

NEPALI Times

#130 31 January - 6 February 2003 16 pages Rs 25

Before the ceasefire announcement and after. Read all about it in Himal Khabarpatrika



Donors glad

Foreign countries have generally welcomed the dramatic ceasefire announcements by the Maoists and government. An Indian Embassy statement said it had "noted" the developments and added, "To achieve durable peace, security and stability in Nepal, we believe that the process of dialogue should be based on national consensus, should involve political parties and should be conducted in an environment free from violence."

The US Embassy said, "We welcome the immediate cessation of all Maoist military activities and terrorist attacks as concrete evidence that the Maoists are serious about holding peace talks with the Nepali government."

The British Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien said from London, "A lot of work needs to be done, and it is vital that all groups in Nepal do everything they can to end the pain and suffering this conflict has caused." German envoy Rudiger Lemp welcomed the truce announcement and assured full cooperation from the European Community.

The question many are asking is: Why did King Gyanendra and the Maoists decide to patch up now?

The Maoists were beginning to feel the pressure from a cadre base that grew too rapidly, and was getting out of control. A newly-beefed-up army could drag on the war. And they were also feeling the squeeze from New Delhi, which was getting anxious about a possible spill-over, as well as Americans running around its backyard. Then, there was a real danger of being slotted into America's terror list.

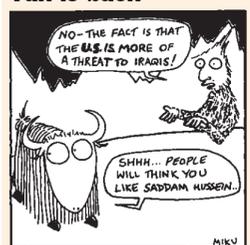
King Gyanendra, on the other hand, needed a peace dividend to bolster his own legitimacy and that of a government he appointed four months ago after sacking an elected prime minister. The king had staked everything on his October 4 move, and needed to pull this rabbit out of the hat.

Whatever the behind-the-scenes tradeoffs, the announcement on Wednesday inspired hope among war-weary Nepalis that this may finally be the beginning of the end of a seven-year conflict that has cost more than 8,000 lives and ruined the nation.

"This is a major breakthrough, but there is a big challenge ahead now to make the ceasefire stick and carry on the negotiations," one senior government official told us Thursday. He said the negotiations had been tortuous. "Till the last moment, we knew it could have gone either way." The government conceded to lifting the terrorist label, an international warrant and the bounty for the heads of senior Maoist leaders—all in return for the immediate ceasefire call.

A truce is the first step to build confidence

Yak is back



Yak Yeti Yak, the famous comic strip of an existential yak and a talkative yak is back after a sabbatical, see page 14.



A ceasefire is the beginning of the peace process, not the end.

ANALYSIS by KUNDA DIXIT

Once there was the political will, everything else fell into place. Even so, there was finger-biting tension on that rainy Wednesday morning this week when it was touch-and-go till the last minute. As ministerial mediator, Narayan Singh Pun, shuttled back and forth between the Maoist leadership and the cabinet room until the ceasefire agreement was done.

The next step will be direct talks between Pun and possibly Babu Ram Bhattarai from the Maoist side to iron out the facilitation procedures. Asked if these negotiations would take place outside Nepal, one senior government official said, "I don't think there is any need. This is our problem and we need to solve this ourselves." Then, the two sides will get down to the nitty-gritty of Maoist demands of a roundtable conference of political forces, constituent assembly elections and an interim government.

Can't fail this time

in negotiations. This ceasefire can't be like last year when executions, extortion and plunder continued nationwide while the talks took place.

"The peace process has already started," Lt Col Pun told us Thursday morning. "I am very optimistic that we will see lasting peace." The ex-Royal Nepal Army helicopter pilot-turned-aviation entrepreneur-turned-politician is suddenly in the limelight as the main architect of the negotiations. He has been credited with making initial contacts with the top Maoist leadership two months ago and mediating between them and the palace. The government has named him chief coordinator in coming negotiations.

The UML has the most to lose if the Maoists emerge as a mainstream party, and it will likely emerge from Janakpur more radicalised. The Nepali Congress has been caught flat-footed, and had not even issued a statement till late Thursday. Party leaders tried to put on a brave face, and said neither the monarch nor the Maoists had shown a readiness to find a peaceful outcome.

It is clear that however dramatic the initial announcement on Wednesday, the real work has just started. The road ahead is rocky. But this process cannot be allowed to fail because if it does, the alternative is unthinkable.

By getting Ram Bahadur Thapa (Comrade Badal) involved early in the negotiations, Lt Col Pun has ensured that the main Maoist personalities are on board. But the question is, are there other hardliners out there who will keep on fighting? Also, will the political parties play ball? The signs are not good. They are miffed not to have been consulted and are fearful about fallout on their own futures.

Editorial p2 The absence of war is not peace

"Time for all-out action is now..."

Nepali Times: What are the lessons for us in Nepal from the way African countries have handled the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

Nafis Sadiq: The urgent message to the countries in the region is that the time for all-out action is now while the prevalence of infection is still low and the epidemic can be controlled. South Asia is not yet anywhere near current levels of HIV/AIDS in Africa. It is still mainly confined to the most vulnerable groups—commercial sex workers, IV drug users, men who have sex with men, transport and migrant workers—as well as people who are infected by receiving infected blood or blood products. But it is breaking out of these groups.

The lessons learned from Africa are to take the problem seriously while prevalence levels are still low. You need high-level political leadership to remove stigma and silence, to treat the problem as a development problem not just a health issue, build partnerships with NGOs religious groups and women's organisations, and to take bold actions including access to services for all who need them. South Asian countries can contain HIV/AIDS with actions now. Time is of the essence.

How seriously do you take the US administration threats to cut funds for condom propagation and use?

This is to be taken very seriously. Everyone agrees that abstinence, faithfulness must be promoted, but individuals at high risk should be enabled to protect themselves. As we know, the majority of girls and women have only one partner—90 percent of infected women got the infection from their spouse. So cutting funding for condoms for AIDS prevention will affect the health of large numbers of people including many those who may be infected as a result not of their

own behaviour but that of their partners'. I hope the US, which has been a world leader on reproductive health and rights issues, will recognise these realities and maintain its support for condom programs.

There is still a lot of squeamishness about discussing sexual transmission prevention in our region. In your experience, what is the most effective way to break taboos?

This squeamishness about discussing sexual matters is one of the greatest hindrances to high-level political support. First, countries must acknowledge high risk behaviour exists in our societies. South Asian leaders need to state their objective clearly; that to contain the epidemic there must be education and information for the whole public, starting with the high risk groups. There is no cure and no preventive vaccine. The only way to stop HIV/AIDS from becoming a huge epidemic is by educating and informing people and providing access to services.

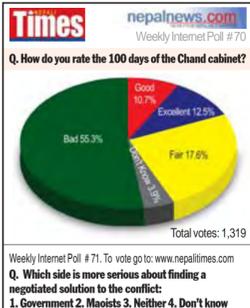
There is criticism that combating AIDS gets all the funds, leaving unglamorous diseases which kill more people under-funded. How would you respond?

The reason that HIV/AIDS is getting the attention it does is that it is not just a disease. Look at the African experience. The epidemic has reduced decades of health gains. Botswana's life expectancy which should have been about 67 years has gone down to 43 years. HIV/AIDS can be a major developmental calamity. This is why South Asian countries must act with courage and forthrightness immediately. Our leaders will be judged by the actions they take now to contain the serious problem of HIV/AIDS.



Nafis Sadiq became the UN secretary general's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Asia after serving as the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She is in Kathmandu for next week's high-level South Asian regional conference on AIDS. Nepali Times talked to her about the epidemic.

See also p4-5, 15



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Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd. Chief Editor: Kanda Dutt Design: Kiran Maharjan...



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



An outbreak of peace?

The truce, however fragile, is a respite for Nepalis. The alternative is too horrendous to contemplate.

A breakthrough in negotiations between the king and the Maoists on the eve of Martyrs' Day has opened the doors for a meaningful dialogue between the warring parties.

IGP Shrestha is the highest-ranking government official so far from among those who have laid down their lives for the country.

If the ceasefire leads to a lasting solution, the blood of the innocent will not have been spilt in vain.

By agreeing to remove the terrorist tag, withdrawing the red-corner notice from Interpol and cancelling the bounty over the heads of Maoist leaders...

move would be to unilaterally accept those demands of the Maoists that do not directly contravene the laws of the land.

Since the Maoists are fighting for a republic, their main dash is with the king. However, they seem to have decided to strike while the iron is hot.

Among all the stakeholders of the peace process, the role of the king is the most crucial. He can either seize the moment and make a place for himself in history...

The predicament of the mainstream political parties like Nepali Congress, UML, RPP and even the Sadbhavana is unenviable.

They have so far been used, ridiculed, discredited and then sidelined from the conflict resolution process between the monarchy and the Maoists.

Accepting the Maoist demand for a constituent assembly shouldn't be very difficult for the Nepali Congress as it has already prepared its supporters for it.

Among the possible procedures for constitutional reforms (a constituent

assembly, parliamentary enactment, drafting by an all party expert committee, negotiated settlement between conflicting interest groups, petition to the ruler, direct foreign intervention and a national referendum) an election for a constituent assembly is undoubtedly the most complex.

The legitimisation of the Maoists implies that the UML needs to reinvent itself at its Janakpur Convention. There is no place for two large communist blocs in Nepali politics and UML has to carve itself so bitter that the likelihood of Comrade Madhav Nepal and Comrade Khadga Oli burying their personal differences for the greater good of the party...

The RPP and Sadbhavana have realised by now that the benefits of being the "king's party" are ephemeral. A party, by its very definition, belongs to the people.

The prospect for peace in the country depends upon the choices that these stakeholders make. Meanwhile, all we can do is keep the pressure on all sides to pursue the path of peace without sacrificing democratic pluralism.

At the end of a hard and bitter winter this truce, however fragile, is a respite for the Nepalis. The people have less to lose than those who have higher stakes.

THE ABSENCE OF WAR IS NOT PEACE

The people did not greet the ceasefire announcement by the Maoists and the government on Wednesday night by spontaneously pouring out on the streets.

But as a new day dawned, and with it the prospect of an end to the violence, there was a palpable sense of relief in the bahals, in the sidewalks, the temples and markets.

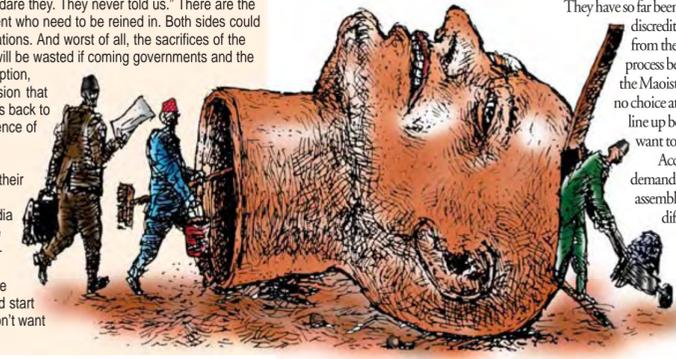
On Martyr's Day, it is in memory of the nearly 8,000 Nepalis who have been killed in the past seven years that we have the responsibility to see this process through.

What is different this time is that the Maoists don't seem to be using this as a ruse to buy time to regroup and rearm as they did last year. The political leadership appears to be reacting to internal pressures of a revolution that was going out of control and to the squeeze of regional geopolitics.

A ceasefire announcement is the beginning of a process. The hard part now begins. But as the Sri Lanka experience shows, if the ceasefire sticks, the Maoists' main demands for a roundtable meeting, constituent assembly and interim government can be thrashed out on the table.

To be sure, there will be obstacles. The political parties aren't helping any by sulking in the corner and muttering, "How dare they. They never told us."

As we said in this space last week, the political parties now need to come out of their narrow cocoons to help the administration prepare for elections. And let not the media frenzy of the peace process eclipse all the other urgent matters that need attention—delivering basic services, rebuilding and rehabilitation.



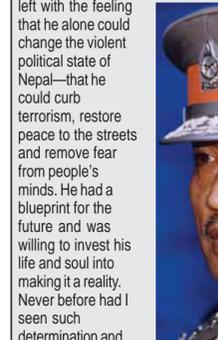
LETTERS

KRISHNA MOHAN SHRESTHA

My name is Pradeep and after reading the obituary for Krishna Mohan Shrestha on your online edition I wanted to write a few words of tribute.

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Amy Chua's highly over-rated book is reviewed rather uncritically by Daniel Lak ("The worst form of government, except all the others" #129).



elite stranglehold, if not so successfully in the economic sense, at least the elite hegemony in the ideological sense. For example by promoting the idea of real democracy to include social justice.

Globalisation Your issue #129 featured two articles that dealt with Nepal joining the WTO and globalisation in general ("An alternative to Davos" and "Three views on globalisation").

In my opinion, the issue of work visa restrictions is the hidden flaw in the logic of globalisation as it is conceived of today. Poor countries have a limited array of goods to entice the wealthy countries.

the Gurkhas. I would ask your readers to be aware of the potential serious damage that could be done to the hitherto exemplary name of the British Gurkhas and to the very close and valuable links that have existed between Nepal and the United Kingdom over nearly two centuries.

years, supported by many overseas organisations, has helped so many in Nepal who have fallen victim to natural disasters or poverty and found themselves in need of urgent financial assistance.

PRIVATE CROOKS In your interview with Badri P Shrestha ("There is enough money to finance development" #127) the finance minister brags correctly about his ability to direct scarce resources of the poverty-stricken government which he inherited towards development.

distinguish between who is a flower and who is a weed. So, before rescuing the tourism industry, please try to make sure you are not rescuing the swindlers. Badri, like Arjun in the Gita, should shed his emotion and attachment and be ready to slay even kin and kint to clean up the country.

CHILDREN FOR SALE There are thousands of homeless, orphaned and starving children in Nepal, and child adoption is one way to take care of them. I can understand a processing fee of \$2,500 as a valid amount to pay for adoption.

government orphanage that if I go through an agency, I can have a baby girl in a few weeks, otherwise my application will be placed at the bottom of the list. What kind of reasoning is this?

STILL WIRED After using wireless for well over four months now, I wish I could actually do many of the things that Rajib Subba described in "Cable and Wireless" (#129). The



briefly, the UML has now embarked on a "national awareness campaign". The mass turnout at these rallies have been good considering the situation, and it has proven wrong those who said that the masses had abandoned the political parties.

again, the Maoists are waiting with open arms to take the cadre away. The Nepali people have been mis-governed for too long, too many promises have been made and broken, they have suffered this poverty and violence for too long. It is now up to the UML to put the country back on the road to democracy and development.

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

RAJESH THAPA

COMMENT

by DHAWAL SJB RANA



Janakpur and beyond

Even by international standards, the history of communist parties in Nepal shows a fissiparousness that is unsurpassed. It is hard to keep track of where and when the different factions split and went their separate ways.

Both are no more. But the unity they strove for has withstood the test of time, even though there have been rump factions breaking off and reuniting in the intervening years.

The last three years have seen the UML as the main opposition in parliament, and its role has been limited to exposing scandals in the ruling party as well as exploiting internal rifts within the Congress.

In all this commotion a coalition between the RPP (Chand Faction) and the UML, with Chand as the prime minister and Bamdev Gautam as the Deputy PM managed to undo all the achievements of the nine-month UML government—a coup of sorts.

Treaty with India. Gautam used this issue as the platform to launch his opposition at the 6th National Convention in 1998 at Nepalgunj with the formal split of the ML faction led by Gautam, who later went into a coalition with the Nepali Congress.

The ML was trounced without even a single representation in the lower house. After an extended period of bitterness the ML finally came back to rejoin the UML last year, but the bad blood is just beneath the surface.

The Congress swept. King Gyanendra's dismissal of the Deuba government, charging it with incompetence, opened up a whole new chapter in Nepali politics.

King Gyanendra's dismissal of the Deuba government, charging it with incompetence, opened up a whole new chapter in Nepali politics. It resulted in a direct and worsening polarisation between the constitutional monarchy and the political parties.

where the call went out for the king to briefly, the UML has now embarked on a "national awareness campaign". The mass turnout at these rallies have been good considering the situation, and it has proven wrong those who said that the masses had abandoned the political parties.

bring democracy back on track, but UML leaders fell short of calling for an escalated protest.

Instead, the party issued strong words of warning against "regressive forces" within the palace and against the Maoists. This was to try to buy time to resolve the crisis between the parties and the palace and also to put the UML's own house in order at its 7th Convention in Janakpur.

In the run-up to Janakpur, Madhav Kumar Nepal presented a political paper which was unanimously passed by the central committee. But the party's future plans have been eclipsed by a power struggle within the party, with some central level leaders like KP Sharma Oli and Bamdev Gautam trying to settle their old grudges.

They accuse Nepal of playing favourites and want the vacant post of chairman to be filled by the convention. They want to create the post of deputy general secretary and would also like the term of the general secretary to be fixed.

The Nepal faction thinks these reforms would undermine party discipline and authority. The delegates to the national convention numbering 1,200 represent 150,000 card-carrying members of the UML who will decide the future of

The UML needs to grow up and see beyond the immediate personal gain of its leaders.

the party in Janakpur. Elections for convention delegates have been completed at the district levels, with both factions claiming that they are in the majority.

Unnecessary bitterness and charges are being exchanged, which may lead to a showdown just like at Nepalgunj in 1997 with the losers quitting and splitting the party. Nepal and his supporters have the responsibility of keeping the party intact, while the challengers must learn to accept defeat gracefully and move ahead to people their promises to the people.

Nepali politics has been revolving around individual egos and one-upmanship. Our leaders need to grow up and see beyond their immediate personal gain—nothing less than the country's welfare and even survival is at stake.

But if the UML splits

again, the Maoists are waiting with open arms to take the cadre away. The Nepali people have been mis-governed for too long, too many promises have been made and broken, they have suffered this poverty and violence for too long. It is now up to the UML to put the country back on the road to democracy and development.

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



RAJESH THAPA

US gag rule hurts population and AIDS work

The United States got everyone started into family planning in Nepal 35 years ago. Now, under pressure from the religious right, Washington has cut funding for condoms, jeopardising Nepal's family planning and anti-AIDS campaign.

HEMLATA RAI

US president George W Bush's decision to reinstate the "Global Gag Rule" that prevents NGOs from providing abortion-related services, including counselling and referrals, has started affecting projects that aim to improve the reproductive health of Nepalis.

AIDS is going to be the single biggest killer of young Nepalis in the next five years and is spreading

rapidly because of unprotected sex and injecting drug use. Nepal also has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world mainly due to lack of health care and unsafe abortions.

One estimate two years ago showed that at least six Nepali women die every day because of unsafe abortions. There are still hundreds of women in jails serving sentences for abortion, three-fourths of them are illiterate and have never received legal support.

Legalised abortion would make it safer and also help women in prison, but such reforms and

legal services will be jeopardised if American funding dries up.

"We are concerned about US funding," says Wasim Zaman, the Kathmandu-based South Asia director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). "They should be taking the lead, not slowing down. This is not about supporting abortion, it is about population, development and safe motherhood."

UNFPA was hit hard after the US cut its funding during the Reagan years, citing money was used for abortions in China. The Clinton administration reinstated funding, but when George W Bush came to power the bill was once more blocked in Congress under

pressure from the religious right. Like the UNFPA, the London-based International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), which campaigns for women's reproductive rights all over the world, has also had its US-funding cut off and it has scrapped some of its support for local affiliates.

At the fifth Asia-Pacific Conference on Population and Development in December which was supposed to take stock of progress since the Cairo conference in 1994, the US delegation tried to block two chapters in the resolution dealing with reproductive rights, especially for adolescents because "it would lead to abortions".

Although the US was isolated, it did manage to put pressure on countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka to abstain from the final voting.

Last August, after intense lobbying by health and social activists, Nepal's parliament passed a bill with an overwhelming majority, conditionally legalising abortion under strict consensual and health guidelines.

Now, some of these NGOs face cuts in US funding. The Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) has been supported by the US government for the past 30 years, and had been getting \$430,000 annually till 2001. That support has been cut. In addition, funding from the IPPF suffered a 23 percent cut when the US stopped funding its London headquarters. The cuts

have affected FPAN's contraceptive procurement as well as awareness activities, and the association has also laid off 70 experienced staff and slashed other expenses.

"Nepal is a success story, there is very high awareness about the contraceptive and AIDS-prevention aspects of condoms. Now, all this could go down the drain," warns Nirmal Kumar Bista of FPAN.

Nepali health activists say Washington could face a harsher reaction from the American public if they were told what the US aid pullout is doing to mothers and children around the world. When asked, USAID's health expert Pancha Kumari Manandhar told us: "The US Congress has heard the views of Nepali NGOs, but a policy change is not being considered at this moment."

Pro-choice organisations like Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy are therefore trying to generate public pressure from within the US. "The American people haven't been told about the negative impact Bush's decision has made on family health services and AIDS prevention in countries like Nepal," says FPAN's Bista.

US aid officials based in Kathmandu admit privately that they were embarrassed and worried by their government's stance, but said there wouldn't be a shortage of donors if the US pulled out. Other donors said it was the principle of the thing. "The Europeans are doing a good job, but they shouldn't be asked to fill in," one aid official in Kathmandu told us.

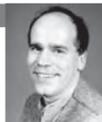
At the Ministry of Health's Family Planning Division, Laxmi



Raj Pathak says there already is a negative impact, but added, "It's not going to affect our policy on safe abortion and contraceptive awareness and distribution."

The US decision has not only upset activists and lobbyists, but has also irked policy makers. Sharat Singh Bhandari who was the outspoken health minister in the Deuba government told us, "We respect the US' right to decide its own policies, but we urge it to take a wider perspective in issues that might have global impact and implications." While minister, Bhandari battled social taboos about discussing sex and was embroiled in controversy for advocating the legalisation of prostitution. He added, "Our present reality demands that women should be given a right to decide what happens to their bodies and how they want to plan their families. We should keep politics out of it."

by DANIEL LAK



Through the Patan mist

A foggy morning is often the ideal time to walk the streets of old Patan. So is a bandh, but no point in advocating more of those exceedingly costly occasions. Hurrying to an early appointment in Mangalbazar, the mist matched the mood on the streets. Gloom and vague forboding was everywhere. Earlier in the week, Krishna Mohan Shrestha of the Armed Police Force had been gunned down on the Ring Road by who the authorities immediately said were Maoists. A woman among those squeezing triggers was pretty clear proof.

Not just the inhabitants of Patan share the fear and paranoia of the local elite who saw one of their own targeted and killed with apparent ease. No, the reaction to the sad events of last Sunday were more complex. First stop—just before Durbar Square—a metalworking shop where intricate Bhairavas, Buddhas and Ganeshas are formed from molten brass and loving craftsmanship. The heat of the forge kept the morning chill at bay. In fact, the man stirring a pot of liquid metal wore a T-shirt and trousers and still wiped sweat from his brow.

Here the conversation was about what the government would do now that the Maoists had apparently shown their weaknesses—on a very personal level—at the heart of state power. "No one deserves to die like that," said metalworker Raj, stirring his silvery brew. "And they shouldn't have killed his wife too. She wasn't commanding police forces and fighting their cadres. I guess that means the end of the peace talks."

I'm not sure his gloom is justified, but it's certainly heartfelt. Like so many ordinary Nepalis, Raj wants peace most of all. But he'd also like to have leaders that paid attention to his concerns and didn't just lurch through the streets in armoured four-wheel drives that are worth more than the lifetime income of his family.

Now the rain is coming down so people hurry past the yoghurt sellers and the vegetable merchants. "Pyaj, kauli, moola," they chant like song



lyrics. Most are Maithili men in lungis who work 15 hours every day, peddling endlessly from tarkari bazar to back allies and bahals. A few dozen rupees profit is good.

Mahesh was wheeling his battered bicycle past housewives with no interest in his wares, their day's dal-bhat was already hissing in the pressure cooker inside. He'd heard about the Shresthas' murder on the Radio Nepal news at midday on Sunday. He pursed his lips as he thought about an answer to my question, "What do you think will happen now that the

Mangalbazar is as much a beleaguered frontline in the conflict as the hills of Rolpa or Rukum.

Maoists seem to be assassinating top people in Kathmandu? "Why didn't they do it before?" He wonders. "Why did so many like me get killed or captured or forced to leave the village. Nobody should have to die at all, but if they're fighting against the sarkar, then why not attack the sarkari people?" Mahesh could understand why they police officers in the field and soldiers were attacked. "But why abduct students?" I had no answers. I'm a journalist. I have the luxury of just posing the questions.

In Mangalbazar itself, the most miserable day of 2003 so far was well and truly underway. The men crouching in front of the Krishna Mandir next to the road had taken shelter in the temple's top tier. None wanted to speak to the khair with the questions. A few "ke garné" was the best I could do.

But I can't help but wonder if the people of Patan just reflect the feeling of Nepal as a whole. This tiny, almost perfect urban enclave at the heart of the old city is as much a beleaguered frontline in the conflict as the hills of Rolpa or Rukum. People here know what's going on, and they worry that the tragic deaths of Krishna and Nudup Shrestha and their bodyguard who were killed while walking back from the nearby Bangalamukhi Temple might just leave them as exposed to violence and despair as ever. While the elite hire more armed guards, add more armour to the jeep and build the glass-topped walls to their compounds ever higher. ♦

Bush declares war. On Condoms.

NICHOLAS D KRISTOF in NEW YORK

Three thousand years ago an amorous Egyptian couple (probably libidinous liberals) experimented with a linen pouch, producing the world's first condom. Some right-wingers still haven't gotten over it.

Over the last few years conservative groups in President George Bush's support base have declared war on condoms, in a campaign that is downright weird but that, if successful, could lead to millions of deaths from AIDS around the world.

I first noticed this campaign last year, when I began to get emails from evangelical Christians insisting that condoms have pores about 10 microns in diameter, while the AIDS virus measures only about 0.1 micron. This is junk science (electron microscopes have not found these pores), but the disinformation campaign turns out to be a far-reaching effort to discredit condoms, squelch any mention of them in schools and discourage their use worldwide.

"The only absolutely guaranteed, permanent contraception is castration," one Catholic site suggests helpfully. Hmmm. You first.

Then there are the radio spots in Texas: "Condoms will not protect people from many sexually transmitted diseases." A report by the Human Rights Watch quotes a Texas school official as saying: "We don't discuss condom use, except to say that condoms don't work."

I'm all for abstinence education, and there is some evidence that promoting abstinence helps delay and reduce sexual contacts. But young people have been busily fornicating ever since sex was discovered in 1963 (as the poet Philip Larkin calculated), and disparaging condoms is far more likely to discourage their use than to discourage sex. The upshot will be more gonorrhoea and AIDS among young people and many more people dying young.

So far Bush has not fully signed in to the campaign against condoms, but there are alarming signs that he is clambering on board. Last month at an international conference in Bangkok, US officials demanded the deletion of a recommendation for "consistent condom use" to fight AIDS and sexual diseases. So what does this

administration stand for? Inconsistent condom use?

Then there was the condom caper on the web site of the government Centres for Disease Control. A fact sheet on condoms was removed and eventually replaced by one that emphasised that they may not work. "The Bush administration position basically condemns people to death by HIV/AIDS," says Adrienne Germain, president of the International Women's Health Coalition. "And we're talking tens of millions of people."

Evangelical groups do superb work in Africa running clinics for some of the world's most wretched people—like impoverished AIDS victims. So it is baffling to see these same groups buying into junk science in ways that will lead to more AIDS deaths.

The scientific consensus is simple: Condoms are far from perfect, but they greatly reduce the risk of HIV and gonorrhoea for men, and they probably also reduce the risk of other sexual infections, though more studies are needed to prove the case definitely. See, for example, the National Institutes for Health report at <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/dmid/studs/condomreport.pdf>.

One study by the University of California at Berkeley found condom distribution to be astonishingly cost-effective, costing just \$3.50 per year of life saved. In contrast, anti-retroviral therapy costs almost \$1,050. Yet the US is now donating only 300 million condoms annually, down from about 800 million at the end of the first President Bush's term.

Consider Botswana, which has the highest rate of HIV infection in the world—39 percent of adults. According to a report on condoms by Population Action International, the average man in Botswana gets less than one condom per year from international donors.

In the time it has taken to read this column, 28 people have died of AIDS, including five children. An additional 49 people have become infected. It is imperative that we get over our squeamishness—accept that condoms are flawed but far better than nothing. ♦ (NYT)



"The Bush administration position basically condemns people to death by HIV/AIDS"

UK-Nepal: Parliamentary Research and Information Centre (PRINCE)

At DFID, our central focus is on an international commitment to halving the proportion of people in extreme poverty by 2015 – through sustainable development, education, and better management of natural and physical environments.

The Department For International Development (DFID) through its Enabling State Programme is seeking Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from organisations/consortia to advise the Parliament Secretariat of the Kingdom of Nepal with their Parliamentary Research and Information Centre (PRINCE) project. You will be required to establish a research and information service for Parliament, upgrade the services of the existing parliamentary library and provide information, research, documentation and reference services to MPs and other parliamentary users through an IT-equipped information system. The project will also assist in the recruiting and training staff to run the services. Other key activities will include setting up and equipping suitable accommodation (space in the new Parliament Secretariat building has been allotted); specifying and resourcing the new service; and training users.

The project is planned for an estimated ten years. The service will be established within two years, followed by a period of three years for handover and up to five years for technical support and external monitoring and evaluation. With the agreement of DFID and the Parliament Secretariat, you will be required to provide national and international technical assistance and project management expertise to the project.

DFID does not expect that one organisation will be able to fulfil the needs of this project, and thus encourages Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from consortia.

Full details of the project including further information of the full range of skills required and application form are available on the DFID website: www.dfid.gov.uk/Contracts/ContractOpportunities.asp

Contact: Peter Gallagher, Department For International Development, Abercrombie House, Eaglesham Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow, G75 8EA, Scotland, Tel: 01355 84 3237, Fax: 01355 84 3327, Email: p-gallagher@dfid.gov.uk

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DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Snow on Swayambhu

No, it's not what you think. This is the Nepal pavilion constructed at the Hannover World Expo 2000 in Germany which is an exact replica of the Swayambhu Nath temple. Nepali artisans were specially flown to Germany to build the Buddhist-Hindu temple complex using traditional techniques, and without using any modern machinery. The entire complex was recently re-erected near Regensburg in Bavaria, where it was spotted recently blanketed in snow.

Empowering Nepal

Nepali students in Minnesota have set a noble example by contributing towards their motherland at a time of crisis: they raised nearly \$ 2,000 for victims of landslides that left 443 dead and more than 12,000 homeless during the last monsoon. The cheque was handed over to the Nepal Red Cross Society this week to the mother of 24-year-old Rashmi Bhattachan who is studying in Minnesota. With the help of Empower Nepal Foundation, Rashmi managed to involve six universities in her state with 350 students to organise a cultural program *Hamro Daitwa* (Our Responsibility) during dasain. Many US and international students participated in the fund-raising event. "We were able to spread this message across hence each individual understood the importance of the event and therefore supported it wholeheartedly," says Rashmi. Other Nepali students in California, Washington and Australia also organised similar events to help Nepal Red Cross Society aid the landslide victims.



Stepping in

There was not a dry eye at the funeral of the late IGP of the Armed Police Force Krishna Mohan Shrestha and his wife Nudup Shrestha, ruthlessly gunned down by four armed assassins on the morning of 26 January. Present among grieving relatives, commoners and colleagues who had gathered to pay their respects to this officer and gentleman were AIG of the Armed Police Sahabir Thapa, DIG of the Armed Police Rohit Thapa, IGP Shyam Bhakta Thapa, and DIG of the Armed Police Ravi Thapa. AIG Sahabir Thapa succeeds Shrestha as IGP of the Armed Police Force.

Health over revenue

Tobacco and alcohol might mean plenty of revenue but Dr Upendra Devkota appears unmoved by that particular argument. As Nepal's Health Minister, he is preparing to promulgate a special order to control advertising of tobacco, smoking and alcohol—the major causes of lung and oral cancer. They may bring in revenue but they are harmful substances that affect health and longevity, the minister told the third national meet of ENT specialists in Bharatpur. "Advertising drinking and smoking for the sake of revenue is like killing more people to ensure a higher sale of wood for funeral pyres," he said.

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BIZ NEWS

“Quiet governance revolution”: World Bank

Despite gloom and doom, the World Bank sees some silver linings in the Nepali clouds. It's progress report on the Nepal Country Assistance Strategy released this week says: "Over the past year a quiet governance revolution seems to have begun in Nepal. These changes have been met with strong public support and merit the fullest support of the Bank group." The bank recently upgraded its lending programme for Nepal from the "low case" (\$0-50 million annually in new lending) to the "base case" (around \$100 million or more annually). Among the good signs the bank sees are: the government's efforts to restructure its development budget by dropping low priority projects as part of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, as per the government's "immediate action plan" education and health at the local level being handed over to community management, the government has resisted pressure from vested interest groups to bring financial sector reforms back on track, there has been a crackdown on corruption and "impressive" public sector appointments.

First from the bottom

The 2002 Human Development Report South Asia published this week by the Mahabub ul Haq Development Centre confirms what we knew all along: South Asia is one of the poorest regions in the world, and among them Nepal is the poorest. Examples: the number of people living below the poverty line in Nepal is 42 percent, the highest among South Asian countries. Although the infant mortality rate in Nepal have gone down dramatically, at 72 deaths per 1,000 live births it is still higher than most other countries in the region. Female illiteracy out of total population of women is 76 percent—by far the highest in South Asia. The ratio of people per doctor is several times worse in Nepal than any other country: 20,000 per doctor. The second worst is Bangladesh with 5,500 people per doctor. And the clincher: with an average lifespan of 59 Nepalis live the shortest lives among South Asians.

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SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL by PUSKAR BHUSAL

Guns n' choppers



Nepal has become a dynamite stick between two boulders. Another Mi-17 being unloaded from a Russian transporter in Kathmandu this week.

For a country that continues to pay the price of hasty compromises palmed off as historic change, the ongoing battle of wills may have some redeeming value. There are clear traces of relief in each combatant camp that a fight to the finish has finally begun. Consider some of our current contradictions. Nepalis face the awkwardness of having to accept the only party that has attempted regicide—twice—as the staunchest defender of the monarchy (OK, OK, they never targeted a titular head of state). The CPN-UML remains the fiercest opponent of a constituent assembly, the easiest route to the republic most of us believe it ultimately aspires for.

The two parties wearing freedom in their full names—Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nepali Congress (Democratic)—are fighting the hardest to ward off the regressive label. The Maoists, who have manipulated fissures in most mainstream parties all these years, are caught between their commitment to joint action to preserve the gains of 1990 and a perpetual readiness to hold talks with the real possessors of power. The palace finds itself being coerced to accept a purely ceremonial role by the same forces that have conferred on it the status of a political power centre.

These anomalies have been amplified in the post-9/11 ambience. The US-led war on terrorism, to be sure, has increased the importance of democracy in the armoury of idealism. On the battlefield, though, the commanders are forced to fight radicalism by forging closer ties with some of the same illiberal regimes that continue to breed it.

To Western eyes, the economics of extremism puts Nepal in the league of Georgia, the Philippines and Yemen. The conventional wisdom is that while poverty doesn't cause terrorism, it can lead to hopelessness and despair in states where governments fail to fulfil the basic needs of the people. Because of the realisation that such nations easily become havens for terror, "defensive imperialism" has ceased to be the oxymoron many of us thought it was.

Nepal also embodies the unfinished business of the Cold War. Those who dismissed the 'people's war' in its nascent as an ephemeral legacy of Cambodia and Peru still can't detect what's behind the diffusion. Left International is banking on Prachanda's Path to resume the march of history Francis Fukuyama so famously ended. History, however, comes with its own histrionics. Comrade Badal wasn't shooting from the hip when he described Nepal as a load of dynamite between two boulders. Civil war wasn't a purely internal affair even when national sovereignty was sacrosanct. With communist internationalism having been edged out by global capitalism, great powers are more apt to intervene in domestic conflicts to protect their international interests.

Our political discourse needs something more creative than the democracy-is-in-danger refrain. And more so, when the World Bank decides to lift our lending status from low to base case. The bank is categorical in its report card: "Over the past year or so, despite the continued political turmoil, the reform efforts—largely led by technocrats—seems to have gained momentum and resolve." Kangresis and comrades are correct in counselling a newly assertive palace not to read too much into the accolade. Where they err is in continuing to isolate Sher Bahadur Deuba and his teammates who presided over the "quiet governance revolution" the bank lauds. (For the record, Ram Sharan Mahat who as finance minister entertained donors with an improvised prance after last year's Nepal Development Forum, ditched Deuba the day after the premier dissolved parliament. How does he feel today?)

In a sense, Nepal has reverted to the months between Satra Sal, when parliament was abolished and political parties were outlawed, and Unnais Sal, when the panchayat system was formally enshrined in the constitution. Remember how the exiled Nepali Congress abruptly called off its insurrection on the prodding of its Indian hosts. The real catalyst, though, was Nepal's northern neighbour, which scored a decisive victory in the Sino-Indian war of 1962, changing the regional power equation.

Many who tend to ignore the geo-strategic core of Nepali politics do so because it's so perplexing. But these are shadowy times where every shade and snap has a meaning, and presents an opportunity.

A word of caution: In our righteousness race, let's be sure we really know where the finishing line is. We don't want to end up having to vote for a constituent assembly every three years, do we? ♦

ECONOMY

INTERVIEW

“We can become number one.”



Yoshio Ishizaka, executive vice president of Toyota, was in Nepal recently to promote the company, inaugurate a new venture in the capital and to show his company's concern for the environment. Excerpts of his talk with Nepali Times:

What is the main purpose of your visit to Nepal?
Our main purpose is to inaugurate the 3S facility started by United Trade Syndicate and also to celebrate the launch of the new Corolla. The 3S facility is sales, after sales service and spare parts. We are also going to the zoo for future projects in supporting Nepal's biodiversity.

What exactly is Toyota's market strategy in Nepal?
United Trade Syndicate has been handling our business for the past 37 years. Our job is to cooperate with them and offer our best products. Although the size of the market is small, we are established here now and loved by the people of Nepal. We are here to conserve Nepal's beauty and environment and to talk about future cooperation.

Given tough global competition, how does Toyota intend to stay ahead?
The global economy is contracting a bit, but we have a wide range of products and we are old players in the global economy. What we do is look after our own customer base and to cater the new customer on worldwide scale. We sold almost 6 million vehicles last year and we are third after next General Motors and Ford. We like to expand our business constantly. Since the company started in 1937, we have gone through ups and downs. We experienced the adverse effects of World War II, and became bankrupt. America controlled the Japanese economy and we had no material for labour. We were restricted to making lunch boxes and trucks. But then the economy bounced back and our growth paralleled the rise of the Japanese economy

What has been your company's response to climate change due to the greenhouse effect?
The Japanese government has already endorsed the Kyoto Protocol. Of course, we have to wait for the US to join. It is very important to preserve nature otherwise, in a 100 years time the problem will get out of hand. Preserving the environment is very important to us. This year I was asked to go to the World Economic Forum Conference at Davos to represent Toyota and attend the automobile governors forum representing the company. There we discussed a sustainable society for the future.

What are some of the specific programs you discussed there?
We are developing environment friendly vehicles. The first one is a Toyota Hybrid car. The Hybrid has a gasoline motor. It is marketed worldwide. It is very well known among the Japanese public and the Americans. The ultimate eco-cars are called fuel-saving vehicles and we recently launched them in Japan and the US. We are frontrunners in environmental technology. Today, Toyota is the number one in hybrid car technology in the world. At the same time, we have a special project to grow trees in Australia, where we have a farm. It is a long-term project in order to reduce fuel emission gases. We have to do positive things. In Indonesia we grow potatoes that can be used as bases for plastic. Of course it's organic. This means after the car component has outgrown it's usefulness, it is biodegradable. Normal plastic has to be burnt, thrown or recycled. Ours is a bio-technological plant. Very soon we are going to adopt it as automobile material.

So, you believe the automobile industry still has a future?
There are so many people who do not necessarily receive the benefit of driving cars. In advanced countries, there is one car for two buses on the road. Our aim is to increase automobile penetration in every country where we do business.

Why did Toyota enter Formula 1 racing?
That has two purposes. One is to explore our technology in terms of engine and chassis development. Motor sport is one extreme of the motor company where we can test-run many things, especially the speed, chassis and engine development, and aerodynamics. Secondly this enhances our image. It's a pleasure for people to watch motor sports. They are the ones who appreciate driving cars with high power.

A lot of car companies are merging. Is that going to happen to Toyota, too?
At this stage, there are no such plans. We can stand on our own. Of course Daihatsu and Hino are our two subsidiaries. We, the Toyota group, can stand our own in the worldwide business, there is no need to merge with anyone else.

Do you think it can sustain brand loyalty?
Definitely. We would like to have 15 percent of the worldwide market share in automobiles. Currently we have around 10 percent. We aim to see a 15 percent growth starting from 2010. Probably then we can beat GM and Ford to become number one.

THE WORLD BANK
NEPAL OFFICE

REQUIRES
Consultant Education Specialist

Background
The Education sector unit in the Human Development Department in the South Asia Region is responsible for development of lending and supervision of activities/operations, policy advice and sector work. Over the next several years, analytical work in education and the education portfolio will be expanding in response to efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals and Education-for-All targets, and to adjust to a changing economic and social environment.

In response to this demand, SASHD is seeking an Education Specialist – Short Term Consultant to assist with managing existing operations and developing new ones. The duration of the assignment may be up to 190 days. The consultant would work with professionals in Washington and the Nepal Country Office.

The person selected for this position will begin working immediately on supervision and preparation of investment projects. The job will require experience in (i) planning and management of school/university education or other relevant management experience; (ii) program preparation and implementation, and donor relations; (iii) education finance/economics (iii) identifying and analyzing institutional constraints; and (iv) operations of the World Bank or other international agencies.

The position is in the Nepal Country Office. The assignment may involve extensive field trips. We prefer that the selected candidate be prepared to begin working at least by April 1, 2003.

Duties and Accountabilities
The areas of primary responsibility are as follows:

- Operations: Supervision of education sector operations and assisting the team with developing follow-on programs.
- Non-Lending Services: Participate in missions to provide specialized technical inputs and guidance to government counterparts. Assist in reaching consensus through participatory methods including consultations with a wide variety of stakeholders. Actively work to improve the monitoring and evaluation of sectoral activities.
- Partnerships: Work constructively with other development partners in the country.

In performing these roles, the Education Consultant will interact with counterparts in government and with a variety of international and other partner organizations; with Bank colleagues and managers of the HD sector. The selected candidate will report to the Education Sector Manager and will be expected to work in close collaboration with the other members of the HD Team.

Selection Criteria :
To be successful the Education Consultant should have the following attributes:

- Education: Advanced academic degree in education, economics or other field with experience in education sector
- Skills/Experience: A minimum of 5 years of relevant experience is required. Demonstrated knowledge of and experience in solving education sector issues. Experience in operations of the World Bank or other relevant international agencies.
- Teamwork: Success in working in teams both as a team member and as a team leader.
- Conceptual and Analytic Skills: A creative, sharp intelligence that can conceptualize and demonstrate in a tangible and understandable way and through a variety of methods how appropriate policy and investment reforms in education can assist clients to achieve their developmental goals more effectively.
- Communication: Excellent presentational and writing skills are essential.
- Excellent interpersonal skills: Capacity to interact effectively with a range of stakeholders within and outside the Bank.

The World Bank is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate with respect to gender, religion, ethnic origin or caste. Female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply. Applicants should apply in writing, with names and addresses of three references and a sample of recent written work, by February 28, 2003 to :

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SOI GROUP



Moving up

A part of India for 30 years, the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim has now come to embody the best of South Asia's largest nation: engaged and responsive governance, sustained and ecologically-sensitive commercial development, and large-scale investment in the state's people to make it a 21st century development dynamo. Sikkim is unique for its lush and rugged physical setting and human diversity. It has also made a name for itself as one of the best-managed states in India. Led by Chief Minister Pawan Chamling since 1994, Sikkim has reversed a fiscal slide, taken governance to the people and balanced resources from New Delhi with intelligent local planning.

History and geography

Sikkim joined the Indian Union in 1975. With a small physical setting and only half-million population, Sikkim is smaller than most Indian states. But its biodiversity, topographical variation and ethnic diversity belie its size. Sikkim has international borders on three sides: Nepal, China and Bhutan. The world's third highest mountain, Kangchenzongka marks the tri-junction of the borders of India, Nepal and China.

The south of Sikkim rises from the tropical plains bordering West Bengal at 300m to over 8000m. As a result, the variety of flora and fauna within this small state is Himalayan in scale: 600 species of rhododendron, nearly 700 species of birds, and a great variance of herbs and medicinal plants. Nearly 40 percent of Sikkim is under



Targets by 2015

- Poverty alleviation
- Full employment
- Universal health care
- 100 percent literacy
- Eliminating HIV
- Raise revenue to INR 10 billion

forest cover. All this, and the fact that it is one of the few places in India, and indeed in the subcontinent, that has enjoyed uninterrupted peace in recent years, means that Sikkim is emerging as one of Asia's premier tourist destinations.

People and leadership

Lepchas are thought to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim, and with the Bhutias and ethnic Nepalis, make up the three predominant communities. The current state government led by Chief Minister Pawan Chamling recently succeeded in procuring scheduled tribe status for the Limbus and the Tamangs of Sikkim, thus fulfilling a long-pending demand to protect the interests of these two communities. It has also asked New Delhi to accord constitutional recognition to the languages of the Lepcha, Bhutia and Limbu peoples.

Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) prides itself on being a leading example of real, people-based democracy. The SDF has been in power in Sikkim since 1994, and was re-elected in 1999. In 2001, Sikkim published its Human Development Report, becoming only the third state in India to do so. The report serves as a baseline study and a blueprint for further development of the state.

The SDF government has mapped out a long-term strategy of accomplishing 100 percent literacy, poverty elimination, full employment, youth empowerment and sustainable fiscal health. Devolution of power to local communities and previously marginalised sections of the populace are components in a program of bottom-up development.

Sikkim hopes to build on its hydropower and tourism potentials. Its unique geo-strategic position makes Sikkim ideally placed for a day when the WTO regime will come into force, allowing the state to become the focal point of regional trade between eastern India, Nepal, China and Bhutan.

The SDF's emphasis has been to foster fiscal discipline and to make the state self-reliant. In 1994, Sikkim had an internal revenue generation of INR 400 million, today it has soared to INR 1.5 billion because of a careful strategy of nurturing tax and non-tax revenue.

The Confederation of Indian Industry, international donor agencies, multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank, bureaucrats and leaders from various civil society groups

have been involved in the formulation of a development agenda such that its fruits reach the people at the grassroots level. An effort is underway to formulate public-private partnerships in order to power development programs. The airport at Pakyong, near Gangtok, scheduled to be operational by 2005, is expected to ease the transportation bottleneck. Sikkim expects to be a power exporter by 2007. There is also investment in roads, connectivity, and education.

One of Chamling's major achievements was securing the state's inclusion in India's North Eastern Council in December 2002, giving Sikkim access to central funds for incentive programs in the region, allowing its youth preferred access to premier educational institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology in Guwahati.

At the December 2002 meeting of the National Development Council in New Delhi, Chief Minister Chamling announced that Sikkim was targeting an annual growth rate of 10 percent per annum, two percent more than the target national average. To help with this aim, he requested that the centre link Sikkim into the Prime Minister's "golden quadrilateral" highway project that will join India's east and west. If achieved, this will reduce the state's dependence on the overburdened National Highway 31A that currently is its only road link to the rest of the country.



The vision

The SDF's mission is to make Sikkim a model state in India. And it intends to do this through:

- Strong, visionary leadership
- Effective management, monitoring and evaluation of set targets
- The rule of law
- Peace and development
- Develop human and natural resources
- Environmental protection

Water world

A fresh new look at Nepal's fresh water, with the message: no wetlands, no water.

2 February is World Wetlands Day 2003 is the International Year of Freshwater

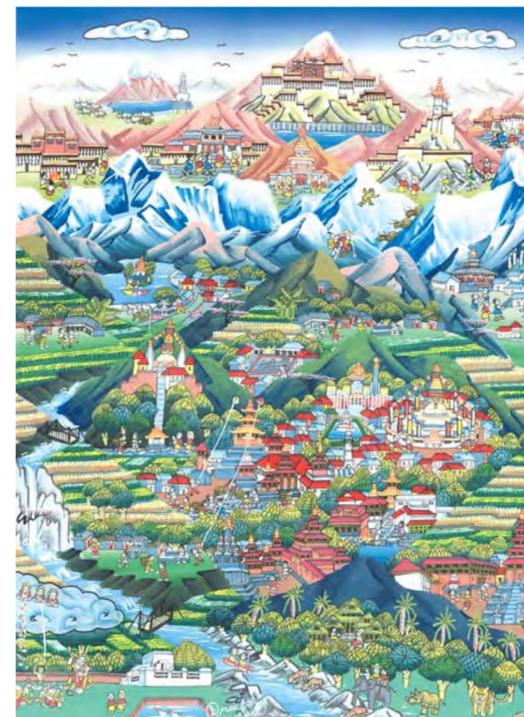
SAMUEL THOMAS

The Himalayan mountains are called "water towers": an enormous high-altitude storage system for fresh water in the form of snow, springs and underground water. Nepal's 6,000 rivulets and rivers contribute more than 40 percent of the total flow of the Ganges. But this resource is never constant. Depending on the time of year, or geographical area there is either too much water or too little.

This gap in water supply, particularly in the absence of adequate storage facilities, creates surpluses at times and places, and shortages for the rest of the year. When governments and planners talk about water, they only think of rivers. However, equally important to the ecosystem and to the evening out of water supply are wetlands. Wetlands are undervalued, and regarded as wastelands.

Wetlands in Nepal are called *simsar*—derived from the Persian word "sih", which means low-grade land not suitable for cultivation, and the Sanskrit "sar" for water. They are increasingly threatened by a spreading population most of whom depend on agriculture for livelihood. Wetlands are often drained or reclaimed for agriculture, industrial and urban use, particularly in the more developed central region of the country.

The modification of land-use is particularly noticeable in the tarai where migrants have pushed population growth rates up to nearly 4 percent in areas like Kailali. This poses a serious problem because the tarai also has the greatest diversity of wetlands—the Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve alone has 17 wetland types. Of 163 tarai wetland sites inventoried by the IUCN in 1998, 43 percent had suffered some



degree of drainage.

Inappropriate wetland management often results in increased fragmentation of wetlands and forests, reducing previously extensive populations of mammals and large reptiles into genetically isolated sub-populations, many of which are now at risk.

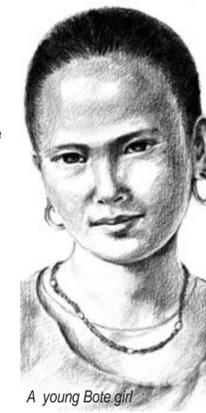
Nepal has several wetland ecosystems

of global significance, including 20 of 27 globally recognised freshwater wetland types. Though wetlands account for only 5 percent of Nepal's total surface area they have high ecosystem diversity and high biodiversity values. Of the various species found in Nepal, wetlands support 66 percent of 89 globally-threatened animal species found in the country, 47 percent of 74 near-threatened animal species, 85 percent of 20 endemic vertebrates, 25 percent of 7,000 vascular plant species, 23 percent of 859 bird species, 12 percent of 91 globally-threatened plants, and 10 percent of 246 flowering plant species. Wetlands are also important stopover and breeding grounds for migrant and wintering birds and waterfowl.

The nation's water resources have traditionally been seen in terms of their potential for hydropower generation and irrigation. There is a shift now to thinking in terms of more holistic management of water resources and implications for biodiversity and livelihoods. This focus comes on the back of a landmark policy instrument adopted last year.

The Water Resources Strategy of 2002 sets guidelines for the sustainable use of water, and is a landmark for Nepal by being the first policy document related to water resources that acknowledges environmental conservation and ecosystem maintenance as a priority during water resource planning.

Nepal's freshwater resources must have a wider definition to include riverine floodplains, marshes, ox-bow lakes, swamps, ponds and lakes from the plains to the high Himalaya, glacial lakes, river-recharging cloud forests, spongy alpine meadows and much undervalued and



A young Bote girl

Nepal's wetlands

Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

This stretch of the Sapta Kosi River and its floodplain in the tarai lowlands in eastern Nepal, adjacent to the Indian border has a high density of migratory and resident bird populations—467 species listed, with recorded congregations of over 50,000 migratory waterfowl during the winter months. It has the largest known heron sanctuary in Nepal and the last surviving population of the Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo. There are Gangetic Dolphins and two endemic fish species in the Sapta Kosi River. It also has 45 percent of total vertebrate species of the country. Kosi Tappu Birdwatching Festival this year: 2-8 February.



Ghodaghodi Lake Complex

A complex of lakes, marshes and seasonal ponds in the lowland plains stretching up to the foothills of the Siwaliks. The Ghodaghodi Lake Complex is an unprotected wetland ecosystem, a key link between the Churia Hills and tarai, and a corridor connecting Royal Bardia National



Park with the Royal Sukhlaphanta Wildlife Reserve. The site falls within the Tarai Arc region identified by the WWF linking Royal Chitwan National Park with Corbett Tiger Reserve in India. The area has high global biodiversity values including several endangered species of gharial, marsh crocodile and red-crowned roofed turtle.

Shey Phoksundo

The deepest lake in the Himalayan range is located in the heart of Nepal's largest protected area—Shey Phoksundo National Park. The trans-Himalayan ecosystem is remarkable for its unique flora and fauna, including the endangered snow leopard, the musk deer, blue sheep, wolf, goral and marmot. Shey Phoksundo contains the highest number of endemic plant species in Nepal, including several medicinal species.



Rara Lake

Nepal's largest lake is situated at an elevation of 3062m in the Rara National Park near Jumla. Designated as a National Park in 1975, the area is home to wild animals such as the Himalayan bear, the Himalayan tahr, goral, musk deer and the red panda.

A high altitude lake ringed with thick forests of pine, juniper and spruce.



overexploited groundwater resources.

The alarming level of groundwater extraction directly affects the health of our wetlands. Kathmandu's deep aquifer has dropped from 9m to 68m below the surface within the past decade. It has been estimated that total sustainable withdrawal of groundwater from the Valley's aquifer is approximately 26.3 MLD while current withdrawals total about 58.6 MLD. More importantly,

the discourse over water resources must include their crucial importance to livelihoods, especially the livelihoods of the marginalised wetland dependent communities in Nepal.

The slogan for Wetlands Day is succinct: No wetlands, no water. The preservation and well-being of our wetlands is inextricably woven with our future. Ignore one, and we jeopardise the other. ♦



On the warpath

PERTH - With the deployment of Australian troops for a war against Iraq, Prime Minister John Howard is ignoring the majority of Australians who oppose the country's involvement in any military action that does not have UN backing.

Australia became the first country, apart from the US and Britain, to begin deploying troops to the Gulf, with the departure from Sydney Harbour of the transport vessel HMAS Kanimbla carrying 350 sailors and extensive military resources such as army landing crafts, an air defence detachment and a specialist explosives team.

Last year Howard said his government would commit troops to a US-led first strike on Iraq only if it was "completely satisfied that it was in the national interest to do so". Defence Minister Robert Hill defended the deployment decision, saying Australia was joining other countries in applying pressure on Saddam Hussein.

Restoring ties

WASHINGTON - President Bush's administration moved closer toward normalising military ties with the Indonesian military (TNI), which it hopes will be a key ally in its 'war against terrorism' in South-east Asia.

The Senate voted to defeat an amendment that would have barred funding for enrolling Indonesians in Washington's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program until it cooperates fully in an investigation into the killing of two US teachers in West Papua last summer.

Human rights groups oppose renewing military ties with the TNI, widely considered an abusive and corrupt national military institution.

Year of the worm

LONDON - Computer users will be plagued with a host of new viruses this year, particularly worms deployed into instant messaging systems, predicts a senior technology consultant with UK-based Sophos.

One of these brought down internet services throughout Asia earlier this week by shutting down servers by overloading them with messages.

"Virus writers are most interested in creating the next super Windows worm, spread by e-mail or instant messaging, as these mass-mailing viruses carry the greatest impact," says Graham Cluley.

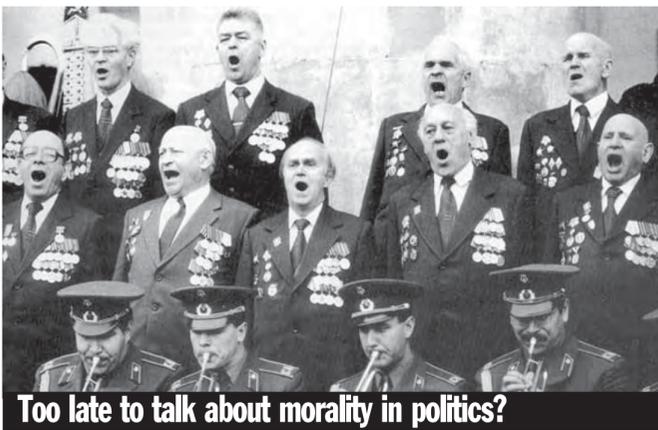
Windows users are particularly at risk, as nine out of 10 of last year's top viruses were spread via e-mail on Windows platforms, the most prolific being the Klez worm.

Advertisement for Rato Bangala School. Includes logo with a book and text: 'Rato Bangala School Excellence in Learning Admissions Open Rato Bangala School will be admitting students to Grade I for the academic year 2003/2004. Distribution of Application Forms: February 3 - 14, 2003. Please call the School office for details about the application procedure and for an appointment to visit the School.'

COMMENT

Discussing vegetarianism with cannibals

by YULIYA TYMOSHENKO



Too late to talk about morality in politics?

Moral principles and moral obligations in today's political and economical realm have undoubtedly gone astray, unashamedly displaced by the interests of profit and power.

The implications are clear. In today's world, "order" reflects a balance of interests that is maintained mainly by force—be it military or financial. But something other than this "order of the barracks" is possible.

One reason for the complete absence of values in "power politics" nowadays is that leaders get away with speaking words whose true meaning they leave out of their policies.

Let me suggest five steps necessary to begin to bring this about. The first calls for the world to deem as utterly unacceptable state violence that seeks to impose conformity and discipline.

communism, and, recently, market fundamentalism, most people no longer seek answers in ideological clichés and the driving, purifying force of political certainty. Forced harmonisation is dead, which opens the door to making new voluntary forms of social harmony possible.

however, the state must be stripped of its ability to impose divisive dogmas, traditions and stereotypes. That can happen only if a carefully crafted system of "checks and balances" is established, in which powerful organised interests—states, above all—are restrained in their efforts at dominance.

separation of state power and capital. Even in long-established democracies, candidates for elective office are not evaluated according to their wisdom and leadership, but according to the size of their campaign war chests.

political power transparent for all to see. But the will to achieve this division is, sadly, absent among most people in power.

Related to this, it is necessary to separate mass media from both power and the interests of capital. In Europe, America, and Japan, media ownership is increasingly concentrated, which rightly worries citizens in these countries.

All these reforms presuppose an independent judiciary. The autonomy of judges must be assured, which requires that their character is such that people trust their decisions.

In essence, creating a more moral political order requires the removal of money as the decisive factor in politics. Where money rules, some citizens become depressed and apathetic, others become cruel and heartless, and children

learn aggressive behavior. Money should not divide people into political haves and have-nots, or states into successes and failures.

Of course my proposed "transformations" may sound too good to be possible. In defense I wish to cite the great Harvard philosopher John Rawls, who died recently.

Perhaps only someone who comes from one of the post-Soviet states can conceive of politics in terms of original principles in the manner of Rawls. Our newborn states were given the opportunity to create moral political systems on the ruins of a "god that failed."

(Yuliya Tymoshenko is a former deputy prime minister of Ukraine and now a leader of the political opposition to President Leonid Kuchma. She has survived several assassination attempts.)

COMMENT

War doesn't make economic sense

by JOSEPH E STIGLITZ



War is widely thought to be linked to economic good times. World War II is often said to have brought the world out of the Great Depression, and war has since enhanced its reputation as a spur to economic growth.

Today, we know that these propositions are nonsense. The 1990s boom showed that peace is economically far better than war. The Gulf War of 1991 demonstrated that wars can actually be bad for an economy.

The current situation is far more akin to the Gulf War than to wars that may have contributed to economic growth. Indeed, the economic effects of a second war against Iraq would probably be far more adverse.

The Bush administration's (admittedly wavering) commitment to fiscal prudence means that much, perhaps most, of the war costs will be offset by expenditure cuts elsewhere.

There is also the uncertainty factor. Of course, resolving uncertainty is no reason to invade Iraq prematurely, for the costs of any war are high, and are not to be measured only, or primarily, in economic terms.

uncertainties connected to America's massive trade deficit. Will foreigners be willing to continue to lend to the US, with all of its problems, at a rate in excess of a billion dollars a day? Uncertainties associated with Europe's stability pact. Will it survive, and will it be good for Europe if it does? Finally, the uncertainties associated with Japan: will it at long last fix its banking system, and if it does, how negative will be the short-term impact?

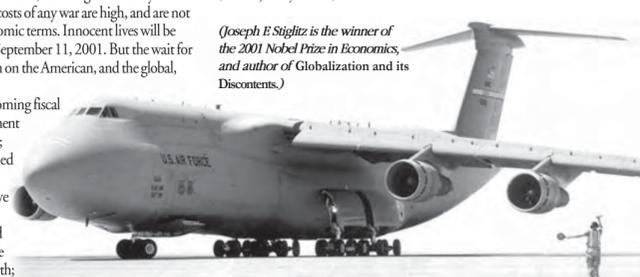
Some suggest that the US may be going to war to maintain steady oil supplies, or to advance its oil interests. Few can doubt the influence that oil interests have on President Bush—witness the administration's energy policy, with its emphasis on expanding oil production rather than conservation.

Indeed, should the US go to war, no one can predict the effect on oil supplies. A peaceful, democratic Iraqi regime could be established. Desperate for funds for reconstruction, that new regime could sell large amounts of oil, lowering global oil prices. Domestic US oil producers, as well as those in allied countries, such as Mexico and Russia, would be devastated, though users of oil around the world would benefit enormously.

Or the turmoil throughout the Muslim world could lead to disruptions of oil supplies, with high prices the result. This will please oil producers in other parts of the world, but will have enormously adverse consequences for the global economy, akin to those resulting from the oil price hikes in 1973.

Whichever way one looks at it, the economic effects of war with Iraq will not be good. Markets loathe uncertainty and volatility. War, and anticipation of war, bring both. We should be prepared for them.

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



Muzzling the media

KUALA LUMPUR - Two of the most sensitive issues in Malaysia—race issues and press freedom—combined to ignite last week's police raid on an independent internet newspaper and has turned it into a political controversy.

The controversy began after the editors refused to reveal the author of what the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) called a "seditious" letter that said special benefits given to Malays for more than three decades are "meritocratic politics of privilege" that worked against the other ethnic groups like the Chinese and Indian Malaysians.

Public discussions of race is a touchy subject with the Malaysian government who say inflammatory remarks about race have no space in a multicultural country, where it may create dissension.

The Bangkok-based South-east Asian Press Alliance called this police action "a crude attempt" to muzzle independent media.

'Resettlers' woes

WASHINGTON - The resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people dislocated by China's controversial Three Gorges Dam project has been marked by inadequate compensation, serious abuses of human rights and widespread corruption, says a report released this week by California-based International Rivers Network (IRN).

The Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric power project, will displace more than 1.2 million people. The reservoir is scheduled to begin rising in April, reaching a depth of 135m by June and stretching 500km upstream to Chongqing, slated to be the industrial centre of inland China.

Compensation to 'resettlers' has fallen short of the replacement cost. New housing costs far more than what they were offered, the report says. Public protests have led to police using "excessive force" against local demonstrators and countless individuals have been thrown in jail or prison.

Tougher laws

TOKYO - Special legal weapons and alternative protection measures are needed to combat gross human rights abuses against undocumented foreign women lured into Japan's sex industry, experts said at a recently concluded Asia Foundation and International Labour Organisation seminar.

The Justice Ministry reports as of January 2002, there are around 224,067 overstayers in Japan, of which 105,945 are women. More than 46 percent of these women work as bar hostesses, followed by waitresses and factory workers.

Slack laws have allowed criminals to only pay light fines when arrested. Experts concluded Japan should institute a proper system for the issuance of legal visas and the provision of health and mental care for migrant labourers.

Clean air initiative

DHAKA - Nearly a month after Bangladesh phased out polluting three-wheelers from the capital's busy streets, residents and urban planners are finding out that green initiatives take deep root only if other pieces of the puzzle—better transportation networks, more people-friendly cities—are in place.

It took a year until December 2002 for the government to phase out 40,000 to 80,000 three-wheelers or "baby taxis", popularly used transport with two-stroke engines blamed for causing the bulk of vehicular pollution, from this city of 10 million people.

The initial gains from this step, coming after the 1999 enforcement on lead-free petrol and the introduction of compressed natural gas (CNG) and four-stroke machines, are already being felt. The environment department estimates that there has been at least a 25 percent drop in harmful minute particles in the air.

Green initiatives are harder to sustain when commuters complain about not enough replacements for the three-wheelers. For many, this has meant longer travel times, circuitous trips, rising costs and another headache—traffic jams that result in engines dirtying the air.

contest

by PRAFUL BIDWAI



The India-Pakistan who's bigger

NEW DELHI - Nuclear neighbours India and Pakistan have further intensified their rivalry with an escalating war of words about the mistreatment of their top diplomats. So far, each country has expelled four personnel from the other's high commission.

This plunges the South Asian foes' relations to a historic low barely one year after they withdrew their ambassadors and halved the strength of their diplomatic missions. Their mutual relations today are even worse than during the 1971 war that led to Pakistan's dismemberment.

The adversaries are flouting well-established rights of accredited diplomats under numerous treaties, including the Vienna Convention of 1961. Even worse, they are violating the bilateral code of conduct on the treatment of diplomats that they signed in 1992.

On the military plane, their adversarial relations are deteriorating further as they accelerate nuclear weapons deployment and embark on arms purchase binges. India and Pakistan are competing with each other to make South Asia "the most dangerous place in the world".

One of the truly sordid aspects of the present state of India-Pakistan relations is their mistreatment of each other's top diplomats. Earlier, middle-level diplomats used to be subjected to verbal abuse, intrusive surveillance and actions such as "physical harassment, disconnecting of telephone lines, threatening telephone calls, pursuit in cars and unauthorised entry into residences"—which the code of conduct explicitly prohibits.

They also agreed that an official declared "persona non grata" should be given at least a

A truly sordid aspect of the present state of India-Pakistan relations.

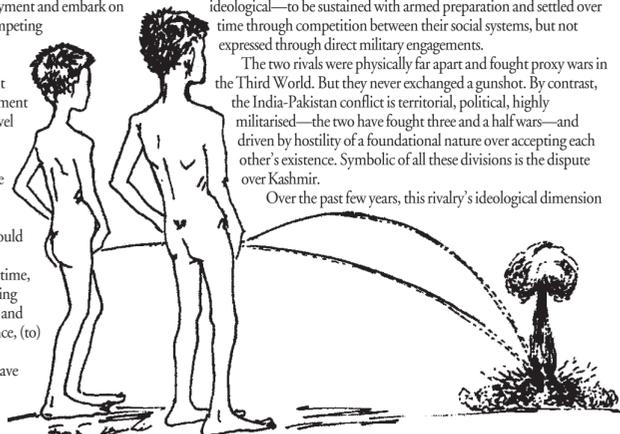
week's notice before being expelled. But India and Pakistani gave each other's staff 48 hours' notice.

In today's highly inflamed situation, it is irrelevant to ask who fired the first shot. What is material is that both states use grossly intimidating methods. Both intend to cause damage to each other—including bodily harm to diplomats.

The rivalry and tension that exist between India and Pakistan can only be understood in terms of a hot-cold war, distinct from the Cold War. The conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union was essentially ideological—to be sustained with armed preparation and settled over time through competition between their social systems, but not expressed through direct military engagements.

The two rivals were physically far apart and fought proxy wars in the Third World. But they never exchanged a gunshot. By contrast, the India-Pakistan conflict is territorial, political, highly militarised—the two have fought three and a half wars—and driven by hostility of a foundational nature over accepting each other's existence. Symbolic of all these divisions is the dispute over Kashmir.

Over the past few years, this rivalry's ideological dimension



(Praful Bidwai is a senior Indian writer, and author of the book, South Asia on a Short Fuse, Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament.)

Murders most foul



Special Editorial in Kantipur, 27 January

Armed Maoists murdered Krishna Mohan Shrestha, head of the Armed Police Force, his wife Nudup Shrestha who was a teacher at Lincoln School and their security guard Surya Regmi. The murders were executed in an extremely cowardly manner. The Maoists may feel they have taken a great leap towards their revolutionary goals, but this is a major mistake. In reality, the results of the murders will be unfortunate for both the nation and the Maoists themselves. Also, if the government, political parties and pro-democracy powers do not realise the threat these murders pose and continue to close their eyes to reality, then the consequences will be dangerous.

The murders have now made it easier for the international community to list the Maoists as a terrorist organisation. It has also increased the possibility of Nepal becoming a market for foreign arms. While the country has been compelled to divert development funds towards security concerns, the murders have proved that the Maoist leadership, despite their professed interest in peace, have once again violated that trust. The bullets that killed the Shresthas and their bodyguard has silenced the demands to lift the terrorist label from the Maoists.

Do the Maoists want to bring foreign powers into the country and end the very existence of the nation? Its future looks uncertain, and those in power are uncertain about how to react to these assassinations. The increasing differences between the king and parties, who like to call themselves democratic, have encouraged the Maoists. The division among the pro-democratic parties and their weaknesses will further enable the Maoists to forge ahead with their principle of divide and destroy. Attempts to restore peace will remain nothing but a slogan. The king and democratic powers need to immediately patch their differences. If the murder of the Shresthas can bring the two together, there is a possibility that this tragedy will have at least one small positive outcome.

The murders of Nudup Shrestha and her husband are not symbols of a successful revolution. They are murders plain and simple. This is a burning example of violence dominating the intellect. What else can be made of incidents when the gun is trained against children, students and teachers?

It would be an error for the government to retaliate in kind, to be like the Maoists whose intellect has been undermined by violence. It is the responsibility of the state to solve the nation's overall situation in a suitable manner. Again, unless the king and political parties ensure a government with maximum participation, the uncertainty and anarchy plaguing the country will continue. That is the moral of the story.

Awesome

Mulyankan, #103

अन्या कथा

An extract from an interview with Maoist supremo Prachanda:



कान्तिपुर

Obviously we favour a political dialogue for a forward-looking solution to avoid the possibility of a civil war. But if forces want to crush the people's war by using dialogue as a pretext, then we will not let that happen. Making the people sovereign in the real sense can be the only solution to the present problem.

Narayan Singh Pun

Rajdhani, 30 January

राजधानी

Lt Colonel Narayan Singh Pun left the Royal Nepalese Army to float his own chopper company, Kamali Airways. The Nepali Congress MP and Minister later began his own political outfit, the Nepal Samata Party. As Minister for Physical Works and Planning in the Chand government, Pun came into the limelight for his role in bringing the rebels to the negotiating table. Excerpts of an interview:

Talks will actually be held under the third phase. The government, political parties and representatives from civil society will take part. It is something like the roundtable conference proposed by the Maoists. The conference will try to find solutions to all problems.

Is the government ready to release Maoist detainees?

There are no problems that can't be resolved if we have an understanding. We are ready to release the detainees and it's not a big deal.

How confident are you regarding the outcome?

It doesn't matter whether I am personally convinced about a positive outcome or not. The talks are compulsory for all Nepalis in the current situation. There is no alternative. We are ready to pay any price but will not allow the peace talks to fail.

When will peace negotiations start with the Maoists?

The process of dialogue will start from Thursday. A lot of homework has already been done in this regard. His Majesty's Government has assigned the role of convener of the negotiation committee to me. This committee will be expanded according to circumstances.

Not Maoists

Chinese ambassador Wu Cong Yong in Spacetime, 30 January

स्वच्छन्दन दैनिक

"Nepal needs an environment of trust for the government and rebels to negotiate. I have noticed the government has paid special attention in this direction. As a close neighbour, China has been closely watching the internal developments in Nepal."

Responding to a question on the US military presence in Nepal for training activities, the Chinese envoy smiled and said it was up to Nepal. "It's good to exchange one's experiences but the movement of huge troops is not considered good in the international arena," he said.

The ambassador also said King Gyanendra's recent visit to China had added new dimensions in bilateral relations. During the talks, he repeatedly insisted that Nepali rebels who were indulging in violence were not true Maoists. "There is no relationship at all between their activities and Mao thought," he declared.

When will the talks actually start?

We have completed the tasks under the first phase. The government and Maoists have agreed to hold negotiations. Now the government will take the initiative to mobilise the political parties, civil society and intellectuals, and unify the whole country in favour of talks. We have already initiated processes in that direction.

What preparations have been made so far?

We have completed the tasks under the first phase. The government and Maoists have agreed to hold negotiations. Now the government will take the initiative to mobilise the political parties, civil society and intellectuals, and unify the whole country in favour of talks. We have already initiated processes in that direction.

When will the talks actually start?



अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"If a young woman has the right to have sex, it is her responsibility to use available contraceptives. It is everyone's duty to guide young people by providing them information; whether they follow through is their responsibility."

- Dr Bhola Rijal, gynaecologist in Rajdhani, 26 January



Car sign: Joint movement
Balloon: Lift Please...!
Surya Bahadur Thapa: RPP
Lokendra Bahadur Chand: PM
स्वच्छन्दन दैनिक Spacetime, 29 January

Death of innocents

Annapurna Post, 26 January

Ujjwal Neupane

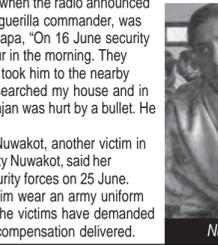
अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

Binod Mainali, a 34-year-old teacher from Nuwakot, has been missing since 28 October. He was on his way to the district education office. His father, Phatta Prasad Mainali is not only worried about his son but is also extremely concerned about the situation that will arise from the death of so many innocents.

Niranj KC of Likhu Nuwakot has been confined to his room for more than a year as he recovers slowly from Maoist inflicted injuries. They brutally broke his arms and legs. "You can't even get justice in Gorkha. Innocent people like me are in this situation. I have land but I can't return to my village and farm," says KC.

Before the state of emergency and even after it, dozens of women in Nuwakot have been widowed and hundreds of children have become orphans. Arjun Thakuri, a farmer of Sunakhani-9, has been missing since 10 December when he was out guiding security forces. Sita Thapa, a widow from Samundrarat-4 Nuwakot, says the entire village was shocked when the radio announced that Sabin Kumar Thapa, a Maoist guerilla commander, was killed in an encounter. Says Sita Thapa, "On 16 June security forces took away my husband at four in the morning. They made him carry 50kg of stones and took him to the nearby Shera jungle and killed him. They searched my house and in the process my 7-year-old son Nirajan was hurt by a bullet. He can't write well today."

Parvati Pudasaini of Kumari-7 Nuwakot, another victim in the Dupcheshwore Protection Society Nuwakot, said her innocent husband was killed by security forces on 25 June. Before they killed him, they made him wear an army uniform and handed him a gun, she said. The victims have demanded all the cases are investigated and compensation delivered.



Nuwakot's widows and orphans.

NEPALITERATURE by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Momila

BOTH INTERIOR AND OUTSPOKEN:

Momila's is one of the fresh young voices of the period following the reinstatement of democracy. Her poems are at the same time deeply interior and outspoken, expressing her political concerns through private, individuated expressions. The first poem below is one of the most succinct poems to be found on the social and psychological boundaries that girls are limited by.

PERHAPS!

Perhaps!

The young girl draws a border by the pond beside the house
This is my home, Father!

The young girl draws a border in the translated distance of passion
These are my tears, Father!

The young girl draws a border in the rolling fog and the ocean wave
This is my joy, Father!

The young girl draws a border in the transformed gales of conflict
This is my life, Father!

The young girl draws a border in offerings of pity and in dream nymphs
This is my ineffectualness, Father!

The second poem, below, was written at the death of the climber Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, the first woman to climb Sagarmatha, who died on her descent.

AT THE LOSS OF A RHODODENDRON

(To Pasang Lhamu Sherpa)



At the loss of a rhododendron I thought of—
an evening of cherry blossoms in flower
a night of the redolent parijat flower
the pain of purple jacarandas on the street
the cry of the sarangi in the mute flowering hills
the blue earth from each angle of space...

I thought of you when your waking days
as beautiful as dreams turned to snow and fire
when your dream as difficult as the waking state
became victory-separation and touched the heart
I thought of the rhododendron blooming
at the blue borders of the flag's moon and sun
Even as a fool I found the soft touch of the fogs grand
I remembered the tears dropping
at the sorrowful tune of the snow and wind
at the loss of a rhododendron...

In the Himalayan canvas of the country
you are a beautiful collage
A blue mountain waterfall in the settlements-4
And...so
Excellent poems are breaking out of eyes
Beautiful tunes are playing in the songs
In your name
I sat down to write an excellent poem
I tried to compose a beautiful song
but no poem could excel over you
no song could be more beautiful than you

At the loss of a rhododendron...

Momila's voice is clear, clean and sophisticated, and she deserves more attention than she has perhaps received.

FICTION

by PRADIPTA SJB RANA

The Naked Truth

Second in the British Council Short Story (15-18 category)

By her sixteenth year she was still not used to the taunts, abuse and beatings. One month she missed her periods. She was horrified. She had overheard women talking about what that meant. She tried to hide the sign of new life as it grew in her. The milkman found out first, followed by the baniya and then the local mahajan. The news spread and her troubles increased.

People called her a whore and spat on her face. Soon the village Panchayat summoned her, demanding to know the truth.

Someone threw a stone at her from the crowd. She shouted in protest but her cries were drowned out by the angry voices of the mob. The Sarpanch asked everyone to be quiet. In the silence only her sobs could be heard. No one made an attempt to calm her, not even the postmaster. He stood there like a stone. The pleading in her eyes only reflected the helplessness in his.

"So tell me girl, whose child are you carrying?" the Sarpanch questioned.

Though her heart protested she brokenly said, "The panditji."

The mob became hysterical.

Was she certain, she was asked. With tears streaming down her face she replied, "Sarpanch, your community is without compassion and your beliefs are so rigid. I am an untouchable who has been abused by the most respected amongst you, the keeper of your religion, the pandit."

Uproar broke amongst the people but the Sarpanch called for her to continue.

"Why does everyone torment me? Can't a priest have dirty thoughts? Why is your hypocritical society so shocked?" she cried out.

The pandit was sent for. He

arrived with his face covered with sweat as he clutched his rudraksh, which swayed in his trembling fingers. He was told of the girl's accusation.

"What? I could never do such a thing. Abuse a chamaar? Ram, Ram, Ram," he coughed out.

The Sarpanch, not surprisingly, thought the same. In view of public opinion he told her to leave the village immediately.

The next morning the milkman found the body of the pandit hanging from the peepal tree. He left a note admitting to his crime.

By the time the villagers went looking for her she was miles away from the village. Perhaps she would be able to raise her child without it knowing the naked truth. ♦



Vacancy for Thermal Energy Expert

IEM Institute of Environmental Management Kathmandu, NEPAL

The Institute of Environmental Management, presently a component of the DANIDA-HMG joint Environment Sector Programme Support (ESPS) in the Urban and Industrial Environmental Sector Nepal is the training and educational arm of the ESPS.

IEM backed by a small team of highly motivated and result oriented technical experts delivers trainings and implements Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in the Nepalese Industries, often by using business friendly tools such as Cleaner Production, Energy Efficiency, Occupational Safety & Health, Higher Productivity etc. IEM in its three plus years of existence has trained over 1500 persons from the Industries, HMG Ministries, Trade Unions, Environmental Consultants, Industries, and Business Membership Organizations etc.

Due to excessive demands for its trainings and EMS implementations, IEM requires a highly dedicated professional to take up the post of the Thermal Energy Expert. The applicant should have the following qualification:

1. Graduate in Mechanical Engineering
2. At least 3 years of experience in the industrial sector out of which a minimum of 1 year of experience in carrying out Thermal audits in the industries
3. Formal exposure to business friendly environmental tools such as Environmental Management Systems, Cleaner Production, Energy Efficiency, OHS, Productivity Improvement etc.
4. Ability to work in teams and within the given deadlines
5. Excellent written and spoken command of English and Nepali is a must.
6. Working knowledge of Computer based applications such as MS Project, Power Point, Word, Excel etc.

The duration of the contract is valid for a period of one year with scope for further extension. IEM reserves the right to accept or reject any applications.

Please send your application on or before February 21, 2003 to:

"Thermal Energy Expert"
Institute of Environmental Management
Post Box 4149, Tripureshwore,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Alternatively, applicants can also log onto
www.esps.org.np/iem

Click the "Announcements" tab and send in their applications electronically via email formats provided at the IEM website.

Qualified women candidates are strongly encouraged to apply. Telephone inquiries will not be entertained.

Carlsberg Green Bar of the month

KATHMANDU REVOLVING Restaurant

Log on to www.carlsberg.com.np and get a chance to win chilled carlsberg. Contact no. 224978, Location : New Road

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- Seeing the unseen: The Kathmandu Valley as Chakrasamvara Mandal by Dina Bangdel at Indigo Gallery 218048
- Poetry of Abstractions by Uttam Nepali at Sidhartha Art Gallery till 9 February. Baber Mahal Revisted. 218048
- From now until Valentines Paintings and sculptures by the LEAF group at Lazimpat Gallery Café.
- Kosi Tappu Migratory Birds Festival 2-8 February, Wetlands Day. Aqua Birds Unlimited 441226

EVENTS

- Men in Black, Women in Red dance and open bar at Nepa Dhuku Hall at Hotel Radisson on 31 January. Tickets: Single-Rs 1,299, Couple-Rs 1,999. Available at Roots, Labels, Station Pub, Suwal and Nanglo outlets. 246545
- Jangi Nishan 1974 AD's new album launch on 6 February 2PM at Moksh, Pulchowk. Live performance. Entry by invitation only.
- The Legends Night Songs by Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Kurt Cobain and Janis Joplin on 1 February, 6PM onwards at Megha Malhar, Soalte Crowne Plaza. Rs 1,111 pp. Tickets available at Station Pub-250970, Himalayan Java-422519.
- Sur Sudha lecture/demonstration from the Cultural Studies Group of Nepal. Membership tea at 10AM on 1 February, Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat. Entry free, CSGN membership available.
- Verge Inn Leisure Club Food, fashion, music by Robin n' Looza: on 2 February 5-7PM. Rs 500 pp. Funds for children's scholarships. 271768

MUSIC

- The Steam Injuns with Abhaya presents Acoustic Sessions at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat every Friday from 7.30-11PM. The Strings every Saturday from 7-11PM. 416071
- Live music by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336
- Rusty Nails presents their blues, jazz and beyond, 7.30 PM every Friday at The Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali. 479488
- Friday Nites at Jatra with The Strings. Free entry. Thamel
- Gaines Traditional Nepali music every night at Kantipur Restaurant, Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 680083/ 80
- Sketches with Abhaya and The Steam Injuns at Moksh, Sanepa on 1 February, 6.30 PM onwards. Entry: Rs 300. 528703
- Thunder Bolt led by Ram Shrestha, Live at Ga Zabko 6PM till late on 31 January. Free Entry. Gazabko Cocktail Café, 415432

DRINKS

- Kiwi Sensations Cocktails, mocktails and desserts made with organic kiwis 11AM till midnight daily at The Piano Lounge and Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- Paddy Foley's Irish Pub A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096
- Rang Mahal Buy one drink and get one free from the house of Seagrams and Carlsberg Beer. Dinner and performances by Kathmandu's top dancers. 7-10PM, Hotel Vaishali. 413968/ 423878
- Fab Feb Friday Happy hour, free snacks, Seagrams whisky tasting. Live Music 4-7PM. Thomas Kilroy at 1905, Kantipath. 225272.

FOOD

- Kumari Restaurant and Bar Mixed menu, imported drinks at affordable prices. Putalisadak. 417958, 422666
- Krishnarpan 40 percent discount until February for 4 to 16 course Nepali meals. Dwarika's Hotel. Reservations 479488
- Patan Museum Café Mixed menu, traditional Nepali thali lunch, garden seating. 11AM-4PM. 25 percent off for Summit Club Members. 526271
- Italian cuisine The Coffee Shop's live pasta station for particular palates. Rs 350+tax with a free beer. Till 31 January at Hotel de l'Annapurna.
- Raclette and Fondue Table top cooking at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- Rox Restaurant Italian cuisine on Sundays. Antipasti, main course, pizzas and a dessert buffet. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza at Stupa View Restaurant and Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- Saturday BBQ Lunch at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 pp. 680083/ 80
- Sekuwu Saanjh Friday BBQ for Rs 555 plus tax pp, one free beer or soft drink. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- Hot Pot Combo Fab Feb Rs 100 Lunch 11AM-5PM This week at 1905, Kantipath. 225272

GETAWAYS

- Tea House Combo Room, breakfast, Nepali thali dinner, swimming, jacuzzi. Rs 700 pp on twin sharing for Nepalis and expats, Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 410432
- The Great Godavari Getaway Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge Rs 2750 pp per night (tax included) for accommodation, meals, arrival and departure transfers from Bijaypur, walks, bar snacks and swimming. 01-361500

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

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Just as we anticipated, the westerly front arrived on schedule dumping snow at high altitudes and rain across Nepal's midhills and tarai. As this satellite picture taken on Wednesday shows, the low pressure area covers Nepal and a large swath of northern India. Another front is following close behind and prevailing winds will bring it over Nepal during the weekend with another spell of rain. A low pressure region over the plateau is sucking these moisture-laden front towards us. Expect bright sunny days with a rise in maximum temperatures by early next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

| | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue |
| 17-02 | 18-01 | 19-01 | 20-01 | 21-00 |

YAK YETI YAK by MIKU

BOOKWORM

London rose Durga Lal Shrestha Pasa Puchah Guthi (UK) Rs 200

This anthology of poems by the Kathmandu-born Newar poet speaks eloquently of his experiences as a Nepali living and observing life in the UK. Shrestha's Newari poems sit adjacent to English translations by Giridhar Manandhar.

Institutional management and human resource development Bhusan Pathak and Arjun Bhattarai Social Youth Council, 2002 Rs 150

The contents of this slim book covers a wide area that social workers and development professionals need to be proficient in. It will be a useful tool for organisation management and training to professional skills like report writing, proposals and participatory rural appraisal.

Vegetation and society: Their interaction in the Himalayas R.P. Chaudhary, B.P. Subedi, O.R. Vetas and T.H. Aase (ed) Tribhuvan University, Nepal and University of Bergen, Norway, 2002 Rs 1,000

The volume contains papers dealing with environmental, social and economic aspects in the Himalayas with a focus on Arun valley in the Makalu-Barun region and the adjoining areas. The editors have used a multi-disciplinary approach that highlights the complex mosaic of the area's eco-system.

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

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Saathiya takes a new look at marital life showcasing its ups and downs. The small day to day fights, ego clashes, and most of all, the expectations for everything to be as beautiful and dreamy as it was before marriage. As a director, Shaad Ali could not have asked for a better opportunity or cast for his debut, a remake of the Mani Ratnam's Tamil Alaipayuthey. Saathiya stars Vivek Oberoi and Rani Mukherjee and features Sandhya Mridul, Tanuja, Satish Shah, Sharat Saxena, Shahrukh Khan and Tabu in supporting roles. A R Rahman's music and score is fantastic as is Anil Mehta's cinematography.

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Kathmandu's untold stories

A new film that peers under the surface of the Valley's sexual culture.

Anjan Amatya Kishore Pandey Namrata Pradhan

RAMYATA LIMBU

Two years ago Sunil Pant almost gave up finding like-minded people to start a support system for homosexuals in Kathmandu. Today, the Blue Diamond Society provides psychosocial counseling, a drop-in centre and sexual health services for local networks of males having sex with males (MSMs) and male sex workers in Nepal.

Seated in the pleasant common room of the Blue Diamond Society in Lazimpat, Pant and his colleagues voice their frustrations and fears at a society that considers homosexuals freaks. They talk about abuse by the police, rape, torture, blackmail, family apathy and denial, and the individual fear of coming out of the closet.

"When I tried to register Blue Diamond Society with the Social Welfare Council as an NGO working for the health of homosexuals, I was advised it could lead to legal and social complications," recalls Pant who finally opted for the less-loaded term "male sexual health".

Sunil's centre along with groups like Richmond Foundation, Freedom Centre and Life giving and Life saving Society (LALS) all contributed to the UNICEF film, *Kathmandu: Untold Stories* which was released last month. Filmmakers Subina Shrestha and Alex Gabbay's 26-minute documentary explores the dark underbelly of Kathmandu society.

"The film is not really an AIDS awareness film in the proper sense," says Shrestha. "It's more about young people in the city who live lives their families know nothing of or don't want to know about. As they tell their stories, it becomes clear how complicated everything is. And how young people are forced into dangerous situations that often expose them to HIV/AIDS."

Shrestha and Gabbay interviewed friends, friends-of-friends and, with the help of various organisations working in HIV/AIDS, met people like 27-year-old Kishore Pandey, a government employee.

Pandey is a member of Blue Diamond Society, is happily married, loves his wife and has two children. But he has a "third life". He asks: "What do I lack? Why shouldn't I have married? Nobody in my family can tell that I am gay and I could not tell them. I didn't even know myself. I came to know about it much later."

But unlike the majority of MSMs who visit the society's counseling centre and drop-in clinic, Kishore is aware of the dangers of unsafe sex and the vulnerability of MSMs to HIV/AIDS. "Gays do test for HIV. We enjoy having sex and we have to be extra careful that we don't harm others."

People on camera insist that society must listen, talk and get out of denial. "The most ironic and hypocritical thing about our society is that families will get their sons or brothers married, knowing that they are HIV positive. They still want to save face, and he wants to have fun. He can neither say yes nor no. He'll give into parental pressures and get married," says Rajesh Chhetri, a 23-year-old student who became a drug addict after his parents died. "I was all alone. I could not deal with myself. I guess I took drugs because I felt isolated from my family," says Chhetri in the film.

AIDS is going to be the single biggest killer of Nepalis in the 15-49 age bracket in the coming decade. Commercial sex and injecting drug use are combining to spread the epidemic to the general population, which means that anyone, not just the vulnerable groups, are at risk. "But as long as the problem doesn't stare them directly in the face, it's difficult to take seriously," says Shrestha. The film was shot in Kathmandu so policy-makers in the capital would take notice. "If officials saw a film about the HIV problem in Achham or Doti, they would probably not identify with it," she adds.

At 19, Namrata Pradhan is comfortable with herself and her sexuality. She speaks frankly about love, sex and relationships and how it's wise to know someone well before progressing into a sexual relationship. She says, "But the problem starts

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Visit Nepal (Or Else) Year, 2003

Among the many things we do to make visitors to Nepal more than welcome in Shangri-la is the ritual organised by the Department of Immigration requiring all inbound passengers arriving on the shores of our Landlocked Himalayan Kingdom to mandatorily hand in autographed Disembarkment Cards. Failure to do so results in an on-the-spot fine in cash or kind of an amount not exceeding \$100 (in unmarked \$10 bills plus 10 percent VAT and 2 percent Tourist Tax), or defenestration from aircraft at an altitude of 35,000 ft over waypoint Romeo, or both.

The existing Disembarkment Card is a fine document, and we would be hard put to improve on the typographical oddities, quaint syntax and exotic grammar contained therein. However, there is always room for refinement and we have taken the liberty of presenting below a modified sample form with suggested answers for your future reference during 2003, which as you may have already figured out from the title of this piece, has been declared "Visit Nepal (Or Else) Year". In this way, NTB can glean more relevant information from visitors about just why it is that they want to visit Nepal when the rest of the world is keeping away:

| DISEMBARKATION CARD | | | | | |
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| Date of Birth | Date of Expiry | Present Nationality | Future Nationality | | |
| Occupation: <input type="checkbox"/> Parachute journalist <input type="checkbox"/> Ambulance chaser <input type="checkbox"/> Arms merchant <input type="checkbox"/> Smuggler <input type="checkbox"/> Peace consultant <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-terrorist <input type="checkbox"/> Spy <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-hippie <input type="checkbox"/> Development wallah <input type="checkbox"/> All of the above | | | | | |
| Passport Colour | Place of Issue | Date of Issue | Best Before | | |
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NEPALI SOCIETY

Michael, the mountaineer

Three decades after taking part in an expedition that climbed the southwest face of Sagarmatha (and 50 years after the world's highest peak was climbed for the first time) Michael Thompson still glows with a sense of achievement.

"Everest had been climbed many times up the South Col, but our expedition went straight up from the Western Cwm, at that time it was considered the last great problem in mountaineering," recalls Michael.

Apparently, Reinhold Messner thought so too. When the two finally met at a mountaineering meet two years ago, Messner acknowledged that he was also preparing to climb the southwest face, and when the British upstaged him he wanted to do something even more daring, and went on to become the first person to climb Sagarmatha solo and without bottled oxygen.

Michael is a soldier-turned-mountaineer-turned-anthropologist, and was in Kathmandu recently to speak on his favourite subject—culture theory, a research tool used to interpret human behaviour in hierarchies and groups and applied to analyse the failures of everything from mountaineering

expeditions to governments. Michael's interest in Nepal and the Himalaya grew after he served with Gurkha soldiers during the counter-insurgency Malaya campaign in the late 1950's. He was in the 1970 Chris Bonnington expedition to the south face of Annapurna, one of the tallest vertical mountain walls on earth. Coming off the mountain, and on an easy stretch, Michael and his friend Ian Clough were caught in

an ice avalanche. Clough was killed and Michael survived miraculously. On the Everest southwest face expedition, another friend, Mick Burke, died on the way down from the summit.

"On average there was one death on every Bonnington expedition. And with 6 or 7 people on an expedition, the odds were not looking good," Michael told us. So he quit hard climbing and began studying the anthropology of expeditions, their organisation and financial aspects, looking at things like "risk perception". Of the numerous Sherpa climbers he interviewed, many got hooked and continued climbing. "A few Sherpas quit and went back to farming," Michael says. "They're not very rich, but they're quite content."

A bit like Michael himself, who now teaches at Norway's Bergen University where he is involved in research into technology and democracy. "This is a critical subject for countries like Nepal," he adds, "you have to make technological decisions, for example about high dams or fossil fuels, with huge potential impact." ♦



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