



WORLD CUP STARS 8-9



Emergency elections

There is more to the Deuba-Koirala fight than meets the eye.



BINOD BHATTARAI
 On the face of it, the sudden dissolution of parliament and the call for mid-term polls in November was just the latest outcome in the clash between Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his nemesis within the ruling Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala.

But there seems to be more here than meets the eye. Koirala has tried to portray this as an epic battle between democrats and demagogues,

and he calls Deuba a dangerous deviant who is intent on handing over the reins to a palace-army combine. Deuba's supporters see Koirala as an ambitious dictator not satisfied with just being party president, and wants to be prime minister again.

Pressure had been building up among Koirala's cronies for a final showdown, and the sight of Deuba being fired at the White House and 10 Downing Street this month seems to have been too much to bear. The quarrel

erupted as soon as Deuba got back.

Deuba was cornered, and ran out of options. On the one hand, the army brass was insistent that it needed a state of emergency for its counter-insurgency operations, and on the other his Congress rivals and the leftist opposition saw an extension of the emergency as a path towards martial rule.

In the end, the party had to do what it had to do: it suspended Deuba's party membership and Koirala asked the remaining members of his cabinet to resign. But Deuba has also got what he wanted: another six months as prime minister

whether or not he holds the elections as scheduled on 13 November. Furthermore, with parliament dissolved, the army can get a new three-month emergency without much of a fuss.

It appears to have taken Deuba less than three hours to formalise the decision to go for elections. Technically that would have involved a cabinet meeting to make a recommendation to King Gyanendra, rushing the paperwork to the palace for the royal seal—all in time for the 11pm newscast on Radio Nepal.

What has surprised many insiders is not so much that the decision was taken, but the speed at which it was done. And the entire process was so hush-hush that even Deuba's close cabinet colleagues were not taken into confidence.

"He may have had this option in mind, but because of its very nature only very close supporters were told," a Deuba aide told us. By press time Thursday evening resignations had come from Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahar, Education Minister Anand Upadhyay and Women and Social Welfare Minister Rajendra Kharel.

Mahar told reporters: "I don't think elections can be held, and the political situation will be very uncertain." Kharel, once a staunch Deuba supporter, said: "We have doubts about the future of democracy itself."

Meanwhile, the main opposition was in a huddle all day. The UML standing committee saw this as a result of Congress mislighting, and said it had a yes decision whether to accept the elections. The unlikely allies in this are Koirala and UML leader Madhav Prasad Nepal, brought together by their common suspicions about Deuba's anti-democratic motives. Political analysts see several scenarios

all November.

- Congress sacks Deuba and his supporters, and Deuba formalises a split.
- UML goes into elections allied with the rump Congress under Koirala under a pro-democracy platform.
- A compact caretaker government announces an extension of the emergency, restricting campaigning by opponents to pull off a Musharraf-type ploy.
- Maoists try to muddy the waters by allying with anti-Deuba forces to further their republican agenda while escalating the level of violence before elections.

All scenarios point to one outcome: more instability in the country.

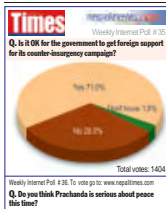
On return from his US-UK trip, Deuba rivited the police and army brass to an all-party meeting. According to sources present, Chief of Army Staff Prajwal S Rana told party leaders that the emergency extension was needed to keep up the momentum against the Maoists and without it, there might be setbacks. On Wednesday he told the Nepali daily, *Himalaya Times*, "The Royal Nepal Army does not get into politics, it only responds to the national interest. We will first let the politics play itself out."

The Congress won a majority in May 1999. But enlightening brought the average life expectancy of a prime minister to less than a year. Deuba came to office in July 2001, as the third Congress prime minister since May 1999. His government was the 12th in 12 years. ♦

EXCLUSIVE

Royal visits

King Gyanendra will make two goodwill visits to neighbouring countries after coming out of mourning on 1 June, a source close to the royal palace said. The six-day India visit is slated for the third week of June, followed soon after with a China trip. The India visit is finalised down to the dates, and will be announced after the dates for the king's China visit are confirmed.



Weekly Internet Poll # 95. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com
 Q. Do you think Prachanda is serious about peace this time?

KANAK MANI DIXIT IN LUMBINI

Lumbini is Buddhism's equivalent to Bethlehem or Mecca, but it has been more of a weeping wall for pilgrims and devotees. Decades of disinterest in distant Kathmandu have maintained this nativity site of Sakyamuni Siddhartha Gautam as a monument to neglect and prevarication. All that may be about to change.

When the 60-year-old Mayadevi temple structure—the white box with the pipal tree—was pulled down in the early 1990s and the hollowed ground beneath it excavated, it seemed the final desecration. Since the dig was completed in 1996, the site has remained closed to the public, and the excavations covered by tarp and tin.

But suddenly, there are heartening developments. The Lumbini Garden is today a hive of construction activity, and the nativity site is set to open to visitors within a couple of months. A part of the new structure is ready for the ancient Mayadevi statue to be re-consecrated on 26 May, Buddha Jayanti. The completed structure will display the excavated ruins of the temple complex put up in the 3rd century BC, which includes the historical "marker stone" said to pinpoint the spot where Mayadevi gave birth to her illustrious son (an event the ancient statue commemorates).

There have been enough reasons in the past decades to give up on Lumbini. The main trouble lies with Kathmandu's party-centric political establishment, uncaring bureaucracy, and demanding Buddhist groups fighting for control of the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) and its dollar-and-yen potential. The terrain has become more complex as the sectarian interest in Lumbini extends beyond Kathmandu Valley Buddhists to include hill and high-mountain Buddhists of Nepal. Added to all this is the unhappiness of the Muslim locals who populate the Lumbini area, who feel left out in the rush to cash in on Lumbini's tourism and pilgrim potential.

Lumbini's rebirth

Things may finally change at the Buddha's birthplace. For the better.



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A SIMILAR PATH

Once more, we are made to pay for the tiny minds and large egos of our politicians. Once more the nation is held hostage by their myopia. The dissolution of parliament, the November elections are just other manifestations of infighting in the ruling party. We can only hope by making this desperate move to save his own skin, the Prime Minister Deuba has instilled a sense of responsibility in the ruling party leadership to the mainstream. But will the underground comrades grab this chance? One of the lessons Nepal can take from Peru is that if you want to gain an insurgency, you have to first put your political house in order. You can't have political parties clashing at each other's expense while the security forces try to quell a guerrilla war.

Nepal's Maoists are travelling the well-trodden path of the Peruvian revolutionaries. The parallels between these two Andipal uprisings are striking. Their remote and rugged abodes is our mid-west. Peru and Nepal were similar populations of disenfranchised, marginalised ethnic groups and capital-centric elites who have shown breathtaking disregard for the hardships and misery of fellow-citizens. When revolutionaries took arms to capitalism on this bitness, the state in both Peru and Nepal came down hard. The Maoists designed to nip the rebellion in the bud had the opposite effect: the atrocities of the Peruvian security forces in Ayacucho in the mid-1980s had parallels in human rights violations that accompanied Operation Romeo and Operation Kilo Sierra in the mid-west in 1996-98.

For anyone who wanted to predict that this country was going the way of Peru, the writing was large literally on the wall. Back in 1993, the streets of Kathmandu were painted over with blood-red graffiti proclaiming solidarity with the Peruvian struggle, and when Sandoz Luminozo leader Abimael Guzman was caught that year there were "Release Comrade Guzman" slogans emblazoned across the country.

Our comrades have followed the Shining Path model to the letter, even deviating their doctrine the Prachanda Path by playing on the Nepali word "path". (Of course the Peruvians were such purists they didn't want to play personally but by naming their revolution after a leader). But there is no doubt about it: both revolutions essentially follow the paths of destruction. The aim is to destroy the presence of government and symbols of its oppression through devastating slaughters that spread panic and demoralisation through their shock troops of violence.

The core of the ideology in both cases is therefore to play on the psychological impact of violence and mayhem so that people, in the end, lose faith in government, in the economy, and, to a long story short, in everything "old". By their own admission, the Maoists in Peru and Nepal both aim to say that they don't believe in the "old", and any residue of the "old" is allowed to remain, it will undermine the "new".

The panic and anxiety feeds on itself, and Peru came close to Zoro. The same process had been chased away from large parts of the country, and the stratification of the capital from the countryside had begun. It was in fact while the Shining Path guerrillas were on the verge of advancing into Lima that an intelligence breakthrough led to the arrest of Abimael Guzman.

Following the Shining Path and Nepali Maoists is that our comrades have consisted of elites and served in parliamentary parties. Some of them have even been members of parliament. They could go back if the conditions are right, and elections in six months may be just the thing. To be sure, they will first have to live down their role for the mayhem that they have unleashed. But for initial rebel movements have been known to join the political mainstream in other countries.

In Peru, the government reacted late, but it got its act together with a multi-pronged counter-insurgency strategy that employed a classic "shield" and "sword" approach. The shield was a grassroots development program that addressed neglected. The sword used military pressure and effective intelligence to go after hardcore. While sparing the followers. It can be counterproductive to make the people suffer. That's what worked with the Shining Path. But to be made to work Prachanda's Path?

THE STATE OF THE STATE The Buddha is all things to all people.

The number of people who call themselves Buddhists in Nepal has, according to the latest census, more than doubled the last ten years. For an official Hindu kingdom, even one that boasts an entire administrative system named after the Enlightened One, the sudden jump to ten percent is somewhat perplexing. After all, Buddhism hasn't run an aggressive conversion campaign, nor has there been a huge influx of Buddhist refugees into the country. The reason behind the rise must then be simple: emboldened by democracy, many no longer feel the need to hide their non-Hindu identity.

Buddhism and Hinduism have evolved synchronously here. Having appropriated Lord Buddha as just another avatar of Vishnu, the Hindu orthodoxy here looks approvingly upon a Lumbini Buddhist temple. In Janakpur, the birthplace of Sita, doesn't ring a bell in the assemblies of the global elite. But the moment Nepalis discover that Lord Buddha was in fact born in what is now Nepal (and not what is now India) they often succeed in getting the attention of everyone present anywhere in the world. The Buddha is a universal symbol shared across the globe. Convenience is another factor that makes Nepalis accept the Buddha as their own. Nepalis avoid sometimes pretend to be Buddhist in order to prove their 'non-Indian' identity. Nepali intellectuals and politicians often have been known to pass themselves off as Buddhist, just so they don't get harassed.

The fascination of the Nepali elite with the Buddha is not a new phenomenon. It was in fact in the excess of the Lumbini Development Trust, where a new set of bosses take over after every change of government at Singha Durbar. Ever since former UN Secretary General Dutt was invited to Lumbini in 1967, and King Mahendra recognised the importance of those precious drops of tears,



Besides the usual accusations of cynicism and nepotism that came to undermine the efficacy of the Trust, the rapid turnover of its key personnel in the last twelve years has also been a factor in its stagnation. But quite apart from all these factors, keeping the Dali Lama away from Lumbini is probably what has really prevented the project from taking off. It seems absurd, but the Lumbini Development Trust has made no effort to date

to get the Dali Lama to visit the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Fear of raking in the Chinese he wrong way may have prompted our government to exercise restraint—the Dali Lama is, after all, not just the spiritual, but also the temporal, head of Tibetans in exile. But there is really no need for the Lumbini Development Trust to follow suit. Lumbini won't grab the attention of the world as long as it misses on keeping the most illustrious of Buddhists off its soil. Sure, the Chinese are too busy with their Dali Lama to consider a reincarnation of the Buddha by most followers of their ten billion people (and that's without their aid) and has won the Nobel Peace Prize. In his Lumbini Chakra yehovasis, architect Shankar Nath Rana argues that a Lumbini Garden contains symbolic representations of almost all the important events of the Buddha's life. Rimal further points that a park of this kind, the Buddha's memorial, remains might also have been buried at Lumbini. If that can be proven, the place will take on even more significance for devout Buddhists.

The responsibility for inviting the Dali Lama to Lumbini lies primarily with the management of the Trust. But that doesn't mean that His Holiness shouldn't make his own efforts. There are other countries spread around where Buddhists have welcomed the Dali Lama even if their governments were less than keen. Maybe Nepal's 2.3 million Buddhists also have a say in this? Chinese dignitaries on official visits to Nepal now have Lumbini on their itinerary, so the Chinese government may someday see that it is in its own long-term interest to welcome the Buddha's most eminent contemporary disciple to visit the place of his birth? ♦

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An emergency for the Maoists The Maoists now have to decide which side they are on: the side of destruction or the side of democracy.

After the dissolution of parliament and an imminent repositioning of the emergency, the Maoists have two choices: continue on their path of retrogression, or join hands with other democratic forces to defend and build on the achievements of the people's movement of 1990. The choice is an urgent one.

At the heart of every insurgency and rebellion is the goal of pushing the legitimate demands of the people. In this case, it has been with the Maoist "People's War". The Maoists' justification for the insurgency is derived from the failure of the government, and indeed the political system, in addressing the basic economic, social, and cultural development of the vast majority of Nepalis.

The Maoists portrayed their rebellion as an attempt to provide an alternative path to Nepal's progress. In the early phase calls against rural economic and social exploitation, untouchability, ethnic discrimination of dalits, indigenous ethnic groups and women were at the forefront of the Maoist struggle.

They drew attention to the unfinished agenda of Nepal's unification, and the unaddressed issues of Nepal as a nation-state. They appeared to question the content and direction of on-going development efforts on grounds of their reach and effectiveness on the lives of the poor and the disadvantaged.

This strategy played a major role in the relatively strong support and consequent expansion of Maoist influence in rural Nepal. Despite the murder of political opponents, of extortion, and an increasing militaristic tendency, the movement spread rapidly to other towns, development or the lack of it provided the reason for 'et cetera' for the People's War. Or so it seemed.

However, since the ratification of the constitution by parliament in February, the main target of Maoist destruction has turned to infrastructure. Telecommunication towers, airports, community health water plants were destroyed. Nearly a thousand VDC offices, hundreds of

schools, and the Sanskrit University have been razed. Now, all private schools in the mid and far west have been forced to close down. Even health centres, Red Cross offices, drinking water systems and orphanages have not been spared.

These acts of wanton and brutal destruction are not isolated, neither can they be dismissed as instances of indiscipline within the Maoist ranks. Had it been, the Maoist leadership would have repudiated them and disassociated itself from such recklessness. Clearly, the destruction of development has been a deliberate act to score political points. What is incomprehensible in this madness is the purpose they serve and the message these acts convey to the public at large.

Why has a rebellion whose avowed objective was to end legitimise the government in the public eye, been so keen on de-legitimising itself? Development infrastructure may not have been serving the dispossessed directly, but the problem is not with infrastructure, the problem is with its reach among the poor and the conditions for its use.

A school, a health centre, a university, community buildings and offices, roads and bridges, electricity, drinking water, houses there must be a cause. Some are already drawing parallels with Afghanistan. That is the distance we have travelled from the vibrant democracy we were some years ago. Militarisation is not a substitute for the politicisation of the people. Terror cannot be a means to make people "sovereign".

Physical liquidation of individuals is not an alternative to the battle of ideas. To refuse reason and dialogue as a basis for the creation of the objective conditions for progressive social and economic change to nurture totalitarian dictatorship. And the intent of all dictators (ideologies notwithstanding) is to rule.

It is also an open invitation and a call for all defenders of the status quo, both domestic and foreign, to close ranks. No wonder, Nepal has become an "interesting" place, interesting enough to be a playground for foreigners. Nepal has received more powerful dignitaries in the last six months of the emergency than in its last 12 years as a democratic state. Surely, the message on the wall should be there for all to see, including the Maoists.

The truth is indeed ugly. A blunt Nepali proverb says it all when the status quo there must be a cause. Some are already drawing parallels with Afghanistan. That is the distance we have travelled from the vibrant democracy we were some years ago. Militarisation is not a substitute for the politicisation of the people. Terror cannot be a means to make people "sovereign".

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LETTERS

LEARNING TO COUNT Himalaya Ra's "Counting on Nepal" was interesting. It is good to know that the 2001 census will soon be out. Many new facts are shown through the census. But the most intriguing thing is that ethnic and language counting revealed dramatically more than the actual numbers. This may be due to the fact that respondents did not understand what they were being asked. Therefore, as language names they gave another person's name instead of the actual name of their ethnic group or language. Complications arise from differences in the naming of ethnic identity and language names—an ethnically "Raj" person speaks a language that is different from the name of his ethnically the same. Tejpur or Ganga, on the other hand, speak the same language as the Rajas. But their ethnic identity is their own ethnic identity. Thus they claim to speak "Tejpur" or "Ganga". A scientific linguistic/linguistic survey should be conducted by an authoritative body as soon as possible to determine accurate numbers of languages and ethnic groups in Nepal.

MORALITY This is not the time to re-assess the morality of Maoism as they have evolved, or whether or not they are true followers of the Great Heisman (Maoism in a broad sense) as Mr. Ramesh Gautam, #93. The present situation in Nepal is the outcome of various things, such as lack of political commitment, no sense of due to the professional. Can't the so-called great minds like Dr Baburam Bhattarai stand apart from the destructive bunch of anarchists that have hijacked the revolution? You can exploit the emotion of the ignorant and destitute population and urge them to act at gunpoint. It is a shame that the revolution is destroying everything. You cannot heal a society after you have torn it fabric to shreds.

NP Poudel, by email ● We strongly condemn the terrorist attack on Sanskrit University. These terrorists are no different from the ones who destroyed the Buddha statues in Afghanistan. The recent attack by Maoist terrorists is a cruel attack not only on the university, but on Hinduism as well. We hope the Nepali government will take action against the perpetrators.

Kamala, Rita Rana, Subhash Ghil, Prativa KC, Barbara Gurung, Chandra ISameer, USA

Rana, Nandida Rai, Manisha Kapoor, Bharati Shah, Reema Gurung, USA

FOREI Reading about golf (Forel, #94) was like a soothing spa for the tattered soul of an overseas Nepali. Today, I am not going to bother or worry about the Maoists and their tactics of inciting trouble. I am simply going to indulge myself in the pleasure of playing golf vicariously at the Gokarna Club in faraway Nepal.

The eventuality of golf tourism in Nepal is unquestionable. Kathmandu can be the Thailand of the golf tourism industry in India where the golf population is leapingfrogging. South-east Asia has plenty of first rate golf courses but the infrastructure and facilities courses like Gokarna have an edge over those countries in that almost all courses in ASEAN are in the "Tibetan" environment and landscape; but Kathmandu and Pokhara provide cool and comfortable weather condition as well as the magnificent Himalayas backdrop.

As a recreational golfer, I get hundred percent satisfaction shooting the white ball at the Gokarna Club. The greens in par with any first-rate course, the

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Seeing neither forests nor trees



PHOTO: WALTER BRONKHORST

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
IN MANANG
 Local entrepreneurs in Manang could never have imagined their luck would run out so fast. Just last year, this remote district bounded by Thorung-La, Tibet and the high Himalaya was one of the most trekked areas of Nepal. And almost every resident of every village on the trekking route was building a lodge or expanding their teahouse, in anticipation of even more visitors. Many tents of Manang settled in Kathmandu, and many others were even moving back, sending

better business in the boom, and building hotels and homes. But Manang has seen trekkers drop by 40 percent this year. And that isn't the only loss the area has had to bear. In the last decade this once-Himalayan valley has lost over 10 percent of its lush forest cover, in large part due to the wave of construction to the ready for what local buyers would be. There are no official records to quantify the increase, but locals say that every village on the trekking route saw at least half-a-dozen new lodges built, and more than a dozen new houses. Many of these new houses were even moving back, sending

programs about safe logging practices. Manang will rapidly lose its richest natural resource. ACAP officials say the mushrooming of new lodges and teahouses in Manang and other areas in the Annapurna region last year was unprecedented. "Never before have so many structures been built in these areas in one year," an ACAP employee told us. There are no official records to quantify the increase, but locals say that every village on the trekking route saw at least half-a-dozen new lodges built, and more than a dozen new houses. Many of these new houses were even moving back, sending

for a renovation or expansion. Given the cost of transporting other construction materials to this remote part of the Annapurnas, most people build structures of wood and stone along traditional lines, paying Rs 50-100 for a tree, and Rs 5 for a seven-foot-long wooden plank. Pasang Lama, chairman of the Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC) at Chame, Manang district's headquarters, says the construction boom is also in part due to the return of locals formerly living abroad and in different parts of Nepal. "After they

Tourism is down in Manang, but tree-cutting hasn't stopped.



instances of bad decisions made by us," said a young resident of the Manang Village Development Committee, who did not want to be named. "There are still no Forest User Groups in the upper belt of Manang, like there are in the lower part," the ACAP official told us. "The fate of the forests depends on the whims of the person who has been entrusted to look after them." In keeping with tradition, permission to fell trees can still be obtained by making an offering of chhang and a glass to the "authorities". The District Forest Office has said, and logging is on the rise.

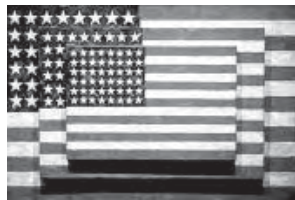
The lack of uniform laws shows in the forest—some areas have what appear to be healthy tree cover, other hillsides are denuded and bare. Take the case of Pisang village, where the forest is thicker than that around other villages in Upper Manang. So far, the Village administrators have already given out some pockets of the forest on contract to neighbouring villages. Manang village is increasingly dependent on this contract for its timber these days. Even smaller plants are feeling the ill-effects of mis-managed logging. After the trees are felled, the logs, instead of being carried away, are simply rolled downhill, smothering the undergrowth. The Manang forests contain a significant portion of the over 1,200 species of plants found in ACAP, including 40 varieties of orchids and 10 types of rhododendron. The forests are also home to many endangered animal species, such as the red panda and possibly the snow leopard. Our informant in Manang who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that even if control over felling were to be restored, many of the outside agencies could do a lot better in terms of raising awareness about better logging practices. "When the laziness to carry a single log results in the death of so many smaller plants, the least we could get is proper education on these issues."

by DANIEL LAK

HERE AND THERE

Re-inventing America

The US has some things going for it: its ability to transcend failure, and its insistence on accountability.



capital of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority—has more native sons and daughters in America than remain behind. Shabehed compares the British and Israeli occupation of the West Bank by looking at the type of road each occupier built. The British, he says, built narrow, choppy, windy roads that followed contours and cupped ancient sites in their curves; the Israelis used American money to punch four-lane highways through their territory to Jewish settlements, security ever-present. Yet the writer—Palestinian and Ramallah to the core—says American goodness and optimism may yet tip the balance for peace in this sad region, but asserts that America is fundamental to eventual peace in that cauldron of history and anger. A heartfelt contribution from Palestinian Rajiv Shabehed reveals that the city of Ramallah—now

citizenship is an act of faith, the only country whose promises to itself count to command the faith of people like me, who are not its citizens." Ignatieff begins his essay at an anti-Vietnam war rally in 1972, in the middle of one of the most turbulent periods in modern American history. It was a time when it seemed the colours was on the ropes. The conflict in South-east Asia was going badly, hearts and minds at home were uncertain despite having elected Richard Nixon. Still to come were the carpet-bombing of Cambodia and the Watergate revelations of or at the very heart of the White House, the uncertain Carter years, the Iran hostage scandal and finally, Ronald Reagan.

What's most remarkable in America, for me and many of the writers, is that failure is usually little more than reinvention. Go bankrupt, get a court order, and start a new business next week. Get caught with your hand in the till, go to jail, pay your debt then renew your life's work. The foreign writers—all but societies where failure is more final—are in awe of this trait of American-ness. Some protest against it, most—rightfully see it as America's greatest achievement, the ability to transcend failure.

In these troubled times, it's clear that America is far more important to all of us, everywhere, than she ever was before. Her culture, economy and military might have doubled and trebled their influence in my lifetime and will do so again. This collection of essays could just be the start of a global exercise in accountability by those of us who are not America's citizens, but who live in its shadow and reflect light. The democracy that Washington has raised to high standards accountability, checks and balances, not just within the superpower, but beyond its borders. Who knows? Perhaps one day they'll even give us the vote. ♦



PHOTO: DANIEL LAK

possibility of smuggling into Tibet when they heard about the growing illegal timber for sale bartering in the Langtang and Manaslu areas, which have relatively easier access to Tibet. A similar, but far worse, situation exists in Humla, where illegally logged timber is traded in Tibet via Takkok for food and alcohol. (See "Nepali timber to Tibet," #17.) Gang Bahadur Thapa, executive officer of the KMNTC insists that all trees felled in Manang are for domestic consumption. Unfortunately, that combined with the in slump tourism doesn't mean that the logging will slow down anytime soon. People are still building, hoping for better times.

"Everyone is keen on running a hotel these days," says Lama. Even before last year's flurry of building activity, upper Manang had 700 beds to cater to a maximum of 200 tourists at any given time. There are now more than 100 lodges and teahouses in Manang district, which gets around 1,200 trekkers annually. In Manang village alone, there are 20 lodges, some boasting as many as 50 rooms, often with a deluxe room option. Narendra Lama, the officer in charge of ACAP's Manang office, says "Everyone with a little bit of money feels they must invest in the hotel industry." Ironically, assessments of the tourism industry in Manang say that only 10 percent of the

population benefits directly from the construction of new tourist accommodation. The CAMC is trying to regulate logging, issuing permits in some places, and trying to work with indigenous ways of authoring selling in others, such as fixing the price of timber and trees. Such control mechanism have been very effective yet, however. "That's why we are trying to come up with new, strict rules," says CAMC's Lama. If the new regulation can be implemented, no logging will be allowed for the construction of hotels and lodges in Manang VDC for the next 10 years. "We will implement similar ideas in other villages gradually," Lama says hopefully.

Any regulation, no matter how well thought-out and inclusive, will find that going against the traditional ways in which natural resources have been used in this high-altitude community. In the meantime, conservationists suggest that the ACAP needs to start evaluating the impact of its work. They fear that Manang may prove to be an unexceptional case in the Annapurnas, just more dramatic. "It is high time they did an impact study," says Dr Chandra Gunung, Country Director of the World Wildlife Fund-Nepal. "ACAP has been working in the area for 15 years, it is time they assessed the state of the natural resources now, and compared it with what it was back then." ♦

Garbage isn't a problem peculiar to Kathmandu. A recent survey of the lake city of Pokhara revealed that the city council has been disposing 58 tons of garbage everyday—by tossing it over the Seti river bridge in the city centre due to lack of a proper dump site. Waste generated by the local hospitals, most of it toxic, has made matters worse. Phewa lake, for its part, is breeding an alarming amount of coliform, due to the sewage and garbage from surrounding hotels and restaurants dumped into it. The survey, by Martin Charuhat and the Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that Pokhara's environmental problems, which include the illegal setting of land are numerous and growing.

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Pokhara's problem

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More on Everest

It's been another record-breaking season on Everest this spring. Fifty-four climbers, including 24 high-altitude Sherpas made their way to the top of the world's highest mountain after a much-anticipated break in the weather the morning of 16 May. Among the climbers were Gashi Wangchuk Sherpa, grandson of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, who became the first to scale the mountain on 29 May, 1953 with Edmund Hillary. On the same day Susan Kilgore Trost, Ershler, became the first married couple to climb the highest mountains in seven continents and Nepal's Annapurna Sherpa maintained his record of most ascents on Everest, after summiting Sagarmatha for the 12th time in 2000. An all-American woman, Rosemary Tolson, became the first to scale the mountain on 29 May, 1953 with Edmund Hillary. 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Defensive imperialism

Foreign aid is an investment in a secure future, not philanthropy.

Before our politicians could properly warn us of how Nepal was turning into another Afghanistan, Bosnia or Cambodia, we find ourselves learning the ABCs of life in the post-modern world. Britain is scheduled to host an international meeting next month on ways of helping Nepal meet its security and development requirements. It's unclear where we stand in the classification of strained-fringe-falling-failed states. But the fact that an international meeting is being convened suggests we are on dangerous ground.

How a people internationally acclaimed for their fierce fighting skills could have avoided violence at home for so long always baffled many. It's still hard, though, to accept that the commanders of the global war on terrorism see us as a potential haven for hate mongers from both hemispheres. With Nepal's modern political history smouldering in the wreckage of misplaced hopes and broken promises, distance probably allows a more dispassionate probe.

Although we emerged as a unified entity a full 120 years after the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia gave birth to the modern state, our oneness was predicated on a covenant similar to that of the Europeans. In return for freedom from fear, from want, from internal and external conflict, and greater liberty in our personal lives, Nepalis agreed to follow the decrees of the state. Our part of the deal also required us to pledge our time, energy, resources, and even lives to the service of the nation. Over the centuries, we saw many states fail because they couldn't prevent external aggression and subjugation. We dodged that historical trend only to face the malaise within.

For a country that owed its political awakening to two world wars and a civil disobedience campaign that demolished the South Asian edifice of the British Empire, Nepal's ambivalence on the road to modernisation was perhaps natural. From malaria eradication to market liberalisation, our Cold War trajectory was a little slanted but nonetheless striking. Multi-party politics took a backseat, but, then, weren't the exception in the global assembly of nations that refused to officially rank sides in the superpower rivalry. Instead, we drew up a new compact under which the

state offered us assurances of often-prefabricated in exchange for enforcing silence. Amid a perpetual struggle to establish its legitimacy, the partyless state set targets that sounded too good to be true. In the claustrophobic conditions of those decades, discontent festered. A population that felt doubly duped easily succumbed to the euphoria that comes with getting too much of something too soon. Freed from the state's subjugation sides in the superpower rivalry. Instead, we drew up a new compact under which the

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leadership, for its part, has started apologising for its lack of vision. In a culture that has always exalted authority, this is no mean achievement.

Since 11 September, 2001, those who oversaw the emergence of a new world disorder have had ample time to compare notes. In George W. Bush's war on terrorism, countries like Nepal find themselves caught in Al Qaeda's axis of evil; poverty and ignorance; disease and environmental disorder; corruption and political oppression. Foreign aid has regained respectability on the international agenda. But since it is an investment in a secure future, the rules of philanthropy don't apply. Countries that promote open markets, respect human and political rights, and aggressively combat corruption can qualify for more international help.

Nepal could easily have been in the mind of Robert Cooper, the foreign policy guru of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, when he made his case for a "new imperialism." While poverty doesn't cause terrorism, it can lead to hopelessness and despair in states where governments fail to fulfil the basic needs of the people. These nations become havens for terror. When the terrain is treacherous, every cave and crevice is a potential refuge for radicalism. If they become too dangerous for established states to tolerate, Cooper argues, it is possible to imagine a defensive imperialism that aims to bring order and organisation to which rests today on the voluntary principle. A new era has begun, and it is up to us to make it work with a new set of apprehensions.



Television tales

Two newly-licensed broadcasters are gearing up to get on the airwaves. The Image Channel says it plans to be on your television screens by Dasain (15 October), starting with two-three hours of broadcasting a day and slowly growing to seven hours daily. Kantipur Television is looking at a premiering date towards the end of the year. Kantipur says it is looking at a lead time of 8-10 months before beginning its broadcasts. Image Channel Metro TV, which has been broadcasting on airtime lease from Nepal Television for the last four years, says it will have Rs 100 million as authorised capital (including investments already made). KTV has an authorised capital of Rs 500 million and several co-financiers, including successful Nepali entrepreneurs in Russia and the former Soviet republics. KTV, which is owned by Kantipur, the largest FM broadcaster and newspaper group, says it will go national over three years.

Rupee dives further

The Nepal Rupee took another beating at the end of last week, as the Indian Rupee slid to the exchange board. The dollar now costs Nepalis Rs 0.25 more. The dollar traded for Rs 78.35 last Friday last week, but was Rs 78.60 on Friday, when the Indian Rupee-US dollar exchange rate slipped to \$1:195.49.08, an all-time low.

Copper blues

Vegetable ghee producers say they are already producing just half of what they were last year. But producers of copper goods say they have a even worse. The copper industry says more than half of its establishments have shut down, leaving about 2,000 people without jobs. There used to be 46 copper-related undertakings before Nepal and India agreed to export quotas while renewing the trade treaty earlier this year. Under the new regulations, only 7,500 metric tons of copper goods can be exported to India duty free.

Avros retire

Necon Air says it has decided to permanently retire all its fuel-guzzling Avro (BA648) aircraft, which used to be the mainstay of its fleet. The airline will now rely entirely on ATR 42s and Beechcraft 1900s. Necon flies two flights (right) and one Beech. The company says it will add another to its fleet next month. The last of Avro was ferried by Necon crew to Johannesburg this month.

Housing boom

Construction is big business in the country these days. Consumer housing is the fastest growing segment of the industry estimates say about Rs 2 billion has been invested in consumer housing in the past two years. If market trends are anything to go by, more money is destined to flow that way, and there might soon be more than the current eight major players in the market. The home schemes now in the market are large apartment complexes, although some builders also offer stand-alone homes. Banks and finance companies have joined the business, giving it a kick-off impetus. Apartment and home prices range from Rs 70,000 to the low end, to a high of Rs 5.2 million.

Taxman cometh. Not

"Strengthening" income tax laws won't help. Nothing will, until we learn the art of implementation.

As any tax consultant in this country about the ninety-grain of taxation laws and duties, and you get to see a lot of them. In response—made tax that could legally be levied on you; b) find other ways to avoid a large assessment; c) wait for the next volatility change when five years hence; and d) have an expert to interpret the laws and pay tax. Less than one percent of Nepalis opt for the last choice.

On 1 April, 2002, Nepal's new Income Tax law was made effective. It's strange that the effective date of the law is the first day of the Nepali financial year, but of the Gregorian calendar. Then again, perhaps we shouldn't expect any semblance of normalcy from a law that not only resembles an epic in Sandakrit Nepali, but is still awaiting the arrival of an Act detailing its rules and regulations. There are controversies going right, and plenty of optimism remains and workshops. One of the arguments being repeatedly and forcefully made in some quarters is that the law was no choice of Nepalis, but imposed on us by consultants funded by bi-lateral agencies. Given a choice, many say, perhaps Nepal would do without such a law.

Incidentally, there has been a reason behind the constant stagnation of Nepal business, another sign of how no one wants to do anything professionally in this country. The very idea of entrepreneurship in Nepal is ludicrous because taxpayers aren't given any incentives, and find that working with tax officials, aided by tax pimps in the garb of accountants, yields better results. The Beed will not even get into how many large investment opportunities have been with this sticky matter. As for the new law, it is an attempt to do something, anything. And it shows, in his individual taxpayers the burden, as there is now completely no incentive to save. This country desperately needs more savings, and the general expectation was that we'd get better incentives to save, whether for housing or pension funds. But the new law seems to function just at the opposite principle. With increasing premiums and other savings schemes now taxable, the fall of life insurance companies and allied agencies is also up in the air.

The Beed is being inundated with bitter questions along the lines of 'why bother about Income Tax, people

get away with illegal actions all the time.' The other argument, that one needs't pay taxes, as the money is simply used to fund junky, unaccounted expenditures, has also become something of a set piece. The taxpayers are right. The government's so-called voluntary declaration scheme, YDK, did little more than allow defectors to bleach their black money. Through all conceivable media channels the government warned people of the consequences and even drew up lists of defectors. But the thug and finger-wagging diadem with such great despatch, one can understand the frustration of those who did declare their wealth. Our lawmakers need to realize, to guide their own behavior and that of others, that law-abiding transparent actions are driven by incentive, not just goodwill.

There is no point constantly revising the law. The number of taxpayers will not increase, and our will collection, until we can properly implement at least one of our numerous Acts. The tax administration is in a tatters, same as the beghnited country's political administration. A lot remains to be done, and everyone knows it cannot be done. So not so exceedingly high radiance, and income tax in Nepal. At least business can stop wasting time trying to play that silly game, and get on with the business of business.

Readers can post their views at arhabeed@yahoo.com

FOLLOW UP

It's everywhere

Freedom of speech/press, that is. Even on radio.

First, allow private radio stations to disseminate news from independent sources. In January 2001, the Ministry of Information and Communication issued a notice to all private radio stations saying that it was illegal for them to broadcast independent news and current affairs. The notice claimed that the stations had been circumventing this clause of FM license by reading a selection of daily papers without checking the facts. The full text of a July 2001 Supreme Court decision, released last month, states that the government has to restrict news and information flow on independent radio stations, and media activists say this could change the way the private television stations that have been issued licenses this month will handle news when they come on air.

A three-member team of Supreme Court judges came to the decision while looking into a lawsuit filed by lawyer Madhav Kumar Basnet challenging the legality of the January 2001 directive from the Ministry of Information and Communication. The government notice claimed that FM radio stations were "advertising democracy" through their broadcasts, and directed them to seek news only from "official" sources and refrain only materials from the state-run broadcaster. The directive also maintained that the government would have the final say on whether or not certain material could go on air.

The decision says that the constitutional guarantees to the press are also applicable to other forms of media, radio in particular, although the government can't be held responsible for being applicable only to the print media. The same decision also questions an established government practice of appointing an official as director of the board of all private radio station, saying this was in form of censorship, as the government appointee could single-handedly overrule or alter any decision.

It is an historic decision that could influence the operation of television and other forms of media, says academic media activist Raghu Mainali. "It will influence how we deal with journalists, freedomists, press of the medium," adds Mainali, coordinator, Community Radio Support Centre at the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFJ). To date, the government has licensed 25 FM stations (including FM 100), of which about 20 broadcast currently. Among them six are non-profit stations, including Radio Sagarmatha and Metro FM in Kathmandu.

INTERVIEW

"We are here to stay."



Anil Shah is Chief Operating Officer and head of the consumer banking operations of Standard Chartered Bank. Nepali Times spoke to him about the bank's recent efforts to sell consumer loans, and its long-term outlook on doing business in Nepal.

been extended up to TPM on weekdays and from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM on weekends and holidays. We've also added four more ATM machines, which brings us up to nine. On the asset side, we have launched the home loans, to complement auto loans and credit cards. All this has been done to further enhance the customer's experience of banking with us.

Other banks also offer these loans, why should they come especially to Standard Chartered?
That is correct, other banks offer the same products, but there are some features of ours that benefit the customers more. For instance, our credit card is a true credit card—at the end of the month you have a choice of paying 100 percent of the total amount outstanding in your account, or the entire outstanding amount or any amount within that range. This gives customers flexibility in payments. Our auto loans have an interest of 11 percent, which along with the five-year loan tenure and up to 80 percent financing we provide, also provides the customer maximum flexibility. Our home loans stand above similar products in the market—you get 10 percent interest, repayment within 15 years, loan amounts ranging from Rs 300,000 to Rs 7.5 million and financing of up to 70 percent. It isn't enough for us to just be part of the market, it is essential for us to be leaders in every product and service that we provide. Our dedication to customer service was recently recognised by the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), which awarded us a Commendation for Customer Satisfaction and Relationship.

What is behind your recent push in consumer banking, rather than traditional corporate banking?
Globally, the Standard Chartered Bank views consumer banking as a major contributor to overall revenues. In keeping with, and taking into consideration, our local market, we are stressing consumer banking here too. If you look at the banking industry today, you will quickly realise that in the corporate arena there are many banks and limited customers. Add to this the fact that the number of corporates is increasing at only a marginal rate, and you realise that the potential for growth is limited. Even though the consumer banking side is far less developed, it still offers many opportunities, all of which we are looking at. With our international experience and range of products and services in consumer banking, we have the unique advantage of knowing how to pick those that would be most suitable to meet our customers needs. With this focus on consumer banking the individual consumer will get access to an array of financial products, which until recently were not available in our market.

—Anil Shah, Standard Chartered Bank

One of the first joint venture banks to set up shop in Nepal has already divested. Does that weigh on your mind?
The SCB essentially focuses on emerging markets—we have operations in 50 countries in Africa, Middle East, South and East Asia. We understand the intricacies of emerging markets and have tested policies and procedures that take the conditions in these markets into account. Nepal is an emerging market and therefore poses both the challenges and opportunities that are inherent in such markets. Our commitment to Nepal can be determined by the fact that we have 13 points of representation in the country already and the fact that we are upgrading our entire hardware, network and software platforms. We're investing over Rs 330 million in this project, which started in the initial issue in 1996. The total investment in the business here. Yes we have economic problems and most definitely all institutions will have to tighten their belts and keep a very close eye on cost lines to get through these trying times. But for us emerging markets are our home and we are here to stay.

How would you explain the contribution a bank like the SCB can make to the Nepal economy?
This is a question that we get asked often. We look at our contribution from the point of view of our stakeholders—shareholders, customers, regulators and staff. In the case of shareholders, if an investor had purchased 100 shares during the initial issue in 1996, the dividend would cost him Rs 6,000. Today he would have 675 shares worth Rs 1,012,500 (at a share price of Rs 1,500), in addition to which he'd also have received dividends of Rs 2,462,510. I think that type of return on investment is exceptional anywhere.

From the point of view of the customer, we look at the fact that we have helped bring international standard banking products and procedures to Nepal. In international trade we have provided our customers the opportunity to give their business to us. In turn, the confidence of dealing with recognised global bank. We have provided about 40,000 depositors with a greater level of service, security and satisfaction. Besides we also pay taxes to the exchequer and for the last seven years have consistently been among the highest taxpayers in the country, a fact that was recognised by the government recently. In addition to this we have always taken pride in the recognition that we receive from the Nepal Rastri Bank for the high international standards that we bring to the market in terms of compliance, customer service and operational and credit risk management. In employment terms, our bank is a preferred employer, because we have a performance-oriented culture. Simply put, if you perform you will be rewarded.

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The Stars of the World Cup

With one week to go before the greatest show on earth, Nepali Times brings you pin-ups and profiles of some of the biggest stars who will feature in Korea Japan 2002.



Rivaldo

●Brazil ●Attacking midfielder ●FC Barcelona (Spain)
1.87 m, 75 kg

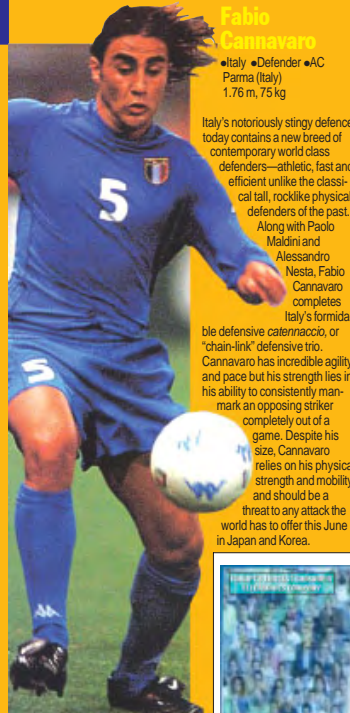
Rivaldo has a knack for scoring goals that leave his opponents astounded. The Barcelona and Brazil number ten can do things with a football most players only dream about. Rivaldo is probably the only Brazilian who could be compared to Pele, and like Pele, he had a modest upbringing and relied on football to save his family from utter poverty. FIFA World Footballer of the Year in 1999, Rivaldo remains an integral part of Brazil's hopes for an unprecedented fifth World Cup this year despite their disappointing qualifying campaign.



Zinedine Zidane

●France ●Midfielder ●Real Madrid (Spain)
1.85 m, 78 kg

After his heroics in France '98, Zizou has reached the best form of his career. With his exceptionally brilliant goal against Bayer Leverkusen in last week's Champions League Final Zidane showed just why he's considered one of the true legends of the modern game. Zidane's intelligence and his masterful dribbling and passing ability enable him to effortlessly create massive gaps in enemy territory. But what really sets Zidane apart from most players is his ability to rise to the occasion and create and score the momentous goals when they count.



Fabio Cannavaro

●Italy ●Defender ●AC Parma (Italy)
1.76 m, 75 kg

Italy's notoriously stingy defence today contains a new breed of contemporary world class defenders—athletic, fast and efficient unlike the classical tall, rocklike physical defenders of the past. Along with Paolo Maldini and Alessandro Nesta, Fabio Cannavaro completes Italy's formidable defensive catenaccio, or 'chain-link' defensive trio. Cannavaro has incredible agility and pace but his strength lies in his ability to consistently mark an opposing striker completely out of a game. Despite his size, Cannavaro relies on his physical strength and mobility and should be a threat to any attack the world has to offer this June in Japan and Korea.



Michael Owen

●England ●Forward ●Liverpool (England)
1.73 m, 70 kg

Eighteen year-old Michael Owen burst onto the international football scene in France '98 with his wonder-goal against Argentina. Now twenty-two, he has established himself as among the top strikers in the world. Owen's brilliant close control and acceleration is perhaps only second to Ronaldo when he is at his best. At only 1.75 m Owen is not considered dangerous in the air—but the timing of his runs, his pace and his sheer confidence make him a terror to defenders.



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 Manji Radio & Video, Tel: 217707 • Palpa — New Ganesh Impex, Tel: 20378 • Dharam — Mitra Impex, Tel: 25168 • Baneswar — Jasti & Son Traders, Tel: 21171 • Bhagat — Shreeja Impex, Tel: 24224
 • Pindaka — R.T. Electronics, Tel: 28753 • Mahabaleshwar — Kumar Radio, Tel: 28283 • Bhaktar — Goodwin Enterprises, Tel: 28778 • Nepalgad — Tal Electronics &
 Electronics, Tel: 28479 • Mahabaleshwar — Sami Trading & Manufacturing Co. (P) Ltd, Tel: 22014 • Yakkal — Ananya Suppliers, Tel: 80150 • Jambhakar — Cyber House, Tel: 22838

"Untouchability is not only a problem of dalits"

Sixty-eight-year-old Padamsing Biswakarma has completed his Madhyama (A Level) in Sanskrit literature and used to be a teacher in Baglung. His views on the problems faced by dalits is different from those of people in the business of development. *Himal Khabarpatrika* spoke to him about the issues confronting dalits in Nepal today.

HIMAL: How would you define dalits?
Biswakarma: (They are) economically exploited, socially oppressed, deprived of education, politically marginalised, ostracised from the world of religion. They are outside the mainstream of the state. Before the 2020 Muluki Ain (Civil Code 1971) came into force, they were considered untouchables.

What are the major problems they face?
Illiteracy, poverty, social oppression and expulsion from the mainstream of politics and society. We will not have effective programs for dalits from the state until they themselves are in decision-making positions. Until then we will be unable to raise dalits to the level of other groups in society.

So how can all this be changed?
First, educated dalits should get jobs commensurate with their qualifications. They need affirmative action, reservations proportional to the size of their population. If they cannot have affirmative action, they must be protected in other ways. Dalits are skilled in working with gold, silver, leather and iron. Their skills can be conserved by engaging them in productive activities. The goods they produce can be made tax-free to help with marketing. Managers (the people of Manring) are good examples of how people can progress, even supportive state policies.

Which is the larger problem, economic poverty or untouchability?
Dalits, who make up 20 percent of the population of this country, are plagued by both. Because they are poor, it is difficult for them to get good education and if they do manage, they find it difficult to get jobs. Then there is untouchability. Even today educated dalits cannot openly say 'I am a dalit'. Even today they have to lie about their surnames to be able to get housing in cities.

What should be done to caste-related problems second and first work towards reservations, or end caste-based discrimination and work for competition on equal basis?
We need to balance the two. There was no untouchability in early times. In the Gita Krishna tells Arjun that character is based on virtue, that your deeds should reflect your virtuousness, and that caste is determined by your deeds or karma. That is why we need to revise the scriptures relating to dalits that were added to the scriptures after the Vedas. In short, to emancipate dalits from social and religious oppression, we need to improve Hindu religion and culture. To put an end to their economic problems, dalits need to be given facilities and reservation.

Isn't there untouchability within the dalit community?
We have made it a tradition. The Upadhyays do that with the Jais, the Jais with the Thakurs, the Thakurs to the Chetris, the Chetris to the Newars, the Newars to the Gurungs, the Gurungs to the Magars, the Magars to the Kami, the Kami to the Sarkis, the Sarkis to the Damals, the Damals to the Gaine, the Gaine to the Badi, the Badi to the Poda and the Poda to the Chyame.

This is why it is important to not say that untouchability and equality are issues related only to dalits. Yes, because they are the weakest, they are the most affected. The roots of untouchability are not Vedic religion but feudal tradition and they will remain until that is erased. That is why we need to look at untouchability and caste as a problem of all, not only dalits.

Have you had any bad experiences because you are a dalit?
I had a Jaisi-Bahun acquaintance in my village. When I was told to step down from the threshold of his house, I almost felt as if I had died. Once, on the way from Pokhara to Baglung, I met a pundit on the road. I discussed the scriptures with him. While we were talking leave from another he asked me which bahun I was, and I said Biswakarma. After that he began to address me as *smi*, not *tapal*. I felt bad but such instances are common.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Democracy has become weak because you have party workers sporting *chappals* even as the ministers are always dressed to the nines.

— Speaker Tarant Nathar in Kaniupur, 19 May.



The offering on the dishes: Emergency Man. Do I want more? Enough is, I full.

संस्कृतमा लेखेका सुप्रसिद्धता: 19 May

Recast RECAST

Snapcine, 19 May

The wind mill at Tribhuvan University's (TU) Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST) is a mockery of the institution itself. There has been no repair or maintenance work done on it in its two decade-long life, and creepers have taken over it.

The only TU institution with the mandate to conduct research work on applied science and technology is defunct because it does not have enough money. TU allocates Rs 9.5 million annually to RECAST, but that is spent on paying the 95 employees. There is no money for research. RECAST employees complain that TU used to provide a minimum of Rs 700,000 every year for research in science and technology but this year, there isn't even enough money to pay the telephone bills. "When we don't have enough money to pay for utilities, how can we be expected to conduct research programs, even if we wanted to pay for them out of our own pockets?" asks Roshni Shukla, administrative head of RECAST. "Even simple expenses are being paid for with help from outside projects."

Most of the 28 research posts are empty. A few are staying albeit by the way of research projects in four areas. These include a British Embassy-funded experiment to generate alternative fuel (oil) from the *Sisyrinchium* plant, research into the feasibility of solar dyes, the properties of Salsabudh juice, and a project looking into plant-based cures for cancer being carried out in coordination with the Thailand-based Asian Institute of Technology.

The reactor of TU Professor Dr Premraj Pant thinks there is nothing abnormal about the fact that the research funds have been slashed at a time when TU itself is cash-strapped. "It's perhaps natural that RECAST also suffers when TU is going through a budget slump, but research work must not stop. TU is discussing the possibilities of outside help to invest in all four research centres," says Professor Dr Mohan Bikram Gawali, executive director of RECAST. "The third instalment of funding that His Majesty's Government was supposed to give TU has been delayed, hence a delay in the allocation of research budget," says Dr Pant.

Money, leaders

Bhairav Kial in Snapcine, 21 May

The current aim in politics, whose sole ambition is to amass money, is humiliating the country like a swineepan that can't be stopped. Maybe in a rich country it would be natural for the rich to rule, but in a poor country the poor cannot be ruled by leaders whose mindset is geared only towards earning more money. True leadership of a nation does not come about by actions such as abducting parliamentarians or luring greedy ministers to Bangkok.

The tendency to consider oneself above laws is harmful. You become minister and member of public bodies. Why should the people consider such people as leaders? You get telephone lines allocated to you in every other

present during the prime minister's meeting with President George W Bush, an indication of the importance that the US is currently giving to security in Nepal.

At a time when the Maoists are increasing attacks on physical infrastructure, making it difficult to evaluate how donors, money and other assistance is being used, analysts feel it would be appropriate to bring the Maoists around to a peaceful solution. The US has not yet provided \$40 million annually and also provide weapons and military training. Although the UK has yet committed publicly to any particular amount, the focus of assistance will probably be on security, training, and security equipment.

A government source says that Prime Minister Deuba has been visiting China, Russia, Japan, and the European countries for more international support for fighting the Maoists.

Look who's talking

Dhruva Hari Adhikary, 19 May

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba visited the Indian Chief of Army Staff General S Padmanabhan at Singha Darbar on Thursday, 16 May. Nepal Television covered the event on its 50th anniversary with a visit of Prime Minister Deuba shaking hands and sitting down for talks with General Padmanabhan.

The meeting, and the issues discussed were those we generally anticipate when top-ranking officials from two countries meet. But what really surprised and pained me is the source of the information. Deuba, our national broadcaster had to rely on it. It was clear that while the government had the government on TV, the press had to rely on the press statement issued by the Indian Embassy here that PM Deuba had thanked India for providing weapons and other military hardware. I am not sure about how other fellow viewers felt, but I was somewhat disturbed.

I feel that this incident concerns every Nepali. We must know what could have really happened at Singha Darbar (where I am not sure if it really happened) and the employees in the press department and all the prime minister's advisers at the PMO might have been doing that. What might have happened? Ministry says that they issued long statements about the deaths in everyday clashes between the Maoists and the security forces. What could have happened at the headquarters of the Nepal Army from acknowledging the importance of meeting with the Indian Chief of Army Staff himself? It seems that none of our government officers would be at the meeting... If Singha Darbar had provided it with information, NTV might not have had to rely on material produced by a foreign embassy.

The government should learn from its mistakes. Otherwise it could just appoint the Indian Embassy to prepare all its publicity material, and gradually hand over total governance too. Why bother about protecting our sovereignty?

THE MID-COLUMN BLUES



especially in dehumanising times such as these. But it all feels very marginal to be looking up the dictionary for the meaning of such expressions as 'repress', 'repress', 'repress' when hundreds are being killed with such brutality.

I never got my head around this problem (my head is not very elastic); so, two weeks later, I was back translating Nepali stories and poems, and calling that a column. For Biral Nibha, who was among the best young poets opposing the Panchayat era, and now is among the best chroniclers of the mis-governance of the past two years. A satirist as well as a poet, Nibha's best work adopts a naive voice to express bewilderment, and moral outrage, at the failed promises of the recent past. Writing with a clear ethical vision, he calls not for a return to the authoritarian forms of government that many Nepalis seem to be wishing for these days, but for greater, and truer democracy. Both the poems below come from his collection *Aganoria Ubbeko Machhe*.

A Shirt With ONLY One Sleeve

Biral Nibha

For my friend I needed to purchase a shirt with only one sleeve

At the time of the democratic movement my friend had fallen from a police shot while the statue of King Mahendra. One arm had to be amputated.

Since then he'd required a slightly different kind of shirt not unknown to me, my own village. But I couldn't locate such a shirt in any of the shops.

When I said so to my friend he smiled and said— A shirt with both sleeves will do for me, Companion. Look, look at my hands.

Oh! How peculiar. Both hands were there as before. A moment later in an outburst of joy I tried to take his hands in mine. But what was this? I was missing one hand.

Nothing my confusion my friend said—Companion don't be surprised. This is actually your hand I just took to make do.

It seems that it's possible to work with only one hand. My friend and I both wore shirts with only one arm, and in abundance. That was his missing one arm made no difference at all for I had both.

Then came this matter, one day— Making an invitation to the masses the Prime Minister was waving his hands and I too waved my hands in salutation and in abundance. I tried to raise both arms forcefully. But I couldn't do this.

I was missing one arm I assumed I was with my friend. Upon meeting him later I asked—Where's my hand? and he answered and said— I also have your hand, Companion. I don't grow serious and started to fret.

Who knows what's happening. They're suddenly disappearing, hands

One of my friend's wents in the dark age of absolute monarchy and in democracy, one of my own

Both friends are missing one arm each how we might wear shirts that have sleeves on both sides

CYCLE

Biral Nibha

It's been a few days my bicycle has vanished. Do you know where I might find it?

It's true that my cycle is small its tires are bald they have too little air the colour is faded the stand is broken the kinetic light is faulty the bell rings softly the peddles move slowly the chain is old the handlebars are askew the wheel is bent it has no camera and no lock.

No matter what even if it's small and defective even if it's shabby no matter what it's like, that cycle is mine.

The weight of my body lies on its seat The measure of my feet fills its peddles The print of my hands marks its handlebars.

My breath rests in each part of that cycle. I am there. In summary that cycle is my life.

(What kind of place is this not unknown to me, my own village where in the bright light of midday a whole life has vanished. Do you know where I might find it?)

It's been a few days my bicycle has vanished. Do you know where I might find it?

ENCOUNTERS

Midnight memoirs

They have like dragons, circling over the lakes slaughtered. From their bellies emerge coons of dead soldiers faces caud in blood. At the scene of battle, half-buried and half-borne of their brothers are the faces of the fallen heroes. And the innocents, Nepalis who side with neither side, just got in the way.

People walking to work, people buying fruit, vegetable vendors, men on the street walking on the scalding asphalt, sweating under the noontday sun, puffing carts piled with 100 kg seed cabinets. All struggling to earn enough to buy food for the evening meal for the hungry child, expectant wife swollen with a sixth.

At first you could count the dead on the fingers of your hand, now we have exhausted the fingers many times over. The daily death toll is announced on the radio as if we cricker scores—a killer, a citizen, body counts numerically listing a grotesque march. Listening to it out here, far from the capital it seems like a farce—history repeating itself like an unstoppable tragedy. Now the deaths come in hundreds, numbering numbers that we need electronic calculators to project before our eyes. And the audiovisual on television shows corpses piled high. Is this the Nepal we were born in, the Nepal we love so dearly?

Most of the dead are men. This is a patriarchal society so these are all "breadwinners" someone's father, someone's brother, someone's son, nephews and uncles. "Marty" is a fancy word for workers who died trying to feed their families. Society demands that there be a son to carry on the family name, society demands that the son shall earn, grow up to start a family, look after his aged parents, get his sisters married, shoulder the burden of the dowry, but before the groom's parents (having forgotten he was groom himself once) educate the younger brothers and plough the land (we still do not look approvingly at those women who take the tons of tilling the fields in the absence of their migrant husbands).

So what happens to their dependants? Thousands of Nepal men killed means hundreds of thousands who have lost their sources of livelihood. Soldiers, police, teachers, political leaders, civil servants, Maoist militia—they all have families. Are they not graves in a life-support system to their father, brother, sister wife and child? Who does one place this blood-renting the sweet smelling meadows of Mustang or the crystal cool waters of the Bheri? Survival cannot overlook existence, the quintessential and beat-making beauty that surrounds us amidst the carnage. Now too amongst the concrete metropolis of Kathmandu, one can spy niches of the human spirit. The favour of devotees at Bagmati every Thursday morning, the thingy prayers at Krishna Mandir Square, the red vermilion and yellow-powdered deities (even Convent Prachanda has the vermilion plastered on his brow) the solitary red hibiscus adorned the stone images polished to perfection by a million supplicating fingers over the centuries.

Further off, the sweating Bhimeswar Mhadake, the multiple identities raising their defiant spikes to the skies above Kailashik, where you walked through the rhododendron forests at Gheopur in early April. A canopy of red, white and pink blossoms, the cascading waterfall at Rupsa and the changing mood of mountains along the 12s. Where will all this die a few years from now when the sweetness of our nation is slowly extinguished? Where will the doves rest?

Midnight memoirs

Midnight memoirs

Midnight memoirs

Midnight memoirs

Midnight memoirs

Midnight memoirs

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ABOUT TOWN

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EVENTS
 ♦ **Meditation Retreat for Nepalis** by the venerable Took-Nyi Rinpoche at the Ngedon Osel Ling Monastery, Halchowk Danda. Seven-day silent retreat from 12-19 June with meditation, teachings in English on shamantha and vipassana meditation and Buddha drama. Rs 1,000, including food, room, monastery upkeep. Contact Nagpurani Institute of Sacred Method, Patan, 527146. HIMAL Association, Patan Dhoka, 542544; Blood Bank, Pradashani Marg, 229344; Basanta Rangkar, 249455; chhipas@yaho.com; or Manjushree Thapa, mhapa@msn.com.np.
 ♦ **Friends of the Bagmati** aim to clean up the Bagmati river. Monthly meetings open to everyone. Email friends@bagmatinepal.org or ahpou.com for details.

MUSIC
 ♦ **1974AD in concert** 25 May, Birendra International Convention Centre, Baneswor, 2:30PM. Tickets: Rs 1,000, Rs 500, Rs 300, Rs 200, at TK 'n' Tok, New Road and Jawalakhel; La Soon Restaurant and Vintnoque, Pulchowk; Jatra, Thamel; all Bakery Cafe outlets, Dexo Music, Thamel and Kantipath; The Club, Bhat Bhasini.

♦ **Rockers on Parade** Robin n Looza, X- arica, Albatross, Ugrakarma, Mokshya and many more perform at the Mahendra Police Club from 2PM. Tickets, Rs 125, at TK 'n' Tok, New Road and Saturday at Mahendra Police Club.
 ♦ **Club Rasta** Live band salsa and merengue on Thursdays. Early bird discounts between 8-9:30PM, buy one, get one free. Hotel Shangri-La, 412999. Rs 200
 ♦ **Dinesh & Pomba** Live every Friday 7PM-9PM, Himalaya Cafe, Thamel. 262526
 ♦ **Beatsle Nite** Tribute to the late George Harrison. 12 May, 6:30PM New Orleans Cafe, Thamel.
 ♦ **Down Memory Lane** Wednesday nights with Teesta. The Rox Bar at the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234.
 ♦ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 1/8 Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

DRINK
 ♦ **Friday Music**, dance and between 9PM-11PM, unlimited drinks with entrance. Men Rs 995, women Rs 495, couples Rs 1,445. Until 7 June at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999
 ♦ **Coming soon** Fusion at Dwarika's

FOOD
 ♦ **Saturday Brunch** Buffet, free flow of beer, desserts, outdoor jazz. Adults Rs 1050 plus 12 and complimentary use of the swimming pools and outdoor jacuzzi. Adults Rs 1,650 plus taxes, children below 12, 50 percent off at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234
 ♦ **Wood fired pizzas** at the new Roadhouse Cafe. Completely redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. The Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel.
 ♦ **Steaks, Sangri and ESPN** Food, drink, and the World Cup at K-toof Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel, 433343.
 ♦ **Big Barbecue** Two cocktails for the price of one (Rs 250), Friday through Sunday, 4PM-8PM. Kinky's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440
 ♦ **Sin Miguel BIG Brunch** Lavish brunch buffet and free flow of Sin Miguel beer. Saturdays 11.30 AM-2.30 PM at The Fun Cafe, at Radisson Hotel, 411818
 ♦ **B-B-Q & MoMo Evenings** 5PM onwards at Nanglo Cafe & Pub, Darbar Marg, 222636
 ♦ **Special Thai Authentic Cuisine** at the Ban Thai Restaurant, Darbar Marg, 243271
 ♦ **Buddha's 2,546th birth anniversary** 106 lamas pray for peace and recite the holy Tripitak at the Bouddha Stupa Mandala on 26 May. Watch from the Stupa View Restaurant and Terrace, with vegetarian food, day-even pizzas and momos. 480262
 ♦ **Too busy to eat lunch?** Daily specials for the busy executive at Dwarika's Hotel, 479488.
 ♦ **Weekend Brunch** Rs 350 per head, special package available with bowling. Oriental and continental lunch or dinner by the pond, 1900 Boardwalk, Kantipath, 225272
 ♦ **Authentic Thai food** Everyday at Vin Yang Restaurant, 425210
 ♦ **Paddy Foley's Irish Pub** A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096.

GETAWAYS
 ♦ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort, 560675
 ♦ **Packages** Overnight and short-stay at 4299-4399, 479488
 ♦ **The Teahouse Inn Combo** Special package for Nepalis and expatriates. Rs 700 per person on twin-sharing basis for room, breakfast, Nepali thali dinner, and swimming and jacuzzi at the Club Himalaya. 410432, 680048
 ♦ **Summer Splash** Use of pool 15 May - 15 July, 10AM-6PM Over 18 Rs 4,000 plus tax, schoolchild under 18, Rs 2,000 plus tax. Hotel de Annapurna, 221711
 ♦ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, staff guides to monkey, peacock and reserve. Rs 1,850 per person in dinner and breakfast. Rs 925 per child 5-14 years, children under five free. info@escapetonepal.com

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

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The subcontinent is virtually free of cloud, dominated by a high pressure area over northwestern India. The nascent monsoon can be seen massing up off the Kerala coast, still very weak. Over northeastern India is a large low pressure system that is bringing pre-monsoon rains, some of which was unleashed over Nepal last week. This system could bring us more pre-monsoon showers, short and heavy at times, specially over central and eastern Nepal next week. Let's between expect sunny hot days with thick sand-blown haze from the desert bringing down visibility.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu
29-16	28-16	29-15	30-17	31-17



BOOKWORM
 Plants and People of Nepal Narayan P Manandhar
 Timber Press, Oregon, USA. Hardcover, UK Rs 5790
 For 30 years, with limited means, but a vast heart and engaging, scientific mind, Manandhar botanically explored every corner of Nepal. In addition to species descriptions, including line drawings, he provides the historical, ethnographic, and ecological settings from which his ethnobotanical information is derived. The result is this brilliant book, a world-class contribution to ethnobotanical literature, and the most complete survey ever of Nepal.
Limited edition, few copies in stock, order now.

Chebhria Media: Varun Vartaman Prayoonchi, Omta, ed
 Virata Kathmandu, Kathmandu, 2002

This volume, a compilation of essays and case studies, explores the impact of democracy on the Nepali press, particularly outside Kathmandu. Dealing with the country as divided into development region, the essays tackle two aspects of the evolution of the media in different parts of Nepal, first detailing briefly the history of journalism in the area and then looking at the current state of the media and the changes it has seen, especially post-democracy.

Kimiyagar Paulo Coelho, Ritesh Thapa, trans.
 Walden Book House, Kathmandu, 2002
 Rs 200
 A Nepali translation of the Paulo Coelho's bestselling *The Alchemist: A Fable About Following Your Dream*. An Andalusian shepherd boy dreams of hidden treasures in Egypt and sets off to follow his vision. Along the way he meets many people, including an alchemist who teaches him about the "Soul of the World" and how to stay true to his dream and consider the fear of suffering to be worse than suffering itself.

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

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Stupa View and Restaurant & Terrace at Bauhandhar Stupa. Well-appointed restaurant and terraces with views of stupa and Himalayas. International vegetarian specialities, pizza from Italy oven, ice cream, soft guitar tunes on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays from 5PM on. Special events on full moon. Open daily 11AM-8:30PM. 480262.

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Lumbini's new look

from p1

Between the largely Hindu administrators, Buddhist leadership and Muslim locals, Lumbini becomes a proper cauldron of woe. There then is the donor factor. Although the LDT has sought to say over the area, since 1997 the Sacred Garden has been declared a World Heritage Site, which brings it within the oversight of UNESCO. Meanwhile, the trust has tended to lean on the Japanese Buddhist Federation (JBF), practically regarding it as exclusive patron.

In thrall of the small pickings from the JBF and heritage support provided by UNESCO, the Nepali commissioners have quite forgotten the existence of an unique inter-governmental committee in the United Nations Headquarters in New York, solely dedicated to Lumbini. Started at the behest of the late Secretary General U Thant, who dropped famous tears on seeing

the desolation of Lumbini in 1967, the International Committee for the Development of Lumbini was supposed to fund-raise and keep Lumbini in world focus. Kathmandu's unconviction has left the Committee moribund for more than a decade. The United Nations website today does not even list the Committee, and Nepal's Permanent Mission to the UN is clearly un-interested in leaving the body.

So what has changed, that we can now look forward to the proximate completion of Mayadevi temple structure?

The sudden burst of activity can be attributed to the coming together of three factors: a can-do minister supporting a new, committed leadership at the LDT, which in turn took the help of the professional architects and engineers of the Institute of Engineering (IOE) at Pulchowk.

The sudden burst of activity can be attributed to the coming together of three factors: a can-do minister supporting a new, committed leadership at the LDT, which in turn took the help of the professional architects and engineers of the Institute of Engineering (IOE) at Pulchowk.

Minister for Culture and Tourism Bal Bahadur KC, ex-officio chairman of the Trust, has given the green light to the present LDT chief, Vice-Chairman Omkar Prasad Gauchan. A Thakali and Nepal Congress leader, Gauchan is known to be above schisms between Buddhist groups. The IOE team, meanwhile, is led by the institute's current dean, Jitendra Raj Pokharel, a conservation architect with a PhD from York University. He is backed by IOE faculty, including Sudashina Prasad, Susan Shrestha and Prem Nath Maskey, the last having the task of ensuring the integrity of the hidden steel superstructure that is at the core of the new building.

This was the site where Emperor Ashok put up the rock pillar marking the birthplace of the "Sage of the Sakyas" in the 3rd BC, and where Chinese travellers Fa Hien and Hsueh-Tsang separately reported a complex of monuments in the 5th and 8th centuries. Archaeologists of British India located the Ashok pillar in the 1850s. The scholar and author Keshar Sumshere cleared the area and had by 1939 put up the white-washed brick box around and step of the ancient mound containing Mayadevi's statue.

It is this aesthetically-challenged white box that has for years been associated in the mind of people everywhere with the place of the Sakyamuni's birth. The image included in the legal tree which grew out of one side of the block. Over time, the structure-and-tree standing beside the Ashokan pillar took on concrete power by association - until the excavation "disappeared" it. The LDT gave permission for the concrete power by association - until the excavation "disappeared" it. The LDT gave permission for the concrete power by association - until the excavation "disappeared" it.

Lumbini got converted from native site to archaeological dig, and the foundations of a 15-chambered edifice were revealed, as well as the rock conglomerate "marker stone". The Japanese and Nepali archaeologists involved in the dig had cited various historical references to prove that this stone marks the exact place of Siddhartha Gautam's birth.

Tug-o-war
 The excavation was completed in 1996, but the next steps that to do with the site—became the subject of a tug-of-war between the various national and international players. The issue contested with were the UNESCO guidelines on the conservation of heritage archaeological sites.

Some proposed a prayer hall, others a grand hollow stupa covering the entire site. Yet others wanted a building with 'Nepali' elements, and there was a suggestion of recreating a Mauryan period shrine. In the end, an original plan put forward by the IOE was re-evaluated and approved.

The principle challenge was to find an appropriate design for the building itself so that the archaeological finds would be displayed while the Mayadevi statue was returned to its original sanctum. (The image had been removed for safekeeping in the dig began in 1992.)

The IOE team's proceeded with its work on the basis of the following decisions:
 • Keshar Sumshere's box would be emulated despite its aesthetic shortcomings because of the appearance of the earlier historical structure is unknown.



The planned structure, with brick covering the steel. West elevation.

the archaeological ruins as well as the marker stone would be exhibited by making the inside of the structure hollow.
 • pilgrims and tourists would have access to the inside of the building.
 • all the work done on the site would be reversible.

Following architectural principles for heritage spaces, the Lumbini today is Bissas Bidari. LDT's Chief Archaeologist of the last 18 years, who has had the unenviable task of being custodian of an out-of-sight nativity site beneath a tin shed. Says Bidari, "This project is unique because it does several things at once—it follows UNESCO guidelines, respects Nepali sentiments and memories, as well as follows architectural conventions for such sites. Besides, the Mayadevi statue will be back where it originally was." Faced with the 26 May deadline, the IOE team worked up a storm to finalise the design and structural aspects just a month-and-a-half before the start.

"Even if we are unable to complete the whole building, we will have Mayadevi back in her sanctum on Buddha Purnima," says LDT Chief Gauchan, overseeing the work in his surawal-kameez and an umbrella to protect him from the blistering sun.

The cost of the project is Rs 70 million. The LDT will pay Rs 30 million and the government is supposed to come up with the rest. Gauchan says the money has been promised but not yet sanctioned.

"For all the pride we take in Nepal being the birthplace of Buddha, the attitude towards this place has been slack," says Gauchan.
 "You do not have to look far to see that Lumbini may yet be buffeted by the modifications various factions and groups. Political changes in Kathmandu directly affects the executive leadership of the LDT. Since September 2000, there have been five chairmen of LDT (ie. ministers of culture and tourism), and seven individuals have occupied Gauchan's position of Vice Chairman since 1990. All of them might well have done a decent job had they been allowed to stay through the biennial five-year term.

Being made a political football is what has made Lumbini look increasingly like what one journalist described as a "religious Disneyland" rather than a spiritual site without religio-political overtones, a space that can be "owned" by all the world.

Perhaps the work underway at the nativity site, at long last, is signal of the maturing of understanding as to what Lumbini represents. It is this, one may even begin to hope for the implementation of the grand visions that form part of the Lumbini Master Plan prepared by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in 1975. Omkar Prasad Gauchan, certainly, cannot wait to get started on that. "This idea is to keep working as long as one is allowed to," he says. ♦

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