



Image and imagination 19



UNDER MY HAT
Neither here nor there 20



10-11 Two out of 200,000

FRONTLINE

SHIVA GAUNLE IN GHORABI

The bus journey to Ghorahi in Dang district took much longer than usual. Over a dozen checkpoints had sprung up along the highway west of Narayanghat. In addition, mobile paramilitary checkpoints also sprang out of nowhere. Most of the checking is routine. Security officials step into the vehicle and check your belongings. But there are also those that require you to step out and line up for a body search.

It feels like you're entering a war zone as you reach Bhalubang, the point where you officially enter the mid-west. You get a thorough frisking: bags are opened, diaries are read and telephone books scanned. You are asked where you are headed and why. The person sitting next to you in the bus may not want to have a casual conversation. There is apprehension in the air.

When I reached Ghorahi on 7 December, this usually busy highway junction looked like a ghost town. It was undergoing its 13th night of dusk-to-dawn curfew that began even before the state of emergency was declared on 26 November. (Elsewhere in the region, an unofficial curfew is in place after sundown, as nobody ventures outdoors in any case.)

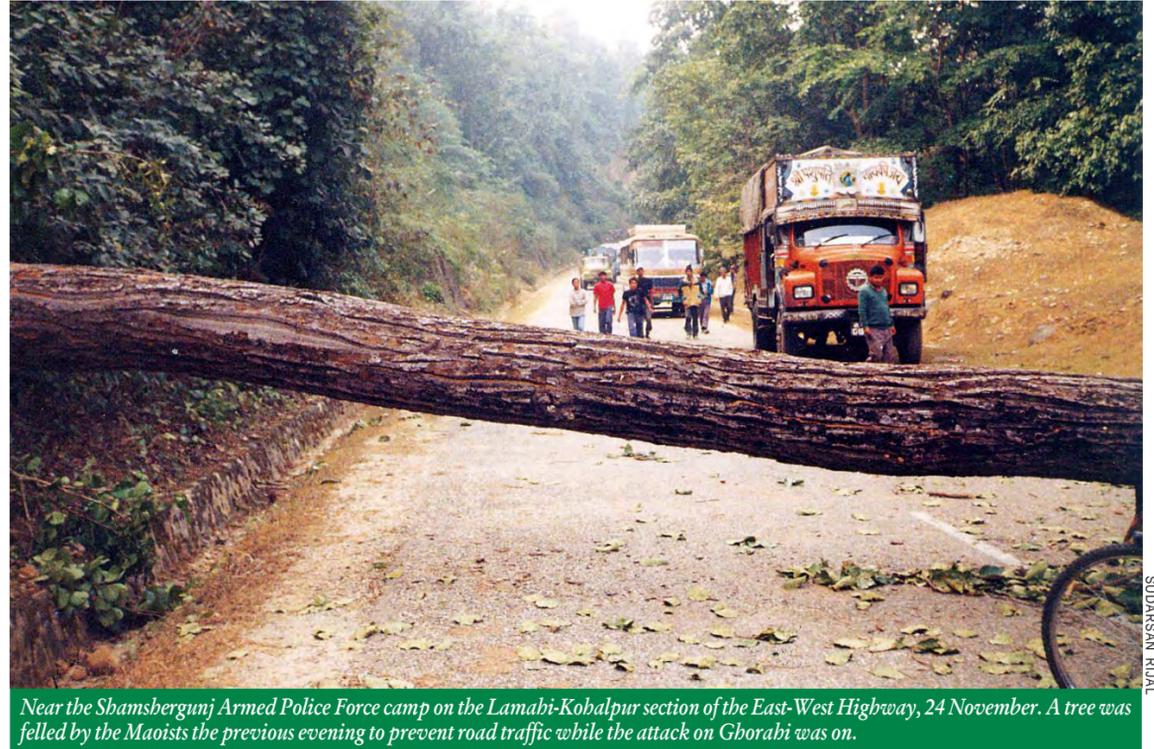
Ghorahi is the site of the 23 November rebel attack which effectively ended the

four-month-old government-Maoist ceasefire. Several government offices were plundered and weapons looted from the military barracks. But signs of the conflict can be seen even before you reach Ghorahi. The roadside is lined by stumps of trees felled by the rebels as roadblocks.

Every now and then the dusty stillness is shattered by the heavy roar of rotors as helicopters ferry supplies and troops to the frontlines in Salyan and Rolpa districts. Schools are slowly opening their doors but bewilderment is writ in the faces of students—a suppressed fear that echoes, like the sound of gunfire you can hear almost every night. The unseen scars are deeper still.

"We're becoming used to sleeping with sounds of gunfire all around," says a local school teacher. "There has been fighting every night since the Maoist attack." On the night of 9 December, the army and Maoists clashed at Ratmate, Rolpa. Down here in Ghorahi, the night rang with blank gunfire from the army unit nearby.

Life in the Dang Valley is nowhere near normal. The 42-km road to Holeri in Rolpa district has been closed. Elsewhere, buses ply half-empty. With business down, wayside storekeepers laze in the sun. Locals even hesitate to talk to strangers, let alone discuss the insurgency and the ongoing counter-insurgency. Lodge-owners are scared to let out their rooms unless they are sure of their guests' bonafides and in any case only do so after



Near the Shamsbergunj Armed Police Force camp on the Lamahi-Kohalpur section of the East-West Highway, 24 November. A tree was felled by the Maoists the previous evening to prevent road traffic while the attack on Ghorahi was on.

having informed the police. This reporter was the only guest for three nights in a lodge with more than 60 beds.

Students from the local college hostel have been asked to vacate their lodgings. The Nepal Bank Limited, which was looted by the Maoists, has not opened for business. However, the Agricultural Development Bank, also hit, is being given a face-lift. A weekly paper close to the Maoists, *Jana Ubhar*, has stopped publishing and the editor is underground.

The Chief District Officer and the Deputy Superintendent of the Police, who had been abducted in the course of the 23 November attack and later released, had been given a transfer. Their

replacements were yet to arrive. The chief of the Land Revenue Office had left the district to inform his superiors about the damage caused by the Maoist attack on his office.

In the absence of senior officials, no one in the civilian administration in Ghorahi was ready to provide information on the security situation—such as the army's gunning down of 11 unarmed Tharu farm labourers. I later learnt that although all of them may not have been Maoist fighters, they certainly were Maoist sympathisers, for the simple reason that the Maoists had enforced a new share-cropping scheme, *Tri-Khandi*, under which the tillers received two-thirds of the harvest.

The feeling of uncertainty has infected everyone, including politicians. Amar Giri, a member of the CPN (UML)'s Rapti zonal committee, had attended an all-party meeting at the district administration office. "Every time we asked them about arrangements during the curfew, the civilian authorities tell us 'we'll ask the army'," he said.

Bam Bahadur DC, president of the local Nepal Trade Union Congress, seemed as confused: "We just don't know what will happen next. There's a war going on here."

A security official in Ghorahi probably summed up the post-23 November situation best: "The Maoists have not been able to rest so far, but they have been able to keep the state on its toes." ♦

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 11

Q. Do you think the Maoists will now return to the negotiating table?



India and the Maoists

DEEPAK THAPA

It was one of the many strikes organised by Leftist tea garden workers just after the Gorkhaland Movement had ended in 1988, when the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was just settling in. A former tea planter was managing a garden near the Nepal-India border and had his share of worker problems. The planter, now living in Kathmandu, swears that the man who came to negotiate on behalf of his workers was none other than today's Maoist supremo, Prachanda.

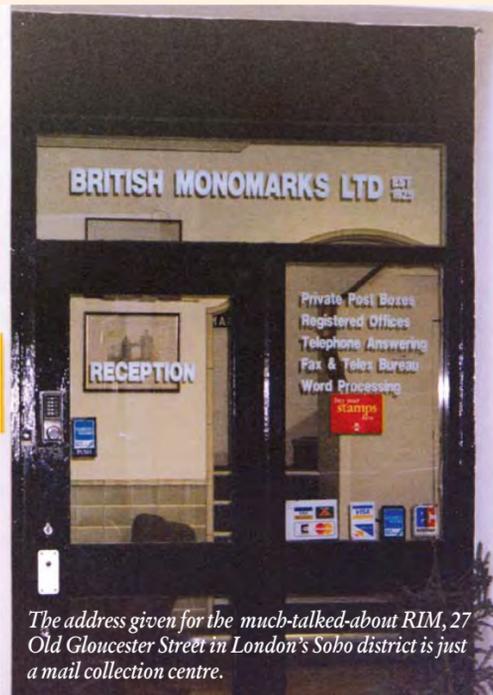
Implausible as it may sound at first, the planter may be right, for exchanges between the communists of Nepal and India have a long history. The first instance would be the famous 1947 Biratnagar Jute Mills strike. That was when the legendary Ratan Lal Brahman (better known as Mahila Bajey, who later represented Darjeeling in the Lok Sabha on a CPI-M ticket) is known to have journeyed down in support of what probably was the first-ever workers' strike on Nepali soil. Later, in 1949, there was Ayodhya Singh representing the then-undivided Com-

munist Party of India in the Central Organisational Committee of the also-undivided Communist Party of Nepal.

Contacts between the young Nepali radicals of the Jhapa movement of the early 1970s and the more mature comrades of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) in India, who were well into their Naxalite movement, is well documented. Nearer to the present, before the launch of the 1990 anti-Panchayat movement, Left luminaries from India, M Farooqi of the CPI and Harkishen Singh Surjeet of the CPI (M) were in Kathmandu to endorse the teaming up of the United Left Front and the Nepali Congress.

The point of recounting all this anecdotal information is the interest Nepal's Maoist movement has suddenly received in the Indian press with the breakdown of the ceasefire and imposition of emergency. While credit goes to the Indian media now for

While Indian intelligence feeds the Indian press with stories of ISI support for Nepal's Maoists, it is clear that Comrade Prachanda & Co have their links firmly south of the border.



The address given for the much-talked-about RIM, 27 Old Gloucester Street in London's Sobo district is just a mail collection centre.

devoting so much column space and air time to an insurgency that it has by and large ignored for the last six years, it has not been able to resist the usual Indian establishment line of espying the hand of its *bete noire*, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in all kinds of trouble in Nepal.

And so, now, it is the ISI hand-in-glove with the Maoists. Whereas, in fact, the historical links of Nepal's political parties—and the Maoists are no exception—have always been with their southern counterparts. As put succinctly by Dr Harka Gurung in a recent issue of *Himal South Asian*: "There is a general misconception that the democratic side is seen to be India-centric, and the Left Sino-centric. In reality, both democratic and communist ideologies came to Nepal through India. If the Nepali Congress was nurtured in Banaras, the comrades of the Left opposition are beholden to Charu Mazumdar of Bengal."



UNCIVIL WAR

Look at it every which way and it becomes apparent that even if the Maoists are wiped out, the government will still have to tackle the political cause that the insurgents represent. To do so, it must not only fight a war, it also needs to unleash development on a war footing. Unfortunately, this government seems incapable of multi-tasking.

Seven years ago, the Maoists gave up on parliamentary democracy within a constitutional monarchy and dedicated itself to the violent overthrow of both. In the beginning it seemed that the comrades truly wanted to change things: their political agenda was populist and they organised the grassroots. But it gradually became clear that their resort to violence was only a shortcut to power rather than a means of societal transformation.

The underground group has murky links to the international revolutionary movement (see p. 6), and wanted to carry on where Mao Tse-tung left off. Nepal became a petridish where this experiment in world revolution was to be carried out. There is no proof of what support, if any, our rebels receive from their comrades-in-arms elsewhere. But there is clearly a reciprocity: in the early 1990s the walls of Kathmandu and the rocks on the hill trails had huge red graffiti that said "Long Live the Shining Path" and "Release Comrade Gonzalo". Peru is at relative peace while Shining Path leader Abimael Guzman is in jail. The Senderistas, meanwhile, have reincarnated themselves in the Himalaya.

On their Internet site, the international revolutionaries say they chose Nepal because the "objective conditions" were ripest here. Desperately poor and ruled by an elite that couldn't care less for the welfare of its citizens, Nepal is a country where socio-economic disparities are remarkable even by South Asian standards.

When they decided to launch a "people's war" in February 1996, the Maoists disavowed the democratic space they had gained four years earlier. Their decision was so wrenching that it split the ultra-Left parties, some of which were not convinced about the timing or the justification for armed struggle. Although sworn enemies, the Maoists and the reactionary right became allies in trying to bring down democracy and turning the clock back to pre-1990.

Meanwhile, the democracy warriors were becoming freedom's greatest enemies. As soon as they were elected to power, they proceeded to undo everything they had struggled for, to discredit themselves and the system they fought to put in place. Their incessant bickering, their mindless plunder, and the sidelining within political parties of just about everyone who had integrity, vision and commitment paved the way for the Maoists' challenge to democracy.

Can a political system be so rotten that only a violent struggle to destroy everything and rebuild from scratch is the solution? Or are there less destructive options that use institutions of checks and balances to curb the excesses of parliamentary democracy?

It is one of the fundamental tenets of revolutionary movements that everything has to be destroyed before it can be rebuilt. But many revolutions have floundered because violence becomes an end in itself, breeding more and more violence until the revolution devours its own children.

Yet for all that, peace may still be possible, if it were only the internal dynamics of political forces within Nepal that were dictating events. Unfortunately there are worrying signs that the neighbourhood is eyeing us keenly. Is this war going to threaten Nepal's very existence? Does Prachanda know this? If so, why is he taking the nation in that direction?

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's forceful assertion last week that Nepal can fight its own war sent the right signals. We have only to see the ruins and carnage of Afghanistan to prove, if any proof was needed, of what happens to countries that become chessboards for the mighty. The other, even more unspeakable, example is Cambodia where a superpower that is today the avowed defender of human rights backed a genocidal regime just because it happened to be the enemy of its rival superpower.

We created this mess. We have to solve it. But let us harbour no illusions that military force alone will do the trick. We have said it often in this space, and we will say it again: what we need is a campaign to give citizens the hope that genuinely participatory democracy offers the only route to peace and progress. ♦

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



LILLE, FRANCE - *This is not a junket by any standard. Being confined to smoke-filled rooms for close to 18 hours a day discussing abstract ideas is no vacation. And when you consider that vegetarian French food is absolutely terrible, the fact that I do not drink becomes a definite disadvantage. Despite this, though, I am glad that my first peep into the western world is through the French window.*

Apart from their aquiline, almost parrot-like noses, Nepali Babuns and academics from the North of France have one other thing in common—their love for ideas that transcend time and space. They do not let considerations of pragmatism restrict them to the "done" ways of doing things. Perhaps it is for this reason that the seeds of the French Revolution were first sown here—in the coal mines of northern France.

Like the coal mine we visited in Arenburg, or the remains of a once-flourishing steel industry in the ghost town of Denain, almost all this region's smoke-stack industries are now closed. The French find it is cheaper to import coal and steel from Africa and Asia than to produce either here. In any case, close to 75 percent of electricity consumed in France comes from their own nuclear power plants.

But remarkably, even such large-scale closure of factories has not destabilised the job market. That is because the city of Lille invested in culture—a university, art galleries, museums, theatre and the like. That gave a fillip to tourism and created more jobs in the service industries than were lost through the closure of the various mines and factories. As a result, this region has a cultured and cosmopolitan ambience and on weekends fills up with visitors from the cold country across the Channel. People boast proudly that the South of France may have better weather, but the smiles on Gallic faces along the Belgian border are sunnier.

The ideas we are exploring in seminar halls are so far from the grim realities of our daily lives that they are either visionary or plain nuts. How

Letter from Lille

We have drawn the arbitrary political lines on maps. We can certainly erase them from our consciousness.

many of us, for instance, are ready to believe that we can change the orientation of our nation-states from "national security commitments" to "human security consciousness"? In functional terms, that shift would mean that nation states would start disbanding their military forces and setting up armies of teachers, health workers, artisans, singers, artistes, writers, poets and philosophers. A dream no doubt, but one worth having. The prelude to all great transformations is a dream.

Our main preoccupation at all the sessions has been trying to come up with ways and means to resolve conflict, as are organised religion and obsessive individualism. But these are all harsh facts of modern life. We cannot wish them away, we can only do the next best thing—reform existing institutions or set up new ones that engage with and mediate between conflicting agents to work for the least unacceptable terms of conflict resolution.

The state as a large whole itself needs to be reformed, its institutions need to concentrate on facilitating and enabling, rather than controlling and regulating. This requires an important change: focusing not only on popular democracy, but on functional democracy. We all know the democracy we have been practising all these years has not been functioning optimally, yet we keep repeating the stale apologia of Winston Churchill that "nothing better has been devised". It is time we moved away from that and tried to conceive of something new, something better, that we can put into practice. How long can our academics and thinkers continue to hide their intellectual lethargy behind the so-called "liberal" hedge of "western domination"? If they do not hurry, there

are other Khomeinis and Osamas waiting in the wings to cash in on the popular dissatisfaction with western values.

The need to reform religions is no less pressing. After all, religion is politics with cold deities or dead prophets as leaders. It might be desirable to simply abolish religion, but that, too, is unlikely to happen anytime soon. So the only option for us is to have platform for inter-faith dialogues, and inter-religious parliaments where criticism is not considered heresy. Unless liberal clerics themselves take the lead in initiating such changes, their own more obscurantist colleagues will make them irrelevant. Swami Agnivesh from India brought home this point so forcefully that silence, and not applause, greeted his talk.

The most daunting task is transforming individuals from being consumers obsessed with their own rights, to global citizens aware of their responsibilities towards the world, and the diversity of cultures and species that make it. It is very difficult to wean individuals away from juvenile ideas of patriotism and make them grow into citizens of the world conscious of the common suffering of all humanity. But it is not such a new idea. It dates back to "Vasudaiva Kutumbkam"—the planet is one family.

In the end, that is what really matters. The political lines drawn on maps are arbitrary. The sky, the air, the water, birds and bees and the curses and boons of nature do not recognise human boundaries. We have drawn those lines, and we can certainly erase them from our consciousness.

Very abstract ideas, these. And more powerful when imbibed in the company of people who do not need to understand your language in order to understand you. ♦





“Why did the emergency have to be imposed now?”

Questions leader of the opposition, Madhav Kumar Nepal in an interview with the Nepali Times.

Was the nationwide emergency necessary? Once you had the ordinance [Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention and Control) Ordinance (TADO)], it allows you to impose curfew in particular areas. There was no need for a national emergency.

What has been your assessment of the emergency? Before going into the assessment, first of all I would like to ask some basic questions because we have not been given convincing arguments about why the emergency was imposed. What was the compulsion behind imposing emergency rule now? If the government has now decided that emergency was the only option, weren't there similar situations before this? Wasn't the situation equally grave in Dunai when the Maoists attacked the district headquarters [in September 2000]? Or when they attacked the police in Rukumkot [in April 2001]? Can the government tell us when it realised that the time had come to impose an emergency? The situation has been bad since some years, because we have a serious problem on hand. Our question now is, was it necessary for the government to declare emergency? Will the emergency automatically solve all these problems?

What has the government response to these questions been? We have not been given reasonable answers. Our position is that if the army needed to be deployed, the decision of the National Security Council would have been enough, there would have been no need to impose emergency rule. If the intention was to ban the Maoists, the [TADO] ordinance would have been enough. So why did the government opt for the emergency? Again, if the emergency is only aimed at controlling the Maoists, as we have been told, why is the media getting no information, why is there lack of transparency, why have the civil rights of other people and political parties been suspended? How can the government convince us that the emergency is aimed just at the Maoists and not at other sections of society? Couldn't the government have said the civil rights were being suspended only for the Maoists or their supporters? Couldn't we have been more focussed? Our position is clear: even the Maoists cannot be killed indiscriminately. People may be killed in combat but no one can kill the unarmed, or those who have been taken prisoner or those who surrender.

Do you have reports that this is happening? We understand your party is monitoring the emergency. We have heard that unarmed Maoist supporters were killed in Dang. Non-Maoists have also been killed in Makwanpur. In Syangja a porter was killed, in Kabre an ordinary citizen was killed. Besides, many workers from other parties, including the UML, have been arrested. Their houses have been searched, and they are being made to suffer unnecessarily. Can you subject common people to that only on the basis of suspicion? If you are involved in "cordon-and-search" operations in a particular place, that is fine. But you cannot conduct searches wantonly, just because you want to. You cannot search 1,000 innocent people and trouble them because you want to arrest one person. Even when you do that, there are ways you can do it politely. You can harass criminals but not ordinary people. The government's methods are not befitting a democratic polity.

What steps are you taking to check the misuse of emergency powers? We have been saying that the Maoist problem cannot be solved through this approach. You have to get to the root of the problem and focus on

that. For that you need a sound intelligence network, but that doesn't exist. Are they trying to cover up their inability to perform by declaring an emergency? Are they hiding information fearing that their inability will be exposed? Are you missing targets and hiding information because that would expose you? Are you afraid of information? If you were honest, responsible and confident, there would be no need to withhold information. These are reasons for us to think emergency powers can be misused. That is why we are trying to develop a monitoring mechanism, within our party, and jointly with other parties.

Today we could not enter Singha Darbar showing our press passes issued by the government itself. Does that say anything? When any government does not have confidence in its own machinery, there is a danger that it will develop an undemocratic character. There is the danger of its developing authoritarian, even fascist, tendencies. Such governments lack patience; they try to cover up their inability by blaming others. They get angry if their incompetence is exposed and take to more repression, and eventually head towards their own destruction. We are worried, we fear the government is taking that road. The Nepali Congress has failed to rule in the past 12 years, and it is responsible for bringing the country to the situation it is in now. It politicised the bureaucracy, dismantled the systems of different institutions, it rendered them ineffective and misused resources. But even now it shows no sign of changing.

Your support is critical to give continuity to this state of affairs, what would be your position? I told the prime minister yesterday (Monday) that if you continue to misuse emergency powers we will be forced to take a serious decision.

Does that mean you won't support the emergency? We've not used the word "support" yet. There are times when one has to use particular terms, we have a very rich vocabulary.

What is the word we can use? (Laughs)

You could use one to send a message... I cannot think of one now. But if the government begins to misuse its powers, and takes inhumane actions by restricting the rights of the constitutional opposition, the general public and even the Maoists who want to surrender, the UML will not keep quiet. It will go along with public opinion—with what the people want. The UML will play a very responsible role, depending on how the situation develops.

Are you considering the option of calling for an early session of parliament? We have not given much thought to that possibility. The present question is, should the government not have consulted the main opposition on something as important as an emergency? There was no consultation, no information. Such a method of functioning has led us to believe that the government may not be able to perform. We will decide on future actions based on how the situation develops.

We don't have as much information as we would like, how is the

information-sharing at your level? We have no information-sharing with the government.

You are not briefed on what is happening on the ground? No, we have not been briefed up to today (Tuesday).

Have you asked for information? Yes.

What is the response? They tell us that we will be told.

Why is that? That is something for the government to say.

So for two weeks all you've been told is, "We will tell you?" Yes. That is what we have been told. Logically they should be sharing all the information with me. Are we expected to make guesses or make phone calls to the districts to get the information? Or, are we expected to catch up with all the people coming in on buses and ask them what is going on? This is not the way things should be run. Okay, we can collect information from our own sources, but if we get the facts there won't be rumours, there won't be room for suspicion. We need to have the facts to be able to analyse, and separate truth from make-believe.

In July the prime minister himself came to chat with you. Has that kind of informal talks taken place this time? The prime minister came once, but only after I told the press that I had been back from the US for four days and did not know much. After that he came to see me. He said that he would brief me on everything that happened. It is already over a week and a half since, but he has given me no information whatsoever.

Your first statement on the emergency was some sort of a "cautious support"? We have been giving the government the benefit of doubt.

How long will you wait before beginning to ask tough questions? We are seeing the prime minister today (Tuesday), and we will ask him three questions. First, we will seek an acceptable rationale for the need to declare this state of emergency. We will ask what mechanisms have been developed to prevent misuse of emergency powers, and if the authorities have a code of conduct? We will also submit to him a list of complaints and queries on atrocities that have taken place so far. We will take with us facts on where there have been unnecessary arrests. We have some cases of that happening, they have raided offices of the Samyukta Jana Mocha, arrested journalists.

Where do you think the present uncertainty will end? Now we also bear that development spending will be cut... The government has not been able to do much development. As for what little was happening, of course there will be more problems once you begin to divert the budget. This affects the entire social sector, productivity and employment. That could deepen the crisis and force us to rely on foreigners. We are headed for economic collapse and the Nepali Congress is responsible for that. ♦

LETTERS

FISH, AND WATER

With regard to "Going by the Little Red Book" (#70), Mao famously illuminated the relationship between Maoist guerrillas and their supporters by likening them to fish and water, respectively. This analogy also unwittingly suggests the key to resolving typical Maoist insurgencies. Maoist fish should not only be rounded up by casting a wide military net but the water they swim in also must be made inhospitable to them by winning the hearts and minds of people through meaningful

development.

Kanden Thebe Yaangrup, Taplejung

STEM THE ROT

The events of the last two weeks are an outcome of the Maoists' megalomania, and their over-ambitiousness. We can predict that the army will be able to control them now by suppressing their power. But I am curious about: what next? No doubt, the main cause of this problem is not the Maoists but the successive governments that have been formed after the restoration of the multiparty system in the country. I have closely watched the situation of people in the



western hills of Nepal. Not one government effort to ameliorate the economic condition of the people has been successful there. The people are either forced to live with a half-full stomach or go to India to work as seasonal labourers. Nepotism and corruption have engulfed the country and decayed the people's sense of morality and hope.

The Maoists' populist sloganeering attracted the people. But it is a universal phenomenon that people revolt against widespread corruption and injustice. Why can't the government curb corruption? I am studying rural sociology overseas and have been reading lots of development theories. But I cannot

understand why they do not work in my country, and why I always have to be apologetic when I mention that the per capita income of Nepal is \$200. The Maoist problem is emblematic of all this. Medicating the leaves and branches will not help the rot in the root. I am not optimistic that we will see "people-centred" programmes even after all this is over.

L Kumar
By email

KATHMANDU IMMIGRATION, REDUX

With regard to the letter in Nepali Times last week ("Kathmandu immigration"), I have something to add. I was leaving the airport for the US after visiting my parents in Nepal. On the way to the

boarding area a police officer asked me for \$100. When I asked her why, she replied that they were poor people and that they do not get a chance to make money like high-ranking officers. I said, no, sorry.

She then said, "I wish you a safe journey, that you do not have any accident while you are flying."

I could not believe she said that to me! As a Nepali, it had the psychological effect that it spelt bad luck. Then another policeman came up to me, a two-star one this time, and said, "Give her Rs 1,000. She is poor. She can use it for chya-pani."

I really felt so bad and angry because these people were wishing bad luck just before I was to fly. So I gave

her Rs 500, because that was all I had. Why does the government allow these people to run such personal businesses at the airport? I know they have to pay a lot to get a posting at the airport. Isn't this is another form of corruption? They do this to everybody, and it is time the government stopped it. ♦

Suman Shrestha
USA

CORRECTION

Padma Jyoti was erroneously identified in last week's Biz Chat as a graduate of Harvard University. He went to MIT's Sloan School of Management. - Ed

For some children, the home



ALL PHOTOS: ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY
When it comes to children—not your healthy, well-fed, well-cared-for, school-going children, but the ones who do all the housework, keep rooms clean, cook and wash—the truth is as hard as it gets. The IINGO worker for child rights, the “progressive” professional, the old-money family or the nouveau riche,

hardly anyone can do without domestic child labour.

Take these two examples. Shanti (not her real name) has been working at a professor's house in Kalimati ever since her mother left her and her younger sister there six years ago. Shanti was nine then. Today when people ask her age, she tells them she is 17. But her physique tells a different story—she

looks barely 14. “Father told me that I should tell people I am 17 if they ask my age,” says she referring to her employer.

Shanti's mother re-married after her father's death. She has never even seen her stepfather and really doesn't want to, although she does miss her mother. Her job at the professor's house requires her to get up at 4 in the

Perhaps we cannot eliminate child labour immediately. But that is no reason to stop trying.

morning, clean the house, prepare the food for cooking (though not actually cook it, since she is a ‘lower caste’ and her orthodox Bahun employers do not allow her to touch cooked food), clean the dishes and do all the laundry. By the time she goes to bed, it is almost 11 PM.

There are five people in the family she lives with, apart from her sister who is two years younger than Shanti is. Though she calls everyone in the family by family names—*bua, mua, dai* and *didi*—it is normal for Shanti to get sworn at or slapped if she makes a mistake.

A little coaxing and Shanti reveals more. These days the distinguished professor has even started touching her here and there when he is alone with Shanti. Her younger sister is luckier as a kind-hearted Canadian woman has been sponsoring the child's education for the past year at a nearby school. Shanti also wants to go to school, but her employer refused to let both sisters off.

Shanti does not receive any money for the work she does, and no one from her family in Kavrepalanchowk district come to visit her.

For all that, Shanti and her sister are much better off than Maya, comparatively speaking. Thirteen-year-old Maya, who comes from a village near Pokhara, has been working in a civil servant's house in Lalitpur for the last three years. She has to do all the daily chores and lately, according to the next-door

neighbours, something more even. For the last few weeks she has been complaining to them of stomach pains. When questioned, she reveals the horrors she has to go through. Her employer has a 25-year-old unmarried son who runs a shop. In early October, when the parents were in Pokhara, the son raped Maya and has been doing so constantly since, even when his parents are in the house. Maya has missed her period the last two months.

One could detail such stories by the hundred. And it's always the same. Most children working as domestic help in the capital come from poor families outside the Valley, for whom survival is the primary question. Promises are made of education and/or a job once they reach maturity, and meanwhile, the salary is little more than food, clothes, and those often inadequate. The children's families are so hard up that they find it easy enough to leave the children behind in the hope that somehow their chances in life will improve if they work in the city. One year down the line, the child will have got used to the life of a domestic, with hardly a chance of anything better.

A rapid assessment of the situation of domestic child labourers in Kathmandu conducted by the National Labour Academy-Nepal says that one in every five households in Kathmandu employs children as “domestic help”. The 2000 survey found 21,191 domestic child labourers in Kathmandu metropolitan city alone, nearly 70

percent of whom were below the age of 14, and 46 percent, girls. The total estimated for the entire country was 42,674. The survey also revealed that Bahun households led in employing child labour, with Newars coming second. Another factor indicated was the absence of dalits, or supposedly low-castes, among domestic child labourers.

Legal provisions

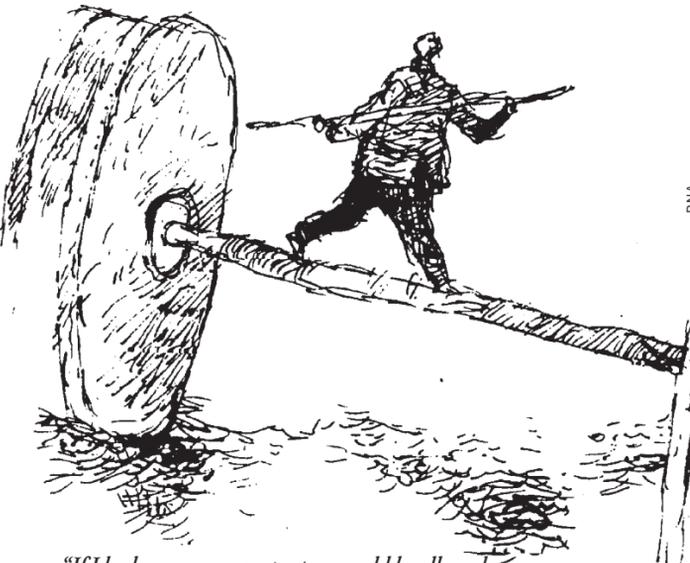
Section 5 of the 1992 Labour Act prohibits the employment of children in any enterprise. The Act describes a child as a person who has not attained the age of 14, while a minor is one between 14 and 18. The Section also prohibits employment of minors between 6 PM and 6 AM, except under prescribed conditions. Then there is the Child Labour Prohibition Act 2000 that provides for three months' imprisonment or a fine of Rs 10,000 for anyone employing children below 14 as workers. But these are only on paper. The reality is totally different.

It is not that civil society is turning a blind eye to the plight of these children. Organisations such as Child Workers In Nepal (CWIN) have been working for years now to help them. In November 1998, CWIN, with the approval of the government, started the first telephone helpline for children. Anyone with information regarding a child undergoing physical or mental abuse can ring 271000 for CWIN to investigate the matter. If the matter needs to be pursued

HERE AND THERE

Via media

Debate is not defeat. It is what gives democracy its heft, its tensile strength.



“If I had my way, you reporters would be allowed everywhere, to write what you like, to see exactly what's going on. These days, the information war is as important as ground operations.” This from a senior police man who had just stopped me from meeting imprisoned “Maoist leaders” in a district outside Kathmandu. Orders, he explained, from higher-up. The officer asked that I keep his identity a secret, so I will. But he had a point. I wonder if anyone in government, the military or the media is listening.

First the question of access to information and areas of conflict. The nightly drip, drip of press releases about the actions of the security forces are not enough for the media to do its duty. For a few days after the emergency was declared, conflicting accounts and

casualty figures were issued. That's to be expected. This is largely new territory for Nepal and evolving a unified voice took the authorities some time. Now it is time to find other voices, other points of view. I know they're out there, I've met a few myself in trips east and west of the capital. But in public, they're largely silent. Where are the NGOs? The human rights activists? The political parties? The independent voices of reason and caution? A state of emergency to quash a vicious insurgency shouldn't impose silence across the spectrum.

Debate is not defeat. It is what gives democracy its heft, its tensile strength.

As for the military, such fine points are not the concern of soldiers. They have more pressing tasks at hand, the most crucial they've ever addressed. In a democratic system, the political process frees the military to carry out its orders. And those orders come from the people, they are expressed through the system, delivered by political leaders after much discussion. The army doesn't operate in a vacuum, not here, not in the United States.

Yet as the American campaign in Afghanistan shows, the military too needs to take the role of information dissemination very seriously. Inside Afghanistan, at the US marine base southwest of Kandahar,

journalists have been alongside soldiers since the beginning. True, they are restricted in what they can say. Not by patriotism, or commitment to the mission, but to protect the safety of American soldiers. The main condition imposed upon journalists with the US forces is that they cannot divulge their location, or the movement of soldiers. That endangers lives and you agree to that before you are allowed to go.

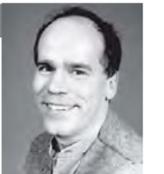
At the same time, other journalists—myself included—tried for weeks to see the Taliban and get their side of the story. We failed. The Taliban were simply too disorganised to have an information policy. Our duty was to find out their point of view and put it across to the world. Not because the Americans and the Taliban are of equal merit, but because it is our duty. Purely and simply.

Finally, the media. There is, at the moment, a fair amount of self-censorship being practised in newsrooms around Kathmandu. In a sense, this is understandable. A violent struggle is threatening a way of life that many in the press have come to treasure. Constitutional rights, democracy, freedom of information, these are the mainstays of a free media. Bombs, massacres of police constables, bank robberies and extortion—decent people abhor such things. But opposing atrocities doesn't mean keeping mum on important matters. Reporters must report, newspapers have to dig deep into the most important news story in this country in a generation to find out just what is going on.

That means travel to affected areas. That means discomfort. That means a degree of risk and that means occasionally angering those in authority. There are stories that are not being told. In Maoist-affected areas are details of clashes and army operations that must be disclosed. Journalists could agree to various conditions, among them not reporting in any way that would endanger lives or security of ongoing operations. That doesn't mean wearing the uniform but it does mean behaving responsibly in the line of duty. Our duty.

My new friend, the police officer, agrees with all of this. But he's keeping his opinions to himself, at least as far as his superiors are concerned. I wish he would speak out on the record, but I suppose he's wise to keep his remarks private and off the record. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



is no place to grow up

legally, the organisation bears all the costs. The abused child is then brought to a centre maintained by CWIN and kept there for a maximum of three months, while ways are found for the child's normal return to society.

Last year, CWIN rescued 28 children, 20 of them girls, in this way. A majority were being physically tortured. But these are only the reported cases, and we will never know that fate of many others. Bimal Thapa of CWIN puts it bluntly, "We will never be able to fully eliminate child labour, but at least we can try and do something about it."

Then there is the Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre (LACC), which aims to provide free legal services, especially to women and girl labourers working under dangerous conditions, and also has a telephone helpline. But Dr Shanta Thapalia of LACC says that although in many cases the court decides in favour of the abused and grants compensation,

hardly anything happens in practice. "In principle we are able to provide justice to the victims, implementing it is however another difficult task" she says.

After a lot of hue and cry by international bodies like the ILO and UNICEF, the government has also started showing some interest. It is said to be in the process of ratifying the ILO's Convention No 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999). At the "Best Practices Conference" held in Washington in May 2000, the Nepali government announced its commitment to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by immediately implementing programmes of action to remove children from intolerable situations and provide for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

That sounds enthusiastic, but nothing much has really happened. Which is not at all surprising, since even existing laws have not been acted upon.



The Labour Act may have made child labour illegal, but so far there has been no recognition that this practice exists, and no official study has been conducted to find out how many children are

working as child labourers.

The truth is that no matter how many organisations come up to help unprivileged children, no matter how many international covenants the government signs, no matter how many surveys are funded, no matter how many measures are announced to check the working conditions of domestic child labourers, this modern-day slavery may not end unless civil society wakes up and refuses to take any other child into its service. No matter what justification is given for the practice, there is no really reasonable excuse to rob children of their future.

On International Human Rights Day last week activists and media persons raised their voices against rights abuses in society. At the end of the day they went back to their cosy homes, and doubtless many gathered their families around them and ordered the 14-year-old "domestic help" to bring them tea and snacks. ♦

Emergency fixes?

It took an emergency for the government to realise that its machinery was not functioning normally. His Majesty's Government has issued directives ordering its departments to work—which should translate into tap connections being fixed within 24 hours, the same with your water meter that has not worked for the past six months, and so on. To make sure all that happens, the government has ordered its employees in Kathmandu to be at their offices at 9AM (that is when they are supposed to be in anyway) and those in offices outside to come to work by 10AM. Late-comers will not be allowed to sign in and employees leaving the office premises during work hours will need to fill in a valid reason in a specified register and take permission from the office chief. Employees going in to vacant posts are required to report to duty within seven days and those who have been transferred have to be at their new posting within 15 days. Government service-holders won't be allowed to take paid leave, except for mourning, maternity, etc, and they are to travel abroad officially only if the government needs to be represented by their department or to promote their department's business and services. The only to-do missing from the government order was deciding whom one could approach if the new orders are not being complied with.

Celebrating Nyatapola

Bhaktapur's landmark Nyatapola Temple has been standing for 300 years now and the municipality wants to celebrate that anniversary in style. The festivities are to include photo and painting exhibitions, symposia and conservation awareness-building campaigns, all between 5-11 July 2002. Nyatapola was built in 1701 during the reign of King Bhupatindra Malla, and was among the few Bhaktapur monuments that survived the Great Earthquake of 1934.

Heritage sites

Nepal is trying to get two more mentions in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list. Tilaurakot, capital of the Shakya kingdom Kapilavastu (in today's district of the same name), where Siddhartha Gautama spent his first 29 years, and Ramgram (in Nawalparasi district), where Buddha's astudhatu, or last remains, lie, are the two likely new entrants on the list. The Lumbini Development Trust has had them on its own list of heritage sites and long wanted them included in the global list. The Trust requested enlistment in 1999, and last year's archaeological dig findings suggesting that the Buddha was indeed born within modern Nepal's borders is likely to help its request.

The Cheetahs have landed



The two "Cheetah" helicopters (a version of the Alouettes) (See "Where to cut," NT #71)—India's contribution to the government's war effort against the Maoists—landed in Kathmandu on Tuesday. The Indian-assembled choppers are said to be able to perform at high altitude and can also be fitted with machine guns. Indian media reports that India's assistance includes military hardware have not been confirmed or denied by the government so far.

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The Terrace

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Community Literacy Project
World Education Nepal

Invitation to submit evaluation capability profiles

The Community Literacy Project (CLP) is a joint undertaking between HMG and DFID. It is implemented by World Education Nepal (WEN). These partners are undertaking scoping exercise to assess the potential of local organizations to undertaking an evaluation of this project during 2002.

The main purpose of this scoping exercise is to collect profiles of Nepali organizations as a basis for assessing their capability to undertake the evaluation. The information provided by interested organizations will be used by a Technical Committee to decide on a competitive tender process early in 2002.

Organizations with the expertise and interest to act as evaluators of CLP are requested to submit their capability statements to WEN.

The capability statements should reveal expertise in:

- Institutional appraisal
- Financial appraisal
- Social development appraisal
- Literacy Development
- Project Evaluation

The terms of reference for the evaluation will be available from the WEN office between 17 and 21 December 2001

Organizations are requested to submit their capability statements by 5:00 pm on Friday 8 February 2002 to

World Education Nepal
 CLPN Office, Martyrs Road
 Ganeshwar, Ratopul

Any submission reaching the WEN office after this deadline (Friday 8 February 2002) will be considered. Telephone enquiries will not be considered.

The Maobadi and South Asia

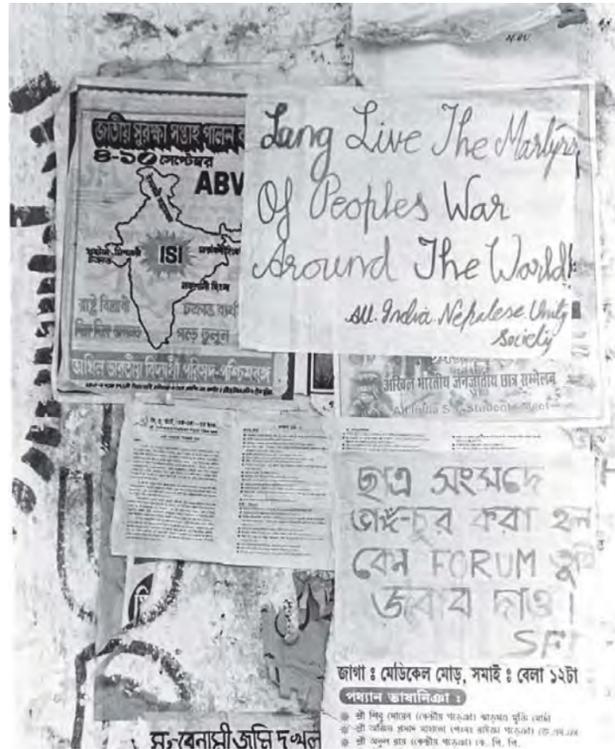
from p1

Maobadi and the ISI
Indian press reports of the supposed ISI connection with Nepal's Maoists are not new. As far back as January 2000, the newsmagazine *Outlook* wrote: "Raids conducted on the Maoist group's camps during the recent general elections in Nepal confirmed an old suspicion—that they possessed Pakistani arms. For the ISI it is a convenient link-up as it can use the Maoist group's camps in Nepal's Chitwan jungle to train Indian and Nepali youths in terrorist operations."

One of the more purportedly authoritative articles in the present coverage is by B Raman, a former additional secretary with the Indian government, who writes in the *Hindustan Times*: "While there have been reports for many years of the Maoists receiving financial and material assistance from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the North Korean intelligence, they have not so far used any sophisticated weapons or explosives."

In the case of *Outlook*, that was probably the first anyone had heard of the Maoists' supposed ISI link, but since the article was published just after the Indian Airlines' hijack one could understand what the writer was trying to drive at. Otherwise, how could he suggest that the Chitwan National Park is used by Nepal's Maoists as a training ground just because it looks well-wooded from the Indian side, while conveniently forgetting or just plain ignorant that the Park is patrolled by the Nepali army.

The North Korean angle in Raman's piece is a new one (although *Outlook* had also tried to make a case of Chinese involvement). He does not provide any citation for the "reports"



Posters in support of the People's War vie for attention at North Bengal University, near Siliguri, India.

he mentions, although he does predictably pick on the much-quoted interview given by Prachanda to an online magazine in early 2000 to support his thesis: "The ISI's interest in helping the Maoists is due to the latter's anti-India views. The Maoists have not only been demanding the abrogation of all treaties and agreements with India which, in their view, are detrimental to Nepal's interests, but also projecting the Indian Army as their next enemy after they defeat the Nepalese Army."

As an analyst in a neighbouring country, is it possible that Raman be unaware that almost all major political forces have at some time or other called for a revision of treaties with India? Or, that the perception that India is

the "ultimate enemy" is a position long held by various communist factions in Nepal and certainly not limited to the Maoists.

According to another recent *Hindustan Times* report datelined Siliguri, West Bengal, we are now informed that the Maoists are not only endeavouring to set up a communist republic in Nepal, but also instigating insurrections in India. "As the world turned its attention to the bloody strike by Maoists across Nepal on November 24 [it should have been 23], around 300 Maoist insurgents slipped unnoticed through the Siliguri corridor in the wee hours the next day. Their goal: to establish 'Greater Nepal.'" The correspondent then goes on to establish that the Maoists have got

in touch with various insurgent outfits from the Indian Northeast and, of course, the ISI.

Nowhere in any of these write-ups is there any evidence of a nexus between the CPN (Maoist) and the ISI, apart from quotes from the ubiquitous "intelligence and army sources". (These must be the same "intelligence sources" who were remarkably silent when the communist *loya jirga* convened by Prachanda met in Siliguri some months ago.) Having said that, it cannot be ruled out outright that some of the armaments that could have reportedly been smuggled into India by the ISI might not in fact have made their way to the Maoist arsenal through the underground arms bazaar in India.

The Maoists have not taken the Indian claims lying down. The October 2000 issue of their party organ, *Revolutionary Worker*, accuses the Indian government of using the ISI as a red herring. "It [the Indian government] had been labeling People's War in Nepal since its initiation as being funded and trained by ISI agents. In fact BJP is so phobic against communism that it has labelled the MLM [Marxist-Leninist-Maoist] groups waging People's War in India as ISI agents!... In the case of Nepal, the Indian state is using ISI whip for the short term benefit in order to malign People's War in Nepal, for the long term strategy it is brandishing ISI stick to bring Nepal under its defence-umbrella. In the case of India, Indian state is trying to play the ISI card on its own land to unleash an all out terror on the revolutionary masses of India and also to malign them."

The India connection
If the ISI connection is yet to be demonstrably proven, the Maoists' contacts with ultra-left groups are no secret. These seem to have been strengthened after the 1984 founding

of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), a forum of Maoist forces the world over, a kind of latter-day Communist International wedded to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Although the CPN (Masal), then led by Mohan Bikram Singh, was one of the founding members, somewhere along the way, it was replaced by the splinter CPN (Maoist), and in 2000 Prachanda is believed to have been elected to its executive committee.

RIM seems to be an amorphous organisation that provides only a mail forwarding centre in London for its address, but as Prachanda said in the interview referred to above, the CPN (Maoist) has benefitted immeasurably from that association. "There are important ideological and political exchange. From the RIM Committee, we got the experience of the PCP (Communist Party of Peru), the two-line struggle there, and also the experience in Turkey, the experience in Iran, and the experience in the Philippines. We learned from the experience in Bangladesh and from some experience in Sri Lanka. And there was a South Asian conference that we participated in. At the same time we were also having direct and continuous debate with the Indian communists, mainly the People's War (PW) [People's War Group-PWG] and Maoist Communist Center (MCC) groups. And this helped in one way or another. It helped us to understand the whole process of People's War."

(In all likelihood, it was the RIM connection that saw Kathmandu walls plastered with slogans demanding the release of Comrade Gonzalo of Peru soon after his arrest in 1992. The Sendero Luminoso was at that time the premier Maoist insurgency in the world—that dubious distinction has now been taken up by Nepal's Maoists.)

Later years saw contacts with Indian Maoists intensify. Apart from helping identify the illegal arms

market in India after the People's War began in 1996, the MCC and the PWG have also provided weapons and explosives training to Nepal's Maoists. The police in Nepal believe that the CPN (Maoist) is also in touch with separatist organisations such as the United Liberation Front of Assam.

However, the Maoists' India connection is not limited to extremist groups alone. They also have the support of a part of the Nepali diaspora in India, a fact demonstrated by the presence of a large number of Nepalis in the December 1998 rally held in New Delhi under the aegis of the 'Solidarity Forum to Support the People's War in Nepal'. There are various other forums that stand behind the CPN (Maoist), such as the All India Nepali Unity Society. The Nepali authorities believe that this largest organisation of Nepali migrants in India, with a claimed membership of around 150,000, is a front to collect money for the People's War. The Unity Society denies providing financial support to the Maoists, but there is no doubt where its sympathy lies (see picture above).

India is certainly aware of all these linkages and has expressed concern about what could ultimately turn out to be a chain of Maoist movements stretching from Nepal through Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh up to Andhra Pradesh. Especially so since the formation earlier this year of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) in order to, in Baburam Bhattarai's words, "unify and coordinate the revolutionary process in the region". Which begs the question: could it be only a coincidence that just days after the ceasefire was called off in Nepal, Indian Maoists went on a rampage from Jharkhand to Andhra Pradesh? Or, can it be speculated that there is a larger design at work—such as the ponderous-sounding CCOMPOSA really at work? ♦

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The fourth estate of the state

The Indian news media's coverage of Nepal gets nauseating with each episode. The crescendo of criticism that nobody on the other side of the border seems to care about should not allow us to wallow in self-pity. It's time to try another tack. Let's shut our eyes and plug our ears for some critical contemplation.

Satellite TV and the Internet may have expanded the reach of what Indian reporters file, but their responsibility essentially remains what it has always been: advancing their nation's agenda. Regardless of how rapidly their international audience grows, their primary duty is to resident Indians.

Once that premise is perceptible, it becomes easier to get some perspective. As long as the *panchas* enjoyed official Indian confidence as the custodians of the jam that could maintain a semblance of equilibrium between the two Asian boulders, Indian newspapers didn't think Nepali politics was terribly newsworthy. But they did maintain correspondents and stringers just in case. If the partyless community tried to play its cards a little too

cleverly, the editors back home knew they could always get instant copy on how elections were rigged or how restive the people were getting over the profligacy of their rulers. The more discerning readers on both sides of the border understood all along that it really wasn't that Panchayati Nepal contained no news value; it's just that it didn't fit into official Indian policy.

When Nepal needed some anti-aircraft guns through the trans-Himalayan route at a time when its

trade and transit treaty with India was about to expire in the late 1980s, the ground rules in Indian newsrooms saw a transition. The *panchas* suddenly turned out to be tyrants, a story line buttressed by the debris of the Berlin Wall. In no time, the Indian media started covering how Nepalis were dying for democracy. There were no liberal or hard-line *panchas* anymore. Those who had chosen to become part of the contemptible system had to be rotten to the core. A similar paroxysm of episodic

allurement had consumed Indian reporters and editors of an earlier generation. What was remarkable in their coverage of events leading up to the 1951 political changes in Nepal is the prominence the country had acquired in both the news and op-ed pages. Koirala was already a headline name then, although it was Matrika Prasad who you'd invariably come across in the lead graph.

Re-reading those yellowing pages, you'd think the revolutionaries who had denounced the "Delhi

compromise" as a betrayal of the cause were congenitally uncompromising miscreants bent on spoiling the party. Meanwhile, rookies who started out in newsrooms down south with copy on the fall of Birgunj went on to write books like *Delhi Accosts Peking in Kathmandu*.

The purpose of this ponderous overview is to emphasise that on foreign policy and defence matters, the Indian media uniformly projects the official line. That's why you probably wouldn't know that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is known on the other side of the Line of Control as Azad Kashmir, complete with its own president and prime minister. You miss that vital regional reality in that Bangladeshis don't feel they have to thank Indra Gandhi for their independence because they knew from the outset that she was just trying to get even with General Yahya Khan. Moreover, you would tend to believe the Bhutanese are simply thrilled by the opportunity of being able to subcontract their foreign and security policies all these years.

It would be unfair, however, to single out the Indian media for failing to depart from the government agenda. Remember how *The New York Times* held back its exclusive on the impending Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 on the Kennedy White House's explicit orders? Or, more recently, how the US TV networks deferred to the Bushies who wanted Osama bin Laden off America's air waves?

Our anger at having to see in the Indian media a Nepal that scarcely resembles the one we live in is exacerbated by our

inability to do much about it. We can't expect the government to ban Indian newspapers, jam Indian TV channels or order our ISPs to build firewalls to keep out Indian websites carrying inflammatory content. A little extra shot of scepticism could be helpful, though. The next time you read external analyses on who might stand to benefit from a Maoist insurgency that began in the midwestern Nepali hills, think about the foreign military checkpoints that were ordered out by Kirtinidhi Bista's government in the late 1960s. If you're flustered by why so many Indian governments are interested, remember this: the power that comes with space-linked surveillance, intelligence and navigation systems on Nepal's high mountains gets geo-strategic leverage over several Asian regions, from Central Asia to South East Asia. What this means is, if you can't get to place your own listening posts on the Everest range, the second best thing would be to make sure no other country does. Conspiracy theorists may be a calumniated lot, but they're the ones who widen the range of possibilities so that others can narrow down their search.

If you still can't figure out how that TV reporter boarding his flight back to New Delhi with his hidden camera turned on could hand in that story on Tribhuvan International Airport's lax security or how that garrulous Nepali passenger on IC Flight 814 could end up being described as one of the hijackers, consider this: it's not without reason that the press is called the fourth estate of the state it represents. ♦

On foreign policy and defence matters, the Indian media uniformly projects the official line.



COMMENT

by JOHN CHILD



After nearly 150,000 deaths, the fighting remains fierce and draws frequent international press coverage.

Our giant neighbour to the South hosts multiple insurrections of its own, including the fighting in Kashmir that the Indian Army has brutally (and futilely) tried to quash for the last 12 years. The struggle around the independence movement in Nagaland dates to 1947 and has claimed some 10,000 lives, at least half of them since the deployment in 1987 of some 40,000 soldiers to "crush" the Nagas. Since 1979 at least 10 other armed movements have been operating elsewhere in the northeast.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Naxalite (Maoist) movement was "finished" by Indira Gandhi's emergency rule of 1975-77, then "defeated" in 1980, "banned" in 1992, and "eradicated" by State Police special units operating under the Disturbed Areas Act of 1996. Since promulgation of the Disturbed Areas Act, a powerful vigilante group, the Green Tigers, has arisen and been charged with committing serious human rights abuses. More than 6,000 people have been killed.

Throughout the world, application of military force has rarely succeeded in ending armed struggle, insurgency, or political conflict. In the handful of cases where force has succeeded, it has taken decades of fighting, billions of dollars, and tens or hundreds of thousands of casualties. That is not encouraging history for a country that is entering its seventh year of conflict and only the third week of emergency and army actions.

Why does force work so rarely? Because insurrections are symptoms only, and application of military might to quell insurrections fails to address their causes. The disease in Nepal and most of the world is poverty, uneven development, and corruption. Of the 40 conflicts listed by Project Ploughshares, 33 of them are taking place in countries below the world median for development.

Those predicting and hoping for a quick and decisive end to Nepal's emergency and the Maoist *samasya* would do well to remember that statistic. (John Child is an American living and working in Kathmandu.)

Wishful thinking

The lessons from world history are not encouraging for Nepal.

Although Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has assured Nepalis that the state of emergency will be lifted "soon," and administration officials have suggested they expect victory over the Maoists within six months, the course of similar insurrections in other countries leaves little room for optimism. Project Ploughshares, the Canadian NGO that tracks domestic armed conflicts around the globe, recently added Nepal to its list of 40 conflicts in 35 countries. The average duration of these conflicts has been 17 years.

Even less encouraging is the fact that after many decades of fighting, most current insurgencies and civil wars aren't even close to a conclusion. The only conflicts successfully resolved by armed force in recent years, in Angola and East Timor, took respectively 30 and 26 years of fighting.

Peru is an instructive example because the main insurgent group, Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path") are ideologically close to Nepal's Maoists. Shining Path's revolution began in 1980, and by 1992 the rebels, army, and police had killed almost 30,000 civilians. In that year the military captured Abimael Guzman, Sendero Luminoso's "Prachanda". The following year Guzman declared an end to the armed struggle. Today, eight years later, the rebels still control 16 percent of Peru and a state of emergency remains in force in those zones.

In Peru's next door neighbour, Colombia, they wish things were that good. The government has been trying since 1964 to quash two groups, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). Since 1986, some 40,000 people have been killed—at least half of those were civilians. The government holds the cities, but more than 50 percent of the countryside is controlled by the guerrillas.

In the last 15 years, the number of Colombian government forces engaging the rebels has grown from 66,000 to 261,000, and paramilitary death squads have gone out of control. Some \$24 billion has been spent on, among other things, 60 military helicopters. The "hearts and minds" programme launched last year by the Colombian government has a budget of \$7.5 billion; but there is no end in sight for Colombia, its economy is in ruins and the people live in terror.

In the Philippines, the Maoist New Peoples' Army and an alliance of 14 guerrilla groups have survived despite fierce attempts by the Filipino Army to wipe them out. Between the failed peace talks of 1986 and the failed peace talks of 1999, some 25,000 civilians were killed, but the New Peoples' Army remains. In Mindanao province in the south, some 70,000 army troops and death squads have been fighting the Abu Sayyaf and Moro Liberation Front rebels since 1971.

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State of the state

Government spending has begun to increase, but most of the money is being used to pay recurrent expenses, says the Central Bank's economic report for the first three months of fiscal 2001/02. Regular spending was up almost 30 percent compared with the same period last year, while spending on development programs grew very slowly, at just over one percent. The Nepal Rastra Bank said regular spending was high because of payments of overdue pensions, medical allowances and increased expenditure on security. The relatively static development spending resulted from slow approval and release of funds. Revenue collection was sound, growing by about 19 percent, but the government was unable to mobilise the volume of cash grants it had anticipated, resulting in a budget deficit of Rs 3.66 billion.

According to the National Urban Consumer Price Index, prices rose by 2.2 percent year-on-year, reflecting mainly the upward shift in prices of goods in the food and beverage basket, which were up by 3.8 percent compared to the 4.6 percent decline during the same period a year ago. Inflation would have been worse but was reined by a drop in the prices of goods in the non-food category. The prices in the non-food basket rose by just 0.4 percent compared to the 12.7 percent growth in the same period last year.

Exports have begun tumbling in a big way: there was a decline by 0.3 percent to Rs 13.5 billion in during the first quarter of fiscal 2001/02, compared with the 28 percent growth in the corresponding year-earlier period. Exports to India have also slowed down, and the overall trade deficit reached Rs 13 billion. Despite all this, foreign exchange reserves remain sound, thanks mainly to remittances from overseas: Rs104.7 billion in mid-October. However, the percentage of reserves in foreign currency is shrinking and now stands at 76 percent.

Dirt under the rug

The Central Carpet Industry Association (CCIA) has asked government to lower the export floor price of woollen rugs, saying that the current regulations make it difficult to compete internationally or diversify. The CCIA says the floor price, based on which producers are taxed, is much higher than the real production cost, as a result of which they have lost much of their market share to cheaper producers in other countries. The floor price of carpets last year was Rs 3,295 per sq m, while the production cost was about Rs 2,400. This year the floor price is Rs 3,537 while the production cost is Rs 1,900. The CCIA has made some recommendations on the "right" floor price to the government.

Royal Nepal again

An airline with only one plane flying to over half a dozen international destinations? Before you snigger, consider that that is exactly what the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation has been doing since 26 November, after it sent one of its two Boeing 757s for its regular maintenance regimen. Royal Nepal axed its flights to Bangalore and Bombay—two new destinations where it decided to concentrate after cancelling long hauls to Europe in September—and cut down flights to New Delhi to make up for the aircraft shortage. Royal Nepal can do this and get away with it because, unlike private companies that value consumer confidence to continue doing business in the long run, the state-run airline has little incentive to be businesslike. As an angry travel agent told us recently, "Why can't we use the emergency to do away with Royal Nepal and let private companies fly the flag-carrier?" Royal Nepal presently flies to Japan, Hong Kong and Bangkok in addition to its India-hops.

More noodles

The producers of Mayos and Hurray are pushing one more brand in Nepal's already crowded instant noodles market. The new brand comes with a predictable two-syllable name: Ru-Chee. The Khetan Group's Himalayan Snax and Noodles is a joint venture with Thai President Foods. Ru-Chee is priced at Rs 10 a pack.



ALICO

The American Life Insurance Company (ALICO) says it is opening shop here next month. ALICO was finally licensed in August after an almost two-year wait, partly caused by litigation opposing its entry into the Nepali market. The US-based insurers will join another private life insurance firm that began business last week.

On privatisation



The government needs to simply let some companies go.

This week the Finance Minister made very interesting announcements on privatisation. He and other colleagues from the government have been harping on this for ages but nothing much has been done. Curiously enough, this time around he seems serious. Whether intentionally or through happenstance, he flew Indian Airlines from Delhi to Kathmandu. A move like that might just indicate the urgency of the need to privatise Royal Nepal Airlines.

India, for its part, has been positively dizzy with action on privatisation, or at the very least, shaping up their sick public enterprises. Indian Airlines, for instance, bears examination as a rather interesting government undertaking. In the last couple of months, it has certainly pulled up its socks, so to speak—flights have been on time and luggage arrives at the baggage claim just as one walks into the arrival lounge, omitting the need for tedious and frustrating waits. Shockingly for a state-owned and run enterprise, they even seem to be developing a sense of customer service. At the check-in counter for flights to Kathmandu flights, at least, travellers are asked whether they want a window seat to view the mountains. If they keep this sort of thing up, well, they might just give the more glamorous private airlines a run for their retractable wings. The private carriers have decided retaliatory action is called for and they've unleashed a media blitz advertising better rates and countering sops to flyers.

Royal Nepal one time foolishly thought it was better off than Indian Airlines, mainly because it was not as bankrupt as the Indian carrier. Vain optimism perhaps, but even by his benchmark Royal Nepal is in a pretty pathetic state—how could they possibly be left with one-and-a-half aircraft to fly to half-a-dozen destinations? Internal squabbles and political

interference are still a problem with IA, but its management has undergone a significant change in its thinking and delivery. It is starting to understand that in a market that is affected by so many factors, they have to develop a core advantage to remain competitive. Once such will is there, political will and support from the concerned ministries and

neap tides, or perhaps it simply matches the frequency with which I push privatisation in this space—why on earth would someone want to acquire a loss-making enterprise, even with support and subsidies from government.

A situation like this needs some strong medicine. We might start with transferring control of all



departments becomes less of an issue.

Privatisation requires strong political will, although a word of caution is not out of place here—there are numerous examples of the world over to show that simply shifting ownership from the government to the private sector does not immediately bring about the desired improvements in the enterprise, whether operationally or financially. The privatisation process has to begin with making the enterprise attractive to people who may be interested. This is the nub of the matter—you do not start thinking about privatisation from the perspective of ridding the government of a loss-making undertaking, or keeping a firm grip on one that is doing well. You start by asking what sort of people in the private sector might be interested in taking on one government-owned enterprise or another. The lack of this kind of sharp thinking is why your faithful Beed is asked with such annoying regularity—perhaps it coincides with the spring and

public enterprises from their respective ministries or departments to the privatisation cell. After that point, the decision would rest with the privatisation cell, which would draw on the expertise of professionals in such matters, to decide on which enterprises can continue, which ones should go out on management contracts, which could be sold and which, alas, deserve no kinder fate than liquidation.

Unfortunately, the credibility of the privatisation process in this country is at an unfortunate ebb, given the strange goings-on at the Butwal Power Company, which still resides in the government's house, despite so many years of attempts to marry it off. We need to know what the intention is here, or "privatisation" will simply become a shibboleth used in infinite present continuous. Hope the Finance Minister's Indian Airlines flight indicates that he means business. ♦

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

BIZ CHAT



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times spoke with Rajeev Kulkarni, the new CEO of the Standard Chartered Bank in Nepal, on banking sector reforms and the state of industry, investment and insurance. Kulkarni has over twenty years of experience in the manufacturing industry and banking. He has worked on corporate banking, investment banking, risk management and treasury, in South Asia, the Middle East and south-east Asia. Kulkarni, an engineer, also has a master's degree in Business Management.

NT: You arrived in Kathmandu five months ago, have you been able to assess how the Nepali banking sector has been faring?

Rajeev Kulkarni: I believe there is a very close linkage between the performance of the industrial sector and the banking sector. They are mutually dependent. Over the past two years, due to various external reasons, the performance of the industrial sector has witnessed a downturn. This is bound to have a domino effect on the performance of the banking and financial sector in due course. Currently, the liquidity in the banking system is high. But that is mainly due to the lack of acceptable lending opportunities.

To address the situation, our bank is doing the following:

- Focus on the asset quality and monitor the portfolio
- Focus on customer service quality, ensure customer responsiveness
- Focus on strategic cost management.

How have the Rastra Bank's directives affected your bank?

The recent directives of the Nepal Rastra Bank are in alignment with those of the other central banks in industrialised countries. As you would be aware, Standard Chartered Bank, being a British bank, comes under the purview of Bank of England (BoE) and also the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). Thus the policy of our bank is to follow the tougher of the two guidelines. So, if the BoE guideline is tougher, then we follow that guideline or vice versa. Hence, our bank is compliant with the recent directives.

Is that also true for the more recent Directive Nine?

Directive Nine concentrates on the information/disclosure all the banks need to provide. The requirements are very detailed. The entire banking sector will need to significantly upgrade its Management Information System to comply with this directive. This will entail additional costs. We hope this information will be used constructively for policy formulation by the authorities, otherwise it would be an ineffective use of a useful resource.

Private insurance companies recently said they were unwilling to secure damage due to terrorism and sabotage. Was that fair?

As I understand, the reinsurers withdrew their cover on terrorism and sabotage. As a consequence, some of the private insurance companies decided to withdraw this cover due to their inability to cover this risk. This did give rise to a few anxious moments. However, the Finance Ministry and Nepal Rastra Bank acted swiftly and decisively in addressing the concerns of the industry and the banks. As a result, the issue was speedily resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. All the industries and the banks are very appreciative of the steps taken by the Finance Ministry and Nepal Rastra Bank to address and resolve an issue of this magnitude in such a short period of time.

We were particularly worried because stopping coverage would directly impact not just the coverage of our cash in the vaults and money in transit but also our collateral—for example the vehicles etc. I think this incident perhaps indicates a need to build up onshore insurance institutions with sufficient financial capabilities to underwrite such risks, and hold a significant part of them in their books if needed.

Banks are now said to be awash with liquidity and most are lending in the consumer/personal segment? Why has that liquidity not gone into longer-term projects?

In the South Asia region, banking has traditionally meant gathering deposits from retail customers and lending this money to corporates. At the retail level, the customers were not in favour of borrowing, because in our culture, borrowing was frowned upon.

However, in past few years, consumerism has come to our region as well. People are willing to borrow against their future earnings to enjoy comforts today. This has opened up a new line of business for banks. The consumer lending business is very different from the corporate business. The distribution channels, risk evaluation and the business model are evolving. Being a new line of business, it is relatively unexplored, and so has caught the imagination of the region's banking sector.

The second factor for this shift in preference is that due to economic instability across the region, long gestation projects have become riskier and hence are not generating significant enthusiasm in the banking sector.

If the government were to ask you what we could do to spur new investments in Nepal what would you advise?

You would be aware that capital is a scarce resource. Currently, all the emerging markets in the region are fiercely competing to attract investors. In this scenario, we need to concentrate our efforts on a segment that is most likely to consider Nepal as a possible investment destination. If we proceed on this logic, then to my mind, the medium-sized companies in India, are our logical target investor segment.

In order to attract this investor segment, a well-thought out marketing strategy needs to be drawn up by the government, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI). Once this is done, we need to have road shows in India to disseminate information to the target investor segment. Needless to say, the capacity to deliver the promises needs to be built up simultaneously so when the investors do come in, they have a positive experience and go ahead with the planned investments. ♦

Two out of 200,000

Ganga and Jamuna are back and well. Dr BASANT PANT gives us a blow-by-blow account of this heartening medical advance.

The chance of its happening is one in 200,000. And yet happen it did, to Sandhya Shrestha and Bhusan KC. The first child after their love marriage was not one child, but two. But two that were completely fused at the head.

Ganga-Jamuna, as they were first called, were born to Sandhya in May 2000, through caesarean section performed by Dr Diveshwari Malla and her team at Prasuti Griha in Thapathali. The birth of the babies made headlines. It was a nice human interest story, but few would have thought that some months later, the twins would also be making medical history.

Soon after the birth, Sandhya and Bhusan went through a difficult period. Sandhya was distressed because she did not even get to see her babies for some time. Meanwhile, the twins remained at the maternity hospital, cared for by paediatrician Dr Dhanraj Aryal who, with other doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff, worked hard to save their lives.

Since it was such an unusual case, people went out of their way to help get the twins to the Singapore General Hospital, the nearest feasible location for separation surgery. Dr Upendra Devkota helped prepare them for the trip with his vast experience and able leadership. On 11 October, 2000, Singapore Airlines transported the five-month-old babies, their family and the medical team for free. There, too, Ganga-Jamuna generated great public interest, and MN Shawani, Nepal's Consul-General in Singapore mobilised the goodwill of the Nepali



Dr Basant Pant

and non-Nepali Singaporean public to collect enough donations for the treatment of the children and the stay of their family in Singapore for as long as it took. Those who have followed the saga from the beginning are quick to point to positive attitude and charisma of the babies' grandfather, Arjun Shrestha, in keeping everyone's spirits up.

Once in Singapore, paediatric neurosurgeon Dr Keith Goh of the Singapore General Hospital led the team that was to take care of the twins and explore the possibility of separating them. An amazing number of people were involved in Singapore to give Ganga-Jamuna a shot at becoming Ganga and Jamuna—four neurosurgeons, five plastic surgeons, five anaesthetists, two neurologists, three paediatricians, three radiologists, a computer engineer, a speech therapist, a physiotherapist and veritable armies of nurses and volunteers.

They all knew what they were up against. Similar surgery had previously been tried at least 13 times in different parts of the world, and the rate of failure was dauntingly high. The first such successful separation was carried out in 1997 by Dr Ben Carson of John Hopkins Hospital, but the present status of those twins is not known. Since Carson was the only person who had experience of such surgery, the team in Singapore began communicating with him.

Ironically, their task was greatly complicated by the fact that both Ganga and Jamuna were in good health, with no neurological or other medical problems. This made the surgery extremely dangerous—chances were high that either or both twins could be disabled in the process, or even die.

The Singapore General Hospital team was taking no chances, and spent six months preparing for the final show in the operation theatre. Starting with extensive diagnostic and exploratory procedures—the twins underwent an MRI (Magnetic

Resonance Imaging, which produces detailed high-quality images of anything inside the human body), angiography and a Magnetic Resonance Angiography (normal and three-dimensional X-ray exams of the arteries and veins to diagnose blockages and other blood vessel problems, and a three-dimensional CT scan, which is not only a real-time view of what is going on inside the body, but also allows observers to view the different functions from any angle, with cut-outs rendered to show relative volume.

All these were to help determine whether at all the twins could be separated with some degree of safety, and what the best way to do that would be. Once analysed, the images from these procedures were fed into a computer, which then aided in constructing four plastic replicas of Ganga-Jamuna, showing in detail the form of the bone, brain and vesicles in place. The models were one hundred percent accurate and the team even referred to them during the surgery.

Once this was done, the experts turned to another wonderful machine called the dextroscope, that a student of Carson's had developed for use in the procedure in South Africa. This machine was like a repository of every possible image of the insides of the babies' bodies—and the team had many, accounting for all three dimensions of every possible inch they might have to work on. The dextroscope did justice to the images—for a screen it has a special kind of glass that shows the image in 3-D. Goh and the other surgeons practised virtual surgery on the dextroscope for the next four months, performing every step from skin incision, removal of bone, brain dissection and ligation of vessels.

Going into the theatre, they had the entire, complicated procedure memorised. And it was a good thing they did that, for without these practice runs there was no way they would have realised that although there was a plane on which they could

dissect the two brains, at one point the two brains were, in fact, fused. And through that point ran the largest vein of the brain, called the superior-sagittal sinus. Like the rivers they were named for, at this point Ganga and Jamuna had a single common vessel. In order to know the exact plane they needed to dissect along to avoid cutting through to the wrong side of the brain, Goh and the other surgeons decided to use a neuro-navigating system, which tells the surgeon exactly where he is manipulating on an MRI screen. This sounds like it simplifies matters, and it does. But not a great deal—it is still like navigating your ship into the eye of a storm.

The team decided there was nothing to do but go for it, and so the other preparations went ahead full steam. The next problem they had to tackle was how to cover the defect that the babies' heads would have after they were separated. The plastic-surgery team led by Dr ST Lee started inflating a silastic balloon under the skin of each child. Ganga and Jamuna lived with this for three uncomfortable months, before the team decided that enough new skin had been generated for the repair work. In addition, the surgeons would need to harvest bone and artificial membrane to cover the brain.

All this went on simultaneously, but little of it was made public. Even so, there was an enormous amount of anticipation. Behind the scenes, everything was falling into place. Goh and Carson did a final rehearsal on the dextroscope—together, through an Internet teleconference. They manipulated the same model in real time, thousands of miles apart. There were multiple rehearsals of the actual surgical preparation that would have to be done in the operation theatre. It was like rehearsing a particularly tricky Broadway show with a huge cast, they had to plan all the transportation moves, the seating arrangement, the layout of the equipment, and the distribution of the team.

Finally, after six long months of

preparation, the surgery began on 6 April, 2001. It was meant to take 30 hours. It lasted much, much longer—94 hours for Jamuna and 102 hours for Ganga. Some 20 surgeons were involved. Goh and Dr Chumpon worked through, with others working on a rotational basis. Dr ST Lee and his team were involved in the opening and final closure of the defect.

As in every surgery, but playing an even more critical part than usual, was the anaesthetist. The babies had to be turned three times through 180 degrees, with one facing up and the other down, to approach the brain from different angles. Already a delicate and dangerous process, each turn was complicated by the fact that the anaesthesia tube in each baby had to be placed with pinpoint accuracy. Since the anaesthetist did not know exactly how blood was flowing through the head, it was something of a gamble to ensure that the drug pumped into one baby did not go into the bloodstream of the other. The twins were anaesthetised six times before surgery for different investigative procedures—the CT MRI, for example, would have been impossible without this because of the motion factor, so the team was not without experience.

For the five days that the surgery took, all the vital functions of the babies had to be monitored. Towards the end, things started to look bad—Ganga's blood started flowing into Jamuna. As a result, Ganga was

becoming anaemic and Jamuna was receiving more and more blood. The anaesthesia team had to draw blood from Jamuna and transfuse it into Ganga. They were ready for any eventuality and had even prepared for a cardiac standstill technique, where the heart stops for a few minutes and there is no flow in the vessels and surgeons can repair the damage without bleeding. Luckily, the team did not have to do this and complicate an already exhausting procedure.

On 10 April, after five days of surgery and the intricate and careful work of more than 40 people, the babies were separated. Ganga-Jamuna were now Ganga and Jamuna, but the surgery was not over yet. The team was immediately divided into two groups to close the defect in each child. They started covering the brain opening with the help of artificial membrane and prosthetic bone. Finally, skin grafts were harvested from the backs and thighs of the babies.

After the surgery, came another massive challenge. The separated twins had to be put on ventilators and their health monitored by the minute—Jamuna for seven days and Ganga for 17. The most serious post-operative danger was the infection the babies had contracted, most likely due to prolonged surgery. Most of the artificial covering had to be removed, which left them with large bony defects. In addition, fluid started collecting in their brains, which



Clockwise from top left: Three plastic models of the heads of the conjoined twins Ganga and Jamuna before surgery showing the nerves, the brain and the skull. The tangled web of nerves and veins in the twins' head. Ganga and Jamuna being readied for surgery, the marks are to guide the surgeons. Practice surgery using a dextroscope.



The neuro-navigator

needed tubes to be inserted to bypass the fluid into the abdomens. Ganga's cleft lip was repaired a few months later. For their last three months in Singapore, both the babies were doing well, and being looked after by their parents.

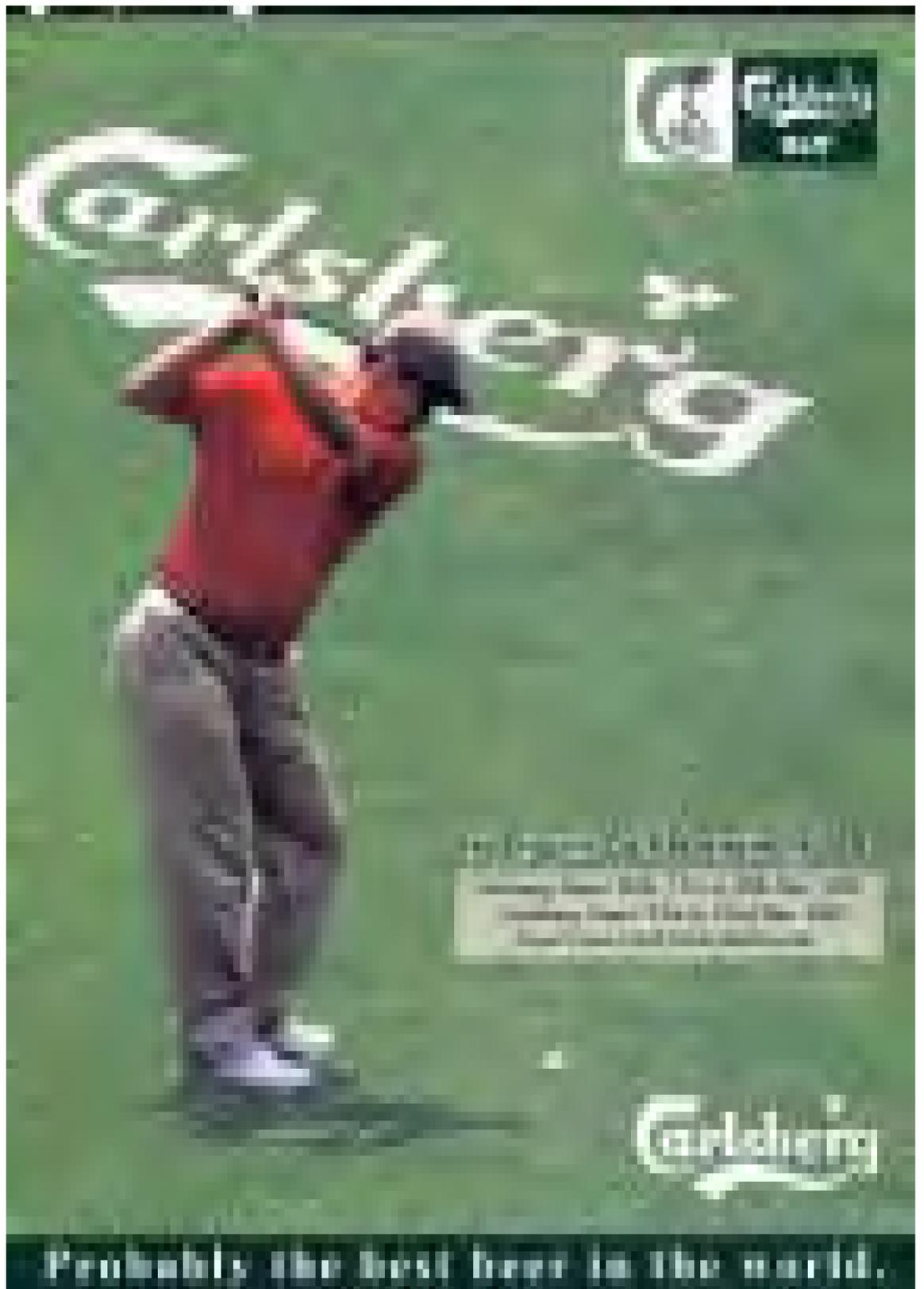
Thirteen months after they left their home country, Sandhya, Bhusan, and their twins were back on a Singapore Airlines, but this time they were looking out of windows on opposite sides of the aircraft. They left Nepal on a single passport as Ganga-Jamuna, but they returned, each with their own passport, proudly proclaiming themselves to be Ganga and Jamuna, respectively. ♦

What's next for the twins?

Now the responsibility for the well-being of the children rests with Nepali physicians. At present, paediatrician Dr Parash Mani Bhattarai, physiotherapist Dr Ravi Thapalia, speech therapist Captain Bhawani Pradhan, nurse Bindu Gurung and I, as a neurosurgeon, are responsible for the day-to-day care and treatment of the children. Ganga and Jamuna live at home and we visit them regularly. Our role is also to rehabilitate the whole family so that they can take care of their own children. Institutional responsibility for the children has been taken on by the Kathmandu Model Hospital, and more experts will come on board as and when the situation requires it.

As with the Singaporean team, the medical community here also needs the support of the Nepali people to treat Ganga and Jamuna. The role of the media in this case has been extremely important and creditable, seeing how much it did to generate interest in the case the world over. These children will need this support in the future as well. Right now, neither child has a skull on the top of her head—they are only covered by skin, and this needs to be fixed. We have six months to decide on when, how and where to cover this defect. This will be decided after careful discussion with the Singaporean team.

The night before I flew back to Kathmandu, I had dinner with Keith Goh and his wife. During the conversation Mrs Goh told me how stressed and overworked her husband had been all through the run-up to the surgery and after, and how she used to support him. It was then that I realised how many people are responsible for such a venture, but who are not in the public eye. Given how stressful the whole exercise was, I asked Keith Goh whether, given a chance, he would conduct such an operation again, and whether he would change his technique at all. "Certainly," he shot back promptly, "I would certainly do it much better next time." This, I think is the contribution of Ganga and Jamuna, and all those involved in giving them a brighter future, to medical science. The next time babies like them are born, they will have a better chance to be operated upon, and successfully, with all the experience of the past year and a half to draw upon. I feel that all those who were and still are involved in this case are privileged, and this privilege has been given to us by these children and their parents. ♦



The old age boom

Ageing has become easier physically. The challenge now is to help older people maintain the quality of their lives.



Against the advances of time, many adults deny themselves even small indulgences in the belief that virtuous moderation will ensure a healthy old age. New recruits to the war against ageing receive some basic training. Body map references are used daily to target damage attributed to the enemy—a single process called “ageing.” Eventually, even keen recruits admit that they are losing the battle. The language of surrender echoes. Battle-worn veterans say bluntly what younger

adults avoid talking about. In late life, people fear abandonment. Everyone suspects that they will be left unwanted because they are old.

If old people feel unwanted, why is biological science taking on ageing? Outsiders assume that the aims are worthy. Vague ideas are expressed about the prevention of suffering caused by age-related diseases. Tucked away inside this easy assumption is another rather more difficult idea. For many, including some scientists, “age-related” means the same as “age-

dependent.” By extension, the proper study of diseases that are more common with age must include careful analysis of the biology of ageing. If true, this might be a satisfactory explanation of what biological ageing research is all about.

As the pace of ageing research quickened, the assumption that “age-related” diseases were “age-dependent” did not stand up to scrutiny. As the detritus of life was peeled away from ageing, a great deal was lost, but what remained proved crucial. Long regarded as cardinal features of ageing,

the detritus could be explained by the lifelong accumulation of wear and tear, the damage caused by episodes of illness or, to more devastating effects, poverty, stress and malnutrition. Much as a house battered by winter storms will succumb to a spring tempest, so an individual’s capacity to withstand adversity in old age is diminished by recurrent illness.

The typical picture of old age is now seen to result from at least two processes. One is the depletion of resources available to cope with illness. Another—loosely termed “intrinsic ageing”—concerns the properties of ageing cells. Once the precise tools of molecular biology were applied to these intrinsic processes, rapid advances were made.

The problem of ageing has yielded to a better understanding of what is happening now to old people. There are more of them, they are healthier and when they have a serious illness it is often their last. In the developed world, the evidence of gradual but portentous changes in the well being of old people is easy to find. In 1975, around one in seven US men aged 80 was disabled in some way. By 1996, this had halved. Clinical scientists began to describe sizeable and growing numbers of “elite” old men (but fewer old women) who did not deteriorate as expected.

Community health studies showed that not only were old people becoming healthier, their experiences of illness were “compressed” into the last year or two of life. These improvements were the

direct result of improved living standards and community measures to reduce vascular disease and discourage smoking. Benefits like these are built on decades of sound progress in economic development and public health medicine. They will not be intentionally undone and are certain to continue to improve and maintain the health of old people for years to come.

Biological science, too, had its successes. Researchers identified molecular targets with the potential to slow or even arrest components of intrinsic ageing processes. One example will suffice. Antioxidant damage control and repair systems help contain the harmful effects of respiration on the cell. With ageing, these systems become inefficient and their failures can trigger a cascade of damage leading to cell death. Chemists have synthesised compounds capable of mimicking the beneficial effects of some antioxidant enzymes but with up to 100 times their potency.

Animal experiments tested these novel and highly potent compounds. They showed this type of agent could extend the life span of a laboratory animal by up to 50 percent. Of course, short term experiments like these do not establish such agents as safe for the decades of use that seem likely if they prove to be effective “anti-ageing” drugs. More likely they will be first evaluated as drugs to prevent the complications of acute tissue damage after, say, a heart attack or stroke. Only later will they be tested for long-term use, probably as adjuncts to other life-style interventions.

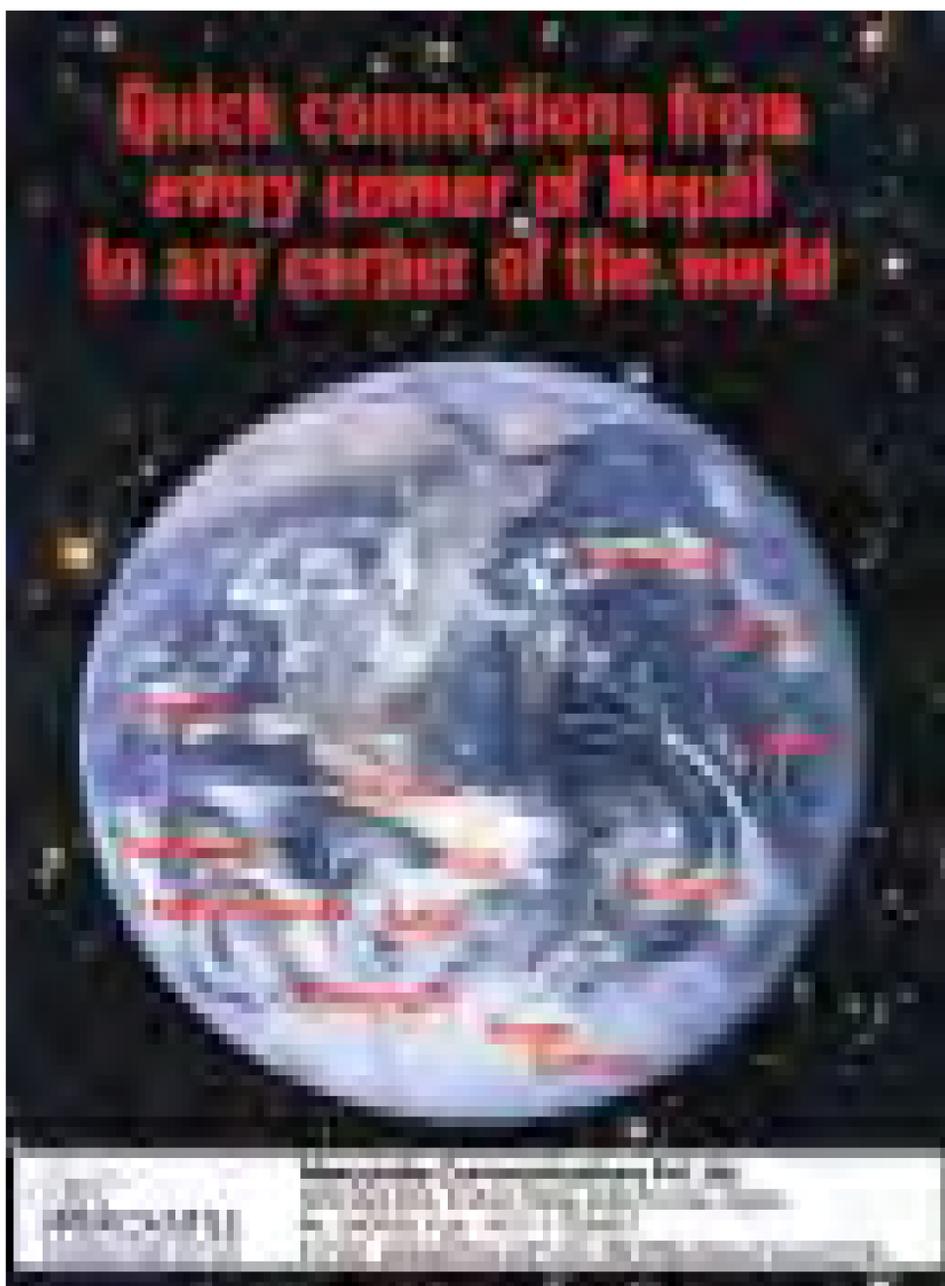
Improved health of old people with added disease “compression” looks likely to stay. Medical science is confident enough to

predict extensions and consolidations of these improvements and may soon introduce safe and effective anti-ageing agents. But at what cost?

It is certain that old people will enjoy and benefit from an old age with fewer disabilities. Many will prefer a short final illness to a more delayed departure. But what will be the quality of a life extended by 20 or even 40 years? Will old people feel any more wanted because of these gains? Or will they, as some do, believe that it is all to sustain a cult of youth and beauty, aimed to diminish the fears of the young and to postpone the prospect of worn out old age?

While the public remains fixed on the idea that old people are a burden, specialists in the care of the old must set out the broader picture. Healthy old people may not wish to leave productive work. Compulsory retirement on grounds of age is already indefensible. Instead, we should develop opportunities that retain old people as net contributors to our prosperity. Much as molecular biology drives the pharmaceutical industry and the development of novel agents, so the computer industry has revolutionised the workplace. These two powerful forces must be harnessed together to serve the common good of old people. (Project Syndicate) ♦

(Lawrence Whalley is a psychiatrist and professor of mental health at Aberdeen University, Scotland. His book *The Ageing Brain* was published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson in July.)



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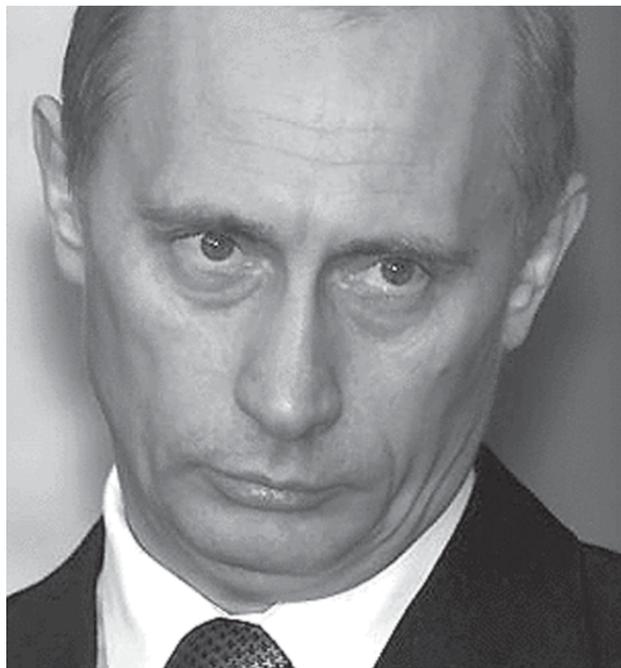
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OPINION

by BORIS NEMTSOV

Politics with a human face



problem in creating viable policies is that too many Russians want to live simultaneously under both market conditions and socialism. Blame our deeply ingrained traditional belief in miracles. This lack of realism made Russians so susceptible to financial pyramid schemes run by unscrupulous individuals, and a similar belief in miracles bedevils Russian politics. Political parties are meant to run on political programs, and if elected, turn those into government policy. But instead of the electorate choosing between parties and policies, Russian politics are ruled by a pendulum effect. People get sick of looking at the same faces in power, become disillusioned and demand change. Only the Communists seem to survive. They retain the biggest faction in parliament and control 20 regions. Even more control is exercised at the municipal level.

took security out of their lives, held power only for nine months. People complain that in that time he aroused so much hatred toward reforms that he strengthened the Communists' position. Possibly, but Russia was in a coma when he took power, and he brought the country back to life.

This history lesson is important to understand Putin's presidency. He has consistently pursued many liberal policies without portraying himself as liberal. He satisfies the Russian craving for a figure of authority and order, and so enjoys colossal support. That support is for the man, not his policies. History, though not Marx's rigid construct, does follow a type of logic. The rebellious Yeltsin had to be followed by someone even-tempered. Putin's arrival seemed predestined. Like him or not, the stabilisation he brought was overwhelmingly desired.

People say liberal democrats held power in the Yeltsin years, which is why liberal groupings, such as the Union of Right Forces of which I was leader, could not garner mass support. Russia's liberals are blamed for the last decade, not the Communists who created the crushing system liberals sought to change. That is nonsense. Viktor Chernomyrdin, a gas industry apparatchik, was premier for five-and-a-half years during the Yeltsin presidency. He is a good man, but neither a democrat nor a liberal. He was more concerned with not rocking the boat than building a better future for Russians. Yegor Gaidar, whom many still vilify as the man who

Meanwhile my associates—Gaidar, Anatole Chubais, and Irina Khakamada—and I are establishing a new democratic party with an explicit platform to assure that, together with others, we provide checks and balances to President Putin. Russian voters remain more likely to judge political forces by personalities and rather than scrutinising their platforms, but we believe in the political education of Russia's people. No revolution lasts forever, political ignorance and disillusion can also be overcome. ♦ (Project Syndicate) (Boris Nemtsov, a former deputy prime minister of Russia, is a leader of the Union of Right Forces.)

by RUDI DORNBUSCH

Russians focus on people rather than policies.

Without anyone noticing, Russia has become Europe's most liberal country—at least as far as taxes go. No one pays more than 13 percent in personal income taxes. People pay taxes more willingly, state revenues are increasing. President Putin may be few people's idea of a liberal, but his policies are undoubtedly such. For reasons peculiar to Russia, his is a liberalism that dare not speak its name. I have opposed Putin in the past, and may oppose him again, but credit should be given where it is due. Serious judicial reform is underway, Russia's "third branch of government"

is becoming less Leninist and less corrupt. Land sales have moved beyond the talking stage, with a Land Code near adoption. Labour relations are stabilising, the Duma approved a new Labour Code. Expenditure on education is to increase by 60 percent. Pensions are rising, though the pension system needs updating. We also need a more effective system of social security: 100 million Russians are entitled to various privileges, and not all of them are poor. Putin and his ministers know what needs to be done. Their

ANALYSIS

Productivity or unemployment



Europe is productive, while the US manages unemployment well.

Not only did America's bubble crash, but it now also appears that much of the 1990s US economic miracle never happened. When it comes to performance, Europe is king, not the US. An OECD study of the sources of economic growth brings together a formidable set of data and new views about who is doing well and who isn't. One new conclusion is that America's economic performance is not as glittering as previously thought. The accompanying table captures a central fact: the US had high growth in the 1990s, far more than Europe's largest economies. But the part about being a productivity miracle is wrong. This is apparent at the conventional level of output per person employed. But it gets even worse when we recognise that in Europe many fewer hours are worked per person than in America. On output per hour worked, Europe shows a full reversal. Suddenly a place thought dull—Germany—is the big winner. Germans don't work much, but when they do, it is with unmatched productivity. It seems from these numbers that Europe has figured out a neat trick: work little, work well. Not only was productivity growth better in Europe, but so also were productivity levels. Germany or France produced absolutely more dollars worth of output per hour worked than the US. So did Italy. Japan, with its inefficient service sector, was way below the US or Europe, as was the UK. How should we interpret this? One possibility is this: Europe's labour market is a great problem. It is over-regulated and inflexible and, on top of that, expensive even at the current low level of the Euro. Why be surprised, then, that

European firms shy away from labour and operate in a capital-intensive fashion. With high concentrations of capital per worker, other things being equal, labour is highly productive—that is the European model. Moreover, labour-intensive (i.e. low productivity) companies outsource some tasks or go offshore altogether. This is partially because restructuring in Europe is hard, and can result in a whole business leaving Europe altogether. Consequently, the firms that remain are the ones showing gains in productivity.

That is a smart model, but there is a downside. Europe has high unemployment because firms don't hire new workers. In the US, growth normally involves relatively less capital accumulation per worker and a small productivity gain per worker or per hour, but significantly more employment creation. Much of America's growth in the 1990s involved employing the unemployed and welfare recipients. Europe's growth, if high, keeps unemployment barely constant. Two different models, each with a downside. It would be good for Europe to get the extra benefit of massive job creation and for the US to enjoy stronger productivity in addition to its mammoth jobs machine. Is there a chance of either happening?

Europe does not stand much of a chance to emerge from its unemployment trap either in this recession or any time soon. Europe would need to stoke the economy with a lot of investment, cheap money, tax cuts for everyone, and perhaps public works spending, hard in these days of strict accounting. The story will remain good productivity—surprisingly good given Europe was not thought to be part of the "new economy". In the US there is recession and rising unemployment. The likely modest recovery will not be strong enough to outpace productivity. Next year, Europe and the US will look alike.

On productivity, the news may be somewhat better. This is the first time the US shows productivity growth in a recession (during which productivity normally turns negative). If this holds, and strengthens with recovery, as Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan seems to think it will, the US may soon face the European dilemma. It will do well on productivity, possibly better than Europe, but will not be able to get the unemployment rate down. It is not clear which is better. (Project Syndicate) (Rudi Dornbusch is Ford Professor of economics at MIT and a former chief economic advisor to both the World Bank and IMF.)

Growth 1990-98 (% per year, Source: OECD)			
	Actual GDP	GDP per Employee	GDP per Hour Worked
US	3.0	1.7	1.5
Germany	1.4	2.1	2.5
France	1.4	1.3	1.8
UK	2.0	2.0	1.9

New, clean money for old

BELGRADE - Last week three million Serbian households received flyers from the National Bank inviting them to convert hidden German Marks into Euro bank accounts, in a move being called an invitation to money laundering. Serbia is years away from EU membership but the bank wants to use the Euro's 1 January introduction to bring billions of hidden German Marks into the banking system. "Regaining the people's trust could partially revive the Serbian economy through resources still in the country," said National Bank governor Mladjan Dinkic. Dinkic estimates Serbs keep between three and five billion German Marks in cash (\$1.5-2.5 billion) in the grey economy. The money is repatriated by relatives working abroad or comes from the parallel economy which helped Serbs survive the 90s. The National Bank is offering a deposit of hard cash into bank accounts at 1.995583 Marks to a Euro. That carrot comes with a stick: While no questions will be asked about savings accounts opened with up to DM20,000, the bank will keep personal data of customers with sums bigger than that, and accounts with over DM30,000 will have to be investigated. The offer is on until 1 July, 2002, when a law against money laundering comes into force. Some, like financial analyst Dimitrije Boarov, are "doubtful whether many Euro accounts will really be opened." Serbs have good reason to question the safety of banks. The Milosevic regime simply took over \$5 billion from private saving accounts in 1991. Critics add that the scheme encourages money laundering by the new rich, who emerged when international sanctions were breached to great profit by Milosevic's circle. (IPS) ♦



The Pacific solution

SYDNEY - Australia is admitting that its 'Pacific Solution'—sending asylum seekers intercepted in the ocean to poor Pacific Island countries—may not be the solution to the refugee crisis. Australia came up with the policy in September, when the Norwegian freighter Tampa rescued over 400 people, mostly Iraqi, from a sinking ship between Indonesia and Australia. Australia refused to let the ship offload them in a local port and negotiated with Pacific Island nations Nauru and Papua New Guinea to house them in camps until UNHCR and Australian officials assess their claims. Since then, the Australian navy has intercepted more boats, and one has sunk with the loss of many lives. None that were rescued were allowed to enter Australia. Most are flown to Nauru and PNG, some to the Australian territory of Christmas Island, where they are not eligible to apply for "on-shore immigrant" status. But some are calling this plain bribery of smaller countries. Last month, Tuvalu and Fiji rejected Australia's request to take in 'boat people'. There are 700 asylum seekers housed in Nauru and 216 in PNG. Australia has allocated \$75 million to the Pacific Solution, calling it "burden sharing". When the Tampa crisis began, Australia offered Nauru \$10 million in financial assistance—a 20 percent boost to the GDP of the island of 11,000 people—and diesel worth \$5 million to end its chronic blackouts. PNG was also offered increases in aid, followed in October by a request to take in 1,000 more asylum seekers. Such tough policy on asylum seekers was a major factor in Prime Minister John Howard's recent re-election, but the government is now expressing doubts. "As for the Pacific solution, if we see reduced numbers of arrivals, it will be manageable," Ruddock said last week. "But," he added, "if you saw a marked increase in arrivals, one would have to change one's approach." Howard himself may be backing down. In a marked departure from his campaign rhetoric, he recently said that turning asylum seekers' boats back to sea was "completely inhuman". (IPS) ♦

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The pragmatic dictator

Pakistan's once-derided military ruler has bought himself some time, opportunities, and risks.

Three months ago, Gen Pervez Musharraf was an international pariah who had overthrown his country's elected government and yet failed to arrest Pakistan's slide towards the "failed state" category. Hit by sanctions over its 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan's economy was settling deeper into recession and default.

The 11 September attacks and the links found to Afghanistan-based Osama bin Laden presented President Musharraf with an apparently no-win choice. The US wanted to fly planes and missiles across Pakistan, stage helicopter raids from Pakistani airfields and use the ISI's close knowledge of the Taliban. Musharraf could refuse—and have a war fought across Pakistan anyway, while more sanctions and loan refusals sent it to the dogs. Or he could agree—and risk being undermined by a truculent ISI as Islamic fundamentalists stirred an impoverished, illiterate population into a Taliban-style revolution.

Musharraf pledged "unstinted support" for the US, allocated landing fields and air corridors, and replaced the ISI chief with a trusted army friend, Lieutenant-General Ehsan ul-Haq. He now looks good, though the Taliban's imminent defeat is a huge blow to Pakistan's long-term aim of creating a friendly strategic backyard in its northern neighbour. About 15 western foreign ministers have visited Islamabad, Musharraf has travelled overseas, and received billions of dollars in economic aid. Some of this has raised his prestige at home. More

importantly, Musharraf has called the fundamentalist Islamic parties' bluff that they could cause chaos.

The fundamentalists challenged the US-led campaign, sending more semi-literate youths to join the Taliban, starting what they planned as snowballing daily street demonstrations and, once the bombing began, encouraging a sceptical local press with exaggerated accounts of civilian casualties. The army came out when protests turned to riots in Quetta and Peshawar, and a few senior leaders of religious parties were detained, but Musharraf allowed the protests and press criticism, without much ado. And as the Taliban crumbled, the protests have tapered off.

Last week, in a nationally televised interview, Musharraf promised a crackdown on fundamentalists. Western diplomats hope Pakistan's political and diplomatic posture will move towards the secular Turkish model. But that is considered a big call, probably premature, by Pakistani political analysts such as Najam Sethi, editor of the Lahore weekly *The Friday Times*. "Having done a 180-degree turn on Afghanistan because he had a gun put to his head, Pervez Musharraf can hardly expect the army to reverse its entire political philosophy of the state, built up over 50 years."

Meanwhile India worries that though the ISI and al-Qaeda jihadis have been stymied in Afghanistan, their cadres of young suicide bombers are streaming into Kashmir, staging atrocities like the huge bomb blast in



its state assembly in Srinagar on 1 October. The US has fobbed off India's demands that organisations sponsoring such attacks, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba, be listed as targets in its war on terrorism, saying: "We'll get around to it." Sethi and others see Pakistan's role in Kashmir coming under Western scrutiny. "Pakistan's proactive Kashmir policy is beaded for stresses in months to come," Sethi said. "Musharraf will be pressured to rein in fundamentalists in Kashmir, in return India will agree to further talks. But probably Pakistan will make greater concessions than India."

Taking on the fundamentalists and winding back Pakistan's support for the 12-year-old Kashmir uprising is a task analysts can't see Musharraf carrying off on his own. "He has to take on allies from the political mainstream," Sethi said. "Only one person fits, Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party, though Musharraf hasn't yet said he will do business with her." Bhutto is in exile, though she backed Musharraf's stand on Afghanistan and during her visit to India last week indicated a wish to contain the Kashmir dispute. But

there are serious corruption charges against her and her jailed husband stemming from her two terms as prime minister. Musharraf has given no hint he will quash the arrest and trial that would greet her return to Pakistan. The other question is whether Musharraf can impart to his army colleagues and political parties a vision of a Pakistan out of rivalry with India, given that it is clear the US and Europe won't risk their links to India's huge economic and strategic potential for Pakistan.

Musharraf's record is of letting things drift until forced into a decision. He staged his coup against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (now exiled in Saudi Arabia) only after Nawaz left him literally stranded in mid-air, in an aircraft running out of fuel and denied landing permission. He joined the war on terrorism indeed with a gun at his head. "This man is guided by necessity rather than vision," Sethi says. "But since Pakistan will be guided by necessity for the next few years, perhaps it's better Musharraf is in the saddle." ♦ (Sydney *Morning Herald*)

East Timor and Kissinger, ca 1975

WASHINGTON - On the 26th anniversary of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor, the release of previously classified US documents make it clear that former President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger gave President Suharto the green light for the operation at a meeting in Jakarta the day before. According to the embassy record of the meeting released by the National Security Archive, an independent research group, Suharto told Ford in their 6 December talks, "We want your understanding if we deem it necessary to take rapid or drastic action (in East Timor)." Ford replied, "We will not press you on the issue. We understand the problem and the intentions you have." Kissinger, who has denied East Timor was discussed then, seconded Ford's statement with one reservation—the use of US-made arms in the invasion "could create problems" given legislation outlawing the use of US military equipment in offensive actions. He suggested the invasion might be framed in a way acceptable under US law. This newly public information is likely to fuel recent controversies over Kissinger's support of several brutal military regimes during his tenure as national security adviser and Secretary of State. A recent book by Christopher Hitchens, for instance, says Kissinger should be tried for war crimes for his policies in Indochina, Chile, Cyprus and Indonesia. Since Suharto took over in the 1960s, Washington had considerable influence as Jakarta's main western ally and source of military equipment. In the late 1960s, it significantly aided Indonesia's annexation and absorption of West Papua, re-named Irian Jaya. Suharto was looking for similar backing for his moves in East Timor. As many as 230,000 people—one-third of the former Portuguese colony's population—may have died from starvation, disease and counter-insurgency operations carried out by Indonesia's army in the late 1970s, making East Timor one of the worst genocides in the 20th century, according to Amnesty International. (IPS)

The long road to Mandalay

BANGKOK - Exiled Burmese human rights activists are losing patience with the slow progress made in 14 months of dialogue between the military government, the opposition, led by the detained leader of the National League for Democracy, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, and a special UN envoy. After visiting Rangoon, UN envoy and former Malaysian diplomat Razali Ismail, was reticent about the substance of the talks, but quoted as saying he was hopeful about "the eventual outcome" of his mission, pushing for human rights and democracy in a country oppressed by a military regime since 1988. Aung Zaw, editor of

Irrawaddy, an independent magazine that covers Burma, says, "It is very unlikely an agreement will be reached. I don't share Razali's views, nor do a lot of people inside Burma." Activists say this assessment, and the critique that the Rangoon government is gaining political mileage from the talks, is not misplaced. While the government in Rangoon, which calls itself the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), claims it has allowed the NLD to reopen its offices, the reality reveals the limits on the freedom of association—intelligence personnel are permanent fixtures near the offices, monitoring NLD activities, activists say. As for Rangoon's assertion that it has freed 200 political prisoners, largely NLD activists,



since January, Ye Htut, a member of the Bangkok-based Burma Lawyers' Council, says, "Most were freed because their sentences had expired. But they aren't so keen to free the other 1,500 or so political prisoners, some of the strongest NLD voices." Then there is the long-time criticism of Rangoon for its use of forced labour, including recently by the ILO. Rights monitors say forced labour in Burma ranges from clearing forests, repairing roads and carrying goods for the military, to more dangerous work such as minesweeping. In addition, there are continued reports of "widespread human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings and rape," states the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN), a Bangkok-based rights lobby. Rights abuses are also the order of the day in conflict-affected areas of the ethnic Shan, Karen and Mon, says the New York-based Human Rights Watch. (IPS)

Fight terror with terror

NEW DELHI - The lower house of the Indian Parliament was forced to adjourn earlier this week by members of the Congress party, the regional Samajwadi (socialist) Party, the Rastriya Janata Dal and the Communist Parties opposing the new Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), a version of which the government is seeking to enact. Senior Congress party leader Pranab Mukherjee said: "There are many clauses that violate human rights and rule of law. Under this ordinance, the onus is on the accused to prove their innocence." The new version of the bill tries to accommodate popular opinion by deleting a clause compelling journalists to pass on to government information that might help prevent terrorist activity. India's Law Minister Arun Jaitley said the bill was necessary to rid the country of terrorism in places like Kashmir. "We have been asking other countries to ban terrorism and terrorist outfits and it is now necessary for us to enact laws similar to those in the US and the UK." But D Raja, secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) countered, reflecting the mood of the opposition parties, "There is every possibility the new law will be misused, especially when nothing is being done about badly needed police and judicial reforms." The Congress Party, the CPI, the SP and the RJD all have a "secular" stance and consistently champion the rights of minorities, particularly the large Muslim community they say is unsafe with the blatantly pro-Hindu BJP. While the BJP and its allies in the ruling National Democratic Alliance can get the bill through the lower house, opposition parties dominate the upper house and swear they will veto it when it gets there for the necessary ratification. Jaitley said the new bill focuses on confiscation of the property and funds of terrorist outfits, and banning and intercepting them, and also points to various provisions in the bill to make police officials accountable for their actions. (IPS)



The king and Thaksin

From a moral high ground, Thailand's king talks tough on the premier's policies.

The king's birthday speech before Cabinet members, senior bureaucrats and social leaders—led by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—will be a turning point for the country which, he made no bones about warning, is in a major decline. Admitting he had spent considerable time thinking about what he wanted to say to the nation's leaders and the Thai people for his birthday address this year, our beloved monarch delivered a strong statement peppered with words intended to give them a rude awakening: "catastrophe", "double standards" and "egoism".

His Majesty confessed he was unhappy as the country is backsliding instead of developing. He drew laughter from those in the Dusitdai Throne Hall when he commented on Thaksin's "long face", but soon the king's seriousness sank in and a number of political leaders began squirming. No government in recent memory has witnessed such a pessimistic speech from the king, and nobody in the royal audience would have felt his words more distinctly than premier Thaksin, who turned increasingly red towards the end.

The king's remarks ought to help remove any doubt the people, especially in educated and professional circles, have about the government. His criticism requires the administration, particularly the prime minister in whom power is concentrated, to radically review its role in running the country. The king has asked every Thai citizen to help him think of the meaning of "double standard". With Your Majesty's permission, *The Nation* would like to offer its interpretation. To us, the expression is a reminder to be truthful to oneself. Double standards prevent us from being true to our principles, because we use one "rule"

to measure our morality or merits and another for other people. In public administration, "double standard" means a lack of moral authority for the national leader, because in applying different rules for different people, he is alienating himself, not sharing the people's thoughts and plight. No law or force is as effective a stamp of power over the people as moral authority, which the king has studiously built up during his over 50-year reign.

In our view, the government has made little effort to build up its moral authority. First, the prime minister hates criticism or opposing views, but freedom to speak is a hallmark of development. Second, many Cabinet members are involved in conflicts of interest concerning their business backgrounds and there is no attempt to deal with this. Third, there is a clear double standard in the treatment of various socio-economic groups. People close to the government—advisers, business allies—have not yet been held to account for the 1997 Baht fiasco. Foreign allies and businesses are discriminated against, though all ought to be treated equally and fairly. Fourth, the public is confused by the political spin on many issues, causing widespread concern and loss of direction. Laws are being changed for reasons unacceptable in a civilised society, like those allowing wives of public office holders to maintain businesses related to state concessions.

The people are fed the line that all is well and being taken care of—at a time when hardship is real for many and extra effort is needed to create unity to overcome the country's problems. A government without moral authority does not have credibility, nor can be regarded as reliable in serving the country's interest—no matter how good its policies may be on paper. Add arrogance and intolerance to the mix and disunity arises, the very thing the king said would lead the country to a catastrophe.

His Majesty has given Prime Minister Thaksin and his team some serious homework. They will have to do some heavy soul searching if the decline towards a catastrophe is to be reversed. ♦ (Editorial in *The Nation*, Bangkok, 6 December.)



Not by force alone



Punarjagaran, 4 December

Excerpts from an interview with Pashupati SJB Rana of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party

Is the nation in a state of civil war?

I was out of the country when all of a sudden I learnt that the Maoists had broken off the talks. Their attacks in Dang and Syangja were very tragic. The government has every right granted to it by the constitution to take all necessary measures to control this insurgency. Everything the government is doing right now falls within the parameters of the constitution. We can only pass judgement on how these measures are implemented, because the government has imposed an emergency and issued an ordinance concerning the situation. Three things have happened at the same time. [The imposition of the emergency, designating the Maoists as terrorists and the promulgation of the anti-terrorism ordinance.] We cannot guess how the situation will play itself out. It has only been a week, so we will have to wait and see how effective these actions will be and analyse the results. It is not such a simple thing to do, suspending human rights. After the army was attacked, the government had to take some action and it did what it had to do.

Are you saying that whatever action the government has taken after the Maoists broke off the dialogue is correct?

Our central committee will pass its judgement only after analysing the results.

Are you implying that there may be misuse of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention and Control) Ordinance, 2001?

If you analyse the history of the Nepali Congress, you will find that whenever it has been given such powers, it has exploited them to benefit the party. The truth is that at present the country is facing a major problem, and that is all due to corruption and nepotism. In such a situation the Nepali Congress must be very patient, it must be able to restrain itself and it must utilise the powers given to it by the constitution in a proper manner. The Nepali Congress has never faced a problem of such magnitude earlier. So, in order to be able to tackle the situation, it must work very differently, it cannot go back to its normal behaviour. We have to wait and see if it functions appropriately.

People are saying that democratic rights will never return.

I do not feel it necessary to view the current context that way. It all depends on how the government functions. We are now faced with a certain situation. A new agency is being deployed. What is to be done when an agency is mobilised? What must be done in general? This problem will not be solved only through war. The government had earlier also made provisions concerning the development and security of the country. How should these development programs be carried forward? What must be done under the security programmes? It is the time right now to make some changes. The government must be able to win the minds of the people, and for that, it will need to initiate some programmes. Some fundamental changes have to be brought about and improvements will have to be made as and when required. There must be special programmes for people who fall below the poverty line. Corruption has become a major problem and has to be controlled. If corruption increases during this emergency, we will soon be facing an even bigger problem.

Earlier, when Girija Prasad Koirala was prime minister and wanted to deploy the army, everyone protested. Now when the army has been deployed, everyone says the king and the prime minister see eye to eye.

I do not think like that. I was not here at either time, so I cannot answer this question.

Will the Maoist problem be solved just with the use of force?

How can it be solved by force alone? Whatever the Maoists do, I cannot say that theirs is simply a political agenda. All that has been happening until now—corruption, indiscipline, earlier missteps—all these have ignited the protest. We have to understand the reasons behind the revolt. As I said earlier, we have to bring about changes in our political, economic and social sectors. We have to prove that we can have a government that is disciplined, patient, and that works for the benefit of the people. I feel the government now is following a one-track agenda. Security is only one aspect of it. Development and poverty alleviation must go together with security. When we had a dialogue, everything was concentrated on security; now that we have declared war, everything is still concentrated on security. If we are to move forward, eventually we will have to negotiate. This problem will not be resolved only through the use of force.

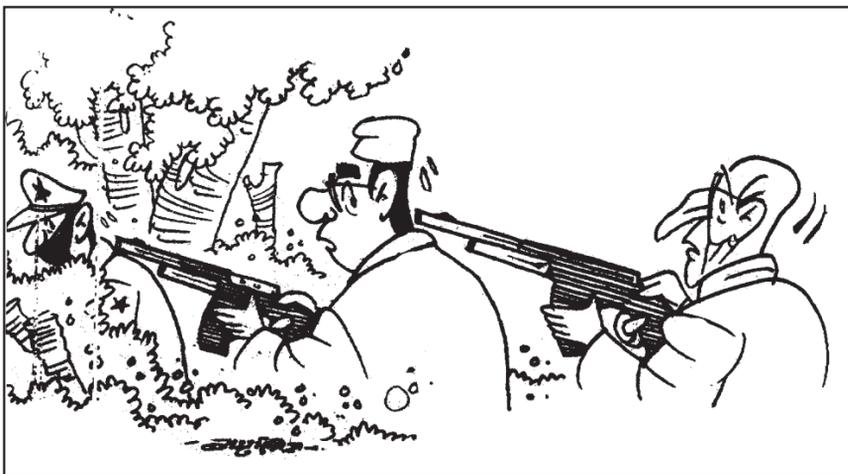
People say that there is a special relationship between you and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Haven't you given him any advice?

Definitely, we have a great relationship. We worked together for 19 months. That time also we worked on big projects, like the Mahakali project, etc. If he asks me anything, certainly, we can share ideas.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

I do not like this (emergency) at all. I never wanted the emergency... the situation called for it.

—King Gyanendra in *Naya Sadak*, 11 December 2001



बुधवार

Budhabar, 12 December

Dang reportage

Jana Aastha, 5 December

आस्था

Loose cannon

The Maoists attacked the army in Dang and carried off three cannons with them. Will the Maoists use these cannons against the army? The people need not be worried that the Maoists will use them. The cannons were a curse, not a boon to the Maoists.

According to army sources, the Maoists carried off three 81 mm cannons from the Dang barracks but they will not be able to use them. Although they took away the cannons, they were not able to take their "base plates" on which the cannons must be placed to be used. The army officials are smiling.

For the cannons to be functional, the guns have to be fixed on to the plates before firing. If the cannon is not fixed to the base-plate and then used, it will be uncontrollable, causing more damage to the people firing it than against whom it is being used. As the Maoists did not carry out the cannon's base plates, these weapons are little more than a source of trouble for them.

Forewarning, movie-style

Next to the barracks are a small village and shrubs. The Maoists hid in these shrubs and fired into the barracks with their .303 guns. When the firing started, the telephone in the signal room rang. An officer



answered the phone and the voice on the other end said, "The noise you hear outside is not from firecrackers being burst. It is us, Maoists, and we will be attacking you in a few moments. The firing and this telephone call were just to warn you. Do you have the guts to fight us?"

Captain Thapa had been transferred from the barracks in Bhaluwang to Ghorahi that very day. As soon as he heard the threat, he replied, "We are prepared to fight you. Come on in if you really want to fight." As soon as he said this, the Maoists, who earlier had been firing from the south only, opened fire from three sides, the south, west and the east. As the firing started, an army personnel made his way to the signal room and informed the barracks in Surkhet, Rolpa, Dailekh and Kathmandu. When the firing started no one had a clue where the telephone directory was, but luckily the person in the signal room knew the telephone numbers of the barracks in Rolpa and Dailekh and was able to give a live commentary on the battle taking place right in front of him. After the Maoists overran the barracks, they found him, dragged him out and asked, shouting, whether he too was fighting them. To save his life, this man lied and said he was a new recruit who had just joined the force...

Guns without gumption

In earlier encounters between the police and the Maoists, the police had a lot of trouble with their pre-World War II weapons. Similarly, the army had to face a lot of trouble using their outdated weapons. As a result, the

Maoist forces could successfully overrun the barracks and all the army personnel there were killed. The extra magazines did not fit into the SMG guns, while the general purpose machine guns simply did not fire. These shortcomings helped the Maoists to a great extent.

The Maoists' beef

After their success in Dang, the Maoists threw a party for their activists in Holeri. They included everyone they had taken prisoner, and Chief District Officer Lok Bahadur Khatri was also invited to the party. As Khatri tells it, the Maoists even served beef. Khatri has not divulged whether he himself partook of the feast.

Tender to teach

Rajdhani, 6 December

राजधानी

You might be surprised to hear that nowadays teachers are being appointed using the tender system. Last week, teachers were selected in just this manner for Bhrikuti Primary School in Madanpur Village Development Committee of Nuwakot district.

The school has financial problems and a severe shortage of teachers, and the villagers decided they had to do something about it. According to system they devised, the selected teacher would be from Madanpur, would be paid a minimum amount and be more a

has been thoroughly decimated by the Royal Nepal Army. They were itching for a fight and have been completely destroyed within a week of engaging the army. The Maoist forces lost five platoons at one go in Salleri. Ganga Bahadur Karki, alias Comrade Bishwa, an alternate member of the Maoist central committee and political commissar of the Salleri mission, was also killed in this encounter. The Maoists wanted to capture Solu and used five platoons and hundreds of other militia in this operation. There are 39 soldiers in a platoon, which means the Maoists lost 245 soldiers in Salleri.

Sources tell us that the Maoist forces overran the district headquarters of Solu and then moved towards the army barracks. The army was waiting for them, and slaughtered the rebels. The army is said to have lost four personnel when the Maoists attacked from the rear. They had killed the sentry earlier in the encounter and so could enter the barracks compound. They then started attacking with socket bombs. A female militia member was among the first to be killed.

The army used their military tactics once the firing on the barracks intensified. The encounter continued until 6AM, by which time the army had completely destroyed five platoons of the Maoist forces. Only a few Maoists were alive after this encounter.

Revolution?

Budhabar, 5 December

बुधवार

The central committee of the Communist Party of Nepal (Masal) has concluded the following about the activities of the Maoists aimed at fighting reactionaries and other counter-revolutionaries who were granted limited political rights after the 1990 revolution: The Maoists have done nothing of this sort, instead they have helped those very forces they claim they want to destroy. This is the prognosis of Ram Singh Shris, general secretary of Masal.

Shris' release also says that the extreme activities of the Maoists show that they are opportunists, lack political stability and gravity and are not firm in their objectives. "Our party," says the release, "fully opposes this behaviour..."

Unsuccessful

Budhabar, 5 December

बुधवार

The Maoists' declarations at their second national convention early this year lay great emphasis on the military aspect of their struggle. Today's events show that all that was written about their military activities was worthless. The military aspects have all proved unsuccessful, and it is time for a new military strategy. Their entire war policy has been a failure.

After attacking the army at Dang and being decimated, what is the next step they will take? If victorious, it will be an all-out war, if they are defeated, they will again look for a political route of escape.

The Maoists never prepared for an emergency—they were sure it would never be imposed. It is clear that they only expected the army to be mobilised. The emergency has proved very detrimental to them. It has completely destroyed their political position and the validity of their political thought. They have been branded terrorists. Their propaganda machine has been completely incapacitated.

volunteer than a paid employee. Of the eight people who submitted applications, Manohar Lama was selected as he had quoted the lowest amount. Rs 2,000 per year to teach at the school. Lama will have to work eight months of the year as a volunteer and for the other four months, he will be paid Rs 500 per month. This VDC falls in Nuwakot's election constituency number one and is a three-hour walk from the district headquarters, Bidur. Each person submitting applications was asked to deposit Rs 200. According to the school's principal, Jagannath Silwal, none of the eight candidates had studied beyond the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) level.

Rajendra Mani Khanal, the village representative in the District Development Committee, says the villagers collected Rs 80,000 this past Tihar for the school. This money will be used to construct the school building, add grade nine and pay teachers.

A year earlier, teachers were appointed in the same way in a school in Ramechhap. The person selected had agreed to work for Rs 400 per month. And three months ago, another teacher was selected similarly in Sindhuli. There is a shortfall of 27,000 teachers nationwide, but because of financial problems the government has not been able to meet this requirement. This is why schools in villages have adopted this way to get the teachers they need.

Suicidal mission

Dristi, 4 December

दृष्टि

The "People's Liberation Army"

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

After its success at the Asia Cup, the Nepali under-19 cricket team is all set for the big one: the Youth World Cup. Preparations for the World Cup have already begun, with the team in a closed camp at the Kirtipur Stadium. A lot is expected of the boys after their Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Under-19 Youth Cup victory here in Nepal in early October. Things are looking up for the future of Nepali cricket, but the question everyone is asking is: will the juniors be as competitive when playing for a foreign audience at the World Cup in New Zealand in January?

Nepal, the only non-test-playing nation from Asia to have made it to New Zealand, will be pitted against Pakistan, England and Papua New Guinea in Group 'C'. The team is going in with better preparation and significantly higher morale than it did in Sri Lanka last year, when it was the only International Cricket Council associate member to qualify. Even so, most cricket observers here feel the Nepali team's chances for a miracle are slim, to say the least.

The Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) has organised two phases of closed camps, the first of which began on 21 November, with 19 hopefuls doing their best. Their daily routine in the camp begins with fitness training in the morning, followed by batting and bowling practice at the nets till the noon. Assistant coach Samson Jung Thapa feels the team was allowed a longer rest than they should have been after the ACC trophy, which brought down their level of fitness.

"Two weeks would have been ideal," he explains adding, "A month-long rest means we will have to work a bit harder." But he's happy with the effort the young cricketers are making to get back to their optimum training level.

In addition to the usual coaching in batting, bowling and fielding, this time around the emphasis is on practice games. "These are vital for the boys, as it gives them a chance to play in match-like situation," says Thapa. Two practice matches were held against Yeti Airways recently. At the end of the first training camp, the Nepali team will travel to Indore, India on 16 December to play five one-dayers with local clubs there.

The junior side can use all the help they get, and the presence in the training camps of Sri Lankan batting whiz Roy Dias, who coached them to victory in the ACC, gives them hope. In addition to Dias, former Sri Lankan paceman Romesh Ratnayake and Indian fitness expert Dr Vace Paes are also in Nepal helping the team. Thapa is glad of the help, which he says is not only technical, but also improves the morale of the team. "There is lots of team spirit and the boys' confidence has received a boost."

Since this is only their second time a Nepali national squad has made it to the Youth World Cup,

the prospects of entering the super-league are distant. With regular test playing nations like Pakistan and England in the group, the league matches will be a hard battle for Nepal. The only other team of Nepal's calibre in this group is Papua New Guinea.

Though Papua New Guinea is the obvious choice for an easy Nepali win, Thapa feels the chances of a good fight against England aren't that bad either. "The English team is traditionally weak on spin bowling. We can exploit this to our advantage," he explains. If spinners Lakpa Sherpa and Shakti Gauchan can repeat their brilliant Asia Cup performance, Nepal can cause some interesting trouble for the English batting side. Bowling will be Nepal's trump card as usual, and not only because of the spinners. With Binod Das, Manjeet Shrestha, Sanjam Regmi and Pramod Basnet, Nepali bowling also has all-important variety. Skipper Das will spearhead the pace attack, aided by Shrestha and Basnet. The New Zealand pitch favours medium pacers like Das and the others.

The downside is that it won't be so easy for the batsmen. Although Gauchan and Kanishka Chaugain's batting was admirable at the last tournament, they might find it difficult to adjust

Nepali cricket

Can the Nepali junior cricket team can repeat its Asia Cup performance at the Youth World Cup?

their batting to the seaming wicket they will be playing on next month.

CAN has not announced the final list of the players yet, but chances are, the 14 players who took part in Youth Asia Cup will be retained. "We do not want to disturb a set-up that is doing well. The boys have mixed well and understand each other well," says CAN secretary Binay Raj Pandey. "There might be a couple of new faces if there are injuries or other problems," he adds.

It's not only the pitch that will be new, for the first time, Nepali players will don coloured clothes and play with white balls. CAN has designed a red, blue and white uniform for the squad, which is likely to be approved by the tournament organisers, the New Zealand Cricket Council.



MIN BALRACHARYA

Youth World Cup Cricket was started in 1997 to provide a platform for budding cricketers. England won the first edition in South Africa. Two years later, India lifted the cup in Sri Lanka. Over the years, this tournament has become the place from where talented young players make their way to senior teams. Ritender

Sodhi, Yuvraj Singh, who were part of the winning Indian team in 1999 now play one-day cricket for the country.

As for Nepal, the fact that the junior team shows so much promise means that, hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, the national squad might show its mettle in the international arena. ♦

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Mystic moviemaker

Ismail Merchant, responsible for numerous adaptations of literary classics to celluloid, has come out tops with his rendition of VS Naipaul.



SUJOY DHAR

KOLKATA - What happens when an Indian Oscar-winning filmmaker adapts on celluloid a novel by a controversial Indian Nobel laureate on the immigrant Indian community in the Trinidad of the 30s?

The outcome is sheer movie magic—a feast for the eyes and minds of cinema enthusiasts across the world, a toast in the international film festival circuit and even a cue for many to peep into the history of the Caribbean islands.

India-born, New York-based producer-director Ismail Merchant now basks in the rave response to his screen adaptation of *The Mystic Masseur*, one of the best known novels of this year's Nobel literature winner VS Naipaul and based on the Indian diaspora in Trinidad.

"We were apprehensive about obtaining the rights to the novel from Sir Vidia. But I think because of our reputation he entrusted us with the novel," said Merchant, the Oscar-winning director-producer of the famous Merchant Ivory Production.

The film brings alive the saga of Indian indentured labour that arrived in the Caribbean to work on the sugar plantations in the second half of the 19th century, after slavery had been abolished in the British Empire. *The Mystic Masseur* is a rare insight into the warmth and humour of these characters' lives as the Indian community in Trinidad began to grow and prosper.

The film, at times hilarious, is the story of the rise and fall and the final acceptance of life of the protagonist Ganesh Ransumair (played by Asif Mandavi), a

schoolteacher with the outsized ambition of becoming an author and later a politician in Port of Spain.

Merchant recalled wooing the London-based Sir Vidia before he finally obtained the filming rights for *The Mystic Masseur*. "I went on location-hunting to Trinidad and returned to London with photographs of Sir Vidia's home, possible location and the Indian community there. Then I invited him and his wife Nadira to dinner at my London flat."

"I cooked mackerel for him. I had brought chilli sauce from Trinidad. I put in a little tamarind. And then my daal (pulses) with lemon. But Nadira came into the kitchen and told me that Naipaul hated mackerel. Well, it was too late, and I took the platter in. Naipaul tasted it, looked at me and said it was splendid," said a beaming Merchant, whose culinary skills are formidable.

"Making this film was one of the most pleasant of experiences," said Merchant. "It was as if the whole island had turned up and the spirit of Naipaul was everywhere. There are great actors there in Trinidad and they were willing to contribute more than the script asked of them."

Said screenplay writer Caryl Phillips, "When I read the book for the second time, I was convinced that it was a book which not only could be filmed, but was one that was rich in character, in comedy, and full of pathos."

"The early novels of VS Naipaul, including this novel, had always held a special appeal for me as they seemed to depict a

Trinidad that the author had some affection for. I felt it would be a challenge to adapt this novel for the screen," Phillips said. "Caribbean life has been underrepresented in the cinema, and the islands have often been used as little more than an exotic backdrop for stories of people whose lives are not invested in the region. Ismail Merchant appeared to be ready to address this problem," he said.

"As a writer, working on *The Mystic Masseur* was a privilege. A wonderful novel, a beautiful island with an enthusiastic and supportive populace, and a film company prepared to woo me, not with false promises, but with the assurance that they would include me in key decisions along the way," he added. Says internationally-renowned Indian actor Om Puri, who played an important role in the film:

"Working with Merchant was a great pleasure. I worked on my accent a lot to make it perfect."

The film has received praise in the United States. Cinema doyen Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* wrote: "With great cast, performances, beautiful cinematography and an excellent music score, the richly-layered *Masseur* is an enchanting piece of work."

But Ismail Merchant's celluloid courtship with Nobel laureates seems to have only just begun. "I am going to capture on celluloid the intellectual bonding of two of the greatest litterateurs of the last cen-

tury—Bengali literary giant Rabindranath Tagore and French author, savant and philosopher Romain

Rolland," said Merchant. "We have started research on this project. Catherine Berge, who directed Merchant Ivory production *Gaach* three years back and Caryl Phillips, screenplay writer of *The Mystic Masseur* are currently working on it," said the maker of memorable screen versions as literary classics *Howard's End*, *Maurice* and *A Room With A View*.

However, Merchant's next venture is a project based on a novel by Diane Johnson. "Our next film is *La Divorce*," says

the maker of some 46 feature films who has just completed shooting of *Merci Doctorey* based on their original screenplay and set in Paris. Merchant, who on 19 November was conferred the New York State Governor's Arts Award at Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Big Apple, marked his fortieth anniversary in film career in April this year with the release of another celluloid adaptation of literature, *The Golden Bowl*. Merchant is also toying with the idea of filming the recent works of such noted Indian authors as Shashi Tharoor (*Riot*) and Amitav Ghosh (*The Glass Palace*). (IPS)

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EXHIBITION

❖ **Textiles of Gujarat** Until 12 January, Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 413580
 ❖ **Colour from the world around us** Art photography by Navin Joshi. Until 26 December, Park Gallery, Pulchowk. 522307
 ❖ **Prints** by Finnish printmaker Juha Holopainen. Until 23 December. 12noon-6PM, Shivata Art Gallery, Pilgrims Book House, Kuponol. 521159

TALK

❖ **Bungadya: The tenacious survivor of a pan-Asian Buddhist cult** by William Douglas, Oxford University. 10 December, 4PM, Library Hall, Royal Nepal Academy, Kamaladi. Talk followed by discussion, snacks. The South Asia Institute, Heidelberg and the Royal Nepal Academy.



EVENTS

❖ **Friends of the Bagmati** Citizens groups meets to restore life into Kathmandu's Valley's water system. For details of December programmes email dwarika@mos.com.np
 ❖ **Contemporary Jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Francaise Sundays and Tuesdays 4.30PM-6.30PM, 241163. At Banu's, Kamal Pokhari, Wednesdays 6.30PM-8PM, Saturdays 1.30PM. 434024, 434830
 ❖ **Children's party** Food, drink and games. Rs 400 per head. 15 December, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 273999
 ❖ **Kids Karnival** Fun, food and festivities for children, including Santa Claus, poolside buffet, games, face-painting, clowns, carols, music and dance, and surprise gift for every child. Rs 600 per head. 22 December. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234

MUSIC

❖ **Live acoustic music** Dinesh Rai and Deependra every Friday and Sunday at the Himalatte Café. 7.30PM-10PM 262526
 ❖ **Live music** Tuesdays and Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant. 414336
 ❖ **Himalayan Feelings Fusion** band every Friday night with full Sekuwa dinner and complimentary beer or soft drink. Rs 555 per head or Rs1010 per couple net. Traditional dances nightly in the lamp-lit courtyard, free entry. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

❖ **Special cake shop** Cakes, pastries, breads, cookies, yule logs, turkeys, stockings, pies, jujubes, terrines, mousse and other specialities. Solatee Crowne Plaza. 273999
 ❖ **Christmas cakes and hampers** including cakes, puddings, stollen, mince pies, yule logs, cookies, marzipan, shortbread, toffee, wine and more. The Pastry Shop, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 221711
 ❖ **Christmas and Eve dinners** Five courses at Chimney, Rs 2,500 per head, or Sunrise Café buffet with roast turkey and mulled wine, Rs 1,000 per head, 24 December. X-Mas brunch, Rs 850 per head, 25 December. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999.
 ❖ **Creamy delights** Cookies, home-baked breads, stollen, plum cake, gingerbread, fruit tarts, log cake and more. Christmas gift hampers too. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234 or .
 ❖ **Christmas Eve buffet dinner** with roast turkey, exotic dessert, glass of mulled wine. Rs 650 per adult; 50 percent less children under 12. Also Christmas brunch at same rates with live folk music. Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 412999

EATING OUT

❖ **Children's Saturday** Games, prizes and food every Saturday, 12 noon onwards. Bakery Café Baneswor and Teku.
 ❖ **Spa and Swiss Food** Spa Rejuvenation Cuisine Special brunch with use of health club and swimming pool. Sundays, 11.30AM-5PM. Rs 750. Daily dinner fondue, Rs 1,200 for two and raclettes, Rs 900 per head. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999.
 ❖ **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
 ❖ **Le Cafe des Trekkers** New Tibetan and French restaurant. Special 10 percent discount on Nepali menu until 7 December. Jyatha, Thamel, opposite Hotel Blue Diamond. 225777
 ❖ **Authentic Thai food** Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant. 425510
 ❖ **Far Pavilion** Indian cuisine with Sapan Pariyar and Suresh Manandhar. Everyday except Tuesday. 8PM-11PM, The Everest Hotel
 ❖ **Ceremonial Newari and Nepali cuisine** Daily lunch and evening, six to 20 courses, from \$19 per head. Krishnarpan, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
 ❖ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays and Sundays at the Godavari Village Resort. 560675
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 ❖ **Special short Christmas and New Year breaks** Starting from \$155 per couple for two nights at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488



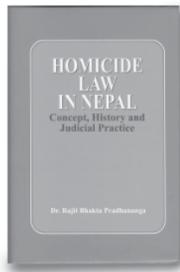
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by MIKU



BOOKWORM



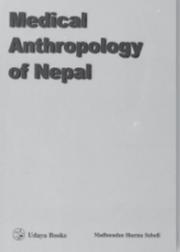
Homicide Law in Nepal: Concept, History and Judicial Practice Raji Bhakta Pradhananga
 Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 2001
 Rs 895

This volume starts by examining the criminalisation of homicide in Nepal. Pradhananga then goes on to the concept of culpable homicide and its categories, including murder and manslaughter. The volume also discusses diminished responsibility, suicide pacts, provocation, infanticide, intoxication, and battered women. There is extensive discussion of the concept of causation and, finally, an overview of the historical element of homicide law.

Nepal at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Gender, Health and Medical Information Narayan Bahadur Basnet

By arrangement with the Department of Paediatrics, University of Tokyo, 2001
 Rs 177

A basic primer on the history and society of Nepal. The volume includes discussions on race and ethnicity, the transition of modern Nepal to a democracy, the human, material and cultural resources of the country, and prospects for development. There is special emphasis on the status of health, education, women and children.



Medical Anthropology of Nepal Madhusudan Sharma Subedi
 Udaya Books, Kathmandu, 2001
 Rs 350

Subedi begins with a discussion of the concept of medical pluralism and how it relates to Nepal. There are more particular chapters on theories of illness causation and interpretation, cultural knowledge of hygiene and sanitation, ideologies of food, health and illness, the role of mediums and other traditional healers, as well as acupuncture and allopathic therapies.

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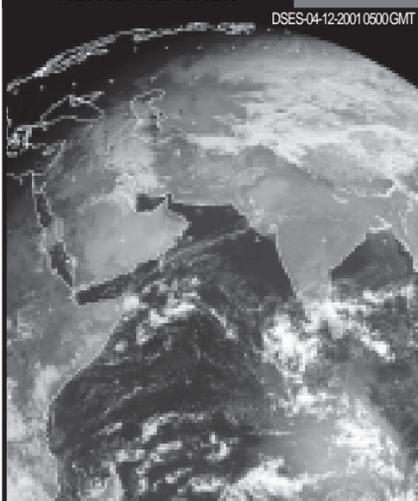
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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



DSES-04-12-2001 05:00 GMT

Cloud, cloud and more cloud. This satellite picture from Wednesday morning shows a fresh westerly wave approaching the western Himalaya. There might be a short break in the weather, but mostly it will be unrelenting gloom and more cold along the Himalaya and the tarai. Unfortunately, the cold will be dry—these clouds will not bring any precipitation either, the only thing that could clear the haze. Wheat farmers, who need rain as well as sunny weather, will be frustrated for another week. The night temperatures will remain more or less the same, but the days will become even chillier.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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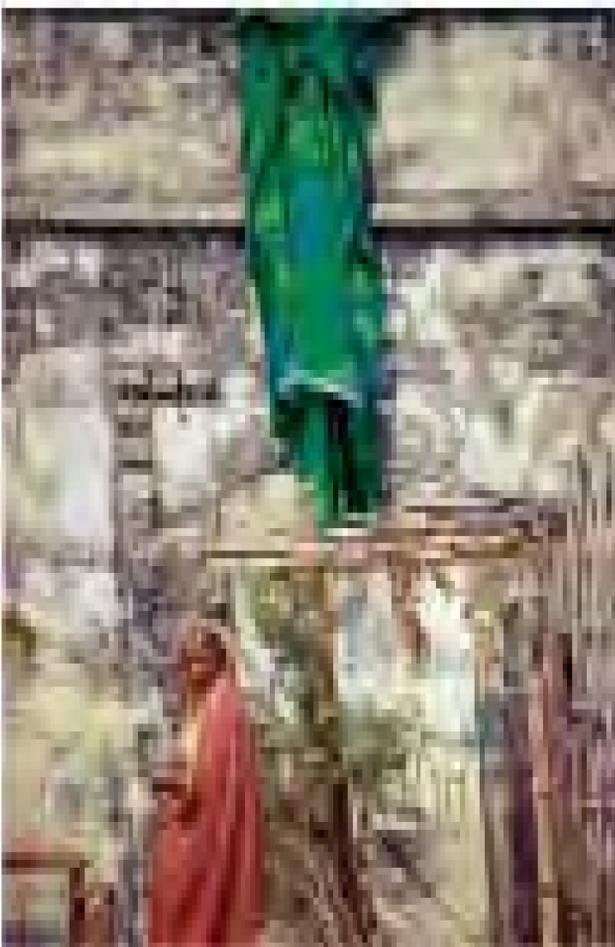
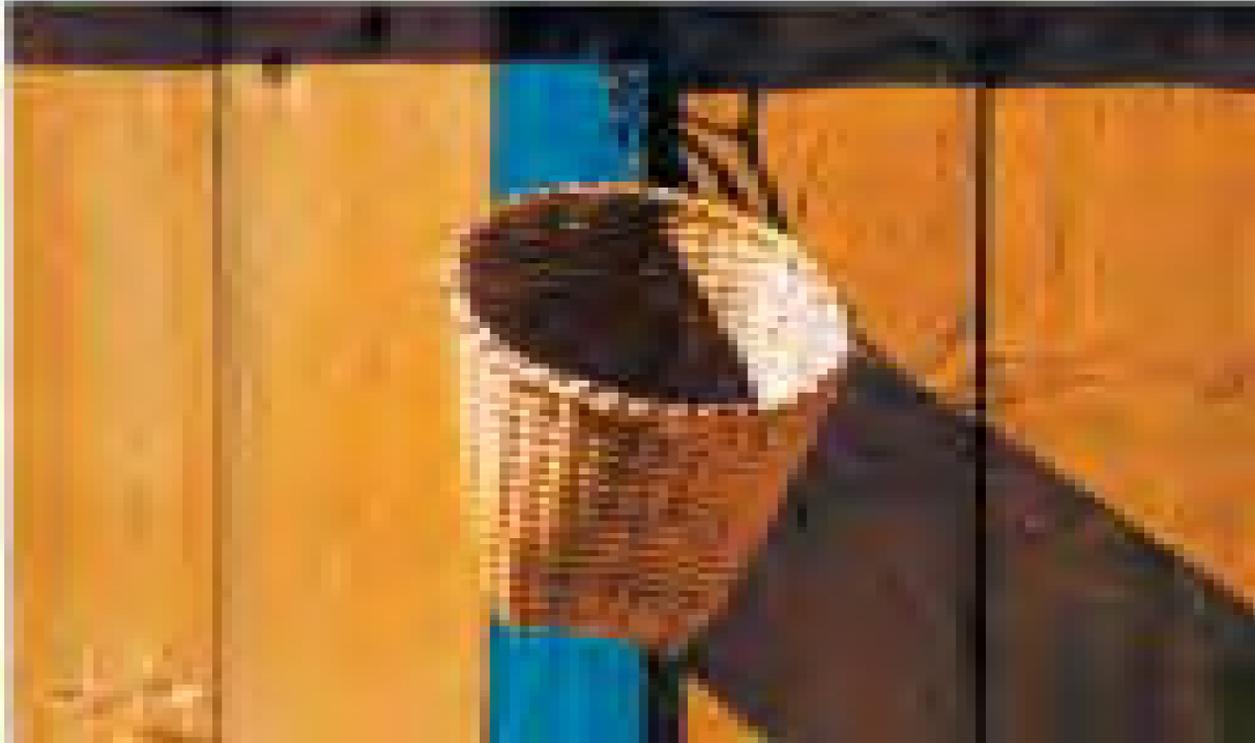
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Photography and art meet again in Nepal, but in a rather more interesting manner.

Navin Joshi's pictures, on display at the Park Gallery, Pulchowk, until 26 December, are an innovative and artistic blend of colour photography and subtle computer-assisted art. Joshi's computer pastels on photographs show the direction to take when blurring the line between the new technology and the older one to make hybrid art. No mean feat in these days when the public is alert to heavy-handed manipulations of photographic imagery by computer technology.

Most of Joshi's photographs themselves run the traditional gamut of touristic and semi-touristic images from Kathmandu Valley, parts of the tarai, and the upper Kali Gandaki—a Buddha face, a Mustang desert landscape, people peering out of windows, elders sunning themselves on the parapet outside Patan Darbar. No complaint there, because the photographic originals are themselves very competent, but what Joshi does to them is what makes this show. He scans his images on a professional scanner and then enhances one aspect or the

Image and imagination



other—the green of a flying dhoti, the grain of a crumbling house—to bring out what he sees as the soul of the image. Never overdone, the alterations give the pictures, printed on Kodak photographic paper, a dream-like yet almost hyperreal effect.

Connoisseurs of photography often wonder why colour pictures do not carry the same depth of feeling as black and white photographs. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that by purporting to give us exactly what is "real", colour photography of landscapes and other subjects—all of which we have a surfeit of in Nepal—deny us the imagination that is required to read a picture, no matter how representative it might be. By enhancing the pictures to pinpoint the particular elements that drew him to photograph the tableaux in the first place, Joshi gives us that space. When a picture looks almost too real, we are forced to re-evaluate what we expect out of a photograph, and in doing so, we look at it anew.

Like children with a new toy, people the world over are over-doing computer manipulation picture art (which often just delivers kitsch) and in photojournalism (where much of it borders on the unethical). (See #71, "Ethics in the age of digital photography"). Navin Joshi, on the other hand, seems to understand both the possibilities and the limits. He does

not daub garish Photoshop colours on pictures. Instead, his touch is light and selective.

It may be a touch of deep blue added to the sky above and beyond the packed-mud wall of a Kagbeni dwelling, enhancing the colour markers placed by herders on a pack of Tibetan mountain goats (chyangra), or getting just that right shade of brick-red in the façade of a Kathmandu palace. There is a tarai picture, where the green of a dhoti that hangs in the sun to dry is enhanced with a light shading of green that makes the entire picture stand out, and the same goes for a bushel of maize in another picture, and a wickerwork dhoko hanging against a painted woodboard wall in yet another.

Born in 1969, Navin Joshi says he grew up surrounded by his father's paintings. "However, I wanted to forge a different path from that of my father, as I chose to specialise in applied art, rather than drawing and painting." He adds, "I had a profusion of ideas, visions and thoughts, and I identified the camera as my initial sketch tool, and the computer as a means to achieve what I wanted."

Joshi has no problem with the fact that he is using the aid of the computer to bring photographic art to the public. "My exploration of photography made me realise that every photograph is actually a



SOUTH ASIAN COLOURS: Prime Minister Deuba and the Rainbow Partnership's Madanjeet Singh inaugurate the South Asia Foundation Conference, Tuesday, 11 December.



CHECKS AND BARRICADES: The bandh called by the Maoists on Friday, 7 December, slowed life down a little as commuters faced checkpoints through the city, like this one in Maitighar manned by the army.



SAVING THE EARTH: Minister for Population and Environment HPL Singh speaks on land degradation, drought and sustainable land development, Tuesday, 11 December.

manipulation, in framing, use of lenses, filters, camera formats, kinds of colour film, and darkroom manipulation." Joshi talks about Ansel Adams' work and how he used techniques like dodging and burning extensively to achieve the effects he wanted. "Computer technology is my darkroom," he explains. "I am merely extending the arena of traditional manipulation."

Adams' work is, interestingly, the example Susan Sontag used in her extended essay "On Photography", in which she discusses how photographs seem to be over-valued even as societies become saturated with images. She asks how, when faced with the grandeur and overt realism of Adams photographs of Yosemite National Park, one cannot but be a little underwhelmed by the sight of the original. One might ask something similar of Joshi's work, or indeed, of much of the photography that the power of Nepal's landscapes inspires, sometimes unfortunately, whether in tourism brochures or coffee table books. (Much of this photography has been manipulated, whether to brighten the velvety golden sheen to Himalayan icefields in the evening

sun, or bring the jungles of Chitwan into your living room.)

Work like Joshi's can function in two ways to save us from both the tackiness we so often have to suffer, and the other extreme, the faint disbelief in the actual scene itself, should we see it, since it does not match the photograph we remember. Joshi's "manipulation" is more obvious than that in Adams' work, and far more artistic than virtually any touristic pictures. In walking this fine line, Joshi forces us to think about the place of photography as an art form in contemporary Nepali society. His work is obviously neither in the world of brush and paint nor in the world of cameras and darkrooms, as we understand them both. And the realisation of this difference makes us think about what photography can and cannot do and ask whether all we expect from it is justified. It reminds us always that we are, after all, looking at an image, at one of many possible representations of one person's perception of reality. ♦

(Colour from the world around us, photo exhibition by Navin Joshi, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, through 26 December. 522307)





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Neither here nor there

It is a matter of great satisfaction to learn from the national press that the mayors of Kathmandu and Pyongyang have just signed a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the sister-city relationship between our great towns. That the long and arduous process to declare the two capitals siblings has finally borne fruit points to the spirit of give-and-take that has characterised this decades-long negotiation process. We must see this as the beginning of a great new relationship. And



although the agreement took a long time to see the light of day, my professional opinion is: Better late than never. It is good that the two mayors decided to bite the bullet, cross the Rubicon, and let bygones be bygones. And so saying, let me raise a toast at this point to the honourable mayors and pay tribute to their endeavours. Whoa. That was strong stuff.

Now that the deed is done, we must wait and see what new ideas Mayor Sthapit has brought back from the North Korean capital and how he is going to implement them in the context of the ongoing preparation for the SAARC Summit which, as we all know, is being undertaken here on a civil war footing. There is obviously a lot that the Greater Kathmandu Metropolitan Cosmopolitan City can learn from its counterpart north of the DMZ.

As anyone who has been there will tell you, Pyongyang is an extremely clean city. There is no garbage there

because no one actually lives in Pyongyang. Therein probably lies one possible solution to Kathmandu's garbage problem. If we can evacuate the entire city before the summit, and leave the streets at the disposal of the seven heads of states, we will probably leave an extremely favourable impression on our visitors.

But there is one aspect of Pyongyang that leaves a lot of visitors pained. Koreans love dogs. In fact, they love them so much, you don't see a single dog on the streets of Pyongyang. According to insider sources, our mayor reportedly offered all possible technical assistance to lend a helping hand and provide a tip or two to our Korean friends on how to repopulate Pyongyang's heretofore dog-free streets with canines before the next Afro-Asian Conference of Non-aligned Nations on Youth, Women and Workers which will be going on at about the same time as the World Cup is being held in Seoul.

Essentially, it is a supply and demand situation. Kathmandu has a surplus of dogs, Pyongyang has a shortage. Let's do an exchange. There is of course the real danger that the Mutts of Mandu while on a study tour north of the 38th Parallel will end up being served as Man's Best Friend in Oyster Sauce. But this is a danger that they will have to live with for the greater cause of international solidarity. After all, it is a man-eat-dog world out there. There is no denying that some dogs will go astray, others may overstay their tourist visas, but a fairly large proportion of our dogs will end up on the streets of Pyongyang and make them a friendly place once more.

Before animal rights activists and dog lovers raise a howl of protest, let me hasten to clarify that no dogs have been harmed during the course of writing this column, and any pain inflicted on them is inadvertent and deeply regretted. And it is also incumbent on me to end with a proviso to readers that the above column has been declared safe as long as you don't believe a word of it. The authorities have vetted it, and nothing herein has been found to be detrimental to our national security and territorial integrity at the present time. ♦



काठमाडौंको एक महिला
रङ्गरङ्ग कपडाहरूको लागि

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NEPALI SOCIETY

Cradle to grave

It doesn't strike one usually that people other than pundits and alms-seekers make their living from religion. But come time for a big puja of any sort, and you realise someone has to provide the countless little items needed for it. And if you know your city well, you know Hem Narsingh's Shop in Mangal Bazaar.

An Arabian Nights fantasy of a family business that started 150 years ago, Hem Narsingh's Shop sells every item needed for all the ceremonies of our society, from birth to death. Wood chips for a yagya, huge pieces of cloth with Garudas and Ganeshas painted on them, specially coloured pots, cardamom from Guatemala, this store has it all. Run by 35-year-old Prakash Narsingh Amatya and his wife Pramila, the shop is open around the clock, not because it is good for business, but because they consider it their obligation to society. "You never know who might need what, and when. We down the shutter at night, but people can always call for us upstairs," says Prakash.

Kirti Narsingh Amatya, Prakash's great-grandfather, started the shop, which is said to have really taken off in the time of his son, Hem Narsingh. Prakash, a grandson of Hem Narsingh, is the lucky one to run it, because all his older cousins are settled abroad. He loves every minute of it. "The



ALOK TUMBANGAPHEY

shop has established a name for us, we learnt all about this from our forefathers. And what's more, it is now our duty to continue providing this humble service to society," smiles Prakash.

The shop specialises in Newari ceremonial items, as well as those needed for orthodox Hindu and Buddhist rituals. This diversity ought to be the norm in Kathmandu Valley, but for some reason shops like this are hard to find, which may just be one reason it does so well. "This is the only shop of its kind around, and people come from as far as Swyambhu to Bhaktapur to make their purchases," says Prakash. Although the rituals of the Valley's different communities seem to go strong throughout the year, the Amatyas knows better. "Sure the regular business is always there,

but during the months of Pausa and during Purushottam, which comes around once in three years business goes down," they explain. As for profits, they aren't as high as one might imagine, but the satisfaction the couple get out of their work is apparent in their glowing smiles.

Purna Kumari Amatya, Prakash's 75-year-old mother, leaves her son and daughter-in-law to take care of things, and can often be found basking in the sun outside the shop. From her long experience and wisdom, she reassures the young couple—and anyone else who cares to ask—that contemporary Kathmanduites seem to be getting more, rather than less, devout. We're willing to bet that will be the case as long as Hem Narsingh's little shop of wonders is around. ♦

