

EXCLUSIVE

South and North

It is still as King Prithvi Narayan Shah said: Nepal is a yam between two stones. This week, his descendant, King Gyanendra has completed important visits to



India and China. The king has sought and got support from both for the government's counter-insurgency campaign. "China supports the efforts of King Gyanendra and the Nepali government in cracking down on armed anti-government forces," Chinese president Jiang Zemin said after meeting the king on 12 July. Chinese leaders refuse to call them Maoists, and say the rebels are besmirching the name of the Great Helmsman.

No grass, no roots

The cabinet decision on Monday not to extend the terms of elected village and district councils has made a lot of people angry. They see the hand of Deuba's all-powerful home minister, Khum Bahadur Khadka, to gerrymander elections.

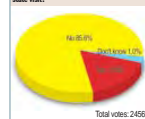
The UML, which dominates local bodies has the most to lose, and the party's Rajendra Prasad Pandey can barely hide his fury: "This is what the Maoists wanted all along. Deuba has done it for them."

Donors are also livid. One diplomat told us: "This decision creates a vacuum. It is clear the Maoists are going to fill it." Last Friday, donors jointly wrote a terse letter to Deuba warning him that such a decision would only help the Maoists.

UNDP, German GTZ and Dutch SNV work at the VDC level in 60 districts, as well as the Norwegians and the Danes who support these programmes. The projects will be directly impacted by the dissolution of local bodies. "It is a problematic decision," the UNDP's Henning Karcher told us guardedly. "The best solution now would be to have both elections together."

Editorial p2

Act locally



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 Q. Do you support the cabinet decision to dissolve local government units?

Sick of war

ARUNA UPRETY in DOTI
 The woman had visited the health post with her sick baby. The health worker gave her some tablets and told her to give them to the child after meals. Two days later, the health worker asked her how the baby was doing. "I haven't been able to give her the medicine because you had told me to give it after food," the woman replied. "I have no food at home, and we haven't eaten for days."

The Maoist insurgency in western Nepal is taking its toll on the health of villagers, and the conflict is eroding many of the gains of the past decades in immunisation, maternal and child health. But the crisis goes beyond lack of medicines and vaccines: there is a danger of widespread malnutrition as the conflict makes food scarce, with repercussions on children and their mothers.

We were in Doti to organise a follow-up training of auxiliary midwives and staff nurses and

Western Nepal faces a food emergency and a health emergency. Women and children are affected the most.

also run a health clinic. (See "Women are dying in the far-west" by Aruna Uprety, #52). Thirty-five health workers from Achham and Doti were to take part. Only half of that number attended because they just didn't get the message. The phones are down, the postal service doesn't work, the buses don't ply.

And then the poignant question put to us by a nurse from Achham, for which we had no answer: "As a health worker, am I of any use in this situation? Most of my patients don't need medicines, they need food." The mule trains that traditionally transported food to Achham are stopped by both the security forces and the Maoists. "They should leave the locals alone," said one nurse.

"We don't know what will happen when the potato and grains are exhausted." Most health workers say they will abandon their health posts once food supplies run out. They have no choice. This could create a humanitarian crisis in a region where services were poor even at the best of times. Even by Nepal's dismal human development standards, the west is the worst. The far-west has traditionally had the poorest maternal and infant mortality statistics in Nepal. The status of women in society is lower here than elsewhere, and female literacy is only nine percent. So, although no one is healthy here, the burden of disease tends to be heavier for women because of lack of access to health care. All this is now made much worse because of the conflict.



"The answer is no."



In a candid interview with the Nepali Times, Ken Ohashi, World Bank director in Kathmandu, discusses his concerns about budgetary support, banking reforms, and the Bank's priorities.

NEPALI TIMES: What do you make of the government's spending plan for 2002/03, vis-à-vis the goals and policy statements?
KEN OHASHI: Commenting on HMG's spending plan has been a hazardous exercise, because the actual spending typically has differed much from the budget. However, this year, HMG has gone through quite a serious process of prioritising expenditures in most sectors. The 2002/03 budget reflects this effort pretty well. So I feel it is consistent with HMG's poverty reduction objective. Of course, the proof of the budget is in actual spending.

But is it good enough for donors to extend budgetary support?
 Well, no matter how polite I try to be, the answer is no. The budget is only a plan. We cannot assume that the actual spending will be close to the plan. In a pre-election period, there may be a lot of pressure to divert funds to lower priority projects that are nonetheless politically attractive. To Prime Minister Deuba's credit, he did overcome severe political resistance to cuts in unproductive spending. The true test, however, will be whether he and HMG more generally can stick to their guns, in a manner of speaking.

There are two basic requirements before donors will consider budget support seriously. First, HMG must show that it is now able to keep actual spending close to the budget. Spending it well is quite another matter. The basic problem of public spending in Nepal has been the quality of spending, more than its quantity. The second requirement is effective implementation of the Immediate Action Plan. If these two things happen, then I think donors should get ready to offer budget support.

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then, only the people will exercise their fundamental rights and duties as a polity. Speed and stability is the key to growth and development of an economy. Growth leads to employment and income for the people. When people's income has risen, there is growth of the middle class which is the backbone of a functioning

**Subarna Bhattachan,
Kansas, USA**

Thank you for your daring editorial. I couldn't agree with you more that it is not democracy that has failed, but politicians who have taken the country over to the Maoists. So, the answer to the Maoist problem is to make

● The bureaucracy is turning sybaritic. The government should not declare holidays on the day that King Gyanendra leaves or returns from a foreign trip. If the king himself took that practice seriously, he would have a different attitude would be lauded by the public who want to respond to his

for being bold and professional in telling us readers what is really going on in the inside during the crisis at all times. Your role during the emergency is much like what the Indian Express did in India during their emergency. Please keep the light burning.

Mangal Shrestha, Bangkok

Rajbiraj revisited

PRASHANT JHA IN RAJBIRAJ
The stagnation and neglect of the Nepal tarai is best symbolised by the one town that once had so much promise: Rajbiraj.

It was the first township in Nepal to have urban planning, it had one of the first airfields in the tarai. And while other border cities like Birganj and Biratnagar surged ahead, Rajbiraj was bypassed by the east-west highway and became a backwater.

You wouldn't know it when visiting this sleepy, dusty town in the vicinity of Biratnagar that Rajbiraj is the social headquarters of Sagarmatha Zone, named after the world's highest mountain. It is also an indication of Nepal's vertical topography that Mt Everest, 8,848m high is barely 150 km from this town, located at barely 100 m above sea level.

Anju Da, a resident of Rajbiraj for more than two decades was recently confronted with an agonising dilemma: whether to stay in her ancestral town or escape in search of better opportunities. The absence of proper educational facilities for her growing children coupled with lack of future prospects for her husband compelled the family to migrate to Kathmandu.

Anju is not an isolated example. With general stagnation in Rajbiraj, more people from diverse backgrounds have been moving out of town for over two decades. Though this phenomenon is prevalent elsewhere in Nepal, Rajbiraj is an extreme example.

The district headquarters of Saptari, Rajbiraj was the earliest planned township in the country. Systematically designed in 1938, it was declared a municipality in 1959. Rajbiraj served as a trade centre, occupying a prominent place in the economy due to the Hudaik highway. Rajbiraj was also



Downtown Rajbiraj

The tarai town that missed the bus. Is a revival possible?

Rajbiraj has been a lot slower than it should have been."

There seems to be a consensus here that the construction of the east-west highway which by-passed played a major role in the town's decline. Renu Yadav, MP from the area, believes that Rajbiraj would be a thriving economic centre if the road had passed the town, instead it went through the tiny village of Lahan, to its north. Lahan has now sprung up as a major township and highway junction.

The town used to have an industrial estate, which has now been reduced to a cowshed. Industrialists are reluctant to invest in Rajbiraj because of the lack of infrastructure, and other basic services. While these might well be contributing factors, Rajbiraj's intelligentsia is quick to point to the failure of the political leadership locally as well.

Farming fares no better. Ideally, with its fertile soil, access to irrigation, and its location on the border Rajbiraj should have been a major hub for trade in cash crops. But harvests are stagnant and there is very little innovation. Dirt-poor peasants are just struggling to survive from season-to-season.

Municipal officials, for their part, blame discriminatory policies of the central government for slow development. Citing prejudice against the tarai, Mayor Das says the capital-centric attitude of Kathmandu-based bureaucrats and politicians as the main reason for this neglect. "Development is confined to the valley," Das told us.

While these might well be contributing factors, Rajbiraj's intelligentsia is quick to point to the failure of the political leadership locally as well.



Jagannath Das, mayor of Rajbiraj

"Unfortunately, there has been a shortage of leaders committed to development in our town," says Dr Ashokanand Mishra at the Sagarmatha Zonal Hospital. This rings true in the face of glaring political squabbles. Member of parliament, Yadav and Mayor Das, for example trade allegations of incompetence, and pass on the blame for Rajbiraj's decay on each other.

Kumar Upadhyay, a consultant who has worked extensively in the region believes that the citizens of Rajbiraj must take a share of the blame. Citing statistics, he says that

6,500 cases are filed annually in the district court at Rajbiraj compared to 3,500 cases in neighbouring districts and a mere 150 in the hills. "This illustrates the myopic mind of the people in Rajbiraj. They prefer to go to court over petty issues instead of resolving disputes amicably and working towards development," he says.

Despite the general gloom and despondency, there may be a glimmer of hope if immediate action is taken. Kuber Sharma, a Green Party member whose family is from Rajbiraj, suggests the following steps may revive the sagging fortunes of his town:

- Begin a management school of excellence in Saptari, which would attract students and improve the general state of education.
- Strive to make Rajbiraj a software centre by supporting entrepreneurs.
- Develop local agro-industries, for instance fish farming.
- Get the Indians to bring a railway at Kanauli, across the border in Bihar.

"Operating an industrial area along with institutionalising better co-ordination among various government agencies is a must if any revival is to take place," says Sharma. But even more essential seems to be a commitment by the local leadership and the citizens to work untidily for progress.

If that does not happen, Mishra at the zonal hospital foresees Rajbiraj once more missing the bus. "We could become the development hub of the region, but we will be pushed to near anonymity if we don't act," he told us.

While this may be an extreme scenario, it reflects the pessimism of the residents and explains why more people like Anju are migrating. To stop this, there is a need for a concerted effort by civil society and government to launch multi-pronged interventions. However, the big question remains: will Rajbiraj's themselves rise up to the task? ♦

by BHASKAR RAY

India's Maoists

The Indian state is ignoring a peril that will not just die out.



Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The radical thesis swept the minds of a million millions and expectedly caused acute unease in the mainstream communist movement.

Rejecting the agitational aggression of the established communist parties, Mazumdar proposed that every party worker from a five-man secret group as part of revolutionary activity. Laying major emphasis on underground political training, he prepared an outline of revolution on the basis of agrarian inequalities, borrowing heavily from Mao Zedong's experiences in China. In these theories, he made a radical departure from the established practices of the conventional left by dismissing trade union activity and farmer's agitation as a mere way of getting marginal economic benefits.

Instead of a large-scale campaign to seize political power, he directed his followers to create liberated zones by armed struggle. The "secret active groups", the fourth document said, would play a crucial role in organising "revolutionary violence to counter reactionary violence" and fight the police forces.

Mazumdar surmised that it would be impossible for the police to zero in on the workers participating in the secret groups. In the fifth document, he directly attacked the mainstream communists, accusing them of using unarmed people as "cannon fodder" instead of training them in guerrilla warfare. In the remaining three documents he criticised the established left for adhering to the path of parliamentary democracy and participating in the non-Congress coalition governments in some states in 1967.

Cham Mazumdar's call for area-wise liberation armies and eliminating "class enemies" had an adventurous appeal for a section of youths and farm workers. Though the uprising was brutally crushed by the state machinery with active support from the cadres of the mainstream communist parties, Mazumdar's documents survived as pointer to an alternative political route for the future.

More than 35 years after he wrote his first radical document, Mazumdar's idea of revolutionary violence, liberated zones and armed campaign are still being put into practice by the MCC and PWC activists. Despite the heavy toll of lives exacted by this violence, and its threat to parliamentary democracy, we have seen no perceptible urgency anywhere in the political establishment to understand the cause of this warfare and erode an effective response. ♦ (The Times of India)

(Daniel Lak is away on holiday and will return next week.)

from ➡p1

There is peace in western Nepal, a deathly peace.



Clockwise from top, left: young mothers line up for their check-ups at Doti, women recovering in the wards at the district hospital, and patients thronging the health post.

one social worker from Kailali, and adds with a hint of sarcasm in her voice: "No emergency is more urgent than the state of emergency."

(Dr Anuna Uprety is women's health and reproductive rights activist.)

Travel has become difficult and dangerous. There are checkpoints everywhere. There is no food, so you have to carry your own provisions. But there is no guarantee that your food won't be confiscated at a checkpoint. There are unofficial dawn to dusk curfews in every town, "unofficial" because it they aren't announced anywhere, news of their travels by word of mouth. Curfew violators are taken in, even shot. The lodge-owner in Doti warned us to eat and go to bed by 7 PM. Outside there is a deep silence punctuated by a barking dog and the rustle of leaves. There is "peace" here in far-western Nepal, but it is a deathly peace.

And as in all conflicts everywhere, it is the women and children who are most vulnerable. At last year's clinic in Doti, we were welcomed with 2,000 patients. The VDCs had been mobilised to spread the word, and sick women were being encouraged to come. Some walking or being carried for 10 hours. Others came all the way from Dalkh district, carrying their own food.

This time, with the VDC network all but non-existent, word of the camp couldn't get around. And even if it did, the difficulties of travel kept most sick women at home. The logistical difficulties in getting to us, and the lack of communication meant that we were able to treat less than 600, all people from nearby villages. It's not that there weren't more sick people—they were just "in sight" of us. We brought back half our medicine supplies to Kathmandu because we could not dispense them to the sick and needy.

In the government's scheme of things, the security emergency takes precedence over medical emergencies. "We just pray to god that nothing happens to anyone at night when there is a curfew," says

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Former MP missing after 'arrest'

In an appeal to the National Human Rights Commission dated 17 July, the family of Rewang Lama, former MP from Humla, has asked the commission to look into Lama's disappearance. A 14 July news item in *The Kathmandu Post* says that Lama was arrested by the Chinese authorities while in Tibet on suspicion of being associated with Maoist activities, and was handed over to the Royal Nepal Army.

Lama's family and friends don't buy it. They say Lama, who also goes by the name Chakra Bahadur Lama, had returned from Kailash to Humla district headquarters in Simkot by helicopter on 11 July with an Indian tourist group. There, they say, he was apparently asked by local security and government officials to stay for a few days in Simkot before returning to his home in Torpa village. There has been no official news about Lama, and his family has not heard from him since. Lama's son Rinjin has appealed to the commission, human rights organisations, and political parties, asking them to help ensure his father's safety.

A former member of Baburam Bhattarai's Samyukt Jan Morcha, Lama gave up politics in 1994 and was managing an NGO, the Humla Conservation and Development Committee. Before Lama's disappearance he was also preparing to visit Kathmandu to launch his guidebook on Humla, Kailash Mandala: A Pilgrim's Trekking Guide (Bookworm, #101).

Constituency update

The Constituency Delimitation Commission has reduced the number of constituencies in Palpa to two from the previous three, and in Jhapa the number is down to six from seven. The changes, which come into effect in the November mid-term polls, also include an increase in the number of constituencies in Udayapur and Kailali by one each. The Election Area Delimitation Act requires that constituencies be redrawn every ten years to incorporate the changes in population distribution, and the diversity of the population. The present changes are based on the findings of the Census 2001.

Humane image

The Royal Nepal Army headquarters has set up a human rights branch under the Department of the Adjutant General to look into adherence to or violation of the prevailing human rights and humanitarian laws that might occur during military operations, and handle public complaints.

Spinal drive

On 14 July, after driving for two days over 1,200 km from Kathmandu to Dhaka in a VW Beetle, editor of Himal South Asian magazine Kanak Mani Dixit and his team were greeted by 100 disabled men, women and children at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) in Bangladesh. (See pic.) "I have two missions—to raise awareness about spinal injury in Bangladesh and in my country where a lot of people, mostly poor, suffer from it. Second, to tell people that driving from Kathmandu to Dhaka isn't that difficult," Dixit was quoted as saying in Bangladesh's *The Daily Star*.

Dixit drove to Dhaka to raise funds for the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Jorhat. He has already raised Rs 800,000 of the Rs 1.2 million the centre needs for a year. Opened by Edmund Hillary on 7 April, the centre draws on the experience of the 20-year-old CRP in Bangladesh. Dixit survived a serious spinal injury in a 60 m fall in Lamjung in 2000. (See "Standing up to spinal injury," #91.)

Matching donations for HIV

The Save the Children (UK) country office says that for each donation made by an individual Nepali donor to PRERANA, an NGO initiated in 1997 by HIV/AIDS positive people, it will offer a matching donation. This pledge lasts until 25 July and is valid for donations up to Rs 100,000. PRERANA works to create greater awareness about HIV/AIDS, and also provides counselling and support for positive people. Due to financial constraints, PRERANA is faced with closure. Interested donors can contact the organisation at 41292.

PHOTO: ANITA BHAI

COMMENT

India, a nuclear power and satellite manufacturer, is grappling with an armed political campaign that best belongs to another era, and is administering the outcomes of the highly contradictory and backward agrarian society—the continuation of the ultra-left violence in several parts of the country, despite the ban on the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC).

Though violent left-wing politics has spread over a large part of the country and its neighbourhood, successive regimes in Delhi have been reluctant to address the questions of land alienation and rural exploitation, particularly in the tribal belt. Had a similar extremist movement erupted in Delhi's vicinity—say, Haryana or western Uttar Pradesh—the political bosses would have undoubtedly reacted much earlier.

The Maoist movement, fed by rural deprivation, has been significantly different from the violent agitations for Punjab and Assam in the past. It is based neither on religious fundamentalism nor on any sense of regional or linguistic injustice. Sustained by the theory of class struggle and linked to social and economic inequities, the Naxalite movement is unlikely to die down with the ebbing of any momentary madness. So long as feudal exploitation continues and the local administration shares with the affluent landlords in their dispute with the landless poor, the scope for such ultra-left extension will exist. The ongoing bloody confrontation between the Maoists and the authorities in Nepal attests to this.

Against the backdrop of a worsening food crisis and political unrest, a lean communist activist, still recovering from a heart attack in a small town in the Himalayan foothills, came out with a radical thesis in 1965. That man was Cham Mazumdar. He drafted the first of his highly political documents in his Silliguri home on 28 January that year. The document he prepared still has its echoes in every act of daring of the CPI (ML) factions in the tribal belts of Jharkhand, Bihar,

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SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL
The core flaw in Nepali espionage is information overload.
The return of the spooks
The state of emergency may have turned statecraft into an overt act of subterfuge, but it has brought our private eyes under full public scrutiny. Count the column inches newspapers and magazines have devoted to Nepal espionage capabilities in recent months, and you get a clear sense that snooping around is on its way to becoming a promising career option.
Not that nosiness was ever really sneered at in a society with an insatiable appetite for who-did-what-to-whom political prattle. For decades, New Road's prepal bar was the pre-eminent place of course information. True, some of the things that came your way were wild rumour, informed speculation and outright innuendo. But you were bound to get all the news that was fit to print in the two government dailies published right next door. Professional sleuths next door. Confidential source of the evening assemblage, many ready to test their lies dissemination strategy. Agent provocateur used a careful mixture of whispering and bravado to start conversations on sensitive subjects. The transparency of 12 years of democracy has diminished the grapple's popularity. The juicy spoken word still commands greater consideration than the most creatively drafted Home Ministry clarification.
This directly leads us into the core flaw in Nepali espionage: information overload. Local politicians and officials had cautioned the government well in advance that something was afoot in and around Manglen and Sathariya early this year. The security forces went on to suffer heavy blows from the Maoists because the state saw little reason to investigate the sudden increase in suspicious human movements.
The National Investigation Department (NID) and other spy agencies have come under fire for their sporadic tendencies. Much of the criticism is unfair. For one thing, the department has become the principal dumping ground for supporters of the home minister of the day. With that kind of chronic policy, even the most of phenolic innocuous would have little motivation to keep their eyes wide open. Perpetual padding and logical problems forced the government to ban the KISM in 1979. (Which, by the way, is tentatively, the student-leader link.) A decade later, middle-ranking leaders of the people's movement could not only evade arrest but also contact the supreme commander under house arrest for instructions.
The panchas thought all those top comrades in jail were senior functionaries in the Marxist-Leninist hierarchy and tried to instigate them against the King. Days after the fall of the partyless office, Madan Bhandari surfaced in a four-column New Delhi-drafted interview in The Times of India. He was followed by a few of the known names that would go on to adorn his central committee roster.
To be sure, the challenges have grown enormously since the days when rookie spies agent bent hours spending the week in the cards in front of the homes of leading pro-multiparty leaders. Gone are the days when snuffing out Kangresi bombs from bags of vegetables was considered the most hazardous feat.
An NID team travelled to the United States last month to learn better ways of anticipating terrorist attacks. An ambitious endeavour, you might say, considering how American agents failed to figure out why flight-scheduled rain from a particular part of the planet were so lethal about take-off and landing procedures. But there's the first lesson: never forget to connect the dots even when it seems they're not there. There's a reason why intelligence, in the lexicon of espionage, is both a quality and a commodity. ♦

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ECONOMY
BIZ NEWS
NRB directives
The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has issued new directives to govern the operations of 34 co-operatives with permission that have been permitted to do limited banking. The 12 July central bank directives require these institutions to hold on to 10 percent of their capital. Seven percent of the deposits are for capital adequacy, one percent in an account with the central bank and the remaining two percent as total liquid funds in vaults or in current accounts at a commercial bank.
Paid vacation
Nepal Tourism Board and the tourism industry department at the ministry are weeklong to activate a 1998-idea to send government officials on weeklong paid vacations to boost domestic tourism. The proposal has been sent to the Finance Ministry and is likely to be included in the 10th plan. Government officials use examples from India and China to justify the idea, and see it as a way to keep the tourism industry running in bad times. For now, no one is talking about productivity issues, or about the unsustainably long list of public holidays our government employees are already entitled to. Does this mean productivity will go up because civil servants will come back rested and fresh from a vacation in Dhangshunggola?
NBL reforms
The Bank of Scotland of which the ICC Bank is part began work aimed at turning around the Nepal Bank Limited this week. The management consultants will replace the bank's top management and take over the day-to-day functions, while also updating accounts and trying to shore up the ailing bank. The management consultants are required by contract to prepare a detailed action plan within 45 days of beginning work, which will be implemented after it is approved by the central bank. Similar reforms at the Rastriya Banijya Bank remain up in the air following the decision of Deloitte Touche Tomahatsu (DTT) to not take up the job.
ADB/N stats
The Agricultural Development Bank Nepal (ADB/N)—a government-run bank whose books are to be scrutinised by foreign auditors this year—reports profits for two consecutive years. Early this week, its general manager said that profits in 2000/01 totalled about Rs 93 million, slightly higher than the figure for 1999/00. The government owns 93.7 percent of the ADB/N's equity of Rs 1.45 billion. The rest is owned by the Nepal Rastra Bank, co-operatives and individual shareholders. The ADB/N, like the Rastra Bank and the Rastriya Banijya Bank, the two other large banks that involve government, is said to have a backlog of unpaid, politically-motivated loans, poor bookkeeping and excessive government influence in day-to-day operations. The bank's rural branches and outreach projects have also come under Maoist attacks in recent months. ADB/N employs 4,615 people in its 546 offices.
China aid
China has announced it is giving Rs 780 million for three projects in Nepal—the 18 km Rasuwa-Syabrubesi road to the Tibetan border, a hospital for government employees, and a polytechnic institute in Banepa.

Opinion
by RAJENDRA S KHADKA
There is more than meets the eye in Kathmandu these days.
Nothing is what it seems
A t a recent social event, I saw a handsome, elegantly-dressed man stepping out of his Mercedes-Benz car. He looked vaguely familiar, one of those faces one recalls from a momentary flash in TV. When I asked an acquaintance to identify the man, he hesitated in confusion. "You don't recognise him?" He turned out to be a celebrated doctor whom I'd indeed heard about but never met.
I was saying something sincerely appreciative about the doctor when my acquaintance narrowed his eyes and whispered conspiratorially. "He's made tons of money. Enough for three generations." I remembered weakly that I had heard the doctor was a self-made man who'd worked very hard to achieve his material and professional status. I was, for my acquaintance, the doctor's unflattering view was that he transcended his rural childhood into poverty and was now strutting about the nation's capital with too much of everything—wealth, status, and, surely, health.
I used to think that such covetous envy (of that career assassination) was on the decline among the Kathmandu sophisticates, and so was disturbed by my naïveté. During the picturesque Panchayat era, when such career observations were daily fare, especially regarding the mandarins of the Panchayat regime. Nepali society remained caught in the culture of childhood and adolescence, with material/professional
who remarked, "It isn't enough to succeed. Others must fail!"
(Rajendra Khadka is a freelance facilitator in Kathmandu.)

Dissolving local councils is a serious setback...
and will have a hard time coming up with the "counterpart funds" for many people living in the hills. The level of aid inflows may be too high. This leads us to the perennial concern of an unrealistic development budget. As in the past, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) may have to impose the real budget constraint by limiting the "release" of budget. Hence making the budget figures fairly realistic. And we back to business as usual? Not quite. HMG has come up with a sensible and important innovation. This budget specifies a small number of priority projects ("P1" projects), which amount to only about Rs 17 billion. This should give MOF a tool to allocate limited money on important development projects on a priority basis.
Are you satisfied with the numbers, quality and priorities of the budget?
The list of 10 P1 projects is good. One can argue about whether certain projects should be really P1, but my sense is to say and large this is a credible list. I understand that some donors are unhappy that their projects are relegated to P2 or P3. There is also speculation that some ministries deliberately put some donor-assisted project in P2 or P3 lists and their favorite projects in the P1 list, figuring that donors would put pressure on government to fund their P2/P3 projects anyway.
Well, this is a learning process. Ministries may make mistakes. They may play games. But the best response by donors is to respect HMG's decisions. Even if HMG makes some mistakes, unless donors respect its priorities, HMG will never become accountable for its own decisions.
Generally, the World Bank seems to have become very selective about the projects it funds.
I am glad that you have noticed how selective we have become. We want to fund broadly two types of projects. First, projects where, things are happening in the way of reform. Second, we want to fund community-based projects on the belief that empowered communities can make things happen. We hope to be able to fund three or so new projects: a financial sector reform project, to support the reform of RRB and NBL, and a rural water project, which promotes community-based water schemes and a power project, to support reform of NEA, creation of a system to bring private power generators on a competitive basis, and community-based micro hydro schemes. If conditions are right, then a budget support operation.
What about Melanchi? On revenues, foreign aid and loans?
I think the projections are still on the optimistic side. In 2001-02, revenues grew a meagre 3 percent, because of a sharp economic slowdown. The new budget projects revenue growth of 13 percent, which I personally assume a fairly healthy economic turnaround. I hope that what will happen, but I do not think it is wise to assume that. Since HMG will be short of cash in 2002-03
and will have a hard time coming up with the "counterpart funds" for many people living in the hills. The level of aid inflows may be too high. This leads us to the perennial concern of an unrealistic development budget. As in the past, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) may have to impose the real budget constraint by limiting the "release" of budget. Hence making the budget figures fairly realistic. And we back to business as usual? Not quite. HMG has come up with a sensible and important innovation. This budget specifies a small number of priority projects ("P1" projects), which amount to only about Rs 17 billion. This should give MOF a tool to allocate limited money on important development projects on a priority basis.
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What about Melanchi? Why aren't you involved?
Well, those are exactly the questions we have been asking ourselves. I know this is not necessarily a popular position in Kathmandu, where many people view Melanchi as the solution to all their water problems. We believe that important options have not been explored to utilise the water resources available within the valley. First order of business is to fix the distribution system, and start charging prices to reflect the scarcity of water. Only then, one can find out how serious the alleged water shortage is.
It may turn out that a shortage does not exist, at least for many years. Besides, without fixing the distribution system, Melanchi water will have no place to go but into the Bagmati River. Now you may ask why this World Bank is reluctant to fund rehabilitation of the system. You need only to look at the history of the four projects we did try to support over the last two decades to realise that it was money down the Bagmati. The question that begs to be asked before spending about 10 percent of GDP on this project, which benefits arguably the richest 5 percent of the population, is about its necessity and priority relative to the vast needs of the poor who live outside the valley. Some have argued that higher water charges will pay for Melanchi and hence this project does not affect HMG's ability to implement more poverty focused projects. I question that assertion. This project costs over \$400 (Rs 3,000) per valley resident. Do you really think people are ready for that kind of investment? Also, in 2002-03 budget, inclusion of Melanchi as P1 did displace Rs 1.8 billion worth of other priority projects.
How are donors reacting to the governments decision not to extend the terms of local councils?
I think donors are deeply concerned. DDCs and VDCs are meant to represent the interest of the people through local electoral processes. Many donors have supported DDCs and VDCs precisely because they believed that such processes are likely to make them more accountable to the people. Although the process of decentralisation is far from complete or satisfactory, there is evidence it has been changing the governance dynamics locally. The latest development is a serious setback to this process.
How has DTTs in scope delayed the financial sector reform program?
We are exploring with HMG alternative ways to address the problems of RRB (Rastriya Banijya Bank). The introduction of an external management team at NBL (Nepal Bank Limited) is in itself a very important step in reforming the failing commercial banking sector. So, DTT (Deloitte, Touche Tomahatsu) or not, we will be prepared to support HMG.



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The red palace

The history of Lal Darbar is like a fairy tale with legends, rumours of gold, and resident ghosts.

SOPHIA PANDE

Once upon a time there was a Maharaja. His name was Bir Sumsher, and he had three palaces. The marble for his palace was brought from Italy, the mirrors from Belgium, and the crystal for his chandeliers from Murano. One of these palaces was called Lal Darbar because of its red facade, the others were Seto Darbar (The White Palace) and Phoon Darbar (The Palace of the Fountains). Lal Darbar was built in 1890, the days when cars didn't carry men in Kathmandu, but men carried cars, through the hills surrounding the Valley.

Lal Darbar remains a prime example of the decadence of that era, although it presently exists as his and pieces of the Yak & Yeti Hotel. The remains of the palace now enclose a casino on the lower level, the Regency Room on the second floor and the Dynasty Room on the third, top floor. The engineers and architects working on the restoration

project took as their inspiration the original facade of the Lal Darbar and rebuilt it to complement the new functions of the rooms, in addition to adding an extra wing to both sides and restoring the interiors of Bir Sumsher's beloved residence. The Dynasty Room, Bir Sumsher's private bedroom back in the day, is lavish to the extreme. The beautiful lush pink marble was shipped all the way from Italy to Calcutta and transported from the port all the way to Kathmandu by armies of porters. And it doesn't just stop at Italian marble—Bir Sumsher also had a hankering for Belgian mirrors, which are in evidence still, and all of the chandeliers are from Murano. Walk into Bir Sumsher's bedroom and you see what an extreme concentration of riches and indulgent tastes can do: this is where the nation's money went, all of it. That said, the combination of marble, crystal and glass is sheer brilliance, and makes the rooms glow with a kind of grandeur that we will probably never see attempted in our lifetime.

Building somewhat over the top, super-luxurious palaces became



something of a trend after Jung Bahadur returned on his famous trip to England and France in 1850, where he met Queen Victoria, cried copious tears at the opera, and developed a taste for high living. Suddenly there was a spate of palaces all built in the neo-classical style, most with well-proportioned columns ornamenting the elegant white stucco facades housing the maharajas, their wives, mistresses and numerous progeny. Lal Darbar, probably the best example of this kind of thing, is surrounded by its fair share of tall stories and anecdotes. It is said that Bir Sumsher built the palace for his favourite son Indu Sumsher, the offspring of his oldest legal wife. When it was built, Indu Sumsher is believed to have got more than just a palace—on the grounds were three wells, one

the famous 300 Cak. The Yak & Yeti Darbar was where the most important people in Nepal, as well as members of the royal family dined on borst and other exotic Boris concoctions.

Mala Rudrauskia, a waiter who has worked at The Yak & Yeti since its humble restaurant beginnings, and who joined Boris at the Royal Hotel, says that his boss would put a dash of alcohol in everything he cooked and that he made his own port and plum wine. Boris had a kind of flamboyant carrying on the extravagant traditions of the Ranas (and the Romanovs), and he added his own touch to what he deemed the "Kathmandu Baroque" of the old Rana Darbar. The present chandeliers in the Naachghar restaurant were brought from Belgium and installed by Boris, and the magnificently carved Nepali windows in the Chimney restaurant are also a part of Boris's legacy.

And thus were sown the seeds of what is now the Yak & Yeti Hotel. Eventually Boris would withdraw from cooking at the restaurant, and the hotel would continue to grow as a five-star property. The hotel acquired the remainder of the Lal Darbar in the early 1970s, but did not start renovations on it until 1994.

Today, the Yak & Yeti uses the Lal Darbar as a conference room and banquet hall. The thorough restoration is a remarkable job, and remains faithful to the original details and make-up. The restorers who work for the hotel report that the rooms themselves were in surprisingly good condition and only needed a few careful touches of paint in order to be brought back to their original splendour. The chief engineer at the Yak & Yeti, Devraj Bana, credits the original architects of the Lal Darbar with making the job of restoring the rooms much easier. The foundation of the Darbar goes incredibly deep into the ground," he says. Some say it was necessary to be so deep as the Darbar was high. Whether this is actually true or not, the foundation does indeed run very deep, as 15 ft. providing the Darbar with an incredibly strong base. In addition, there is a series of vents running through the foundation aerating it

and protecting the walls of the Darbar from the insidious dampness that would otherwise have wreaked havoc on the walls, which are works of art themselves.

The Yak & Yeti Hotel has annexed the palace to the modern part of the hotel by means of a clever passageway that houses exotic, intricately-worked jewellery and textiles to tempt susceptible tourists, and connects the lobby with the atrium that is in turn connected to the Lal Darbar complex that now houses the Casino and the

The Dynasty Room is still more dizzyingly beautiful. The chandeliers are even more lavish, the ceilings are alive with patterns in gold and other colours, and there are mirrors all around, each crowned with the picture of a wife or mistress. Quite a treat for the eye, though you might come away feeling a little disoriented. The Naachghar is a well-equipped modern theatre with a raised stage and lost of very interesting lighting devices. In Bir Sumsher's day the room was a little more primitive. The

is quite a juxtaposition with the stucco and vaguely baroque décor of the rest of the room.

There's something about this décor that positively encourages slightly over-the-top behaviour. Of course, there's no telling what things these walls and mirrors have seen, and these wedding-cake light fixtures have illuminated, but it seems that the ghosts of indiscretions past have not yet been laid to rest. The people who work in the Regency and Dynasty rooms swear that the very heavy doors

doesn't think too highly of their burglarious comers. As Pashupati Sumsher JB Rana says in his book *Kathmandu: A Living Heritage*, "Whether they conform to one's particular taste or not, the Rana palaces are a part of our cultural heritage." Ignoring or destroying reminders of history are not a way of dealing with it. The Yak & Yeti hotel has found a perfect way to live with its physical surroundings. They have restored their building to its former glory and



Regency and Dynasty rooms. The atrium itself is a graceful structure adorned with portraits of the various Shree Tim Maharajas.

The elevators that take unsuspecting visitors up to the Regency and Dynasty rooms are wonderful glassed-in showpieces. As they ascend you get a view of the atrium, but when the doors open on the first floor there are more treasures. The Regency Room is impressive, with ceiling and chandeliers that turn the ceiling into a garden of light. Step out of the room and into a marble grove—this is the infamous Italian marble, and it is possible to just stand there, rooted to the spot. It almost makes you condone the extravagance that brought it to Kathmandu.

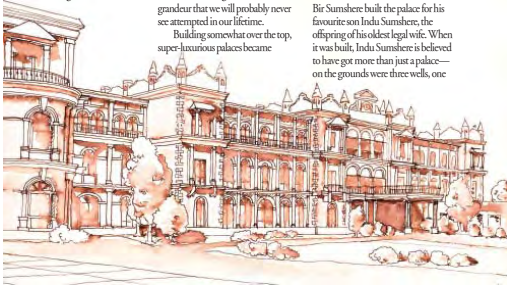
floor was mud, and there was a shallow rectangular pool in the middle where Bir Sumsher could take a dip to cool himself down during the summer as he watched the entertainment. In the evening he would sit at one end while the entertainers stood around the room performing their various dances and song routines. It is easy to imagine Bir Sumsher tuning in his grave when one hears that today the Naachghar hosts day-time discos and other such activities. People who work at the Naachghar swear that they have moments when they see Bir Sumsher glowing down at them from his portrait. One also wonders what he would think about the distinctly odd ceiling mural—a circle depicting all the different signs of the zodiac. It

has this curious propensity for swinging shut, all by themselves, as the last man of the cleaning crew leaves after a function that has taken place there. The Naachghar has its own ghosts. Either that or the crystal chandeliers vibrate of their own accord. The Naachghar stuff tell us that even when everything else is still, and there is nobody in the room above the restaurant, the magnificent chandeliers shake, making tinkling sounds.

It's a shame that such graceful architecture, through no fault of its own, comes to be associated with the excesses of the Rana rule and a time of oppression. Actually, these buildings are worthy of preservation even if one



are using it in a modern context—as a casino, banquet hall and to promote tourism. Projects like this, Babur Mahal Revisited, and the Keshar Mahal Garden ("Garden of dreams", #43), are good markers for the future of Kathmandu's aesthetic and commercial life.



The British Council

Tell a Tale

The British Council Short Story Competition

Topic: Contemporary Nepal

Age Categories
15-18 (US\$00 - 1500 awards)
18-35 (US\$00 - 3000 awards)

Dates
Closing date of entry: 15 August
Winners Announced: 15 October

Language
All entries must be in English

Prizes
Awarded in the top 5 entries in each category
1st Prize: Rs. 35,000
2nd Prize: Rs. 15,000
3rd Prize: Rs. 10,000

Judging Criteria
- Original and creative thought
- Imaginative plot, characters and descriptions
- Use of language
- Related to the topic

Entry Conditions
- Machine edited only
- Stories must not have been published or used in another competition before and must have been written in English not translated from another language
- Winners must agree to the publication of their work but copyright will remain with the writers
- Entries must be typewritten, double spaced on A4 paper using 12 point font, left side and 4 copies must be submitted

Short Story Competition
The British Council
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The right to say 'I do'

OTTAWA — Rights activists celebrated last Friday as a panel of senior judges officially ordered the government of Canada to allow its country's most populous province, to register gay and lesbian marriages. It was the first such decision in Canada and is expected to set a precedent throughout the country. The panel of the Ontario Superior Court, sitting in Toronto, ordered the government to allow gay and lesbian couples from marrying violates the Canadian constitution's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While the court does not have jurisdiction beyond Ontario, the unanimous ruling will likely be taken into account in similar actions across the country. Canada already recognizes some rights to same-sex benefits, but not full legal and lesbian marriages. The court has given the federal government, which has jurisdiction over family law and the definition of marriage, two years to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples. Judge Heather Smith acknowledged that parliament needs time to redeline "marriage" in applicable legislation. (P3)

Zero tolerance? Not quite

CANBERRA — Frantic attempts by the New Zealand government to defuse a politically damaging crisis over the import of genetically modified (GM) corn seed have unraveled, with the conservative opposition party backing calls for an inquiry into the affair. In the book *Seeds of Distrust* by New Zealand investigative journalist Nicky Hager, he cites government documents showing that in November 2004, a 5.6-tonne container of sweet corn seeds imported by Novartis from the United States was contaminated with GE seeds. (In mid-2004, Novartis merged with Agencis to become Syngenta.) New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark initially favoured the removal of the plants and the non-use of the remaining seed in the shipment. But before they could be destroyed, a major lobbying campaign led by the public relations lobbyist for Novartis persuaded the government to back-track on its earlier plan. Hager says:

Stunned by these revelations just two weeks away from the 27 July election, New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark has denied there was any cover-up or that GM contaminated crops were illegally allowed to grow, harvested and used in food products for domestic and export markets. A spokesman for the Minister for Environment Marian Hobbs, told IPS that the government had a "zero tolerance" policy on GM contamination and that while the tests revealed "low" levels of contamination, there were legal considerations that it could not be proven to be GM contamination. "What it comes down to is that officials could not stand up in court and say, 'We have evidence that this seed is contaminated therefore it must be destroyed.'" (P3)

AIDS vaccine?

BARCELONA — An experimental "therapeutic" vaccine against AIDS, produced and tested with some success in Spain, was presented last week at the 14th International AIDS Conference in this northeastern Spanish city. The head of the immunology service at the Gregorio Marañón Hospital in Madrid, Eduardo Fernández Cruz, reported the positive results obtained so far. In Phase II of clinical tests involving 243 patients in 13 hospitals in Spain over three years. The vaccine developed by the US-based Immune Response Corporation would be especially useful in the developing world, as it would be less costly than existing antiretroviral drugs, and would be easier to administer, while it checked the advance of HIV, the AIDS virus, the researcher told participants in the conference. Fernández Cruz explained that Remune was the first "therapeutic" vaccine—in other words, a treatment option designed to boost the immune systems of people already infected with HIV, in combination with antiretroviral drugs. (P3)

Britain gets charitable

LONDON — The British government has decided to increase its aid budget to 0.27 per cent of GNP from the 0.22 per cent of the Chequers (finance minister) Gordon Brown announced the raise in London Monday. It means that aid to combat global poverty will be hiked over the next four years to \$7.7 billion from the current \$5.2 billion a year. The announcement was welcomed by NGOs in Britain, but they said the aid budget is still short of the 0.7 per cent of GNP recommended by the UN. George Gelber, head of public policy with the aid group CAFOD said, "It is particularly significant that the UK increases its aid budget when other rich countries such as Denmark and Ireland are cutting theirs."

The \$2.5 billion increase means that the British government will have substantial new resources to support a wide range of aid projects. NGOs are demanding careful planning of where the additional money is spent, and a renewed focus on front-line services like health and education. BOND, a network of some 260 British NGOs in international development, welcomed the increase. But said Cliff Alum, BOND chair, "Following recent attempts to link aid to other policies, it's impressive that any additional aid resources not be siphoned off and spent on foreign policy, security or anti-immigration policies." (P3)



COMMENT

Modern, Muslim Turkey



Turkey, which lies in both Europe and Asia, might be the mediator between Islam and the west.

Recently, Turkey assumed from the United Nations the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Typically, hardly anyone noticed. Turkey's troubles—be they financial crises or the collapse of the Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit—grab headlines. Its successes and contributions, when reported, get buried in the back pages of the world's newspapers.

But in the world ledged by the terrorist attacks on America last September, the identity, and the choices and alliances that Turkey made in its historical quest to become modern, have acquired greater significance than ever before. Turkey's leadership of the peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan, something highly popular among Turks, highlights more the fact that Turkey is the only Muslim member of NATO. Turkey's straddling of Islam and the west makes the country's domestic and international relations a unique case. To view the country's development as a compelling legend to any idea of an inevitable "dash of civilisations" between Islam and the west.

Turkey remains concerned that America's war against terrorism was quick to appear. In the terrorist attacks against the US, many Turks found vindication of their decade-long effort to end of contamination, there were legal considerations that it could not be proven to be GM contamination. "What it comes down to is that officials could not stand up in court and say, 'We have evidence that this seed is contaminated therefore it must be destroyed.'" (P3)

COMMENT

No final solutions

BERKELEY — In their frustration with the maddening inconclusiveness of the choices that bedevil the nations, politicians from Washington to Jerusalem, New Delhi to Karachi, Paris to Amsterdam are being increasingly driven by forces both within and beyond their control to demand final solutions.

India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee calls for "decisive victory" in the country's half-century argument with Pakistan. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon seeks total destruction of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. And the Islamic call for jihad to clear the place of infidels, even the most democratic, Western Europe finds its progress towards a multicultural society suddenly disrupted by disaffected "lovers" who fear being further marginalised by enterprising immigrants. Most influential of all, President Bush sees the one with an apocalyptic politics that demands an irreversible choice between US and Them. The consequences of this choice are not only very, but the aim and obsession are alike. Out of a world of disconcerting change and blurring boundaries emerges an irrational yearning for certainty and finality.

We should know better. The most massive and monstrous social experiment of the 20th century, fascism and communism, were based on the pernicious premise that there was an end to history, a final solution to chronic social conflicts. And this wasn't always dictated by historical inevitability but by the personal decisions of a power-driven individual who believed in his own right. Tens of millions of corpses later, we emerged from the rubble of their false promises to realise that any such final statement on history is bound to be catastrophic violence to the inane disorder of human evolution.

So it is all the more ominous that in a moment of unbearable uncertainties, politicians and certain factions among their own peoples are again demanding total solutions based on dangerously partial understandings. The opening of the new millennium is marked by the emergence of two competing national ideologies—religious fundamentalism and secularism. In fierce rejection of all other beliefs and cultures, religious fundamentalism is more readily identifiable as a dead-end final solution, whether it takes the form of Islamic, Christian, Jewish or Hindu zealotry.

Corporate capitalism views itself as inherently tolerant, inclusive, flexible, multicultural. But in a post-cold war era dominated by a sole superpower, it has become increasingly arrogant, suffocating independent

wing secular opposition to US policy kept the debate from focusing solely on Islam. At the same time, Turkey has been a two-day "dialogue of civilisations" between the Organisation for Islamic Co-operation and the European Union. Participants from both sides found common cause expressing their doubts about American policies.

Turkey remains concerned that America's war against terrorism was quick to appear. In the terrorist attacks against the US, many Turks found vindication of their decade-long effort to end of contamination, there were legal considerations that it could not be proven to be GM contamination. "What it comes down to is that officials could not stand up in court and say, 'We have evidence that this seed is contaminated therefore it must be destroyed.'" (P3)

Officially, Turkey is concerned that Saddam Hussein's fall could result in the irreparable fracturing of the Iraqi state. Below the surface, long-standing Turkish anxieties about Kurdish nationalism, and how this might threaten Turkey's borders, may be at the root of its anxiety to keep the borders of a newly-shattered

Iraq. But at the end of the day, few Turks doubt that if the US decides to send ground forces into Iraq, Turkey will provide the launching pad, and may even participate.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Turkey's generally positive relations with Israel have been under strain as a result of Israel's "Operation Defensive Shield". In the face of public anger with Israel, Turkey's military relationship with the Jewish state, and recently awarded Israel a lucrative tank modernisation contract.

A May public opinion poll found nearly two-thirds of the public opposed Turkey's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian fighting. But this is mitigated at times by public revision over the Israeli attacks in Israel. A further element that caught the public's eye was the lethal assault in Hebron against an international observer team that included two Turkish officers.

The Turkish military believes that the attack, which killed Major Cengiz Toyuncu, was carried out by Palestinians. Most of Turkey's public outcry to drawing links between Islam and mindless terrorism

(Sali Ozal, professor of international relations at Istanbul Bilgi University, edits the Turkish-language edition of Foreign Policy.)

thought and imagination as effective as any other orthodoxy. One can indeed be brown, black or yellow and still play the game, but one must ultimately embrace the privatisation of the planet.

The challenge of these distressingly uncertain times is to resist final solutions. Not in defence of the hopelessly compromised politics of the "ville cenné"—where abandonment of principle only breeds cynicism and a desperate search for absolute answers—but by embracing a truth that includes both self and other, and that is neither a redemptive, imperfect but indispensable unity. Like it or not, we are bound together in a common fate. Final solutions are not possible, but fundamental refraining of the relationship are essential. And out of them may emerge final settlements balanced and sensible enough to withstand the buffeting of history.

The difference between final solutions and final settlements is fundamental. Any final solution based on the annihilation of the other or denial of legitimate needs will have caused both parties for generations. But a settlement based on meeting the core interests of each party and achieving an equitable balance between their sacrifices and benefits rewards both and all. So it was that Hitler's Final Solution brought ruin to his nation and the world's peoples as effective as any.

Plan produced a durable peace between a democratized Germany and its former enemies. Where George Bush declares a grand reprieve of the triumph over fascism in his self-styled terror war, he reveals an absolutist impulse of his own, as the final solution he pursues is based on a fatally arrogant assumption of exclusive moral rectitude. We would all well to identify ourselves from such delusions and seek instead the balanced final settlements that are the sole basis for an enduring peace. ♦ (P3)

(Mark Sommer, author and internationally syndicated columnist, focuses on new approaches to long-standing global challenges.)

ASIA

A proposed security and emergency bill in Japan brings back unpleasant memories.



SUVEDIRI KAKUCHI IN TOKYO

Japan's ruling coalition government is determined to push through parliament a set of bills aimed at expanding the country's military powers, but opposition parties and activist groups are set to resist.

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The proposed laws would be the first time post-war Japan has attempted to lay the framework for how the nation should defend itself during a security crisis. Critics say that the proposed laws encourage Japan to get entangled with US military operations in Asia, a clear shift from concerns of mere defence of the country as enshrined in the country's Peace Constitution after the Second World War. Debate has also served in a case in the emergency bill that says authorities the premier in an emergency situation to override any local government or public organisation for opposition to nuclear safety. It also calls for a vote on the Diet to adopt the bills not only in the wake of the 11 September attacks, but security concerns such as the December 2000 Japanese Coast

Historical present



Guard shooting of a suspected North Korean spy in the East China Sea. By April, the government had submitted an outline of the proposed bills designed to allow the SDF to cope with an external military attack.

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COMMENT

Re-occupying Palestine

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military raid on July 9 of Al-Quds University and the closure of the offices of the president, San Nuseibeh, is an extreme measure and yet another worrisome indication of the scope and direction of the current Israeli military operation. Nuseibeh is one of the most outspoken moderate among prominent Palestinians, criticising suicide bombings and asking his people to give up their long-standing demand for the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their original homes in Israel.

With tank-enclosed blackads on horse of the right major West Bank urban centres, Israel has reoccupied more Palestinian cities than in the prior military campaign, placing 700,000 citizens under arrest, essentially turning the territories into massive open-air prisons. Nevertheless, "Operation Determined Path", which began on 18 June, is portrayed as a kinder, gentler action than its predecessor, "Operation Defensive Shield".

Unlike the reoccupation in April, this time the Israeli army is here to stay. Sharon is well on the way to obliterating the eight years of Israeli self-rule under the Oslo peace accord. Settlement construction continues apace, with over 35 new settlements built in the last seven months. Sharon's government has resumed its policy of political assassinations, sanctioned a massive military onslaught in Gaza, approved in principle the deportation of families of Palestinian suicide-bombers, and begun construction of a "security fence" that effectively annexes parts of the West Bank to Israel and reinforces the ongoing closure of the Occupied Territories that is crippling the Palestinian economy.

The current reoccupation has been faster than previous efforts. Most fighters from Hamas and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades are either dead, on the run, or among the 1,700 Palestinians who were rounded up during the last raid. The Israeli forces have avoided dramatic standoffs like those at the Church of the Nativity and Arafat's compound. The first thing the Israeli forces found when they entered the city was a large number of Palestinian soldiers, throughout the city, to be sold off the Holy Quarters. While clamping down on journalists, the military also turned away at the airport hundreds of internationalists who have arrived over the last two weeks, coordinated by the International Solidarity Movement, which aims to obstruct and publicise the occupation's efforts.

Among Palestinians throughout the West Bank, the prevailing reaction to the initiation of Operation Determined Path and Bush's accelerating speech was demoralized shock. When the speech was broadcast, the joke among Jewish residents was that the real reason for the raid in Bush's speech was that a first had to be transferred from Hebron. Few could discern the concrete ingredients of the US plan for peace. Even fewer could understand why President Bush believes that free and democratic multi-party elections within the West Bank and Gaza, currently impossible within the context of the reoccupation, would under any circumstances ever produce a more acquiescent Palestinian leadership. It is far more likely that if Palestinians did remove Arafat, it would be a result not only of

One legal expert says this gags the peace and facilitates annexes and seizes without prior warning from judges. The Ma'inichi newspaper has said that the two information bills "weaken the media's watchdog authority". But the bills are annoying more depressed East. Hiroko Mizutani, spokeswoman for the Japanese Consumers' Union, which is leading massive protests against the bills, says, "I was ten and remember the hardship (during military rule during the World War II) vividly. No Japanese want their country to be ruled by a military dictatorship period ever again."

Despite the Peace Constitution, changes have come to the SDF in the last few years. For instance, it has been allowed to participate in peacekeeping activities overseas. In 2000, Japan and the US signed a new security pact that expanded SDF support for the US military. In October, Japan enacted an anti-terrorism bill that allowed the SDF to assist the US military in the war against terrorism.

Kanishu Shigemoto, head of the 340-student Japanese Peace and Environment, says of the draft emergency law: "It is time for Japan to stop following the United States and make clear its role as a responsible nation."

The public uproar has also been over the accompanying bills that demand full cooperation from citizens to ensure the smooth working of the SDF, that legislators should also take and involve neighbours like South Korea and South-east Asian countries, to assure them of Japan's benign intentions. Moreover, Nuseibeh's Green-owned land can be confiscated for SDF activities in the name of protecting citizens. The government can also order a media clampdown and withhold information from journalists.

BY IAN URBINA

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Thailand stays in the game



BANGKOK — Thai officials are cautiously optimistic about the EU decision last week to remove Europe's hefty farm subsidies, saying Thai farmers stand to gain from the move. They are especially relieved by the EU proposal after worrying in the wake of the passage of the US Farm Act in mid-July. While the EU's announcement comes to be 21 percent less than the current \$35.45 billion a year in farm subsidies, the new US law would give \$180 billion in subsidies to American farmers over the next 10 years. "If the EU reduces subsidies to farmers, I would boost the export prices of agriculture products from Thailand to the EU market," Suvarn Vajirathien, deputy commerce minister, said in the English-language daily The Nation Friday.

Thailand has of late been expressing concern, especially about the EU retaining its Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). There is no economic justification for CAP. It is part of the 'Fortress Europe' policy of unfair protectionism that co-exists with EU demands that the developing countries lower barriers in their manufacturing and services sectors," argued an editorial in The Nation last week. The CAP allows European farmers gain from selling their products at prices that do not reflect the true cost, and European-subsidised produce in the world market drives down prices. Similar trends would arise from the US Farm Act, a move that many developing countries are avid about.

Rice is the mainstay of Thailand's agriculture sector. The country is the world's leading rice exporter and shipped some 6.5 million tonnes last year. Over 3.5 million in this country of 63 million people are rice farmers. (P3)

Bureaucrat power

NEW DELHI — Ten days after the power supply in India's capital was handed over to private companies to tackle the serious problem of theft, it is apparent this attempt at privatisation will be very hard. These were 10 trying days and nights for Delhi's 13 million residents. Many of them are beginning to walk around like zombies for lack of sleep in July's sweltering, heat-wave conditions unrivelled by the whirl of even employees of the Delhi Vidut Dab (DVB), the government utility privatised early this month, saying that there is a serious move on to scuttile the privatisation plan. "If any of us simply can't do without the electric lights, it is apparent this attempt at privatisation will be very hard. These were 10 trying days and nights for Delhi's 13 million residents. 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ABOUT TOWN

EVENTS

Michael Hutt speaks on Bhutanese Refugees: Some Reflections on the Past and Present. 19 July, 5:30PM, Bagbikha, Patan Dhoka. Social Science Baha and the Institute for Social and Environmental Transformation. 542544

Presentation skills and public speaking Training provided by UK charity ELD. 20-22 July. Details at eld@wilm.com.uk, www.eld.org.uk 524202

MUSIC

Momos and music The Heartbeaters at Nango Bakery Café starting 19 July, 6:30 PM on Fridays in Teku, Saturdays at the Nango Café and Pub, Darbar Marg, Sundays in Baneswor. 434554

BRINK

Happy Hour at the Splash Bar & Grill 5:30 PM-7:30 PM, buy one get one free. Live band Wednesdays and Fridays with barbeque, Radisson Hotel. 411818

Business lunches, poolside parties, romantic dinners All at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

FOOD

Authentic Thai food Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant. 425510

The La Son Restaurant and Vintotheca Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchow. 535290

Patan Museum Café Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11am–2pm. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271

Improved Singaporean and Malaysian food New dry noodles with wonton soup, better nasi lemak, satay, and more. Sing Ma, the Food Court, Jawalakhel. 520004

Tukche Thakali Kitchen Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village, Darbar Marg.

Cuisine du jour Rs 700, two for one, and free use of pool. Hotel Shangri La. 412999

Regional cuisine at the Fun Café Saturday Brunch with buffet of cuisine from Ireland, Mexico and more. 12 noon-2:30 PM, Rs 600, Radisson Hotel. 411818

Friday Continental BBQ at Dwarika's Hotel 7PM on. Rs500 per person, includes a free beer or soft drink. 479488

Pasta Mania Choose from a variety of pastas for Rs 111 plus tax at lunch and dinner, and 20 percent off bottled wines. La Dolce Vita, Thamel.

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NEPALI WEATHER

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We are now waiting for the next low pressure zone hovering over the north and Bay of Bengal that we see in this satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning. If it doesn't bring substantial rains to Nepal, then this year's monsoon can be officially declared to have failed. Western Nepal, and northwestern India are under severe drought. The rain that has fallen has come down in huge cloudbursts like the one that triggered the landslides in Khotang this week. The approaching monsoon trough is now supported by two distinct lows over the tarai. Expect heavy rains by Monday. Farmers crossed.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

FR Sat Sun Mon Tue

31-21 30-22 30-22 29-21 29-21

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YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU

BOOKWORM

The New Lahures: Foreign Employment and Remittance Economy of Nepal David Seddon, Jagannatha Adhikari, Ganesh Gurung Nepal Institute of Development Studies, Kathmandu, 2001 Rs 250

The authors explore the impact of remittances on rural livelihoods and the national economy. They discuss the structure of access to employment, regional patterns and linkages, and variations between villages. They present analyses and case studies from the western and other hill areas and ask how migration from the tarai is being affected. They end with policy recommendations at the international, national, regional, district and VDC level.

Lives and Work of Nepalese Children: A View from Below Aino Asgaard, Kathmandu, 2002 Rs 250

Asgaard spent two years in Kathmandu working with a small group of Nepali children, many of whom work as domestic help, ragpickers, and porters, and some who are in school. This volume contains testimonies of the children about their lives and dreams, as well as photographs of the children took under the guidance of Asgaard and Nepali photographer Mani Lama.

Pioneer Nepali Students in Japan: A Century Ago! Izumi Bana Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu, 2002 Rs 650

Bana traces the adoption in the early 20th century of Japan as a model of development and growth for Nepal's rulers, who decided to send a certain number of Nepali youth there to study. The students who made the arduous journey were welcomed in Japan. This trilingual volume (English, Nepali, Japanese) contains reproductions of documents pertaining to these students, as well as period photographs.

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

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CITY

ART REVIEW

by SOPHIA PANDE

Nepal's best art

concentrated and intense. Shashi Shah's works, all titled "Terrorism", are almost scary in their intensity. Obviously, they have particular resonance in these times, but even seen out of this context the images of horses loaming at the mouth and trampling on screaming, dismembered heads are enough to disconcert even the most hardened. Shashi Shah has dedicated his whole career to painting horses, and he is a master at manipulating his horses to fit any theme. The result is a startling, thought-provoking set of paintings.

Navindra Rajbhandari's "Naturrescape" are dramatic, expressive depictions of nature. He uses bold, harsh, brushstrokes, and dark colours—predominantly blacks, browns, greens and reds. Peer into his abstracts and you just might see birds sitting on lush dark green pines, and jagged rocks with trees clinging to their sides.

Kiran Manandhar's set of paintings, titled "K I" through "K V", are the highlight of the exhibition. They are instantly identifiable as part of his oeuvre, with their sure, bold, black strokes and vibrant colours. He takes off how he used a model when he started to paint this particular set.

and how, initially, the work encapsulated only the essence of the model. He then used layers of paper, and overlapped his work with different materials in order to make the subject his own. "Hijo samma con thiyi," he says "aaja ma bhaen." ("Until yesterday, the model was the work; today, I made it mine.")

Uttam Nepal's works display a similar depth of thought and perception. Collectively entitled "Feelings", these are lovely, luminous, airy works of art. Abstract and whimsical, they are full of elusive, intangible objects floating around and seeming to wink at you cheekily. Also abstract are Krishna Manandhar's set of paintings called "Rocks".

This is a show worth seeing. It isn't often that the some of the best-known names in Nepali art exhibit their work together in a joint effort to promote contemporary Nepali art. Chances are, you'll go back for a second taste. ♦

(The show, Recent Paintings by Contemporary Nepali Artists, runs until 27 July at the Srijana Art Gallery, Kamalad from 9AM-7PM everyday. 247889)

Girls' goals

Our under-16 girls are off to play competitive football in Norway. Back home, they need a budget, events and an audience.

KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

There's good news for everyone who grew up on Nepali football disgraced with the power struggles between the two factions of the All Nepal Football Association. There's a Nepal team off for the first time to play in Europe, at the 30-year-old Norway Cup. The national under-16 girls' team. And even better news, the team has members from all over the country, and not only Kathmandu. There's only one problem with the capital: the others come from as far away as Rajaul and Kailali.

The girls haven't had much time to prepare for the tournament, which begins 28 July, but they're working hard at the closed camp being run at the ANFA hotel in Sandness. After three rounds of selection following the agreement signed between the Norwegian Embassy in Nepal and the ANFA in April, 16 players were chosen from 70 candidates. The team has been training in Sandness since, practicing for an hour-and-a-half two times a day, no matter what the weather.

The terms of participation in the Norway Cup require that girls' teams be accompanied by a female coach. The only licensed women football coach in Nepal, Lalita Shrestha, was engaged elsewhere, so for the moment the team is working with coach Milan Hada, who has been a coach for seven years. He says the team is a good one, but acknowledges that they aren't yet bank-tested. "There is lack of competition for the girls. You can't guarantee performance without competition," he says. Without regular competitions and matches, there's no avenue for the team to develop their skills, confidence and strategies. "There are five or six players with great potential, and they should have the opportunity to continue with this," says coach Hada.

Unfortunately, it is likely that this under-16 team won't even be a team after the Norway Cup. Hada and Sanjay Mishra, manager of the team, aren't too hopeful, although Mishra tells us that Geeta Rana's Women's Football Committee is trying its best to ensure the team's survival. The major hurdle here is the matter of social acceptance. Nepalis are finding it hard to come to terms with the idea of women playing football. "Society, the way people think, is the biggest enemy of women's football. There are still these traditional ideas about girls staying home and performing chores," says Hada. "The team is almost entirely supported by ANFA right now, but they will definitely need more support from other sports organisations, the media and maybe even individuals," Hada said. The team needs proper budgets for everything from training to housing to food to education.

The girls themselves are over the moon. They are focused, dedicated, and excited, even if they do worry about how tall and strong many of their competitors will be. When we visited them at a practice session last week, they were clearly enjoying themselves thoroughly, although they played with grin concentration. "It's great to be a national player. Everyone dreams of making it. I'm proud that I represent my country all over the world," said 15-year-old Pulakarna Karki, who has been playing on various national-level teams for five years. But the most experienced player on the squad knows only too well how hard it will be to keep her passion alive. "People are still discouraging and disrespectful to players," she drings. Her teammates agree, but say that their love of the game is a suitable enough reason to most naysayers.

The girls met for the first time when they moved into the ANFA hotel, but they've managed to get to know each other. They say they are a very close-knit family now, sharing their sharing their problems and helping each other. And despite the rigorous training, they remain young girls in their early- and mid-teens who like to lounge up after practice. They laugh and tell us about stinging in the shower, playing cards, reading books and swapping family stories. They say they will train hard here, and do their best and learn all they can in Norway. When they return, they're desperately hoping that they can keep playing. ♦

(Kashish Das Shrestha is a staff writer with Wave.)

15

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Irony, Steel and Industriousness

Stop me if you've heard this one before, but we have just received a piece of breaking news that the All-Nepal Association for Satire, Parody and Sarcasm (Electron symbol: 1,000 rupees note) has split into two factions with one accusing the other of not having a sense of humour.

In a more serious vein, the president ousted the incumbent general-secretary and made himself secretary-general of the rump faction, promising equal merit and meritism for all Nepalis by the year 2020. Meanwhile, the ousted incumbent general-secretary is not taking it lying down and has already started providing immediate entertainment by embarking on a nationwide roadshow to perform skits at all Zonal Headquarters of the Kingdom.

For those outside the ZHQs, it doesn't really matter that one bunch of clowns has been replaced by another bunch of clowns, because both are equally good. They should both turn professional. As a result of all this fun and amusement, the whole country is in stitches, which is just as well because, as we all know, a stitch in time saves nine, and, lest we forget, he who laughs last laughs best.

Now that the youth wing of the All-Nepal Association for Satire, Parody and Sarcasm has also followed the adult wing and split, it has become a knotty issue deciding which juveniles will represent the country at the XII International Congress of Under-19 Jokers which is being held in Ouagadougou later this month.

But going by the preamble of the constitution of

the incumbent general-secretary's faction of the former president's bloc of the youth wing which states, and I quote, "The more is always the merrier," it is quite possible that both factions will be represented to present a joint working paper titled "The Importance of Irony and Steel in National Industriousness, Property Alleviation, and Sustainable Human Debasement".

This is a hefty document that charts out our strategy in unleashing the forces of mockery, derision

and scorn in a nationwide campaign so that we will all in the not very unforeseeable future be able to laugh our guts out and, I might add, to our heart's content. In doing so, we will all be able to better survive our ongoing trials and tribulations and collectively emerge from them better human beings.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me now a few more minutes of your indulgence to delve into the vital importance of journalism and journalists in this great endeavour. As we set about on this path of national deconstruction, we need to keep a watchful eye on the lapdog role of the media. We cannot allow the pen to be mightier than the ploughshares that we turn into swords. Since it is all fun and games, there cannot be even a moment of seriousness.

In conclusion, with permission from the Chair, I would like all of you gathered here today to stand up on your seats, lampoon the person standing next to you, and observe a minute's laughter. You may now start chuckling. ♦



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NEPALI SOCIETY

Meera's world

Next time you drive up Kuponole towards Patan, look at some of the classic handicraft shopfronts on either side of the road and you may just see Meera Bhattarai visiting her retailers.

Meera has broken away from the mould of women-headed crafts production for charity, and plunged headlong into the management and marketing style of hard-nosed business, embracing competition and rigorous quality standards, and catering to the latest trends.

Watching Meera function, you'd think she was in the corporate world, and not the founder of the Association of Craft Producers. As executive director, she has been able to balance business with social obligations, developing what she calls a "socially-oriented, commercially viable enterprise".

Meera has come a long way since she first started managing women's skill development at the Nepal Women's Organisation 25 years ago. As a psychology graduate, she has used her academic background and learnt over the years that the only way is to combine charity with entrepreneurship.



"It's helped me understand people's attitudes," says an introspective Meera about the people she meets everyday; small craft producers, mostly low-income women, sophisticated international buyers, businessmen (and they are almost always men) wanting to cash in on the handicraft trade, bureaucrats from the labour department, and most recently—and bruisingly—dogged trade unionists.

Meera says she has inherited her strong sense of altruism from her mother, and

she wanted to help other women like her stand on their own feet with income generation and skills training. "My mother would always feed and clothe people who came to our door, she never turned anyone away," she recalls.

But as Meera learnt over the years, kindness and generosity are not enough. Continuous charity makes people dependent, her idea is to give people fishing nets, not fish. Today, her organisation helps women strike out on their own, develop craft and management skills, self-confidence, and a sense of ownership over their products.

The group helps women develop product ideas and marketing arrangements that allow a sufficient margin to provide not only competitive incomes, but a wide array of fringe benefits not common in Nepal today, including an emergency welfare fund, annual bonuses, and a retirement plan. There is even an "educational allowance benefit program" to help female children go to school. The finished products are displayed at Dhukuti, the ACP's trendy Kuponole outlet. ♦

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