

## Can't say goodbye

The fur is flying once more on the divestment row over Nepal Indosuez.

The French company Crédit Agricole Indosuez, which owns half the shares, wants to sell off to a consortium of 24 Nepali companies. Nepal Rastra Bank has to officially sanction it, but is keeping mum. The French are getting impatient, and warned this week that if they don't hear from the central bank by 31 July, when their management contract ends, they'll just pack up and leave.

Crédit Agricole has given the NRB two options: sell to the Nepali consortium, or permit transfer of shares to a non-banking offshore subsidiary. "All we want is a decision," Marc Dumetz of Indosuez told us. "We are not interested in looking for other buyers."



The Nepal Rastra Bank says it can't decide because the divestment is in the courts. The Chaudhary Group has sued Credit Agricole for not honouring an earlier MoU, and charges the bank with attempting to prejudice the dispute and exert diplomatic pressure. Indosuez maintains the contract has long expired. Last month, the Supreme Court refused to issue an interim order to block the sale of shares and ordered the Lalpur Appellate Court to deal with the litigation as a priority.

## SLO-MO

Earlier or later political turmoil had to impact industrial production, and it now finally has. We are making less of everything from needles to noodles. Official neglect and indifference is forcing factories to close down and lay off workers. The five-day Maoist strike next month may be the final blow for many. There has been no mass closure yet, but industrialists say many factories in rural towns are working only three or four days a week and cutting back on production. Overall manufacturing has declined by between 30-50 percent, depending on the commodity. Beer and alcohol, already hit hard by the Maoists' day drive last year, are still stagnant. Even the production of instant noodles and toothpaste is down. Growth in the past six months is estimated to be about 10 percent negative.

"There is a net decline in almost every sector," says Yuhang Khatiwada, an economist at the Research Division at Nepal Rastra Bank who keeps track of economic performance. "Even if we had peace today, it would take another six months for the quietest turnaround."

But this hinges on the assumption that there will be a spurt in export demand resulting from, say, new concessions for Nepali garments in the US market. It could take much longer for new investment decisions.

With no other lining, business is in deep gloom. Most Nepali industrialists we talked to are so fed up they don't want to discuss the slump anymore. Those that do, repeat an uncannily similar story irrespective of the commodity they manufacture. "Our market territories are getting out of reach, payments are becoming a big problem, banking channels are disrupted, and people don't feel safe to hold cash or stocks," says industrialist Binod Chaudhary.

Factories that earlier thought processing production by re-scheduling shifts would help them tide over the emergency are now

- Garment exports are down by a third
- Carpets are at a quarter of normal levels
- Pashmina has fallen by 80 %
- Food and beverages are down 30-50 %
- Liquor sales are down by 60 %
- Textiles are flat and could slip further

beginning to realise there is no point producing unless you can sell. Production at a rice mill in Birgunj has been slashed by 75 percent because it has become almost impossible to send foodgrains to remote mountain districts—the major markets. The situation is also frustrating for many in government. One economist told us he dreads looking at the new statistics that arrive on his desk every month. The numbers are all tumbling.

The best-case scenario for manufacturing this year is zero growth," the government economist told us. "It means we can write off even the little employment that was being generated until last year." Industry employs about 300,000 people and once layoffs accelerate, contract workers will be the first to be hit.

Last year manufacturing contributed Rs 38.7 billion to Nepal's GDP, when the economy was relatively buoyant and exports were bullish. Today, even though the trade treaty with India has been renewed, it is unlikely there will be a major increase in exports. This is because the five products (zinc oxide, copper wire, steel pipes, acrylic yarn and vanaspathi ghee) that now face quantitative restrictions for duty-free access used to account for almost 40 percent of exports to India. "We don't know who to blame anymore," a producer and exporter of toiletries told us. "Even now, no one is seriously considering a holding-on strategy either at the shop-floor or in policy circles."

Recession in domestic demand, resulting from factors like low agricultural growth and the security situation, has hit the entire chain from manufacturers to distributors to retailers.

Purchasing power has fallen, buyers are spending cautiously, so traders and retailers don't have money to hold stocks, which translates into a slump in factory sales. The

problem is more severe in markets feeding the hinterland, where restrictions on movement have sapped demand.

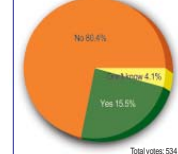
Supplies are unpredictable because of security checks along the major highways. In some districts, security forces, in an attempt to cut off Maoist food supplies, have even blocked transport of food products.

"Security is better than being killed by Maoists but the measures taken by government are killing industry," says an alcohol producer. Shops shut down early and alcohol dispensation has come to almost a complete halt. "Suddenly our industry has become unviable."

Economist Shambur Sharma has a bird's eye view of the economy from his perch above the prime minister's annex in Singha Darbar. He says the external situation is already showing signs of improvement and, assuming our domestic problems are resolved in six months, we can look forward to 5-6 percent economic growth. "But," he adds, "these predictions depend on peace."

## “We have as much authority as a court of law”

Bhairab Prasad Lamsal, chairman of the newly-formed Judicial Commission to probe the ill-gotten wealth of public officials, speaks about his new job.



Q. Do you support the five-day strike called by the Maoists?

What are your commission's terms of reference, will you just investigate or will you also prosecute wrong-doers? Our main task is to establish facts. We will find out the facts and submit the report to the government with recommendations. The concerned individual would be responsible for explaining how the property was amassed. For those who cannot present evidence commensurate to their property, we will mention in the report how the property may have been earned.

But from the royal announcement we gather that your mandate is only to investigate, not make recommendations? I have not received all the papers. Some technical issues on what is to be investigated and what type of report is to be submitted remain to be finalised, so I cannot discuss all the details. But legally, the commission is empowered to investigate and make recommendations. The law under which we have been appointed has many

provisions relating to that. We can accept evidence, question witnesses. This commission has as much authority as a court of law.

You also headed the commission to investigate the Dasarath Stadium accident. What difference do you find between that probe and your present job? That was a specific investigation of a specific tragic event. The scope of this task is much greater. I had presented my findings objectively then and was also happy that the government actually implemented many of my recommendations. The security system of the stadium today is based on the recommendations we made, including measures on improving the safety features on the exit gates.



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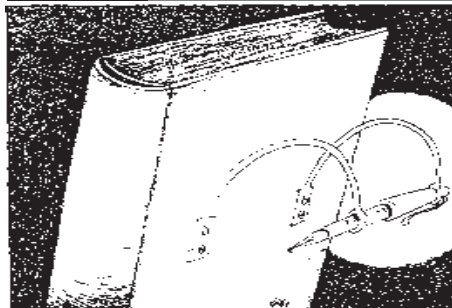








SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL



Those who expected the country's first legislative session sitting under a state of emergency to go into hibernation after the ratification roll call are fighting off their own sleep. The political atmosphere has been so electrified by clandestine pacts and

public commitments flying left, right and centre that even a momentary lapse of concentration could leave you far behind on current affairs. The main opposition CPN-UML's eight-point constitution-amendment proposal has animated discussions both in terms

of sound and substance. With key comrades still jumping off their seats to cord off the rostrum and firing off incendiary threats, we may rest assured that democracy is alive and kicking. (How that ward chairman from Taplejung who snarled into the opposition

# Constitution contention

Despite, MPs' clandestine pacts and public commitments there are other players who can influence constitutional change, including the people.

benches could breach such tight security is probably under investigation. But he and his illustrious lapel pin provided reaffirmation during these perilous times that parliament still remains in the public domain.) The UML could be so definite about the articles it wants changed primarily because of the critical support it bestowed on a document drafted by a panel that included two of its senior leaders. In raising some questions and answering others, the party has given us a refreshing course in civics at a time when our civil rights stand suspended.

On the question of amending the constitution, the UML is firmly against outsiders stepping on the toes of honourable legislators even if they happen to head or serve on the panel that drew up the draft. The newly reunified party is in such resounding unanimity on this matter that the tone of its deliberations has shot up several decibels. You might argue that raw ideology is at play here since all the non-communist representatives that were on the drafting panel are almost uniformly arrayed against an amendment. But here's the basic flaw in that contention: none of them is an MP.

On the face of it, the UML has good reason to be outraged by the outpouring in favour of the status quo. How could the emergency stand in the way of amending the basic law when it hasn't stopped some people from demanding a constituent assembly? Moreover, the comrades and fellow travellers in the other parties have 61.9 percent of the people on their side (Nepali Times/nepalnews.com weekly Internet poll #24). You have to delve deeper, however, to fathom the finer points. Given the composition of parliament today, an amendment represents a clear and present danger, while a constituent assembly is merely something in the realm of possibility. The case could be made that the assembly, therefore, enjoys greater speech protection than the amendment proposal, although these are not normal times. As for the majority of the UML in the parliament, it is the party that believes the constitution needs "tinkering," you have to acknowledge that the term covers everything between the devil and the deep blue sea. "Let the people proliferate" phrase from the national anthem to a surgical overhaul of everything except the four unchangeable features.

That brings us to the crown of the debate. Do we need the palace's approval to alter a document that stands on the tripartite compromise of April 1990? The constitution was promulgated when the palace technically still wielded supreme powers. Once it became the basic law of the land, the people gained the right to exercise sovereignty through parliament. And Article 44 of the constitution describes parliament as consisting of His Majesty and the two chambers. The UML and the Nepali Congress may get the two-thirds

by PUSKAR BHUSAL



NEPALI ECONOMY

BIZ NEWS

## Mystery release

Tulsi Ram Agarwal, a Biratnagar businessman, returned home last week after spending 40 days in captivity. Agarwal was abducted when out on his morning walk in his Biratnagar neighbourhood. Government and Agarwal himself have divulged few details on the businessman's ordeal. Days before his release opposition MP had charged Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka with protecting the alleged kidnaper. Umesh Giri, a resident of Biratnagar, Agarwal was held in India and some newspapers have said he was released upon payment of Rs10 million. Family sources have denied the reports.

## Fertiliser policy

The government adopted a new policy on 28 February, which it says will help make sure there is enough fertiliser when the farmers need it most. The new policy requires government to assess and make public the quantity of all fertiliser stocks in the country six months before the cropping season. The government began privatising fertiliser imports and distribution in late 1997, but in the absence of effective regulation there have been shortages in supply even under the private sector joint business. In 2000-01 the private sector imported 60 percent and the government-run Agricultural Implements Corporation, 40 percent of the total fertiliser used. Under the new policy all fertiliser importers have to be registered at the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives. The government is to make public international fertiliser prices and will require wholesalers to publicise the selling rates to ensure local fair pricing. The government will also require all fertiliser importers to maintain 20 percent stocks at all times to ensure availability.

## Towards a cleaner Valley

There are to be no new brick kilns in the Valley. The government, concurring with the decision of the new Industrial Promotion Board, has decided not to permit any more traditional kilns in Kathmandu Valley until entrepreneurs come up with a less-polluting way to produce bricks. The board has also decided that kilns already operating in the Valley will have to install pollution control equipment within 18 months. The government has also decided that kilns operating without registration will be immediately shut down. The law allows the government to slap fines of up to Rs5,00,000 on errant kiln owners or even order the closing of the factories. The government decision comes after the Lalitpur branch of the Small and Cottage Industries department refused last year to renew permits of 43 traditional brick-makers. Also recently, 16 kilns in Bhaktapur were penalised for operating without licenses.

## Tourist count

Tourism numbers continue to tumble. Statistics compiled by the Nepal Tourism Board show that total arrivals in January and February were down by almost 47 percent, a continuation of last year's trend. Last month's total arrivals were down by almost 48 percent. Indian arrivals were low last year and continue to be so. A more worrying trend is the drop in three country tourists: the numbers dropped by 54 percent in January and 47 percent in February. Indian arrivals in January were down 24 percent, and in February had slumped by 41 percent.

## Union Finance shares

Union Finance has begun distribution of the 240,000 shares it offered to the public late last month. Two of the four applicants who had applied to purchase 3,000 shares each are to receive 120 shares (par value Rs 100). Those seeking to purchase 50 shares are to get 10 each. The company received 22,819 valid applications.

INTERVIEW

# "How does private investment impact on social development?"

- Siddhartha Rana



Siddhartha Rana recently took over as Chairman of the Social Enterprise Group from his father. He received the Global Leader For Tomorrow 2001 Award at the World Economic Forum last year in Davos. He attended the WEF meeting in New York last month, and spoke to Nepali Times about the Forum, and its message for countries like Nepal.

Nepali Times: Why New York?

Siddhartha Rana: One of the unique features of this year's annual meeting is that it was held in New York instead of Davos for the first time in over 30 years. This was largely a show of respect and confidence post-11 September. Although it was planned for Davos, the forum chose to move the venue along with making changes to the agenda.

Aren't these meetings getting a bit elitist, and unabashedly globalisation?

Siddhartha Rana: But the original reason for the annual WEF meeting is still valid. The rapid growth of the global communications, information technology and international business in the second half of the 20th century increased the need for a common platform where various sections of society are brought together to consider and advance the key issues on the global agenda. The WEF is that platform. And in the course of three decades, the Forum has grown from a small European economic conference into a unique, member-based institution comprised of the foremost 1,000 corporations in the world. The Annual Meeting in Davos has become the premier meeting of world leaders in business, government and civil society to address the issues and challenges confronting humanity.

But how does a meeting like this address the genuine concerns of those disenfranchised by economic globalisation?

Siddhartha Rana: I think there is now a realisation that the events shaping the world and influences on society today require a paradigm shift in the way that we address the issue of globalisation. There needs to be a radical formula that affects change for equity and a more even improvement of living standards around the world.

And how is the WEF going to do that?

Among the things discussed were ways of attracting capital inflows in a risk-averse environment; basically dealing with restoring investor confidence and averting the herd mentality. This is something that we have seen practically in Nepal's present investment climate. An economic and development crisis is a factor in conflict, but the conflict and instability in turn prevents new investment. It is a catch-22 situation. We were trying to rekindle the role of the IMF and the World Bank, even a radical redesign in their way of functioning. After Argentina, there are questions about their role.

And there is also the question of why developing countries must

borrow and service their debt when past borrowings have either been returned to the donor through intermediaries, or corruption and bad governance meant that the money was never spent on development. And when states fail, where can the international community step in to rebuild them and restore domestic order?

How about issues like migration?

Siddhartha Rana: There is a recognition of the need to define citizenship in an era of migration, dealing with international demographic issues. There is recognition that these things are all interlinked. People are migrating because of failed development, instability and lack of investment. So how do you link the global social investment market that private investment makes an impact on social development projects around the world?

How much has the 11 September attack been instrumental in changing thinking in these areas?

Siddhartha Rana: The very fact that the WEF meeting took place in New York was proof that the roots of the global crisis are recognised. CEOs need to become statesmen and leaders beyond just business. We need to bridge religious divides internationally, within regions and in countries. We have to create a deeper dialogue among faiths and the search for common values. Then there is the more immediate need to address the problem of terrorism and international laws to tackle them.

Was the need to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor also discussed?

Siddhartha Rana: Yes, we looked at the digital divide, how technology can be used to support development, and especially a look at the education and health gap. A more immediate issue was the need to break patents to the sick in poor countries can afford cheaper generic versions of drugs. Then there was the issue of philanthropy and how it can be made more effective globally; the need to bridge the gap of inequalities where everyone has a role and a responsibility.

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## "Why should the Maoists surrender arms before talking?"

Lilamani Pokhrel  
8 February, Bimara



The government says it has imposed the emergency to control the Maoist terrorists. But has the emergency been directed to that end? The Maoists say they don't abide by this constitution. They say they want to reject the present parliamentary system and existing laws and have even announced a parallel government. The existing laws and constitution don't affect them, and because they don't accept the state, the emergency will not affect them either. The emergency is instead affecting those who accept the constitution, such as political parties, civil society, social organisations and people at large. The civil liberties given by the constitution have been curtailed only for those who believe in and work under the present statute, not the Maoists. So if the desired effects don't reach the targeted group, why should we allow our rights to be curtailed?

Nowhere has an armed conflict such as this been resolved by other than political means. After 18 years of an ethnic liberation movement Sri Lanka now has a ceasefire. Ours is also a class struggle, so it is unlikely the problem can be resolved by only mobilising the army.

The constitution allows an emergency to be imposed for a maximum of one year. What are we going to do if the problem is not resolved even in this time frame? There is no provision to extend the emergency thereafter. The army says it could take time to come to a resolution and that political efforts should also be underway. So how can [government] shut the doors to a political solution and say that the emergency and involvement of the army will solve the problem. We need to re-open the political doors and go to talks with an alternative proposal. There is no reason to endorse something that has no justification and will only restrict the rights of the people. Likewise, the country's revenue has also been hit by the emergency, and we'll see those effects next year.

The government was unable to present an alternative proposal during talks with the Maoists. It only said let's work under this constitution and also form an interim government. Where is the provision to form an interim government under this constitution? The Maoists are a force outside this constitution and they would not have revolted if they wanted to remain under it. Before the talks we had advised the government to come up with an alternative proposal and asked the Maoists to be realistic. They made a mistake in walking away from the talks, which is why they are now cornered. ... In the third round of talks, the Maoists came with only the demand for a constituent assembly, and they were wrong to simply make a proposal and walk away from talks. They have not been able to justify their actions until now. They should have consulted other political parties. The government should also have been flexible. ... A constituent assembly is the ultimate form the power of the people can take in a political system... even King Tribhuvan had announced one, though it was not implemented. There are two lines of thought in the country concerning how the Maoist problem should be resolved. One wants to maintain the status quo and more stringent laws. This is the old way of thinking. It's been proven that an army cannot protect democracy. The other group wants to make improvements to the system that exists. ... We say the constitution should be amended. It says that sovereignty rests with the people, but it also says that constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy cannot be changed. Why can't the sovereign people change that? Likewise, they say four castes and 36 ethnicities, and then impose a Hindu state. We are not against constitutional amendments, but they can't be a means to solve the Maoist problem. Which clause in the Constitution can provide that? There is talk of an election government, but will the Maoists be part of that? This is why we ask whether amendments can help resolve the problem.

Many times negotiations have failed in the world, but the process has not stopped there. If we want peaceful resolution [government] has to find alternatives and go back to talks. The Maoists have been asked to come to talks after giving up their arms. This is what someone who doesn't understand politics says. Why should the Maoists give up their bargaining power before coming to the table? Even a snake doesn't remain a snake if you defang it and remove its poison.

## Recruitment drive

28 March - 15 April  
Himal Khatunpurna

At a time when the anti-Maoist war is in full swing and the Royal Nepal Army, the Armed Police and Nepal Police all need new recruits, the demand for young Nepal army recruits is also growing. After recruiting hundreds of Nepal youngsters in Ilam and Gaighat over the past six months, officers from the Indian Army are busy measuring the chests of hundreds more Nepalis in Dharan.

To be eligible for the Indian Army they need to be between 16-22 years old, at least 157 cm tall, weighing 50 kg, with a 77 cm chest. They also need to have finished at least class eight.



Col Saradip Singh of the Indian Army says in fluent Nepali: "We will be taking 250 from the eastern zones Mechi, Kosi, Sagarmatha and Janku. We'll first shortlist 500, and pick 250 from that group in Darjeeling. Currently our intake is 1,000 recruits from Nepal and they are mostly from the Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Magar, Chhetri, Sherpa and Newar communities."

There is stiff competition to get into the Indian Army, and roughly 75,000 youngsters apply every year. With tensions high on the India-Pakistan border, it looks like the level of recruitment will increase this year. The Gorkhali troops in the Indian Army who were the best acclimatised for the high-altitude battles in Kargil last year. Thirteen Nepalis lost their lives in that conflict.

The Indian Army currently has seven regiments and 42 battalions, with a total of 50,000 Gorkha troops.

## No revolutionaries

Prakash Jwala, Chaplha, 10 March

Kajol Khatoon, an innocent girl, died last year in life when Maoists set fire to a Kathmandu-Bagmati bound bus she was travelling in. Four other passengers died with her.

Hem Bahadur Rai was injured in a bomb explosion while he was clearing away garbage. He died in hospital.

The Maoists killed security personnel in Sitapuri, Salyan by shooting them in the back; there was a river of blood.

Man Bahadur Tamang, a former national tawakdoo practitioner, was killed by Maoists near his home in Nawakot; they hacked off his hands and feet.

Forest fires started by the Maoists in Achham have destroyed government and private property. Two innocent children from Bhatkpur were injured while playing with Maoist explosives.

The Maoists have kept thousands of villages of Salma VDC in Jajarkot under strict surveillance, restricting free movement. The Maoists killed Tarzanth Vogi of Dang district while he was in mourning for his father.

These incidents, which have

taken place in the last couple of weeks, clearly reflect the true character of the Maoists and the path they have adopted. The Maoists, who say they are fighting to free the common man, are killing farmers, labourers and children. Setting alight a bus and burning people alive, putting bombs in the hands of wage earners, making children the target of explosives, hanging teachers and slaying the throats of people who don't agree with their ideology is not revolutionary. Their actions have forced the public to regard them as terrorists. No one has the license to do whatever they like in the name of revolution and change.

The Maoists have snatched away the life of Kajol, who was accompanying her uncle home to celebrate Eid. What have the Kajols of this world done that they are being indiscriminately killed? Kajol died in Kalkot, yet others are injured in Bhaktapur. Children have to be wary of road bombs, they have to witness their teachers being taken from the classroom and backed to death. What effect does this have on their psychology? Chawan Bhandari incident tainted the Maoists movement in the same way as when they set fire to a house of people in Harjung, Rolpa, a couple of years ago. When one considers the barbaric things they have committed from Harjung to Bhandara, they have outdone Hitler's atrocities.

The Maoists say they are fighting for the working class, but it is labourers and farmers who are falling prey to their violence. Their behaviour contradicts what Mao said. They kill people like Nim Lal Rokha, Han Singh Nepali, Shobha Ram Basnet, Balan Senkha, Dal Ram Khadka, Chin Bahadur Khadka whom they say as class enemies. They kill people like Hem Bahadur Rai, placing bombs in garbage drums. No minister, feudal landlord, or any other person will ever place his hand in a drum. Do you call people who place explosives near public parks, roads, and in drums anywhere but terrorists? Have they begun to overshadow the Qaedi and the Taliban? Maybe the Taliban can learn a lesson from the Maoists! Is this how the people's rule will be established? By killing innocents? Is this the communist principle?

What Marx, Lenin and Mao taught? This is what Idi Amin and bin Laden have taught. The Maoists talk about international humanitarian law. But they kill people who have surrendered to them. In Dalkh and Salyan, the public witnessed them killing soldiers in cold blood. They've also killed civilians. They kill unarmed political workers who challenge their ideology. Challenging political beliefs with armed violence is not common political practice.

Recently, Maoists have restricted the movement of villages in Salma, Jajarkot.

They've been doing the same in places like Rukum and Rolpa for quite some time. They throw people out of the villages, the districts, and even the country. Thousands of villages have been forced to live as refugees in the district headquarters and the capital. People caught between the Maoists and the security forces have been forced to leave the country. The government has declared an emergency. The Maoists, on their part, have

declared their own emergency in certain areas. So people have to suffer curfews and security checks imposed by both the sides.

The extreme left thinking that the Maoists have espoused has led to the country's present situation. The Maoist revolution, in its later phase, has degenerated into violence, terrorism, and anarchy. As a result, its political character is eroding and instead, it is being defined by its terrorist thinking, style, and behaviour. Will the Maoists be able to fulfil their dream this way?

## Minister's manoeuvres

Dani, 12 March

The argument between Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation Gopdham Shrestha and State Minister Surendra Hamal regarding the transfer of civil servants has taught other corrupt ministers a few lessons in how to designate their people without internal fighting. Home Minister and Minister for Local Development Khum Bahadur Khadka has already started practising what he learnt.

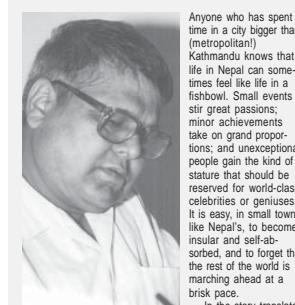
Minister Khadka, known for appointing his own people in government organisations and offices, has added three more workers to the Decentralisation Implementation and Inspection Committee. The three Congress

loyalists recruited are Dhanbar Bahadur Gaudari from Dang, Dr Baham Gaudari from Rupandehi, and Dhanaraj Chandrai Chaurasiya from Parsa. Among them Bhandari is said to be Khum Bahadur's man. Dr Gaudari was previously a state minister in the Ministry for Local Development, Doodhanchi Singh Chaudhary, and Chaurasiya by assistant minister Ajaya Kumar Chaurasiya. Evidently, the new appointments are part of an agreement was reached between the minister, state minister, and the assistant minister. Bhandari has been taken in as the accounts specialist, Dr Gaudari as the revenue specialist, and Chaurasiya as the administration specialist.

Clause 41 sub-clause 6 of the Self-Government Act 2055 says that people appointed to the Decentralisation Implementation and Inspection Committee must have ten years of work experience in the same sector. But none of those appointed yesterday fulfil the criteria of the Act. Dr Gaudari's qualification is that he is a former mayor of Bhatihawa, Bhandari is a school teacher and Chaurasiya's qualification is that he is a relative of the assistant minister. How could these people be appointed when the Act prevents their nomination? Udayaraj Soti, Secretary of the Local Development Ministry, claims that the three fulfil the ten-year work experience requirement.

In between all of this, Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka is also to be investigated by the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority. A source at the Department of Roads says the CIAA has taken the already gathered enough papers proving Khadka's role in the corruption in the construction of the Rapti river bridge sometime ago. Just last week, the CIAA interrogated director general of the NCCN Ramnagar Chaturvedi, and former director general of the Roads Department Anand Khanal.

# Life is a Fishbowl: Dhruba Chandra Gautam



Chandra Gautam captures, with wit and dexterity, the nature of a small-town society where even the most unremarkable occurrence spawns tall tales, avid gossip and widespread rumour-mongering. Gautam is an important modern writer of Nepal, a prolific creator of experimental, open-ended fiction. This story is more linear than most of his work. It is originally found in the collection *Gautamka Pratindhi Kathaharu*.

## HEM SUBBA ATE PAAN

Hem Subba was new in town. But when the short man walked down the paved road clacking his heels, many of the town's shopkeepers bent low to offer him their namaskar. He too was well-dressed, and made sure to please everyone by returning their greetings. In fact, the person he didn't ride a car was the car a handerider him from making direct contact with the people.

Hem Subba became renowned overnight through the town. Tales about his personality spread in out-of-the-way corners. His short profile covered the entire urban landscape. Word spread of the politeness of his speech, and praises were sung about the courtesies of his manners. His liberalism was immense. Much talk was generated on the matter of his ways and habits. Hem Subba doesn't ride a car. Hem Subba wears thick eyeglasses. Hem Subba never touches money with his hands. Hem Subba doesn't wear a watch. Hem Subba doesn't drink liquor or smoke cigarettes. Hem Subba doesn't have a wife.



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Leaving aside his habit of wearing eyeglasses for a moment, for each of his days, there were alternative ways: Hem Subba doesn't ride a car; he's rich enough to ride a Jeep.

He doesn't touch money with his hands; his pockets are filled with coins.

Hem Subba doesn't wear a watch; he carries a gold chain watch instead.

Hem Subba doesn't drink liquor; beer does the trick for him. He satisfies his cravings for cigarettes by smoking cigars instead.

Hem Subba doesn't have a wife (she died in a delivery case); there are pictures of four or five young women in his photo album.

Meaning, though there was some measure of renunciation in his ways, it was not possible to view him as extraordinary or strange. Do people become extraordinary merely because they are talked about? Hem Subba was an ordinary, healthy man. But for his slight stammer, his words were pleasant to hear. But it is true that one or two of his habits were odd. For instance, Hem Subba never ate paan.

Now paan was all the rage in the town. Everyone's mouth was stained red. Hem Subba sometimes designed to chew betel nuts, but he never ate paan. Betel nuts alone, however, do not add to the beauty of one's mouth.

There was a rich merchant in the town, who was very amicable about eating and feeding others poor. He saw that Hem Subba was breaking the town's tradition: the culture was about to erode.

On the day of the spring festival of colours, the merchant arranged large rolls of paan on a stainless steel plate, and made a request: "Hajoor, you must try this today."

Hem Subba was inflamed: "Don't you know that I never eat paan? I don't want to look like I've rubbed blood on my mouth by eating paan. Paan causes cancer, return that plate at once!"

Hem Subba put on some red abhir powder, and chewed some cloves and cardamoms, but he did not eat any paan. The merchant got quite worried; was the town's culture doomed to erode, then?

He made a second attempt. He invited Hem Subba to his daughter's wedding. Hem Subba came. The merchant placed cloves and cardamoms on a silver plate, then decorated it with yellow rolls of paan. He said, "Hajoor, on the occasion of my daughter's wedding, some special paan."

This time Hem Subba spoke calmly, "Hajoor, paan does not suit my health, thank you, I'll have the cloves and cardamoms."

The merchant offered him the cloves and cardamoms.

Then the time came for Hem Subba's daughter's wedding. Hem Subba looked very worried: what was he to do, how was he to proceed? Marrying off a daughter is as difficult as fighting the Mahabharat war. One must consider one's own good name, as well as the good names of the town's important



people by inviting them all. Massive preparations got on way. Two days before the wedding, the merchant appeared and asked, "Hajoor, might I be of any service?"

"There's nothing particular for you to do, Hajoor, though it's natural, of course, that I be worried," Hem Subba said.

"No need to worry, Hajoor," said the merchant. "We are always there for you. How could the marriage of your four daughters diminish your resplendent wealth? And even if your wealth were diminished, it would be replenished by the gods, if they so pleased."

For a while there was talk of other matters related to the wedding. After this, the merchant slowly took out a plate, this time of gold. Well, maybe it was just gold-plated, or maybe it was really gold. The merchant had also brought along some paan. He arranged a few rolls on the plate. These were silver-coated paans giving off the fragrance of roses.

The merchant said, "Eat these, hajoor, you must enjoy yourself at the time of your daughter's wedding. Your daughter is my daughter too, after all."

The merchant had spoken extremely warmly, in a way that touched the heart. Hem Subba hesitated. "But Hajoor, perhaps this will cause some harm?"

"No, hajoor, it will cause no harm at all. I've fed paan to some very important people, and it's never harmed anyone. Paan increases blood, it digests food. Just try eating one, this once."

This time, Hem Subba pulled the plate towards himself. He put one paan in his mouth, and experiencing its taste and the pleasure of its juices, he said, "Hajoor, I never knew in all my days that paan could be so juicy!"

The merchant smiled and said, "There was just this one flaw in your way, hajoor. In all other respects, you were a diamond, an absolute diamond."

"So when will you feed me paan next, Hajoor?"

"I'll attend to it at once, hajoor," the merchant said, placing his hand in his pocket.

This time Hem Subba took a double helping, and put it in his mouth, looking very pleased. He ordered the merchant never to come to his house without bringing some paan. Then he strode towards the jeep that the merchant had prepared for him to go shopping for his daughter's wedding.

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

There can be no development without security and no security without development.

—Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba while inaugurating the secretariat of the National Security Council, on 11 March.



Faster, faster, faster. There shouldn't be any delay. Board: Constitutional reform

Gorkhapatra, 11 March

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**ABOUT TOWN**

**FILM**

- ♦ **Films on Nepal** Chickenshit and Ash, and Listen to the Wind. 5.30PM, 17 March, Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari.

**EXHIBITION**

- ♦ **Open House** with exhibition of self-caricatures and current issues in oils at The Hermitage Mahankali, home and garden of artist Manuj Babu Mishra. 12 noon-5PM, 15 Friday, Ring 487985 for directions.
- ♦ **Prints by Noriko Saito**, Japan. On show at the Siddharth Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisted. 18-31 March, 11AM-6PM except Saturdays.

**EVENTS**

- ♦ **St Patrick's Day** Party with live Irish music by An Fainne, dancing and poetry. Free admission, cash bar and food. 17 March, 4-7PM, Shamhalla Garden, Shangri-La Hotel. 412999
- ♦ **Sunshine and Irish cheer** Special Irish menu, St Patrick's Day, 17 March. Kilroy's of Kathmandu. Thamel. 250440
- ♦ **Live music and Irish coffee** Fixed price Irish dinner with complimentary Irish coffee. K-Tool Beer and Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043
- ♦ **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

**MUSIC**

- ♦ **Live music** by Catch 22. Friday nights at the 40,000 ft bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

**DRINK**

- ♦ **Hit the Roof** Now open till 8.30PM, exotic cocktails, roll-ups etc, live music Fridays. Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel. 411818
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**FOOD**

- ♦ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant, Lazimpat. 413874
- ♦ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. Traditional Tharu dishes and drinks every evening, cooking classes starting this month. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com.
- ♦ **Charcoal Buffet** with grilled delicacies from around the world, glass of lager, live music and strawberries with cream. Non-vegetarian Rs 595 and vegetarian Rs 495, tax included. Poolside, Yak & Yeti Hotel. 248999
- ♦ **Singaporean and Malaysian** food Satay, rice, soymlisk dishes, curry puffs and more. Near St Mary's School. Sing Ma, the Food Court. Foodcourt@winlink.com. 520004
- ♦ **Variable chef's special luncheons** Special rates for office goers, 12-3PM. Dwarika's Hotel. 479458
- ♦ **Oriental Luncheon** Special lunch menu, Rs 350 per head everyday 12 noon-3PM, China Garden, Hotel Soalttee Crown Plaza. 273999
- ♦ **The Big Breakfast** Hearty farmer's breakfast, plain nutritious food, or all-time favourites. Daily until 11AM, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ♦ **Lunch and dinner** European and American cuisine with fine wines. La'Soon Restaurant and Vinothèque, Pulchowk. 535290
- ♦ **Barbecue lunch** with complimentary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays at the Godavani Village Resort, Rs 650 per head. 560675

**GETAWAYS**

- ♦ **Getaway to Thailand** One-way flight Kathmandu to Bangkok, \$210 including insurance charges. Going Places Travel, Kathmandu. 061-23402, 251400
- ♦ **Pimms, Pathways and Picnics** Rs 6,000 for a couple for two nights and three days, including easy trek to The Peace Pagoda with guide and packed lunch one day, buffet breakfast on all days. Complimentary airport transfers, extra bed complimentary for children under 12 years. 15 percent discount on F&B. Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 435741
- ♦ **Rhododendron Getaway** at the Horseshoe Resort in Mude, three hours from Kathmandu. Two days of rhododendron walks in forests, package tours at \$30 per day, all meals and sauna included. resort@horseshoe.wlnk.com.np
- ♦ **Muktnihar Darshan** Two nights-three days on B&B basis with Pokhara/Jomsom/Pokhara flights and airport, resort transfers. Indian nationals Rs 6,950 per head, exports \$250 per head. Jomsom Mountain Resort, sales@jomsom.com.np or jmr@soi.wlnk.com.np. 496110
- ♦ **Taste the difference** Cosy Nepali-style house on an organic farm in Gamcho, south of Thimi. Up to Rs 1,200 per person per night including meals. aaa@wlnk.com.np.
- ♦ **Heritage package** Two nights including a six-course Nepali dinner, massage, breakfast. \$155 per couple, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

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

**NEPALI WEATHER**

BY GANMIDRA DAHAL

This picture taken at noon on Wednesday shows a northwesterly cloud front sweeping across northern India and Nepal. The strong high pressure zone prevailing over the Tibetan Plateau is sucking in cold dry air into Nepal. The Tibetan high is also getting stronger due to replenishment of cold air masses from the polar regions. This will push the front into Nepal over the weekend, but this is a stormless system and won't bring much rain. The northwesterly will ensure crisp and fresh afternoon breezes over Kathmandu Valley into next week keeping the heat in check. Morning temperatures will rise further.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
27-10	26-10	27-09	28-08	27-10

**YAK YETI YAK** by MIKU

**BOOKWORM**

Party Building in Nepal: Organization, Leadership and People Krishna Hachhetu Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu, 2002 Rs 550

A comparative study of the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML. The author traces the parties' numerous transformations: from movement or underground entities to open competitive parties, from cadre-based to mass-based parties; from a small group of people sharing common interests to heterogeneous organisations; and from ideology-oriented organisations to power-seeking parties.

Herpetology in Nepal Dr. Tej Kumar Shrestha Bimala Shrestha, Kathmandu, 2001 Rs 1,200

A field guide to the amphibians and reptiles of trans-Himalayan Asia. Nepal's diverse variety of newts, frogs, snakes, lizards, crocodiles and turtles are described and illustrated with photographs and drawings. The author also focuses on the importance of terraria, vivaria and nature parks for the conservation of declining herpetofauna, and describes the role of amphibians and reptiles in myth.

Spy on the Roof of the World Sydney Wignall Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2002 Rs 400

The author's 1950s climbing expedition to the Himalaya turned out to be a life-threatening adventure that involved the Chinese and Indian governments at the highest level. Belayed by one of the many spies operating on Nepal's border with Tibet, his group was captured by the People's Liberation Army. Their subsequent escape over the Himalaya in mid-winter is one of mountaineering's great epics.

French Lover Taslima Nasrin, trans. Sreeraj Gaha Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2002 Rs 400

When Nilanjana, a young Bengali girl from Kolkata, moves to Paris after marrying a restaurant owner, it is like living in a gilded cage. She has a passionate, sexually liberating affair with a handsome Frenchman. The relationship ends, and the road to Nilanjana's self-discovery begins when she realises that even he cares primarily for himself. Nasrin portrays the workings of a woman's mind as she comes to terms with her identity in a hostile world.

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

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**ANDREW NASH**

On the morning of 10 March, four rhinos were selected in the Royal Chitwan National Park and loaded on to trucks to make a long journey across the tarsi. No, this wasn't the work of poachers, but conservation officials and NGO workers beginning the annual rhino translocation programme. Established in 1986, the programme will translocate ten rhinos to Royal Bardia National Park this week in an attempt to help control the rhino population in Chitwan and establish a viable rhino population in Bardia.

Dr Shanta Juvani of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), who coordinated this year's rhino translocation, says the long-term prospects for the species' survival are "very good", providing that conservation remains a high priority in the long term. "As long as we have the natural resource base, the rhino population will have a bright future," he added.

Nepali environmentalists and international observers say the country's rhino efforts are among the best of their kind. The programme shows that conservation efforts such as this also have economic benefits for the country, says Dr Chandra Gunning of the WWF Nepal Program, with ecotourism emerging as a major cash industry in the Chitwan area.

"Conservation has been a major success for Nepal," says Dr Gunning. "The environmental work is carried out by Nepalis and the country is reaping the economic rewards."

The organisation of a programme such as this involves as much logistical manoeuvring as the actual translocation itself, and the fact that the rhinos are getting from Chitwan to Bardia is a cause for celebration. The Nepal rhino translocation programme is considered a model of cooperation among government agencies, NGOs and international donors. This year's program, for instance, is the joint initiative of the DNPWC and KMTNC with financial support from World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The DNPWC and KMTNC oversee the technical aspects of the animal translocation, while the international donors provide the \$4,000 it costs to transport a single rhino from Chitwan to Bardia.

Although Nepal's estimated rhino population stood at 800 in 1950, sixteen years later that number was down to about 100, and there were serious doubts about how much longer the rhino would be around in Nepal. The wide-spread poaching that existed throughout South Asia before World War II—in 1938, for example, a hunting expedition in Nepal killed 38 rhinos—threatened rhinos as well as other species. Meanwhile, the natural habitat of the rhino, which at one time was found in the stretch of land from the Hindu Kush to the mountains of Burma, was also being encroached upon due to hastening economic development, and in Nepal in the 1950s, the eradication of malaria, which caused the plains population to boom.

It became obvious fairly soon that something had to be done, and in 1957 Nepal passed its first rhino protection law. By 1973, the government was worried enough about the threat to Nepal's wildlife to create the country's first national park in Chitwan and pass stiff anti-poaching laws. Today more than 18 percent of the country's land is under state protection. Anti-poaching efforts have also helped to

**The 2,200 kg migrant**

**Nepali rhinos return from the brink of extinction.**

Now that the rhinos are back on track, conservation officials and activists are also looking into other conservation programs that could help rhinos and other threatened species to thrive in larger areas. Meenima Narba Sherpa, a director of Endangered Species for WWF-US, says that more work needs to be done to protect natural habitats that straddle international boundaries. The WWF is working to develop a biological corridor between Assam and Bhutan, and proposals have been made to create the "Tara Arc" encompassing 50,000 square kilometers in Nepal and northern India. As animal populations reach pinpoints in enclosed areas, argues Sherpa, that it is important to open up larger areas of land so they can spread out. "We feel that success in Nepal isn't enough." ♦

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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Much ado about nothing much

Without further ado, let us use this period of relative calm before the onset of the annual typhoon season to get right down to some literary analysis of the works of William ("Bill") Shakespeare. As some of you may be knowing (or pretending not to know, as the case may be) Mr Shakespeare actually travelled overland to Nepal during his hippie days as a budding bard, and many of his now-famous lines are strongly influenced by this poetic nation of ours. (National flower: rhododendron, national animal: cow, national credo: "Never do unto others what you do to yourself".)

When he got face-to-face with Nepal's great versifier, Bill realised just how much harder he needed to work to polish his iambic pentameter, inject more subtlety to his symbolism, and be less clumsy with his morphology and syntax. But, inspired by some of our great poet laureates, Bill learnt fast and honed his craft, going on to become rich and famous, and the inventor of such vibrant words as: "sounds", "forsooth", and "bung-hole" (this last word was later shamelessly plagiarised by two terrorists going by the nom de guerre "Beavis and Butthead").

Bill Shakespeare's words carry many references to the sights and sounds and, yes, the smells of Kathmandu Valley. Take this verse that he penned after an exhilarating hot-air balloon ride over our fair city, and later used in *Macbeth*:

*Fair is foul and foul is fair  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.*

Being a great dog lover, Shakespeare was especially touched by the number of canines he saw in and around Kathmandu. Sometimes, he even mistook the she-guns for dogs, like:

*Arise! thee, O, Spartan dog, I do beseech you.  
Fie!  
Black ram rapping with your white ewe.*

Or take this vivid description of the garbage dump at Krishna Galli, which the troubadour got to know intimately since he passed it every day on his way to his rented flat at Chakrapati:

*There's hell, there's darkness,  
There's sulphurous pit, burning, scalding,  
Stench, Consumption!  
Forswoth, fire-burn and cauldron bubble  
In the poison'd entrails throw  
Filler of a fenny snake,  
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,  
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,  
Lizard's leg, and howlet's wing  
Ditch deliver'd by a drab.*

Having been a keen student of politics, Bill often erupted spontaneously into poetry after reading the Nepali morning papers:

*Fetch that minister hither.  
Thou rogue, thou rascal,  
Thou art a hellish villain, hell hath no end  
Thou burst thine ass in thy back o'er the dirt  
What profane wench art thou?  
And to that dauntless temper of his mind, alack,  
For supporting robber, shall we now  
Contaminate our fingers with base bribes  
And sell the mighty space of our large honours for so much trash  
As may be grasped thus.*

Shakespeare was also impressed with the languid pace of life in Nepal, and wrote a tribute to the Nepali habit of never doing today what can be done tomorrow:

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*

And then again, he was impressed by how we can fall asleep at the drop of a hat despite the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune:

*To sleep, perchance to dream, there's the rub  
O sleep, o gentle sleep,  
Nature's soft nurse how I have fought thee  
That thou no more wilt no more weigh my eye-lids down  
Prithvi, let me snore, sirrah,  
For, otherwise, I will knock you over the mazzard.  
Zounds! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of 'bung-hole'?*

And despite the restrictions on his personal freedom imposed by a state of emergency, Old Bill managed to say:

*Alas! 'd by this sentinal,  
I awake,  
Be not offended  
I speak not as in absolute fear of you  
I think our country sits beneath the yoke  
It weeps, it bleeds,  
And each new day a gash is added to her wounds.*

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