



Disaster unpreparedness

The response to this week's floods show our disaster management is a disaster.

BINOD BHATTARAI

Floods and landslides are common in the Himalaya. What was unusual this time was the lack of information, the degree of unpreparedness, and the inadequacy of relief response.

It took three days for Kathmandu to be alerted to reports of the devastation in adjoining Makwanpur district where more than 100 people were washed away by floods. By Thursday afternoon, the official death toll had crossed 150, including 30 dead or missing in the valley. The figure does not include dozens who died of snake bites, most after being rushed to district hospitals which didn't have venom antivenoms.

"I've seen worse rains and floods but not as many deaths," says environmentalist and broadcaster Bhairab Risal.

There are up to five cloudburst events in the Nepal Himalaya every monsoon season. These relentless and locally concentrated rain (like the 177 mm in 24 hours that fell in Kathmandu Valley on Monday night) cause massive flashfloods, landslides and river blockages. Given how common cloudburst events are, you would expect the government machinery to be geared up for it.

An expert group did recommend in 1996 that the government acquire one C-130 aircraft, eight helicopters, 157 trucks and vehicles, tents, communication equipment, 10 Bailey Bridges and rafts for emergency rescue. That report, like many others, gathers dust in government shelves. Neither the hazard maps nor the specialised rescue teams recommended in 1996 were set up.

This negligence was made worse this time because the government's information network is in a shambles. Maoists have destroyed phone lines in one-third of all districts, the local bodies which used to rush information and coordinate relief cease to exist, and the army and police are pre-occupied with fighting Maoists.

"This was a medium scale flood, something you would expect every 20 years or so," says water expert Dipak Gyawali, the higher casualty figures are a result of encroachment of flood plains and urbanisation. The really worry is: what if we get a once-in-500-years type flood next time round." The government has a Central Disaster Relief Committee (CRDC) and recently set up a curiously named Department of Narcotics Control and Disaster Management at the Home Ministry to



coordinate relief. The group met on Tuesday to take stock of damage, but relief is hampered by a lack of information on the ground situation. "Mitigation and prevention activities work best at the local level and these activities have to be decentralised," says UNDP's Man Bahadur Thapa. But the government seems to be more interested in the political advantages of

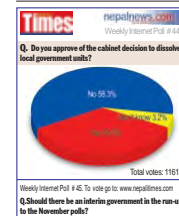
relief after disasters strike. The UN itself has not set a good example: one of the areas inundated this week was the "UN Park" on the Bagmati floodplain in Thapathali. Garbage landfills and new roads along the Bagmati constricted flow, backing up flood waters.

Editorial
Apres nous, le deluge

EXCLUSIVE

Localise, says Court

The Supreme Court Wednesday issued an injunction against the government decision last week to dissolve elected local councils. So far, the government is unmoved by a public outcry, the sharp criticism from opposition parties and donors. Prime Minister Deuba tried to convince donors Tuesday about his political compulsions, but they were reportedly so skeptical that they are drafting another strongly-worded letter to Deuba to reconsider the move. The decision to dismantle VDCs and DDCs, they say, is a serious setback to grassroots democracy and development.



One week in Rolpa

The people of Rolpa desperately need help. Not to fight the Maoists, but to give the Maoists nothing to fight about.

KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA in GHARTIGAUN

I just takes a few hours walk out of the Rolpa district headquarters of Libang to get the first indication that you are entering Mao land. Two young lads approach us and ask where we are headed. They note down our names, refuse to answer questions about who they are. Later, we are told they belong to the Maoists' "Company D". Further on, we run into three more Maoists in civies, they greet us with the *lal salam*.

On the hilltop of Badgaun, there is a festival in progress. There are food stalls, including one selling local "ice cream". People are making sacrifices at the local Shiva temple. The Maoists don't seem to have banned the Hindu festival as they have in other parts of the midwest.

A young Maoist who looks 15, but says he is 18, is on patrol carrying a musket that is taller than him. A certain Comrade Burma steps up and, taking advantage of the crowd that had gathered for the festival, gives a little speech. He is on sick leave recovering from a bullet wound on his lower back, and he tries to justify why the Maoist leadership decided to break

the truce and attack the army in Ghorahi.

"The government refused to agree to our demands for an interim government, constituent assembly and the establishment of a republic," Burma says, gesticulating vigorously with his forefinger. He plays down Maoist casualties, and plays up the defeat of security forces at Gam, Satharia and Mangal on earlier this year.

Later, Burma grants an impromptu interview to three visiting journalists. "I have nothing to lose, I'll fight to the end. Why shouldn't I?" he asks. Then he launches into a tirade full of Maoist jargon from the 1960s.

We reach Ghartigaun late in the evening to be told that a large Maoist group had just left, heading south. This used to be a bustling township six years ago. Today, most shops are closed, it is impossible to bring in supplies and foodstuffs. The police post at Ghartigaun was moved out four years ago. In November the security forces returned, but stayed for only three months. There used to be a local administration office, a forest range post, a depot of the Food Corporation, an agricultural extension office, and a veterinary clinic. All have been destroyed or abandoned.



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APRES NOUS LE DELUGE

This week's rains and floods were a metaphor for the crisis battering this country. While nothing can be done about mother nature, there is plenty that can be done about the moribund.

Officials say that we suffered a natural disaster. But just like everything else in this country, it was a largely man-made disaster. Monsoon cloudbursts and earthquakes have been happening in the Himalaya even before humans started settling in these hills. But rains and quakes don't kill people, buildings and the sites of settlements do.

Natural events mostly kill people when we don't follow traditional wisdom about locating communities, ensuring proper land use and building codes, or don't have adequate disaster preparedness and prompt relief.

Urban sprawl and social inequalities send squatters to live on, and farm, vulnerable flood plains. Badly-designed roads, bridges and embankments exacerbate floods. As long as we seek only engineering solutions that do not treat river basins as drainage systems and obstruct their flow, we will keep having man-made disasters. Let's not pass the buck and blame nature.

This week's floods over central and eastern Nepal were much worse because we have, through our own misjudgement and incompetence, lost the first line of defence in times of calamity: Nepal's efficient and reliable telephone system. More than 20 of our 75 districts have been without phones for most of this year thanks to the revolutionary zeal of our comrades who have blown up telecom towers as part of their effort to build a new Nepal. Without rapid information, there will not be much relief to coordinate. Four days after the deluge, we still do not have an accurate picture of the life and death toll of the disaster to life and property.

Then, it used to be local police posts, elected village councils, district-level officials and Members of Parliament who used to galvanise local relief work, and draw the attention of faraway Kathmandu to rush aid. None of them exist anymore. In many districts there isn't a single unit of local, district or national government left.

So, when a landslide or flashflood strikes, as it did in Khotang two weeks ago, or in Saptari, Chitwan or Makwanpur this week, there is no one to take charge of relief. People are left to fend for themselves the best they can.

Luckily for the impoverished politicians in Kathmandu, most Nepalis have come to expect little from them. The people will get by, like they always have, with community and self-help. But this time they will also see how corrupt and unfeeling officials who couldn't be bothered. People whose bidding most seems to be to live for the minute, who care what happens after we are gone. Madame de Pompadour is supposed to have said it best: "Après moi, le déluge."

POETIC LICENSE

Let this nation live free

by Ram Prasad Gyawali

This address is unbearable, mother, how will I live there is blood all over mother, let me live noisily me, and let my innocence live. This stunner and stunner are unbearable. I can't sleep with all this noise don't hold me so tight, let me breathe I was the world, let my innocence live. I was me powerless, how could I ever harm you who give me life if you didn't want me to live. I can't harm you, let my innocence live. The rivers are thirsty, the harvests hungry the Buddha is in rage, death is still in mourning the animals will still smile, let me smile with them, the tarai will still dance, and so will I my hills will live, let my innocence live. Blood won't quench my thirst, nor will my hunger. I'm now soaked in tears, it's getting unbearable here let the birds soar, my on their wings let this nation live free, let my innocence live.

(Sung in the prachanda chhanda and translated from the Nepali original by Kunda Das.)



ANALYSIS by SHYAM SHRESTHA

What do the Maoists want this time?

The Maoists have shown new political flexibility. The political parties must respond in kind.

The latest statement by Maoist Chairman Prachanda tells us three noteworthy things:
● If the government is willing to sit down and resume talks, the Maoists are also ready to come back to the table anywhere, anytime.
● They also appear willing to consider taking part in elections, provided there are provisions for an interim government, and on mutually agreeable election procedures.
● The Maoists are ready to forge a working partnership with all "pro-people" forces against retrogression for the complete democratisation of the Nepali polity, and to join the political mainstream.

What Prachanda doesn't say clearly in his statement is whether the "agreed election procedures" should be for a constituent assembly, or for parliament. The Maoists themselves must give the authentic and final explanation about what they mean. But I believe that since they have recently declared their readiness to drop the proposal of a constituent assembly for now, they will settle for the government agreeing to an interim government and a referendum.

This is the first time that the Maoists have been so positive on the question of elections under the present regime. This is a sign that Maoist tactics have changed since their plenum in early July. However, this is not the first time the Maoists have hinted that they are willing to put their demand for a constituent assembly on hold. That was the message in a letter to all seven major political parties before the dissolution of parliament. They said that they were willing to come to a common agreement if all parliamentary parties agreed to bring the army under the command of the elected government, in order to make the present bourgeois democracy "fully" democratic. Prachanda's 18 July statement appears to be a continuation of that line of thought.

The Maoists had also suggested a constitutional provision which would be needed to conduct the referendum. This could mean that the Maoists may now consider in a very positive light the insertion of a referendum amendment in the constitution. This is the Swiss and Scandinavian model, where any provision of the constitution can be changed at the will of the people. It could provide a basis for

taking the country forward through a democratic political process. This will make the Nepali people truly sovereign, which the Maoists believe they are not now. It also shows that if other political parties agree to this change and make it their main election platform, and if the government can assure free and fair elections, there may be hope of a peaceful end to the present political crisis.

All these factors would also force the Maoists to reconsider their stated objective of destroying parliament, and instead be forced to look upon that institution in a more constructive light. Before the dissolution of parliament, there was the possibility of dialogue in parliament with all political parties which had been trying to find a way out of this quagmire of violence. But because parliament was hurriedly dissolved (perhaps because the government got wind of such a dialogue) the emerging alliance was pushed to the backburner.

The dissolution of parliament brought the new possibility of elections to the fore, but it also dispensed the emerging alignments between political parties. The most recent Maoist overtures may therefore be motivated by a desire to bring to the fore and reset the process that was sidetracked. The other factor that must have weighed in on the Maoists decision to make the conditional offer for talks could be a change in India's attitude towards them, and the possibility of the American military turning Nepal into a proxy zone.

With elections in November, Nepalis are in a Catch-22 situation. The country would lose by not letting the elections take place, but the likelihood of being able to hold free and fair polls does not exist. The government's presence is nonexistent in more than half the country, making it impossible to set up polling booths. Even if they were established, the possibility of people coming out to vote is slim.

These developments make it necessary for the parliamentary parties to take the recent Maoist proposals seriously. The rebels have committed serious mistakes in the past, but this is an opportunity for peace that politicians of all hues must grab. The conflict can only have a negotiated political solution; there is no military way out of this. Such a

(Shyam Shrestha is the editor of the monthly magazine *Mukhyak*.)

CKL is on the road and will return to this space next week.

NATION

COMMENT

Bahuns and the Nepali state (revisited)

Ten years ago, I was at the Foreign Ministry to request a change on my passport. Restless and beaten by the heat, I waited in queue for the concerned officer to show up. "He should be here any minute," said the guard. He finally appeared, a diminutive bahun with a gaunt, cross face.

A few minutes later, a man carrying a motorcycle helmet came through the door and went straight in. When I alerted helmet-man of the existence of a queue, the officer stared at me and barked, "Ta bhothe, bhadra janne hunchas?" I have no appetite for racial insults, and ten years ago I was a fascist teenager. Even so, I quietly submitted to the officer's authority since I needed to get my work done.

That the bahun community collectively dominates the political and bureaucratic systems is beyond contention. It is in explaining this dominance, however, that optimism seems to vary widely. The anti-establishment revolutionaries point to the prevalence of caste-based, conspiracy-inspired discrimination that has turned the state and its institutions into instruments to further their hold.

The conservative rightists, on the other hand, revert to cultural explanations of the traditional bahun commitment to learning and education that paved a path for access to high office.

The first seeks to explain state-sponsored social injustice, and hence calls for a fight to end it. The latter argues for a morally justifiable position of a meritocracy.

Whatever the origins of the caste system, it was encouraged and enforced by those who benefited most from it. It could hardly be otherwise. So it is not that non-bahuns are or were less inclined towards education, but in a restrictive cultural climate which ascribed one to a certain hierarchical worldview and predetermined life-path, a lower caste interest in education came secondary to requirements of the role in society: soldier, farmer or blacksmith.



Not only was access to education less available to lower caste groups, but education could not provide an escape from caste perimeters. Caste advantages along with the priest-scholar roles in the royal courts allowed bahuns easy access to centres of power. With the formation of a modern state with its requirement for a bureaucracy and election-based political processes and institutions, the educated bahuns had "first-mover" advantage.

Nepotism, ethnic favoritism, and the demands of a new nation provided bahuns many opportunities within the state apparatus. Other ethnic groups did

not enjoy the same caste privileges, educational achievements, monarchical access and intra-ethnic networks to pursue these opportunities.

This view synthesises both the reactionary and conservative positions, and attempts to paint a less political and more accurate picture of bahun encroachment on the Nepali state. It is a product of historical social processes based on natural instincts for self-progression in the state system, explicitly since 1990, contempt for the stifling, corrupt and cold Nepali state has effectively transformed itself into a

Favoritism is rampant, but to bring

It is unfair to blame everything on bahuns, or blame every bahun of wrongdoing.

charges of some conspiratorial state agenda to undermine minorities and bestow privileges exclusively to the bahuns is stretching the truth too far. Such blatant charges seem often to come from conceited minority leaders whose fatal attractions are limited to cashing in on the ethnic card.

Ethnic domination is not restricted to bahuns. The Ranas and the chhetris in the Royal Nepal Army, Newans and Marwaris in businesses, Sherpas in mountaineering, Gurungs in missionary armies are some other well-known cases. The lack of opportunities within the state apparatus is one reason why many non-bahun communities have built their own "economic" niches.

But all ethnic monopolies, large and small, need to be denounced. Every Nepali should be provided a fair chance to participate in all activities, public and private, within the state. But what of communities which have no niches to rely on? And if ethnic monopolies are prevalent, why all the hue and cry against bahuns only? Why are they only being blamed for the sorry state of our country today? After all, it is not the bahuns who have ruled Nepal for the last two-quarter centuries. They have become elected leaders only after 1990.

When a Limbu resident of Panchagarh goes to Phidim to make his citizenship card, he will most likely encounter a bahun bureaucrat who refuses to sign his approval without some "chhya piure kharcho". In his office, a framed, garlanded portrait of the king and queen will bear down on him. The Limbu villager never saw the raja in real life; in his mind he is the impartial, benevolent arbiter of justice.

A non-bahun officer might be equally uncooperative but given bahun preponderance in the state system, explicitly since 1990, contempt for the stifling, corrupt and cold Nepali state has effectively transformed itself into a

contempt for bahuns at large. Bahun vanity his where it hurts the most: the pride and dignity of ethnic minorities.

FOODCHAIN

Viewing Nepali politics from a purely caste perspective, one can argue that the so-called democratic changes of the 1990s were part of a successful bahun exercise to take substantive power from the Rana and Shah rulers and share the spoils. The bahuns effectively succeeded, but the struggle of the lower castes for a level playing field goes on. No matter how nationally-motivated and all-encompassing the aspirations of those who spearheaded the democratic struggle, looking through the ethnic glass it appears as an incomplete democracy.

Something is obviously wrong when bahuns make up over 80 percent of Nepal's political and administrative positions when they only constitute 15 percent of the population. Fair representation from various ethnic groups in the government should be encouraged, not as showcases to get minority votes but to really put minority viewpoints and grievances at the forefront.

At the same time, minorities should refrain from impulsive, inflammatory reaction. It is unfair to blame everything on bahuns, or blame every bahun of wrongdoing. Democracy provides the minorities with an opportunity to organise and have their voices heard without engaging in hateful, malicious rhetoric or violent, disruptive conflict.

At the same time, increased educational campaigns to root out caste prejudices, and reform pressures to reduce state control on peoples' daily lives can lessen prevalent negative perceptions held by bahuns. ♦

(Nura Lama Shrestha, a Ph.D. student, is presently earning a Master's degree in Public Administration at Harvard University.)

LETTERS

DEJA WHO?

That editorial "Act locally" (#103) was spot on. Great job. Here is a list of what faces us hapless Nepalis 12 years later:
1. A partyless Prime Minister
2. A dissolved parliament with supposed caretaker government
3. Pending court case regarding the parliament further aggravating uncertainty
4. A political party that is not a party
5. EC that can't seem to decide which is the real Congress Party (is there such a party anymore?)



5. Two very-power-hungry leaders of Nepal Congress who are keen to try anything under the sun to snatch power.
6. Local government minus the local representatives
7. A national shutdown each time there is a royal visit
8. Heightened corruption of unheard proportions
9. Total indifference of the public in public office
10. Complete exclusion of the poor from the development process
11. Severe hindrance for Nepal to obtain a passport or even citizenship certificate
12. No right to protest
13. Economic growth rate of below 1 percent, population growth rate of 2.5 percent
14. Election date with little scope of elections
15. Government media completely misused daily by the people in power
16. Massive spending on Kathmandu beautification
17. Kathmandu elites oblivious to all the above, and still partying away.

Now, is this déjà vu, or what?
Sashi Subedi, Kalikasthan

- An extreme example of convergent thinking, lack of confidence and vision among political parties and leaders is reflected in the obsession of both factions of the Nepali Congress to keep the party name and symbol. If the Deuba faction was confident of their majority, why could they not come up with a new name and symbol? Ditto for the Gijara faction. This shows that both party and party leaders do not have trust, faith and commitment to win the election on their own. They just want to take on the momentum of BP's name.

Unlike these politicians, the public does not have any particular obsession with the Nepali Congress name or symbol. The political parties also fail to analyse the public mood, which is hope fully looking for a renewed political commitment. A new name, symbol and new spirit would therefore be an advantage. By quarrelling over the old name and symbol, they are exhibiting a serious lack of political horizon, wisdom, and confidence to provide people what they want.

Rajeeb J Satyal, Bansbari

TIME FOR TIMES

The hectic schedule here does not give us much time, but when it comes to news from Nepal then it is a different story. www.nepalitimes.com that we all await. This letter is just to congratulate you on your 100th issue and give you a pat on the back for providing such a reliable, credible (and eagerly awaited) window on Nepal. Once the latest issue is read on the web it makes us want to click again and again. This is the new issue has appeared. We like the combination of serious field reports from Maoist areas, social and development issues.

Kumar Basnet
Sophia University, Japan

BEWARE

We are writing to you to publicise the plight of Nepalis in detention at a refugee centre near Melbourne so that others will not be victims. They are duped and cheated by a human smuggling mafia which promised to take them to Australia for a price of \$8,000 each.

They were given fake French passports in Bangkok and flew to Australia where they, as instructed, destroyed their passports at the airport on arrival and claimed political asylum. They are now at the Maryborough refugee centre and will probably be deported. They have lost everything, and now they have also lost their freedom. Our association has been visiting the Nepalis at the detention centre, but there isn't much we can do except to warn other Nepalis not to fall into a similar trap.

Ben P. Adhikari, Nepali Association of Victoria Melbourne, Australia

MISOGYNY

Thanks to Manjushree Thapa's "Misogyny amid the Intellectuals" (#103). It is touching and at the same time inspiring. She has portrayed a real and clear picture of the attitude, perception and behavior of so-called intellectuals towards women in our society. Sapana Malik's daring and bold expression is very encouraging and inspiring to women like us who have been working in the women

empowerment sector. It is true that the silent, vulnerable and repressive nature of women hinders them to further their success in any kind of field. Manjushree's words struck a chord and expressed the feelings of many Nepali women.
Renuka Gurung, CREPHA, Ekantakuna

● Manjushree Thapa's accusation that some "Congress boys" threatened to disrobe her in public is hard to believe. It is a clear attention-seeking publicity to make her point. It has been done at the cost of the country's image and is quite unbecoming of a person of her intellect.
Name withheld, Kathmandu

CORRECTION

In Bookworm (#103) the text and cover of two books (Lives and Works of Nepalese Children and Pioneer Nepali Students in Japan a Century Ago) were interchanged. Both books are available at Mandala Book Point.

Peace will only return when there is a genuine

from →

The scars of war are all around: gun-toting young Maoists, burnt down government buildings, landroves reduced to ashes, households with only children, young widows, and old people. "We are harassed by both sides. We just listen to whoever is there at the moment," one villager told us with an averted gaze. He looks scared, and whispers about threats, interrogation, beatings by both sides. "You could be arrested on a suspicion, and if you don't have a good explanation once you're taken in, you could be killed."

Ghartigan has the look of no-man's land. There is no security, no marketplace, no electricity, few drinking water taps. The local school still has some classes, but the two teachers there fled after being threatened by Maoists.

We seek shelter in a house. Our host used to run a tea shop until one day the Maoists came and took him away. He was held captive for six months, handcuffed, blindfolded and beaten almost every day. He has three daughters and two sons, the youngest was born 16 days after the rebels had taken him away.

He was finally released after he sold his cattle and all household utensils and paid the Maoists a ransom of Rs 25,000. The family is still paying a Maoist "revolutionary tax" of Rs 50 every month. Other villagers pay the tax in cash or kind. Our host can't afford to pay any more, and is heading off to India to find work the day after our visit.

Another day's walk, and we wait on a house on a hilltop for a



PHOTO COURTESY OF PRACHIN

promised meeting with a local commander. Comrades Sushil and Ashok arrive, accompanied by the head of the village "people's government", Comrade Prakash. They are soft spoken, and give us the partyline. (See interview.)

Another one, calling himself "Sunil", comes in brandishing a pistol and shotgun cartridges. He is in cash or kind. Our host can't afford to pay any more, and is heading off to India to find work the day after our visit.

Another day's walk, and we wait on a house on a hilltop for a

decided to join the Maoists.

The other one, Sushil, chats with us, and tells us about how the police raided his house during Operation Kilo Sierra Two in 1998. He managed to flee, but says they took away his 17-year-old niece and raped her. She joined the Maoists after that.

Sushil says there is a company of female Maoists 500 strong. He tells us stories of the action he has seen, including the Maoist defeat at Khara, Rukum. There is an audio tape of the battle, there is sound of heavy gunfire, shout-

ing, and in the distance the thuds of an approaching helicopter.

The Armed Police Force training camp on the Nepalgunj highway issues us a curfew pass. Without it, we may have been stopped at a security checkpoint, or the Maoists may have suspected that we were army. Armed police tell us of the dangers of Maoist ambushes, and that doesn't lift our confidence level.

At the Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepalgunj, Keshab KC has just been brought in. He was attacked the night before and beaten up



Clockwise from left: Grade Two students, Gaushala and Bandana, at the Krishna Madhyamik Gharti School in Gartigan, which is running even though two teachers have fled. Army checkpoint en route to Liung. A policeman showing us the emergency evacuation procedure from his sentry tower in Liung. Two Maoist teenagers at the Budagang Mela. Comrade Sushil was assigned to be our security detail.

mercilessly by Maoists using their favourite torture method: crushing knee and ankle bones with rocks. KC's crime is that he is a Nepali Congress supporter. He is conscious, but groaning in agony. His arms are also dislocated. There

isn't much they can do for him here, he will be flown to Kathmandu for treatment.

The hospital used to get two patients a day with similar injuries until last year. After the emergency was declared, there are fewer cases

by DANIEL LAK



It's a small world

striker not up to scratch, as the grindingly ordinary British commentator said during the Brazil Germany match. "All that matters is who puns more balls past the goalkeeper." And the best team did that in the end, putting more balls past the best, most entertaining keeper ever to guard a World Cup goal—Brazil beat Oliver Kahn in one of the greatest finals in a generation. It's impossible not to love Brazil, nor to avoid the easy metaphor that the Brazilian melange—races, ethnic groups immigrant and aboriginal cultures—is globalisation in miniature, great at football, bad at economics, but something to admire and emulate wherever there are political forces that urge spurious notions of purity, exclusivity and racism. For a few moments on Sunday, 30 June, we were all Brazilians.

Alas, there's also a growing global distrust of the globe's only superpower, as each week brings more dire examples of American imperial overreach and arrogance. It's sad to make such an observation in a month that saw the United States celebrate their first Independence Day since last September's terrorist outrage. The

newspapers of Europe, Britain and Canada are awash with stories and analysis that express unease and outright disdain for the behaviour of the George W. Bush administration. The blatant partisanship in the Middle East, the horrible bombing of a wedding party in Afghanistan, the outrageous holding-to-hostage of global institutions like the United Nations for narrowly defined national interests, corporate malfeasance on a grand scale... the list can be endless. The best thing one can say is that this administration is an aberration, that the Clinton years show better what America wants from the world, peace in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, freedom spread through expansion of economic opportunity, not coercion. But the creeping feeling that more and more of us are paying a price for the frighteningly parochial politics of America is hard to avoid.

So yes, it's a small world and it's getting smaller. But I can do without the 30-hour voyages, endless queues at security, bad food and jet lag that underline globalisation every time I travel. ♦

effort to redress past wrongs.



Q&A with ASHOK

He introduces himself as Comrade Ashok, and answers our questions in a soft voice. But his is a radical and rigid party line. In any other time and any other place, this could have been a chat with a trekking sardar in a roadside tea shop about the condition of the trails.



Ashok (right) being interviewed

Nepali Times: Your party has killed teachers here. Why?
Ashok: Could be. If we killed him, there must be a reason. He could have been a spy, or been responsible for something that benefitted the enemy.

Why are you attacking schools?

The demands come from higher places, but our basic idea is to do away with the old and make something new on our own. We are running high schools in areas we control.

Do you believe that people all over Nepal will agree with your philosophy?

They must. It is for them. Our philosophy is that we take from the people who have more, and we give back to the people. We will do exactly that. When the Maoist government has taken place, then there is not much they (the government) can do.

Why didn't Maoism work in China?

I really don't know that. Maybe it's because of the difference of class reality.

How do you communicate between units?

It is strong. If we need to send a message to Gartigan from here, anyone is willing to do it for us, even the local villagers. We have already heard you were coming into these areas. Villagers are constantly travelling these routes. If they see new faces they will automatically let us know about it.

Do you have the same kind of organisation in Kathmandu?

There is. They walk around in civil dress. They can't move about as freely, but they go there to do surveys and things like that.

complete road projects.

The blockade of food and consumer goods has affected local people badly. Bread, instant noodles, shoes are all contraband items. There is a severe food shortage right across the districts. More than elsewhere, it is in this heartland of the Maoists' revolution that ordinary Nepalis are trapped between the security forces and the rebels. There is extreme fear about what both will do, and there are enough instances of disappearances and torture for the fear to be real.

Out here in the remote hills of Rolpa, peace has never seemed further away. The villagers are fed up of the Maoists, they are fed up of the police and now they are fed up of the war. Four years after Kilo Sierra Two, the methods are still the same.

As I walked out of Rolpa, my mind raced ahead. Who will bring us out of this? The same people who got us here? What will bring an end to this? When will Rolpa stop being a war zone? Will Nepal stop being a battlefield?

The way out of this is not brute force. Peace can only come when there is development, a genuine effort to right past wrongs, and make up for past neglect. ♦

(A longer version of this article will appear in the August issue of the Nepali magazine Wave, of which Kashish Das Shrestha is staff writer.)

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Standstill

Over a week after the term of the local government bodies expired, their future remains uncertain, what with the Deuba government unwilling to extend their term. The constitution and the Local Government Act allow the government to extend the tenure of local bodies by one year in case elections cannot be held for any reason. Prime Minister Deuba's government wants to appoint all-party political committees to run the local bodies which until their tenure expired were dominated by the UML.

But no one else thinks this is a good idea, especially not the UML and the Election Commission. The UML claims it would be against the constitution and the Local Government Act, and says that it suspects these committees will be used to install Congress cadres in the districts in order to manipulate the parliamentary elections in November. The party has also stated that government appointees and political nominees are not empowered by the people to run local bodies, and that the term of the local bodies should be extended, or local elections should be held. The UML and other political parties say that the government is playing right into the hands of the Maoists, who have been trying to displace locally-elected representatives and establish their own government at the local level. In all, 3,913 VDCs, 75 DDCs, and 58 municipalities are now virtually non-functional.

Once bitten

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba isn't taking chances. Following the breakdown of the third round of talks with the Maoists last year, when the insurgents withdrew from negotiations and resorted to extreme violence, Deuba has been viewing every Maoist move with suspicion. At a recent gathering of political cadres in Birga, he announced that the Maoists would have to lay down their arms and indulge in a little self-criticism before they come to talks. Deuba was sceptical about Maoist supremo Prachanda's recent press release indicating the Maoists' desire for a political solution and the possibility of participating in the November elections. This is another underhanded step to undermine the government, Deuba told listeners. He doesn't believe the Maoists will give up violence willingly, and is concerned about a repeat of last November.

State of Nepal

Finally, some insightful reading on Nepal. *State of Nepal*, a collection of sixteen essays by 14 Nepalis, one Nepali-Indian, and one Indian was released Tuesday. The original, unpublished writings deal with a broad spectrum of issues—education, the economy, gender, ethnicity, democracy, development, the Maoist, water, Indian perceptions of Nepal, the insularity of contemporary Nepali literature, the notion of the Hindu state, the role of the new king, and Nepali's media boom. The book, published by Himal Books, is edited by Karan Kant Dixit, publisher of Himal Khazana, and Shashi Ramachandran, Senior Assistant Editor at *The Times of India*.

A small world

Young Danish students will labour for one day in Denmark and send their earnings to aid in the education of Kamaia children. Eleven school-age Danes visited Kamaia camps last week to meet their Nepali counterparts. Their conclusion: Kamaia children will be enslaved again if they are not provided opportunities for education. The Danish students expect to collect \$700,000, which they will hand over to Backward Society Education, a Nepali NGO working with Kamaiajats that works with the Danish international cooperation agency MS/Nepal.

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Covering up

Who's shielding whom?

The struggle to save democracy is taking the form of identifying who's shielding whom. From the trajectories of the sparks flying around, you would have had the major targets were clear. But the volatility of political alliances has always dictated the battle plan in Nepal. Consider the developments of the last three months. The seven partners of the budding broader democratic alliance were gearing up for their ultimate showdown with their shadowy foes. Their concentration on the cause was so compelling that they barely realised they had ditched a partner for trying to address the Open Theatre mass meeting in the only non-English foreign language Radio Nepal broadcasts in.

The resolve to defeat the demons of dictatorship melted away the moment the House of Representatives was dissolved. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's late-night pre-emptive strike threw the power-sharing formula Nepal Congress president Girja Prasad Koirala had painstakingly worked out with UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal into a tailspin. Nepal's support for Deuba's decision to seek a fresh popular mandate startled some senior comrades who thought this was a quiet time to be dreaming about a UML majority government. The constraints of conformity kept them quiet.

The Nepal-Deuba bonhomie has evaporated with the evocation of



local democracy. The UML chief's office alleges comes nowhere near Koirala's when it comes to sensing conspiracies. But Nepal has grown more suspicious of Deuba's motives after the government snubbed local elected representatives expecting a one-year term extension. With key Deuba lieutenants suggesting that

Koirala and Nepal could be arrested for having maintained links with Maoists leaders, the two men have moved close. Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) president Surya Bahadur Thapa is warning us that even if the November elections were free and fair, the political climate still would not be conducive to resolving the

country's problems. Until a fortnight ago, it looked like Koirala was the only major camp known on seeing the Supreme Court reinstate the lower house. The UML and the RPP have now clashed their Plan B. Before you conclude that this shift might pre-empt a revival of the broader democratic alliance, consider where the main players are coming from. Nepal is compelled to strike a posture that would set him apart from Ram Dev Gautam and Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli. Thapa is disoriented by his desire to serve a third term as party president without having to be the one proposing an amendment to the RPP charter to make that possible. The reason why Koirala sounds so incoherent about the polls is that he

doesn't want to seriously think about the dissolution order? Not if you examine the other elements at play. Court Prachanda starts playing the Koirala's democratic convictions to provoke Deuba—and succeeds. The prime minister, after consistently ruling out a resumption of peace talks, says he won't mind square up to Comrade Deba. The next thing you know, Prachanda sends out feelers that he might be willing to contest elections under an interim government. Then a weekly known to reflect the views of the Koirala dan quote "a reliable security source" as saying Deuba and Khadka have already begun negotiations with a Maoist team including the man Poudel was cultivating as deputy prime minister. So, who's shielding whom? Keep trying. ♦

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Monetary policy

In accordance with the new Nepal Rastra Bank law, the central bank has loosened up monetary policy. This is an extension of its earlier decision to slash the compulsory cash holdings requirements for commercial banks. Effective mid-July, the NRB has allowed commercial banks to lower their Cash Reserve Ratios (CRR) by one percentage point, which it says would reduce the cost of funds and help lower lending rates without affecting the already low interest on deposits. The central bank's decision is expected to free up Rs 2 billion for investment. Last year the bank had taken similar policy measures to lower inter-bank lending rates and refinancing for loans for exports, as well as those dispensed by rural development banks. The NRB had also lowered the CRR in December. The goal of the policy is to help support the government's plan of raising economic growth from 0.8 percent in the last fiscal year to about 4 percent, as announced in the budget. The bank has already drafted two laws governing banking, the Bank and Financial Institutions Act and the Anti-Money Laundering Act. The central bank and the government have also agreed on the overdrafts the government can obtain—they are to be restricted to under five percent of the remittance collected by the government in the previous year. The government would have to convert all overdraft amounts over the permissible levels into treasury bills.

The central bank has also made two other long overdue decisions: calling back its employees assigned to serve as directors in banks and financial institutions under its supervision, and bring desisting from rural development banks.

Supply credit

The Laxmi Bank Ltd., the youngest commercial bank, has launched a new scheme to finance the working capital requirements of small and mid-sized short-term borrowers. The bank says that the Supply Finance seeks to meet the funding gaps that arise after the disbursement of goods until the receipt of payment. The scheme aims to reach out to raw material suppliers, traders and inventory holders. Eligibility for the financing would require presentation of buyer-accepted sales invoices (credit notes), and the loans will be made against the final payments due such borrowers. The bank says this approach to financing helps its customers avoid going through the lengthy procedures to establish a line of credit. Laxmi Bank is the country's 16th commercial bank, and focuses on the trade and retail segments.

Remittance economy

KIRAN NEPAL

It's a good thing that the laws of economics don't always work. If they did, the Nepal economy would have crumbled after the disastrous 2001/02 fiscal year. All major economic activities—tourism, manufacturing, investments and exports—suffered major developments and even agricultural production and imports slacked. Revenue barely covered government spending, and collection has almost come to a trickle. "These are signs of an economy that is becoming bankrupt," says Rajan Kapur, former vice chairman of the National Planning Commission.

But not everyone agrees with Pant, especially people in the urban areas, where consumption patterns have not changed and where real estate transactions, in particular, have continued to rise.

The explanation lies in Nepal's remittance economy. Employment abroad has not only helped lessen the impact of the growing unemployment problem, it also continues to inject much-needed cash into the economy. It has also been propping up foreign exchange reserves, helping the country avoid a major balance of Payments crisis. Some days ago central bank officials said that they estimated that about Rs 70 billion—almost two-thirds of the budget—was coming in as remittances every year.

The central bank's books do not reflect this, however, as much of this money comes in through informal channels. Officially, in 2001/02 about Rs 16 billion came in through private banking channels of which Rs 6.1 billion was sent by Nepal working in India and about Rs 9.9 billion by workers overseas in third countries. When Nepalis working abroad send money back home through legal channels, they use Western Union or Money Gram, or commercial banks. Those figures are far below the central bank allowed the International Money Exchange to transfer money from workers in Malaysia in May. In its first two months of operations the IME brought in \$200,000.

What was your Kathmandu trip all about?

We were in Nepal to firm up our association with Prisma and assess the potential for growth in Nepal.

Does that mean you see a potential for more growth in Nepal's advertising market?

Nepal is exhibiting a strong advertising market. This will not only come from advertising, but also from PR, direct and rural communications—areas Ogilvy India is particularly strong in.

But isn't there a danger that there are already too many players trying to carve out shrinking slices from the same pie?

Actually, we feel the pie is growing, and there are opportunities. The Nepal economy has shown tremendous resilience and the fundamentals for growth are inherent in the system.

How do you think the advertising industry been faring business-wise?

As in most emerging economies the entrepreneur does well. I can only comment on Prisma, which has grown exponentially these last couple of years.

Did you see much indigenous capacity for the creative and production aspects?

This is a very subjective area. Creative standards have some way to go, relative to India, but I believe Nepal has the potential to become an offshore production centre.

Doesn't that mean there may not be enough work domestically within Nepal to justify the entry of large advertising companies such as yours?

I don't think so, we have demonstrated that we are serious about our partnership with Prisma. Other large agencies are either there already or contemplating entry.

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Economic hara-kiri

One move has reversed the most important economic gains of the past decade.

In a land where all economic decisions are fundamentally political ones, the fiscal supposes, plainly, that one ought not be surprised by the cabinet decision to dissolve all local bodies. Despite several calls made by multilateral and bilateral agencies, thinkers and virtually all sane Nepalis, the government went on to commit an act that, apart from making their own cajoled of voters cheat, does not serve any rational purpose. The public good is clearly a dispensable commodity for this partyless political dispensation.

After the Local Self Government Act was enacted, the local bodies had started making a lot of progress in deciding what they wanted and how they wanted to do it. The frustrations of the people at the centre started becoming increasingly evident as these local bodies began to show that they could overcome the donor community of their style of functioning and vision. The emphasis on decentralisation has been getting stronger and everyone is pretty much convinced that for Nepal, empowering local level units can deliver in stable form what a top-heavy centralised planning process envision.

There are more immediate, urgent ramifications of this decision, too. The anti-terrorist funding and allied development packages are now looking a little uncertain—what funding agency would trust a government that has neither an identity, nor any power. Even the interim government supposedly continues with a beleaguered cabinet, and with government appointees at the local body level, one wonders where governance shall come from.

Nepal has all of a sudden, become a lot less interesting to the outside world, aid-wise. The Reel is

This is what powers the economy:

- Of the Nepalis working abroad, 34 percent are in India, 16.3 percent in Saudi Arabia, 6.8 percent in Qatar, South Korea and the United Kingdom, 5.6 percent in the United Arab Emirates, and 1.5 percent in Japan, Malaysia, Germany and the United States.
- 60 percent of these working abroad are between the ages of 26-40, 20 percent over 41, and 16 percent are below 25.
- Nepalis abroad tend to do the same thing—an overwhelming 85 percent are labourers, 16 percent are in the armed services and two percent are in organised government employment.
- Among those working abroad, 49.4 percent earn about Rs 10,000 per month, 20.6 percent earn Rs 10,000-25,000, 12.8 percent earn Rs 25,000-50,000, 8.1 percent earn between Rs 50,000-75,000 and another 8.1 percent earn over Rs 75,000 each month.
- Twenty-one percent send money home through friends and acquaintances, 19 percent through the banks, 17 percent through money order and seven percent through the hands of informal channels. The remaining 16 percent said they sent money using either one or more of these facilities depending on the circumstances.

The good stories that

"Strong potential for growth."

Ranjan Kapur, vice chairman of Ogilvy & Mather, Asia-Pacific was in Kathmandu recently to assess the potential for business here and for consultation with Nepali partners. We caught up with Kapur, who is also executive chairman, Ogilvy & Mather, India and asked him whether he had doubts that there are already too many players sharing the advertising pie and whether the slices are shrinking. Excerpts:

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JANAKI GURUNG

Dim lights, soothing music, an inviting bed, gentle aromas and a smiling attendant. Robed in a comfortable gown, the guest is ushered onto the bed, instructed to lie down and relax. A mixture of pleasant-smelling oils is poured into strong, firm hands that gently knead their way around the knees. They slip down the calves while working the muscles, and gently but firmly, toe-by-toe, joint-by-joint, massage the nerve points on the feet.

You don't have to go to Thailand to get any of this, or to the fancy new Ananda Spa near Rishikesh in the Garhwal Himalaya. There are spas and spa treatments to be had in Nepal, in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

The massage at the Hyatt's Club Oasis is sheer indulgence. Half an hour later, and Rs 850 lighter, the guest heads to the steam bath for 15 minutes before stepping into the jacuzzi. A rejuvenated, glowing person leaves the hotel.

Spas, those old standbys of Dickens and Thackeray novels, were once synonymous with 'taking the waters' as springs with minerals or other curative natural resources. Even today, many spas are based on long-term treatments and often used to recover from stress, long-term illnesses or to receive cures for specific health problems. But that is time-consuming, while also on the rise is the number of people who are simply burnt-out, and just want some pampering. The new generation spas offer luxurious surroundings and exotic treatments, often in connection with a hotel or a resort.

In Nepal, the concept's catching on. An increasing number of hotels are offering facilities designed to entice jet-setting executives and travel-weary tourists. "Most enquiries regarding the Fulbari resort are accompanied by enquiries about the spa, which opened about three years ago," says Ramesh Rawat, a sales official with the Spa Avatar at the Fulbari in Pokhara. "Most of our in-house guests use it, and many people visit from Kathmandu, too." At the Fulbari, Nepal's first international-standard spa, guests



are offered treatments and packages ranging from aromatherapy with exotic Himalayan incenses for the world-weary, to a combination of deep-cleaning facials and specially-tailored massages for avid trekkers just back from a rugged trek around the Annapurna. Aptly named after the Sanskrit word meaning reincarnation, rebirth, renaissance, revival and rejuvenation, the Fulbari Spa Avatar works with guests to ensure they get the best combination of massages, facials, body massages and complementary therapies such as reflexology, ranging from \$20-\$130 for singles and from \$33-\$200 for couples.

The whimsically-named Annapurna Adventure package

includes an aromatic steam bath, followed by a stimulating cleansing and anti-cellulite treatment with a body stimulating polish. Then comes an energising body massage and deep tissue sports massage to ease tired joints and sore muscles. You then fall asleep in the Jacuzzi, and emerge to a deep-cleansing, purifying facial. The cost for four hours: \$122 for a single person, and \$195 for a couple. The Exotic Himalayan Discovery sees a guest spend 15 minutes in the herbal steam room. An aromatic Himalayan Honey Seed Rub is followed by a dip in an aromatic jacuzzi, and a "Himalayan Massage" and rounded off with a facial using Himalayan herbs.

Neater here in the Valley, the Royal Hana Garden on Lazimpat ensures that you don't have to travel to Tanpuri. The restaurant's Japanese-style outdoor tub has a constant flow of warm, calming water, and holds two people at a time. After half-an-hour of soaking in it, the last thing you want to do is leave.

Also available soon will be the spa at the luxurious Le Meridien Gokarna. "In the modern world," explains Samira Wadi, manager of

the Le Meridien Gokarna, "it is difficult to find the time and space to pamper oneself, but there is a growing awareness of the necessity of fitness. Personal wellness, such as a rejuvenating massage aren't only physical pleasures they're also mentally reviving, a recharge of our batteries." Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Resort Spa's USP will be its traditional ayurvedic treatments, adapted for the leisure market. There will be the usual variety of relaxing massages and general fitness and diet development programs, but the resident ayurvedic doctor will also take on ailments such as arthritis, spondylitis, paralysis, obesity, sinusitis, and migraine headaches.

Other options at the Le Meridien include aromatherapy, reflexology, and other pure treatment based on European, Indonesian or Thai traditions. The spa's treatment products will be tested in-house before being used, and there are plans to also start a spa boutique to retail Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Spa-branded products such as massage oils, incenses, aromatic oils and oil burners, bathrobes, towels, soaps, lotions, herbal teas and the like. In

The scent of content

The healing, cleaning, preservative and mood-enhancing properties of natural plant oils have been recognised for over 6,000 years. Stress, pollution, unhealthy diet, hectic, yet sedentary lifestyles—all these factors have adverse effects on our bodies and spirits. The art of aromatherapy harnesses the pure essences of aromatic plants, flowers and resins, to work on the most powerful of the senses—smell and touch—to restore the harmony of body and mind. Essential oils can be used to treat common ailments, and promote good health and emotional well-being.

Essential oils can be burnt, or applied to the body. Before you choose an essential oil for massage purposes, you need to identify a carrier oil. Choosing the appropriate carrier oil adds considerably to the dynamic nature of an aromatherapy massage and can have specific benefits, such as helping to guard against heart disease or inflammatory diseases such as arthritis.

Almond oil is a good source of vitamin D and suitable for all skin types, especially dry or irritated skin.

Avocado oil is easily absorbed into the deep tissues and so is excellent for mature skin. It can help to relieve the dryness and itching of psoriasis and eczema.

Japoba oil is rich in vitamin E, and good for sensitive or oily complexions. It contains bactericidal properties, making it useful for the treatment of acne.

Sesame oil, when made from unroasted seeds, sesame oil is good for skin conditions, and can be used as a sun-screen.

Olive oil is too sticky for massage, but a good addition to a blend for mature or dry skin. There are many essential oils in use, but some are more popular than others.

Geranium The rose-scented geranium has useful properties, including its ability to bring a blend together for a more harmonious scent. Geranium has an antidepressant quality, and is good for nervous tension, exhaustion, and circulatory and skin problems.

Lavender is one of the safest and most versatile of all essential oils. For centuries it has been used as a refreshing fragrance and



as a remedy for stress-related ailments. It is especially helpful for tension headaches and nervous digestive upsets.

Neroli is uplifting and calming.

It is useful during times of anxiety, panic, hysteria, shock and fear. It can help promote self-esteem and is particularly effective for

nervous diarrhoea and other stress-related conditions.

Rose evokes a general sense of pleasure and happiness. It is sedating and anti-inflammatory.

Rose oil has a wide reputation as an aphrodisiac, and where anxiety is a factor, it can be very beneficial.

Sandalwood Probably the oldest perfume in history, sandalwood has been used for over 4,000 years. It has a relaxing, antidepressant effect, and where depression causes sexual problems, sandalwood can be an aphrodisiac.

Ylang-ylang is an intensely sweet essential oil that sedates and eases symptoms of excessive tension, such as insomnia, panic attacks, anxiety and depression.

Henna is a somewhat uncommon Indian oil, often distilled with sandalwood as an attar. It is excellent for devotion, and to open up psychic abilities. The herb itself is used to dye hair and make it stronger.

Saffron helps balance the nervous system, and promotes digestion and quietness of the

mind. It also rejuvenates all tissues of the body.


Get to the point

Much eastern medicine believes that the body runs on a kind of 'vital energy', imbalances in which cause illness. In forms of Indian medicines this is called prana, and in Chinese and Japanese medicine, chi, or qi. This energy is said to run to every part of the blood, and is carried to and from the heart in veins and arteries. The movement of qi can be affected by massaging an acupuncture point on a meridian line, or by inserting an acupuncture needle a few millimetres in, or by burning moxa herbs on the appropriate point. Working on the right spot can free trapped chi, slow it down if it is moving too fast or encourage it into an area that it has been bypassing.

Reflexology works with a

different map that divides the body into 10 vertical zones, starting from the tip of the head, branching out to end in the 10 fingers, with the main branches ending in the toes. According to this system, each part of the body is represented by a reflex point on the foot or the hand. Like acupuncture, the aim of reflexology is to help the body's energy circulate effectively without blockages, energy loss or stagnation. Reflexology has been found useful for stress-related conditions such as allergies, asthma, insomnia, depression, anxiety and migraine; disorders caused by muscle tension such as back pain and fibrosis; and women's conditions such as PMS, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. It is said to have eased the symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), multiple sclerosis and even cancer.

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The boundaries of anti-Semitism

Civilised people are loath to admit that they are anti-semitic, or that they are anti-semitic, or that they are anti-semitic. But they disagree about when these tabs are violated. If they think that blacks make better allies than those who are worse, they are anti-semitic. If they think that this is bias, but what about those who believe that "rich Jews" control, say, the media? Are they merely mislead, or is that "mislead" a moral vice?

Today, drawing the boundaries of anti-Semitism is difficult, because much of the world disapproves of Israeli military crackdown in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip. Whether criticism of Israeli policy is right or wrong, pundits and politicians who speak out on the issue should not be lumped together with those who say that "Hitler should have given the Jews the job."

Yet many Americans think that much of Europe's critique of Israeli policies expresses a zeal that cannot be explained simply by Europeans' present or past colonialist past and thus their sensitivity to an Israeli occupation that looks like annexation. As one commentator put it, Europeans share a collective guilt about the Holocaust that makes them eager to have Israel stamped as an aggressor contemptuous of Palestinian humanity. The Germans, as one pundit puts it, will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz.

But guilt and anger have deeper roots in Europe's image of the Jew. More than most people realise, the Gospel marks recalcitrant Jews—those who refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah—as perpetrators of a crime that lives on in every generation. Just as whites attracted extraordinary sexual powers to black men, early Christians saw Jews' intransigence to treat Jesus as the nucleus of extraordinary forces—including the power to kill deities and control world finance. A cartoon caricature this year in the Italian newspaper *La*

by GEORGE P. FLETCHER

Anti-Semitism nowadays is more subtle than spray-painting swastikas.



The eternal Jew. The stereotypes remain, and they keep popping up.

Stampa captured this latest sentiment perfectly. A group of Israeli soldiers surround a manger with a baby. The caption reads: 'They will kill him again!'

To be sure, at the time of Jesus, Jews constituted a hegemonic majority in Jerusalem. Jews who rejected Jesus were indeed, among the first to be intolerant toward the early Christians. But other hostilities soon took root, and by the fourth century, Christians had more to fear from other Christians than from outsiders. Yet the fear of Jewish powers continued to shape the thinking of the west, both consciously

and unconsciously. In the fall of 2001 the Parisian *Comet* magazine staged a belated production of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. As though it were second nature in French culture, the director presented Shylock's attempt to claim his pound of flesh by recalling the image of a crucifixion. Antonio is stretched out on a rack with ants swarming over him, the Jew Shylock leaning over him with his long, thin fingers. This is apparently the natural way for Christians to think of Jews—reacting in every generation the crime described by Matthew. It is as though a form of original sin entered a

subspecies of humanity descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The belief in both the diabolical power and the permanent goal of the Jews is, to no mind, the essential core of anti-Semitism. It is when this image is invoked in politics that critics cross the line between the constructive and the vicious. A good example of this politicized imagery is a poster distributed by Amnesty International in Switzerland. It displayed a composite picture of an Israeli tank and a soldier taking aim at a defenceless Palestinian. The caption read: 'It is the killing spot. Only Palestinian victims are listed. Under protest, the poster was withdrawn.'

The Catholic Church has abandoned its anti-Jewish teachings, but this does not mean that the crime engendered by Christianity can easily be redefined in premises. In fact, the Christian image of the diabolical Jew feeds the conspiracy theories that infect the way Muslims regard Jews. In the Arab media, Jewish conspiracies constitute the single most popular explanation for everything from the 11 September terrorist attacks to the Clinton Lewinsky affair (the Clinton presidency [Miss Lewinsky being the Jewish spy who infiltrates the White House]).

Isaiah blames their critics for not shedding these irrational beliefs. They find it hard to negotiate peace in a world that approaches them armed with the diabolical, medieval, medical superstition. In contrast to the Muslim world, Europeans pride themselves on being objective. But it is time they come to grips with their inner conflicts about Jewish guilt—and their own. (Project Syndicate)

(George P. Fletcher is Professor of Jurisprudence at Columbia University.)

Sending back 'illegals'

BRUSSELS – The European Union is planning to adopt a common policy on the return of illegal residents to their country of origin by the end of this year. The European Commission (EC), the executive arm of the European Union (EU), is urging member states to harmonise deportation practices towards creating a common policy on asylum and immigration. EU leaders in June endorsed a common immigration policy in principle at a summit in Seville, Spain. Under EC proposals if someone is ordered to leave the territory of one member state, the removal order would also apply in all other member states, Borchardt said. Common standards would lead to mutual recognition of deportation decisions, he said. (IPS)

Crime: none

CANBERRA – "Imprisoned beyond wire indefinitely. Age 6 years. Crime: None," reads one of the advertisements that was launched last week to kick off a new, high-profile campaign against illegal immigrants. The Australian government's hardline policy against asylum seekers. The campaign was launched by Australians for Just Refugee Programmes to enlist new supporters and mobilise support to change government policy on asylum seekers, one that has strained Canberra's ire of many rights activists and the United Nations.

The advertisements, which have a common rallying call for 'A Just Australia', are the latest development in a groundswell against government policy on asylum seekers. Howard Glenn, director of the program, has no illusions that the support for Australia's decade-old policy of detaining asylum seekers will change quickly. Glenn hopes that a community-based campaign in key marginal electorates will gain momentum and diffuse local opposition that were powerfully exploited by Australian Prime Minister John Howard in last year's election campaign. (IPS)

Succour for the dying

UNITED NATIONS – Warning of a major humanitarian crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations appealed last Thursday for immediate food and relief supplies for nearly 13 million people living in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A 'severe food crisis' is developing in a region already struggling to overcome the legacy of conflict and the debilitating effects of HIV/AIDS, said Secretary-General Kofi Annan. "There is still an opportunity to avert and reduce the crisis, but the window is closing rapidly," he warned delegates. Annan appealed to western donors for \$611 million for immediate food and other life-sustaining support. This assistance would meet urgent and non-urgent needs in the six affected states. But African diplomats said they remained sceptical that donor nations would respond to the appeal. (IPS)

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Wanted: a new model

Can Pakistan forge a stable political system that doesn't depend on individuals?

political step backward since the largely toothless pact for parliament and prime minister has been replaced by one for a virtual puppet, somebody like the prime minister of Egypt, Jordan or South Korea. And prior to the announcement of the 10 October election date, Musharraf declared that any person who has twice held the office of prime minister would be barred from seeking a third term for that office. This was specifically aimed at ousting former prime ministers and rivals Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif from the option of contesting.

Likewise, instead of devolution of power to the provinces, centralised control would be the key under Musharraf's political pact. Pakistan's political pact, as governors appointing chief ministers of provinces. By no means does this package bear even a remote resemblance to a federal, parliamentary model. Rather, this is more the 'Indonesian model', certainly not the Turkish model. Under General Suharto, who tried the Indonesia model for 32 years before it collapsed with a popular uprising in 1998, a 'strongman' was president-for-life. The army and America were the prop for the Indonesian model, since the governing ideology was a strict anti-communism with 500,000 Communist Party members and sympathisers killed the cadres in one of the bloodiest political pogroms in the post-World War II period. The army governed directly, influencing virtually

sectors of Indonesian life and society largely through the army. It was the presence of military officers and an intrusive web of intelligence. The parliament was a puppet, somebody like the prime minister of Egypt, Jordan or South Korea. And prior to the announcement of the 10 October election date, Musharraf declared that any person who has twice held the office of prime minister would be barred from seeking a third term for that office. This was specifically aimed at ousting former prime ministers and rivals Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif from the option of contesting.

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What price 'negligence'?

NEW DELHI – Last week saw hunger strikes and a march on the Indian parliament by a group of 400 survivors of the world's worst industrial disaster in Bhopal in 1984, and activists campaigning in the capital to prod the government into bringing to justice Warren Anderson, then boss of Union Carbide, and eight other executives of the US-based company. At least 10,000 people died and another 500,000 were seriously injured in the disaster. Most survivors, who might have lost their entire immediate family to cancer in the 18 years after deadly methyl-isocyanate gas leaked out of storage tanks at Union Carbide's pesticide plant in Bhopal, have not received more than \$500 as financial compensation, despite promises from the Union Carbide management.

The Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA) says that discussions with three key union ministers have led it to believe that the prime minister is keen on accommodating Bhopal victims, even earlier acquired Union Carbide's assets, in using compensation money due the victims for detoxifying the factory site. Now, which has accepted Union Carbide's asbestos related and other liabilities in the United States, has so far refused to accept pending liabilities of Union Carbide in Bhopal. They also say that although charges of culpable homicide against Warren Anderson and several other company executives were filed in 1987, there has been no move to seek their extradition from the United States. Instead, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's main investigating agency, moved court to reduce the charges from culpable homicide to one of negligence, "something akin to a car accident."

The state government in central Madhya Pradesh state, where the disaster occurred, also filed objections to the filing of charges against Warren Anderson when the case came up for hearing last Wednesday. The present move to dilute the case would mean that Anderson cannot be extradited because the present extradition treaty between India and the US covers cases of homicide but not negligence that caused the runaway reaction in the Union Carbide plant. It has now been established by scientists that had the Bhopal plant's refrigeration units not been shut off as an economy measure to save about \$50 per day, the runaway reaction in the storage tanks would have been retarded and perhaps even prevented. Various Indian governments appear to have colluded with Union Carbide in a cover-up and in watering down the original damage suit filed for \$15 billion, activists say. After amending to itself the right to compensate the victims, the Indian government filed a claim for \$3 billion and finally settled for \$470 million.

Nearly a fifth of the 500,000 survivors continue to suffer from a host of maladies, including lung fibrosis, impaired vision, asthma, body pains, loss of appetite and neurological disorders. But experts say the worst may yet to come in the shape of chromosomal aberrations in future generations. (IPS)

No mercy for blasphemers

ISLAMABAD – The Pakistan government's efforts to curtail the misuse of the blasphemy law has been running into trouble. Since 1981, when the law was enacted by former dictator Zia ul Haq, the religious lobby has acted as both the abuser and custodian of the law. Critics say the law carries a maximum punishment of death. The room for abuse has been such that police often quickly arrest alleged blasphemers and keep them in jail for long periods to protect them from outraged Muslims, who have been known to take the law in their own hands. The Independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said that six persons were convicted under the law last year. Of these, three were given death sentences and the others face life imprisonment. Fifty-one new cases were registered under the law last year. Three were against women and the accused were both Muslims and non-Muslims. But often, the accused are not safe even in jail. Youssaf Ali, known as a humanist in many circles, was shot dead by his fellow prisoners in northern Lahore city on 11 June. (IPS)

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Russia's Europeanisation

In less than four years, Russia has undergone an astonishing change. Macroeconomic stabilisation is but the start. A common set of fundamental political values has emerged, and the ideological vestiges of communist economics have been swept away. The achievement of these political conditions near the institutional change can now become more purpose-oriented and consistent. The consolidation of political parties has given Russia's government a stable parliamentary majority for the first time since the post-communist transition began.

But, unlike economic stabilisation, near-universal roads do not apply to institutional reform. While there has been noticeable progress on the legal framework of the strategic plan that the government unveiled in 2000, breakthrough has not been achieved. Many in Russia seek to accelerate the pace of reform by pursuing closer ties with the EU. Just as the global strategic realignment that marked the war against terrorism led to quasi-membership for Russia in NATO, the attraction is mutual. The EU's Common Strategy on Russia referred in 1999 to "the future establishment of an EU-RF free-trade area." By 2001, the EU declared an even more ambitious goal: a Common European Economic Area based on gradual approximation of EU legislation and standards. Romano Prodi's statement last week that Russia was now a fully-fledged "market economy" is a step toward this cooperative notion.

A common economic area with the EU promises to provide fundamental institutional guidelines for Russia's socioeconomic transformation. Russia can now formulate its own long-term development path, with criteria for appraising policy choices. Adopting European standards on Russian conditions can now be viewed as a set of medium-term strategic targets—institutional objectives to be achieved within the next 10–15 years. These targets are increasingly compatible with Russia's social and economic development, as well as its strategic rapprochement with the west. The level of educational attainment, the evolution of the political system and the pressure of GDP make the choice of European standards the most natural and appropriate.

Several caveats are in order. First, the issue of institutional criteria must not be confused with the goal of EU accession. The latter is a political issue, and Russian society is not ready to discuss it. Russian standards developed in Russia and for Russia. Russia should determine its own targets and goals rather than formalise its desire to join

Russia doesn't need to join the EU to create institutions worthy of Europe.

The EU, Second, there should be no formal approximation to EU institutions when the world would Russia's competitive advantages. Reforms of the past few years have already put Russia ahead of the EU in several areas, including tax legislation, fiscal policy (which aims at balanced budgets), and labour rules. Russia's agricultural policy is similarly more efficient than that of the EU.

Third, the legal and technical parameters of the proposed Common European Economic Area remain vague. More work is needed to develop detailed targets for Russia. The European Economic Area (EEA), which incorporates EU countries along with Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. EEA membership implies a common market and substantial progress towards legislative harmonisation with the EU, but does not envisage the establishment of supranational bodies (except for a dispute resolution mechanism).

Adapting the EU's economic criteria should focus on the following areas: • existence of a functioning market economy; • effective competition and open markets; • structural reforms aimed at establishing secure property rights, meaningful bankruptcy legislation, an efficient tax system, and a stable financial sector; • monetary and fiscal policies that promote sustainable growth; • establishment of strong regulatory institutions.

It is unrealistic to believe this will happen any time soon, or that Russia will come close to meeting the EU's Maastricht criteria for macroeconomic performance. Russia's fiscal balance has improved dramatically over the last two years, but the rapid economic growth and moderate currency depreciation that Russia needs to catch up with Europe will keep inflation higher than the Maastricht ceiling.

Higher inflation inevitably means near-term interest rates will also exceed EU limits. The establishment of a Common European Economic Area with Russia means Russia can aim for a position in Europe similar to Norway's. Russia does not need to join the EU to create institutions worthy of Europe. (Project Syndicate)

(Vladimir Maur is director of the Russian Academy of National Economy and co-author of *The Challenge of Revolution*.)

BANGKOK – When the UN special envoy to Burma arrives in that South-East Asian nation early August, Burma watchers and critics will be looking to see what pressure he puts on Rangoon's military junta to end the flagrant attacks on the country's many ethnic groups. Former Malaysian diplomat Razali Ismail's behind-the-scenes nudging is believed to have played a key role, if quiet, role in the release from house arrest of Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in early May. Since October 2000, Razali has been vocal in his support for Burma to end the UN-brokered reconciliation talks between the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), as the Burmese government is known, and Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

Whether he is able to move Myanmar out of the issue of the treatment of ethnic minorities—a sensitive matter for Rangoon—is up in the air. Nevertheless, many say that it is time to push for progress in this area, especially in the light of reports by local and international rights lobbies about the extent of these rights violations and the upcoming meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 29–30 July. "The fate of the ethnic nationalities has not figured in the talks Razali has held," says Aung San, a director at the Network for Democracy and Development, a group made up of exiled Burmese. He says the reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and the local Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF), which cover the armed forces' operations against ethnic groups and minorities to quell dissent and insurgencies, make it difficult for Razali to ignore them. "See Aung urged an 'inclusive approach' to restore democracy, peace and stability in Burma. The democracy and the problems faced by ethnic nationalities have to be addressed together." Strick Pipat, head of Amnesty's Thailand regional office, agrees that Razali's attention is needed: "It is important, because there has been little international attention to these violations."

On Thursday, HRW drew attention to the violent attacks against Burma's Muslim minority. "The government has failed to take effective action to protect Muslims in Burma, imposing restrictions on their movement and freedom of travel both inside the country and abroad, and taken no action to punish those responsible for destroying Muslim homes and mosques," the HRW study declares. In Arakan, a state with a predominant Muslim population, abuse is "omnipresent," including forcing Muslims to convert to Buddhism and to travel on freedom of movement. HRW charges in the report: "Crackdown on Burmese Muslims. Two days before that, Amnesty accused Burma's armed forces, the 'Tatmadaw', of perpetrating attacks and abuse against members of seven other ethnic nationalities in Burma, which was named Myanmar by the military rulers since 1988."

The human rights violations committed by the armed forces against civilians include "extrajudicial executions, torture, forced labour, land

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

♦ **Shunya man ka shabdh aanka haru** Exhibition of paintings by Shashikala Tiwari. NAFA Art Gallery, Bal Mandir, until 12 August.

EVENTS

- ♦ **Monsoon momo mania** Music, dance, and unlimited Japanese-style momos. 3PM-6PM, 27 July. Rs 200, children under 12 Rs 50. Gazabko Cocktail Cafe, Marcopolo Business Hotel, Kamalpokhari. 416432.
- ♦ **Chautari Sangam** 2PM-5:30 PM: HIV/AIDS awareness exhibition, with food festival, outdoor disco, live music from The Heartbreakers. Rs 25, free to children under eight. 6PM-8:30 PM: Poomina and cultural troupe from Bollywood. Tickets Rs 2,000, Rs 1,500, Rs 1,000, Rs 350, for numbered seats. Birendra International Convention Center, 27 July. 415103.
- ♦ **Club at the Hyatt Anniversary** CATH members and spouses invited to the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 27 July, 7:30 PM - 9:30 PM. Entertainment includes DJ, live band, jazz dancers. 491234.
- ♦ **Weekly dialogues on life and living** and books and audiotapes at the Krishnamurti Study Center, Dhyanika, Swayambh. Saturdays 1PM-6PM. 227704.

MUSIC

- ♦ **Prism live** at the Shangi-La Jazz Bar Friday nights starting 8PM. www.hotelshanghila.com. 412999
- ♦ **Music and barbecue** Barbecue, well-stocked bar and Almagul VJ playing a variety of music. 27 July, 5PM, poolside, Nangoo International Club. Members Rs 150 (adult), Rs 75 (child), non-members Rs 200 (adult), Rs 125 (child), includes one beverage. 550861
- ♦ **Momos and music** The Heartbreakers at Nangoo Bakery Café starting 19 July, 6:30 PM on. Fridays in Teku, Saturdays in Banewar, Sundays at the Nangoo Café and Pub, Darbar Marg, 434554
- ♦ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

DRINK

- ♦ **Buy one get one free** at the Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM daily. Wednesdays and Fridays also live band and barbecue. 411818
- ♦ **July Kegane Madness** One free draft beer with every meal, including Mexican specialties at the K-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043
- ♦ **Business lunches, poolside parties, romantic dinners** Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

FOOD

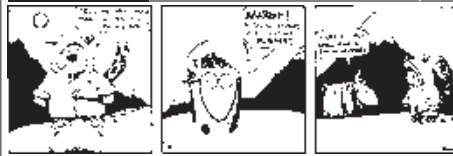
- ♦ **Seafood and wines** from around the world at The Olive Garden, Radisson Hotel every evening. 411818
- ♦ **Masala Bazaar** Extensive Indian buffet, lassu curries and special desserts at the Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu until 31 July. 491234
- ♦ **Beer & Barbecue Special** 1-4 August for lunch or dinner, unlimited beer at The Clubhouse, Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. 451212
- ♦ **Patan Museum Café** Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11AM-2PM. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271
- ♦ **Improved Singaporean and Malaysian food** Sing Ma, the Food Court, between Jawalakhel fire station and St Mary's School. Foodcourt@wlink.com. 520044
- ♦ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with potatoes and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.
- ♦ **Friday Continental BBQ** at Dwarika's Hotel 7PM on. Rs 500 per person, includes a free beer or soft drink. 472491
- ♦ **Pasta Mania** Choose from a variety of pastas for Rs 111 plus tax and lunch and dinner, 20 percent off bottled wines. La Dolce Vita, Thamel.
- ♦ **Fine dining and table top cooking** Dinner at The Chimney, Hotel Yak & Yeti, starting 6:30 PM everyday. 248999

GETAWAYS

- ♦ **Monsoon Madness** Rs 5,000 worth of coupons free with every two-night package for a couple for Rs 5,000 at the Shangi-La Village, Pokhara. Coupons valid at all Shangi-La Hotels. 435714
- ♦ **Trust your sixth sense** Indulge the other five at The Old Inn, Bandipur, the ancient hilltop town near Dumre, Pokhara Highway, Contact Himalayan Encounters, Thamel. 417426.
- ♦ **Special Offer** Buy one \$99 overnight package, get the second night at 50 percent. Valid for single or double occupancy at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- ♦ **Writing Retreat** Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 375280

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

YAK YETI YAK



BOOKWORM

Pioneer Nepal Students in Japan a Century Ago Harendra B Bana Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu, 2002. Rs 500 (hardback), Rs 400 (paperback). 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 trifling volume (English, Nepali, Japanese) contains reproductions of documents pertaining to these students, as well as period photographs.

Rural Development: Principles, Policies and Management Katar Singh Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1986/1999. Rs 440

Part of the core curriculum for Tribhuvan University's MA program in Rural Development, this volume combines economic theory with the practices of rural development, and emphasises the role of human resources. Rural development is viewed as a multidimensional process involving the reorienting of economic and social systems and interactions between biological, technological, economic, institutional and organisational factors.

Management of Social and Natural Resource Conflict in Nepal: Realities and Alternatives Bishnu Raj Upreti Adroit Publishers, Delhi, 2002. Rs 960

This book, based on an analysis of social and natural resource conflicts, examines the causes of conflict such as failure to meet the people's social, political and economic needs due to scarcity of resources, corruption, bad governance, changing economic conditions, etc. In addition to taking a critical look at the fundamental structural causes of conflict, Upreti assesses the performance of the conflict resolution apparatus in Nepal.

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RAMYATA LIMBU

- ♦ "There are so many lights, I don't know which ones to look at."
- ♦ "It took me 30 minutes to get from Maiti Ghar to Bhrikuti Mandap on a Saturday afternoon. All because of this stupid traffic light at Padmoadya."
- ♦ "We don't need red lights in Patan."

These are actual comments this week from angry drivers in Kathmandu. They are provoked by a grand three-year plan to improve intersections in Kathmandu which, by all accounts, has so far been a disaster.

No-go on green

Even the head of the Rs 640 million, Japanese-aided project admits things have been slow. But he says there are resolving problems that will soon be needed.

"It's a new experience for everyone, for pedestrians, for drivers, and for traffic policemen," Durga Prasad Oti, senior divisional engineer at the Department of Roads told us. "It will take some time for people to get used to the new lights. But if they've worked everywhere else in the world, why shouldn't they work in Nepal?"

Indeed. But what if the traffic lights are not synchronised, stay red for too long for the main thoroughfare and remain green for a little-used side street? And why doesn't the Department of Roads simulate them on a computer before making Kathmandu commuters' guinea pigs?

The Traffic Section say the synchronisation work is going on, but the volume of traffic flow, and the dynamics of intersections need live tests. Every since the traffic lights went into trial operation, phobias at the Department of Roads at Bhat Mahal have been ringing off the hook with complaints. Oti has also seen some of the incoherent cartoons in the newspapers, and thinks some of them are quite funny.

The department has launched an aggressive public information campaign with ads in papers and large billboards, like the gory one with a blood-splattered accident victim with the message: "Rano ma gye jan jala, polceman ma gye dughatana ma para".

The new traffic lights were supposed to make Kathmandu traffic more organised. But it has got worse. Why?



The project's main aim is to regulate traffic and reduce congestion by reworking 10 important intersections by March 2003. It includes installation of traffic and street lights, pavement work, reconstruction of walkways, drainage, flag posts and handrails and improving traffic signs.



Oti is confident that traffic will be more disciplined and more streamlined, but it means everyone has to follow the rules. By monitoring traffic flow and pedestrians at different times of the day, technicians at the department have now been able to synchronise the lights.

Operated by solar cells during the day, the lights automatically switch to city power by night and on sunless days. In case of power failure, there's a 30 second warning period during which traffic follows set routes.

The current improvement works involve Kotewar, Tinkune, Kotewar Ring Road, Naya Buleswar, Singha Darbar, Kalanki Chowk, Keshar Mahal and Ram Shah Path-Dilli Bazar. Delays have been caused by property compensation, coordination with other departments to relocate electricity pylons, trolley bus lines and drainage. If all goes well, more aid is forthcoming, the next intersections to get revamps are: Chhabili, Gushala, the Maharajung Ring Road, and Purnao Banewar. ♦

ART REVIEW

by SOPHIA PANDE

Expressions of a grieving mind



Shashikala Tiwari's stunning current show, entitled *Shunya man ka shabdh aanka haru* (The twined eyes of a grieving mind, is a tribute to Their Late Majesties. The 13 paintings are an intense portal that evokes the viewer's feelings back into time to relive the experience waiting up to the news of 1 June, 2001.

Each painting is like the feeling out of a nightmare, an evocation of the pain the artist feels she has forcibly channelled out from her self and onto the canvas. They have an immediacy that brings on goosebumps. The paintings are accompanied by little explanatory sentences in Nepali, and even these are like miniature poems, giving the paintings even more power.

Tiwari isn't selling the paintings—she wants them to be on display for as long as possible. The message, she told us, is from the late King Birendra himself, who once told her that it is one's duty to love one's country, and to do what you do best in order to help it. That long-ago message is what kept her sane, says Tiwari, and inspired her to paint through her misery. ♦

(Shunya man ka shabdh aanka haru is on at the NAFA Art Gallery, Bal Mandir until 12 August.)

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

That was what is called a monsoon trough: 177 mm of rain in 24 hours in Kathmandu Valley, a 30-year record. An average of five such troughs hit the Himalaya during an average monsoon, but even by our standards this was a major depression. Dammed by an impregnable high pressure zone over north India, the monsoon front was forced to dump all its moisture over central and western Nepal. By Wednesday afternoon, as we see in this satellite sequence, the trough has been blown back into northeastern India by westerlies, and western Nepal remains largely dry. The monsoon is still moderately active over the Bay of Bengal, so expect more night rain over the weekend and into next week over Kathmandu.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

| Fr | Sa | Su | Mon | Tue |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 26.20 | 27.30 | 28.24 | 28.24 | 27.21 |



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Do we have the guts?

Before I forget, it is my duty as a responsible citizen to warn all minors that, as per a statutory requirement of the Bored of Censors, this week's column is rated 'R' and only readers who can prove with a photo ID that they are 18 or above are allowed to proceed (with caution) beyond this point. You two hiding there under the table, run along home to Mama now. Management would also like to warn clients who are having breakfast while reading this to stop right there, and remain in your bunkers until the

laughter. Really. What is so funny?

After all, it is a perfectly natural thing to do. Like all organisms on this planet (we don't yet know whether organisms on other planets have alimentary canals that are in working order, but the search is on) human beings have to eat. What they eat has to be digested by a series of tubes known collectively as the gastrointestinal tract, and eventually expelled through a trap door known by its Latin name, *cloaca maxima*. I fail to see the humour in that.

As I was saying, the bottom line here is: what happens to food after I masticate it is my business. And you should not be poking your noses into it. (Toilet etiquette Rule # 1: Never poke your nose into others on matters that you don't want others to poke unto you.) Now that we have that cleared up, I can now present this photograph sent by a hand-pressed reader from Pokhara of the outside of a public lloo at the lakefront. Many of you may not have the guts to look at the categories on offer, and I have taken the liberty of presenting below an expurgated list:

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- ★ Mugging Belly With Dry Cleaning Only: Rs 15
- ★ Extra-long Mugging Belly: Rs 10
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- ★ Short-term Deposit: Rs 5
- ★ Long, But Fruitless, Squat: Rs 1 (Reading material will be charged extra.)



all-clear is sounded. Management will not be responsible for any untoward incident in the vicinity of the duodenum.

OK, now that we are only adults here, let us get to the topic of the week. It is still a mystery why human beings find the activities of each others' digestive tracts so funny. Let's take a moment or two here to analyse why, for instance, it is that we find someone shooting the breeze while lifting a heavy object an event of such vast amusement that we can't help regurgitating the incident in a conspiratorial tone with all its gory details (even orally imitating the exact tenor and decibel level of the report) to a circle of close friends and relatives who then break into paroxysms of scatological

laughter. Really. What is so funny?

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