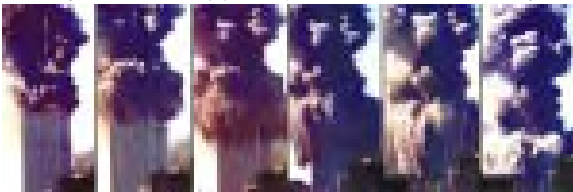
shame, refined manners, purity, modesty, frugality, martial spirit, honour and affection". It is impossible to take a moral high ground against those who willingly eliminate themselves for their faith.

Faith is an abstraction, and waging war on an undefinable enemy is as doomed to failure. That is why George W's declaration "We are at war" resounds with false bravado. The boast that "we will smoke them out of their holes, we will get them running, and we will bring them to justice" is what Americans want to hear.

Let's face it, it is not the time to call for a war. It is time for introspection, an occasion to engage with the world. By its withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol, by its unwillingness to enter into missile control regime, by its refusal to ban land mines—in short, by the sheer arrogance of its power in the name of unilateralism, Americans have alienated a significant section of the world population. The United States has a big hammer, but it cannot make Islam a nail. Waging war is not the solution of an issue as complex as orthodoxy and revolution. Call for vengeance may sound cathartic, but the strong end up adding the fuel of revenge into the fire of rage that burns inside the weak.

Engagement is not appeasement. On the contrary, by the knee-jerk threats against Osama bin Laden and Taliban in starvation-hit Afghanistan, the United States will confer a measure of respectability on them that they do not deserve. We don't need another war at the beginning of a new century. After all, we are supposed to be getting civilised by economic liberalisation and globalisation.

The myth of American invincibility lies shattered in the rubble of once mighty buildings. America has lost the innocence of its isolation. Reality is even more painful than sadness, and redemption lies in forbearance, not vengeance. I



The second life of Chairman Mao

by IAN BURUMA



Chairman Mao died twenty five years ago this month. Or did he? His name is still evoked with reverence in such revolutionary backwaters as Peru and Nepal. In China he has become a pop icon to a young urban elite with no memories of him.

Mao's legacy remains a sore point to the current Party leadership, who have betrayed almost everything the Chairman once espoused. At the same time, however, Mao has become a folk deity. His image, often encased in gold, dangles from the rear-view mirrors of many Chinese taxis, especially in his native province of Hunan. In the village of Shaohuan, where Mao was born, amulets bearing his face are sold alongside amulets with Buddhist or Taoist images, each offering the promise of prosperity and good health.

Even Chinese less prone to religious superstition and aware of Mao's murderous deeds acknowledge his greatness. Mao, they say, was a great leader. To be *weida* is to transcend good and evil. For the Great Leader is like a god, whose wrath is as terrifying as his goodness is bountiful. Non-Chinese are often surprised and not a little outraged to find out that Hitler will inspire a type of fascination new in places such as Taiwan. Hitler, like Mao, was *weida*.

The scale of violence unleashed by Mao, far from diminishing him, adds to his

god-like stature. A vengeful god, who comes to purge the world of corruption, cannot take half-measures. Like a giant storm, he must rage, and the destruction and death left in the wake of his wrath is a testimony to the Great Leader's superhuman powers. Mao followed other awesome gods into the Chinese pantheon. Like the God of War, his power to unleash violence is seen by some as a necessary force to keep demons at bay.

The fascination for great, destructive leaders is not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon. Neither is the affinity of rural folk to deity powerful men. It is true, perhaps, that people in polytheistic societies create new gods from secular day more easily than those who worship one god. In East Asia, anything—a great leader, a mountain, even a rock—can be imbued with a sacred spirit. One irony of modern Chinese history is that despite attempts by the Chinese Communist Party to stamp out superstitious practices with "scientific socialism", their cult of Mao only helped to perpetuate them.

There is, however, a deeper problem underlying

the Maoist cult, posthumous and during his lifetime. It is rooted in the historical lack of separation in China between church and state. Emperors in pre-modern China were intermediaries between Heaven and Earth, not unlike popes or high priests of a state religion.

The Chinese state, like ancient states in the western world, was based on a cosmic notion. Harmony would persist in the world only if the rulers were virtuous, did their ceremonial priestly duties, and kept Earth in harmony with Heaven. Corruption and immoral practices in government would invite the wrath of Heaven, and the right to rule would fall into more virtuous hands. It was the role of Confucian mandarins to protect the Mandate of Heaven and see to it that rulers remained virtuous.

This means that any political revolution is a moral, or even quasi-religious revolution. It is not only institutions which must be put right; order in the cosmos must be restored by purging the world of moral corruption. Historians of new dynasties must rewrite history to extol the virtue of the new rulers, while painting the ancient regime as beyond redemption.

In this respect, though by no means in all respects, Mao's revolution was no different from past upheavals. Like many peasant messiahs in ancient and not-so-ancient China, Mao set out to restore order in the cosmos by destroying the corrupt old regime and establishing a glorious, new one that was virtuous and pure.

This is what Mao's scribes would have us believe, just as court historians

justified their emperors' right to rule in the past. Mao had not been elected. He had wrested Heaven's mandate from the wicked old order by sheer force of virtue.

It is interesting to contemplate how this virtue might once again play itself out if China ever gives rise to another great political upheaval. The vicious circle of violent rebellions, followed by periods of autocratic order, is likely to continue as long as China is ruled by Great Leaders, with claims to moral and philosophical rectitude, instead of laws and democratic institutions. Heroic authority—such as Mao's—is naturally beyond the reach of legitimate opposition or criticism. For how can anybody be a loyal critic of perfect virtue?

When the source of truth is also the source of power, as it was to some extent in imperial China, and to a greater extent in Mao's China, there can be no loyal opposition, for that would defy the system's logic. Indeed, China's Leninist political structure handed down from Stalin in the 1950s and still largely intact, continues to militate against open political dialogue.

As long as this is so, Mao lives on. As long as the Chinese are not ruled by their chosen representatives, but by supposedly virtuous men blessed by Heaven, and as long as the state is not seen as a set of institutions, but as a cosmic order which is also the guardian of morality and ethics, Mao will live forever. That is to say, there will be another Mao, and another, and another. □ (Popeye Syndicate)

Ian Buruma is the author of *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels From Los Angeles to Beijing*, to be published in November.

LETTERS

DILLI RAMAN REGIMI

CK Lal in "Greatness and goodness" (#59) attempts to put BP Koirala on a pedestal. He could have done so by not bringing Dr Dilli Raman Regimi into the picture. However, he had to compare the two with the sole intention of denigrating and belittling Dr Regimi, so that BP appears greater. Does lowering the stature of one person enhance the stature of another?

He talks about Dr Regimi sitting on a mysterious throne-like chair, and he drank tea in a silver cup. Why does he not talk about Dr Regimi's contribution to Nepal history which he spent a major part of his life unraveling? Dr Regimi was not only senior to BP in age, but he started his political peregrination much earlier. CK Lal purposefully leaves out those facts which bring about my late father's greatness. All papers worth fitting tributes after he died. Your paper failed to do so, and I won't be surprised if this letter is not published. It nevertheless hurts and angers those who love him to read such nonsense.

Avantika Regimi USA

CAMUS AND SARTRE

Ram Limbu (Letters, #59) says CK Lal ignores what Camus once said about Sartre being a revolutionary in the bistros of Paris. Sartre never claimed to be a revolutionary. Or was that Limbu's point?

Jovan Ilic
 Hetuda

CORRUPTION

Puskar Bhushal's commentary on corruption ("Corruption Index", #60) is puzzling. Why does he ask us to empathise with the motives of the corrupt? The majority of Nepalis

have continued to vote for the same corrupt individuals. Let's face it: we do not hold honesty, efficiency and hard work ethics very highly. The last thing we need is educated people like Mr Bhushal exhorting empathy for the corrupt when what they need is punishment.

Umesh Rai
 Lagankhel

11 SEPTEMBER

As a Nepal living in the US, I mourn for the many innocent lives lost in the barbaric acts of

terrorism on 11 September. While I totally understand the immediate feelings towards the war for revenge and retaliation, I too felt them and continue to feel them. Terrorism didn't spring up overnight and it will not go away with a one-time strike as you say in "Kamikaze" (#60). Countering terrorism will take awareness and education of societies, religions, histories, and peoples, and we all need to do our part.

Raj Lohani
 New Jersey, USA

I take offense at your comment ("Kamikaze", #59) that the personal threat to Asians is due to the "insular media and education" of Americans. I am an American. I have had the finest education in the world. It is not lack of education of Americans or our media not making us aware of the world outside our borders.

Magie Namjou
 by email

BIRATNAGAR AGAIN

Finally, the media and the government seem to see the

urgency of reporting Maoist atrocities all over the country. Nothing happens in this country when the "enemy" is hurting someone else. Once Kathmandu was threatened, the government banned the 21 September rally. Now, the Maoists want the rally in Biratnagar on 21 September. Why do we have to suffer for pampered Kathmandu? Don't make Biratnagar the victim again.

Sharada Karki,
 Biratnagar



Dr Dilli Raman Regimi

Sex and the Valley

More Nepalis are having sex—y younger, before and even outside marriage. When will our society develop codes of conduct suited to this new reality?

asked my father. He pretended not to hear.

The reaction is not surprising. This is a society which thinks it is disrespectful, even vulgar, to talk about sex, especially to elders. Embarrassed teachers skim over the subject in school, and Sunita and her peers wouldn't dream of asking their parents about sex.

Instead, she and her friends devoured whatever books, and magazines they could get their hands on. "Of course, it wasn't always the right kind of material, you know the social education kind. But it did make certain things clear. Students are eager to know. There should be sex education classes which fulfill that curiosity."

Sunita thinks there is some sense in exploring relationships before getting married. But she also knows that by and large, Nepal's mainstream caste and ethnic groups regard a young woman who has a couple of boyfriends as promiscuous. The taboos are less entrenched and relations more relaxed in the minorities and indigenous groups.

Sunita Chetri belongs to that generation of young Nepalis, exposed to a rapidly changing urban lifestyle that often contradicts the social, moral and religious values their parents teach them. Unlike her mother's generation, when women married very young and were forced to move from childhood into adulthood in a trice, men and women are marrying later these days. As a result, there is a new group of people—generally young working people—that is exploring the diverse recreational options thrown up by a society that is

loosening its grip on its youth.

The problem, is there are no social rules yet about how to deal with such young people. "People are comfortable about their sexuality within set norms," says Rajendra Bhadra, director of the Reproductive Health Division of the BP Memorial Health Foundation. "Some feel sex education is about sexual pleasure, they don't think of the entire picture—of sexuality, love, relationships. So there's confusion. And when you're confused, there is discomfort. Those who are open and frank about sex are comfortable with their sexuality. Those who think it's taboo and don't talk about it are also comfortable. It is those caught in between who are confused."

This confusion is reflected in the Nepal media, which sends out mixed messages that are aimed at raising awareness but often end up engendering misconceptions among adolescents trying to make sense of a bewildering new phenomenon they are faced with. A fourteen-year-old boy who is just discovering his sexuality finds it hard to relate to advertisements about STDs and HIV that feature married couples or mothers, but are vague on whether other sexually active people are at risk for STDs.

This confusion is heightened in the face of pressure, especially in urban areas, among teenagers and young adults to date, be "cool," and maintain a certain image. And so young Nepalis are often forced to lead a double life, claiming to have knowledge and experience with their friends, but pretending to know nothing in front of parents and other authority figures. They stay up late to

watch adult channels long after their parents have gone to bed. Boys worry about "experiencing" and girls want to be slim and beautiful. And girls say they feel particularly vulnerable to the stress and stigma of double standards, and worry that they do not even have the safety net of legal abortions.

So far, what little sex education is available in schools isn't adequate. Bhadra and his colleagues were taken aback by the results of a random survey taken among high school and college students in Kathmandu and Pokhara recently. More than 11 percent of students said they had had sex, much more than they expected. The average age of first sexual intercourse was found to be 15.5 years. The gender difference was noticeable, with 30 percent of college-going men and only 2.3 of college women reporting that they had had sexual contact. Knowledge about STDs and AIDS was relatively high, but the use of condoms, low.

"In a society where sex is regarded as taboo, the results were unsettling. It made us realise that we're way behind in addressing adolescent need for information. They know how to put themselves at risk—there's STDs, HIV/AIDS, early pregnancies. But they don't seem to know how to extricate or protect themselves," says Bhadra.

The findings should perhaps not be surprising, given the results of the first survey on Nepali sexuality conducted three years ago among an older age group. The survey, conducted by *Himal Khatrapurika* showed that 29 percent of the respondents had premarital sex and 10



ANIL KANTAR

percent had extra marital affairs. Roughly 60 percent males and 34 percent females said they considered themselves "liberal" about sex. Given all this, it stands to reason that people are also becoming sexually active at a younger age—when their peer group cannot give them advice and their parents and teachers would rather not know.

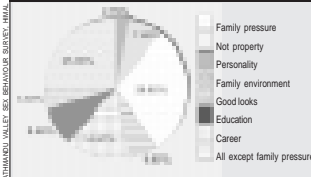
Bhadra and his team are working on a curriculum to provide sex education through peer educators in schools and also among other groups of adolescents including factory, and

migrant workers. Apart from covering technical aspects of STDs the curriculum will focus on sex and sexuality, communication and certain psychosocial skills aimed at changing behaviour—how to say no, how to behave at parties, group gatherings, distinguishing between different kinds of touches, how to delay sexual intercourse, and what the best way is to prevent unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. "What is the use of giving names like progesterone and testosterone when you can't see how they work socially," asks Bhadra.

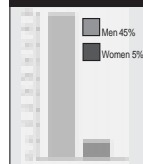
Sex—how often?



Reasons for marriage



Pre-marital sex



Parents are often aware of the need to talk to growing children but are bound by social conditioning. Says Mahesh De Bhattrai, director of the General Welfare Parishad, an organisation that works to sensitize truck drivers and commercial sex workers about sexually-transmitted diseases. "It is easier talking to people who you don't know about sex, but extremely difficult talking to people close to you." But Bhattrai has found a way to do just that. He gives his young daughter and son sex education and information material to proofread. "I'm sure they get the message."

What is urgently needed is better and more accessible counselling about sex and sexuality either through telephone hotlines, FM phone-ins or television programmes. And many of these need to be tailored especially for women. Last year, the BP Memorial Health Foundation's Reproductive Health Division started youth-friendly services in clinics. The program doesn't stress knowledge, but attitudes, and focuses on helping unmarried youths. "There's a

difference in attitude while handing out contraceptives to unmarried and married youth," says Bhadra. The project is also creating self-assessment tools for clinics to see how effective their services are. The division provides contraceptives, but also stresses abstinence as the only foolproof way to stay in the clear, and the only behavior that fits Nepal's dominant social mores. Bhadra believes that while direct measures are vital, communication is equally important. The division he heads also runs a counselling hotline where calls range from traumatised victims of rape and abuse, individuals who want to talk about improving their sex life, and even some soliciting favours. "On a deeper level, sex governs society," says Bhadra. "It needs to be talked about. In a civilised manner. It's not a western, American or European concern."

He should know. He runs an agony column in a popular weekly, *Kantipur Sapthik*. "When I started the column, the questions were very fundamental. Now they've become more technical, more sophisticated. Many questions from men are about their self-esteem and sexuality. Previously we received medical questions, but now they are more to do with relationships, and sexual pleasure. Readers have become more mature." And, adds the doctor, debunking a popular myth: "It isn't only middle-aged men who write." Many queries come from young people and older women. □

Dying to work abroad

Earlier this year shocked Nepalis learnt that on average 12 of their compatriots employed in Persian Gulf countries die every month. But the number can be higher than that—only our government is not keeping count. The Nepali-language daily, *Nepal Samachar* on 18 September reported that 12 Nepali workers, had died last week, four in Qatar and eight in Saudi Arabia.

The customs department of Tribhuvan International Airport confirmed the arrival of four coffins earlier this week from the Gulf. But Madhavji Shrestha, chief of the West Asia and Africa Desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Lalit Bahadur Thapa, director general of the Department of Labour, say they are unaware of the deaths and the arrival of the bodies. Shrestha said he was on leave for two weeks, while Thapa made the excuse that Ministry of Foreign Affairs was "not coordinating" with his department.

"The government is not serious about these deaths," said Deepak Rijal, the Samachar reporter who broke the story. Official data shows that about 100,000 Nepalis are working in menial jobs in Gulf countries at any given time. But unofficial estimates put the number at four times that. Nepal employment agencies are known to trick workers into accepting informal labour status to free themselves from any accountability once the workers reach these countries.

A government study tour last year to Gulf countries led by former labour secretary Damay Bhattarai found that Nepal workers are under tremendous physical and mental stress due to a number of factors, including mistreatment, the fear of losing family property mortgaged to pay for a placement, and an almost complete lack of communication with their families back home. On top of that they have to work under the sun in temperatures that soar to 46 degrees this time of year.

Qatar is currently identified as one of the safest Gulf countries for Nepalis to work in, and talks have been underway since 1998 between the two governments to formalise this relationship through a labour agreement.

Swiss aid

Swiss Foreign Minister Joseph Deiss is coming to South Asia on a three-state visit to Nepal, Bhutan and India. Swiss sources say the planned visit confirms a continuation of aid for Nepal in the coming year. Switzerland has listed Nepal as a "priority" country, meaning Nepal is eligible to get just over \$18.5 million a year, which would be an increase of around \$6 million on what Nepal presently gets.

Deiss will talk firmly about some things, though—he is said to want the Bhutanese refugee issue resolved soon, and also be happy to help speed up negotiations if both Nepal and Bhutan agree to seek third party help. And, if the Nepali government agrees, Deiss is said to be planning a visit to the refugee camps when he is here in November.

Indian intelligence

KP Singh, India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief, said last week in a potentially controversial disclosure that relations between Nepal and India were under threat due to new relations between Maoists in the two countries. Singh also claimed at an annual meeting of Director Generals of Police and top officials from the Indian IB and paramilitary forces that Left groups in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa have recently started acquiring more sophisticated weapons. Home Minister LK Advani, who was also at the meeting said that not everything was okay with India's law enforcing agencies, especially in terms of credibility and trust.

RAMYATA LIMBU

Sunita Chetri, a young, single health-worker used to squirm when boys asked her about wet dreams. She'd struggle to keep a straight face when they asked her for medicine to treat the "disease".

"Initially, I thought they were ragging me," says the 23-year-old. But

soon she realised the queries were in earnest. Today, Sunita is adept at answering queries about sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), AIDS, erratic sex drive, and wet dreams. She no longer blushes when the counsellors young men about growing pains, instead explaining to them the changes in their bodies, and giving

them additional literature to read.

But it has taken time for her to overcome her inhibitions concerning talking about sex, the body, and AIDS. As a student nurse, Sunita (not her real name) recalls asking her father what *yam parpaka*, a term she had heard on television, meant. "I'd never heard the Nepali term for sex, so I

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

The real enemy

America must keep alive the innate decency and spirit that made it a beacon for the world's huddled masses.



conflict, and the hard place of American wrath. Daily, my views vary on what went on that horrid day of infamy. Reports of cynical Israeli military activity in the Gaza strip and Ramallah fuel discussion about the Middle East as a cauldron of hate, America's partisan policies in the region coming home to roost, as it were. Then a New York Fire Department chaplain is buried, an American friend sends clippings from the Washington Post and New York Times calling

for tolerance, understanding, unity and a searching of souls for the causes of violence. The America that was attacked is not just the pillar of Israel and the sometimes blundering giant who can seem callous, even evil on occasion. It is the most cosmopolitan, tolerant, human society on the face of the planet. The terrorists killed people from at least 35 countries, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and others, women, men, children, the broadminded and bigoted, rich, poor and middle class. This was, as Bush, Blair and others are asserting, an attack on democracy and human values.

Now we are at war, and there's no choice about the side you're on. The enemy is not Islamic, or Protestant or Semitic or capitalist. The foe in the other bunker is hate, intolerance, violence. Good people have to back the Americans on this one, at least up to a point. And they have to fight hard for the preservation of those values that the terrorists are testing so severely. What the grim men at the controls of the hijacked aircraft want is an America where mosques burn, where the innocent run from frenzied mobs with torches and hateful slogans ring out. They want New Yorkers ripping each other apart, they want what the hate mongers of talk radio want—an end to America's undeniable virtues.

So what I'm backing in the coming days and months is that spirit that made the United States a beacon for the world's huddled masses. The cruise missiles, the bombers, the hellfire rhetoric, it will all pass. An avenged America must then renew the innate decency and energy that the terrorists wanted to take from them. The fate of global citizenry lies in the balance. □

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Remember Lauda?



Lauda Air (left) and Royal Nepal (right)

RNAC's cancellation of aircraft leases requires the most urgent attention. Or we need to find alternative sources of political funding.

The national fixation with finding the best way of fostering peace and fragmenting land should not be allowed to obscure what could become the principal threat to our multiparty polity. RNAC's flight to dismemberment has overcome a major pocket of political turbulence after the Nepal Congress and the UML burned their fingers trying to collar each other for being neck-deep in corruption. By returning the Lauda and China Southwest aircraft and regionalising in operations amid the heat, RNAC may finally have begun to assert the corporate autonomy it has enjoyed on paper.

Ordinarily, this would have been cause for comfort. Irrespective of the party in power, the national flag carrier was among the first destinations of every incoming cabinet. Contrary to conventional wisdom, political interference in RNAC did not begin with Girija Prasad Koirala's first government. It's just that the restoration of organized politics made it difficult for agents of omission and commission to conceal themselves from public scrutiny.

RNAC's decision to pull out of the European sector may be good

economically, but it is bad politics. Our leaders, who are expected to adhere to the pluralistic tenets of the US constitution without \$25,000-a-plate dinners, found in aircraft leases a lucrative source of funding. That's why they ignored the banks of watchdogs like the Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority and the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee and the officious alertness of nifty reporters as long as they could.

Ultimately, the kind of headlines Lauda Air made in Nepal was enough to chase air agents away. The political fallout? An abundant source of money carried legged to flying hours and pegged to the day's foreign exchange rate has dried up. To be sure, the "people's war" has raised the prospect of another attractive source of cash through agents for arms manufacturers. With the Maoists and the government engaged in a relentless race to augment their arsenal even during their truce, commissions can be expected to pour in as copious quantities. However, you do have to factor in the possibility of peace talks succeeding or, at least, the eventuality of belligers becoming tired of shooting at each other. So this might

not be a bad time to be thinking about ways of finding more secure sources of political funding.

The process can begin from the prime minister's official residence. The Balaovar guestroom could be rented out for Rs 25,000 a night to those who afford proximity to power. Throw in a couple of thousand more and you can even join the head of government for his working breakfast on forging the compromise of the day. The Nepal Congress could do a couple of things, such as

organising camps for sister parties around the world on the cycle of uniting for democracy, fighting for its spoils and pretending to be on the verge of a split before re-adjusting internal power equations. The NC central office could organise a permanent exhibition portraying the party's progression from failed armed struggles to an aborted civil disobedience programme to the semi-peasant popular mobilisation that eventually helped restore multiparty democracy.

The UML could join hands with other communist parties to give a crash course on how the Sino-Soviet split smashed Nepal's proletarianist enclaves, complete with pictorial essays on Pappa Lal's trail-blazing contributions to the construction of Prachanda's path.

The Kasta Prajanta Party could offer dog-eat-dog seminars on the Theory of Perpetual Political Union and Fusion. Sessions could be

illustrated with case studies on how once-ruthless varieties of partylessness can manage to win votes in multiparty elections.

As an incentive, parliament could pass legislation exempting parties from disclosure rules on such income. In order to avoid charges of discrimination, the state could set up a national fund to finance the smaller political groups. The fund could raise money by, among other things, imposing a mandatory democracy surcharge at the airport and border points on all visitors entering on a valid visa or ID.

From the private sector, tour operators could launch special packages for adventure seekers, such as 30-minute car ride across town during bandhs. Points could be awarded for the number of projects donated, with occupants of the last damaged car getting vouchers for a Mahabharata expedition redeemable within the first month after the mountain is opened to climbing. A portion of tourism revenues could be apportioned to political parties in inverse proportion to their role in instigating hotel strikes.

In terms of external resource mobilisation, donor governments should be encouraged to become more generous in the cause of saving democracy. Since they already influence our politics through the tiniest of micro-credit projects, they might as well become more active in directly funding political parties.

The Bretton Woods institutions, for instance, could design a bank fund that would support parties by calculating the percentage of popular votes they received in the last election weighted with their voting record on legislation facilitating structural adjustment programmes.

Electional laws should be amended to ease the flow of direct foreign political investment. This way, donor governments, agencies and consortiums could provide matching grants to candidates who have more than the optimum holding. After all, excess liquidity in the bank means that the money is idle: as idle as a field staying uncultivated. There will always be poorer people who can make more productive use of any asset that a richer person. But is this reason enough to redistribute assets in a society? The prime minister, in his new radical avatar, and the communist parties say yes. This is land-grabbing.

And just how rich are the new landowners going to be? Five katha (0.1 ha) of land that the Congress Party is willing to give to the poor will yield 1,000 kg of grain in one year provided the land is irrigated. For an average family this will mean an income of up to Rs 10,000 a year. And forget vegetables—the market is so small that even a small increase in supply causes prices to tumble below cost of production. The UML's ceiling of 4.5 bigha (3 ha) with irrigation will yield about Rs 180,000 a year. This translates to Rs 500 a day: even less than the daily turnover of my neighbourhood paan shop.

Meanwhile, zamindars whose property has been taken away will henceforth have no incentive to invest in land levelling, irrigation, or augmenting soil fertility. After all, land grabbing will need so much money to implement, will redistribute poverty and this will entail even more land grabbing in future by succeeding government who will need to be even more "revolutionary" to stay in power. The farmers will be wiser to sell off the remaining land and invest the money in a bank across the border in India.

The government's agenda appears to be set by the Maoists. The Congress wants to be more communist than the communists and probably wishes to take the wind out of their sails. If may work, but at the end there may be nothing left to govern. By being like the Maoists, the Congress is showing the same tendency to wreck something that works rather than fix something that doesn't.

The Maoists have done the same by threatening private schools: it is too much of an effort to reform and rebuild under-achieving government schools, so their answer is to close better private schools. The government fails to provide quality education to all, so does that mean no parents can or should work to provide better education for their children?

This country's ruling elite has messed up the country. So, one way is to junk the whole lot and start afresh like the Maoists want to do. The other is to have new rules to govern the behaviour of those who govern to make them more accountable. And we all need to be politically more active to keep check on politicians. Politics is too important to leave just to politicians. □

The government's great land grab

By trying to outdo the Maoists, the Congress is showing the same tendency to wreck something that works rather than fix something that doesn't.

As a landowner, it would be natural for me to be horrified at the prospect of losing property to cover up the government's failure to reduce poverty. But my outrage goes beyond just loss of land. I am horrified that the political parties that have opposed the edicts (RPP Sabhawan) are trying to outdo the others by asking for a cap on cash.

Did the head of a democratically-elected government consult his cabinet or senior party members, or even a legal adviser before taking such a major step? Did he feel the need to make sure that the edict fell within the greater social agreement called the Constitution?

Most societies move forward economically by creating new wealth. Here it is forcible redistribution on a scale that needs to be so large that it will open a gaping wound in the economy. Just look at the math: if half the population below the poverty line is to benefit, the land they own must sustain at least their food requirement. This is about one bigha (0.67 ha) in the tarai with at least some of it irrigated in the dry season. If there are two million families below the poverty line then the government needs one million bigha to be given to the poor.

Having land is of course not enough, the farmers will need inputs, equipment and irrigation. How is all this going to be funded, with bank loans? The government certainly doesn't have the money. So there has to be another round of property grabbing—this time of liquid assets.

Most Nepalis with meagre property are already spooked. They are withdrawing cash and investing in gold. Even if the government takes the money that the banks have not been able to invest (about Rs 45 billion) they will have enough to actually give every poor family a lump sum of Rs 20,000 per lot started.



DANA CHAN

The poor would of course make better use of this money than the banks ever did. Taking idle money from banks and putting it to use in uplifting the poor is every bit as noble as taking land from those who have more than the optimum holding. After all, excess liquidity in the bank means that the money is idle: as idle as a field staying uncultivated. There will always be poorer people who can make more productive use of any asset that a richer person. But is this reason enough to redistribute assets in a society? The prime minister, in his new radical avatar, and the communist parties say yes. This is land-grabbing.

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(Kabindra Pradhan works on his farm near Butwal.)

Peace Corps veterans return to Nepal



Dana Chan in Baglung in 1977 after spraining her ankle

ALOK TUMBHAHANGPHEY

October 1960 when

American president John F. Kennedy at a speech at the

University of Michigan challenged

young Americans to "go into the

hills and villages of half the globe

and help people "break the bonds

of mass misery," few besides

Kennedy himself might have

foreseen the global force it would

turn to be in the coming years.

Kennedy did not live long

enough to see his brainchild

become one of the most promi-

nent voluntary efforts in the

world. Today, the Peace Corps is

still one of the most sought after

volunteer programs in America.

These young (and sometimes not

so young) Americans bring health,

education, and specialised skills

to developing countries and in

turn, benefit from the first-hand

experience of life in the Third

World. Many ex-volunteers like

to say the friendship and under-

standing is of greater value than

their actual contribution in the

field.

Nepal was one of the first

countries to have Peace Corps

volunteers. Sixty-eight of them

arrived in Kathmandu in September

1962. They had come to an

exotic and idyllic but desperately

poor land. Some stayed in

Kathmandu teaching in schools

and colleges and training teach-

ers, while others were sent to Pokhara, Kalayia in the tarai and even as far east as Dhanuqua to help out with agricultural extension, teach in schools or help in health posts. These were a mix of teenagers fresh out of high school looking for adventure in Shauri La, college graduates determined to "save the world" and still others who had already gone much further in life. What many did not expect was that the Nepal experience would change their lives as well. Of all the countries the Peace Corps sends volunteers to, Nepal has been that one the most ex-volunteers have felt bonded enough to, to come back.

Peace Corps Nepal "alumni" have frequent get-togethers and many keep in touch by email. "It is Nepal that draws us together, Nepal did a lot for us. It showed us you didn't need two cars in the garage to be considered successful in life," says Mac Odell, who came to Nepal in the first batch in 1962, and has since returned to Nepal to work with an international shelter charity.

Don Messerschmidt was in the second group of 36 volunteers that arrived in Nepal in the spring of 1963. Don remembers landing in the DC-3 in the grainy pastures of Gauchar (present day Tribhuvan International Airport). "There was grass everywhere and

the flowers were blooming, everyone was wearing daura sarwal," he recalls. After spending a week in Kathmandu, Don was assigned to Kancha, a remote Gurung village in Lamjung, seven days walk from Kathmandu. He spent the next two years living with a Nepal family, helping the "Panchayat Development Office" in different community work and teaching English at the village school.

When the smallpox epidemic struck Nepal in 1964, Don and another volunteer Bruce Morrison vaccinated some 25,000 children. But more than the work he did in Kancha, Don values the friendship that developed between him and the villagers.

"Neighbours in America don't even have time to say hello to each other and here I was living and working with people who hadn't even heard of my country and yet showed genuine concern and appreciation for me," says Don. His attachment with Kancha eventually led Don to write his doctoral thesis on the Lamjung Gurungs. Today he works as a consultant for various development organisations in Nepal.

Many veterans' have returned to Nepal to work here. Mike Gill came to Nepal in the spring of 1967, a fresh college graduate. He remembers being "blown away with surprise and amazement" when he first landed here. "We had some idea of what Nepal was going to be like, but of course it turned out to be completely wrong. Nothing had quite prepared me for this," he says.

Mike was assigned as a junior technical assistant with the Department of Agriculture and posted to a Maithili-speaking village near Janakpur. Although he never had any professional training in farming, his initiative in helping the farmers understand and work with the new developments in agriculture created waves in the local economy. The farmers were introduced to newly-developed rice seeds that yielded much more than the traditional ones. Mike had "plenty of reasons to come

back," and today he is the director of the United States Educational Foundation for Nepal. Both Mike and his wife Barbara Butterworth, director of the Lincoln School and a former volunteer in Kathmandu, live in Nepal with their children.

Nick Langton, presently country director of the Asia Foundation, came as a volunteer in 1977 but it wasn't his first time in Nepal. Previously here as a student group, Nick had by that time developed a strong attachment to the country and a fascination for the mountains.

When he enlisted in the Peace Corps and came to Nepal, he had no idea what he was going to be doing. After undergoing village training for six weeks in Rukum, Nick was assigned to a village in Gorkha where he helped develop a drinking water supply system that took two years to complete. More than the fact that he successfully alleviated the village's water problems—not enough and contaminated water—Nick says another more tangible outcome: "The two years of communal effort that it took to bring water also brought the two divided groups of Newars and Bahunas together and that was what really mattered."

More than 4,000 Peace Corps volunteers have passed through Nepal since 1962. 13 have died contributing their services to Nepal. In that time, there have been dramatic changes: the country's population has gone from nine million to 23 million, Nepalis are still ingraind, there are big gaps between rich and poor and there is an insurgency in the countryside. Nepal used to mainly rural, but the urban population today is growing at a staggering eight percent and there is the new phenomenon of urban poverty.

There have also been improvements: Nepal's literacy rate has shot up from 15 percent to 43 percent, infant mortality has fallen by more than half to 80 per 1,000 live births, more girls are going to school than ever before and grassroots democracy is

Young and idealistic American volunteers are drawn back to a Nepal that changed their lives.

bringing new awareness to villagers across the country about their rights.

The Peace Corps has responded with the times, by changing its own priorities.

Volunteers now work not just on education, agriculture, and infrastructure development but also on nursery education, water and sanitation, community and women's health and youth development programs. Nepal teachers, many of whom have had little classroom instruction, receive in-service training from volunteers who besides teaching English, math or science in primary and secondary schools are also involved in community development. Rural health centres in Nepal often focus on maternal health and are involved in activities such as family planning counselling, educating expectant mothers, and training local health workers and birth attendants at the district level. Others work to improve the sanitary conditions of rural and semi-urban communities by improving public health conditions, and provide skill training to local government workers and villagers.

Dana Chan, a Chinese American, came to Nepal in 1997 as part of group 183. After orientation, Dana was assigned to a village in Baglung where she spent the next two years helping the community teaching health education especially concentrating on women's health. "Women in rural areas really need the knowledge, and these are facts about basic survival. You just wish you could do more," she

says. Dana, who could not even imagine living in a place where there were no roads, now believes she can "live with less". She helps her Nepali husband run a restaurant in Thamel.

The Nepal that early volunteers experienced and the Nepal that volunteers experience today are different, but David O'Connor, the present director of Peace Corps Nepal himself a volunteer in Karpohla in Ilam between 1967-69, told us: "The basic challenges are still there. The issues are different but the demands are the same." One thing has changed: the numbers of volunteers in Nepal are on the decline. In the 1970s there were up to 120 Peace Corps volunteers in Nepal at any given time, now there are less than 30. "Nepal still remains one of the most attractive places for these young Americans to give up their comfortable lives and help those less privileged, and in the process spiritually enrich their own lives. Be it in the remote jungles working on bio-diversity conservation or in urban settings helping with youth development programs, volunteers still show the same dedication they did when John F. Kennedy started the Peace Corps. Says Erin Boyd who works in eastern Nepal: "I don't feel any less here and I there is something I know I can do any day for my family or help."

What also remains is the spirit of idealism that drives these young Americans to give up their comfortable lives and help those less privileged, and in the process spiritually enrich their own lives. Be it in the remote jungles working on bio-diversity conservation or in urban settings helping with youth development programs, volunteers still show the same dedication they did when John F. Kennedy started the Peace Corps. Says Erin Boyd who works in eastern Nepal: "I don't feel any less here and I there is something I know I can do any day for my family or help."

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NOTICE FOR TRAVEL TRADE WRITERS

This is to bring to all the travel trade writers' Notice that Nepal Tourism Board is in the process of compiling the latest list of writers specialized in travel trade. Therefore, all the writers of profound experience particularly in writing brochures, booklets, specialized books on Trekking, Culture, Nature, Adventure etc. are requested to furnish their latest CV with contact address within 15 days on the following address:

PR & Publicity
Nepal Tourism Board
Phone : 256909
Bhrikutimandap
C. P. O. Box 11018
P. O. E-mail in
bshah@ntb.wink.com.np



BIZ NEWS

Banking on Nepal

Three Nepali banks are in Asiaweek's list of the top 500 banks in the Asia Pacific. The magazine has Nepal Gridriya Bank (now Standard Chartered Nepal) at 480, Himalayan Bank at 488, and Nepal Arab Bank (Nabil Bank) at 491. The 1997 South-east Asian economic crisis forced a number of banks to close and others to merge, making way for 35 new banks in the list, including the three Nepali banks. The listing, based on the property the banks own, reflects a wide gap in the ladder. The top ten positions are occupied by Japanese and Chinese banks, with the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi at the top with over \$7,000 billion and the Korean Exchange Bank at 500, with \$175 million.

Hotline

Here's some good news for Nepal consumers. The Department of Food Technology and Standard Control has set up an anti-food adulteration hotline. Consumers can dial 262741 if they are concerned about the quality of food supplies they have purchased, and food inspectors will be at their door. In its recently published annual report, the food standard control body says most food supplies in the market are adulterated. As a response, the department promises stern action against suppliers found guilty of adulterating food. The department will also train consumers to test products on their own and provide equipment to interested consumer groups at the ward level.

Another bank

Nepal's 157 commercial bank, the Kumari Bank Ltd (KBL), opened formally last week. The KBL promises customers from all segments of the country's economy a wide range of consumer banking products and services through innovative delivery channels, including the Internet. The KBL is banking on its large capital base, a management team comprising seasoned bankers and versatile banking software to deliver the goods. Of its authorised capital of Rs 1 billion, the bank has paid up Rs 350 million and planned a Rs 150 million public issue.

Nepal Pratiap JBR, chairman of KBL, said at the opening that at the moment Nepal's economy is not expanding commensurate with the increased volume of development activities. "A lack of investment opportunities has reduced individual savings," he added. "The reluctance of banks to accept interest deposit has further worsened the situation."

Nepal has seen a marked increase in the commercial bank ventures since the Nepal Rastra Bank liberalised the banking sector in the country. The number will increase as the Rastra Bank recently gave a Letter of Intent to three other banks.

Coffee on the go

No more waiting in tea-shops and scalding your throat trying to grab a quick cup. Vending machines that enable you to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee at a touch of a button are now in Kathmandu. The machines are being installed in educational institutions and business houses by Pays Entertainment, the sole franchisee of Instant Tea and Coffee Vending Machines of Nestle India Ltd. The company says its machines are a one-stop tea and coffee shop that cater to the beverage needs of personnel in an efficient, hygienic, convenient and economical manner.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Look forward, hopefully



For growth, peace is a necessity, not an option.

Last week's grey events in New York and Washington have impacted the world in a manner reminiscent of the days of world wars. One of the first lessons of this episode, whatever the eventual ramifications, is that violence costs. The fallout is already evident in the world economy, what with the half-powerful New York Stock Exchange being shut for four whole trading days.

Even in Nepal we will be affected. Tourism will be the first to feel it, what with the recession in the airline business and fewer people willing to fly. If the US were to initiate military action against one or more countries, arrivals here will see a distinct drop. 2001 could yet turn out to be one of the worst years till date for the travel and hospitality industry. And, let this Beed caution, while a slump in tourism would obviously affect the whole economy, what is especially worrying is what will happen to banks and financial institutions that have large portfolios of loans to tourism and related businesses.

India will also be affected, and needs to be monitored closely—see the Indian Rupee under pressure, which means the Nepali Rupee is also losing value. We need to take our cue

from Indian exports and industry, because they will determine the exchange rate. This, coupled with the rise in world oil and gas prices, means fuel prices could soon go up in India, and so also Nepal. Which, in its turn, leads to one fear: inflation.

The world is so tightly interconnected now that though our stock market has no links with outside markets, a depression in any major economic centre translates into a slowdown here. Markets here will take longer than we anticipated to recover from the jolt of the last couple of years and liquidity will be stretched to the maximum.

Gold is the ubiquitous choice of investment in times like these, and world prices, which had stagnated in the last few years, have rallied. Nepal is already a gold-mining country, and buying will only increase. Which means more imports, through formal or informal channels, which means a

high demand for dollars. Last week's informal sector exchange rate of Rs 81 to the dollar is a sign of things to come.

Finally, 11 September means new global alignments and new areas of focus for spending. The Beed has some modest predictions: the speed of globalisation will likely slow down, regional groupings in the form of trade blocs will be consolidated. This will happen for many reasons, but mainly because now especially we see the dangers of excessive dependency on a single economic super-power.

Every event in history sheds light on a new dimension of our existence. As for Nepal, since we are pretty powerless to influence the fallout of such occurrences, the only thing to do is look to the future, and be ready to our best when the time is finally ready. And take what has happened in the US as a chilling reminder that economies grow best in peaceful political environments. Nepal—our government, and we, the country's polity—need to ensure that peace is negotiated for. The cost of violence is too high. ☐

Readers can post their views at artha@cyahoo.com

NEPALI ECONOMY



The government is spending Rs 120 million on a new IT Park in Banepa. So why are industry professionals so unexcited?

RAMYATA LIMBU

From the US to Singapore to India, countries have been trying to deal with or stave off recession caused by the bursting of the IT bubble. Last week's bombing of the World Trade Center will hardly make things better.

Yet, Nepal's government has chosen now to wake up to the information age. This year's budget, which came smack in the middle of a global economic slowdown, allocated just over Rs 400 million to develop an information supercorridor in Nepal.

IT industry insiders are lukewarm at best, uncertain of the benefits the market will offer, and none too confident in the government's abilities to jettison out important matters.

The Ministry of Finance has earmarked Rs 120 million of the allocation to build the much-hyped IT Park in Banepa. But Allen Balochan Tuladhar, Co. of Unlim-

ited, a software development company, is not excited. "I don't think the private sector is interested in the IT Park in its present context, location, and size," he says.

One of the biggest grouches industry professionals have is the distance. Banepa, where the civil works on the park are being carried out, is about 40 km away from Kathmandu. IT professionals say the crowded highway and traffic would cause enormous amounts of delay for commuters, which will grow worse once the Sindhuli Highway is complete, and 60 percent of the traffic going east is diverted to the area. Right now, there is little construction work going on than a wall around the future information campus, and even that will take time to ring the 12 hectares of land off. But in two years the government hopes to have the first phase of the IT Park Master Plan complete—a business block, an administrative block, and a residential

block that would cater to the needs of 200-300 IT professionals.

For companies like Unlimited, which has its 16,000 sq ft of office space for its 360 staff, and is comfortably ensconced in downtown Kathmandu, the IT Park, doesn't have much to offer. "The government may offer incentives to new companies. The question is, what more can they offer us?" asks Tuladhar, who like his peers, has been stressing the need for a virtual park and not a physical park that might end up as another white elephant requiring enormous maintenance cost.

According to the IT Park Master Plan, which is being guided by Indian consultants and assisted by UNESCO, the park in its final form, including a business block that houses 5,000 professionals and recreational and housing facilities, is scheduled to be complete by 2005—depending, of course, on whether the government has the Rs 1 billion the entire project

is anticipated to cost. "Of course the government doesn't have a lot of revenue and it is diversified at that, but it is committed to developing Nepal's IT sector, including the Park," says Punya Prasad Neupane, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Science and Technology.

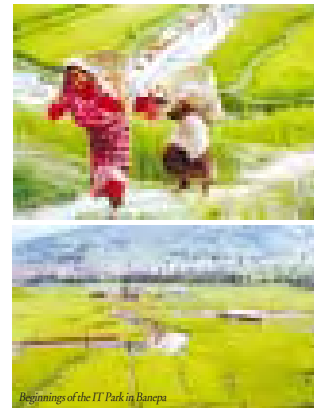
In keeping with its one-year-old IT policy, the government's recent budget allocation is divided into three kinds of support—in addition to the Park, Rs 200 million has been set aside for human resource development, and Rs 100 million for an IT venture capital fund. Neupane is hopeful that the Cyber Act, drafted by the government with the cooperation of the private sector, will be presented in the current session of parliament.

When the Ministry of Science and Technology came out with a national IT policy a year ago, the private sector welcomed it as visionary. The industry was pleased that the government had decided to form an IT Council under the chairmanship of the prime minister, and an IT Board under the chairmanship of the Minister of Science and Technology. The Board and the Council have to have representatives from associations like the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Computer Association Nepal (CAN), and also individuals from the private sector.

But that approval is tinged with doubt. "You can't implement a policy just on paper," says Lochan Lal Amatya, president of the CAN. "If the government is serious about the IT park, it should prove it to the private sector by running incubator programmes, developing research wings parallel with the development of smaller physical infrastructure and employing physical infrastructure. And we need improved communications."

The government says its IT policy addresses a number of these concerns, and promises to make communication quick and more reliable, provide an uninterrupted flow of electricity, and a separate earth station or V-SAT (Very Small Aperture Satellite), which would be independent of the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC). Also, it says the policy has provisions to exempt IT-related hardware and software from export duty.

Officials involved with the drafting of the plan also say that despite transportation and commuting problems, Banepa is an ideal site, enhanced by having Kathmandu



Beginnings of the IT Park in Banepa

University and a number of hospitals nearby. There are also plans to build a polytechnic and an electricity substation in the area. Two other roads are being constructed that would connect Banepa to Kathmandu via Jorpati and Banepa to Gwarko which in the long run would lessen the pressure of traffic. "It will take some years for those roads to be complete. But the present road could be turned into a double lane road which would bring down the commute between Kathmandu and Banepa to 20-25 minutes, half the time it now takes," says Neupane.

The government is working out the operational modalities, says Neupane, but he suggests that when the Park is ready the government will play only a support role. "The government is looking at an salaries and on Internet and V-SAT services. But if the government is to achieve its goal of Rs 10 billion in IT-related revenues in the next five years, government officials need to keep their ear to the ground and be flexible."

But even with the best of intentions, some goals may be virtually impossible to attain—like that of achieving computer education for all by 2010. Given that another government slogan is "literacy for all by 2020," that may be a little difficult. ☐



Weekly Internet Poll #1

Q: Do you think the Maoist insurgency can be resolved through talks?

Starting this week, Nepal Times will print excerpts from comments made by readers who voted in the weekly poll via www.nepaltimes.com. For this week's question (Should America go to war to avenge the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington last week?) please go to the site to vote. Short comments with genuine names will get preference in the excerpts printed here. -Ed

Maoists are Nepalis who we, the supposedly educated and enlightened, forgot. Democracy wasn't just for Nepalis in Kathmandu, or Nepalis who could read and write. It was for all Nepalis, and many got nothing. We have to accept that. We have to talk and negotiate. One step at a time. Maoists, too, must realise that the majority of Nepalis do not want what they want. Many Nepalis do, and should, sympathise with their legitimate demands. But we are not willing to go along with all their demands. This is a battle that both sides can only win partially, never completely, through violence. I hope both realise that and are willing to make genuine compromises through talks.

Samir Koirala

No, it cannot be resolved through the talks. And Maoists do not believe in talk anyway. Just remember the previous two incidents of outcome of talks and negotiations: one with the students' wing of Maoists and the other with the women's wing. In both cases, the government sold out the people's concerns. One of them destroyed the education system, and the other destroyed the economy.

Ram Prasad Sharma

Who knows, Maoবাদis may be better for our country than the present corrupt rulers. Don't be afraid if you are called corrupt. Maoবাদis will also need no-so-called computer literate people like you guys.

"Mao Bhakta"

Can Baburam or Prachanda exercise control over their lower cadre? How the Maoবাদis fare in their public relations, especially with those who do not agree with them is yet to be seen.

Sanjay Upadhyay

No, I don't think this problem will be solved through talks. This negotiation is just fun for the Maoists. No communists in world have ever negotiated. If our Maoists are true Maoists, they will never negotiate, they will go on with the revolution.

Basudev Bhandari

It can only be solved by mutual understanding. We don't want war, so talk, and bring peace back.

Rajesh Adhikary

Wake up, King Gyanendra. We do not want an unknown serpent in the name of Maoism. Put these looters who plunder in the name of Mao or democracy behind bars.

Parashar Sarthi Lepcha

Whether it be Prachanda, Baburam or Deuba, it's only me, me, me. They are all the same. Maoists are a band of bandits from across the border.

Tamang

Talks between the government and the Maoists will not work. The Maoists themselves are not on the same wavelength with each other. There is looting and extortion. Then we have a human rights jokers like Padma Ratna Tuladhar (the same guy who said it was OK to slaughter

cows) who think that the Maoist extortion of four lakhs from Kantipur is OK because they don't believe in the constitution.

Matika

I do agree that talks can solve the problem. But the big challenge is to solve the root problems, too. Why are we still lagging behind? Corruption has engulfed the country. There is urgent need to change the whole system.

Avash Sharma

I don't think the situation is under control of Maoists because they too are after power and money. If they are true revolutionaries, why are they looting from ordinary Nepalis?

Taran Prasai

No way talks will work. The government and Maoists are at extreme poles with opposite vision.

Tony Karki

Nepal does not just belong to Prachanda and Baburam, it belongs to all Nepalis. I'd prefer if the monarch ruled.

Nilam Rai

If the Arabs and Israelis who had enmity for thousands of years, can sit down for talks, why not the Maoists and HMG? If the Maoists hold on to their guns they will just annihilate each other and the country.

Deepak Kumar

The government is stupid to believe that the problem will be solved by talks. Can't it see the looting, violence and intimidation going on while the talks are being held? They are taking us for a ride.

Realist

I think the Maoist insurgency can never be resolved through talks. A republic is an impossible demand, so they don't want a solution. They just want a bloody war

that will remove Nepal from the map.

"Patriot"

The Maoist problem can't be solved by talks. The government has to take immediate action. It should mobilise the army and finish them off.

"Mother Nepal's Son"

Sher Bahadur has given the Maoists an opportunity which they don't want to miss. No matter how much Communist Prachanda makes himself out to be a revolutionary, for sure he cannot face the army.

Bigyan Sijapati

If you (Maoists) agreed to talks, then tell me why you killed so many people with your nonsense peoples' war?

Lingden Limbu

It is necessary to talk and come to an agreement to reform the government, the economy, the education system and the whole lot of social security in Nepal. The key to success is the reform in governance, minimise corruption, revolutionise agro-industry, reform education policy and generate local level income. This will bring peace and stability. I can fully understand the frustration of Maoist although I am not sure of their real ideological leanings.

Ramesh Shrestha

The Maoists have now gone further than the leaders ever imagined. They are now addicted to killing and mayhem. Talk is only theory.

Niraj Ojha

Communists don't believe in democracy so why treat them like democrats?

Anjan Sharma

Even if Baburam and Prachanda come to an amicable understanding, more than half of their cadre would defy the

understanding and will have a new leader. So it is better to start planning to bring these cadres into the mainstream while planning radical social changes where there will be no discrimination and inequality.

Pramad Aryal

The talks are just drama to deceive the Nepali people. If the Maoists are really sincere about talks, why are they extorting money and sowing terror in the public? The only solution to this is the use of armed force against these terrorists.

P Sherepa

If you (Maoists) wanted to resolve this they would have done it properly a long time ago, and had they really wanted peace they would have adhered to peaceful means. They don't care about peace at all.

A Tuladhar

Yes sure go ahead and "negotiate" with the terrorist, extortionist Maoists. Go ahead and sell your country into slavery to the cult of communism. Go ahead and throw your country into a bloodbath unseen since Pto Pot. Sure go ahead and have "peace talks" with a bunch of murderers and bandits who want nothing more than to destroy your country, your culture, your religions, kill all your educated people, dictate every movement of your lives and make your children into a bunch of sloganeering robots.

Paul Walker

There is no political solution of this problem. Banish Maoists. Establish a working a proper political code of conduct.

Dinesh Janju



Still reaping the Afghan whirlwind

gence Directorate (ISI)—to be reopened to give guerrilla training to fundamentalist volunteers from Xinjiang, China; Bosnia; Algeria; and elsewhere to further their Islamist agenda through armed actions in their respective countries. The Taliban has rebuffed Washington's demands that it hand over Osama bin Laden, a Saudi veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan and a fugitive enemy accused of masterminding the US Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 and also last week's hijack attacks on the US east coast. The US government has offered a \$5 million reward for his capture.

Did the founders of US policy in Afghanistan during the Carter Administration (1977-1981) realise that in spawning Islamic militancy with the primary aim of defeating the Soviet Union they were sowing the seeds of a phenomenon that was likely to acquire a life of its own, spread throughout the Muslim world and threaten US interests?

Perhaps not, but it was not as if they had no choice. When Moscow

intervened militarily in Afghanistan in December 1979, there were several secular and nationalist Afghan groups opposed to the Moscow-backed Communists, who had seized power twenty months earlier in a military coup. Washington had the option of bolstering these groups and encouraging them to form an alliance with three

traditionalist Islamic factions, two of them monarchist. Instead, Washington beamed up the three fundamentalist organisations then in existence. This left moderate Islamic leaders no choice but to ally with hard-liners and form the radical-dominated Islamic Alliance of Afghan Mujahideen (IAAM) in 1983.

The main architect of US policy was Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Adviser. A virulent anti-Communist of Polish origin, he saw his chance in Moscow's Afghanistan intervention to rival Henry Kissinger as a heavyweight strategic thinker. It was not enough to expel the Soviet tanks, he reasoned. This was a great opportunity to export a composite ideology of nationalism and Islam to the Muslim-majority Central Asian states and Soviet republics with a view to destroying the Soviet order.

Brzezinski also fell in easily with the domestic considerations of Gen Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, the military dictator of Pakistan. After having overthrown the elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1977, Zia was keen to create a popular base for his regime by inducting Islam into politics. One way of doing this was to give aid to the exiled Afghan fundamentalist leaders in Pakistan.

As for Saudi Arabia, the remaining member of the troika, it had long been a bulwark of anti-

Communism, its rulers lavish in their funding of anti-leftist forces around the globe—be it in Angola, Mozambique, Portugal or Italy. The fact that the population of Afghanistan was 99 percent Muslim was an additional incentive to Riyadh.

The US-Saudi-Pakistani alliance's financing, training and arming of the mujahideen—recruited from among the three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan—was coordinated and supervised by the CIA. The day-to-day management rested with Pakistan's ISI. All donations in weapons and cash to the campaign by various states—chiefly Washington and Riyadh—were handled by the CIA. These amounted to about \$40 billion, with the bulk coming from the United States and Saudi Arabia, which contributed equally.

The growing strength of the military training and political education. Both were imparted by the ISI. In the political classes the mujahideen were given a strong dose of nationalism and Islam. The fact that the Soviets were foreign and atheistic made them doubly despicable. The intention was to fire up militant Muslims to fight Soviet imperialism. Armed with CIA-supplied Stinger missiles in the later stages of the jihad, the mujahideen made a hash of Soviet helicopter gunships, a critical tool of the USSR's counterinsurgency campaign.

From the start the ranks of the Afghan mujahideen were complemented by non-Afghan volunteers eager to join the anti-Soviet jihad. The very first to do so was Osama bin Laden, then a young civil engineering graduate from an affluent family of construction contractors in Jidda, Saudi Arabia. He devised a scheme encouraging non-Afghan Muslims to enroll in the jihad. The 30,000 who did so in the eighties consisted of an almost equal number of Arabs and non-Arabs. Bin Laden, who attracted 4,000 volunteers from Saudi Arabia, became the nominal leader of the Afghan-Arabs. He developed cordial relations with the heads of the more radical constituents of the IAAM, including Mullah Mohammad Omar of the Hizb-e-Islami (Khalis group), who was later to emerge as the Taliban's supreme leader.

Besides participating in guerrilla actions, bin Laden constructed roads in mujahideen-controlled areas and refurbished caves as storage places for arms and ammunition. Working closely with the CIA, he also collected funds for

the anti-Soviet jihad from affluent Saudi citizens.

On the wider propaganda front, Brzezinski's successors continued his intensive radio campaign (through Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe) to arouse and heighten Islamic consciousness and ethnic nationalism in Central Asia in order to undermine the Moscow-directed Soviet system. The glaring contradiction of the US policy of bolstering Islamic zealots in Afghanistan while opposing them in neighbouring Iran seemed to escape both Brzezinski and his successors.

In the end, the Soviet Union collapsed, but for reasons that had nothing to do with the inter-religious or interethnic tensions among its citizens, which the US policy-makers had tried to engender in Muslim-majority Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

Following the 1989 Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Afghan Arabs, including bin Laden, began drifting back to their homes in the Arab world. Their heightened political consciousness made them realise that countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt were just as much client regimes of the United States as the Najibullah regime had been of Moscow. In their home countries they built a formidable constituency—popularly known as "Afghans"—who combined strong ideological convictions with the guerrilla skills they had acquired in Pakistan and Afghanistan under CIA supervision. Having defeated Soviet imperialism in Afghanistan, they felt, naively, that they could do the same to US imperialism in say, Saudi Arabia, with its strong links to Washington since its inception in 1932.

During the 1990 Kuwait crisis, the stationing of more than 540,000 non-Muslim US troops on the soil of Saudi Arabia—considered sacred as the realm containing Mecca and Medina, the birth and death places of the Prophet Muhammad—angered many pious Saudis, especially the ulama (religious scholars).

They argued that under the Sharia it is forbidden for foreign forces to be based in Saudi Arabia under their own flag. Their discontent rose when, having liberated Kuwait in March 1991, the Pentagon failed to carry out full withdrawal from the kingdom. Among those who protested vocally was bin Laden, who established a formal committee that advocated religious-political reform. In 1993 King Fahd created a Consultative Council, all of whose members were appointed by him and served in a

merely advisory capacity; this step failed to pacify bin Laden.

During the Yemeni civil war of April-July 1994, when Riyadh backed the Marxist former South Yemeni leaders against the government in Sana, bin Laden condemned the official policy. The authorities stripped him of his Saudi citizenship and expelled him from the country.

But bin Laden's banishment (to Sudan) did not deter other Islamic radicals from pursuing their agenda. In November 1995 they detonated a bomb at a Saudi National Guard base in Riyadh, killing five US service personnel stationed there. Of the four Saudis arrested as suspects, three turned out to be "Afghans." They were found guilty and executed.

However, what put the US military presence in Saudi Arabia in the spotlight was the truck bombing on 25 June 1996, outside the Al Khobar complex near the Dhahran air base. The explosion killed nineteen American servicemen and injured more than 400.



Wounded boys in Kabul after deadly intra-mujahideen fighting broke out in 1992 (left) and American soldier on the streets of Mogadishu in 1993.

This occurred a few weeks after bin Laden had arrived in Afghanistan from Sudan, which he was forced to leave when its government came under pressure from Washington and Riyadh.

Bin Laden then called for a jihad against the Americans in Saudi Arabia. "The presence of American crusader forces in Muslim Gulf states...is the greatest danger and [poses] the most serious harm,

threatening the world's largest oil reserves," he said. "Pushing out this American occupying enemy is the most important duty after the duty of belief in God."

See p. 12

What is lost in the desire to avenge last week's terrorist attacks on the United States and the official blame on Osama bin Laden is that the Saudi zealot is an extremist of America's own making.

DILIP HIRO

It has been 12 years since the last of the 115,000 Soviet troops crossed off Riyadh and Islamabad as the first, crucial step in the re-emergence of an independent Afghanistan ready to ally with the United States. The US-Saudi-Pakistani alliance had played the central role in training, arming and

financing the Afghan mujahideen to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan. With the Soviet withdrawal accomplished—a severe blow to Moscow in the Cold War—

Washington put Afghanistan on the back burner. But the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 gave a second wind to the mujahideen movement, which

acquired a momentum of its own. Its seizure of power in Kabul in April 1992, following the fall of the leftist regime of Muhammad Najibullah, paved the way for the rise of the Taliban Islamic movement two years later and its capture of Kabul in September 1996.

Today the Taliban controls 90 percent of Afghanistan and rules the

country according to its interpretation of the Sharia, Islamic law—an interpretation that even the mullahs of Iran find repulsive. Unique in the world, the Taliban regime deprives women of education and jobs. It has allowed the training camps near the Pakistani border—originally established by the CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelli-



Zbigniew Brzezinski



Osama bin Laden

BOLERO	
Model	1.800
Engine	1.800
Power	100
Speed	180
Consumption	10.0
Price	1.800

TAMIM ANSARY

I've been hearing a lot of talk about "bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age." Roma Owens, on KGO Talk Radio today, allowed that this would mean killing innocent people who had nothing to do with this atrocity, but "we're at war, we have to accept collateral damage. What else can we do?" Minutes later I heard some TV pundit discussing whether we "have the belly to do what we must do."

And I thought about the issues being raised especially hard because I am from Afghanistan, and even though I've lived in the US for 35 years I've never lost track of what's going on there.

I speak as one who hates the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. There is no doubt in my mind that these people were responsible for the atrocity in New York. I agree that something must be done about these monsters. But the Taliban and bin Laden are not Afghans. They're not even the government of Afghanistan. The Taliban are a cult of ignorant psychotics who took over Afghanistan in 1997. Bin Laden is a political criminal with a plan. When you think Taliban, think Nazis. When you think Bin Laden, think Hitler. And when you think "the people of Afghanistan," think the Jewish people of the Middle East. Not only that the Afghan people had nothing to do with this atrocity. They were the first victims of the perpetrators. They would cull if someone would come in there, take out the Taliban and clear out the nest of international thugs who rule in their country.

Some say, why don't the Afghans rise up and overthrow the Taliban? Well, they've been starved, exhausted, hurt, incapacitated, suffering. A few years ago, the United Nations estimated that there are 500,000 disabled orphans in Afghanistan—a country with no economy, no food. There are millions of widows. And the Taliban has been burying alive the families of the dead. The soil is littered with land mines, the farms are all destroyed by the Soviets. These are some of the reasons why the Afghan people have not overthrown the Taliban.

As for bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age, the trouble with that is, it has been done. The Soviets took care of it already. Make the Afghans suffer? They're already suffering. Level their houses? Done. Turn their schools into piles of rubble? Done. Eradicate their hospitals? Done. Destroy their infrastructure? Done. Cut them off from medicine and health care? Too late. Someone already did that.

New bombs would only stir the rubble of earlier bombs. Would they at least get the Taliban? Not likely. In today's Afghanistan, only the Taliban eat, only they have the means to move around. They'd slip away and hide. Maybe bombs would get some of those disabled orphans, they don't move fast and they don't even have wheelchairs. But flying over Kabul and

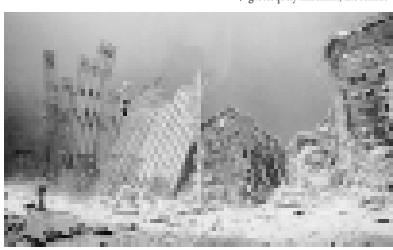
When you think bin Laden, think Hitler.

dropping bombs wouldn't really be a strike against the criminals who did this horrific thing. Actually it would only be making common cause with the Taliban.

So what can be done. The only way to get bin Laden's men to go in there with ground troops. When people speak of "having the belly to do what needs to be done," they're thinking in terms of having the belly to kill as many as needed. Having the belly to overcome any moral qualms about killing innocent people. Let's pull our heads out of the sand. What is actually on the table is Americans dying. And not just because some Americans would be fighting their way through Afghanistan to kill a shadow. It's much bigger than that. Because to get any troops to Afghanistan, we'd have to go through Pakistan. Would they let us? Not likely. The conquest of Pakistan would have to be first. Until most Muslim nations just stand by? You see where I'm going. We're flirting with a world war between Islam and the West.

As I said, I don't exactly hate bin Laden. What I do hate is this. Read his speeches and statements. He really believes Islam would beat the West. It might seem ridiculous, but he figures if he can polarize the world into Islam and the West, he's got a billion soldiers. If the West wrecks a holocaust in those lands, that's a billion people with nothing left to lose, even better than bin Laden's point of view. He's probably wrong, in the end the West would win, whatever that would mean, but the war would last for years and millions would die, not just their but ours. Who has the belly for that? Bin Laden does. Anyone else? ☐

Tamim Ansary is an Afghan-American writer.



Edgy Afghans on Pakistan's border

BARRY BEARAN

JALALABAD, AFGHANISTAN — An abundance of Afghans gathered outside Pakistan's consulate here last Sunday. They were apparently feeling down to eternity than they liked and thought it a good idea to get permission to leave the country. They either want to go to get out of a weapon to defend themselves," said Lalor Saleem, the ruling Taliban's chief of security at the compound. "We had 180 application forms, and within a few hours they were gone."

Afghans are nervous. One after another, local news bulletins say America has decided to attack them in reprisal for last week's terrorism in the US. The rumour of war is announced like a weather warning, with the horizon darkening. Today, the Taliban ordered all foreigners out, saying their safety could no longer be guaranteed. The International Red Cross, which rarely pulls out of a western nation, reluctantly complied. Foreign employees of the UN and dozens of aid agencies had already left, leaving their Afghan staff in charge.

The only foreign aid workers probably left in Afghanistan are eight jailed members of Shelter Now including two American women, who are being tried on charges of preaching Christianity. Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban's supreme leader, remained defiant. He summoned religious scholars to the capital last week to discuss waging a jihad—a holy war—against the United States.

Here in Jalalabad, east of Kabul near the border with Pakistan, people seemed bewildered and in denial. "We're not expecting trouble—we are totally innocent," said Haji Sai Muhammad, the emirance among the moneylenders. At 75,000 Afghanis to the dollar, Haji Muhammad has to do business with a gargantuan supply of bills. He is a thin older man with a perfectly combed foot-long beard. He sees no need for confrontation with America. If Osama bin Laden, the financier of militants who has been given refuge in Afghanistan, is guilty of terrorism, he said, let America show Afghanistan the proof and a trial will be held in a court of Islamic law. "The court will decide what to do with Osama, out of his head or whatever," Haji Muhammad said. "I should think that would satisfy the Americans." Said Mahmood, a Taliban soldier, said much the same: "If there is proof, bring it to us. We have courts here, a system. We'll have a trial. But you cannot expect us to extradite him," he added. "We have no treaty. No one recognises our government or lets us join the UN. If the world won't consider us human beings, then what does it expect?"

Comments made in public in Kabul, Jalalabad and other locales repeat the same themes: Only a government, and not an individual like bin Laden, could have coordinated multiple hijackings; the US is looking for excuses to wage war on Islam; American soldiers will find only their own graves in Afghanistan. In private, however, other themes develop: rather than face American might, why not just kill bin Laden and toss his body across the border, one man suggested. Another wanted to know why bin Laden was the nation's sacrifice. "What will Mullah Omar say to God on Judgment Day?" he said, "when he is asked why he protected one personality at the cost of destroying an entire nation?" ☐ (New York Times)

Now we know

NOAM CHOMSKY

The terrorist attacks were major atrocities. In scale they may not reach the level of many others, for example, Clinton's bombing of the Sudan with no credible pretext, destroying half its pharmaceutical supplies and killing unknown numbers of people (no one knows, because the US blocked an inquiry at the UN and no one cares to pursue it). Much worse cases easily come to mind. But this was a horrendous crime. The primary victims, as usual, were working people: janitors, secretaries, firemen, etc. It is likely to prove to be a crushing blow to Palestinians and other poor, oppressed people. It is also likely to lead to harsh security controls, with many possibilities for undermining civil liberties and internal freedom. The events also reveal, dramatically, the foolishness of the project of "missile defence." As has been obvious all along, and pointed out repeatedly by strategic analysts, if anyone wants to cause immense damage in the US, there are innumerable easier ways than a missile attack that are basically unstoppable. But the crime is a gift to the hard rightist right, who hope to use force to control their domains.

As to how to react, we have a choice. We can seek to understand what may have led to the crimes, which means making an effort to enter the minds of the likely perpetrators. If we choose this, we can do no better, I think, than to listen to the words of ROBERT FISK, whose direct knowledge and insight into affairs of the region is unmatched after many years of distinguished reporting.

ROBERT FISK

So it has come to this. The entire modern history of the Middle East—the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the Balfour declaration, Lawrence of Arabia's lies, the Arab revolt, the foundation of the state of Israel, four Arab-Israeli wars and the 34 years of Israel's brutal occupation of Arab land—all craved within hours at the hands of the American people. We claim to represent a crushed, humiliated population struck back with the awesome cruelty of a doomed people. Unless I am grotesquely mistaken, thousands

The US needs to look for real, historical reason for this awesome cruelty of a doomed people.

have accused Israel of doing: acting disproportionately. But we were warned. All the years of rhetoric, the promises to strike at America's heart, to cut off the head of the American "cancer," we took for empty threats. How could a backward, conservative, undemocratic, corrupt group of regimes and small, violent organisations fulfil such preposterous promises? Now we know. After last week's annihilation, I began to remember other extraordinary assaults upon the US and its allies, miniature in comparison. Did not the suicide bombers who killed 241 American servicemen and almost 100 Israeli paratroopers in Beirut on 23 October 1983, time their attacks with unthinkable precision? It was just seven seconds between the Marine bombing and the destruction of the French three miles away. Then there were the attacks on US bases in Saudi Arabia, and last year's attempt—almost successful it now turns out—to sink the USS Cole in Aden. And how easy was our failure to recognise the new weapon of the Middle East which no American or Westerner could equal: despair-driven, desperate suicide bombers.

All America's power, wealth—and arrogance, the Arabs will say—could not defend the greatest power the world has ever known from this destruction. For journalists, even those who have literally walked through the blood of the Middle East, words dry up here. Awesome, terrible, unspeakable, unforgivable—in the coming days, these words will become water in the desert. And there will be, naturally, inevitable, and quite immovable, the like of which we have not seen since Hitler's death and the surrender of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, begin to fade away in comparison. Eighty years ago, I helped to build a city which tried to explain why we Muslims had come to hate the West. I remember some of them, their families burnt by American-made bombs and weapons. They talked about how no one would help them in the mass murder of the Jews. I remember that they were all of the same mind: the suicide bomber against the nuclear power. Now we know what this means. ☐ (The Independent)

more will now die in the Middle East, perhaps in America too. Some of us warned of "the explosion to come." But we never dreamed this nightmare.

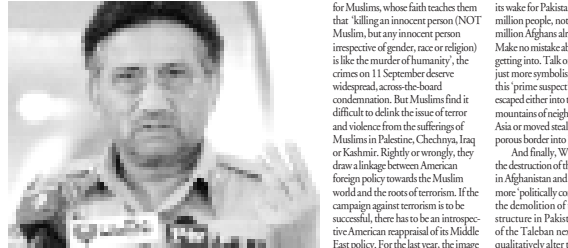
And yes, Osama bin Laden came to mind, his money, his theology, his frightening dedication to destroy American power. I have sat in front of bin Laden as he described how his men helped to destroy the Russian army in Afghanistan and thus the Soviet Union. Their boundless confidence allowed them to declare war on America. But this is not the war of democracy vs terror the world will be asked to believe. It is also about American missiles smashing into Palestinian homes and US helicopters firing missiles into a Lebanese ambulance in 1996 and American shells crashing into a village called Qana a few days later and about a Lebanese militia—paid and uniformed by America's Israeli ally—hacking and raping and murdering their way through refugee camps.

There is no doubting the indescribable evil of what has happened in the US. That Palestinians could celebrate the massacre of thousands of Jews shows their despair, but also their political immaturity, their failure to grasp what they have always

ANALYSIS

by MUSHAHID HUSSAIN

Pakistan's choice



The general is damned if he does, and damned if he doesn't.

Since 1971 has Pakistan been faced with such a grim regional scenario where even the stability, and long-term survival of the Pakistani state can be affected by the decisions taken and the course of events at they unfold.

The campaign and the crimes against humanity committed on 11 September which killed thousands of innocent Americans and hundreds of Muslims from almost a dozen countries is reprehensible. But the US response being fashioned alongside is new-found friends in Pakistan could be a catalyst for a drawn out, unwinable war that could quickly turn into a Vietnam-like quagmire, but this time without frontiers.

The US has been to declare war, but who is the enemy and where? Can it be identified as an individual, institution or country? If not, the US will end up chasing shadows.

The justifiable are being spared on by the Americans, but also by their humiliation in the face of the impunity and scale of the crime. The result is a "shoot first ask later" approach which could spark a new confrontation between the US and the Muslim world. For Pakistan, there could be a conflict with Afghanistan (the Taliban have already threatened reprisals if Pakistan territory is used against them), and a dangerous damage within Pakistan society that would sow the seeds of Arabisation, pitching the establishment against the jihadis.

Ironies, marked by about turns in policy, abound for the United States and Pakistan. The US has now embraced multilateralism, eagerly seeking support from previously reviled quarters, from the UN to Beijing and Islamabad. Then there is

for Muslims, whose faith teaches them that "killing an innocent person (NOT Muslim, but any innocent person irrespective of gender, race or religion) is the murder of humanity", the crimes on 11 September deserve widespread, across-the-board condemnation. But Muslims find it difficult to delude the issue of terror and violence from the sufferings of Muslims in Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq or Kashmir. Rightly or wrongly, they draw a link between American foreign policy towards the Muslim world and the roots of terrorism. If the campaign against terrorism is to be successful, there has to be an introspective American reappraisal of its Middle East policy. For the last year, the image etched in the popular Muslim mind is that of innocent and unarmed children, women and men being attacked by armed Israeli soldiers backed by tanks, missiles and planes. The Israeli and Indian agendas in Palestine and Kashmir respectively must not be allowed to influence American policy on these issues.

Second, Pakistan faces very limited, difficult choices. It is damned if it does, and damned if it doesn't. Not joining the coalition is no longer an option. Pakistan's closest friends—China, Saudi Arabia, the Central Asian Republics, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and even Iran—are all basically on the same side as the Americans on this issue. In a significant move, Iran has closed its border with Afghanistan and in the first official comment since the attack on the World Trade Center, the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Mayor of Tehran sent official condolences to the Mayor of New York.

Pakistan has been here before—plans and promises have been made, resources, and its territory to promote American agendas as Cold War ally of the US in the 1950s which allowed a base to spy on the Soviet Union, a frontline state for the Americans in the Cold War, last battle in Afghanistan, and an ally against Iraq in the Gulf War with Pakistani troops fighting with the 28th Indian US-led coalition.

But we have asked for a quid pro quo or figured out what is in store for us? Or fathomed the consequences of the decision to "fulfil all American requests and to assist in whatever is required," as General Colin Powell is

apparently put on 15 September, when he was flanked by an apparent President Bush at Camp David. Once the get Osama plus the Taliban Operation's over, and the last American soldier leaves, who will be there to remove the debris of discontent that this entire situation will bring in

in value for Pakistan and its 140 million people, not counting the 2.2 million Afghans already resident here? Make no mistake about what Pakistan is getting into. Talk of getting Osama is getting into a very real symbolism, since by now this "prime suspect" has probably escaped either into the Pamir mountains of neighbouring Central Asia or moved southwards across the porous border into Pakistan.

And finally, Washington is seeking the destruction of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and its replacement by more "politically correct" Afghans, and the demolition of the infra-structure in Pakistan, which is part of the Taliban nexus. This will qualitatively alter the nature of Pakistan's Kashmir policy.

Yet, however serious the challenge, this changed global and regional scenario provides Pakistan with some opportunities. Prior to 11 September, Pakistan was generally perceived by the US as part of the problem, but now, Pakistan is part of the solution, and a crucial component of that. America's syndrome has been forced to take a turn in favour of India, has been forced to be more balanced, devoting Pakistan to a "friendly country," a vital change of status. With terrorism as the new obsession, the "China as enemy" syndrome has been forced to take a backseat, which is good for Pakistan since China is our best friend and close ally. It will be a test for the military regime to translate this opening into clear strategic political space for the first official comment since the attack on the World Trade Center, the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Mayor of Tehran sent official condolences to the Mayor of New York.

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OPINION

by MARCUS MOENCH

America's shadow war

When the middle ground shrinks, extremism and terror grow.

Mainstream America has little real contact with the rest of the world and the realities most people face in their everyday life. For us, food is in the supermarket and the car is in the driveway. Few starve and almost no one knows what it feels like to wait hours at a public tap for water. Most Americans live in a world rich in communications, but limited in information.

Options and perspectives from other regions rarely resound in America's heartland. During times of crisis people in South Asia often ask what Americans think of the role our country plays. Few realise that most Americans are unaware of regional perspectives and issues, while people here are flooded with information about America. To most Americans, Nepal has mountains, India has Gandhi, while Afghanistan has beards and fundamentalists. Although American society is made up of immigrants often still rooted in their own cultures, as a society we're driven by internal perspectives and issues. Access to 100 channels on TV and the World Wide Web doesn't necessarily imply that Americans are well informed or understand the rest of the world.

As Tamim Ansary, an Afghan-American writer points out ("What's next for Afghanistan?", p. 14) "we can't bomb Afghanistan back to the Stone-Age, it already is there. Furthermore, eliminating terrorists "and those who harbour them" will involve an ever-widening circle of countries. Pakistan is now in a cleft stick, caught between elements of its own population and America's demands. This is a tall order. Middle-Eastern countries have been walking that tightrope for decades. Winning the global war will require an ability to understand address and the contradictions that give birth to terrorism.

Peace flourishes when the middle ground is fertile. This is the ground in which people can live everyday lives, send their children to school and hope for better futures. It is a ground nurtured by governments that serve rather than oppress, and by global economic systems that create opportunity rather than inequity. When the present is grim and the future more so, the middle ground shrinks and the extremes of socialism, fascism, extreme nationalism, fanaticism, the roots of terrorism, grow well.

When America entered World War II, my father-in-law, an active member of the German opposition whose associates later died in the attempt to assassinate Hitler, was intended by the US government. Those with him included Nazis, German Jews, Italians and Japanese. Little distinction was made between the "good" and the "bad." Everyone was locked up together. Something similar may happen again. Attacks against Muslims and those with Middle-Eastern names or appearances have increased.

Winning against terror, however, requires making such distinctions and continuing to make them as close as the shadow war continues. The greatest challenge facing both America and many moderate Muslims may be to maintain and live by our ideals, ethics, tolerance and generosity as we deal with terrorism. This is a tall order. How many of us can rise above prejudice, as my mother did, and encourage our sons to be among the daughters of people whose countries obliterated millions? How many of them, as we, as my father-in-law did, move beyond personal injuries to long-term partnerships?

How will America move forward? Military action depends on us. The longer-term direction depends on whether or not America can expand its understanding of the world and develop the political will to act in accordance with our basic values as we take its toll. It also depends on the ability of moderate Muslims to recognise how little America may really understand about them and to rise above the impact of discrimination or far worse actions. The ultimate battle is for the hearts and minds of populations. For America, the media may well be the frontline in this war. Can the media interest Americans in the rest of the world? ☐

(Marcus Moench received his doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley. He is a co-founder of the Institute for Social and Environmental Research, Kathmandu.)



ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

□ **Saint Clara** A 13-year-old girl enjoys a sudden burst of supernatural powers. Eventually, she has to choose between keeping them, or falling in love and losing them. On Sivan and Ari Folman, Israel, 1996. Sunday, 23 September, 5.30pm, Russian Cultural Centre. Tickets at the venue or ring 537551 for season tickets. Organised by the Inter-Cultural Film Society.

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

EATING OUT

□ **Regal Specialities of Nepal** Chef Govind KC's culinary heritage, with Nepali cultural programme. Until 15 September. Himalchuli Restaurant, Soaltee Crown Plaza. 273999

□ **Patan Museum Café** Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11am-2pm. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271

□ **Naachgar** 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 Kantipuri, Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. BBQ buffet Rs 500 per head 414432

□ **Dine with the birds and butterflies** Chef Sher Shing BBQ, kababs, tandoors, other traditional cuisine Farm House Café overlooking Shivapuri Reserve. Park Village Resort, Budanikanta.

□ **La Soan Restaurant and Vintnoque** Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchowk. 535290

□ **Sandwiches** Over the Rainbow American Diner has reopened. Fifth Avenue sandwiches, full meals at backpacker prices. Opposite Pilgrims Book House, Thamel. 42651

□ **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-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043

□ **Dinner and concert** Dine with Nepali singers Sapna Shree Parryar and Suresh Manandhar. 8pm-11pm, except Tuesdays. Park Pavilion, The Everest Hotel. 488100

□ **Saturdays at the Malla** Swimming and French chef's barbecue lunch. 11am-5pm. The Malla Hotel. 413585, 410966

MUSIC

□ **Red Sky Walkers at the Rox** Abhaya and Dev live, and DJ Neil. Happy hour 6pm-9pm. The Rox, Hyatt Regency. 491234

□ **Great coffee, live music** by the Heartbeaters. 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 Fairs. 7pm onwards. Shangri-La Hotel.

□ **Live Acoustic Music** Dinesh Rai and Deependra every Friday at the Himalatte Café. 9pm 491234

EVENTS

□ **Contemporary Jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Francaise Sundays and Tuesdays 4.30pm-6.30pm, 241163, 242832. At Banu's, Kamal Pokhari, Wednesdays 6.30pm-8pm. Saturdays 1.30pm, 434024, 434830

□ **Action Asia Himalayan Mountain Bike Races** Biking event—categories for everyone, cash prizes, trophies and \$1950 in bikes to be won. Three races on 10, 17, 24 November. For details, 437437 or www.bikingnepal.com. Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel.

GETAWAYS

□ **September at Shangri-La** Swimming and lunch for Rs 600, eam Rs 300. For details call 412999

□ **Dwarika's two for one package** Two nights accommodation plus afternoon tea, dinner, breakfasts, massage. Cost per couple US\$155nett. Offer valid till end of September. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

□ **Chiso Chiso Hawana** Summer B&B package for Nepalis and expatriates. 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 expatriates. Hotel Keyman Chautari. keyman@wlink.com.np 436850

EXHIBITION

□ **Charcoal drawings** by Chungpo Tsering 14-24 September, 8am-6pm daily. Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 413-580

□ **Paintings and sculptures** by Batsa Gopal Vaidya and Shashi Shah. 14 September-17 October, 11am-6pm. 411122 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Residence. 411122

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

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The monsoon is now truly over. We observed this low pressure circulation climbing up the Bangladeshi delta expecting it to head towards eastern Nepal. But, lo and behold, the westerlies have set in and they blew off the clouds towards Burma. Barring the eastern tail, distribution of rainfall was normal and adequate throughout the kingdom. A high pressure system signifying sunny weather is building up in the Gangetic plains, but one or two series of mild post-monsoon showers will still pass over on the tail of a low pressure system over Tibet which may still draw some stray moisture our way. Meanwhile the minimum temperature will drop steadily, with the first early-morning autumn mist on the valley floor.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fr	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
25-16	27-17	27-16	27-27	27-16

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



BOOKWORM

Civil Society in Nepal: Opening the Ground for Questions Dev Raj Dahal
Centre for Development and Governance, Kathmandu, 2001
Rs 200

The author explores how the idea of civil society works in the Nepali context, and examines its history and modern transformations in light of Nepal's political history. Dahal also suggests policy guidelines to institutionalise civil society, and explains how "associational living," which he calls "the heart of democracy," aids in the process of democratisation and development.

Nation and National Identity in South Asia S.I. Sharma, TK Oommen,
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2000
Rs 480

Eleven essays explore how the "nation state," a western concept, is transformed in South Asia. The authors ask how the nation state and nationality are conceived in South Asia and how this conception is affected by systems of stratification, different traditions of civil society, caste, ethnicity, tribe, gender, language, region and religion.

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

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K-Tool Beer and Steakhouse not the "longest," "higest," "first" or any other superlative. Just a relaxed, easy-going bar and restaurant with the coldest beer and juiciest steaks this side of the moon. By the Kathmandu Guest House. 433043

HMB Mountain Biking Have your bike serviced or repaired by HMB's Professional Mechanics at the HMB Workshop. Riding gear, accessories and

parts available. Second hand bikes bought/sold/hired. New and reconditioned mountain bikes for sale. Himalayan Mountain Bikes—Tours and Expeditions. 437437.

For Sale One each Casio piano model CT-770 (MIDI compatible), Aiwa CD-tape recorder player, Panasonic VCR. Also other furniture and household items. All in good condition, very reasonable prices. Ring 373218 before 9.30am and after 5.30pm.

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KATHMANDU	POKHARA	DAILY	08:30	03:30	10.00S
KATHMANDU	CHITRASARI (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:00	8.00S
KATHMANDU	SUNACHARI (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:30	8.00S
FROM	TO	SERVICES	DEPTIME	ARR.TIME	FARE/US
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	DAILY	07:30	02:30	10.00S
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	DAILY	08:30	03:30	10.00S
POKHARA	CHITRASARI (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:30	8.00S
POKHARA	SUNACHARI (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:30	8.00S
FROM	TO	SERVICES	DEPTIME	ARR.TIME	FARE/US
CHITRASARI (CHITWAN)	KATHMANDU	DAILY	10:00	03:30	8.00S
CHITRASARI (CHITWAN)	POKHARA	DAILY	10:00	03:30	8.00S
SUNACHARI (CHITWAN)	KATHMANDU	DAILY	09:30	03:30	8.00S
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Monarchy for democracy

Excerpts from an interview with
Girija Prasad Koirala,
Ghatana Ra Bichar, 12 September

In Syangja you called for 'democratic unity'. What did you mean by that?

We need unity now, among everyone who believes in democracy, constitutional monarchy and the present constitution. I believe it is time to stop bloodshed and terrorism and bring all political forces into the constitutional framework, even the Maoists. The forces of democracy need to come to some kind of understanding for the nation and democracy. This is why I raised this issue.

What do you think the second round of talks will be like?

It must be successful, or if the situation gets worse, the Maoists will be held responsible. The Maoists must stop their activities before dialogue begins—they cannot come to talks with a show of force. The government has already shown that it is flexible. The Maoists must be prepared to enter the present constitutional framework, the Congress will welcome them.

Has the party given the government all authority to stop this move?

The whole nation is united on this and asks that the meeting be stopped. Everyone is terrified to even think of the consequences. So the Congress party asks the government to take whatever steps are necessary to stop it.

There are rumours that you are very active because you want to be prime minister again?

I have become prime minister four times. The office is not a big deal for me. It comes and goes. For me the most important things are my country, democracy and a constitutional monarchy. There is no need to place issues of such national importance on the same level as the office of prime minister. I am working to bring all believes in the democracy together to get the country out of the trouble it is in.

Does Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba have your individual support and the party's support?

Prime Minister Deuba is from the party. He was elected leader of the

Drishit, Editorial, 18 September

Who was behind this attack in the US? America has many suspects in mind but now they have uncovered no concrete evidence of the involvement of these people. They have laid the blame on the doorstep of their old enemy, Osama bin Laden. It is clear that the US, with its allies, is preparing to carpet bomb Afghanistan for providing shelter to bin Laden.



If America is a civilised society, if it believes in justice, then first of all it should arrest the people and masterminds behind this attack. We have no right to put the lives of innocent Afghans or any other nation in jeopardy just for bin Laden. The support many nations have shown so far is for the American people and the tragedy they have faced, this support is not for American policy or the American administration. In the same way these nations have condemned this attack and shown support for America, they will support Afghanistan if innocent Afghans lose their lives. And they will condemn the US.

The US destroyed Vietnam. It has stationed its forces in many countries. It does not have a positive attitude towards Libya, Cuba, North Korea and other nations where liberation armies are active. It is moving ahead on the basis of its military might, but this will not turn world opinion in its favour.

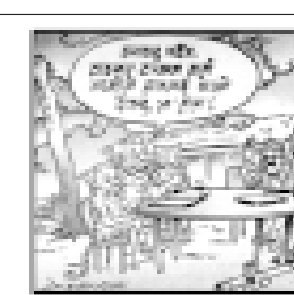
US policy is the main reason for the people who are now suffering in New York and Washington. The Cubans have shown support and sympathy towards the Americans in these difficult times but the US has shown no solidarity for the flood victims in North Korea, the earthquake victims in Iran or for the people of Belgrade. What is the reaction of the American people towards these victims?

If the people of America are really for justice, peace and liberty, and against terrorism, they should put pressure on their government to change its policies. The thinking of the American people must be centered on bringing the culprits to justice while at the same time not jeopardising the lives of thousands of people. If the US government is intent on bombing other countries in retaliation, then other countries of the alliance should not support this action. Remember war does not bring about peace or stability, only more destruction. The Bush administration must not act in haste or it will create problems for everyone.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"America may portray itself as a superpower, but it is rotting inside. This is evident from recent events."

Top Bahadur Rayamathi, Member of Maoists Talks Committee in Drishti, 18 September 2001.



"Don't be afraid. You're only seeing us like this because the talks are at Tiger Tops."

Nepal Samacharpatra, 16 September.

party in parliament and I have promised him my full support. I will stick to my promise. The party also fully supports him.

Gods are missing

Chhapal, 9 September

Changu Narayan Temple is listed as a World Heritage Site. Last week, three historic idols from here, including one of Bhupendra Mall, were stolen. Locals say that this is the work of a well-organised idola mafia that is very active in the area.

Under the pretext of providing proper security, a 297-year-old statue of Bhupendra, and two other statues of Kali and Bhairab were removed—in reality, stolen. The statues stolen from this site include in 1975 a statue of Krishna, in 1977 a statue of Kishore Mahadev, in 1980 a statue of Surya, and in 1981, the main statue. "It is no coincidence that in the last six weeks security here has become very lax," says Mohan Bir Shrestha, chairman of the Changu Narayan Village Development Committee (VDC).

Shrestha tells us that only ten days ago he was at a meeting in Kathmandu organised by UNESCO called, "How can Nepal recover its lost statues." He realised the urgency of protecting Changu Narayan's statues. The day after the meeting, he met the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Bhaktapur and requested him to strengthen the security at the site.

Shrestha was told that for this he needed to bring the CDO's office a letter from the VDC. The next day were holidays, and Shrestha had decided to present the letter the following Monday, but before he could, on Sunday night, the statues were stolen. Shrestha wonders if this was a coincidence.

King Bhupendra Mall had two statues, one of himself and another in the form of his wife Bhuvan Laxmi, erected in front of the doors of the temple exactly 297 years ago. The cast iron statue of Bhupendra that was stolen was 19 inches high, weighed about 50 kg and was gold-plated. That of his wife was similar, but of bronze. Also gold-plated was the statue of Chinnu Mata Mai (Kali).

The next day, Bhupendra's statue was found partially buried in a hillside, 500m west of the temple. A cowherd was tending to his cattle when he saw something buried in the ground, hastily covered with leaves and branches. Curious, he cleared away the leaves and discovered the idol. He got scared and called his uncle, who informed another person, who in turn called the police. The cowherd was rewarded with Rs 1,100, and the VDC has also promised him a reward in the near future.

Maoist demands

Pachanda's statement
Sapthak Janshed, 18 September

"At a time when the country is looking for a peaceful way out of this present mess, Deuba's government is not following its own laws and constitution. The government is becoming autocratic, dictatorial. Our team that took part in the second round of dialogue had stated clearly that our party was open to the idea of scrapping the 21 September pact, if this would in any way help to make the dialogue

a success. Despite this, Deuba's government has proved that it is fascist, anti-national and autocratic.

In the hope that a peaceful political solution would be found, those in favour of an interim government, a constituent assembly and a republic came forward, but Deuba's government let loose the Royal Nepal Army on these people. This fascist autocratic government sent the army against the people using the international scenario as an excuse. This is a stupid move. We also request the government to scrap the many laws and regulations used to suppress the people. If the government does not change its ways, dialogue won't move forward.

"Our party requests all Left forces to oppose such autocratic behaviour on the part of the government. We also request our people's forces to take any action it is necessary to protect themselves in such an environment. We also announce that the 21 September meeting has been postponed, all meetings will be held on a regional basis now. We request all people and parties to protect such autocratic behaviour which worsens the situation and impedes the dialogue."

Welcome to Nepal

Deshaer Sapthak, 15 September

It seems nothing gets done in the Department of Immigration if you do not bribe someone. Recently, an employee asked a foreign woman for a bribe. The woman pointed on him and gave him a piece of her mind. After that, frustrated, she broke down and cried. Everyone was stunned for a moment. Then the woman shouted that she would never again come to Nepal and that she really hated this country.

This is nothing new—most foreigners will be able to relate to this and probably narrate similar stories. It is an open secret that department employees won't lift a finger unless bribed. People who do not offer a bribe are forced into a

tangle of red tape. Eventually they get frustrated, and give up.

Tourism industry insiders say that even as the number of tourists is drastically decreasing, the Department of Immigration seems to be doing all it can to chase away the few who do come. Most tourists unfortunate enough to have a run with these officials swear they will never return to Nepal.

Even after completing all formalities you need to pay a bribe of anything between Rs2,000-10,000 for a trekking license. In some cases the bribe shoots up to Rs15,000. The bribe for a visa extension is anywhere between Rs1,000-Rs10,000. (Deshaer has named three Department of Immigration employees who it says are the most corrupt.—Ed)

India and Nepal

Drishit, 18 September

Using the Maoist problem as an excuse, the Indian army has been active in Nepal for some time. Now, a high-level delegation of the Indian army has arrived here. Maj Gen SS Chauhan is the leader of the delegation. Other members are Col Raju Bhatia, Lieut Col SG Bhandari, Major RK Singh and SS Deb. The Indian Embassy had asked the airport authority to allow the team use the airport's VIP facilities. The team also visited Syangja and neighbouring areas.

On whose invitation has this team arrived? What are they here for? When are they going back? The government is not providing any answers, but people who work at the airport authority have stated that they came on the invitation of the government. Shouldn't the government inform the public about something like this? This is certainly the government's duty. Parliament is in session and questions concerning this should definitely be raised.





Light gravity

Chungto Tsering's charcoals are as much about imagination as reality.

for a year. In this short time, he has not just mastered the medium, he has managed to ground himself in a place that sees just how the everyday is beautiful. In *Kora*, for instance, there are three monks and a beggar-boy, sitting together for a meal. It is a real life drama that you see everyday around Boudha, in the evening, of course. But in Chungto's charcoal you get a sense of openness and acceptance of the monks, and the street-smarts of the young boy. "There is such a beautiful harmony between them," he smiles.

The *Lhasa Festival* is at first glance a straightforward drawing of a flamboyant Tibetan youth speeding on a stallion, trying to spear a target on the ground. But something in the picture makes you look again. And then you realise that there is an unerring stillness in the picture, as if the artist sensed that the time for such sport is past, even if its spirit is alive. The same silence pervades drawings like the silhouette of *His Holiness the Dalai Lama carrying the Dorje and Ghanta*, and the sketch *Swayambhu*.

And as the surprise of his youth sinks in, comes another shocker—Chungto has only been doing this

for a year. In this short time, he has not just mastered the medium, he has managed to ground himself in a place that sees just how the everyday is beautiful. In *Kora*, for instance, there are three monks and a beggar-boy, sitting together for a meal. It is a real life drama that you see everyday around Boudha, in the evening, of course. But in Chungto's charcoal you get a sense of openness and acceptance of the monks, and the street-smarts of the young boy. "There is such a beautiful harmony between them," he smiles.

But not all the drawings rely

so much on the imagination for their impact. Chungto often walks the fine line between depicting what the mind's eye sees and duplicating what simply meets the eye. Some may not like this—one viewer at his show was of the opinion that his work comprises 'copies', much the same as photographs. Maybe so, but they are compelling copies that hint at the stories behind the people.

Chungto is very honest about how many of his works come about, which parts are drawn from life and which are inspired by other representations. In *Old Man From Rolpa*, he says that while he got the face of the man from a popular postcard, he had a tough time creating the sinew of the picture. "I stretched and strained my neck till I could see even the small veins in the mirror. Then I copied them one by one," laughs the artist, adding, "now I know what my neck will look like when I grow old." And by that time, when charcoal has rubbed against many countless sheets of paper, Chungto may not even have to look in the mirror.

Chungto seems well tuned into humour, harmony, silence

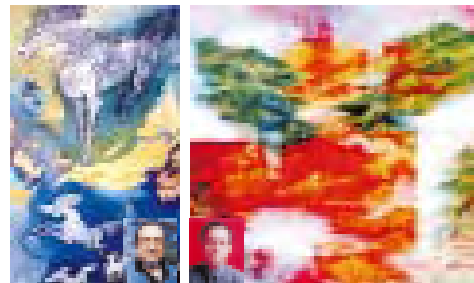


and action. His drawings, filled with Tibetoid locations, livelihood, bright faith and smiles, have the ability to draw viewers in pondering histories, some personal, some larger. The smile on the face of *Tingri Sister*, for instance, is extremely intimate, and if you ask Chungto, he says, well it should be, after all that is the smile of his sister. If Chungto decides to only draw family members at any time, he is well supplied—he has three brothers and three sisters. But the young artist, who grew up in the Dalai Lama's Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala, says he would have trouble doing his parents. "I never got to see them too well."

Meanwhile, when the sun comes up everyday, in a small room in Boudha the lights will be going off and a young artist will be ending his day. □

Charcoal drawings by Chungto Tsering, 14-24 September, 8am-6pm daily, Indigo Art Gallery.

Horses and temples



For years Shashi Shah has painted horses and Batsa Gopal Vaidya, temples. This week, a significant body of work of both artists is on view at the Siddhartha Art Gallery.

It is a felicitous combination, because Shah and Vaidya are two of Nepal's best artists and unusual for their devotion to teasing out the diverse possibilities of a single theme.

In Shah's paintings there are terrified horses. Running horses. Galloping horses. Baying horses. Leaping horses. Even flying horses. All of them are afraid, maybe, of the impending danger. Shah says he sees the horse, the incarnation Vishnu takes on to

protect humanity from dangers, as a fitting sign of the times. Even the horses at rest in his paintings have an ear cocked, as if to catch the faintest whisper of discontent.

Shah's horses often seem to be in chaotic situations, yet the colours tell us that the paintings are really about the equine power to preserve and reassure. The soothing calm of blues and greens, lived up in one instance by Shah's kinetic red, at others by a life-affirming yellow, all tell us before Shah's statement does, that, "no matter what crisis we face and whatever the dangers may be, the world is surviving up to now." What is important is to

acknowledge that trouble exists, and that the universe eventually finds a way out of it.

Unlike in his earlier work, Shah does not play with the thick impasto he was partial to, which created sculpture-like relief in his work. This time around, he concentrates on refining the illusion of distance and depth created by contrasting colours and tonal gradations. The horses retain their characteristic ruggedness through the use of paper and glue. His fleeing horses have an ironic and reassuring air of strength. This solidity echoes in Shah's deceptively simple-looking sculptures of paper mache and iron strings.

Batsa Gopal Vaidya's paintings provide a vivid contrast to Shah's work. There are fields of shimmering colours—red orange, yellow, green, pink—where the eye loses itself in, only to discover slow brushstrokes that delineate landscapes, and intricately designed temples. Vaidya's work does not overtly play with texture, instead, there is a subtle layering of images on a flat surface, much like in thangka. The influence of this traditional painting is also evident in the way Vaidya uses two converging lines to create impressions of mountains and hills.

The depth in his paintings comes from the division of the picture plane into different segments by rectangular swathes of colour—not, always entirely successful. Some of the paintings look flat, and the impressionistic, mysterious air that Vaidya seems to be aiming at looks simply overdone in these works.

But regardless of these shortcomings, the preoccupation of the show comes through—a sense of Nepal's heritage, mountains, rivers, forests and, yes, temples.

Putting these two artists together was a good idea, and not just because both are diminutive, reserved alumni of the JJ School of Arts in Mumbai. It is always interesting to see the directions taken by artists like Shah and Vaidya, two of Nepal's best who lavish all their attention on one theme or object. □



AMBASSADOR AT CHANGU: Minister Bal Bahadur KC and Japanese ambassador Mitsuki Kojima jointly inaugurating a reconstructed pati at Changu Narayan on 18 September.



ABOVE: CROUND: A first ever open press conference by Maoist negotiators (l to r) Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Agni Sapkota speaking to media after the deadlock in the second round of negotiations with the government on 14 September.



TRANSNAVIA NIGHT: Dutch charter operator Transavia celebrating its travel agent's award night at the Rox Bar. Yogendra Shakya and Subodh Rana and Transavia staff in the airline's distinctive green uniform pose with the three winners.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Chicken soup for the soul

It is a well-established fact of life that airlines and fine dining do not necessarily go together. One does not fly to eat, just as one does not eat to fly—unless one is oneself personally a fly in which case one flies while eating. Royal Nepal Airlines is our national fly carrier, and whatever else one may say about it confidentially in adult company at the Rox after a few drinks, culinary extravagance is not one of them.

There is something about the omelette served on the early morning RA205 shuttle to Delhi that defies description. Obviously, as the Great Helmsman himself instructed, an egg or two had to be broken to make that omelette, but which proportion of what Royal Nepal considers a "non-vegetarian breakfast" is actually the embryo of a fowl yet unborn and which proportion should rightfully belong in the cracker unit of an oil refinery is hard to tell.

In fact it was only after I had eaten halfway through the styrofoam tray while at cruising altitude. Somewhere Over the Western Sector, that I suddenly realised I was gnawing no more at the said omelette but was walloping down the plastic container. If I may be so bold as to say so, the receptacle actually tasted more like an egg than the omelette itself. And after swallowing the mushroom-and-onion-fluoro-biphenyl hexa-propylene tetrachloride it was hard to keep my tray table stowed and my seat in an upright position for very long without having to make mad roundtrips up and down the aisle to the fore and aft lavatories. (This is no mean feat, try it sometime.)

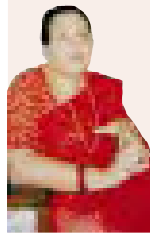
Speaking of eggs, RA hasn't yet settled which came first—the egg or the omelette. But we have it on good authority, viz. the Chicken Rights Alliance of South Asia, that there is going to be strict monitoring of poultry farm conditions in the subcontinent to ensure that our two-legged feathered friends, (be they broilers or layers) enjoy the basic rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration before the time comes for them to be converted into airline food. And here we must also think of the rights of the unborn chicken, the egg.

Chicken rights activists are also rightfully up in arms about fowl language that employs poultry terms like "chicken" when we mean "coward"—this callously stereotypes the essence of chicken and gives them an unnecessarily negative image. Phrases like "chick" are sexist and are used derogatorily to describe vertically-challenged poultry and young girls. "Hens-pecked" is an insult to hennism in general and animal husbandry in particular. Even

"cocks" get a raw deal when used to refer to twinkies. And what of "cockpits", the arenas where warlike roosters are made to fight by humans who gamble on the outcome!

It was when the plane had started making its descent into Indira Gandhi International Airport that the pilot came on the intercom: "Ladies and gentlemen this is your captain speaking from the arena where warlike roosters are made to fight humans who gamble on the outcome. We hope you have enjoyed our nightlife service today, we would like to ask you to stow your tray table for landing. That is, if you haven't eaten it already." ☐

NEPALI SOCIETY

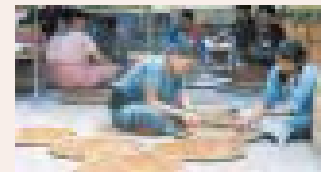


Hot stuff

over, Hajuri, along with Keshar Shrestha, who was also in the program, spent the next three years experimenting with their traditional recipes and new skills. The duo decided to bunk down in Hajuri's kitchen and made every conceivable Nepali pickle. They pickled, they tasted, they fed, they sold and they surveyed to see which of their concoctions would have the most impact.

MBA students could learn a thing or two from Hajuri about how to sell. "I went around selling the product to people I knew, not giving it for free as many thought I would. I was selling it so they

they're spreading this goodness around. In their three-room production unit—in Hajuri's backyard by now—20 women make their living creating pickles that some of us can't live without. The 17 varieties of tongue-tingling pickles, marketed by WEAN, are appropriately called Navaras—"nine flavours." Of the five women who make pickles for the brand, Hajuri has the most devoted following. And the good news is, the humble, if potent Nepali pickle is going international. Word is that folks in Hong Kong are craving this 'home-made' taste. As for Nepali students



could give me their true opinion on the product. I took this very seriously," says Hajuri.

Hajuri and Keshari invested Rs 40,000 each, they had only one assistant and saved on rent by not moving out of Hajuri's kitchen. Today, their pickle is a hot business—their annual turnover is in the region of Rs 4.5 million. And

abroad, it is impossible to wean them off Hajuri's pickles.

Hajuri is proud of her success—after all, she has converted something often dismissed as mere housework into one hot product. "Nepali women today need to understand that times of have changed and we need to exploit our knowledge," says Hajuri. ☐

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