

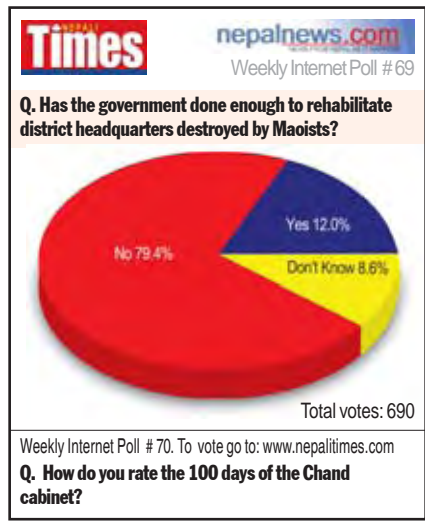


Father of the bride
King Gyanendra with his daughter Princess Prerana on the occasion of her marriage to Kumar Raj Bahadur Singh on Wednesday.

Ayo Nepali!



Aba dekhi Roman Nepali ma sathi haru lai email pathaunu pardaina, Nepali mai lekhe hunchha . Didn't you always want to email, do accounting, databasing and Internet surfing in Nepali? A workable and universal font standard for Nepali is now here to make all this possible. No more downloading typefaces for every Nepali website, no more scanning text to send as jpeg files. Soon, we may be able to get grocery bills from electronic cash registers in Nepali, be able to spellcheck, sort and list alphabe-tically—all on standardised Nepali keyboards. Read more in our IT Special on page 8-9.



A spring thaw?

ANALYSIS by **RAJENDRA DAHAL**

After a hard winter of frozen politics, spring brings with it the possibility of a thaw in Kathmandu. The outcome, in turn, will have consequences on the direction of the Maoist insurgency.

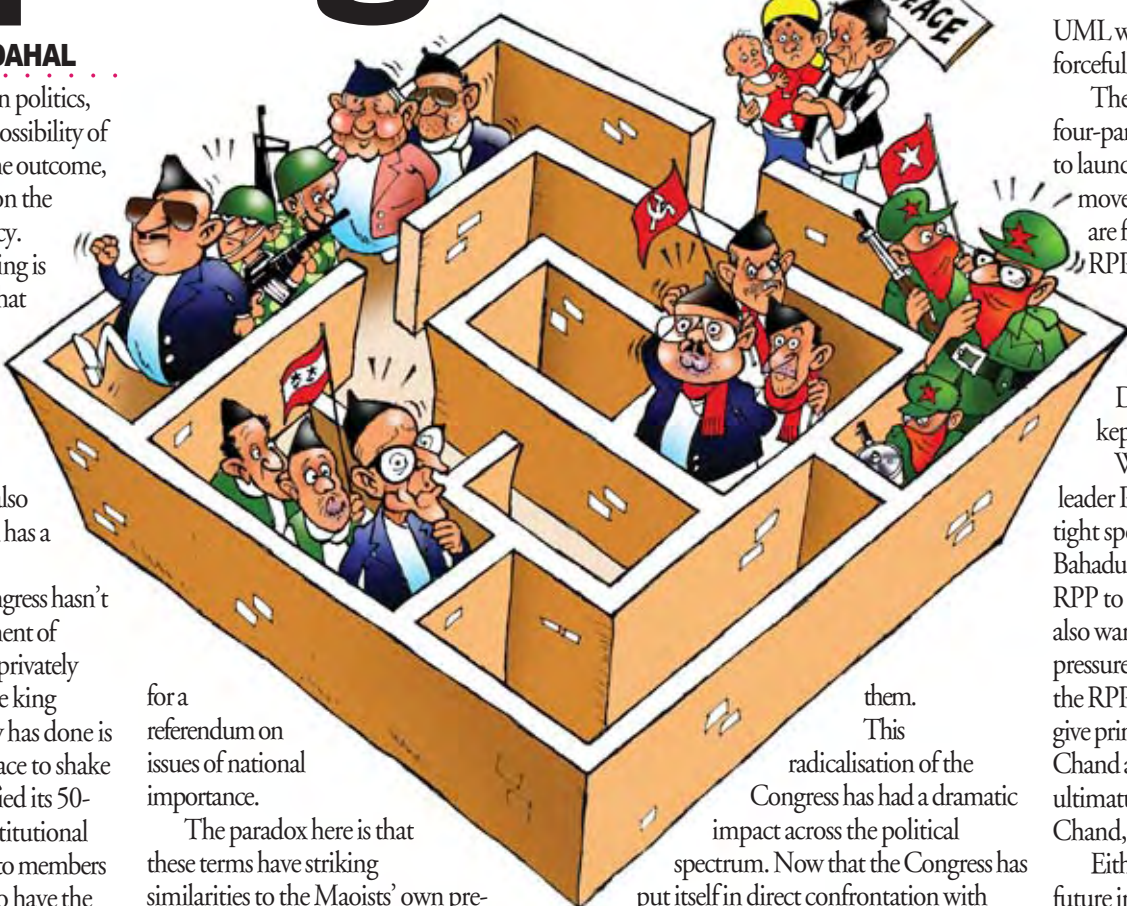
The air is warming up, the king is wrapping up family obligations that had him tied up, the political parties are stirring and the Maoists are preparing for the seventh anniversary of their “peoples’ war”. It may look hopelessly tangled, but it could also mean that the political deadlock has a chance of getting unstuck.

Even though the Nepali Congress hasn't given up demanding a reinstatement of parliament, some kangresis now privately admit that there is no hope of the king agreeing to it. So, what the party has done is apply pressure tactics on the palace to shake things up a bit. The party modified its 50-year-old stance towards the constitutional monarchy by demanding a limit to members of the royal household allowed to have the “Shree Panch” title.

In addition, the central committee meeting on Monday also wanted the army brought under elected civilian command, and a provision in the constitution allowing

for a referendum on issues of national importance.

The paradox here is that these terms have striking similarities to the Maoists’ own pre-conditions for talks. Many don't trust the Maoists to stick only to these three demands when negotiations start, but the wily leader of the Congress, Girija Koirala, seems to have his reasons to firmly believe



them. This radicalisation of the Congress has had a dramatic impact across the political spectrum. Now that the Congress has put itself in direct confrontation with hardliners in the palace, being communists, the UML can't afford to look “more royal” ahead of its party convention in Janakpur next weekend. Squeezed by the palace on the one hand the Maoists on the other, the

When things get so messed up, they can only get better.

UML will be compelled to come out forcefully vis-à-vis the palace.

The Congress stance also forced the four-party meeting on Wednesday to decide to launch a united agitation against the royal move. However, the parliamentary parties are far from united. The centre right RPP and the tarai-based Sadbhavana were both kept out of the four-party meet as punishment for defecting to the king's side. And the Deuba faction of the Congress was kept out as per Koirala's wishes.

Within the RPP itself, newly-elected leader Pashupati S Rana finds himself in a tight spot. He needs to listen to the Surya Bahadur Thapa faction which wants the RPP to align with the other parties, but he also wants to make peace with the king. It is pressure from the Thapa faction that made the RPP's central committee on Tuesday give prime minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand a 15-day obey-party-or-quit ultimatum. This is a warning not just to Chand, but also to the king.

Either way, this means Chand's own future in the prime minister's seat may be numbered. And if the king wants a change of face, he can use the RPP's ultimatum as an excuse to replace a prime minister widely seen as being too weak to give proper leadership. ♦

An alternative to Davos

BHAGIRATH YOGI in PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL

Just as Nepali anti-globalisation activists joined thousands of others from around the world in this Brazilian port city this week, a Nepali business delegation is touring the United States and Canada to seek duty and quota-free access to Nepali garments. The irony of it is not lost on the dozen-strong Nepali delegation here.

Nepal is set to join the WTO within a year and hopes to benefit from a rule-based trading regime that will throw open the world market for its products like hand-woven carpets, pashmina, and readymade garments. But WTO and its fifth ministerial meeting in Cancun in September is exactly what the activists gathered here are protesting against.

This is the World Social Forum (WSF), billed as the “Third World Davos”, where birds of a feather—activists, academics, intellectuals, with some professional junketeers—who oppose the World Bank, IMF and WTO have been gathering since last year. They say the WTO will make rich countries richer by flooding poorer countries with their subsidised produce, while rich country markets will continue to be closed to Third World exports.

The rallying cry here is “No New Round”, and this slogan is emblazoned on the T-shirt of every other delegate. They say the WTO has a non-democratic decision-making process which will further marginalise developing countries in WTO decisions and benefits. The WTO maintains that globalisation will benefit all and spread prosperity. But Porto Alegre already seems to have an impact on the WTO, which has now started talking about



“globalisation with a human face”.

Unlike the cold and sterile Swiss ski resort, Porto Alegre is a vibrant, tropical city in the middle of the southern hemisphere summer. “Porto Alegre is the future while Davos is the past,” says Filipino activist Walden Bello of the Bangkok-based think tank, Focus on the Global South.

Bello is here with leftist intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali and Samir Amin to enforce the forum theme, “Another World is Possible”. The conference is being held amidst the drumbeats of a possible war against Iraq, which activists here call a “blood for oil” conflict. “The US war against terrorism is a perfect cover for the failure of the neo-liberal economic doctrine,” says Ian C Rivera of the Hong Kong-based Asian Alliance for Peace.

Porto Alegre hopes to address the issue of a growing global gap between rich and poor. The world's richest 20 percent now own 86 percent of the world's GDP, while the poorest 20 percent have only 1 percent. Three of the world's richest people have assets greater than the combined output of 48 of the poorest nations.

To balance this, activists are pushing for the “Tobin Tax” on international currency transactions that could raise \$45 billion a month to ease world poverty.

Cancellation of debt is the other demand. Highly indebted developing countries—Nepal among them—transfer more to service their debt to the North than they receive in aid. Nepali and South Asian delegates here are also raising issues like untouchability and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. ♦

Marcopolo



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THE PEACE PRIZE

It's all getting a bit too ad hoc. Nepalis can't take this aimlessness for much longer. Stung by criticism that there had been "zero" achievement in 100 days of this administration, state-owned *Gorkhapatra* has come up with a long list of the administration's accomplishments: chasing corrupt officials, trying to begin negotiations with the Maoists, investing in rehabilitation of infrastructure. Yes, some members of the cabinet have taken genuinely bold moves to stem the rot in the lethargic government machinery. But these were interventions that were needed even during normal times. These are extraordinary times and the people expect extraordinary breakthroughs. Especially since we paid a heavy price for it: a dismantled parliament, a sacked elected government and dissolved local councils.

Instead, recent decisions by the government are so reminiscent of 1962 that even those who were willing to give the royal move the benefit of doubt are now beginning to suspect that 4 October was a regressive attempt to turn back the clock. How else does one interpret the signs: a grovelling government media, the appointment of a roving squad of trouble-shooters who are going to visit the 14 zones behaving like neo-anarchaladishes. We've really come a full circle. Centralised partyless rule, to elected local self-governance, back to centralised partyless rule. Do we really need to swing between extremes all the time?

We can see no logic in the palace battling it out on two fronts: against the political parties and against the Maoists. The king has repeatedly stressed he is for a constitutional role for himself, for democracy and pluralism. All the parliamentary parties believe in the same values. So, where is the problem? Unless there is reason to doubt the sincerity of royal pronouncements, there is really no other way out of this impasse than for the fractious parties to first get together, and then jointly forge an alliance with the monarchy.

Instead, what we see is tough talk that is hardening positions, accumulating bad blood, spreading mistrust and pushing back chances of compromise. If this is all about power, then unless a deal is struck there will be no power to fight over. The Maoists, for their part, are sitting in the sidelines watching this show play itself out while gearing up for their anniversary fireworks next month.

The Girija Koirala Congress's decisions at its central committee meeting on Monday are unprecedented in scope, and puts the party in direct confrontation with the king. You could say the parties are just talking big to prevent the corruption watchdog coming after them for past misdeeds. But by calling for limits on royal titles, bringing the army under the purview of parliament and pushing a provision for referendum on national issues in the constitution, the party's position is now for all intents and purposes analogous to the Maoists. This has already radicalised the RPP and will put pressure on the UML ahead of its party convention in Janakpur next weekend to be even more critical of the king.

However, by formally declaring their positions the parties will have sent a clear signal to the Maoists: We have now gone as far as you, there can be no discussion on the preamble to the constitution, but let's sit down and talk about do-able changes.

The real problem, however, is that neither the palace nor the parties seem to want to hand over the peace dividend to the other. Instead of trying to prevent each other from reaping the rewards of restoring peace, the palace, parties and the Maoists must now cobble together a compromise. They don't have to agree on everything from the start, but they could stop the violence, create the right conditions for the peace process to begin, and give long-suffering Nepalis a reason to hope.

The prize is peace. Let's all share it.

D Gajraj, email



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



In the meanders of history

Seeking BP Koirala's soul in a village by the Kosi where he spent his boyhood.

TEDHI — Village boundaries in the Kosi floodplains are fluid—they keep changing with the seasons. Living without a fixed address comes naturally to those who have to survive in the proximity of any primal force, be it ideological or natural.

BP Koirala spent the formative years of his life in one of these villages along the Kosi River. In his memoirs, *Atmabrittanta*, BP has fond memories of his childhood in this nondescript village, a settlement along one of the western tributaries of Kosi. He writes about the time he was spanked for speaking the truth while those who lied got away. "If one speaks the truth, one should be prepared to pay for it," BP concludes.

The moral foundations that guided BP in later life were laid here along the Nepal-India border where the Kosi flows by with a hushed murmur.

A monsoon flood on this mighty river washed away the Tedhi that BP knew, and the town has now shifted to the road embankment further away. The Greek historian Herodotus said "all history must be treated geographically, and all geography must be studied historically." The Marxists, whose ideological meanderings are as fluid as the Kosi floodplain, regard all history as the history of class struggles. That is one way to look at it, but the very nature of class formation and struggle is largely geographical. The living condition of hill farmers was the precursor to the rise of the Gorkha Empire, as Fr Ludwig Stiller explains in *The Silent Cry*. And it is also in geographical conditions that we may have to seek some of the answers for why an armed insurgency is sweeping through the same hills nearly 300 years later.

What would have happened if BP Koirala had spent his childhood in Dumja, Sindhuli—the village where his father Krishna Prasad Koirala was born, instead of here in Tedhi? In an age of inter-disciplinary studies, it's quite likely that the impact of geography on the psychology of leadership has already been explored. But theories need expert interpretation. It is the very lack of such a knowledge that allows me to frame a sweeping hypothesis: Hills make their inhabitants restless and rebellious, and the lazy meanders of a mature river make people who live on its banks reflective and cautious.

BP writes: "We lived five/seven years in Tedhi. Then the Kosi's floods began to threaten us...the family began to discuss where to move." Like a lonely man in a boat, BP found himself "calmly disturbed" and buffeted by the *Atmabrittanta* here on the fog-bound banks of Kosi, you begin to empathise with the loneliness of boy who grew up with the unpredictability of a temperamental river.

To those not aware of the circumstances of BP's imprisonment by King Birendra in 1977, his English prison diary from Sundarjal (being serialised in this newspaper every fortnight, see p 13) reads like a monotonous log of an old man fighting his own frustrations. But that impression is only partially valid. More importantly, it records the valiant attempt of one man to transform extreme loneliness into profound solitude.

Like an addiction to drugs, the involvement in an armed struggle is intoxicating. The exhilaration of carrying a gun, and that too for a higher political purpose, seems to be so intense and heady that revolutionaries get hooked to the

rush. Renouncing violence induces withdrawal symptoms. Instead of hectic political activity to keep his mind off the relatively easier option of relapsing to armed struggle, BP found himself in near-solitary confinement at Sundarjal.

BP's most trusted lieutenant Ganesh Man foresaw then the choice before the Nepali Congress leadership: it was "between a slow death in India, and dramatic suicide in Nepal". King Birendra tried to induce "slow suicide" by putting BP Koirala in prison while simultaneously drumming up a clamour for his head. BP realised, quite accurately, that his immediate fight was to save his own sanity.

Prison diaries, as a genre, are testimony of the power of a determined mind. When the entire country was one gargantuan prison, perhaps it was natural for BP and Ganesh Man to find themselves once again behind bars at Sundarjal. But while Ganesh Man tried to steel himself for failure, BP fought to keep the flames of freedom alive. It is an irony of history that it was Ganesh Man who lived to see that flame lit again in 1990.

Produced by his loyal acolytes, the feature film *Mr Ganeshman* effusively depicts the many exploits of its near-mythical hero. But the film fails to show us the fuel that fired his energy. It came from BP Koirala, who in turn had his destiny shaped by the currents of the Kosi here in Tedhi. When Ganesh Man refused the offer to be made premier in the 1990 interim government, the first interpretation was that he did so due to health reasons. That could be true.

The second inference was that he considered himself to be less worthy for the post than the man he proposed in his stead—K P Bhattarai. This couldn't be true, for any one who knew Ganesh Man would know that that he knew about Bhattarai's limitations more than any one else in the Nepali Congress.

Could it be, then, that Ganesh Man's refusal to take up King Birendra's offer of premiership was a sincere tribute to his late leader? It may also have been a subtle snub to a well-meaning monarch who let Nepali history meander needlessly for so long.

As we live through another twist and turn in the flow of Nepali history, it makes sense to re-discover Ganesh Man, and re-read BP Koirala. In their lives, we see the reflection of our own aspirations and frustrations.

And we find hope. ♦



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

NATION

COMMENT



It isn't students who fail in SLC, it is the government school system that has failed.

Education for all, all for education

Mixing up politics with education is nothing new in Nepal. The Rana rulers understood very well that education would ultimately lead to their downfall. They made it difficult for Nepalis to attain any kind of formal education. During the Panchayat years we saw more emphasis on education, but we saw the syllabus and curriculum used flagrantly to propagate the non-party state.

In the past 12 years, the private sector stepped to fill the gap left by the government in the public's demand for quality and quantity of education. Education soon became an industry and

spurred by a huge demand went through a boom cycle. And as with all booms, came malpractice. Fly-by-night schools opened, and the unscrupulous had a field day in the absence of government and bureaucracy that failed to play a proper regulatory role. Unethical norms for enrolments, exorbitant fees and dubious deposits and curriculum used flagrantly to propagate the non-party state.

In the past 12 years, the private sector stepped to fill the gap left by the government in the public's demand for quality and quantity of education. Education soon became an industry and

punishment, the blatant daylight robbery in the name of education got progressively worse. Democratically-elected governments and unstable coalitions were too busy ensuring their political survival, fighting each other or plundering the exchequer to devote much time to educational reform.

When they did speak up, the political parties made matters worse by threatening populist measures like nationalising education and ensuring free education. In the past decade education became a free-for-all as "boarding" schools sprang up like tea stalls, with some having as little space. Many school

inspectors and district education offices were hand-in-glove with school owners. On the other hand, we saw the total collapse of the government school system due to politicisation, low motivation, lack of training and budgetary cuts.

The result is there for all to see in the annual SLC results where government schools are lucky if 10 percent of their students pass the exams. Many schools have a zero percent pass rate. It isn't the students who have failed, it is the school system that has failed.

Is there nothing called shame, responsibility or guilt on the part of these school teachers and the district education office and board? Various half hearted efforts have been made to improve this situation, like the in-built system of punishment and reward for schools on the strength of their results, such as reducing government grants for poor results and giving more say to the management committees. But these efforts are half-hearted and worse, there is a danger that it will punish the already weak.

There are some 8,500 private schools in the country with a student strength of 1.5 million and approximately 700 establishments for higher secondary education. The government's effort to regulate the education sector has been restricted to maximising tax extraction from these schools. It has come out with a law which requires private schools to register themselves as a company or as a non-profit trust. If they opt for the company they are to be taxed on the gross revenue, which as they say, is not fair.

Faced with Maoist threats to renew their campaign against schools from mid-February, the government has come up with a list of reforms. The private schools body, PABSON, has made recommendations for slashing school fees. Private educators want the

30-year-old Education Act to be overhauled and a separate section added for private schools classifying them as "institutionalised organisations" and not as private businesses. They have no problems with paying taxes on the profits founders take home, but say that institutional profit that is ploughed back into development and upgrading of school infrastructure should not be taxed.

Controversies regarding the ownership, classification and fee structure, and the proposed 1.5 percent tax on total income must be resolved as a matter of urgency. If this is delayed, schools that have been hard hit by threats, extortion and property damage by Maoists will simply shut down permanently. Already, schools in 10 districts have closed. School have been adversely affected in 25 districts.

Governments everywhere cannot afford to take up the sole burden of education, they delegate a part of that to the private sector. In Nepal, there is even less of a chance that the government can take up this responsibility. It cannot even manage basic primary education with the proper application of quality standards. How can it compete with the global trends in information technology and English language instruction?

Nepal is a long way from achieving the goal of universal free education for its citizens. There is no other way to fill the gap than to promote responsible and regulated private sector participation. And there is no reason why those who can afford it should not have access to world class education in their own country. Those who can't must be ensured good, balanced, and free education by the state so that they have the same opportunities to pursue higher education as graduates of private schools do. ♦

(Dhawal SJB Rana is the former UML mayor of Nepalganj.)

LETTERS

RICHARD VOKES

In your interview, "Recovery hinges on peace" (#128) the ADB's Richard Vokes rightly states what donors want to see: An improved effectiveness of public expenditure. He assures us that monitoring of implementation on the basis of in house anti-corruption guidelines is scrupulously maintained. But there are still loopholes in procurement which gives the corrupt leeway. Both the banks need to look at the basic rate of hiring experts which is multiplied by a certain overhead coefficient, usually 2.0 to 2.5 times. Shouldn't the basic rate be taken as actual expenditure incurred to be paid to the expert in question? It should not be made in itself a part of the profit.

by the contractor. Consulting firms (national, "anti-national", or expat) in most cases never pay the stated basic rate declared in their proposal on which the cost of the project is based. Shouldn't the donor assisted by its auditor, the employer government agency together check the documents submitted by the consultant and monitor what goes on in practice? Ignoring this basic rule of transparency creates a vast resource of black money that government, politicians and influence peddlers can siphon off. The case with contractors for job procurement is another (longer) story.

D Gajraj, email

KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

Thanks to Kashish Das Shrestha's "A day in the life of Patan's street children" (# 128). The article should open up the eyes of child rights activists, development workers and NGOs who are concerned with children issues. Even though there are a number of NGOs who claim to be working towards protecting child rights and survival, the article showed that the misery of street children remains same. The policies and commitment to guarantee the rights of children have yet to be translated into action and the children's participation in development has been almost neglected. There is much that remains to be done to improve the lives of Nepali children who are poor and have no access to education, health care and social environment. The situation of street children, as Shrestha points out, is worsening. Government, civil society, families and communities need to chip in. We have wasted enough

time on lip-service.

Jhabindra Bhandari
NEPAN, Kathmandu

EDMUND HILLARY

Beside being a first man to summit Mt Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary returned to Nepal to build schools and hospitals. He should be recognised as a national hero. So why is this hostility and sarcasm towards him in Arti Hamal's letter ("Sir Ed", # 127)? Besides, since when did Tenzing Norgay become a Nepali? Sorry, but he was a decorated and admired citizen of India. So, how is he, as Hamal puts it, "our own"? Unless she is saying that all of humanity is "our own".

Ram Bahadur Nepal, USA

HEMLATA RAI

I completely agree with Hemlata Rai ("Why can't manpower agencies find jobs for women?", #127). Nepalis are migrating because there aren't enough jobs and opportunities at home. Nepali women have always taken care of their families, so why restrict their travel in search of work? The employment

opportunities for Nepali women is limited. At a time when remittance from Nepali workers abroad has become a pillar of the national economy, the government has to be more serious on training and providing awareness facilities to those willing to go abroad. Of course, the government and the job recruiters should be more careful to monitor abuse and exploitation.

More importantly, Nepali consulates and organisations in the host countries should keep track of the workers—both men and women—so that they can help them in times of crises.

One other point, there are now about 8,000 Nepalis working in Japan. They send large amounts of money home through the *hundi* system. This is terrible loss to the country. Why doesn't the government finally act on regularising this remittance through official channels? Banks could do better business and the government could keep track of what's coming in.

Kumar Basnet
Sophia University, Tokyo

MANJUSHREE AND SAMRAT

Finally a Nepali writer has done justice to Samrat Upadhyaya ("I rely on the muse of hard work", #128). Manjushree Thapa's interview was highly introspective and good edutainment, though I am a stickler for the Naipulean edict "the author should never precede the work, let the work speak for itself". Keep it up Samrat and Manjushree, your recent writings speak well for many Nepali writers seeking literary exposure outside of Nepal. I hope Nepali Times will carry more pieces in the future on hidden Nepali talents in music, the arts and culture that otherwise escape our Nepali stereotyped image of fame and success.

Jack Prasadi, Cape Town



CK LAL

I have been reading the online edition of *Nepali Times* for a few years. I would like to congratulate CK Lal for his excellent analysis of various situations inside and outside Nepal. He has his detractors, and I personally may not agree with all of his views, but I do accept that his presentation is of high standard. The first thing I read in Nepali Times is his column. And one of the best aspects of his writing is that he tries to be fair and is an advocate of a more just society.

Bhesh Bhandari,
University of Queensland
Australia

One reads CK Lal's columns week after week for neither intellectual edification, nor for intelligent commentary but for its intrinsic entertainment value, and here CK Lal hits a home run every week. "Have a Party" (#128) is no exception. He pulls no punches at the object of his white-hot wrath and condescension: The great Nepali "elite" class. Whatever his definition du-jour of "elite" may be, CK Lal insinuates that they are

pro-king and therefore anti-democracy, and are quick to assign blame at the politicians for all of society's ills, all the while extremely loathe to get their own hands dirty. The implication being that either one supports the political parties wholeheartedly despite their mockery of the laws and the constitution (which ironically, they authored in partnership with the king) and a total betrayal of public trust, or one is judged to be against democracy and rights-for-all. He then goes on to make a giant leap of faith by equating party-building with nation-building. As any fair-minded person will concur: While the political parties grew like wild mushrooms in the last 12 years, nation building and other matters of national priority affecting the majority of Nepali people, were relegated to the back-burner.

Finally, I don't know if I fit CK Lal's definition of an "elite", but I am certain that CK Lal fits his own profile. I don't know about "true-blue", or "with-it" (actually most "true-blue" are more likely to be "without-it" than "with-it"), but as a common Nepali who is invited on

junkets from Paris to Hyderabad, looks disdainfully at "beer-guzzling" passengers on airplane flights, can boast his own one-on-one sessions with His Majesty the King, and has his own weekly column in an influential newspaper to pontificate from a high horse to voice his weekly polemics against the "elite", qualifies in my book for the title of—you guessed it—an "elite".

Bishwa Basnet, email

VIJAY KUMAR

After I'd gone through the Scorpio and the 2 PM ads on your back page, I read the ad for Vijay Kumar ("Vijay Kumar's makeover", #128). Why do you squander valuable space on a person who thinks he is conducting the Nepali version of BBC's "Hard Talk"? Who does he think he is, the Tim Sebastian of Nepal? Vijay Kumar has always been blunt, unnecessarily aggressive, downright rude, very very personal (which he has no business to be) and last but not the least, the crudest of the crude. I really do not know (neither do I want to know) how many viewers he has put off over the

years. I gradually lost all respect for that man and switch channels the moment his irritating face appears on screen.

Amrit KC, Bishalnagar

I don't believe that Vijay Kumar Panday has metamorphosed into a "better human being". In fact, I think he is as rude and brash as he always was. And why should he change? I think Vijay Kumar should continue being a brat, he should keep giving the high and the mighty a hard time on camera.

N Sharma, Dilli Bazar

It was refreshing to read an alternative opinion about Nepal's most-watched television anchor. Most of my friends who hate him



the most do not miss a single one of his shows. I personally never liked this ill-tempered, arrogant journalist but I must admit that today there is no one to match his persona on Nepali television. You rightly point out that in his Monday night show Vijay Kumar puts out an entirely different side of himself. It is good to know that finally Vijay Kumar understands that it is possible to be good human being and a brilliant professional at the same time.

Asha Ram Shrestha,
Kalimati

KUNDA DIXIT

With reference to Kunda Dixit's "Why Sikkim works" (#126) regarding the relatively successful socio-economic transformation of the neighbouring Indian state of Sikkim (vis-a-vis the economic stagnation in our country) I think that the bottomline lies largely on the difference of those responsible for conducting public policy. Development is regarded as a serious business requiring a sustained momentum in Sikkim. In Nepal, it is seen as a resort to fleece the public

exchequer for personal aggrandisement. The results are there for all to see. Nepal's ongoing civil war has further inhibited prospects for progress and prosperity. We can start by stopping this senseless war.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha
Institute of Social
Studies, The Hague

CORRECTIONS

• Lal Deusa Rai, quoted in "Universal values" (Letters, #128) has written to say that the letter writer's reports of his demise are exaggerated. "I am still battling, and hope to continue to do so for some length of time," Rai told us. Lal Deusa Rai is now teaching journalism at TU's masters program. The error is regretted.

• Due to a translation inaccuracy in Dipak Gyawali's interview (From the Nepali Press, #128) the answer to the question "How do you analyse the Maoists' strategy of destruction?" should have read: "The Marxists interpreted Hegelian philosophy upside down, and adopted the principle of destruction first, construction later..."

'There is no sense of urgency to solve the insurgency.'



Is it really necessary for Nepal to go through what Sri Lanka did with 80,000 deaths in 20 years of war? No, says conflict resolution expert John Richardson (left) who has studied both countries.

SALLY ACHARYA
in WASHINGTON DC

It is sometimes said that everyone in a Nepali village knows who the Maoists are, except the soldiers. To John Richardson, that is no surprise. It is a pattern he has seen around the world.

One of his arguments is that a major failure of policy-makers and donors is to ignore two key but unfashionable factors—community police and young men. Governments tend to pump money into armies that prop up a small nation's pride in peacetime, but can never address a 21st century crisis.

Meanwhile, donors ignore the needs of young men, who are most likely to turn their thwarted energies into violence. When ill-funded and dispirited police fail to stem a movement fueled by angry young men, armies are predictably called in, and just as predictably fail.

Richardson is a Sri Lanka specialist who has devoted over two decades to studying guerrilla conflict and trying to

pinpoint the common factors in struggles that drag on until both sides come to a "hurting stalemate" and are weary enough to talk.

Guerrilla wars are rarely won by either insurgents or governments, notes Richardson, a former military man who teaches at the American University's School of International Service here, and who recently visited Nepal.

Insurgents around the world tend to be better armed, better motivated and even better trained than soldiers. They are often self-sustaining, through extortion, robbery, smuggling, drug running, and in the case of some, such as the Tamil Tigers, through the deep pockets of the diaspora. Yet even the Tigers, whom he calls "perhaps the most resilient and best-armed rebel army in the world", have failed to achieve their goals through bloodshed.

Meanwhile, armies aren't equipped—and perhaps never can be—to fight effectively



Nepal, 2002

against their own people, Richardson adds. Their training prepares soldiers to fight an easily identified stranger, yet in modern times, virtually the only time a small country's army will be used is to fight its own population.

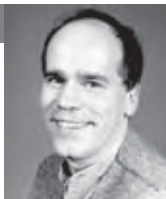
A small, impoverished country attacked by a major

power would win or lose based on its ability to find allies, not based on its own army, he argues. Costa Rica is one of the few countries without an army, shows that it is possible to have a nation without a military, and this could be a model for Nepal and Sri Lanka.

"The truth is, Nepal doesn't need an army at all," he says provocatively. "It may need a few people to guard the palace and for ceremonial duties, but what is the point of an army? To fight India and China? The same is true in Sri Lanka. This doesn't mean there is no need

for security. But in the budget process, the army gets preferential treatment over police." And that, he says, is the mistake. If the goal is a secure life for the country's people, that would be better maintained by a professional police force that lives in the

by DANIEL LAK



The worst form of government, except all the others

There's an ill-wind blowing through the corridors of foreign policy in rich western countries. It has to do with democracy, and it illustrates the dilemma posed by the failures of development at every level in most nations in the world.

A Filipina-American academic, Amy Chua, has added great momentum to this trend with a book, *World on Fire*, in which she argues that liberal, free market and democracy systems imposed on largely feudal countries by well-meaning donors are actually dangerous and often lead to economic decline and war. She used the example of her native Philippines, where she was born into the wealthy but subtly discriminated against Chinese community. The People Power revolution that swept Corazón Aquino to power in the 1980s, Chua says, was universally welcomed and supported by Western capitals, most of all in Washington which was growing steadily more humiliated and impatient at the excesses of its former client, the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos.

The huge crowds of middle class Manila residents that surrounded Marcos' palace, braving the tanks and riot police deployed to protect the autocrat, were rapturous when Aquino won the day. "Our Cory" they called her, making a play on words with her first name, which is Spanish for "heart". Over time, the "heart" of the middle classes, Chua explains, was somewhat of a disaster for the Philippines—a nation that had never quite recovered from centuries of colonial rule by Spain and the United States. She also relates how the market economy imposed as part of the democracy system empowered just a tiny sliver of Philippine society: her own Chinese community, and how that led to flaring resentments and anger by other citizens.

Chua (left) says democracy also ripped open ancient ethnic and religious divides in her native land, between Filipinos and the Chinese community, between Christians and Muslims, between settled citizens and the indigenous tribes of the jungle. Political parties played divide and rule, local identity mattered more than national and armed gangs mutated into liberation armies. The state of the Philippines today is testimony to the abject failure



of western-style democracy in a politically primitive land.

This book is causing great excitement, along with many others like it, among foreign policy makers, senior commentators and aid bureaucrats in America and Europe. In a way, I wonder if it isn't music to the ears of such people. Much was made in the 1990s of the triumph of liberal democracy and free markets everywhere. At one point, we were informed in breathless tones, only a few countries in Africa, China and Indonesia were still authoritarian states. Each new little colonial remnant that elected a long-suffering opposition leader as Prime Minister was hailed as "another triumph for democracy" by the likes of Bill

Two years after People Power II in the Philippines (left), debate on whether poor countries can afford democracy is on again.

Clinton and Tony Blair. Never mind that even the most well meaning dissident turned leader faced vast economic, ethnic and public health problems that would stymie the wealthiest of societies.

As Issac Newton knew, actions produce reactions and it became clear after Perviz Musharraf ended democracy in Pakistan in 1999 that the liberals in the West were changing their tune. In fact, so many of the "new democracies"—Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Argentina—were going sour, and the phrase of the moment became "I told you so" from those, like Chua, who argue that countries that aren't rich and well developed aren't ready for democracy. Or free market economics. I'm starting to hear people talk that way here in Nepal, amid the endless debate about the king's move of 4 October. "An unfortunate necessity" seemed to be the foreign view of the sacking of Sher Bahadur Deuba back then. Even now as autocratic smoke signals occasionally billow from the new corridors of power in Kathmandu, the murmur among aid donors and foreign political observers of Nepal is "pragmatism".

Whether Amy Chua's essay was intended to change the philosophy of Western engagement with the developing world is questionable. Everything she says about democracy in the Philippines is true. But one question remains there, and here, and that is: "What is the alternative to democracy?"

I'm pretty sure the answer is "nothing". Or at least "nothing that works any better". The sooner we realise that here in Nepal, the better. ♦

World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability
by Amy Chua
Doubleday
256 pages

NATION

community, knows its dynamics, and can identify a threat as it begins. "In Sri Lanka, and even more in Nepal, there has been a tendency to neglect the police force," he notes.

Police in both countries have been underpaid, have bad public relations, are poorly trained, poorly armed, politicised and placed in a position where bribery and corruption are tempting alternatives. So when the time comes to call them out to deal with a nascent movement, they don't get the support of the community. And they're likely to beat up on people who are opposed to the government,

stay in the capital," he notes.

"People in the outstations are under-funded, and may even be sent out there as punishment. Then, when trouble comes, they're called on to lay their lives on the line."

It doesn't work, and in time, the army is called to maintain security. But if security is defined as the right of ordinary people to live in safety, that means they're doing the job of police, he says.

And who are they fighting? In major part, disenchanted young men. Yet donors seem blind to this vast, hurting group until it's too late. It is only when enough of them join

wracked by two insurgencies: one a separatist civil war in the north waged by the Tamil Tigers, and the other the Maoist JVP uprising in the south. The Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers reached a stalemate. Each side realised it couldn't win, and both were ready to try something else. What also helped was the post-11 September scenario, and the threat of being put on the terrorist list by the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia endangered the diaspora funding, which in turn forced the Tigers to look for an alternative. The Tigers are currently engaged in peace

controls the swing votes.

Richardson is currently completing a book on democratisation in South Asia and the political economy of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. His recent research and writing has focussed on the prevention, management and resolution of political conflicts in developing countries.

Is it really necessary for Nepal to go through what Sri Lanka went through for 20 years with 80,000 deaths? The war can be much more destructive in Nepal because of the terrain, and also because it is already a much poorer country than Sri



Sri Lanka, 1998

but not really militants, and create circumstances where they are unwittingly serving as recruiting agents.

An unpopular police force is paired with what, in colonial terms, can be called the "outstation mentality" in which civil servants and development workers shy from living outside the capital. "People will go, but everybody is doing their best to

an insurgency that donor-funded projects scurry away, leaving years of development in shambles.

Add that to a lack of urgency within governments, and a refusal on both sides to see that total victory is impossible, and the stage is set for the sort of protracted, winner-less conflicts seen in Sri Lanka. The island nation was

talks with the government, and the ceasefire in the northeast has held for a year.

The JVP uprising was quashed after top leaders were rounded up and killed after an intelligence breakthrough in 1990. The JVP is now the third largest party in parliament, with political clout disproportionate to its membership because it

Lanka. A recent visit to Kathmandu did not leave Richardson encouraged. The missing element, he told us, was a sense of urgency. And without it, there is little to keep the violence from stretching on for years—or even decades. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Charumati facelift

Chabahil locals have formed a committee to restore the crumbling Charumati Stupa, which had developed cracks because of heavy vehicular traffic on the nearby road.

The 4th century stupa has relics dating from the Lichhavi period and is regarded as a site of great religious and archaeological importance, rivaling that of nearby Pashupati. What is unique here is that the impetus for restoration has come from the locals who have watched with dismay as the stupa was overwhelmed by urban expansion, and last year actually started falling apart.

"Individual donors have come forward and we are even getting cash from devotees," says Rajendra Kumar Shrestha, secretary of the renovation committee. The estimated cost of Rs 600,000 is expected to go up since the construction required special bricks and traditional mortar. Because of the lack of money, only the upper part of the stupa is being rebuilt.

Pricelless ancient artefacts, coins, and manuscripts have been found during the renovation work, and archaeologists say more could be found if the whole stupa could have been rebuilt. It has also been discovered that Charumati, like the rest of Kathmandu Valley shrines, have been revered by both Hindus and Buddhists. Hindu deities like Bishnu and Narayan have been found among the Buddhist relics.



NEPALNEWS.COM

Refugees still on hunger strike

Nepali foreign affairs experts are trying to turn on the heat on Bhutan to take back the 100,000 of its nationals from camps in eastern Nepal, and are using an international donor meet in Geneva next month. "There's no other alternative but to internationalise the refugee issue," says Hiranya Lal Shrestha of the Bhutanese Refugees Repatriation Support Group (BRRSG). "We've tried unsuccessfully to settle it bilaterally." The group has been lobbying with western ambassadors accredited to Bhutan in New Delhi and with the Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu to solve the 12-year-old refugee problem. BRRSG has once more stressed that India

needs to be involved in the process. Since 1991, more than 100,000 refugees have been languishing in refugee camps in eastern Nepal. A joint Bhutan-Nepal refugee verification exercise interviewed 12,000 refugees from Khudunabari camp in Jhapa before the process broke down more than a year ago. BRRSG is visiting the refugees who have been on a relay hunger strike in the camp for the past two weeks.



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Food insecurity

Bhokmari ko Mausam (Famine in the far west), a 25-minute documentary about a looming food crisis in Bajura premiered on Nepal Television on Tuesday. Produced and directed by journalist Mohan Mainali from the Centre for Investigative Journalism, it focuses on the food crisis in the remote Maoist-affected districts of the northwest. After the security forces pulled out, Maoists hit bridges, airports and roads last year making it hard to get rice and wheat into this chronically food-deficit area.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) last week issued a statement saying its survey showed reports of the food crisis were alarmist. But Mainali maintains things were already bad four months ago when he shot the film, and because no food has got into the area since then, he didn't believe it had got better. He told us: "I don't know why the ICRC is trying to underplay this crisis."

It takes seven days to walk from to Bajura from the nearest road in Doti, and no food has reached the district headquarters of Martadi since late last year. The Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) says it can only send food if there is security, and banks re-open.

International meet on Nepal democracy

At a time when Nepal is facing a state of uncertainty, Kathmandu-based Social Science Baha is organising an international conference to discuss the matter of representation, pluralism and inclusion in Nepali democracy. The Agenda of Transformation: Inclusion in Nepali Democracy, is scheduled to be held 24-26 April. Says organiser Deepak Thapa, "While the Maoist insurgency creates the context, it has become necessary to look deeper and beyond it to address the need to create an inclusive, representative, participatory system of government." (www.himalassociation.org/baha/nepalidemocracy)

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Loyal Nepalese Army

With the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) in full action on two fronts, questions of national security have acquired a new urgency. The recent upsurge in hostilities on the political battlefield has emerged as the greater threat. Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist supremo Prachanda have launched a joint offensive to bring the army under the control of parliament. Their war aims are different, to be sure, but the tactical alliance remains firm for now. Koirala's quest evidently stems from the imperative

Costa Rica eliminated its military altogether, while Japan reduced a formidable imperial army into virtual insignificance. Where control of the security forces has been dispersed among local governments, they have acquired the benevolence of neighbourhood patrols. These policy options contain little more than academic value in Nepal, unless you're prepared to ignore the army's contributions to the creation of the Nepali state. Some politicians believe the indoctrination of professional soldiers would work better to foster allegiance to the ideas

What if the army brass views ineffective civilian control as going against its fundamental interests?

of maintaining civilian control over the state's coercive force. The Maoists, for their part, are ideologically attuned to a people's army as an emblem of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They also see it as a good way of allowing the fighters to keep their jobs once peace is established. The RNA, for its part, feels it's being criticised for doing its job. At least that's what stands out from the Defence Ministry's objections to news and views on troop deployments and acquisition of modern weaponry. Democracies have tried different ways of diluting the political content of the state's armed capabilities.

and practices of democracy. Today's men in uniform, after all, were civilians yesterday and would be so again tomorrow. This argument, however, overlooks the military's sense of obligation to uphold its professional code. Under the constitution, as many of us know by heart now, the military can be mobilised after His Majesty's approval of the recommendation forwarded by the National Security Council (NSC), which comprises the prime minister, defence minister and the army chief. If the tradition of the prime minister retaining the defence portfolio ends up bolstering the army chief's position in NSC deliberations, we

can't blame the Sahi Nepali Jangi Adda for that, can we? Such misgivings have mangled our deliberations on civilian control of the military establishment. We in the media, still revelling in the publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, see uninhibited inquiry into the military's ways and means as a sign of press freedom. Reading from the same history books, however, our generals are inspired by the American media's national-security-induced vow of silence ahead of President John F Kennedy's Bay of Pigs operation against the Cuban regime a decade earlier. The publication of the flight path of the aircraft carrying those Belgian arms might have been less offensive to our top brass had we covered with equal ardour the twists and turns of the local equivalent of the Ho Chi Minh Trail sustaining the Maoists. Although the deep psychological gulf between military professionals and the civilian leadership has come to the fore more prominently in recent years, episodic outbursts have been apparent since the political change of 1990. Fortunately, the crisis sparked by then army chief General Prajwalla SJB Rana's hard-hitting convocation speech at Shivapuri last year was defused in time. The political outcry focused on General Rana's blistering attack on elected leaders for creating the country's mess and then fizzled. In the exigency of the moment, we glossed over a serious question. What if the military establishment views civilian control as going

against its fundamental interest? The operative word here is "interest", shorn of its negative connotation. Don't you think military leaders would be instinctively inclined to reject civilian control if they believe that the democratically elected leadership endangers the stability, health or existence of the system they are obligated to preserve? That's probably why in some countries the constitution has assigned a certain responsibility to the military to ensure law and order and the proper functioning of state institutions. There must be a reason why Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's opponents continue to urge the military to fulfil its obligation to defend the prerogatives of the people. And we mustn't forget that former Chilean president General Augusto Pinochet has enjoyed immunity from prosecution in his capacity as a senator for life. National disorder, civil strife, internal rebellion, political polarisation and deepening economic crisis all sound familiar to Nepal's today. A combination of these ills struck countries like Argentina, Brazil and Chile in the 1960s and 70s, resulting in the resurgence of the political right in uniform. Granted, the world has come a long way since Latin America's "dirty wars". What's disturbing, though, is that the problems of those tumultuous decades half a world away have come closer home.



by PUSKAR BHUSAL

Japanese debt relief

The Japanese government has provided Nepal with a grant aid in debt relief worth Rs 540 million. Japan has extended grant aid for debt relief with the objective of assisting Nepal to procure commodities such as construction materials, fertilizer, petroleum products and medicines to carry out development activities since 1978.



Movers and shakers

One of the largest international manufacturers of earthmoving and construction equipment, EUCB, has opened up a dealership in Nepal and hopes to expand its presence in other South Asian countries as well. EUCB has a strong presence in India and has appointed Morang Auto Works (MAW) as its Nepal representative. MAW says it has a network of branches all over Nepal and is geared to offer a better range of construction equipment to Nepali clients. EUCB's managing director, Onkar Singh Sunar inaugurated the MAW showroom in Kathmandu this week, and welcomed its Nepali partner to the EUCB family. Said Sunar: "The expansion of our range is part of our continuing commitment to help in Nepal's crucial infrastructure development plans."

More mo-bikes

Another Chinese motorcycle maker is eyeing the growing market for two-wheelers in Nepal. Futong motorcycles are finding a growing market in south-east Asia and the Americas, and its manufacturers say the machines are well-suited for Nepal's roads and climate conditions. "We compare well in terms of durability and affordability," said Futong's chairman, Zu Chang on a visit here to promote his product. Futong's local handlers are Star International, which will be selling six models in the Rs 85,000-225,000 price range.

Creating microwaves

When it comes to microwave transmission to the kitchen, it seems Samsung leads the way. Going by the high turnout at the free familiarisation with microwave cooking at the Hotel Radisson with executive chef, Nabhojit Ghosh, there is indeed great interest here in fast, clean cooking via microwave. Organised in collaboration with Samsung and its local distributors, Him Electronics, the microwave gastronomia produced mouthwatering recipes with little effort. Said Ghosh: "Microwave cooking is convenient, hygienic and healthy." Samsung hopes to hold more such programs in the future.

Just do IT

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Information Technology (IT) is the new buzzword, and computer schools in Kathmandu are struggling to keep up with demand. Classes are always full because of the rapid rate of IT evolution and the vastness of the area of study. For a student, choosing the right institute and finding one's computer niche can be quite a maze. The high concentration of IT schools in the Valley belies the importance of computer literacy today, but far too many bank on the ignorance of students and get by providing shabby service. It's always a good idea to shop around. Fortunately the Computer Association of Nepal's (CAN) InfoTech fair starts this weekend and will be an excellent place to gawk at the latest gadgets. It is also a good opportunity to see what the Valley's IT centres have to offer.

"Students often arrive without a clear aim," says Ganga Ram Manandhar at Pentasoft. Many are still in high school, or are working towards a bachelor's degree. So, Manandhar gives students a demonstration guide so they can decide according to interest and aptitude. A popular method for the undecided is the introductory Gateway 2, a two-month basic platform covering eight applications. "The tragedy here," says Manandhar, "is that students only start computers from class eight, nine or ten. Then, the method of teaching is very narrow." He believes in the importance of stressing conceptual processes that drive applications like MS Word so the students are not limited and are capable of exploring outside the norm. It is not easy for IT schools to maintain a standard of excellence, because teaching IT well rests not only on good hardware like computers and classrooms, but also a great deal on the teachers. In the Valley the stress is on herding students through the course, leaving one to question the capabilities of the trainers. The instructor turnover rate is high in Kathmandu, affecting the quality of computer education. Recently, Pentasoft invited Dhanjeet Shah, a Nepali

If you want to go to computer school, first separate the wheat from the chaff.

trainer certified in the UK for a seminar on Auto CAD, a software critical to building design, structure, internal wiring, interior design and a requirement for engineers. Information sharing is paramount and the institute plans to take awareness programs to colleges. But the responsibility to lay strong IT foundations must be shared. New Horizons is a franchise of a California-based computer training school nation, and places a premium on the capability of its trainers. "We have maintained a high

standard and are confident in our product because of our instructors," says New Horizons' Rachana Khatri. Five classrooms, each equipped with the latest Pentium IV computers, provide an inviting atmosphere for serious students. Candidates arrive at New Horizons to supplement their knowledge of computers or to embark upon IT careers. Counsellors or account executives talk to interested students, making them aware of what is available to them. They are encouraged to sit in on a class to assess for themselves.

New Horizons aim to tailor their facilities to the needs of Nepalis, providing the best training available at reasonable prices. Providing a 100 percent learning guarantee, they have a multi-dimensional approach. Students have access to "Online Anytime Learning", a web-based interactive training available 24 hours a day. With access to an online library, they have resources at the touch of a key. Skill assessments help students to identify and focus on areas requiring improvement. Slow learners may retake any class any number of times.

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Banking on bankers



Let's try something different for a change.

Even from this far away, the Beed is intrigued that the balance sheets of Nepali banks report good profits and generous dividends for shareholders. What's going on? Some accuse the banks of window dressing accounts by not taking enough provisions on doubtful loans, but the bankers swear they don't cook the books. Banking plays a big role in ensuring economic activity even at depressing times. The fact that the Nepali economy is at present excessively monetised and banks have little share of the economy pie provides more opportunities. Perhaps, all bankers, together with the "restructured" Rastra Bank need to be more adventurous and venture beyond traditional ways of managing liquidity or monetary policy. A stable foreign exchange rate and a dollar rallying behind other hard currency at present provide the right backdrop for taking some risks.

The banks need to get the liquidity out of their system knowing well that their margins may dwindle a bit in the short term. Lowering of interest rates is important to make money available for consumption or other investment. This would perhaps also lead to lowering of lending rates for the banks. Idle cash and low interest loans makes risk taking possible and perhaps the business community big and small would be happy to take the plunge. The banking system needs to be

able to link up with the securities market to inject some new life to the stock market. Banks should be allowed to establish or promote mutual or pension funds, as such institutional investment can only be able to build a good foundation for the future of the stock market. A country with 23 million people has big potential for consumer-based banking, and there is an incentive for the government from the revenue perspective for transactions to be legal.



When will our governments stop looking at the banks as a cash cow but as a means of expanding the tax net and increasing revenue? Credit cards or debit cards with customer loyalty programs have always provided the surge in channeling the transactions through the banking system. Consumer financing—be it in terms of housing, automobile or appliances routed through credit cards—provide transactions legitimacy. And the side benefit is taxes, and it goes without saying that regulators will

have to keep a watchful eye on the goings-on. Banks also should explore whether together they can help finance larger infrastructure projects, be it hydropower plants or toll roads. These large outlays eases employment problems, and at the same time starts a hub for economic activities. The time has also come to question why Nepali banks or institutions are not allowed to invest outside the country. Since, there has been no way to control the informal

flight of capital, can't there be some pilot investments tried out? If the money in the country is lying idle, why not try invest in other countries and earn money for Nepali institutions? If full disclosure is maintained and dividend is repatriated, why should a Nepali institution or fund not be allowed to invest in a software facility in the

Philippines, the United States, or India? Banks could be allowed to float specific funds for such investments.

The idea is to find roles for the banks outside the small boxes that they have been confined to so far. There are many successful examples in other developing countries to learn from. Why not try something different for a change. At least it will be less boring. ♦

(Readers can post their views or comments at arthabeed@yahoo.com)



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आयो नेपाली

Get ready to email, do accounting, databasing, Internet-surfing—all in Nepali.

Despite a decade of talk about "leveling the playing field", allowing developing countries to "leapfrog into the information age" and "bridging the digital divide", advances in information technology haven't necessarily made the world a better place. In fact, the gap between the haves and the have nots has actually grown.

One problem has been the dominance of the English language that has put the technology out of reach for those societies that have a different language or script. Computers are not by definition monolingual, if they are only to understand the binary language of 0 and 1.

The dominance of English on our screens, on the LCD displays of pagers or the brightly-lit faces of ATMs is a cultural and political

phenomenon rather than a technological one. The American origins of the defining technologies can be seen in the names given to hardware and software. Despite the dreams of some enthusiasts, high-level programming languages are not likely to drop their English-based syntaxes for Sanskrit or Chinese.

Yet with the development, and now universal, reach of graphical (rather than text-based) interfaces, this need have no bearing on the end user. The potential for breaking down the language barrier and offering unlimited IT-based services in Nepal lies latent in all the under-utilised computer equipment that we see around us.

The prospect of emailing, accounting, databasing and Internet-surfing in Nepali—and

thereby at a stroke opening a world of opportunity to those outside the English-speaking upper middle classes—is no longer the stuff of dreams. For a long time it has been possible to use Devanagari fonts for Sanskrit-based languages on a variety of platforms: Windows, Mac and Unix/Linux. Developers across South Asia and elsewhere have produced attractive and functioning fonts that are currently used in a number of environments, not least for word processing and typesetting. Such work has also been taking place in Nepal since the 1980s. Yet, despite various efforts, one single problem undermines all of this work to date: there was no standard for Devanagari which meant that to read *Kantipur*, *Gorkhapatra* and *Himal*

Khabarpatika online one has to download and install all three separate fonts.

Without standard encoding for Devanagari (preferably combined with a standard keyboard layout to make learning to type simple) it is impossible to develop serious data processing and manipulation in Nepali. The knock-on effect on development planning in Nepal in opportunity loss is immense.

The Nepali Font Standardisation Committee that consisted of linguists, technicians, librarians, academics and media experts made a major effort in 1997 to find a common parameter. A document detailing the font standard was prepared. The standard specified what characters must be included in any Nepali



font, and how they were to be sorted. This standard was discussed during a workshop held during CAN Info Tech 1998, and given a final form. Unfortunately, the work couldn't progress ahead in the lack of technical expertise to implement it natively in computer systems.

Unicode is a standard developed for computers to store the character standards developed by a worldwide consortium. Unicode contains standard encoding for, among a wide range of scripts, Devanagari. Given global acceptance of the Unicode, the standard will be adopted uncritically by the vast majority of computer users as they upgrade to newer releases of different operating systems.

RAJIB SUBBA

Imagine checking your emails and surfing the net while sitting in your own garden. Imagine being able to connect to your office network from a coffee shop, or from the airport. Now, imagine doing all these things easily, quickly and cheaply without getting all tangled in phone jacks and looking for the wall socket. Welcome to the world of Wi-Fi.

Wireless Fidelity allows you to connect to the internet from your couch at home, or from the South Col. Essentially, it marries the mobility of the cell phone with the portable PC. Wi-Fi enabled computers can send and receive data indoors and out without wires. And best of all: it is all several times faster than the fastest cable modem connection.

Free networks are currently being installed across Europe and US based on Wi-Fis, where access points are being set up in the cities. Such networks can be arranged to form a continuous "cloud" of connectivity using free air waves, known as "elektrosmog" in Europe.

Wi-Fi equipped laptops can automatically search and connect to this "cloud" within a 100 m

Cableless and wireless

radius of a base station. Chalk symbols scrawled on sidewalks mark the location of the nearest access point.

Meanwhile, back in Nepal, "Communications for national development" has been a slogan for so long that people have stopped taking it seriously. Yet, the role of information technology in leapfrogging development for a country like Nepal is not a slogan, it is real. In a country where copper wire technology has made it next to impossible to get a land line, wireless telephony and Wi-Fi offer a viable way to bypass bureaucratic hurdles so we can finally get on the information superhighway.

The number of people in Nepal who have applied for a telephone connection, but haven't yet got a line has now crossed the 300,000 mark. Nepal's teledensity is 1,446 lines per 100,000 people, one of the lowest in the world. The

primary reason—or, excuse—for this is that telecom infrastructure is capital-intensive. This is even more so for a country with rugged topography like Nepal.

This is why the best news to hit us in recent years is the rapid spread and increasing affordability of wireless communication.

Wireless overcomes the tedious, time consuming and costly process of laying cables within crowded metropolises or extensive cabling across the country. Wireless offers an alternative in developed and developing countries alike.

"Wireless gives us flexibility, it has tremendous potential for remote area telecom, for bringing urban areas into Wi-Fi networks, and with wired equivalent privacy so that it is secure," says Shree Ram Regmi, lecturer at the Institute of Engineering in Pulchowk. The technology has now arrived in



No messing around with wires anymore. Wi-Fi comes to Nepal.

Kathmandu, it is still a bit expensive. But prices are dropping all the time.

Himalayan Technologies (www.himalayantech.com) is one of the companies dealing with Wi-Fi products in Nepal market with its Linksys wireless networks. The system operates at the 2.5 GHz Industrial Scientific and Medical (ISM) free frequency where the data transfer rate is 11Mbps. By the middle of this year, customers in Kathmandu can have high-speed wireless internet access to replace their wired LAN systems. Says Sumeru Shrestha of Himalayan Technologies, "Linksys delivers the freedom to configure your network your way. You can set up workstations in ways you never

thought possible: no cables to install mean less expense and less hassles." But isn't it going to be complicated and expensive? No, Shrestha says. Wireless local area networks will in fact provide seamless roaming to your home server so you can check email from anywhere.

How about security, can hackers get into your server through wireless? Again, no worries. Wireless comes with advanced user authentication features. And the beauty of it is that it is plug-and-use with Windows-based diagnostics that keep you in control. Shrestha plans to show off his product at the CAN Info Tech 2003 starting this weekend. Wireless is the new freedom. ♦

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If, and only if, Unicode is implemented according to the needs of the Nepali people will they then be able to compute natively in their own languages. A UNDP-supported pilot project involving the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Computer Association of Nepal are working on a pilot project to implement a workable and potentially universal font standard for Nepali. It overcame difficulties like the lack of a standard keyboard layout. An integral part of the objective was not only to find technical solutions, but to publicise them and provide the training and education necessary to ensure their widest possible adoption and exploitation. ♦

(Nepali Unicode fonts will be made public on 24 January at the CAN InfoTech 2003, and tutorials will be held on 27 January. Software can be downloaded for free at the website www.mpp.org.np. Since bandwidth is a problem, there is also a CD which will be available at various stalls during the CAN Info-Tech, which can also be ordered at cost price through amar.gurung@info.com.np)

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No Clone

BELGRADE - The sensational announcement last month that a human clone is to be born in a private clinic by 15 January in Serbia caused an avalanche of denials by local experts and health ministry officials. In December, the Yugoslav Association for Fertility and Sterility hosted a symposium on the problems of artificial human reproduction, attended by more than 250 local and foreign experts. It was here that controversial Italian gynaecologist Severino Antinori announced "Serbia will be one of three countries which will go down in history" due to the assumed 15 January birth of a cloned baby.

Antinori's announcement came only days before the controversial Cloneaid group announced the birth of the first human clone by a mother in the US. An unprecedented media search for a place where the allegedly cloned baby would be born followed. More than 140 private gynaecologist practices around Serbia became the targets. Dr Drazen Milacic, head of the association, denied the rumours adding the symposium was "abused for sensation". The Serbian Health Ministry issued a decree banning any experiments that would lead to cloning of humans. The decree became an annex of the existing Law on Human Reproduction. (IPS)

Not-so-good

by Emma Bonino, Euro MP and a member of the Italian Radical Party



How is it that people like myself, who have always considered it a duty to fight poverty and injustice, feel so distant from the anti-globalisation movement—indeed, feel that the way to make the world more liveable is not to stop globalisation, as you propose, but to accelerate and extend it.

You are right to denounce the growing social and economic inequality of our age. But it seems impossible to deny that the onslaught of contemporary globalisation has brought real macroeconomic progress, producing wealth and reducing poverty in much of the planet. True, there remain large areas of exclusion, but can anyone seriously believe that producing less wealth will make it easier to fight poverty?

Among the scandalous disparities that characterise the North-South divide, there is a phenomenon of breath-taking pertinence: while hundreds of millions of people around the world have to subsist on a mere dollar a day, every cow born between Finland and the south of Italy receives a daily subsidy of this same amount from the European Union. Could there be a more rousing call to denounce the hypocrisy and myopia of European (and American) leaders, who preach the expansion of

globalisation while their protectionism—and not just in agriculture—works to the opposite end?

It will be interesting to see which proves the greater obstacle to globalisation: your opposition or the protectionist policies with which the North continues to asphyxiate key sectors of the economy of the South.

Born and developed in the North, the anti-globalisation movement claims to represent the dispossessed and to defend their interests. So how does it justify the presence at forefront of its ranks of someone like Jose Bove, champion of French and European agro-protectionism? And what about the Catholics who claim to practice "liberation theology" yet remain loyal to a church that (like Islam) blesses the demographic explosion and continues to forbid any sexual education and the use of condoms despite the ballooning pandemic of AIDS?

And what of the post-communist leftists who demand extraordinary aid and debt forgiveness for the poorest countries but don't bat an eye when the leaders of these countries massacre their own people in devastating wars, as in Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea?

The anti-global movement demands an immediate major transfer of resources from the North to the South yet overlooks a startling fact that is jeopardising the future of aid for development: four decades of development policy have failed

to lift a single country out of underdevelopment.

The movement also demands that the international community put an end to the "scandal of poverty", but it doesn't seem worried by the fact that these days the most efficient form of battling poverty is that practised by 150 million emigrants from about 30 countries of the South who, without waiting for World Bank programs, went to find work in the industrialised world. It is worth reflecting on the fact that in many countries remittances from these workers to their families have become the major source of currency.

But not even these remittances are enough to kick-start the economies that receive them given the absence of even minimal democracy or rule of law.

Globalisation can multiply its benefits only if it manages to defeat its greatest enemies: the resistance of too many political leaders in the North to eliminating barriers to the free circulation of goods and peoples; and the resistance of too many political leaders in the South to granting their citizens fundamental political and economic freedoms, which are a necessary condition for development.

I would like to create an alternative movement to yours called "Globalisation? Yes please!". One of its goals would be to introduce among the priorities of globalisation—and therefore of international relations North and South—the worldwide promotion of rules and principles of the rule of law and democracy. As Churchill said: "It is the worst system of government known to man, except for the rest." ♦ (IPS)

Not-so-bad

by Supachai Panitchpakdi, Director-General of the WTO



Multilateralism is the only sustainable way to secure our global future. At Doha in November 2001, in a climate of dangerous international uncertainty, World Trade Organisation (WTO) members showed the determination to make multilateralism work.

What the world needs today is a reaffirmation of this choice of multilateralism over unilateralism, of stability over uncertainty, consensus over conflict, and rules over power. Trade liberalisation is a powerful ally of sustainable development. Given that trade barriers harm the poorest, removing trade barriers helps alleviate poverty.

The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects 2002, estimates that abolishing all trade barriers could boost global income over a ten year period by \$2.8 trillion. Of this, developing countries stand to reap more than half, and an additional reduction in global poverty of 320 million people by 2015. Freer trade, accompanied by appropriate domestic macroeconomic policies and a sound legal framework, is vital in helping poor countries grow their way out of poverty and move on to the path of sustainable development.

The share of developing

globalisation

countries in world trade has grown to around 30 percent and it could be made to grow even higher. One way to do this is by improving market access for products of particular interest to developing countries, such as agriculture goods and textiles. This one action will make a huge difference to the lives of millions.

We should also remember that trade is not a zero-sum game. Developed countries also stand to gain from trade liberalisation in these areas. For instance, agricultural support in developed countries, which comes close to \$1 billion every day, represents a significant cost to developed country

tax payers and consumers.

In preparation for the Fifth Ministerial Conference, slated for 10-14 September in Cancun a number of further deadlines have been set which should bring a needed sense of urgency to the negotiations.

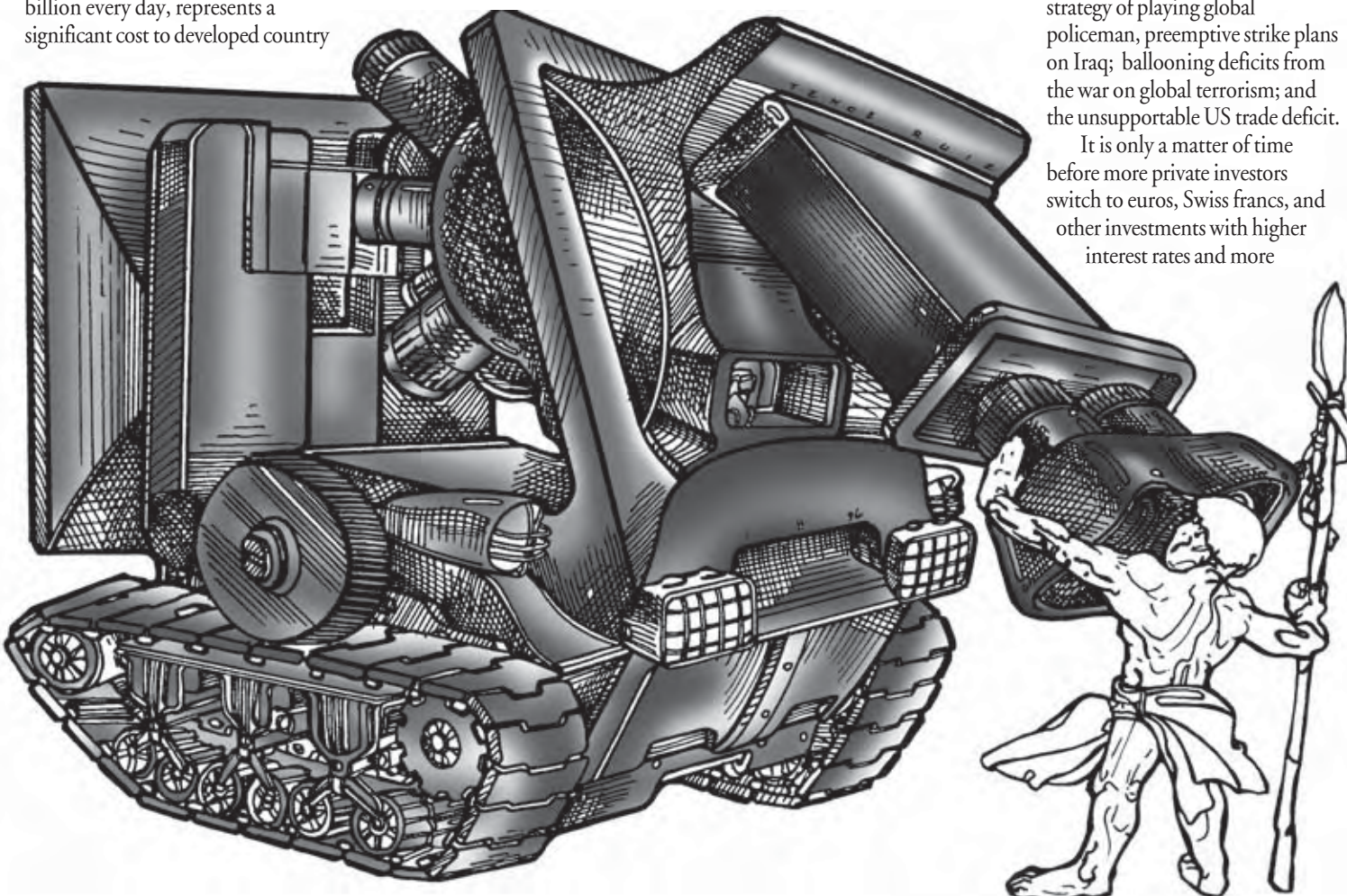
The WTO has moved from the failure of Seattle to the success of Doha. Developing countries need to ensure through their positive engagement in the negotiations that they make the most of their opportunities. A strengthened multilateral trading system is in the interest of every country. ♦ (IPS)

Not-so-smart

by Hazel Henderson, author of Beyond Globalisation, Building a Win-Win World and other books.



Even though a welter of evidence is now in indicting globalisation—from the 1997 Asian meltdown to the default of Russia and now Argentina—its apologists still promote this



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OPINION by JOHAN GALTUNG AND DIETRICH FISCHER

Korea's hawk-dove dialectic

Treat someone like a crook and he'll behave like a crook.



Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang indicated that the sunshine had thawed even Japanese hearts. But not US hearts. After his (s)election, President Bush Jr ordered a "review" of North Korea policy (meaning procrastination). By including North Korea in the "axis of evil", he marked it for war/invasion if it refused to collapse.

The US decided to crush the Sunshine Policy by getting North Korea to admit/confess that it had not abandoned the uranium enrichment program. Yet Washington never admitted/confessed that it had not yet fulfilled its own part of the 1994 agreement (offering North Korea two civilian light-water reactors to replace the reactor Pyongyang agreed to shut down); nor that Japan's plutonium policy was the same as hawkish North Korea's.

Recently the US took a very hawkish position, even stopping the flow of oil to North Korea at the beginning of winter. Later, the US reversed itself, saying it is ready to "talk" but not negotiate with North Korea, hinting at possible food and energy assistance if North Korea first dismantles its nuclear weapons program in a verifiable way. Interestingly, a majority in South Korea prefers to continue the Sunshine Policy, Japan a little less so, China more, and Russia possibly much more, eyeing Wonsan as oil export port.

The extent to which the US can make others toe their hard line, by stick or carrot policies, depends partly on whether North Korea will reward dovish policies by those four.

- The following five steps can help ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula and build a better future for all:
- 1 A Continuation of Sunshine Policy;
 - 2 A Regime change in North Korea, like in China, heading for more democracy and human rights and a mixed Capital-State economy;
 - 3 A One nation/two states Confederation on the Korean Peninsula, with no collapse, no take-over, but changes on all sides and without an all-out sale of the North Korea economy to world capitalism, leaving a door open for full reunification in the future;
 - 4 A Conference for Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia, similar to the 1973-75 Helsinki Conference that prepared the end of the Cold War in Europe, aiming for an organisation to handle security and cooperation problems;
 - 5 As tensions are reduced, all foreign troops are withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula, as agreed (but not practised by the US) for Austria in 1955.

What helped end the cold war in Europe was a gradual mutual opening — to the flow of ideas, goods and people. The same policy can work in Korea. ♦ (IPS)

(Johan Galtung is a Professor of Peace Studies and Director of TRANSCEND, a peace and development network. Dietrich Fischer is professor at Pace University)

approach with the familiar cry: There Is No Alternative.

Now we are seeing the emergence of an even deeper set of contradictions generated by the strict regime of export-led GNP-growth, open capital markets, convertible currencies, privatisation, deregulation, and increasing world trade.

The US, globalisation's most fervent promoter, has up to now, reaped the greatest benefits, as the dollar—over-valued in the recent past by between 15-25 percent—became the world's defacto reserve currency. This has led to soaring US trade deficits as US-based companies found it increasingly difficult to export.

But the United States' long ride on the over-valued dollar is now coming to an end as its trade deficits continue growing to unsustainable levels (some 4.5 percent of US GDP). Until recently, countries which export to the US (China, Taiwan, Japan, Mexico, and many others) kept accepting US dollars in payment and buying US Treasury bills for their currency reserves.

This system, with the United States absorbing so much of the world's exports and capital, trying to serve as the world's "locomotive", is now bogging down as a result of the weakening dollar, currently below the euro.

The US Federal Reserve has lowered interest rates to 1.25 percent, the lowest level in 40 years, to try to kickstart the domestic economy—so far with little success. The Japanese "deflation malaise" may be in store for the post-bubble

US as well. Countries holding their towering piles of US dollars in their currency reserves are diversifying into euros, which is now becoming the world's alternative reserve currency.

Private holders of US T-bonds and stocks look on with alarm as the dollar continues to weaken and the interest they now earn is close to zero when corrected for inflation.

These private investors are worried about the US economy's fundamentals—historically high levels of corporate and consumer debt, over \$1 trillion of unfunded corporate pension liabilities in the auto and other "Old Economy" sectors; a corporate crime wave that continues to undermine confidence in auditor's reports and stock markets, the Bush foreign policy strategy of playing global policeman, preemptive strike plans on Iraq; ballooning deficits from the war on global terrorism; and the unsupportable US trade deficit.

It is only a matter of time before more private investors switch to euros, Swiss francs, and other investments with higher interest rates and more

favourable fundamentals.

China is fast becoming the world's newest superpower. It already produces many of the world's goods—50 percent of cameras, 30 percent of air conditioners and TVs, 25 percent of the washing machines, 40 percent of all microwave ovens sold in Europe, and fast moving into computers, mobile phones, and DVD players.

Lower wages and cheap export platforms used in China and elsewhere by US multinationals were supposed to be the advantage of globalisation. Today, however, the United States fears global deflation, a danger the US Federal Reserve is bracing for while its main tool of choice—interest rate adjustments—has stripped the gears of monetary policy. Will the Fed fight deflation by "talking down" the dollar? Or another surprise, when China shifts to a convertible currency will the now undervalued Chinese yuan lead to the dollar's further devaluation?

The failure of the laissez faire orthodoxy to register alarm at the blow-back from "Washington Consensus" policies indicates a lack of systems thinking. As psychiatrists know, people who cannot conceive of any alternative to their current behaviour are deemed to be suffering from clinical depression.

And scientists note that it is illogical to imagine that repeating a similar experiment could lead to dissimilar results. Washington would do well to take note. ♦ (IPS)

Donor-bashing in the Philippines

MANILA—Donors are usually the ones who scrutinise the work of their aid recipients, so they sat up when Filipino senator Aquilino Pimentel upset this equation, and demanded full disclosure of the salaries of foreign consultants working for the government.

Pimentel, a veteran opposition senator, takes donor-bashing seriously. Two years ago, he charged that a huge portion of aid meant for development projects was being allotted for the salaries of foreign consultants, most of whom were paid "outrageously huge fees". As a result, the success of projects, some of them geared towards poverty alleviation, have been greatly undermined. In recent years, more and more developing countries have been demanding greater transparency and a bigger say in projects that receive counterpart funding from foreign donors.

"We have to be humble as donors and accept that not a lot of aid we have been providing has been productive," said Stephen Browne of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

"We need to accept that there is no one-size solution that can be applied to one type of problem," Browne told the International Symposium on Capacity Development here.

Developing country governments are saying that they should ask more questions because after all, a huge chunk of the aid are loans payable on concessional terms, and only a small percentage are grants made available either in cash or kind.

For instance, of the \$15 billion official development assistance committed to the Philippines by the United States, Japan, and other donors since 2000, only 8 percent are grants and technical assistance in nature. (IPS)

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In the process of uncapping the fountainheads of development in this country through speeches and exhortations, our leaders should not forget to partake of the folk wisdom contained in our proverbs.

In the process of uncapping the fountainheads of development in this country through speeches and exhortations, our leaders should not forget to partake of the folk wisdom contained in our proverbs.

It is indeed a sad fact of life that one of the side-effects of Economic Globalisation is that our proverbs are disappearing at an alarming rate. At this pace, according to World Bank estimates, proverbs will be eradicated from Nepal by the year 2007. Although we shouldn't count our chicken before they are hatched, it is a fact that an omelet cannot be made breaking all our eggs in one basket.

It is also incumbent upon every man, woman and child to rescue and conserve every proverb that they come across in day-to-day life. If you see a sleeping dog, for instance, you shouldn't let it just lie there, since its bark may be

worse than its bite and, what's more, we may still be able to teach it new tricks. After all, every one of those dogs has his day.

You may well ask, how can we as a nation learn from our proverbs before they become extinct? Good question. And if I knew the answer to that one, I wouldn't be here wasting your time and mine writing a weekly column like an ass that likes to hear himself bray. I would be out there: an early bird that knows fully well that a worm in the hand is worth two in the bush, who flocks with others of a feather and who, in turn, tries to make sure that two of us are not hit by the same stone, especially since what is sauce for the gander is also sauce for the goose that lays golden eggs.

And our leaders should do well to remember that since brevity is the soul of wit, they must call a spade a shovel. Rome, as we know, was not built in a day, but all roads lead to it so when we get there we must do as the Romans do: give long speeches with a lot of obscene hand gestures.

Let me add here that when it comes to proverbs, Nepal is second to none. Our proverbs carry the accumulated common sense and wisdom of our ancestors and which they passed down from generation to generation through hand-to-mouth. For some reason, a lot of Nepali proverbs are about crows, monkeys and

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facial hair. Let's translate some of them and provide accompanying examples that illustrate their exact meaning:

Khane mukh lai junga le chhekdaina.

Translation: A moustache shouldn't come in the way of a tax official.

Example: Even though he's had numerous visits from the vice squad, Phanindra's whiskers haven't been a hindrance to collecting a small facilitation fee from every truck that passes his border checkpoint.

Chauta khana gayeko budi, jhol ma dubera mari.

Translation: The greedy drown in gravy.

Example: Ram wanted so badly to remain prime minister that he tried to postpone elections by a year-and-a-half, so the king sacked him.

Raja ko kam, kahile jala gham.

Translation: Hey, aren't we off yet?

Example: After a hundred days of being in office, Shyam can now tell instinctively that it's time to go home when the peon wakes him up with a clatter of tea cups.

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