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WAR

- Kathmandu's gas stations shut
- Bush awakens the global public
- Blair gambles on war

Full coverage, page 10-11

Times nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 77

Q. Should the main political parties extend more support to the peace process?

Total votes: 928

Weekly Internet Poll # 78. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Has the government done enough after the ceasefire to revive the tourism industry?

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MIN. BAJRAJCHRYA

GASP!

If you knew what Kathmandu air contained, you may want to stop breathing.

HEMLATARA I

The Supreme Court this week said the government is not doing enough to check air pollution in Kathmandu Valley, and ordered a ban on all vehicles 20 years old in two years.

Pressure from green groups and the Supreme Court may be the last hope for Kathmandu's citizens. But unlike New Delhi, where the Supreme Court forced the government to make cleaner CNG fuel mandatory (see page 5), our courts have in the past been uninterested or unable to enforce their own orders. In fact, the Iraq war and the

ensuing fuel shortage may show us how clean Kathmandu's air used to be.

Even so, this week's decision paves the way for action to address worsening pollution. Besides more dust and soot particles, there are new poisonous emissions. Carbon monoxide levels on Kathmandu sidewalks are five times higher than they were 10 years ago. The area of Kathmandu Valley where suspended particulate concentrations of 75 micrograms per cubic metre has doubled in the past five years.

Benzene is the latest poison. This carcinogenic gas is a by-product of the kerosene used to adulterate petrol and diesel. Fuel

adulteration is so blatant and widespread that one survey last year showed half the diesel sold in gas stations in Kathmandu was mixed with subsidised kerosene, while the percentage of kerosene in petrol was 40 percent. Last year, the government formed a task force to look into adulteration, but hasn't licked the problem.

Measurements by the Ministry of Population and Environment (MoPE) show benzene concentrations of nearly 80 micrograms per cubic metre along Kathmandu's main streets. This gas is so harmful that the WHO doesn't even have a minimum safe level for it: it is dangerous in any concentration. Kerosene worth more than Rs 1 billion is mixed with petrol and diesel every year in Nepal. Both fuels are subsidised for the rural poor, but more than 70 percent of the kerosene and diesel in Nepal is used by city dwellers.

MoPE blames lack of funds, which sounds disingenuous considering it could easily raise more than twice its entire budget if it levied a proposed pollution tax of Rs 0.50 per litre of petrol and diesel sold in Kathmandu.

continued ➡ p4-5

Everything on hold for two weeks

ANALYSIS by RAJENDRA DAHAL

All important decisions on the peace process or rapprochement between the palace and the parties are on hold for two weeks. "Only after His Majesty comes back," is the familiar refrain in government and palace circles.

Officially, this is an unofficial royal pilgrimage. The king is visiting various holy temples revered by Hindus as sources of spiritual power. But the Nepali monarch is also meeting sources of temporal power in New Delhi.

Whatever the real purpose of the visit, most Nepalis are convinced that King Gyanendra's is not just seeking divine blessings, but also that of India's political leadership. Otherwise why would he go to India twice in nine months, while Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee hasn't been here on a bilateral visit for five years? (He did attend the SAARC Summit two years ago.)

The royal visit also gives the Maoists breathing space to take stock of the past two months. The king, the parties and the government may seem at perpetual loggerheads, but they are fairly clear about what they want to achieve with the peace process.

This is not so much the case with the Maoists. Two Maoist representatives have been going door-to-door for the past month paying courtesy calls. On Wednesday Krishna Bahadur Mahara even went to the bastion of capitalism, the FNCCI, and assured businessmen that his group essentially supported a free market economy.

Mahara's main message to everyone he meets is: "Trust us this time. We really want peace. Help us." However, the leadership has also been telling its cadre to be prepared for



a last-ditch do-or-die battle. In large parts of the country, the government is still nowhere to be seen, and local Maoist cadre are getting impatient. They are intimidating party leaders and dissenters, saying, "Just you wait, we'll fix you once the ceasefire is over." Still, there haven't been any major violations of the truce agreement.

While the rightists are giving King Gyanendra the credit for the ceasefire, the Maoists are spreading the word that the army wanted a truce after it figured it couldn't defeat the rebel forces. This is one reason the ceasefire is still fragile and there is residual fear.

In their talks with the parliamentary party leadership, Maoist representatives have been eager to give the impression that they are now as powerful as them. However, when talking to opinion makers and intellectuals, the Maoists also express fears that the king may be springing a trap on them, and solicit support.

Many of the Maoists' internal demands have been rejected outright by the king. For instance, they had insisted that the peace talks be held outside the country, but sources tell us King Gyanendra refused. Similarly, the Maoists want to deal through their trusted Western mediators who have been talking to them over the past three years. But Mahara and Sharma now seem suspicious that the palace may slowly want to jettison the mediators.

India has said it doesn't think third-party Western mediation is a good idea, and our officials could be taking their cue from that. But what is intriguing is that in the past six months, the mediators spent more time in New Delhi than in Kathmandu.

And since King Gyanendra is also going to be in India for the next ten days, that is perhaps where we can expect a breakthrough. ♦

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CLEARING THE AIR

Ever since Tyrolean travellers to Nepal in the early 17th century described Kathmandu Valley as “the dirtiest place in the orient” we seem to be trying our best to live up to that status.

That was a time when the entire Valley had no more than a population of 10,000. Today, it has swelled to nearly 1.5 million and it is clear we are now reaching the limits of growth. A metropolis of this size needs either a major river running through it to flush itself, or has to be situated near a sea. We just have three spring-fed streams that by now have turned into sewers.

It is a myth that Kathmandu is a valley. Actually it is a plateau, the terrain beyond the valley rim on all sides dips down to less than 900m. All these natural impediments pale in comparison to the human bungling that has turned one of the most spectacularly-located and culturally-vibrant capital cities in the world into a toilet bowl. The fact that Kathmandu’s old-world charm shines through all the grime, concrete and foul air is a tribute to our ancestors. They left us a legacy of beauty and architectural harmony, but what legacy are we leaving for our grandchildren?

It is said that the test of a civilisation is the way it treats its waste. Well, we don’t treat it. On that count alone, we fail miserably to attain a civilised status. The raw sewage emptying into the Bagmati, the industrial waste that makes this holy river froth at Chobar, and the powerful odour of death over the bridge at Kopundole all remind us of our own callousness.

Then there is the growing garbage crisis, each time we pass the neighbourhood heap, the stench reminds us of our inability to separate and turn its organic constituents into valuable fertiliser, and the failure to stop the growth of non-biodegradables like plastic bags.

Even more shocking is our breathtaking disregard for air quality. As our investigative report in this issue (page 1) makes clear, we are choking ourselves to death. The paradox here is that we know it, we know what should be done about it, we have the laws in place to do it, but we still can’t do it. There are lessons from how New Delhi managed to turn itself from one of the most-polluted cities in Asia to one with one the cleanest air in three years (see page 5).

Here in Nepal we have great laws, the world’s best, in fact. Our zoning laws, the municipality’s architectural guidelines for new housing, the rules for garbage collection. We have emission standards for vehicles, there are supposed to be tariff incentives for electric transport, and fuel adulteration is a crime.

Yet, every 30 litres of diesel sold in Kathmandu’s gas stations has 15 litres of kerosene mixed with it. This is kerosene supposedly subsidised to make energy more affordable for the rural poor. What is coming out of the tail pipes of the buses and cars on our streets is therefore benzene, an invisible carcinogenic gas.

Take a peek at the furnaces of the brick kilns on the town’s outskirts: they are burning plastic trash and old tyres to bake bricks. Think about that the next time you buy a lorry load of bricks. Or the next time you take a deep breath. And then think again what we can all do as responsible citizens.



Kathmandu, the responsibility on Sir Jeffrey’s shoulders is indeed onerous. But he will not go very far in his new role if he takes it up as just another errand of carrying out the white-man’s burden. Kathmandu isn’t Kampala. If that is not obvious enough inside the “koi-hai” complex at Lainchaur, the special rep must remember that Nepal is one of only two countries in Asia that were

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Sir Jeffrey’s mission

History has shown that democracies with qualifiers like “basic” or “guided” are dangerous delusions.

With his haughty tone, gruff manners and condescending attitude, Sir Jeffrey James appears to represent the quintessence of British colonialism. The towering stature and aquiline nose of the newly-appointed British special representative for Nepal gives him the persona of an imperious patriarch.

But what really completes the picture is Sir Jeffrey’s barely-concealed contempt for politicos of the nether world. Small wonder then, that Kenyan president Daniel Arap Moi heaved a sigh of relief when the time came for Sir Jeffrey to complete his term as British high commissioner in Nairobi.

The special rep is said to have special rapport with the top brass of Bretton Woods institutions. He is believed to have enthusiastically supported the agenda of the Washington Consensus in Africa, sometimes even overstepping diplomatic norms to promote them. That acquaintance and experience should come in handy for us in his new responsibility as the British special representative for Nepal.

Since no other country or institution has a co-ordinator for post-conflict relief, rehabilitation and re-construction in



never colonised. We Nepalis do not know enough to accept our ignorance, hence Sir Jeffrey must get rid of his know-it-all attitude if he is to succeed in his new assignment.

It is somewhat encouraging that the coordinator refers to himself in the lordly third person singular “one” rather than the royal plural “we”. This detachment may come in handy, since an intermediary harbouring biases about party politics is unlikely to see the crises of Nepal in their proper perspective.

While it is true that elections in the past haven’t succeeded in weeding out undesirable elements, it’s fatal to presume that the remedy lies in contemplating some kind of a third world version of democracy with a limiting prefix. History has shown that democracies with qualifiers like ‘basic’ or ‘guided’ are dangerous delusions.

What we need is more democracy, not less. To ensure that there is a better representation of all communities and more participation by all classes in the governance of the country, Nepal has to forge ahead on the road of political pluralism. The pause caused by the royal take-over of 4 October has already outlived its utility.

Before we begin to contemplate structural changes in the system, the country must return to the status quo of a functioning constitution first. To move forward, it’s necessary to turn around and face the front. Political exigency of the moment is restoration of people’s sovereignty, not some fanciful tinkering with

the statute based on biases from somewhere else in the world.

The real challenge lies in finding a common ground where peaceful politics and the unbridled ambitions of armed insurgents can coexist. Maoists must not be allowed to retreat to their lawless ways. But if the price to be paid for their accommodation is a curtailment of political liberty, the choice must be left upon us Nepalis. A donor coordinator cannot be a viceroy.

The fundamental problem in Nepal is institutionalised inequality. Graft is a symptom of widespread social corruption, not its primary cause. Treating the symptom may be tempting, but countering root causes of corruption needs long-term commitment. It needs political will, something that can’t be dispensed by an outside consultant. If “one” gets too worked up about bribery, “one” wouldn’t be able to pay enough attention to urgent post-insurgency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

To derisively dismiss the Nepali administrative machinery is the done thing in Kathmandu’s donor circles. It’s not clear how immediate relief can be delivered to insurgency-hit districts without depending upon the functioning of that same bureaucracy. Steps to reform governance are necessary, but relief measures can’t wait for that.

The special rep’s good offices are more important for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed by the Maoists. Here, his close familiarity with multilateral funding agencies and the London base may come to good use. Once these measures begin to be implemented, Sir Jeffrey will find a more receptive audience for his long-term plans of shoring up Nepal’s armed forces, reforming bureaucracy and institutionalising good governance.

History exempted Nepal from the benefits of benign British colonialism, so we are yet to learn that nothing but pure beneficence inspires British officialdom. Kenyan journalists used to refer to Sir Jeffrey as a “straight-talking” high commissioner. What we need here is a sincere peace coordinator. ♦

each district. Women there want this issue to be included in the agenda for the peace process. It is clear that even if the combatants on both sides could not control the sexuality of their personnel, they have to own up to the fact and take responsibility for looking after the women and children.

Sources have told us there are several senior police officers who have married second or third wives while posted in the districts. Affected wives have approached the National Commission for Women to prepare stricter legislation so women will think twice before marrying an already-married officer.

Some Maoist sources have also approached the commission to investigate cases of alleged rape and pregnancies of women prisoners while in army or police custody. After an investigation, the commission found no cases of rape-related pregnancy, but human rights activists said that Maoist women who have been raped or made pregnant had not been imprisoned. In one tarai and one hill district, two Maoist girls revealed to us that they had been raped by their own comrades.

In Kailali, Devi had been brutally and repeatedly raped while in military custody and then disappeared. Devi’s parents think she is dead. These cases need to be investigated, perpetrators identified and punished. Otherwise, there is a great danger we will have yet another set of war victims: brutalised women, heart-broken girls with fatherless children. This will be another category of Nepali women needing psychological and legal counselling and welfare support. ♦

(Dr Durga Pokhrel is the chairperson of the National Commission for Women who recently returned from a tour of the western districts. The names of women have been changed to protect their identity.)



Nepal’s war babies

Love in the time of war: legacy of seven years of conflict.

Sita is a pretty 25-year-old woman with lovely honey-hazel eyes. Her husband is a police guard at a jail in western Nepal who left her to elope with a Maoist prisoner. Sita came to the National Commission for Women last week with her two children to seek help. “Once they have children, he will abandon her just like he left me,” says Sita.

During the last seven years, we have heard harrowing tales of people killed and orphaned by the insurgency. But not much about babies born from relationships between security forces, Maoists and local women.

After a recent tour of the midwest, it is clear that Nepal’s problem of war babies is similar to the Amerasian children left behind in Vietnam.

In Bardia alone at least 300 security forces personnel have eloped in “gandharbha bibaha” with local girls. The young women don’t seem to want to know whether the men are already married, nor do our sipais reveal their existing marital status. The lucky ones are picked up by unmarried soldiers. But, even then, the problem with this kind of marriage is that they can neither register with the local authorities—which in most cases are non-existent or non-functional—nor can they have a traditional marriage.

Then, there’s always the sudden surprise when the girls wake up one morning to find that their secret lovers have been transferred during the night sans consort. Some of the women are pregnant when left behind, and have no idea where their husbands have gone. Uma in Daddeldhura married a member of the Armed Police Force, but he left suddenly one day. “I don’t know where he has been transferred to,” Uma says, “all I know is that he had a police cut, was sturdy and muscular and the dates he was posted here.” She has his name, at least the name he told her, and there is no other identity she can use to chase him through the police bureaucracy. Surprisingly, it was Uma’s

mother who encouraged her to date the paramilitary officer.

Uma’s mother says, “Poor policeman, nobody of his here, *chori* was kind to him.” Mother even vacated the house to facilitate things. And for Uma, one thing just led to another.

Many women of various ages in towns across western Nepal express sympathy for men in uniform. They did not care who they were, it was almost as if they fell in love with the camouflage fatigues. In Rolpa, a woman shopkeeper says she believes that in times of crisis it is her duty to support the soldiers. “We have to be friendly and loving to men in uniform to boost their morale,” she says. If the women are willing, it seems natural that the men—lonely, afraid and homesick—fall for their affection.

However, there are many cases of abandoned and pregnant women, and mothers left behind with their babies. It’s the same old story: as long as the girl doesn’t get pregnant, the relationship seems secure and romantic.

Even if abandoned, the woman has the hope that her soldier will return. But if she is pregnant or already has her baby, and the “husband” is nowhere to be seen, she faces stigmatisation and becomes a pariah in the village.

There is no official count of how many abandoned women and babies there are throughout our war zones, but on a brief recent visit we estimated hundreds in

LETTERS

PEACE AT ANY COST?

no-holds-bared devotion to Gijrja Prasad Koirala, his support for the prime minister in the murky Lauda Air deal casts doubts about his integrity. Also, we see Pun as a ladder climber who jockeys to put himself in the corridors of power. It is clear that it is not all selflessness and humility that has got this man to where he is today.

Naresh Sharma, email

● Narayan Singh Pun is the first ethnic politician in Nepal who is not a token official handpicked by the elite in Kathmandu to be just a janjati face. Pun is self-made, works hard, has integrity and has just the right dose of ambition to make a difference in not just the peace process but also in Nepal’s future political development. I wish there were more people like Pun, then we wouldn’t have to worry about governance.

Susan Pradhan, email

● I agree with your editorial sentiment that the political parties are morally bankrupt. (‘Give peace a chance’, #136) They have been selfish and greedy, and have never thought about the people. There is a limit to everything, and they crossed that limit. When King Gyanendra did us all a favour by sacking Prime Minister Deuba, it proved that good can triumph over bad. Now, the Nepali people have to get up and lend a hand to establish peace. The political parties are once more trying to stop the process because they want to be in power. Can I use your letter column to ask them a simple question: If you can’t even govern your own party, how can you govern the country? We cannot just throw away this chance for peace. Let us all support the government’s peace effort.

Buddhi Pant, Coventry, UK

IRAQ
Re: “The bubble of American supremacy”, #136. No matter how much we praise the self-appointed world police in the guise of the United States of America, its actions in the recent days have shown that its main focus is the ever vague “American interest”. It is not world peace which concerns USA. All that benefits the American society, is what seems to guide American policy.

Bhumika Ghimire, Kathmandu

● Daniel Lak’s “Even hawks are squirming” (#135) implies that the end of the Iraqi crisis would be if Saddam were to go (of own will or by force). He justifies this by, among other things, citing Saddam’s use of “poison gas on his own people”. Is that something worse than using atomic bombs on others, like the US did during WW II?

Sorry to say this, but here’s the bottom line on why the US (supported by its close ally Britain) wants to go to war:

a) The collective wish of the American (white Anglo-Saxon, mainly) people to avenge the 9/

So, finally we have peace. We all wanted peace, even the Maoists. Whatever their stated declared aspirations, the palace, security forces, Maoists, political parties and all Nepalis want peace. But before we go headlong into this process, we should stop just a moment to reflect upon what kind of peace we want? Is it to be peace at any cost? Are we to hazard the future for a respite in the present? Indeed, which side is more desperate for a respite? Do our negotiators really know what they are risking? Doubtless, the country has suffered and a solution is required. You cite the “lessons” we can learn from Sri Lanka (“Lessons from Lanka”, #135), but the government there is bending over backwards to accommodate the Tamils.

Has our army fought for 20 years and brought to its knees? Did it look like we will never win? Are we a failed state with a dysfunctional military where the balance of power reflects the reality of having to draw a line of control or a zone of separation? Are we really so desperate as a nation that we have to allow a minister of dubious moral and alleged family ties to the Maoist military leader to deal on our behalf? It is now an open secret that the announcement of the ceasefire was a surprise, not just to the political parties and the army but the cabinet itself. This implies that the deal is actually done and the talks are just a formality, which the minister himself has tacitly implied. Does the palace have the legitimacy, credibility or right to gamble on our future? Do the sacrifices till this day have no meaning? Shouldn’t the political parties with popular representation or the army which shed blood to make this day possible have a say?

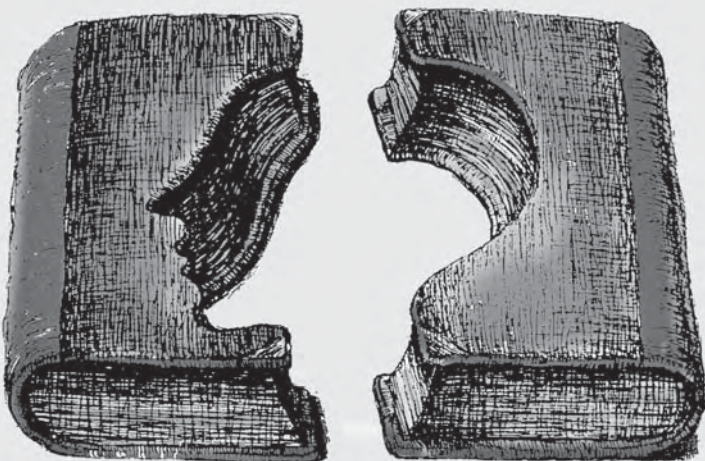
Having reached its peak during the surprise attack on Dang, which finally dragged the army into equation, the Maoists, despite few measured successes, were slowly but surely being pushed back militarily. Not employing the army when the police was being butchered was an unforgivable neglect. After their

Jumla and Rumjatar misadventures the Maoists lost a lot of their men, they were running low on ammunition, food, medicines, recruits, morale and (most importantly) on popularity. News of army mass recruitment, induction of helicopters, US military advisory personnel and weapons on regular basis cannot have made their perception of the future any rosier. Moreover the increasing dominance by the security forces on the battlefield meant a proportional decrease of their playground and freedom of action. In simple terms, the Maoists are and ought to be far more desperate for ceasefire.

They need a safe landing now, while they still retain a chance to get some votes. They know deep inside that if they miss the boat this time, they will have to come in for talks on their knees the next time around. On that note, the army seems to have achieved the aim of “creating an environment for talks”. So, how wise was it to surrender the advantage gained through 15 months of blood, sweat and toil? The code of conduct, even the small bits of it that have been leaked, contains aspects more characteristic to a ceasefire induced by insurmountable stalemate—like Sri Lanka. And it is atrocious to even think of integrating the Maoists into the army.

What we need to contemplate is that when the entire mechanism of governance almost collapsed, when even the palace had its own demeaning crisis, we all had in the army (for all its faults) one institution that lived together, a pillar for the nation to lean on. Instead of thanking it, we are hell-bent on compromising it in the name of peace. Peace at what cost? Hopefully, we are not naïve enough to believe that the Maoists have changed their spots. The palace, political parties, the army and more importantly we the people should not compromise on integrating the Maoists into the army. This is supposed to be a ceasefire, not a surrender.

iAnili, Ohio University



11 attacks on the US. So far, they have been unable to find a solid jaw to whack; attacking Iraq would satisfy that urge.
b) The US would like to redraw the world map to suit its strategic goal of controlling the vast oil wealth Iraq possesses.

S Pal, email

MAJOR INJUSTICE

Re: “Visas and Advisories” (Letters, #136) by Chris Lebonne. I have been bringing foreign groups to raft on the Karnali River, and stay in the hotels at Bardia National Park for a few years now. I was there this year, and heard a similar story about the local army major taking “protection money” from each of the hotels there. He even called a meeting of the local hotel association to make his demands, all of whom meekly agreed to make monthly payments of Rs 1-3,000. Incidentally, when the Maoists came to extort money from the hotels, they asked nicely and even gave receipts! It’s about time the army seriously look at the behaviour of its senior staff, because it needs the support of the people, not the fear and loathing they currently have in Bardia. All money collected by this major should be returned and the matter thoroughly investigated. I have the utmost faith in the people of Nepal, and the only reason I am writing this

is that I know that those who want to complain about this gross injustice cannot.
Steve England, UK

● I think it’s unrealistic to expect the head of security forces in remote areas not to expect some support from local bodies such as hotels (“Letters”, #136). They receive little funds, probably irregularly from the central government in Kathmandu, and it is for the benefit of these local hotels that the army exists surely?
Jackie Moon-Shrestha, Kathmandu

● I would like to ask a few open questions that may seem a bit naïve from a Nepali who has been out of Nepal for over two years now. I take it that the army receives funds from the government in Kathmandu? If not, do the local populations now have to fundraise to support security

CORRECTION

Due to a layout error, the title strip of “Wanted: Nepali Managers” on page 7 of #136 went missing. The article was the fortnightly column, *Economic Sense*, by Ashutosh Tiwari. – Ed.

● The correct website for SPACAN in “Holy Cow” (#136) is www.fospcan.org.np.



“What are we waiting for?”

- A frustrated electrical vehicle operator in Kathmandu.



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

➔ from p1

Three years ago, the government decided to ban two-stroke vehicles, three-wheelers and commercial vehicles older than 20 years in Kathmandu. Minister Kamal Chaulagain who promised “bold steps” when he took office six months ago, says MoPE is in the “final stages” of carrying out that promise.

The government’s inability to stop adulteration is even more glaring, it has time and again buckled under the pressure of the petroleum dealers’ lobby which wants to keep on adulterating petrol and diesel because it says there is no profit margin in selling it pure.

“It is clearly a case of sheer negligence and inefficiency on the government’s part to resist the pressure from the lobby groups,” says Bhushan Tuladhar of the pressure group, Clean Energy Nepal.

Nepal’s successful experiment with emission-free electric vehicles is also in danger of unravelling. Chinese-donated trolley buses, which initially served up to 88 percent of the daily commuters in the Tripureswor-Surya Binayak route, was shut down last year after 25 years of profitable operations. The number of locally manufactured three-wheel electric vehicles (EV) have reached 600 in Kathmandu, and have become

popular with commuters as well as transporters.

The National Transport Policy emphasised the promotion of environment-friendly vehicles, but once again it seems to be just lip service. New four-wheeler EVs are languishing in garages because the government has yet to approve of a six month trial period. “What are they waiting for?” asks one frustrated EV operator.

Five Indian made EVs have been held at Birganj customs since last March. Confused MoPE experts delayed the process not knowing that “battery operated” and “electric vehicles” are one and the same, and therefore

entitled to unobstructed entry after paying 10 percent customs duty. Thanks to the bungling, the duty increased 10-fold, ruining the market value of EVs.

The government’s failure to improve mass transit lies at the heart of Kathmandu’s pollution problem. When the valley’s 120,000 commuters can’t find a reliable and cheap method of transportation, they will use old private buses, inefficient petrol three-wheelers, motorcycles or cars. The traffic jams they cause means the engines burn fuel less efficiently and cause more pollution.

A car emits 90 times more carbon monoxide than a bus to

Kathmandu’s killer kilns

In March 2002, the Industrial Development Board decided to phase out obsolete kilns from Kathmandu. They also set up a committee to inspect brick kilns and take action against illegal kilns. Well accustomed to the government’s lethargy, the owners continue to operate the units. MoPE’s own study shows that about 82 percent of the total suspended particulate in the Valley’s air comes from these kilns.

At present 98 brick kilns are registered with the government, but activists have counted more than double that number operating illegally. The sudden boom in real estate construction encourages illegal manufacture of bricks. According to a 2001 study by Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO) just about everyone living in the vicinity of a brick kiln in Bhaktapur suffers from respiratory problems.

Another study by Clean Energy Nepal last year in Bhaktapur’s Jhaukhel VDC found the concentration of particulate matter in the air was three times higher in the brick kiln areas than elsewhere. “Our health and livelihood is at stake and the government is just not interested,” says an angry Sunil Karki, a Bhaktapur resident who has filed a public writ in the Supreme Court to shut illegal brick kilns.

Besides being eye sores, brick kilns affect health, flight movement at the airport and also destroy soil fertility. A study last year showed that agricultural production decreased by half once the kilns exhausted the clay and moved on. (Hemlata Rai)

carry the same number of people over the same distance. A two-wheeler is marginally less at 49 percent, and three-wheeler at 60 times the emission of carbon monoxide.

The contribution of vehicles to Kathmandu’s overall pollution is now overtaken by new brick kilns that scar the landscape around Bhaktapur and in Lalitpur district along the southern fringes of the valley. A construction boom in Kathmandu has fuelled the spread of the brick kilns, which bake fertile Kathmandu valley clay by burning tyres, plastic garbage and low-grade coal.

Things got so bad, and there is so much frustration with

official inaction, that residents of Bhaktapur last year decided to take the law into their own hands and demolished polluting kilns near their homes. The stacks are arrayed along the southern approaches to Kathmandu airport, and air traffic controllers report poor visibility till noon, even though Kathmandu’s winter fog used to clear by mid-morning.

Many flights have been re-routed, or forced to make longer and more expensive instrument approaches. Meteorological data shows that the number of days per month with visibility more than eight km at noon in Kathmandu has gone down to 2,

compared to 22 in 1970. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



Pirates of the past



proof of the importance of history. Events there recycle themselves with nasty regularity. Yet outside powers rarely learn from past folly. Who cannot read about the assassination of Zoran Djindic, the pro-Western Prime Minister of Serbia, redolent as it is of the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914, the spark that touched off World War I. It’s not so much that another European conflagration on that scale looms now; it’s that Serbia was where the West last attempted to impose liberal democracy on an apparently unwilling

Spare a moment for history and think on how little has changed.

society, a people to whom the past is more important than the future.

There’s not much to compare between Gaval Prinzip, the Serbian nationalist whose “shot heard round the world” killed Archduke Ferdinand, and the gangsters who evidently murdered Prime Minister Djindic, but both spurn what is widely assumed to be reality, and the modern age. Both yearn for the battlefields of the past. Both take individual actions that plunge whole societies into turmoil. Nothing since 1914 has lessened the Balkans’ propensity to set off larger fires.

Finally, in a doom-laden week, I look with eerie feelings of vicarious deja vu on the latest mystery disease that’s spreading panic outward from East Asia. As I write, there are at least 100 cases and several deaths being blamed on a new flu from Hong Kong or Shanghai. Long haul jet aircrafts have helped spread this as far afield as Canada, Slovenia and Germany. There is no cure. Yet I can’t help but wonder if the real disease isn’t good old Orientalism, the belief that exotica, mystery and horror all come from east of Suez, as Rudyard Kipling might have put it. In this case, the latter, a horrible disease, the latest in a long line of flu’s from the east. In fact the world’s worst influenza outbreak of all time, between 1918 and 1920, came from Spain, not quite the Orient but in those days a country of almost feudal health and social standards. An Orient for the times, if you will.

As George W Bush, Tony Blair and Jose Maria Aznar of newly modern Spain face down the Babylonian Barbary pirate, Saddam Hussein, spare a moment for history, and think on how little has changed. Even if the “coalition of the willing” ignores the past at their peril. ♦



How Delhi did it

Residents of India’s capital lobbied and won the right to breathe cleaner air.

HEMLATA RAI in NEW DELHI

Till two years ago, visitors to New Delhi used to compare the pollution in India’s capital to the notoriously bad air of Mexico City. No more.

New Delhi has transformed itself in that time from a cesspool of putrid air to a much healthier city with fresh air. “Clear and green” is just a slogan in Kathmandu, there they have actually gone and done it. And it didn’t just happen overnight, the charge was led by an activist Supreme Court that acted because the government was too afraid to.

By the 1990s it was apparent that years of neglect and urbanisation had finally caught up with the city. New Delhi’s lessons for Kathmandu is that judicial intervention actually works, but it also needs civil society, public pressure and media. Delhi municipality started by closing down polluting industries, brick kilns, hot mix plants and stone crushers. Then the Delhi government implemented a series of environment-friendly legislative and judicial directives including the introduction of unleaded petrol, upgrading diesel quality, enforcing mandatory testing of vehicular emission and requiring public transport vehicles to run on compressed natural gas (CNG).

Like in Delhi, the main culprits of air pollution in Kathmandu are obsolete vehicles and adulterated fuel. Nepali officials individually are appalled by the threat to public health, but always pass the buck. “The Delhi experience and what is happening here shows that the authorities will not make a move unless combined pressure compel it to do so,” says Prakash Mani Sharma, a public interest lawyer and the executive director of the legal pressure group, Pro-Public.

Even though New Delhi’s pollution levels are today well within permissible limits, there was opposition, even transportation strikes, by bus and taxi cartels. Factory owners and workers, carmakers, auto-rickshaw drivers and bus-owners have all locked horns with the Delhi government at one time or another.

One of the biggest conflagrations was over the compulsory conversion to CNG. Government procrastination and the lackadaisical attitude of auto-rickshaw, taxi and bus operators meant that a years-old Supreme Court directive went ignored until the last

moment. As a result, when finally the much-postponed deadline for conversion arrived on 31 March 2001, fuel suppliers and transporters were caught unprepared. On the first day of April, public transport ground to a halt, with only a fourth of Delhi’s 12,000 buses having converted to CNG.

Tensions boiled over by 3 April with auto and taxi unions going on strike, government buses were vandalised, and rumours of sabotage did the rounds as the tanks of some CNG buses blew up. In the face of this chaos, Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit declared that her government was ready to “face punishment for contempt of court” but would not allow citizens to suffer.

She publicly denounced CNG as an “untried and untested” fuel and declared that its safety was “questionable”. The uncertainty continued for months. Queues more than 2 km long formed at the roadside as harried auto-rickshaw and bus drivers spent nights on end trying to get their vehicles full. Only a few stations stocked the new fuel, and erratic supply meant that even at these, it would often run out.

But the supply and distribution bottlenecks have now been removed, and two years later Delhi’s public transport system is much more efficient. And cleaner.

“The trick is to convince the general public that it is possible to clean the air. It will automatically create pressure for the politicians and bureaucracy to understand that environment is a part of good governance,” activist Sunita Narain of the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment told us.

Studies show that between 1980 and 2000, India’s GDP doubled, but in the same period vehicular pollution increased 8 times and industrial pollution was four times. The general population became victims. The World Bank estimated that air pollution kills 7,500 people annually in Delhi.

Another World Bank study for Kathmandu Valley in 1996 calculated that the monetary impact (through deaths and sickness) was Rs 200 million per year—excluding long-term impact on tourism and the effect of leaded emissions on intelligence of children. Considering that pollution levels are today several times higher, the toll would also be much higher. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Bilateral assault

A Nepal-India joint army team will attempt to climb the Sagarmatha and Lhotse this April, to mark the golden jubilee year of Hillary and Tenzing’s successful ascent of the world’s highest peak in 1953. Lt Colonel Surya Sen Thakuri of the Royal Nepali Army and Colonel Ashok Abbey (see pic) of the Indian Army will jointly lead a 34-member army team, supported by 26 additional climbers. The team will climb Everest from the south-east ridge and Lhotse from the west. The government has waived its \$50,000 royalty fee for this joint expedition team.



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

Radio Sagarmatha launches “Buy-a-brick”

Radio Sagarmatha, the first community FM radio station in South Asia, has launched a fund-raising drive to build its own premises. Inspired by South African and Dutch delegates who took part at a recent international conference here of community broadcasters, the Patan-based radio is airing a fundraising campaign this week in which donors can pledge money to help the station to have its own building and become self-sufficient. Listeners can call in and pledge money to buy bricks.

“We have already collected donations worth Rs 300,000 in the first two days of the campaign,” says the station’s Bhubendra Basnet. Architect Keshab Bidari has offered to design the proposed building for free, while Oxfam Nepal donated over Rs 60,000. Sagarmatha FM 102.4 started in 1997 and now has over one million listeners in Kathmandu Valley, and has promoted public debate on governance, corruption and environmental issues. Bhairab Risal, a senior journalist at the station says, “Money should not be the problem. The challenge now is to give continuity and retain credibility.” The campaign aims to raise Rs 2.5 million.

Pension hike

All ex-British Gurkha servicemen and their widows will receive an increase of 12 percent on their current pension with effect from 1 April this year, an announcement by the British government said this week. “The latest increase is above the rate of inflation in Nepal and demonstrates the British government’s continued commitment and concern for the welfare of its ex-servicemen in Nepal,” said the British Embassy in Kathmandu. Since the 100 percent increase to British Gurkha pensions in 2000, the annual pension increase each year has been over 10 percent, which has ensured British pensions have kept pace with the cost of living in Nepal, the statement said.

Children benefit

MS Nepal (Danish Association for International Cooperation) in partnership with Backward Society Education (BASE) is launching a comprehensive education project for the children of former Kamaiyas (bonded laborers) and other disadvantaged groups in the mid-western district of Bardia. The five-year project will cover six VDCs and Guleriya municipality to work through the existing government school system. Approximately Rs 60 million of the funds originates from Danish high school students’ fund-raising campaign, “Operation a Day’s Work 2002”. In 2001, MS Nepal and BASE won the bid to be the project beneficiary in a competition with two other proposals for education projects.

Iraq fallout

Nepali workers eager to go to Kuwait for work will have to wait till the war clouds dissipate. The government has suspended migrant workers from going there because of the threat of an invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition. The government is also likely to ban Nepalis from visiting other Gulf countries in the event of an actual war. The estimated 300,000 Nepalis, working in the Middle East, contribute nearly Rs 30 billion annually in remittances to the country’s economy.

Fishy assets

The properties of nearly 2,000 public servants and politicians have come under the suspicion of the high level Judicial Commission for Property Investigation (JCPI) which investigated over 30,000 records of those who held public office since 1990.

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Peace jitters

You can see them looking over the shoulder, under the table, behind the curtain and reading between the lines. Our leaders appear as clueless as the rest of us when it comes to current affairs. Three of the four major mainstream bosses who insisted they would accept nothing less than a joint audience with King Gyanendra opted for individual consultations.

From reports appearing in Nepali Congress-friendly press, it seems the facilitator was CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. His contention that rejecting one-on-one meetings with the monarch in the post-ceasefire context would be disrespectful of the crown and a dereliction of duty. The exhortation impressed Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and Nepal Workers and Peasants Party chief Narayan Man Bijukche. United People's Front leader Amik Sherchan chose to stick with the original stance, ostensibly because he had the least to lose.

As the trio got back together to compare notes, pro-Koirala quarters started suggesting that Nepal had played a more active and less altruistic part in seeking a patch-up with the palace. Having tamed Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli and tormented Bam Dev Gautam within the party, Nepal evidently felt confident enough to mount another bid for the premiership. Chand, too, was happy to use his good offices once he got Nepal's personal word that all four

Political leaders appear as clueless as the rest of us when it comes to what happens next.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Krishna Bahadur Mahara being welcomed with bouquets at the FNCCI by Binod Shrestha and Rajendra Khetan. Mahara said he supported a free market system.

would attend. Given the circumstances, Nepal's ability to make good on 75 percent of his pledge must have gone well with the premier.

We shouldn't be uncomfortable with the ease with which the ex-leader of the opposition asked the premier to schedule an appointment with the king. Nepal may not recognise Chand in his official capacity, but he knows

the value of informality at a time when proximity to power equals the real thing. Moreover, most of the leaders who have been boycotting Chand's all-party conferences regularly receive the premier at home or accept his phone calls.

Before we could contemplate the mainstream's next move, though, the Maoists stepped in and firmly

positioned themselves on both camps. Through the code of conduct, they have committed themselves to fostering far-reaching change with palace representative Narayan Singh Pun. As part of the Eleven Reds, they have fortified the campaign to preserve the gains of 1990. For now, Dina Nath Sharma is taking care of the parliamentary flank. To sense the

significance of Sharma's deputation, it's not enough to read his latest plea for selfless contributions from the three power centres to prevent Nepal from becoming an alien nation.

You have to recall how he went on BBC Hindi Service last May to retract Prachanda's reported ceasefire offer, arguing that the rebels would have to be crazy to do that while they were winning the war. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who went on CNN six months later to castigate world leaders for lacking ideological conviction, is dropping clear hints of a revision of the Maoist stance on the monarchy.

Politicos of all persuasions have been re-reading US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Donald Camp's remark that Nepal is one of the few places in the world where American, Chinese and Indian interests are in perfect consonance. (Just in case you missed it, Camp met Chand on 21 October to assure him of continued American support, while the newly disenfranchised political class was making fun of the new premier's failure to win international recognition.)

Considering the Bush-Blair convergence on the post-9/11 world, we probably shouldn't read too much into Camp's omission of Britain in that particular sentence. In any case, Britain's special representative for Nepal, Sir Jeffery James, arrived to express confidence that everyone would support the peace process. Indian Ambassador

Shyam Saran, despite his clear reservations on the desirability of third-party mediation (*Nepali Times* interview, #136) agrees Nepal needs a supportive international environment. China, maintaining its characteristic circumspection, must have conveyed its considerations to the concerned quarters.

Amid the confusion reigning supreme left, right and centre, one thing stands out. When the joint audience takes place, our leaders would demand a reinstatement of the House of Representatives and the setting up of an all-party government, though not necessarily in that order. That would effectively rule out the possibility of the Maoists' heading the new government, something Comrade Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai have been alluding to from the moment the truce took effect. Having come this far for peace, they might accept the ground realities. How would that affect the rebels' morale? Or Chand's? Most Nepalis are in favour of an all-party government (*Nepali Times*/Nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Opinion Poll # 76). Some 13 percent of the respondents want parliament restored. Over twice that number prefer to see the Chand government continue until the next polls. After all we've been through these seven years, we know for sure that no concern is inconsequential enough to be ignored. ♦



ECONOMY

“An Iraq war is a problem for tourism.”



Managing director of President Travels and Tours and General Sales Agent of the Gulf Air in Kathmandu, Bhola Bickram Thapa, doesn't mince words when talking about the challenges facing Nepal's tourism, especially now that the war in Iraq has begun. He also spoke to *Nepali Times* about things that need to be done for long-term tourism development.

Nepali Times: What could be the impact of a US-led war against Iraq on our tourism industry?

Bhola Bickram Thapa: The chief of the Gulf Air recently said that his airline would operate normally even during the period of war. But it is definitely going to create problems for our tourism. After the ceasefire, the Kathmandu-based embassies had changed their travel advisories, from "Don't Go" to "Use Caution". The attitude of international travellers has changed a lot over the last few years, but the number of Nepal-bound tourists from the US, Europe and Japan will be affected if war breaks out. The severity of its impact will depend on how long it lasts.

Is this going to negate the gains of the ceasefire announcement?

That remains to be seen. But we are very optimistic about the ceasefire and hold a positive attitude. It looks like the black clouds have finally moved away and one can see rays of hope. There have been signs of improvement after the ceasefire. The most important thing is that we are getting inquiries from overseas. This shows foreigners are interested to visit Nepal again. On our part, we have already sent messages saying that things have changed here. We are looking forward to better days ahead. But this does not imply that tourists will come back to Nepal in huge numbers that easily.

Have we been able to convey the message that Nepal is a safe destination?

People involved in the tourism industry have been trying to convey to the world that things are not bad as the media portrays. A Sri Lankan entrepreneur once told me that their media used to carry news saying so many people got killed and the location, which was 500 km away from Colombo, would be written almost as an aside. Such things happen everywhere. I do not mean to say that the media should not give facts and figures. They, however, should be very careful in presenting the information. Every hotel and travel agency in Nepal sent out information to their clients on the improvement of the situation.

So, what else do we need to do?

At the moment Nepal is being carefully watched by the outside world. People will scrutinise us for three to four months to see if the ceasefire holds. The good thing is that the ceasefire was announced at a time when tour operators were preparing their tour packages. Most of them had taken out Nepal, we had to convince them to put Nepal back in their list. They may not have 30-day programs but the possibility of three to four-day tours are still there. Our tourism industry has been constantly hit since the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight in December 1999. But we always asked ourselves, "How bad can it get?"

Why is the tourism industry so sensitive?

The main reason is because we have not been able to develop Nepal as a tourist destination. We are still a side-trip. The focus has to be on developing Nepal as a destination. If people in Europe have three weeks holidays, they cannot fly to Nepal paying \$2,000 for a four or five day trip. We also need to capitalise on man-made resources to exploit the opportunity. For this to happen, we have to focus on two things: first, focus on trekking and second, develop Kathmandu as a hub. For example, if tourists visit Nepal for three weeks they can also travel to places like Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet for three to four days and come back to Nepal. For this we need to give multiple visas to tourists. Charging visa fees every time simply adds to their expenses. We also need to have many airlines flying to Nepal to sustain this activity. However, ground handling and other services at the airport are high, which increases the cost for airlines. If we could motivate airlines to market Nepal it would be better than billing them high service charges. We cannot afford the expensive promotional activities that they can.

How about other attractions besides trekking?

We have to change our marketing strategy. We must project something new to international travellers. How are we going to do this is another question. There have been a lot of trade fairs and other activities but we have not been able to get the right response. If we are going to market a country, we need to emphasise visuals, not words. We always depend on natural rather than on man-made resources.

How bad has the impact of insurgency been on the tourism industry as a whole?

The insurgency hit hard operations that had bigger infrastructures but everybody suffered to some degree. Larger tour operators cut down working hours and staff salaries as part of their cost-cutting measures.

Is there any way to pull RNAC out from the current mess?

There is a need to open a new, subsidiary company. We can rope in the private sector and float public shares. The traffic rights of RNAC are an asset that can be put in as its contribution to the new company. The company has to be run by private sector management. Although regulations governing RNAC cannot be changed overnight, we must be sincere in our efforts to pull the corporation out of its present mess. The main problem is none of the concerned government agencies work in unison. They blow their trumpets without the slight consideration to national interest. I believe that given a free hand, Nepal's can still manage our national flag carrier efficiently.

Gouging out a living in Lele's quarries

KARMA THATANG

The dust is so thick it starts swirling inside the bus as we lurch towards Lele. Near the Tika Bhairab shrine, we find the reason for the dust storm: hillsides gouged out by stone quarries.

The stone mining is feeding Greater Kathmandu's unrelenting construction boom. The trucks transporting the rocks have destroyed an already bumpy road. The ride is nauseating as the bus skids and bounces along the narrow trail pock-marked with pot holes. Come monsoon,

this is sure to be a river of mud. The hills around here are increasingly landslide-prone. Quarrying by freelancers and contractors has become Lele's main industry. The incessant drone of the drilling and pounding carries easily across this scenic valley, punctuated only occasionally by jets descending into Kathmandu airport.

From the plane, Lele is a pretty U-shaped valley nestled on the flanks of Phulchoki with the idyllic Nallu river meandering through dazzlingly yellow

mustard terraces in full bloom. But this agrarian facade hides the grim hillside truth: indiscriminate quarrying, especially toward the eastern and northern ends of Lele.

The ugliness reaches its height straight up the road from the main bazar, past the water-bottling venture aptly named "Mr Cool". Here you find yourself entering a canyon-like section of Lele, which looks like Tora Bora after a pounding by daisy-cutters from a B-52.

The quarries have gutted the hills on either side of the dirt road, creating mini-caves and hollows, which could implode anytime. Rocks jut out from or sit precariously on the scarred hillsides, threatening the workers, passersby and livestock below. Dust-covered workers, mainly Tamang, work the quarries unsupervised. Bollywood music blares from a cheap Khasa radio placed strategically on a boulder. Quarrying provides a less-than-minimum-wage along with health hazards to the worker, nothing more. The whole quarrying scene on this stretch reeks of illegitimacy. It's got the feel of a "hit and run" or "hit and miss" fly-by-night variety. The owners and contractors are nowhere to be seen.

As more and more hillsides in Lele succumb to the ravages of quarrying, the trend increasingly threatens biodiversity, watersheds, human life and livestock from landslides or falling rocks, the health of the Lele communities from increasing noise and dust pollution, and road safety. It will,

Out of sight and out of mind, a beautiful valley is ravaged by quarrying.

moreover, create dependency on externally provided temporary jobs (the cursed precursor to rural-to-urban migration) and sever the eco-demographic (man-land) production relations that existed here for centuries that made Lele what it is.

This brutally exploitative extraction can surely be plotted in the larger scale of Valley-periphery relations. The people of Lele, or any other village on the Valley rim, have never been compensated for being environmental custodians. If the people of Lele had been compensated in the past for protecting watershed functions (water flows clear and plenty even in the dry season and is tapped by Mr Cool), they would not have allowed the contractors to come in and rape the hillsides.

If we are not to sit in judgment over cement plants and brick kilns and quarries we must ensure that the city pays for conservation action on the periphery. If the centre is to continue to sing the song of community forestry success, they must pay for every green patch on the rim—for the effort, for the absence that the periphery must practice for the greater common good.

Whenever urban folks complain about air pollution in Kathmandu Valley (see page 1,4-5) their collective action merely has the net effect of forcing old, worn-out gas-guzzlers to ply

the rural routes instead. The unspoken development paradigm has been "dump the failures of planning (if any) or any negative externalities in the front or backyard of the rural poor".

This probably explains why many quarries and brick kilns have conveniently relocated or even flourished further and further from the urban core—far from the carping, maddening crowd of enlightened elite. Whether one likes it or not, quarrying has found a perfect niche in Lele, as have countless failures of national and district level development planning across much of the hill region of Nepal: out of the ear and eye-shot of the Centre.

Lele is perfect for this illegal extraction and trade. It does not sit on any major highway. It is not on the way to either Nagarkot or Pokhara. It does not lie on a hiking biking trail where development people may stumble upon it. It is the back of beyond for Valley people. Out of sight, out of mind.

Will a judge of the Supreme Court, treating this as a public interest litigation, initiate suo moto action? The idea is not to shut down the quarries in typical knee-jerk reaction, but ensure minimum wages and protection for the workers, environmentally sensitive extraction and a percentage of profits from every truckload for the villages that sit precarious on the hillsides. ♦



LUOL SHERCHAN

Indo-Nepal relations need a paradigm shift.

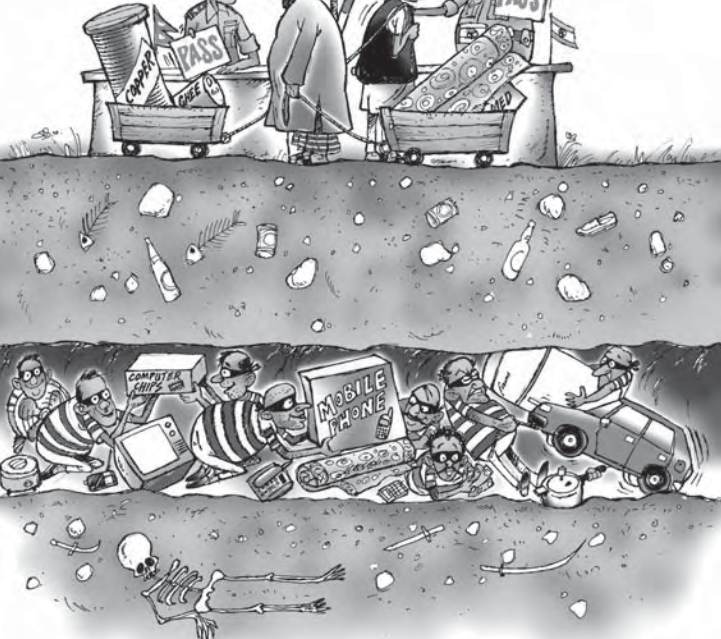
As King Gyanendra prepares to begin his unofficial visit to India, there is speculation among political pundits of behind-the-scenes meetings with Indian government officials on deadlocked bilateral issues. In the past six weeks, the Nepal-India negotiations on both transportation and power did not reach any consensus. And alleged Indian support to the Maoists is not a feverish conspiracy, if the Beed is to infer anything from Donald Camp's recent speech (*Nepali Times*, #135). Of late even the international press has been drawing transboundary connections between the Maoist movements in Nepal and India.

The Nepali economy cannot be isolated from India and the same holds true for politics. Despite this dependence—or perhaps because of it—Nepalis have never been able to look at common issues with India holistically. A preferential treaty and a pegged exchange rate notwithstanding, we have never thought of creating a strong India-focused policy body or a division to coordinate the ministries.

Perhaps we should look to Bhutan for a little inspiration. In the past decade they benefited by being pragmatic about 'Big Brother'. Nepal continues to compartmentalise foreign policy with its neighbours. The issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is dealt in isolation from India building dams on the border and Indian restrictions on Nepali exports. Bhutan played its card cleverly, binding India into silence on the refugee problem with the hydropower card. Or, as the Indian ambassador said in this paper last week (*Nepali Times*, #136) Nepal should look at India

as an opportunity, rather than a threat. Nepal needs to present a single front with all the unresolved issues—exchange rate to refugees, exports surge to hydropower, sustaining peace and customers procedures—as part of a one dialogue package. The Rastra Bank is sitting on lots of dollars received from remittances: this may be a good a time as any to review the exchange rate between our currencies.

For many Indians, Nepal is the face of the simple-minded



bahadur gatekeeper. Babudon in Delhi has extrapolated this mindset further on its dealings with Nepal. On a day-to-day basis this translates into the difficulty Nepal's encounter with customs officials at various border points. If India is concerned about the anti-India sentiment and its effect on bilateral relations then perhaps it's time to do some damage control by respecting Nepal as a genuine partner. Both

countries should work on exploring the positive aspects of their relationship instead of bemoaning a porous border and labour flow. And the private sector must look beyond lobbying for an additional ghee quota, or lifting tariffs on zinc oxide.

India must realise that it stands to gain more as Nepal's dominant partner. It would do well to mount a blit of goodwill gestures and drown us in magnanimity. It must not mistakenly think that we only respect power. Nepal's

SIBHAS RAI

will respect those who show some respect to them. The Beed believes if the Nepali economy is to thrive, then our relationship with India needs a bilateral paradigm shift. Piecemeal solutions are not the answer. And King Gyanendra's visit could pave the way towards this. ♦

Readers can post their comments or suggestions to arthabeed@yahoo.com

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Nepal hit

BHAGIRATH YOGI

Although our own conflict is on hold, Nepal will feel the economic impact of the American war on Iraq that began with a dramatic cruise missile raid on Baghdad Thursday morning.

The war couldn't have come at a worse time for Nepal. Tourism, which was just beginning to pick up after the ceasefire, had started seeing cancellations as fears of war mounted in the past weeks. Most flights from Europe to Kathmandu have stopovers in the Gulf or overfly west Asia. The Nepali travel industry is in deep gloom, and is only hoping that the war will be short and decisive. *(See interview, p 7)*

A much-graver impact would be on overseas remittances from Nepali workers. There are an estimated 300,000 Nepalis in the Gulf region, with 6,000 workers in Kuwait which is now a frontline state in the war. There are another 85,000 Nepalis in Saudi Arabia, 65,000 in Qatar and nearly 4,000 in Bahrain. Together, these Nepalis remit an estimated Rs 30 billion back home every year.

Officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, supply, home and transport met all day Thursday in an emergency session, but there was no question of being able to evacuate all Nepali workers in case of a full-scale war. "It would not be possible to bring back all the Nepalis from the Gulf and provide them alternative employment," admitted Yuba Raj Khatiwada, member of the National Planning Commission.

A cabinet meeting on Thursday was expected to decide on a range of options from fuel rationing to odd-even rules on vehicles so as to reduce consumption. Nepal Oil Corporation depots in Thankot and Amlekhganj are said to have enough storage capacity to last only one month of normal consumption.

Government spokesman Ramesh Nath Pandey said Wednesday "all necessary steps would be taken if war broke out". Some gas retailers took this to mean that the government would hike the price, and shut shop to hoard their stock. This spread panic-buying, and led to most gas stations to close by noon Thursday.

Officials told us there was nothing to worry about. "The supply of fuel is regular and there is no need to introduce provisions like rationing at the moment," NP Sanjel, from the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies told us. Even without the war, the government was reviewing the price of kerosene and diesel to check adulteration and smuggling across the border.

The Nepal economy is going to take a direct hit. "The Iraq war will have a multiple effect on the Nepali economy," says economist Biswomber Pyakuryal. "It will not only reduce remittances sent by Nepalis working in the Gulf countries, but could also have an adverse impact on Nepal's exports to the US and its allies."

OPINION

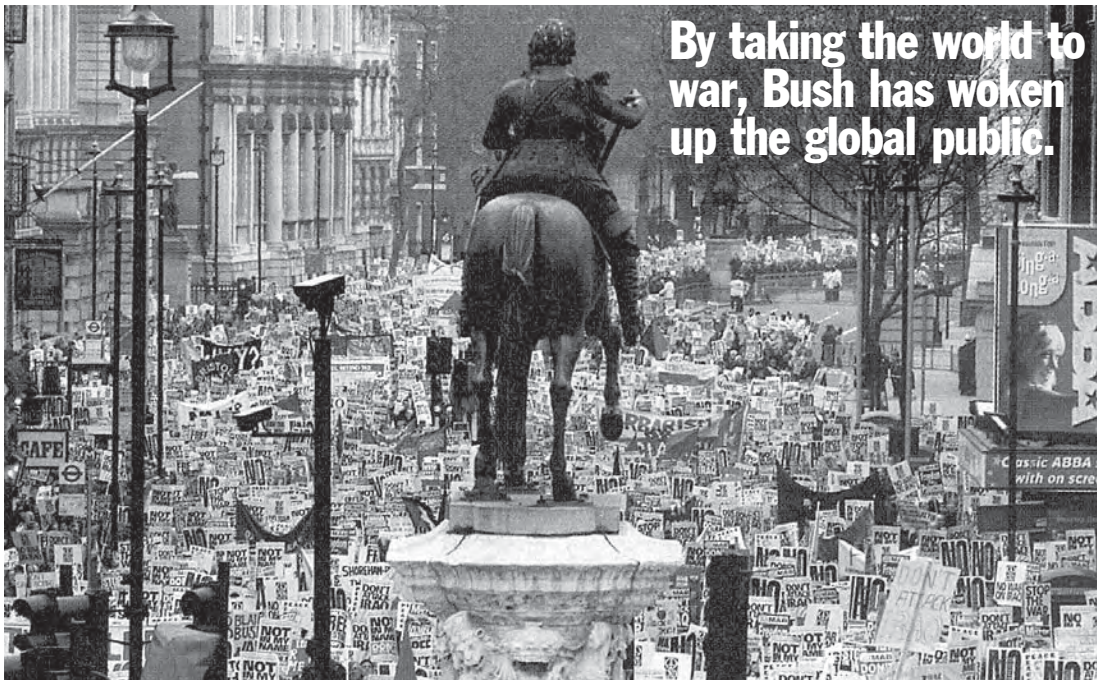
The Second Superpower

BERKELEY – The morning after the world's largest-ever simultaneous demonstrations against war—ten million people in six hundred cities on six continents—a front-page news analysis in *The New York Times* made a startling assertion: There are now two Superpowers, the United States and world opinion.

"President Bush appears to be eyeball to eyeball with a tenacious new adversary—a new power in the streets." Even in their headiest moments, citizen activists have never imagined that their shoestring efforts would ever confer on them the status of a superpower. If George W Bush has achieved no other constructive act in his calamitous two-year tenure, he has unwittingly triggered a global tectonic shift. A new citizen superpower is emerging to challenge the primacy of global elite. By threatening virtually everyone and plundering everything still of value in this diminished world, President Bush has quickened the pulse of our collective passion for what still matters to us.

This sudden ascendancy to superpower status did not occur overnight. A fundamental realignment of interests and identity has been underway for two decades. Global governmental and corporate elite have increasingly aligned themselves with one another rather than their nations of origin.

At the same time, they have rapidly accumulated an ever larger share of wealth and power at the expense of the middle classes and the poor. Wealth and income inequality both within and between countries, especially within the most advanced industrial nations, has reached levels formerly seen only in banana republics. By brazenly betraying the interests of their own



By taking the world to war, Bush has woken up the global public.

peoples and expropriating the wealth created by their labour, these elite are rapidly exhausting their most precious resource: what little remains of their peoples' faith in their good will.

The global argument over whether to allow the Bush administration to attack Iraq is accelerating citizen alienation from leadership elite and triggering a historic realignment. The nation-state that for several hundred years held the allegiance of citizens to "God and country" is being replaced by a new identification between ordinary citizens and their ad hoc social movements across all national and ethnic boundaries, most often in opposition to the policies of their own governments.

The anti-globalisation movement has joined with global antiwar sentiment to become a pandemic of citizen resistance—and an embrace of the credo of Porto Alegre's World Social Forum, that

"Another world is possible".

Despite overwhelming opposition from their own electorates, the governments of Britain, Italy, Spain, Australia, Eastern Europe and US client regimes in the Arab world have capitulated to Washington's mercenary "coalition of the killing" in sordid political deals enforced by massive bribery and brutal intimidation. The machinations of the global elite, on behalf of a narrow class interest not only in this particular war but in closed-door negotiations that consistently trade off the public interest for private gain, have opened up a yawning gulf between leaders and peoples.

What a coercive Communist International could never achieve through conspiracy, the global leadership elite through egregiously self-serving policies have succeeded in stimulating among disparate publics worldwide: a supranational solidarity that transcends geography,

ethnicity and ideology. We are seeing a phenomenon heretofore unprecedented in human affairs: the emergence of a global public interest with a capacity to contend on equal terms with the great powers of the earth.

Yet before they celebrate this breakthrough moment, citizen activists must confront the continuing weaknesses in their new-found strength. The spontaneous emergence of street demonstrations and shoestring social movements, if fuelled by unrealistic expectations, could all too easily be deflated by the grinding struggle required for long-term social transformation. The lack of resources and self-discipline to sustain a steady, effective presence leads to disenchantment and burnout. Governments and corporations equipped with a retinue of lawyers and publicists are paid handsomely to outflank, outlast and co-opt citizen movements. Politicians and

by MARK SOMMER



citizen leaders alike come and go, but bureaucracies endure with an innate institutional bias against reform.

Today's global consensus against Bush administration policies has been triggered by the monumentally inept execution of the agenda of a global elite that until recently has been highly disciplined in its exploitation techniques. If cleverer minds ultimately prevail and depose the reckless Texans, they could well adopt more accommodating rhetoric and mollify many of those alarmed by Bush and Co. At the same time, the leaderless spontaneity of the early days of social movements may soon be supplanted by the emergence of citizen leaders who could themselves become entrenched elites.

Sustaining a democratic and enduring "citizen superpower" capable of tempering the excesses of the elite superpower will require steady effort, clarity of purpose, and eternal vigilance against a totalitarian temptation arising from within as well as without. It will also require a true partnership between leaders and citizens in place of the domination and manipulation that have historically characterised their relationship.

The version of globalisation that emerged since the end of the Cold War has been fatally flawed by its anti-democratic nature. The version now emerging to replace it must be driven by a democratic process in which the interests of ordinary citizens—those most affected by its policies—are fully represented. ♦ *(IPS)*

(Mark Sommer, journalist and director of the Mainstream Media Project, a syndicated radio program.)

ANALYSIS

by FAWAZ A GERGES



Can Iraq be “won”?

America may win the military battle, but lose the political war.



In moving to topple Saddam Hussein's regime, the Bush administration stakes its case on two critical arguments. First, President Bush and his senior aides insist that the coming Iraq war is an extension of the military campaign against terrorism. It would spare America and the world, in the words of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, "the danger that Iraq's weapons of mass terror could fall into the hands of terrorists."

Second, the Bush team is pledging to bring democracy to Iraq, a transformation that—it is hoped—will spur democratisation across the region. A peaceful, democratic dawn in Iraq, they assert, would soon break over other authoritarian Arab states as well. By transforming the political landscape of the Middle East, American officials hope to strike at the root causes of Islamic extremism.

Messrs Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney and Wolfowitz like to pose as realists, but just how realistic is such thinking? Is it based on a sober assessment of the complex realities in Iraq and the region? Or is it driven by ideology and wishful thinking? Will a war against Iraq help the US in its fight against terrorists, or will it make Americans more vulnerable?

Despair and alienation have taken hold of the younger generation of Arabs, who represent over 50 percent of the region's population. Political repression and the silence of Arab public opinion should worry America and its Arab allies, not reassure them, because it means that there is no way for the public to channel its interests, demands and frustrations peacefully.

A US invasion of Iraq, with large numbers of civilian casualties, would deepen the sense of victimisation and defeat felt by Arab youths and make them inclined to join al-Qaeda-style holy war cells. Far from undermining militancy and combatting terror, a war will likely play into the hands of al-Qaeda, giving it a new lease on life.

Indeed, militant Islamists, hoping to recover from the devastating blows they have absorbed since the war on terror began, are already positioning themselves to capitalise on the coming war with Iraq. In the last few weeks, al-Qaeda's propaganda messages have pointed increasingly at the Iraqi crisis. The organisation seeks to reinvent itself as a defender of the Iraqi people.

In this, al-Qaeda finds a receptive audience. The dominant Arab-Muslim narrative stresses that the coming war has nothing to do with fighting terror. Rather, it is intended to settle old scores and make Washington the arbiter of Arab destiny and resources, particularly oil. By attacking Iraq, the US could win the armed confrontation with Hussein, but probably lose the broader—and more vital—political struggle for the future of the country.

American officials do not seem to recognise how difficult, costly and prolonged the task of creating a peaceful order and a viable democracy in Iraq will be. There is a lack of appreciation of how deeply entrenched are Iraq's sectarian, tribal and ethnic loyalties. A sense of humility and skepticism is missing.

The building blocks and institutions necessary for a functioning polity, let alone a democracy, do not exist. Since the advent of army rule in 1958, successive regimes have terrorised Iraqis into submission and bled the country white

through their military misadventures. Monitored and oppressed for 45 years, Iraqis have lost faith in the political system and turned inward, to tribalism, and religious and ethnic factionalism. Civil society has been crushed and the middle class decimated—thanks in no small part to the UN-led economic sanctions that have been enforced since 1991.

Of course, reforming and democratising the Iraqi political system is not impossible. On the contrary, the Iraqis have suffered more than most and have learned the hard way the perils of authoritarianism and oppression. They recognise their vested interest in overcoming their divisions and rebuilding their political community.

Iraq also possesses human and material resources that should work in favor of democracy in the long term. But democracy cannot be delivered to Iraq by an outside power. Only Iraqis, with international assistance, can transform their country. This task requires time, patience, hard work and luck. It will likely take one or two decades, not just a year or two, the proposed time frame of American military presence in Iraq after the expected ouster of Hussein.

Unless America is willing to police the new order for many years and invest vast political and economic resources in assisting, not imposing, the reconstruction of state and society, Iraq will fracture and descend into chaos. Its neighbours will be destabilised. New jihadi groups will arise. Not only will there be no peace and democracy in Iraq, but the West's security interests will be endangered further. Sadly, this worst case scenario is hardly entertained by American officials, who now seem to be prisoners of their own rhetoric. ♦ *(© Project Syndicate)*

(Fawaz A Gerges is Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Sarah Lawrence College, and author of the forthcoming The Islamists and the West.)

by RALF DAHRENDORF



stakes all

By defying populism, Blair has shown statesmanship.



jeopardising West Germany's European and Atlantic destiny, which by this point had become generally accepted.

Both leaders prevailed and in the end won elections. Other leaders have proved the same point. Charles de Gaulle prevailed politically after ending French colonial rule in Algeria. Mikhail Gorbachev did not, but he remains a prophet without honour in Russia for the policies of glasnost and perestroika that led to the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of democratic Russia.

There is a point in all these cases that cannot be overlooked. Each political leader espoused ideas, policies or principles that were far ahead of their peoples. They had, as it were, only history on their side.

These leaders seemed to be working against the grain, but the grain itself was about to change direction. Initially heterodox and apparently

unacceptable views became the new orthodoxy accepted by most of their citizens. In a sense, this is the definition of true leadership: to take a country and its people to a better future which is not yet clear to most but that has been partly discovered and partly created by those in power who hold an unerring sense of direction.

There are those who think that this is precisely what might happen to Blair over Iraq. They foresee a short war, the rapid collapse of the Baathist regime, and a new beginning for Iraq's people. Blair will then have triumphed in almost the classical sense of that word. Along with President Bush, he would be acclaimed as a great leader, while voices of dissent and opposition would be silenced. His re-election would hardly be an issue; on the contrary, those who opposed him will be in trouble.

However, other scenarios loom, not so much of defeat as of confusion and the impossibility of creating sustainable peace. But what is at stake in the Iraq debate is not so much a vision of the future as a moral principle. It really is a matter of conviction. Blair, at least, is pursuing his Iraq policy because he is deeply convinced that he is right. He will still retain that conviction even if he fails, although the price he will pay is certain to be high. Unlike Adenauer, Brandt and de Gaulle, Blair may really be going against the grain of his people rather than anticipating a changing general view.

Blair knows all this, which is why he has prime more than once that he has put his political career and his position as prime minister on the line. He is a true conviction politician, inspired less by a sense of the future as by a sense of morality. Such leaders risk a great deal—and not just for themselves. Perhaps they risk more than can be justified. In today's crisis, anyone who believes in Western values must hope that such politicians emerge victorious. ♦

(Ralf Dahrendorf, the author of numerous acclaimed books, is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics and also a former Warden of St Anthony's College, Oxford.)

ANALYSIS

by EDWARD N LUTTWAK



Saddam's strategy

Expert in internal repression but utterly incompetent in military strategy, Saddam Hussein thinks that he can fight and win. His strategy seems to be to defend Baghdad as another Stalingrad, street by street, house by house.

A war strategy that deliberately begins the way that most wars end, with a street-fighting defence of the capital city, is certainly original. It is also realistic in not even trying to defend Iraq's borders against American air power. But it is fantasy to think that the people of Baghdad will defend Saddam's regime. It will have to be done by Saddam's elite troops.

Whether they will fight after heavy bombing depends on the success of the air campaign. It is

unlikely that Saddam's elite forces will be caught in well-identified barracks.

Saddam's security system for Baghdad includes the Special Republican Guard, whose 16,000 men are Iraq's most disciplined, best equipped troops. It is not clear how many street-fighters Saddam can obtain from his five competing security forces whose 25,000-30,000 men are distributed throughout Iraq.

"Fedayeen Saddam" with more 15,000 men recruited from trusted tribes will provide strength in numbers. For really big numbers, the Jaysh al-Sha'abi Popular Army, a party militia, has 150,000 men and women in Baghdad alone. But street-fighting requires even more training, cohesion and leadership

Why defending Baghdad like another Stalingrad will not work.

than open-field combat. Even in "heroic" Stalingrad, the workers' militia collapsed at the battle's beginning.

The Special Republican Guard are supposedly loyal because they are recruited largely from Saddam's own al-Bu Nasir tribe but they are also a true Praetorian Guard, like their Roman predecessors. Many officers are too close to the intrigues of Iraq's palace politics to remain blindly devoted to Saddam. A few have been executed over the years for plotting against Saddam. Not all of them were innocent.

Recently, Saddam moved the Republican Guard into Baghdad. Its 10 divisions, with at least 100,000 men, are better trained and armed than the regular army, which is now weaker than in the first Gulf War of 1991, when it scarcely resisted before surrendering.

The main offensive from Kuwait must advance 500km to reach Baghdad. It is for this reason that the lighter forces centred on the 101st Airborne division and the British 16th Air Assault brigade will fly directly into the Baghdad area,

linking up with armoured columns racing up from Kuwait. The offensive into and around Iraq's second city of Basra is to discourage Iran from venturing across the Shatt river border. Fighter bombers and attack helicopters would be employed to intercept any counter-attacks against the flanks of the advancing columns and to break up blocking forces.

In 1991 less than 150 aircraft were equipped to launch the precision weapons that did 90 percent of the useful bombing. Now all US and British strike aircraft use precision weapons. The number of separate targets that can be attacked in the first 48 hours should be five times as great as in 1991. More than 900 ship-launched cruise missiles—triple the number in 1991—will double the impact of the initial air strikes. ♦ *(©Project Syndicate)*

(Edward N Luttwak is one of America's leading military strategists. He is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC.)

COMMENT

Tony Blair

Even those who disagree with British Prime Minister Tony Blair's stance on the Iraq crisis rarely fail to praise his courage. US President George W Bush never faces hostile crowds in the way that Blair must. When Blair enters Parliament for the weekly ritual of Prime Minister's Questions, members of his own Labor Party heckle him and ask hostile questions. Outside parliament, even on television, Blair confronts groups that emphatically demand peace.

Throughout it all, Blair has shown the courage of his convictions. These are, quite simply, that Saddam Hussein is an evil ruler who potentially threatens his neighbors and the wider world, and that he has to go.

Blair's posture is all the more remarkable at a time when political leaders depend on opinion polls and the views expressed by so-called "focus groups" to tell them what to think. Many politicians try to stay as close to prevailing majority views as possible. They regard this as "democratic" and hope that such fidelity to the popular will guarantee them re-election.

Fortunately, such populism—for it is just that—is not ubiquitous. Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar of Spain is not far behind Blair in showing the courage of his convictions. President Jacques Chirac of France has the support of his people, but he also has an agenda that appears to be concerned as much with French grandeur as with mere popular acclaim.

The most flagrant absence of leadership on display today, in the name of following the apparent majority view of the people, is that of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in Germany. He not only probably won his last election by openly opposing military action in Iraq, but he continues to behave as if he were heading a peace march rather than a country.

Perhaps Schröder should spare a thought for his two great predecessors, Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt. When Adenauer took Germany firmly into the Western alliance, he was not only opposed in parliament (by the Social Democrats), but also by a popular majority that thought his policy would make reunification with Soviet-controlled East Germany impossible.

Similarly, when Chancellor Brandt launched his Ostpolitik two decades later, he was widely accused of selling out to the Communists and

Garland canal detractors

NEW DELHI – India's ambitious, \$112 billion project to link together its major river systems has its critics. Linking the northern Ganga, Indus and Brahmaputra with the peninsular rivers, Krishna, Godavari and Kaveri is expected to irrigate 150 million hectares and generate 3,500 MW of electricity.

Although China was the inspiration behind the project, hydrology experts are sceptical about the feasibility of replicating their achievements—either topographically or in its political organisation.

Inter-state and inter-country dissensions are likely to surface according to Sudhirendar Sharma, at the Delhi-based Ecological Foundation.

Already, Pakistan has threatened war if the current status quo regarding the Indus is not maintained, and neither India nor Bangladesh are satisfied with the treaty to divert the Ganga at the Farakka barrage. Meanwhile, the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are tussling over sharing of the waters of the Kaveri river.

Professor Syed Iqbal Hasnain, an internationally-known glaciologist, said the whole project is being undertaken without adequate understanding of the Himalayan glaciers, which feed the Ganges, Indus and Brahmaputra and could turn into an economical and environmental disaster. The garland canal is a "waste of money" and a "political gimmick," says Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan. *(IPS)*

Reinventing Beijing

BEIJING – As the Chinese government has stated its goal of "integrating the 2008 Olympics with Chinese characteristics and spiritual civilisation", its choice of mainly foreign architects entrusted with the search for Beijing's new architectural identity remains puzzling to many.

What is dubbed Beijing's first European-style skyscraper is on the drawing boards of Dutch architects from the Office for Metropolitan Architecture. German architect, Albert Speer Jr, will build a north-south axis across the city that will connect the new Olympic Park with the Imperial Forbidden City. The headquarters for the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the country's largest, was assigned to the US firm Skidmore Owens & Merrill.

The preference for foreign talent to remake Beijing has been so evident that plenty of cultural friction has arisen. The construction of China's Grand National Theatre, awarded to the French architect Paul Andreu in 2000, has been criticised as too expensive, too alien to Chinese culture and has been repeatedly stalled by an avalanche of objections.

Foreign architects however, are lined up to satisfy the needs of China's building boom, undaunted by the clamour of a nationalist lobby that wants to see China's skylines mapped by Chinese. *(IPS)*

Solar power leader

BANGKOK – When Thailand's largest solar power plant begins producing energy in March next year, it will make this country a leader of this form of alternative energy in South-east Asia. What impresses local environmentalists is that achievement comes courtesy of the government—the plant being built in northern Mae Hong Son province is the work of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT). The plant will have the capacity to generate only 5 MW, bringing the country's total solar energy capacity to 10 MW by 2004. Currently, renewable energy, which includes biomass, small-scale hydroelectric plants and solar power, contributes above only one percent of Thailand's energy mix. *(IPS)*

Soul-searching in Indian media

CHENNAI – Indian media should uphold standards and handle increasing commercial pressures on their editorial content without compromising on credibility or profitability. This was one of the issues raised at a seminar here by the Media Development Foundation last week. Editor of *The Business Standard*, TN Ninan said the palming off of advertising as news was the worst sin. At the same time, he said every organisation was guilty to some degree, and there was little to be gained by pointing fingers.

Executive Editor of *The Hindu*, Malini Parthasarathy, said the identity crisis facing the Indian media was partly due to the anxiety not to rock the boat because of the fear of dipping circulation figures.

"We are also facing an identity crisis because we are lazy in the pursuit of our own intrinsically enjoined obligation to pursue the truth," she said. Warning against confusion of patriotism and nationalism with loyalty to the government, she said "very few question the authenticity of government versions on terrorist incidents."

Managing editor of *Malayala Manorama*, Philip Mathew, said that newspapers could play a positive role in carrying out campaigns for the development of a region. Columnist Sucheta Dalal warned that if the Indian media did not police themselves, then regulators might step in. *Indian Express* editor, Shekhar Gupta, said there was no contradiction between good journalism and the marketplace. Vinod Mehta, Editor-in-chief of *Outlook* magazine, said that editors of newspapers and magazines should respond to new readers, new aspirations and ideas, without undermining the social obligation or credibility of the media. "Change does not mean a sell-out," he insisted.

The safest way

Excerpts of an interview with Subash Nemwang, central committee member of the CPN (UML) and constitutional expert. *Budhabar*, 19 March



MIN. BAHADUR RAJA

The political parties seem reluctant to involve themselves in the peace process.

It must not be forgotten that when the government was set against a peaceful solution, we launched an all-party campaign and pressurised the government to be more amenable. In the same vein, we also called upon the Maoists to give up violence and join mainstream politics. Now, we are pressurising both sides to make the talks transparent so nobody can back out of negotiations in an irresponsible way.

Why are the parties against the constituent assembly?

The recent statements and activities from the Maoists suggest they are in favour of formulating a constitution that includes the representation of the king. If that is the case they should make clear what they want to achieve outside what amending the present constitution can't do. This would be the safest way to end the present crisis. We have no wish to see the country pass through another state of indecision and confusion like that of 1950-59 in the name of the constituent assembly.

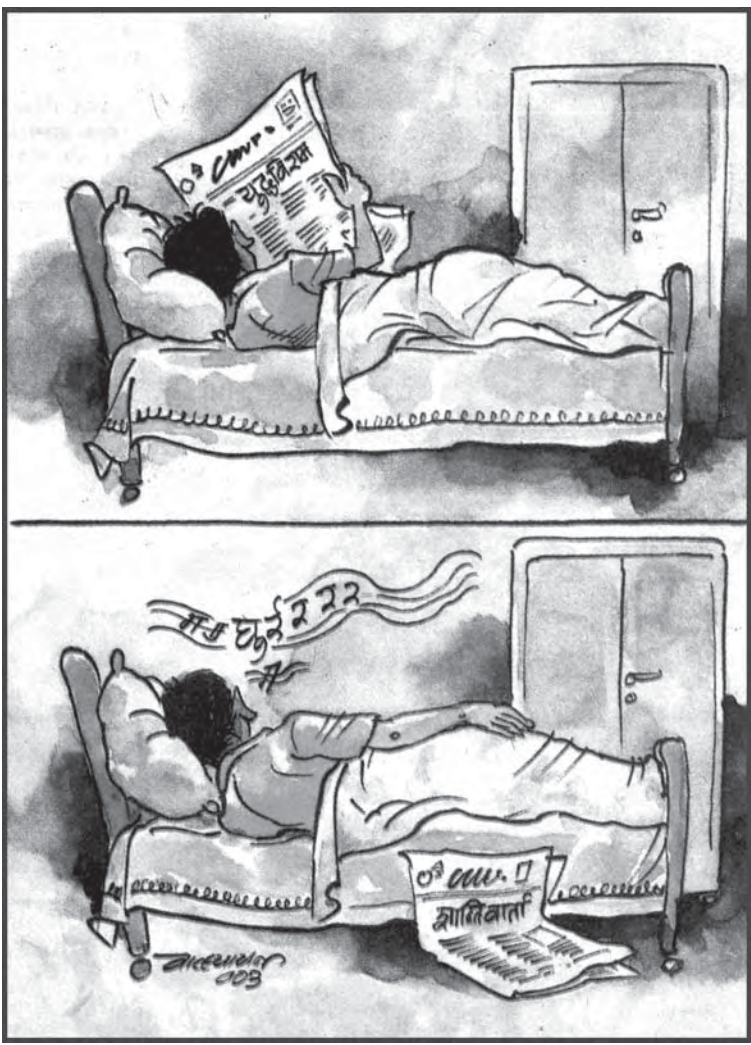
Can the king scrap the present constitution?

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 recognises people as the source of the country's sovereignty. People can exercise their sovereign right through this constitution. Nobody can annul a constitution that was formulated by the popular will. What will those people who say the 1990 constitution can be scrapped do when a similar situation arises in the future?

The government argues that the root of the bad governance is the present constitution.

Certainly there have been weaknesses in governance during the last 12 years and there is a need to move forward by correcting those mistakes. We have a system and mechanism within this constitution to correct such aberrations. We already have a mechanism to punish the corrupt and book anybody indulging in irregular activities, even if it is the prime minister. Those who point at the so-called bad governance of the past should ask themselves whether the Panchayat system had mechanisms other than oppression.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



Nepali journalism has made strides but hasn't been able to break away from the periphery of political fraternities...if rural journalism is promoted it can defeat the politicisation of journalism.

-Bharat Dutta Koirala was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for journalism last year for his contribution to the development of journalism, in Chhlahpal on 16 March.

Newspaper: Peace talks Reader: Zzzzz

क्रान्तिपुर
Kantipur, 15 March

Trial-and-error

Excerpts from an article by Dr Surya Dhungel, a constitutional expert. *Deshantar*, 16 March

देशान्तर-साप्ताहिक

"The roots of the present constitutional crisis date back to the recommendation to postpone parliamentary polls by major political parties to then premier Sher Bahadur Deuba. That was a constitutional error. The royal move of 4 October to assume executive powers, too, is an unconstitutional move.

All the activities undertaken ever since have been unconstitutional. In fact the present crisis is not a constitutional one. It is an outcome of the failure of the political forces to manage political problems within the sphere of the constitution. Now, only a political solution can be sought to resolve the present crisis. In order to make the constitution functional, political parties should go to the polls.

The constitutional process can resume only after a new government is formed. The new parliament can also work as the 'constituent assembly'. The political parties can approach the matter of a constitutional amendment as well. There has been an external influence behind every constitutional upheaval in Nepal and our political leaders over the last 12 years failed to munge these elements diplomatically. If they don't take lessons from such experiences we can't expect reforms in the constitutional process."

Honour the code

Manju Thapa

Kantipur, 17 March

क्रान्तिपुर

The code of conduct to be followed during the ceasefire has already been made public. When the ceasefire was announced in late January, people had raised questions about whether the Maoists really wanted peace, or if this was just another excuse to prepare for yet another onslaught of violence. But now suspicions are being expressed if the government itself is not in favour of the lasting peace. The recent activities that have violated the code have given rise to such suspicions although there have been some reports of violations by the Maoists, too. The primary responsibility for both the government and the Maoists is to respect and honour the code of conduct that they

mutually agreed upon. For this purpose, monitoring groups of brave and honest people should be formed immediately. If one side tries to use the peace process to hoodwink the other for the second time, that spark will engulf the entire country. Such an act would be a betrayal towards the nation. It would be wise to realise now that nobody stands to gain when the country is reduced to rubble.

Dalits' plight

Sanghu, 17 March

साङ्हु

Maoist party-affiliated Dalit Mukti Morcha (Dalit Liberation Front) has released data that shows more than 500 dalit leaders and workers were killed during the seven-year long "people's war" by the security forces. President Tilak Pariyar, accused the government of spreading terror in dalit villages by mass executions and torching dalit huts in various villages at Kalikot, Bajura and Dang during the state of emergency 2000-2001.

The injustice inflicted on the dalits by the Maoists was not included in the report. The Maoists may have also executed many dalits for their political beliefs. Pariyar said dalits have been victimised for demanding fundamental human rights denied to them by traditional values imposed by the caste system. The National Dalit Commission formed by the government last year has demanded reservations for dalits and the Maoist-affiliated Dalit Mukti Morcha has been raising the issue for special rights to the dalit communities.

Pariyar opined that as long as Nepal remains a Hindu nation, the state-sponsored discrimination and injustice against the dalits would continue. His organisation believes only a secular state authority can ensure dalit liberation.

Tilak Pariyar said that affirmative action for dalits is an illusion as it depends on the discretion of the regime, and only a handful would have access to such an arrangement. Citing the failure of the Indian government in providing reservation for their dalit communities, Pariyar claimed they need special rights until they reach the social, economical and political status of other advantaged caste groups. "Reservation would actually support the continuation of the caste system. Therefore, to achieve genuine changes and equality, dalits and women need to be protected by special rights," he said.

Spring cleaning

Bimal Gautam

Rajdhani, 18 march

राजधानी

The government is preparing to scrap more than 7,500 positions from the bureaucracy. Most of the



Hat: George W Bush

Jacket: Saddam

Balloon: "Don't you know you're not allowed to carry such a destructive weapon? Throw it away immediately..."

बुधवार

Budhabar, 19 March

positions have remained vacant for years and doing away with these permanently would cut administrative costs. The steps would be in line with the recommendation of a commission formed two years ago for administrative reforms in the civil service. The positions to be cancelled would mostly be the lower level non-gazetted positions like drivers and peons.

Government sources said that since keeping these positions vacant had no effect on performance, it was proof that they are irrelevant and could be cancelled. The cabinet has already endorsed the decision. A study showed it will save the government Rs 10.6 million in salaries, pensions and other welfare facilities. A government employee is entitled to monthly salary, medical facilities and a provident fund. Government data shows that presently the bureaucracy has 106,000 positions, out of which only 86,000 are filled.

Inspections

Laxmi Prasad Upadhyaya

Space Time, 19 March

स्पेसटाइम टैमिक

After an exhaustive first month of investigating inefficiency and graft in administration in the far western zones of Seti and Mahakali, the mobile team only offered directives. Government offices in Doti, Baitadi, Darchula, Dadeldhura, Kailali and Kanchanpur received dozens of instructions to streamline their functions for efficiency and promptness. Although complaints against various NGOs were filed, the mobile team did not initiate any action against them.

Coordinator Champak Sunuwar said the team aimed at immediate improvement in services they found lacking during their office visits. He also said more than 90 percent of complaints filed with the team during their visits to the six districts

were unrelated to mandates given to his team. Shankar Raj Baral, a team member, said most complaints were related to land disputes, land distribution to squatters and Kamaiyas.

An evaluation paper prepared by the team revealed an order of continuance to the Irrigation Division at Doti despite the absence of the office chief Umesh Chandra Jha, who has been asked to settle all his pending accounts. The local prison was directed to make arrangements for efficient food supplies, toilet facilities and security.

Baral said the team unearthed cases of long absent employees, unsettled accounts at the district education office and the selling of expired medication at the public health office in Baitadi. They also found bad debts, unpaid AgDB loans, expenditures totalling Rs 57,000 without proper accounting from the district development committee and a huge number of undecided cases at district forest office in Darchula. Sunuwar said all the lapses were noted and immediate steps to redressal had been made. Importantly, district education offices in Bajhang, Achham and Bajura were asked to make arrangement for teachers to return to their appointed schools. Most teachers were found living in district headquarters though they received salaries from schools in remote areas. The functions of land revenue employees were unsatisfactory in Kanchanpur and abuse of authority in land distribution to squatters in Kailali were also noted.

The team has yet to decide what action will be taken. They have made a written request to the home minister to reconsider its decision to establish a DIG office of armed police in the Urtariya area on behalf of the locals. The team was unable to visit the remote areas of Bajhang, Bajura and Achham.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

22 March, 1977

Sundarjal

Dr Bhattarai came in the afternoon with a cardiogram machine—he monitored the occasional missing of my heart beat. He examined me very carefully, and said that this symptom may not be an indication of serious heart trouble. There are many extra causes that point to this symptom; and in my case tension and anxiety may be the cause. He also said people have however [managed] to live with this type of [affliction] for a very long time. I am greatly relieved. I did have this symptom for some time, which has only been aggravated by my present condition here. Dr Bhattarai said that I could take normal exercise and forget about this trouble altogether. A dental doctor also came for GM who got his teeth filling. I also needed this service, but since it was getting late I told them that I would send for him later.

It has been a good day from other point of view also. The election results of India's General Election for the Parliament so far—according to the *Gorkhapatra* of today—have gone in favour of the Janata Party which has a large [number] of my friends and supporters of our cause. Its spiritual leader is JP [Jayaprakash Narayan]. Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay have been defeated. These results have demonstrated the strength of democratic ideal that has prevailed over moves to be supplanted with authoritarian ideals centering around Indira Gandhi who wanted to be equated with India itself. Her defeat is a very happy news for those who pine for democracy. Moreover, her politics was wholly diverted to the promotion of her son's status, ultimately to have him succeed her. Her whole edifice based on chicanery and falsehood has tumbled. I am happy for this reason also. I don't know whether the Janata Party will obtain enough seats in the parliament to be able to form the government, even if it does succeed with the support of other splinter groups, whether it can hold all of them together since it is a hurriedly composed party of divergent elements—some kind of a League of Nations than a party. My anticipation is that Jagjivan Ram will again go back to the Congress Party to head it—his quarrel being wholly with Indira Gandhi her removal from the scene could induce him to rejoin his old party which is in need of a man of some stature to head it. My friend Barma has won, but he doesn't have sufficient support in the party to enable him to assume its leadership, although he is currently the president of the party.

Today the security guards put up a very powerful searchlight at the gate and frenzied commotion has been going on outside in the

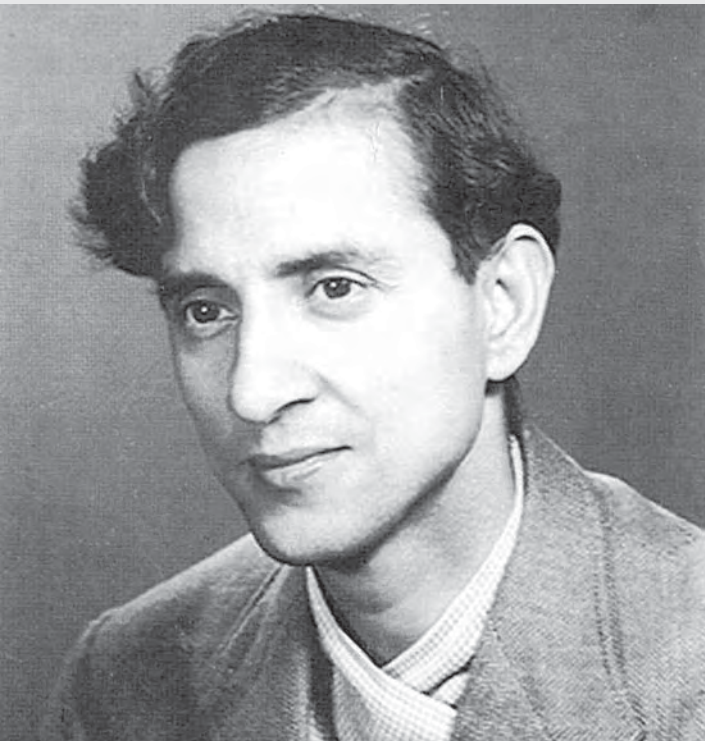
last few days. What are they doing? My hunch is that a courtroom is being constructed where our trial will take place. GM doesn't accept this, and feels that this establishment being a military one, is enlarging and improving the grounds for routine work. But why this feverish construction work which can be done routinely?

23 March

Sundarjal

GM was in a less optimistic mood today—I will not say that he was in a mood of frustration. His optimism has been constant, even when I sometimes felt that the king could decide not to respond to our gesture and thereby nullify the objective of our return (ie, national unity) proving our decision to be wrong. He used to brush aside my doubts and was convinced that there was no way out for the king, in his own interest. GM always...advised me that I should start thinking of the time when we talk with the king rather than worry my mind with doubts...

On the last occasion when we were prisoners under King Mahendra, GM once said he was not hopeful because the situation favoured the king, but now the situation didn't favour him and he is in a tight-corner. Hence GM is hopeful this time. He is even categorical that we shouldn't be put on trial and that the publicity given to our projected trial is free propaganda and allows the king to make up his mind and also propitiates hardliners in the palace, etc. Today, however, he was less optimistic. He said that Nepal's fate was not propitious, it would take both its sovereignty and the people's objective of democracy. When I told him that if the king saw light and an understanding was reached between him and us, then we could save both, but the obduracy of the king could bring about the gloomy prospect envisaged by GM. He said the situation had gone far beyond repair and nothing could save Nepal. I said we should make our last effort to save it. It may be a matter of touch and go, but we have no other choice but to make the effort. As far as I am concerned, knowing fully well that the situation is really desperate, I am making an effort—a national total effort—to raise the country out from the political, economic and diplomatic morass that 17 years of the king's dictatorial rule has led her into. At my age, I have no other choice. That is why I am keen on meeting the king even just once to convince him that national efforts can't be mobilised by the total centralisation of political authority solely in his own hand. If I could succeed in this then I will have personal satisfaction, and the sacrifices of so many men will be relevant and won't go in vain.



BP Koirala, into his third month in jail, writes in this serialised jail diary that Ganesh Man Singh has suddenly lost his optimism and feels that democracy and peoples' sovereignty in Nepal are doomed. For his part, BP is in a slightly better frame of mind after a visit from a doctor. He is happy about the defeat of Indira Gandhi in India, and is determined more than ever to work to "lift Nepal out of the political, economic and diplomatic morass".

Something in the air

A new community radio station wins hearts and minds in western Nepal.

Kathmandu's Sagarmatha FM. Other programs include Sanjavani (Elixir of life) and Saha-asitwa (Coexistence) which are aimed at raising the status of women.

The fact that Swargadwari has survived even a year in the polarised and tense atmosphere during the worst part of the insurgency in the heartland of the conflict is already proof of the power of its message. The station's listeners include villagers, local civil service and even the Maoists. "Swargadwari gives the most authentic and reliable news," wrote one anonymous Maoist listener from neighbouring Rolpa. During the emergency, the Maoists cadre depended heavily on Swargadwari and the BBC/Nepali Service for news of what was happening in the country, according to KL Peedit, ex-editor of the now-banned *Jana Ubhar* weekly.

One indication of the popularity of the station is the soaring sales of FM radio sets in Dang district. Retailers of tiny Chinese and Indian made FM sets in Ghorahi and Tulsipur bazar can barely meet the demand. Durgesh Yogi, a health worker

who also owns a radio shop, says, "Since Swargadwari came along, radio sets have been selling like hot cakes. It's good for business." Scratchy broadcasts from Radio Nepal are being replaced by the clarity and rising popularity of Swargadwari.

However, the station which is named after a popular ashram in Pyuthan, cannot survive from commercials and depends on grants from donors. Listenership is estimated at 700,000 in Dang and parts of Salyan, Rolpa, Pyuthan and Banke. Once its transmission capacity is increased to 300 watts listeners will be able to access the station.

Listenership zoomed after Swargadwari started relaying newspaper headlines from Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu at 6AM. This program now has the highest ratings. The management at Swargadwari FM encourages local artists, and does not feature any Hindi or English songs. This has resulted in a surge of singers and musicians recording their songs in the FM-compatible digital format. They are churning out folk, modern and pop songs



RAM HARI JOSHI

not just in Nepali but in regional dialects as well.

The station has special programs for Dang's indigenous Tharu people. Said one elderly Tharu farmer: "It's wonderful to hear our own language directly relate to our day-to-day life. We learn so many things, from improving crops to health tips."

Station manager Dadhiram Subedi (*pic, above*), who switched from to broadcasting after 15 years as a print journalist, told us, "We were very concerned about the Tharus who have been marginalised for so long. Our sole objective is to inform, educate and entertain people living in this part of the

country. FM has won the people's trust by being reliable with news, and not being a purely commercial station."

Despite the immense popularity of Swargadwari FM—judging from the deluge of heart-warming letters from listeners—the station is plagued by problems like the lack of local and national level advertisers, initial threats from the Maoists, and lack of stand-by broadcasting equipment. Subedi doesn't mind admitting that Swargadwari is deep in the red despite all staff being voluntary. But he is not worried. "It is not easy, but our popularity means that we are in it for the long haul." ♦



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Tribal/Village Rugs and Kilims from West Asia.** Exhibition and sale on 23 March from 11AM-6PM at Sammelan Hall, Shangri-La Hotel, Lazimpat. 4432830
- ❖ **Negotiating borders** contemporary Pakistani miniatures from 23 March-1 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4411122
- ❖ **8th Annual Open House Flower Exhibition** 10AM-5PM from 21-25 March at the Standard Nursery, Bansbari, Maharajjung.
- ❖ **Nepali Landscapes** exhibition of painting from 21-25 March at the Alliance Française, Thapathali.
- ❖ **La soirée de la francophonie** -The French Speaker Party 21 March at 7 PM at Alliance Française, Thapathali.



EVENTS

- ❖ **Ex AVM party** at AVM 1PM on 29 March Tickets Rs 300 single, Rs 500 couple. Contact AVM School
- ❖ **World Cup Cricket Finals** at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. No cover charge.
- ❖ **Annual KVPT Fund-Raiser Dinner 2003** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza on 27 March. Tickets Rs 2000 pp. Available at KPVT Patan (5546055), Soaltee Crowne Plaza (4272555), Chez Caroline (4263070)
- ❖ **World Music/Fusion** from Shukrabar. Prastar on 21 March. Tickets Rs 350. 4218517

DRINK

- ❖ **Splash Bar & Grill** Exotic cocktails, panoramic view. Happy hour 5:30-7PM. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818

MUSIC

- ❖ **1974 AD** new singles at 7.30 PM on 21 March. Entry Rs 200. **Big Screen Cricket** at 1.30 PM, 23 March. Free. Moksh, inside Club Hardic, Kupondole. 5528703
- ❖ **Harald Eikeland and band** at Jivin' Joe's Restaurant, Kupondole, Friday at 5PM.
- ❖ **The Steam Injuns with Abhaya** on Friday at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. 4416071
- ❖ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday at Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 4414336
- ❖ **Rusty Nails** 7.30 PM on Friday at The Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Friday Nites** at Jatra with The Strings. Free entry. Thamel
- ❖ **Gaines** every night at Kantipur Restaurant, Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 680083/ 80

FOOD

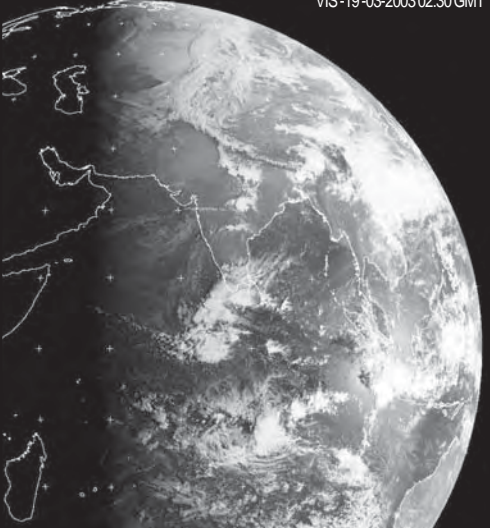
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** 40 percent off lunch and dinner. Dwarika's Hotel, reservations 4479488
- ❖ **Breakfast deal** Smoked salmon, scrambled eggs and filtered coffee. Weekends in March. 9-11AM. Thomas Kilroy at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272
- ❖ **Chez Caroline**, Baber Mahal Revisited. Weekend designer brunch. 4263070
- ❖ **Celebrate womanhood** with 50 percent discount for ladies every Wednesday at Olive Garden amidst. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Dwarika's Hotel** offers 40 percent discount in March at Krishnarpan. The 12th century styled swimming pool is open. Reservations 4479488
- ❖ **Saturday Asian Brunch** at The Café, **Sunday European Lunch** at Rox Restaurant. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Great Value Lunches** at the China Garden. **Pizza Promotion** at the Alfresco. Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Café Mitra goes Chinese** Wednesday night with guest chef Ranjana Yonzone from 5 March. 4259015
- ❖ **Traditional favourites** at The Sunrise Café for breakfast and lunch. Yak & Yeti Hotel. 4248999
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali Lunch** at Patan Museum Café 11AM-4PM. 5562271
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 680083/ 80

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights** Traditional cottage with modern facilities. www.escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort** Packages available. 680080/83
- ❖ **Ultimate Bungy** at The Last Resort. 4439525
- ❖ **Tea House Combo** Rs 700 pp at Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 4410432
- ❖ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** \$55 pp per night. 01-361500
- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge**, Bardia National Park. Rafting and more. 061-32112

NEPALI WEATHER

VIS -19-03-2003 02:30 GMT



This satellite image taken on Wednesday morning shows a fresh incursion of moisture from the west. Combined with the warming up of the north Indian plains, this system has the potential for generating Localised thermals and thunderstorms along the foothills. Expect some of these storms accompanied by strong winds to lash Kathmandu Valley towards late afternoon. Mornings should be fresh and bright, with maximum temperatures notching up a rise, and night temperatures climbing up to double-digits.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri
24-08

Sat
24-09

Sun
25-09

Mon
25-09

Tue
26-10

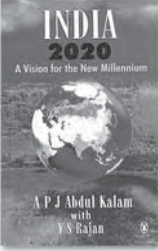
BOOKWORM



The magic of astral voyages: the art of interdimensional travel Dr Bruce Goldberg New Age Books, 2002 Rs 250
Out-of-body experiences are as natural to our functioning as breathing suggests the author. Goldberg presents dozens of time-tested techniques that train a person to safely leave their physical body and explore other dimensions.

The Gauri Shankar trekking area (including Rolwaling): A cultural tour book Patricia East, Susan Hoivik, Max Petrik, Sara Schneiderman, Mark Turin Eco Himal, 2003 Rs 300

This book, written by five experts, provides detailed information on trekking routes that are untouched yet easily accessible in the Gauri Shankar Trekking Area due west of the Everest region. It also has an in-depth introduction to its rich culture and history.



India 2020: A vision for the new millennium APJ Abdul Kalam with YS Rajan Penguin Books, 2002 Rs 400
The authors offer a vision of how India can be among the world's first five economic powers in less than two decades. They cite growth rates and development trends to show that the goal of a prosperous, strong nation is not an unrealistic one.

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

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Sangeeth Sivan-directed *Chura Liyaa Hai Tumne* marks the acting debut of yesteryear actor Sanjay Khan's son Zayed Khan as Vijay. Co-starring another star child Esha Deol as Tina, the script is a roller coaster ride of love, trust, betrayal and the mad rush for money. Shot on location in Goa and Bangkok, the film is liberally punctuated with song and dance sequences. With all the right ingredients for a mega-masala blockbuster, *Chura Liyaa Hai Tumne* has something for everyone in the family. The question is whether newcomer Zayed will succeed in stealing the hearts of the audience.



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PROFILE

Karna's karma

At 60, the man who “discovered” Thamel, is turning to heritage tourism.

JANAKI GURUNG

It was the 1970s. Freak Street was the happening place in Jochhe for hippie tourists in Nepal, the land of the wild hash. They sat on the temple steps in Basantpur, read Allen Ginsberg and watched the world go by.

A little to the north, past Asan was Thamel. There were wide open spaces then, only a few houses with vegetable gardens. It was a backwater. Then came Karna Sakya with his Kathmandu Guest House and the rest is history.

Today, Thamel is a brash, crowded, cosmopolitan city within a city. Visitors either love it or they hate it, but they can't ignore it. And it all started with Karna's baby, KGH. “Freak Street was a cult thing and it died a natural death,” recalls Karna, “Kathmandu Guest House was all about atmosphere. It catered to the ecological-minded mountain adventurer.”

As it turned out, KGH became so popular that it developed something of a cult following itself. Cat Stevens stayed there, as did Jeremy Irons and Ricky Martin. The guidebooks wrote about it, and suddenly it was “discovered”. Then, Karna's Law kicked in: “Everyone wants to go some place exclusive, but once everyone starts going there, it isn't exclusive anymore.”

In true Kathmandu fashion, KGH clones sprang up, and before you knew it Thamel had become a must-be for all tourists visiting Nepal. “The reason it clicked was because it was vibrant, urbane, and it served as a re-entry zone for trekkers coming back from weeks of solitude and rough-living of the mountains.”

Karna Sakya is a forester-turned-hotel entrepreneur, and has prided himself in doing pioneering new work. He has travelled across Nepal, working with naturalists, and was in the team that drew the boundary of the Royal Chitwan National Park. “All that travelling changed my whole outlook about my country and about myself,” he recalls. That is when he learnt “that tourism must not be a bird that fouls its own nest, it has to be a goose that keeps laying golden eggs”.

He calls it “soft tourism”, or “tourism forever”—the kind of controlled sustainable tourism that has a small ecological footprint, creates employment and raises living standards while preserving the indigenous traditions, cultures and the environment.


Karna was the architect of the Visit Nepal Year 1998, which was successful in raising Nepal's total tourist arrivals to the half-a-million mark. New international airlines started flying into Kathmandu, conventional tourism got a boost, and there was a 25 percent increase in domestic tourism.

After his wife and daughter died of cancer within months of each other in 1987, Karna devoted all his time and energy to helping fundraise for the state-of-the-art cancer hospital that is now set up in Bharatpur. Then he designed the Park Village Hotel in Budanilkantha, which is integrated to the Shivapuri National Park, and nature dominates the physical infrastructure.



Karna's latest project is to convert his family home in Naxal into a bed-and-breakfast pensione called Maya Mansion (see picture above). This is an old Rana home designed and built by Nepal's first civil engineer, Kumar Narsingh Rana and is nearly 100 years old. The interior has been completely renovated into ten spacious and modern rooms, there is a cosy library and dining area. Often, Karna can be seen sitting in the gazebo chatting with guests about the best place to go bird-watching, or where the best Newari cuisine can be found.

Karna hopes that others will copy his idea and turn some of the crumbling Rana palaces as well as the old bahals inside Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur into b&b hotels as well. Asked about what drives him, Karna says: “This is my karma. I am different from other businessmen, money is not my main motivation. With everything I do, I need the satisfaction of knowing that I am doing something original, creative, and also that I am paying back the debts that I owe to my motherland.” ♦



WITH READER CLUB CARD
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In the March Himal

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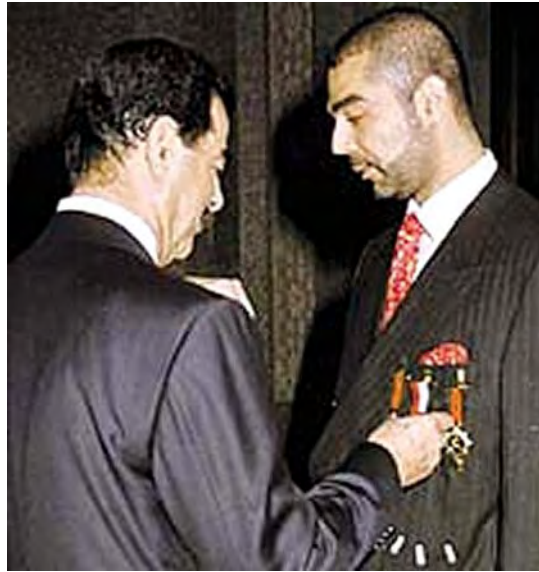


Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

An offer you can't refuse

Of all the investment opportunities available today, the Iraq USD Capital Protected Growth Fund provides the highest yield and earnings potential. As a new investor who has just put my entire life savings into this scheme, I share with readers this email so you too can also make big bucks:



From: uday@scud-farm.com.iq
Subject: An offer you can't refuse
Date: 18 March, 2003
Good Day Respectable Sir/Madam,
You may be very surprised to receive this email since we haven't met, but I'm sure you've heard of me. I am Uday, son of the president of Iraq (pronounced "eye-rack"), His Excellency Saddam Hussein.

I have it in good authority that you are a reasonably greedy person who will not hesitate to grab hard cash when it is waved under your nostrils. That is why I'm writing to you, so I beg your indulgence.

If you have been following CNN, you will know that my Dad has for some time now been lifting one leg to make fairly loud and rude reports in the general direction of Globocop Bush and his sidekick, Deputy-Sheriff Blair. He has therefore been wrongly accused of concealing more biological weapons in various nooks and crannies.

If detonated in a crowded closed space, and depending on prevailing winds, Dad's stinkers have been known to wreak mass destruction in a five metre radius. Since he is going to be smashed into

pulp any minute now by a broad multilateral US-led coalition composed of Great Britain, Andorra, the Canaries and the Federated States of Micronesia, Daddy had asked me to stash his cash at a secret vault in Zurich. However, as you may have gathered, my father's bank accounts have been frozen until he agrees to live in exile in Des Moines, Idaho, for the rest of his natural life.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, I am soliciting for your humble and confidential assistance to take custody of FIFTY million United States Dollars (US\$50,000,000.00), and to also front for the extended Hussein family in the areas of business you deem profitable. These funds need to be accessed by a trustworthy proxy on behalf of my father, and that is why we are approaching you because we know for a fact that not only are you exceptionally greedy, but you are also a complete idiot.

So, to start with, all you need to do is open a bank account in the Cayman Islands with a minimum deposit of EIGHT hundred thousand United States Dollars (US\$800,000.00) and give me power of attorney to be the sole operator of this account. Then, using my Dad's secret password you will transfer the US\$50 million (United States Dollars Five plus six zeroes) into the same confidential account in the Caymans, since he is not allowed to operate it himself.

Dad and myself will then transfer 20 percent of the fifty million to any bank account you give us. (Cross our hearts.) We will also refund any of your incidental expenses on snacks, phone calls or taxis during the course of this Grandmother of all Transactions.

Please, sir or madam, I need your entire support and cooperation for the success of this deal, your utmost confidentiality and secrecy is highly required due to my family's present predicament. Since time is of the essence, kindly call me as soon as you have deposited the eight hundred grand into my Caymans account.

Warmest regards,
Uday Hussein
PS: Anyone you know in Des Moines we can look up?

NEPALI SOCIETY



Pramod Lama has an entirely different way of meditating. To unshackle his mind, he skies down very steep slopes very fast.

"It's just great. Every thought leaves my mind, it is only the next turn that I think of when coming down a slope," says the 33-year-old Ohio-based software engineer who represented Nepal at the Salt Lake Winter Olympics, and later at Aomori in Japan.

He didn't win any medals, but Pramod did become the first Nepali ever to compete in a slalom event, one that requires 56 turns in the course of 1km with an average steepness of 30 degrees.

Pramod is into all kinds of adventure sports: mountain biking, rock climbing and roller blading, but admits he was not all that prepared for competition. "My limited skiing and the extensive media coverage played tricks in my head. I was close to panicking and even closer to quitting," says Pramod. But his Japanese coaches persuaded him to persevere, and so he ended up racing slalom on a pair of borrowed skis.

Pramod, now a permanent resident of the US, is looking



Skiing for Nepal

forward to joining the US Ski and Snowboard Association, a big organisation that offers competitive races. With coaching he will be in for tougher competition in the coming skiing season.

Pramod started skiing in 1995, but money, school and work kept him away from the slopes until 2000. But the constraints did not end his fascination with the sport. As soon as he could afford it he bought mountain skis and a season pass to the slopes. But determination alone was not enough—ski injuries again kept him away from the sport most of the following year. Recovery was

painful, but he was back on the powder before long. Through summer he dreams of fresh snow and he couldn't help celebrating the unusually high snowfall in Ohio this February. His wife Moini supports his love for skiing but would be happier if he took up a less adventurous sport. "Like golf," she says. Pramod thinks he has become a more careful skier after learning he was a father-to-be. But it is not his skills on skis that he looks forward to sharing when he comes home to Nepal. "I want to educate Nepali children," Pramod says. "It is what they need most." ♦

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