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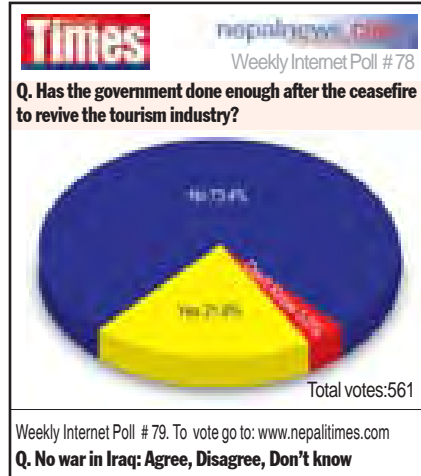
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Third force?

The RPP did it, the Nepali Congress did it, the Sadbhavana has just done it, and now it looks like the UML is on the verge of splitting too. Bamdev Gautam calls his UML bosses “a bunch of dictators” and threatens to form his own party which will be a broad alliance of “patriots, democrats and communists”. Tentatively called the Democratic Socialist Front, the new party will try to bridge the rift between royalists and the Maoists and may emerge as a third force in Nepali politics.



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War jitters

BHAGIRATH YOGI

Nepal may be 4,000 km away, but the impact of the Iraq war is ironically being felt more acutely in Nepal than in the Gulf countries where Nepalis work.

One week into the war, there is already a drop in tourist traffic, inflation, and panic buying of fuel. Now, we have to brace ourselves for long-term indirect impact on the national economy of a prolonged conflict. “A lot will depend on the duration and intensity of the war,” Shanker Sharma, vice chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC) told us. “But tourism, trade and remittances from Nepali workers abroad will be hit.” All this will have a negative impact on the balance of payments, raise inflation and dampen growth.

By far the biggest impact on the economy could be remittances from the estimated 300,000 Nepali workers in the Gulf who send back Rs 30 billion to Nepal every year. There are 2,000 British Gurkha soldiers deployed in Iraq. “Remittances have become the major source of revenue in recent years and the Iraq war will have an adverse impact on receipts,” says economist Minendra Rijal.

Once the war ends, however, Nepal could benefit. Says Rijal: “Nepal can cash in on the increasing demand for migrant workers for post-war reconstruction.” The reconstruction budget for Iraq has been estimated at up to \$100 billion and Nepalis would be well-placed to benefit from their experience with working in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Back at home, a serious cash-crunch at the Nepal Oil Corporation forced the government to use the war as excuse to raise oil prices Tuesday (see p 5). The move was greeted with street protests in Kathmandu this week. “There were long lines for kerosene for the past month,” says Maiya Tamrakar of Bhedasingh. “Now there is kerosene, but we can’t afford it.”

In Thamel, which had started seeing a trickle of tourists after the truce, there is gloom again. “We haven’t yet seen a big difference in load factors to and from the Gulf yet, but if this war goes on, international travel will be hit,” predicts Joy Dewan, who represents Doha-based Qatar Airways in Nepal.

Last week, the government stopped Nepali workers going to Kuwait where there are an estimated 6,000 workers. “All the Nepalis in the Gulf are safe and we haven’t got any requests for evacuation so far,” Foreign Secretary Madhu Raman Acharya told us. Officials also said that they were making arrangements for emergency services including evacuation. “We are waiting and watching and staying put,” Tara Bhandari from Damam in Saudi Arabia told BBC Wednesday. “But we are prepared to go back home if the war gets worse.” ♦



Despite the war, Nepalis are still going to work in the Gulf. And they could benefit from a post-war reconstruction boom.

Patch up and move on'



KUNDA DIXIT in THIMPHU

It's not quite yet a thaw, but the governments of Nepal and Bhutan seem to be trying to quickly resolve the 10-year-old Bhutanese refugee crisis that has strained bilateral relations.

A Nepali delegation led by Foreign Minister Narendra Bikram Shah returned to Kathmandu Wednesday after meeting with his Bhutanese counterpart, Jigme Y Thinley. At an airport briefing, Shah sounded upbeat: “We have agreed to meet again on 11 May, and the repatriation of refugees will start after that.”

In Thimphu itself, senior Bhutanese officials appear to have overcome previous reluctance to talk about the refugee issue, admitting privately this was a humanitarian crisis that shouldn't be prolonged. Bilateral friction was holding back development in both countries, one said, and it was time to “patch up and move on”.

Welcoming the largest-ever Nepali delegation to visit Bhutan last week, Foreign Minister Thinley said: “Nepal and Bhutan share bonds of culture and religion, we also share the same fears and vulnerabilities. There is a mutual desire to put this festering problem behind us and get on with the business of business.” The 20-member FNCCI delegation visited Bhutan to expedite a draft bilateral trade treaty. Indeed, this air of optimism seems to be cautiously shared by the Nepali camp after this week's meetings in Thimphu.

Some 100,000 refugees have been living in camps in Jhapa for the past 11 years. In 1993 then-home minister Sher Bahadur Deuba agreed to a Bhutanese proposal to categorise Bhutanese into those who left voluntarily, who were forcibly evicted, those with criminal records and “non-Bhutanese”.

It has now been two years since the first batch of 12,000 refugees living in the Khudunabari camp were processed by a joint verification team (JVT). The “categorisation and harmonisation” process is taking place in an office in Thimphu, and one Nepali JVT member admitted to us here last week that “things are moving slowly”. But he had detected a sense of urgency in Bhutan to resolve the issue.

Foreign Minister Shah said Wednesday the JVT had been instructed to finish the Khudunabari verification by the 14th ministerial meeting next month so repatriation can start. A decision on verification of refugees in other camps will also begin after that, he added.

In Bhutan, a new sense of urgency to resolve refugee crisis.

continued → p6

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NEPAL'S PEACE ROADMAP

The king goes on a pilgrimage and the country grinds to a halt. The political parties play brinkmanship. The Maoists are trying to overcome internal vulnerability to make a lunge for power. The people, as before, are nowhere in the picture.

At least the ceasefire has brought respite from Maoist *safaya* and the heavy hand of the state. But the people are still traumatised by past violence, and fearful of the future. They need quick rehabilitation, and the service infrastructure needs immediate reconstruction nationwide.

These immediate needs are not being addressed. Politicians exhibit no tension about leaving their constituents without protection or support, and the Maoists are too busy protecting their flanks. Parliament is a distant memory, but it is the lack of a local government that has left the people to fend for themselves.

Government and bureaucracy is nowhere to be seen. Gun-toting Maoists continue to walk the trails, rural party activists continue to live in roadhead towns and district headquarters. Two months after the ceasefire, one would have expected a groundswell movement to deliver the peace dividend to the population, but there is only deathly silence.

Kathmandu is too busy following the tripolar jousting at the top to demand a rural Nepali Marshall Plan. Donor agencies are unable to deliver support to the grassroots. They have tried to fight the apathy by making direct appeals to Singha Darbar, whereas the buck now stops at Narayanhiti.

The royal palace is supposed to be above the fray, but that is where power is now centralised. The government will not countenance any Maoist involvement in delivery of services at the grassroots, and the rebels who still retain the power to intimidate and defy will not allow the government to function. This has put national recovery in limbo.

Rather than confront this immediate deadlock in delivery, would-be interlocutors, one special representative and donor agency heads have decided to focus on sorting out the long term ills of the Nepali polity. It is easier to talk about transparency and corruption, criticise the political parties, and propose tinkering with the political structure. But someone has to give the people immediate hope.

Nepal doesn't need a regime change. Democracy hasn't failed here, the politicians have. Those who believe that the political parties cannot be trusted with democracy will have to tell us who it can be trusted with. For all their faults, as we have often argued in this space, the political parties present the only credible interface between the king and people.

What the donors can do is something that tragically our own institutions, exalted or plebeian, have shown themselves incapable of: devote themselves to a immediate mass-scale reconstruction package for the country, a campaign so dramatic that it should make up for the neglect of the past decades. For this it may be time to appoint an international coordinator, preferably from the UN system, to ensure that all donors, aid agencies and NGOs are rowing in the same direction.

The work is vast: psychological rehabilitation, rebuilding of government infrastructure, arrangement for those returning to their villages, a plan of action to publicise peace so that the tourists return, rehabilitating Maoists cadre so they are not tempted to take up the gun again, rebuilding VDCs, compensating families of those killed by state forces and the Maoists. A human rights monitoring capability must be 'embedded' in any rehabilitation package so that it becomes difficult for Maoists and the security forces to act again with impunity.

And all this should be done while we wait for a political opening to be found between the party leaderships and King Gyanendra which will open the way for a long-term resolution with the Maoists. The longer we sit on our hands, the less likely will be the prospect of long-term peace.

MORALLY BANKRUPT
I found the letter "Peace at Any Cost?" by "Anil" (#137) muddled, confusing and dangerously naïve for one who has evidently had the benefit of a good education. I recommend that he returns at once to Nepal to experience the feeling of relief, hope and optimism that has been markedly apparent since the ceasefire came into force.

It was clear that the country could not take much more of the wanton destruction of



SAGAR PANDEY

infrastructure, economy and human life that was reminiscent of Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge. Far from pushing back the Maoists militarily, the army, lacking in manpower and resources, was stretched to the limit and largely reduced to guarding key points and military barracks. The rank and file were under constant stress in the field. As a result of seeing their comrades killed in front of them, they would on occasions commit atrocities that rivalled those of the Maoists in their violence and senselessness.

Thank god in this hour of desperate need the king had the vision and courage to take what he knew would be an unpopular move to save his kingdom from further destruction. Such action is statesmanship, not dictatorship. He had no option but to take the action he did. Indeed, it could be argued that had he not waited so long, many of those police lives that Anil mourns in his letter might have been saved.

The main political parties of this country are now acknowledged as being morally bankrupt. I would remind Anil that it was they and not the Maoists, the king, or the army that gave birth to the "people's war".

Even in this political vacuum, the king has been reluctant to seize total power. He has appealed to the political parties to set aside their differences and come together for the good of the country. In refusing this request the erstwhile leaders of the main political parties are guilty of

LETTERS

treason. We should be grateful that in Narayan Singh Pun we finally have a politician who has the patriotism and selflessness to put the needs of the country before his own and to go out on a limb, at considerable risk to his own safety, to establish contact with the Maoists and achieve a cease fire desperately needed by both sides. It is now incumbent upon the citizens of this country to support him and the Maoists leaders in their search for a just and lasting resolution to the conflict.

I do agree with Anil that the army is perhaps the only institution in the country, with the exception of the monarchy, to have come out of the crisis with any moral standing. This is only because they were under the direct control of the king as Supreme Commander rather than the corrupt and selfish politicians who controlled their unfortunate brothers in the police. That they chose to remain apolitical is to their lasting credit. Any attempt to

GASPI!
Thanks to Hemlata Rai for her incisive and investigative report on air quality in Kathmandu Valley, ("Gaspi!" #137). What I liked about it is that, unlike most people in Nepal, she doesn't just criticise the authorities but also offers them solutions: electric vehicles, an activist judiciary, and also shows them lessons from New Delhi. If India can do it, there is no reason why Nepal can't. After all, our problems are on a smaller scale and much more manageable.

Tek B Thapa, Kathmandu

• There are indeed numerous causes for Kathmandu's increasingly unhealthy and visually poor air quality. They include extremely adulterated diesel and petrol, brick kilns and the carpet wool dyeing industry. On top of everything else is the increasingly prevalent north Indian sub-continental haze which extends into all Himalayan valleys, including Kathmandu, up to 9-

tamper with the constitutional controls over the army by future governments should be very carefully examined in this light.

Anil is also sadly correct in alluding to the army's faults. It is no coincidence that his letter appeared on the same page as others referring to a protection racket being run by the army company commander in Bardia ("Major injustice", #137). If we are ever going to get back to any kind of peaceful civil society it will be important for such crimes committed by both sides to be resolved, either through some form of peace and reconciliation committee, or through the civil courts. It is my fervent and staunch belief that we will only be able to put the past several years of bloody conflict behind us when such issues have been resolved. They have not been resolved through violence, so let's give peace a chance.

Ishwor Gurung, Kathmandu

Incremental appeasement

The foundation of good negotiations is a fair exchange.



DIRUBA ALE

It has been almost two months since the ceasefire was announced. We were told that the government accepted three pre-conditions of the Maoists so peace talks could start immediately and also allow the Maoists to come above ground like any other constitutional political party. As a result today they can move around the countryside to propagate their views freely, build and expand their organisation, while still retaining arms.

The Maoists have the best of both worlds: this is a unique arrangement. Meanwhile, the talks have not started. The Maoists have added new demands: release of comrades, withdrawal of court cases, agreement on a code of conduct, confinement of the army to barracks, repealing the anti-terrorist and anti-subversion laws, etc. Now, a code of conduct hugely favourable to the Maoists has been announced.

Still, the peace talks seem elusive. The Maoists maintain that the government has not done enough to create appropriate conditions for talks, which could be delayed. The Maoists won't even sit for "goodwill talks" unless five of their central leaders are released from prisons, and court

cases against their leaders are withdrawn. This is all very reminiscent of the last ceasefire when they insisted on new demands even during the talks, a period they used to consolidate their positions and ultimately back out from talks. The prime minister is now mulling a general amnesty for all Maoist detainees.

The Maoists are once more cleverly manipulating the situation by extracting concessions and benefits one after the other in the name of "confidence-building". These concessions should normally be on the agenda for negotiations. For its part, the government has not demanded any concessions, making the whole process a one-sided affair.

The general perception is that the government is bending over backwards to appease the Maoists. It does not even have a commitment from them to renounce violence, a timeframe for surrendering arms or confinement of cadres to their homes during the ceasefire period. The government has so far failed to take action against Maoists still carrying weapons openly, intimidating and extorting from people in the countryside. The foundation of any

good negotiation is "fair exchange", where both sides gain something of value in exchange for something tangible. It should be a win-win exchange.

This phenomenon of incremental appeasement is the other extreme to what Sher Bahadur Deuba was doing during the latter part of his premiership. Under pressure from the army, the Maoists started sending feelers for talks. But Deuba, stung by their earlier betrayal, said "No talks until you surrender arms". Desperate to restart talks, Maoist top leaders met GP Koirala in New Delhi and expressed their desire for talks. Afterwards, they wrote to the political parties to propose negotiations. The Maoists need a safe landing as much as the restoration powers-that-be need peace.

The recently signed code of conduct treats the Maoists as a rebel group, recognising the existence of their army, promises fair coverage of Maoist news in the government media, and gradual release of their detainees. Although the code speaks of releasing prisoners from both sides, the reality is that only the government will release detainees, since the Maoists say they have no prisoners.

All these steps help legitimise Maoist violence. As far as ordinary citizens are concerned, the only consolation is the Maoist agreement to stop extortion and intimidation, facilitate the safe return of displaced people to their homes and freedom of movement without fear. However, there is no proper mechanism to enforce these provisions. Intimidation and extortion are not likely to stop as long as one side with a history of unparalleled violence is armed and roams freely.

The peace code, of course, talks of a mechanism to monitor its implementation. This is easier said than done, given the topography and the lack of a tangible civilian authority where the real problem exists. As long as the Maoists hold arms, the exercise of the freedom of movement without fear will be theoretical.

An even more important aspect of the peace code is that it is supposed to represent an agreement between the government and the Maoists—amended or terminated by the two sides. Clearly, the present ceasefire does not yet involve the political parties, making a mockery of the government's charge that the political parties are not helping the peace process by absenting themselves from the all-party meeting called by the prime minister.

It is one thing to call the political parties to a meeting to brief them about political developments, but quite another to take them into full confidence and seek inputs on issues of vital national importance. In all major decisions taken so far—the ceasefire, the peace code, release of detainees and other understandings—the political parties have not been involved, except for invitations to perfunctory meetings.

The government didn't even respond to a written request by the Nepali Congress for a draft of the code of conduct while it was being prepared. Curiously, the code did not form part of the agenda even in the all-party meeting which the NC and UML did not attend. Every thing was done secretly between the two sides. Full transparency may not be possible on every sensitive issue, but informal consultation on matters of national importance is necessary. ♦

(Dr Ram S Mahat is a senior Nepali Congress leader and former finance minister.)



Traffic jam on the south summit ridge of Sagarmatha in May, 1996.

Kanak Mani Dixit: It's been 50 years since Tenzing and Hillary got to the top of Everest. Tenzing was a Himalayan and a climber at heart. If you read his writings, even those translated autobiographies, he was somebody with that fire in the belly of a climber, the sensibility, the broad-based understanding of the whole idea of climbing. It's been 50 years, but we are still looking for climbers like him in the Himalaya. There are few climbers in Nepal that come out of the urban milieu. I can't say whether this is a plus or a minus, but we haven't evolved mountaineering as a sport in Nepal. **Michael Thompson:** If you look at how it happened in other mountaineering countries, there is a strong base of climbing. People start with hiking and then rock climbing and can even join numerous climbing clubs. That's how I started. You do some basic climbing at home and go for your first trip to the Alps. One thing leads to another and then you say, "Hey! We can go to the Himalaya." So you need to have this base and Kathmandu, with

so many peaks of great variety nearby, could emerge as one.

KMD: But we haven't even reached the stage, people haven't even started hiking to the ridges along the Valley rim.

MT: Well, it will happen when people start saying, "Wow! What a fantastic country we've got." And it's a kind of middle class thing as well.

KMD: Clearly, we have a middle class but our middle class doesn't even climb Phulchoki, Nagarjun or Chandragiri.

MT: That will come. I think it's got to come. People will get bored. Young people with a bit of money will get bored if they are just going around on motorbikes. And you've got a fantastic country full of beautiful mountains. It will happen.

KMD: Then would people have to get more bored before they become more interested in hiking and climbing?

MT: Perhaps, and there might be something impeding it which is the

"If you do more with less, the benefits are long-term."

The Himalaya put Nepal on the mountaineering map, but the mountains have also come to be associated with pseudo-nationalism, personal ego, glory and money. The Nepali people would benefit from more and smaller flexible, club-type climbing of the lesser peaks.

The 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Sagarmatha may be a good time to go back to the basics of the aesthetics of climbing where you can do more with less. **Kanak Mani Dixit (pic, right)**, the editor of *Himal South Asian* magazine talked to noted British alpinist-turned-anthropologist, **Michael Thompson (pic, left)**, about climbing ethics, nationalism, mountaineering and the market. Excerpts from the conversation:



official Nepali attitude to Himalayan climbing. What I know of the 50th anniversary is that the celebration is being presented in an absence of the aesthetics of mountaineering. They are proposing to give all the people who have been to the summit free visas as if getting to the summit was a uniformly worthy achievement. Or drawing up lists of summitters and how many times they got there and so on.

The essence of climbing is always doing more with less. So for the first time 50 years ago, the thing was to climb the mountain. It was a big expedition. They had oxygen and everything. The technology, knowledge, techniques and equipment were a lot different from today and they really pushed themselves to what was unknown and they got up there. That was a terrific achievement. Then, later people tried to do more difficult routes with the same-sized expeditions on the west-ridge climb.

And it came to the south-west face and we got to that in 1975 after several attempts had failed. The climb was so much harder than what the Sherpas call the "Yak Route", the Tenzing-Hillary route by the South Col. We could look across from where we were at the south-west face and it was this gentle slope whereas the south-west face was vertical rock

and ice at 27,000 ft. That was doing much, much more with a fair-sized expedition.

Then you've got Reinhold Messner who climbed Everest solo without oxygen. That was a fantastic achievement. Since then you have these huge expeditions. People book the mountains and then sell space on their expeditions, and actually end up doing less with more. In the forthcoming anniversary celebrations, what is missing is the essence of mountaineering in this theatre of summitters. They have even set up a shop selling oxygen on the mountain.

KMD: Then there is the fact that we've let our nationalism run away with our mountaineering. It started right off the bat when Hillary and Tenzing came off the mountain and it was all murky—who was Tenzing? Was he Tibetan? Was he Nepali? And in the process, of course, the Nepali state took him over. We lionised him, but the moment he decided to go back to Darjeeling we just dropped him like a stone. We still haven't appreciated Tenzing as a climber, our nationalism took over. When Tenzing chose to live in India he suddenly became persona-non-grata to us. He is a true Everest man. He's seen the east of Everest, since he was born there, he's worked in

the west of Everest, he tried Everest from the north and then actually achieved the summit with Hillary from the south in 1953. There isn't anyone more Himalayan than Tenzing, yet he did not fit our definition of Nepali nationalism. Likewise, we regard our mountains as if they were proof of our achievement. Tectonic factors made them high, not our hard work. Nepali children and adults and even our political leadership exhibit pride that Sagarmatha is ours forgetting that only half of the mountain is in Nepal. Nationalism has overwritten nature and mountaineering. And proof of that is the lack of genuine empathy and understanding among our public of the Everest 50th anniversary. But all is not lost. Hopefully, we can use the celebrations to inform the Nepali public about what these mountains mean to us.

MT: If somebody asked me what I think should be done with the 50th anniversary, I'd say just look at all these big expeditions to Everest. They are pulling the mountain down to their ability, they are dragging it down instead of climbing it. Everest has become a terrific honeypot. Well, one idea that crossed my mind, though it is a rather extreme measure, is to really try enforcing the aesthetics. I'd say

don't allow any expedition on Everest where they've got more than one member. And don't allow any oxygen. That would stop that oxygen shop. You can have oxygen down below at the Himalayan Rescue Association for medical purposes.

KMD: Or maybe a moratorium until the mountain is clean, or to have a limitation on the number of teams. But can you enforce adventure on people? Isn't it like saying "Okay, I hereby decree only the adventurous shall climb Everest."

MT: It's not so much enforcing adventure on people, but taking away the non-adventurous. It is an extreme measure but it's well worth thinking over. The other thing is mobile and satellite phones. You call up and say I'm stuck. That sort of destroys things. In the best and the most congenial restaurants and clubs in say, London, you'd have to leave your mobile phone in a basket. In the wild west you had to put your gun away before you went into a saloon. Well, maybe we could do something like that or make expeditions walk all the way either going or returning, right from Kathmandu

KMD: Or Jiri. A proactive way in



which the local economy benefits, and at the same time sees the aesthetics are restored to some extent.

MT: I don't mean to say that people who are not of the highest calibre can't go climbing. But they'd start to say, okay, what can I do? What is within my ability? The smaller mountains for instance. And there are of course a lot of small mountains. So then you get away with much more exploratory climbing. Not desperately hard, but exciting. Another thing is not actually the mountains but crossing the passes, which seems as exciting as climbing the mountains.

KMD: Because of all the climbing you and others have done, the Himalaya is seen as a place for extreme climbing and for extreme heroics. People tend to forget that there are hundreds of smaller

peaks besides the eight-thousanders. It also seems to me climbers are coming, but the demand is for these high-end, exotic, guided-climbs of Everest.

MT: Partly it is because Nepal has not being able to market itself, and partly it is the function of the market not having developed itself in the West to come and holiday or club climb in Nepal. Maybe there are so many things to do in the world of adventure that mountaineering gets proportionately fewer people excited: you can go scuba diving, rafting, caving and hand gliding. I think the world of adventure has expanded and climbing is not catching up commensurately with the rest of adventure sports.

Mountaineering is not just climbing up the mountains. You have to appreciate the landscape, the people, how the farming system affects livelihoods, the

wildlife, the ecology and the birds. So instead of jumping on a plane and getting off at Lukla, if you walk all the way there and eat dal-bhar in little places along the way, you are getting much, much more.

KMD: What Nepal could do is challenge the spirit of adventure. The world of adventure has shrunk because everything is packaged and people are not reaching out. Nepal is meant for people who can do that. We may have the highest mountains but we also are the most-populated mountain region in the world, which gives us tremendous diversity, not to mention biodiversity. Where else on earth do you have a country like this?

MT: Oh, you're right, nowhere. When tourism picks up again in Nepal, the opportunity exists to do niche tourism. People can come up here for an amazing range of activities.

KMD: We could use the 50th anniversary for this refocusing as well as to remind the world that there is a ceasefire, and Nepal is safe. It is also important because climbing and trekking employs large numbers of porters not just in the trekking areas but also in non-tourist areas. There used to be significant cash income for hill villagers. In the last 3-4 years that has been blocked off. The Maoists never deliberately targeted tourists, which was our saving grace. Nevertheless, the world still thinks there is a Maoist thing raging in Nepal—even after the ceasefire. So we could use, perhaps cynically, the 50th anniversary event to tell the world to come here and have a look.

MT: One thing different about Nepal from a lot of poor countries is a tremendous amount of people out there in the world who have spent their formative years in this country. Members of the Peace Corps, climbers and all sorts of people care very much about what happens to Nepal. They worry about Nepal and would like to know things are normal over here. Mind you, many of these people are in very influential positions.

There is a huge audience of well-wishers out there and, yes, it would be worthwhile sending across that message.

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DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Nepal's oil crisis

If you thought the government's odd-even restrictions on fuel and the price hike announced Tuesday night were related to the Iraq war, think again.

The real reason is that Nepal Oil Corporation is bankrupt. Mismanagement, corruption and past political interference have contributed. But the main factor behind NOC going belly-up is the subsidy on kerosene and diesel that the state-owned enterprise has to foot. By an across-the-board increase in the price of petrol, diesel, kerosene, LPG and aviation fuel, the government hopes to reduce NOC's deficit from Rs 700 million to Rs 100 million.

Government officials explain that the price hike is aimed at stopping smugglers from selling cheaper Nepali kerosene in India because of the 20 percent price differential across the border. In addition, they hope to make it less lucrative to mix kerosene with diesel and petrol and curb rampant and open fuel adulteration.

The price of petrol is up from Rs 52 per litre to Rs 56. Diesel has gone from Rs 26.50 to Rs 35.50. Kerosene is up nine rupees to Rs 28. Aviation fuel has taken off to Rs 34, prompting domestic airlines to raise air fares by Rs 350. Bus costs went up by 30-40 percent. Subsidised cooking gas, which was being used by public transport vehicles has gone up from Rs 650 to Rs 700 per cylinder.



Pro-Govinda rally in Tokyo

TOKYO — A rally proclaiming the innocence of Govinda Mainali, who is currently serving a life term in a Japanese jail, was held in Tokyo this weekend. Nearly 100 lawyers, human rights activists and Nepalis in Japan took part in the event which was organised by the pressure group, "Justice for Govinda". Mainali, 36, has been kept in detention despite an acquittal by the Tokyo District Court and is accused in the rape-murder case of a Japanese woman in Tokyo in 1997.

Mainali's lawyers say the Nepali worker who was overstaying his visa in Japan was framed by the police, and have appealed to the Supreme Court. A final decision by the court is expected soon. Japanese activists like Kenzo Akiyama, a former judge and lawyer, says there are many cases of police and prosecutors cooperating to falsely convict illegal migrants in Japan for crimes they didn't commit.

The respected human rights group, Peoples Aid and Relief Association of Japan (Kyuenkai) recently put its weight behind the campaign to get Mainali released and returned to Nepal.

Govinda Mainali's wife Radha is currently in Japan, and visits her husband in jail to keep his spirits up. "I am very glad and appreciate the efforts by our Japanese friends to get my husband released," she said. Mikiko Kyakuno of the Justice for Govinda group said, "We will continue our struggle until Govinda is released. This case has tarnished the image of Japan's judicial system."

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George's gift to Osama

An American magazine, Harper's, carries a strange graphic on its front page this month. The illustration takes the form of a recruiting poster for the United States army but instead of Uncle Sam extending his forefinger outward and ordering the reader to join the armed forces, it's Osama Bin Laden with "I want you to invade Iraq". A grim reminder, as if one were needed, of the immense gamble that the American government is making at the moment.

For it is surely self-evident that the invasion of Iraq is a gift to the Bin Ladens of the world. Even those who support the idea of America and its allies remaking the Fertile Crescent in their image would have to agree, at least on the surface. Those who argue the moral case for intervention in Iraq say the benefits outweigh the risks, a world without Saddam Hussein will justify a temporary upsurge in support for extremists who claim to operate in the name of Islam. But they do admit that the upsurge is taking place.

How could they not? BBC television is showing almost daily images of angry protests in Muslim countries. From Jakarta to Cairo, Muslims are marching and often even without their government's tacit support. The riots in the Egyptian capital have shaken the deeply unpopular Hosni Mubarak government to its core. Fears that popular movements instead of armies could replicate "regime change" in Iraq are growing. Even George Bush Sr is said in private to have counselled his son against this invasion, with warnings that the Saudi Arabian government—corrupt,

brutal and incompetent—could itself be toppled by Muslim anger over America's behaviour in the region.

A television report from Jordan showed a collection of art students in the capital, Amman, sketching in class. In flawless, British-accented English, a young woman said Saddam Hussein was her "hero" and she expressed a chilling satisfaction with the Iraqi resistance to the American-British advance. A Christian crucifix dangled from a chain around her neck. No stereotypes here, just a proud Arab seething with resentment. The same reporter visited cafés where men puffed hubble bubble pipes and cheered at images on Al Jazeera television of American prisoners-of-war.

"It's simple," said a newspaper editor, "someone invades your country, you capture them, you kill them." This is Jordan, remember, an Anglophile king ruling a land that's more than half Palestinian—one of only two Arab countries to recognise Israel—but a place where popular sentiment tends in exactly the opposite direction to the pro-Western feelings of the ruling elite.

Let's look closer to home. Pakistan, a place that should be a proud repository of tolerant Barelvi Islam and Sufism, is becoming ever more militant and angry, largely because its president, General Musharraf, supports Washington's war on terror. Ostensibly, the Pakistani government does not back the invasion of

The Iraq war benefits extremists. No one else.

Iraq but the "street"—inflamed by bearded opportunists once derided as marginal and out of touch with popular sentiment—doesn't believe Islamabad truly opposes Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In truth, Musharraf has little choice but to play the game as he does but Washington's latest adventure helps him not one bit. Neither has it escaped notice among the audiences for Al Jazeera that the US soldier who ran amok last week and hurled grenades at his own comrades was a recent convert to Islam, an African-American who felt he was being discriminated against. I'm sure that situation was more complex than this, but America's enemies are presenting it as a religious issue and the message is hitting home.

Bin Laden and his evil colleagues are winning the war for Muslim public opinion. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say that America is losing it. This invasion, the treatment of Muslims in the United States, unrelenting support for Ariel Sharon in Israel, plans to invade or pressure Iran into a "regime change", for the conspiracy theorists of the world, it all adds up.

Not to me. I happen to think that there is no grand conspiracy, just short-termism: reactions to events without due consideration of history, context and lasting impact. It was ever thus, and the many mighty empires of the past largely collapsed accordingly. ♦



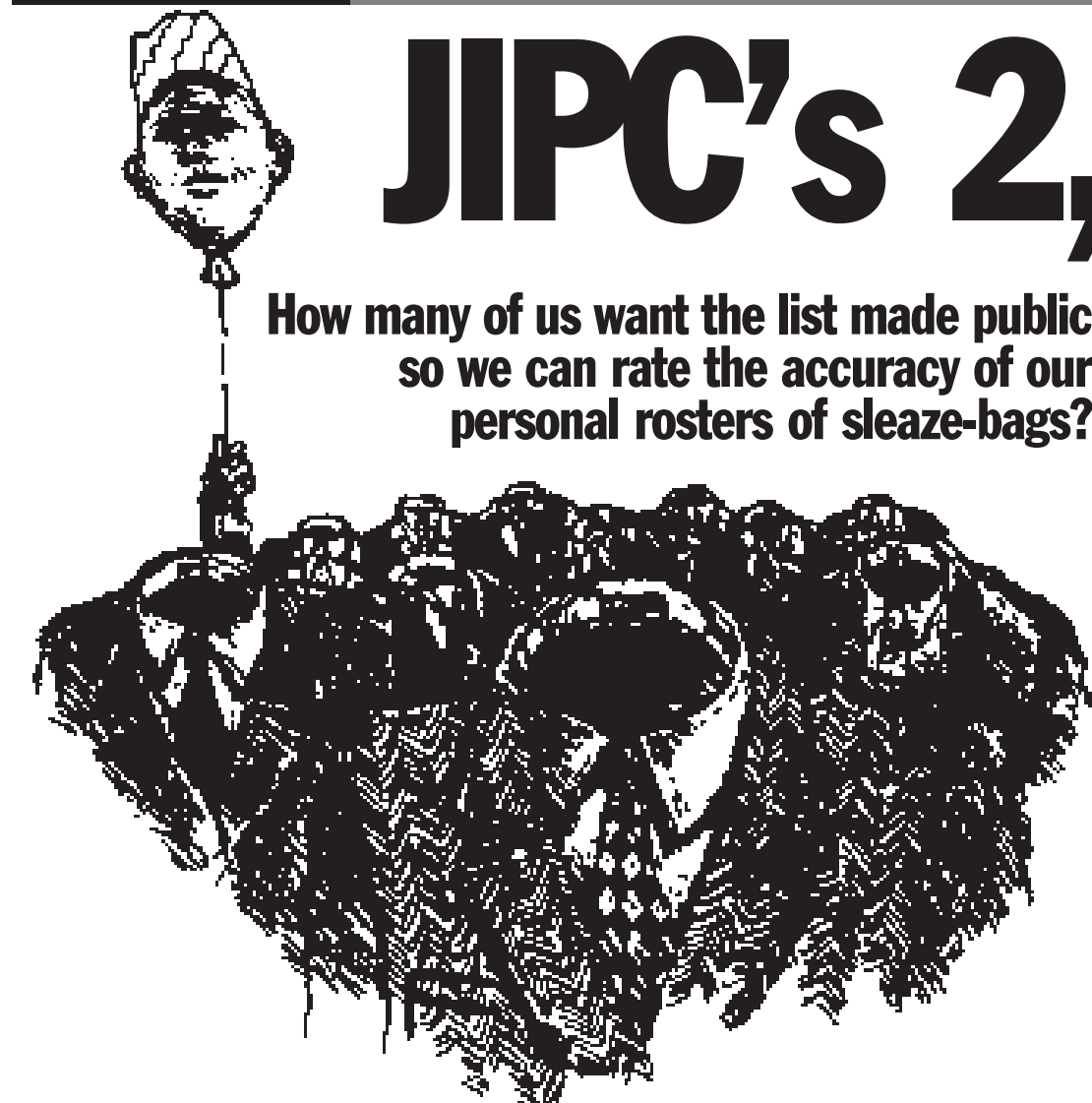
by DANIEL LAK





JIPC's 2,000

How many of us want the list made public so we can rate the accuracy of our personal rosters of sleaze-bags?



The confidentiality surrounding the findings of the Judicial Inquiry Commission on Property (JIPC) makes you wonder how we've suddenly become so good at keeping secrets. We've heard little from the authors since they submitted the 878-page report to King Gyanendra over a week ago. Enough, though, to understand that the panel has carefully

probed and profiled personalities who it believes have profited the most from the restoration of multiparty democracy. (By the way, how many of us want the list made public so we can rate the accuracy of our personal rosters of sleaze-bags?)

Commission chief Bhairab Prasad Lamsal says he has made a strong recommendation for necessary action against the officials.

Panel member Gyandira Bahadur Shrestha insists that naming names would be a clear violation of the right to property envisioned in the constitution. Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand's to-do list just seems to be getting longer.

With the United Nations working on a global treaty to combat corruption, the time is propitious for our own house cleaning. As a responsible member

of the community of nations, we must play our part to ensure that all governments have sufficiently strong laws to criminalise corrupt practices, to track down and confiscate ill-gotten gains and to protect witnesses. However, we must think locally and concede how money pumps life into our liberties.

Some politicians have warned us that the JIPC report may become another tool in the arsenal against democracy. This time they could be right. The panel's cut-off date of 1990 doesn't mean the panchas were paragons of probity. So the sneers from that side don't amount to much. We should be troubled by the clear disadvantage the report puts our multiparty politicians at.

They won't say so during on-the-record sessions, but our leaders have had a fervent plea since the Dhamija-scam days. If the people want political parties to live a healthy life, they must help them find ways of raising funds that bypass the realm of shadiness. For a clearer perspective, let's consider some of the impediments to a career in public service. The field is off limits to those unable or unwilling to make clear investment decisions. Such tactics as capturing booths and stuffing

ballot boxes may fall under the law-and-order category. Paying off competitors to stay out of the race and dispensing the precise mix of patronage and persuasion to carry swing constituencies require hard cash. And we haven't even started talking about pampered supporters supposed to run the campaigns.

Moreover, considering that no MP elected in the last dozen years has succeeded in serving a full five-year term, budgeting becomes riskier. From a macro-economic standpoint, when the internal rate of return is so unpredictable, can our politicians be faulted for considering corruption a compulsion?

True, the profligacy of the political class, not the transparency of fund-raising, is our primary concern here. You can't tackle one without tailing the other. We gave up the luxury of blaming the system in 1990 and the ensuing years of deepening denial have edified impunity. With each broken barrier, the fence between public and private aggrandisement has become fuzzier. When parties become institutions that owe a large part of their influence to personal patronage networks, failure to deliver contracts, jobs,

transfers and scholarships to clients becomes the shortest route to disenfranchisement.

It's no coincidence that things started going downhill for the mainstream parties once prominent entrepreneurs began warning politicians not to count on their money in the next elections. The Maoists, described as one of Asia's wealthiest rebel movements, have begun interacting with the captains of commerce. In a new book, *The Future of Freedom*, Fareed Zakaria attempts to address some of these dilemmas by making a distinction between democracy and liberty. His assertion that democracy is now spreading at the expense of liberty by feeding ethnic hatreds, precipitating wars or undermining the institutions of liberty sounds pretty much like what the reactionary right has been insisting since *Saar Sal*.

Before you marvel at Zakaria's mastery of the Nepali malaise, consider his verdict: Countries need a history of building liberty and a per-capita income of at least \$5,000 if they are to begin sustaining liberal democracy. That may help explain why a third of our tainted 2,000 are thought to be politicians. ♦

Bhutan-Nepal

→ from p1

But Bhutanese in Nepal maintain the categorisation process is an eyewash. "It is a farce," said RB Basnet, president of the Bhutan National Democratic Party, himself a refugee in Kathmandu. "Bhutan's strategy has always been to dilly-dally and to minimise the number it takes back to the maximum extent possible."

The negotiations now seem to be settling down into a "numbers game". Bhutan realises it must take part of the refugee population back, while Nepal is so keen to get over this headache that it may decide to go along if the proportion is substantial enough.

Bhutanese officials now say they will consider taking back those who were forcibly evicted and want to return. But refugees here want to know on what basis that will be decided. "Let's say Bhutan wants to take back 20 percent of the refugees, how are they going to pick us? Are they only going to take able-bodied, young, good looking ones?" asked one refugee representative in Kathmandu.

The sense of urgency in Thimphu could be a result

of international pressure and also concern that the camps may be radicalised by Nepali Maoists. There are other long-term worries: even if Nepal and Bhutan agree on partial repatriation and the camps are closed, there will still be enough refugees who will not give up trying to go back to what they consider their homeland.

Bhutan's Minister for Trade and Industry, Khandu Wangchuk says the two countries should start trading more, and that would relax relations. "As two sovereign nations, we have to join hands to strengthen our sovereignty and economic development," he said in Thimphu last week.

Nepal has sent a draft trade treaty with Most-favoured Nation provisions to Thimphu, but Wangchuk says Bhutan would prefer a free trade treaty. "If Nepal is not yet ready for free trade, we can agree on a list of items of Nepali exports which will get preferential treatment," he added. Nepal and Bhutan signed a MoU to set up a Joint Economic Council to push the treaty and to boost trade. Suraj Vaidya, the leader of the FNCCI delegation told us, "We have been bogged down by the refugee crisis, but if we start trading it may be easier to resolve the issue."

But Bhutanese exiles in Nepal are skeptical. "We are deeply disappointed," said RB Basnet. "Nepal has fallen into the categorisation trap and can't get out. And Bhutan, as usual, is just playing for time." ♦

House for Rent

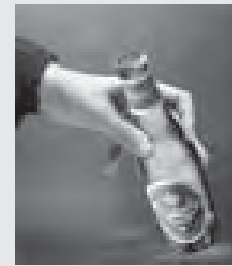


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Mini Carlsberg

"Drink the way the world does" is the slogan for the new smaller 330ml bottle of Carlsberg. The smaller size follows the international trend for easy-to-carry bottles. Also sold in 650ml cans, Carlsberg is popular in urban areas, especially among trendy consumers, the company says. The beer, a leading brand in the premium category, has been available in the Nepali market since 1995.



Nepali rug makers to US

A 13-member Nepali delegation from the Nepal Carpet Exporters' Association is participating in the New York Home Textiles Show to be held in New York from 28-31 March. The United States is the biggest market for Nepali carpets after Europe.

Nepal and Bhutan to trade

Thimphu-Businessmen from Nepal and Bhutan met last week in Thimphu to discuss a new bilateral trade treaty. A memorandum of understanding on a Joint Economic Commission, signed by the Bhutanese and Nepali Chambers of Commerce, was the first formal step to foster business links between the two countries. The minister for trade and industry, Khandu Wangchuk said he hoped the private sector in the two countries could work together to expand trade markets. FNCCI's Suraj Vaidya, led a 20 member Nepali business delegation which included manufacturers of noodles, beer, vegetable oil and representatives of the airline, construction and dairy industries. Nepal and Bhutan agreed to identify products on which they could cut tariffs so as to bolster trade. Bhutan already has similar treaties with Bangladesh and India.

Qatar to Kuala Lumpur

Everyone seems to be scrambling for a share of the traffic of Nepali workers between Kathmandu and Malaysia. Royal Nepal Airlines is starting bi-weekly flights via Singapore on 31 March, with Qatar Airways also using its fifth freedom rights to fly the route direct twice a week. Discussions are ongoing about code-sharing between the airlines.

More beer

Popular Indian beer Haywards 5000, has been launched in Nepal with a technical partnership between the Chaudhary Group and Shaw Wallace Breweries. In the past, Shaw Wallace sourced Haywards 5000 from Sun Gold Brewery, an enterprise of the Chaudhary Group which upgraded the capacity of 1.2 million cases every year. Haywards 5000 sells over 14 million cases annually in India.



Little Italy

Elba, the Italian brand of household goods will now be available to Nepali consumers. Touchstone Sales and Services are distributors for Elba products in the Kathmandu Valley and major cities around the kingdom. Products include a range of gas ovens, microwave ovens, washing machine, water pumps, refrigerators and colour televisions.



Deepak at the Indian Open

Nepal's leading professional golfer, Deepak Acharya is teeing off to play in the Indian Open Golf tournament at the Delhi Golf Club 27-30 March. The tournament has a purse of \$300,000. Deepak, 27, is head professional at the Le Meridien Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and is invited to represent Nepal in this four-day mega golf event of the Asian Golf Tour—the first time a Nepali has been invited to any major golf event in the Asian tour.



BHAGIRATH YOGI

Nepal's rugged terrain, its lack of roads and telephones in remote areas and the importance of adventure tourism make this a country ideal for satellite phones.

So, you would think the government would be enthusiastic about making it as easy as possible for people to get hold of the instruments, and encourage competition so prices come down. Not so. Just as with everything else, the government seems to be unable to decide.

The unofficial explanation for the delay in licensing satellite phones, it is whispered, is that the government doesn't want it to get into the hands of the Maoists. But with the ceasefire, the huge potential in rural telecommunications and the tourism industry, the delay is now getting difficult to defend.

"It's been more than one year since we applied for the license and we are still waiting," says Anudan Jung Rana of Constellation (pic, right), a service provider in Nepal for Thuraya satellite phones. Rana was one of several private companies that applied for the license last year as soon as the government opened the telecom sector for a number of value-added services.

The state-owned monopoly, Nepal Telecommunication Corporation, is preoccupied with meeting the growing demand for cellular phones, but officials say

a decision on satellite phone licenses will be taken soon. "We have already prepared guidelines and only the final decision is to be made," Kailash Neupane of the regulatory Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA) told us.

The Ministry of Information and Communications is said to have already allotted the frequency for satellite phones, and NTA has fixed the license fee at Rs 1.5 million which the service provider will have to renew every five years by paying Rs 1.4 million. Service providers are a bit worried about the high license fee, but think the market is big enough for them to launch the service.

"Everything is set, all we need is the license," says Rana. Potential customers include trekking agencies, mountaineering expeditions, the Royal Nepali Army, and Kathmandu-based aid agencies.

International mountaineering expedition teams in Nepal often bring in satellite phones, but have to pay a deposit of \$3,000 on each set. The restrictions and delays on satellite phones have encouraged smuggling of the machines and there are said to be at least 300 satellite phones in use in Nepal at present that have pre-paid SIM cards from Thai and Filipino companies. Many more satellite handsets with SIM cards are smuggled into India through Nepal, one source told us.

With technological advances, satellite



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...in experience, specialisation, marketing and after-sales servicing.

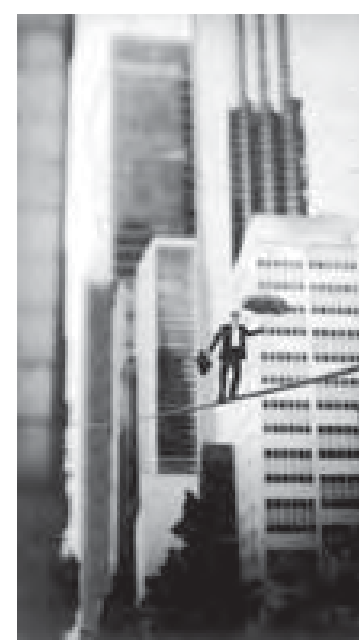
How big is the business training market in Nepal? No one seems to know for sure. But that doesn't matter because no matter how vast it is, the training market remains a growing one: a testament to Nepali businesses looking for ways to make staff more productive.

A few Nepali ex-bankers with years of experience recently offered a series of short-term training to staff of banks in eastern Nepal. The trainers later ended up, laughing their way, well, to the bank. Just last week, a business college in Kathmandu charged fees to offer day-long training on the basics of negotiation and export management to businesses. So profitable were these stints that the college is now considering short-term programs for Nepal's business community—over and above regular full-time academic schedules. (True, a facilitating entity provided both parties with promotional money but even after accounting for that, what was left in the kitty was impressive.) And one could cite further success stories like these.

Despite profits in the business-to-business training market in Nepal, the majority of Nepali trainers—many of whom have devoted time and resources to form organisations such as the Trainers' Association of Nepal (TAN) and the like—are not rushing to service private-sector businesses.

What's holding them back? What stops them from targeting businesses as new clients? The answers lie in four areas in which, alas, the trainers themselves need education and training: experience, specialisation, marketing and after-sales servicing.

Experience: Most Nepali trainers seem to have started their careers usually in the 80s and the early 90s, by providing the usual run-of-the-mill "development training" to NGOs and INGOs—organisations that have to dutifully spend their annual



training budgets anyway. The trainer's dominant experience was what they offered did not depend on market demand. As long as they came up with brochures and a few loyal contacts, they could always count on a certain share of the pie. Everyone cruised along till "development clients" started slashing budgets and trainers were faced with the prospect of either going belly-up or innovating for new market segments. The latter is something they are still finding hard to do.

Specialisation: Most Nepali trainers appear to be a Janardan of all trades, and master of none. Sure, such a generalist approach may serve well up to a point in the "development" market. But it doesn't cut ice for private-sector clients who are willing to pay for expertise they can't get in-house. As development funds shrink and private sector spending grows, the only way these trainers can expand is by specialising or hiring experts in anything from knowledge management to market research. And then charging premium rates. Given the job-related uncertainties in the

Nepali "development training" market, the days of being just another Janardan are numbered. Only experts will survive and excel.

Marketing: To woo private sector clients, trainers have to learn the rudiments of marketing. A Janata Mukti Kendra may buy a six-day program in Dhulikhel on, say, "how to motivate community organisers". But a Shiva Shakti Pvt Ltd needs to be convinced of the positive effect that similar but shorter programs are going to have on their bottom line. Yes, it's a truism, but businesses are interested in training so far as they save or make money. Nothing else matters much. Trainers who understand this, and then adapt accordingly are more likely to find clients in the private sector than those who sit around, pining for the good old days.

Post-training servicing: This seems to be an embedded trend in the market. Clients who buy a set of specialised training retain the trainer for other customised services. One firm, for instance, sold VAT accounting training to businesses outside Kathmandu and was asked to design other solutions. The firm won more money and loyal clients from these post-training consultancies than from the training programs. Training could be an entry point to develop a base of big-money paying clientele.

Not all Nepali trainers will find private sector clients. Big businesses will continue to send staff to India and elsewhere, or fly in experts from outside. But there still remains a wide swathe of businesses in Nepal that are hungry to learn more. Serious trainers who make a successful transition to serving private businesses could find the other side of the NGO fence to be just as lucrative. ♦

Satellite phones still stuck

Government indecisiveness is delaying a communication tool best suited for Nepal's terrain.



NINA BARAGHARNA



SAMUEL THOMAS in TINJURE

It may not rank among the natural world's most celebrated events like the monarch butterfly passage, phytoplankton blooms, wildebeest migration, or the New England fall colours. But the annual flowering of the rhododendron in Nepal is well worth travelling to see.

And the place to see it is the Tinjure Milke Jaljale (TMJ) ridge in eastern Nepal. In the coming weeks these scenic hills will be awash with red—not of political fervour but of rhododendrons in full bloom. The junction of three districts in the northeastern hills—Taplejung, Sankhuwasabha and Tehrathum—is home to Nepal's prime rhododendron

When the rhododendron bloom in Tinjure this spring, it will be a true arcadia.

Go East



Sabhapokhari. The TMJ ridge is spectacular eco-tourism country, and is quite strategically located for nature tourists between two protected areas. This is still arcadia, no pasta on the menu, no curio shops, no tiger balm, and no touts. The rhododendron trek can be done

even by the moderately fit. Basantapur to Guphapokhari is all within 2000-3000m. Typically, very little money that accrues from eco-tourism goes to communities. TMJ is only getting started, and with the ceasefire this could be the spring of hope for the east.



TMJ for beginners

- Tread easy, manage your impact.
- People depend on rhododendron forests for fuelwood. If you have porters or engage the services of a mule, carry kerosene stoves and fuel.
- Do not litter. Carry non-degradable waste back. Even Basantapur has no facilities for recycling.
- Bury human waste, at least 30m from any water source.
- Carry some drinking water supplies. The ridge has its limitations.
- Spread tourism money around. Purchase goods and services from little people.
- Yak caravans: step aside and let them pass, especially on narrow trails.
- Hailstorm: take shelter, hailstone size matters.



Kathmandu to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore

New bi-weekly flights on Royal Nepal Airlines starting 31 March.

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RA in KL

More than any other spot in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, or "KL" as it is commonly known, is the focal point of new Malaysia. While the city's past is still present in the evocative British colonial buildings and the nightmarket, that past is everywhere met with insistent reminders of KL's present and future.

The city's bustling streets, its shining, modern office towers, and its cosmopolitan air project an unbounded spirit of progress to symbolise Malaysia's unhesitating leap into the future.

As the entry point for most visitors and the meeting point of the country's many attractions, Kuala Lumpur is a grand gateway to a fascinating destination.

Royal Nepal Airlines now links Kathmandu to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore twice a week with its Boeing 757 aircraft. Nepal's national airline operates direct flights from Kathmandu to Bangalore, Bangkok, Delhi, Dubai, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai, Osaka, Shanghai and Singapore.

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Off the rhodo trek

- Depart from the main trail at Guphapokhari toward Taplejung Pathivara via Gorja, Change and Dobhan.
- Take the trail from Dobhan to Olangchung Gola (trail leads all the way to Tibet).
- Visit Hyatrung falls, reportedly the largest in Asia, which can be reached via Guphapokhari, Srijung and Pauthak.
- Guphapokhari to Srijung, Morahang, Jirikhimti, Myanglung and Lahsune before returning to Basantapur (considered a culture trek).
- Guphapokhari to Makalu Barun base camp via Nundhaki and Khandbari of Chainpur. The latter can also be reached via Mude Sanischare.



East Nepal is exciting even minus the flora—less explored, great ethnic diversity and wildlife, magnificent views of the eastern Himalaya and lots of adventure options for rafting and mount-

United States Kingdom Nations ?

Healing today's divided world may only happen with fresh political leadership in both the US and UK, and a strong assertion of UN authority, argues JEFFREY D SACHS.



The Iraq war's main consequences will not be on the battlefield. They will come later, and will depend on whether George Bush and Tony Blair can justify their onslaught on a largely defenseless population.

They launched this war for certain declared reasons, all of which were heatedly debated around the world. If they are vindicated, then the war could conceivably bring a safer world. If their arguments remain unproved or are disproved, then the war will incite instability. In that case, a critical step towards healing the world would be their quick departure from office.

The Iraq war was not and could not be justified to the world on the basis that Saddam Hussein was a tyrant. Justification, if it exists, rests on the danger Saddam's regime posed. Bush

and Blair made four claims:

- Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction,
- those weapons pose a grave, immediate threat,
- UN inspections were not eliminating that threat and
- the threat could best be eliminated by war.

The first claim will be the easiest to verify. Bush and Blair talked repeatedly about stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, massive underground and mobile units to produce or launch such weapons, and active programs to obtain nuclear weapons. It is incumbent upon Bush and Blair to prove their case, and to prove it in the face of worldwide suspicion that the US and UK security agencies might plant phony evidence.

For this reason, independent UN experts should assess any evidence that is

uncovered. If no evidence is produced of weapons of mass destruction on a threatening scale, then both Bush and Blair would deserve to be finished politically, no matter what else happens in Iraq.

The second claim will be trickier to prove. Bush and Blair must show that any weapons

of mass destruction that are recovered posed a grave and urgent threat. We know that Iraq at one time possessed chemical and biological weapons, because the US sold them to Iraq. The test is not whether traces of those weapons remain, as such traces will be found at disposal sites, but whether those weapons were poised for use in threatening amounts.

If the Iraqis launch an attack with such weapons, this would demonstrate that the weapons were ready for use. Whether they posed any real threat outside Iraq's borders, or would have been used in the absence of the current war, must still be assessed.

The third claim is hugely contentious. Bush and Blair should demonstrate that the UN inspection process was failing. This can be done by showing that the Iraqis were simply hiding the evidence at sites visited by the inspectors and declared free of weapons. There should be a

systematic review of sites that were visited. There should also be an explanation, if weapons of mass destruction are uncovered at other sites, as to why the inspectors could not have found such weapons in a realistic period of time.

The fourth claim will be subject to wild propaganda on both sides. Was the war justified in terms of costs and benefits, and was war really the last resort? This will depend on an objective assessment of the costs of the war in terms of loss of life, destruction of property, economic impact within Iraq, spillovers into other forms of violence such as terrorism and geopolitical consequences.

To date, Bush and Blair have failed to make the case to the world, with the partial exception of their own countries. The American people have been treated to a spectacle of jingoism, fear mongering, confusion of Iraq with Osama bin Laden's terrorists, and simple patriotism.

None of this has swayed the rest of the world, which views the war with a mixture of disdain and alarm. This would change if evidence on the four points is mustered. When the 13 British colonies in North America launched their own War of Independence, Thomas Jefferson understood that "the decent respect to the opinions of mankind" required an explanation for that war, which he set forth in the Declaration of Independence. The need for such an explanation, backed by rigorous

evidence, is no less necessary today.

If the arguments for this war are not proved, the consequences will be profound. Propaganda, streets lined with cheering Iraqis, amazement over the prowess of US smart bombs, would not distract us from an awful truth—that Bush and Blair broke the world peace, engaged in massive premeditated killing, and did so against overwhelming global opinion. Healing today's divided world could start only with fresh political leadership in both the US and UK, and a strong assertion of UN authority.

Given the terrible costs, I hope that this war will prove justified, though I have my doubts based on the current evidence. If compelling evidence proves that weapons of mass destruction were at hand; that they were poised for use on a threatening scale; that the UN inspectors had poor prospects of uncovering and dismantling those weapons, then we must acknowledge the arguments made by Bush and Blair. Even in those circumstances, war might well have been unwise compared to a policy of containment. Still, the war would then at least have made some sense. The horrors of a completely senseless war are indeed almost too frightening to contemplate. ♦

(© Project Syndicate)

(Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.)

ANALYSIS

by ANTHONY BRUCE

Britain's first invasion of Iraq

Britain says it has gone to war to rid Iraq of Saddam, but this war seems uncannily like its invasion of Mesopotamia in 1914 to secure oil wells.



as the river was the only suitable route north. Similar progress was made up the Euphrates, where a smaller force protected Townshend's flank. After a month's hard struggle in the summer heat, Nasiriyah was captured in July 1915.

As enemy opposition remained light, the advance continued until Townshend's army encountered a Turkish force of equal strength entrenched on both banks of the Tigris at Kut. Crossing the river, the British attacked from the north on 28 September, routing the Turks, who lost 5,300 men and all of their artillery. However, a fall in the water level delayed the advance northwards and enemy survivors escaped to Ctesiphon, 16 miles from Baghdad.

Without waiting for reinforcements, Townshend moved forward on 11 November. Although Baghdad's strategic significance was limited, the British government needed a success to restore its international prestige, badly

damaged by the failure of the Gallipoli expedition. With a force of 14,000 men, Townshend met the Turks at Ctesiphon, where they occupied heavily fortified positions on the east bank of the Tigris.

Although substantially outnumbered—the Turks now had 30,000 men—Townshend unwisely ordered an advance. The British initially succeeded in moving through the enemy's forward lines, but as the Turks brought up more troops they were forced to withdraw. Four days' heavy fighting left the British with 4,500 casualties.

Townsend retreated south, reaching Kut on 3 December and decided to hold the place as the cornerstone of Britain's presence in Mesopotamia. Defences were prepared around the village, situated on a loop of the Tigris, before the Turks besieged it on 8 December.

The operation involved two Turkish divisions whose three

successive assaults failed to penetrate the fortifications. The Turks used most of their troops to prevent British reinforcements from breaking through. British relief forces made three separate attempts to reach Kut. None succeeded.

Without hope of relief, the garrison surrendered on 29 April 1916, after a siege of almost five months. Food had run out; starvation loomed. Some 8,000 men were taken prisoner; many died in captivity. Months of preparation were needed before another offensive could be launched. After a gradual buildup and significant improvements in transport, the British government authorised another attack on Baghdad. On 13 December 1916, the British advanced from Basra on both banks of the Tigris. Some 50,000 men were involved in the new operation, but progress was slow because of rain and the need to keep casualties to a minimum. The 12,000 Turks were heavily outnumbered when the opposing forces met near Kut on 24 February 1917.

Late in the war, Britain resumed the offensive north of Baghdad, with the aim of capturing the Mosul oilfields and strengthening their bargaining position in the post-war peace talks. The new campaign was not completed by the time of the armistice and Mosul was not occupied until later. In the peace settlement following the war, Iraq emerged from the ruins of Mesopotamia in 1921 as a quasi-independent state under British mandate. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Anthony Bruce, a British historian, is at work on a military history of Britain's Great War campaigns in the Middle East.)

Another Vietnam?

HO CHI MINH CITY — The Iraq war resonates most loudly in Vietnam. Nearly 30 years after the end of its own war, this southeast nation of 80 million people knows what it means to come under a US "shock and awe" treatment.

In those days it was called "terror and panic". General Nguyen An, a veteran of the war against the United States, says US military planners believed that heavy bombardments would erode their enemies' combat spirit. Today, it looks increasingly like America didn't learn its lesson from Vietnam.

"In 1969, they dropped millions of tons of bombs on the Ho Chi Minh Trail (which brought supplies to communist fighters), boasting that no living thing could survive such heavy bombings," recalls An. "Still, we remained alive, fought back and became victorious. The same thing would happen to Iraq, because using bombs to kill Saddam Hussein is not easy. If President Saddam Hussein could survive, Iraqi forces could survive too," he pointed out.

For him and many other veterans, the war on Iraq also brings back many memories of the role of psychological warfare and the difficulties that the United States had in coping with spiralling costs of a war, especially a prolonged and bloody one. And there is another parallel: protests all over the world, including the United States, against the war.

Daily newspapers are competing fiercely in supplying the latest news to readers, reflecting intense interest in the war. "We have suffered much during the American War and understand the pain and the loss caused by fighting. That is why we should do our best to stop it," said Tran Dinh, a retired schoolteacher who attended one of the many protest rallies in Hanoi. (IPS)



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

THE ROYAL DANISH EMBASSY, New Delhi, invites applications from Nepali professors for the post of a **TEACHING ASSISTANT OF TEFL** to assist in the Danish class for the education sector programme.

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or deliver it at the Embassy premises in Kathmandu by 10 April 2003. All applications must include a letter of contact persons for recommendations, curriculum vitae and two recent passport size photos. An enclosed Curriculum Vitae with details of previous employment, education, language and other relevant information is required.

Only written applications are considered. Inquiries may be made by e-mail to hr@royal.dk. Only shortlisted candidates will be called for interview.

Interested candidates are requested to apply by 10 April 2003.

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SATIRE DEPT.

by RO WHATLEY

"Je ne pas Americain"

In what is believed to be its strongest travel advisory ever, the US State Department today warned Americans abroad not to act like Americans.

The advisory was issued simultaneously in Washington by State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, and in The Hague by a man who, in halting Dutch, denied he was US Ambassador Clifford Sobel. The US Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, is proudly displaying the red, white and blue flag of France.

Unlike previous alerts, which have warned Americans to keep a low profile or avoid certain destinations, the new advisory notes that it is now unwise to come across as American at all. As a result, the State Department cautions US citizens to avoid behaviours that could cause them to be singled out as obviously American. These include:

- the wearing of white socks and tennis shoes.
- complaining if asked to share a bathroom.
- threatening to sue over bad

State Department advisory warns Americans to act un-American. (Just joking.)

service, television reception or weather.

- hegemony.

In addition, US citizens attempting to speak a foreign language are urged to curb their Americanisms. For example: Correct: "Est-ce que vous l'avez aux autres couleurs?" Incorrect: "Est-ce que vous, like, l'avez aux, like, autres

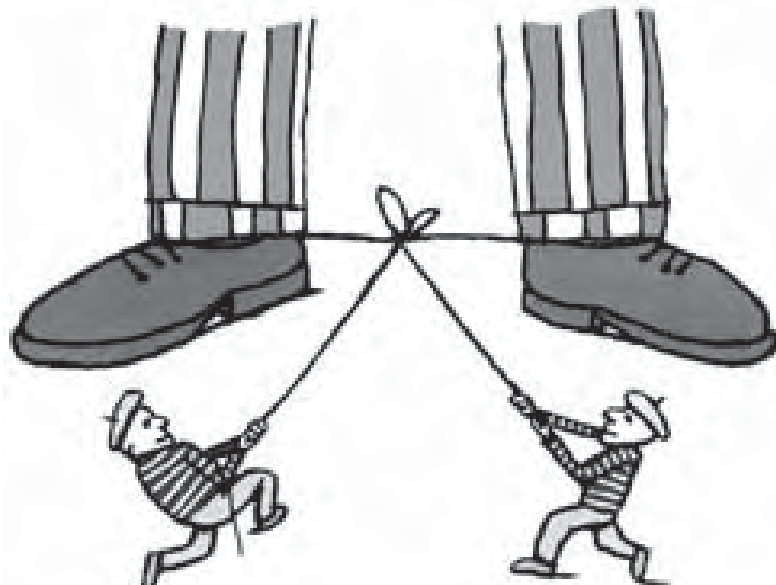
couleurs?" The advisory immediately created turmoil overseas, particularly for US military personnel, who pretended to be French and were forced to surrender. The alert also caused confusion at home, as it seems to contradict the US Department of Homeland Security, which has warned

Americans not to act un-American. In a press briefing this afternoon, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer attempted to unravel the paradox.

"What we are saying is, when you are in America, you need to behave like an American, particularly if you are not American, or are Colin Powell. But when you are outside America, you should not behave like an American, unless you are not American, in which case we urge you to act American. Here I refer specifically to the NATO representatives from Germany, France and Belgium."

The advisory, Fleischer added, applies to all Americans, including President Bush. "When the President is travelling abroad, he will only act American while aboard Air Force One or in the company of US media. At all other times, he will attempt to come across as Kosovian or Grecian."

Reached for comment in Brussels, US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns said, "Qing wen, ren min gong yuan zai na li?" ♦ (BBSpot online)



India and Pakistan united against war

Finally, there is something that New Delhi and Islamabad agree on: opposing the war in Iraq.



make a first-hand, independent appraisal of conditions there.

Similarly in Pakistan, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) that in many ways approximates the Congress party in India has been careful to steer away from a clear-cut position on Iraq, focusing on humanitarian issue rather than openly condemning Washington. Outside their parliaments and on the streets, the two countries look even more close to each other with similar-sounding slogans and banners calling for 'Death to America' carried by people ready to battle grim-looking police to get at US installations and institutions.

Predictably, pro-Islamic groups and political parties are at the forefront of such rallies in both countries—but this time around they are sharing a platform with intellectual groups, secularists and leftists.

Last Friday, Pakistan was crippled by a shutdown called by the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), an alliance of religious parties that represents a third of parliament. It is powerful in such sensitive provinces as Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province and influential in Punjab

and Sindh. Friday was a sensitive day in India too which, though officially secular, houses the world's second largest Muslim population of 120 million people, most of them concentrated in important urban centres such as Bhopal, where people burned US flags soon after prayers were over. The loudest demonstrations have been in Kashmir, India's sole Muslim majority state whose possession is being disputed by Pakistan.

Bangladesh, currently ruled by a coalition supported by the Jamaat-I-Islami, has also had its share of anti-US demonstrations and mass rallies over the past weeks—in contrast to quieter opposition to US-led action in Afghanistan. Last weekend New Delhi witnessed a march to the US Embassy organised by the Committee Against War on Iraq in which political leaders, intellectuals and artists, including the well-known author Arundhati Roy, parliamentarian and journalist Kuldip Nayyar and the painter Manjeet Bawa.

The People's Health Movement (PHM), which is led by doctors and health professionals has taken a page out of anti-colonial history by calling for a Gandhian-style boycott of goods made in the United States and in Britain. The targets of this boycott call are items of food, beverages, petroleum products and cigarettes. "Make it a point to tell the shopkeeper why you are boycotting these brands," urged Ravi Narayan, international coordinator for PHM, which was born out of a 92-country summit held in Bangladesh in 2000. The PHM charter declares that wars and violence devastate communities, destroy human dignity and have severe impacts on the physical and mental health of women and children. It condemns the "increased arms procurements and aggressive and corrupt international arms trade" that "undermines social, political and economic stability", which is the result of wars.

Apart from sentiment, both India and Pakistan have genuine fears that a prolonged war in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region could result in millions of their workers employed there having to be repatriated home—with serious consequences for the local economy and for employment. India has already begun an airlift of its nationals out of the region and Defence Minister George Fernandes announced that transport aircraft from the air force stands ready to help with any emergency evacuation that might become necessary ♦ (IPS)

Kamal Thapa

Jana Astha, 26 March

Excerpts of an interview with Kamal Thapa, leader of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and member of the government committee to monitor the code of conduct.

What is the status of the code of conduct?

It's been only one week since the code of conduct went into effect. There may have been some confusion in implementing it in the beginning. A period of three weeks was specified for the code to be fully enforced. At the moment it remains a formula, some concrete decisions from the government is necessary for implementation and monitoring.

The chief government negotiator, Narayan Singh Pun, has said the Maoists are adding new demands.

I don't know if the Maoists have formally added new demands. Both sides should stop tacking on conditions at this point. The code of conduct says both sides have to gradually release those held in captivity. The government is formulating a policy for the release of Maoist detainees.

Where do you see the role of political parties in the peace process?

The political parties welcomed the ceasefire and expressed hope that will translate into a lasting peace. But they are not actively contributing to this process by participating. Instead of cooperating, the parties are putting forward irrelevant demands and views, which is not helping anyone, least of all the fragile attempts at peace. We must all rise above partisan politics and uphold the national interest.

But Pun has said the peace talks will take place even if the parties don't cooperate.

The participation and agreement of the political parties is a must to provide the peace process with political legitimacy and boost its chances of success. The government must continue to open its doors for consensus.

What are the chances of the political parties aligning with the Maoists?

I don't see any such possibility. Of course, in the context of the country's politics, there are three forces, namely the king, parliamentary parties and the Maoists. But in the context of the peace talks there are only two forces—the establishment and the rebels. Political parties are an integral part of the establishment.

Is your party demanding an all-party government by sacking the Chand administration?

No, we haven't demanded the present government be sacked. But we are not against the formation of an all-party government that can accommodate all political parties. Such a government must be formed within the sphere of the constitution. We must not let the king make political decisions outside the ambit of this constitution.

Take responsibility

Jana Bhavana, 24 March

The Maoist leadership has started making contradictory claims over the murder of Armed Police Force chief Krishna Mohan Shrestha in January. Contrary to a previous statement, Eastern Region Bureau member Kripashwor revoked his party involvement in Shrestha's assassination. Addressing a local meet at Mahadevsthan in Sindhuli, Kripashwor said his party was investigating the murder to find out who was involved.

Local intellectuals and political party representatives who also participated in the talks concurred that peace talks must begin soon. Madhab Acharya, the president of the Nepal Teacher's Association also called on the Maoists to acknowledge the serious mistakes they made in the last seven years of the armed insurgency. "The Maoists should take responsibility for the blunders they made, they cannot be excused for the crimes they have committed," Acharya said.

Back in print

Janadesh, a pro-Maoist paper resumed publication Tuesday after a one-year gap. The publication was closed following the arrest of all the editorial and administrative staff by the government just after the state of emergency was declared in November 2001. Excerpts of an interview and an article from its 25 March issue:

Prachanda

The chairman of the CPN (Maoist), Comrade Prachanda, announced the five-member Maoist negotiation team will be made public "within a day or two". In an exclusive interview, Prachanda said although the government is still unwilling to create an environment of trust, the Maoist negotiation team will go public, placing its trust in the people. He made clear that his party hasn't given up demands for a roundtable conference, an interim government and a constituent assembly. While saying

the major parliamentary parties, including the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML), seemed committed to peace after the ceasefire was declared, Prachanda added these parties fell into the trap of "indecision".

Baburam Bhattarai

In his column Maoist chief negotiator Baburam Bhattarai said, "The peace talks are going to take place in the country between representatives of the old regime and the new regime. Current domestic laws have no jurisdiction over negotiators because the entire country had been divided into two opposing regimes and armies. Only international laws will be applicable during the period of talks...the old establishment isn't serious enough about creating a congenial environment for talks. Why else would they file cases against us in their so-called courts after the ceasefire? And although an agreement was made, why have they refused to release our central level leaders?"

Stand firm

Editorial, Budhabar, 26 March

The US-led attack on Iraq has not only undermined the role of the United Nations, but has also completely ignored its charter and past decisions. In some ways it has pushed the UN to a degree of irrelevance. But the Nepal government's reaction towards the US assault marks a massive deflection in our foreign policy. It completely changed after the Minister for Information and Communications Ramesh Nath Pandey—a self-proclaimed expert on foreign affairs—openly supported the US-led war.

Foreign affairs experts see this as a serious mis-step in national policy too. Other than highlighting this government's readiness to bow to the powers-that-be, the emerging threat now is that Nepal will fall into a series of similar problems and challenges. Why is the government committing such a grave mistake by ignoring our



Newspaper headline: Son of former minister jailed on corruption charges. Man behind bars to journalist: "My cars, mansions and bank balance were made available by the People's Movement. Tell me, it is now a crime to protect my assets?"

राजधानी Rajdhani, 21 March

own traditional patterns for foreign affairs? We don't see any alternative to a foreign policy of standing firmly in favour of a strong United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Incompetence

Editorial, Nepal Samacharpatra, 26 March

The government with the so-called "clean image" has been tarnished by yet another example of incompetence in announcing a steep hike in the price of petroleum products for the second time in the last three months. The government's decision cites the "international situation" as an excuse to strike an additional blow to already deprived citizens.

The fact is, petroleum-

exporting countries have neither reduced their production nor raised the price of crude oil. The government of Iraq, which is directly embroiled in war, continues to export oil. Contrary to the national trend, the price of oil has declined in the international market. In this light, to make the "international situation" an excuse is nothing more than an attempt to hoodwink the Nepali people.

The recent artificial shortage of fuel in the market may be linked with efforts to hike the price of petroleum products. Citing the smuggling of petroleum products across the border to India merely exposes the incompetence of our administration. The question arises: do decision makers have some sort of "unholy alliance" with the oil mafia?

Embanking

Drishhti, 25 March

Nepali experts have demanded an immediate stop in the construction of the Mahalisagar embankment in Kapilbastu that might inundate hundreds of kilometers of agricultural land on the Nepali side of the border. They also said the repair work claimed by the Indian Embassy in the capital is actually the construction of a brand new embankment.

A report prepared by an expert team consisting of Dr Mangal Siddhi Manandhar (below, left), Netra Prasad Dhital, Baburam Bhattarai and advocate Hari Phuyal revoked claims made by the Indian Embassy. The report categorically states: "The old gate has not been repaired but a new one has been constructed about 50 feet away from the old one." Despite claims from the Indian government that construction stopped on 29 January, the study team found it in full swing till 23 March.

They also questioned the validity of the Indian claim that the construction is being carried out on the basis of set benchmarks. The experts said the Indian benchmark violated international standards after they found the embankment extended 2.2km between border pillars 50 to 52 along no-man's land. The Indian authorities say the construction is in accordance with a 1901 agreement, but failed to name the parties.

Every monsoon, more than 180 hectares of land on the Nepali side gets inundated because of the Mahalisagar embankment. The base level of the dam is 91.6m asl and its FRL is 92.67m. The experts observed the length and height of the embankment has grown every year, increasing the risk of flooding the Nepali villages of Baidauli, Rangapur and Parsohiya. The report recommends an immediate halt in construction, and appeals to the Nepali and Indian authorities to find a mutually-satisfactory solution.



दृष्टि

HISTORY AND CULTURE

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Manjul With the masses

The poet Manjul began his career as a committed communist worker, traveling from village to village with singer Raamesh, sounding out songs against Panchayat-era oppression and rallying the masses to revolution. Those who grew up in the eastern part of Nepal still speak of staying up all night along with the entire village, listening to the two singers in the rain or in biting cold weather.

Disenchanted with communist politics and aesthetics, Manjul was later to abandon all cultural work aimed at serving the political parties. For this, he bore the brunt of his comrades' ire. Yet Manjul persisted in defying the standard subjects and styles of progressive writing by exploring individual subjectivity in a metaphorical, abstract, and sometimes extravagantly surreal language. His Sajha prize-winning collection *Mrityu Kabita* bears much evidence of his break from communist poetics. And his collection *Siddhicharharu* voices a demand for poetic freedom.

Having established his freedom as a poet, then, Manjul now seems set to return once again to the masses. One of his new projects is a collaboration with American photographer Susan Simone, a series of photographs and poems focusing on the material and emotional suffering of Nepal's economic underclass. Those who miss the old Manjul—the one who spoke of social ills and exploitation—will surely welcome this body of work, some of which features below.



I'M CRUSHING MY AGES

I'm crushing my ages
along with these stones
my days and nights
my wishes and dreams

I myself
am being crushed
along with these stones
day to day
moment to moment
time to time

At my own crushing
I'm becoming from a person, a stone
At my own blows
I'm shattering to countless pieces

I am violated
like the rocky shore
I give birth to gravel

There's nobody to speak of
Either there's soft earth like me
or places soiled by the shit and piss of animals

EVEN IF THE BUFFALOES DROWN

Even if the rest of the buffaloes drown
their horns won't drown

If the horns drown
everything will drown
There'll be nothing left that can't drown

My poem
will also drown

If it drowns
action will drown/fate will drown

Trees will drown from the earth
From trees,
flowers
From flowers, smells
From smells,
feelings

Water will drown from the river
The depths from the water
From the depths, the quality reflecting me will drown
the quality that washes hands will drown

There will be nothing left that cannot drown

If the horns drown
my poem will drown

WILL YOU STITCH BACK MY HEART AS WELL, TAILOR?

Will you stitch back my heart as well, tailor?
it seems to have ripped quite badly—

Maybe it'll hold for a few days yet?
Maybe it'll stay stitched for a few more days?

They say a flood came,
the river washed away
the few fields we had

They say the house succumbed to landslides,
the wife and children are living in the cow shed
in hunger

They say our son hasn't gotten to attend school
They say our daughter hasn't yet gotten married
They say my old woman keeps hacking and
coughing

They say she wheezes asthmatically with
every breath

Me, an old man
unable to put together the expenses to return
home

Will you stitch back my heart as well, tailor?
it seems to have ripped quite badly—

COME, LET'S LIVE LIKE GRAVEL

Come, let's live like gravel

who have hordes
but no one of their own
who are split and shattered
squashed and trampled on by footsteps

who are transported back and forth
on trucks
at the will of others

who have no home
(or for whom the whole earth is home)
who have no bed, no fixed stove

Come, let's live like gravel

Let's not speak even when we're together
the language of our hearts
let's consider them adequate—
the sounds made when we knock against others

Come, let's live like gravel
not the greatest pariahs of this place!

FEEDBACK

by ISHWOR GURUNG

Letter from Bardia

Hope and development need to urgently invest in this fertile recruiting ground for the Maoists.

For many years the area around the Royal Bardia National Park has been a hotbed of political dissent. This is hardly surprising when you consider that some 5,000 people had to be moved out of the Babai valley to extend the park area in the 1970s.

Many of these people received no compensation. They had probably been living in the area for some time, but had no title deeds to the land. No deed, no compensation. Evicted, most have since been again squatting on land for which they have no titles.

Much data was collected in the area in the late 1990s under the the UNDP-supported "Parks and People" project, now renamed Participatory Conservation Programme, run by the Department of Wildlife Conservation and National Parks. It focused on grievances leading to conflict of interest between locals and the park.

There is no doubt that the local inhabitants in Bardia have some legitimate grievances. Ever since malaria was eradicated in the 1960s, the tarai has seen a continuous wave of migration not only from the hills but also from India. Space is at a premium and many indigenous people, mainly dangauda and deshaura Tharus have been displaced. Many were forced into slave labour under the kamaiya system, and ended up working as kamaiyas on lands they once owned.

Government legislation two years ago to free bonded labourers far from helping these people had the effect of removing their only shelter and source of food. The plight of these people is desperate.

In the circumstances, the Maoists found in Bardia a fertile recruiting ground. As early as 1998, visitors would be allowed to proceed only by returning the *lal salaam*. The army got sucked into the conflict, and was targeted by the Maoists.

A major in Bardia who used to command the Thakurdwara company had become popular because he mixed with the people and addressed their grievances. He was targeted by the Maoists, severely injured in an improvised landmine explosion, and has only recently returned to duty. His successor, along with a pleasant 20-year-old Gurung from Gorkha who was the driver, travelling in the same vehicle, were not so lucky. Both were killed in an attack last year. It is not surprising that there now exists little trust between the locals and the army.

Resorts in Bardia, like the Bardia Jungle Cottage, are largely empty because of the conflict. For security reasons, the army had withdrawn telephones from local hotels. In order to communicate with their travel agents and prospective clients, the army have allowed hotel owners access to lines within the army camp for legitimate business purposes.

The army also took in all privately owned rafts in the area for fear that they could be used by the Maoists for transportation. This is further hurting the hotel owners and aggravating an already bad situation. Many hotels have had to close down, including the Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge, the biggest in the area.

Army commanders in remote areas where normal government operations have been suspended due to the conflict have been raising voluntary contributions from local businesses to assist in the reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by seven years of armed conflict. The amount and frequency of the donations is set by the private donors themselves. The army says the thinking behind this policy is to demonstrate that Nepal need not be reliant on foreign donors for development aid, since it mostly comes with strings attached and is often inappropriate and wasteful.

Recent reports about army "extortion" (*Nepali Times*, Letters, #137, 138) are a result of misunderstanding and attempts by local political leaders to tarnish the image of the government because they feel left out of the peace process. Many locals in Karnali are happy about the ceasefire and a semblance of normalcy is returning to the area. They may not agree with the methods of the Maoists, but feel the rebels at least have principles to which they have stuck and have been willing to die for them. The situation in Bardia could be a microcosm of what is happening in the rest of Nepal. ♦



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Negotiating borders** contemporary Pakistani miniatures exhibition from 23 March-1 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Must see. Contains works of Aisha Khaled, Humaira Abid, Imran Querishi, Mariam Khurshed, Nursa Latif, Reeta Saeed, Saira Wasim, Talha Rathore, Tazeen Qayyum and Waseem Ahmed. 4411122
- ❖ **Water for the future** Exhibition and debate program. 27, 28 March, Nepal Art Council. Rs 20 for ½ day site visits, leaves 9AM. Organised by NGO Forum for Urban Water & Sanitation. Details: ngoforum@mail.com.np. 4491052, 4493188

EVENTS

- ❖ **The twelve deeds of the Buddha** by Korchak.Tulku Book launch. 4PM on 29 March at the Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- ❖ **Ex AVM party** at AVM 1PM on 29 March. Tickets Rs 300 single, Rs 500 couple. Contact AVM School.
- ❖ **Martin Chautari** Patterns of Injustice and Peace: Global and Regional with Dr Ranabir Samaddar, SAFAR on 30 March. 4256239, 4240059
- ❖ **The Secret of Roan Inish** Film by John Sayles 5.30 PM at NTB, Bhrikuti Mandap. Organised by Inter-Cultural Film Society.
- ❖ **Tennis coaching classes** Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **La Cabana Salsa Night** at the Jazz Bar. 28 March, 8PM onwards. Free Entrance. 4412999

DRINK

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

MUSIC

- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali Lunch** at Patan Museum Café 11AM-4PM. 5526271
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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. 6680080/83
- ❖ **Tea House Combo** Rs 700 pp at Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6410432
- ❖ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Rs 2,750 pp per night. 01-361500
- ❖ **The secret of Kathmandu** Overnight package \$99. Second night at 50 percent. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse**, near Thimi. Traditional Nepali farm house in lush gardens. 6631734

NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-26-03-2003 08:00 GMT

A moving low pressure system replenished moisture content in the atmosphere over Nepal this week, resulting in the massive thunderstorms on Monday and Wednesday. Moisture pushed up by hot air rising from the plains created thunder cells that covered most of central Nepal towards the afternoon. But the tarai was surprisingly rain-free. Unlike winter frontal systems, this was convection-related precipitation, characteristic of the Himalayan spring. As this picture, taken Wednesday afternoon during Kathmandu Valley's thunderstorm shows, the Himalayan arc is covered in storms with the plains clear. Expect a partly overcast weekend, and more late afternoon showers over the hills and himal next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
24-09	25-09	24-11	26-12	27-12

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

BOOKWORM



Hindu Samskaras: Socio-religious study of the Hindu sacraments Rajbali Pandey
Motilal Banarsidass, 2002
Rs 195

The *samskaras* give expression to the aspirations and ideals of the Hindus. The work is a systematic study of all the rites, ceremonies and customs to be performed by an individual from birth till death. It shows the sacramental beliefs and practices, far from being irrational priestcraft, are consistent and logical and have practical utility and intention.

The book of **Buddhas: Ritual symbolism used on Buddhist statuary and ritual objects**

Eva Rudy Jansen
New Age Books, 2002
Rs 125

In Buddhism, every symbol has a meaning, and this book explores and explains the ritual meaning of objects associated with the religion. It is an excellent introduction for students, while not a comprehensive or exhaustive study, it provides an introduction to Buddhism with a generous survey of the most common figures and symbols.



The twelve deeds of the Buddha: A painting by Korchak.Tulku Kun-ga Gyeltsen based on the Dérge Parkhang xylographs
Shechen Publications, 2003
Rs 750

Nine blockprints have been reassembled in a simple, elegant format to present the life of the Buddha as it has been traditionally understood and depicted for centuries in Tibet. It brings the celebrated Dérge images back into print and showcases Tulku's colourful painting style. Each Deed is accompanied by a verse in Tibetan calligraphy with an English translation and a summary from classical literature.

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

Sufi soul

Abida Parveen is Pakistan's "female Nusrat". Next week, she will bring Kathmandu closer to god through her music.



In the ancient tradition of Sufi singing, the power of Abida Parveen's voice engages the listener to transcend temporal space and truly comprehend how music can be a path to the divine. The Embassy of Pakistan in Kathmandu brings the famous singer to audiences here with a concert on 5 April at the Hyatt Regency.

Lovers of Sufi Soul will get a chance to hear Abida's husky alto voice as it rises and dips effortlessly, wrapping itself around poems written hundreds of years ago by Sufi saints in Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi and Saraiki. She sings with a trance-like intensity, raising her hands to heaven in fervour or submission and slapping her thighs in emphasis.

The 49-year-old is often hailed as the successor to the legacy of Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. It is a mantle that sits well on Abida, who has a similar command over traditional ghazal, the ability to infuse folk songs sublimely and above all, to communicate with the audience. But unlike the late

Khan, Abida is not tempted to crossover to more accessible—and lucrative—world music or fusion styles.

Surprisingly, she has a pragmatic view on the Bollywoodisation of Sufi music. "Plagiarism is good for Sufi music. Film music only makes way for larger audience and more mass appeal," she says. Despite her niche following, Abida's fame has spread across the world, and is not just limited to the Urdu cognizant quarters. From Los Angeles to Lucknow, they queue up to hear her sing. The breadth of her audience does not faze Abida. "I always assume I'm singing for god. For me, my audience is god."

Abida Parveen was born in the Pakistani town of Larkana, where her father, Gulam Haider, ran a music school. Though women in Muslim society are rarely encouraged to pursue musical (or other performance) careers, Haider recognised his daughter's extraordinary talent at an early age and encouraged her to sing.

Her career crystallised after her marriage to the late Ghulam Hussain Sheikh, a senior producer in Radio Pakistan who became her mentor. She studied classical vocal music with Salamat Ali Khan.

While she does not regularly perform purely classical music, her prodigious command of the ornamental idiom and developmental genius of this genre is apparent throughout her music. She has performed in a wide range of venues both sacred and secular, from the shrines of saints in her native Sindh to the world's greatest concert halls.

It is to touch this divinity through music that those fortunate enough to get tickets to Abida's public performance on 5 April count themselves privileged. (Those who can't make it can watch the broadcast on Kantipur Television when it goes on air.) The concert is being managed by Infinity International. She will also be singing at a separate private concert for King Gyanendra next week.

Abida devotes herself to Kafi, a strain of mystical and often radical poetry originating from what is now the troubled border between India and Pakistan. These are love poems in many senses of the word and the Sufi ideal of *Visal* (union with the beloved) is often expressed in ways that seem as

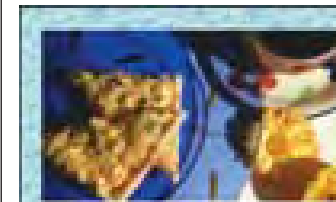
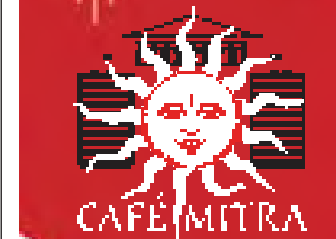
worldly as they are spiritual. Whether any awareness of Sufism is necessary to fully understand this music is a moot point, but without getting into Cultural Studies territory it's clear that the best devotional music (whether Gregorian Chant, John Coltrane or Le Mystere de Voix Bulgares) has a power to communicate across racial and denominational divides, and Abida's ecstatic flights are no exception.

This music is more reflective than the joyous abandon of Qawwali. The tabla and dholak provide the shifting, cyclical heartbeats that underpin Abida's song, shadowed by the harmonium and bansuri flute. Her gloriously honeyed voice is a warm, agile instrument, suffused with sadness and joy, strength and fragility in equal measure.

With such a voice Abida could sing a shopping list and have an audience weeping, though we doubt we'd ever get to test that particular theory. ♦

(Abida Parveen's concert will begin at 4.30 PM at the Hyatt Regency on Saturday 5 April. Tickets: Rs 2,500 and Rs 2,000 per person. Price includes dinner and drinks. For more information and reservation: 01-4491234. Tickets available at Hyatt Regency, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bhatbhateni, Namaste Lazimpat, Himalayan Java, Nanglo outlets.)

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Cable surfing

Human civilisation, during various stages of its evolution, has defined true bliss in multifarious ways. Our furry hunter-gatherer forebears, for instance, were happiest while chewing on a grilled gnu rib, washing it down with fermented antelope buttermilk, and belching in a loud and carefree manner while walking around their prehistoric underground bunkers with no clothes on.

The relentless march of history and biology meant that when the Roman Civilisation finally rolled by, the zenith of human contentment was to be able to wangle tickets for seats near the orchestra pit in the Colosseum and cheer a pride of lions (home team) while they tucked into the dessert (visiting team).



And so we fast forward to the ongoing Western Civilisation, in which Reverse-Darwinism and the Process of Unnatural Selection means couch-dwelling hominoids can attain nirvana by transforming themselves from bipeds with enlarged craniums capable of rational thought into long hairy caterpillars with a remote in one hand and a can of alcoholic beverage in the other. As long as there is a steady supply of Doritos with dip, freedom fries and prawn crackers progressing at a steady rate through our alimentary canals and a choice of cricket, the Oscars or Iraq on cable, you could say that we are truly happy.

Navjot Singh Sidhu: "So, Mandira, my cute friend, there is light at the end of the tunnel after all, what do you think of that excellent delivery?"

Mandira: "Yes, the Australians have really upped the tempo in the last half-hour, but they are still facing pockets of resistance from the rear. By the way, don't you think this red lace outfit with the plunging neckline that I'm wearing today is rather fetching?"

Navjot Singh Sidhu: "Very eye-catching indeed, but I think we're trying to catch balls here, Mandira. Can't quite figure out whether that last cut by Sachin was a straightish square leg or a squarish straight leg, but it did go past the slips to a silly point. So, we now go live to our correspondent who is embedded in the sand by the Rivers of Babylon for an unconfirmed report that Geraldo Riviera of our rival Fox Channel has just been spotted on the other side of the berms. What do you make of these reports, Christian?"

Christian: "Well, so far we have no confirmation from coalition sources, but if true, this means Geraldo's presence is going to strike such terror and panic in the Republican Guards that they are going to forget that they are actually supposed to be shocked and awed by all these misguided missiles."

Navjot Singh Sidhu: "I know things are rather awesome at the moment, Christian, but are you able to tell whether these guards are really republican, or could they perhaps be democrats masquerading as republicans to fool our coalition forces?"

Steve Martin: "If I could just butt in here, I didn't quite catch that last question, but it was indeed a green sari that J Pex was wearing on stage. It raised quite a few eye brows among defence analysts, and here with me in the studio to comment on the mother of all bums is the editor of Jane Fonda's Defence Weekly, Col (Retd) Oliver North. Oli, let me ask you this, was that a sari, and if so, shouldn't Ms Lopez have been wearing a blouse underneath?"

Oliver North: "Well, what I learnt from selling weapons to the contras via Iran was that in the relentless march of history every asset, however big or small, is a military asset."

Daljit Dhalwal: "Let's crossover to the weather centre for the latest weather."

Jim Fish: "Daljit, thanks, gusty wind and soaking rain is threatening the Australian Open as it gets underway, and over in Kirkuk we are predicting a high of 18, a night low of 8, and a bit of unsettled weather perhaps a little bit later in the day over the Northern No Fly Zone..." ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Eventful manager

Event management is a relatively new concept in Nepal, but Kiran Krishna Shrestha's catchily-named "event nepa-laya" group has put musical extravaganzas firmly on centre stage. "We have been giving music performances the importance they deserve," says Kiran who believes in creating an environment where the artist can concentrate on creativity and performing well, leaving the nitty-gritty to the management team.

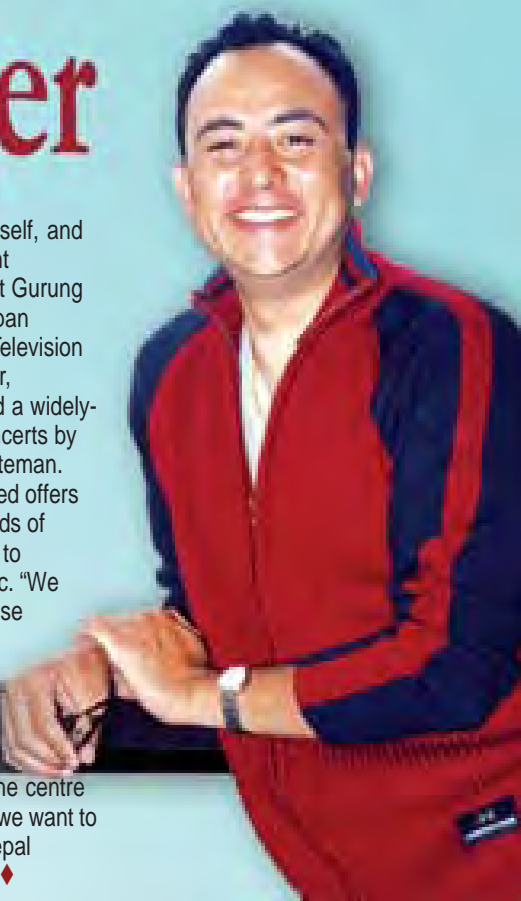
He is still beaming with the success of Sundar Shanta Nepal Sangeet Yatra, a travelling music roadshow that event nepa-laya helped organise at venues across Nepal last month. The January ceasefire was the impetus it needed to not only

gather the best Nepali musicians but also plan the ambitious city-hopping tour. "The show gave the people an opportunity to step outside their lives and just be normal, have fun and enjoy themselves for a change," recalls Kiran.

Nepali performers are now beginning to ask for Kiran's formidable skills in managing events. But this is a modest man. "At first I had no experience, just courage. Now it's different. But it is for the others to say if we are getting better and setting higher standards." The 32-year-old former radio jockey and television producer found his calling behind the scenes. It began when he couldn't find anyone to handle Nepathya's national "Education for peace" tour two years ago. So he

decided to do it himself, and last year set up event nepa-laya with Amrit Gurung of Nepathya and Arpan Shrestha of Nepal Television as partners. Last year, nepa-laya organised a widely-acclaimed set of concerts by veteran singer, Phateman.

Kiran has received offers to organise other kinds of events, but he wants to concentrate on music. "We would like to specialise in one area instead of spreading the talent too thin," he says. "Kathmandu is not the centre of the universe, and we want to take music to the Nepal outside the Valley." ♦



28 MARCH - 3 APRIL 2003 NEPALI TIMES #138

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