

EXCLUSIVE
Three men and a tree

Up here in the remote north of Gorkha district at the base of Mt Manaslu, ten days walk from the nearest road, we should be far away from the Maoist insurgency. The silence and stupendous scenery momentarily hails us with its tranquility. But the silence of these villages is the silence of fear. You suddenly realise that there is no laughter of children greeting strangers walking into town, no curious villagers chit-chatting on the trails. Fear stalks the valley of the Budi Gandaki, even this high up near the Chinese border.

Down up the valley by the action of the security forces, armed Maoist guerrillas roam the village trails and train in the jungles. The nearest army base is eight days walk away at Anghat, and the Maoists here don't even bother to hide.

Samagaun and the villages of Shyow and Lho are located high in the Manaslu region, directly north of the areas of Gorkha district which have been Maoist strongholds. There is one-way in and one-way out, and the guerrillas have their bases and training camps in the thick coniferous forests on either side of the river. There used to be two police stations at Jager and Namung, but they were blown up by Maoists in late May.

In a monastery courtyard in Shyow, Gyalmo had just started telling us: "People do not treat strangers as they used to in the past..." Just then his younger brother Pemra shouted from the house: "Get inside, quick, inside. Maoists are coming." (Both names have been changed to protect the brothers' identity.)

Later, we found out that an ad hoc squad led by Bhabu Lamichhane, known as Comrade Sameer, had come up to find out who had flown in on the helicopter. The villagers apparently told the Maoists that it was a group of monks who had come from Kathmandu to paint the monastery.

At Sando, 3,900 m above sea level, the local lodge owner told us the last time the Maoists came was in June. "I drank an entire bottle of Chinese liquor to fortify myself," he said. They had come to ask him to feed some of their comrades. "Of course I fed them, what can you do when they have guns?"



The argument that the tree may actually be a liability for candidates does not seem to bother rival kangress who are using pay-war tactics to put pressure on the commissioners. There have been 'leaks' to the press, and threats of a poll boycott. Elections are less than three months away, and the EC needs to select 256 election officers, decide on how to phase the elections, and agree on voting booths and polling officials. The key factor in all this, of course, is security. Officials told us a decision is expected by the 'end of next week'.



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Times Weekly Internet Post # 68

Q. Is it now time for the government to agree to the Maoists' offer of talks?

Yes 58.3%
Don't know 2.2%
No 39.5%

Total votes: 2153

Weekly Internet Post # 68. To vote go to: www.nepal.com.np

Q. Has the CIAA done enough, or should it go after the big fish?

MOHAN MAINALI in SAMAGAUN

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H is for helicopter



Learning new alphabets in remote Nepal.

Things get more tense as you move south along the swollen Budi Gandaki. The deep gorges and cliffs serve as perfect hideouts, and the security forces avoid them for fear of ambush. "We don't have an idea of where they may be, but can sense them all around us," a shopkeeper in Philim told us. "They come when they want, ask us for food and supplies and then leave after painting slogans on our houses." Most villagers are afraid the army will come up and mistake them for Maoist sympathisers because of the slogans.

"One of them told me, Ama don't ever enter this slogan," a 60-year-old grandmother told us in Jager. "Otherwise you will be killed." Now the fans she will be killed if she does, and killed if she doesn't. The red scrawl on her wall reads: "Withdraw the anti-servant

law, and end the military offensive." The slogans are everywhere on the road to Anghat: on destroyed public buildings, the sides of homes, on cliffsides, on bridges. The villagers are so terrified of forced recruitment by the Maoists or retaliation by the security forces, that many young men have fled the region. There are very few teachers, or anyone who can read and write, left.

If you don't agree with them, you get killed. So the safe option is to get out," admitted one village elder.

Here in the north, villagers suspect any loud "Ronghe" of being a Maoist and keep away from them. "I spent the whole night in the jungle with my wife when I heard that the Maoists had come to our village," a

local in Syala told us. Soldiers go out on patrol from the Royal Nepal Army camp at Anghat, and venture as far out as Lapa, one day north. The regions beyond are already rife with rumours about what the soldiers do. "Some teachers at Lapa were beaten up, and so was a teacher who later fled to India," a teacher told us. For their part, the Maoists killed a hotel owner in Amala on suspicion of being an informant.

Northern Gorkha is a food deficit area, but no food has gone up for the past three months. The villagers have the current potato crop to last them till new supplies are brought down from Tibet. The Imphess has also increased timber poaching, and hundreds of yaks carry Nepali logs being smuggled into China.

CIAA to target big fish

BINOD BHATTARAI
CIAA Chief Suryanath Upadhyaya has begun to come under a new kind of "pressure". This time, his phones at home and work are ringing off the hook, not from people seeking favours, but from others urging him to enter his crackdown on corrupt officials.

Two weeks after the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) busted 22 revenue department officials, Upadhyaya is encouraged by the support. He told us in an interview: "I have had calls from many people, including politicians, and they've all congratulated us." CIAA officials are concerned about their safety, though they haven't received any overt threats. Upadhyaya and his team of in-house lawyers are now preparing formal charge sheets against the 22 officials, five of whom are still at large.

How about criticism that the CIAA is not going after the big fish, and has let the political masters of corrupt bureaucrats go scot free? "I can't tell you what will come next, but we're not sitting idle," Upadhyaya said. "No one is big or small for us. If the crime is serious enough, and we have proper evidence, nothing will stop us from doing our job."

The 55-year-old former Secretary who has a law degree says that the CIAA could do with more resources and manpower, but it is not waiting for that to go after crooks. "It is the public support that has given us more confidence," he said.



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NEPALI TIMES
Editorial
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Editorial

BLOODY WELL RIGHT

It is when your country starts making it regularly to the News Bar on CNN that you know it has hit the big time. In the past year, Nepal has been seen scrolling across the bottom of the screen with breaking news of some disaster or another.

You don't make it to the News Bar with a story on how tourists are beginning to return to Nepal this season. No, it has to be a plane crash. You don't make it to the news with the opening of a new hospital. It has to be on the latest village to be wiped off the map by a landslide.

That is the way the business is: news is whatever is negative, out of the ordinary, bizarre, or celebrity-driven. Tabloid television's appetite for news is voracious. But the news menu is shrinking as producers try to cut costs by repeating the same news on the hour, every hour. Slabs of news, therefore, come off the assembly lines of the world's Perpetual News Machines, refined, sugar-coated, and packaged for a lowest global denominator in audience surveys.

Live coverage of routine trivia distorts reality by exaggerating the importance of an event. It sends the truth by selecting the negative. The mere listing of facts thus does not necessarily bring us closer to the truth. In fact, facts can distort reality. Facts, if they are selective or incomplete, can lie.

But it is really not fair to blame the international press when we are doing such a poor job right here. The media has a role in preventing conflict, but rarely do we see them fulfilling it. Mostly, the reporting begins only after the guns start blazing, by which time the momentum of war muzzles media. And we have seen time and again that even the saddest stories of human anguish and suffering of the innocent are not enough to stop conflict once it begins.

Body-bag journalism, a daily death count that reads like a cricket score sheet, dehumanise the misery. It numbs the public into accepting violence as a way of life. It spreads bad blood and a thirst for revenge. Violence may be prolonged even by the loaded words that we choose to use: "terrorists" when it is "martyrs" when it is us. We legitimise slaughter by accepting propaganda, by selective coverage, by sterile, clinical listing of numbers, by sensationalism and negativity, by the absence of context.

And when we in the restful world of the media are confronted with our own deficiencies, we blame the critics. Or we hide behind journalism's traditional rules of stence objectivity and neutrality to make ourselves a safe cocoon. What we need is a journalism of outrage, outrage at the violence, outrage at the injustice that perpetuates it, a journalism that builds public outrage against our conflict.

Let us explore the causes of escalation, and the impact of our choices. As we do, we need enough to heal society's wounds, or are we rubbing salt in them? Why do we repeatedly show the bodies of the dead on television screens spread about like water buffaloes at the Kof? How does that help restore peace?

We have a choice: media can keep on being a passive observer. Or we can start becoming a part of the solution.

The justices of the Supreme Court did not find fault with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's decision to dissolve parliament and local government bodies. But the court's legitimacy comes from the people. Whether it is a landmark or ordinary, none of the news is good news. You don't make it to the News Bar with a story on how tourists are beginning to return to Nepal this season. No, it has to be a plane crash. You don't make it to the news with the opening of a new hospital. It has to be on the latest village to be wiped off the map by a landslide.

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Bonus miles for Deuba
If a leader on the verge of boarding a plane is unaware of his destination, he deserves our sympathy, not criticism

Speaking at an airport ambush before heading for Brussels last week, prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba appeared to be confused about where exactly he was he was going. Just as amazing miles, he might have said.

That would have been okay, but he did seem to have any idea whether he was going to be re-imposed on not, and he had nothing much to say about efforts to make elections free and fair. But he did use the opportunity to beat the media for criticising everything he did.

To be fair, Deuba has reason to be peeved when he called it. If someone on the verge of boarding an aircraft is unaware of his destination, he deserves our sympathy, not criticism. Ever since the dissolution of the Lower House of

the parliament, premier Deuba's politics have atrophied so much that his leadership has become dysfunctional. The coalition odours have now circled the globe and even reached the Paris offices of Reporters Sans Frontiers, which has officially declared him a "press predator" and listed him with the likes of the Abu Sayyaf and Kim Jong-il.

Even though he called it off mid-trip, Deuba's johannesburger junk was completely appropriate. His presence wasn't really required in the corridors of power here in Kathmandu, and no one (except perhaps the security detail in Baluwatal) noticed his absence. In fact, the country seems to run pretty well without him.

The feeling that the country can be better governed by non-elected constitutional bodies and non-political security forces is gaining ground in Kathmandu. And if the capital's chatter had its way, it would willingly hand over the reins of power to an international trust.

In this milieu, all politicians are considered expendable. And premier Deuba even more so, because all of Nepali society—barring the government and the faction behind him in his own political party—is convinced that he has little or no say over decisions that really matter. Nobody believes that Deuba can prevent the re-imposition of state of emergency in the country if the security forces decide to remain engaged with the insurgents.

Perhaps Deuba knows that if another possibility of a negotiated settlement with the Maoists arose, he would have no role in it. Completely irrelevant on the domestic front, it's quite natural for Deuba to venture overseas, and get entangled in domestic Belgian politics for a change.

Deuba has another powerful excuse to spend scarce government on an exotic tour. Since Nepal is the chair of SAARC and president, and he's been elected to represent more than one-sixth of humanity at the first-ever United Nations' World Summit on Sustainable Development. That is, he's never gotten anywhere near Johannesburg.

Intelligently used, it could be an effective tool to magnify Nepal's visibility at a mere of more than 100 world leaders. So, it's surprising that he is largely symbolic, so he needs to have worried about the substance of what he said.

The third reason Deuba needs to be in Johannesburg was he could meet Colin Powell and Tony Blair to whom he put in a word so the hardware deliveries for the military are expedited.

And, oh, yes, last but not least, the prime minister could reaffirm Nepal's commitment for sustainable economic development, even if it cost the \$15 million of much-needed cash to send our delegation there.

Unlike George Bush, Deuba had no credible reason to boycott Johannesburg. And he needs to worry too much if his actions back home bear no resemblance to the speech he would have given from the podium. There is no death of hypocrites at any international meet.

There is another advantage of this pleasure trip for an ex-clubber in social democracy. Far away from the constant bickering of shifty-eyed cabinet colleagues, the justice would be that Deuba gets a opportunity to reflect upon the promises that he had made to himself years ago as one of the loyal acolytes of late BP Koirala.

No doubt, the expression of "sustainable development" is a fancy yellow, but it rests on the same old three pillars of inter-and intra-generational social equity—democracy, fraternity and liberty.

Democracy incorporates the participation of all citizens in the decision-making process; the preventive and solidarity principles, and liberty ensures that the entire process remains human. The Washington Consensus has given liberalism a bad name, but fundamentally, to be liberal it is to be tolerant of all kinds of diversity on the planet that is our collective home.

Even if Deuba returns to Kathmandu with just a recollection of things he believed in a decade ago, his trip may have been worth it. Even if he never made it to Jo'burg.

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Giving micro-credit where it's due

Away from the glare of national politics, a quiet rural revolution in microfinance is on in the tarai.

ANI RUDRA SILWAL

IN DUMKIHAS,
at 2 PM on a recent Sunday, and the women of Dumkikas in Nawalparasi district know that it is the time for the weekly meeting of their village bank.

Thirty women have gathered in this dusty highway town for the meeting of the Bhrikuti Village Bank. After president Kiran Tiwari formally opens the meeting, she begins calling each member by name. They come forward one by one and hand over their weekly savings to the treasurer.

Once everyone submits their savings, plus payments of installment on previous loans, the president declares that Rs 7,500 was collected that week. She asks who in the group would like to borrow money for the next four months. Two women decide to borrow: one to pay fees for her children, and another to invest in a tea-shop to raise nearby.

Faraway from the corruption and default scandals in the big banks in Kathmandu, and out of the glare of the national media, there is a quiet rural revolution going on in the tarai. More than 1,500 small village banks like the one in Dumkikas have been bringing new hope to farmers, giving women economic empowerment and raising the nutritional standards of children.

Nepal's revolution in microfinance—small-scale, semi-formal savings and credit activ-

ities in rural areas—had begun simultaneously with the more famous experiments in Bangladesh in 1981 with Grameen Bank. Here, we called it the Small Farmer's Development Program (SFDP) and twenty years later, every conceivable model of microfinance has been tried in Nepal. The village banking idea is the latest, and what is unique is that the cooperative savings schemes are owned and run completely by local women.

One of those initiatives is the three-year Women's Empowerment Program, the group PACT Nepal had helped establish and train village banks to keep their own records. Each bank consists of 25-35 women who elect a president, treasurer, secretary and a controller from amongst themselves. They decide how frequently they are going to save, which is usually weekly or monthly, or to pay fees for her children, and another to invest in a tea-shop to raise nearby.

When an 11-year-old girl was raped in Chitwan a few years ago by two men (one of them a relative) local women from the Mahila Urban Village Bank caught the two men, tied them up and hired two tractor to report them to police. In Dumkikas, women from the Bhrikuti village bank are working with another nearby women's bank to improve the dirt road that passes through their village because heavy trucks have ruined it.

Still, many women say that

immense sense of ownership and accomplishment. Pointing at a heap of corn drying in the sun, Laxmi Chaudhary of Chitwan says, "Although this corn belongs to my family, I don't really feel that it is my own. But I feel that the cow that I bought with the loan from the village bank is really my own." Laxmi sells the milk to save in her village bank and uses the rest of the money for purposes that she sees fit. Her friend, Subhadra Chaudhary says, "I have one's worry even if my husband leaves me because I have my own savings."

Because they borrow from themselves, the interest on loans stays within the group. More importantly, it releases the village women from having to depend on local loan sharks who charge up to 60 percent interest. This is also indirect benefits to women for whom financial independence appears to result in social empowerment.

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Still, many women say that



the decisions on loans and spending are still made by the men in the family. "After we set up the bank, women themselves have been able to borrow," says Bidhya Timilsina of Chitwan. "But most of the time, the loan is used in consultation with the male members of the family. Even when that happens, it is women who are responsible for repaying the loans."

The other problem has been that most microfinance schemes have not used loans to set up self-sustaining businesses, but to allow the family to tide over an immediate need like a marriage, send a relative abroad to work, pay medical or school bills. These activities are not necessarily non-productive and investing in education, or health can yield long-term benefits. However, it does put a burden on women who have to repay the loans.

Opening up a micro-enterprise in rural areas by women of their own requires a lot of self-confidence and a change in attitude that cannot be brought about in a few years. Where rural planners are optimistic is that the message is optimistic is that there is use in consultation with the male members of the family. Even when that happens, it is women who are responsible for repaying the loans.

Most village banks are still less than five years old, and most have maintained practically zero default rates, and delinquency is also very low. These results are stupendous when compared with repayment rates at large government-owned banks like Nepal Bank or Agricultural Development Bank which have huge amounts of bad loans.

The reason is the social networks that bind the women in a cooperative. Since everyone in the group knows each other, they use peer-pressure to make sure that borrowers repay their loans on time. "Women are afraid that

they will lose their *ijjar* in front of everyone in the group," says Nimlata Chaudhary of Sauraha in Chitwan. "No matter what, we repay loans to the group, even if we have to do so by borrowing from a different source."

One rule that banks enforce is that at the end of the loan cycle (which is usually between three and six months), everyone must repay the loans from the group. The banks have realised that doing so in reality is extremely difficult so they allow women to repay from a different source and borrow the same amount immediately. Doing so keeps the records clear of delinquencies and makes borrowers happy.

Alternative sources of loans for women have been friends, relatives, other groups that the women save in, or other microcredit programs like the



Grameen, Nirhdan, or other government-sponsored lending programs. In the long run this mechanism of instant repayment and co-borrowing could put the banks in jeopardy.

The health of VIB relies heavily on how well they manage to stick to the rules. Penalties for delayed savings or repayment is not an example. Although most groups have rules to charge fines in such cases, older groups seem less strict

about them than newer ones. In the long run, relaxation of rules could raise the default rate, or even cause a bank run with members withdrawing their savings.

Most banks have total savings of less than Rs 100,000, and the fund is increasing by up to 50% per year. At this rate, they could easily reach Rs 1,000,000 within the next five years. And as the volume of deposits increase, so will the size and complexity of records. Record-

keeping will be a problem for banks which have few educated women. And as the fund increases, the women will need to look for new places and ideas to invest in.

Economists have long told us the importance of savings in economic development. And the miracle in the tarai is that subsistence farmers have found that they can save. "In the beginning our group began to save Rs 2 per week," says Kamala

Adhikari of Arangkhola, Nawalparasi. "I would wonder how I would be able to save that amount. But I have become careful about where I spend. Now we are saving Rs 25 per week and I am still managing fine."

(Ani Rudra Silwal was working on a thesis on village banking at Swarthmore College in the United States.)

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Twin Otters still safe

Even though most of the Twin Otter aircraft have been lost in accidents in Nepal in the past 15 years than any other aircraft type, aviation experts say the Canadian-built plane is still the most suitable equipment for Nepal.



The latest Twin Otter accident was the Shangi-la Air DHC-6 which crashed into a mountain just before landing in Pokhara during heavy monsoon showers last week killing three crew members and 15 tourists on board.

The Twin Otter was introduced to Nepal in 1970 as part of a Canadian aid project, and is the mainstay of the domestic fleet of Royal Nepal Airlines. The state-owned airline has six of the twin-engine short-take-off-and-landing (STOL) planes out of an original total of twelve. Other private airlines also fly Twin Otters, and find the aircraft to be versatile on the short, sloping dirt airstrips in the mountains of Nepal.

"It is still the best aircraft to fly in Nepal," says George Nowak, of Acres International, a Toronto company which got a Canadian government contract to refurbish Royal Nepal's ageing Twin Otters last year. "We brought 20 years of life back to them." Nowak told the Toronto Globe and Mail. Nowak said there have been improvements in Nepal's aircraft-maintenance records, but pilots still face dangerous weather conditions flying in the Himalayas during the monsoons.

Between 1972 and 1979, the Canadian International Development Agency donated seven Twin Otters to Royal Nepal. Subsequent CIDA projects, which were vital to regional development and tourism in Nepal, focused on aircraft maintenance, pilot training, and building a hangar in Nepalgunj.

Disabled expedition to Everest

Fifteen disabled Americans are warming up to climb up to Mt Everest in spring 2003 in an expedition. Team Everest '03 organised by the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities. "I just love the camaraderie of the people facing some adversity in their lives and have found a way to overcome it," said Gene Rodgers, 47, one of four team members who will attempt the climb up to Base Camp in a wheelchair. The group, with members from their 20s to 60s, is looking for five more climbers with the stamina, a sense of adventure and \$6,000. Expedition leader Gary Guller tried to scale Mount Everest last year. Now the 35-year-old, whose left arm was amputated after a climbing accident in Mexico, aims to climb to the 8,848 m peak from the Nepal side after the team reaches base camp.

Courting controversy in Belgium

Nepal's bid to buy 5.56 mm assault rifles from Belgium's Fabrique Nationale (FN), has become controversial in Brussels, leading to the resignation of a cabinet minister. The Belgian government defends the sale of more than 5,000 machine guns to Nepal saying that the Nepal authorities need the weapons to fight the Maoist insurgency. But politicians from other Belgian parties, including Minister for Health and Environment Magda Aelvoet, who resigned over the deal, claim that the sale could infringe on a 1991 law that bans export of weapons to countries engaged in a civil war. They have demanded an urgent parliamentary debate on the deal.

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HERE AND THERE

Robert D Kaplan roams the world, from the edges of anarchy to the cognitive wilderness of his own United States of America. Both these colourful little phrases, by the way, are his creations, titles of books that he's written along the way—the first a collection of accounts of Kaplan's travels to hellholes, basket case countries and war zones, the second a look around the USA through a foreign reporter's severely jaundiced eye. His observations everywhere are ingenious and controversial, even at home in these patriotic times. I don't always agree with Kaplan but I rush to read what he writes.

His insights into American demographics were haunting me this week as I sat in a coffee shop in a large shopping mall in Toronto. The table looked out on a large open space between shops, a sort of 21st century village square. You could sip your beverage and watch the world go by. And in Toronto, the world does go by. More than half of the population of this city was born outside of Canada. Many of the remainder are first generation immigrants, and as I watched the multicultural ebb and flow through the stream from my cappuccino, I began to reflect on a phrase of Kaplan's from the *An Empire Wilderness*, a turn of the millennium book about the changing face of America.

As he travels from Orange County in California to the decaying public housing estates of East St Louis, Kaplan discovers that America's black Asian immigrant population is becoming the most influential demographic group in the country. People from across the vast sweep of Asia are not outnumbered by Latin Americans, Europeans or black Americans, but their economic abilities allow them to punch far above their weight. And as Kaplan finds out, more and more of them are moving into other communities. So too are the Latinos and the children of newly arrived Europeans. It's not that teenage children of immigrants are rushing into the arms of the nearest white person, or actively joining their people their ethnic group. It's that America's economy and society throw people into a different sort of promiscuity, a whoddy of work-related opportunity,

The Mestizo Mall

In the not-so-distant future, we'll all be mixed.

debate and creativity that makes ethnicity subservient to intelligence and vocational skills. Then people who work together get married. It's that simple Kaplan speculates in *An Empire Wilderness* that as the generations pass, America will become a nation populated by a vast successful swathe of mixed race people with slightly brown skin and slightly Asian features, whatever those may be. He coins the term "mestizo-Polyasian," an awkward construct to be sure but as I drained the last drops of my fancy coffee in that Toronto mall, I could see what he meant. The older couples that strolled between the shops were uniformly similar people, Italians with Italians, Jamaicans with Jamaicans, Singhs and Kanars. But then came the younger folk and a rainbow coalition of changing demography in action.

For fun, I started a mental game, saying to myself "Okay, now how about a Tamil and a Laotian," and eventually such a couple would wander by. "A Somali and a Finn?" Yep. And so on. Now none of these people have any offspring yet, but I sense mestizo-Polyasians (think of them as MP) aplenty will soon be populating the malls of Canada. There'll be horror as the landed generation of immigrant parents contemplate the foreign (relatively speaking) face of their daughter's (or son's) side during the wedding ceremony. But the great American (and British, Australian and Canadian) muddle culture mixes well with human sexuality to sweep all that aside. Then MP's marry MP's and the mixed society regains respect. That's one reason why places like Nepal and India have, in my view and Kaplan's, more potential than citizens often realise. The mixing and matching of castes and communities in cities like Delhi and Kathmandu is creating a microcosm of the vibrant MP culture of the New World. No not quite Orange County or the Yorkdale shopping mall in Toronto, but a beacon of hope nonetheless. And the cappuccino at Barista or Himalayan Java is pretty good too. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



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WHO or WTO?

GENEVA - The principle that public health concerns should take priority over trade interests was publicly accepted Thursday by the international organisations entrusted with regulating these two areas, which are often the source of discord. The WHO and the WTO recognise the right of each country to adopt measures restricting imports or exports when they are considered necessary to protect the health and lives of people or to preserve national animal and plant life. "WTO jurisprudence has clearly established that its members have the undisputed right to determine the level of health protection they deem appropriate," says Miguel Rodríguez Mendonza, one of the trade institution's four deputy director-generals. The tensions between the right to health services and the existing multilateral trade rules have troubled the WTO since it was created in 1995, and have been a stumbling block in its relations with civil society. Since then, NGOs specialising in health and development, like Doctors without Borders, Oxfam International and the Third World Network, have waged a campaign to ensure that trade in medicines is subject to universal rights and values, and not to the rules of the market. (PWS)

Only two kids, or else

NEW DELHI - Several Indian states have been silently enforcing a two-child norm that may worsen the country's already skewed sex ratio and ruin the chances of women taking part in local governance, experts here warn. India's National Population Policy (NPP), released in 2000, aims to have the country - now with a population of more than one billion - achieve a stable population by 2045. India is expected to have 1.63 billion people by 2050. The policy does not state that couples should not have more than two children, but contains measures that encourage small families. An example is the family welfare-linked social insurance scheme for couples below the poverty line, available for those with two or less children. There is also a reward for couples who marry after the legal age of 21, and accept sterilisation after the second child. But several Indian states have gone further with their individual population policies. Six states debut couples with more than two children from contesting elections for local government administrative bodies called panchayats. These include the southern Andhra Pradesh state, the northern states of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan, eastern Orissa and central Madhya Pradesh. Ten years ago, India reserved a third of all elected seats in panchayats and other local bodies for women - but many potential women leaders may not qualify simply because they have more than two children. (PWS)

OPINION

Johannesburg The greenhouse gas emissions for one American is the same as that for 269 Nepalis.

Capitalism has many "laws of motion", but one of the most destructive is as far as the environment is concerned it says 'law demand that that supply creates its own demand. Capitalism is a demand-creating machine that transforms living nature into dead commodities, natural wealth into dead capital. Capitalism has expanded unevenly, being overdeveloped in its heartland in the North and underdeveloped in the periphery. Its environmental impact has been likewise differentially distributed. Nothing captures this better than the difference in per capita greenhouse gas emissions: one American emits as much as 17 Maldivians, 19 Indians, 30 Pakistanis, 49 Sri Lankans, 107 Bangladeshis, 134 Bhutanese and 269 Nepalis.

The global impact of the superdeveloped capitalist North may be greater than the comparative statistics reveal. For in response to the rise of the environmental movement, the North has displaced ecological disqualification to the South. Perhaps paradigmatic in this regard is the way Japanese capital has lived up to its own standards by accelerating its consumption of nature and waste to East and Southeast Asia. Japanese consumption, for instance, was responsible for up to 70 per cent of timber logged - mostly illegally - in the Philippines from the 50s to the 90s. Japan's consumption of commodities produced far away drove the

uncontrolled toxication and the transfer of Japan's pollution-intensive manufacturing facilities to that region in the late 1960s. Today European and US capital have joined Japanese capital in making cheap labour, pollution-friendly China both the workshop and the wastebasket of the world. What is happening to China and East Asia today is, however, only the latest phase of capitalist globalisation's 150-year-old process of displacing the environmental costs of global capitalist production and consumption from the centre to the subordinate parts of the world economy.

Ten years ago George Bush Sr toppled the Rio Summit by saying "America lifestyle is not up for negotiation". The Europeans and the Japanese figned horror, but the next ten years showed that consumption was king for them too, and that over-consumption was the common recipe for keeping the global capitalist economy going. The G-7 has essentially served as a forum to negotiate which capitalist centre would serve as which period as the consumption-engine of a regionalised economy.

The Johannesburg Summit was killed a year before it was held by George W. Bush's decision to withdraw from the world's prime capital power from being party to the Kyoto Climate Change Protocol. This is capitalism stripped of its liberal face. Japanese European elites pretend to be upset, but they

are most upset by the American's acknowledgment of the basic dynamic of the system of production they all share: that its continuing expansion must be achieved via an accelerated consumption and reification of nature.

Johannesburg was a mixture of corporate greenwashing, American bullying, European holier-than-thou posturing, third world leaders begging for aid in return for more pro-corporate liberalisation, and the WTO hijacking the environment in the service of free trade.

This failure comes at a time when Latin America is exploding in rebellion against neo-liberal economic and lack of accountability and systemic corporate criminality has eroded the credibility of corporate capitalism in the US, with 72 per cent of Americans feeling that corporations have too much power over their lives.

It comes at a time when, owing to the crisis of overproduction or overcapacity, global capitalism's ability to consume its way out of crisis is stymied. The US, Europe, Japan and East Asia - the engines of consumption-driven growth - now face the spectre of a regionalised downturn. What analysis from Marx to Schumpeter have discerned as the self-destructive dynamics of the capitalist world economy is unfolding. (Red Pepper)

(Walden Bello is executive director of the Center for Global South.)

by JOSEPH STIGLITZ

The role of the government is understood well here, and there is a broad political consensus on issues that matter.



epidemic. Brazil faces challenges to its health system, and while one may agree or disagree with the particular approaches taken by the Brazilian government, everyone recognises this is a major responsibility of government. Whoever wins the election almost certainly will continue efforts in these areas. Brazil's GDP to GDP ratio is moderate - better than in the US when Bill Clinton became president, far better than that of Japan and several European countries. Unlike its neighbour to the south (or to Argentina's or Chile), Brazil has a flexible exchange rate system: its currency is not overvalued - if anything, it is undervalued. With strong exports, it should have no problem meeting its debt obligations, so long as interest rates do not soar to levels that turn a problem into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Brazil has carved out a path that is not based on ideology or over-simplistic economics. By succeeding in changing its own course, Brazil has created a broad consensus around a third, balanced, democratic, market economy. (Project Syndicate)

(Joseph Stiglitz is winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics, and the author of Globalization and its Discontents.)

ASIA

ANALYSIS

Maoists fight on in the Philippines



MANILA - Since the start of his action and say this could help end Asia's longest-running insurgency. Talks between communist leaders and government negotiators have stalled after the killing of two legislators by communist hit squads last year. Jose Maria Sison, the head of the movement, now in exile, has ruled out peace talks with Amro.

In seven years, the Muslim-bled insurgencies have had a higher profile, as communist guerrilla activity had eased from the peak in the 1980s. But Secretary of State Colin Powell recently added the CPP-NPA to his list of "foreign terrorist organisations" after an "evaluative review of the group's violent activities". Amro and his advisers welcome

Manila is preparing to battle a resurgence of the insurgency.

are red, not terrorist," says Senator Rodolfo B. Santos, a former armed forces chief who once fought them. The Philippines has no law defining terrorism but a pending in Congress. "Declaring the CPP-NPA terrorist is one thing; attacking it like one is another," says Biaton. The US cannot replicate its recently concluded six-month training exercise in Basilan, southern Philippines, to help eliminate the Abu Sayaf, a Muslim extremist group. "Washington links to al-Qaeda. The magnitude could have unforeseen results," Biaton, explains, referring to the nationwide presence of the CPP-NPA. "Besides, the United States didn't have a hard time justifying its presence just in the south."

Despite the high-profile military action against the Abu Sayaf, the National Security Council (NSC) and military consider the CPP-NPA "the number one threat to national security." After declaring the insurgency dead in the 1990s, when guerrilla activity had weakened considerably, military leaders grudgingly acknowledge that it has bounced back with a vengeance. From a low of 2,000 armed guerrillas in the mid-1990s, it has grown to 12,000, says the NSC. It was present in 45 villages in 1995, but this grew to 1,671 in 2000. This steady growth has been fuelled by rural poverty and landlessness, and the "reification" campaign initiated by groups that are seeing the political space provided by the Philippines' democracy since 1986, think Amro. "Amro's trying to isolate the NPA but he's also warning others that they become a nuisance, they could be next." (PWS)

by MARITES SISON

Thailand, Burma, friends again

BANGKOK - Thailand and Burma governments have cut each other's throats just a few months ago, but these days Thai officials are busy rounding up and deporting anti-Rangon dissidents working out of this country. But Thailand and Burma aren't quite friends again though. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is pursuing what critics call a blatant "assessments" policy with Rangon. His government's goal appears to be to patch up ties with neighbouring Burma, which have been tense since border clashes led to the closure of the border on 22 May. The clashes occurred because Thailand's of stealing its territory to help ethnic Shan rebels.

In pursuit of this goal - which the government considers a pragmatic one - rights activists and critics say that Thailand is breaching human rights standards and putting at risk its tradition of being a humanitarian haven for those fleeing repression and danger. The Thai authorities Tuesday rounded up 31 Burmese nationals in Kancharaburi province, across Burma's Mon state, saying they were illegal entrants. Some belonged to the National League for Democracy of Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other dissidents groups and some reportedly had UNHCR-issued identification cards as refugees. Two days later, immigration officials forcibly repatriated the group to Burma, although activists say some had already found their way back to Thailand. Senior Krastak Choonhavan, chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, says that by forcibly sending dissidents back to Rangon, Thailand would be perpetuating and aiding the violation of human rights. (PWS)

Will China get its Young Turks?

BEIJING - China's Communist Party has announced a November date for its long-awaited 16th Congress, but details of the critical leadership succession expected to take place at that meeting remain shrouded in secrecy. The Communist Party's all-powerful Politburo has forwarded a proposal of 8 November as the start date for the Congress, which takes place once every five years. The decision to schedule the Congress nearly two months later than originally expected fuels speculation that the party's inner circles are gripped in an intense power struggle and that key decisions have been left for the last days before the meeting. In a similar vein, the decision for the retirement of the former National People's Congress chairman Qiao Guh - a rival of President Jiang Zemin - at the 16th Party Congress in 1997 was not taken until just days before the meeting.

At that same congress, Jiang pledged to retire at the 16th Party Congress to be held this fall as part of a major leadership shift. Jiang, 76, is expected to step down as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, making room for a new, younger generation of leaders led by incumbent Vice President Hu Jintao. Party observers believe a decision about Hu Jintao's resignation was made years ago by then-paramour leader Deng Xiaoping. Five of China's 30 seven Politburo leaders, and half the country's ministers and provincial leaders, are to be replaced at the Congress, hailed by China watchers as the first orderly transfer of power in China's modern history. Analysts do not believe that this year's meeting was delayed to allow Jiang to visit the United States and Mexico in October, while he still holds his top jobs of party chief, state president and commander-in-chief. (PWS)

by PERVEZ HOODHOY

COMMENT

Musharraf and the Jihad Industry

General Musharraf is the third Pakistani general in fifty years to see power proclaimed a reform agenda. Each time the US and its allies nodded in agreement. But Musharraf or Geoharaj, or the Karzai, or the Karzai, who pushed internal reform on their societies. Musharraf's attempts at reform have resulted from international pressure. Feeble at best, they have invariably avoided the structural changes Pakistan needs if it is to break out of its worsening crisis. Musharraf does not believe the economy, over its military, is the institution that can seriously threaten it - Pakistan's military. All countries have armies, but in Pakistan the army has a country. Defence expenditures are one-third to half the national budget. Senior military officers have been transformed into powerful land lords and industrialists with vast real estate and other investments. This garbion economy is unsustainable, as Pakistan's poor multiply and the economy flays.

The army, always the most powerful political force in Pakistan, has undergone important changes since independence. The army's British colonial traditions were slowly Americanised during the Cold War. With his 1977 coup, General Zia ul-Haq (Islamic Law), "Islam, Pakistan, Jihad" became emblazoned on banners at Pakistani army recruitment centres, bands, football, promotions went with piety, and few could miss Friday prayers. It wanted to be an army for the greater glory of Islam. The global jihad industry, financed by the US and Saudi Arabia, welcomed it.

Today, the army's jihad philosophy lies buried under the rubble of the World Trade Center. When attacked the US, it opened up bloody vengeance, a sure institutional sense of survival sent the military establishment scrambling to join the US-led coalition and take up arms against its former creator, the Taliban and their Amir-ul-Momineen (leader of the piety). The internet, Contradictions of Pakistan's whole face are being exposed at the military encounters with al-Qaeda's volatile force, casualties mount, and hostile rebel reaction to join US/Pakistani search-and-destroy operations on the western border is increasing. Officers and soldiers are asking what the purpose of the current campaign is. They are officers and soldiers, not politicians, not al-Qaeda (marry). But is fighting America's jihad war? are soldiers paid by al-Qaeda or other former allies also martyrs? Since official certification of martyrdom is tied to land grants and compensation to families, this question carries real material significance.

All countries have armies, but in Pakistan the army has a country.



Invitably the anger at having to fight America's war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban focus on Musharraf, who's received high praise from the United Jihad front after incursions and battles fought against Islam in Kargi. Kashmir two years ago. Right-wing religious groups in Pakistan welcomed Musharraf's successful coup. Today his arrival is ironically hailed to George W. Bush, who could not recall his name during the US presidential elections. Seeking to make permanent his coup, Musharraf has proposed amendments to Pakistan's constitution - a new National Security Council to formalise the army's political constraints of Pakistan's society with the armed forces, and having the power to sack the prime minister and dismiss an elected parliament. But for Pakistan to overcome its army's Bonapartism and win the war against jihadists, the military - not just society - must be reformed. The army must believe in martyrdom, not just in martyrdom. This is not only a political, not a military, solution for Kashmir. (PWS)

(Pervez Hoodhoy, one of Pakistan's leading pro-democracy advocates, teaches physics at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.)

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Three cheers for Brazil

World markets seem to be turning up their nose at Brazil right now, but the country could prove surprising and resilient. In recent years, Brazil has created a vibrant democracy with a strong economy, and deserves a vote of confidence from investors and political leaders. As in any vibrant democracy, differences in view exist. Not all Americans are enthused about President Bush's rapid conversion of trillion dollar surpluses into deficits, nor does a majority embrace his proposals to privatise America's social security system, which has done so much to eliminate poverty among America's elderly. Within Brazil, however, no issues are as hotly debated as consensus exists, and this includes all the major contenders in Brazil's forthcoming presidential election in October.

There is a consensus on sound fiscal and monetary policies: no one wants to return to the hyperinflation of the 1980s. Brazil's monetary policy has been managed extraordinarily well by Arminio Fraga (my former student), but behind him is a strong institution, with the analytic capacities of a first world Central Bank. The initiative that Brazil's Central Bank made of its new transparency and openness are a model for central banks throughout the world. Brazil's developed world well as the less developed. There may be disagreements about fine-tuning the economy, but such are routine in any democracy.

There is also a broad consensus that while markets are at the centre of a successful economy, there is an important role for government. Brazil's government, for instance, pushed one of the most successful telecom privatisations, and also pushed for stronger competition and regulatory policies. Unlike America, where the country faced an electricity crisis, it didn't blithely say, by selling market forces (which in the US, meant market manipulation), "Trust us, we know others" handle; the matter, rather, the government came in with strong action.

Brazil is a country of extraordinary human and physical resources. It may be called an emerging market, but it has rare financial, educational and research institutions. Discussions about economics in Sao Paulo are as sophisticated as in New York. Univerisities exist in Cambridge, Massachusetts or Cambridge, UK. It produces one of the finest airplanes in the world - so good that competes in the more advanced industrial countries but tried to impose trade barriers. Brazil has one critical weakness: a high level of inequality. It is a weakness that, unlike America, also carries a broad consensus: most agree that it needs to be addressed, and that government has the obligation to do so. The current government has made extraordinary strides in education. Ten years ago, 20 per cent of Brazil's population was attending school, now that number is down to 3 per cent. Similarly, landless peasants are both an economic and a social problem, and the current administration has taken on vested interests to push forward on an exciting market-based land reform, one that has received support from the World Bank. With the AIDS

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Maoist dissident speaks out

Excerpts from an interview with Mukti Pradhan, dissident cent committee member, Maoist 'people's government'.
Budhar, 21 August

How would you describe your departure from the Maoist people's governments as a dissident, an escapee, or as someone who surrenders to the government?
[My press] release makes clear my stand on this issue, on my connection with the revolutionary people's council. I would say that in the time I was underground, I acted independently most of the time. People might speculate, but I have clearly stated in my release that I dissent from the party line. I have clarified that I disagree with the policies of the Jana Parishad (the 'people's council'). Disagreeing with policies is rebelling. I was a professional before, and I want to concentrate on the business being a professional again. I would also like to continue being concerned and vigilant about human rights violations at the national and international levels.

How do you think we should move ahead, past the political issues we are in now?
I would say that we should find a peaceful solution; that is possible within the framework of the present constitution. We got this constitution through the 1990 People's Movement. Progress is impossible unless we protect it.

People find it hard to believe that you just decided to come aboveground. You say you disagreed with the policies of the people's council. Which ones exactly did you have the most reservations about?
First of all, I was not allowed to function there. I was consulted and then declared a member of the Jana Parishad, so I cannot point out where I had the most reservations. Since I was interested from the start, I did not even leave the Jana Parishad and with what aims. As far as my query about why I rebelled, principles and politics will always be debated. Our first priority should be establishing peace, different parties might have disagreements, but we need to find a point from where we can sit across the table and start talking to find some place where we can agree.

You must have learnt a lot from your experience of being underground?
Obviously my life took a different turn when I went underground—that is bound to happen when you try to change the whole course of your life's I learnt about life and living. I learnt about the differences between participants and practicing them for real, now I want to apply that in my real life.

Did you find that the Maoists are true to their colours?
I would rather not comment on that because I did not work with them. All I would like to emphasise is that the present impasse can only be broken through talks and compromises for the sake of the life of the people and the future of this country.

So you now fully realise that a politics of violence does not yield results?
As a human rights activist, I never supported violence, not even when I was underground. My principle is that one should never take up arms or turn to violence.

Would you like to continue with politics, now that you are aboveground?
I will work for human rights and peace. I firmly believe that a peaceful solution to the present problem can be found within the present constitution. I will function independently, but in line with progressive thought. As a progressive intellectual, I will try my best to serve this country.

Do you feel threatened, being a dissident from the Maoist party?
Everyone should be able to think and analyse with responsibility and sensitivity. I have appealed to everyone for the protection of my life. I never intended to harm others, but I have attempted to make myself clear—everyone has a right to have opinions. No one should feel too intimidated to have a difference of opinion.

Have you appealed to the national and international communities for your protection?
I came aboveground in the presence of the president of the National Human Rights Commission and other human rights activists. Being a human rights activist myself, I have faith that the human rights community of this country will be concerned about my safety. I also have faith that the political parties will be keen to help restore my life to normal.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"It is difficult to hide a great deal of money. They say that a minister once burnt a lot of cash in India. Another hid money under mattresses and blankets. This was probably because they were scared that the commission to investigate property would check their bank accounts, or that relatives would use the money they'd given them for bookkeeping."

—Radharaman Upadhyaya, former chief of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority in Jana Bhawan, 26 August



Not a hospital. Think he needs a check-up at the commission!
गोर्खापट्टा Godkhatpatta, 26 August

'Secret' meeting

Jana Bhawan, 26 August

The UML team that was in India is still keeping its 'secret meeting' with the Maoists a secret. When Jana Bhawan asked team member Jhulanath Khanal about the meeting, he said that it was completely invisible. Despite Khanal's denial, our sources maintain that the meeting did take place. Sources say the UML, for fear of the possibility of holding a plebiscite on the constitutional monarchy, even as it worked on softening the Congress government. In fact, the Maoist leadership would direct its party workers to leave the UML cadres alone and even assist them during the upcoming elections.

Mind your language

Gunraj Luitel in Kantipur, 27 August

We have constantly been using words like 'marty' and 'sacrifice' while reporting on the conflict. The Maoists declare their dead martyrs and the security forces describe deaths in the ranks by calling them 'higra' (martyrdom). These words glorify death beyond the physical end of being and give continuity to a cycle of violence by suggesting energy. This cycle of violence needs to be broken. Sacrifice, like martyrdom, also carries with it a political meaning, in addition to religious connotations. Because work like sacrifice and martyrdom message conveys violence, we better of not using them.

We have also misused words like 'encounter' and 'clashes'. It is necessary to know what kind of encounter took place, or whether it was a clash—and for a 'clash', both sides need to have exchanged fire. Likewise, terms like 'goat' don't tell us why the death was gruesome, but only

sensationalise it. There are other examples of misuse: 'human shields' can—and has been—misused to refer to 'infantry'. Another widespread practice is prefixing every Maoist institution or action with 'people's'. To show our neutrality we should perhaps not talk about a Maoist 'people's council' just a Maoist court.

There are many more expressions that are used in media, criminals, crisis, court, deviant, gang, so-called, systematic, etc. Using them incoherently affects the balance of reports and can even be an obstacle to peacemaking. If we want to take the country on the path of peace, it is time we paid heed to our choice of words in reporting the conflict. More importantly, has the conflict dug our words that normalise violence, and make their use part of our daily lives?

We also understand that Madhav Nepal said at the same meeting that he could control the army if the Maoists helped them get a majority in the elections. The Maoist have considered being asked for support to elect a constituent assembly. Madhav Nepal has given his word to support a plebiscite for either a constituent assembly or for constitutional amendments. Since the army began operations in Dang from 25 August, the Maoists have been displaced from the area. As they continue to run operations to displace the Maoists before the upcoming elections, the rebels are divided over whether or not to hold talks. Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda appear to be in favour of talks, but Ram Bahadur Thapa [Bhadu] and Bisharam Panwar are insisting that Maoist cadres should support talks. Those in favour of talks have been accused of surrendering. Today, the Maoists are on the defensive. The ammunition they've taken from the security forces is depleted and most of their weapons don't work. The army has seized six months' food supplies from Maoist camps. The UML appears to be internally opposed to the idea of

UML-Maoist alliance

Fatin, 26 August

We have learnt that Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Maoist Revolutionary Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) met with Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai in Daxhi last week. According to the grapevine, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhulanath Khanal and Bharat Mohan Adhikari in Kolkata while rushing off to Daxhi for an meeting with Bhattarai arranged by an Indian leader.

Nepal is supposed to have told Bhattarai that the UML would pressure the government to hold talks with the Maoists if he later announced a unilateral cease-fire on 31 August or 1 September. In return, the Maoists would back the UML during the upcoming elections.

A UML source told Fatin that Bhattarai assured the UML of his help in finishing off the Congress of the UML, acted as a protective shield. Despite assurances, the UML appears to be internally opposed to the idea of

The scale of corruption

Excerpts of an interview with Devendra Raj Pandey, president of Transparency International in Nepal
Deshanar, 25 August

Who should be primarily responsible for controlling corruption?
The political parties and society have both encouraged corruption. There needs to be a change of attitude. Laws have been promulgated, but not implemented, and people in responsible positions are reluctant, disinterested even, towards their duties. Even the general public is unconcerned about respecting laws and regulators to help control corruption.

What do you think the recent moves of the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority?

The recent CIAA operations send out a strong message against corruption and have raised hopes that things can change. And it is a warning to delinquents.

The CIAA actions have allegedly led to the big bosses in corruption. Do you think they will get away?
This is only a start, no one has yet escaped. This is not a question of big and small. It is a procedure. Besides, the government needs to act within ministries and offices, not the CIAA. There is a law that requires that all holders of public positions declare their property. Why are prime ministers and ministers reluctant to respect this legal provision? The CIAA should only be responsible for cases that escape this legal mechanism to check corruption.

Government should think about the impact on the national economy, and consider having consultations with the business sector and the CIAA to find an effective way of fighting corruption. If the government does not support the CIAA with prompt actions to activate the constitutional anti-graft functions, this campaign is lost.

Do you agree with the allegations that the police force, courts, infrastructure construction, irrigation, electricity authority, civil aviation and administration sectors are the most corrupt areas?

I would say that the commercial sector is the most corrupt. The country probably lost around Rs 20-22 billion for revenue officers to earn the Rs 6 billion confiscated in the CIAA raids. And there is a popular belief that corruption of such magnitude is taking place because of political patronage. So you could say that politics is the most corrupt sector. The CIAA should not limit itself to the revenue sector only. Without a drastic improvement in the political, cultural and competitive environment, raids alone will not achieve much. There should be immediate action to make the upcoming elections transparent—people have the right to know about the candidates' fundraising process. The CIAA raids cannot bring this to the people.

Can a provision be formulated to prevent people charged with corruption from contesting elections?
Definitely, we have been demanding it. We cannot prevent anybody from standing unless there are proven charges against them, but parties need to be concerned about allegations too.

You were a minister with the interim government and are now president of Transparency International here; do you think the scale of corruption now threatens democracy?

Corruption was there before democracy too, but it might have increased in the last 12 years. But that it has increased is not because of a fault in the system, but due to the weakness of the parties and leaders. If corruption threatens democracy, we need to commit ourselves to start another campaign for democracy and a new constitution. But it will be better if we can move forward with what we already have.

NEPALITERATURE

by MANUSHREE THAPA

Sudha Tripathi

my fingers as I tasted it from my cupped palms.
I'll stand you, now, at the threshold of the past. My eyes water at this memory and a smile appears on my lips all at once. This is what happened: I was small, and you were angry for some reason, and you raised your hand to strike me, but by the time your hand reached my cheek it had become affection. At that, the dam of my tears burst, and I showered you with the blows of my girly fists. My earth, I couldn't forget you even if I tried to. When I place an imported orange in my mouth, my mouth goes bad with its aged, sour taste. I remember the sweet, juicy oranges that you fed me from my mouth waters by itself. I swallow the oranges here in memory of your oranges. Even the water that Kathmandu offers me is un-speakable; your buthaloes would not waste in such waters. I close my eyes and I evoke the taste of Tama Koshi as I drink water here.

Your memo, this life, erodes as it grinds along Kathmandu's stony centre. I tremble that I might never return to a moment to you. I yearn to return to it in whatever condition before my body collapses. Yet what chance is there that Kathmandu will allow me to return to you in good condition? This desire grinds down the youth that you gave me. So I may come to you, mother, but please don't panic to see my harried state. Don't gather tears at your eyes to see the erratic way of my heart. This life that I have so cared for. The beauty of the body isn't all there is. The heart of humanity is never ugly. This city's touch may have stripped my body of beauty, but my heart is as you made it. That's why though I live far from you, I soften with your love, and drop, melting, in each of these letters.

My earth, my mother, I'll ask you a question if you'll reply honestly. I've started to see bad dreams these days. They say that it's not good to see trees falling, but I saw that all your trees fell and you were making an offering of leas from their roots. I saw that your upper teeth had fallen out. They say that also inauspicious. It means I'll see the destruction of those whom I revere. I revere no one more than you. Mother, tell me without looking down on me as a daughter, I ask you under my breath with difficulty, unable to even speak aloud: are you somehow in danger? I see eagles and vultures swooping down on you in daylight. The terror of wolves grows not just there and here but all over the world. Ah! How cryptic life is! How ill-intentioned!

Soonkhaani, what news of your other sons and daughters? I hear that your sons, untouched by their birthplace's warmth, walk from distant ground draped in the snug blankets found in bottles. Didn't you make them take an oath of affection? I hear that your daughters, seeing their own brothers, startle as though they've seen tigers, and come crying to hide in your embrace. Someone who came from there the other day said that once, when you tried to offer counsel, one of your sons came after you with a khukri, trying to kill you. Unable to even cry out, you rushed away with all your pain locked up inside you. Soonkhaani, don't take refuge in the house of someone who shows you the mercy of a moment's snow in the yams of butter that I sit sitting on your lap. When I see the rivers lining the peak, I remember the rich curd that spilled over

I'LL COME WITH FLOWERS
Soonkhaani, my birthplace, you must think I've loved stopping you. It would be fair for you to think so: I've done nothing for you even at the end of my days. I hear that you look towards Dolakha again and again, translating from Tripathi's 1997 collection *Jeevanutra* ra *Swapanabhas*.

I haven't stopped loving you. To do so would mean to stop loving myself because my 'I' is you. I stay in the depths of my emotion and drench myself in your affection and well wishes. How else could I survive this desire? I won't tell you to stop looking at my path, but I'll likely have to wait a while yet before coming to curl up at your lap. What else can I, your destitute daughter, offer for your faith? What have I to give? I am rich in feelings. I long to place two cupped palms full of white flowers at your pure feet. Scouring this whole city, though, I haven't found flowers enough that bloom from the immaculate grounds of the heart. I so wish to see you decked with buds at least once in this life. But virulent pests are gnashing the roots of the plants. Tell me, Soonkhaani, when will my palms be full?

A part of me thinks—let me stay away, fidgeting at your memory, but not meeting you, not seeing you. Some kinds of pain are detectable, and dreams too can be tantalising. It's better to love from afar than to hate from nearby. Everything looks good from a distance. When I see roses far away I feel—let us live in their midst, let us die in their midst, even if one were to commit suicide, let it be amid rose bushes. Those who follow the allure of beauty become wild, intoxicated, they approach these bushes, then come to their senses when pricked. They look—oh, my ugly thorns! Beauty is just a trap that roses lay out. I don't know why, these days I'm afraid to get too near you, Soonkhaani. Your ugliness not break my faith, may I not stumble off the edge of trust in panic. My return to you might be held back by the lame foot of my scepticism.

Yet even away from you, I am near you. I laugh with the fragrance of your soul on my hands. I live with your signs in my life force. I sprinkle the waters of Tama Koshi through my veins. When from this desert I see Gaushankar in my hands and move up to let you, Soonkhaani. I hear the hissing words I spoke as a child echo off Gaushankar and return to me now. When I see the peaks white snow, I remember the blows of butter that I ate sitting on your lap. When I see the rivers lining the peak, I remember the rich curd that spilled over



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

♦ **Colorgraph prints** by Ragini Upadhyay-Grela. 17 August-15 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 11AM-6PM, except Saturdays. 218048

EVENTS

- ♦ **Sizzle in the Drizzle** Punctiava, featuring Abhaya and Raj, Kababs, two-for-one beers, special offers on wines and spirits. 31 August, 7PM, 1905, Kamniph, Rs 250. punctiava@weissbusba.wink.com.np. 225272
- ♦ **Fiesta Latino** Salsa, tango, food, drink, dance master Andreas Lehrke. Drinks and dance Rs 450, drinks, dance and dinner Rs 750. Hotel Yak & Yeti, Sundays, 7.30 PM, 248999
- ♦ **Young amateur artists and photographers and enthusiasts** Rs 450, drinks, dance and dinner Rs 750. Hotel Yak & Yeti, Sundays, 7.30 PM, 248999
- ♦ **The Fort Resort**, fort@mos.com.np. 226799
- ♦ **Nanglo International Club & HITS FM** present Nepali ballads by Pravin Rimal, followed by DJ Bishwas, poolside, Nanglo International Club, Surendra Bhawan, Sanepa. Adults Rs 200, children Rs 100, includes welcome drink.

SEMINAR

♦ **ELD Interactive seminars** 3 September: Conflict Management, 4 September: Negotiation, 5 September: Team Building, 2-6 September: Developing Project Proposals. Per workshop Rs 1,500, Rs 1,200 (NGO), Rs 900 (student), all at Hotel Greenwich Village, Kupondole. Details at www.eld.org.uk, early registration at eld@wink.com.np. 541613

MUSIC

- ♦ **Kegarne Madness** Live band Mondays and Wednesdays, everyday free draft beer with every main course, at K-toof Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043
- ♦ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Work Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

DRINK

♦ **Fusion bar** at Dwarika's Open 4PM-midnight, 30 percent off all beverages. Happy hour 5.30 PM-7.30 PM, buy one get one free. Drop your business card for raffie. 479488

FOOD

- ♦ **Salmon and rosé wine** Pizza with smoked salmon, smoked salmon and cream cheese crostini, Asian salmon cake and more, paired with French, Colombian or Australian rosé wine. Until 12 September, The Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234



- ♦ **Mountain Madness** Thomas Kilroy's award-winning cuisine, Rs 250 each barbecue and two-for-one cocktails. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440
- ♦ **The greenest patch** Weekend lunches in the oldest and largest garden in Nagarkot at The Fort Resort, fort@mos.com.np. 226799
- ♦ **Walter's Bodega** relocates opposite KCs, Thamel. Mexican food promotion including fajitas, enchiladas, burritos and more. Buy one entrée, get one free.
- ♦ **Chef's Special** Daily menu for quick lunches at discounted rates, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **Vegetarian specialties** with membership discount for Nepalis and expats at the Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 480282
- ♦ **Cool Saturday Brunch** at The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel, with buffet of cold soups, salads, starters, mains etc. Noon-2.30 PM. 411818
- ♦ **Ice Lemon Sour** Plum Sour, sweet, salty, bitter, to go with the improved Singaporean and Malaysian food. Sing Ma, the Food Court, foodcourt@wink.com.np. 520004

GETAWAYS

- ♦ **Secret Garden weekend** Local residents buy one night for \$39 plus tax and get the second at 50 percent, single or double, with discounted add-ons. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **Monsoon** misty Horseshoe Resort, Mude, two-and-half hours from Kathmandu. Nature walks, birdwatching, drizzle walks, Finnish sauna. resort@horseshoe.wink.com.np
- ♦ **Monsoon in Shivapuri** For birdwatching, short hikes, writing, 20 minute drive and 10 minute walk from Kathmandu, two acres 6,000 feet on the edge of the Shivapuri National Park. Rs 1,850 per person with dinner and breakfast, Rs 925 per child 5-14 years, Shivapuri Heights Cottage. info@escape2nepal.com
- ♦ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort. 560675

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

HITS 91.2 TO DEPRIVE YOUR CHILD OF EDUCATION IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. FULL STOP. NO DISCUSSION.

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

We aren't finished with the monsoon yet, and as the showers over the coming weekend will probably demonstrate, it can still deliver a powerful punch. It is the late monsoon cloudburst that can trigger deadly landslides since the topsoil on the slopes is already saturated. There are few monsoon pulses that will come our way from the bay, in fact, two low pressure circulations spinning into the delta region of Bangladesh. They will lose strength as they move northwards, but should bring us some precipitation. Expect clear, bright mornings, hot and humid noontime conditions and afternoon and night showers.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

FR	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE
28-18	28-18	28-18	28-18	28-18

YAK YETI YAK IS ON HOLIDAY

BOOKWORM

The Buddha's Art of Healing: Tibetan Paintings Rediscovered John F Avdon, Fernand Meyer, N D Bhakshabasa, KM Ceramova, Tamin S Bradley
Rizzoli, New York, 1998
Rs 1,450
This lavishly illustrated book introduces the history and foundations of Tibetan medicine to the lay reader and explains the painted guide to the body, disease, diagnosis, treatment, and medical ethics. In addition, it contains an essay on the search and rescue in eastern Siberia in Stalin's Soviet Union for a set of paintings called The Atlas of Tibetan Medicine, and the subsequent establishment of centres of Tibetan medicine in Russia's metropolises.

A Simple Monk Tom Morgan, ed
New World Library, California, 2001
Rs 2,765
This new visual biography of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, contains provocative writing by Robert AF Thurman, Diki Tsering, Orville Schell and Pico Iyer, an interview of the Dalai Lama by monologist Spalding Gray, and vibrant colour images by photojournalist Alison Wright.

The Essence of Buddhism Roy Giller
Caxton Editions, London, 2001
Rs 720
Who wants to be unhappy? We spend most of our lives trying to avoid it, but can we ever succeed? Talking like this puts people off, but those who have lived with Tibetan Buddhist lamas and monks, and even visitors to ordinary by families are struck by how easy their day-to-day interactions are. This book gives practical ideas and advice on how to adapt the essence of Buddhism into our modern culture and lifestyle.

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

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A love triangle with a twist. What would you do if the one you loved was not actually the one you loved? What would you do if your best friend was in love with the one you love? What would you do if you knew your best friends are sacrificing their love for you? Raj (Pratik Roshan), Pooja (Ran Mukherji) and Tina (Kareena Kapoor) are three best friends thrown into situations that time, letters, love and separation create for them in Shimla and London. A Youth Choice presentation. **Mujhse Dosti Karoge?** is written and directed by Kunal Kohli.

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The quest for human perfection is as old as humanity itself. Ever since our early cave-dwelling ancestors discovered that squeezing prehistoric blackheads was not just a delightful way to pass the time, but also resulted in a youthful and unkempt look, mankind has shown that as a species it likes to keep itself well-groomed.

And thank god for that. If we didn't care about our outward appearance, we would still be wild, armpit-ringing hunter-gatherers moving in large herds from home to office and back everyday. This is why we are all excited about the fact that after its roaring success in Singapore, the 100% Natural Botanical Bust Enhancement System is being introduced in Nepal for the first time to address the concerns of mammary-challenged commuters of voting age and above.

(We'll be right back after these messages: "Sag No More! Call us for a free trial. No Pills. No Surgery. No Injections. No Side-effects. Seeing is Believing.")

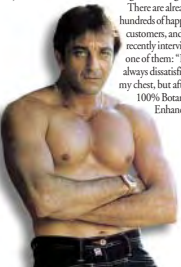
There are already hundreds of happy customers, and we recently interviewed one of them: "I was always dissatisfied with my chest, but after I tried 100% Botanical Bust Enhancement, I

got great boobs. Even my wife said the result is good."

And that is not all, the beauty industry is now aiming below the belt. A drug that was developed to reduce muscle spasms has been found to have anti-cellulite properties, and has just been given approval by the Food and Drug Division in Nepal. (Adventurous: "Inject Botox into your buttocks and get rid of ugly wrinkles fast.") Elsewhere in the metropolis, partyless election candidates who think their Barbara Streisand nose can a political liability are having them re-carved into sleek nostrils resembling the proboscis of a certain Michael Jackson.

So, you see, we don't have to wait anymore for evolution to give us a body we are proud to call our own. With the new technologies at our disposal, we can take destiny into our own hands and metamorphose into anyone we would like to be. Which brings us to some of the plastic surgery options now available in Nepal for those who want a total remake of their physical infrastructure:

- **Keep Lip With the Arms Race.** Two hands are not enough to efficiently carry out underhand deals. Install two extra arms to your thorax region so that you can rake it in faster, since time is of the essence. Extra fingers and greasy palms optional.
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- **Brain Enlargement.** With new laser surgery it is now possible to expand the average cranium and graft brain tissue implants from donors. Money back guarantee if you aren't visibly smarter in 30 days, and free blackhead removal for all public officials availing of this promo.



NEPALI SOCIETY

Cry baby

People might call him a crybaby but 22-year-old Prakash Poudel doesn't mind. Instead, the third year BBS student from Dharan bawls his heart out in unabashed longing for the girl he can't have in *Nai Malai Tyahi Kei Chahinchha*—the first single in what he calls the Nepali C-Rap or Cry-Rap genre. The entire song is composed of lyrics delivered through a plaintive wail. What the lyrics lack in imagination, the delivery compensates for with originality. And ironically, all this wailing leaves many of his fans howling with laughter. Most others don't know whether to laugh or cry.

But don't think creating C-Rap is easy. Prakash entered a recording studio and cradled for six hours straight—in tune and time with the rhythm. And he didn't forget to rhyme. "I just wanted to try a different style. I think we need to widen the field of Nepali music. Rap, rock, metal, whatever you do, do it in

Nepali," said Prakash, who was in Kathmandu last month to promote his debut album, 3 Much.

So did Prakash decide to weep publicly when he didn't get his girl in real life? "No, it's just a song I wrote. Also, mostly, in love songs like

these, the families are not involved—they just talk about the girl and the boy. But in this one, I have included the boy's mother, to whom he cries out his sorrows," says the innovative young man who got a cool Rs 95,000 advance from Moonlight Records for 3 Much.

Between playing basketball—he almost made it to the national team, working at the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, and attending classes, Prakash, whose wailing is gaining immense popularity on the airwaves, is already at work on another album entitled (what else?) 4 Much.

He's tightlipped about whether this one, too, will feature loud, hysterical weeping. "I have a few tricks up my sleeve," he says mysteriously. "I will bring them out one by one." Now should we laugh or cry at this threat?



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