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Peace bridge

MANJUSHREE THAPA in KALIKOT

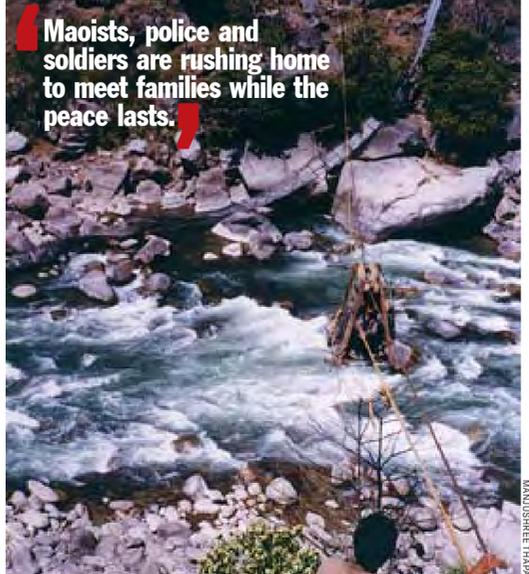
A few weeks into the ceasefire, and Dailekh bazar is transformed. "Nobody dared to move about like this before," marvels a young man, eyeing the bustle. "The Maoists didn't dare come here, and the security forces wouldn't go to the villages alone. Now they're all talking to one another."

A few Maoists are openly attending passing-out ceremonies in local schools. In nearby Chupra village, Maoist

athletes have joined a regional volleyball competition. A driver who weekly plies the Nepalganj-Dailekh road says hundreds of people who had fled during the state of emergency are returning. "The Maoists, the police and the army are rushing back to meet their families while the peace lasts."

Further afield in Dullu, the scene is even more festive. Many village men are stoned on the occasion of Holi, in flagrant defiance of Maoist puritanism. "We welcome the talks," says Maoist area secretary, 'Rebel', talking to us at a hotel close to where a man, high on *bhang*, is ranting about a monarchy-Maoist conspiracy against democracy.

"We've had to resort to violence out of necessity, not desire," Rebel says. "We agreed to the peace talks because the people want relief. We are committed to moving forward through talks."



OVER TROUBLED WATERS: Villager being pulled across the Karnali at Raraghat above the remains of a suspension bridge blown up by Maoists last year.



Out in the open

The Maoist negotiating team hasn't had a moment to spare as it made its high-profile comeback in Kathmandu this week. Baburam Bhattarai and Ram Bahadur Thapa have been giving back-to-back interviews to media, meeting political leaders and diplomats and reiterating their three-point demand for a roundtable conference, constituent assembly and an interim government. A rally in Tundikhel on Thursday, two months after the ceasefire agreement, was attended by about 15-20,000 supporters, mainly from outside the Valley. Bhattarai said: "It is today's hard reality that the King is a force to be reckoned with, and for now we need to negotiate with him...But if the talks fail we will go back to the jungle." The rally was a show of force timed to precede King Gyanendra's public felicitation in Dhangadi on Friday. Victims of Maoists also held a black-flag demonstration near Tundikhel to coincide with the rally, saying, "Stop terrorism once and for all, don't use the talks to grab power."

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 73

Q. 'No war in Iraq': Agree, Disagree, Don't know

Total votes: 561

Weekly Internet Poll # 80. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Should the Maoists be included in an all-party government of national unity?

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Pollution, poaching threaten Chitwan's success

KUNDA DIXIT in SAURHA

When Crown Prince Paras released a nursery-bred gharial into the Narayani River at the Royal Chitwan National Park on Monday, he may not have known that toxic effluents were pouring into the river from factories upstream.

Earlier in the day, his send off for the first of 10 Chitwan rhinos being translocated to the Royal Bardia National Park came as conservationists sounded alarm bells over a worrying rise in wildlife poaching. Crown Prince Paras is chairman of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, and officials hope royal patronage will galvanise government resolve to control the twin threats of pollution and poaching in Nepal's parks.

The gharial release is one of Nepal's most-successful efforts to save endangered species. Since 1978, more than 400 of these endangered fish-eating crocodiles have been bred and released into the wild. In that time, urbanisation and industrialisation have degraded the Narayani River so seriously that it threatens the program.

Another conservation success story is the comeback of the rhino. Hunting and habitat destruction had nearly wiped them out from Chitwan by the 1970s, but since then the rhino population has multiplied five-fold to nearly 400 today. Tigers have also made a dramatic rebound.

Part of the reason for this success is that Nepal's reserves have been under military protection since 1976. But after the army was deployed for counter-insurgency two years ago, only seven of the 32 guard posts in Chitwan are manned. Poachers have moved in, picking off rhinos with the biggest horns. Last year, 37 of the 54 rhinos that died in Chitwan were killed for their horns. So far this year, four of

eight rhinos that have died were killed by poachers.

"This is a serious threat, it could undermine three decades of successful conservation in Chitwan," says Chandra Gurung of WWF Nepal. The park authorities say they are aware of the problem, and with the ceasefire the army says it plans to re-occupy abandoned posts. The outspoken ex-MP from Chitwan, Jagrit Bhetwal has no doubt who the culprits are. "Rhino poachers are in cahoots with local politicians," he told us. "Rhino killing increased after the 1996 elections, and it became really bad after the army pulled back."

Overcrowding in Chitwan means rhinos often raid crops on the park perimeter where villagers poison or electrocute them. Translocations reduce the pressure on villages in Chitwan, and also to develop an alternative viable population for rhinos in west Nepal. Of the rhinos in Bardia, 83 have been moved from Chitwan. But Bardia is in the heart of the insurgency, and translocation expert Shanta Jnawali admits things are difficult and there is little monitoring. "The army has moved out of seven of the 11 range posts in Bardia and our guess is that there is poaching going on," he told us.

The illicit trade in rhino and tiger parts follows laws of supply and demand: as long as affluence creates a demand in China and Japan, there will be poor farmers and criminal middlemen in the subcontinent willing to ensure supply. "We have to look into the demand side in China," says Claude Martin, director general of WWF International, who was in Chitwan this week to oversee the rhino translocations. "And we also need to increase vigilance in Nepal and India."



PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: Crown Prince Paras with Princess Himani and their daughter Purnika petting an orphan baby rhino in Sauraha on Monday.

see also p4-5
Narayani pollution

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THE KATHMANDU SPRING

For two whole months now, the guns have been silent. The Kathmandu spring has already thrown up some dramatic scenes of reconciliation: the prime minister shaking hands with a Maoist ideologue who goes on to speechify like an incumbent minister...



Beyond the iron gate

What does SLC-topper Baburam Bhattarai have in mind for the nearly 200,000 Nepalis who will not pass this year?

His week nearly 300,000 students are sitting for their School Leaving Certificate examinations all over the country. Despite the introduction of the 10+2 system, SLC continues to retain its mystic importance as the gate to future career options...

Like in most other prismatic societies where traditional ties and modern aspirations co-exist, nepotism and the afro manchu culture dominates the Nepali job market. But the absence of trade education in the school curriculum is no less of a factor in flooding the offices of prospective employers with an army of virtually unemployable youths.

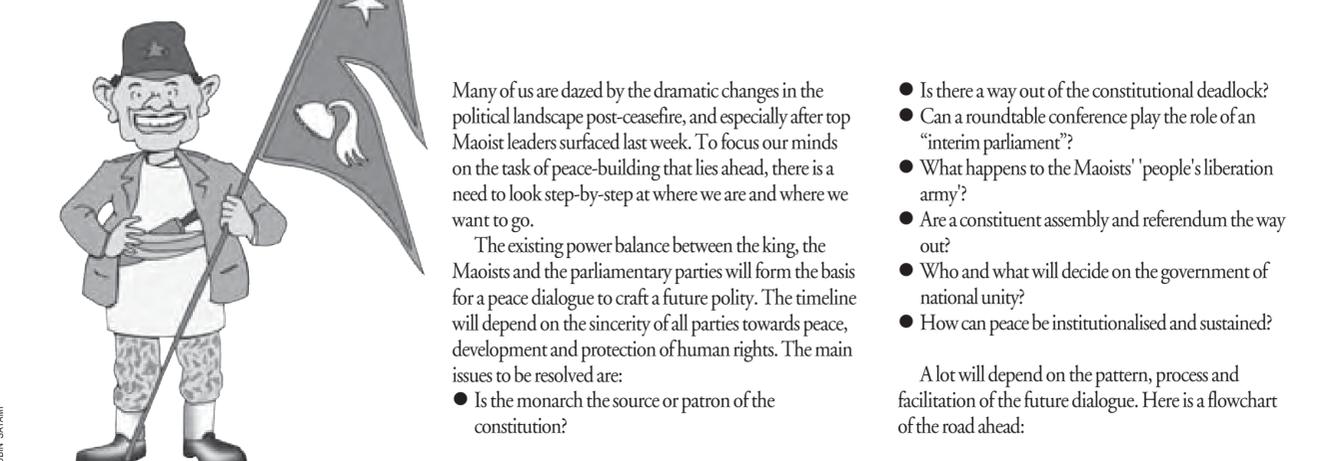


Table with 5 rows and 5 columns: Agenda of Dialogue, Process, Priorities/Measures, Outcomes, Role of Civil Society. It details the flow from dialogue to societal outcomes.

LETTERS

CK LAL As a regular visitor to Nepal and an occasional reader of Nepal Times, I am often intrigued by the passion that your columnist CK Lal generates...

being what he is. Last week's intelligent critique of Sir Jeffrey's imperial mission to Nepal was well-aimed and blunt. I shall wait to see the reaction that it generates...

we may meet the same fate as Iraq. Kiran Nakarmi, email SAFE KILNS This is in relation to your box item 'Kathmandu's killer kilns' (#137). There is good news for Kathmanduites, specifically the brick kiln neighbourhoods...

matter (SPM), a principle pollutant and health hazard, will be reduced by 80 percent compared to the conventional kilns. The technology also provides a cleaner and better working environment for labourers on site...

Kathmandu 24/7! Now, it seems pollution is even affecting flights in and out of Kathmandu. Are we going to wait until we're all sick before we do something about this? We must be cautious, responsible and treat our environment with respect. Rashmi Bhattachan, email

in the world, it should therefore follow that the people of Kathmandu also have a constitutional right to breathe clean air ('Gasp!'). The odd-even rule actually had beneficial effects: traffic congestion decreased, the air was cleaner...

We have been concerned for some time at the increase in the volume of quarrying and stone crushing work in the valley. This has resulted in more injuries due to accidents related to these activities (both crush industries and motor accidents) which is brought to our hospital for treatment...

We agree that it is time that effective regulation of these industries takes place—not only for the sake of those directly involved in this dangerous work, but also because of the effect that it is having on our beautiful valley. Pradeep Failbus, Dr Mark Macdonald, Anandaban Hospital, Lele

citizens have been jailed on account of their Christian faith. Newspapers have printed several defamatory articles antithetic to Christianity. Plus, despite the ceasefire, Maoists continue to terrorise and threaten to murder Nepalis because they profess faith in Jesus Christ. Do the perpetrators of these acts not believe that human beings deserve to choose a faith for themselves? Are they so insecure in their own views that they must defame, threaten and imprison persons of a different faith? What are the fruits of Christianity in Nepal? Christians started some of the best, most well known and reasonably priced schools in Nepal...

War. The naked girl in the picture is Phan Thi Kim. She met her photographer in Havana in 1989, seventeen years after the first picture was taken. She was nine in the first picture, and it so moved me that it was the inspiration for my short story, 'Bamko jhirkra' and was translated into English in www.paradesh.com volume 12. You are right to call Iraq as 'Another Vietnam'. Let the people of the Third World along with the Iraqi people be united and take part in the resistance war against US imperialism. Hari Har Khanal, Chitwan

I would suggest that you devote more space to SARS than the Iraq war in your international pages. The government should have a health worker placed at the airport to keep a check on flights coming in from Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong. Harish Agrawal, kathmandu

Pollution alarm on the



ALL PICS SHAMAN J THAPA



SAMMAN J THAPA
in GAIDAKOT

Economic growth and ecological conservation are often on a collision course, and nowhere is this more apparent than at the point where the Narayani River enters the Royal Chitwan National Park.

Nepal's third largest river is the source of fresh water for the western reaches of the park, sustaining its aquatic life, attracting indigenous and migratory birds, and replenishing its wetlands. However, the population growth in Chitwan valley, the use of agro-chemicals, and the location directly upstream of polluting paper mills, breweries, distilleries and other factories now seriously threaten

Nepal's best-known nature sanctuary.

Luckily, being a big, snow-fed river system, the Narayani has a built-in capacity to flush itself, especially during the monsoon. But in the dry season, concentrated pollution on the Narayani is killing fish, which in turn is wiping out birdlife, reptiles and other fauna.

Studies have shown that downstream from Narayanghat, the Narayani's once-abundant fish stock has dwindled. The population of Brahminy ducks has declined sharply. The rare Gangetic fresh-water dolphin, already depleted by the Gandak Barrage on the Indian border, have all but disappeared. There used to be 18-20 sightings per year of dolphins in the Narayani till 1996,

last year there were only three.

No systematic census has been done on the estimated 400 gharials which have been released into the Narayani River from the Kasara breeding farm since 1978, but an IUCN study showed that even eight years ago only seven percent of the released gharials survived in the wild. On Monday, Crown Prince Paras and assembled dignitaries released another five gharials into the Narayani at Amalari, 15 km downstream from Gaidakot.

"The effect of pollution on gharials is cumulative," says conservation researcher Prahlad Yonzon of Resources Himalaya. "The pollution kills the fish, and the gharials have nothing to eat."

When the government decided to set up the Chinese-aided Bhrikuti Paper Mill in Gaidakot in

1984, environmental concerns were not very high on the national agenda. After it was privatised, the paper mill increased its capacity to 70 tons of paper per day and is planning to up it again to 128 tons with new modern equipment.

The mill's pollution record is so bad that environment groups and ecologists have been trying to get it to treat its effluent for more than a decade. In 2000, the legal group, Pro-Public even filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, which ordered the plant in December 2001 to clean up its act. But the foam still floats down the Narayani.

Over the years, Bhrikuti's discharge has been analysed and tested by the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, various government ministries, the Nepal

Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) and the Environmental and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO).

One toxicity analysis of samples of Narayani water by independent researchers last year showed just how serious the problem is. One indicator of pollution is Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), and according to Nepali law, COD content in industrial discharge cannot exceed 250 mg/l. A sample of Bhrikuti's effluent showed a whopping 979.6 mg/l. Even 1 km below the mill, the river had COD of 58.14 mg/l, whereas the international threshold for drinking water is in the 5-10 mg/l range.

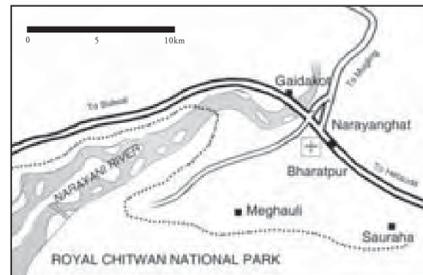
Another indicator of pollution is Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) which measures the amount of biologically usable oxygen in the

water. A low BOD value implies a lot of micro-organisms present in the water (which is a healthy sign). Bhrikuti's effluent water had a BOD count of 74 mg O₂/l, and 1 km downstream it was 6.4 mg O₂/l. Narayani water above the mill was measured at only 3.6 mg O₂/l. Measuring the pH value of discharge is an indicator of alkaline content, and the paper mill's effluent was 11.5 on the pH scale, whereas this value is not supposed to exceed pH 9 in industrial discharges. Since the pH scale is logarithmic, this means that the alkalinity of Bhrikuti's effluent was almost 1,000 times more than permissible standards. The researchers also detected high concentrations of ammonium nitrate and nitrite.

With such a chemical

Narayani

Toxic effluent discharged into the Narayani River from a paper mill (see pics) is threatening the ecology of the Royal Chitwan National Park downstream.



cocktail of caustic soda and chlorine flowing into the river, the fish don't stand a chance. Actually, the effluent can easily be treated and the mill has a large pit that it tells visitors is for waste water treatment. The factory has in the past decade repeatedly promised to environmental monitoring groups that it would set up a treatment plant there. We tried unsuccessfully to talk to senior management at Bhrikuti Pulp and Paper Mills in Kathmandu and Gaidakot in the course of researching this article.

Journalist Rajendra Dahal was president of NEFEJ when he visited the plant twice in 1991-92. "They take you around in circles. Every time someone went to meet them, they would show the same site for waste water treatment," recalls Dahal. "But I don't blame Bhrikuti. I blame the government for not making a categorical finding about pollution, and acting on it."

It may be true that Bhrikuti is using the apathy and disinterest of the government departments,

but environmentalists say a company of that stature should show responsibility towards the public and the environment even without being legally forced to, especially since it is located in such a sensitive river system.

"I remember going to them several times in the mid-1990s," recalls one senior member of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, of which King Gyanendra used to be the patron. "They'd just give us the run around."

As a result, this one plant alone generates 300 cubic metres of effluent per ton of paper produced. The waste has caked and crusted on the banks, and foam from the discharge pipe floats past canoes full of tourists on bird-watching trips inside the park.

The pollution is not just affecting the wildlife. The mills also pollute the air, and many people in the vicinity who can afford it have sent their children to school in Bharatpur or Kathmandu after they fell sick.



The public outrage has been building up, and three years ago two young lawyers, Raju Prasad Chapagain from Tandi and Thaneshwor Acharya from Gaidakot itself, filed a case in the Supreme Court. The verdict in 2001 required the government to come up with permissible levels of pollution for both air and water pollution, and ordered Bhrikuti to restrict its emissions within set standards by establishing a wastewater treatment plant.

Chapagain says that although the verdict came, the judgment took another year. It officially informed the offending party of wrongdoing and what they must do in order to rectify it. "There is

a catch here: the court has not followed up," says Chapagain. "In India, courts are stricter in public interest litigation to ensure that its judgement is followed." India's courts keep themselves informed through a monitoring body about how their interim order is being implemented, instead of relying solely on information provided by the two parties involved, and only then gives the final verdict.

"But in Nepal this doesn't happen. We have only succeeded in adopting a model without fully understanding it, let alone implementing and practicing it," Chapagain told us. "This allows the polluter to use loopholes and get away scot-free." ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Running for aid

British adventurer Rosie Swale Pope began her speed trek from Hilsa in west Nepal to Pashupatinagar in the east, going through several high passes like Thorung La, Larke Pass, Tashi Lapcha and Nara. Proceeds will go to help renovate Humla's only hospital that presently serves a population of 50,000 with only one doctor and no laboratory. Three guides, a medical staff, 10 porters and three supporting staff will accompany the 57-year-old grandmother. Interested sponsors can help by donating Rs 100 for every hundred of an estimated total of 2,500,000 steps that she will make during the tour. Rosie spoke of her experiences as a sailor, voyager, adventure, gaucho, cross country runner, trekker and mountaineer at a fund-raising dinner at the Hotel Yak & Yeti on 29 March before flying to Nepalgunj on 31 March. Contact Creative Statements at 5522741 for inquiries and donations.



Rights and wrongs

Nepal once again made the dishonour rolls of the Committee to Project Journalists (CPJ). This year we were singled out as a case of "the most spectacular abuse of press freedom" under the guise of protecting national security. CPJ this week said "hundreds" of Nepali journalists were unlawfully detained and 16 were formally incarcerated in 2002.

Nepal's human rights situation is as bleak on other frontiers too. The United States Human Rights Report 2002 highlights our poor track record. It accuses both the government security forces and the Maoists of rights violations. The report concluded that the Maoists were no less heinous or ruthless than national security forces in killing and torturing people. The use of unwarranted lethal force, torture as punishment or to extract confessions, arbitrary arrests and extra judicial killings that took place was condemned by the report.

Malaysia opens up

The Malaysian government has decided to open a diplomatic mission in Kathmandu. Nepali visitors to the country will also be granted a 14-day visa on their arrival. In return, Nepal will be establishing an embassy in the Malaysian capital. The national flag carrier RNAC recently began a twice-weekly flight service to Kuala Lumpur. Both countries hope to promote tourism and bilateral economic relations, which will include a plan to increase the number of Nepalis working in Malaysia. Official data on Nepali workers in Malaysia puts the number at around 80,000.

HERE AND THERE

We never learn

by DANIEL LAK



TORONTO — I write this from a country that's not at war with Iraq. Canada has decided that it will not support America's efforts to oust Saddam Hussein from power in Baghdad. Mind you, Canadian warships are patrolling the Persian Gulf and Canada isn't exactly paying close attention to its exports to the United States to make sure that none are used to kill Iraqis. Our cabinet ministers constantly contradict themselves about whether we want Saddam out of power or not, whether America is right in its war making or not. But we're not bombing the people of Baghdad. I'm pleased about that.

That's about all that pleases me about this ludicrous conflict. We were told it would be high-tech, precise and quick. Instead, it is infantry-led like all wars since cavemen first raided other tribes' hunting grounds. Civilians are dying from smart bombs guided by dumb people, and it could drag on for months. Officials in Washington and London try to say that the media raised all of these expectations. The media fires back with smart weapons of their own—the words of Donald Rumsfeld, his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, and Dick Cheney, all promising a quick denouement, minimal casualties and so on. They mostly said such things on television so it's easy enough to play back the tapes. I believe this is called "undeniability" or perhaps they, like Saddam, had body doubles.

Vice President Dick Cheney even spoke on the TV program *Meet the Press* during the 2000 election campaign, promising a humble less-interventionist foreign policy for America should he and his cohort George W make it to the White House. They did, and there's no sign of humility anywhere. Too much dust and smoke from bombs and cruise missiles, I guess. Admittedly, Cheney was speaking before 11 September 2001 but a trawl through other statements made by his partners in crime, especially Wolfowitz, show that a significant body of opinion in official America has



been longing for this war for years now. President Clinton was presented with the total war option in 1998 when Saddam threw out UN weapons inspectors. But he was a detail man, he knew where the devil lay. And he said "no", and sent in the bombers for just a few days. His successor who goes on gut feelings and conviction, we're told, likes to delegate, and has faith in his instincts. The world is led by President Bush's intuitiveness. Personally, I prefer Clinton's brain to Bush's gut.

Another thing, let's stop calling the Americans and British a "coalition". The dozens of countries who banded together in 1990 to eject Saddam's forces from Kuwait, backed by a UN Security Council resolution, were a "coalition". Frenchmen fought alongside the Dutch and Poles. Americans, Brits, a few hundred Aussie special forces and yes, the Poles

We were told it would be high-tech, precise and quick. Instead, it is like all wars since cavemen first looted and killed rival tribes.

again, do not a coalition make. It's a silly media shorthand that borders on propaganda. And America's claim to have the backing of more than 35 countries is stretching things somewhat. Yes, Holland, Spain and Italy—eyes firmly on postwar reconstruction money perhaps—have all said a reluctant "yes" to George Bush. So have Tonga, Lithuania and Micronesia, the latter an American colony, by the way. But France, Russia, Germany and even Canada all say "no". And aside from America, so do the ordinary people of the non-coalition countries. Slovenia has publicly protested to the State Department that it should not be counted as a supporter of the war. The Slovene government did back America a few months ago, but sensing that public opinion was against an invasion of Iraq, Slovenia's prime minister changed his mind. That's not inconsistency, it is democracy in action.

As Nepal embarks upon its peace process, the world lurches further forward into primitivism and madness. One group of cavemen brandish their clubs at another. Women and children die in clashes and from deprivation caused by war. Will we ever learn? Not if history is a guide... ♦

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Civil defence

When the next elections roll around, we still won't be able to figure out what democracy is because we won't know what we want it to be.



Now that the Maoists have conferred upon civil society a status equal to the palace, mainstream parties and themselves, we can perhaps expect some courteous discussions on the national malaise. When Maoist negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara said his party would "unveil" chief delegate Baburam Bhattarai and the rest of the quintet on the security assurances of civil society, many of us were waiting for Narayan Singh Pun's denunciation of this latest assault on the (old) state's credibility.

Building on his pledge to ensure that civil society got a fourth set of seats at the proposed round-table conference, Mahara accompanied three eminent personalities to Butwal to escort Bhattarai and co-panelist Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal out of subterranean shadows into the capital's sparkle. Let's hope Bhattarai's overture of avoiding extemporaneous prolixity in favour of a coherent text on the two-states-three-political-forces theory at his conference augers well for the hard bargaining ahead.

In retrospect, civil society didn't need the Maoists' exaltation. There was a time in the late 1980s when Rishikesh Shaha's arrest used to make "this-just-in" news on BBC World Service radio. While the acronym HURON revived images of the American Indian tribe and the great lake across much of the world, it embodied our astonishment at the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal's faith in the democratic aspirations of a dazed people. Caught between the inexplicable referendum verdict against a return to party

politics and a depletion of options, the Nepali dilemma ran deeper than what was demonstrable.

Once the people realised that the promised reforms to the partyless order were cosmetic, they had to make up their minds about how soon to vote with their feet. After the Kangresi civil-disobedience campaign for democracy imploded with a series of bomb blasts in 1986, an embryonic civil society started taking shape. Since academics, human rights activists, doctors, engineers and journalists made the people move in 1990, it was perhaps natural for our

disillusionment with democracy to define our perception of civil society.

Some of these organisations were too close to the new power elite and too dependent on donors for their own good. The behaviour of a few undermined the credibility of the entire fraternity, as perjorative terms like "dollar farmers" and "political brokers", ostensibly more vulgar in the vernacular, stuck. The public clamour for civil society organisations to respect some of the basic norms, values and principles of good governance they preached grew louder. By this time, the

government, too, was viewing many of these organisations and activists as fierce competitors for external cash and internal space.

The bright face faded into the dark. Amid our complaints that democracy was limited to periodic elections, however, civil society kept score of constitutional exercises through public-interest litigation and secluded briefing sessions in Nagarkot. The issues of social equality and economic justice were kept alive in the non-government realm while political players were engrossed deeper in parliamentary

arithmetic. While politicians and the people were pondering what had really changed on 4 October last year, civil society activists were already on the streets protesting against a resurgence of the palace's political ambitions.

Rest assured, elections will be held sooner or later. And we'll again start complaining how democracy begins and ends on the ballot paper. We still won't be able to figure out what democracy is because we won't know what we want it to be. Civil society will continue to be central to the debate.

The mainstream parties knew all along that our political model would have to take into account our own social and cultural environment, tradition, decision-making and governance. They tried tinkering here and there by articulating such concepts as "new democracy", "people's multiparty democracy" and "assertive monarchy". The political class couldn't go deeper in search of qualifiers because of the harsh legacy of the air-water-soil exegesis of the partyless past.

Don't expect civil society activists to create conditions in which the majority of Nepalis can begin participating in real socio-economic and political change any time soon. They can help us conceptualise democracy without conditions and compulsions, without fear of being castigated as regressive. After all, they would be the last people to invite their own extinction. ♦

Tea slump

High damage may prove to be costly for tea farmers in eastern Nepal this year. Harvesting has been postponed by two weeks—time for the plants to heal but if there aren't enough sunny days the crop is highly susceptible to fungi and rot. Perhaps more worrying is a plummeting international market for orthodox tea. Two years ago, the farmers in Ilam earned Rs 40 per kg of fresh tea leaves. Last year they got paid half that amount. "This year it might go even lower," says CP Rai, manager of Himalayan Shangri-La Tea Producers. The recent increase in oil prices in Nepal will bite into their already narrow profit margins.



Best at show

The award winning Philips Plasma and Pixel Plus televisions are now available from Syakar. The Pixel Plus technology won the EISA Award (European Imaging and Sound Association Award) in 2002 and has enjoyed an unrivalled success in Europe. The company says this has set a new benchmark in picture quality. The new televisions are on sale at the Philips showroom at Jyoti Bhawan in Kantipath.

Just add water

Coffee Mix, a foil packet of sugar, milk creamer and instant coffee, imported by Akhli Trading Concern from Khao Sang Company in Thailand could have a lot of converts among Valley coffee drinkers who don't have time to brew. Available in packs of 6 (Rs 40), 10 (Rs 70) and 30 (Rs 190), Coffee Mix is also conveniently available in singles (Rs 5) at department stores.

Beauty aid

Hitline detergents and Roky System cosmetics from the Schmees Group of Germany is making a foray into the Nepali market. Their range extends from hair shampoo to carpet shampoos, from body sprays to insect killers and also includes liquid shoe polish and liquid soaps.

Home sweet home

Half a kilometre from the Ring Road at Sitapaila, Star Holdings will be constructing 70 independent houses following the trend for housing estates and to meet consumer demands. Financial companies working with Star Holdings are offering a 20-year loan to finance up to 70 percent of the total building cost of each house.

The oil yo-yo



The low down on high prices.

The price of petroleum products in the United States yo-yos with every day of the Iraq war, affected by things as diverse as news stories, consumer confidence and commodity markets that shuffles things around on the bourses and the commodity markets. In contrast, here in Nepal the Beed has observed prices only go one way—up. And interestingly, because the government is the sole arbiter of that decision, it alone faces the consequences.

Other than the war, we now have two important things to protest: electricity tariffs and fuel. For one of the poorest countries in the world, we pay among the highest prices for our electricity, thanks to the NEA. The massive bungling between the NEA and Nepal Oil Corporation results in Nepali consumers paying the price—an unfair trade of less for more.

Of course the public bears the brunt of it, after all the government barely conceals attempts to transfer responsibility for its inefficiency onto the masses. Rather than allowing privately managed or owned businesses to set the price based on demand and supply, the government stubbornly holds onto prehistoric policies. In cases of such negligence, the Beed declares the government should be thrown to the lions, or worse still, left to an enraged Nepali mob.



The politicisation of oil has been hardwired into our South Asian minds. Over the years we have born witness to post price-hike activity south of the border. Buses were burnt in Calcutta after a five paisa increase but we Nepalis took a Rs 9 jump in the price of kerosene with a large dose of tired acceptance, broken by only a few spurts of street protests and slogan chanting. The Beed has noted that political activists are at their most combustible when the price of petroleum products are raised. Governments have fallen on this issue alone so it is no surprise that political parties feel it is a legitimate ticket into the corridors of power.

Oil is a good populist tool to woo voters. Every single party promises stable prices in its manifesto. Politicians are ignorant enough to assume they can

control something tied to our exchange rate with India that in turn sways with the Indian currency's dollar parity.

Politicians also do not understand that they cannot control the prices of global crude oil that has more geo-political and socio-economic ramifications than any other commodity. Keeping that in mind, here's a radical perspective—we act myopically when we raise a hue and cry without trying to understand the rationale behind price hikes.

The only way for Nepalis to move away from lambasting the people at the top is to first understand that prices of commodities can rise (and fall) and this has as much to do with previous governments trying to shy away from raising prices as it does with the state of global affairs. Secondly, the government should allow the market to determine the prices of oil or electricity by ruling in favour of privately managed or owned companies. Last but not the least, leave the ramifications of price hikes to the nation's economists and planners instead of embroiling it in politics and speaking about a subject one does not know in open-air theatrics at Tundikhel. ♦

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

INTERVIEW

Now, for the peace dividend

Nepali Times: How will the Iraq war impact the Nepali economy?

Shanker Sharma: It will depend on the duration and intensity of the war. In fact, the world has anticipated this for quite sometime, and the market has responded accordingly. Fortunately, there haven't been any disruptions in the supply of petroleum products so far. If the war drags on, it will have a negative impact on Nepal's foreign trade and tourism. One of the areas affected most by the war is the petroleum sector. With the imports bill going up, it could adversely impact the balance of payments situation. The Indian government revised the price of petroleum products nearly ten times in the last six months. We had to hike the price because the government has been absorbing all the difference. We know this will affect transportation costs, inflation and cost of production.

That means it will affect economic growth.

Worldwide economic growth is estimated to decline by 10 percent. There were some signs of tourism reviving this season, but the Iraq war was a backlash and remittances too will suffer temporarily. Nepali exports could also be affected, reflecting trouble in our export destinations. All of this affects the GDP, which puts pressure on the government's budget, development expenditure and creates a negative impact on economic growth.

This will hit development, too. What advice are you giving the government?

The development funds could not be spent at the district level due to insecurity. There was very little demand for central grants among the Village Development Committees and District Development Committees. Now the government has formed a committee headed by the Local Development Officer at the district level. This will place responsibility of works related to roads, drinking water, irrigation, rural electrification and rural infrastructure with community-based organisations and users groups.

Can you make any economic forecasts for the year?

It is still early to make any forecast. We have to deal with the fallout of the Iraq war with four months to go before the end of this fiscal year. Of course, it will be much better than last year (when the growth rate was negative) but we will not be able to achieve the growth rate of 5 or 6 percent we projected earlier.

How about reconstruction and rehabilitation in areas directly affected by the Maoist insurgency?

Essential services like electricity have already resumed. We have asked donors to continue activities in their sectors. The Peace and Development Trust is working towards rehabilitating the people displaced by the insurgency. NGOs and INGOs are also actively involved. The needs of local communities are being assessed. We need to launch immediate humanitarian as well as long-term income generating activities. The Trust is working to establish food-for-work and school-feeding programs. Our aim is to bring the peace dividend to the people. Within three to four months you will see development works expedited.

How much is all this going to cost you?

We estimate the destruction of infrastructure at around \$250 million. That figure doesn't take into account the impact on the economic growth. We need Rs 2.5 billion immediately to reconstruct the infrastructure in priority areas. The costs for reconstruction in the second phase have yet to be estimated. The government has already allocated a budget for district headquarters at Achham, Jumla and Arghakhanchi. The first phase of reconstruction activities are already speeding along in these places.

Do you have a timeframe in mind?

Basically, the course of the peace process as well as the availability of funding will determine it. As soon as the situation is favourable, we will also work on strategies for nation building.

How does the government plan to rehabilitate people displaced by the insurgency and find them local employment?

People who left the country, especially for India, have started returning home. The local administration and NGOs are supporting those who took refuge at various district headquarters. Large-scale rehabilitation will depend on the outcome of the peace talks. The government is going to sanction labour-intensive, income-generating programs at the district level.

How will the Tenth Plan address the need for reconstruction?

We have made two different projections for the Tenth Plan. Our focus has been on poverty alleviation and we have already incorporated issues like re-orienting development programs towards this end. Except the humanitarian and other immediate needs, our long-term programs fit exactly into the framework of the Tenth Plan.

You were appointed a member of the NPC five years ago. How do you see your new role as its vice chairman?

Though it is a collective responsibility, accountability increases when you are in a leadership position. We have already finalised the Tenth Plan and are now working a summary. The first-phase of the Mid-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) is complete, and we have also finalised the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The high-level committee for monitoring development programs met after a gap of nearly 20 months recently under the chairmanship of the prime minister. Some people, including the donor community, find it hard to believe that the NPC has completed all this. We are preparing a preliminary report for poverty monitoring within this fiscal year. The NPC is working to coordinate reconstruction, rehabilitation and relief works. Although we have a heavy workload, I am satisfied with the NPC's performance.



Shanker Sharma has been through a roller-coaster ride in his five years at the National Planning Commission, but nothing has prepared him for the present challenge of cashing in on the peace dividend. Five months after his appointment as vice-chairman by the Chand government, he spoke to Nepali Times about the impact of the Iraq war on the Nepali economy, poverty alleviation and reconstruction.

MIN. BARICHARAN



World Food Programme

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

World Food Programme, Country Office (CO), Nepal invites applications from suitable qualified and experienced candidates for the post of Finance & Administrative Officer at SO-A level.

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- Assist the Regional Manager and Country Director in preparing various WFP budgets, budget implementation, monitoring and Act as Certifying Officer of the Regional Office or Country Office.
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We saw only a few armed Maoists on our week-long trek from Karibot bazar in Salyan to Thawang in Rolpa. This group agreed to pose in uniform, but with masks.

KIYOKO OGURA in THAWANG.

The mid-west is red: rhododendron forests are aflame, the valleys are crimson with simal blossoms and the trails are festooned with red Maoist banners.

A month after the ceasefire was declared, the arrival of spring cloaks this blood-soaked land in new flowers of hope. The season blurs evidence of the seven-year insurgency as we walk from Salyan and Rukum to Rolpa. Rhododendrons burst red flowers all along the rugged trail from Thawang to Uwa in Rolpa. In western Rukum, fields of dukku, flowering radishes, undulate in the gentle breeze. Peach blossoms confetti the paths of Rukumkot.

The evidence of war is only apparent when we reach human habitation. In the villages, the people who suffered are still sullen with memory. They distrust strangers like us who come asking questions. They talk guardedly at first, but the words spill out once they begin. Their stories of helplessness have fermented into hatred, directed predominantly against state authorities. Fear is still a constant companion.

At Kholagaun, western Rukum, the house we stayed in had other visitors—Manjil, a Maoist cadre since his student days, and his wife who had come home on leave. The family has three "martyrs" to the Maoist cause. In 1999 the police killed the father and eldest daughter. Last year her 19-year-old sister died in the Mangalsen attack in Achham. The 58-year-old mother, who has been interrogated and tortured by the police, says, "I am happy my

Spring in the heartland

"If the talks are unsuccessful we have only two options: run away, or die."

husband and two daughters died for the sake of Nepal's sons and daughters." The emptiness in her eyes makes what should have been a patriotic sentiment sound hollow.

Our arrival in the village coincided with the third 'people's council' meeting to elect new members to the district-level 'people's government'. One evening, more than 20 relatives of those killed by security forces gathered to talk with us. A 19-year-old widow who lost her husband during the attack in Jumla last November says, "I feel a strong hatred towards the enemy. I always think of how to revenge my husband's death." When asked who is her biggest enemy she gives the party line, "Everyone who belongs to state power."

Contrary to expectations, we saw very few armed Maoists en route. But at Thawang in north Rolpa armed Maoists are in full control. Members of the militia and villagers are building a road, volleyball games are organised every evening and the soldiers of the 'people's liberation army' organised meals together in a big



Thawang is different from any other village. Security forces that stayed here a month-and-a-half in March last year set fire to the 15 houses in the village centre. Many residents fled; some went to work in foreign countries and others to live in their goth in summer pastures.



Santosh Budha, a member of the central committee member and the United Revolutionary People's Council, gives a *lal salaam* at a mass meeting in Chaurjahari. A former high school teacher and a Magar leader born in Thawang, Budha said in his speech, "Some foreign forces are trying to benefit from the political situation in Nepal. It is possible that our main enemy might not be the Royal Nepali Army but these forces. In that case, we may have a situation where the two armies could work together."



Thousands of people gathered at this mass meeting organised by Maoists at Chaurjahari on 3 March. Twenty-five members of the newly elected United District Council of Rukum were introduced to the gathering. Celebrations lasted till 3AM and the Maoists put up a play. The main theme revolved around "the families of the Royal Nepali Army and the People's Army" and tried to show how these two armies can work together for the sake of the nation (above, right). The newly elected

council was the third after the first 'people's government' was declared in this district two years ago. "The term of the district council is actually two years. But elections are being held every year so we can establish power more quickly," says Sharun Bantha Magar, the newly elected chief of the council. This year, for the first time, the council drew up a budget of Rs 2,300,000 for the construction of small scale hydro-electric power plants and 'people's schools'.



We met a group of the militia who were carrying materials for rebuilding a school. Many armed Maoists were engaged in reconstructing infrastructure with the villagers in Thawang. The declaration of the ceasefire has seen many of them return home for a few days.

hall. The usual greeting is a *lal salaam*.

In the middle of the village is the rubble of 15 houses torched by security forces when soldiers came in hot pursuit after the Mangalsen attack early last year. It wouldn't be far-fetched to say that the root of the 'people's war' lies in Thawang. This communist stronghold has been targeted by the authorities many times ever since the Panchayat era. Since

1996, 25 Thawang residents have been killed either by the army or the police, a figure that doesn't include Maoist cadre and militia from the village killed in action. "Most of them were common villagers," Pratap Roka of the Thawang 'people's government' tells us.

As the central leaders of the Maoists surface in faraway Kathmandu to begin peace talks with the government, who will

address the deep anger of people in villages like Thawang in the midwest? How will they rehabilitate guerrillas if the ceasefire holds? Who will bring health care and education to these remote hamlets and cancel out the roots of future unrest? This is as much a challenge for the state as it is for any future local Maoist administrator. Most villagers here have no

illusions about the peace talks. "The ceasefire is just a breather. The battle will continue. We are demanding the election of a constituent assembly just to stop more bloodshed. It's not our final aim," a platoon commissar in Rukumkot tells us. Santosh Budha is a Thawang-born Maoist leader, and he adds: "The army should be dissolved and a national army under the control

of the parliament should be formed." But if the central leadership has a clear plan for the future, it is not clear from talking to people here what it is. The guerrillas are reluctant to give up their arms. "If the talks break down, we will fight again to the last," says a 23-year-old militia member in Thawang. Sitting in the sunshine under a peach tree in Kholagaun, it is clear that a peace

agreement in Kathmandu will not bring an end to conflict in these rugged mountains of mid-western Nepal. A young woman says, "I am very afraid that the talks might be unsuccessful like the last time. In that case, we have only two options: run away from this village or die." ♦ (Kiyoko Ogura is a Kathmandu-based Japanese journalist.)

"We don't need the Maoists, and we don't need the army. We just want to be left in peace."

from p1

There are many Maoist men along the trail, gossiping in tea shops in the idle way of village men. They appear as relaxed as the villagers. They ask after the mission that brings outsiders to their region, but do not restrict our movement. They brook blunt questions about their methods and motives, and they admit, in a roundabout way, that their movement lost popularity as the state's counterinsurgency efforts escalated last year. "The people are demanding peace," says Area Committee Member DP Rijal of Dandibandi. Another worker in the party's Farmers' Front echoes this view: "The people want peace."

The Maoists are quick, though, to point out the state's breaches of the code of conduct, exaggerating for effect. A more balanced account comes from a human rights worker in the area, who says that on 28 February in Dulu several hundred armed Maoists and about a hundred armed security forces came close to a clash. There was firing from both sides, but no injuries.

In another case, a teacher, Bhakti Sharma, was arrested in Dailekh and held by police for 21 days on the suspicion of being a Maoist. Still, says the human rights worker, these are minor infractions as compared to the violence of the preceding year. Indeed the state of emergency has ravaged

communities. In Haudi village, Kalikot district, villagers talk with disturbing compulsiveness about the killings that they witnessed. They say that Sahadev Badi was made to dig his own grave, and then made to sit in it as he was set on fire alive by the security forces for being in possession of a gun.

They say that Dilli Prasad Acharya, a teacher, was shot from a distance as he washed his hands. They say that Takka Bahadur Shahi, a student, was shot for avoiding a security patrol. They say that Ratan Bahadur Shahi, a teacher, was mistaken for a Maoist named Ratan Bahadur Bam, and shot. And they say that Hasta Choulagain and Ravi Bohora were both summarily executed on the suspicion of being Maoists.

The villagers also speak with equal horror of Raj Bahadur Shahi, who was forced by the Maoists to admit that he had informed on them, and who was then hacked to pieces before being shot dead. They point out where the security forces dropped explosives from a helicopter, they talk of the houses that they have burned, and of the rapes and beatings that they have meted to ordinary villagers. Most of these violations took place, they say, in reprisal after the February 2002 Maoist attack on Achham.

"We never liked the Maoists," says one man from parched, poverty-stricken Raraghat. "But we came to like the security forces even less, because instead of giving us protection from the Maoists, they betrayed us. They killed indiscriminately, without differentiating between innocent civilians and Maoists. Now we want them all to go away. We don't need the Maoists, and we don't need the security forces. We just want to be left in peace."

Another man, listening in on the conversation, disagrees. "But we must get compensation for those who have been killed," he says. "Won't redressing past mistakes be part of the peace talks? Or will they just talk about who gets what post?"

These are the questions being asked, quite vocally, in Kalikot district. Several hours uphill from a



Sick patient being carried to hospital in Kalikot.

bridge that the Maoists have destroyed, the district headquarters Manma bazar gives off a tense air of hush and control. Visitors must register with security forces when entering and leaving. An informal curfew is enforced at six by policemen blowing whistles and wielding rifles. At night the army routinely carries out target practice in its hilltop barracks, setting off flares that light up the surroundings in a lavish display of might.

The activities of the mainstream political parties is restricted to the bazar. A round-table talk called by the Maoists just outside Manma was boycotted by the bigger parties and government officials alike. Further along the trail, however, Maoist Area Secretary 'Sandesh' speaks of a recent two-day interaction program at Ratadab between the army and the Maoists.

From his account, it is clear that a competitive 'development war' is fast emerging: since the cease-fire the RNA has held two medical camps, and the Maoists have countered with camps of their own, as well as programs to build bridges, clean up villages, electrify settlements, and teach in schools. Area Committee Member 'Kopila' insists, despite our expressions of disbelief, that the party is planning to construct the abandoned Karnali Highway. The absence of the civilian government is glaring in all this development

talk, as is the absence of the mainstream political parties.

"The Maoists have forced us to hold posts in their party, so we are doing so," says one ex-UML man. "We don't like them from inside." It does appear, at times, that the only people who support the Maoists are the Maoists themselves. Most of the party's men along the trail are menacing, and some are even tuggish. All the women—or girls—we meet are 12 to 17 years old. Many of the cadres are SLC-failed or entirely illiterate. For anyone mature in thinking, the persuasiveness of their political thoughts are limited. Near Khalanga, the gutted district headquarters of Jumla, a man says, "Only 15 to 20 percent of their workers are ideologically motivated. The rest are jobless kids who wouldn't be given money if they asked for it from their parents. So they join the party, and extort from us with their guns."

Will these workers abide by their leaders in coming to a peaceful settlement? The answers are mixed. Some younger Maoist cadres say they will agree to a settlement only if it does not smack of compromise.

Rebel says, "We won't follow Krishna Bahadur Mahara if he sells out. We'll follow only Prachanda." But Maoist Area In-Charge Kanchan Sagar of Jumla says that his party workers are committed to peace: "Anyone who presents an obstacle to peace will lose favour with the people," he says. "The government has broken the code of conduct, but we have not."

He points to a grim-faced youth, the local commander of the military wing. "Look, he's not wearing a uniform: we've laid down arms. Even when the government makes a mistake, we've been flexible." He is very emphatic about this. "We will not turn the hopes for peace into disillusionment."

For the people of these hard-hit districts, a lot is riding on the promise that the present peace will hold. All along the trail, when asked what they would do if the talks were to fail, villagers told us that they would have to choose between leaving home once again, or dying in the crossfire. ♦

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Pentagon vs Powell, Europe

WASHINGTON - Even as US troops grind their way toward Baghdad, the administration of President Bush remains in turmoil over its post-war plans to occupy Iraq. The main issue of who will be in charge of the occupation pits the Pentagon against the State Department and its allies in Europe, notably British Prime Minister Blair. The Pentagon appears determined to maintain as much power for itself, while the State Department, backed by the intelligence community and Blair, is arguing for major roles for other US allies, the United Nations and other opposition figures.

Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld reportedly insisted that all relief and aid work come under the jurisdiction of Army General (Retd.) Jay Garner, the co-ordinator of the Pentagon's office of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, who will report directly to the chief of the US Central Command, General Tommy Franks. Secretary of State Colin Powell argued in a letter to Rumsfeld last week that US government relief work should be headed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which reports to the State Department. Aid groups have called for the United Nations to assume control of relief operations. (IPS)

Russia's new markets

MOSCOW - Moscow is eager to develop new markets for its crude oil and become an alternative to the volatile Middle East, especially as a source of fuel imports from Asia. Russia is particularly keen to build pipeline projects in the Far East to boost its oil exports to countries such as Japan—the second biggest importer of oil in the world after the United States—and China, the world's third largest oil consumer.

Over the past few months, the Russian government has been mulling over its plans while keeping watch on the conflict in the Middle East. At the moment, Russian oilmen decline to speculate whether their bold pipeline vision in the Far East could be affected by Iraqi war. "It is too early to foresee if consequences of war or changes in Iraqi oil exports policy may affect pipeline project," says Rosneft chief Dmitry Panteleyev. Russia is looking at two competing projects. One, backed by Russia's top oil firm Yukos and China, is a \$2.5 billion, 2,400 km extension of the existing network from near Irkutsk to Daqing, China. The other, backed by state-run oil firm Rosneft and Japan, would cost \$5.2 billion and circumvent China, running 3,800 km to the Russian city of Nakhodka on the Sea of Japan. (IPS)

Right to protest

LONDON - Amnesty is documenting instances of human rights abuses and the inflicting of war on civilians within Iraq in a report due to be released in a week or so. Meanwhile it is pointing out violations of the right just to speak against the war in 14 countries: Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Jordan, Norway, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Turkey, the US and Yemen.

"Human rights abuses connected to the war on Iraq have not been limited to that country [Iraq]," says the report *In the shadow of war: backlash against human rights*. "Governments appear to be using the world's focus on the theatre of war to violate human rights shielded from public scrutiny." Many of the countries cracking down on demonstrations have a record of not allowing peaceful protests, Judit Arenas of Amnesty said. Amnesty is also very concerned about measures taken against asylum seekers particularly in the US and in Britain. In the former, Operation Liberty Shield mandates the detention of asylum-seekers from Iraq and at least 33 other, as yet unnamed, countries. The report says "anti-terrorism" legislation has been used to support these violations in several countries. (IPS)

Panos South Asia is pleased to invite you to a discussion forum:

Conflict Conscious News Management in Nepal's peace process: Lessons from Sri Lanka

Date: Sunday, April 6th 2003
Time: 11:00 am - 1:00 pm
Venue: Bagbikhana, Patan Dhoka

After a brutal, prolonged conflict, Sri Lanka has been engaged in a truce and peace process which has lasted more than a year. Sri Lankan media and civil society have played essential roles in achieving the truce and sustaining the peace. There are lessons for Nepal, at present in its own delicate truce period, which can be drawn from the experiences of Sri Lanka. We are pleased to bring you the following speakers: **Sunanda Deshapriya** is a former daily newspaper editor in Colombo, an insightful columnist, and director of media programs for the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a leading non-governmental organization in Sri Lanka. **Sanjana Hatotuwana** is the Centre for Policy Alternatives' analyst of public attitudes and media trends in Sri Lanka. **Taitur Torkelson** is Press and Information Officer with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) which works to monitor the truce in Sri Lanka. Together they offer a wealth of insight into Sri Lanka's peace process and the possibilities for Nepal. Programme and discussion to be facilitated by **Kanak Mani Dixit** of Himal South Asian.

This programme is co-organised by International Media Support (IMS), Media Services International (MSI) and the World Association of Newspapers (WAN).

The waiting game



A young Iraqi boy grabs a box of supplies distributed by an aid agency in southern Iraq.

FERRY BIEDERMANN IN AMMAN They cannot say so openly, but the sentiment among senior United Nations officials who now have to wait in the Jordanian capital Amman until Iraq is safe again is for Saddam Hussein's regime to collapse quickly.

What they do speak openly about is their worry about the international divisions over Iraq. The chasm between countries that support and oppose the war may seriously affect the whole aid effort, says David Wilmhurst, spokesman

for the United Nations Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq (UNOHC). "In a few days time at most we will launch an emergency appeal for more than a billion dollars," says Wilmhurst. "If some of the countries who oppose the war refuse to help out, that could pose serious problems."

He worries also that the prolonged war and lack of security will mean that the UN cannot carry out its much-needed humanitarian tasks soon enough. Wilmhurst says, "First the UN

could not get it together politically, now we also are seen to fail on the humanitarian level." The Security Council has to reactivate the now suspended oil-for-food program—nearly 60 percent of Iraq's population depends on food from this program that distributed by the Iraqi government. Now the council may have no option but to renew it. "We estimate that people had six weeks supply of food," says Carel de Rooij who heads the Baghdad office of UNICEF and is now working from Amman. "So if there's still fighting in five weeks

with medical supplies from Jordan to Baghdad this week.

The first relief convoy sent from Kuwait by the local Red Crescent Society was mobbed and the supplies did not reach the people it was intended for. Kassis says the ICRC is meant to coordinate operations by local societies, and that it was unaware of the move from Kuwait. The ICRC has been able to offer significant help in Basra. It helped restore the supply of clean water to half the population after coordinating arrangements with all parties, including the Americans and the British. In Baghdad the ICRC partly repaired a water purification plant damaged in the bombing.

But water supply has been cut completely in three southern districts with a population of some 400,000. The British forces are trying to extend a pipeline from Kuwait to these areas. British and US forces are responsible for the welfare of the population under their control, says Wilmhurst. Where aid organisations cannot operate, only the armies can supply relief, he says. The UN has left 3,400 local staff behind in Iraq, and large stores of supplies. They carry out operations wherever possible, says Wilmhurst. "It's not easy to sit here and be unable to go in and help. That hurts." ♦ (IPS)

For now, everybody is preoccupied with safety. Most organisations will not send their people in while there is a military threat. The UN has its own security assessment teams, the International Red Cross prefers to coordinate its operations with all the parties involved. Medics Sans Frontieres decided they could not wait, and sent two trucks

Aid agencies are waiting for a green light on safety to go back into Iraq.

AD MCKENZIE IN SINGAPORE

Closed schools, empty taxis and people wearing face masks at the airport—these are just some of the signs that it is not business as usual in this South-east Asian city state known for its cleanliness, efficiency and discipline.

Some unusual steps are being taken as both the Singapore government and its people become increasingly concerned about the contagious and potentially deadly disease now known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which has killed two people here and made 89 ill so far. Worldwide, the illness has killed at least 55 and affected 1,550 people from Hong Kong, China and Vietnam to Europe and North America.

The Singapore government ordered the closure of schools until 6 April, affecting some 600,000 students in this tiny city state of 4 million people. Local teachers welcomed the decision. Residents are snapping up face masks to protect themselves from others' sneezes and coughs. Over the weekend, a sign at a pharmacy in the normally bustling Parco Bugis Junction shopping centre said it all: "Face masks out of stock". Outside the same centre, a line of taxis stretched halfway round the block, waiting for patrons. "Few people are going out," said taxi driver Lim Teck Hua. "They are afraid of the virus."

Earnings have fallen as there are so few clients. A local newspaper, *Today*, summed up the mood with the headline "Terror in a speck of spit". According to the paper, SARS has become the "best known acronym in Singapore these days". Singapore's

SARS attack



Singapore wears a deserted look with closed schools, empty cabs and most residents staying indoors.

Archbishop Nicholas Chia has instructed Catholic churches to avoid giving communion into people's mouths, but having them receive it on their palms instead. The Anglican Church is also staying away from the usual practice of having churchgoers drink wine from the same cup.

The initial SARS cases here involved three women who had travelled to Hong Kong—the most seriously hit by the virus with 470 cases of infections and at least 11 dead—and subsequently passed on the virus to family members and friends. About 1,500 individuals who have been exposed to the virus have been quarantined. They have been ordered to stay at home under the Infectious Diseases Act and are not allowed out even to buy food. Anyone who disobeys the order faces a heavy fine.

At Changi airport some airlines have been following WHO guidelines asking travellers whether they might have been exposed to the virus, or whether they had any telltale symptoms. Other airlines, however, seemed unaware of the advisory. A task force has been set up to examine border controls to prevent further cases of the disease from entering Singapore as experts struggle to find a cure for the illness.

Several entertainers, such as Moby, cancelled concerts here and in other countries in the region. Although the Rolling Stones did perform two gigs here, they cancelled shows in Shanghai and Beijing. The United States, Australia, Finland and Ireland have issued a new travel advisory, warning their nationals to postpone trips to areas affected by SARS. ♦ (IPS)

Friends and allies

TOKYO - With the US-led invasion of Iraq likely to last much longer than initially thought, Japan sees no choice but to step up its support to US-led troops as an insurance given the unstable situation with North Korea's nuclear crisis.

Signs of this foreign policy position by Tokyo, despite sizeable public opposition to the war, was evident from Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's statement on the day the invasion began that Japan stands firmly behind the US-Japan security alliance. Now, Japan's support may go well beyond financial support. In a telephone conversation with President Bush, Koizumi left open the option of dispatching Self-Defence Force troops to Iraq to maintain order as requested by the United States. Participation of these forces overseas need special laws to be passed each time for their dispatch.

Given North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons, Japan is acutely aware of its reliance on the US security umbrella. Washington's backing would come in handy with regard to instability in North Korea, which has been at loggerheads with the United States after its admission of a secret nuclear program and Washington's labelling it as part of the "axis of evil" that included Iraq. (IPS)

New spoils of war

PERTH - There are signs that United States farmers are eyeing the lucrative Iraqi wheat market as one of the spoils of war, much to the alarm of Australian producers who claim the US is trying to use humanitarian aid to muscle in on Australia's \$449 million market share in Iraq.

Washington announced last week that it planned to send 600,000 tons of wheat to Iraq as food aid as it began a military invasion to oust Saddam Hussein. The US Department of Agriculture said the first portions of some 200,000 tons would be released soon with another 400,000 tons "made available as needed". The Australian Wheat Board (AWB) says it was unfair for the US Wheat Associates to steal their market share during a war. Farmers in Western Australia have threatened to sue the government for millions of dollars in compensation.

Just a day before bombing began, the UN suspended the oil-for-food program and withdrew all their staff from Iraq. Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said the government is working to secure its speedy resumption "as soon as circumstances on the ground permit". (IPS)



OPINION

by DEEPAK CHOPRA



Prospects for peace

There can be no hope if government policies are based on self-interest and greed.

CARLSBAD, CALIFORNIA - Is it childish to hope to create a peace consciousness in a world when every television radiates the devastation of Iraq, the birth place of civilisation? Arthur Miller has observed that human beings have a profound longing for meaning and purpose—perhaps that is why we deny the evidence that society, its leaders and world governments have lost their minds. The record of human behaviour overflows with continuous violence.

Human beings have been racist, bigoted, ethnocentric and tribal throughout history. We are the only species that has devastated the ecological balance of the planet. We have committed murder in the name of God. We have created weapons of mass destruction. Can we be naive enough to say we are going to create a peace consciousness?

What we see on news networks is reality TV competing for ratings. Were it not for the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are going to be affected by the war and many hundreds will die, including children, we might as well make popcorn and enjoy the show.

As long as the policies of governments across the world are based on self-interest and greed there can be no hope. The nations at war and their leaders may appear to be enemies but they are in fact implicit allies in the destruction and devastation of humanity. In this situation no amount of angry activism against war is going to help because angry activism is still anger and only adds to the turbulence of the world.

If we recognise that consciousness is a field which modern science is just beginning to understand, there may be some reason for hope. More than 2000 years ago Buddha said: "We are inter-beings that inter-arise in the interishness, and there is only the interishness. If we think only in terms of me and mine then no amount of military power can provide security. The greater the military strength, the greater the insecurity, which is a product of fear. True security comes from an expanded sense of self in which greed is replaced by sharing, arrogance by humility, aggression by nurturing, demands by conciliation.

This can happen only if our leaders emphasise service and not profit-making, cooperation and not competition, open hearts instead of open markets: when we identify with the human family instead of the nation or the tribe. If we join forces then maybe it is not so naive to hope that we can change things. If the media, entertainment industry, and educational



institutions start to focus on building a peace consciousness that will render military power irrelevant we will see things change.

Perhaps we can create an environment where nationalism itself becomes an out-moded idea. The philosopher Krishnamurti said 50 years ago, "Nationalism is tribalism." Einstein said, "Nationalism is an infantile disease; it is the measles of humanity." Eric Fromm said, "Nationalism is our form of incest—it is its idolatry, and patriotism is its cult." Today these are dangerous statements to make.

Perhaps we can create a consciousness where to tell the truth is to be a true humanitarian, where we can go beyond national identity and see ourselves as members of the human race and children of this planet, where different nationalities and tribes are considered not reasons for conflict but parts of an indivisible eco-system.

An anthropologist friend of mine said that if insects disappeared from the planet, all life here would cease in five years, but if human beings disappeared, life would flourish in five years. Perhaps Mother Earth is saying, "You know, human being, it was an interesting experiment, but it didn't work. Let's move on." Maybe that is our fate. Maybe it isn't. The world waits with bated breath for the lovers to lead us out from this nightmare. ♦ (IPS)

(Deepak Chopra is founder of the Chopra Center, member of the board of directors of the Alliance for the New Humanity, and author of *How to Know God*.)

Shocked and awestruck

Fifteen stories the media has already bungled.

GREG MITCHELL in NEW YORK

The war is two weeks old and already the media has got at least 15 stories wrong or misreported a sliver of fact into a major event. Television news programs, of course, have been the prime culprits. Newspapers, while they have often gone along for the ride, have been much more nuanced and careful. Newspaper coverage has not been faultless, as photos and headlines often seem shock-and-awe-struck but, compared with TV, newspapers seem more editorially—and mentally—balanced. Some have actually displayed a degree of skepticism of claims made by the military and the White House—what used to be known as "journalism".

The problem is that most of the TV commentators on the home front appear to be just as "embedded" with the military as the far braver reporters now in the Iraqi desert. Here, then, is a list of stories that have been widely misreported or poorly reported so far:

1. Saddam may well have been killed in the first night's surprise attack (20 March).
2. Even if he wasn't killed, Iraqi command and control was no doubt "decapitated" (22 March).
3. Umm Qasr has been taken (22 March).
4. Most Iraqis soldiers will not fight for Saddam and instead are surrendering in droves (22 March).
5. Iraqi citizens are greeting Americans as liberators (22 March).
6. An entire division of 8,000 Iraqi soldiers surrendered en masse near Basra (23 March).
7. Several Scud missiles, banned weapons, have been launched against US forces in Kuwait (23 March).
8. Saddam's Fedayeen militia are few in number and do not pose a serious threat (23 March).
9. Basra has been taken (23 March).
10. Umm Qasr has been taken (23 March).
11. A captured chemical plant likely produced chemical weapons (23 March).
12. Nassiriya has been taken (23 March).
13. Umm Qasr has been taken (24 March).
14. The Iraqi government faces a "major rebellion" of anti-Saddam citizens in Basra (24 March).
15. A convoy of 1,000 Iraqi vehicles and Republican Guards are speeding south from Baghdad to engage US troops (25 March). (Editor & Publisher)



CAREER OPPORTUNITY

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F-SKILL imparts market responsive training for employment of Nepalese youth. The Project is looking for highly motivated candidates for the following positions:

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 - Establish quality control processes for the delivery of training to franchisee clients
 - Work with training providers to establish quality standards for the delivery and assessment of trainers
 - Coordinate training and accreditation of trainers
 - Establish monitoring and assessment procedures to ensure compliance with quality control systems
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Qualifications and Experience

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- Willing and able to work long hours, independently and productively
- At least three years experience working with quality control systems
- Ability to work in a team with good communication skills
- Good negotiation skills
- Strong conviction on the Impact Financing modality of support and assisting disadvantaged people
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- Excellent knowledge of computer applications

2. Programme Officer - Business Support Services

- Main Responsibilities:**
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 - Conducting franchisee orientation and business training of franchisees
 - Coordination of F-SKILL mentors: selection, assignment and professional development
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 - Coordinate the conducting of labour market surveys, targeted at employers throughout Nepal
 - Constantly improving from a technical perspective, the "franchisee package" offered to franchisees
 - Reflecting the principles and manner of operating the franchise business as defined in the Franchise Agreement, which includes the brand name and the confidentiality of skill and know-how transferred
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 - Make regular and in-depth field visits to examine and monitor the work of the franchisees
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- At least five years successful operation of a small business
 - Business training or related qualification preferable
 - Excellent knowledge of English and Nepali both written and spoken
 - Excellent knowledge of computer applications

Interested candidates are requested to forward their hand written application with at least two references by 18 April, 2003. Please state the position you are applying for. (Quality Control or Business Support Service) clearly in your application and mail to the following address: F-SKILL/Helvetas GPO Box 688, Kathmandu

Women candidates and those from minority groups are strongly encouraged to apply. Only short-listed candidates will be called for interview.

F-SKILL is implemented through a network of the franchisor and franchisees and supported by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC).

End of revolution



MIN. BABURAM BHATTARAI

Binaya Kasajoo in *Budhabar*, 2 April

Some may have found it unbelievable, others merely amusing; Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand and the Maoist peace talk coordinator Baburam Bhattarai standing together as they distributed awards. The Nepali media has found their blue-eyed boys in the Maoist peace talk team. Even state-owned media are giving them wholehearted coverage. On the one hand this could be an indication of press freedom, and on the other, it could be the glamour that surrounds rebel leaders creating an illusion that the regime may have changed in Nepal.

The ceasefire announcement came as a surprise to most Nepalis. A series of abrupt developments occurred after that. It is understandable that the leaders expected to participate in proposed roundtables and peace talks put on a good face, meet with other political powers and members of civil society. But Bhattarai has disappointed everyone by his eagerness to stand on the same dais as the ministers from the "old regime" to hand out awards to controversial people. After witnessing his eagerness, authors who want to sell more copies of their books, youths flogging music albums and traders that need their sales boosted may be encouraged to request his presence at their events. There are no guarantees

that Bhattarai won't give any more meaningless audiences.

The appearances made by CPN (ML) leaders, specially Madan Bhandari 13 years ago wasn't any less dramatic than Bhattarai's public appearance on 29 March. Nobody has forgotten that the official greeting card from Nepal's first communist prime minister, Man Mohan Adhikari, carried a picture of the goddess Durga riding a lion. And the public has yet to recover from the spectacle of seeing a communist leader making offerings at the Pashupatinath temple. People don't want leaders who talk big about political ideologies and spout slogans, only to jockey for positions of power in the government. People want actions to match words. Nepalis are tired of unfulfilled promises. History proves that political revolution cannot be sustained without social revolution. Bhattarai's appearance at the function on 30 March has sown anxiety and fear among advocates for change. They see it as a demise of the revolution. Will what they fear come to pass?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"In case we do need international mediation, we'd rather have the United Nations do it than any other country."

-Baburam Bhattarai after meeting UNICEF's Nepali deputy director, Kul Chandra Gautam in *Rajdhani*, 3 April.



Baburam Bhattarai: "This is the new model democracy we have been demanding!"

Budhabar, 2 April

Above ground

Rajdhani, 1 April

राजधानी

Baburam Bhattarai stole the limelight when he entered the BICC hall to participate in the sixth anniversary of the Reporters' Club in Kathmandu. Earlier this week, colleagues Ram Bahadur Thapa and Matrika Yadav accompanied Bhattarai to his first public function in seven years. Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand entered the hall seconds after Bhattarai with his entourage of bodyguards but was largely ignored by the public who focused all their attention on the rebel leaders. Chand and the Maoist leaders shook hands warmly and when they were invited to take their seats at the dais, Bhattarai and Chand smiled and whispered to each other to jointly preside over the function. Bhattarai greeted leaders of the other political parties with equal warmth—shaking hands and distributing hugs to those who dared to encourage a more intimate greeting. He raised his fist in a *lal salaam* to Bamdev Gautam and Hriday Tripathi. The organisers treated Chand and Bhattarai on an equal footing by asking both of them to jointly inaugurate the function. Throughout the proceedings Prime Minister Chand appeared visibly discomfited. When the master of ceremony requested both the leaders to distribute certificates and awards Bhattarai looked elated, while Chand seemed exasperated.

The audience was fascinated by how the leaders who bayed for each other's blood a few months ago now hugged each other in public. Several members of the audience were also heard speculating what might have happened if these leaders had discovered this warmth a few years earlier. Applause filled the hall when RPP president Rajeswor Devkota suggested Bhattarai should now take up the role of an alternate prime minister, adding it was "everyone's desire". Bhattarai

maintained a thoughtful expression at the statement.

Chits and cheats

Nepal Samacharpatra, 2 April

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

A police inspector surveilled the examination authorities at an exam centre at Banepa's Siddhartha Boarding School to allow SLC candidates of Dipendra Police School to cheat in exams. Only children of policemen are admitted to the latter institution. According to exam centre chief Gyan Bahadur KC, policemen stationed at Banepa took control of the centre and allowed candidates to cheat in the math exams for more than an hour. They were also seen coaching students.

KC told us that a group of policemen arrived half an hour after the exam began, and allowed three senior students of Dipendra Police School to start cheating. The gang left when the chief district officer arrived after KC contacted him for help. District education officer Lok Prasad Upadhyaya said there would be no more incidents of this kind during the remaining examination period. CDO Narendra Dahal said he had heard about the incident but denied seeing anyone actually involved. The police personnel deployed at the centre corroborated KC's account of events despite accusations from the police force that KC was lying to tarnish the image of the Dipendra Police School, which is a fierce competitor of his institution, Siddhartha Boarding School. The candidates from other schools at the exam centre have demanded army guards against more foul play saying policemen could not be trusted. If the police are convicted, they could face up to six months of imprisonment and a Rs 50,000 fine for illegally entering an examination hall according to the Education Regulation laws.

A similar story of policemen helping examinees has surfaced from Dadeldhura. Ten minutes after the question paper was



"Why do you worry that your son will fail the SLC? We have officers who will see to it that he gets through."

distributed, students of the Mountain Boarding School had their answers delivered by the policemen deployed for security at the centre. A huge crowd had gathered outside the exam hall to help the candidates. Journalists were denied entrance into the hall when they demanded to know what was going on.

To arms

Jana Aastha, 2 April

आस्था

The Royal Nepali Army (RNA) wants to keep its boys ready in case the ceasefire is broken again. Sources tell us that the RNA is equipping its soldiers with M-16 rifles in the insurgency affected districts of Rukum, Rolpa and Salyan. These rifles are used by the security detail who guard the royal palace. The M-16 is comfortable to carry and is fully automatic. The RNA purchased 5,000 American made M-16 last August to replace its ageing SLRs. There are plans to replace all SLR rifles with the A-One version of M-16, all LMG rifles with the A-Two version and all SMG rifles with Colt Commando models. The latest move has been made to modernise the RNA. Officials are convinced the new weapons will boost the morale of the soldiers since the it is lighter and more powerful than the rebels' SLRs.

Back at Sundarijal >31

"I have suddenly become a political being"



BP Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh are separated and kept in solitary confinement for the first time in the four months since incarceration. Both refuse to give any statement to the assistant zonal commissioner without the presence of their lawyers. Instead of exacerbating his depression, solitary confinement raises BP's morale. He thinks it transforms him into a public figure, and gives him responsibilities which he now needs to live up to.

24 March, 1977

[page contains entry continued from 21 April]

25 March

Sundarijal

GM was taken away to be lodged separately in the new cell whose construction was so feverishly completed this morning. The Ass. Anchaladhish came and said that we must be kept separately kept till certain processes of inquiry are completed. GM was taken away at about 11:35 AM and a team of officials with the Ass. Anchaladhish, government advocate and others came to take my statement. GM must have gone through the same procedure. We had decided unless legal advice of our... is made available to us, and we decided who our legal advisers will be after consulting our men, we would not make any statements. GM must have taken this stand because they didn't take long to deal with him. They came to my camp at about 12:30 PM. They were with me for 45 minutes.

GM is probably lodged in the newly constructed jail just outside my jail where walls tipped with electrified wires are visible from my [cell]. There appears to be a small courtyard in front of my cell which is enclosed in high walls. The gate of the new prison is of strong iron, and I believe the security guard has been reinforced. This is amazing—in view of the fact that these extraordinary security measures are against our escape—we have voluntarily returned to Nepal. This morning I told the Ass. Anchaladhish that they must be aware that ours was a voluntary return and that it was through no successful efforts of theirs that we are here, but they behave as if we were apprehended with great difficulty. I told him ours was a political decision, therefore even if we are sent off we wouldn't leave the country. I would go back to my house at Chabhel and GM to his at Thamel. I told the Ass. Anchaladhish that we must get the normal privileges of prisoners—ie regular interviews and correspondence, and a supply of books and newspapers. He explained his inability to do anything on the matter, but I reminded him since I am kept in detention on his orders, he can't avoid responsibility as to the condition of my imprisonment. Poor officer!

Now real solitary confinement has started for me and GM. It was already a solitary imprisonment but with the departure of GM the solitude has increased hundred-fold. We used to discuss things and his very persona was a kind of assurance that life was still normal. I don't know how long this will be maintained. The Ass. Anchaladhish

REVIEW

by CK LAL

The rise (and fall) of the people's war

Splits and amalgamations of communist parties are so common and confusing that it's almost impossible to examine them as independent institutions with different sets of distinct belief systems. There isn't much in the formal declarations of the UML that makes it any different from, say, the Maoবাদis.

The shroud of ideological ambiguity covering the entire utopian spectrum of the left makes objective assessment of any discrete movement extremely

complex. Editors of *The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives* have chosen to get around that challenge by asking leftists themselves to assess a 'war' that threatens to make many of them politically irrelevant.

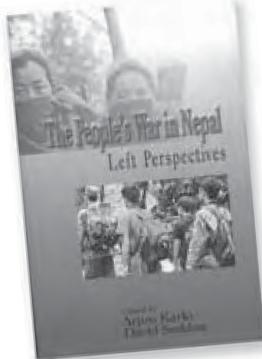
The book begins with an introduction, and is divided in three parts: an overview, Maoists perspectives and left perspectives. For Nepali readers sick with the ventriloquism of the Maoবাদi leadership and the verbosity of other leftist luminaries, there is nothing new here and they can skip quite a bit.

Despite the editors' claim that they have "tried to maintain a light touch as regards matters of writing style", the volume is no more lucid than any other hazy harangues that routinely fill up the pages of Nepali publications like *Drishiti* and *Janadesh*. The sole exception to the overdose of ideological swearing is Comrade Mohan Bikram Singh's convincing indictment of "The Royal Palace Massacre and the Maoists' Pro-King Political Line" in Part Three of the book where he swears at his former comrades. Compared to what has gone before, Singh's piece reads like a thriller.

Now that Baburam Bhattarai and his team of negotiators are sharing the stage with Lokendra Bahadur Chand, the ideological underpinnings of the Maoist uprising may have receded into the background. All that remains is the claim of an armed group of insurgents that they be given a fair share of the spoils of state power. The sartorial elegance of Bhattarai and Comrade Ram Bahadur Thapa notwithstanding, the Maoবাদi leadership started losing its revolutionary sheen as soon as it surfaced in Kathmandu's polluted air. Now, as they are just another bunch of political manipulators.

The demise of left extremism was formally announced the day Krishna Bahadur Mahara proudly

proclaimed in front of business bigwigs that his outfit was all for the free market. The book compiled by Karki and Seddon is an intellectual tombstone of a dead war that consumed nearly 8,000 Nepalis. For students of the communist movement in Nepal, this book can be a useful primer. Perhaps the biggest weakness of this collection is the absence of any useful conclusions, or an exploration into the relationship between Nepali and Indian Maoists.



The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives Arjun Karki and David Seddon (eds) Adroit Publishers, Delhi Pages: xxiv+494 Rs 1,000



Dialogue Quarterly Vol 4 No 2 BB Kumar (ed) Astha Bharati, Delhi Pages: 196 Rs 100

In this new book, leftists assess a conflict that helped make them politically irrelevant.

The last issue (Oct-Dec, 2002) of *Dialogue* can be cited here as 'further reading' for the Karki-Seddon collection. This journal of Astha Bharati, New Delhi, gives what can perhaps be termed as the Right Perspective on the "Maoist Insurgency in Nepal and India". Articles by Parmanand, Deepak Thapa, General Ashok Mehta and Chandrasekharan are directly about the Maoist insurgency in Nepal while Prakash Singh, a former Director General of Border Security Force of India, explores their cross-border nexus.

Last month, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca made it clear that the Maoবাদis of Nepal were still on her watch list. Unfortunately, most assessment of the phenomena of left extremism in South Asia still has to be based on newspaper reports. These two volumes—along with an earlier publication of CNAS that explored *Domestic Conflict And Crisis of Governability in Nepal* in an eponymous title (*Nepali Times* #40)—will help broaden the horizon of scholars interested in the rise (and fall?) of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Such publications also inform inquisitive decision-makers about the ground realities that give birth to issues they are expected to address. ♦

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Inspired by the Nature of Nepal** paintings by Dagmar Mathes till 22 April at Park Gallery, Pulchowk.
- ❖ **The Characters 2003** paintings by Uttam Kharel till 13 April at Sirjana Contemporary Art Gallery, Kamaladi. 4247889
- ❖ **The Twelve Deeds of the Buddha** Tibetan wood block print exhibition till 15 April at the Indigo Gallery.

EVENTS

- ❖ **On the road by cycle** Slide show by Edwin Toker. Free. 7.30 PM on 5 April at Via Via Cafe, Thamel. 4435184
- ❖ **ASMAN Spring Mela 2003** 10AM-6PM on 19 April at Hyatt Regency. 4417649
- ❖ **Bird Conservation Nepal** discussion forum by Friends of the Bagmati. 3PM on 6 April, Lazimpat Gallery Café. friendsofthebagmatinepal@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Conflict conscious news management in Nepal's peace process: lessons from Sri Lanka** Discussion forum by Panos South Asia, 11AM-1PM on 6 April at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Speakers are Sunanda Deshapriya, Sanjana Hattotuwa and Teitur Torkelsson, mediated by Kanak Mani Dixit.
- ❖ **Tennis coaching classes** Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Reiki workshops** from 8-9 and 12-13 April. Reiki@eld.org.uk. 5541613

DRINK

- ❖ **Splash Bar & Grill** Exotic cocktails, panoramic view. Happy hour 5.30-7PM. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818

MUSIC

- ❖ **Shukrabar V: Comfy songs to slip into** Southern harmony and rock presented by Due South. 6PM on 4 April at Patan Museum. Tickets Rs 250. 5527373, 4256411
- ❖ **Live Music** Friday at 5.30 PM. Saturday movie at 4.30 PM. Jivin' Joe's Restaurant, Kupondole.
- ❖ **Abhaya with the Steam Injuns** 7PM every Friday at Moksh in Hardic Club, Jhamsikhel. 5528703
- ❖ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday at Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 4414336
- ❖ **Rusty Nails** 7.30 PM on Friday at The Fusion Bar, 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

- ❖ **Vegetarian specialities and clay oven pizzas** at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 480262
- ❖ **Thakali food at affordable prices** at Tukche Thakali Café (New Baneshwor).
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Dakshinkali package** every Saturday. Rs 500+tax. 4370714, 4371537
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights** Traditional cottage with modern facilities. www.escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort** Packages available. 680080/83
- ❖ **Ultimate Bungy** at The Last Resort. 4439525
- ❖ **Tea House Combo** Rs 700 pp at Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 4410432
- ❖ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Rs 2,750 pp per night. 01-361500
- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge**, Bardia National Park. Rafting and more
- ❖ **The secret of Kathmandu** Overnight package \$99. Second night at 50 percent. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse**, near Thimi. Traditional Nepali farm house in lush gardens. 631734

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Not much to add to what we said last week about the onset of spring and the convection systems over the Himalaya. As this satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows, the haze over the plains is getting thicker and the south-westerlies will bring them our way, this will filter the sun and lessen its intensity a bit but not enough to stop the steady climb of maximum temperatures to 28 degrees. Expected hot, muggy afternoons leading up to thunderstorms by evening or night, and bright warm mornings.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
28-12	26-13	26-12	27-12	28-13

BOOKWORM

Resistance and the state: Nepalese experiences David N Gellner (ed)
Social Science Press
Rs 525

This readable book gives a graphic description of conflicts over the interpretation of history, and various perspectives on the Maoist insurgency that has taken control of large parts of rural Nepal since 1996. The contributors illuminate the complex relationship of a modernising, developmentalist state and the people it professes to represent and benefit.

Nepal darshan Ashok Vyas
Kantalaxmi Publications
Rs 440

A former journalist who spent more than a decade exploring Nepal, Vyas presents us with a travel guide written with a South Asian sensibility. With plenty of colour prints and short but succinct descriptions of the kingdom, Vyas covers areas from geography, flora and fauna, trekking, wildlife reserves to general information.

The founder of modern Nepal: Prithvinarayan Shah SP Asa
Vaani Prakashan, 2003
Rs 500

A historical biography presented in the form of a novel, the author has endeavoured to present this legendary king of Nepal in a context that makes him accessible to the reader. It is minutely researched but escapes dry narrative with lively dialogues. The author has several other works published in the same genre.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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BROADCASTING

Yo BBC ho

The BBC's Nepali Service is the main source of news for the Nepalis in Nepal and abroad.

SRADHA BASNYAT in LONDON

During the darkest days of the insurgency, most Nepalis—including the Maoists themselves—who wanted real news tuned in to the BBC Nepali Service. Ever since it was started, the nightly new bulletin in Nepali has been the most reliable source of information for Nepalis on what is happening in Nepal itself. During the Panchayat years, the BBC's Hindi news bulletins used to be staple fare for most Nepalis.

Such was the demand for trustworthy news that what began as a half-hour weekly bulletin addressing topical issues is now a daily source of news and information for Nepalis all over the world. And as the Nepali diaspora grows, so does the listenership of this shortwave broadcast which is now estimated at 1.5 million. What shortwave reception lacks in sound quality, it more than makes up for with relevance. For Nepalis in the Gulf, Malaysia or Japan, it is the only source of news from home. Now, the BBC Nepali Service is

also available on bbc.co.uk/nepali and nepalnews.com in audio.

"The main advantage of using short wave is it reaches far flung areas where medium wave and FM don't reach," says Khagendra Nepali (pic, bottom left), the editor at the BBC Nepali Service in London. Shortwave is still the most affordable and accessible medium to reach Nepalis in Nepal and abroad. But the service is rebroadcast simultaneously on FM in Kathmandu on Radio Sagarmatha 102.4 FM and in Bumei and through the British Forces Broadcasting Service for the 3,000 or so Gurkha unit and families there.

In their tiny workspace at Bush House that sits cheek-by-jowl with BBC's Bengali, Tamil, Urdu and Sinhala sections, the Nepali crew was getting busy this week for the evening bulletin. Veteran broadcaster Mani Rana was bidding goodbye after 32 years in the service, saying he loved every minute of his time in the service. "When I came to London, my English was better than my Nepali, now it's the other way around thanks to the BBC Nepali Service," he tells Khagendra Nepali during a goodbye interview inside the studio. Fulltime staff strength is being augmented to four by the arrival here this week of Bhagirath Yogi from the *Nepali Times*.

"This is really exciting work, you know you are providing a service with impartial and factual information," says reporter and announcer, Jitendra Raut (right in pic, top).

The production teams here are supported by BBC producers and correspondents the world over, especially in the coverage of the Iraq



war. In addition, the Nepali service does its own interviews with Nepalis in Kuwait and the Gulf region. The news team also has stringers in Kathmandu and all over Nepal who have been kept busy in the past three years covering news of violence. But since the ceasefire, there is daily coverage of the peace process and interviews with senior political figures.

afied as Guam and Angola. The team says that feedback keeps them responsible and vigilant. "We have very responsive listeners, and now they let us know their opinions almost instantly through email," says Raut.

The BBC Nepali service has been almost axed several times, but has always managed to survive budget cuts. Any new plans for expanding the service? "Nothing really on the horizon, the BBC has limited resources and so we must prioritise. Unless it is very big news and people are crying out for more information—like after the royal massacre—we stick with regular programming," says Khagendra Nepali.

(BBC Nepali Sewa airs daily 2045-2115 and 2245-2300 Nepali time on Radio Sagarmatha 102.4 FM in Kathmandu.)

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Decoding the code of conduct

It is our job as journalists (motto: "The truth shall prevail, unless it's a lie") to keep all and sundry informed about the activities, however trivial, of our public figures' private lives. That is why we will go to any length to ferret out the facts: even if it means joining an all-expenses-paid junket to Japan and never coming back. Being curious cats of the fourth estate, we are duty-bound to let the cat out of the bag. We tell all. We spill the beans, and let the chips fall where they may.

Many of you may have heard that there is now a top secret code of conduct in effect which is such a well-guarded secret that no one actually knows what it contains. Which is just as well. Being Nepalis, we would probably break every rule in the book if we knew what those rules were. Nevertheless, it is our sworn duty as professional snoops to decode the code of conduct. This is what we have managed to dig up so far:

Preamble to the Code of Conduct

Given, that Nepal is a sweet potato, *Bearing in mind*, that we are landlocked between a rock and a hard place, *Conscious*, of the fact that the yam is rotten to the core and there are worms crawling all over it, *Bearing in mind also*, that if things go on at this rate the said sweet potato will be history, *Considering*, that it behooves us more than ever before to close our ranks to better meet the hopes and expectations our people have nurtured for decades, *Convinced*, that the United Nations charter reaffirms the faith of the International Community in the dignity and sanctity of the human person, the equality of the rights of men and women, as well as the right of every small nation to be invaded by the world's only superpower, *Determined*, to defend the right of every citizen to

do exactly what he and/or she pleases, *Aware*, that most of us couldn't be bothered which bunch of crooks replaces the present bunch of crooks. *Recalling*, that the International Potato Institute in the 1954 Quito Declaration in its Article 129 stipulated that all yams shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition, respect, right and freedoms of other potatoes, either sweet or otherwise,



In view of the aforementioned:

1. A Goodwill Volleyball Match will be held between the two Negotiating Teams to break the ice this weekend at the Dashrath Stadium. The Government Team will wear *daura suruwals*, while the Ungovernment Team will wear tweed caps.
2. The Ungovernment side shall not turn down any invitation to attend ribbon-cutting and lamp-lighting ceremonies, music CD launches, *bartamans*, weddings, Ghode Jattras, anti-Iraq war rallies and interaction programs followed by *dosallah*-wearing. In each venue, comrades shall deliver a speech lasting not less than a half-hour each.
3. Both Negotiating Teams are entitled to be accompanied by three bodyguards per member, who shall stand backstage wearing wrap-around designer shades and olive green flak jackets with an ominous bulge on the left side.
4. The captains of the Ungovernment Negotiating Team shall follow these guidelines for dealing with media: give at least one interview daily in all the capital's newspapers provided nothing of any substance is actually uttered, hold one press conference every other day where all reporters will be mandatorily flogged with a bamboo cane before they enter the venue. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

The man in the middle

Many who saw the pictures of Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand shaking hands with Baburam Bhattarai at the Convention Centre on Monday wondered who the man in the middle was. It was none other than Rishi Dhamala (*centre, pic below*), the flamboyant chairman of the Reporters' Club Nepal, adroitly squeezing himself between the two so the cameras could catch him.

The occasion was the sixth anniversary of the club, and as it turns out, the prime minister wasn't told that the wily Dhamala would get him to shake hands with Bhattarai.

To his detractors, and they are legion, Dhamala is a self-seeking publicist who uses his club to shamelessly promote himself. But even his critics credit Dhamala with a nose for news that turns a Reporters' Club function itself into a news event.

Asked why he didn't warn his guests about the nature of the

anniversary function on Monday, Dhamala told us: "I wanted to show that the process of reconciliation had begun." Although his intended message got twisted, the function got more public interest than most other face-to-face events conducted by the club so far.

Dhamala is not a modest man, that's for sure. He is often seen sitting sandwiched between celebrity invitees so he is always on the front page of newspapers and on television. "Look, I don't purposely get into the limelight," he says testily. "But I deserve credit for what I do."

In the last six years Reporters' Club Nepal has invited even the most inaccessible and media shy public figures for the pleasure of being grilled by Kathmandu's hacks. Controversial political leaders, timid bureaucrats, diplomats, ministers and prime ministers from home and abroad have all gone through the wringer.

Dhamala says his job is symbiotic: the journalists get access to figures they could not otherwise interview, and his guests

get to talk to the entire press corps at one go. Whatever one may say about his abrasive style and self-publicity, Dhamala is self-made. He was jailed for hawking anti-Panchayat newspapers when he was just a high school student. The 30-year-old political science graduate was a full-time journalist until he founded Reporters' Club six years ago. Now he says he is ready to hand over the club to his successor and return to reporting again. "I crave for the rush of producing a daily newspaper," he confided.

But it isn't hard to imagine that beneath all that there is a political animal struggling to get out. "Yes, I would like to ultimately get into politics, and I have strong grassroots support in my home district of Dhading," he admits. In that case, all this exposure and rubbing shoulders with politicians will be useful.

But isn't he running out of guests to invite to his forum? Who is left? Rishi Dhamala doesn't hesitate with the answer: "The king." ♦



NICHAMAN DASOL

Times in Delhi

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