

Annapurna marathon

The Aussies are back

8-9

EXCLUSIVE

SLRs at SLC

More than 250,000 students all over Nepal are sitting for SLC exams this month under unprecedented security. Children were frisked, sniffer dogs went through classrooms, and troops stood guard outside schools like this one in Kathmandu (below). But uncertainty over the bandh meant that the exams were



still disrupted in some of the 683 centres, which were reduced from the normal 833. In Maoist areas, rebels prevented children from travelling for tests. Despite the bandh being called off, long-distance buses kept off the roads and business in the town was disrupted all week. Is it lingering fear of Maoist retaliation, or is this an anti-bandh bandh?

Dr Gurung's Nepal

Consolidating the country's 75 districts into 25 is the only way to make them economically viable and more governable, argues Harka Gurung. (see p3)

RA to restart Dubai

Royal Nepal Airlines is dumping its loss-making Bangalore flights, launched with much fanfare last year, to resume flying to Dubai. The ailing airline is under pressure to increase revenue, and a top official told us flights to the Emirates will have better load factors. Meanwhile, the airline's international flights, badly disrupted last week by the grounding of one of its 757s in Bangkok, is now back to normal.

BINOD BHATTARAI

It's more than piles of dead bodies now. Ever since their latest campaign of destruction began in mid-March, Maoists have struck unguarded bridges, hydropower projects, water supply, irrigation offices, horticulture farms, forestry projects, telecommunications and government buildings. They have destroyed infrastructure that took decades to build, and it has already cost the Nepali nation tens of millions of dollars.

It is hard to see the rationale for such wanton destruction other than an indication that the Maoists are now desperate to force the government back to the negotiation table. Or is this an attempt to bring the government down to its knees? "Theoretically the attacks on infrastructure could be a real-own for their final armed revolt," says Puskar Gautam, a former Maoist commander. "Or, it could be that anarchy is spreading in the ranks. Attacks on drinking water systems and small rural hydros just don't make sense to me."

The latest attacks have hit the one area where democracy had taken root and was beginning to deliver development: local self-government. Hundreds of VDC and DDC buildings have been destroyed in the past month. Not a single VDC office is intact in districts like Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Kalikot and Salyan, says Prakash Jwala, MP from Salyan (see *Countdown to Year Zero*, below). In Dang, only two of 39 VDC offices are still there. Projects that were helping local elected officials to plan and implement decentralisation have been systematically demolished.

On 28 March, armed Maoists torched three government offices in Okhaldhunga. A

few days earlier, rebels strode into Panan Bazar in Baitadi, snatched kerosene from shops and torched eight government offices looking after district irrigation, roads and soil conservation, women's welfare, agriculture development, family planning office, forestry building, the local post office.

There is so much destruction, one official in Kathmandu admits, he can't even begin to assess the damage. But he estimates that the toll on public infrastructure since November alone may have surpassed Rs 2 billion.

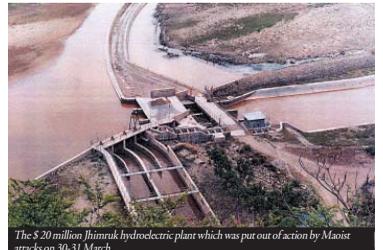
The most grievous damage has been to the 12 megawatt Jhimruk hydroelectric project, which was built at a cost of \$ 20 million. This was a rare project by Nepali standards: it served one of the poorest regions in Nepal and was designed for rural electrification. It had its own distribution network and was selling directly to consumers in Pyuthan, Rolpa and parts of Arghakhanchi.

On 30 March a group of Maoists walked in and blew up the main control room, destroying the main switching station. Water then flooded the turbines and inundated the powerhouse. The water could not be drained because the rebels had also blown up the staircase leading to the gates.

Because it was so easy, the Maoists returned the next day looting offices and stores and carting away everything: computers, fax machines, wall clocks, curtains, sleeping bags and whatever food supplies that were left. Still, no sign of security forces. So the Maoists took their time attacking nearby government buildings, ransacking the offices of the Jhimruk Industrial Development Corporation which used to train locals in

RAMPAGE

Maoists are now targeting infrastructure. Is this desperation, or is the conflict entering a new phase?



The \$ 20 million Jhimruk hydroelectric plant which was put out of action by Maoist attacks on 30-31 March.

entrepreneurial skills and income generating activities. "We have estimates but no formal assessment of damage," says Binod Koirala, Finance Secretary. "A team will be going to Jhimruk to do a proper assessment next week." This may in fact be the first specific assessment of Maoist damage so far, and it has been necessitated because of the on-going effort to privatise Bural Power Company which owns the project. The army contingent at Chemata

overlooking the power plant had recently been moved elsewhere. Locally hired guards were no match for the rebels, who rounded up all 300 employees and held them hostage while they razed the power station. "We don't have a complete picture of the damages yet because we have not been able to go there," Kiran Malla, general manager of BPC told us on Wednesday. Go to >> p2

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Fear and Loathing

COMMENT

Countdown to Year Zero

by PRAKASH JWALA



On 8 March, Bhagwati Gautam of Shoba village in Rukum was heading to Khalanga for a Women's Day rally. She stepped on an anti-personnel mine near the military camp in Saankh and lost her right leg (see picture). The security forces and the Maoists are both using landmines in this increasingly costly war. This is worrying because of the danger to civilians and the long-term impact landmines have on populations long after the conflict is over.

In districts like Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Jajarkot and Kalikot the sound of bombs going off and gunfire are so commonplace, people take little notice. Ordinary people are trapped between the government's *sankai* (emergency) and the Maoists' *mahai* (showdown). Walking across these districts, there are checkpoints everywhere: army sentries and Maoist sentries. Many district level politicians are immobilised. Almost every VDC building in Rukum has been demolished. Most local politicians have sought refuge in Muskot, or further afield. Those who dared stay back are harassed.

Bane Kami, the VDC chairman of Maikot was held captive for five months, and the Maoists tried to bury him alive. They raided the house of Pashupati Thapa, VDC chair of Gotamkot, looted Rs 800,000 worth of property and are still holding him captive. They abducted and tortured Karna Bahadur Gurung, Kewal Sharma, and Devlal Khadka. The Maoists are preventing students travelling to the district headquarters to take their SLC exams.

The security forces are based in the headquarters ringed by barbed wire and minefields, and the Maoists rule the countryside. There is an undeclared curfew

after 6 pm. Rukum's CDO went on a five-day leave, and arranged his own transfer. There has been no CDO here for months. Flights to Chaurjhar have stopped after the Maoists destroyed the airport tower two months ago. Everyone expects the next attack at Muskot's Salla airfield, the last remaining lifeline to the outside world.

The Maoists are now on a rampage: destroying bridges, stopping highway construction. The government is controlling transport of food and medicine into the hinterland of Karnali, Bheri and Rapti zones so it does not get into rebel hands. And the Maoists are looting whatever provisions villagers still have left. The locals are running out of food, and there is a real danger of starvation. Farmers are not growing food because they have to pay a cut to the Maoists even for the vegetables they grow.

The Maoists are now picking on the weak and helpless. Those with money and connections are no longer in the district or have bought their safety by giving the Maoists food, donations and shelter. Those who remain now have little choice but to run away, leave everything and head to India in search of work.

Some who survived Maoist excesses have been caught in the security forces' dragnet. Many civilians have been killed and wounded in army action. Kowara in Kalikot has seen casualties: construction workers at an airfield, political cadre of the Nepal Congress and UML, shot because they were mistaken for Maoists. Villagers in Rolpa going to the forests to collect firewood were wounded during helicopter attacks.

(Prakash Jwala is the UML MP from Salyan, and visited Rukum 23-25 March.)

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #25
Q. Should the government accept the Maoist offer to resume talks?

Yes 48.6%
Don't know 2.28%
No 49.2%

Total votes: 1367

By e-mail at # 25. To see your www.nepalnews.com

Q. Do you believe the Maoist's reporting of the Maoist insurgency?

<p>GULF AIR 5 days a week flight to Europe & USA, best connection to USA with stop-over in Europe</p>	<p>QANTAS 3 Australian Cities via Bangkok, Singapore or Hong Kong</p>	<p>25 years of excellence</p>	<p>QANTASHOLIDAYS Offers best possible hotel & tours rates all over the world.</p>	<p>EURAL Experience city to city travel by Eurail within 17 European countries.</p>	<p>GREENLINE Enjoy overland bus service to Pokhara & Chitwan by luxury coach.</p>
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FEAR AND LOATHING

It was Machiavelli, with that devious brain of his, who gave the prince this famous advice: 'It's better to be feared than loved.' Mao understood the power of fear and used it ruthlessly, but he also preached love, believe it or not.

Mass base support, Mao wrote, was crucial for the success of the revolution. Squander that support, and you are a fish out of water. Mao understood the power of the mass base. Even revolutionaries can't afford to ignore public opinion. Mao's revolution was no picnic. Millions died of starvation in his failed agrarian and rural industrialisation experiments, and millions more were killed during the cultural revolution—that fearful precursor to the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

For Mao, an armed struggle to dislodge entrenched feudal interests and a self-perpetuating, and corrupt oligarchy was not only justifiable but also necessary. Mao felt violence was needed because there was no other way to dislodge despots. The only thing that will make unyielding and soulless elites take notice is when resistance uses the force of arms. The rigid, centralised power that they struggle against is brittle. It doesn't take much to shatter such structures when they are ridden with corruption and factionalism.

Such revolutions pass through their own cycles. After their initial populism, the violence they unleash breeds counter-violence, they descend into anarchy and spin out of control. Internal fires surface, warlords take control, psychopathic purges begin. The revolution devours its own children.

It will be fair to say that except for the election violence against the United Peoples' Front in the mid-western districts in the 1955 polls, there was ample political elbow room within the post-1990 constitution for our comrades to manoeuvre, gain support on a genuine socialist platform and deliver their promises through parliamentary politics. But they were impatient. Parliament was too messy, and it meant they had to usually share power. They wanted a shortcut to total power, and it came through the barrel of a gun.

The phenomenal spread of Prachanda's path through Nepal in the past seven years shows just how deep the public frustration is, how ripe for the picking the country had become. And the gathering revolution in turn fed the frustration by wrecking the economy and throwing more people out of jobs. When the momentum of revolution takes over, there is no room for dissent. It is the inexorable logic of totalitarianism that support must be total. You agree with us, or else. If you don't agree with the goals of the revolution and the path chosen by the leadership to get there, then you take the ultimate punishment of being banished into afterlife.

The only way to command such unquestioning allegiance is through the power of fear. And that fear will only work if it is the fear of grievous bodily harm. If your entire support base is derived from fear, then the violence has to be of the fiercest and most barbaric kind. Which means as an individual, you harden yourself to witness and implement unspeakable and savage acts. You shed your humanity, your compassion and your ability to be moved by human suffering—those are all signs of weakness.

"ANTI-GOVERNMENT FORCES"

Our comrades are convinced that they have mass support, that their goal is so pure it must have the unquestioning support for the aim and method. But you don't have the mass with you if you rely on the support of people who are too afraid to oppose you. Deserted streets do not signify the success of a "bandit". It shows that a fear psychosis is rife. We know from other revolutions that support borne out of fear never lasts. Especially when revolutions go the way of most revolutions and implode from an internalised culture of violence and elimination of opponents.

Ignoring mass support and public opinion, therefore, is the easiest way for Nepal's Maoists to lose their early populist base. And the best indication of a political force that doesn't care for public opinion is one that wants to shut down the country for five days, the one that destroys a hydropower plant that electrifies its own 'base area', destroys telecommunication towers, blows up highway bridges, burns down an agricultural extension training centre, closes down schools.

This revolution has drifted a long way away from what Mao Zedong thought would work. That is probably why Chinese state media, Radio Beijing, or Xinhua never say 'Maoists' to describe our comrades in news bulletins. The Chinese call them simply 'anti-government forces'.



STATE OF THE STATE

Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full

Gen Rana got a well-deserved tweak in parliament, and pretended to wince.

What is surprising about the boo-bah that followed Chief SJB Gen Prajwal SJB Rana's speech last week is that it died down so quickly. Pushing the envelope seems to be the Chief's forte, and he gets away with it.

Remember his comments after the Nayabithi Massacre last year, when he asserted that protecting the life of the Supreme Commander was not the responsibility of the Royal Nepal Army, thereby refuting his own argument by making it. Soon after, he said an all-party consensus was necessary to mobilise the army to fight the insurgency. This riled the politicians again because according to the laws of the land, the army is a not a constitutionally-mandated institution but merely an instrument of the executive. The Commander-in-Chief does have direct access to the decision-making process by virtue of his membership in the National Defence Council, but other than that the constitution gives him the primary function of "not to question why".

But we all know things are not as clear-cut as that, and the chair of command has some hangovers from the past. Gen Rana's latest salvo from Tokha on 27 March was a well-timed airtight round directed at the political leadership of the country (see "Who brought the nation to its present condition?" #87). The remarks were couched in a series of rhetorical questions, the most inflammatory of them being "Is it right to blame the Royal Nepal Army, the protector of national security, for a situation which is the result of 12 years of political factors?"

It must have been a lawyer who wrote that speech. And the chief appeared to be giving vent to his own frustration that the insurgency is proving to be more difficult to fight than expected. But it is tragic that the questions (and their corresponding answers) had to come from the chief of a force that has been fighting to protect the political gains of the past 12 years. Rather than a slap on his wrist from parliament, maybe Gen Rana needed an understanding of the difficulties of the job he has at hand. Nevertheless, the general showed us every-thing a leader that has been fighting to protect the political gains of the past 12 years. Rather than a slap on his wrist from parliament, maybe Gen Rana needed an understanding of the difficulties of the job he has at hand. Nevertheless, the general showed us every-thing a leader that has been fighting to protect the political gains of the past 12 years.

Part of the problem faced by the polity can be attributed to the reluctance of the instruments of the state, including the Royal Nepal Army, to carrying out the

personality. He sports a bright-red tika on his forehead even while in uniform, indulges himself in extended religious ceremonies, and has no hesitation in coming up with trade mark sound-bites to catch the headlines. But the reason his recent outbursts have created a stir in political circles has nothing to do with Rana's popularity with the press. It is not what he says, but how and when he says it that raises the hackles of politicians.



Nepal's political elite doesn't seem to have come to terms with the realities of democracy. The bahunistic privileges of Nepal refuse to realise that every time they induct its nose at "gutter politics", it inadvertently ends up manufacturing one more apology for those who want to subvert the system at the point of a gun.

The mantra of good governance is music to the ears of donors, but is an elaboration of the concept to meet the twin challenges of strengthening democracy and building a strong state is yet to emerge. Democracy confers legitimacy to power, but it is of no use if the authority to exercise it is not there. As a former cabinet secretary put it: it is pointless talking about good governance when there is no governance at all.

Part of the problem faced by the polity can be attributed to the reluctance of the instruments of the state, including the Royal Nepal Army, to carrying out the

decisions of successive elected governments. The bourgeois believe the political leadership of the country for being thoroughly corrupt. And most of them are indeed guilty of plunder and squandering public trust. However, it is unrealistic to expect to be freed by socialist angels when the whole society is in the process of jumping from the frying pan of feudalism directly into the raging fire of unbridled capitalism.

It is Samuel Huntington right, then, when he points out that corruption is inevitable, even necessary, in order to co-opt an emerging political elite into the system of governance. Democracy develops its antitoxins as it matures, and the circulation of elite through elections is institutionalised. To question this evolutionary process is to abort those who want to short-circuit the system.

Sociologist Aravinda Das notes that corruption is a way of making space for itself by the emerging elite in traditional societies. Former bureaucrats can easily wrangle lucrative consultancies on the basis of donor contacts and bash the government that they served so well for the better part of their lives. But there is no way for ministers to survive in a market-led economy other than the way they are doing. The intelligentsia slams the political class no matter what—Pradip Giri is slammed for being principled and losing the election, while Khum Bahadur Khadka is damned for being unprincipled and winning elections with increasing margins. Heads you win, tails they lose.

Sermonising sermons and wifidial thinking notwithstanding, there is no way corruption is going to disappear overnight. Neither can the genie of "good governance" materialise out of thin air. Meanwhile, a gear palm that is instrumental in building power stations is still preferable to the bloody hands that hold them up in the name of authority. Kathmandu's character better get that straight and learn to spend more time denouncing terrorism than deriding politicians. And as for Chief Yash, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has already given him a well-deserved public tweak. And the Commander in Chief pretended to wince. But my question is: will Kathmandu's power elite ever learn? ♦

by CK LAL



COMMENTARY

Decentralisation has been an incessant theme in Nepal over the past five decades. The Ranas used it for cosmetic purposes, during the Panchayat period it was used to sustain the elite power base, and for good governance in the present democratic setup.

These past initiatives all floundered on the bedrock of the centralised governance system. Even now, there is no evidence that the central government and entrenched bureaucracy are becoming amenable to some form of local autonomy.

There is a need for conceptual clarity on the forms and functions in the decentralisation process. Delegation and deconcentration are basically related to the exercise of administrative authority in which the lower hierarchies are allowed tenancy. Devolution, on the other hand, is related to political authority including autonomy in local governance. Unlike delegation, whereby functions are assigned, devolution involves exercise and sharing of power. This is contingent on the relative strength of the contending parties. In Nepal, the centre is too pervasive and the districts too weak without economic viability.

The economic status of districts is the basis of their capacity to bear the cost of administration. Presently, most districts are dependent on the grants from the centre even for their regular budget because of their fragile financial base. Only eleven of 75 districts are in surplus even in the tarai, three are in the hills and one in the inner tarai. Their high revenue is mainly due to customs receipts, except for Chitwan, which has a

The centre cannot hold

Consolidating the country's 75 districts into 25 is the only way to make them economically viable and truly decentralised.

by HARKA GURUNG

District would be the new headquarters of the enlarged district. Elsewhere, it would be a new township with a highway or airport. The present 75 districts could be relegated to Jaka, or sub-district level with their headquarters converted to service centres.

This rationalisation of districts should also be extended to Village Development Committees. Of the Rs 630 million total budget allocated in 1999 to the districts, 30 percent was for VDC secretaries. If the number of VDCs was slashed by half, there would be a saving of Rs 95 million annually. Larger districts would also mean a larger revenue base. Resource mobilisation in the re-consolidation of districts would require delegation of functions to local bodies instead of the expansion of the central administration that has stunted local initiative and capability.

Districts can function as autonomous bodies only if they have an adequate resource base. This would mean curtailing the present highly centralised budgetary allocation system and empowering districts with more taxation authority. District income could also be enhanced by allocating a certain percent of revenue from the district's natural resource exploitation.

One innovative scheme to mobilise district revenue would be to replicate the buffer zone programme around the Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP). VDCs in the buffer zone received 20 percent of the tourism revenue from the national park for community and conservation activities.

Mountain districts are considered the poorest in terms of revenue sources. Yet much of the revenue they generate is diverted to the central exchequer. If the Chitwan model for revenue sharing is adopted, tourism-dominated districts would be much better off. For instance, the Everest area generated tourism revenues of nearly \$900,000 through climbing royalties, trekking and park entrance fees. This was 2.6 times the district's total revenue. If only half the tourism receipts were to be retained in Solu-Khumbu, the amount would be nearly eight times the central government grant to the district.

national park, and Lalitpur, which depends on excise.

There is a wide income variation among District Development Committees according to their geographic location. The higher the elevation zone, lower their income. On average, a tarai district is ten times more resourceful than a mountain district.

The major item of expenditure in most districts is public works and manpower. Most of the expenses were supported by grants from the central government. This dependence on grants from Kathmandu ranges from 84 percent in Bardia to 99 percent for Bajura. Most districts are generally more dependent on Kathmandu for support, depending on the centre even to run their District Development Committees. The decentralisation of authority to such entities without fiscal authority has been an exercise in futility.

The parthenals of government agencies have also grown by leaps and bounds over the years. In 1963, 35 districts were expanded to 75 with an additional tier of 14 zones. In 1972 four, and later five, regional centres were established with directorates of various ministries. Then development projects established more offices at the district level. Consequently, the re-organisation of the 75 districts into 40. The proposal was based on an economic rationale, but was rejected for political reasons. Since then, there has been much extension in roads, airports and telecommunication. These have narrowed the geographic space enabling the administration of a much larger area. The reduction in the number of districts also seems a logical option to economise administrative cost.

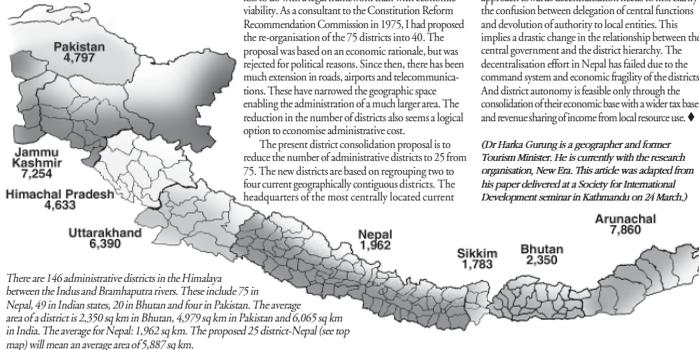
The present district consolidation proposal is to reduce the number of administrative districts to 25 from 75. The new districts are based on regrouping two to four current geographically contiguous districts. The headquarters of the most centrally located current

tion of authority to such entities without fiscal authority has been an exercise in futility. The parthenals of government agencies have also grown by leaps and bounds over the years. In 1963, 35 districts were expanded to 75 with an additional tier of 14 zones. In 1972 four, and later five, regional centres were established with directorates of various ministries. Then development projects established more offices at the district level. Consequently, the re-organisation of the 75 districts into 40. The proposal was based on an economic rationale, but was rejected for political reasons. Since then, there has been much extension in roads, airports and telecommunication. These have narrowed the geographic space enabling the administration of a much larger area. The reduction in the number of districts also seems a logical option to economise administrative cost.

Similarly, Upper Mustang yielded \$737,000 from trekking fees in 1998. Of this income, 3.3 percent went to the Annapurna Area Conservation Project and the rest to the central exchequer. If this amount were to be shared, Mustang would have eight times more revenue than the current grant from the district.

There has been much discussion on the legal framework of the Local Self-governance Act 1999, which endorses the concept of devolution. A realistic approach towards decentralisation needs to first clarify the confusion between delegation of central functions and devolution of authority to local entities. This implies drastic change in the relationship between the central government and the district hierarchy. The decentralisation effort in Nepal has failed due to the command system and economic fragility of the districts. And district autonomy is feasible only through the consolidation of their economic base with wider tax base and revenue sharing of income from local resource use. ♦

Dr Harka Gurung is a geographer and former Tourism Minister. He is currently with the research organisation, New Era. This article was adapted from his paper delivered at a Society for International Development seminar in Kathmandu on 24 March.



There are 146 administrative districts in the Himalaya between the Indus and Brahmaputra rivers. These include 75 in Nepal, 49 in Indian states, 20 in Bhutan and four in Pakistan. The average area of a district is 2,350 sq km in Bhutan, 4,979 sq km in Pakistan and 6,065 sq km in India. The average for Nepal: 1,962 sq km. The proposed 25 district-Nepal (see pop map) will mean an average area of 5,887 sq km.

LETTERS

RAM MANI GYAWALI

The Nepal Times stands out for its sharp and to-the-point coverage of Nepal that gives us a good idea of the goings on back home. But even by your superlative standards, the piece by Sagar Pandi on the murder of Ram Mani Gyawali by Maoists ("The murderous middle ground," #86) stood out. It is one of the most poignant pieces of reporting ever done on the

current crisis that has befallen our motherland. Reading the story of the brutal murder of this good man, I was moved to tears. And from this far away, all I could do was mourn for Ram Mani, for the country and people that he stood for. If the Maoists think they can come to power through such barbaric acts, then they are badly mistaken. They are accumulating the course of thousands of their victims. One day the ghosts of people like Ram Mani will come back to haunt them.

J N Chaudhary Boston, USA

CORRUPTION

Artha Bada's column on graft ("Words come easily," #85) raised some interesting points. Nepalis are confused about graft and corruption. A lot of what goes by the name of corruption describes taking a shortcut, or giving take-money—not actual graft. Like a decomposing fish, corruption rots the heart and that is where one must begin to tackle graft. Unfortunately, the newly set up judicial commission is not clear in its function. Possessing assets is not illegal. One has to prove it that it was bought with ill-gotten wealth. If the allegations cannot stand up in court, we have made a mockery of the rule of law, and the ensuing chaos would do more harm than good. It is time to be cool-headed and calculating about genuinely curbing corruption, not just playing to the galleries and chasing shadows.

Govinda Sharma Thapathali

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

Congratulations to Hemlata Rai for the very interesting article on the radio programme Sathi Sangam Ma Ka Kura ("Someone I can talk to..." #87). We are regular listeners of the programme on FM and I and my friends find the broadcasts entertaining and informative. Also, like the way the presenters give us straight answers, without lecturing or being judgmental. Thank you for printing a picture of Sushma, Toya and Bhaskar. Now we know what they look like!

Anita Shrestha by email

THANK YOU

Thank you, Nepal Times for providing us with your outstanding service in this time of deep crisis in our country. You excel where other sources simply lack the wisdom and depth of analysis. I'm a regular of your internet site (www.nepalintimes.com) ever since I discovered it. It is a comprehensive, coherent and very informative.

It is also lively, and tries to keep a positive eye outlook against all odds.

Amit Jung Thapa Sydney

Seeing tomorrow

Many Nepalis suffer from trachoma, an eye infection that leads to blindness. Now there is hope of better vision for tomorrow.

RAMYATA LIMBU

An infection so serious it can lead to blindness, and a remedy so simple that all it takes is a bit of washing the face and some pills. Such is the paradox of medical problems in developing countries.

One such infection is trachoma which is endemic in western Nepal, where it afflicts nearly one in every ten people, and it is the leading cause of preventable blindness in the country. But a new prevention and cure campaign launched by a Nepali NGO which will distribute antibiotics donated by the US pharmaceutical company, Pfizer, is expected to eradicate trachoma in the next two decades.

In two weeks, the Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh (National Society for Comprehensive Eye Care - NNJS) will administer Zithromax pills to patients in Kailali, Kanchanpur, Nawalparasi and Chitwan districts. The antibiotic is the key component of a national strategy to eliminate trachoma. It is part of a strategy called SAFE - Surgery, Antibiotic, Facial Cleanliness and Environmental Improvement. "With SAFE, we hope to eliminate trachoma as a blinding disease by the year 2020," says Bimal Poudyal of NNJS.

Trachoma is a type of chronic conjunctivitis caused by a micro organism which leads to acute

inflammation and scarring of the inner lining of the eye. In extreme cases, the eyelashes turn inward, rubbing on the cornea and causing blindness by turning the lens opaque. The key to treatment is Zithromax which can control infection by bacteria in the tissue of the eyelids. But, explains eye specialist NNJS chairman, Ram Prasad Pokhrel: "It has to be accompanied by a widespread awareness campaign about personal hygiene and a clean environment."

Trachoma, known locally as *kharse*, is prevalent in 6.9 percent of the population and in the far-western regions of Nepal. The 1981 National Blindness Survey showed that trachoma was endemic in Banke, Bardia, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dang, and Surkhet and largely prevalent among the Tharu, Magar, and Thakuri communities. Pockets also exist in hilly and mountain regions like Jajarkot with its poor personal hygiene and lack of community sanitation.

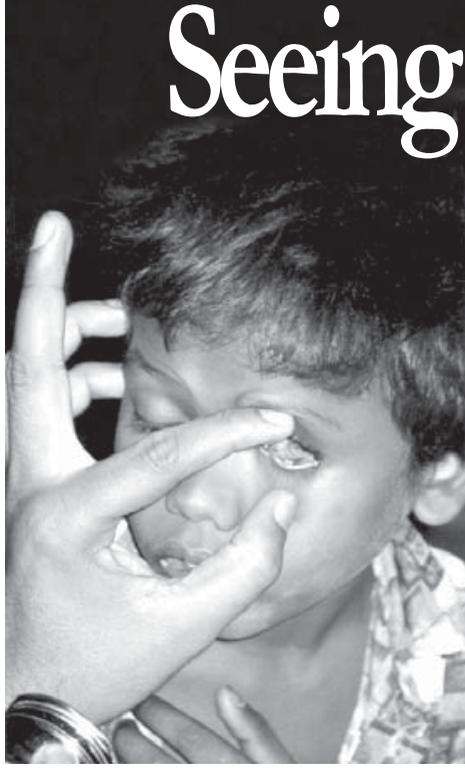
Cataract blindness strikes both the rich and the poor - and most people seek a cure once they lose their sight. But trachoma, a disease that is preventable, is common in areas deprived of basic needs in housing, health, water and sanitation, and debilitates families and communities.

Studies show that Tharu communities are three times more

likely to contract the disease. Likewise, women who are in close contact with children are more likely to suffer from trachoma blindness because infants and young children are reservoirs of the disease, primarily because they do not wash their faces.

The highly contagious bacteria that spreads trachoma is most active during the hot months, so NNJS and its network of collaborating community groups have their work cut out for them this summer. "We have to get the antibiotics into the field for this cycle if we want to meet national targets," says Diwash Rijal, NNJS Program Director. That target is part of the National Plan of Action for Eye Care Services in Nepal prepared last September. The Global Initiative for the Prevention of Avoidable Blindness (called Vision 2020: The Right to Sight) set the objective of reducing trachoma in Nepal by 30 percent by 2004, 50 percent by 2009, 80 percent by 2014 and

by DANIEL LAK



A trachoma awareness camp in progress in Bardia.

complete eradication by 2019.

Effort of NNJS and its collaborating partners have already seen some success. Mobile surgery camps, eye hospital treatment centres and community trachoma control programmes in high-prevalence areas like Banke and Bardia have brought about a drop in the disease. "With education, awareness and medication, the situation has improved in areas like Bardia, where prevalence has dropped from 30 per cent to 16 per cent," says Shail Shrestha, the Swiss Red Cross Representative in Kathmandu.

A community-based trachoma control programme run since 1989 by the Nepal Red Cross in collaboration with the Swiss Red Cross and NNJS has mobilised local volunteers to promote awareness about trachoma infections and relatively simple cleanliness and hygiene prevention measures. Makuni Tharu is one of 200 active eye care Red Cross volunteers in Bardia. She with 15 other volunteers has received a bicycle for referring 50 cases for surgery to the Fateh Bal Eye Hospital in Nepalgunj, and with it she is now able to reach a wider community.

The most recent prevalence study in children under 10 years indicates that 16 percent of the population in Kanchanpur and more than 12 percent of the population in Kailali suffer from the disease. A population-based survey conducted by the Hellen Keller International in May 2001 indicated that 19.9 percent of Chitwan's population suffers from the condition, as well as 16 percent in Nawalparasi. Prevalence is even higher in Surkhet (19.5 percent), Dalekh (27 percent), and Jajarkot (36 percent).

Nepal is one of 16 countries that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has put on its priority list for trachoma elimination. In 1997, the WHO established the Global Elimination of Trachoma (GET 2020) alliance which falls under the umbrella of "Vision 2020 - The Right to Sight". The alliance aims to drastically reduce the global burden of blindness, which currently affects an estimated 146 million people. Trachoma is one of five vision diseases that Vision 2020 has placed a priority on, along with cataracts, onchocerciasis, childhood blindness, refractive errors and low vision.

Five stages of Trachoma

- 1. Trachomatous Inflammation - Follicular**
The presence of five or more follicles in the upper eye lashes. Follicles are red, itchy swellings appearing white, grey or yellow. Follicles must be at least 0.5 mm in diameter. At this stage, a treatment of tetracycline cream is sufficient to prevent more serious problems.
- 2. Trachomatous Inflammation - Intense**
Pronounced inflammatory thickening of the bases of the lashes that obscures more than half of the vessels. The area appears red, rough and thickened. There are usually numerous follicles. At this stage, doctors recommend giving topical treatment and considering systematic treatment.
- 3. Trachomatous Scarring**
Scars are easily visible as white lines, bands or sheets in the tarsal conjunctiva. They are glistening and fibrous in appearance. Blood vessels obscured.
- 4. Trachomatous Trichiasis**
At least one eyelash rubs on the eyeball. Patients should be referred for eyelid surgery.
- 5. Corneal Opacity**
Easily visible corneal opacity over the pupil. Such corneal opacities cause significant visual impairment. Immediate treatment is required.



HERE AND THERE

What is it about the sport of cricket that inspires such self-deception among its fans? The recent cover story in *Himal South Asia* magazine about cricket, caste and the Bollywood movie *Lagaan* has become a hot topic of conversation and letter writing, with opinions starkly divided. Not just divided, but at near violent loggerheads. And a good thing that excellent magazine is read only by a well-informed minority of opinion makers in the region. Even cricket can be fodder for the "divide and rule mob", some of whom are still rampaging in Gujarat. Let me state first of all that I am no fan of the game of cricket, that I find it tedious, tedious and anachronistic.

My late foray into these troubled waters was during the Hansie Cronje affair in Delhi. My first in several years earlier in Pakistan, during a controversy about certain members of the Pakistan cricket team caught drunk

Not cricket, old boy

The sport is a sport like any other, not a metaphor for life.

and with illegal substances on a beach in Barbados. On both occasions, and many times in between, I fell foul of the British sporting media by laughing at the stories in question and adopting the attitude "well, they would, wouldn't they." Now we reporters tend to regard most things with cynicism, a sense that nothing is as it seems and the public face being put on events is not to be trusted. For an explanation of most things, look to human nature, greed, lust, an overestimate of one's own competence.

That's certainly how I interpreted the tale of poor Cronje, South Africa's cricket captain, caught by the Delhi police with a pocket full of bookmakers' money. He was, it seems, offering advice on pitch conditions and such—at ten thousand dollars a pop. Not bad for a weather reporter. To me, he was obeying one of my natural laws, giving way to greed, sating away filthy lucre for that not too distant day when his cricketer skills no longer earned him big bucks. Wrong, perhaps, but the pambuteo of human sins, venal, no violent, not harming anyone save perhaps the poorer suckers who bet with uninformed bookies.

But the British (and South Asian) sporting press saw things differently. Words like "tragedy", "outrage" and "criminal" popped up regularly. The phrases were even over-the-top. "A stain on the face of the sport," according to one BBC commentator, "a body blow to cricket," said a writer on the game. Excuse me? What are we talking about here? An international enterprise that earns vast sums of money for a panoply of people, not least bookmakers, or a pristine, pure pastime of gentlemen on a village green in Victorian England. Respectfully, I say the former. Sport is big business, among the biggest. Content, entertainment, closely linked with the marketing of lucrative and luxurious consumer items, and its players desire to get what chunk of action that they can. If, like Hansie Cronje and so many of others, they cross a legal line and are caught, they must be punished. But they must not be vilified by Taleban-esque supporters

and media types, people who've deceived themselves into thinking professional cricket is a religion and not a big business masquerading as a sport.

So too with the *Himal* analysis of cricket's casteism, its uniquely South Asian twisting of British imperial identity in the selection process, its subtle symbolism in support of the status quo, its ability to seem more than the venal enterprise I'm talking about here. The article was a good read. It made certain points, and we should all favour the deconstruction of anything we hold dear, if only to strengthen it, make it more sustainable. But no, keep your hands off cricket, it's doing rather nicely without grubby journalists spying around and getting ink stains all over bat, ball and those nifty pullovers worn on even the hottest days.

I'm no great fan of any other sport, although I have a soft spot for football—dead simple, a great leveler, a platform for the poor to shine in many countries. But also a pursuit that drips money from its seams, that tempts wrongdoing and match fixing and the misuse of fame by simple souls exploited by the bookies, agents and other profiteers. So too America's sports of baseball, basketball etc. But Americans—at least—see their sporting heroes as professional athletes, not angels or guardians of tradition.

Cricket needs to loosen up, to drop the holier than thou attitude, to accept that it's part of the entertainment business, and not a metaphor for life. Control match fixing if you can, but don't put Hansie Cronje or anyone else who defies your perceptions of the game in a pit with Jack the Ripper. Besides, a sport that accepts the role of legal money, marketing and profit-maximisation might just be more egalitarian and even successful. As we saw in *Lagaan*, no caste, class or ethnic group has the market cornered on hitting sixes, fast bowling or sharp fielding. Howzat? ♦



CIAA stats

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is making moves. In the past 18 months the CIAA has charged more than Rs. 210 million as fines for irregularities by public office holders. It has investigated and filed cases against 87 individuals at the Patan Appellate Court. Out of the 72 cases heard at the court, 36 cases were decided in favour of the commission while a dozen were annulled. In the same period CIAA investigated 442 academic certificates and found 69 to be fake. It has filed cases of misrepresentation of academic qualifications against 28 employees, of which 13 are government employees and 15 are from different private corporation employees who has used fake certificates for securing recruitment and promotion.

Adventure Nepal

As the world of adventure travel asserts itself as Feature Product during the 25th PATA Travel Mart in Singapore, 9-12 April, Nepal will be in the spotlight as the Feature Country. Plegued by an insurgency, an emergency, and recession, it might be the much-needed boost Nepal's flagging tourism needs. For some years, adventure travel has become the most dynamic and fast-growing sector of international tourism with adventure related activities accounting for as much as 20 percent of the revenue turnover of the tourism industry. "Adventure travel remains an aspect of the industry that is dominated by small operators with limited budgets," says Action Asia magazine Publisher and Editor-in-Chief Robert Houston. "Being Feature Product at PATA Travel Mart will encourage operators to lift their standards and offer a greater variety of new and interesting packages." Are Nepali operators listening?



Kapil visits Govinda

Member of National Commission on Human Rights, Kapil Shrestha, says the case of Govinda Mainali who is serving a life-sentence in a Japanese jail for allegedly killing a Japanese woman in 1987 is a "blot" on the cordial relations between Japan and Nepal. Shrestha was addressing a press conference in Tokyo last week organised by the activist group, "Justice for Govinda". He had earlier visited Govinda in a Tokyo detention centre, and said he found him to be "reasonably good spirits". Some 80 people, including three lawyers defending Govinda and Japanese-Nepali Rajan Pradhanang, participated in the talk programme at the Catholic Centre in Tokyo.

Lawyers defending Govinda also took part, saying that the way the appellate court decided in 2000 to convict him without serious investigation or carefully analysing discrepancies in the police investigation "raised some serious questions on the impartiality, fairness and efficacy" of the process.

Bangkok Times

The Bumrungrad Hospital in Thailand, has become the first hospital in the world to offer its patients and visitors the latest international edition of their hometown papers. That has been possible with the installation of an interactive newspaper kiosks on its premises. The PRESSPOINT™, PEPC's self-contained interactive kiosk, currently prints the latest editions of 69 national and international newspapers from 37 countries - including the Nepali Times published from Kathmandu. Asia's only internationally accredited hospital, Bumrungrad accommodates over 750,000 patients a year of which over 215,000 patients are from outside Thailand. "We are excited that we can now offer our patients and visitors the latest edition of their favourite newspaper in their native language while staying at our hospital," says Curtis J. Schroeder, Bumrungrad's American CEO. "Bringing our patients a daily touch of home will surely make their stay more pleasant." That includes Nepali patients.



THE BRITISH EMBASSY, KATHMANDU

Has a vacancy for an assistant in the Consular and Immigration Section.

You should:

- have a bachelor's degree (any discipline)
- possess a good command of Nepali and English (oral and written)
- be computer literate (MS Word, Excel, Access, e-mail, etc)
- have at least 2 years work experience in a busy office environment, preferably in customer services
- possess a high awareness of customer expectation and service
- be an energetic and enthusiastic self-starter with the presence and inter-personal skills to make an immediate positive impact in a busy and challenging working environment

After successful completion of a probationary period, you will be entitled to participate in a Staff provident fund. In addition, you and your immediate dependants will be entitled to the reimbursement of medical charges.

The starting salary, on an incremental scale, will be Nrs. 13,675

Applications, with CV, stating details of previous work experience, qualifications and referees should be sent to:

The Head, Consular & Immigration Services
The British Embassy
PO. Box 106
Lainchaur, Kathmandu

Applications must be received no later than 9:00 am on Thursday 18 April 2002 and should be sealed and clearly marked "Application for Immigration Assistant". Applications received after this date will not be considered. Only short listed candidates will be contacted and called for an interview.



Hostile territory

We are turning into a nation of cynical, frustrated misanthropes.

knows how expensive a career in public service has become. The people can't figure out how their leaders can be so insensitive to their concerns and still have the impudence to come knocking at election time. The security forces complain how the people's representatives' reluctance to camp in their constituencies is undercutting the campaign to draw rebels away from their guns. The insurgents can't understand why the country is losing sight of their ultimate cause just because the armed wing of the party happens to have gained a premiership over the political commissars now. Bureaucrats don't know how many masters they are expected to serve. Civil society workers about how fast courtesy is disappearing from the national discourse.

tor. A lot of people don't seem to like what everybody else is doing.

Others complain that aren't getting credit for what they are doing. Add the cumulative stress induced by apathy, bloodshed, corruption and drift to this grumpiness and you get a real feeling of the cynicism that has set in. We've been carrying so many chips on our shoulders for so long that the blades of hostility have become the hallmark of our defense mechanism.

The beats of agitated hearts and the heat of distraught minds can be felt almost everywhere. Politicians can't understand why the people are so fixated with corruption when everybody

Those in the saddle has been forced to witness a spectacle they clearly didn't expect and certainly don't like.

Sure, things could have been a whole lot better. Singapore was too ambitious a goal our inexperienced leaders tried to impress us with. But, remember, we did start out with more opposition MPs than denizens of Lee Kwan Yew's city-state could ever dream of. Talk of the sun rising from the west was an ironic symptom of the compulsions of our hung parliament. But we could have tried to complete the Mahakali detailed project report before that part of Uttar Pradesh turned into Uttaranchal. The ruling party has consistently failed to act on its pledge to provide a stable government. But our eternally hissing Kangress could have ensured that the opposition did not end up being the final word on who the prime minister should be.

It probably doesn't hurt to hit rock bottom once in a while to reflect on missed opportunities and to reach out to our possibilities. One-time tested therapy for despondency is to think of how much worse things could have been. (Excuse No. 1: Make a list of three things we might have been

worrying about today if we didn't have a Maoist insurgency, endless corruption allegations or sickening power plays.)

Does this approach mask of escapism? Not when there aren't too many refugees around. Is it fatalism? Our life is too heavily influenced by predestination for another few twists of fate to make much of a difference. Do I have a roadmap for renewal after all this crap? No. Especially not when those who are paid to prepare one have hardly spread out their drawing boards. But that doesn't mean I'm about to give up my right to rant.

But here's my two paises anyway. While we have to make the best with what we have, we must confront our quest for freedom and dignity with brutal candour. Perhaps a good place to start would be the rapidly diminishing space between the nostalgia for the predictability of the parryless decades and the promise of a one-party paradise.

Discussions on panchazari atrocities would serve little purpose anymore without acknowledging that opponents of the status quo used murder and sabotage as political weapons long before the Maoists rose up against the state. How Kangress hijackers and commu-

nist head-hunters pitted against the putrid panchas in the 1970s eventually recognised the need to build a common platform two decades later is crucial to understanding the undercurrents of our political flow.

To be sure, this catharsis will reopen old wounds. People whom we've spent a lifetime deferring may come down crashing from their pedestals in no time. In the wisdom time, so graciously bestowed on us, some sullied personalities may succeed in redeeming part of their reputation. In any case, we have to stop playing this blame game if we want to avoid becoming a nation of misanthropes. The destruction of the myth that a few have a monopoly on political virtue would eventually have a therapeutic effect on the nation's conscience. (Excuse No. 2: Let's try to find out if we have the compassion to absolve each other—and ourselves—of crimes we may not have committed.)

You know what? Maybe we should set up a truth and reconciliation commission where we can sob, wail, moan and bang our fists for as long as we feel like. Once we run out of grudges, we just might start liking each other. ♦

by KANAK MANI DIXIT

COMMENT

Kathmandu's armchair analysts feel little reason to express their opinion on international affairs. They ignore even the ones that have a bearing on Nepal. We are content with news provided by the international satellite channels, the discussions held on Star TV or Aaj Tak, and op-ed analyses in the New Delhi papers that arrive every evening on IC 313. There is little need left to pass comment (or judgement) on international and South Asian issues. For example, to take something close at hand, you are likely to be weighed down by a volley of soul-destroying lamentations from your interlocu-



Why do Nepali commentators not feel the need to express their opinion on the Palestinian intifada, Govinda Mainali in a Japanese jail, or the Uttar Pradesh elections?

ask why the Dalai Lama cannot visit the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautam.

When it comes to India, the pundits mouth the identical 'nationalist' views heard from the political party pundits. You would be hard-pressed to locate an India-watcher in Nepali academe, even though our economy and polity is dominated by the southern neighbour. Do not expect the Kathmandu analyst to write on the results of the recent Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, or the possible impact of Ayodhya violence on the Nepali. We are fixated on New Delhi as a supposed equal, but do little to challenge the so-called Nepali-experts in New Delhi, mostly self-important academics who do not keep up-to-date with the country's wildly changing political landscape. Nepali academics profess to loathe these talking heads, but then they do precious little to make themselves heard by the Indian opinion-making classes. When was the last time a Nepali professor published in a New Delhi weekly or daily?

The homework is just not there. For decades, the opinion-makers roared on the need to rescind or renegotiate the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India. But the moment the Indian government (under I.K. Gujral) agreed to discuss the treaty, all our resolve disappeared and we ran for cover. After all, it is unclear whether we would indeed benefit—under present conditions of underdevelopment—if the equal treatment clause and the open

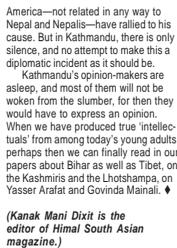
border were to be tampered with. ("Okay, tell me what you want to do with it," Gujral asked the diggaj gathered at the Nepal Council of World Affairs, when challenged on the treaty. He was greeted with pin drop silence.)

On geo-political discourse, we are still at the stage of valourising Nalpani, claiming that Lumbini is ours (even though no one is really taking it away from us), taking pride in being the land of Buddha (even though peace is here no more), and pointing to Mount Everest as our own (forgetting, conveniently, that the trends on the labour markets in the Gulf and Southeast and East Asia? Come to think of it, there is no intellectual curiosity even to identify issues abroad that should concern us?)

Nepal has been a long-standing friend of Israel, with which it has maintained diplomatic relations since the days when Tel Aviv was considered a parish in much of the Third World. We therefore may have the right to applaud the Israeli government for its ongoing inhumanity against the Palestinians, and the incredible television footage of Yasser Arafat's person under siege. But do not hold your breath. The who make up Kathmandu's polarizing classes do not feel up to expressing opinions on world affairs. Turning them to Japan, where one of our former Govinda Mainali, languishes in Tokyo detention centre, is the miscarriage of justice. The matter of his innocence is such an open-and-shut case that activists in Japan and

America—not related in any way to Nepal and Nepal's—have rallied to his cause. But in Kathmandu, there is only silence, and no attempt to make this a diplomatic incident as it should be. Kathmandu's opinion-makers are asleep, and most of them do not even waken from the slumber, for then they would have to express an opinion.

When we have produced true 'intellectuals' from among today's young adults, perhaps then we can finally read in our papers about Bihar as well as Tibet, on the Kashmiris and the Lhotshampas, on Yasser Arafat and Govinda Mainali. ♦



(Kanak Mani Dixit is the editor of Himal South Asian magazine.)

High-flying fees

Airline tickets could cost more pretty soon. The government on 29 March revised several fees relating to the aviation sector, which airlines will double need to pass on to the consumer. The decision raises the registration, renewal and ownership fees for airlines and also reduces fees relating to Air Operating Certificates (AOC). Registration fees for aircraft (including helicopters) up to 7,500 kg flight weight is Rs 22,950 (\$300), almost double the existing rate, that for gliders is Rs 7,600, up from Rs 4,000. The AOC fee for international airlines, which was based on flight type, has been fixed at Rs 95,500 (\$12,500), a significant reduction from the Rs 500,000 payable earlier for charters it was Rs 300,000. However—as it is to balance the revenue losses—the government has raised the AOC fees for domestic operators to Rs 382,500 up from Rs 100,000 (and Rs 60,000 for irregular operators). The domestic industry, which was declared as 'sick' some weeks ago and allowed to raise fares is perplexed, because the decision was taken without consulting the industry.

Bidding for tea

The Nepal Tea and Coffee Development Board (NTCDB) has begun auctioning tea in Birtamod, the first organised effort to market domestic tea produce. Six producers participated in the auction on 27 March though the sale was not very brisk as the bidders were largely Nepali companies. Nepali tea producers say they produce some of the best quality teas in the world but have not been able to sell because of the lack of marketing arrangements. Nepali orthodox tea, produced in the hills of Nepal, is said to be of better quality than Indian teas, largely because the plants are young and grow using relatively smaller quantities of pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Nepal produced 6.6 million kg of tea in fiscal 2000/01, up from the roughly 5 million kg produced the year before.

More ADB loans

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) says it is willing to give Nepal up to \$300 million in loans between 2003-2005 to support 13 proposed projects. However, Nepal will see the money only if it is able to perform in accordance with criteria set to assess its macroeconomic performance, policy reforms in different sectors and ability to use the money. By ADB standards Nepal's performance is a 'base case', which makes it eligible to borrow between \$90-100 million annually from the bank's concessional lending window, the Asian Development Fund. The bank has also said yes to about 24 non-loan grants as technical assistance, which add up to about \$4 million each year. Sector-wise, there are to be six loans in agriculture and natural resources, two in finance and industry, three in social infrastructure, one in energy and one in transport and communications.

Cheaper, greener flooring

Here's a choice for less expensive and possibly more-environment friendly flooring. The Himalayan Bamboo P. Ltd. has begun marketing its bamboo-flooring parquet as an alternative to using wood, marble etc. The flooring resembles wood but retains the texture and colours of bamboo. Company sources add that its anti-mold, anti-mildew, waterproof, heat resistant and deformity proof.



INTERVIEW



That has always been a strong competitor. We also have Qatar, Transavia, Gulf Air.

Does Singapore Airlines promote Nepal, how?

If you recall, about a year-and-a-half ago we did a USA-Nepal tour where we flew travel trade industry people to nine US cities. We did that twice to make sure the Americans were coming. If nothing else, with such trips we can assure their congress or firms about coming to Nepal. It is good to tell people there about the situation first hand and invite them to visit. You have to have a presence in markets, otherwise it is easy for people with money to go elsewhere. We are doing other things. For example, during the jazz festival, we brought over Don Burrows, and band to perform live on stage. These things are needed to pacify people, make them think Kathmandu is quite safe. We hope the word gets around. We distributed codes to over 100 posters on the festival in the US, Australia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan... almost all over the world.

You seem to be doing what Royal Nepal should be doing

Given their constraints, it is quite difficult for them. They have been closing their stations one by one. Somebody has to fill their shoes, do their bit for the sake of tourism.

What can Royal Nepal learn from Singapore Airlines?

If I were at Royal Nepal I would concentrate only on routes that are making money. It is time to put aside your national pride and focus on the business. Let's make the profitable routes work first and then say you got more confidence and revenue, you can expand to other routes. Some destinations that Royal Nepal flies to are a little suspicious, why would anybody want to fly to stations that are like white elephants. Last year we cut out of two stations because they were not making money, it has to be run like a business.

How has the in-bound traffic of Nepalis to Singapore been? Why should Nepalis go there?

Singapore is a very convenient place for Nepalis. You don't need visas, everybody in Singapore speaks English. All you need to get there is a return ticket and you can spend a few days there. There is a fairly large Nepali community there. Singapore is safe, almost crime free.

Do you also have a new package?

The package is for all travellers visiting Singapore. We realise tourism is

Towards total destruction

Earlier in the week, the Maoists blew up the Chandauda sub-station in Kapilvastu, causing damage worth Rs 5 million, and attacked another electricity station at Atria. They have also attacked and damaged small hydro in Khandhari, Bhojpur and Okhaldhunga. The Nepal Electricity Authority had not assessed the damages in Okhaldhunga, but the loss in the two other plants was estimated at Rs 12 million. Besides NEA-owned plants, the Maoists have also destroyed numerous community-run hydro plants, which no one even seems to be counting.



The telecommunication tower was blown up by Maoists on 29 March, now the tourist town of Saubaha is without phones.

So far the Maoists have attacked and damaged 37 telecommunications substations, including some major repeaters, each one of which will cost over Rs 40 million to rebuild. Phones have been dead in 12 districts for months.

There could be some rationale to attacking highways and hydro-power, but what is harder to fathom is what the rebels gain by destroying a training centre for agricultural extension in Karve, the remote Jughal airstrip and the Dolpa's only lifeline, the forestry project centre in Sindhupalchok, or small hydro projects built with local initiative all over the country or the only small hydroplant in Panchdar. Or, why does it help the revolution to destroy water supply of

Narayan Nagar Palika in Dainikh and Okhaldhunga's water supply?

The attacks after 20 March appear to have been part of the terror campaign in the build-up for the strike the Maoists had proposed for 2-6 April. Maoists caught trying to plant bombs in Kathmandu in the past week reportedly admitted just that.

There then are all the other losses. The counter-insurgency operation has already cost the government Rs 1 billion since November. The crippling losses caused by the collapse of the tourism industry and manufacturing and its knock-on effect on the economy cannot even be estimated. Add to that the cost of destroyed infrastructure and it shows that the Maoists are not just fighting an insurgency, they are systematically dismantling a nation. By now, the rebels have dropped all pretences of trying to be popular by not attacking projects that benefited the poor. Now, anyway is fair game, and there is a frightening element of looting and plunder that accompanies the attacks. It could be that the Maoists are responding to military pressure on their activities, and have turned to soft targets to spread maximum panic. Could it, then, be a sign of desperation? Explains Gautam: "The despairing and its knock-on effect on the economy cannot even be estimated. 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They ran up another mountain, and what do you think they saw?

Take a normal marathon, multiply it by nine days. And add the highest mountains in the world. You have the Annual Annapurna Mandala Marathon.



PADAM GHALEY It's not called the "mother of all marathons" just for fun. Along with the shorter Everest Marathon, this is one of the most gruelling races on earth, and is recommended only for the most physically-fit, endurance-tested and acclimatized of athletes. Normal marathons are 42.5 km runs through flat city streets. Now take that race, multiply it by nine days and add vertical segments. And you have the

Annapurna Mandala Marathon. The race is organised every year by the Himalayan Races Association in France in collaboration with Mandala Treks in Kathmandu. This year's just-concluded third annual race had 31 participants of which nine were Nepalis, one runner from Greece, one British, one German, and the rest from France. The race starts at the road-head in Besi Sahar, and follows the Marsyangdi River up to Manang, over the Thorung La to Muktiनाथ,

Jomsom and down the Kali Gandaki, up again to Ghorepani and down to Dhampus near Pokhara. It is a horizontal distance of 325 km, but add the ups and downs and you have a marathon designed by a masochist to inflict maximum punishment on a runner. The Annapurna marathon has everything: altitude variation, stupendous scenery (although runners don't have time to sit around and admire the view), and a geographic diversity of going from



the steep southern slopes of the Himalaya to the arid rainshadow of trans-Himalayan Manang and Mustang. Besi Sahar is at the bottom of the semi-tropical valley at barely 800 m above sea level, and Thorung La is at 5,416 m. Competition had a day to acclimatise in Manang, and this year's side-run to Tilicho lake was also added before the runner made a dash for the pass over the hump. Unlike the Everest Marathon, which is shorter, the Annapurna run is a circuit and doesn't go through the same area twice. The race also passes some of the big names in Himalayan peaks: the Annapurnas, Himalchuli-Manaslu and Dhaulagiri.



From left to right: A marathoner on a rare level stretch in Manang, passing under a gate in Braga, Bruno Poirer huffs and puffs up Ghorepani with majestic Dhaulagiri in the background, and Mandala's logistics team poses after the trek in Pokhara.



Back in Kathmandu this week from the run, Poirer is already planning for the 2003 marathon. He intends to make it even longer by starting the race at Kaputar near Begnas Lake instead of Besi Sahar, the trail will then join the existing Manang route near Bhulbule. "Maybe next year we will get even more runners from all over the world," says Poirer.

All runners have to be registered, they carry a mandatory checklist of items including provisions and equipment up to ten kg. They can carry extra material, but that will weigh them down. The beginning of every run is flagged off, and there is a mid-point control check along the way, and then it is all the way to the night halt. The daily timings are added up for the totals for each runner.

There is a strong competition among the marathoners, but also a feeling of camaraderie. There is code of conduct for runners who have to help those in need along the way. For instance, not helping an injured or incapacitated fellow-runner gets you a punishment of 10 hours added to your final time. A French runner this year was penalised for not helping a fellow-Frenchman. There are also strict do's and don'ts about not acting arrogant, or pushing locals or other marathon venues. After all, with the Annapurna Mandala Marathon behind them, 42.5 horizontal km at sea level should be a piece of cake!

Many marathoners stop along the way at local tea houses for rest, but the more competitive ones race straight through the trail eating their high-calorie bars and drinking water while on the run.

This year, locals along the way gathered in large numbers to cheer the runners along. Nepali participants got loud cheers and shouts of encouragement. And the Nepali runners did the country proud. Of the seven Nepali participants, the

first five winners were Nepali. Dachi from Takshidun was number one with a time of 30 hours 43 minutes and 54 seconds. He overtook last year's winner, Nar Bahadur Shah, on the downhill after Thorung. Shah, who is with the Royal Nepal Army, timed 32 hours 43 minutes and 54 seconds. Sumba Sherpa also from Takshidun came third with 33 hours 31 minutes and 40 seconds. In fourth place was Babu Raja Shrestha, a poultry farmer from Thankot who has been an athlete all his life.

The first among the European runners was Poirer himself, who came sixth clocking 36 hours 30 minutes and 41 seconds. With the runs, and the stellar performance of the Nepalis, the marathon is registering a lot of interest among locals along the Manang trail. Local tea shops are encouraged by the added business during times of a trekking slump. In Manang, the runners got a rousing send off and a cultural performance with music and dance before they headed off for Thorung La. Village youth clubs had inquiries about joining in next year's marathon.

At this rate, it would not be surprising if Nepalis start bagging medals in Olympic and other marathon venues. After all, with the Annapurna Mandala Marathon behind them, 42.5 horizontal km at sea level should be a piece of cake!

(Padam Ghaley is co-director of Mandala Treks and was in charge of the local logistics of the 2002 Annapurna Mandala Marathon. He was assisted by Bhim Tamang and Jerome Bada. To join the 2003 Marathon send bio data to Mandala Treks, phone: 977-1-412 438 email: mandala@mos.com.np)

RAMYATA LIMBU She's run the Atlanta Olympics, the Kathmandu Marathon, the SAF games and done the run in Hong Kong. But running in the Annapurna Mandala Marathon was a totally different experience for Bimala Rana Magar who says she is not using to running uphill. "Before this, the only uphill I'd done was run up Swyambhu," she laughs. Also, she is used to running in a sand vest and shorts, not with 10 kg on her back.

Back now in Kathmandu Bimala, 28, is sore but happy. "I'm so glad I completed the marathon without succumbing to high altitude," Bimala finished 18th out of 31 runners.

Bimala has run from Kathmandu to Helaudda, the old route, from Kathmandu to Melanchi as part of her long distance training. Five months back she and a bunch of long distance runners ran from Kathmandu to Muktiनाथ. They were celebrating the 50th birthday of Nepal's most famous marathoner, Baikuntha Manandhar. "That was the first time I had been at a reasonably high altitude," says Bimala. "The route was much easier than the Annapurna Mandala Trail."

At Thorung PheDi, the runners were roused at 3 am

before they made their way upwards to the 5400m snow-bound Thorung La, and down to Marpha in Mustang. Bimala's preparation for the marathon consisted of her regular 90-minute run along Kathmandu's Ring Road, and her diet of dal-bhat. "If I'd been training for the 3,000m or 1,500m events, which I used to run, and was in a special training camp, I'd probably be getting coached and extra diet. But marathon running in Nepal usually means you're on your own."

She considers herself fortunate to have a family, especially an elder brother, who encouraged her to run. "I started running late, after completing high school. I used to watch runners from the parapet and get the urge to join them." But she doesn't see an increasing number of women join the sport.

Bimala began training for marathons in 1993, and came third among women in the 42km Kathmandu Marathon in 1994, her first event. The following year, she came second. In the 7th SAF Games in Madras she came fourth, and she came 11th in the 1999 Hong Kong Marathon.

In between running, Bimala is busy at her job, which is preparing voter's identity cards. "While attending college, I took some computer courses which helped me get

a job. One does have to work." Of course, it would be ideal if she got a company to sponsor her for what she does best. "My dream is to become a coach. I can teach other young people what I have learnt. One has to recognise, train, and nurture talent. Despite the odds, she's keen to go the distance. "If I get a sponsor and someone to train me, I'm keen to do the Annapurna to Everest marathon this autumn."



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OPINION



The real problem with Arafat is that he has a lot in common with Sharon: old, ruthless and cynical. Both men have come to despise each other.

After all, his killers have managed to murder dozens of Palestinian gunmen already, including occupational women and children who get in the way. The real problem with Arafat is that he has a lot in common with Sharon: old, ruthless and cynical; both men have come to despise each other. Sharon believes that the Palestinians can be broken by military power.

He doesn't realise what the rest of the world learned during Sharon's own 1982 siege of Beirut: that the Arabs are no longer afraid. Once a people lose their fear, they cannot be re-inoculated with fear. Once the suicide bomber is loose, the war cannot be won. And Arafat knows this.

No, of course he doesn't send the bombers off on their wicked missions to restaurants and supermarkets. But he does know that every suicide bombing destroys Sharon's credibility and proves that the Israeli leader's promises of security are false. Arafat is well aware that the ferocious bombings are serving his purpose—however much he may condemn them in public. But like Sharon—also a better strategist than he is—Arafat is actually sending off the suicide bombers, choosing the target, the amount of explosives.

He was, then, surely Sharon who would have sent his dead squads after the Palestinian leader months ago.

probably will have to give up their occupation. But the Jews of Israel are not going to run or admit to an endless war of attrition. Even if Sharon is voted out of power—a prospect for which many Israelis pray—the next Israeli prime minister has also said that his intelligence agencies—the heroes who failed to discover the 11 September—have proof (undisputed, of course) ever more revealing.

Hamas calls its Jewish enemies "the sons of pigs and monkeys," while Israeli leaders have variously bestialised their enemies as "serpents," "crocodiles," "beasts" and "cockroaches." Now we have an Israeli officer—according to the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*—advising his men to study the tactics adopted by the Nazis in the Second World War.

"If our job is to seize a densely packed refugee camp or take over the Nabulus cash, and if this job is given to an (Israeli) officer to carry out without casualties on both sides, he must before all else analyse and bring together the lessons of past battles, even -shocking though this might appear - to analyse how the German army operated in the Warsaw ghetto." "Paradox? What on earth does this mean? Does this account for the numbers handed by the Israelis on the hands and forehead of Palestinian prisoners earlier this month?

Does this mean that an Israeli soldier is now to regard the Palestinians as sub-humans—which is exactly how the Nazis regarded the trapped and desperate Jews of the Warsaw ghetto in 1944? Yet from Washington comes only silence. And silence, in law, gives consent. Should we be surprised? After all, the US is now making the rules as it goes along.

Prisoners can be called "illegal combatants" and brought to Guantanamo Bay with their mouths taped for several weeks. The Afghan war is declared a victory—and then suddenly explodes again. Now we are told there will be other "fronts" in Afghanistan, a spring offensive by "terrorists." Washington agrees—the heroes who failed to discover the 11 September—have proof (undisputed, of course) ever more revealing.

Iran is one of the oldest political sources, but in an interconnected world, isn't it possible for the international community to do more to restrain tyrants in order to ensure a more stable global environment? A tricky question, no doubt. No country is ready to cede political sovereignty to outside powers or electoral moitions.

Sanctions, however, are clumsy, costly, and often ineffective. They are insufficient to stop abuses (after all, sanctions were threatened before elections) and risk pushing Zimbabwe's economy deeper into crisis, hurting millions of innocent people, especially during a period of intensifying hunger and political violence, and increasing the world's stake in preventing the continued mantle of Mugabe and others like him.

One plausible idea is regional monitoring and sanctions, giving neighbours would help forestall such tyranny, since neighbours are the biggest direct losers when instability spills across borders. Yet they are also now prosecuting the "war on terror".

When Macdonald says gun-down seven Arabs, they announce that they are participating in the "global war on terror". When Russians massacre Chechens, they are now prosecuting the "war on terror". When Israel fires at Arafat's headquarters, it says it is participating in the "war on terror". Must we all be hijacked into America's dangerous self-absorption with the crimes of 11 September? Must this vile war between the US and the Israelis be distorted in so dishonest a way? ♦ (The Independant)

Nepal Britain Chamber of Commerce and Industry is deeply saddened at the demise of Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother of the United Kingdom.

Through the good office of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Nepal, (NBCCI) would like to convey its heartfelt condolences. We pray to the Almighty that her departed soul rests in peace.

NEPAL BRITAIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY
Rajendra K. Khatun (President), the Executive Committee Members & the Chamber family.

OPINION

Dictating limits to dictators

The high costs of tyranny spill over to the rest of the world. What can be done?

by JEFFREY D SACHS



The most fearful of challenging one of them is the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has acquiesced to Mugabe's abuses. If that silence continues, it will gravely undermine SADC institutions, and cast a deep pall over the SADC's most important leader, South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Sanctions offer another approach. America, Europe, and other democracies should not continue to do "business as usual" with Zimbabwe. Mugabe and his henchmen have stashed millions of dollars abroad in the past year according to plausible press accounts. These accounts should be frozen, despite the difficulty in doing so in a world rife with secret banking and nominee accounts that disguise true ownership.

Mugabe's phony elections should go unrecognised, and Mugabe denied a welcome as a legitimate head of state in international gatherings.

Sanctions, however, are clumsy, costly, and often ineffective. They are insufficient to stop abuses (after all, sanctions were threatened before elections) and risk pushing Zimbabwe's economy deeper into crisis, hurting millions of innocent people, especially during a period of intensifying hunger and political violence, and increasing the world's stake in preventing the continued mantle of Mugabe and others like him.

One plausible idea is regional monitoring and sanctions, giving neighbours would help forestall such tyranny, since neighbours are the biggest direct losers when instability spills across borders. Yet they are also now prosecuting the "war on terror".

An international term limit could govern the right of a real democracy to keep a popular leader for more than 20 years. Helmut Kohl and his 16 years in office. In Germany approached this limit. But even in strong democracies, the final years of a long rule are typically the worst. Kohl's last years, for example, were marked by electoral corruption. Given the incredible advantages incumbents have over challengers in nearly every political system, a firm time limit would strengthen the strongest existing democracies.

The roster of long-serving heads of government in the twentieth century—Stalin, Mao, Franco, Kim Il Sung, and Ceausescu—makes it clear that an enforced international term limit would have spared the world considerable grief and turmoil. In our much more democratic and interconnected world, it is possible a clear international norm limiting time in power could spare the world from dictatorship and destabilisation in the future. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

(Jeffrey D Sachs is professor of economics, and director of the Center for International Development, Harvard University.)

China could accept this rule, because it would apply to heads of government, not ruling parties. China routinely sends the highest executive positions, and the change of power prevents tyrants from gaining excessive power, a lesson learned painfully during Mao's long, often disastrous reign. Corruption is limited by the frequent alternation of power, since tyrants typically need many years to build up systems of mega-corruption, usually involving family and business associates.

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ANALYSIS by KAUSHIK BASU

Trade and the Third World

hypocrisy and trade-talk together, as America's decision to impose tariffs on imported beef shows. Although that action is expected to be judged illegal by the World Trade Organization (WTO), developing countries remain wary. Historically, they argued that the WTO is a tool of rich countries and so resisted much of what is sought to do. Indeed, before the WTO ministerial meeting in Doha earlier this year, India's line was to oppose the launch of a new round, resist further trade liberalization in industrial goods, and oppose the use of trade-sanctions to punish countries that fail to meet minimal labor standards.

The perception that the WTO is largely an instrument of the powerful, industrialized nations is broadly correct. To oppose it on all fronts, however, is wrong. A more sophisticated approach towards the WTO (and the North in general) is needed.

The WTO says that it is a democratic organization on the principle of one country, one vote. Anybody who follows the WTO knows that rich countries get around this "nuisance" democratic formality by lobbying behind the scenes to get the agenda in advance. Despite this, constant opposition to the WTO is self-defeating. As the dispute about America's new steel tariffs illustrates, in today's globalized world a centralized trade ombudsman is vital. Eliminating the WTO would be like trying to run a modern society without a law court. While law courts are typically more lenient towards the rich and powerful, it is still better to have them than not.

Chronic opposition also reveals a lack of self-confidence of the sort when you cannot decide what is good for yourself, instead, demand the opposite of what your trading partners want in the belief that what is good for them must be bad for you. This implies a zero-sum view of global economies that is false. In economic transactions there are many instances where everyone gains or everyone loses.

So consider the steel tariff. India's three demands. It is right for India to have opposed injecting international labor standards into the WTO agenda. But it is wrong that India strongly opposed a new trade round. India's average tariff rate is



around 30%. While much lower than previously, it is higher than in most industrial nations. But India independently cannot decide what to do over the next three years. A global program to lower tariffs means that India would only be asked to do what it planned to do anyway. As others would have to lower their tariffs, India's access to other markets would increase.

Nowadays, economic policy is so complex that it is not always clear what is good for a nation and what is not. Last December, there was a furor in India when a dispute settlement panel of the WTO ruled against India's practice of (1) forcing automobile manufacturers in India to buy a certain proportion of parts from Indian producers, and (2) requiring automotive manufacturers who need to import parts and kits to export goods worth the same value.

If we reflect on these conditions, it is not at all clear that these policies are good for India. Forcibly creating a market for Indian automobile parts eases pressure on these manufacturers to improve quality. Forcing Indian cars to use such parts handicaps Indian cars from matching international quality. India and other emerging economies must engage with the WTO, keeping pressure on it to give more voice to developing countries. There are, for example, 18 African countries without any representation in the WTO's office in Geneva. What benefit can they expect from the WTO?

When there is a WTO legal tussle and big countries bring in expensive lawyers to argue their case, what chance do poor countries have? As a democratic country with considerable expertise in economics and law, India should fight for better representation throughout the WTO. Once that is achieved, it will be easier to entrust the WTO with tasks, such as assuring minimal labor standards that appear contentious today. But a rule to remember is that even if this is not achieved, India and countries like it will gain more by being active participants in the WTO dialogue than by withdrawing or being habitual naysayers. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Kaushik Basu is professor of economics at Cornell University and is currently visiting professor at MIT.

How much longer can Ariel Sharon pretend that he's fighting in the "war against terror"? How much longer are we supposed to believe this nonsense? How much longer can the Americans remain so glibly silent in the face of a vicious conflict which is curving close to obscuring the entire humanity of 11 September? Terror, terror, terror. Like a

punctuation mark, the word inflicts every Israeli speech, every American speech, almost every newspaper article. When will someone admit the truth: that the Israelis and Palestinians are engaged in a dirty colonial war which will leave both sides shamed and humiliated? Just listen to what Sharon has been saying in the past 24 hours. "Arafat is an enemy. He decided on a

strategy of terror and formed a coalition of terror." That's pretty much what President Bush said about Osama bin Laden. But what an oath did he mean? That Arafat is actually sending off the suicide bombers, choosing the target, the amount of explosives? He was, then, surely Sharon who would have sent his dead squads after the Palestinian leader months ago.

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Core Tasks:
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- Preparing, in consultation with other staff members, annual plans and budgets
- Developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation system for the project
- Representing the project at key public functions
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Sri Lanka talks in Bangkok
BANGKOK—Thailand's reputation as a neutral player on the global stage strengthens its case as an ideal venue for the first round of imminent peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tiger rebels. On March 26, a ranking member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as the Tamil rebels are formally known, virtually confirmed the story doing the rounds in Colombo's diplomatic and government circles — that the South-East Asian kingdom was the chosen venue. There has been no official announcement of the venue for the talks as yet.
But the statement by Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, that Thailand is the preferred venue for peace talks put to rest speculation that Sri Lanka's closest neighbours—India and the Maldives—would host discussions to end over two decades of ethnic conflict in the South Asian island nation. Balasingham returned to Sri Lanka in the last week of March from Britain, where he had been living in self-imposed exile for three years. His arrival is expected to spur the groundwork being prepared by the recently elected United National Front (UNF) government in Colombo and the Tamil Tiger leadership for the talks, which may begin early May. (IPS)

Post-Enron Narmada
NEW DELHI—India can teach more lessons in the financing of power projects than learn them, says a report released this week, which uses Enron's discredited megaproject in the country and the controversial Narmada Valley project to expose the murky workings of indirect funding for such schemes.
The report, "Power Finance: Financial Institutions in India's Power Sector", banks on the Indian experience to examine the latest trends in the financing of development projects and in the process untangles what its publishers call "the complicated web" through which large dam projects are funded through financial intermediaries. "Power Finance", published by International Rivers Network, Ugrwadd and the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, also documents resistance to uneconomical and destructive projects in India.
"Finally, we have a single document that outlines all our struggles over all these years," Vimala Bhai, campaigner for the umbrella National Alliance of People's Movements, says of the report, authored by Peter Bossard, former secretary of the Berne Declaration. (IPS)

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“Dummy government?”

Chalghal, 31 March
(Excerpts from Madhav Kumar Nepal's statement in parliament demanding an explanation from the prime minister)

"We have taken the statement made by the Chief of the Army Staff 27 March very seriously. The statement says why the people's representatives have not supported the security forces. Reading the full text, we found other very serious issues in it. The allegations in the statement have raised questions about the authority and duties [of the CoAS] and at what point such statements cross the limits of decency. We are concerned if one type of indiscipline takes root in the nation. It will be very difficult to return to normal. We are deeply worried about these things.

The prime minister and the defence minister is [are] automatically responsible for statements made by the CoAS. The defence minister is responsible being the line minister, and as chair of the National Security Council, the prime minister is answerable for the issues raised. We demand a satisfying explanation to the matters raised in the statement from the prime minister.

Some may agree with the CoAS statement, so they may not think it is necessary to discuss its subject matter. But the question is not about the matters raised, it is who said these things, and where. What would happen if the chief secretary were to go around saying there is bad governance in the country? What would happen if a secretary went around making political speeches? Can we accept it if people in responsible positions in government go around opposing or criticising the government's performance? We are now forced to ask such questions.

...We are highlighting in this house of people's representatives the concerns raised by the people about the CoAS' statement. People have to be capable of understanding their limits and responsibilities. We must all stay within our limits. What would happen to this country if we all started crossing the line? We have to be able to separate the good from the bad, the right from the wrong. We must be able to point out shortcomings. But what is the appropriate place to point out what is wrong, what is the appropriate medium and audience, how should such things be said—all these things have their own definitions and meanings, and fixed limits. We must respect those limits.

...We don't know if Sher Bahadur Deuba's government is a dummy, or whether it is actually running the country. If it is a dummy government, why is the Nepal Congress still supporting it?... this government is helpless, just a shadow. Why has a puppet government been allowed to continue its show? We cannot understand why the Nepal Congress is content with watching a puppet show. A puppet government must be overthrown. The Nepal Congress has to form a more real government... We are also surprised by statements of the party president [Girija Prasad Koirala] that the state of emergency was declared because the army demanded it. Who will tell us what is happening, that is unclear even though we have a majority government? Who will explain all this to us—isn't this the responsibility of the prime minister?

...We see these kinds of contradictions in a situation where the prime minister is weak, helpless and powerless. He cannot speak in front of others, he just projects a helpless decency. He tries to lie to everyone, he is unable to understand his own status, duties and responsibilities. That is why he always has hearing statements from the prime minister] such as because "everyone has said... you have said..." "I have talked...", or you said strike, so I've struck" [an earlier Deuba statement in parliament]. That was why we asked whether this country has a prime minister or a robot?... If the prime minister is a robot, we have nothing to say except that the country does not need a robot as a prime minister.

...We don't think it is a valid charge that we haven't supported the security forces. The entire parliament rallied the emergency. Would the emergency have been possible if the people's representatives had not backed it?... There is no mention of that in the statement... The people's representatives [discussed in the statement by the Chief of Army Staff Prajwal Rana of refusing to go to their constituencies] may also have their concerns. They have been told: don't go to the villages, don't visit the districts. They have been told not to move around in groups of more than one or two people, they've been told don't organise meetings, and don't conduct any political activities now. On the one hand you say this, on the other you say that you don't have the support of the people's representatives. Isn't this contradictory?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We come from a tradition where citizens are treated as 'subjects', our tradition of centralised rule still holds the concept that rulers are 'more equal' and people are insignificant. Or we're still a feudal, centralised state."

—Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani, Vice President of Rastriya Prajatantra Party in Budhthara, 3 April.



Rock: Nepal Bandh
Board: SIC examination centre

संविधानको संरक्षण: Spacetime Daily, 31 March

United we pass

Sanacharpatra, 31 March

The five-day Nepal bandh called by the underground Maoist party is going to affect 250,000 students who are to appear in this year's annual School Leaving Certificate examination. The bandh is called from 2 April, which is the day the exams start. Still, the student unions are silent about the bandh and the effect it will have on the students and their exams.

The Nepali Congress and its youth wings, namely the Tarun Dal and the Nepal Students' Union have not spoken out strongly against the Maoist call for a nationwide shutdown. Similarly, the main opposition CPN-UML and its youth wings are equally passive. Other parties in the opposition are also inert—they have issued statements, but none has initiated a joint action against the call for the bandh, which will affect the nation very adversely.

Despite this, the spokesperson at the Ministry of Education is hopeful that the political parties and their youth wing will aid in ensuring that the annual examinations can be conducted smoothly. "We have mobilised all the security agencies, and hope that all the political parties, their youth wings, organisations and civil society will join in our endeavour to provide security to the students," says Yub Raj Pandey.

When the government is so open seeking the participation of other political parties and their youth wings in ensuring the SIC exams are administered without a hitch, why are the political parties not acting. "We are ready to support the government," Bishu Prakash Sharma, President of the Nepal Students' Union said. However, he did not explain how his organisation would go about that. "We will discuss it with other student unions and work out a plan to provide protection for students taking the SIC examination," Sharma said, without announcing any timeframe.

Naga Raj Sunwar of the All-Nepal Free Students' Union also claimed that his union is willing to offer assistance to the government for security during the SIC exams, but he does not have a concrete plan either. "We are holding discussion within our union, and with other unions too," he said.

Nepali student unions have a history of fighting each other physically on various non-student political issues. But they seem reluctant to share their zeal and strength to fight united against this attack by the Maoists on the future of over 250,000 students. "There are examples in world history when student unions have put aside their differences and united to fight a national crisis," says educationist Dr Man Prasad Wagle. "If Nepal students had called around the country ahead in order to accomplish their task, the army will not engage in talks, but keeping its work until the talks conclude and it is ordered to retreat.



Hands up! You criminals, you want to become doctors and intellectuals like us!

Frequent fliers

Deshantra, 31 March

The government has not curtailed foreign travel and associated expenses even during a state of emergency. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who sent ministers on junkets to Bangkok as a strategy to cling to power [in his earlier stint], seems to be using the same formula now. Ministers have travelled extensively during the past five months, the finance, agriculture and information and communications ministers are the most frequent fliers. Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat travelled to Sri Lanka, India, Mexico and the Maldives. Minister for Agriculture Madesh Acharya visited Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The Minister for Information and Communication Jayaprakash Prasad Gupta went to Pakistan, Turkey and Bangkok. Some other ministers who have travelled during the period include the Minister for Women and Social Welfare Rajendra Kharel who went to Japan; Minister for Industry and Supplies Purna Bahadur Khaika, Germany; Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Bal Bahadur KC, Germany; Minister for Health Sharan Singh Bhandari, Brazil; Scientist and Technology Minister Bhakti Bahadur Balyar, India, United States; State Minister for Health Mohan Bahadur Basnet, Switzerland; State Minister for Foreign Affairs Anjan Bahadur Singh, India, and State Home Minister Devendra Raj Kandel, Indonesia.

Talk, Talk

Deshantra, 31 March

(Excerpts from an interview with Dhruva Bahadur Tripathi, former Inspector General of Police)



The Maoists have been told laying down their weapons is a condition for a fresh round of talks...

Such a condition may not be completely appropriate. That is, after all, something to be decided during the talks. You decide when to stop fighting during talks. The first negotiations began after the cessation of hostilities on both sides, and no one attacked each other. You can even have talks now, not necessarily by

stopping the fighting.

You are said to have first designed the Integrated Security and Development Program (ISDP), but leaders did not listen...

What can I gain by blaming them now? We made a programme based on the problem then, and the needs that were relevant at that time. We could have succeeded in resolving the Maoist problem, but the government treated it casually, it didn't give it due importance.

Do you think the problem can be resolved militarily? There could be a resolution, but it can take time. What will the situation of the country be by then is more important. We need a quick solution, talks are one way to get there faster. I am not saying that the deployment of troops should stop, that is something the government must decide. We could destroy ourselves if we do not find a quick resolution to the problem.

Are talks possible now?

This government failed in the earlier talks. If it starts talking again, that could happen again. Others have to initiate the talks, leaders of parties in power today need to take a decision.

So any talks now must be of a different order from the earlier ones?

Yes. They should be such that there is no need to stop the fighting for them. This is where there could also be a role for the king. Who will give the mandate for the talks? Who is the authority to say okay, go and initiate talks? This is not the time to compete against each other and talk about other unrelated things.

Is the king also needed in the context of talks?

Possibly.

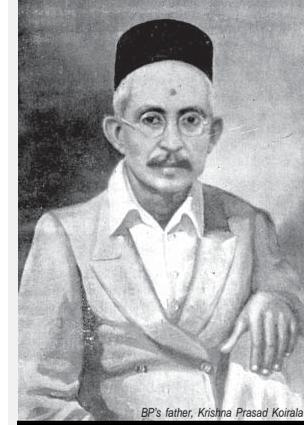
What are the dangers of not finding an immediate solution?

It could end our nationhood, destroy our nation.

Are talks really possible in times of war?

There is no relationship between negotiations and the security situation. The security forces should not need to worry about whether or not the talks are taking place, they shouldn't even think about it. The leadership engages in talks, there is no relationship between talks and the fighting.

What about the morale of the fighting forces? They will continue moving ahead in order to accomplish their task. The army will not engage in talks, but keeping its work until the talks conclude and it is ordered to retreat.



BP's father, Krishna Prasad Koirala

BP at Sundarjial turns away from more mundane matters and begins to analyse the political situation outside the walls, will King Mahendra see him? What is the monarchy's role? He reads the history of intrigue and betrayals, and wonders if that will ever change.

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Back at Sundarjial >8

“The ship is sinking.”

12 January, 1977

GM (Ganesh Man Singh) reminds me that we have returned to Nepal as captains of the ship (that is Nepal). The ship, according to our calculation and for everybody to see, is sinking. We have rushed to its rescue, and in case it has to sink, we will not have our place and run for safety, but will go down with it. If the other party, (ie the King who is captain today and whose piloting is responsible for the ship being in the present stormy sea and predicament) doesn't in its senses yield to our piloting, and doesn't permit us in its calculation then Nepal as a state and nation will be obliterated from the map and we patriots will also perish in this national obliteration. Therefore we should not unnecessarily brood over as to whether King (King Mahendra) will see us and discuss things with us or whether this thing would happen or that; if he doesn't, everything is lost. We shouldn't calculate the loss because the loss is total and cataclysmic. We should rather think over the points that may come up for discussion with the King and what steps, immediate and long range. We should take to affect remedial and permanent results, in the case of the talk with the King is successful. GM prepares tea, both in the early morning and afternoon, and during these hours we discuss politics.

We again asked for a doctor and a dentist, the Major also feels helpless. He says that he has repeatedly sent me to the army HQ that we are asking for a doctor everyday in the morning. He himself doesn't know why this delay. He has asked us to speak to the general who would be coming to the camp to supervise the interviews on Saturday (is 2nd of Magh). We think that it is in keeping with the policy of keeping us incommunicado that the doctors are not sent. But if the interviews are granted then our analyses with regard to our solitary confinement were wrong.

I did some washing, took a bath—my second bath after I arrived here. I rub oil, stay in the sun for some time and when I am sufficiently warm I rush to the bath room, stand under the running tap, rub my body briskly, stand under the running tap once again before I rub off with the wet and rough towel and return to the room with the tingling sensation of health. The water is so cold that it beats like a hammer on the back of the head unless you know how quickly to remove your head from the running water. Even after that for some time the head aches. Perhaps it is nature warning that enough is enough.

13th January, 1977

Having nothing better to do I started leafing Rishikesh Shah's 'An Introduction to Nepal' which GM had bought. It is not a substantial book, and Shah himself was a little apologetic about it, saying that it was written for one who had no idea about Nepal—for some foreigner who wouldn't know facts about it—in a hurry. I read the chapter dealing with the Shah period, Pritivi N Shah and the coming of Jangbhadur. The story is replete with court intrigues, murders, chicanery, betrayals and machination of our ambitious queens, the most numerous of the protagonists. Shah has not written a word about how they administered the country. In a country that has a monarchy of such tradition the unbridled royal power is a menace. I don't know how far culture and modern political spirit is imbued by present incumbent whose ancestral legacy is dripping with honor. Will the modern prevail over the medieval in the palace atmosphere? Will the modern prevail over the medieval in the formulation of state policy? Royal vs the People, the Palace vs the country? That is the question whose answer one way or the other will divide the fate of Nepal one way or the other.

When my father died in prison in 1946, he was most probably 66 years old, my mother was probably 48 years, I was 30 years and something—Bunu, our youngest sister was 13. I am now 62 years and a half. Sushila, 10 years my junior is 52. Prakash 30 years and 4 months, and my youngest Chetna is 17 years and a half. This idea of death, a macabre imagination induced perhaps by jail condition where one doesn't know when and if one would be relieved sometimes crosses my mind and that father had died in the Rana prison puts into me the idea of my own death in prison. After that a chain reaction starts in my mind—Mother, Sushila, myself, Prakash, Bunu and Chetna. I also know that time is on our side. Therefore I have to live. If father had survived even for a year, he would witness the tremendous transformation in the political scene of the Indian Sub-Continent. Jadhva SS would have abdicated, Padma SS would have been the PM. In India, the British would have been gone. Did father have the slightest inkling of the coming events of such earthshaking dimensions? I have to live. I don't have to be told by astrologers, some of whom have predicted a bright future for me provided my health doesn't betray me that ultimately I will triumph, our cause will win, the people will prevail, I will see myself all this happening.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

♦ **Stupas, Stones and Space** Exhibition of solo paintings on Nepali paper by German artist Dagmar Mathes. 8-20 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited



EVENTS

- ♦ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** 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 Vajra. 271545
- ♦ **Red Ribbon Grand Celebrate Nepal New Year** with a mix of Nepali performers like Ram Shrestha, Alibaboss, Hybrid, Pressurized as well as the Australian band The Agents. 13 April, Hotel De L'Annapurna
- ♦ **New Year at Rox Bar** Celebrate New Year's eve with pulsating music, exciting cocktails, and tempting Nepali snacks. Guest performer will be singing popular Nepali numbers. Tickets single Rs 400, couple Rs 750. Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency

MUSIC

- ♦ **1974 AD** will be playing their hit numbers in Jatra, Thamel 6 April, 6PM. Only 70 seats available. Reserve your tickets on time. Call 433859. Tickets Rs 250
- ♦ **The Nuns Welfare Foundation of Nepal** presents the third annual evening of Tibetan chants and more with Ani Choyin Doma, Manose on flute and others. 7 April, 6PM, Patan Museum Café. Tickets Rs 600 at Dragonfly at Mike's Breakfast, and Patan Museum Café. For details email nwf@choyin.com
- ♦ **Australyeahhh!** Music festival from the land under organised by Eternity Music Festival 2002 with support from the Australian Embassy featuring artists like The Agents, Ruby and Jade, The Koomari Dancers and solo performances by Simon Russel Baker, David Lloyd Jones and Koda Jo Berry. 10-11 April, 7PM. Trendy Hatch, Hotel de L'Annapurna. Tickets Rs 250.
- ♦ **All that Jazz** Afro Dizzi Act performs their last gig in Nepal. 12 April, 7.30 PM. Nepa-Duhku Ballroom. Radisson Hotel. Tickets Rs 500
- ♦ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Run Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414356

DRINK

♦ **Metor of Malt** Exhibition and tasting of Single Malts like Knockando, Carduh, Cragganmore, Glenkinchie, Glenlivet and more all imported from Scotland. Rs. 999/- net per package. Piano Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

FOOD

- ♦ **Groove with the Roos** Special evening of fabulous Australian buffet, free flow of wine with live music. 12 April, 7PM. Trendy Hatch, Hotel de L'Annapurna. Tickets Rs 999/- net
- ♦ **Saturday Live Buffet** with unlimited draught beer and live music by the Rusty Nails. The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel, 11.30AM-2.30PM, Saturdays. 411818
- ♦ **The new Roomhouse Café** Completely redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. Original Mediterranean specialities and wood-fired pizzas. The Roomhouse Café, Thamel.
- ♦ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589
- ♦ **Kebab and Biryani** Nawabi delicacies straight from the tandoor - Biryani and Kebabs at the Café. Dum ki Raan, Mugh Tikka Nawabi and more. Mixed seafood Biryani is a must try. 12-26 April, Hyatt Regency. 491234
- ♦ **Charcoalz** Buffet with grilled delicacies from the world, glass of lager, live music and strawberries with cream. Non-vegetarians Rs 595 and vegetarians Rs 495, tax included. Poolside, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ♦ **Lunch, tea and dinner** European and American cuisine with fine wines. La'Soon Restaurant and Vinohetque, Pulchowk. 535290
- ♦ **Paddy Foley's Irish Pub** A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096

GETAWAYS

- ♦ **Great Godavari Getaways.** Special weekend packages available. Room with breakfast and dinner with 25% discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort, 560675
- ♦ **Bandy's Best.** Four nights and three days, jungle activity, transfers and meals including dikhit (steamed rice dumplings) in jungle sauces and spicy coriander chutney, \$120. Jungle Base Camp, Royal Bardiyia National Park. 061-31961
- ♦ **Escape** to the peace and harmony of Dwarika's Hotel. Several packages available. 479488
- ♦ **Taste the difference** Cozy Nepali-style house on an organic farm in Gamcha, south of Thimi. Up to Rs 1,200 per person per night including meals. aaa@winik.com.np

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



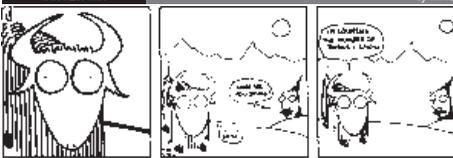
All this rain just goes to show you that weather forecasting is an inexact science. We predicted some rain last week, but not the massive hailstorms we witnessed Monday and Tuesday. This satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows the big clouds over central Nepal dumping rain on us. These have now moved rapidly towards Assam. But there is another westerly front over Afghanistan and it is headed our way. Expect more showers, more storms into the weekend and next week. Notice how the clouds are clear, they will stay that way. Drop in temperature with increased cloud cover.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
27-12	28-11	28-12	28-11	27-11

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



BOOKWORK

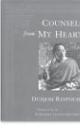


Pilgrimage in Tibet Alex McKay, ed. Curzon Press, London Rs 510
Tibetans have traditionally mapped out their land in terms of sacred space, and pilgrimage throughout these areas earned a high degree of mobility within all classes of traditional Tibetan society. Leading scholars of Asian pilgrimage traditions discuss historical and contemporary aspects of pilgrimage within the Tibetan cultural world. Myths and legends, material conditions, textual sources, a modern pilgrim's impressions, political and economic influence, biographies, and contemporary development are examined in this major new work.



Luminous Lives Cyrus Stearns Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2001 Rs 2860

This is the first in-depth study of the literature and history of the Lam 'bras, the Tantric Buddhist tradition, practiced in Tibet for almost a thousand years, most prominently within the Sa skya lineage. The central focus of the story is a rare Tibetan history that brings alive the story of the earliest men and women practitioners of the Lam 'bras.



Counsels from My Heart Dudjom Rinpoche Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2001 Rs 1620
Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987) was a highly revered Buddhist meditation master and the leader of the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Dudjom Rinpoche calls upon us to follow Buddha's instructions to "get a grip on our minds" pointing the way to give up our habitual ways of behaving in order to liberate ourselves from suffering and also offers advice on how to view the Vajrayana teachings.

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

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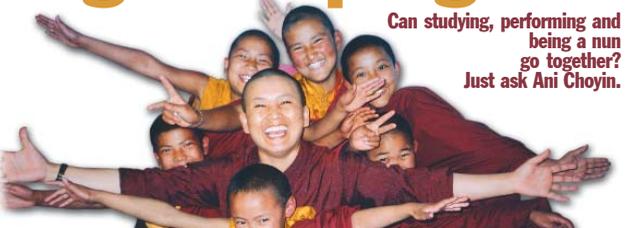
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ARTS

Pilgrim's progress

Can studying, performing and being a nun go together? Just ask Ani Choyin.



ALEXANDRA ALTER

Known around Kathmandu as a singing nun, the high-tech nun, and the driving nun, Ani Choyin Drolma is perhaps best described as "the progressive nun." She's progressive not only in her embrace of modern technology (she drives a car, rides rollercoasters and uses a cellular phone), but in her magnanimous goal of fostering a better educated, more socially engaged community of nuns.

Though the status of nuns, like that of women in general, has improved since the women were ordained in India around the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, even today nuns have far fewer opportunities to study than monks. Generally, they are expected to engage in prayers and pujas within the monastery, while monks occupy themselves with more rigorous intellectual pursuits, such as Buddhist philosophy and debate. The more subtle and difficult aspects of Buddhist philosophy, which most monks are obliged to master, are rarely taught in nunneries in Nepal. "Our society's patriarchal mindset is very strong. Most people don't encourage women to be active and educated. As a result, monasteries get more financial support than nunneries, so they get better facilities. It's not that nuns are stupid or that they can't study; it's just that the financial support isn't there," explains Ani Choyin.

In an effort to remedy the glaring discrepancy between monks and nuns' education, in 1998 Ani Choyin established the Nuns' Welfare Foundation, which aims at improving the education and status of nuns. Three years ago, she started the foundation's first major project, the Anya Tan School for nuns. "There are so many academic institutions for monks that it's difficult to even count them. It's hard to think of one similar institution for nuns," Ani Choyin said. As a young nun at Nagi Gumba, Ani Choyin didn't have the opportunity to engage in academic study, but she managed to learn English and basic medical skills through private instruction, which she claims improved her confidence enormously. Now, she hopes to help other nuns achieve the same degree of self-assurance. "In just a few years, I've seen the difference an education makes for these girls," Ani Choyin said. And indeed, the young nuns at the Anya Tan School are bright, confident, and outgoing.

Ani Choyin calls her institution a school rather than a nunnery because she's more of an educator than a spiritual director. Nuns from any nunnery in Nepal can come to the Anya Tan School to engage in serious study for a maximum of eight years and then return to their nunneries, where they will be equipped to teach and provide basic medical services. "This year, 14 nuns between the ages of nine and twenty are studying English, Tibetan, math, biology, basic first aid, and Buddhist philosophy—a range of subjects impossible to find in a traditional nunnery. But however unconventional Ani Choyin's school may seem, her program of study has essential Buddhist practices and teachings at its core. When they leave the Anya Tan School, Ani Choyin's students will be better prepared to practice the actual Buddhist principles of compassion and skillful means by serving their communities as teachers, nurses, and spiritual counsellors. Ani Choyin hopes that in addition to providing practical assistance, these accomplished nuns will encourage more people to educate girls.

With 14 students to provide for and plans to build a school large enough for 100 nuns at Pharping, it's no wonder that Ani Choyin is constantly working to raise funds. Lucky for her and for any young nun who wants to study, that Ani Choyin is tenacious and generous—and an extremely talented singer. Since 1998, Ani Choyin has been performing traditional Buddhist chants in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Nepal to raise money for her foundation. Though she's been a gifted singer since her childhood, Ani Choyin attributes her musical success to her teacher, Tullu Ugen Rinpoche, who encouraged her singing and taught her the beautiful spiritual songs

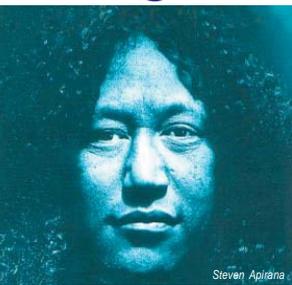
that she now performs around the world. The chants originate from a practice called Chod, or "cutting," because engaging in the practice helps to cut through egoistic tendencies. "Singing or listening to these songs gives rise to a mental state where there is no negativity, no clinging, no duality," says Ani Choyin. "People who've heard her sing are quickly convinced of the subtle effects of her music. Her voice has a natural clarity and organic quality that perfectly conveys the spontaneous and ecstatic nature of the songs."

With four albums out, including a more innovative collection of dance music that layers traditional chanting and modern, trip-hop beats, Ani Choyin has effected countless people through her music and become something of a celebrity—no doubt a first for a Buddhist nun. In the midst of it all, however, Ani Choyin remains focused, humble, and dedicated to the memory of Tullu Ugen Rinpoche.

Although her initial US and European tours were enormously successful, Ani Choyin had reservations about performing in Kathmandu at first. "I wasn't sure how the local people would react," she says. "This is something completely new for a Buddhist nun to be doing. People want to see a nun who is secluded and quietly saying mantras, not performing

Tickets for Ani Choyin's Patan Museum concert are available for Rs 600 at Dragonfly in Mike's Breakfast and the Patan Museum café. The concert begins at 6PM on 7 April.

The show must go on



Steven Apirana

Looks like there is no end to music this season. No sooner had we got over the hangover of the Kathmandu Jazz Festival than we had the Sounds of Spring. And now, guess what mate, the Australians are back!

Bands like The Agents, the cabaret couple Ruby and Jade, the aboriginal dance group The Koomari Dancers and solo performers like Simon Russel Baker, David Lloyd and Koda Jo Berry will be performing at the Hotel Annapurna and Hotel Yak and Yeti along with a host of talented Nepali bands next week. The Agents, are a three piece blues, rock and soul band known for their energetic and dynamic shows in pubs and clubs around Australia. The drummer and vocalist Ian Farrington has toured the world as drummer for rock stars the likes of Phil Collins, Dire Straits and even the Mick Jagger Band. The Agents will play popular covers including those of Eric Clapton, Jim Hendrix, and Santana. While Farrington is the only original member of the band the two others joining him on this trip are Robert Kani and Steven Apirana. Steven is a Maori singer gifted vocalist and guitarist specialising in the blues. He has toured with Daddy Cool, Black Sabbath, Split Enz, and Dragon. With three CD's to his name Steve is a regular performer at festivals in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Holland. Among the solo performers David Lloyd Jones, a New Zealander currently living in Australia, began his musical career at the age of 19 as a guitarist and support act for different bands playing covers such as Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Eagles etc. Australian Simon Russel Baker plays keyboard and is also a vocalist and an actor appearing in such musicals as Pippin and Into the Woods. Koda Jo Berry, a West Indian has had solo appearances since the age of four and sings R&B, soul and has also appeared numerous times on television.

The show begins at 7PM on 10 April at Hotel De L' Annapurna. Tickets for the shows on 10 and 11 April are priced at Rs 250 each, on 12 April a special show with the artists, an Australian buffet dinner and Ozzie wine will also take place. Tickets for this are priced at Rs 999 net. Special Annapurna buffets will also be included in the different events. The final performances of Aussie musicians will be on 19 April to commemorate the World Earth Day (22 April) at the Hotel Yak & Yeti.

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Rural Programme Nepal

Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

His Excellency Ramesh the Rhino

Landlocked Nepal has always been a pesky pebble between two enormous yams. But today we find ourselves trapped between the devil and a hard place. In other words, we are now firmly ensconced between a rock and the deep blue sea.

Despite this predicament, it's heartening to learn from the main news on Radio Nepal this morning that our leaders still have the presence of mind to remember that today is the National Day of the friendly nation of Guinea-Bissau, and therefore time to shoot off yet another one of those annual telegrams to wish the Numero Uno of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Guinea-Bissau best wishes for his personal health and happiness, and offer warmest felicitations for the future peace and prosperity of friendly Guinea-Bissau.

This is what being a proud and committed member of the international community of nations is all about: exchanging telegraphic bonhomies and wishing each other all the best on our national holidays. With permission from the chair, I would like to suggest that we move with the times and stop using telex and telegraph for these greetings. Telepathy is a more secure channel, and it is also much cheaper.

The other cost-effective method of keeping our relations with friendly countries on an even keel is to employ the time-tested method of donating our wildlife to their zoos. As a matter of fact, zoological diplomacy has a glorious tradition in Nepal under which we gift endangered species to countries to which we wish to offer Most-Favoured Nation trading status.

Our latest foray into wildlife diplomacy was the arrival at Jawalakhel Zoo last month of His Excellency a Hippopotamus. In exchange we dispatched

Ramesh the One-horned Rhino as our Roving Ambassador-at-Large and Plenipotentiary to the Chrysanthemum Throne. But despite his diplomatic impunity, Ramesh had a tough time convincing the visa officer at the Japanese embassy he was not one of the rhinos being translocated to Bardia who bought his way out and escaped en route. Good thing Ramesh has a thick skin, otherwise he'd have impaled a couple of those chaps behind the glass window.

But Ramesh's travails were not over. Just before boarding his flight, security refused to clear him saying his horn could be classified as a "sharp object" and it had to be stowed with his nail file in this checked-in luggage. This made Ramesh very horny, but a diplomatic incident was averted when an alert member of the cabin crew agreed to allow him on board if the horn was blunted by sawing off the tip.

Despite these teething problems, zoological diplomacy has a lot of potential.

The urban crew is an endangered species in many developed countries. Nepal has a surplus. The law of supply and demand dictates that we export the entire cohort that lives on a tree outside my window to a crow-deficit country like Sao Tome and Principe.

The pack of howling dingos that defend our friendly neighbourhood trash heap can all be sent off to South Korea in the run-up to the World Cup. Then there is the common housefly, on the verge of extinction in Europe, but of which we have swarms in Shyam's Bus Stop Tea Shop. These animals can serve as Nepal's honorary envoys abroad and ensure that our age-old bonds of amity and co-existence with the president and people of Togo are further strengthened in the years to come. ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Siddarth's spice and style

Having notched up some years of designing experience down south in his fatherland, Siddarth Gopalan decided it was time to add some spice to his motherland. Siddarth's mother is a chhetri from Dharan and father is a South Indian brahmin, and at 25 this architect is already making his mark in Kathmandu.

After getting to Kathmandu three years ago and designing a resort-farmhouse in Chitwan, word of the simplicity and elegance of Siddarth's work spread quickly. More assignments followed: Sipradi, the Australian Embassy, and (ahem!) our very own Himalmedia. Now, the best example of this young Indo-Nepali architect's talent is not swanky offices and the bedrooms of the rich and famous, but on full display at the newly-opened Roadhouse Café in Thamel.

Tired of having to pay the same old architects for designs he had to dismantle almost on an annual basis, Chandan Kayastha was on the look out for someone who could make his diverse Roadhouse Café crowd feel at home. Having already turned off a few other eager bidders, Chandan's imagination was immediately captured when he saw what Siddarth had to offer.

"One should always respect one's culture, but at the same time be bold enough to use the imagination. What we have done here is not purely Nepali but at

the same time there is a bit of Nepal too. Tourists relate it to the Caribbean Islands, some to Mexico and some to huts in Tharu villages," says the designer.

Sack loads of ammonite stones transported from the banks of the Kali Gandaki stud the walls. ("Some of them have ammonite fossils inside, but we haven't opened them yet.") The walls have that muddy brown "lpeko" touch so familiar in traditional Nepali homes. Dried corn and garlands of chili and garlic hang from the walls, while the antique window grills give a touch of the old aristocratic Kathmandu.

Siddarth has made a point of using material leftover from previous eras. Old wooden beams (uninhabited termite holes intact) provide ceiling support, water pipes are recaricamed as wine bottle holders, cement mixing plates serve as light shades (we liked the way the pinpoints of light poetically illuminate our cigarette exhaust) and there is even an antique wooden door leading to the kitchen.



Siddarth is busy designing the yet unfinished garden at the Roadhouse, as well as working on plans for La Dolce Vita, the Italian restaurant owned by the Kayasthas and other dream houses for the nouveau riche. It's a fine balance between kitsch and Ikea-like minimalism, and Siddarth treads it every day. "You can use a lot of glitter and make a place look tacky, or you can use a little mud and have a classy place," he explains. Siddarth's balance of new and old, spice and style has turned him into an original fusion artist in Kathmandu's mongrel landscape. ♦

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