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 From the Nepali press 15-16

COMMENT

by KUNDA DIXIT



Let's get this over with

Let us be perfectly clear about this: the Maoists brought this on themselves. They willfully took the "people's war" to the next phase to bring down this country's constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. While there may have been a few other options, it is clear why the elected government decided to declare a state of national emergency.

By breaking the truce and the talks to attack the Royal Nepal Army last Friday, the Maoists knew exactly what they were getting into. They must have foreseen how the government would respond, they must have known it would plunge the country into civil war. And yet they went ahead and did it. Why?

It was either an exaggerated sense of their own strength and a complete misunderstanding of regional geopolitics. Or, it indicates a deep-seated division in the leadership in which the hardliners now have the upper hand, and the cadre have run away with the agenda.

Either way, the country is now in it for the long haul, and the long-winded (and feared) clash between insurgents and soldiers is a reality. All indications from the first week of army action are that after Dang, where the RNA was caught napping, the Maoist rank-

This campaign must be brought to a swift and effective conclusion with the least amount of Nepali blood shed.



and-file is now taking a heavy beating.

As repeated often, the killing of Nepalis by Nepalis cannot be a victory for anyone. But that is exactly what the Maoists were doing these past years, and now the tables may turn. The Royal Nepal Army, which has held its fire for so long, now has the difficult job of bringing this campaign to a swift, effective and conclusive end with the least amount of Nepali blood shed. The focus of this campaign must clearly be to disarm the rebels and get them to surrender, rather than to eliminate them. The army can only neutralise the Maoists, it cannot solve the "Maoist problem". Even though

they went for armed struggle, the Maoists' is still in essence a political cause. A defanged Maoist movement is the best bet that the party will enter the political mainstream, as it should. There has always been space for their ideology in the parliamentary arena.

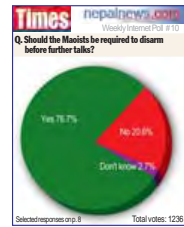
Impatient for power, the Maoists took a violent short-cut rather than go the long-distance marathon of political organisation. They decided on a re-run of the Shining Path in the Himalayas. During the past four months of truce, they also realised that there is a lot else that comes out of the barrel of a gun: criminalisation of a once-valued struggle, erosion of discipline, lack of

command and control, and a serious danger of internecine violence.

Emergencies are not pretty. In 1975-77, Indian democracy suffered once as Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay used it to try and rid the country of all its ills: the Naxalites were mowed down in West Bengal, trains ran on time, and there were forced vasectomies. It is important to understand that unlike the socialist Jayaprakash Narayan and others who Indira had it in for, Sher Bahadur Deuba's emergency is directed solely at the Maoists. It must also be said that Indian democracy has still not recovered

from those years.

Here in Nepal, civil society, media, human rights organisations and the intelligentsia must understand this if they are to be true monitors of the 'Nepali Emergency' just begun: they can guard against its possible misuse. This is a test for our institutions: parliament, government, monarchy, judiciary, bureaucracy, army and police. It will be the alertness of media and civil society that will ensure democracy emerges stronger from this test so it can at last deliver socio-economic development to all Nepalis. ♦



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Once a "foreign disease", AIDS



For urban Nepali youth, the lure of injectable drugs is increasing, and needles are hard to come by.

KUNDA DIXIT
 • For those still sceptical that AIDS is a major crisis for Nepal, consider the following facts:
 • There are nearly 40,000 Nepalis living with HIV or AIDS, six times the total number of hospital beds in the country
 • 3,000 Nepalis will die of AIDS this year
 • 14 Nepalis are infected with HIV every day, at this rate the number of infected people will grow to 200,000 in the next 8 years
 • AIDS will soon be leading

cause of death in the 15-49 age group.

There's more:

- There are 6,000 injecting drug users in Kathmandu Valley alone; this number is expected to double in the next three years
- More than half the drug users are HIV-positive
- Nearly all injecting drug users are sexually active, and almost half are married
- Three-quarters of all injecting drug users have multiple partners, and 64 percent of them do not use

There is no such thing as a high-risk group for HIV in Nepal anymore. Everyone is at risk.

agencies and activists working with sex workers or drug users in Nepal. It is clear that at the present rates of growth, our health care system, already grossly inadequate, will just not be able to cope with the onslaught of new AIDS patients. Nepal is moving from what epidemiologists call a "concentrated epidemic" to a "generalised" one, which means the disease is spreading from virulent pockets in vulnerable groups to the general population. And it is doing so exponentially, driven by the rapid spread of injecting drug use among urban youth and the expansion of Nepal's highway network, which is giving people from the hinterland new mobility.

The urban areas of Pokhara, Kathmandu and Dharan are the main areas where the deadly combination of prostitution and injecting drug use is incubating the virus, which then spreads through Nepal's widening highway network to all parts of the country. Along the highway, there has been a dramatic increase in drive-by commercial sex. Brothels serviced by young village women and client sex workers alike help spread the virus to the general population.

And this is why, although HIV is still entirely a disease of men and women working in Indian cities, it would be a mistake to believe it can be checked by closing the border, or carrying out mandatory tests on migrant workers. Says Michael Hahn, of UNAIDS in Kathmandu: "Even if you close the border tomorrow, the epidemic is still going to spread domestically." A recent survey by the research

group New Era showed that half of all trucks along Nepal's highways and 15 percent of all migrant workers visit prostitutes. Awareness among them about condoms has increased from 33 percent in 1997 to 51 percent now, but more than half of all sex workers along the highways said their clients did not wear condoms. "There is a big gap between awareness and behaviour," says Hahn. "Condoms have to be easily available and affordable. And then there are taboos, it is still very difficult for women to go to a shop and ask for a condom."

Poverty, peer pressure and frustration are the major push-factors here, forcing young women into prostitution along the highways, and driving middle and upper-middle class youth to drug abuse, and in dangerous concomitant, needle-sharing. A sample survey of Nepali teenagers by UNICEF in April showed that more than one in ten people surveyed said they had tried drugs, and of those between 5 percent in Kathmandu and 13 percent in Pokhara said they had injected. Even Nepalis abroad are infected, one AIDS treatment charity in Sydney says among the foreigners it is treating.

Most drug users in Kathmandu do not use the more expensive "brown sugar" anymore, but a morphine-based compound called Hahn, of UNAIDS in Kathmandu: "Even if you close the border tomorrow, the epidemic is still going to spread domestically." A recent survey by the research

by DANIEL LAK

The bastards of war



The lessons of war and everyday life are often simple and similar: equal rights, equal development. For women and men.

Many of us, the case for women's equality in all walks of life has been self-evident for a long time. But it is a fight that must never cease and extolling the dividends of victory is one way to keep fighting, ceaselessly and in our own self-interest as men.

Put quite simply, Afghanistan is in the state it is in today because of the war. The Taliban, let it be clear: the Islamist students militia that is on the verge of extinction is soundly traditional on the question of women. Bangs and confinement to home are widespread Afghan customs, not an aberration by Taliban dictators.

The exception was Kabul, where the television cameras showed a once relatively liberated female populace clad in iron—doctors, lawyers, scientists and civil servants forced from their jobs into maximum pitons called home. Afghan history is a litany of crimes against women, the beheading and enslavement of half the population. And it was always done in the name of a religion that actually guarantees a form of equality by insisting on education and careers for the female of the species. The Holy Prophet's first wife, Khadija, was a successful businesswoman who funded his religious activities with the revenues of her camel caravans. He fought long and hard against the practice of polygamy, and eventually settled for a compromise—a maximum of four wives but only if all could be treated with equal dignity and each approved of new marital unions. My learned friends tell that was supposed to be a way of guaranteeing that polygamy, widespread and horrific in pre-Islamic Arab culture, would eventually disappear. It is true that the Prophet himself married nine women in total. But the next seven after Khadija were poor widows, and by marrying them he put them under his protection and gave them a safe and sheltered existence. Before that, they begged on the street or were prostitutes—the fate of widows in all patriarchal

societies even today.

Nor does Islam justify the ill treatment of women who refuse to hide behind closed doors and veils. Covering the hair and wearing loose clothing is a way of deterring rape, again something all too hideously common in the Prophet's time. He fought against it. The inference by conservative clerics that somehow women, if were to blame if they showed an elbow or a forehead is a latter day perversion of what Mohammed intended, again so my liberal Muslim friends assure me. The grafting of Islam onto the fiercely patriarchal society of what is now Afghanistan saw the faith assimilated and diminished by tribal custom. There's no mention of the war in the Quran.

Afghan leaders of the 18th and 19th centuries were a bloodthirsty, cynical, unaccountable collection of robber barons. They married what they believed was their allotted total of four wives, then sought concubines by the dozens. Naturally, they fathered far too many children, and sons and bastards fought over the succession to power, squandering resources and ignoring the development of any institutions save armies and treasuries. It is not a far cry from Afghanistan today. It's as if the attempted reforms of King Amanullah in the 1920s, Zahir Shah in the 60s, and the Moscow-backed Afghan regimes of the 70s never existed. Medieval robber barons, whether they call them Taliban or Northern Alliance, use the values of the countryside to accumulate wealth and power, and to ceaselessly fight fellow warlords—today's bastard sons squabbling for a scrap from the king's table.

Nepal of course is not a Muslim state, and its laws forbid polygamy and guarantee rights to women. The reform of King Mahendra in 1963 was a good start towards erasing patriarchy. The women's property bill should have been on that. But there are still too many obstacles to the progress of women here.

Politicians and feudal landlords who marry more than one wife need to be taken to task for their behaviour is an offence to all. Denying property rights to women in any way is to deny them their humanity. Rape and sexual assault need to be addressed on a war footing. And so on. No, Nepal is not Afghanistan, but any place that condones inequality needs to change and quickly. Once men realise the economic benefits, they'll stand aside and let women, and society, flourish. Equal rights equal development, it's that simple. ♦

is now a Nepali epidemic



Highways bring mobility, and a greater demand for drive-by sex.

it, as well as the needle to shoot it with, because one ampoule is too much for a single user. The curb on sale of new disposable hypodermic needles (which cost Rs 12) by pharmacists to suspected drug addicts, and the scaling-down of activities in the past year by LALS, the only organisation involved in needle-exchange, has led to an increase in transmission among Kathmandu youth.

The result is a dramatic increase

in the proportion of drug users with HIV, and the danger of this spreading into the general population. In 1993, only two percent of injecting drug users in Kathmandu were HIV-positive. By 1999 it had soared to 49 percent. Rajiv Kalle, a former drug user who went public last year by disclosing he had HIV, says the proportion today could be anywhere up to 70 percent. (See also p. 7) He blames the scaling back of needle-exchange pro-

grammes, and adds that a campaign offering safe needles—called "harm reduction"—is the only way to bring down the infection rate.

The best way to stop the spread of HIV is to ensure that needles are not shared. Yet our mentality is still to try to use the police method, says Kalle.

Sharan Chhetri is another person living with HIV who has gone public with his infection, and is with the help group, Prepara. Two years ago, Sharan married Ashu, who also has HIV and the story of their lives got wide publicity in the Nepali media. Sharan told us: "The most important thing is to generate awareness in schools for 10-11 graders. We see so many of these boys sharing needles, and getting infected. It is tragic." He says the most effective strategy to arrest the spread of AIDS is to tell young people about drug abuse and safe behaviour.

Drug users are often treated like outcasts, due to the public's perception that they are deviants or criminals. Needle-exchange programmes are not widely supported, because society thinks they encourage addiction. The police take the same view, even so many of them continue to be in cahoots with pushers on the streets.

Advocates of needle-exchange programmes say their first priority is to make addicts kick the habit. But it is not easy, so as they work on it, they also try to get them to switch to less harmful injected drugs.

If they still inject, addicts are persuaded to stop sharing needles. If they share needles, they are told how to disinfect needles before use.

Whatever the method of harm reduction, says Hahn, the main goal is to allow young people access to protection from HIV. "You have to make it acceptable that they protect themselves," he adds. And here, awareness through media alone is not enough, there has to be

an environment created by education, peer pressure, family support and accessible counselling. Injecting drug users are young people from all strata of society. Deny them access to safer habits, and they only hasten the jump of the virus from vulnerable groups to the general population. HIV/AIDS is not simply about drug use or migrant labour or commercial sex anymore.

After being in denial for many years, the government seems to have finally woken up to the crisis ahead. Nepal is still ahead of the curve, and with a strong awareness and prevention campaign like the one launched in the late-1980s, the epidemic could still be checked. On a visit to Nepal earlier this year, the architect of Thailand's dramatically successful anti-AIDS campaign, Mechai

Varadivada, advised: "This is a war. The more you do today, the less of a problem AIDS will be in the future. The less you do today the bigger the problem in the future." Health Minister Suresh Singh Bhandari, who was the prime minister to chair National AIDS Council, when it is set up, will be the first in South Asia that is led by a head of government. A National AIDS Prevention Strategy is in the arid and due to be released in April, the National Planning Commission is also addressing the problem, and planning to make HIV/AIDS a "cross-cutting" issue in the 10th Plan.

There is reason for the government to panic. One just needs to look at African countries like Botswana and Malawi (with nearly 40 percent of their population HIV-positive) to see

how much we are headed if something is not done urgently. This is going to be not just a health crisis, but an economic emergency for the nation, with a larger and larger portion of the productive labour force infected. ♦

One who did Nepal proud

The 1960s through to the mid-1970s can be considered the golden age of Nepal's bureaucracy, when a few but able bureaucrats, led by redoubtable individuals such as Yashu Nath Khandal and Padam Bahadur Khatri, helped create the state infrastructure that has kept the country going until now. One of the best of this crop of world-class and worldly-wise civil servants was Ram Chandra Malhotra, who passed away at his home in Baneshwor on the night of 22 November at the age of 73.

Malhotra was born in Jamal on 28 October 1928 to the family of Gokul Chandra Malhotra, a scholar who came from Lahore at the invitation of the Rana rulers of the day to teach at the Durbar High School and later at the Titi Chandra College. The son, Ram Chandra, himself studied at Durbar High School, finishing in 1945. After that, Malhotra completed his BA and then his BA at Titi Chandra College, and went on to earn a master's degree at Punjab University.

He started off in the civil service as deputy secretary in the Ministry of Transport, and in the following two decades held senior positions in a number of ministries. He was also variously head of the National Trading Corporation and Royal Nepal Airlines, and member-secretary of the National Planning Commission.

Malhotra retired in 1974 and was immediately picked up by what was then ESCAPE (now Escap), the UN office for Asia based in Bangkok. In 1980, he joined the newly formed International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), where he served as Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, becoming one of the first Nepalis in senior positions in the international bureaucracy.

In February 1988, in his last year at IFAD, Malhotra suffered a heart attack after which he had open-heart surgery in the United States. He returned home with his wife Raj to their Baneshwor Heights home in Kathmandu. In retirement, Malhotra headed the Arya Samaj society in Kathmandu. Besides his wife Raj, Malhotra leaves behind four daughters and a son, all settled abroad.

Prayag Dutt Tewari, a long-time friend and colleague of Malhotra in Rome, said: "Ram Chandra" was one of Nepal's best bureaucrats. In the international arena also he did the country proud as a straight-talking, mild-mannered, extremely competent official. Those who know what he stood for will miss him deeply."

Short on passports

Those hoping to obtain a passport in the near future are in trouble if they don't have their passports yet. An official at Kathmandu's Central District Office confirmed that the distribution of passports here and in most parts of the country had been stopped due to the shortage at the Foreign Ministry. The new stock of Nepali passports, which are printed in France, has been delayed for two months, supposedly because the Finance Ministry did not have the funds for it. They will take another two months to arrive here. The Foreign Ministry distributed passports until two years ago, when they handed the job to the Central District Administration under the Home Ministry office to make the process quicker. Officials at the Foreign, Home and Finance Ministries are said to be blaming each other for the current situation.

Culture of preservation

Following the 1992 declaration of the Kathmandu Declaration, adopted by the Ministry for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation in August at an international symposium on illicit traffic in cultural property, will allow existing mechanisms to function better. The 12-point declaration includes establishing a commission of representatives from the Departments of Archaeology and Customs, and the Nepal Police to coordinate protective actions, customs control and recovery of cultural property, establishing a comprehensive record of ownership of all monuments and cultural properties in Nepal, strengthening the Department of Archaeology, and updating and effectively implementing relevant legislation. "But the most essential issue is local ownership," says Dr Yoshiki Kitamura, UNESCO representative to Nepal. "We can pour millions of dollars into protecting local heritage but if the community does not feel responsible that is useless." A good way to foster a sense of ownership, says Kitamura, would be to release a small part of local revenue from cultural income to the community."

Purposeful PAC

For once, someone appears to be taking the Public Accounts Committee seriously. After the PAC issued a notice in August threatening to make public a list of former ministers, bureaucrats, and parliamentarians using government vehicles they were not entitled to, 106 vehicles have been returned. That leaves 46 vehicles, including a couple of motorcycles, still at large, and PAC officials say if they are not brought back soon, they will have to take legal measures.

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In times like these



Perhaps the emergency was the only way out of the present impasse. But civil society should now ensure it is implemented without contravening national laws and international covenants.

There is no question that the six-year-old Maoist 'People's War' provided sufficient constitutional background for the government and the king to declare a state of emergency. This situation was in a sense expected—we have been living in an environment of 'trial and error' in recent years, rather than the 'trial and error' a new democracy expects.

What this new development does not mean, however, is that we will come upon an appropriate solution

immediately. Indeed, it is possible that we will see the conflict escalate in an even more barbaric manner. Whatever the pros and cons, hoped-for results and unvoiced fears, a state of emergency is now in force. And with it, comes the challenge to justify it in legal and political terms. Briefly, an emergency allows for the suspension of the following articles: 127(a), (b) and (d), (relating to freedom of speech and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly without arms, and freedom of movement),

13(1) relating to press-censorship, 15 (preventive detention), 16 (right to information), 17 (right to property), 22 (right to privacy), and 23 (right to constitutional remedies except habeas corpus).

The government and the king must now consider this the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Nepal on 14 May 1991, prohibits the suspension of rights relating to

freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The same covenant also prohibits any act on the part of the government that violates the rights to life, freedom from torture of any kind, and the right to a fair and speedy trial in a regular court.

One can argue that Nepal has nothing to do with such international obligations in a situation of emergency. However, we made no such reservation or declaration while ratifying this internationally-binding legal treaty. Further, this treaty has supreme status over other domestic laws in Nepal, including the Constitution, under article 9 of the 1991 Nepal Treaty Act. The governments of George W Bush and Tony Blair are recent examples for those who believe we should not care about such standards or obligations.

Another legal challenge is the issue of compliance with similar binding obligations under article 3 common to all the four Geneva Conventions on the Laws of Armed Conflict (1949), which Nepal ratified in 1964 without reservations. As a minimum, this article prohibits the act of violence to life and murder (including murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture) and the taking of hostages, outrages upon personal dignity (such as humiliating and

degrading treatment). It also prohibits the passing of sentences and carrying out of executions without trial by a regular court that affords all judicial guarantees, and discusses the protection and care of the captured, the wounded and the sick.

In addition, there are absolute safeguards for the protection of the civilian population and places of civilian use such as hospitals, electric power plant, sources of drinking water etc, even in times of serious armed conflict and during a state of emergency. The same standards also apply to the legality and the validity of most of the provisions of the government's long-awaited Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention and Control) Ordinance that came into effect together with the declaration of emergency. It is now the responsibility of the government security forces as well as the Maoist guerrillas to uphold these.

As for the Maoists being called terrorists, there is really no universal standard or definition—it always depends on the opinion of a government, political group (non-state), criminal group or person(s). Terrorism can be classified as criminal terrorism, political terrorism, state terrorism and sub-state terrorism, among others.

Calling someone or some group 'terrorist' does not necessarily justify taking action against them in violation of existing laws, international human rights standards and the principles of international humanitarian law (IHL), or the Geneva Conventions.

Times are grave for the country and the people, and we must act together to find a permanent solution to the conflict, and a return to normalcy from the state of emergency. But until this happens, it is the primary duty of all human rights groups, the media and citizens to closely monitor the situation and establish the accountability of violators of the legal and human rights provisions and the international humanitarian laws principles. And one can presume that the violations will be many.

All this is different from the usual work of human rights NGOs. And for the media it is a far cry from the usual churning out of rhetoric to please the political elite or ensure monetary gain. For even as we are alert, we must be sure that we are not capitalising on the suffering of others. ♦

(Chintan is a lecturer at the Nepal Law Campus, and practices human rights law.)

From □ 21

The last 12 months

12 April 2001: Ordinances for setting up parliamentary and regional administrators re-promulgated. Maoists attacks on police bases continue.

1 June 2001: Royal massacre. Maoists say they had a 'working understanding' with King Birendra, the massacre was masterminded by India. They infiltrate street protests following massacre. Government declares curfew, brings situation under control.

4 June 2001: Government issues the Public Security Regulations amidst widespread protest from the Left and civil society.

15 June 2001: Maoist women declare Chitwan a dry zone, student wing steps up attacks on private schools.

29 June 2001: Baburam Bhattarai says in a newspaper article that the Republic of Nepal was born after the royal massacre.

6-13 July 2001: Maoist attack police posts in Lamjung, Nuwakot, Ramechhap, Gulmi, Daitikh and Hileti. They abducted 60 police from Hileti. Army helicopters intercept Maoists, there is a shootout, but the army is called back. Maoists also form a regional alliance called the Confederation of Communist and Maoist Parties of South Asia (COMPOSAS).

22 July 2001: Deuba replaces Koirala on 19 July. The next night, Maoists attack police post in Bajura killing 17. Deuba strikes a truce with Maoists on 23 July and says talks will begin.

14 August 2001: Top communist leaders including Madhav Nepal of the

UML, and Bamdev Gautam of M-L, sneak to Siliguri India for an audience with Prachanda. The two, and other communist leaders, disagree with the Maoist plan for a joint struggle for a republic.

30 August 2001: Round 1 of peace talks were held in Godavari. Three Maoists and five government negotiators agreed to keep on talking.

14-15 September 2001: Round II. Maoists table their wish-list, had three core political demands: an interim government, a constituent assembly, a new constitution and the institutionalisation of a republic.

13 November 2001: Round III of peace talks. Government scraps Public Security Regulation and frees 68 prisoners before talks. Maoists give up demand for a republic but stick to constituent assembly, all political parties say 'no'.

21 November 2001: Maoist leader Prachanda sees no point in keeping on talking. Maoists set up a 37-member Joint Revolutionary People's Council headed by Baburam Bhattarai.

23 November 2001: Maoists launch attacks in Surkhet, Dang, Syangja and other parts of the country, for the first time attacking the Royal Nepal Army, killing 14 soldiers in the Gorahi base. 22 policemen are also killed. Maoists loot Rs 225 million from banks over the week.

25 November 2001: Maoist attack army again at Salteri. They killed 27 policemen, a chief district officer and four soldiers. But this time, Maoist casualties are heavy—over 60 said to be killed, although only 15 bodies are recovered.

26 November 2001: King Gyanendra declares a National State of Emergency. Government declares Maoists terrorists, and deploys the Royal Nepal Army to fight the insurgency.

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Peace preterence

Maoist semantics has clearly been misunderstood.

A far-drawn-out debate heavily skewed in favour of why Nepal didn't need a constitutional amendment, the Maoists last week presented their case in the form of a discursive article immediately followed by a deadly trail of devastation.

[G]overnments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed—whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organising its powers in such form, as to them seem likely to effect their safety and happiness.

This is not a legistic translation of Maoist ideology. Dr Baburam Bhattarai's latest exegesis on why Nepal needs a genuine constitution

drafted by their true representatives. It is a quote from the Declaration of Independence the Americans adopted in 1776. At that time Nepal had just emerged as a unified country, and in the form of a discursive article immediately followed by a deadly trail of devastation.

If the rhetoric of Nepal's Maoists resonates with the conviction of the Continental Congress, it is because those white men assembled in Philadelphia were also revolutionaries who inspired the creation of the world's first written constitution, unless you count Cromwell's 1653 Instrument of Government as one.

With almost every Nepal political party working within the multiparty system evidently in favour of amending the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, it was believed the Maoists (or at least the top leadership) would inevitably be drawn into the political mainstream once they were

given lucrative ministerial portfolios in an elected government. But Comrade Prachanda's bombshell last week convulsed a nation that was still digesting Dr Bhattarai's argument in a newspaper article that morning why Nepal couldn't expect to move ahead as long as the 'we' in the constitution's preamble did not refer to the people.

In less than 50 hours, it became clear what the Maoists actually meant when they decided to withhold their demand on declaring Nepal a republic during the third round of peace talks. Government negotiators simply failed to grasp the substance of Maoist semantics, and were as startled as anyone else by the scale of the violence the rebels unleashed to shatter the four-month-old truce.

The roots of the current crisis lie in the monumental misjudgement of the agents of the 1990 change made to

enshrining in the preamble the people's movement as the inspiration for the constitution. This had the violent effect of sanctioning violence as the catalyst for political change. There was another serious flaw: a hastily appointed interim cabinet exercising the legislative powers of a dissolved unicameral parliament had endorsed a text prepared by a panel of judges/policemen/lawyers in which one of the king's nominees was to participate. The first session of the parliament convened in 1991 squandered a major opportunity to plug the loophole by failing to endorse the new basic law.

Over the years, leaders of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, the Nepal Sadhavana Party and other political groups could avoid to wear that don't-blame-us smirky eye of abuse during the constitution was castigated because they weren't on the drafting panel. Many of those who make up today's Maoist leadership feel they have a greater claim to condemning the constitution today because they had already rejected it in 1990. (Don't even try contemplating a Maoist-RPP-Sadhavana coalition government under these circumstances.) As a result, the

Who will look after us...

of people—people in Kathmandu and Nepal in Australia and Malaysia—who call and write to me. I tell them what they need to do, about the terrorist treatment available. They now know more about the disease, the ways in which a person can get infected, what to do to safeguard yourself, and the importance of giving infected people care and support.

Nepal is facing an enormous challenge. Every day 14 people are getting infected by the virus. There are many government and non-government organisations working in prevention. Millions of dollars are being put into different projects. Seminars, international conferences take place every now and then followed by cocktail receptions. A lot of reports are written, but the situation is getting worse. This does not make much difference to those who are not infected, since they have many years to come to make things better, but for us infected, they do not want to just wait to die.

There have been of the lucky HIV-positive people to work on advocacy and awareness both within Nepal and outside. I have a big responsibility on my shoulders and have been able to contribute to an extent. The irony is that my own country is one of the hardest hit and I am powerless since there are not many who are willing to listen to me. Without care and support for people living with HIV, no matter how much money or effort is put in, the problem will get worse. At present, very few organisations are providing care to infected people. Around 100 HIV-positive people are being provided direct support.

What, I wonder, are the other 39,900 Nepalis going through? There is an urgent need to set up hotlines for care for infected people, because home-based care is not suitable for Nepal. There are many young men with HIV right here in Kathmandu who have nowhere to go. There is also an urgent need to find injecting drug users access to life-saving tools such as clean needles and methadone. Our government must recognise that needle-exchange works.

Some of the most important and immediate measures that the government and concerned individuals and organisations should take are very basic—such as providing access to proper medical services, access to medication, care and support programs to those who have no place to go, laws to protect the rights of infected people, empowerment and skill development programs, projects to rehabilitate them in the community. If they cannot do that, they should stop using our misfortune for their own selfish ends.

As people with HIV and AIDS, we do not want sympathy, we do not want pity and we certainly don't want prejudice. All across the region, we see people dying every day. Care for people living with HIV and AIDS may have to be treated in the most technologically advanced environment with the latest anti-retrovirals. It could be the most basic of needs: a home to live and die with dignity. ♦

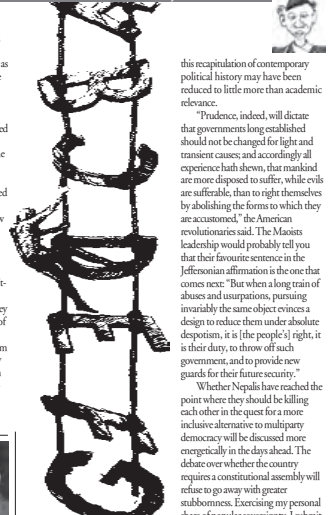
(Rajiv Kalle is a board member representing the Asia-Pacific in the Netherlands-based Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, GNPA+.)

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Nepali Congress, the UML and all the other parties were left voicing platitudes on the irrelevance of a constitutional assembly while the Maoists were providing specifics on how this constitution blocked their vision for Nepal.

The key argument with which the Maoists hoped to score over the UMLs in the court of public opinion—that a constitutional assembly might help the monarchy get

back the powers it lost in 1990—was contradicted from the outset by their assertion the palace had witnessed an erosion of authority and influence after the tragedy of 1 June, 2001. Amid the blood and tears that flowed last week,

After the latest massacre, the political discourse will be defined by an additional element: the profound sense of betrayal felt by those who wanted to give the peace process a chance and thought they had almost succeeded. ♦

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Indosuez shares

Nepal Indosuez Bank's efforts to offload its shares and pull out of Nepal have hit another snag—petitions by board members and shareholders for anti-corruption investigations, which at best would delay the process and weaken the bank, its clients and shareholders further. Two petitions have been made by Rastriya Beema Sanshan shareholders (including a majority of parliamentarians, Public Accounts Committee and the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Here's a chronology of what has happened so far:

Indosuez (owned by Credit Agricole Indosuez, France) has been trying to divest and leave Nepal since July. (See "The scramble for Indosuez," #56) At that time, it wrote to the central bank seeking clarification on if it could sell its holdings to its promoter partners, the Rastriya Banija Bank (RBB) and the Rastriya Beema Sanshan (RBS). Indosuez's concern was that both have held 15 percent shares each since 1985, against a 1993 central bank directive limiting individual or institutional ownership of banks to 10 percent. The public owns 20 percent of Indosuez. The Nepal Rastriya Bank wrote back saying the promoters could not increase their holdings in the Nepal-France venture.

In August, Indosuez wrote to the RBB and the RBS as per the Promoter's Agreement and notified them about the NRB opinion. The Banija Bank wrote back saying it would like to buy, but would need government approval. The NBS meantime wrote back saying it would like to get a proper offer as per the Section 4.02 of the Promoter's Agreement—respectively of what the central bank said. Meanwhile, Ram Sharan Mahat's Finance Ministry decided that the Rastriya Bank would have the final say in whether the Banija Bank could increase its stake in Indosuez.

With both the RBB and the RBS interested in buying the Rs 200 million worth of shares offered, Indosuez wrote to the Rastriya Bank again asking if it could go ahead with the deal in early November. The central bank said "no," following which Indosuez made an offer to a private group, which was followed by the anti-corruption petitions.

BPC bids

The government has extended the deadline for submission of bids for the Butwal Power Company up to 2 December. The bids should have come in by 25 November but did not. Three previous attempts to privatise the company have been bungled over one technically or another—on 20 August the government rejected the only qualifying bid in the third round saying the price offered was less than what it had expected—in dollar terms. (See "BPC's privatisation saga," #57, and "BPC on the block again," #60) The government has not gone through such a major privatisation process since the Nepal Tea Development Corporation (NTDC) was handed over to the private sector last year. Even that handover has not been completed yet.

Deloitte Touche gets RBB

The Banking Reform Project included a step towards the selection of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu as the management group for the job of turning around the Rastriya Banija Bank. Tohmatsu representatives have been invited over for negotiations. There has also been some progress in the bid evaluation of companies wanted to manage Nepal Bank Limited, with the central bank now in the process of evaluating the financial bids of the four qualifying companies. (See "Bailing out the banks," #62)

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Pdf #10

Should the Maoists be required to disarm before further talks?

This question was posted before the Maoists began attacking army bases on 23 November.

Definitely they should be disarmed before further talks. If they really want to solve the problem peacefully why do they need arms and ammunition?

GR Joshi

The only people still to be trusted in Nepal are the Maoists. They must remain strong. It is only because of their arms that the government tried to negotiate with them. When they put out their 40-point demands at the start of their war, the government tried to crush them. Many Maoists were killed before they attacked police. People are fed up of constitutional parties. If the Maoist leaders are genuine, they must fight and turn this country into a republic. Of course, they shouldn't be dictators. They must be able to tolerate different ideas, allow them to flourish with Mao's doctrine.

Deeshbhatka Nepali

Our Australian organisation has always promoted Nepal as a country of peace. Things however seem to be changing rapidly, and if this senseless violence continues it will have devastating consequences for all Nepalis. We urge the Maoists to work within the system change Nepal's government and constitution. There is a framework in place that, with the support of a majority, can bring about the changes the Maoist are asking for.

A concerned Australian

Maoists are against the present so-called leaders as amass wealth at the people's expense. The solution is to stop these corrupt leaders. The Maoist objective is not to create trouble but to eliminate corruption. Talking with such corrupt leaders is worthless.

Anonymous

In light of the recent attacks by Maoists, your poll question is beginning to sound like a cruel joke. In the past, it was only ill-equipped policemen and poor villagers who could not afford to brave the "brave" Maoist revolutionaries who were killed. Now that some of our "brave" Royal Army soldiers have also been killed, is the RNA brass still going to insist that it does not want to get involved? Remember the massacre in Durai, when the RNA stood by as the policemen were butchered? The millions of gods residing in the high Himalaya have truly foreseen this land.

Zorro

The Maoists are growing due to social injustices and suppression. Let us not forget how we are treating fellow countrymen. The Maoists are an expression of the social frustration. It is said it came out in this way. The police aren't saints either, their "Flush Out" operation made the Maoists grow.

BPA

Killings will not solve any problems. Nepalis should open their eyes and support only those who are fair and honest. Students, wake up, and unite.

Meen Gurung

Aren't we victims of our own actions? The majority is lazy, cynical, jealous of other's progress, always at each other's throats. Every one is racing to become rich overnight and the same people blame the government for being corrupt. And who is most worried and knowledgeable about Nepal? The diaspora. The people who don't think Nepal was worth living in and left the country for greener pastures. Get real. There is a social problem in

Nepal. Whether the Maoists drop their guns or not, whether the government is decent or not, as long as the bulk of Nepalis are what they are, wise only after the event, Nepal will not see a better day.

Deeshbhatka

What is happening reflects the people's anger, suppressed grievances, dissatisfaction and frustration. No party met their expectations. If the government brings out sophisticated weapons in the false belief that will flush the Maoists out, they are inviting the current situation of Afghanistan or Kashmir.

Hum Gurung

Not a line is stupid enough to lay down weapons before coming to the negotiating table. No one will engage in peace talks until the Maoists lie behind their back. It is natural that we listen to those who have power otherwise we could have resolved the Maoist issue six years. But without disarming them there cannot be a true peace. So we should find a way that can lead to a peaceful outcome without any kind of violence.

Mike Garg

One of the main reasons the young generation is following these bands of terrorists is that they have been let down by their leaders. Being poor and vulnerable, living in rural areas, they cannot disagree with these terrorists and subsequently are being forced to fight by their cowardly leaders.

Bilal Bhattarai

Not a question of disarming, they need to be finished as soon as possible. There was no doubt these guys were terrorists. But to avoid bloodshed and widespread damage to the nation the government took the right step giving peace a chance through talks. Now we must realise that these terrorists were using the talks as an opportunity to strengthen their military position and they have shown their terrorist nature. Police brothers, you have suffered a lot in fighting these terrorists and while you were dying political parties claimed Maoists were a "political problem." They are simply terrorists.

Bhurlet

There is no chance of peace dialogue with Maoists. They are waiting for the army.

G Gurung

This question is irrelevant in the present context. Talks should be dropped and the Maoists must be peaceed by searching them out. They invited a bloodbath, they will get it. Peace was given a chance and they shunned it. It was Deuba's and Bhattarai's policy which allowed them to grow. The opposition UNML, the RPP and human rights groups are also responsible. In order to halt more bloodshed, it is necessary to activate the army.

Murkhasingh

The Maoists are a political problem and should be taken in that sense. The NC, UNML, and other political parties wasted the past 12 years. This is what we get. The Maoists are raising the core issues to develop the nation for the prosperity of the people. They should be disarmed, but how?

Dinanath

Look north

The newest agreement in tourism cannot remain just a paper tiger.

The Beed is not in a mood for

sacrament and shy beginnings this week. So here goes. It is widely believed that the agreement signed between Nepal and China this week will end our over-reliance on visitors from south of the border. That relation is of course, important, but affected by such a gust of some bizarre and some not-so-bizarre factors, that it is wise to finally have a back-up. China has

finalised Nepal as an outbound destination for its citizens. This means Nepal will get more Chinese tourists all year, but it also allows Nepal to develop into a transit destination for tourists from third countries visiting China.

The announcement was no doubt greeted with semi-hysterical whoops of joy and relief by the denationalised Nepali tourism industry, the whistler goes, wonders will now happen.

China is a large emerging market for outbound tourists—estimates say that from the 12 million now, this number will increase to 30 million in 2010, and as much as 100 million in 2020. Over the years, many venerable experts predict, China will surpass all countries, emerging as the largest source of outbound tourists. The purchasing power of many Chinese is increasing as the economy opens up. Potentially, China could spend billions of dollars on tourism.

And yes, there is great potential

for Nepal but this Beed, ginger-eyed as always, sees room for bungling.

Indeed, it sometimes seems to me in especially bleak moments as if it is becoming a bit of a national pastime, to get up, yawning, for another cup of tea, just as a wonderful opportunity lands in our laps.

Past experience, which ye old columnist has in abundance, suggests we might not make the most of such an agreement. For instance, in 1996, after a big hue and cry, several of weekly airline seats was increased between Nepal and India, but since then they have remained stagnant. Private operators have opened out of India and the national flag carriers have not increased their frequency. Similarly, Nepal has bilateral airline agreements with many countries, and theoretically we have over 60,000 seats a week. But what part of this do we really use? The China Agreement should not die down with the initial euphoria. We need to come up with the idea of understanding the market and providing quality service. The Beed will repeat his rhetoric: open up the travel trade to foreign operators, if we continue to protect Nepal's travel industry, we will lose out. It is better to have a handful of travel companies of international repute providing quality services than hundreds of local ones that exist to perish swiftly.

The China Agreement cannot be allowed to remain a paper tiger. ♦

Readers can post their views at artha@bepi.com

www.nepalnews.com



A funny thing happened on Thanksgiving weekend in the United States. Traditionally one of the biggest weeks for retailers, Kalle Lann and his Adventus group have for the last five years been calling the day after Black Friday Nothing Day. The message: "We'll buy nothing. That, at least, is what the former advertising executive turned anti-consumerism activist would like.

This year, Buy Nothing Day



surprisingly, the networks have also refused Lann's repeated requests to run his 30-second spot encouraging viewers to participate in "TV Turn-off Week."

"I came from Estonia where you were not allowed to speak up against the government," says the 55-year-old Lann, whose family fled to the west in advance of the Russian takeover in 1944. "Here I realised you can't speak up against the sponsor. There's something fundamentally undemocratic about our public airways."

But some viewers did get to see the commercial. For the third year in a row, CNN Headline News agreed to air it, with Lann paying \$10,000 for a slot—for lower than standard network rates. "We should make our commercial space available to debate issues of our day," said Steven Haworth, a spokesman for Time Warner, which owns CNN.

That other networks refuse to broadcast the winnish swipe doesn't bother most constitutional-law experts, who point out that they

How to decide

The Buy Nothing Day campaign in Seattle distributed this checklist to let shoppers evaluate things they were thinking of buying.

- Do I need it?
- How many do I already have?
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it last?
- Could I borrow it from a friend or family member?
- Can I do without it?
- Am I able to clean, lubricate and/or maintain it myself?
- Am I willing to?
- Will it be able to repair it?
- Have I researched it to get the best quality for the best price?
- How will I dispose of it when I'm done using it?
- Are the resources that went into it renewable or nonrenewable?
- Is it made of recycled materials, and is it recyclable?
- Is there anything that I already own that I could substitute for it?

aren't under any legal obligation to do so. "At least we'll make it clear who butters their bread," said Laurence Tribe, a Harvard Law School professor. But he added: "The networks seem to have a short-sighted lack of wit."

The commercial trading-commercialism is Adventus' and Lann's way of reaching the masses. In 1989, Lann founded the Media Foundation in Vancouver, British Columbia. The group—which he

doesn't see as a political group, but rather a social one—has been active in promoting anti-consumerism for years. In 1989, Lann founded the Media Foundation in Vancouver, British Columbia. The group—which he

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one million to one by glassy-eyed shoppers, but there were signs that six years after it began, the event was starting to take on a life of its own. "I all know that there are these spontaneous

outbursts of street theatre, of small invasions of pranks and shenanigans of all kinds," said Lann. "And this is nothing we're pushing heavily it's happening spontaneously." There were scattered reports of Buy Nothing Day posters, downloadable from the Media Foundation's website, cropping up on college campuses around the US, and of related events, from seminars to singalongs, in a dozen spots. Lann said anti-consumerism is more than a dozen other countries put on similar events, he said.

In Vermont, Chapin Spencer, a part-time carpenter, said he had not heard of Buy Nothing Day until he recently saw a public television program about anti-consumerism, the spiritual and environmental life brought on by American-style over-consumption. Spencer and a college professor friend cobbled together

has had revenue of \$500,000 last year and has five full-time employees—produces alternative advertising for student and environmental groups, including an anti-automobile commercial for Greenpeace. The foundation also publishes a quarterly magazine called "Adventus" that sells for \$5.75 a copy and, according to Lann, has 40,000 subscribers. The magazine lambasts advertising's effect on popular culture and includes lampoons of famous ads: one parody of Camel cigarettes features a cartoon character called "Joe Chemo"; a job at Calvin Klein's Obsession campaign shows a slender model seductively caressing a toilet.

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SHOPPING MAKES YOU A BETTER PERSON



Opponents complained that Buy Nothing Day was a guilt-inducer as well, and that retailers provide the economy millions of jobs and billions of dollars in income. "It doesn't make any sense," said Allen Parker, a dishwasher in Burlington. "People should be able to buy whatever they want without being made to feel guilty about it. To do for others, you have to spend money." Still, many would like to spend less. The Center for a New American Dream, a Vermont group that advocates "sustainable consumption," recently commissioned a survey that found that most Americans would welcome lower spending and less emphasis on gifts during the holidays. The survey, conducted last month, found that 15 percent of its 800 respondents were still paying off their 1996 holidays bills. ♦

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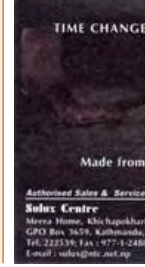
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Shopping for humans

The new breed, coming to a *pasal* near you.



We are at a moment of history equivalent to when man being first discovered fire, for before us lies the very imminent prospect of the cloning of a human being. We have already cloned an animal and it has just been claimed that the first ever cloned baby will be born next year. The impact of this reproductive technology and the issues it raises for all our lives are just staggering.

Welcome to the age of biology. We have always made changes to our environment, we need to grow food and build shelters merely to live. This impact has progressively grown as our methods of control over the physical world have improved and magnified. For example, electricity generated by hydroelectric power has transformed Nepal, road building has and still is doing the same, and on a quieter level, improved access of health services is also slowly transforming the fabric of the Himalayan kingdom. Dramatic physical and social changes are all arising from the application and implementation of these new technologies. Some people will make dramatic amounts of money from the changes, many will make little or nothing, but the underlying ideology which holds all these changes together, is that improved technology and improved services—development, no less, is of benefit to a majority of the people.

The so-called Developed World is at this moment embarking upon a new process of "reproductive development" that will change its fabric as fundamentally as development is changing ours. With the fear of cloning they played with our evolutionary destiny. Is this the dawn of a bright new age or are we risking ominous consequences for the future of civilisation?

Whether we like the thought of clones or not, reproductive technology will become so sophisticated that the biological imperative will recede. One day, procreation will not take place in bed, but in a laboratory, and even take place between a man and a woman, instead, you'll order the genetic make-up of your child and the laboratory will develop the embryo.

As our notion of what life is all about is immersed in sexuality and the biological attraction of male and female, much of the history of civilisation has as a result been played out along sexual lines, think of your family, child of the royal family. All of this will change, reproductive technology will marginalise and eventually make redundant most of these social patterns and norms. The biological attraction of male and female will be abandoned, superseded by the workings of technicians in labs.

And what do we get in return, but shopping and not just shopping at that, but the ultimate shopping experience. Design your children in advance and get them produced to your specification, remove those degenerative genes, give them a good body of hair, strong arms, make them a boy or girl, whichever takes your fancy or need and pick them up from the local store. Let's go shopping, shopping, shopping, and shopping. Your child will not be ugly, physically or mentally impaired, they will have whatever colour skin you wish, and maybe one day soon, you can buy them genes for bravery, intelligence, charm and honesty. You can have a baby that never cries.

An Italian couple has already announced that they plan to have a baby that was a clone of the "father", and the maverick doctor Severino Antonicelli and Panayiotis Zavos claimed recently that the first cloned baby will be born next year. Many people are however, offended by the prospect of people looking exactly the same. Imagine going round to a friend's to see their new baby boy. "Ah," you say, "he looks just like you."

"What about his eyes," the mother says, "aren't they a bit mine?"

"No," you say, "the eyes, the ears, well everything really, they're all his, all exactly the same."

Your friend looks on proudly while you stand perturbed, you say to your friend, he's nice, handsome, but not much that you want a smaller version of him tagging along. "Yes," your friend says, "he may have the same genetic makeup as me but he will grow and

develop differently because the social and environmental contexts within which his life unfolds will not be the same as mine."

The same, but not the same, you say.

The Rodin Institute in Edinburgh have already cloned two sheep, Dolly and Polly. Whereas Dolly was a straight carbon copy, for Polly a human gene was customised into a sheep cell and then the sheep was cloned, making it the first "designer" animal. Using the clone as a standard, scientists can produce endless customised variations for their clients. The same can go for your friend: your friend with white skin, your friend with the threat of cancer removed, your friend with no inherited diseases. Is there anything wrong with all this? We may mock Western women who have plastic surgery to improve their looks, but this is what makes them happy, and happiness is one of the higher if not the highest goal to attain in the good life, then really, our mocking is misplaced. If a prospective parent knew they were likely to pass on a genetic predisposition for heart disease, wouldn't they feel obliged to spare their child by eliminating those genes in the donor cell or embryo? And further, an infertile couple desires to pass on their genetic inheritance by producing clones of one or both partners, shouldn't they feel obliged to exercise their right of choice? We have fertility clinics, why not cloning clinics?

But the science is uncertain; the experience of Dolly and Polly and Dolly has taught us that some defects do not show themselves until after the first few months of life. Aside from that terrible thought, there is also the ultimate question of whether the clone will be a human being. For example, in cows, in the US, cows now give birth not to calves, but to goats these are like South Asian animals. More specifically, Bessie the cow was the surrogate mother of the world's first cloned endangered species. The animal she carried was cloned from a single cell of a dead goat and implanted for a cross-species pregnancy.

It may be easy to say that bananas in the supermarkets of England are still bananas even though we all know bananas don't grow in England. This is a simple import/export, a travelling of goods. When these tourists come the streets of Thamel and especially when they venture further to Chitrapati or Anan Tol many of them are quite plausibly peculiar. The way they eat and dress makes us laugh, smile, or even

dislike, making it the first "designer" animal. Using the clone as a standard, scientists can produce endless customised variations for their clients. The same can go for your friend: your friend with white skin, your friend with the threat of cancer removed, your friend with no inherited diseases. Is there anything wrong with all this? We may mock Western women who have plastic surgery to improve their looks, but this is what makes them happy, and happiness is one of the higher if not the highest goal to attain in the good life, then really, our mocking is misplaced. If a prospective parent knew they were likely to pass on a genetic predisposition for heart disease, wouldn't they feel obliged to spare their child by eliminating those genes in the donor cell or embryo? And further, an infertile couple desires to pass on their genetic inheritance by producing clones of one or both partners, shouldn't they feel obliged to exercise their right of choice? We have fertility clinics, why not cloning clinics?

Second World War, Nazi ideology completely discredited eugenics and the idea of "improving the race." It has been decades before anyone thought about it again, but we have. Imagine a society where more and more people clone and customise their genotype to design specifications and engineering standards, how will it people regard the child who isn't cloned or customised? What about the child born with a "disability"? Will the rest of society come to see the child as an error in the genetic code, as a defective product? Governments might even sue parents for not removing degenerative genes and thereby making an unnecessary drain on health services. Future generations might become far less tolerant of those who are not engineered or who deviate from the genetic standards and norms adhered to in the "best practices" of the industrial market place. Will the human ability for empathy survive that? Will the human being survive that? ♦

world where new technologies speed the process of "improving" our offspring. We can all become gods as well as parents to our children. This is the perfect realisation of the driving dynamic of Western civilisation, this is what capitalism is all about, this is where it takes us—shopping for humans.

Customised human cloning offers the spectre of a kind of immortality. Each generation can continually customise their model (themselves, their genotype) playing and upgrading with new genetic traits. It would be naive to think that there aren't plenty of people who would jump at such an opportunity. Clone a king, managing director, top scientist or political leader and that way insure against their death or an assassination attempt, or an accident. Tata tracks why not Tata kids? Clone your own workforce. Mind you there are certain personalities you would not wish to be cloned. Hitler being one of them. In fact, all the world have happened much sooner if it hadn't been for the

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The end of geography



This conflict is not clash of civilisations.

Ten years ago, Samuel Huntington argued that the fault lines of world post-Cold War politics are mainly cultural—"clash of civilisations" between five or six major cultural zones that can sometimes co-exist but will never converge, because they lack shared values. One implication of this is that 11 September, and the US-led response, should be viewed as part of a civilisational struggle between Islam and the west. Another is that what in the west are considered universal human rights are an outgrowth of European culture, inapplicable to those outside this tradition.

I believe Huntington is wrong. Not because his US Nationalism once wrote an article "Our Universal Civilisation," arguing that "western" values are applicable across cultures, and that he owes his literary achievement to precisely that universalism afforded by his living Huntington's putative civilisational boundaries. Universality is possible in broader terms as well, because the primary

force in human history and world politics is not cultural plurality, but modernisation, whose institutional expressions are liberal democracy and market-oriented economics. The current conflict is not a clash of civilisations between cultural zones of equal standing. Rather, it is a struggle against those threatened by modernisation, and its moral component, respect for human rights. Any right that is or has been asserted historically relies on god, man, or nature. The original source of rights, god or religion, has been rejected in the west since the Enlightenment. John Locke's *Second Discourse on Government* begins with a polemic against the argument for kings' divine rights. The secularisation of the western conception of rights is the root of the liberal tradition.

Today, this means to be the major dividing line between Islam and the west, as many Muslims reject the secular state. But we should consider why modern secular liberalism arose in the west. Liberal ideas emerged in

the 16th and 17th centuries, when blood sectarian struggles between Christian sects in Europe exposed the impossibility of political rule based on religious consensus. Montesquieu, Hobbes and Locke reacted to horrors such as the Thirty-Year War by arguing religion and politics must be separated to ensure civil peace.

Islam confronts a similar dilemma. Efforts to unite Muslims and religion are dividing Muslims. Our politicians are right to insist that the current conflict is not with Islam, an extremely heterogeneous faith that recognises no authoritative source of doctrinal interpretation. Intolerance and fundamentalism are one choice for Muslims, but Islam has always had to contend with questions of civility, secularism and tolerance, as is evident from the ongoing reformist ferment in theocratic Iran.

The second source of rights—the positive view that whatever a society declares by constitutional means to be a right becomes one—also provides no guarantee for liberalising tendencies, for it leads to cultural relativism. If, as Huntington implies, the rights claim in the west emerged uniquely from the political crisis of European Christianity after the Protestant Reformation, what is to stop other societies from appealing to their local traditions to deny these rights? The Chinese government is adept at wading this question.

The final source of rights is nature. The language of natural rights—advanced most emphatically in 18th century America—continues to shape our moral discourse. When we say race, ethnicity, wealth, and

gender are non-essential characteristics, this implies belief in a substrate of "humanness" which entitles us to equal protection against certain types of behaviour by other groups or states, cultural arguments notwithstanding. The spread of democratic institutions in non-European contexts in the late 20th century suggests the west is not alone in this belief.

But if human rights are universal, should we demand their implementation everywhere, always? Aristotle argues that natural rules of justice exist, but that their application demands flexibility and prudence. We must distinguish between a theoretical belief in the universality of human rights and the actual practice of supporting human rights around the world, a shared "humanness" as shaped in varying social environments, such that our perception of rights differs. In many traditional societies where choices and opportunities are limited, the western, individualistic view of rights is jarring, because it cannot be abstracted from the larger process of modernisation. The notion of universal human rights is one part of the complex context of a universal civilisation, from which an understanding of the other elements of modern society—economic justice, democracy—cannot be excluded. ♦

(Project Syndicate)

Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the Last Man*, is professor of politics international political economy at Johns Hopkins University.

by VICTOR BULMER-THOMAS

Growth in an age of anxiety

Latin America and Asia urgently need to put their economic house in order.

Growth in many Asian countries—barring China and to some extent Taiwan—was stopped cold by the 1997 financial crisis. Growth in Latin America has often suffered from a shortage of domestic savings, leading to the need for foreign capital inflows to sustain an adequate rate of investment. Foreign capital inflows led to an accumulation of debt, which on numerous occasions provoked financial crises. The key to sustainable long-run growth in Latin America is higher domestic savings.

Some steps have been taken in this direction. Fiscal deficits are much smaller now inflation is under control. Pensions systems have been privatised, at least partially. Low-making-rate enterprises have been closed or sold to the private sector. However, extreme income inequality in the region has not produced high rates of savings by wealthy households, as their liquid assets are often held abroad. Asia's problems are the opposite. High domestic savings encouraged financial institutions to lend beyond prudent limits. Non-performing loans slowed growth, or required adjustment measures that incite recession. For sustainable long-run growth in Latin America, Mexico, with most of its exports destined for North America, is now in recession. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

As Latin America and Asia became more open, their vulnerability to external shocks increased. Slow or no growth in Japan is a negative factor across Asia. Today's difficulties in the US have exacted a heavy toll on growth in Latin America. Mexico, with most of its exports destined for North America, is now in recession. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

(Victor Bulmer-Thomas is director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London.)

One more UN office

UNITED NATIONS' UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is creating a new high-ranking post whose functions include overseeing the plight of the 49 least developed countries (LDCs), the poorest of the world's poor. The UN Conference on LDCs, held in Brussels last May, recommended creating this post for a UN High Representative. Besides LDCs, the High Representative will also oversee the world's landlocked developing countries and small-island developing states. There is some overlap among the three categories of country. The High Representative will carry the rank of Under-Secretary-General, a standing below that of Deputy Secretary-General in the UN hierarchy and the representative office will be at the UN headquarters in New York. Currently, all matters relating to LDCs come under the purview of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva. The first High Representative is very likely to be from one of the LDCs although though several Western countries have staked claims on the job, which comes with an annual salary of over \$151,000. Annan, in a report to the General Assembly, said the High Representative would be responsible only for coordination and reporting as well as advocacy and fundraising to implement the LDC action plan adopted at the Brussels conference. All analytical and technical cooperation functions would continue to be carried out by other organisations in the UN system, including UNCTAD, in accordance with their mandates. (IPS)

Shackling the Internet

BRUSSELS - The European Commission is expected to adopt rules in the coming weeks that would bind the 15 EU members to outlaw racism and xenophobia on the Internet and offline. A draft proposal lays out what it terms "effective, proportionate and dissuasive" criminal penalties for racist offences and provides a common definition of racism but grants member states leeway in ensuring compliance. The draft defines racism and xenophobia as "the belief in race, colour, descent, religion or belief, national or ethnic origin as a factor determining aversions to individuals or groups." It lists six race-related offences, which must be made punishable as a criminal offence throughout the EU. Vera Egenberger, director of the non-governmental European Network Against Racism, said: "At the moment, EU legal provisions on racist crime are very different, especially concerning people who put racist propaganda on the Internet." The proposal starts from the premise that what is illegal in the real world should be illegal online. The document notes it is very difficult to prosecute those who disseminate racist material on the Internet because racist sites often are located in non-EU countries, particularly the US, where the offence is protected as free speech. The member states' anti-racism legislation would need to cover people who design racist web pages for European consumption, even if they are not on EU territory. The proposal would also make it a criminal offence to set up a racist web site on EU territory, even if the material is not hosted in Europe. To be adopted, the proposal will have to be accepted by the EU Justice and home affairs ministers once the European Parliament has weighed in. (IPS)

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Another Three Gorges?

BEIJING - China is reviving an old water-diversion scheme favoured by the late Chairman Mao 50 years ago, that would see the waters of the country's longest river, the Yangtze, transferred from the south to the parched north. Critics deride the project as 'Great Leap Forward' thinking, which held that nature could be transformed in a great way for human benefit. But officials argue that the biggest water diversion project in China's history is a 'fundamental strategic solution' to the serious water crisis in the north. The ambitious South-to-North Water Transfer Project, estimated to cost over \$60 billion, will kick off early next year and large parts should be completed by 2010. People and industries in Beijing and Tianjin—two cities beset by worsening water shortages—are expected to use water taken from the Yangtze River basin 100 km to the south. More than half of China's 600 cities suffer water shortages. The overuse of groundwater has caused the water table under the North China Plain to drop substantially over the past five years. The Yellow River, on which much of northern China depends for its industry and agriculture, is so overused, it often runs dry before reaching the sea. This year has seen one of the most droughts in decades. China's Ministry of Water Resources says that in 2000, when China's population reaches 1.6 billion, its per capita water resources quota will be only 1,700 cu m, generally acknowledged danger limit. Northern China, the country's breadbasket where a third of the population lives, taps only 7.7 percent of the country's water resources. Some experts argue that such a mammoth project would adversely affect the environment and displace thousands of people along its routes, reviving the controversial Three Gorges Dam in damage caused. (IPS)

A lot of gas

DHAKA - Bangladesh has long been under pressure from international oil companies, representatives of the World Bank and other multilateral agencies, donor countries and businessmen to export part of its gas reserve, but the newly elected government seems to be rethinking an earlier decision to do so. Finance Minister Siraj Rahman says the administration of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia may still go for natural gas export—provided that it is beneficial for the country. Rahman sparked an outcry against the export plan in October, when he said the government had decided in principle to export gas to India. This prompted the principal opposition Awami League, and left-leaning organisations and professional groups to declare the decision dangerous, even 'suicidal' for Bangladesh. Awami League president Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia's immediate predecessor, noted: 'Over 90 percent of Bangladesh's total population has no access to the benefits of gas. Hasina accused the present government of striking a secret deal with foreign oil companies to export natural gas to India through a pipeline. Instead, she said, raw gas should be used to establish gas-based industries within Bangladesh. It is difficult to determine the size of Bangladesh's recoverable gas reserve. Different bodies offer different figures, ranging from 2.85 trillion cu m to 315 billion cu m. At the present rate of utilisation, says state-run oil firm Petrobangla, this will be exhausted in the next 20 years. Bangladesh uses 70 percent of gas to generate electricity and produce fertiliser. Some 20 percent goes to run mills and factories while 10 percent is for domestic use. The government spends about \$500 million annually importing 3.5 million tonnes of crude oil and petroleum products. Last year, using approximately 8.5 million tonnes of oil equivalent saved Bangladesh \$1.6 billion. (IPS)

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OPINION

Women and the "war"

by EMMA BONINO

BRUSSELS - As the Taliban regime collapses, the moment of truth is approaching for the main victims of Taliban rule: Afghan women.

The international community—in the form of the US, European powers most involved in the present conflict, and the UN—has not been able to ensure inclusion of women at every level of the country's new provisional government. This is the demand of a new campaign launched in recent days by the Transnational Radical Party.

The campaign, which already has the backing of hundreds of members of parliament across Europe, spread the word among the international public about the 'international day of fasting and non-violent protest' on 24 November. The event was to put pressure on political leaders around the world to move beyond theoretical commitment and to take concrete steps to ensure the full participation of women in the new Afghan government.

Putting women in power in Kabul is not only a form of reparation, but a necessary condition for resumption of development (including the development of democracy) in a country brought to its knees by over 20 years of civil war and occupation.

Before the civil war, Afghan women took an active part, especially in the urban areas, in the development and modernisation of the country. Sometimes occupying roles normally reserved for men in the Muslim world, they were men practised in the legal and medical



The world must insist on the inclusion of Afghan women in public life.

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However, the condition of Afghan women began to deteriorate rapidly at the beginning of the 1990s with the war between the various Afghan factions and the rise to power of the Taliban, who reduced them to slavery, depriving them of the most elementary rights and making them literally invisible. The barbaric, bloody Taliban regime deprived them of the right to study, to work, and to vote, the right to equality before the law, and even the right to circulate freely.

During more than 10 years of theocratic rule, women were subjected to compulsory segregation in the home, the imposition of the burqa on

direct participation in the civil service. Anything else would risk being nothing more than ineffectual denunciation, soon forgotten when the Afghan question is no longer in the spotlight of the international press.

To ensure that this very reasonable proposal is accepted, strong pressure must be exerted on the governments of the US and the other countries taking part in the military operations, on the UN, on the leaders of the Northern Alliance, and on King Mohammed Zahir Shah.

There is only one way to ensure that the issue of women's rights is discussed during the negotiations for the constitution of the provisional government of Afghanistan: to ask for and obtain their full,

direct participation in the civil service. Anything else would risk being nothing more than ineffectual denunciation, soon forgotten when the Afghan question is no longer in the spotlight of the international press.

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(Emma Bonino is a member of the European Parliament and a former European Commissioner)

THE FORBIDDEN TRUTH?

JULIO GOODY IN PARIS

Influenced by United States oil companies, President George W Bush's government initially blocked intelligence agencies' investigations on terrorism while it bargained with the Taliban on the delivery of Osama bin Laden in exchange for political recognition and economic aid, two French intelligence analysts claim.

In a new book, *Bin Laden, La Verite Interdite* (Bin Laden, the Forbidden Truth), Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Daigle, reveal that FBI Deputy Director John O'Neill resigned in July in protest at the obstruction. The authors claim O'Neill told them that "the main obstacles to investigate Islamic terrorism were US oil corporate interests and the role played by Saudi Arabia in it." They also claim the US government's main objective was to consolidate the position of the Taliban regime to obtain access to Central Asia's oil and gas reserves.

Until August, they say, the US government saw the Taliban regime "as a source of stability in Central Asia that would enable the construction of an oil pipeline across Central Asia from the rich oilfields in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the Indian Ocean. But confronted with the Taliban's refusal to accept US conditions, "this national of energy security changed into a military one," the authors claim. "At one moment during the negotiations, US representatives told the Taliban, 'either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs.'"

The book says the Bush administration began to negotiate with the Taliban after coming into power in February. US and Taliban diplomatic representatives met several times in Washington, Berlin and Islamabad. The last meeting was in August, five weeks before the attacks in the US, the analysts maintain, when Christina Rocca, in charge of Central Asian affairs for the US government, met Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan (Abdul Salam Zaeef) in Islamabad.

Brisard and Daigle have long experience in intelligence analysis. Brisard was until the late 1990s Director of economic analysis and strategy for Europol, a French intelligence company. He also worked for French secret services, and wrote for them in 1997 a report on the now famous al-Qaeda network, headed by bin Laden. Daigle is an investigative journalist and publisher of Intelligence Online, a respected newsletter on diplomacy, economic analysis and strategy, available through the Internet.

Brisard and Daigle draw a portrait of the closest aides to Bush, linking them to the oil business. Bush's family has a strong oil background, as do some of his aides. From Vice President Dick Cheney, through the Director of the National Security Council Condoleezza Rice, to the secretaries of commerce and energy, Donald Evans and Stanley Abraham, all have long worked for US oil companies.

The book also takes issue with the role played by Saudi Arabia in fostering Islamic fundamentalism, in the personality of bin Laden, and with the networks that the Saudi dissident built to finance his activities. In addition, the authors say the US government's claim that bin Laden had been present in bin Laden since 1998 [is a big fraud]. "Actually," Daigle says, "the first state to officially prosecute bin Laden was Libya, on charges of terrorism."

The book confirms earlier reports that the US government worked closely with the UN during the negotiations with the Taliban. "Several meetings took place this year to discuss the situation in Afghanistan," says the book. "Representatives of the US government and Russia, and the six countries that border with Afghanistan were present," it says. Sometimes, Taliban representatives were also there.

These meetings, called Six plus 2, have been confirmed by Niaz A. Naik, former Pakistani Secretary for foreign affairs. In a French television program earlier this month, Naik said that during one meeting in Berlin in July, the discussions turned to "the formation of a government of national unity. If the Taliban had accepted this coalition, they would have received international economic aid. And the pipelines from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan would have come." (IPS)

A new book adds to speculation that at bottom the fight between the US and the Taliban is about oil.



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Black Friday

Tarun, 26 November

Since it was a Friday, the rulers and administrators of the country were in a holiday mood. Prachanda, supreme commander of the Maoists, had broken the talks (two days ago), saying there was no point in talking anymore. Still, he had not ordered his forces to attack. The government was trying to revive the dialogue and impress its importance upon the intermediaries, facilitators and other people in contact with the Maoists.

At Baluwater Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's aides had left for the day. The telephone rang around 9PM. It was the first sign of trouble and no matter how hard he tried, he could not avert the consequences. The phone kept ringing throughout the night. By Saturday morning, most citizens knew that peace had been shattered.

The 9PM call from Surkhet not only informed the prime minister about the attack on the helicopter, but about the possibility of an attack in Dang. As soon as he heard this, he realised it was not enough to mobilise the army in those affected areas only. He asked the concerned army officers to start preparing for suitable action, and the army replied that everyone had been put on 'alert'.

The prime minister and defence minister was unaware that the army high command had four days earlier ordered its forces not to engage with the Maoists—they were not to shoot at them or follow them. He was satisfied having informed the army, but that was shattered after the call from Dang came through.

At 10PM there was news that the Maoists were organising a torch procession. A few minutes later another call came—they were attacking the offices of the Chief District Officer (CDO) and the Superintendent of Police (SP). The prime minister asked his aides to remain in constant contact with the army, and called senior ministers over to his place. All that acting Chief of Army Durga Prasad Aryal had been saying until now was that the orders had already been given and the army was on alert. Communication with Dang was cut off around 11:30PM. By that time, the massacre had taken place.

At the same time, information came through that the Maoists had kidnapped the Syangja CDO and District Development Committee (DDC) president. Police were being massacred, property was being set on fire and widespread looting was taking place. The prime minister's aides were busy contacting people in other districts. This continued till 3AM. By daybreak there were reports of Maoist attacks in 35 districts.

At 6AM, the prime minister ordered the army to start searching the jungles in Dang and Syangja. The army said it would only accept those orders following all due procedures. The prime minister called a meeting of the Security Council early in the morning. Both police chiefs, Pradeep Sumsher Rana and Krishna Mohan Shrestha were present, the army was represented by its acting chief, and there were two other army personnel there too. The meeting lasted until noon and decided the army would act as a back-up force for the police and the armed police. Just before this meeting, the prime minister had called all the cabinet ministers to his residence. They discussed mobilising the army and declaring a state of emergency. The prime minister met UML leaders, Krishna Prasad Oli, Anant Bohara, Jhal Nath Khanal and Bharat Mohan Adhikari and got their approval to declare the Maoists 'terrorists' and send the army after them.

After the Security Council meeting, the prime minister went to report to the king. He informed him that all the events and also told him the army needed to be deployed. He informed him that the UML had also agreed to these directives. The prime minister then went to the residence of former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, ascertained that he agreed to the plan, and then went to meet former prime minister Gijra Prasad Koirala. This meeting decided an all-party meeting had to be called for.

The cabinet again met at 4PM at the prime minister's residence. It had already been decided that the army would be deployed and the Maoists would be termed terrorists, but since the all-party meeting had not taken place yet, and the Nepal Congress had not passed any directives either, no decisions could be taken.

At 5PM an all-party meeting was held in Baluwater. The events were thoroughly discussed and it was made clear that there was no option but to deploy the army. KP Oli made it very clear that since they had attacked the army, the question of whether or not to deploy the army was no longer relevant. He said this was a question the Maoists had to answer. Interestingly, the Samyukta Janta Morcha, the Rastriya Janta Morcha and the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party did not attend this meeting, though they have always sent representatives to all all-party meetings. Other left leaders present were Jhalanath Khanal, Bharat Mohan Adhikari, Sahana Pradhan, Bam Dev Gautam, Radha Krishna Mainali and CP Council. Ruling party members KP Bhattarai, Ram Chandra Poudel, Sushil Koirala, Chakra Bistola, Narahari Acharya and Arjun Narasingh Koirala were also there. The RPP was represented by Surya Bahadur Thapa, Prakash Chandra Lohani, Rajendra Nath Sharma and Kamal Thapa. The Nepal Sadbhavana Party sent Gajendra Narayan Singh, Rajendra Mahato and Badri Narayan Mandal.

The Nepal Congress Central Working Committee held its meeting Sunday morning and decided that the government should take appropriate legal action against the Maoists, mobilising all security forces. The CWC also asked the government to take appropriate action against anyone threatening peace and security. Home Minister Khun Bahadur Khakha said since the party had already declared the Maoists terrorists, action should be taken against them.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The Nepal Congress comprises a crowd of incompetents. When these incompetents could not carry out their job efficiently, they called for an emergency, proving their incompetence.

Pradip Nepal, spokesman, Nepal Communist Party, UML, in *Buthbar*, 28 November.



Government-Maoist talks: So what if the justification for the talks has ended? Possibilities still remain.

नया सदक: Naya Sadak, 24 November

'Maoist restraint'

(Excerpts from editorials)
Janashakti, 25 November

The 'People's Liberation Army' have carried out military operations in Dang, Syangja and other parts of the country, which shows that they are not coming to any compromise with the Maoist communist parties are also involved in liberating society. The Maoists should not believe that only those who pick up a gun are true revolutionaries. The reactionary forces are also coming to the aid of the Maoists and they were prepared to make changes in the constitution. At this point, the Maoists left the negotiating table and have again taken up arms. This will not do the country any good. As time when all the imperialist and capitalist forces of the world are watching us, they should have tried to win the people's confidence and carried forward the democratic revolution. They did not do that and are walking into the trap set for them by reactionary forces. The Maoists need to think hard about this. It was not a wise decision for them to resume armed struggle when reactionary forces are bent upon oppressing the people by labelling them all terrorists. It was very necessary to establish a good understanding and rapport with the people and between the people and the people. The gun is not the only means of defeating reactionary conspiracies. (This article appeared a day before the emergency was declared)



have shown a great deal of flexibility on the issue of dialogue. If it can be carried out, this flexibility and system out its policy of oppressing the Maoists, that would be detrimental. It would be proper for Deuba's government to agree to the Maoist demand for a constituent assembly before it is too late. It was only after the government that the door in the face of the Maoists that they began carrying out their military campaigns. This is clear for all to see. All peace-loving Nepalis must raise their voice against the present system. (This paper supported appearing Tuesday)

Closed society?

Deshantar, 25 November

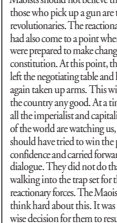
...The Maoists have bitten off more than they can chew. The government was doing its best to carry forward the dialogue. This is what the people wanted too, but the Maoists did not respect their opinions and broke the ceasefire. Within 50 hours of breaking it they massacred a lot of people. After Dang and Syangja, it is clear that the army must be mobilised. Arjun don't return to their barracks until they have finished the work assigned. The Maoists have killed soldiers, and if the army decides to react, a lot of blood will flow. The army is certainly better trained and equipped than the Maoist militia, and also larger. The international scenario is not favourable to the Maoists either. India has already declared them terrorists. Once the government does declare the same, regardless of the claim of suppression and atrocities government actions might involve, no other government or international body will speak in favour of the Maoists. There could be more bloodshed, but to what end?

The type of communism the Maoists want exists only in North Korea and Cuba. Nepalis are not interested in a closed society. There may be some people unhappy with the government's activities now, but this in no way means that they support the Maoists' actions. If the Maoists are really fighting for the rights of the people, they should make sure that people are not killed. Going by recent events, there will soon be a massive bloodbath. Once the Maoists start this, the government will not sit quietly, and certainly, it should take immediate steps to counter it. The government is responsible for providing security to the citizens. It is the fundamental responsibility to take action against people who break laws, the rules and regulations of the country. (This article appeared a day before the emergency was declared)

Who's a real revolutionary?

Chidambal, 25 November

...The Maoists must understand very clearly whether or not the other non-Maoist communist parties are also involved in liberating society. The Maoists should not believe that only those who pick up a gun are true revolutionaries. The reactionary forces are also coming to the aid of the Maoists and they were prepared to make changes in the constitution. At this point, the Maoists left the negotiating table and have again taken up arms. This will not do the country any good. As time when all the imperialist and capitalist forces of the world are watching us, they should have tried to win the people's confidence and carried forward the democratic revolution. They did not do that and are walking into the trap set for them by reactionary forces. The Maoists need to think hard about this. It was not a wise decision for them to resume armed struggle when reactionary forces are bent upon oppressing the people by labelling them all terrorists. It was very necessary to establish a good understanding and rapport with the people and between the people and the people. The gun is not the only means of defeating reactionary conspiracies. (This article appeared a day before the emergency was declared)



What is the main reason that the government and the main opposition parties cannot agree on the matter of a constituent assembly? The Maoists have now removed the demand for a republic from their list and have publicly said that the formation of a constituent assembly is their minimum agenda. The government did not understand this at all, and instead told the Maoists that since they had forsaken the issue of a republic, it was not necessary to raise the issue of a constituent assembly either. As far as I understand, the constitutional assembly was to be the medium through which the people would take a decision on the issue of the republic. The UML and the Nepal Congress have to realise that in principle the issue of a constitutional assembly is positive; it is democratic, and we cannot possibly oppose it. But it is not practical. The Nepal Congress said clearly that it would not support it at any cost. The UML cannot support it in principle, and will have to support it. Some raised the issue that an even worse constitution

Wisdom, patience

Himalaya Times, 27 November

This is a difficult moment for the country, a very critical juncture. We are moving towards war, terrorism and suppression. Our education, industrial and other constructive sectors will all come to a standstill. Fear, unrest and uncertainty have spread to all parts of the country and it is the duty of the citizens to stop this. The Maoists and the government both seem to be caught up in their own pride and show of strength. No one respects their opinions and broke the ceasefire. Within 50 hours of breaking it they massacred a lot of people. After Dang and Syangja, it is clear that the army must be mobilised. Arjun don't return to their barracks until they have finished the work assigned. The Maoists have killed soldiers, and if the army decides to react, a lot of blood will flow. The army is certainly better trained and equipped than the Maoist militia, and also larger. The international scenario is not favourable to the Maoists either. India has already declared them terrorists. Once the government does declare the same, regardless of the claim of suppression and atrocities government actions might involve, no other government or international body will speak in favour of the Maoists. There could be more bloodshed, but to what end?

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might be formed after the election of the constituent assembly. Their concern is useless. Why do you say this? ...I feel this shows that there is no confidence within the NC or the UML. Otherwise these parties would agree to the constituent assembly, as they would be sure that democratic leftist forces would be in a majority, and the constitution that would be formed would be to their liking. Neither party believes in itself; for all of them wanted, they could easily have tilted towards a republic. They were simply not confident they would win the election and write a constitution they liked.

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EXHIBITION

- ◆ **Kenichi Komatsu 2001** Exhibition and sale of photographs by Japanese photographer of Mustang, Dolpa and pilgrimages to old Nepali temples. Organised by Japan-Nepal Photographic Exchange Society. Lasts until 7 December, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, 220735
- ◆ **Colour of my mind** Paintings by Mona Ghosh. Until 2 December, Alliance Française, Thapathali. 241163

EVENTS

- ◆ **AWON Holiday Bazaar** with food, games, handicrafts and Santa Claus. Admission Rs 50 perhead, children under 12 free. 10AM-5.30PM, 1 December, Hyatt Regency Hotel.
- ◆ **Workshop on Knowledge Management** by Mohan Damoharan and Vivek Rana. Organised by NGCCI in cooperation with GTZ/PSPP. Participation fee Rs 1,000, includes high tea. 5 December, 3PM onwards, Hotel Yak & Yeti. For registration and details contact NGCCI Secretariat 226101, 226099.
- ◆ **Contemporary Jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Française Sundays and Tuesdays 4.30PM-6.30PM, 241163. At Banu's, Kamal Pokhari, Wednesdays 6.30PM-8PM, Saturdays 1.30PM-4.30PM. 434024, 434830

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EATING OUT

- ◆ **Afro-Caribbean night** with music and speciality food. Rs 500, 30 November, La Soon Restaurant and Vinotheque, Pulchowk. For reservations ring 525920.
- ◆ **BBQ and Thai buffet dinner** every Friday with live band Las Sonidos Latinos Adults Rs 500, Children under 12 Rs 250. Taxes extra. Summit Hotel, Sanepa. 521810
- ◆ **Far Pavilion** Indian cuisine with Sapan Pariyar and Suresh Manandhar. Everyday except Tuesday, 8PM-11PM. The Everest Hotel on Nepal menu until 7 December. Jyatha, Thamel, opposite Hotel Blue Diamond. 225777
- ◆ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays and Sundays at the Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- ◆ **Rox Restaurant** Traditional home-style European cuisine from a wood-fired oven. Steaks, trout, roasted vegetables, desserts. Hotel Hyatt Regency. 491234
- ◆ **Peking Duck and Mandarin Music** Chinese chefs' mild and spicy delicacies from the far-east at the Imperial Pavilion every Sunday. Hotel Shangri-La. 412999

GETAWAYS

- ◆ **Chiso Chiso Hawana** Summer B&B package for Nepalis and expatriates. Rs 1,250 per head. Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 410432, 414432
- ◆ **Escape to Jomsom** Two nights, three days, B&B package with tours and Pokhara-Jomsom return airfare. Exports \$250 per head. Valid until New Year. Jomsom Mountain Resort. 492009
- ◆ **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
- ◆ **Breathtaking Escape** two nights accommodation, sixcourse Krishnaran dinner, massage, afternoon tea, breakfasts, cocktail. \$155 per couple net. Valid until end December. Dwarka's Hotel. 479488

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NEPALI WEATHER

0855-26-11-2001 09:00GMT

This has been a long, dry November. The only rainfall recorded this month was a mild storm two weeks ago in Pokhara. But the satellite picture shows a long cloud from the Sahara to Pakistan and indicates an active jet stream. It may be blowing a westerly front our way before long. The pressure pattern indicates cloudy patches for the eastern Himalaya. But a high pressure area over the plateau and northern India will keep other clouds at bay. For Kathmandu expect thicker morning fog due to temperature inversion with sunny clear and breezy afternoons.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fr	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
24/06	23/06	23/05	24/05	23/05

संयोग सगरमाथा

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



BOOKWORM

Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi Katherine Frank
HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2001
Rs 1,000

Indira was India. Throughout childhood, love, marriage, imprisonment, motherhood and a sequence of personal and family tragedies, her personal hopes and desires would be continually subsumed by the historical and political imperatives of her country. In this beautifully written and engaging biography Katherine Frank explores the personal and political face of the leader of the world's largest democracy.

The Unknown Hsiao-Tsang D Devantri, ed
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001
Rs 792

There is a silence about the years following 645AD, when Hsiao-Tsang, the Buddhist scholar visited India. German and French translations of Chinese and Uighur texts on his life were in print even in the 1850s, but this is the first time they are available to a wider audience, freshly translated into English. Editor Devantri also provides explanatory notes, footnotes and commentaries.

The Quest for the Yeti: Confronting the Himalayas' Deepest Mystery
Reinhold Messner
Macmillan, London, 2000
Rs 1,500

After a terrifying encounter in eastern Tibet with a creature of unbelievable proportions and agility, Reinhold Messner, the greatest living climber, believed he had proof of the yeti. He followed centuries-old Sherpa trade routes through Nepal, India, Bhutan and Tibet, often alone and on foot. He explored forests, ravines, precipices, scoured monasteries and remote villages, seeking testimony, relics and footprints, and hoping to confront his creature again and capture it on film.

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

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ALICE IN NEPAL

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

All the great extravaganzas of the world, from the football and cricket World Cups to the New Orleans Mardi Gras, have one thing in common. Ever notice the crazy hats? Surprising as some of these concoctions of felt, feathers and fleece are, it is more interesting to find out that much of this headgear with a sense of humour has in the last decade or so come from Nepal. Like the yeti, the crazy hat business in Nepal has a complex genealogy. Every second person in the industry claims to have hit upon the idea of making the silly things in this country. But Nepal's madhatters are endangered, as the Alices of the world start dreaming.

Take, for instance, Aruna Tripathi of Freak Street, where mad hat-making is rumoured to have begun. Tripathi sits bored, far from amused by the creations she is surrounded by. "Things are not the same anymore," complains this pioneer of absurd millinery. "This business has suffered the same disease as every other industry in Nepal."

Unhealthy competition started as soon as we started doing well." In the heyday of the hat, some eight years ago, Tripathi frequently received orders for as many as 8,000 hats. In peak season—the height of

Nepal's madhatters are endangered as business slumps.

worldwide festivities, not tourism—the would make a profit of as much as 25 percent on a hat that on the streets of Kathmandu cost Rs 250.

Tripathi, who scoffs at suggestions that her triumph was, well, trumpery, recalls with the hint of a tear in her eye how she would pick the finest Chinese velvet in all manner of virulent colours from Khasa, and pair that with the lightest material and fastest dyes from India, to ensure the hats gave even the sweatiest football fan no trouble.

Tripathi's is one of just four or five such businesses left of the dozen the country was home to just a few years ago. One of the others is The Kathmandu Madhatter, a once-proud bastion of baroque absurdity. This was a flourishing company that used to receive bulk orders for at least 15-20,000 hats at one go. Each of its 25 workers could make between Rs 400-Rs1,000 a day, depending on how nimble their fingers were. Says a bitter Rajendra Deuja, owner of the Madhatter, "The wholesale market is decreasing, and what's more, our business has been taken away by the cheaper labour and goods markets in India and China."

The Kathmandu Madhatter factory is a dismal sight now, with just a handful of workers listlessly stitching up the last of the small, 6,000-hat Christmas order. That this industry, which did stellar service to modernise Nepal's image internationally and lighten the lives of so many Nepalis, is dying out, is yet another reminder of the ephemeral nature of life and its laughs. ♦

SURYA NEPAL MASTERS
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HAPPENINGS



SHOW OF FORCE: Soldiers patrol the streets outside Singha Darbar on Tuesday, 27 November.



GRIEVING WIDOW: The first CDO to be killed in the Maoist insurgency, Buddha Sagar Tripathi of Solu Khumbu is given a tearful farewell by his wife, Krishna, relatives and friends at the Police Headquarters in Kathmandu on Tuesday, 27 November.



SAD HOMECOMING: Security forces casualties being brought back to Kathmandu airport from Phaplu on Monday afternoon. The aircraft rushed reinforcements back 26 November.



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

One helluva move

Among the priceiest items of heritage that we are in danger of losing to the relentless march of civilisation as we know it are our glorious superstitions. There are those who do not value our traditional faith in these beliefs which have been handed down from one generation of Nepalis to another since time immemorial. Today, these customs are in danger of being discarded into the dustbin of history.

For instance, the practice of blowing into your forefinger in case you accidentally touch your throat with it. Countless people through the centuries have prevented grief with this simple, yet cost-effective, remedy. Similarly, it is because we believe in Black Cat commands crossing the street that our national leaders are safe and sound, mostly sound.

Superstitions have a role to play in development as well. We can correct new superstitions to combat corruption, for example, by spreading the belief that stealing is a sin and those who accept kickbacks will notice their fingers falling off one by one. That should clean things up.

We have other natural and supernatural wonders that are also endangered. One of them is Hell. People have forgotten that there is such a place, and it is vitally important in this day and age to re-invent the concept of Hell as a deterrent to control corruption, smuggling, urinating on Tundikhel, and other ills that plague contemporary Nepali society. To find out exactly how things are going on in Hell, we were recently granted an exclusive interview with the Devil in his secret hideout. Excerpt:

Q: Mr Satan, let me play the devil's advocate here and ask you a hypothetical question. Suppose we said you are personally responsible for many of the misfortunes that have visited our nation in the recent past, how would you respond?

A: At this present point in time, I'm afraid, I can neither confirm nor deny those rumours. But it is a matter of policy in The Netherworld (and I said this to CNN this morning) that we make life a living hell for all and sundry.



Q: We hear rumours of a serious energy crisis in hell. Some returnees have told us that the fires are not burning as fiercely as in the past and there is a draft. Are you caught here between yourself and the deep blue sea?

A: That is correct. It is due to a temporary shortage of CNG caused by universal pollution control measures, and unfortunately we in Hell are also affected. But we will soon be switching to burning tyres to tide over the shortage. Things should be nice and toasty then. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Chatyang Master



sent him to India. After graduating from an Australian university, Gautam came back to Nepal to see if he could apply what he learnt. Besides his professional work, and hobby as "part-time comedian", Gautam is an activist who tries to change attitudes by setting a personal example. Some days you see him and a group of volunteers sweeping the premises of schools in Kathmandu Valley, or planning new ways to enhance the dignity of cremation rites.

Gautam is dead serious when he talks about Nepal and his absolute belief that this country can and will progress. "There are lots of Nepalis who are not corrupt," he says gesturing vigorously, "the majority are honest, hard-working people with integrity. But you don't hear about them because they are too busy getting work done."

As Chatyang Master, Gautam gets immediate feedback on his radio talk and this is his adrenalin. After poking fun at the sad state of the library at the Royal Nepal Academy, he got a call one day from Tuli Bhattacharya, the librarian, who said: "Come and see for yourself what it looks like now."

Chatyang Master thinks Nepalis have an innate capacity to laugh at absurdities. "As long as we can do that we will be ok," he says. "Humour is all about twisting the logic of things." Chatyang Master has resumed his popular radio talk after nearly six months, which is on air at 7:25 AM every Friday on Radio Sagarmatha 102.4 FM. ♦

"I was buying fruits in Dakshinkali, and a couple of kids came up and said: 'aunty you Chatyang Master. It's amazing that they recognise someone's voice,'" says Gautam in his rapid-fire chatter. While he is not making the nation laugh at itself, Gautam is helping boost farm productivity. His work has been so effective, the World Bank hired him to share his knowledge with farmers in China. USAID has

have Nepalis become too cynical to laugh? Ha-ha, that's a good one, chuckles Krishna Murali Gautam, who goes by his nom de guerre Chatyang Master (lighting flash). He is best known for his morning monologues on Radio Sagarmatha, and a fortnightly satire in verse on Himal Khabarpatrika. Many Nepalis don't know his real name, or that he is an agriculture economist. But they know his voice.

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