



BINOD BHATTARAI

Exactly ten years ago this week, flight TG 311 from Bangkok was making its final approach into Kathmandu airport. The Airbus A310 dipped into the monsoon clouds but, because the jet was too high,

On a wing and a prayer

the Thai pilots decided to go around for another approach. It was 12.30 PM, 31 July 1992, and it was the last anyone heard from the plane.

Despite an intensive aerial and land search along the approach path, the wreckage was only found four days later, 40 km north of Kathmandu. The plane had slammed into a ridge below Langtang at 500 kmph at an altitude of 3,500 m. An inquiry showed that the pilots, distracted by a flap problem, had made a 360 degree turn instead of a U-turn and headed due north in zero visibility. Ninety-nine passengers and 14 crew were killed; no piece of the aircraft larger than one metre was found.

Two months later, on 28 September, flight PK 268 from Karachi was making the same approach in identical weather conditions. This was also an Airbus A310, and contact was lost soon after the Pakistani pilots reported ten miles from touchdown. The wreckage was found a few hours later just below the ridge line at Bhauru Danda. Of the 155 passengers and 12 crew, none survived.

The two crashes, beamed worldwide on television, made Kathmandu infamous as 'the most dangerous airport in the world'—a reputation that the airport has found difficult to exorcise even after a decade. It was a stupendous bad luck that, after 25 years of safety

Ten years after two of the worst air disasters in Nepali aviation history, new navids have improved safety. But there is a long way to go.

handling jet aircraft, two major disasters happened in such quick succession.

An approach radar at the airport would have prevented both crashes: controllers could have warned the Thai pilots that they were dangerously off course and the Pakistani jet that it was in a no-no zone below the descent profile. The Japanese government helped install a radar tracking system, and in the past five years air traffic controllers say that at least two potential crashes have been averted because pilots were warned in time.

"We have much better equipment than we did ten years ago," says Binod Gautam, chief of the Aviation Safety Department at the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN). "But there is a need for more navids in Kathmandu and other airports."

While Kathmandu airport now has state-of-the-art radar and guidance systems, most other airports in Nepal have minimal or no navigational aids. And this is one of the most difficult flying terrains in the world. Nearly all crashes in Nepal in the past ten years have been near aviation experts describe as "controlled flight into terrain" (CFIT)—

an airworthy aircraft under control of crew flies into a mountain in poor visibility.

"You better know exactly where you are while flying in Nepal in the monsoon," says one veteran Royal Nepal Airlines captain. "This terrain doesn't forgive mistakes." There were painful reminders of this in two crashes in the past two months: a Skyline Twin Otter in Suddhet on 17 July and the Asian Airlines M6-17 helicopter which was lost on a flight from Makalu Base Camp to Lukla on 31 May and has still not been found.

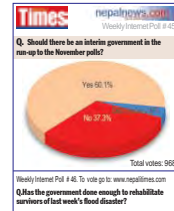
That chopper, ferrying 12 mountain-climbing staff and Russian pilot, did not have the standard Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT), and this is one reason it can't be found. CAAN allows Russian helicopters to fly without the transmitters because installation would require major design changes.

A Royal Nepal Twin Otter that crashed into mountains in cloud while approaching Dhangadhi in July 2000 did not have a Global Positioning System (GPS) which may have helped avoid the crash.

SEE → P6

EXCLUSIVE Bank-rupture

We are back to square one on banking reforms. A month after Deloitte Touche Tomahatsus abandoned its management contract to run Rastriya Banijya Bank, its executive chairman, Ganesh P Adhikari, suddenly resigned. The bank has not made a major investment in one year, and holds Rs 40 billion worth of deposits. The captain has jumped ship, and top guns at the central bank and the Planning Commission seem to be too busy angling for party tickets to rescue the bank. Consultants arrived this week to see what can be done with the other sick bank, Nepal Bank Limited. The World Bank and DTD have made the selection of a management consultant conditional to funding the reforms.



Dolakha's eerie quiet

Past Maoist attacks have hurt ordinary farmers, but the government isn't much help either.

KUNDA DIXIT IN DOLAKHA

With another Maoist bandh looming, the people of Dolakha are bracing themselves for another wave of destruction. The security forces are nowhere in sight, so there is a wait-and-watch attitude for a repeat of the mayhem in April. Signs of the vandalism and rampage in the run-up to the last five-day bandh in April can still be seen along the Lamonsangu-Jiri Highway: the NEA administrative office in Chankol and the Roads Department complex in Thulo Pokhar burnt to cinders, the charred hulks of the tipper trucks and dozers at the Khandhunga magnesite mine, an electricity substation near 24 km destroyed and burnt, horticultural farms in Maini Pokhar and Bhaj torches, a potato seedling farm in Mude destroyed, the Danda Pokhar telecom tower blasted, and even a Pepsi delivery van set on fire.

"Till May, there were a lot of people around here who gave the Maoists the benefit of doubt," says one Dolakha villager who did not want to be named. "But after they attacked the seedling farms it was a turning point, we thought they are not for the people."

During those two weeks in May, the Maoist leadership appears to have given local cadre open-ended instructions to select targets at will to destroy infrastructure and government property, in a coordinated nationwide rampage, telecom towers, hydropower plants including Jimruk and Andhikhola, bridges, government buildings and vehicles, and village council buildings were destroyed. Stung subsequently by rising public anger, the Maoist leadership reportedly reversed the instructions. But for people in many areas of the country, as in Dolakha, that came too late.

Tens of thousands of villagers along the Jiri highway depend on fruits, vegetables and potatoes for income, and the government farms were an important source of seedlings and other extension support for their cash crops. "Many of us are not rich," said one farmer. "Selling potatoes was our only source of income." The government farms are now producing seedlings and hybrids again, but business is slow to pick up and much of the vegetable is rotting in the fields. Dairy farmers have also been hit because Maoists set fire to two milk collection tankers in Panchkhal in April just because the vehicles had white number plates.

There is an eerie absence of government everywhere. The VDC buildings that



Ruins of horticulture farm destroyed by Maoists.

have not yet been destroyed are padlocked. VDC chairmen no longer hold office, but the villagers still come to them with problems. It is rare to see government vehicles plying the highway and, except for the army platoon guarding the Khimti hydro-electric plant and the company in Chankol, there are no soldiers to be seen.

The police left in April when the Danda Pokhar Armed Police Force training centre was abandoned because it was deemed to be too vulnerable to attack. The Maoists came in one night after they'd left, and blasted the houses anyway.

But the Maoists, who used to walk around openly carrying muskets and 303s, have gone back into hiding, leaving the army's undercover agents who reportedly patrol the trails. The army has raided Maoist training camps on the highlands of Salung in pincer attacks from Ramechhap, Jiri and Barabise. Dozens of mid-level Maoist section and platoon commanders have either been captured or killed in the past three months, according to sources in Kathmandu.

Also, in early July, commander for Dolakha and Sindhupalchok and Maoist central committee member Riti Bahadur Khadka, was killed in an encounter in Parsa near the Indian border. Khadka was a charismatic leader with a loyal following. Legends about him spread after his famous escape while under police custody from Bir Hospital in 1997. His killing is expected to affect Maoist actions in Dolakha.

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TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

Damned if we do damned if we don't. Whether or not the Supreme Court reinstates parliament on 6 August, it looks like we are headed into more severe turbulence. More confusion, more chaos, more uncertainty. Was this the intention all along?

Reinstating parliament would set another dangerous precedent of political parties settling scores in the courts and not through the people's mandate. Nothing wrong with that in a country with rule of law, of course, but you are forced to ask who is running the country: politicians or lawyers? Restoring parliament would set off a new round of the horse-trading that we have come to expect from the country's representatives. Political permutations will be needed to reach the magic number 58, and whoever is at the helm will control government machinery at election time.

Not reinstating parliament will mean a high-risk election scenario. The government's conviction that it can hold parliamentary elections, but that it is too dangerous to conduct local polls is so hypocritical and disingenuous that it does not merit any more comment. Every eyewitness report we have carried from the districts in the past month points to the perils of holding general elections in the present political imbroglio. Democracy abhors a vacuum, and this vast vacuum is also deleterious to development. Together with the insurgency, these decisions have pushed us back 30 years.

We have no one else to blame for this but the same old seigniorial leaders, rival power-brokers, and their hangers-on in the ruling party who have made the nation and the people pay for their selfishness. What a ghastly betrayal of the people's trust.

Everyone is hunkering down for expected showdowns in the weeks ahead. The Election Commissioner says he is sick of the Congress factions breathing down his neck, and is probably going to rule on who gets the party symbol before the Supreme Court verdict expected on Tuesday. Then there is the extension of the state of emergency due on 28 August. Technically the prime minister and the king together can check the extension, but the prime minister also wants elections. And he can't have both. Like it or not, the Maestros hold the trump cards. Their campaign of violence may be backfiring, they may be trying to sink back to the negotiating table, but it is the threat of violence that has given them the clout to dictate terms. The bait they are dangling this time is the prospect of talks. The Rs 5 million dead-on-alive ransoms on the heads of underground Maoist leaders is not preventing various organs of state from having furtive meetings through back channels.

The comrades appear to have decided at their plenium in early July that their earlier strategy of a series of military victories to propel them to capture state power by November was unrealistic. Now they have settled for the political weapon of a bandh on 16 August, and a week of mayhem preceding it to put pressure on the government to resume dialogue.

But having breached everyone's trust by unilaterally breaking the truce last year, they will have to do much more than issuing conciliatory pronouncements for the people and the government to take the secret seriously. Depending on how the terrorist-backed bargaining is going, we will see the repercussions on above-the-ground politics.

POETIC LICENSE

Who, what, where, when?

By Chhatyarnaghar

Our democracy is multi-party, but our prime minister is his party's.

We have a parliamentary system, but not one parliamentary.

The people are sovereign, but they have no right. They yield to those who have the might.

For twelve years they plundered, now they tell us to keep. Drafting more rules to keep the deceit.

Armed to the teeth, they extend the emergency, even the Buddha now senses the urgency. Where does leave you, where does that leave us? If this is a democracy, then why all the fuss?

(Translated from the Nepali original by Hani Khushnigara)

STATE OF THE STATE

The beach

PATTAYA—If ever there was a city primarily dedicated to pleasure, then this is it. Two hours on an elevated highway from Bangkok, on weekends the city is dogged with air-conditioned coaches and fancy cars carrying those who yearn to relax down to the beaches and bars of Pattaya.

The delights of Pattaya were first sampled by outsiders 40 years ago when US naval workers arrived here to prospect for natural gas in the Gulf of Thailand. Then came the Vietnam War and Pattaya became the fabled port nearest to the US Airbase at Udon. Pattaya was soon on its way to being transformed from a coconut-fringed fishing village to the world's R&R destination.

Pattaya has lost much of its luster to the more up-market (and less deadly) tourist watering holes such as Phuket and Koh Samui. But the nearest to Bangkok still brings hordes of tourists, other south-east Asians and even the development set. Yes, there is even something called the "Consultants Café" where westerners come to know that the experts of the consultancy business are experts at spending other people's money. There is a case-a-lag attitude here among the residents and the visitors, a true Gnomish of the East.

The Thai tourism industry continues to flourish despite the fact that Pattaya digging themselves into a rut is a tribute to this country's resilience and diversity. Prosperous Thais are a little shy to admit it openly, but they concede in private that sea tourism gave a big push to their economy in the earlier phase of their development.

It had its by-products, they admit, the AIDS epidemic, resorts that rotted away and the embarrassing way that "one night in

Bangkok" came to mean more than just a Royal Orchid travel stopover.

There has also been an impact on culture, and Thai social scientists often bemoan the erosion of traditional propriety and courtesy and the way in which these traditions have been reduced to a caricature. The cultural shows are a parody, and the handicrafts have become airport art.

Countries strive for economic growth, but when this growth is too rapid, it exacts a price. Thailand is an example. Every society has to decide for itself how much it is ready to sacrifice in order to reach prosperity.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who has proposed his concept of "Sufficiency Economics". Popular as he may be, it doesn't look like too many Thais are listening to the wise words of their king on how to live frugally, self-sufficiently and to have a small ecological footprint.

As the world gets ready to review the progress since the last Earth Summit ten years ago at another mega-gathering of leaders in Johannesburg this month, it is a good time to look at the linkages between economics and ecology. Investors tend to think that money can do everything, and that the earnings from increased productivity will be enough to pay for even the most expensive remedial measures in future. But it seldom happens that way.

Groundwater depletion due to pumping has lowered the water table and caused the city of Bangkok to sink by almost five centimeters in some places even in 20. The Thai government has an ambitious plan to recharge the

by CK LAL

Why do countries realise what they have destroyed only once it's all gone.

groundwater, but the engineers admit that the subsidence may be irreversible. The drought on Koh Samui island is big news these days. Virach Phongsabhapakdi, a tourism entrepreneur, told *The Nation* newspaper: "We in the tourism business sell our natural resources like prostitutes sell their bodies. So many of us only think about making quick profits, forgetting that we have to protect the resources that nature has bestowed us. We must realise it is in order that they may be enjoyed in the future."

If he is not listening to their king, it is not likely they will listen to Khuan Vivach. Thailand's economy is now on a full rebound after the Asian crisis, and now more than ever there are even fears for King Bhumibol's "Sufficiency Economics".

Boonmee Thairak's prime minister is business tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra. And like most tycoons he is a born-again, supply-side believer in the theory of perpetual growth. Thailand shows how things can go wrong when on the surface it looks like everything is going right. Ignoring delicate co-systems and fragile cultures is not just immoral, it is also bad economics. And if you leave it to our businessmen, a country only realises what it has destroyed once it's all gone.

For Nepal, there are so many lessons in Thailand. Bad examples of ignoring carrying capacity, of killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Also good examples of towns and islands that have realised their mistake and are now feverishly trying to turn the clock back before it is too late. The moral of the story is: treating tourism as an important industry is fine, but we must remember that most "tourism areas" are non-renewable. ♦

Next time you drive a car, remember: you are poisoning passengers and yourself. The failure of the state to apprehend and punish those involved in the nationwide adulteration of fuel is staggering. Fuel adulteration is one of the most blatant, open and obvious instances of corruption in Nepal today. And the government's failure to control it is a strongest indication that it is only paying lip service to combating corruption.

The pricing force behind adulteration is the price differential between subsidised kerosene, diesel and petrol. A weak penalty system of the state-owned monopoly, Nepal Oil Corporation, and lax monitoring have made fuel adulteration a lucrative exercise. There are huge profit margins, and no threat of punishment. And the whole system is so well lubricated with graft that everyone up and down the line has his share.

A recent survey showed that there is a lot of room for manoeuvre for adulterators of fuel, since the "risk free" rate is 40 percent for petrol and 80 percent for diesel. This means that the amount that can be mixed within technical purity measurement parameters is huge. This margin appears to have been deliberately left wide to allow hanky panky. All this happens in collusion in a "public-private partnership" between the Nepal Oil Corporation, and retailers under the Nepal Petroleum Dealers' Association.

Fuel adulterators are not just cheating consumers. The impure fuel is turning our cities into gas chambers, reducing efficiency, weakening health, and dragging the economy down. One conservative estimate is that the country loses Rs 1 billion a year just from the adulteration loss, not counting the health costs and the indirect loss of efficiency.

Risks from adulterated fuel are real, it is not some alarmist scientific theory. It affects you and me, everyone who walks or rides on the roads. It will affect us today, and it will affect us tomorrow. The dangers add up and are lethal.

There has been an exponential growth in the number of people with asthma in Kathmandu. This is a direct result of the soot particulates in the air from vehicle exhaust, which in turn is a result of inefficient burning caused by adulteration. Another health problem is hypoxia, which is caused by lack of oxygen in the blood and is related to excessive carbon monoxide in the air, again caused by incomplete combustion. Hypoxia leads to



and are lethal.

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fatigue and dizziness and is the cause of numerous traffic accidents.

The introduction of lead free petrol in Nepal has eliminated the danger of lead, but replaced it with benzene and toluene, both deadly carcinogens. These chemicals are added to lead-free petrol to raise the octane level, and should be replaced by catalytic converters in Euro II cars. However, the filters lose their efficiency

because of the adulterated fuel.

To start doing something about this scourge, those who are involved in adulteration have to realise first that they are poisoning themselves. Those senior officials who are on the take have to see that their own lifespans are decreasing. And we consumers have to be aware of the dangers, and raise our voices in outrage.

After investigative reports came out in the media last year, the government set up a commission to look into the matter. But adulteration just went on. The Ministry of

Population and Environment decided to do something about it, and set up large billboards urging motorists to "tune their engines regularly." As if that would help. No government office has so far addressed the issue of fuel quality. There are strong indications that officials are in cahoots with the fuel adulteration mafia, even that the two are one and the same.

And yet, it is so easy to do something about it. All we need is political will. We can learn from neighbouring India, where the levels of corruption are no less than ours. But India has managed to curb adulteration through a "marker system". This method allows anyone to check the purity of the fuel at the sales point with a digital counter at nominal cost. After its initial success in Delhi and Bombay, the marker system is now going to be implemented all over India.

The marker system allows any consumer at a gas station to check the purity of the fuel in an ATM type machine where a 20 ml sample of fuel is taken in a test tube is inserted to check for purity. This simple method ensures that there is no chance of government authorities getting in the way. It is between the buyer and seller, and the marker system ensures that the transaction is proper.

The architect of the anti-adulteration scheme is the Director of Research and Development of the Indian Oil Corporation, A K Bhargava. He came up with the idea under which fuel is marked by a bio-coding method and the concentration of this marker is tested at the pump with a portable digital analyser. For the time being this is the best tamper-proof method we have of stopping fuel adulteration. But is there the political will to stop it? ♦

(Chakra Khadka is associated with the Department of Economics at the Pann Campus.)

LETTERS

TALKING ABOUT TALKING

Thanks to Shyam Shrestha ("What do Maoists want this time?" #104) for saying what most of us have been thinking. Do we want a long-drawn conflict that will destroy our country or even cost us our independence? Because that is what will happen to us if this war drags on. The government and the Maoists must take the opportunity for talks seriously. If we may, we have lost a valuable opportunity to strike a peace deal.

G Lamsal, Kathmandu

• We must always give peace a chance, and I appreciate Shyam Shrestha's efforts to bring the warring parties together. But what Mr. Shrestha also has to understand is that it is the Maoists on the run now, not the government or the democratic forces (and no, the Maoists are not democratic, I refuse to believe it) and that it is they who have to compromise more, for peace talks. The way the Maoists broke off the last peace talks, and used the time during their propaganda, makes any other party very reluctant to believe in

the Maoists. In fact, Prachanda himself has gone on record and said that he had followed the example of other anarchists and used the time during the peace talks to strengthen his party. He has further said that he would do likewise in the future. Now, who will trust this person? Mr. Shrestha has also used the election card to argue that the government now has to talk to Maoist leaders for elections to be held. As Prime Minister Deuba has said, he would rather talk with the Maoist military commanders than these dastardly leaders. I firmly believe that there is no one voice in the Maoist party—it is horizontally and vertically split, and there is no need to talk to Prachanda. In fact, Prachanda wants to use peace talks to re-establish his lost connection with local cadres. It would definitely wield more positive results if peace talks are initiated with the military commanders. At least it might lead to laying down arms, and an end to the fighting.

S Rana, Kathmandu

SELF-MADE

I really identified with 'Nothing is what it seems' (#103) by Rajendra Khadka. He touched an issue that I

have faced from childhood as a daughter of a father who was a domestic cook and had to struggle to establish himself. It surrounded me as a dark circle of inferiority complex. Because my father worked hard, I was lucky to go school. But this was the school where the children of the family that employed my father went. No matter how well I did, for those kids and their parents I was always their "dohar ko chor". Instead of appreciating my dad for his hard work, Kathmandu's elite class sneered at us. Reading Mr. Khadka, I was reminded of how I felt in school. This feelings grips me to this day.

Romi Nepal
San Diego State University

MANUSHREE THAPA
Thank you for Manushree Thapa's "Mogony and the Intellectuals" (#103). I have many times thought of returning to Nepal, whether out of nostalgia, or as a participant in its growth. But articles like these leave me shuddering as a woman, at the narrow-mindedness of the cavern government and its derivative subculture. I feel sick and violated, as did Sapana Malla. I guess I am too weak to return and face that kind of ugliness.

V Lamsal, USA

• To the person "Mogony", Letters: #104 who wrote in

anonymously, doubting my claim to have been threatened you should be ashamed of yourself. (Oh, I guess you already are, since you withheld your identity.) What was cheap was not my writing about the threat, but the original threat, and your silly attempt to discourage me from writing further about it. From now on, spare "intellectual" Nepal women your double-speak about what is and isn't appropriate to discuss in public. Your condescension comes through loud and clear.

Manushree Thapa
Kathmandu

NEPALIS IN THAILAND

I enjoyed CK Lal's piece on Bangkok "Talk Lessons" (#103). The next time he visits Bangkok, I would recommend that he take a trip to the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) to see a glimpse of a little Nepal inside an academic institute far from home. There are currently 150 Nepalis at AIT, three of them are professors. Perhaps no other foreign institute has been as beneficial to Nepal: more than 6500 Nepali graduates are AIT alumni.

Mangal Shrestha, Bangkok

GO AWAY

I visited Nepal every year with medical equipment for a vision programme of the Lion's International and also help children in jail and their mothers. I have brought my tickets to Nepal in October, where I expect to stay three-and-half months with a 10-day side trip to India. As of now, here are my visa fees: \$55 for a 60-day double-entry + \$50 for an additional 30 days, and \$75 for my 30 day return visa in March, 2003.

Total \$180.
Not only that, because of the fees for entering Hanuman Dhoka, I will probably not visit my many friends with shops around Darbar Square. My multiple-entry visa for India is \$80 for 10 years. I don't take a PhD to understand that Nepal is doing every thing possible to tell tourist and aid workers, to go away. Aloha. Michael VanDeVeer
Kauai, Hawaii

CORRECTION

Several readers pointed out a spelling mistake in the editorial "Djia vu" (#102). Rana haphograpger "Perovcal Langdon" should have been Perovcal Landon.

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

Democratic deficit

Another report tells us that democracy, development and security are intertwined. If only the right people listened.

In the midst of a wet and slippery summer of discontent, the United Nations Development Programme brushed crumbs of morsels of warmth last week. The good news in the Human Development Report (HDR) 2002 is that Nepal's slide into perfidious has been as precipitous as we had thought. What's heartening is that we're in good international company.

Of the 81 countries that embraced democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, the report says only 47 are considered fully free today. With authoritarian leaders manipulating elections and millions of people losing faith in the democratic process, the authors

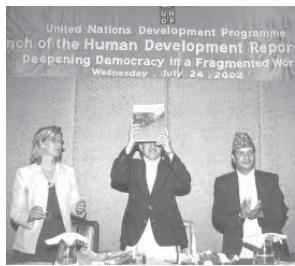
conclude, the hard-won post-Cold War gains risk being reversed. In scores of nations, political opposition, free press and citizens groups are either non-existent or on their way to becoming so.

The study, *Dyspending Democracy* in a Fragmented World, also found that economic slowdown in many countries add to the popular perception that democracies cannot deliver better lives. Banks, courts and government institutions are under

strain, often because of corruption or political pressures. Electoral processes are subverted by fraud and iron-hand politics. The authors maintain that barriers to trade, along with production and export subsidies in rich countries, cut the developing world more in lost exports than the \$56 billion they receive in aid each year. Nevertheless, the principal stimulus for democracy and development must come from within countries. The international community can encour-

age the process, but not impose it. You might wonder whether Nepal needed an elaborate international report to learn what we've been living through. It's the messenger, not the message, that counts here. Those of you who were so worked up by the dressing down we got at the Nepal Development Forum and London conference can cheer up. It doesn't look like the governments of Burundi and Burkina Faso have avoided similar, though less dramatic, criticism.

The HDR 2002 authors affirm the traditional tenet that democracies are less prone to civil war than non-democratic regimes and are more likely to cope with political turmoil. Before you retort how Nepal is an exception on both counts, you must acknowledge that the authors are speaking in general terms about 140 countries that hold



United Nations Development Programme's *Dyspending Democracy* in a Fragmented World. Wednesday, July 24, 2002

per capita income to slide from \$240 to \$224 within a single fiscal year. (Actually, things aren't as bad as they sound: 63 countries have lower per capita incomes than what they did 12 years ago.)

Although they were buried in the sixth and seventh paragraphs in most newspapers, our publications can take heart from remarks UNDP chief Mark Malloch Brown's made at a media briefing in New York. Exhorting the people's democratic movement in developing nations is a growing sense that their elected governments have little power over the world bodies that set the rules for their economies. Working Translation: The next time we feel like spending our own fire and fury, we should seriously consider letting the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization take some of the heat.

For an organization that just two years ago brought out an HDR hailing

the spread of democracy across Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and parts of Africa and Asia, the UNDP couldn't have missed the post-9/11 legislation. With Cold War-style military alliances having returned to the centre of international strategic calculations, it's not hard to corollary—the scale of human rights for international security—be far away? Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, HDR 2002's chief author, seeks to demolish the emerging wisdom that fostering democracy might endanger world security. "History and academic research provide no evidence that authoritarian regimes were better at promoting economic and social progress." Ordinarily, such a bold assertion would have been sufficient to disengage our readers from the book. In today's frenetic political climate, it could embolden our agents of authoritarianism to have another try. ♦

For an organization that just two years ago brought out an HDR hailing

from

Domestic concerns

"You can have the best equipment in the world, but carelessness and over-confidence can still cause crashes," says one of the interviewees for this investigation, wanted anonymous. The skyline architect in Surkhet had a GPS, but still flew into high ground on approach. To be fair, he had an cockpit voice recorder, but crash investigators have not been able to go to the site after the initial rescue because of security concerns.

Aviation safety experts say that the best safeguard against CFTIs is the sophisticated "enhanced ground proximity warning system" (EGPWS) which is an onboard computer that stores global terrain data, and in conjunction with a GPS, warns pilots with a coloured 3-D map of approaching mountains in time to take evasive action.

CAAN made standard GPS mandatory early this year, but officials told they cannot force airlines to install the \$35,000 enhanced version because of cost considerations. "Finding the right balance between safety and cost is tricky, and every airline has to weigh it carefully," says one senior pilot with a private Nepal aviation firm. But given Nepal's terrain and lack of other ground navigational aids, and the fact that almost all crash involves planes flying into mountains, it is clear that onboard



SAFETY ISSUES

- Crowded airports, especially on mountain flights and the Kathmandu-Pokhara corridor
- Corrupt ground handlers in remote airports overloading cargo (an investigation showed that the Twin Otter that crashed in Dhangadi was seriously overweight)
- Inadequate crew training, route familiarisation and VLOS field clearance
- Determination in sightability at Kathmandu airport due to weather, and every airline has to weigh it carefully, says one senior pilot with a private Nepal aviation firm. But given Nepal's terrain and lack of other ground navigational aids, and the fact that almost all crash involves planes flying into mountains, it is clear that onboard

EGPWS could improve safety. Although mechanical defects on aircraft have not been the cause of any major crash in recent years, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has audited CAAN's airworthiness certification procedures and has said that its checks are not rigorous enough. "I have been flying for over 40 years and I have come across only one suspicious check," one pilot told us.

As Nepal's domestic airlines suffer from the tourism slump and decreased revenue, there is talk of tightening all orders. Pilots tell us that this leads to maintenance lapses. "It is embarrassing to have all these MEL (minimum equipment list) stickers on your cockpit instruments," one pilot told us at Kathmandu airport. Budget shortfalls are forcing most airlines to cannibalise cockpit instruments and spare parts just to allow the plane to get through an MEL category validity check. Some are cutting down pilot training time on simulators abroad because it is so expensive. One pilot told us that things in his cockpit broke, but it was no big deal. CAAN can be an independent authority five years ago, but the government has not been able to open and break it into two parts. CAAN officials have their own list of woes: low budget, lack of manpower and insufficient training. ♦

ECONOMY

BIZ NEWS

Hydro plans

Well, hear about one more plan. The government has put together a hydropower development strategy that aims to take electricity to over 60 percent of the people in another 25 years, by when it hopes to generate over 15,000 megawatts—a major leap from the roughly 800 megawatt (MW) of power currently generated in the country. The idea is to rope in private investors, who under the hydropower development policy 2001 can be licensed for producing electricity for domestic production as well as for export. The policy also makes space for private investors to come in to run transmission and distribution systems.

Here's a recap of the policy: the power generation licenses for up to 35 years (domestic consumption) and 30 years (for export) can be obtained by private investors or joint ventures with government. The transmission and distribution licenses are to be good for 25 years, renewable for another 10 years. The royalty for different types of projects is based on the annual capacity per kilowatt and energy generated per KW per hour (KWH). The capacity royalty for a 10-100 megawatt (MW) project would be Rs 1.500 per KW and the energy royalty 1.85% per KWH for the first 15 years and Rs 1,200 per KW and 10 percent per KWH thereafter. Projects built for captive use don't have to pay energy royalties but at a flat Rs 1,500 per KW annual capacity royalty for the first 15 years and Rs 3,000 energy royalty per KWH. Captive use projects would be charged energy royalties applicable to projects above 100MW category in the event they sell excess power. The policy has different royalty structures for export projects. Accordingly, run-of-river projects are to be required to pay an annual capacity royalty of Rs 400 per KW and an energy royalty of 7.5 percent per KWH in the first 15 years and Rs 1,800 and 12 percent thereafter. Likewise the charges for export-oriented storage projects is to be Rs 500 per KW as annual capacity royalty for the first 15 years and 10 percent per KW as energy royalty, the charges thereafter are to be Rs 2,000 per KW and 15 percent.

Everest insurance

Everest insurance, which completed eight years of operation last week, says it has grown into one of the most successful domestic ventures in the non-life insurance segment. The company claims to have a 20 percent market share and its premiums in 2002 soared by 50 percent to about Rs 300 million. Among its major clients have been the Bani Gandi Hydroelectric Project, whose civil construction was insured by Everest. The company also says it has over 60 percent of the aviation insurance business in Nepal.

Coke's Kinley

Bottle's Nepal Ltd., the makers of a range of aerated drinks, has joined the already overcrowded bottled-water market in Nepal with Kinley. A company press release says the new product goes through exhaustive filtration, purification and clarification processes to ensure high purity of the water. Bottle's produces Kinley at its Balingi plant.

Parle bites

Parle, which controls 40 percent of the biscuit market in India, is introducing some of its best selling brands in the Nepali market. Among those quick-bite brands set to be introduced are Momo, Hide & Seek, Parle G and Marie Choice. Other Parle confectioneries to be introduced are popins, Melody 2 in 1 and Mango Bite.

Kawasaki wash

Bajaj-Kawasaki has opened a new servicing centre at Teku, Kathmandu, an attempt to pamper customers with a wide range of services. Planet Bajaj, as the centre is known, is run by its sole distributor Hansraj Hulaschand & Co.

INTERVIEW



Interview in 1998. I used to buy from someone I sold to locally, and ordered 300 shawls. It was euphoric, it was my first real order. A month later he asked for another 1,000 pieces to be delivered in a month. I started to cash in on the boom before it was over. After three months, he wanted me to supply 10,000 pieces there were buyers from other countries Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Germany, Switzerland and everywhere. We had so much demand that we even had to turn some down.

During the boom, there were about 150 people producing pashmina for me, and another 50-60 working on a piece-rate basis.

How did the silk mixing start?
In the early 1990s there was a company in Balingi that began to use silk threads for weaving. Prior to that we used cotton threads. The product was better and caught on quickly with customers. The manufacturers imported yarn directly from China, and used to cash in on the boom before it was over. After three months, he wanted me to supply 10,000 pieces there were buyers from other countries Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Germany, Switzerland and everywhere. We had so much demand that we even had to turn some down.

During the boom, there were about 150 people producing pashmina for me, and another 50-60 working on a piece-rate basis.

Was it a failing quality or over-supply that killed the industry?
Despite the slump, there are still 200 companies exporting pashmina. In 1997, Nepal exported Rs 30 million worth of pashmina. In 1998 exports reached Rs 280 million, in 1999, Rs 5.16 billion and it was about the same in 2000. These are only official figures and do not include goods exported by hand. At its boom period, Nepal was said to be producing about 20,000 pieces of pashmina products to India every day, most of which was unrecorded.

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COMMENT

by RAVI RAUNIVAR

Is public health intellectual property?

A Nepal's success as an early entrant into the WTO, its implication on long-term economic development, poverty alleviation and public health needs more thought. The obligations that the Free-Trade Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) imposes on WTO members to recognize and strengthen patent protection on pharmaceuticals denies patients in developing countries like ours access to essential life-saving medicines, and the freedom to formulate and implement our own public health policies. Today, the international trading system puts corporate interest before poverty reduction and public health.

In the patent WTO negotiations, the pharmaceutical industry lobbied hard to have patent protection extended to cover pharmaceuticals. This was accepted with certain important safeguards that governments could use to balance public interest with the claims of patent holders. For example, "compulsory licensing" allows governments to increase the access to medicines by R&D of new drugs without the owner's consent if it is justified by public interest.

The Brazilian AIDS policy, which included providing free drugs to people with HIV/AIDS, has been highly successful because of Brazil's ability to manufacture affordable medicines through compulsory licensing. But a country needs a reasonably sophisticated and pharmaceutical industry to do this, and most likely to achieve economies of scale to make them affordable.

Nepal needs adequate domestic infrastructure to strengthen the country's legal frameworks to meet the public health challenges posed by globalisation. ♦

(Ravi Raunivar is with the *Joint Diabetes Centre, Harvard Medical School*.)

But I don't think the industry is dead. I was in Europe earlier this year and saw that pashmina is still popular. In Paris a shawl that would cost about \$50 in Nepal was selling at about \$350. Only the latecomers who cash in on the boom have been hit. Trust in the Nepali product remains.

Is there any diversification?
There have been major marketing oversteps but have not been exporting them yet. Making sweaters is difficult because the lack of skilled weavers and also expensive because if a piece is damaged, it is a write-off. Our weavers cannot weave the necks and robes properly, but we're selling sweaters locally. We make necks, scarves, shawls, and scarves, and the quality is most demanded abroad.

So the quality of Nepali pashmina has not gone down?
Those that were in the pashmina business before the boom are still producing and selling quality goods. Some who had moved into pashmina from carpets and garments are still doing well, but the over-supply of shawls has hit. The prices have also crashed by half, but mainly because raw materials have become cheaper. In a way we have come back to the pre-boom days, both in terms of quality and also in terms of sales. From Rs 30 million in 1997 we are still selling about Rs 1.3 billion worth pashmina annually.

How can locals and tourists be assured that they are buying genuine pashmina?
The best way would be to go to established businesses because they have both history and credibility that they have to protect. The prices may be expensive in such outlets, but the quality is guaranteed.

Are there any industry-specific problems besides the slump?
Our problem is of design and styling, and getting the right colour combinations. This is a critical issue because we don't have institutions surveying foreign buyers to get feedback on their designs and styles. Our customers taught us what quality means. Diversification has not been possible because of designing and styling problems. There are also the routine bureaucratic hurdles: especially at the customs. The government has fixed the price of wool at Rs 300, but the market price is Rs 380. No one can get that \$70, but custom officials insist that it should be \$95, and charge duty based on that. We pay about 13.5 percent to customs and VAT, which is refundable. However, getting refunds on time is very cumbersome.



Logoland

Imagine a world without brands. It existed once, and still exists, more or less, in the world's poorest places. No raucous advertising, no ugly billboards, no McDonald's, yet, given a chance and a bit of money, people flee this Eden. They seek out Budweiser instead of their local tipple, ditch nameless shirts for Gap, prefer Marlboro to homegrown smokes. What should one conclude? That people are pawns in the hands of giant companies with huge advertising budgets and global reach? Or that brands bring something that people think is better than what they had before?



The pawn theory is argued forcefully, if not always coherently, by Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo*, a book that has become a bible of the anti-globalisation movement. Her thesis is that brands have come to represent "a fascist state when we all salute the logo and have little opportunity for criticism because our newspapers, television stations, Internet servers, streets and retail spaces are all controlled by multinational



corporate interests." The ubiquity and power of brand advertising curtails choice, she claims, produced cheaply in third-world sweatshops, branded goods displace local alternatives and force a grey cultural homogeneity on the world.



Brands have come to represent "a fascist state when we all salute the logo and have little opportunity for criticism because our newspapers, television stations, Internet servers, streets and retail spaces are all controlled by multinational

Product power or people power? Yet this is a wholly misleading account of the nature of brands. They are not as powerful as their opponents allege, nor is the public as easily manipulated. The reality is more complicated. Brands began as

NT has often presented critiques of the "buyological urge" and accounts of **Abdusters** and **Buy Nothing Day**. This week, we give you the case for brands: some argue that far from being instruments of oppression, they make firms accountable to consumers.

a form not of exploitation, but of consumer protection. In pre-industrial days, people knew exactly what went into their meat-pies and which butchers were trustworthy; once they moved to cities, they no longer did. A brand provided a guarantee of reliability and quality. Its owner had a powerful incentive to ensure that each one was as good as the precious one, because that would persuade people to come back for more.



Just as distance created a need for brands in the 19th century, so in the age of globalisation and the Internet, it reinforces their value. A book-buyer might not entrust a company in Seattle with his credit card number had experience not taught him to trust the Amazon brand; an American might not accept a bottle of French water were it not for the name of Evian. Because consumer trust is the basis of all brand values, companies that own the brands have an immense incentive to work to retain that trust.



Indeed, that dependence of successful brands on trust and consistent quality suggests that consumers need more of them. In poor countries, the arrival of foreign brands points to an increase in competition from which consumers gain. Public services live in a No Logo world: attempts at government branding arouse derision. That is because brands have value only when consumers have choice, which rarely exists in public services. The absence of brands in the public sector reflects a world like that of the old Soviet Union, in which consumer choice has little role.



Brands are the tools with which companies seek to build and retain consumer loyalty. Because that often requires expensive advertising and good marketing, a strong brand can raise both prices and barriers to entry. But not to insuperable levels: brands fade as tastes change (Nestlé has fallen, while Starbucks has risen); the vagaries of fashion can rebuild a brand that once seemed moribund (think of the Beetle); and quality of service still counts (hence the rise of Amazon). Many brands have been around for more than a century, but the past two decades have seen many more displaced by new global names, such as Microsoft and Nokia.



Now a change is taking place in the role of brands. Increasingly, customers pay more for a brand because it seems to represent a way of life or a set of ideas. Companies exploit people's emotional needs as well as their desires to consume. Hence Nike's "Just do it" attempt to tell runners that it is selling personal achievement, or Coca-Cola's relentless effort to associate its fizzy drink with carefree fun. Companies deliberately concoct a story around their service or product, trying to turn a run-of-the-mill purchase (think of Häagen-Dazs ice cream) into something more thrilling.



This peddling of superior lifestyle is something that intrigues many consumers. They disapprove of the vapid notion that spending more on a soft drink or ice cream can bring happiness or social cachet. Fair enough; and yet people in every age and culture have always hunted for ways to acquire social cachet. For medieval European grandees it was the details of dress, and sumptuary laws that sought to stamp out imitations by the lower orders; now the poorest African country has its clothing markets where second-hand designer labels command a premium over pie-worn No Logo.



The flip side of the power and importance of a brand is its growing vulnerability. Because it is so valuable to a company, a brand must be conserved, sustained, and protected. A failed advertising campaign, a drop-off in quality or a hint of scandal can all quickly send consumer fleeing. Indeed, protesters, including Ms Klein's anti-globalisation supporters, can use the power of the brand against companies by drumming up evidence of workers ill-treated or rivers polluted. Thanks, ironically enough, to globalisation, they can do this all around the world. The more companies promote the value of their brands, the more they will need to seem ethically robust and environmentally pure. Whether protestors will actually succeed in advancing the interests of those they claim to champion is another question. The fact remains that brands give them far more power over companies than they would otherwise have. Companies may grumble about that, but it is hard to see why the enemies of brand "fascism" are complaining.

(The Economist)

Super cool Nepali logos



Nepali logo-makers take little inspiration from this country's great artistic traditions. The motifs are all the same: the head of the national pheasant, the classic shot of Mt Everest, a minimalist version of the Swyambhu stupa that makes it look like a hering bone, temples that look like triangles. Oh yes. Triangles, lots of them: because our flag is made up of two triangles too.

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Tell a Tale

The British Council Short Story Competition

Topic: Contemporary Nepal
Age Categories: 12-16 (2000-2500 words), 17-19 (1500-2000 words)
Dates: Closing date of entry: 31 August, Winner Announcement: 15 October
Language: All entries must be in English
Prizes: Awarded to the top 2 entries in each category: 1st Prize: Rs. 25,000, 2nd Prize: Rs. 15,000, 3rd Prize: Rs. 10,000

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

Entry Conditions:
- Stories must not have been published or used in another competition before and must have been written in English and translated from another language.
- Entries must agree to the publication of their work but copyright will remain with the writer.
- Entries must be handwritten, double-spaced on A4 paper using no smaller than 12 pts font size and 4 copies must be submitted.

Short Story Competition
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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE: SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

OPINION

by RALF DAHRENDORF

Rediscovering the west

Defending western values is the primary issue on the agenda of liberty today.

Half a week goes by without a headline about the already long list of European-American gripes and irritants. One week is the UN Security Council vote on a continued US presence in the Bosnia peacekeeping mission. Before that, the setting up of the International Criminal Court without American participation set both sides on edge, and the question of whether the Palestinians will hold what was to elect as their leader. Israel and the Palestinians remain a subject of profound European-US disagreements, as do issues surrounding the environment and the idea of sustainable development. Add to these US trade sanctions, America's Gulf War fill, and of course the whole question of alleged or real US unilateralism.

Fortunately, such spats are not the violent American unilateralism it is in fact a form of "multilateralism à la carte," where it suits American interests, international interests are happily used, and they usually serve European interests. Also one must never forget that we are talking about democracies. In the US, as in Europe, there are many different voices. In Bosnia, about Israel, even about protecting farmers. After all, not every American voted for President Bush, nor is every European a Euro-fundamentalist.

Sill, when representatives of the US and the EU meet for formal consultations, they arrive at the table with different perceptions. US participants represent a country at war in which energies are concentrated on defeating the enemy, "terrorism," whether the al-Qaeda or Iraq variety. EU participants on the other

hand represent... well, what exactly? If the issue is trade, the answer is clear. Insofar as the EU is a "single market," it is represented by the Trade Commission of the Pascal Jaar. If the issue is compensation, Commissioner Mario Monti represents Europe, strictly so, as Americans have learned to their surprise. But as soon as we move to wider issues of defence and defence policy, Javier Solana, the High Representative of the EU Council of Ministers, may be at the telephone number that Henry Kissinger famously could never find in Brussels when he wanted to "speak to Europe" in his day. But Solana is hardly a European Euro-fundamentalist.

European attitudes demonstrate the complexities. Americans are right to point out that Europeans spend an undue amount of time consulting among themselves, and then come up with very little. Most of the time, they are reluctant. "Don't go too far in welcoming Russia to NATO." Don't

go too far in supporting Israel and neglecting the Palestinians. "Don't exert the fight against terrorism to the producers of weapons of mass destruction." When should the word "terrorism" be used? "Political solutions" should be found, which really means that the European method of consensus building without firm action should be applied to the world at large.

Sometimes the two methods—consultation without action in Europe, actions without consultation in the US—can be turned to mutual advantage. If Europeans do not want to go to war, and Americans do not want to get involved in protracted processes of institutional building in distant places, an obvious potential for an international division of labour emerges. To some extent it is practised already both in Afghanistan and in the Balkans.

At other times, a dangerous potential for division arises between Europeans and the US. Quite a few in Europe define the EU as an instrument for holding their own against the

United States. They see even the Euro as a weapon against the dollar and rejoice when the Euro is "strong" and the dollar is "weak." The US has found a new "empire of evil" in "terrorism" states and organisations. Europe has found a new adversary who helps it integrate in the United States.

This is dangerous for those on both sides of the Atlantic, who believe in the values of the enlightenment and in liberty. In terms of basic values, there is such a thing as the west. After 11 September, it has become more important than ever. Defending the value of the west against anti-enlightenment forces both within and without may well be the most important task asked for all who believe in liberty. ♦

(Project Syndicate)

Ralf Dahrendorf is a member of the British House of Lords and also a former Warden of St Anthony's College, Oxford.

Fuming over pot

OTTAWA—Canada's justice minister is leaning towards striking marijuana possession from the country's criminal code, but he faces tough opposition from the US and other countries. Earlier this year, Minister Martin Cauchon, a member of the ruling Liberal Party, says it is lobby that people who are caught with marijuana receive criminal records that can prevent them from getting jobs and travelling to foreign countries, especially the United States. Cauchon is waiting for the recommendations of Senate and House of Commons committees before deciding whether to wipe marijuana possession from the Criminal Code and make it a non-offence offence punishable by a fine rather than an arrest. A preliminary Senate report said research shows that between 30 and 50 percent of Canadians between the ages 15 and 24 have used cannabis.

The United States, which has the world's toughest drug laws, opposes Canadian decriminalisation because of its relatively open border with its northern neighbour. Earlier this year, Canadian Health Minister Anne McLellan said that US bureaucrats sabotaged Canada's medicinal marijuana program by denying the government's Health Canada access to the US government's supply of research-quality pot seeds. Last spring, US drug war star John Walters threatened Canada with trade sanctions if parliament relaxed pot laws. The US government has threatened to cut Jamaica's foreign aid if it goes ahead with plans to decriminalise drug use. (IPS)

Democracy for development

JOHANNESBURG—There is something sadly familiar in this year's Africa Human Development Index (HDI), published annually by the UNDP. Africa is poorer than she was at the beginning of the decade and sub-Saharan Africa is the region least likely to achieve the Millennium Development goals set by the UN two years ago meant to halve world poverty by 2015, as well as improve school enrolment and nutrition levels. Fewer than half the countries of the region are on track to achieve the global goals, with 11—including Angola and Somalia—well off the mark. Libya at number 64 leads Africa in the HDI, followed by Cape Verde and South Africa. The continent features strongly in the least-developed nations section of the index and did not make it into the high human development section.

This year's index points fingers at the usual gamut of reasons: unfair terms of world trade; declining aid budgets; poor governance. But it also points to a new budget: the decline in democracy after the end of the last African civil wars in the 1980s. "If people have a greater say in how their money is spent and how policies are made and implemented, the greater the chances of success of development programmes," says experts. (IPS)

Unfair trade

GENEVA—The protectionist stance of the EU has hampered the expansion of agriculture in developing countries, say WTO member states in a study of the bloc's policies. Without the barriers posed by protectionist measures, farming "could otherwise be an important source of economic growth and poverty reduction" in poor nations, concludes the WTO trade policy review. The principal objections of the delegates at last week's WTO meet also involved the high tariffs the EU applies to textile and clothing imports. Several countries had reported the adverse effects that the EU's farm trade regime has had on their agricultural products. For the year 2000, the total of 15-country bloc spent on its common agricultural policy (CAP) was \$40 billion, or 43.9 percent of the EU budget. Less than five percent of the EU's population depends on agriculture for its livelihood. (IPS)

Anti-immigration Maori

CANBERRA—Prime Minister John Howard's government has a minority Labour government in the New Zealand election over the weekend is the starting emergence of an anti-immigration party, New Zealand First Party. On the rise is anti-immigration sentiment—and its use as a political issue—in the type in neighbouring Australia, where it has been seen in recent months in the government's tough policies against asylum seekers. The party polled 13 seats, over 10 percent of the vote—up from the partial success of "Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party" in Australia in the 1996 federal elections. In his last election rally ahead of the 27 July poll, leader of New Zealand First, Maori-born Winston Peters, declared that one of the "fundamental rights of ordinary Kiwis [New Zealanders]" is "the right to stop being swamped by a flood of immigrants."

Peters predicts that the number of new people approved by the government to reside in the country of four million people be cut from the current 50,000 per year to only 10,000, a figure so low, New Zealand's population would decline once more.

Prime Minister Helen Clark—whose Labour Party gained 41 percent of the vote in the election and won 52 of 120 seats in the single house of parliament—has ruled out discussions with the party in forming a minority government. Professor Richard Bedford at Waikato University's Population Studies Centre argues that the actually much of the increase in the number Asian people of legal complaints about are students lured by New Zealand's marketing of its international education industry. With opinion polls showing that a majority of voters are concerned about immigration from Asia.

Peters rejects the accusation that he plays the race card for electoral advantage. But in a televised debate in the election campaign, Peters rejected the suggestion that the country was short of workers and might welcome immigrants. "So you want a bunch of people from Bangladesh and India to come down here?" Another academic said that "there is a real paradox: though much of Winston's rhetoric is racist, he dresses it up in ways that he claims aren't racist, and it has some appeal to Maori voters as well." (IPS)

Fighting over rain

NEW DELHI—As India faces its worst drought in a decade, the government's Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has predicted a drop in the increase in foodgrain production to 1 percent compared to last year's 8 percent. Food security isn't a worry: India has a 62 million tonne foodgrain surplus. But every one percent increase in agriculture production means \$2 billion extra cash for the farming community, which supports the demand for manufactured goods. After 15 successive good monsoons, India's luck has run out.



Such is the fear of an adverse impact on the economy of a bad monsoon, that officials at the meteorological department are asked not to speak to the press. Shweta Singh Chauhan, an MP from Central India, has accused the department of making "ironic" predictions that the monsoons would arrive in late June or early July, causing enormous losses to millions who believed them and began sowing. When tilled farmers and their families began pouring into Delhi by the thousands looking for food and employment, there was no way to keep the droughters a secret. (IPS)

Fighting AIDS, Thai-style

BANGKOK—Thailand's medical community has earned new stripes as a leader in the fight to stall the spread of HIV by working on a new drug regimen that cuts the virus' transmission rate from mother to child. This effort adds to other Thai achievements in fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including plans to conduct an HIV vaccine trial and the production of the world's cheapest anti-AIDS drug.

Doctors at a government university hospital reported efforts to reduce to 3 percent the transmission rate of HIV from infected mothers to children, from about 11.7 percent. Reports in the local press on Tuesday drew attention to this achievement as a "breakthrough" in efforts to cut mother-to-child infections and one that made HIV treatment "affordable to low-income people." In the new procedure, from the 34th week (of pregnancy) onward, mothers are treated with a combination of AZT (500 mg) and 3TC (150mg) every 12 hours until the onset of labour. After that they are given drugs every three hours until delivery. The newborn baby only needs one course of the medication within eight hours of birth. "The regimen has minimal side effects," says Dr Pongsak Chaisriwattana, head of the gynaecological endoscopy division at the Bangkok-based Siriraj hospital. An equally significant part of this anti-infection regimen is its cost—about \$45 per course for each person. The team is using the generic anti-AIDS drug produced by the government's pharmaceutical sector. (IPS)

Satellites over Pakistan

ISLAMABAD—Pakistan's concern about permanently losing its slot in geo stationary space has led it to put in place a leased communications satellite by year-end. The country has already lost four of the five slots originally allocated to it in 1984 by the International Telecommunications Union, which regulates satellite-related matters worldwide. At present, there are about 250 satellites in the Geo Stationary Orbit (GSO) belonging to different countries and companies. Not much space is available for new entrants. Science and Technology Minister Atta-ur-Rehman told IPS that if Pakistan fails to have a satellite in GSO by 19 April 2003, it will lose its fifth—and last—slot located at 38 degree East. That will mean its presence in space, which officials also

link to defence and security, would be doomed forever. Though Rehman insisted that the decision was motivated solely by commercial concerns, chair of the National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC), Air Vice Marshal Ashraf Maud, says that a geo stationary satellite can be used to secure defence communication, act as a lookout for a missile attack and detect any nuclear detonation or explosion. Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) says that the technology is vital for making nuclear command and control mechanisms "credible." (IPS)

Complicating Kashmir

NEW DELHI—India's government, led by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, came under fire in parliament today for an overtly pro-UT tilt that has failed to stop the steady internationalisation of the Kashmir issue. Ever since US Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Saturday in New Delhi that Kashmir was "on the international agenda," New Delhi has been abuzz with speculation on whether the meant external mediation on an issue India insists is a purely domestic affair. Powell, on an eight-nation Asian tour that took him to Islamabad on Sunday, also called for international observers to monitor state assembly elections, scheduled to be held in the Indian part of Kashmir in October, and for the release of all Kashmiri political prisoners in Indian jails. What agitated MPs more was further clarification of Powell's statements by State Department spokesman Philip Reeker in Washington Monday. "As the secretary said, Kashmir is on the international agenda and the United States and India are working together to go to an active interest in encouraging a resolution." Although the government is yet to respond to Powell's statement, BJP president Venkiah Naidu said that "the BJP emphatically rejects the suggestion made by the Secretary of State that international observers should be allowed or invited to oversee elections in Jammu and Kashmir." (IPS)

Floundering oil economies

UNITED NATIONS—Continued violence in the West Bank and Gaza, the impact in the value of petro dollars, and the sharp slow-down in world economic growth which has reduced the demand for oil, have badly hurt Middle Eastern nations, says a new UN study. The growth of 13 Middle Eastern nations will average about 2 percent this year, compared with 4.5 percent in 2000 and 2.1 percent in 2001, according to a survey by the Beirut-based UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). This is "a substantial decline given the region's annual population growth rate of 2.4 percent," adds the report.



While countries in the region have improved education, literacy, health and economic opportunities, ESCWA officials said significant regional challenges remain—the lack of peace and security, poverty, unemployment, inadequate natural resource management, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, lack of research and appropriate technologies, and the limited capacity of civil society to become actively engaged in the sustainable development process.

The study covers Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The relative fall in the US dollar has also had a direct impact, and balance of trade positions are expected to further deteriorate. (IPS)

The world's newest country

WASHINGTON—Two distinct welcomes have greeted the newest member of the IMF: free-market advice from the Fund and World Bank, and warnings from civil society groups about who profits is money. The Democratic Republic of East Timor officially signed on with the two financial institutions last week, making it eligible for funds from the donor community and the Bank. East Timor will receive money in the form of grants for three years. After that, any money requested will most likely be given as concessional or "soft" loans. By 2004 the country is expected to be generating about \$70 million a year in oil and gas revenues from sizeable offshore reserves.



Even before the signing, a controversy had emerged over who should control the hundreds of millions of dollars donors have pledged to the island nation of less than one million people. The money went to the World Bank, which collects and disburses aid to members, but leaders in the capital Dili say they want the UN to keep the funds. The leaders and anti-dot activists believe the UN is more likely than the Bank and the Fund to allow East Timor to take the money in the form of unconditional grants rather than loans. In addition to its role in the south-east Asian financial crisis, the IMF is also viewed with suspicion due to its efforts to make the US dollar East Timor's official currency during the reconstruction period. (IPS)

Israel and India cosy up

NEW DELHI—The highly secretive Israeli military complex has successfully managed to become India's second largest weapons provider after Russia, a decade after the two nations established formal diplomatic ties. Israel's Solam is one of three heavyweight manufacturers alongside South Africa's Denelcor and Sweden's Bofors, which are competing in trials in the western Pakistani desert to sell India their weapon systems in a contract worth \$1.5-\$2 billion. This week, the United States said it is considering an Israel request to sell India the Hirsch Arrow missile defence system, developed in cooperation with Washington, against the backdrop of heightened tensions in South Asia.

Russia delivers the hardware—tanks, aircraft and ships—and Israel provides the weapons systems, the radar, the electronic control systems and other high-tech add-ons, a military official said. Israeli security officials have also been seen to clandestinely visit Kashmir's border regions to set up border fencing and sensors. Dr AJP Abdul Kalam, India's new president, as head of the Defence Research Development Organisation and scientific advisor to the defence minister, visited Israel twice in the 18 months leading up to India emerging as the world's sixth nuclear power state after its nuclear tests in 1998. (IPS)

40,000/ft.BAR ...



... Where the tales are as tall as the mountains

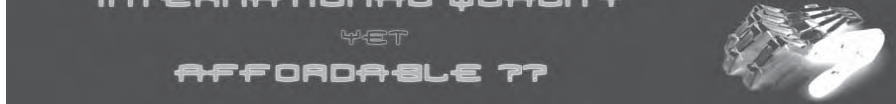
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STILL WAITING FOR THAT PERSONAL COMPUTER WHICH IS OF

INTERNATIONAL QUALITY



COMMENT

by JEAN-PIERRE LEHMANN

Managing migration

We need positive, realistic globalisation strategies.

immigration, with all the crime, corruption, and suffering that it implies. (Money to be made from the illegal traffic in people, by some estimates, already outweighs the profits of the illegal drug trade.) Current trends point toward greater instability, including war.

To manage this situation, no panaceas are on offer, and no miracles expected.

The following prescriptions may, however, help avert a disaster:

● Rich countries, particularly in Europe, must drastically make barriers to exports from developing countries and cease dumping subsidised agricultural products;

● OECD countries should honour the target of allocating the equivalent of 0.7 percent of GDP annually to foreign aid;

● The diversion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in developing countries needs to be greatly increased and more evenly spread. About 80 percent of FDI in developing countries worldwide goes to five economies: China, Hong Kong, Korea, Brazil, and Mexico. The losses of the last decade is that money flowing to constructive investments in developing countries would have yielded higher returns than all the Enrons, Worldcoms, and Virendas, which laying the basis for dynamic industrial development;

● More emphasis must be placed on dramatically improving the quality of governance in developing countries. Wherever demographic growth outstrips economic growth, the frailties lie primarily with corrupt and inefficient regimes and the obstacles they put in the way of entrepreneurship and wealth creation. As a result, wealthy Middle Easterners, for example, invest their capital in developed countries, not at home;

● Europe must open its doors far more widely. This is not merely a question of increasing the rate of legal immigration, but also of strengthening the quality of integration. If properly managed, the economic benefits will be significant both for the developing world (higher remittances, but also greater opportunities for learning and experience) and rich countries (a younger, dynamic, and often entrepreneurial workforce).

It is imperative that world leaders pursue such positive, if difficult, globalisation strategies, rather than the negative, defensive, and protectionist policies that are so universally on offer today. Otherwise we will be plunging our citizens into a period of violence, destruction, and disintegration that could recall the horrors of the first half of the 20th century. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

(Jean-Pierre Lehmann is professor of International Political Economy at IMD, Lausanne, and founding director of the Vivian Group, a coalition for global liberal governance.)



Debates about immigration nowadays tend to concentrate on the impact newcomers have on social cohesion. Advocates of a more open policy argue that populations are ageing worldwide and are diminishing, and greater immigration is needed to sustain high living standards. Their opponents focus on the disruptive effects of immigration, particularly among the most vulnerable citizens in countries that already suffer from high unemployment. But a deeper, more global perspective is needed.

Between 1800 and 1950 Europe's population increased by 260 percent, from 203 million to 547 million, as the continent experienced extraordinary economic change, social upheaval, and political turmoil. Emigration from Europe was the continent's critical safety valve, without which the pressure placed on populations and states would have been unsustainable.

During these 150 years, Europeans emigrated en masse to Latin America, driving its population up by 50 million, to North America, which saw an increase of 75 million, and to Oceania, where the population rose by 11 million. Surplus rural folk could find land to till in the New World, or industrial employment in the colonies of Africa and Asia. Emigration also contributed to Europe's material and cultural wealth. Remittances kept European families, and international markets opened up European goods and capital.

Major shifts began occurring in the Third World, and accelerated in the post-war decades: independence in India, liberation in China, decolonisation in Asia and Africa, national building and industrialisation in Latin America. These changes had massive population impact. Between 1950 and 2050, Africa's population is projected to soar by 800 percent, from 221 million to nearly 1.8 billion, Asia by 375 percent, from 1.4 billion to 5.3 billion, and Latin America's by 484 percent, from 167 million to 809 million.

Sociopolitical conditions in developing countries where demographic growth outpaces economic growth—the situation throughout the Middle East and North Africa—are bound to deteriorate rapidly in the years ahead. So today's entry barriers, particularly in Europe, will produce ever-increasing waves of illegal

Four stars and the tree

Shri Bhadra Sharma, former Nepal Congress general secretary, in Birnathra, 26 July

The flag of the Nepal Democratic Congress led by Subarna Sunshere Rana had four stars, and BP Koirala's Nepal National Congress flag had three stars and a rising sun. The flag's three colours symbolised the mountains, the hills and the plains. The rising sun symbolised the growing political awareness in Nepal. When the two parties decided to merge, it was decided that the flag of the Nepal National Congress would be adopted. But Subarna Sunshere had already made thousands of the flags with four stars, which he showed BP Koirala. BP asked Subarna Sunshere why he had ordered so many flags. He was told that they were needed to spread the word of revolution in Nepal. He also said that it would be expensive to produce another flag, and that those already ordered would be useless.

All this happened before the parties formally merged in Chaitra 2008 BS [1951]. BP thought that the flag was just one symbol, and that Subarna Sunshere had already spent much money on them, and it would be wasteful to dump them. But he didn't say anything then. After both parties completed all the merger procedures, however, BP stood up and said that the flag of the new party would be that of the Nepal Democratic Congress. Ganesh Mani Singh opposed the move strongly. BP said that money would be needed to re-print the Nepal National Congress flag and that the party did not have the resources.

That was how the flag with the four stars became the Congress emblem. The colour red symbolises revolution. It means that we will bring about change through revolution, and then revolt again if it is needed to safeguard democracy. The white in the flag stands for peace. The four stars represent the four basic forces.

After the revolution, it was decided to have elections in 2015 BS [1958]. The Congress picked the tree as its election symbol. There was no particular reason for this, though candidates tried to interpret the symbol differently. The Congress simply selected it from the options put forward by the Election Commission. Today the tree is synonymous with the Congress, and has deep meaning for long-time party cadres.

Today most Congress members mean that they will side with the faction that gets to keep the election symbol and the party flag. This is what the two factions are now fighting for. The Koirala faction would never give up the two, and if the Deuba faction does not get it, its

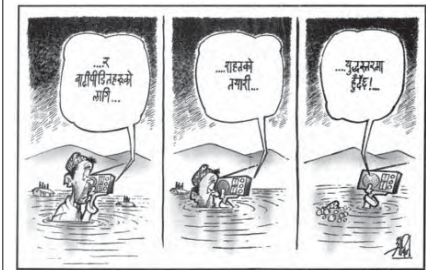


very existence would be threatened. It is difficult to establish a party based only on the fact of being in power, which makes the symbols valuable. The Election Commission should not have delayed its decision on the symbols because the longer it does, the more the commissioners' credibility is strained. People sense it may be delaying making public its decision under pressure from the government. What about the side that does not get the Election Commission's approval to keep the symbols? Can it contest the elections? Would it? The main Congress would be that with the tree and flag, and this complicates the tussle. But the Commission has little room to make any decision other than the expected one.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

There must be talks. I have always been saying that. But I am not saying that the government's military operations must stop. The operations may be stopped after a decision has been reached to have talks.

—Dhruva Bahadur Pradhan, former Inspector General of Police in Tarun, 29 July



Radio says: And for the flood victims... relief is being readied... on a war footing.

हिमालय टाइम्स, 28 जुलाई

Same old story

Excerpts from an interview with Mahan Gopal Khatri in Dhanusha, 28 July



महान गopal खत्री

On Panchayat vs democracy
They are both the same (panchayat and multi-party democracy). Have we changed the organisation at the grassroots? What is there something that was never there. India has Panchayat Raj, Europe at the very local level has councils of five people resolving local-level problems. The courts are for those who can afford them. Locals have always resolved their own problems in the past.

National politics

On behalf of industrialists and businessmen we had told Gijra Prasad Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nara that a 'broad alliance' would be another form of the Panchayat. If you have a coalition government, then there is no opposition. I told GP: you are a lifelong prime minister whether you are in office or not, because you have a strong organization and on make anyone the prime minister or finance minister. Nor just Sher Bahadur Deuba or Ram Sharan Mahat, all are people brought in by him. But I said, come over here and work for Deuba for the sake of the country.

To Madhav Nepal we said: stop doing politics in the name of the labourers and introduce the 'tree and flag' system, other parties will not work, but engage in strikes that cause industrial chaos and discourage investment. That would not enable economic progress.

Marxists have been practicing real communism. Have you seen any others in the group begging? We help everyone and make them capable of being able to earn two meagre days. Didja know that Kanti (the recently deceased Indian tycoon)

did not have anything in 1965, but [when he died] millions came out [to pay their final respects, and shareholders in the company] even feared the value of their shares would topple. He got the respect that no politician had, even though he had many cases against him in the courts. He kept investing and invested Rs 100 billion.

Modernity is in the economic sector. It we are able to achieve economic prosperity, even George Bush will say: 'Tony Blair and the Japanese prime minister will visit almost every month, but no one has paid attention to economics. Finally, it was during the visit of His Majesty the King to India and China that there were agreements on water resources, tourism and trade promotion. All these show that in the past, no country faces more economic than political...

Commission agencies

Earlier trading centres was good business, then contracts for salt and oils. After that came grocery stores and petrol pumps. Over time, business expanded and agencies came into being. Political interference began to increase once agencies started to flourish. These businesses began to think that this was what politicians should be doing, not them. The minister wanted to meet the company (representative), his personal assistant wanted to meet the same person, the minister's relative also wanted to do the same. The ministers themselves are doing the agency business. I don't mean that all HMG ministers are doing that, but in ministries like water resources, housing, telecommunications, where there is foreign aid, ministers are themselves engaged in the business. Earlier (during Panchayat days), when foreign projects came, there used to be briefings at different levels from conception until the project ended. The system vanished after democracy was introduced. Undisciplined people became ministers, and bureaucrats or their relatives took advantage of their positions. How could the political leaders build their houses in Kathmandu? Any person knows what their situation was twelve years ago...

The future for Nepal investors

Those of us in industry are facing hard times. Those who invested in mining (Magness), spinning (Burwal Textiles) and textiles have seen them all collapse. In this country to be successful through industry you have to stall, whether it is electricity or lodging revenue, that is the only way industry can run. Nepal is earning money by re-exporting raw materials imported at one percent duty. I don't have much to say. After India's Steel Authority supported one industry in Hetauda, all other steel makers sank. Why did the government not take up the issue with India? This is an important issue. They imposed anti-dumping duties and quotas, saying we were selling more copper wires than they seem to get away [doing the same] by government policy.

Orphaned

Kantipur, 29 July
Parag Bishara Maharishi (Makwanpur)

Nine-year-old Akash Bahadur Praja lost his entire 13-member family on a landslide on 22 July. Both his parents, grandfather, three brothers and seven sisters were swept away in Bhaisirang Danda after two days of incessant rainfall. Akash himself was 200 m below where his home used to be, when Ratan Man Praja from a neighbouring village carried him in a doko for two days to Manthan, the nearest place where medical help was available.

The child, who can speak only his native Cheung, has been demanding that he be sent back to his home and family. His only solace at the health post is a distant uncle Singh Bahadur Praja, who is also there, being treated for injuries he sustained in a landslide.

The child does not know the fate of the rest of his family. Singh Bahadur has managed to escape Akash so far that they will be able to return home when their work is done.

On the fateful night of 22 July, 42 people were killed at Devtar of Kakada VDC in addition to Akash's family. Kakada VDC is inhabited mostly by Cheungs, and of the 63 killed in the village, 34 are Cheungs.

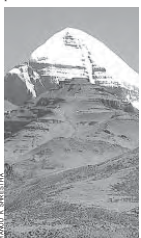
Maoist "tax"

Rajdhani, 30 July
Madhu Sudan Pradhan

The Maoist militants have started collecting "tax" from foreign trekkers. Trekkers going towards Manaslu in Tibet through Simikot in Jumla are charged a fee of \$100 per person. After that they are presented with a guidebook with pictures of Communist thinkers such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Those who refuse to pay the "tax" are said to be forced to discontinue their trek.

A group of New Zealanders on their way back from a trip to Manaslu said that they were assured that their personal safety and the safety for their belongings would be secure after they paid the designated tax. The militants refused outright their request to reduce the tax amount, but threatened the foreigners politely. The militants had appointed local school teachers as English-language interpreters to communicate with foreigners.

About 1,000 foreigners visit Manaslu via the Simikot route annually. The New Zealanders trekkers reported that there is total absence of government functionaries. The police posts in the area are deserted,



and destroyed by the militants.

Trekking agencies in Kathmandu are aware of the situation in the Simikot area, but most refused to comment for fear of Maoist retaliation. The Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAN) has issued an appeal to the trekkers to stop "taxing" foreigners a month ago when reports came in of the insurgents charging foreigners in the Makalu area \$50 each.

This extortion of money from foreigners contradicts the assurance given by Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai in a release issued about three months ago. In the release Dr Bhattarai had assured the safety of foreign visitors—if they informed his party in advance about their routes and schedules. However, he did recommend that visitors avoid "dangerous" areas.

Officialdom claimed ignorance about the matter. The Home Secretary Usha Datta Niraula said that the bureaucracy is unaware of such activities, and assured that action would be taken against anyone forcing foreigners to part with money.

Corruption in the air

Hazari, 31 July

Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Bal Bahadur KC and his deputy Minister of State Sanjay Ram Rai

abused their authority to appoint their brothers, who are not qualified for the position, on the board of directors of Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAAC). The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has already



notified the prime minister and asked him to take action against the ministers.

Presently the CIAA is investigating pending cases of previous controversial appointments to the RNAAC board. Both the ministers in question had tried to mislead the CIAA with irresponsible and irrational excuses during inquiries made by the CIAA before the recommended action against them.

A seat on the RNAAC's board of directors has been long known as a place where anyone can amass wealth and enjoy unlimited privileges. Everyone with influence, from high-level bureaucrats to ministers, have always used their colleagues to appoint their relatives to the board.

The privileged brothers, Keshav Babu KC and Atzabhar Rai, seem to be in no mood to resign from their posts. Besides, the ministers from the Deuba faction of the Nepal Congress seem to have realised that their political careers are coming to an end, and so have decided to appoint their close relatives in influential positions and misappropriate of government funds.

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

OF POTTERY AND POEMS: Jhamak Kumari Ghimire



Two years back, at the age of nineteen, Jhamak Kumari Ghimire burst onto Nepal's literary scene with several collections of poems, songs, journal entries, stories and essays, that showcased her remarkable mastery of language and literature, and insight into the social realities that she writes of. Born with a severe disability that has robbed her of motor control of her arms, stunted her speech, and limited her movement, Jhamak Kumari writes

with her foot. Her sensibility is anything but restricted. With a skill that rivals that of the best progressive writers of today she explores hard political, intellectual, feminist and social issues, without shying away from emotional expressions of love, regret, joy and sadness. The intensity of her voice is riveting: while there are, obviously, more stylish, clever poets and writers in Nepal, there may not be anyone for whom the written word carries so much urgency. Here is someone who palpably lives by her words.

Both the poems translated below are excerpted from Jhamak Kumari's collected writings, *Awasthachhori* Agastman. The first poem below speaks in controlled rage of the senselessness of the present times.

WHAT IS THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM?

A soft light glimmers
on the eve of people's deaths
The fern unfurls out of season
without its stem
having matured

No mourning will be observed now
on the eves of people's deaths
What is the interpretation of this age?
A separate life identity
thrives inside a scream

After a hollow ending
the raped
accused
abducted
orphaned skeletons
won't exorcise their agitation
at the crossroads of expression
as one exorcises
witches and ghosts
by sacrificing chicks

The sari and blouse torn
in the poverty of a ray to wear
in the freezing winters
dram the snow rivers of the season
and yet there is no hint of bitterness
The yearned-for attacks
not once of one winter
but of thunder and lightning
spread no murderous lunescence

A peaceful flame burns forever
at evening time in the homes of the dead
It is likely that
the cultured people who affect devotion
do not wish to offer to the fire
a single leaf
for this millennium

Now, what is the interpretation of this age?
Each hurting moment
Each hurting tremor
kisses the arrival of the new millennium



without the slightest cry of pain

Not a stir of the new millennium came to the frostbitten heaves of the old grandmother to the ragged tune of the old grandfather. The water jugs filled by a young girl near this courtyard of poverty taunt the new millennium it shows she has plundered and arranged unearthly countless realities and search in the grandmother's torn sari and blouse in the grandfather's patched tunic for the interpretation of the new millennium

Poverty is an issue that is difficult to take on in poetry without giving way to flat, cliché-ridden didacticism. Jhamak Kumari overcomes this challenge through the sincerity of her voice, and the sophistication of her language. In the poem below, she takes to task the irresponsible father (the metaphoric father of the state) who has abandoned his progeny to the indifferent streets:

A STREET CHILD'S QUESTION TO HIS FATHER

Baba! I'll ask you a question
if you won't shoot it down
for though you can boast
a hundred thousand offspring
I have only one father

Baba! Have you forgotten me
amid the hordes of your offspring
I am your fugitive child
Have you forgotten your
sleepless communion with my mother?
How could you embrace me
a new ray rising from wrong time?
I am the avenging apparition
of wrong time

an unneeded offspring
added to the hordes of your offspring
a mere child who broke through
his mother's stained womb
a renegade child

Baba! I'll ask another question
though you can boast
a hundred thousand children
the union of my blood
in the union of my blood
Questions of silent union
arise from the cacophony

Half formed by you
fully formed by my mother
am I, the child of the street
Why did you damage me
on a corner of the street?
Why did you fill my mind
with gunpowder?
Its transformation will leave
your society and you poisoned

Baba, my last question:
why are you siring
renegade children like me
who have it in their funeral pyre
before you have died
who have mourned you
before your death
shattering pebbles

Baba! Why are you siring
renegade children like me?

Overcoming great odds to find her clear, moral voice, Jhamak Kumari is one of the brightest poets of Nepali literature today. Her stylish, clever elders in the field of poetry might learn, from her work, how to speak out for democracy and progress in these troubled times.

ENCOUNTERS

by MEGH RANJANI RAI

Pappu the bangle seller

In Nepal, it is now the survival of the smallest micro-entrepreneur.

I watch the political scenario unfolding before our eyes as the newspaper comes flying in on its parabolic journey, a precise trajectory from the delivery boy's fingers. How many more killed yesterday in encounter? How many more washed away by landslide? How many roads blocked? How many more micro-entrepreneurs killed?

Here in Birganj, sitting 'Nepali Special Chat' and munching on a suspiciously orange-tinted bhajiyai I watch through spectacles of speculation.

What speculation? What Expectation. What Tillano?

Behind Closed Doors:
A bashing of the max, an angry face, pacification, justification, Behind Closed Doors:
Decisions taken, Strategies Forsaken, False Political Smile, Every once in a while
Behind Closed Doors:
The Maoist Plight, all planned hindsight, Behind Closed Doors:
Do you know what I do? I have I wish.

The sparrow is hopping and pecking at the gravel under my feet. All the while, great heads are rising, great minds awakening to begin the day a logger-heads. Somebody bumps somebody off, while the opposition stands at the stump. Look at me, watch and hurry off, clapping by bag and my subsequent steps to the minister's back and all. Yet I have had my moment of bliss, the simplicity of a roadside encounter.



There is hope as long as there are enthusiastic people like the young micro-entrepreneur Pappu K Singh. 'Class Fight, the bangle-seller of Mina Bazar. His father is the manager of the Gemini Circus, and is always travelling. Pappu sits in for his mother and is the man of the house, wheeling and dealing with the ladies, who are all set to buy the requisite bangles for the picnic mood of Swarn.

He gauges the customer and, poker faced, quotes different prices for the same product, ranging from Rs 10-16 depending on the customer. I sit silently and watch him negotiate. He looks at me and says 'You should reduce in one item and increase in the other, auntie.' He plans to expand and diversify his bangle shop, a bigger place with a wider range of products.

Or maybe it is the women, who come daily selling green grocers and chilies, colourful cottons, sarees draped over their heads, protecting them from the afternoon heat. Contributing to the family's well being.

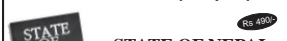
How do foreign exchange reserves and budget lines matter here? It is the survival of the smallest micro-entrepreneur. Maybe we should go that way. A paper presented at a National Seminar on Micro Enterprise Development in Nepal, jointly organised by MOICs and UNDP Policy Needs in Micro-enterprises in Nepal in May had this to say:

'Micro enterprises are an effective means for poverty alleviation by engaging the rural poor in economic activities and employment promotion and encouraging them to convert local savings into productive investments, and focus on women. Entrepreneurship development has contributed to women empowerment.'

Tell that to Pappu K Singh. ♦

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Unrealistic items

Two bits of news this week in the papers give us hope in these troubled times that there is indeed a strong possibility that there may after all be a silver lining at the end of the tunnel for Nepal's economy.

Being the 122nd poorest nation on earth, it is clear that we have to learn to live within our limited means. It does not behoove us to indulge in conspicuous consumption and snobbishly insist on only buying expensive genuine articles.

The first news item concerns an investor who decided to use his photocopy shop in Teku to churn out replicas of Indian 500 rupee notes, and distribute them to the needy and destitute. At the rate his business is expanding, Indian currency is going to be declared legal tender in this country, just like in the old days. Only this time, it is going to be counterfeit currency.

Our next Pirate of the Year is the fellow in Pydhya who is showing exemplary entrepreneurship by manufacturing imitation 555 cigarettes from the comfort of his own home. This guy is a genius.

Ordinary Nepalis can't afford expensive 555s, so he slashes the price drastically and sells fake fags that look and feel just like the genuine article.

All right, all right, the cigarettes taste like you are inhaling combustible horse manure, but we're working on it, OK? You can't expect us to blend horse do-do perfectly at first shot, especially if you are paying for it with fake Indian notes. (Statutory Government Health Warning: It's going to kill you anyway, so it doesn't matter what you smoke.)

The important thing is that Nepal's private sector is concerned about creating new jobs and making Virginia blends trendy and affordable to the masses. And, instead of just sitting on their butts like the rest of us, our bold buccaneers are doing something about reviving economic activity.

What these two venture capitalists, Nepali businessmen have proven is that all it takes is a small amount of seed capital, imagination, and a can-do attitude to launch an unrealistic product, and thus combine business with public service. Inspired by them, we are now processing applications for the manufacture of the following forged items:

● Pseudo-Pajeros.

These are knock-offs of the actual Mitsubishi 4WDs, but for a fraction of the cost. So, if you are a politician, all you have to do is be only half-corrupt to be able to afford one of these.

● Quasi-Diesel.

Instead of pure diesel, which is expensive, put a tiger in your tank by filling her up with affordable and high-octane kerosene.

● Phony-telephony. These designer brand mobiles with names such as Nokia, Sony, and Motorola are coming off the assembly lines in vast numbers at Khosa.

● Sham shampoo. Squeeze out a liberal amount of Head Over Shoulders shampoo with conditioner and rub gently over scalp, and rinse. Careful, now, we don't want the wig to fall off, do we?

● Pretend democracy. Feigning freedom in a make-believe land.

What do a group of young Kathmandu printing press workers do on long weekends: a) stay home and watch Hindi movies on cable, b) stay home and play cards, c) hang around the Bagnath Bridge and watch the world go by. The answer is: d) none of the above.

Ram Tuladhar, Krishna Hari Magar, Sita Ram Gurung, Man Bahadur Gurung, Raju Shrestha, Sunil Babu Dhungana, Suren Shrestha, Parun Nagarkoti, Shyam Joshi, Prakash Thapa Magar, Kapil Budathoki, Nar Bahadur Gurung, Saru Babu Tamang are names that represent a cross-section of Nepal. And they are all colleagues at a printing press in Patan who are bike aficionados. Every chance they get, they're off to see the world. Well, not exactly. They're off to see Nepal.

Inspired by the Nepali round-the-world cyclist, Pushkar Shah, who is currently somewhere in South America, the group has bicycle-

trekked roundtrip from Kathmandu to Trisuli, Kodari, Gorkha, Pokhara and Narayanghat. They have even done the grueling Kathmandu-Hetauda Tribhuvan Highway via Daman.

"People along the highways are not used to seeing Nepalis on long bicycle tours," says 30-something Ram Tuladhar, "village children, along the way call us 'Nepali'."

So far, the tours have lasted four to five days with up to ten hours of bicycling every day. Some days are easy, like coasting downhill all the way from Dhulikhel to Dolaghat. But others are strenuous and need tremendous muscle power, like the Mugling to Thankot stretch.

At tea shops along the way, locals are surprised that it is possible to go such long distances on bicycle, and even more astonished that the "tourists" are working-class Nepalis like them.

"Many people ask us why we take all the trouble if no one is paying us to do it," says Saru Babu

Tamang, "they are puzzled when we say we're just doing it for fun." Many of their friends and relatives have warned the bicyclists that it may be dangerous to do these tours at times like these.

"Some told us the police would harass us, but the policemen have all been friendly. They warned us that the army would stop us, but soldiers have never bothered us. Others warned us about Maoists, but we haven't yet met a single Maoist on the trails," says Ram, seen rounding a hair-pin bend on the Kodari Highway in the photo above.

The group's next ambition is to do a 1,200 km tour from Mechi to Mahakali right across the length of Nepal.

Says Saru Babu: "When you are pedalling, one thing that strikes you is that in Nepal, it is up and down all the way. Everywhere you have an easy downhill, you know that sometime, somewhere, there will be a hard uphill."

Sounds like life itself.