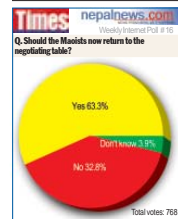


EXCLUSIVE

23 February

The state of national emergency will come up for renewal in parliament by 23 February (counting by the Nepali calendar). The main opposition UML, now close to reuniting with the Maoists, which has the critical votes needed for ratification, won't say yet which way it'll go. The probable scenario is that the emergency will be lifted on the 23rd, but parliament will allow the government to keep its anti-terrorism enforcement under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Ordinance. Most politicians agree that the army should continue fighting the Maoists, but without absolute emergency powers. The casualties since 23 November has now crossed 500, with 350 of them Maoists, according to the Defence Ministry's tally. Several thousands have been arrested, and 9,000 Maoists have reportedly surrendered.



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Meanwhile, in the rest of Nepal...

Rural Nepalis are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Fear stalks the land. The army's cordon and destroy missions are sudden and deadly. To escape, the Maoists have melted into the population. Government presence is confined to district headquarters. "We cut by about 4:00 PM, fearing that the Maoists will come seeking food and shelter," one teacher in Bajhang told us. "I've let them, the police will get us, if we don't, the Maoists will kill us." In Kanchanpur, villagers cover behind their windows watching security forces patrolling on vehicles by day, and the Maoists going door to door by night. "We can't report their activities because the Maoists have threatened to kill us," one resident whispered.

Some weeks ago troops searched Binaana, a village 24 km from Nepalgunj. When they left, the Maoists returned. The village elders fled because, as one of them told us, "The Maoists think we had called in the troops." The bus service from Dang to Hokeni remains suspended. It has resumed from Bhalubang to Lipang, and traffic has also resumed on the Takpur-Salyan-Rukum road. Work on a 16 km stretch connecting Rukum being built by the army has come to a halt. In Nepalgunj, the stream of people heading out for work in India is visibly greater, as is the exodus of rural refugees into Kathmandu Valley.

"Things aren't much better in the east. Crowds have thinned at the weekly markets, there are fewer buses on the roads. The number of night buses plying from Biratnagar has gone down by half. Newspaper sales are down," says Surendra Shrestha in Lalaha. "People are buying less because they find the same news in all the papers."

Tulasi Neupane, DDC chairman of Sankhuwasabha says: "The Maoist are still active in the villages, and most Congress workers have already fled." In Khotang, Hari Pokhrel of the UML told us the Maoists have gone into hiding in the villages. "Security forces do not go beyond distances from which they cannot return at night," he says. In Udaypur, the combination of Maoist and Khumbowar violence has forced residents in some villages to flee to the relative safety of the town towns.

Many parts of western Nepal, including Jomsom, are cut off because the Maoists have blown up repeater stations. Troops still guarding telecom towers in Salyan's Kapurkot and Dang's Rajkot, but Maoists have blown up 56 multi-access radio telephone systems (MARTS), and six district headquarters don't cannot identify who is who.

Food-for-work, non-formal education classes, social mobilisation for community development, community forestry meetings have all been affected. Villagers tend to stay away from meetings because they are afraid of being picked up.

"It is not very good, or very bad. But it is very slow," a frustrated donor representative based in Kathmandu told us. "We would definitely not like to work in a military environment because our projects depend on our ability to win the trust of the villagers."

Most development projects keep selection staff in the field, avoid taking unnecessary risks, information. A development worker in Surkhet says: "There are gunshots at night, next morning there is no way to find out what is all about." Radio Nepal and the media only give out the government version of events, and the people know there is plenty else that is happening. Journalists are being picked up and interrogated. Shant KC, the BBC stringer in Nepalgunj was taken away blindfolded from his office last week and asked about his Maoist contacts. He was released after two hours. Basanta Pokhrel, another journalist in Biratnagar wasn't so lucky. He spent 16 days in detention, no one told him why he was arrested.

Suffering heavy casualties in the army's action, the Maoists have changed tactics. They hide in the villages and ambush convoys with booty-trump explosives along roads. The banks looted at Ghoshni on 23 November are still not fully functional. Both the district jail and the land revenue office are yet to begin business. Officials say it could take another six months just to compile the missing land records. Private helicopters have stopped ferrying vital salt and foodgrain to Kailkot and Mugli ever since Maoists destroyed one of the helicopters at Surkhet airport in November. Bajhang airport is closed. Industries in Biregunj have cut down one shift—from three to two—because travel at night has become impossible. Overnight curfews are still in effect in many parts of the country, in Jajarkot it is on end on 13 January. In Dang, Salyan and Jumla the curfews will continue until further notice.

“Even non-Maoists who were active in the village have fled...” —Development worker

and doing the little bit they can, rather than shut down. "It has become difficult to monitor on-going programs," says Hiralaj Ghale of Namsaling in Ilam. "No one is in a state of mind to even discuss new activities. We have not been able to go into the villages."

Before the army deployment and the emergency, the government had launched the Integrated Security and Development Programme (ISDP) in seven insurgency-affected districts (with plans to expand to another 30). Today, there isn't even the ISDP. "In some settlements we don't have enough people to mobilise," a development worker told us. "After the emergency, even non-Maoists that were active in community organisations have fled fearing arrest." Indira Dahal, a grassroots activist in Boudha says: "Even the donors are telling us let us wait until the emergency is over to begin new projects."

The sense of fear is fuelled by the lack of

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The Great Unifier

Prithvi Narayan Shah is more than the founder of Nepal. Many of his policies are as relevant today as they were when he set out to make Nepal one.

HEMILATA RAI

The aggrandising propaganda of the Panchayat years turned Prithvi Narayan Shah the Great into a surreal figure. Many of his visionary statements remain buried in exam answer sheets, or the subconsciously of most Nepalis. Surrounded by myths and legends, Prithvi Narayan Shah is one of those historical figures people find it hard to actually relate to. Even so, social analysts, political scientists and historians all agree on two things that he was a brilliant leader, and that he

was on occasion only too human. Prithvi Narayan Shah's birthday, 27 Poush (11 January this year) is commemorated as Nepal's "National Unity Day". For the ordinary citizen, this has turned into yet another national holiday, a forced annual ritual—garlanding of his statue in front of Singa Durbar, speeches and photo-ops for political personalities.

However, the great king's vision and policies are as relevant today as they were when he set out 260 years ago from his hilltop town of Gorkha to unify Nepal. Media commentator CK Lal says reading Prithvi Narayan Shah is still useful. "The nation building project he initiated still remains incomplete," he says.

Prithvi Narayan Shah inherited the rule of the hilly Gorkha kingdom in 1742, at the age of 20. But the young king wasn't content and he went on to fight—and win—the numerous battles that in 1769 resulted in the creation of territory we know as modern Nepal.

Was it all part of a gameplan, a burning desire from the start to conquer different territories and forge a new country called Nepal? Historian Dinesh Raj Pant brushes aside the probability. He believes Prithvi Narayan Shah was inspired purely by an ambition to expand the borders of his kingdom initially, and was determined to avoid the defeat his father, Nar Bhupal Shah, had to face. He was determined to keep his kingdom free and safe from the British who were acting belligerent to the south, and the restive Tibetans to the north.

"He was an excellent ruler, strategist par excellence, and champion of psychological warfare. Moreover, he was single-mindedly into the business of ruling a kingdom," Professor Pant says. That was

in sharp contrast to successors, like Singh Pratap Shah and Ran Bahadur Shah, who spent more time pursuing the study of tantra rather than ruling a nation. Pant prefers to call Prithvi Narayan the "re-unifier" of the Nepali state rather than "the unifier" school textbooks describe him as. According to him, stone inscriptions from the time of Samundra Gupta of Allahabad suggest that some 1,500 years ago, the borders of a proto-Nepal went as far as Assam in the east and Kumaon in the west before it broke up into smaller kingdoms.

Whatever the case, says historian KB Uday, "The expansion of the Nepali state (from what it was in the 18th century) can be attributed to Prithvi Narayan Shah's ability to motivate and mobilise people." When he ascended to the Gorkha throne, the kingdom was weak economically and militarily. Gorkha faced constant threat of invasion from the powerful neighbouring states of Lamjung, Palpa and Tanahu.

As first step in the campaign, Prithvi Narayan Shah wanted to mobilise his army and so strengthened the youth of his kingdom, regardless of caste. Maybe this was reason for his famous edict—though not politically correct in present day Nepal—that Nepal was a garden of "four castes and 36 ethnicities".

Going against tradition, he recruited Rana (Magar) to increase the participation of



by DANIEL LAK

Blasphemy on the beach

Do nuclear weapons work? As agents of mass destruction, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are a constant reminder of their effectiveness at dealing death and destruction. No, I wonder about the nuclear arsenals of India and Pakistan, and whether they haven't helped keep the peace between two angry neighbours, bent by internal tensions and pressures and, until now, largely ignored by the rest of the world.

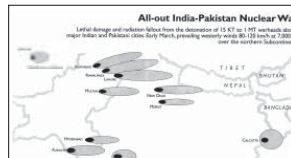
Like many, I went ballistic at the Indian nuclear tests in May of 1998. Pakistan's follow-up was even more maddening. Here were two Titans of Poverty pouring funds—in Pakistan's case, largely money fired up by overgenerous aid donations—into hideously dangerous weapons. They'd fought three largely pointless wars and spent the better part of six decades finding reasons to hate each other.

In mid-1998, they recklessly upped the ante hugely, endangering a region that I've come to love and live in. Now I'm not so sure. Call me shallow, or driven by events, but I wonder if the relatively small nuclear arsenals in both countries haven't helped avoid all out war, at least twice in the past two years. Who, I can hear the screams of outrage already, not least from my abolitionist wing who marched the 1980s away protesting against American and Soviet nuclear weapons.

But let's consider the evidence. The Kargil conflict in 1999 was widely described as South Asia on the brink of all out nuclear war. Pakistan had organised an incursion into Indian-controlled territory along the line of control, India fought back fiercely, and with a little help from Bill Clinton, saw off the threat from across the line.

Hundreds of young Indian men died retaking ridges and mountain peaks that would defy the skills of mountaineers. We'll probably never know how many from the other side were killed, but my friends in Gilgit and Skardu told me that funerals went on for days after the killing stopped. Yet it remained a largely local skirmish. Despite immense rhetorical

There may be a South Asian version of Mutually Assured Destruction. But a little less madness would do us good.



pressure from fire breathing desk generals of the Indian media and the hellfire middle class of Delhi, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee kept his tongue on his side of the LOC. An American diplomatic source told me afterward that there were credible threats from Islamabad that nuclear weapons might be used if the Indians crossed the line. That's denied in public by both India and Pakistan yet it makes some sense. And if it's true, then we must acknowledge the role of the South Asian version of mutually assured destruction. Unwritten NATO-Moscow equation that kept the peace during the Cold War.

I wonder too about the current round of Delhi-Islamabad hostilities. The usual suspects in India (media, middle classes, pundits) Bray for war.

Vajpayee makes all the right noises. General Musharraf regrets but talks equally round. Meanwhile, he quietly rounds up militants while India's wily leader keeps the military preparations firmly within reversible limits. War fear fade as quickly as they flared and only the frighteningly callow commentator in Delhi seems disappointed.

I am willing to bet both Musharraf and Vajpayee were well aware of the immense risks they were taking, and knew how far they could go before starting to throw things down. The problem lies in Pakistan's conventional inferiority to India. As a smaller, poorer country that has been subjected to an American arms embargo for more than a decade, Pakistan is simply not able to best India in conventional battle. The Pakistani armed forces are well trained, morale is high but they lack technology and numerical weight.

So asymmetrical strategies like nuclear weapons and support for cross border insurgency are a natural part of Pakistan's arsenal. Islamabad might have little choice but to use its atomic bombs if invaded by Indian armour and infantry. But lest a lot of hawks gather round me, let me say I still hate nuclear weapons. Just because they deter war in times of rhetorical hostility doesn't mean that defusing tensions is not imperative.

And there are other, frightening issues like the absence of command and control, extremist forces in both countries, nuclear accidents and so on. It all underlines the need to move towards regional peace and the prosperity that will follow. Even Washington and Moscow eventually abandoned mutually assured destruction, known by its highly appropriate acronym, MAD. A little less madness in South Asia would do us all a world of good. ♦



Gorkha dominions at its widest before 1814. Shaded area is present-day Nepal.

the people in the nation-building process, rather than leave it to an elite class. In his Dhyopadesh, Prithvi Narayan describes himself as king of "Magara" and talks about the need to involve "Pandes, Pant, Arjyal, Khanal, Rana, Bohora" (representing the major castes of the Chhetris, Brahmins and Magar people in Gorkha) in strengthening of the kingdom. "As a king, he worked towards gaining total confidence of his subjects," says Uday. Prithvi Narayan appears to have been a born leader. He was crowned in 1742, but historical documents show that he was involved in the affairs of state even as a teenager. One of his first decisions was to make peace with a stronger Lamjung after Gorkha was defeated. In fact his father Nar Bhupal Shah seemed to have been losing interest in the matters of state after facing defeat against Nuwakot in 1737, which is when Prithvi Narayan Shah may have begun with the reins

of the state.

Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur were all part of a single kingdom, until Shiva Singh Malla divided the kingdom into three in 1457. All three states prospered. But intra- and inter-state distrust meant that Kathmandu Valley polity was always weak. Prithvi Narayan Shah strategically befriended with the rulers of the Valley and nurtured the relationship his ancestors had established. He extended the sphere of his influence to the Malla rulers themselves, but was also quick to exploit their relative unpopularity and the lack of clear leadership in the Valley. Kathmandu, for example, had an overly whimsical king and in Patan, between 1758 and 1768, the ministers could replace a king if they wished. Valley residents were also slowly drifting closer to the Gorkhali rule, having heard about the reputation of his kingdom for justice and welfare. It is clear that Prithvi

Narayan Shah recognised the importance of keeping subjects happy and unthreatened—and unified in their loyalties. After he was enthroned in Kathmandu and Patan in 1768 and in Bhaktapur (Bhadgaon) in 1771, Prithvi Narayan Shah seemed to want to keep the infrastructure already developed in the kingdoms much the same. He respected the culture and values of the Valley residents, and joined them in their worship of the Kumanis, the symbol of independent Malla kingdoms, and Taleju Bhawani, the royal goddess of the rulers before him. What he did expect from the Valley was what had not yet taken root—the Roman Catholic missionaries.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's unbiased appointment of able civil officials, regardless of the claims of relation or personal equation is another trait that stands out. For instance, although he greatly favoured Biraj Bhatta, a

faithful, long-time aide, he nevertheless appointed Kulu Pandey as Kaji (the equivalent of present-day prime minister). Kulu Pandey had displayed splendid diplomatic skills in the signing of the agreement of friendship with Lamjung, and later, in 1763, played a key role in the defeat of that kingdom.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's ability to unify such a diverse variety of people in such different geographical locations had as much to do with his economic policy as with his ability to win the hearts and minds of the people whose rulers he defeated. He exploited Nepal's landlocked location to great advantage. On annexing Nuwakot and Makwanpur in 1762, he imposed heavy taxes on both the Tibetans and the Indians who depended on routes through Nepal to trade with each other.

As documented in Dhyopadesh, Prithvi Narayan strongly advocated self-sufficiency, self-reliance and believed in the concepts of sustainability. He wanted self-reliance on fertile lands moved to make way for irrigation channels and agriculture. True to those projectionists terms, he encouraged export but discouraged import that would drain the country's wealth.

He also discouraged extravagance and the import of "crystal, glass and other useless luxuries". He wanted to establish trading houses in both of his kingdom's northern and southern borders to encourage them to trade with the Nepalis rather than have Nepalis deal directly with traders beyond the borders. He was successful in most such endeavours—what he did not manage to do in his lifetime was convince the Tibetans to accept his currency.

Prithvi Narayan Shah could be brutal and vindictive. One instance in which he is said to have ordered the ears and noses of the previous rulers of Kirtipur be cut off as punishment for their resolute resistance against his forces in 1764. Another such incident concerns his killing of a battle commander Jayant Rana for mutiny.

Some historians like Uday think it was a strategic blunder for Prithvi Narayan Shah to shift his capital to Kathmandu, and name the country he had unified after it, rather than after his own kingdom. Even today, the small hill district, from where the borders of modern Nepal were sketched remains neglected. And is known as the birthplace of another more recent political figure, the Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai. ♦

Nepal-India

Its final: India says it could extend the 1996 trade treaty with Nepal one more time. On the sidelines of the SAARC summit, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said, "The trade Treaty has already been extended for three months. It needs arises it can be extended further." There is a catch though. Foreign minister Jaswant Singh said this would be done only if the volume of controversial Nepali exports remains below a certain acceptable level.

Another issue Singh touched upon was the requirement of specific travel documents by Indians wanting to visit Nepal, a major reason why fewer Indian tourists are coming here. India's "security concerns" is the reason Indians are required to have passports or voter IDs. Singh said these were only "temporary" measures. "The intention is not to harm Nepal's tourism industry," he added. "The facility of free movement... was being missed by some elements." There was, however, no pronouncement on when and how the temporary measure could be scrapped—maybe something for Shital Niwas to follow up.

New tourism regulation

This might bring a smile to the faces of mountaineering entrepreneurs and professionals. The government is amending the 20-year-old Tourism Regulation to make the process of obtaining permission to climb easier. The new amendment proposes allowing climbing throughout the year instead of present arrangement of four mountaineering seasons. The regulation also proposes allowing permits be issued in one day, compared to the four months the process can take now. Also addressed are the issues of raising the remuneration, allowances and insurance ceilings for high altitude porters involved in mountaineering. Finally, the proposed amendment is concerned with keeping tourism income in the villages—it proposes offering discounts on royalties to climb mountains situated in economically disadvantaged areas.

Hotels hit hard

The SAARC summit was a brief respite for Kathmandu's hotels that have been hit by the downturn in tourism. But with the South Asian delegates gone, the rooms are empty again. Now the industry says it wants an immediate bailout plan or else all hotels will shut down. The government has promised to help out by rescheduling loans and offering new soft-loans, but that has not been put into effect. It is this delay that is threatening to blow the life out of the industry, where the investment so far adds up to about Rs 70 billion. According to the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN), the industry has lost more than Rs 15 billion from banks and unpaid interest already adds up to Rs 5 billion. Says HAN President Narendra Bajracharya: "We want a prompt decision, otherwise we won't be able to survive." The industry directly employs about 200,000 people.

Human Development

After 16 years of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), South Asia remains the least integrated region compared with other similar regional groupings, and has the largest number of poor. That was the message of the Human Development in South Asia 2001 report, which looks at the region with globalisation as the overarching theme. Almost half-a-million people in this part of the world have become poorer after the process began taking effect. The report, produced annually by the Islamabad-based Mahbub ul Haq Development Centre, says this is because of the inability of the states to develop response mechanisms, incomplete reforms and inadequate pro-poor policies.

Beyond the rhetoric of cooperation we heard during the 11th summit last year, as a region South Asia has very little to show. Trade among them remains below five percent of their total exports, compared to 22 percent for ASEAN members and 55 percent for NAFTA members, and the region's average tariffs remain very high compared to other groupings of nations. Nepal's consolation, articulated by Shankar Sharma, National Planning Commission member, is that they are doing better than the rest of South Asia in human development indicators. In 1975 Nepal's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.29, by last year, it had shot up to 0.48, the fastest gain compared to other South Asian states. We also spend the most on education—about 13 percent of all public spending.

No salt

Inhabitants of a mountain districts in far-western Nepal have been hit hard by a shortage of salt. The salt that is available costs Rs 40 a kg. The demand remains unmet despite a six-month-old agreement between Nepal and India to supply salt from the Salt Trading Corporation in Kathmandu. Locals of Humla, one of the most remote districts in the country, are further worried that winter snows will close down the airport and disrupt supply lights. Residents of southern Humla have been forced to travel to Bajura to buy salt, and their northern counterparts head to Taklaskot on the Tibetan border.

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On shaky ground

ANJANA SHRESTHA

The earthquake on July 20 in Gorkha, which damaged 600 houses, brought home yet again that earthquakes are an unavoidable part of Nepal's future, just as they have been for its past. And as one more Earthquake Safety Day approaches, it looks as if we are still likely to be caught unprepared should a large tremor strike any time soon.

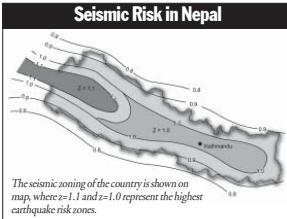
- Every year in Nepal there are more than 1,000 earthquakes ranging in magnitude from 2.5 on the Richter scale.
- Records going as far back as 1255 CE show that Nepal has experienced nine major earthquakes over the last 700 years.
- Recurring earthquakes in the 20th century claimed more than 23,000 lives.
- The Great Bihar earthquake of 1934—which could as well have been called The Great Kathmandu Earthquake—measured 8.3-8.4 on the Richter scale, claimed 8,500 lives and destroyed 20 percent of the Valley's buildings, including a large number of temples and monuments.
- In 1988, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake hit eastern Nepal, with the epicentre in Udayapur. More than 700 people were killed, 6,500 were injured and 22,000 houses collapsed.

"Kathmandu is the highest at-risk city in the world today," says Anand Dixit of National Society for Earthquake Technology Nepal (NSET-Nepal). The Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Risk Management Project (KVERMP) estimates that an earthquake today similar in magnitude to the 1934 Mahabharatkaupa, centred in the densely populated Kathmandu Valley, would likely cause more deaths and casualties than last year's Gujarat earthquake in India. In hard numbers, they count something like approximately 40,000 dead and 95,000 injured. More than 60 percent of the existing buildings would be

destroyed leaving 600,000 to 900,000 residents homeless. It is a disaster waiting to happen—with a population of 1.5 million and growing, the Valley is seeing a spurt of uncontrolled development. Construction techniques have deteriorated in recent decades as the demand for cheap, fast buildings grows. Even scarier, the Valley's infrastructure barely holds up under day-to-day life, and is far from able to support rescue and response operations such as those carried out in Gujarat. One of the fundamentals drilled into the mind of every citizen of quake-prone countries is that

our north. (See also "Waiting for the big one," P25.) A seismic risk map of Nepal produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) based on geological data, shows that the country's hills are more vulnerable to earthquakes than the mountains or the Terai. And western and central Nepal—where a large percentage of the population and vulnerable infrastructure is concentrated—are more exposed than the far east.

The realization that Nepal is as seismically active as Japan but much more vulnerable because of poor



The seismic zoning of the country is shown on map, where 1, 2 and 3-10 represent the highest earthquake risk zones.

infrastructure planning came only after the 1988 earthquakes. The 'Mahabharatkaupa, or nayab saal to Bhudhaka, could have taught Nepal a lot, but public and institutional memory has proven to be short. An earthquake moment, now known as Bhugal Pasa, was erected in 1934 to remind people of the damage the disaster caused. Nepal was the first Asian country to build such a monument, but it was not until 1988 that attention was refocused on actual earthquake preparedness. One of the products of this new concern was the creation of NSET-Nepal in 1994.

NSET-Nepal believes that with concerted effort, Nepal can be quake-resistant. The organization helps people learn what "preparedness" means, in terms of how they build and organize their structures, and what their immediate response should be in the event of a quake. Still, Dixit worries, "Nepalis are very complacent and are not panicked easily," he says. "But to withhold the knowledge so as not to create panic is actually a crime." Dixit cannot emphasize enough that the only way to deal with such a disaster is to be always prepared, which means having long-term vision and patience.

One of the ways to do that is to see to it that quakes are never too far from the public mind. Which is why, though NSET-Nepal, with the support from the government declared March 20 this year 15th January as Earthquake Safety Day, they work around the year with institutions and communities to make the Valley a safer place, should there be a quake. Probably their biggest success

has been the four-year-old School Earthquake Safety Project (SESP). Shocked to find that none of Kathmandu Valley's 643 public schools complied with even the nominal building code in place now, NSET-Nepal decided to strengthen the buildings by a process known as seismic retrofitting, by which even poorly-built structures can be stabilized to withstand quakes. Today, SESP is so popular that it is being replicated in India, Indonesia and other countries. Ran Hari Sharma, principal of Bal Bikas Madhyamik Vidyalaya, one of the schools that has been retrofitted, says, "I agreed when they selected my school, and now there are four or five houses in the area that have replicated what we did."

Starting 12 January, when Nepal's fourth annual Earthquake Safety Week begins, different organizations and experts will come together in public forums to raise awareness and discuss the problems raised by quakes.

Nepal is still inadequately prepared for the next big quake which, like it or not, will happen.



Destruction from the 1934 earthquake to Darbar Square around the Taleju Bell



The Bal Vikas Madhyamik Vidyalaya before and after being retrofitted for earthquake resistance

Lalitpur is the focus this year, and the week will kick off with the hand-over of the earthquake resistant Kaverthi School to the community. This will be followed by programmes such as a mass casualty drill at Machhendrababa, a seminar on improving building standards, a symposium in disaster risk management, messages over radio and a discussion of the role of media in earthquake disaster management. Lalitpur's mayor Buddha Raj Bajracharya says he plans to conduct awareness programmes in every ward of Lalitpur. "My aim is to bring down casualties when such a disaster occurs," he says. The municipality plans to make the approval of two design plans a requirement for any new construction, and already hands out a set of booklets on constructing for earthquake safety when it approves plans.

The UN is also doing its bit. The UN Disaster Management Group (UNDMG), active since 1999, has come up with the first UN Disaster Response Preparedness Plan in the world. Man Bahadur Thapa of the UN Disaster Management Programme, says the team has trained 47 government officials at the ministry level in disaster management and over 100 members of the larger community. The team also provides technical support to the three groups that, should a quake hit, will work on food and agriculture, health, and logistics.

Kathmandu grandparents, when asked about the 1934 quake, often say, "Mother Earth shookled with anger because we insulted her by our sins. So she took people's lives and destroyed buildings and religious shrines." The sins of Nepal may bring on quakes, but the sin of under-preparation will only magnify the damage on an unforgivable scale. ♦

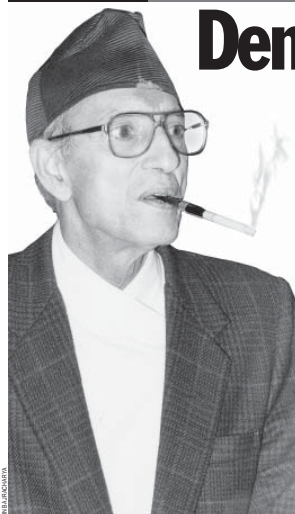
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NATION

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL



MAN BHADUR THAPA

Each time Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala comes back from Birmagar, the political establishment in Kathmandu knows he has something up his sleeves. The product of his latest return in his hometown has defined the political atmosphere at a time when many Nepalis expected their leaders to be enjoying a forced three-month vacation.

For many Nepalis are still wondering whether it is the future of this particular government Congress stalwarts are really worried about. Those who argue that the nation has reached a state where no party or power group can expect to manage things alone are noted in ground

FOLLOW-UP

Finally the Gurkha Memorial Museum has visitors. It used to be hidden away in a dusty corner of Lalchaur, and hardly anyone knew of its existence. But when it moved to Pokhara last September, it began selling even before the museum was officially opened. As the Gurkha Memorial Trust, which runs the museum, had hoped, passing tourists and Nepalis saw the signboard and walked right in.

The four-year-old museum has suffered from a chronic lack of funds and inadequate space to house the entire collection of memorabilia that the trust has gathered together. Captain Yeknaram Gurung, chairman and curator of the museum told us last March that "as this is a national asset, the government helped set up the museum by providing Rs 1 million." Donations followed from the Indian Embassy, the Royal Nepal Army, the British Gurkha Club, Girdhary Bank and Le Collyer Cases. These donations and the yearly government grants, ranging from Rs 100,000 to Rs 400,000, barely covered the overheads and it didn't help that barely anyone visited.

Major Yamabharat Gurung says the trust realized that if they were ever to move the museum had to move where land—preferably government-owned—was easy to find and tourists were plenty. Pokhara was the obvious choice, and in August 2001, the entire collection was moved to Pokhara. The museum occupies an old Nepali house in the compound of Hotel Nature Land. It is a separate building from the actual hotel and stands nearest to the main road, within a minute's walk from the heart of Fewa Lake. Head owner W.O.D. Dharbhar Gaudhari offered the house to the Gurkha Memorial Trust free for the first year, when he heard they were looking for a place to start up until they were allocated a permanent location for the museum. "It was an old untended building that I used to store things in, but I just couldn't find a reason for pulling it down. It paid off in the long run I guess," he laughs. "We are asking for government land in Pokhara as a permanent museum can be built. But these matters take time," explains Vice Chairman, Major Juddhar Gurung.

In the meantime, things are moving ahead and with support from the 2nd Gurkha Rifles Association, the house was refurbished last summer, and the displays were set up. There are three galleries downstairs, devoted to medals, infantry regiments that were disbanded in 1994 to form the Royal Gurkha Rifles, the Gurkha Contingent of the Singapore Police Force, and corps regiments such

realities. But, again, the people still have no way of knowing that this isn't just another ploy to rewrite the political equations under the constraints of the state of emergency.

Rastavi Prasad, Party (RPP) president Surya Bahadur Thapa epitomizes the nation's current political predicament. He can't conceal his outrage at the way his two-year-old proposal has been expropriated, repackaged and sold by a faction of the ruling party. But deep down, he must feel vindicated.

Koirala, desperate to articulate what has become an aspiration transcending party lines, finds himself engaged in episodes of linguistic legismatism.

After his proposition of a national government drew criticism from constitutional scholars, he accused the press of misquoting him. What he really meant, he said, was that the prime minister could include members of other parties on an individual basis to broaden his base. When someone reminded him that such a proposal ought to be coming from Sher Bahadur Deuba, Koirala checked the calendar and re-defined his appeal as an extension of the national reconciliation policy BP Koirala resumed 25 years ago while returning from exile in India. (See "back to Sundarjal" s. 74, and s. 2 on p. 17 of this issue) Since we're still at reconciling our positions, what would RPP have thought of this interpretation, especially if he had actually used that "h" word to characterise his youngest brother's political ascension?

The similarities between the two eras are hard to miss. The Nepali Congress was locked in an internal dispute then, too. Leaders were divided over whether they should continue their campaign for the restoration of civil liberties from the confines of panchayat prisons or from the freedom of the world's most populous democracy. A state of emergency forced the Kangres to make a choice.

When India Gandhi named India into a vast dungeon for all those who dared to disagree with her, our exiles concluded they would have greater freedom of movement in Sundarjal. The operational strategy was to broaden the fight for democracy to include the defence of nationalism.

Democratic forces and the palace had to work together if Nepal was to maintain its identity amid the subcontinental flux.

Many who believe history moves in circles are carried away by GP's clarion call. But a lot of Nepalis who agree with the substance of the Kangres-in-chief's message are not so confident about the sanctity of his motives. Look at the questions we're asking ourselves. Why does the Congress party wish to return to Baluwatar after all he's been through? Or is he just playing games to hold on to the party presidency? On the other hand, didn't Koirala step down as prime minister while he still had the majority in the Congress parliament party? Is there a chance that Deuba may have ranged on a secret pledge to resign in case the peace

talks with the Maoists collapsed? (By the way, who said it Khum Bahadur Shukla on this time?)

Why this sudden flip-flop from a man who built a 50-year political career on an image of steady determination?

Let's give Koirala the benefit of the doubt. Even then, can a broader democratic alliance be conceived without the Maoists?

Granted, they blew their chance to prove they were a bunch of terrorists operating under ideological cover. But the organisation's official name conveys a clear political orientation, even if it has strayed from the Great Helmsman's path.

Why don't we try to separate the political and arming wings of the movement?

If the Marxists, Leninists, the Workers and Peasants and all the other variants of the heavily splintered left can be part of the platform, can the Maoists be engaged in a plan to begin?

Perhaps someone should try to

encourage the emergence of the Maoist equivalent of Sin Fein that could be expected to prevail over its version of the IRA. After years of ambivalence, the Brits seem to have benefited by allowing the two wings to co-exist in Northern Ireland.

Once the Maoist political commissars gain supremacy over their disarmed militia, the healing process could begin.

Thapa must have been devastated by the discovery that his speech in Pokhara was late by 23 years. As a gesture of goodwill, perhaps he could be entrusted with brokering Koirala's consensus package. Given the RPP's success rate in ducking the Maoists' wrath in the past, they might consider him a more acceptable interlocutor than either of two bigger parties.

There's no guarantee the Maoists would accept Thapa as prime minister. But he would have a good reason to amend the RPP charter and serve a third consecutive term as president of the third largest party in parliament. ♦

For anyone interested in Nepali history, there is now a place to explore a vital part of it in the flesh.

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Fasten seat belts

The insurgency and emergency of the past months has slowed not just the government's spending, but has curbed spending in general. The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) says the deteriorating law and order situation kept government spending slow in the first four months of this fiscal year (until mid-October). Recurrent expenses grew by about seven percent and development spending by six percent, while there was a sharp growth in freese expenditure—money that has to be spent during the fiscal year—up by 46 percent to Rs 1.5 billion.

This growth partly reflects spending brought forward by the different ministries to pay for the preparations for the SAARC summit. Government spending may have got worse since, because the central bank figures do not take into account the developments since the 23 November Maoist attacks and the declaration of the state of emergency three days later.

Resource mobilisation grew by just seven percent, compared to 31 percent in the same period last year. Revenue grew by a mere nine percent compared to 22 percent growth in the last fiscal year, hit by a slowdown in imports and sluggish industrial production. The budget deficit in mid-November was Rs 4.2 billion, which was plugged with foreign loans (Rs 1.5 billion) and over-drawing Rs 2.7 billion from the central bank. Inflation is still under three percent, despite a rise in food and beverage prices. The price rise of fruits, vegetables, sugar and oil offset the reduction in the price of rice.

The bank had no good news on the external front: exports are down by about eight percent compared with 42 percent growth in the same period last year. Exports to India grew much more slowly than last year, while there was a slide in Nepal's main overseas exports—carpets (down 15 percent), readymade garments (down by 34 percent) and cashmere (down by a whopping 78 percent). Imports also dropped by 3.5 percent, compared to the 13 percent by which it grew in the same period last year.

As it is wasn't bad enough, a Rastra Bank researcher told us we can expect more bad news. "Every sector seems to be going from bad to worse," he said.

Banking on reformists

The World Bank's deadline to the government for initiating financial reforms expires next month and it is uncertain whether Nepal will get another extension. If it does, it will be the fifth extension.

Employee unions of the two banks have decided to team up to protest the proposed reforms, essentially the handing over of Nepal Bank Ltd and Rastriya Banijya Bank to external management level.

The unions say that hiring highly paid consultants using a World Bank loan was not the solution. They say the ills can be addressed if there is no interference. Reformers argue that foreign managers will have the independence to sever links between politicians, business groups and bank employees—identified as a major reason for the ills.

A study based on 1988 data had said both the banks are insolvent, even though they have substantial liquid funds. The liquidity has resulted from their nationwide reach, and is not because they have recovered their investments. Nearly half of the loans at the two banks are said to be non-performing.

Much like the carpets, garments, pashmina, airline, banking, taxi, or the

One's getting sick and tired of hearing the same regurgitated garbage from each and every industry, in particular from Nepal tourism "entrepreneurs". The 11 September attacks are only partially responsible for the present crisis in our industry.

Our "entrepreneurs" have brought this situation upon themselves by not devising creative solutions in marketing. And I don't blame them; they know not what they do, for they jumped blindly onto the tourism bandwagon.

The lack of operational aptitude and integrity towards tourism, and self-indulgence were their hallmark. They gambled ego-satisfying day after four wheel drives with green plates and the social respectability consumed by the construction of a star hotel.

They cared not that their "valued" golf-like (ambulance-like) guests arrived in ransackable cattle carts called taxis spewing smoke inside rather than outside. They cared not that hygiene in both the kitchen and guest toilets were essential, or that the bed sheets and table cloths were stained. They wallowed in their own perceived levels of mediocrity.

It was so easy to accept this *chalta hai* mentality because we thought: "We are a poor country and our revenues are just not enough to look after these trivial requirements of the guests." Few hotels are a planned exercise, most evolved on the whims and fancies of the landlord who just made decisions on his hunch. Few worry about waste disposal, parking or other infrastructure. Hotels in Pokhara pump their sewage tanks into the lake on which they depend for their water supply.

Much like the carpets, garments, pashmina, airline, banking, taxi, or the

Atithi dollar bhava



industry, most tourism entrepreneurs plunged in to take in the tourist dollar like there was no tomorrow. The quality controllers and the government's licensing authorities moved with the flow. The resulting degradation is evident.

There have been no creative ideas and approach to marketing many of these hotels and destinations. The only marketing tool applied is rate cutting. Even the "two percent" Nepal Tourism Board has not determined for itself the level of quality, or applied any effort to repackage the Nepal product. The opening of more peaks like creative inputs and the two-pick reaction of the peeling finger-pointing bureaucrats. The

height of creativity was locking the Buddha in by erecting a brick wall around his birthplace in Lumbini.

For a lesson in marketing, we need to look at the Indian state of Haraja. It had nothing going for it, but it taught other states rich in destinations, like Rajasthan and Orissa, how to make an impact. Why can't Nepal, which is so rich in the diversity of its tourism product, do a similar repackage?

First, pumping out vague statistical reports and organising interaction programmes will not help. Stop crying and pointing fingers, take responsibility.

Sanjay Baneswar

Outdoor is in

Forget banner ads and TV slots. Old-fashioned billboards guarantee maximum impact for minimum spend



SUK-HYUNG YOON

of a hi-tech company,

Palm Corp.'s marketing strategy in Asia is as low-tech and Old Economy as you can get. No digital bills and interactive clips for its latest Palm Pilot launch. Just some good old-fashioned paint and paper in the form of billboards.

In good company. Nokia's pitch for its sleek new phone is right next to Palm's board by the entrance of the Cross-Harbour Tunnel on Hong Kong Island. Opposite are ads for Cathay Pacific Airways, Citibank and Pacific Airports CyberWorks.

Forget banner ads and short messaging service (SMS) marketing. The hottest things in advertising

these days are billboards, but panels and flyers passed on newstands and benches. Outdoor advertising is about the only thing advertisers are splurging on. According to market-research company AC Nielsen, spending on outdoor media in Asia rose by 20 percent during the first nine months of 2001—even while total ad expenditure was up less than 5 percent in the same period.

"Everybody was talking about 'new media, new media' in 2000," says Philip Rich, AC Nielsen's executive director for Hong Kong and China. "Well, the new media have turned out to be outdoor, the oldest advertising form around."

Old, but by no means dull. At least not these days in Asia. Creative directors have gone all out in the outdoor medium, coming up

with innovative displays and eye-catching visuals. Local companies specialising in transit and billboard advertising are getting stock market listings and winning venture capital, while multinationals are piling into the region. As for the advertisers, they're waking up to the fact that Asia's crowded cities guarantee more eyeballs than any website or TV spot.

What a turnaround. Outdoor advertising has been dying out in the region over the past decade. In 1990, these media took up about 14 percent of total ad expenditure in Asia. But as economic development spread televisions and radios into almost every home and newspapers and magazines proliferated, outdoor lost its cachet. Why advertise on a plain old billboard

when you can buy a flashy 30-second television spot? By 1997, advertising in transit and billboard only 9 percent of their budgets on outdoor ads.

Then came the financial crisis in 1997. While the rest of the advertising industry suffered, cheap and easy outdoor ads flourished. They've been on an upswing ever since, growing more than 10 percent throughout the region in 2000-2001—the largest increase since 1990.

China is growing fastest—no surprise. Hong Kong-based market-research company Zenith Media predicts that the China market expanded 15 percent last year. Advertisers there spend about 16 percent of their budget on outdoor media, significantly more than in other countries. One reason for their popularity is the relative lack of regulation. "Unlike TV or the press, outdoor is totally deregulated in China," says Adrian King, director of media research and strategic planning in Hong Kong for US-based media planner MediaCom. "The government's involvement is virtually negligible. You can basically do anything you like in the outdoor medium."

That means it is also one of the few media avenues that is open to foreign investors. One company that is exploiting this is tom.com. Launched as a portal in 2000 at the height of Hong Kong's dotcom mania, its stock price jumped 335 percent on its stock market debut. But like other dotcoms, its on-line operations failed to make money. So now it's turning to Old Economy tricks to tap into the booming Chinese advertising market and paid in for the media bar is now the streets with its Hugu Boss perfume, which has been

network in the mainland.

The hefty investment has already paid-off—tom.com's revenues jumped from \$1.6 million in the third quarter of 2000 to \$20.4 million in 2001. Its outdoor-media network alone turned over some \$45 million last year.

One tom.com acquisition is Tanning Advertising Company, which places ads on double-decker buses and billboards in Henan province, in central China, has a net profit margin of 40 percent. And the company is growing at more than 30 percent a year. "We're looking for high growth and strong cash flow," says Sing Wang, tom.com's chief executive. "The outdoor business in China right now gives us both."

That's true for the rest of the region as well. Even in the most developed markets, like Hong Kong, Singapore and Korea, profit margins are in double digits. So the cost of building an outdoor media network can be recovered in just three years, says Kam Ling, chief executive of Media Nation, a Hong Kong-based transit-advertising company. "Once you've invested in the infrastructure, you're reaping the results right away."

Media Nation plans to list on Hong Kong's Growth Enterprise Market before the end of the year. In June, the Kowloon Motor Bus Company listed its advertising subsidiary, Roadshow, for close to \$41 million on Hong Kong's GEM in an offering that was 16 times oversubscribed.

But even well-funded local players like these won't be able to corner the outdoor market. First, it is massive—worth over \$1 billion a year. But it is also extremely fragmented. Tom.com's Wang says that 80 percent of outdoor ad sales in China are controlled by small players that share less than a 1 percent market share. Most other outdoor ad markets in Asia are just as a ripe for consolidation. Eying an opportunity, savvy multinational media companies like Clear Channel of the United States and APN News and Media of Australia are aggressively expanding in the region.

That's the supply side. But there's sufficient demand for outdoor ad space. Depleting ad revenues have forced newspapers and magazines throughout the region to cut costs. But companies still need to advertise. And put bluntly, outdoor is cheap. An ad on the side of a bus in Hong Kong costs just \$385 a month while a full-page splash in a local newspaper can cost about \$13,000 a day. "There's no doubt that people are trying to find ways to stretch their money these days and outdoor provides good value during tough times like this," says John Smallwood, head of Singapore-based Asia Posters, APN's venture in the region.

Outdoor may be cheap, but don't discount its impact. Used properly, it can be effectively raise brand awareness. "Outdoor can't build a brand by itself," says Chris Watson, chief executive of media-buyer Mindshare in China. "But it can be used to increase and maintain awareness levels for an extended period."

Forced to cut costs, many brands are rejigging their media budgets to throw more outdoor into the mix. US conglomerate Procter and Gamble, for one, has traditionally shunned TV, radio and print to surf the waters with its Hugu Boss perfume, which has been

Hong Kong. "We've been trying to open their eyes for the last 30 years to the potential of outdoor and nothing has happened," says MediaCom's King. "But they've finally cottoned on to the fact that outdoor is perfect for the kinds of products in their portfolio."

Four years ago, when Nike wanted to launch a Shanghai-wide outdoor campaign, it had to convince 20 different municipal bodies and talk to a handful of billboard owners to seal the deal. Earlier this year Watson arranged a 30-city outdoor marketing push with just one phone call to a Media Nation subsidiary. With 22,000 buses in China, another 2,000 in Hong Kong and 23,500 advertising displays in Beijing and Shanghai, Media Nation is fast becoming the Walmart of China's outdoor advertising industry. "A few years ago, you wanted a country-wide campaign, there was no choice but TV," says Media Nation's Ling. "But today outdoor is a real alternative since China has one of the most developed outdoor networks in the world." Tom.com is building a network in China as well, providing one-stop shopping for billboards, bus shelters and street furniture.

Yet another list expanding their reach, they're diversifying their offerings as well. In Hong Kong, thousands of new bus shelters have been set up like eye-catching displays and billboards and signs over 80 percent of outdoor ad sales from the cross-harbour Star Ferry to a driving range, near.

But the most cutting-edge innovations are coming from the most unlikely sources—Hong Kong's listed public-transport companies. The Kowloon-Canton Railway Corp. and the MTR Transit Railway Corp. and the city's three bus companies have all gone on a LCD binge, fitting their trains, buses and stations with flat-screen TVs.

These screens are used by companies like Roadshow to broadcast ads to a literally captive audience. And put bluntly, passengers a day, we have the largest audience in town," says the company's chief marketing officer, Nancy Pang. "And we know they're sitting there for a long time, so we doubt that people are trying to find ways to stretch their money these days and outdoor provides good value during tough times like this," says John Smallwood, head of Singapore-based Asia Posters, APN's venture in the region.

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INTERVIEW

"We need to agree on a minimum code of conduct."



This delay must be costing you and the exchequer. Does this say something about the government's attitude to privatisation of this sector?

It is definitely costing us heavily. The money we have committed is lying idle in the bank. We have also invested on many people who are on the project and are waiting for the green signal. The losses on the government's side are for the NTA to tell.

The privatisation of mobile telephony is a test for the government. This will show how serious it is about privatisation of the telecommunications sector. The initiative has opened a new avenue for Nepal business and I am hopeful the government will support the project and see it through. It makes sense in every way—we will generate employment and bring in competition, which is best for the customer, and there is extra revenue to be earned by the state in the form of royalties, taxes, etc. We all stand to gain from this.

If you get your frequency sorted out, how much longer will it take?

After we get all clearances from the Authority, it will take another 12 to 14 weeks for us to launch the mobile service.

What extra services will you provide and what company-specific technology will you use?

We'll provide all the essential components of mobile telephony, such as short messaging (SMS), email, Internet, and maybe new services such as news alerts, weather forecasts and the like. We are also looking at offering the other possibilities in telephony, such as roaming services, and the other data communication facilities possible under the GSM mobile technology. Mobile phones can also be used as a security tool, and we're exploring the possibilities of that too. We will be using the latest technology. We are actively negotiating with a few technology suppliers. Spice Cell has a wide knowledge of the business and their experts are already assessing the different options.

What about affordability?

We will price our product to make it competitive, because in any business volume and reach are crucial. The further we are able to reach, the higher our revenues. I cannot talk about specific pricing at this point.

How is your joint venture incorporated? How much money are you and your partner putting in?

We have tied up with Spice Cell owned by Modis from India. They have 60 percent stock and we have 40 percent equity. The project cost is around \$13 million. The debt-equity ratio is still being worked out.

Soon a different note, what do you see as the basic problems of doing business in Nepal today?

Government officials do not implement laws and policies in the spirit that an investor would desire. But then, even the laws are very traditional. There are problems with the labour law, which favour labour unions. Revenue officials still have discretionary powers and because the new law has made them more powerful, business remains at their mercy. Businesses are also affected locally by the whims of local administrators. Of course, the major concern at this point is industrial security. We have discussed these issues with the Minister for Commerce and Industry, Purna Bahadur Khadka, who has assured us we will do his best. The newly constituted Board of Investment should also help resolve some of these problems.

What exactly is the problem with the labour law?

We in business think wages should be linked with productivity to enhance competitiveness. People should not be paid simply because they are there. Industries, particularly those concerned with seasonal products and businesses, should be free to use contract labour. That would help us keep production in tune with demand. How can we ensure productivity and discipline when we can't hire and fire workers? We need to re-think the rights of employers and employees, where industrial disputes are concerned. Any disruption at a workplace affects everyone—owners, workers and labourers. Why can't we agree on a minimum code of conduct to ensure that production is not disrupted, whatever the differences.

Nepali Times: People are waiting for your mobile service to be launched. What's holding things up?

Rajendra Khetan: We completed all the legal and joint venture procedures in September. We applied to the Nepal Telecommunication Authority for frequency allocation and other such matters on which approval is needed. We are waiting to hear back from the NTA. The project is very much ready, we only need to be given the go ahead.

Before and after in Kathmandu Valley

While high profile monuments get all the attention, Kathmandu Valley's old-world architecture is equally in peril. A conservation trust is racing against time to save these forgotten treasures.



Ayagathi Satal, before and in the process of being renovated.



13th century Sulima Rameswara after restoration



Khalkhu pati (rest house) restored



The 16th century Tum Baha Narayan in ruins in 1994 and after restoration in 2000



ALOK TUMBANGPHEY

They have called Patan the Florence of the East. Bhaktapur has been compared to Seville. While the tall temples and the elegant Darbar Squares of these towns stand out, what gives them their unique urban ambience is the architecture of the individual buildings, the sidewalk temples, the rest houses and the harmony of space and colour.

Heritage conservation efforts in Kathmandu Valley over the past 30 years have focused on trying to restore the monuments, but the march of modernisation

has eroded the character of Kathmandu Valley towns, as concrete blocks replace old-world architecture. Many invaluable, but less highlighted, monuments built by our ancestors within the depths of the dark alleys and *hahals* are crumbling away.

Thankfully, city planners and archaeologists and architects are now taking notice. The Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) is now working to renovate the *pati*, *pauma*, *mathand mandir* of the inner city. It is weren't for non-profit groups like the KVPT, much of the Valley's architectural heritage would already have been lost. The

work it does is commendable, but it has received far less media attention and promotion than it deserves," says Keshav Raj Jha, former Nepali ambassador to France and long-time consultant to the UNESCO World Heritage office Nepal.

The KVPT has been around for ten years, doing its work quietly, without too much fanfare. It has rescued over a dozen monuments of cultural value, mostly in Patan, but also in Kathmandu. It selects simple roadside structures such as the Mani Gufa temple that lies hidden behind the temple of Krishan Mandir in Patan Darbar

Square, and restores it painstakingly to its previous beauty. It has also rebuilt entire temples that have been ravaged by time and weather, like the 18th century Kulina Narayan near Bagalamukhi. "The KVPT has set a standard for building conservation in Nepal which is unrivalled," says Peter Laws, a cultural heritage expert with UNESCO.

But it has not been easy for the KVPT and its director, American architect Eric G Theophile. They have had to face all sorts of problems, from fund-raising to even securing the right

to restore a site. "Renovating falling structures is only one aspect of our work, we need to overcome a lot of challenges before we can even reach to that part," says KVPT's Imrana Rashid. For instance, the trust had to fight legal battles for nine years to renovate the Ayagathi Satal in Patan. In 1992, the KVPT obtained funds to repair the crumbling *satal*, initially a place where the faithful sang religious hymns and pilgrims spent their nights, now long overtaken by squatters unwilling to let the Trust in. But work is now underway and renovation

will be completed in March. "Once the work is done the *satal* will be turned into a resource and educational centre for tourists and scholars," says Rashid.

Fund-raising may be a problem, but sometimes a bigger obstacle is lack of help from the local community. Many communities have helped support the renovation by contributing labour, wood or even money. But there are exceptions. The apathy is puzzling, and is probably due to the fragmentation of clans, *guthi* and communities in the formerly closely-knit urban environment. Renovation of

Radha Krishna temple in Patan ended in 1993, but the locals showed little enthusiasm to look after the rebuilt temple.

The 13th century Sulima Rameswara is another temple in Patan that KVPT helped renovate. Manager Raju Roka partly blames the temple priests for the temples' disrepair. "There are more reasons for temples and old structures to fall apart than just old age," says Roka. He says buildings crumble because the traditional management systems designed for their upkeep have fallen apart. "The main problem with conservation here, as elsewhere," says Laws, "is of course the universal one, that of the lack of public awareness. People neglect their cultural heritage." Laws

suggests that one way to ensure that building conservation is smoother is to give municipalities more power, so they can make the road easier for organisations such as the KVPT.

Where KVPT's work has been smoother is where local bodies such as *guthi* are intact. And the most heartening impact of the Trust's work is what some call the "demonstration effect"

evident all over Patan today—when residents of an area see one building being restored, and see that there are often tangible benefits that can accrue from it, they are more receptive to doing the same. As one reaches the Kulina Narayan temple, an old building on the right, in the same style, is being renovated. Until some time ago, the owners were planning to destroy the decades-old building and have a concrete structure. With help and advice from KVPT, the owners are now turning the building into a bed and breakfast pension where tourists can enjoy living in an old-style Newari house with modern comforts.

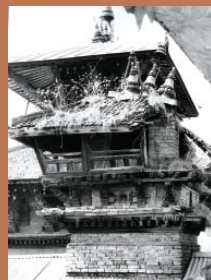
There are positive signs that the awareness level among the local community concerning architectural heritage is also increasing. A walk around Patan reveals numerous houses being re-built in old-style architecture, even though modern materials have been used. Says KVPT board member and director of development Gautam SJB Rana: "Compared to the past, the

situation has certainly improved a lot and people have begun to realise the importance of these structures." Rana was the first Nepali to be elected to the board of directors of KVPT. Rana has been a longtime supporter of the trust's work with his own Baber Mahal Revisited—an example of cultural heritage conservation. In Kathmandu, the Trust is working to re- renovate the Jagannath Temple which had been destroyed by monsoon rains, and disturbed by shoddy reconstruction. There are also plans to renovate a falling Sherpa monastery in Jumbesi in Solu Khumbu, but that has had to be shelved because of the counter-insurgency operation.

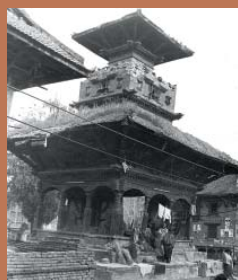
KVPT's real seriousness is reflected by its office. It is a rented old Newari house near Patan Darbar Square, re-ramped with a style and grace that symbolises its passion for conservation. With its traditional exterior and modern office space, it reflects a perfect and harmonious blend of old and new. They certainly practice what they preach. ♦



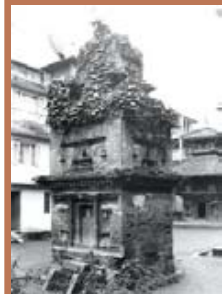
The Trust's office, an old Newari house in Patan re-ramped in style.



Lakhe Agam renovated in 1996



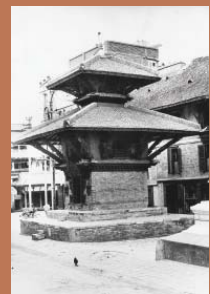
Radha Krishna Mandir restoration period 1991-1993



Kulina Narayan before and after restoration completed in 1998.



Uma Maheswori restored and made safer.



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Introduction:
IT Conference 2002 *IT Revolution: Creating a Network Society in the 21st Century* presents a dynamic, integrated two days of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experiences at the foothills of the Himalayas. This international conference being organized by Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) will be hosted at BICC during the CAN Info-Tech 2002.

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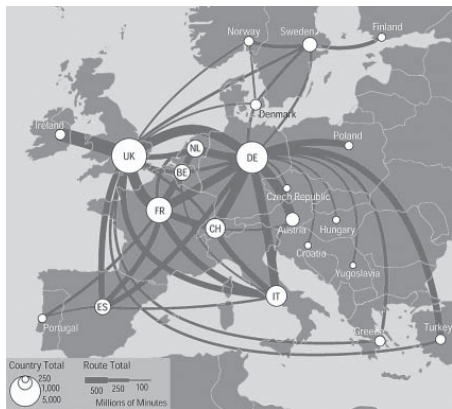
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PC WORLD

Internet gatekeeper



ARIANA EUNJUNG CHA

WASHINGTON—It is the modern-day equivalent of a border station. When visitors try to enter UKBetting.com, a computer program checks their identification to determine where they're dialing in from. Most people are waved on through. Those from the United States, China, Italy and other countries where gambling laws are muddy, however, are flashed a sign in red letters that says "ACCESS DENIED" and are locked out of the website.

For much of its life, the Internet has been seen as a great democratising force, a place where nobody needs know or where you are. But that notion has begun to shift in recent months, as governments and private businesses increasingly try to draw boundaries around what used to be a borderless Internet to deal with legal, commercial and terrorism concerns.

"It used to be that a person sitting in one place could get or send information anywhere in the world," said Jack Goldsmith, a professor of international law at the University of Chicago. "But now the Internet is starting to act more like real space with all its limitations."

These new barriers take many forms. One method is to simply restrict who has access to computers and gateways to the Internet. Another is to make all communications pass through filters that check for content that is objectionable, such as pornography or information deemed to endanger national security. Growing in popularity is software that attempts to match a computer's unique Internet address with a general geographic location, a technology that is becoming more precise every day.

The debate is no longer about if we can create these barriers—but whether or not we should. Even those who support the idea in theory disagree on

who should erect and maintain the electronic fences, whether it should be done by nation-states or by the website operators.

The new borders provide what some call a neat solution to the vexing problem of how to resolve the often-conflicting policies of the roughly 200 independent states of the world on matters such as gambling, commerce, copyright and speech.

But critics fear that the barriers will create an Internet that is balkanised. And civil rights groups warn that freedom of speech will suffer, that the technology will make it easier for oppressive governments to stifle nonconformist viewpoints, and that people's privacy will be eroded, especially because some technologies can pinpoint one's location down to the latitude and longitude.

"It's likely that the Internet of tomorrow will look radically

Boundaries are being drawn all over the formerly-borderless Internet.

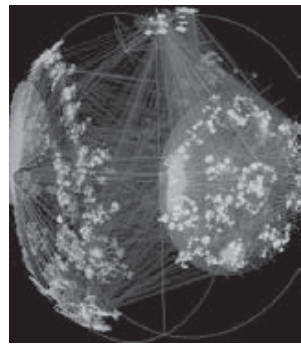
different from different parts of the world," said Lee Tien, a lawyer with the Electronic Frontier Foundation in San Francisco.

Already legislatures and court systems around the world have been attempting to assert their country's authority over the World Wide Web. Hong Kong's government, for instance, has been debating whether to pass a law that would make it a crime for any overseas gambling site to offer services to its residents. A court in Genoa, Italy, recently found the operator of a website in another country guilty of libel. A French judge has ordered Yahoo to stop selling Nazi paraphernalia because a law there bans such practices.

Without an international treaty or mediation organisation, such rulings have so far been largely unenforceable on parties residing outside a country's borders. But that has not stopped countries from drafting rules for what is and is not permissible online.

At least 59 nations limit freedom of expression, according to Leonard R. Sussman, author of "Censor.gov". Singapore, for instance, works with Internet access providers to block any material that undermines public security, national defence, racial and religious harmony, and morals. That includes pornography and hate speech.

Some analysts say the barriers could grow with the development of "geolocation" technology, which attempts to match a person's location based on a computer's Internet



address. Silicon Valley's Quova Inc., one of the leading providers of this technology, claims it can correctly identify a computer user's home country 98 percent of the time and the city about 85 percent of the time, but only if it is a large city.



Independent studies have pegged the accuracy rate of such programs, which also are used by companies such as InfoSpies, Digital Eye, Netgeo and Akami, at 70 to 90 percent.

The technology also is being embraced by web broadcasters, whose nascent industry had been growing slowly because of concerns about copyright. JumpTV is betting its future on this technology. The Montreal-based venture transmits television broadcasts from around the world and is trying to avoid being sued by broadcasters who claim it violates their broadcasting licenses. In early 2000, a US judge effectively shut down another Canadian company called iCraveTV by prohibiting it from broadcasting its signals into the United States for 90 days.

The difficulty in recognising nation-state borders on the Internet became such a concern during the 2000 Sydney Games that the International Olympic Committee effectively banned most web video of the events.

Television stations had paid enormous fees for the rights to broadcast the games on a country-by-country basis—NBC, for instance, shelled out \$3.5 billion for the United States—and they were worried that piracy or even legitimate online transmissions that were accessible to anyone, anywhere

WORLD

ANALYSIS

The American way of war

MANILA—Europe is cool, there is apprehension throughout the South, and outright despondency blankets much of the Arab and Muslim world. There are at least 4000 dead in Afghanistan, a large number civilians, four million refugees, a return to tribal chaos with the dismemberment of central authority. What bin Laden and his organisation did was horrific and inexcusable—but do this to a country in the name of justice?

And yet this victory has wider significance for the Pentagon. Massive, precision-guided air power can win wars, with almost no commitment of US ground troops, and that almost no casualties. With this renewed confidence in what historian Russell Weigley called the "American Way of War"—massive firepower, high technology, total victory—Washington is now considering similar intervention in states that allegedly provide aid and comfort to the terrorists, such as Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Iraq. The events in Afghanistan have likely given a boost to plans for a strong US military role in the drug war in Colombia. Newsweek reports that Colombian authorities seeking a more decisive US role now "trying to show the parallels between the Taliban and their own guerrilla movements."

There is also emerging a renewed respectability in direct intervention in the affairs of developing countries. Respect for national sovereignty and self-determination has been further eroded in Washington and London since September, with conservative intellectual voices opposing powerful states cannot yet articulate. One influential formulation comes from



It is again okay to intervene in the affairs of developing countries.

Paul Johnson, author of *Modern Times*—"...the best medium-term lesson to be to the old League of Nations Mandate System, which served well as a 'respectable' form of colonialism between the wars... Countries that can't live at peace with their neighbours and wage war against the international community cannot expect total independence. With all the permanent members of the Security Council backing, in varying degrees, the American-led initiative, it should not be difficult to devise a new UN mandate that places terrorist states under supervision."

Afghanistan is now turning into the latest experiment in the New Trusteeship or New Mandate System, following the failure of the first major initiative owing to the Taliban's resistance in 1995. The EU is asked to provide—under British leadership, of course—a permanent occupation force. The US is brought in to broker a "representative government" among competing tribal groups to fill the political vacuum. Washington is being invited in military action, multilateral

political engineering, thus getting others to take the blame if the political structure collapses. On the domestic front laws and executive orders are being used to restrict the rights to privacy and free movement have been passed with astonishing speed and ease. Not even the Cold War was presented in such idealistic terms as the War against Terror.

Writing in *The Nation*, David Corn observes that a mere nine weeks into this war, legislation had been passed and executive orders signed in the US establishing secret military tribunals to try non-US citizens, impose guilt by association on immigrants, authorize the attorney general to indefinitely lock up aliens on mere suspicion, expand the use of wiretaps and secret searches, allow secret evidence in immigration proceedings, destroy the secrecy of the press, racial hatred and ethnic profiling. Many of the US's European allies have also tried to push through a resolution outlawing the wings before 11 September. In Europe, however, critics and parliament are

by WALDEN BELLO

not going as gently into that good night—including, surprisingly, the British parliament, which shot down Tony Blair's draconian proposal to allow the indefinite imprisonment of foreigners suspected of terrorism.

The new US legislation institutionalises unilateralism: the latest laws and executive decrees all endow Washington with the power to do almost anything abroad. US forces displayed this recently, when, in an act indistinguishable from piracy, they boarded without consent a Singaporean ship in the Arabian Sea, overpowered the crew, and launched a fruitless search for terrorists. Had a suspect been discovered, the Pentagon could have shipped him to a US base, in, say, Germany, tried him in a secret military tribunal, and had him sent found guilty by a process significantly less rigorous than civilian justice, transported him to the desert or imprisoned in the US, possibly anonymously. ♦

(Walden Bello is Executive Director of Focus on the Global South.)

COMMENT

by DAN KENNEDY

Can CNN be saved?



The left and the right alike hate CNN.

For those on the right, the trouble with CNN is its alleged liberal bias. "Clinton News Network" was the searing neo-conservative slapped on in the late '90s, helping to fuel the rise of the right-leaning Fox News Channel. This perception has been a damming that Walter Isaacson, since becoming head of CNN last year, has gone so far as to have a chat with Republican members of Congress, explore a talk show for right-wing on Rush Limbaugh, and recently remind his troops that they shouldn't dwell on civilian casualties in the Afghan war without reminding viewers about 11 September. (See: Walter, do you think we're forgotten?)

On the left, CNN looks very different. Immediately after 9/11, a fake report sent zipping around the Net that a CNN tape of Palestinians celebrating the attacks was fake footage from the Gulf War. This fit perfectly with the antiwar left's preconceived notions. After the bombing started, some leftists started calling it "CNN" for "Cable Media Network," referring to its alleged unquestioning embrace of US efforts in Afghanistan.

That such a radically centred news organisation could be the subject of these ideological passions says something interesting about CNN's place in American culture. But CNN today is in real danger—not from such critics, but from mindless corporate pressures to squeeze out higher and higher profits with fewer and fewer people. The last few years have not been kind to CNN. When it rocketed to prominence during the Gulf War in 1990 and 91, and when Larry King served as a virtual media consultant for Ross Perot in 1992, CNN had the

24-hour all-news cable audience to itself. Founder Ted Turner took the opportunity presented by this formidable lack of competition to build up his network to become one of the more respected international electronic news organisations—no BBC, but a lot better than the Big Three broadcast networks, which spent the decade closing foreign bureaus and dumping down their products.

In the mid-'90s, other players decided to grab a piece of the action. Microsoft and NBC formed MSNBC, a younger, hipper alternative. Rupert Murdoch started the Fox News Channel to poach old conservatives. With the tiny all-news audience split three ways, CNN's fate—on the ground reporting—became too expensive to maintain and Fox's strategy of headbashed talk shows, epitomised by the luncheonette *The O'Reilly Factor*.

Things only got worse after the corporate owner to whom Turner sold out, Time Warner, merged with AOL last year. Time Warner head Gerald Levin may be calling the shots, but it's AOL that's holding the checkbook, and its approach suggests a pillaging Rome. Last summer, they shut down the failed Time, Inc. library, a substantive symbolic blow for an organisation renowned for its institutional memory. And CNN started emulating its downside competition, unweaving its own lame talk shows.

After 11 September, ratings for CNN, MSNBC and Fox all soared, and CNN, with its superior journalistic resources, led again. Isaacson said CNN had rediscovered its mission. That didn't last. With the terrorism crisis less acute now, ratings are down and the struggle with Fox has resumed. The *Wall Street Journal* recently wrote that CNN will blow through its annual news budget in six months, even as ad revenues continue to plummet. The only solution is a merger of reorganising operations with ABC or CBS. But those networks are reportedly talking with each other.

Fox Company columnist John Ellis observed in the *New York Times* in September 2000 that CNN's problems are deep-seated. Ellis, a veteran of NBC and the Fox Channel (being President Bush's cousin) once had his fiancée giggle Fox during the Florida fiasco, argued that CNN's problem is ingrained. "The CNN culture is sort of retro-Southern gothic," Ellis wrote. "Most people there have never worked anywhere else. They see themselves as Georgians doing battle with hostile Northerners." That was true even after Turner sold out to Time Warner, Ellis added.

That culture apparently died in Isaacson's predecessor, Rick Kaplan, now in exile at Harvard's Kennedy School. Isaacson could presumably encounter less resistance from old CNN hands—there are fewer of them around anyway. But will his corporate masters let him use the chance to make CNN better, or strip mine it for loot? Here, *Headlines of the Day*. From a recent *Boston Herald*: "Budget Fight Could Hurt—Or Help—Gov. Hopefuls." Yes, that just about covers it. ♦ (MediaChannel)

Gross National Happiness in Russia

MOSCOW—Russia's economy has picked up after a decade-long decline, but, say economists, a lot needs to be done. 2001 was a successful year for Russia and the average Russian would be happy by 2010, Russian foreign trade surplus exceeded \$40 billion, and its gold and hard currency reserves rose to \$58 billion, tripling the 1998 level, says the Central Bank of Russia.

But experts warn that continued over-reliance on oil and gas exports might eventually push Russia into a vicious cycle of debt crises, and increasing dependence on international commodity prices. Russia's financial health has improved significantly since the 1998 crisis, largely due to high world market prices for its energy and commodity exports. Russia is a large oil producer, and the world's biggest natural gas producer and exporter. But many of Russia's oil and metal industries were sold cheap to well-connected tycoons, who have been siphoning out as much as two-thirds of the profits from their cheaply acquired assets offshore instead of investing in production. There has also been nervousness recently as Russian oil hovered below \$20 per barrel. Another potential challenge to sustaining such growth is Russia's \$150 billion foreign debt, which represents roughly four-fifths of the country's GDP, or \$1,000 per citizen. Russia's slowing economy could entail devaluation of the Ruble between 2003 and 2005, argues Mikhail Delgany, head of the Institute of Globalisation Problems, a Moscow-based think-tank. (P)

Flier in the ointment

WASHINGTON—A US fighter pilot who shot down a Pakistani warplane in her A-10, with its fast-firing Gatling gun. She was a champion triathlete with a master's degree in public policy from Harvard. She had patrolled the no-fly zone over Iraq and directed search-and-rescue missions inside Afghanistan. Then she landed at Prince Sultan Air Force Base in Saudi Arabia in November 2000. In a briefing, officials laid down the rules for travel off base, even on official business. All female personnel would wear the customary head-to-toe gown, the abaya and its matching headscarf. They could not drive. They would ride in the back seat and be escorted by males at all times. Officials said the policy was to keep from offending conservative Saudi leaders and protect US troops from terrorist attacks. But to McSally, the directive, with its different instructions for men and women, "abandons American values." Last month, she used Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, contending that the policy is unconstitutional, discriminating against women and violating their religious freedom. The suit seeks no monetary damages. She has support from an unlikely coalition of Republicans, Democrats and liberal feminists. "This is bizarre," says Senator Bob Smith, one of five Republican senators pushing the Defence Department to junk the policy, "because we are waging a war in Afghanistan to remove those abayas." In a letter to Rumsfeld, Democratic Rep Louise Slaughter wrote, "It is unconscionable that our own government should uphold this institutionalised disrespect of women by requiring Americans conform to these standards." Says McSally, "The last thing I wanted to do was make a big deal about being a woman. As an officer, you need to shut up and follow when an order is lawful. You need to step out when it's unlawful."

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EXHIBITION

◆ **Photography** Mani Lama's People and Red series and Kim Hong Sung's Wind Horse series. 15-25 January, 11AM-6PM, Sunday through Friday, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisted. 411122
◆ **Phil Privett** Paintings inspired by Hindu and Buddhist mythology, sculptures and three-dimensional Himalayan Chessboard. 13-24 January, 8:30AM-5:45PM, British Council courtyard, Lainchaur. 410798



EVENTS

◆ **Migratory Bird Festival** at Koshi Tapgu Wildlife Reserve. Birdwatching and ecotourism. Rs 1,500 for nights of 18, 19 January, with food, local transfer, accommodation and jungle activities. 441226
◆ **Friends of the Bagmati** Meeting of concerned people trying to clean up the Bagmati river. Dwarika's Hotel, 14 January, 2:30PM. All welcome. 479488
◆ **Philips Bowling Tournament** Each bowler rolls three games, highest average wins. Philips stereo. Rs 500 per bowler, 12 January, 12PM, Bowling Boulevard, Kathmandu. mg@mail.com.np
◆ **Gokarna Forest Golf Annual Tournament** for members (Rs 800) and guests (Rs 1,800, and lunch for spouses Rs 500). 12 January, 7:30AM-Afternoon, 244154
◆ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** at Hotel Vajra. Dances of Hindu and Buddhist gods Tuesdays and Fridays, 7PM onwards, the Great Pagoda Hall. Ticket and tea Rs 400. Nepali folk tunes Wednesdays and Saturdays, 6:30PM onwards, hotel restaurant. Hotel Vajra. 271545
◆ **Contemporary Jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Francaise Sundays and Tuesdays 4:30PM-6:30PM, 241163. At Banu's, Kamal Pokhari, Wednesdays 5:30PM-8:00PM, Saturdays 1:30PM-4:30PM, 434830
◆ **Beetle Mania**, tribute to George Harrison: Poolside party with live band, DJ and contests. Come in a Beetle, pay only Rs 2,222 for as many as you will fit in the car. Prize for most stuffed car. Rs 450 per person head with drink and snack. Hotel de l'Annapurna, 25 January, 3PM onwards. 221711

MUSIC

◆ **Coffee and live music** with Dinesh and Tilak. Saturdays, 6:45PM-9:15PM. Himalatte Café, Thamel. 262526
◆ **Live music** Tuesday and Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant. 414336
◆ **Daily live gazals** by Saj Singh and party. Ghar-e-Kabab, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 221711

EATING OUT

◆ **Steam Away Winter Blues** Hot appetisers, soups, noodles and momos. Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel.
◆ **Mamma Mia** Pizzas with special toppings, special pasta menu and complimentary Coke with every order. 15 percent discount for Standard Chartered Bank credit card holders. Complimentary shuttle from Pokhara lakeside four times daily. Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 061-22122
◆ **Traditional Sekuwa** with live music from Himalayan Feelings fusion band and bonfires. Friday nights at Dwarika's Hotel. Rs555 per head. 479489
◆ **La Cafe des trekkers** Crepes of Brittany, raclette, cheese and meat fondue. 15 percent discount until 15 January 2002. Jyatha, opposite Blue Diamond Hotel. 225777
◆ **Winter specials** French onion soup, hot mulled wine, egg nog, and steaks. K-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043
◆ **Rox Restaurant and Bar** Traditional European cuisine from woodfired oven in show kitchen. Live music, cocktails and snacks at the Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
◆ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.

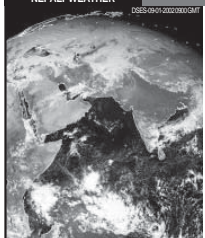
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◆ **Fresh air and tranquility in Kathmandu Valley** Stay at Triple A Organic Farm Guest-house in Gamcha, south of Thimi. Rs. 1,500 per person per night, all-inclusive. Email aaa@wink.com.np. 631766
◆ **Thank Goodness it's Friday!** Dwarika's TGIF overnight package including Friday check-in, sekuwa dinner, Saturday brunch, massage. \$125 net per couple. 479488
◆ **Pokhara Retreat** Through January 2002 stay two nights, get one free night. Package with or without airfare to Pokhara and return. Complimentary shuttle to Lakeside, free use of pool table and fitness centre. Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 435741/42

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

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

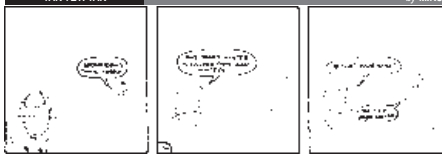


This satellite picture taken on Wednesday afternoon shows a fresh westerly heading our way. It is riding a strong jet stream and will have moved into west and central Nepal by Friday. The front is fighting a high pressure system over eastern Tibet, but seems to be making its presence felt. Northwest India and Nepal may receive light rain Friday and Saturday. The central and eastern hills will get cloudy skies, but will remain largely dry. The current trend of higher maximum temperature will continue because of clear haze-free days. Minimum temperature will also come up a notch at the weekend because of night-time cloud cover.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
21-02	21-03	20-04	21-03	22-02

YAK YETI YAK



BOOKWORM

That Dreadful Night: Carnage at Nepalese Royal Palace Aditya Man Shrestha
Eko Books, Kathmandu, 2001
Rs 500

An absorbing narration of what happened on the night of 1 June, 2001 in the royal palace of Nepal, and its causes and consequences. The only undisputed fact of the night was the death of ten royal family members, including the Nepal sovereign. The rest is a mystery. Shrestha tries to probe into the tragedy and put it in its proper perspective.

Patents: Myths and Reality Vandana Shiva
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2001
Rs 330

This volume examines the myths associated with the universalisation of the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS) in the context of trade liberalisation, and the real consequences of implementing such a regime. Shiva highlights the ethical, ecological and economic impacts of globalised patent regimes.

My Giftbook: An Autobiography Taimina Nazrin
Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2001
Rs 400

The first major work of Bangladeshi writer Nazrin in exile. *My Giftbook* is a sensitive retelling of her growing up in an extended family in enervate East Pakistan and Bangladesh. The author moves back and forth between her own life and that of a fledgling nation, with sharp observations on the class discrimination, bias, gender disparities and growing religious orthodoxy in Bangladesh society.

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CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The man behind Duryaman



BINOD BHATTARYA

The world changed a lot of ways after 9/11. The after-shocks of the suicide bombers triggered tremors in South Asia which are reverberating still. And the other way the world changed was the birth of the Duryaman comic strip.

Duryaman comes from the Texan pronunciation of the middle initial "W" of US president George W Bush. Duryaman is patterned after Superman, but the caped crusader here is actually an anti-superhero. "The real Durya is not renowned the world over for his intellect, and this is a point on his war on terror," said the comic strip's co-creator, Indian journalist Jug Suraiya.

But now that the Afghan campaign is winding down, isn't Duryaman getting a bit stale? Suraiya shakes his head vigorously. He was in Kathmandu this week holidaying, and he was staying at the Everest Hotel where all the journalists were. "Even at the Kathmandu summit we heard echoes of George Bush's rhetoric: you are with us or you are against us," says Suraiya. Just goes to show that Duryaman has now become a role model for other world leaders who are fighting terror.

In fact it was this Bush line that inspired the 55-year-old associate editor of the Times of India to create the comic strip. "A friend called me and asked me to switch on the tv," says Suraiya recounting the events of 11 September. "America is falling down. He is allergic to tv, but switched it on. A few minutes later he was dictating the TOI 10-11 editorial entitled 'Target Humanity'. No sooner was he done, and after watching more footage of the political reaction to the attacks, it struck him that leaders were beginning to make more and more belligerent noises, and the recrimination was aimed at South Asia.

"Here we had the least legit leader who barely scraped through controversial elections threatening a congregation that could happen in our backyard," he says. "I feared that the mental vacuity associated with the rhetoric could do more



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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

SAARCASM

Someone stop me right now before I get carried away and write another column about the successfully concluded SAARC summit. ("Let Us Grandly Succumb to the SAARC"—Mow-Mow Chow Chow Pvt Ltd). Go on, restrain me, otherwise I will have to involuntarily unleash yet another glowing tribute to the concept of regional cooperation to foster crossborder tourism. (Hearty Welcome to Heads of State/Government of SAARC—Yak Premium Filter). You mean you actually want to hear more about the SAARC Spirit of Partnership? You mean you've not had enough? You see you don't have SAARC coming out of your ears? No kidding. All right, then, you asked for it.



Now that we have survived a major shark attack, this is the perfect time for our nation and people to limp back to normalcy. The all-clear has been sounded, the frenzy of deconstruction has abated, and Nepal is slowly regaining the socio-economic rights that they had willingly sacrificed for the duration of the summit of regional hammerheads.

Much to the relief of the man-on-the-street, for instance, the Tundikhel area is now open once more for people who want to take a sun bath. And as is the case after a nice noontime nap, one can now also attend to calls of nature in broad daylight right there on the wall opposite the PCO without facing the danger of being observed by a shark head of state (or government) speeding past on a motorcade, or an escort helicopter gunship swooping low to take a closer look at what one is up to, and catching one flagrant.

It may be hard for those in the corridors of power to imagine what a relief the lifting of these restrictions is to the

man and/or woman on the street. Every activity of personal hygiene was under strict scrutiny, even in the privacy of one's own home. It was rather disconcerting to have your every move on the toilet under constant surveillance from an airborne early warning and control system (AWACS), and the aforementioned common person on the street had to think twice and look over his/her shoulder before caving in to the temptation of pressing one thumb to his/her right nostril and with a sharp exhalation from the lungs, expertly

discharging a major glob of nasal obstruction (Warning to minors: don't try this stunt at home) right there below a large boarding at the Tiptureswor intersection that says "Heard You Will Come to SAARC Heads".

Lost our illustrious readers are labouring under the illusion that we are complaining about the suspension of civil liberties, let me dispel that notion right here and now. There is no gaining that as panoptic Nepal, we feel no sacrifice is too great in order to impress our foreign visitors. We will willingly suspend the dumping of our trash with wild abandon on our own doosteps (we will dump it in someone else's doostep), we will postpone all public nose grooming, we will not sun bathe on the bridge—but only for a limited time, and only if you can get parliament to ratify the strictures with a two-thirds majority.

The question in everyone's mind right now is: when are rhinos going to be translocated to the Royal Tinkane National Park? What are we going to do with all the bad sheets that draped the city's billboards for the past two weeks? The answer to both questions: Maybe. ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Subhas' explorations

Subhas Rai's cartoons have by now become a staple for many Nepal books, magazine and is familiar to the readers of this newspaper. But he does not like to be called a cartoonist, not even an artist. "I am an explorer," says the boyish-looking 34-year-old, and he has never stopped exploring.

Starting out in a Kathmandu ad agency, Subhas was a quick learner and soon found the confines of a "job" restricted his need to seek new challenges. He shifted to a multinational advertis-

ing agency in Kathmandu where he familiarised himself with computer graphics and design. But even here, claustrophobia set in. "It is a very commercial environment, there isn't much time to be creative," says Subhas. So he struck off on his own as a freelance designer.

His most challenging task? To illustrate Adventures of a Nepal Frog, the best-selling children's book by Kanak Mani Dixit which has now been translated into eight languages. Subhas likes to do unusual things, and his latest work

is the cover for the SAARC issue of Himal South Asian which has an upside down map of the subcontinent with Sri Lanka on top. "I'm not a cartographer, but it was fun to spoof National Geographic and make a map that forces people to take a whole new perspective."

Subhas is off to the US to learn new tricks, more computer aided design work and animation. "I'm not the kind that will stay abroad," says Subhas, "I want to widen my horizons, gain experience with new equipment and bring back world-class graphics design to Nepal." Keep on exploring, Subhas, and (like the poet said) return to the place you started to see it for the first time. ♦



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