



HEMLATA RAI in COLOMBO

The biggest change in Colombo visible since last year is the absence of military checkpoints. The sandbag bunkers have vanished from the crossroads.

At the full moon Perhera festival, tourists mingle freely again with the pilgrims as 150 elephants and over 5,000 dancers go in procession through the hill town of Kandy. The sheer numbers say a lot about what the peace deal has returned back to the people of Sri Lanka in the last year. Tourists returning from the north of the island say that even the migratory birds are back in Jaffna this winter. Housewives have started planting flowers in old tins that a year ago could have held explosives.

But the peace is still fragile. As in Kathmandu, many are cautious this might just be another interlude to a renewed LTTE campaign against the Colombo government. Fear of the peace process breaking down looms among the general public. The latest survey by the Centre for Policy Alternatives found that popular confidence in the peace process has declined significantly compared to last September. Scepticism is beginning to creep in. "This decline of public confidence is a manifestation of the general public feeling left out of the process," says Sanjana Hattotiva, a research associate with the Centre. Says Sanjaya Senanyake, who works in television, "Conflicts need to be demystified first. The majority of Sri Lankans do not understand the nature of the conflict we have been facing, let alone what might be a viable solution."

Nepal's former home minister, Khadga Prasad Oli, is currently in Colombo to

Prabakaran and Prachanda



Sri Lanka's negotiators: GL Peiris (l) and Anton Balasingham (r).

'create' international solidarity against US policies on North Korea, but there are a few pointers he could take home from Serendib on how to keep the peace. Says Jehan Perera, a Colombo-based human rights activist, "An inclusive negotiation process will boost everyone's confidence."

One problem is who guides the discourse. Sri Lanka's majority community, the Sinhala, tend to dominate discussion on vital issues of political reform, through the medium of the main political parties in Colombo. The all-important vernacular media is fractured: Tamil media is upbeat but lacks analysis, while the more influential Sinhala media tends to be hawkish.

If there is one lesson for Nepal from Sri Lanka's experience, it is of course that minorities should not be overlooked in the

modernising process. While the island's demography, made up of two large communities arrayed against each other, is quite different from Nepal's multiplicity of communities, the response of those who feel excluded from the political process will still be the same. The young in particular then become easily roused by ideologues to pick up the gun.

Sri Lankan scholars are quick to point out to the visiting Nepali journalist that while there may be some similarities in the peace processes of Nepal and Sri Lanka, the Maoists are to be compared not to the Tamil Tigers (who are fighting an identity-led war) but to the Janatha Vimukti Perumana. Much like the Maobadi, the JVP was made up of disaffected Sinhala youth who proposed a class war and carried out a violent campaign against the state in the

'Inclusiveness' seems to be the mantra for longterm confidence in a peace process.

1980s. They were subdued violently, but are today above-ground as an extreme but potent political force.

Both Nepal and Sri Lanka made mistakes in the way they handled their respective conflicts. The first was to ignore the problem until too late, the case of ethnic assertion on the one hand and economic deprivation on the other. Chandrika Kumaratunga's "war for peace" which began in April 1995 and Sher Bahadur Deuba's "war against terrorism" of November 2001 also seem to be of a piece, according to one Colombo scholar.

As the peace process begins, the negativism of the Sinhala hawks in Colombo against the peace process may find reflection among the Kathmandu hawks. The tendency to put the political parties' interest before that of the nation is a problem that has affected both the Colombo opposition and ruling coalition, and is not an alien phenomenon in Kathmandu. Meanwhile, the Maoists have a credibility problem for the cynicism with which they have approached talks in the past, and this is something that finds reflection in how Velupillai Prabakaran is perceived in Colombo.

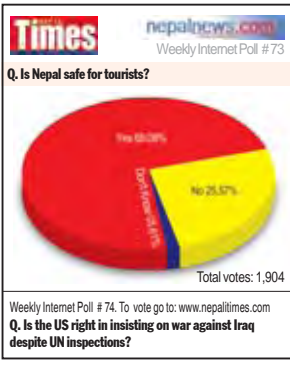
Today, peace and potential resolution are finely balanced in Colombo and

Kathmandu. For the moment, the rebels are showing restraint in both countries. The response from Maoist supremo Prachanda to the alleged forceful extortions from his party cadres earlier this week resembles the concerns shown by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakaran about human rights violation allegations. Both gestures indicate that the rebels are, for now, serious about peace.

"What we have seen from Sri Lanka's experience is that formal talks cannot succeed unless there is adequate homework and a series of informal talks," said Shyam Shrestha, editor of pro-left Mulyankan monthly, who too was in Colombo to study the peace process. "Both sides should be committed and adequately prepared for peaceful resolution. The mediator should not be a propagandist, and must promote quiet diplomacy."

In both countries, the questions loom: will rebels used to resolving issues with the gun be willing to lay down their arms? And will those who lay down their arms willingly put their shoulders to the yoke again? For the moment, both Prabakaran and Prachanda hold on to their rifles. ♦

Nation p4-5
Candid talk in Delhi



Nepalis that the authorities came to blame

KUNDA DIXIT in BANGKOK

After elaborate paperwork and frisking, visitors are led through a long courtyard to sit on benches. A double-layered wire fence separates them from the prisoners. Chandra Rai and Robin Gurung walk by in their prison clothes, and when they hear Nepali spoken their eyes glisten.

There are 20 Nepalis in Bangkok Prison here on the northern outskirts of Bangkok, and ten others are in other jails. There isn't much time, and Chandra begins to pour out his pent-up feelings: his anger at the police who he says framed him, his yearning for home and hopes for his family. "My parents don't even know I am stuck here," he says. "I have been telling them I'll come back soon every year for the last ten years."

Chandra and four other Nepalis who were working illegally in Bangkok were picked up by Thai Police in 1993, and allegedly forced to confess that they were drug traffickers. They were convicted and got life imprisonment. Two of the inmates have already spent 17 years of their 40 year sentences in Bangkok, new Nepalis arrive every few months. All except two are accused of drug offences. Chandra has used his time in jail well, teaching himself law, oil painting and even reflexology. He has tried to keep his hopes high, but he despairs he will ever see Nepal again.

"Many of us were straight out of the hills, for us white powder meant flour. They took advantage of us," says Chandra. "The police had to show the US DEA that it was fulfilling its quota."

Robin is the quiet one. He is overwhelmed that a Nepali has come to see him from Kathmandu. Neither wants to know about what is happening back home, they know the news is bad. In fact, it is the reason these days for mistreatment by fellow prisoners who goad and bully the Nepalis, calling them "dirty communist bastards".

Robin says they are treated badly because Nepali prisoners can't afford bribes and gifts, and because our government doesn't show much interest. An official from



Chandra (top), Robin (bottom) and 30 other Nepalis serving long terms in Thai jails want to be extradited.

The Royal Nepali Embassy in Bangkok does visit the prisoners from time to time, but the Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu hasn't pushed too hard for an extradition treaty. Last month, seven Americans serving life for drug offences in Bangkok were extradited after intense lobbying by activists and the US Embassy.

Foreign Ministry officials in Kathmandu say the draft extradition treaty is stuck in the home and justice ministries where the view seems to be that Nepali prisoners accused of drug crimes should stay out as a deterrence to others.

Given the strict laws against narcotics in Thailand, the chances of extradition don't look good. In a controversial crackdown, nearly 300 drug pushers have been killed in Thailand as the government launched a zero-tolerance policy. Chandra is convinced that the only thing that will save him now is if the kings of Nepal and Thailand intervene. He has painted a portrait of King Gyanendra and Queen Komal with a mother of pearl frame which he wants to send to Kathmandu. "We have written numerous petitions to His Majesty, but no one from Nepal has ever replied," says Chandra.

In a female prison at Klong Prem at the other side of town, there are five Nepali women. Living conditions here are comparatively better and the women earn money stitching slippers. Sita Rai smiles as she tells us how the inmates have elected her leader of the building where she is housed. Bishnu Kumari Bista and her daughter, Debaki have spent 10 years of their life imprisonment at Klong Prem. Says Bishnu Kumari: "We wish we could go back to Nepal, but our country has forgotten us."

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KANAK MANI DIXIT

When Indians and Nepalis meet to talk bilateral relations, the discussants invariably take refuge behind their respective national flags and there is little introspection or self-criticism. Among Indian participants at workshops and seminars, there is ignorance and indifference that gets projected as arrogance. Among Nepalis, there is academic vulnerability and political conditioning that descends all too quickly to conspiracy-seeking, with 'India' seen as one monolithic entity controlled by an ill-intentioned South Block.

There have been 'track two' attempts in the past to jump-start real discussion, particularly because

"We (India) do not remember, and they (Nepal) do not forget."
Jagat Mehta, former Foreign Secretary

Nepal has evolved since 1990 as a deliciously complex polity. But multiple body blows have battered Nepal's image among the Indian middle class, which these meetings have been unable to put in perspective. These extend from the perennial allegations of Nepal as a platform for Pakistani intelligence (remember the 'Nepal Gameplan') to episodes such as the IC-814 hijacking and the Hritik Roshan riots. Meanwhile, the deadlock over the Mahakali Treaty, and misuse of the open border for less-than-savoury 'trade' have exasperated Indian officialdom no end.

To raise the level of discussion on Indo-Nepal relations, a meeting was organised in New Delhi 13-14 February by the Observer Research Foundation. The ORF is a massive endowment created by the Ambani clan (Reliance Group), which has started an Institute for Asian Studies run by Maharaaj Kumar Rasgotra. Within the Institute is a Centre for Nepal Studies, led by another (more recently retired)

"We can live with a lot of things, but please be careful in playing the Pakistani ISI card."
Admiral K. K. Nayyar, former Deputy Chief of Naval Staff

diplomat KV Rajan. The fact that both Rasgotra and Rajan are former ambassadors to Kathmandu means that Nepal is high in the ORF radarscope.

The Indian 'side' was made up of a couple of academics (SD Muni and Mahendra Lama) and a large number of former diplomats, bureaucrats, generals and one admiral. The Nepali phalanx, on the other hand, constituted of several politicians, and two each of scholars, journalists, businessmen, and one consultant. Security concerns of India in the context of the Maoist uprising, the evolving power equation in Kathmandu, and the knottled problem of water resource sharing took up much of the deliberations, while other issues

including that of trade (the revised 1996 treaty, the inexplicable quarantine on Nepali produce, and so on) were just touched upon.

The retired officials of India, whose seniority made them sermonistic, tended to be wedded to their country positions. As happens, the Nepali participants were mostly in listening mode and unwilling to make proactive point-of-view presentations. With the exception of former minister (finance, foreign) Ram Sharan Mahat, who was able to field comments with relative ease on a range of subjects from diplomacy to trade to security. Ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa felt constrained to respond, with his oratorical flair, to sharp challenges from the participants directed at the Kathmandu dispensation. Sociologist Sudhindra Sharma's measured response on tarai demography was not enough to dislodge the mindset about ISI penetration of India through the medium of the Nepali musalman.

Even if the two 'sides' may have

Candid talk in Delhi

A seminar yields clues on Indian thinking on security issues as they relate to insurgent-ridden Nepal.

talked past each other, however, there was enough information to be culled from the presentations made in the ORF seminar, particularly with regard to perceived security concerns of India vis-à-vis the insurgency and the evolving political equation in the kingdom. What follows is a summarising of the presentations.

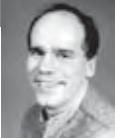
The foreign secretary
In an extempore opening statement which he said he was making in his personal capacity, Indian Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal spoke of the need for Nepal to be "steered and guided" by its well-wishers so that it could handle the "Maoist menace". There was international worry that if Nepal emerged as a

failed state it could be used as a platform for international terrorism. On the other hand, international interest and involvement in Nepal would have a bearing on Nepal-India relations. While India understood the need to strengthen the Nepali army, and was itself active in that regard, it was concerned the flow of arms to Nepal which would raise "the lethality of the conflict". While India did not want to be more closely associated with Nepal than what the latter desired, Sibal wondered whether Kathmandu was showing the required degree of transparency on matters of interest to New Delhi.

India hoped to see much greater collaboration between the monarchy and the political parties "so as not to waste precious time in tackling the real danger" in the form of the insurgency. "Political parties should not be marginalised," Sibal added, and even though in the short term moves "could be made here and there", the advisability of keeping the political parties out of the

"What is Indo-Nepal relations, I do not understand. We (in Nepal) do not have any India policy."
Professor Lok Raj Baral

by DANIEL LAK



HERE AND THERE

Welcome to Nepal

Memo to Nepal Tourism Board: Don't tell anyone but I've found the missing tourists. They're in Bangkok, Chang Mai, Mae Hong San, Krabi, Pattaya, Phuket, Ko Samui, Angkor Wat, Vientiane, Langkawi and all over south Asia.

I'm writing this from an Internet café in Bangkok's Khan San Road, the supercharged Thamel-on-speed (oops, bad analogy, given the Thai government virulent anti-drugs attitude, something that hasn't hit tourism here at all). There are probably more tourists within 10km of me right now than in all of Nepal. I don't write that lightly. Look up the figures, Thailand gets tens of millions of visitors every year. Every year! And there are no soaring mountains, no mighty rivers full of clean water, no Durbar squares, no birthplaces of Lord Buddha. Okay, so Nepal has no beaches or tropical glades, but those two should complement each other.

Once you're tired of the beach, head for the hills. So what I'm wondering is, why aren't the NTB and other organisations charged with bringing the tourists back to our newly peaceful kingdom doing something about tempting the many, many travellers in the immediate vicinity—just a two-and-a-half-hour flight away. A daily flight!

Here are few suggestions. Hire people to walk up and down the Khao San road wearing sandwich boards offering deals to go to Nepal, the land of peace in a world of war. Every time President Bush growls at Saddam Hussein, it undervalours our own peacefulness. No one, and I mean no one, among the travellers of Khao San Road has anytime for President Bush. Or Saddam Hussein for that matter. But they all love mountains and trekking. And peace.

Some of those films that have been made about Nepal over the years—Caravan, Chickenshit and Ash, The Honey Hunters of Nepal, all those BBC



documentaries and trekking films, the list is long and lovely—show them to the lounging café-dwellers of this tourist ghetto. Take them to the five star hotels. And all other stars in between. There are so many people here with time on their hands who will be enthralled to see how beautiful Nepal is. When they're done, you buy them a beer or a coffee and then tell them that it's safe to come see all that beauty for themselves. And offer them a deal.

Cut visa fees. Get rid of visa fees. When Sri Lanka's airport and world class airline were decimated by a Tamil Tiger attack in 2001, did Colombo flinch? Did the tourist authorities of the island of Serendip start cribbing

Muddy Mahakali

On the Mahakali Treaty, which cannot but be a centerpiece of Nepal-India discussions, the Indian participants at the New Delhi seminar expressed perplexity over the lack of national consensus even when parliament in Kathmandu had approved the treaty. Ramaswamy Iyer, former water bureaucrat, said that "if the original treaty was a cheat, then there should be no agreement." But rather than repeat the failures of the Kosi and Gandak agreements, the Mahakali treaty should be made to work, he said. BG Verghese, who has written widely on Himalayan waters, cautioned the Nepali participants that "favourable options for Nepali power may be pre-empted" with projects coming online in the Indian Himalaya. Nepal may be prevaricating against its own interests. Salman Haider, foreign secretary when the document was signed (the organiser of the seminar, KV Rajan, was the ambassador in Kathmandu at the time), said, "The original virtues of the treaty are sadly being overlooked. We should try to reconcile the differences. The waters have been muddled. The objections to the treaty in Nepal should be put to scrutiny." Which might not be such a bad idea, because the participants who spoke at length on the Mahakali tended to focus on hydropower exports, and seemed to gloss over the downstream benefits from (and value of) stored water in the hills of Nepal with regard to irrigation, flood control, drinking water and industrial uses in the plains.

"What has been the Indian attitude when Nepal has sought to expand its sovereign space?"
Ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa in response to Foreign Secretary Sibal

picture was a question that could be legitimately posed. Meanwhile, once the government's dialogue began with the Maoists, this would put New Delhi in a quandary over how to deal with the insurgents given their links with Maoist groups in India.

Diplomatically couching his presentation in the form of questions, Sibal asked, could Nepal's current problems be resolved without India's active involvement, was Nepal ready for such involvement, and would such greater involvement give propaganda ammunition to anti-India forces within Nepal? Further, was there a tendency to blame India for events as they had unfolded? Was there support in Nepal for enhanced international relations so as to reduce India's weight and role in its affairs, and would this in fact lead to increased contradictions within Nepali society?

Sibal then wondered how China

would be look at the increased Western involvement in arms assistance to Nepal, and whether this would not lead to a new strategic equation. Overall, how much of the present situation in the country was the result of less than optimal policies that Nepal had followed vis-à-vis India in the past, Sibal asked, without elaborating. At the highest levels of the Nepali government, he hoped, there would be a desire to maintain a transparent relationship marked by consultations on key issues.

The Indian Gorkha
Ashok K Mehta, a former officer of the Indian Gorkhas, tackled head-on a subject that Kathmandu opinion-makers prefer to leave alone, the service of Nepali men in the Indian army. He said "the lust for soldiering" was still present among highlander Nepalis, and the Gorkhas had "unquestioned loyalty to India". As someone who had walked extensively through the western hills of Nepal, the retired major general defended the ex-servicemen from the charge of having helped the Maoists. There had been no case of subversion by serving soldiers, and a total of only seven ex-servicemen were known to be on the Maoists' "payroll". The

"The adverse fallout (of the IC-814 hijacking and the Hritik Roshan affair) on the common Indians' perception about Nepal has neither been adequately realised nor sufficiently neutralised by the Nepali side."
Arvind R Deo, Former Ambassador to Nepal

ex-servicemen had been told by the Indian Chief of Army Staff last year that they were liable to be branded 'terrorists' and have their pensions cut if they aided the insurgents.

An example of the Gorkha soldier's role in binding Nepal-India relations could be seen in the "blood ties" between senior officers in the Nepali army and those serving in the Indian Army, said Mehta. There was one Gorkha officer currently commanding a brigade in Jammu and Kashmir, whose six generations had by now served in the Indian Army. Besides the many welfare schemes promoted by the Indian army in the Nepali hills, Mehta said pay from the 35,000 service soldiers in the 38 Gorkha battalions and pension of about 150,000 Indian Army and Assam Rifles ex-servicemen added about Rs 160 billion to the Nepali economy every year. Some "misplaced minds" in India had been calling for curtailment of Gorkha recruitment from Nepal, but Mehta felt that, if anything, the numbers should be increased.

Using an analogy that resonates in the present World Cup context, Mehta said the Gorkha ex-servicemen "bat for India while fielding for Nepal". He added fluently, "They are unarguably pro-India, and help in moderating the anti-India factor in Nepal."

The COAS
Ved Prakash Malik, India's former Chief of Army Staff, started by reminding participants that the soldiers of the Royal Nepali Army

were treated at-par with their Indian colleagues, which was a unique privilege not extended by his army to any other force. Also, the RNA got extremely subsidised rates for the ordinance it bought, at rates available not even to the Indian Army. The fact that the chief of each army was recognised as honorary chief of the other was no laughing matter either.

With such a close relationship, it was difficult to understand why Indian security concerns were not being understood by the "other side". Neither did he understand why the RNA, in one instance, had felt it necessary to give a farewell dinner to the departing Pakistani ambassador in Kathmandu. The Indian Army was following closely the evolving Sino-Nepal military cooperation, he said, in spheres ranging from ordinance production to UN peacekeeping training (when China was not a peacekeeping nation), the manufacture of boots and plans for a medical college. Meanwhile, while it was getting guns from other sources, the RNA had rebuffed an Indian offer of supply of a brand new make of 5.56 rifles.

The threat perception concerning the northern frontier of India had diminished, said the retired general, and the Chinese attacking India via Nepal was no longer a valid concern. The threats being seen from the direction of Nepal were now "non-traditional", such as money-laundering, smuggling and terrorism. There was particular concern over Islamic fundamentalism making inroads through Nepal.

In the context of the insurgency in Nepal, a defence planning and cooperation group had been formed between the two countries, intelligence sharing had been upgraded and fast action was being taken when requests came from the Nepali side. "I think it is rubbish to say that India is not active in helping Nepal tackle the Maoist problem," said Malik. However, he confessed he was a little confused as far as politics in Nepal was concerned: "If all the political parties have contact with the Maoists and still you are asking the army to go and deal with them, there is a problem and please sort this out!" ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Their day in court

A four-day hearing on discrimination faced by Gorkha soldiers in the British Army opened in London on 18 February. Cherie Booth, wife of British PM Tony Blair, is representing seven Nepalis who recently retired from military duty in Britain. The plaintiffs allege that Nepali soldiers suffer from racial discrimination and receive less desirable pay, pensions and family accommodation than that enjoyed by other soldiers in the British armed services. If successful, the case could cost of the British Ministry of Defence £2 billion, which is the estimated cost offering equivalent pensions to 30,000 retired and 3,000 active-duty Gorkhas. Speaking in court, Booth said, "it is part of a culture in the British Army in which, on the one hand, the Gorkhas are acknowledged to have been loyal fighters to the British Army for 200 years and, on the other hand, are treated as different and inferior."

No agreement

Talks on a new extradition treaty between Nepal and India remained inconclusive as of Thursday. Discussions in Kathmandu took place on drafts to replace the 50-year-old treaty and the talks will continue soon in New Delhi. The two sides have been trying to iron out an agreement to sort out differences on mutual legal assistance regarding criminal matters among other issues.

Official sources said India proposed to extradition of all persons accused of criminal activities in either country. Nepal rejected the proposal and argued that only those likely to get at a two-year sentence should be extradited.

Joint secretary at the Foreign Ministry, Madan Kumar Bhattarai, headed the Nepali delegation while B A Roy of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs led the team from Delhi. Last week, talks on direct overland transport and a railways agreement between the two neighbours also remained inconclusive.

Changeover

Nepal's oldest hospital, Bir Hospital, will soon transform into the Nepal Academy for Medical Science (NAMS). In association with 10 other major hospitals in the Valley, NAMS will provide basic and advanced medical training for health care personnel. "NAMS alone can't provide training in all disciplines, it will co-ordinate with other specialised hospitals," said Dr. Upendra Devkota, Minister of Health. Minister Devkota added that to join NAMS, a doctor must have at least one year's experience in a district hospital. The course will begin with 30 doctors. "The specialisation course will reduce the number of MBBS doctors going abroad," said Dr Manohar Lal Shrestha, director of the Bir Hospital. He also pledged quality medical services at affordable prices to the public.

Aid and repatriation

Donor countries and agencies must link their assistance to the resolution of the Bhutanese refugee impasse, demanded the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), a Bhutanese political organisation in exile. The call comes just days ahead of a donor meeting on Bhutan in Geneva. R B Basnet, president of the BNDP, also urged India—the largest donor to Bhutan with annual assistance running over Rs 8 billion—to help sort out the refugee imbroglio. Meanwhile, thousands of refugee children demonstrated in refugee camps in eastern Nepal on Sunday to return to Bhutan for their education. The police used force to keep the demonstrating refugee students from leaving Goldhap camp.

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Nepal's digital divide



HEMLATA RAI

When the government made public the country's first information technology policy in November 2001, it scarcely created a ripple. A few private sector players in Kathmandu were involved, but few talk about it now. The famous "IT Park" in Nepal's own cybercity of Banepa is in limbo. When the Indians stepped in last year with an offer to set up an optical fibre backbone, it stirred little interest among the general public.

Despite the large turnout of young Nepalis at the annual CAN Info-Tech fair in Kathmandu in January, IT has failed to fire the imagination of the public. Our IT policy lays out the dream that Nepal could leapfrog into the information age and create jobs. But aside from a few call centres, transcription sites and small scale software development, Nepal is way behind the big regional players like India in hitching its wagons to the information revolution.

"We got bypassed by the industrial revolution, and at the rate we are going we'll be by-passed by the information revolution as well," says one IT entrepreneur.

The government's Employment Promotion Council in partnership with a private company, trained more than a thousand youths in medical transcribing with a promise of jobs at the end of the program. The response was astonishing, but the youngsters never got the promised jobs.

Similarly, the government announced 50,000 lower, medium and higher level computer skills training slots for youths with qualifications higher than SLC within three years, and Rs 200 million was allocated for the last fiscal year's activities. The selection

procedure was completed but the training never took off, with the authorities citing the security situation.

According to the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) there are over 500 IT and IT-related companies, and more than 100 training institutes run by private operators. Some techno-savvy bureaucrats have been pushing for computerisation of government database and services, and the Ministry of Science and Technology is involved in the front standardisation for Nepali. The government's ambitious IT policy in the new five year plan envisages putting Nepal on the global IT map and exporting software and hardware worth Rs 10 billion by 2005.

But many see this as little more than a dream. "At this pace we'll never catch up with rest of the world," says Lochan Lal Amatya, president of CAN. IT has an extremely high rate of obsolescence so training for applications appropriate for Nepal is important.

Digital technology can be a vital means to address Nepal's underdevelopment, but it cannot be expected to generate the solution on its own. The government needs to be more forthcoming to be able to use IT to execute solutions to poverty.

"We have no choice, we either take advantage of the technology that is available, or the technology will leave us behind," says CAN General Secretary Atma Ram Ghimire.

The government could have left innovation and applications to the private sector and concentrated on bringing the digital age to under-developed areas. But even here, say experts, it has failed. The capacity of information technology to bridge the gap between rich and poor has been squandered, and we see within Nepal the same digital divide as we see globally between North and South.

"Technology is created in response to market demand, and not the needs of poor people who have little purchasing power. Nepal's IT sector is very much driven by that and the private sector is in no mood to do social service," says Mahesh Man Shrestha, secretary at the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Because of the lack of opportunity, Nepali software programmers, designers and hardware experts are migrating in droves. An estimated 2,000 IT graduates enter the job market annually, but most of them head out the first chance they get. ♦

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL



Central commanders

Professional leaders carry sharper bestial instincts than the pack of political animals that follow them.

With leaders like Amik Serchan and Narayan Man Bijukkche driving the political centre, the contours of what could be decisive change are becoming distinct. For the first time since the Silguri conclave between the Maoists and other communists two years ago, the fringe left has gained a new respectability in the national discourse. During separate conferences steered by Serchan and Bijukkche, the two big parties appeared closer to a common platform on putting the constitution back on track.

Armed with a new mandate from the Janakpur party convention, CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal launched his own initiative to widen the field. A day after meeting Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala, Nepal held consultations with Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nepali Congress (Democratic) leaders the patriarch has been shunning. That helped Sher Bahadur Deuba mark his official rehabilitation in the hallowed mainstream by bringing together all the parties in the House of Representatives he dissolved, except the Koirala Kangresis. This churning process might seem unchaste to many, but it's part of democratic progress. Professional leaders carry sharper bestial instincts than the pack of political animals that follow them.

The shifting sands of the centre show the resiliency of the core. Politicians tend to treat friends as if they might become enemies because they know it's easier to forgive a foe. Raised on Churchillian faith in the fallibility of democracy, our mainstream leaders know that success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm. They shouldn't be distracted by Baburam Bhattarai's challenge to choose a place between the old and new powers. They're already on firm ground in the middle and should stay there. Rest assured, Nepalis won't let them fade away. (Remember how, during the final Panchayat decade, the district administration allowed parties to organise blood-donation and afford station campaigns as long as their banned status was visible on the banners.)

The people are furious with the two big parties because they feel



betrayed. Shailaja Acharya believes the people are angriest with the Nepali Congress because they had the greatest expectations from them. This probably has more to do with the fact that Kangresis brought democracy twice and blew it both times. People asked to come out and elect their representatives in three-year cycles deserve compassion. In the absence of patient listeners, freedom of expression can turn against its guardians. The parties should spend their time in the wilderness trying to woo the people. That would help us better understand how criticism comes easier than craftsmanship.

Consider some of the bright spots in the post-4 October activities of mainstream parties. Koirala has shown how compromises made to gain and retain power do not corrode a leader's commitment to his core convictions. Nepal, for his part, has come out firmly behind a constitution he helped draft and his party offered critical support to Pashupati Sumsher JB Rana is evidently torn between the past and posterity. Isn't it remarkable that there are people in the RPP who can even think about preserving the gains of the people's movement?

Kangresis and comrades are still hesitant about the road to take and have an explanation. They can't build an inclusive democracy without repairing the foundation built 12 years ago. (Remember, their key word is preservation.) Koirala and Nepal seem to have no

objection to either the reinstatement of the House of Representatives or the creation of an all-party government in keeping with the spirit of Article 128 of the constitution. Although the Maoists have overtaken events, that's still progress. The two big parties seem to have realised that trying to turn a multiparty system into a two-way spoils system can only radicalise the rest.

Not all can abandon the parliamentary process and resort to physical violence to get back into the mainstream. Most leaders who never get elected nurse grievances that go on to fuel the kind of rancour we've been hearing from our more boisterous cabinet members. Most of the parties registered with the Election Commission might have just wanted phone connections and other perks. The listing breeds narcissism with potentially virulent nuisance value. As a gesture of good will, adjectives implying that the six (or four, depending on the meeting organiser) major parties represent the entire political fraternity should be avoided, at least as long as the lower house stands dissolved.

Nepalis know they will always need parties to represent different interests in society and adjust conflicting claims. Who is going to reduce complex problems of public policy to simple slogans for voters? Those who consider their ballots too sacred to squander on the current crop of leaders can't fail to recognise the educational value of political bickering. Even the fiercest critic enjoys targets who can take a liberal dose of censure with tolerance. ♦

ECONOMY

BIZ NEWS

Spoilt for choice

RabRen International, sole distributor of Yinggang motorcycles in Nepal, has introduced two new bikes. The YG 100-12 and YG 125-11 have been available at authorised dealers in Nepal since December 2002. Complying with GVRO standards, the models are equipped with a patented fuel saving device, soft safety brake device, two-clutch system, 4-stroke engine and oil-cooling radiator.

New drive

AVCO International launched the Santa Fe Diesel, a 4-wheel drive jeep in December 2002. Available at the Hyundai showroom in Nag Pokhari, the diesel version of the jeep is equipped with common rail direct ignition, a popular feature among customers.

High standards

Dabur Nepal has declared a sales turnover of Rs 277 billion, registering a 24 per cent increase over last year's profit before tax and statutory provisions. The company contributed over Rs 20 billion to the state exchequer. At the closing in July 2002, Dabur Nepal's gross assets totalled Rs 119 billion. While many new Dabur products are now available, key products like Real fruit juices, Vatika Shampoo and Amla Hai Oil have shown substantial growth in sales.

The company has also been awarded certification for Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) for complying with the US Food and Drug Administration's Mandatory by the SGS Group, a member of Societe Generale de Surveillance, a global leader in verification, testing and certification. This accreditation recognises the company's global standards of expertise, quality and integrity during food processing procedures. The assessment also approves of the technologies implemented by Dabur Nepal that focuses on prevention rather than relying mainly on end product inspection and testing. Organisational control, monitoring of food safety hygiene and quality management system demonstrate the company's commitment to ensure safety. It also boosts customer, retailer and government confidence in Dabur products.

Flying high

The newly established private airlines, Sita Air, launched its operations from 20 February. Their initial routes are between Kathmandu and Lukla, and Bhadrapur and Nepalgunj. Scheduled and charter flights will be made by two Germany-made Dornier 228-202K, 19-seater aeroplanes that are fitted with Ground Positioning System (GPS) and certified for short take off and landing (STOL). The aeroplanes can landing at 35 of the 45 national airfields. Sita Air plans to extend services to Jomsom, Tumlingtar, Dhangadhi and Bhairahawa in the near future.

Export slump

The gloom in the handicraft industry deepened with a decline of over 7 percent in export during the first half of the current fiscal year, affecting self employed small and medium enterprises. Export of handicrafts in this period was valued at Rs 1.48 billion, dropping from Rs 1.58 billion last year. According to the Handicrafts Association of Nepal (HAN), the overall export figure of handicraft goods slumped due to a 26 per cent decline in the export of pashmina—the third largest export item in the national portfolio and the largest in handicrafts. Hit by a global slowdown and domestic turmoil, pashmina exports plunged to Rs 675.61 million compared to Rs 916.03 million recorded during the same period last year.

"The economy will need five years to recover—provided peace is restored."

Nepali Times: Some say now that we have hit the bottom, there is nowhere to go but up. What are the chances of the economy rebounding?

Dr Pyakuryal: Our economy is very sensitive to various factors. After the royal palace massacre two years ago, our currency depreciated vis-à-vis the US dollar. The inflow of Indian tourists declined by 40 percent in the aftermath of the hijacking of the Indian Airlines in 1999. During the 1989 impasse with India, our total production and employment declined dramatically. About 90 percent of the industries were dependent on India and had to close shop. The ceasefire will have a positive effect: people will have a sense of security, which will help the economy pick up.

How badly did the Maoist insurgency affect the economy?

We have to look at the period after 2001 to assess the impact of the insurgency. It will be difficult to explain the tendencies prior to that on the basis of the insurgency alone. The government could not implement nearly two-thirds of the projects identified under the priority sector in 2001. A study commissioned by the United Nations Commission for Trade and Development showed a majority of joint venture industries operating in Nepal want to expand their businesses despite the security situation. The negative indicators of the economy over the last one year are mainly due to the poor performance of the government rather than effects of the insurgency.

But there has been a real cost in the destruction of infrastructure. Haven't we been pushed back decades?

The government is talking about a Poverty Development Fund, a Power Development Fund etc. Foreign aid is pouring in to support the military. There is no question of not having enough support to repair destroyed infrastructure. We have policies, a regulatory and legal framework that meets global requirements. If the government decides to set up a separate fund for this purpose, it won't be difficult to do.

Officials say a good policy environment is now in place. Will

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Come together



Economics is driven by politics.



Inconclusive. A word that defines our political stance over the refugee deadlock with Bhutan. This is also the way long-winded bilateral negotiations with India always seem to end. The Beed is not surprised to note nobody seems to care. Why is it that we excel at bemoaning our landlocked geography while failing miserably at reducing the impact of its disadvantages?

The World Bank funded the dry port at Birgunj and things were chugging along nicely with the submission of management bids before everything stalled. The Indian government convinced the World Bank of the importance of having Indian firms as part of the Inland Container Depot (ICD) management, handing them a critical advantage against even the world's best companies who may want to manage the ICD.

Economics is driven by politics,

not vice-versa. So while we play the finger pointing game, the Beed feels a little critical self-examination would not be amiss.

It is always a source of wonder that while the government seems unable to keep Nepalis out of local casinos, private businesses do an admirable job of doing just that with their tourist buses. The state of our tourism and transportation infrastructure is linked to transport entrepreneurs with their powerful connections. They are able to negotiate with the government on everything from insurance to route permits.

Domestic tourists should have better options than a choice between folding-seat-and-video coaches and prohibitively expensive airfares. In the Beed's opinion Nepali entrepreneurs would do well not to be so averse to expanding operations to India and Tibet. Imagine the benefits of

a fleet of luxury coaches that ferry Buddhist pilgrims from Lhasa to Lumbini in comparative ease and comfort. And when we finally harness our hydropower we could have electric trains like the Japanese. China has been able to build efficient rail links, surely we can too.

When looking at transportation in Nepal the greatest problem we face is our fragmented approach. Some donors want roads in rural areas, others are busy building bridges. A few organisations are promoting environment friendly vehicles, some lobby for unadulterated fuel. Meanwhile the major players do all they can for strategic control of the largest piece of the Nepali transport pie. Is anyone looking at the bigger picture?

These elements will fit together if the business of transportation is regulated. There can be no room for cartels. The Nepali economy rests on exports and tourism, and the backbone of both is efficient transportation. Unfortunately, even as the Beed pontificates through this column, the heads of various government departments confer with each other ad nauseam with predictable results. Inconclusive. ♦

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

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Contract Announcement

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment

Canadian Cooperation Office, Kathmandu, Nepal

The Canadian International Development Agency/Canadian Cooperation Office (CIDA/CCO) Nepal is looking for a competent consultant or consultant team to work with the Canadian and Local Executing Agencies of CIDA projects to undertake a Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) of each development project. The aim of the PCIA will be to ensure all CIDA projects in Nepal are oriented towards conflict reduction in both their content and the manner of their delivery, and can operate safely and effectively within a conflict environment.

A two-stage Summary Request for Proposal process will be carried out to select the successful consultants. The first stage is the Pre-Qualifying stage where interested consultants are asked to present their experience, qualifications and eligibility to carry out the assignment according to the criteria set out below. Only individuals (not organizations) are eligible for this contract. The second stage is the proposal call, where invited consultants who pass the criteria for eligibility will be asked to submit a formal proposal in response to Terms of Reference developed by CIDA/CCO. This announcement only applies to the Pre-Qualifying stage. CIDA/CCO reserves the right to refuse any or all pre-qualification submissions.

CIDA/CCO seeks consultants with the following qualifications, experience and eligibility. Consultants must meet ALL four of the mandatory criteria given below in order to pre-qualify.

- I Experience on conflict and peace building analysis including PCIA in program scenarios in the region;
- II The ability to introduce learning from "in country" (Nepal) experiences and "outside country" experiences of other programs especially from conflict zones such as Sri Lanka, Peru, Guatemala etc.;
- III Some knowledge about the national and donor responses to the present conflict in Nepal and the Government of Nepal's development policies and priorities;
- IV No Involvement in current CIDA projects in Nepal.

Interested consultants are requested to send a covering letter and Curriculum Vitae clearly demonstrating how they meet each of the above screening criteria to the Canadian Cooperation Office in Kathmandu. Applications must be received by 16:30 on 12 March, 2003 through email, fax or by post and should be addressed to:

Director, Program and Projects
CIDA/CCO, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal, G.P.O. Box: 4574
Phone: 977-1-415193 Fax: 977-1-410422, E-mail: cco@cco.org.np

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Dr Biswomhber Pyakuryal is professor of economics at Tribhuvan University and also heads Business Information Services, a private company that performs credit rating of Nepali enterprises upon request. Pyakuryal has been monitoring the country's economic health from close quarters and spoke to us on the prospects for economic growth post-ceasefire.



Nick Aggs of Afro Dizzi Act at Jazzmandu 2002.

All that

After the triumph of Jazzmandu last year, jazz aficionados know they can expect something out of the ordinary at round two of the festival this year. Picking up where it left off, Jazzmandu 2003 is a star-studded fortnight of music from the likes of percussionist Trilok Gurtu, guitarists Knut Reiersrud and Jesse van Ruller, flautist Jamie Baum and local jazz stars, Cadenza.

A decade ago there was no market for jazz. There were hardly any bands that played real jazz and the audience was limited to the brandy swilling elite. Those days seem far removed after the phenomenal rise in popularity of the genre.

The lure of jazz goes beyond just technicalities like range, depth, style, mood, variation and nuance. Central and essential to good jazz is love—art for arts sake—that blends technical skill with creativity and team cohesion. It is musicians' music "written" largely at the moment of performance.

Many local jazz fans credit The Upstairs Jazz Bar with introducing jazz to the Valley. A little restaurant above a nondescript grocery shop in Lazimpat, Upstairs

is easy to miss. But spend one Saturday night there and you'll never forget the way: round the back and up an uneven flight of stairs to a dimly lit bar. The brainchild of Chhedup Bomzon, the manager of Nepal's premier jazz outfit Cadenza, Upstairs may have a placemat sized stage but it features the biggest jazz sounds in Nepal. The place is packed to the rafters when house band Cadenza and their friends perform. Navin Chhetri, the drummer and frontman of the band says, "We took the chance to experiment with jazz in Kathmandu because we had a gut instinct about this—you could say we are educating people and ourselves about jazz, because this a learning process." This year Navin is looking forward to opening for master percussionist Trilok Gurtu.

The idea for Jazzmandu coalesced after Cadenza was invited to play at the Palmer Street Festival in Australia. They asked themselves why Nepal should be denied the experience of international jazz artists. It wasn't long before Upstairs Ideas launched a full-blown jazz festival in Nepal for the first time last year. International legend Don Burrows, consented to perform for the price of an airline ticket. Jazzmandu 2002 became a medium for showing musical



Clear your calendar for two weeks of inspired, funk-filled music.

solidarity for Nepal's nascent jazz community.

As Nepali tourism limps towards recovery encouraged by the recent ceasefire, the festival this year presents a non-traditional reason for travellers to visit Nepal. Organisers have been encouraged by the willingness of jazz artists to travel to a country till recently in the news for the wrong reasons. Susan Sellars, co-ordinator of Jazzmandu 2003 at Upstairs Ideas, calls this a "vote of confidence that sends just the

right message." A few international tours have put together packages pairing Jazzmandu 2003 concert tickets with staples like trekking in the Himalaya. The festival will play in different locations around the Valley and in Pokhara.

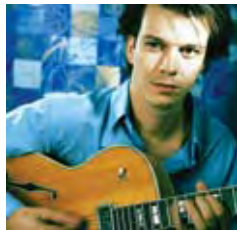
Jazzmandu 2003 couldn't come at a better time. The chill of war and winter is behind us, we are optimistic about the former and assured of the latter. Good times are ahead—it's definitely all that jazz! ♦

At a concert near you...



Trilok Gurtu

Voted the world's best percussionist three years in a row by Downbeat, Trilok Gurtu is the headlining act at Jazzmandu 2003. His unique approach to percussion and drumming centres around an 180kg "floor kit" including tablas, dhol drums, gongs, cowbells and his infamous bucket of water (into which he immerses resonating instruments to astonishing effect). Gurtu has played with Don Cherry, Jan Garbarek, Zakir Hussain and was an integral part of The John McLaughlin Trio. He will perform once only on 13 March 2003 at the Royal Nepal Academy.



Jesse van Ruller Trio

This guitar genius was the first European to win the prestigious Thelonious Monk International Jazz Guitar Competition in Washington when he was just 23. Jesse van Ruller has performed with musicians and ensembles like Christian McBride, Ralph Moore, George Duke, Mike Stern, Kenny Washington, Tom Harrell, Philip Catherine, Toots Thielemans, John Clayton, the Metropole Orchestra, the Asko Ensemble and the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.



Jamie Baum Quartet

The New York-based Jamie Baum could well be the First Lady of Flautists. Recognised for her extraordinary ability to present the flute as a lead instrument, Baum has won three US National Endowment for the Arts awards. She has represented the US abroad under the "Jazz Ambassadors" program. Baum also teaches master classes, compositional techniques and workshops. Recent recordings include Sight Unheard, GM Recordings, Woodwinds on Fire and Undercurrents.

Afro Dizzi Act

Go with da 'fro. You know you can expect something different from these Brisbane boys from Down Under. Last they won over Jazzmandu audiences by mixing traditional grooves with hip-hop, rap, electronica and funk. Afro have a palpable band chemistry that embraces the audience. We are very happy to welcome them back to the Valley of the gods.



Natalie Williams

Born into a family steeped in jazz, Williams grew up listening to Miles Davis, Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald and cites Lauryn Hill and Eryka Badu as musical influences. Williams earned a BA in jazz from the prestigious Guildhall School of Music and Drama in the UK. She currently performs with The Natalie Williams Quintet which has performed in Berlin, Leeds and London.



Groove Suppa

From south of the border comes an act that combines the talent of Tala Faral, keyboardist from Madagascar, Lindsay Demello, Mumbai based drummer, Dwight Pattison one of Kolkata's hottest bass players and Benay Rai, a guitarist from Darjeeling. Their collective experience spans Bollywood movies, Aerosmith concerts, collaborations with other artists like Lucky Ali and Bombay Black, to Hindustani Classical music. Get ready for a heady brew of aural ecstasy.



Knut Reiersrud

It is difficult to pigeonhole this versatile guitarist who travels with eight different guitars, each tuned to suit a certain kind of music and mood. Hailed as a phenomenon, his music has an immediacy that grabs listeners. His body language and mimicry are extraordinarily expressive as he reaches for something greater and more powerful than himself.



Ralph Thomas

Ralph Thomas, maestro of saxophone, flute, bagpipes and percussion, has recorded with Chicago Blues legends Howling Wolf and Mighty Joe Young when he was attending the Chicago Conservatory of Music. Signed by Motown Records in 1974 he went on to collaborate with Marvin Gaye and Smokey Robinson and recorded for "Roots" and "The Colour Purple". He has performed with Don Cherry, Loziada Empire, Sun ra, Mra Oma, Sunny Murray and Sara Alexandra.



Home Grown Stars

Part of having a jazz festival in Nepal is "showing off" our local talent to leave our international guests raving. Performing at Jazzmandu will be Cadenza, jHolo who have been making their mark at Moksh of late, MIK which stands for Music Institute of Kathmandu and consists of our most talented young rising stars, Sita Pati an eight piece late minute addition playing folk and classical with a funky twist, the famous Prastar, Gandharba our very own minstrels, jazz vocalists Vidhea Shrestha and Shristi Thapa, Nepali classical group Vajra and many more.

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kathmandu jazz festival 2003

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Cadenza
jHolo
MIK

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Sita Pati
Steve on sitar and Robin on tabla

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Vidhea Shrestha
Shristi Thapa

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Various local and international artists

JAZZ UNCORKED
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Shangri La Village, Pokhara 6-10PM on Friday, 7 March

Afro Dizzi Act
Natalie Williams
Ralph Thomas
Groove Suppa
Cadenza
Jamie Baum Quartet

DUTCH TREAT JESSE van RULLER TRIO
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Shangri La Village, Pokhara 6-10PM on Saturday, 8 March
Jesse van Ruller Trio

KATHMANDU
JESSE van RULLER TRIO
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Summit Hotel 7-11PM on Sunday, 9 March
Jesse van Ruller Trio
MIK [Opening Act]

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Friends include Nepali Classical Musicians
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Trilok Gurtu
Cadenza and Friends [Opening Act]

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Cadenza and The Latin Section
Ralph Thomas, Natalie Williams and International Friends

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Natalie Williams

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Afro Dizzi Act
Cadenza
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Humanitarian crisis

BRUSSELS - A military attack against Iraq risks provoking a humanitarian fall-out throughout the whole region, says Poul Nielson, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid.

The European Commission, through the European Office for Emergency Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), is analysing the effects that a US-led war against Iraq could have on an already vulnerable nation. In a harsh warning delivered to the European Parliament last week, Nielson said that any eventual military action against Iraq would further worsen the living conditions of the Iraqi people, particularly the most vulnerable. ECHO has already sent out two missions to the region to assess the preparations by different humanitarian agencies in order to react quickly to any change in the situation there.

ECHO was set up in 1992 to finance aid operations throughout the world and now works with over 200 humanitarian partners. Statistics show that the commission, in its work through the ECHO program, is the most important external donor to Iraq outside the UN administered oil-for-food program. This year alone, ECHO has earmarked about \$15 million to continue the existing operations in Iraq. (IPS)

Silver lining

NAIROBI - Despite the slow progress at peace talks aimed at ending more than a decade of anarchy in Somalia, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is optimistic about the future—even if the war continues.

Speaking at the end of a two-day strategy meeting on UNICEF's 2004 to 2008 five-year program this week, Jesper Mørch, UNICEF Somalia Representative emphasised that it is wrong to write Somalia off as a basket case. There has been no central government in Somalia since President Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991 and the UNICEF has had to work in a near vacuum.

The lack of even a basic education structure forced them to create a curriculum and standardised textbooks for primary schools. The health sector continues to dominate much of UNICEF's work in Somalia. Infant, child and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world. Somalia is one of the few countries in the world where polio has not been eradicated.

Peace talks aimed at re-establishing a central national government in Somalia have been dragging on for four months. The current phase of the Nairobi talks involves drawing up recommendations in six key areas like landownership and demobilisation. After that, the delegates will move on to the final and most difficult phase—working out a transitional federal government for Somalia. (IPS)

COMMENT by ROBERT FISK

Gulf War II

It looks like a rerun of the 1991 Gulf War. Already American journalists are fighting like tigers to join "the pool", to be "embedded" in the US military so that they can see the war at first hand—and, of course, be censored. Eleven years ago, they turned up at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia, already kitted out with helmets, gas capes, chocolate rations and eyes that narrowed when they looked into the sun, just like General Montgomery.

Half the reporters wanted to wear military costume and one young television man from the American mid-west turned up, I recall well, with a pair of camouflaged boots. Each boot was camouflaged with painted leaves. Those of us who had been in a desert—even those who had only seen a picture of a desert—did wonder what this meant. Well, of course, it symbolised fantasy, the very quality upon which most viewers now rely when watching "live" war—or watching death "live" on TV.

Thus, over the past four weeks, the massed ranks of American television networks have been pouring into Kuwait to cosy up to the US military, to seek those coveted "pool" positions, to try on their army or marine costumes and make sure that—if or when the day comes—they will have the kind of coverage that every reporter and every general wants: a few facts, good pictures and nothing dirty to make the viewers throw up on the breakfast table. I remember how, back in 1991, only those Iraqi soldiers obliging enough to die in romantic poses—arm thrown back to conceal the decomposing features or face down and anonymous in the sand—made it on to live-time. Those soldiers turned into a crematorium nightmare or whose corpses were being torn to pieces by wild dogs—I actually saw

War journalists should not be cosying up to the military

an ITV crew film this horrific scene—were not honoured on screen. ITV's film, of course, couldn't be shown—lest it persuade the entire world that no one should go to war, ever again.

The Americans are actually using the word "embedded". Reporters must be "embedded" in military units. The fears of Central Command at Tampa, Florida, are that Saddam will commit some atrocity—a gas attack on Shiites, an air bombardment of Iraqi civilians—and then blame it on the Americans. Journalists in the "pool" can be rushed to the scene to prove that the killings were the dastardly work of the Beast of Baghdad rather than the "collateral damage"—the Distinguished Medal for Gallantry should be awarded to all journalists who even mention this phrase—of the fine young men who are trying to destroy the triple pillar of the "axis of evil".

Already, the "buddy-buddy" relationship—that's actually what the Ministry of Defence boys called it 11 years ago—has started. US troops in Kuwait are offering courses in chemical and biological warfare for reporters who might be accompanying soldiers to "the front", along with "training" on the need to protect security during military operations. CNN is, of course, enthusiastically backing these ostensibly innocuous courses—forgetting how they

(The Independent)

COMMENT

Kentucky Fried University

Academics are easily flattered by talk about "knowledge management" and the "knowledge society." They often think this phrase highlights the central role of universities in society. In fact, it signals the opposite—that the wider society itself is a hotbed of knowledge production, over which universities do not enjoy any special privilege or advantage.

This has caught academics off-guard, because they have traditionally treated knowledge as something pursued for its own sake, regardless of cost or consequence. Now they face increasing global pressure to open universities to the wider public, typically for reasons unrelated to the pursuit of pure knowledge. Today's universities are expected to function as dispensers of credentials and engines of economic growth.

Consequently, academics are losing control of their performance standards to "knowledge managers." Universities, according to former *Fortune* editor Tom Stewart, are "dumb organisations" with too much "human capital" but not enough "structural capital".

A fast food chain, on the other hand, is supposedly a "smart organisation" because it makes the most of its relatively low-skilled staff through the alchemy of good management. Academia proceeds almost exactly in reverse, as department heads and deans struggle to keep track of what the staff are doing. McDonald's, unlike

Are academics losing ground to "knowledge managers"?



a university, is much more than the sum of its parts.

Academics remain largely in denial about the impact of knowledge management. But the sheer increase in the number of university presidents drawn from business and industry implies that McDonald's and MIT may, at least in principle, be judged according to the same operational and performance standards.

At the same time, it is unreasonable to expect the increasing number of academics on short-term contracts to defend the integrity of an institution that cannot promise them job security. Indeed, many academics—not just professional knowledge managers—have endorsed recent steps to disaggregate the "unity of teaching and research" that has defined the university since the early 19th century.

With the establishment of each new on-line degree program and science park, universities appear more vulnerable to this mindset. The two types of "post-academic" university that they represent—the one a diploma mill, the other a patent factory—share an overriding interest in benefiting those who can pay at the point of delivery. But universities have always been hard-pressed to justify their existence in such immediate cost-benefit terms.

It would be a mistake to blame knowledge managers, or, for that matter, neo-liberal ideology, for this instrumental view of universities as "service providers". Even in the heyday of the welfare

by STEVE FULLER



defining process to be shared, and thus worthy of receiving financial support from them.

The endowments built through these donations allow successive generations to enjoy the same opportunity for enrichment. "Ivy League" universities like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton still charge the world's highest tuition fees, but only one-third of students pay the full amount.

Universities are not, in fact, such dumb organisations. True, they must endeavour to be much greater than the sum of their parts. But this means that a university's value must not be measured only by the short-term benefits it provides for immediate clients. The ideal of uniting teaching and research promised just such a breadth of organisational vision, one worth updating today.

After all, universities are distinctive in producing new knowledge (through research) that is then consolidated and distributed (through teaching). In the former phase, academia generates new forms of social advantage and privilege, while in the latter phase, it eliminates them. It is this unique brand of creative destruction that marks the university as one of our greatest entrepreneurial organisations. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Steve Fuller, Professor of sociology, University of Warwick, is the author of *Knowledge Management Foundations*.)

OPINION by MARK SOMMER

Weapons inspections for everyone

BERKELEY - When the 200,000 demonstrators marching on Washington on 15 January finished rallying near the Capitol, they turned to the Navy Yard to undertake, they said, a citizens' inspection of the weapons of mass destruction warehoused there.

It was a massive piece of political theatre, of course. There was no way they or anyone else would ever be allowed in to see anything within the tightly-guarded compound. They were making a point that has become obvious to nearly everyone other than most Americans—that the same government that demands total and immediate disclosure of all weapons of mass destruction possessed by Iraq and North Korea, would never allow anyone near their top secret sanctums.

A gold standard for weapons inspections and enforceable disarmament, if applied to every nation that possesses or is thought to possess weapons of mass destruction, would represent a quantum leap in reducing the threat posed by all such arms. Lest we dismiss this point as purely theoretical, we need only consider the words of Richard Butler, the hard-nosed former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq. Speaking to a conservative Australian think-tank, he condemned what he termed Washington's "shocking double standards", arguing that "the spectacle of the United States, armed with its weapons of mass destruction, acting without Security Council authority to invade a country in the heartland of Arabia and, if necessary, use its weapons of mass destruction to win that battle, is something that will deeply violate any notion of fairness in this world."

The US should understand national sensitivities to infringements on the sovereignty, secrecy and the unprecedented—which is not to say unjustified—nature of the demands it is making on Iraq. US allies Israel, Pakistan and India have nuclear arsenals but have not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The US and other permanent Security Council members own the world's largest quantities of nuclear weapons.

The demand for universal inspections and enforceable disarmament must begin with civil society.

Although the US ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, both the government and the American chemical industry have since thrown every roadblock in the way of effective monitoring of remaining stockpiles. The point of this argument is to embrace the inspection and disarmament regime the US has put in place and unwittingly offered as a model for the world. It was surely not its intention to see the same searing searchlight turned back on the arsenals of its allies and its own.

The point is not to force the Bush administration to back off in its insistence on true transparency. We need to demand the same rigor on the entire illegitimate enterprise of manufacturing and maintaining all arsenals of mass destruction. We can't expect most governments and arms manufacturers to embrace any inspection regime that would force them to divulge what they have so assiduously hidden even from their own peoples. That is why the demand for universal inspections and enforceable disarmament must begin with civil society. Those who pay for the weapons have every right to see what their money is buying and to decide whether this is the best and highest use of their hard-earned wages.

Indeed, maybe that's why our own governments are so secretive about what they're building. Were we ever to find out what's behind those tightly guarded gates, we might never let them build them again. ♦ (IPS)

(Mark Sommer is a columnist and radio host who directs the Mainstream Media Project, a US-based effort to bring new voices to the broadcast media.)



India's kidney commerce

RANJIT DEVRAJ IN NEW DELHI

When India's human rights commission stepped in last month to order the state government in Punjab to produce a report on a flourishing trade in live human kidneys, it was a sign that laws concerning the organ trade were not working as they should.

The National Human Rights Commission, a statutory body, was acting on a complaint filed by former federal law minister Ram Jethmalani and other human rights activists, who argued that impoverished people were losing their kidneys to stave off starvation.

But the commission also took notice of a number of media reports that spoke of a revival of the kidney trade across India in recent months.

In January police in Punjab arrested Parveen Kumar Sarin, a leading transplant surgeon, who according to police arranged for thousands of kidney transplants by conniving with O P Mahajan, chairman of the state's "authorisation committee" that must approve all kidney donations among unrelated people. Mahajan, who has been suspended from his job as principal of the Punjab Government Medical College, had, according to police, facilitated kidney deals worth at least \$30 million. Many of the organs sold for high prices to foreigners, they said.

According to Vijay Pratap Singh, police chief in Amritsar, police in Punjab have been on the alert for an international racket in kidneys ever since the de-registration by the General Medical Council in Britain in August of a doctor of Punjabi Indian origin, Bhagat Singh Makkar, for alleged involvement in the trade in kidneys.

Makkar was trapped in a sting operation by journalists from *The Sunday Times*, who produced tapes in which he was shown offering to arrange for kidney transplants and showed a "reprehensible disregard for the interests of potential donors who, you indicated, would be Asian". When the Indian Parliament passed the Human Organs Transplantation Act in 1996, there was reason to believe that it would curb a flourishing export trade in kidneys that had earned India notoriety as a "kidney bazar" to the world.

The act, which dealt with all transplantable organs, banned unrelated donors—unless authorised by a special committee such as the one Mahajan headed—and also sought to promote a cadaver-based program through the building of a national "organ bank".

But S Tamboli, president of the voluntary Organ Transplantation



Society of India, which has been trying to get the government to implement a cadaver-based kidney donation program, said the act was never followed in spirit and that the trade continued as before.

"The trade is worth millions of dollars and kidney patients in affluent countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, the oil-rich Arab countries and Canada and Japan always found India with its fine medical facilities on the one hand and poor people on the other an attractive place to shop for kidneys," Tamboli said.

Soon after the act was passed, kidney racketeers lay low for a while and resorted to sending donors on "guided tours" overseas, where they were deprived of their kidneys and then sent back to India where they could collect their payments. Tamboli said part of the reason for the revival of the

India's organ bazars are doing thriving business as the poor sell one of their kidneys to rich patients who need transplants.

trade was the attitude of the powerful Indian Medical Association (IMA), which tended to rally around doctors who, in spite of the passage of the act, continue to be involved in the kidney business. At times, the association has even tended to justify the kidney trade as a lifesaver for well-heeled clients.

After the arrest of Mahajan and Sarin, R C Garg, president of the Punjab branch of the IMA, demanded that an amendment to the organs transplantation act that would make the sale and purchase of kidneys legal. "What other option does an end kidney failure patient have?" he was quoted as saying. The Indian Medical Association recently came to the rescue of doctors in Kerala who were found involved in a kidney transplant racket. This involved two private hospitals that were found to have sourced kidneys from impoverished tribals living in the remote Idukki district.

"Were the doctors so dull as to not suspect money transactions when poor tribesmen come forward to donate kidneys to unknown patients? The IMA has succeeded in making surgeons look like idiots," said Soman, a health expert and chairman of the voluntary group Health Action by People (HAP).

The scandal broke after two tribal people were presented at a press conference by opposition politicians and told how they had been duped by middlemen. They said that they were now in poor health as a consequence of their organ donations, and had no money even to get themselves medical care. But that is a familiar scenario. A few years ago, four doctors were arrested from a posh private hospital in the national capital after a rickshaw puller went to the police, complaining that he was paid a fraction of the \$6,000 he had been promised for giving a kidney.

Samiran Nundy, one of India's leading transplant surgeons, said it is high time the government cracked down hard on doctors who were violating well-established laws on organ transplants. "There can be no excuse for doctors profiteering from human misery," said Nundy. But law enforcement in the country is so lax that independent investigations into the racket in Bangalore showed that foreign organ recipients nowadays are flying in with donors from their own countries—to take advantage of willing doctors, besides the cheap medical facilities. ♦ (IPS)

GE row

CANBERRA - Growing opposition from farmers and environmentalists is sprouting over an application by Monsanto and Bayer's for Australian government approval of the commercial release of genetically engineered (GE) canola, due to be decided on in April.

Farmers are concerned that approval of Monsanto and Bayer's GE canola applications will result in existing farmers losing access to valuable markets that put a premium on GE-free food products. The spokeswoman for the Network of Concerned Farmers, Juliet McFarlane, says there is little evidence the biotechnology industry or the government are taking their concerns seriously.

A series of voluntary management protocols have been developed by the Gene Technology Grains Committee (GTGC) in an attempt to address concerns of farmers. The GTGC-proposed measures claim that "co-existence" of GE and GE-free farmers could be achieved by accepting contamination of non-GM crops up to a level of 1 percent. At present, nearly two-thirds of all the commercial GE canola crops are grown in the United States. The only other countries in which they have been approved are Canada, Argentina and China. (IPS)

Labour reform

COLOMBO - As the government speeds up investor-friendly labour laws, Sri Lanka's trade union movement believes the country is sinking under the spell of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and is threatening to pull out from an apex labour advisory group.

Trade union representatives declared late last week that they would be forced to withdraw from the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC), a vital, representative group that looks at labour issues. They accused the government of sneaking legislation into parliament at the behest of the IMF and World Bank, without even consulting the council. The NLAC, chaired by the government and has representatives from employers, employees and trade unions, acts as a consultative body on labour matters.

Human rights workers fear the World Bank/IMF-proposed Poverty Reduction Strategy Policy (PRSP) will erode workers' rights. They believe farmers could be thrown out from small, uneconomic plots and handed over to multinationals under flexible labour laws.

Foreign investors, donors, the World Bank and the IMF have often complained about the "rigidity" of Sri Lankan laws, which they say favour employees and make it difficult to lay off workers during an economic crisis or when companies are in bad shape. (IPS)

Unsafe H₂O

NEW DELHI - For years, Indians and visitors to this country who fear water-borne pathogens have put their faith in bottled water. Now, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), has publicised findings that show that even the best-known local brands available in the market have massive doses of deadly pesticides and other chemical contaminants.

Using European Economic Commission (EEC) standards for pesticides in packaged water, the CSE showed that on average, every sample of bottled water collected in New Delhi and in Mumbai contained 36 times more pesticides than maximum permissible limits in Europe. Pranay Lal, coordinator for health with the CSE, traced the problem to the fact that most bottlers tapped water from deep bore wells close to heavily industrialised areas or sites that had a history of intensive agriculture and were likely to have heavily contaminated groundwater.

Among those tested were Coca Cola's "Kinley", Pepsi's "Aquifina" and Nestle's "Pure Life". After CSE blamed lax standards and poor enforcement, the central government responded by ordering investigations into the \$200 million industry. Multi-national companies are protesting that they were following standards set by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). (IPS)

Changing policies

TOKYO - Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi's visit to conflict areas and mine fields in Sri Lanka at the start of the year says volumes about the major changes underway in the country's traditionally conservative policy on foreign aid. The most obvious and recent changes in their emerging peace diplomacy is their involvement in efforts to resolve Asian conflicts and help in the reconstruction efforts afterward. Kawaguchi, the first foreign minister of an industrialised country to visit conflict-torn Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, met leaders and experts on the ongoing peace process.

The review of guidelines for official development assistance announced for mid-2003 is the first since 1992, and comes at a time of falling resources for development assistance as well as global concerns. Japan's aid budget in 2001 stood at \$9.65 billion, down 27.2 percent from the previous year, giving the US the position as the world's top donor that Tokyo used to hold. A further 10 percent cut is estimated for fiscal 2002, which ends next month, with the Foreign Ministry reporting that funds will decrease another 5.8 percent for fiscal 2003. Experts say a successful shift in foreign aid policy would help maximise the impact of Japanese aid even with the financial constraints Tokyo is facing. (IPS)

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Who wants what



MAOISTS

Immediate demands
Round Table Conference
Interim government
Constituent Assembly

Ultimate goal
People's Republic

Interests
Immediate: To share power
Ultimate: To overthrow the present regime

Needs
Philosophically guided
Ideologically oriented
Politically motivated

Power
Disruption
Violence and coercion
Inadequate to bring about total change
Adequate to get partial demands fulfilled

Strong Points
Organised manipulation of information
Mobilisation of youth and women
Organisation and management of militia/guerrillas
Successful disinformation
Use of terror and panic to subdue opponents
Collection and management of financial resources



INDIA

Strengths vis-à-vis Nepal
Geographical location
Cultural/Ethnic/Linguistic affinity
Open border
Dependence on trade and transit
The status offered by the 1950 treaty
Nepalis in its army

Strong aspects
Direct access with the monarchy
Contact and relations with Nepali parties and leaders
Social relations (marital/academic)

Position
Political stability in Nepal
For multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy
Commitment for support, including military
Friendly to all forces
Maoist insurgency domestic affair, but ready to offer any kind of assistance
Declared Maoists terrorists even before Nepal did

Interests
To maintain strategic dominance in Nepal
Economic: Water resources and trade

Needs
To prevent conflict getting out of hand
To maintain its influence
To always maintain its indirect presence
To prevent use of the Nepali soil against India

Himal Khabarpatrika, 13-28 February

National Peace Campaign, a non-governmental organisation, organised a workshop in Pokhara and Kathmandu in January on the theme "Domestic Armed Conflict and Peace Building" involving leaders of major political parties, political scientists and scholars.

They included people like Krishna Khanal of the National Peace Campaign, conflict resolution expert Shivahari Dahal, Chakra Bastola and Narhari Acharya of the Nepali Congress, Jhalanath Khanal and Yubraj Gyawali of the UML, Roshan Karki of the RPP, Sarita Giri of the Sadbhavana Party, Narayan Man



KING

Position
For constitutional monarchy
Publicly in favour of multiparty system
Democrat

Interests
Seeking active role
Reduce their role
Gain internal and external support

Needs
Sideline political parties and reduce their role
Militarisation of the state
To make the monarchy popular and effective
Enhance clout of monarchy through diplomatic means

Strengths
Immaturity and weakness of political parties
History and tradition
Traditional control of army
Support of external factors

हिमाल



UNITED STATES

Position
Support multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy
Conflict resolution through dialogue
Threat to list Maoists as terrorists

Interests
To use Nepal's geo-political situation for its strategic interests
To maintain a favorable system/government
To try to increase its technical/political influence on military through assistance
To balance all of above without jeopardising interests with India

Needs
To keep vigil over China
Growing interest in South Asia

Strengths
An image of a defender of democracy
To work as India's ally vis-à-vis China and Pakistan
China can't do too much to oppose this because of its own economic and trade competition with India



POLITICAL PARTIES

Position
To move towards progressive reforms by protecting the achievements of the People's Movement

Interest
Restoration of the parliament/ elections)

Needs
Set up a popularly accountable government
Agreement between political parties in dissolved parliament
Restoration of peace
A functioning constitution
Immediate government with parties in last parliament

Strengths
Commitment to democracy
Popular support
Philosophical consensus among the parties
International opinion in favour of multiparty democracy

time, became a widow at the age of 26. She now has to raise two daughters, Sadhana and Sijuna, besides her over one-year-old son.

Although all these families mourn the loss of their loved ones, they are faced with more immediate problems. The ones who died were the main breadwinners. With young children and no resources, the future looks bleak. "Who gave them the right to destroy our lives? Will anyone take responsibility for what has been wrested from us?" they ask. No answers seem forthcoming.

No answers



Kantipur, 19 February
Devendra Bhattarai

कान्तिपुर

Their stories are different but they all share the pain of loss.

Sahadev, 16, and Sobhit, 14, lost their father at a time when they needed his support the most. A postman at Tikhanal in Dolakha district, their father Parsuram Rawat was killed by security forces on 4 April last year when he was returning home after delivering letters to nearby villages. The

next day, a senior security officer came home and apologised for their mistake. They thought Rawat was a "terrorist". Despite the acknowledgement of that "mistake", the Royal Nepali Army hasn't given the family any compensation.

Priti, 5, and Sheela, 2, at Laharemane in Thulopatal keep asking when their father is going to come home. Their mother hasn't been able to tell them their father, Buddhiman Pakhrin, is dead. Maoist insurgents killed the 33-year-old on 2 December last year. His fault? He planned to start a boarding school, even deciding to name it after Lord Buddha, without permission from the Maoists. They killed him for his impudence.

Sevak never even met his father, Bhola Khadka. A resident of Charikot, Khadka was killed when hundreds of Maoists raided the Mainapokhari police post where he was stationed two years ago. His wife, Sharmila, who was pregnant with Sevak at that

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"They (the Maoists) think all the political parties should hold unanimous views in context of the present trilateral power balance."

-Narayan Man Bijukchhe, Chairman of Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, after a meeting with the Maoist leaders K B Mahara and D N Sharma. *Space Time*, 20 February.



PEACE TALKS!

बुधवार

Budhabar, 19 February.

Calling the shots

Space Time, 16 February
Madan Mani Dixit

स्वेचलाङ्गम दैनिक

The Maoist insurgency placed Nepal at a crossroad. A member of the present cabinet went so far as to say that the Maoists are responsible for the country's "statelessness". In the present context a number of domestic and external reasons behind the Maoist agreement to a ceasefire can be seen. A major one was the realisation that India was using them to further their own interests. They helped the Maoists reach where they are today. It is obvious that India saw the growing US-UK military assistance to Nepal as a threat and forced the Maoists to opt for peace talks with the Nepali government. The Maoists should have learnt their lesson from history when India forced the late B P Koirala, who launched the pro-democracy movement from Indian soil, out of the country in the 70s. Koirala returned home mouthing

"national reconciliation", just like the Maoists who came to the negotiation table declaring "ceasefire".

Kudos for Chilime

Gorkhapatra, 6 February

गोरखापत्र

The 20 MW Chilime hydropower project is going to set a new direction for the development of Nepal's hydropower. The Rs 2.32 billion project is being constructed at Chilime River in Rasuwa district, and is expected to start test generation from March this year.

An important aspect of this project has been the exclusive use of Nepali capital and manpower. The state-owned Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) owns 51 percent equity in the project and NEA employees own 24 percent of the shares. The rest will be floated on the general market. The project comes as

an example of a successful venture by the Nepali technicians and experts in the country's hydropower sector, otherwise monopolised by foreign technicians and experts. It also sends the message that Nepal is capable of funding national projects without incurring international debts and the conditions that come attached with it.

Through Chilime, the NEA has learned it need not buy costly electricity from independent power producers (IPPs). NEA will buy power from Chilime for Rs 3 per unit—less than half of what it pays to IPPs.

Finally, we have a truly Nepali endeavour to be proud of.

Chilime hydropower plant



Back at Sundarijal >28

"I am homesick more than anything else..."



BP gets into the mundane day-to-day chores of jail life: washing clothes, taking a bath with soap, tallying the accounts with the quartermaster. It irritates him that the papers don't come. Ganesh Man Singh is depressed, but BP can't figure out why. Both analyse one more time why the palace has launched a tirade against them.

Friday, 11 March, 1977

Sundarijal

Today all the government offices remained closed in memory of Ranganath Sharma who died a few days ago—hence no newspaper and not even the usual activities at the gate. A real dull day. I spent two hours in the morning over washing of clothes—a pair of *mailposh* and *suruwal*, a bedsheet and quilt cover, two pillow cases, a vest, a table cloth one towel and three handkerchiefs. In the afternoon I ironed the *mailposh* and *suruwal* and put them all in the cupboard. Washing clothes takes a lot of time and energy—I became very tired and time presses more heavily on my psyche. I feel more lonely, become

more homesick. The loss of energy seems to deplete my psychological reserve of sanguinity too. Today GM too appeared to be depressed and was making depressing comments all the time. He feels that the king or at least the dominant section in the palace which is opposed to us is responsible for the mounting of the tirade against us. (Surya Bahadur Thapa's outburst in Dhankuta and yesterday's editorial of Gorkhapatra on a resolution adopted by the Peoples' Party of India.) I don't at all agree to his point of view. Thapa is India's agent, which must be known to the palace, and as regards Gorkhapatra's editorial, that is not indicative of anything except that...did not like the resolution of the Janata party supporting us. GM who is usually more optimistic than myself is today very depressed—over a reason which is not at all convincing to me. I am homesick more than anything else. I

am not depressed. So far as the political decision of ours is concerned I am more convinced than ever that it has been a correct decision. My problem is psychological more than political and if this isolation is lifted I will have no worry and can carry on almost normally. If only I could meet my people periodically, correspond with them, get books of my choice, and international newspapers and magazines. GM thinks that the present resolution is a temporary affair. If it is, I don't know what worries him.

Saturday, 12 March

[no entry]

Sunday, 13 March

We didn't get any newspapers. This is the third day without newspapers. The captain said the bus left this place before office hours hence the paper could not be collected. The quartermaster submitted the monthly accounts today being the last day of Phalgun—we have overspent the monthly allowance by more than Rs 50. I gave him Rs 39 and asked him to adjust the account next month. We need about Rs 100 per month for miscellaneous expenses. GM will ask him to save this amount from our food allowance (ie, Rs 28 a day). Washed some clothes and had a thorough bath with soap. This is the second complete bath I had since coming here on 31 December 1976. Felt very clean, but feeling cold even with warm clothes.

by TRISHNA RANA

My bundle of joy

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

newborn. He showed no sign of delight. His enthusiasm had all of a sudden drained away. He did not even come to have a glimpse of his first child. Instead, he made his way back to the field, his face small and dim in disappointment.

The birth of a girl child wasn't thought to be an auspicious occasion in our Saaku village. Girl babies were considered worthless: they were a burden to the family.

"Do you know at the neighbouring house Parvati gave birth to a pest? Poor Hari Bahadur and Budi Aama!"

"Chhya, if I was Parvati, the first thing I would have done to this little bundle of garbage was to drown her in the Kundomati River."

This was the gossip that was making its rounds in the village.

Unfortunately, it wasn't just the villagers who considered girls to be troublesome pests. The unwanted birth of a baby girl was pretty well reflected in the overcast environment that our house was shrouded in. I hoped the situation in the house would improve after some time, but it got worse. Late one night my husband came in drunk from the village alcohol shop.

"Acy Parvati, come here! What is this? I have been knocking on the door for the past ten minutes and you come now? Do you expect your husband to wait for you?" He hollered and started jerking my hair and beat me up impulsively in the heat of intoxication. Gradually he started coming home later and later, sometimes at three at night, sometimes at five in the morning and ultimately he returned home less frequently. I did not know where he spent his nights and dared not question him. From the day of my

daughter's birth he made special efforts to make me cry.

"Chhya! This *da* tastes salty and this *gundruk ko jal* is bitter. Take it away! Do you expect me to eat it?" he complained.

My mother-in-law's behaviour towards me also got worse. She was irritated by everything I did. It became extremely difficult to please her. She refused to eat anything that I offered to her, always turning her nose away as if I were offering her some putrid food.

The atmosphere in the house was quite intolerable, but somehow I managed to survive. I was compelled to stay there, because I had a goal to fulfil. I wanted my daughter to have a better life than I did. I didn't want my daughter to swallow her own tears and suffer the taunts of this insensitive society. I didn't want her worth to be measured in the number of sons she gave birth to. Unlike me, she would have a strong spirit, a spirit that would battle against all odds and fight for her rights. I paid little heed to the tittle-tattle in the village and the hard time I was having trying to cope with my indifferent family. Nothing could manipulate me into thinking that my little bundle of joy baby was a curse.

"Trishna, where are you headed to? Have you taken the cattle out to graze? Listen, go upstairs to my room, there are some saris lying around on the floor, wash them properly. Make sure they are clean. Now what are you looking at, go off, do as you're told," Budi Aama ordered.

"Budi Aama, I am taking Trishna to get her admitted into Shanti Bidhya Shram Primary School. Come on chori, it's getting late!"

"School, have you gone mad? What for? There is no need for you to

educate that child. She'll be going to her husband's house in a few years. Then it will be all their responsibility.

Teach her housework and etiquette instead. That will be fruitful to her in her married life. Anyway we need her in the house to feed the cattle and graze them and to run errands. If she goes off, do you expect an old hag like me to toil all day and do all the housework? This is my age to go to Kashi and Haridwar!" she yelled, heating up for another argument.

"Have you seen any of the neighbourhood girls ever going to school? So why is it that only your sweetheart needs to attend school? You don't have to send her!"

I didn't feel it was necessary to answer her questions and start a dispute with her. I knew my girl had better things to do than household chores. She had school to attend. She had a bright future awaiting her with open arms.

My first success came when my daughter secured a first division in her SLC examinations—the first ever girl in Saaku village to even sit for the test. It was a miracle in itself. God's blessings were always with us, but more than that it was my faith in my daughter and in myself that if I had the desire, I could make it happen.

"Parvati, I agreed to let her study. She's passed the SLC now that's it. Enough of school and studying. Education isn't going to help her to find a good groom. It's high time we thought about marrying this girl off. If we delay it any further, no boy will be willing to marry her and we will be stuck with her for rest of our lives! And I don't want to feed an extra mouth forever!" my husband announced. "She's just completed school, what

about college and..."

He cut me short, "I am not going to tolerate anymore nonsense from both mother and daughter. I have decided, she's going to be married by the end of this month, whether you like it or not and that's final. I want no more discussions on this topic. Have I made myself clear?"

Husband dear had made it quite impossible for me to send Trishna to a college in the village but I was not to be so easily defeated. I had promised myself not to falter under any circumstances. I thought about sending Trishna to Kathmandu. Financially it was very hard for me to afford to send her to the city. I sold all the jewellery that I had received as dowry for a handsome amount of money. My daughter had greater value than gold and silver: she was the biggest investment of my life. Due to god's good grace, Trishna received an 80 percent scholarship in Tribhuvan University. From there she went to India where she completed her Masters and a Diploma in law with a 100 percent scholarship.

Yes, it had been a long and gruelling journey. But the hope of freeing my child from the traditional role of daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and mother gave me the courage and determination to move forward. From the moment I first held her, I was convinced that this baby was no ordinary child! And there she was, my daughter, taking her oath as the first female Prime Minister of Nepal. I had come out as a winner in the greatest battle of my life. ♦

(Trishna Rana's story concludes the winners of the British Council Short Story Competition.)

Green Bar of the month

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Tibetan authentic paintings, furniture and ritual objects** at Pathibhara Thangka Art Gallery, Thamel till 10 March. 256004
- ❖ **Festive Moods** by Pradip Kumar Bajracharya at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 25 February at Baber Mahal revisited. 251647
- ❖ **Mapping of Modernity in Nepal** Photography exhibition by Nepal Photography Society. Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal from 10AM-6PM from 5-18 March. wavetex@wlink.com.np

EVENTS

- ❖ **Biking down to Kathmandu** Mountain biking tour from Nagarkot to Shankhu on 1 March. \$20 pp (includes bike, guide, packed lunch, support vehicle, helmet and first aids). www.kmbnepal.com. 539900, 545990
- ❖ **Sundar Shanta Nepal:** Shanti Sangeet Yatra 2059 22 February-8 March. Deep Shrestha, Kunti Moktan, Sapana Shree, Sukmit Gurung and Nepathya. 22 February at Dharan, 24 February at Hetauda, 26 February at Butwal, 28 February at Mahendranagar, 2 March at Tulshipur and 7 March at Kathmandu. Rs 10 Entry. Organised by Himal Association 542544, managed by event nepal-laya 537799.
- ❖ **A Night at Lal Durbar** Musical extravaganza, food and unlimited alcohol. 7-10PM on 28 February. Rs 2,400 for dinner and drinks, Rs 3000 with entry to House of Noise at The Atrium with **DJ Chris David**. House of Noise Rs 1,499. Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248 999 ext. 2865
- ❖ **Love is in the Air** Promote sterilisation of pets. Reduced rates till 14 March. Male dogs and cats Rs 800, females Rs 1,950. 414332.
- ❖ **Jomsom Musical Concert** 23-25 February at Jomsm Mountain Resort, Jomsom Mustang. 496110, 490146.
- ❖ **Organic veggies, herbs, cheese** AAA Gamcha Organic Farm. Saturdays 10AM-2PM at Mike's Breakfast, Naxal. Home delivery available. 631734, aaa@wlink.com.np. www.aaa-organicfarm.org.
- ❖ **The Birthday Cake** Dinner theatre at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 7PM on 6-8 March. Rs 1,500 pp. All proceeds to The Ganesh Foundation.
- ❖ **Charity Bowling** at Bowling Boulevard, Kantipath from 2PM on 22 February. Rs 1,500 pp (includes free drink). All proceeds to Pam Nestling Home. 981032149
- ❖ **Jazzmandu 2003** Fortnight of jazz from 28 February-15 March. Tickets: Upstairs Jazz Bar. 410436

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz at 1905** with **jHOLA** 7PM on 22 February. Rs 300 (includes free drink) at 1905, Kantipath. 981032149
- ❖ **Live music** at Jivin' Joe's Restaurant, Kupondole, Friday at 5PM. Movie every Saturday at 4.30 PM. 539909
- ❖ **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 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336
- ❖ **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

FOOD

- ❖ **Kumari Restaurant and Bar** Mixed menu, imported drinks at affordable prices. Putalisadak. 417958, 422666
- ❖ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant. Lazimpat. 413874
- ❖ **Newari food festival** from 15-23 February at the Summit Hotel, Kupondole.
- ❖ **Rox Restaurant** Italian cuisine on Sundays. Antipasti, main course, pizzas and a dessert buffet. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre, 468589
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza** at Stupa View Restaurant and Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 680083/ 80
- ❖ **Sekuwa Saanjh** Friday BBQ for Rs 555 plus tax per person, one free beer or soft drink. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tea House Combo** Room, breakfast, Nepali thali dinner, swimming, jacuzzi. Rs 700 per head 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** \$55 per person per night (tax included) for accommodation, meals, arrival and departure transfers from Bijaypur, walks, bar snacks and swimming. 01-361500
- ❖ **TGIF** Friday night package at Dwarika's Hotel for \$111 plus tax for double/ \$85 plus tax for single - includes Friday BBQ, overnight stay with breakfast. 479488
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights** Traditional cottage with modern facilities Rs 1,850 pp (dinner and breakfast) Rs 925 per child 5-14 years Web: www.escape2nepal.com Email: shivapuriheights@escape2nepal.com, info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Rs 2,750 pp (all inclusive) 01-361500 TMPL Reservations - Nepali Offer
- ❖ **Bardia National Park - Jungle Base Camp** Pokhara booking office 061 - 32112.
- ❖ **Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse**, near Thimi. Rs 1,200 pp (all inclusive). 631734, aaa@wlink.com.np, www.aaa-organicfarm.org.

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

NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-20-22-2003 03:00 GMT

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Everyone was caught by surprise when a rare giant westerly front passed over the Himalaya bringing the chill of winter back to the country. A low-pressure zone in Pakistan gave the front enough bluster to move eastwards with rain and snow blizzards all the way from Afghanistan to Sikkim. Pakistan experienced winter floods after years. This was our third cold wave, chilling temperatures below normal for this season. Kathmandu can expect a cloudy weekend thanks to the westerly jet stream, but rain is likely to hold off. The weather will improve after that with sunny days and rising daytime temperatures.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
20-03	21-03	22-04	23-04	23-04

BOOKWORM

Sadhus: Holy men of India Dolf Hartsuicker
Thames and Hudson, 1997
Rs 1,430

The author spent many years in close study of these mystics, who form a vital and unbroken link between the birth of yoga many millenia ago and the present day. Hartsuicker traces the historical and mythological roots of the Sadhus. Brilliant photographs accompany a highly readable text.

Sadhus & Saints of Nepal & India T C Majupuria, Rohit Kumar Majupuria
Tecpress Books, 1996
Rs 800

A very comprehensive work on the subject of sadhus in the subcontinent, it discusses concepts of Hinduism, Dharma, Hindu philosophy, self-mortification, Tantra , different kinds of ascetics and their lifestyles.

Auspicious music in a changing society: The Damai musicians of Nepal Carol Tingy
Heritage, 1994
Rs 495

The Damai are thought to be an auspicious caste in Nepal who are professional musicians while their supplementary occupation is tailoring. *Panchai baja* is played exclusively by Damais. The author explores their community, instruments and history.

At the feet of the Goddess Lynn Foulston
Adarsh Books, 2003
Rs 952

At the feet of the Goddess is an investigation of local Hinduism. It embraces ritual, worship and iconography, rather than philosophy and metaphysics, in two communities. In each of these sites, as it is common in within many local communities across India, it is female deities that predominate. This book is a major event in the study of goddess beliefs and practices in India.

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

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Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Sun-Fri	0740- 0800	एकैछिन् (रेडियो पत्रिका)
Sun-Fri	0800- 0830	डबली (विषयगत अन्तरक्रिया)
Sun-Fri	2000- 2030	आजका कुरा (समसामयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800- 0830	शान्ति अभियान
Sat	1930- 2000	आचार विचार (अष्टाचारविरोध सहकार्य)
Sat	2000- 2030	कूटनीतिक मञ्च

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Kathmandu is a great place to be this season. With the beginning of Spring arrives a flurry of activities to get our sap rising. Among the many things to look forward to this month is yet another Yak & Yeti extravaganza. A night at Lal Durbar promises to be a sensation—imagine live performances from international musicians against the sumptuous

baroque backdrop of a palace built over a century ago. Add to that a tempting dinner, good tippie, spectacular lighting and you're beginning to get the idea.

Lined up for the show are The Agents from Australia, Trio Givone from France, Anna Phoebe from the UK and India's all-girl band Caliche. The Agents are from the Land Down Under whose repertoire includes rock, blues and R&B. Ian Farrington, the band leader, has worked with stars like U2, Phil Collins, Rolling Stones and Dire Straits. The rest of the band—Phil Spence, Tim Odea and Rhonda Kay—have played in major music festivals around the world. Trio Givone is one of France's best gypsy

and swing jazz bands. They are renowned for their guitar solos and amazing show of fluid music on rhythmic guitar, contrabass and percussion. Anna Phoebe is something of a phenomenon. She started playing the violin when she was seven and by 16 she was already touring Europe with the Scottish National Youth Orchestra as their youngest member. Anna combines many genres including jazz, rock and soul. Last but not the least is Caliche, a trio from India who have been the opening act for Lou Bega, Diana King and UB40. They will be taking time off from working on their new album to perform at the Yak & Yeti.

With the music taken care off,

gourmet delights are guaranteed by Executive Chef Victor Holla who promises to dish up a multi-cuisine interactive spread at a sit down buffet. There are murmurs of duck teriyaki and chocolate bourbon crepes: delicious decadence from a chef who's motto ("It's difficult to be simple.") makes him a stickler for authenticity. Never one to stint on anything, the Yak & Yeti always lives up to its reputation. With A Night at Lal Durbar, they could top even that. ♦

Tickets for A Night at Lal Durbar will be available from 24 February at Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999 ext. 2865.



Trio Givone

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