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Chakra stolen

A priceless 400-year-old manuscript depicting tantric energy centres of the human body was stolen from the Patan Museum on Tuesday afternoon. One of the main exhibits, it was housed in a special showcase (see pic). The item is originally from Bhaktapur, and had been returned to Nepal by a museum in Vienna. This first-ever art robbery from Nepal's best museum in broad daylight has opened up questions about the safety of other priceless religious objects housed there. Interpol has been notified.



Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 81

Q. Should the Maoist militia be inducted in the Royal Nepali Army as a part of the peace process?

Not at all 7%
Don't know 24%
Yes 69%

Total votes: 1,844

Weekly Internet Poll # 82: To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Is the current student agitation hurting or helping the peace process?

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Peace at what price?

Ten weeks into the ceasefire, the action has shifted to Kathmandu streets. In the countryside, victims of war wait for the truth to be told.

MANJUSHREE THAPA in JUMLA

Nepalis want peace—but at any price? Not if you listen to the people of the war-torn hinterlands. In Dailekh and Kalikot and Jumla, people who have seen family members and neighbours killed either by the Maoists or by state security forces are asking what will be done, in the peace process, to redress these killings.

While in faraway Kathmandu the government announces its negotiating team, the villagers ask whether all the war dead will ever be accounted for. While political parties and the palace jostle for advantage, the Jumlis want to know whether their families will be compensated. "What will happen in cases where civilians were wrongly branded Maoists and killed by the state?" asks a teacher in Haudi. A farmer from Pakha asks if compensation is on the agenda for the peace talks. In Tatopani, a young Maoist cadre asks why human rights organisations have not documented all the violations of the past year: "Will they ever come to find out what has happened?"

These raw questions are not being heard in Kathmandu, which in the past few weeks has been as giddy with bad politics as ever. Now that the Maoists have come above-ground, the media, intellectuals, NGOs and other civil society actors are in a mad rush to kiss and make up, in between attending conflict-resolution talk-shops. At his first

press conference, even Baburam Bhattarai became coy when asked about JGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha's death. He preferred, he said, not to dwell on the individuals who had been killed in the war. It would be more constructive to look forward than back, he said.

This would obviously help exonerate his party members from the murders that they have committed. It would also help exonerate the state security forces, which, if made to look back, would have to answer allegations of rape, torture, disappearances, arbitrary detention, and killings of thousands of civilians and unarmed Maoists.

Do we really want this kind of a "quick-fix" peace? It would be dangerous, say human rights activists. "The trauma of war has to be addressed all the way down to the village level," says Bhogendra Sharma of the rights group, CVICT. "The government must set up a truth and reconciliation commission."

Subodh Pyakurel of FINSEC agrees. "The process of truth and reconciliation should begin the day the peace talks begin. At the very minimum, every violation must be documented. Those who committed crimes must take responsibility for them. And those who suffered at their hands must forgive them." The motto 'Forgive, but forget not' motivated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

International human rights experts point out that achieving truth and reconciliation is a



NIN BARACHAKA

drawn-out, complicated process, especially in countries such as Nepal, with weak justice systems. The push for peace can make people compromise on discovering the truth. "The biggest danger at times like these is that the day they sign the peace agreement, all past violations will be forgotten," says Pyakurel. "Sentimentality will take over. Someone will say, 'Whatever's happened has happened. Now we are united.' From that day on, all the perpetrators of war crimes and of human rights violations will get blanket immunity."

The Mallik Commission report of 1990 stands as an infamous example. That report on government repression during the People's Movement was buried soon after its preparation, an atmosphere of moral compromise tainted all the political parties from the start of the second democratic era.

An Amnesty International report last year cited state-supported intimidation of a young girl allegedly raped in the Chisapani army barracks. If this glaring case could not be countered, who will press for the truth about the 7,000+ dead, and the other casualties of war? "That doubt is well founded," Pyakurel admits. "The human rights community has its weaknesses. Because of our past affiliations, our present political loyalties, the state favours that we depend on, and the relationship between the state, the parties and international partners, we sometimes cannot fulfil our duties."

"I won't say that a truth and reconciliation commission here would be unsuccessful," he concludes. "But it may not be as successful as it should be." ♦

Editorial p2
Time out

Eight too many?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Just when you thought you couldn't handle any more television channels from your cable provider, comes word of six more Nepali stations coming on stream in the next few months.

Kantipur Television, Image, Shangrila, Nepal One, NTV Metro Channel, and Avenues TV are going into full-scale production soon. This, despite serious doubts that the advertising industry can sustain so many new players, concerns about original content to fill air time, and the stranglehold that cable providers have on distribution.

Nepal's advertising industry presently has an annual turnover of Rs 200 million, and this now has to be shared between two existing television channels, six new ones, more than two dozen FM stations and the print media. "The current advertisement volume can support only three to four TV portals for now," says Suraj Bikram Shah at Thompson Nepal.

continued p7

Six new television channels are starting soon. But where is the audience?

ghar-e-kabab

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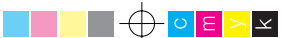
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TIME OUT

It's time to call a moratorium on this unnecessary and totally futile confrontation between the political parties and the palace. The war of words is now degenerating into a new cycle of street-fighting, chukka-jams and bandhs. Clearly, before setting up the government-Maoist truce Narayan Singh Pun should have been first entrusted with organising a ceasefire between the parties and the king.

This pointless polarisation is anti-people and anti-peace process. It takes the country back to square one—to 1989 when the underground political parties were on a confrontation course with an absolute monarchy that vacillated till the end and finally caved in to popular unrest. The only difference this time is that the parties, despite paying lip service to the cause, are not fighting for morality, justice and democracy. It's a fear of being left out.

For this, they have no one else to blame but themselves. Our new year opinion poll last week showed that 65 percent of Nepalis faulted the political parties and their leadership for the country's present crisis. Only four percent blamed parliamentary democracy. Something went seriously wrong in the past decade: the leaders failed us and they squandered the political freedom that they themselves gave their lives for. If a disaster of this magnitude cannot bring our political forces together, one wonders what will. A foreign invasion?

At the root of the present crisis of confidence between the king and the politicians is a deep-seated distrust of each other. What unites the otherwise-fractious leaders of the political parties is the suspicion that King Gyanendra is an autocrat at heart, he wants to be an absolute ruler, and he is up to his father's old tricks of divide-and-rule. Nothing the king says can convince them otherwise. So now they get their student wings to pump up the volume and get out on the streets to burn government vehicles and vandalise traffic lights.

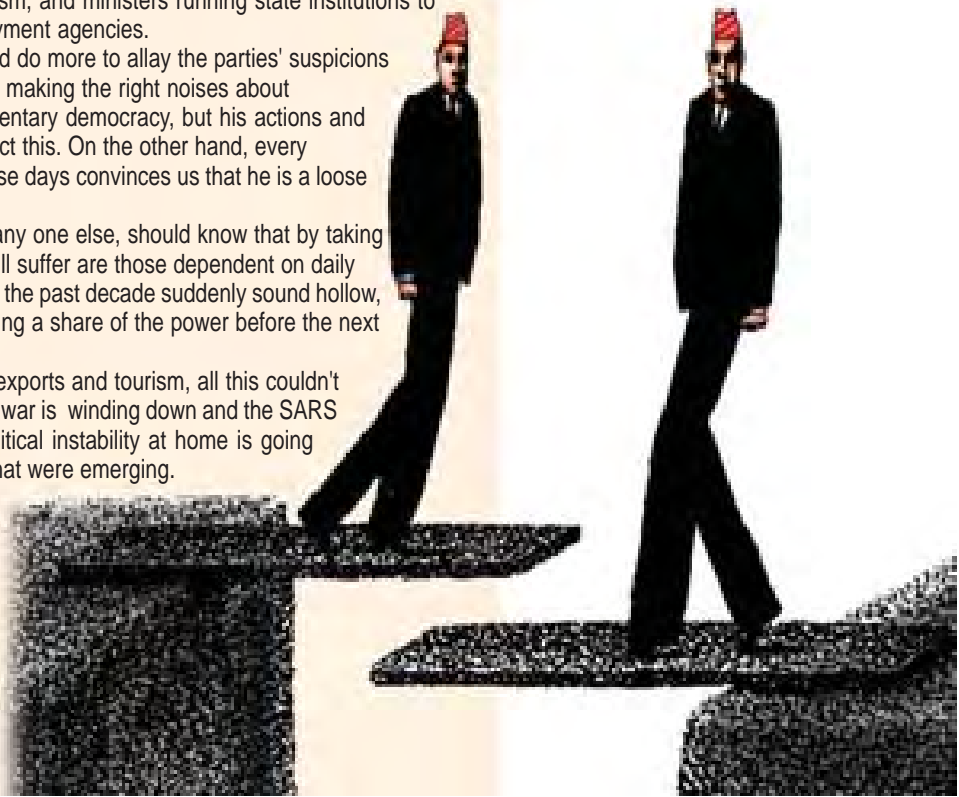
King Gyanendra, on the other hand, seems convinced that it must be peace first, democracy second. If power is handed back to these greedy and near-sighted leaders, they are just going to take the country down with them. He fears it will be a return to inept governance, corruption, nepotism, and ministers running state institutions to the ground by using them as employment agencies.

To be sure, we feel the king could do more to allay the parties' suspicions about his true intentions. He may be making the right noises about constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, but his actions and royal demeanour do not always reflect this. On the other hand, every utterance that GP Koirala makes these days convinces us that he is a loose canon who still doesn't get it.

The political parties, more than any one else, should know that by taking to the streets the only people who will suffer are those dependent on daily wages. The democracy slogans from the past decade suddenly sound hollow, the people know it is all about grabbing a share of the power before the next elections.

For Nepal's foreign investment, exports and tourism, all this couldn't have come at a worse time. The Iraq war is winding down and the SARS epidemic may have peaked, but political instability at home is going to kill the slim chances of recovery that were emerging. Television footage of burning buses and stone-strewn streets are going to turn back the few visitors who may be mustering the courage to come to Nepal.

And the newly-surfaced Maoists suddenly quiet. Why say anything when they can just sit back and enjoy watching the ruling class self-destruct. Time out.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Between hope and despair

Playing the Hindu card may have limited value for Nepal.

KOLHAPUR, India Once the four-lane expressway to Pune is complete, this little city in southern Maharashtra will begin to figure on the industrial map of India. For now, it's still better known for its handmade chappals. At 44 degrees in the shade, chappals are definitely more climate-friendly than any Adidas.

Expectations that the new highway will bring economic boom are high, the suburbs are abuzz with hectic construction. Earth-movers and tipper trucks growl at every intersection. The relatively prosperous state government in Mumbai has been financing prestige projects and ambitious welfare schemes by borrowing from central lenders who raise their deposits outside the state, but invest here with business-savvy politicians of the sugar belt.

Maharashtra's deficit financing will reach IRs 1 trillion in two years, surpassing India's entire external debt by IRs 50 million. If this bubble

bursts, its reverberations will be felt right up to Nepal from where there are hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in this state. The other lesson for Nepal's planners is not to borrow just because lenders are lining up at the door. Case in point: Enron's ill-fated Dhabol powerplant near here. The electricity is intermittent, and one soon gets used to the roar of diesel generators everywhere.

Delegates from India, Sri Lanka, Britain, Germany and Portugal at a media and governance seminar are surprisingly upbeat about Nepal. More upbeat than us Nepalis. The Sri Lankans are impressed that we are sorting out our war ourselves without foreign mediation. The Europeans praise the vibrancy of our civil society, and cite rights groups from western Nepal like BASE and the Aama Samuha. Indian administrators compliment the Nepali media for its coverage of social issues, and for championing human rights despite all odds.

"You have done in 12 years of democracy what we have not been able to do over half a century in India and Sri Lanka," says Leo Fonseka, a scholar from Colombo. That's high praise, but lest it go to our heads, it is important to remind ourselves that we Nepalis tend to go overboard with things. How else to explain our Maoist leaders shaking hands with the prime minister or gracing glittering ceremonies at five-star hotels rubbing shoulders with running dog capitalists?

Here in the southern half of India, King Gyanendra is admired as a Hindu monarch. Kolhapur was the seat of the great Maratha Warrior, Shivaji who defended his kingdom fiercely against the invasion by Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor of Delhi. Today, the ruling Shiva Sena

party swears by his name and rules by whipping up hatred against all non-Hindus.

It is perhaps natural that many of Shiva Sena's most ardent supporters are Hindu expats from Nepal. But for the future of Nepal-India relations, the Hindu card is of limited value. For every devout Hindu that lined up for the darshan of "emperor of the world's one billion Hindus" during King Gyanendra's recent pilgrimage to India, there are many others who hold that the foreign policy of a 'Hindu Kingdom' must remain India-centric. Issues of foreign policy are decided by hard-headed bureaucrats in South Block, and antagonising them by courting sundry priests and swamis may turn out to be counter-productive in the long-term.

Despite the praise for Nepal from delegates here, it is the fate of democracy back home that worries us. The government of the king's nominees headed by Lokendra Bahadur Chand has already completed its first six months, but there is no indication that the constitutional process is coming back on track. The king has staked all, but for most of his ministers it seems to be pretty much business as usual. Presiding over social functions, releasing cassettes and books, cutting colourful ribbons and then zooming home in escorted flagged limos to watch themselves in the evening news is how the average day plays out.

This is the cause of despair. Despite King Gyanendra's public commitment to withhold the norms of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy, there is reason to be worried. With street protests heating up again, Nepali society continues to be precariously balanced between hope and despair. ♦



NATION

OPINION

Though successive rulers of Nepal have tried their best to retain Nepal as a unitary state, it may now be time to tinker with this concept. Unitarism has not brought us greater unity or autonomy, it has just presented artificial and abstract symbols of nationhood that many Nepalis may not directly identify with.

Ever since the great unifier, King Prithibi Narayan Shah, recognised Nepal as a "garden of four castes and 36 races", he felt that this immense ethnic diversity could and should be forged into a single nation state. His successors, and later the Ranas and Panchayat rulers, spent a great deal of energy to homogenise Nepal by restructuring it in terms of diversity and physical demarcation of regions and districts to make the nation monolithic and unitary in nature.

Some of these means were: propagation of the Nepali language as lingua franca, the official language and the medium of education. The Ranas also divided the country into 35 districts for the sake of administration and revenue collection. Centralisation of power, economy and administration in Kathmandu during the Panchayat controlled the country via a restructuring of administrative units into five development regions with 14 zones and 75 districts.

Politically, there was an enforced Nepali nationalism with slogans like: "One State, One Power Center, One People, One Religion and One Language." Nepali nationalism was symbolised by the absolute monarchy, the Hindu religion and the Nepali language.

Pluralism was subdued by slogans such as "Our King, Our Country, Our Language, Our Attire."

Traditionally, the Shah and Rana rulers created a caste-based hierarchy which was used to



Devolution of political power would enhance Nepal's diversity, making our democracy more robust and inclusive to strengthen peace.

displace political and economic power. Hinduism is also a cornerstone of Nepal's mainstream society, and the traditions that come with it have been entrenched in the psyche of our rulers. Regimes have come and gone, but this has not changed.

Internal migration and resettlement of the hill villagers in the tarai and bhriti-madesh have been a gigantic social engineering project which has altered the cultural demography of the nation. That this resettlement was carried out regardless of cultural and racial considerations was clear all along, and its consequences will be with us for a long time to come.

After democracy, this Kathmandu-centrism was recognised and local self-governance became a buzz word. But the pre-eminence of Kathmandu as the power centre has been maintained, some would say it has become even more ingrained, after the restoration of democracy. The 1991 constitution states that Nepal is a unitary Hindu state. It prohibits, via article 112 (3) the formation of political parties on the basis of religion, community, caste, tribe and region. It places monarchy as the symbol of nationalism with Nepali as the only official language.

Some ethnic and regional parties like the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, Rastriya Jana Mukti Party, Jana Mukti Party, Nepal Rastriya Jana Party and organisations of indigenous people such as Limbuwan Mukti Morcha, Khambuwan Mukti Morcha, and Tharwan Mukti Morcha have been demanding the restructuring of the country into a federal state with the right to self determination. The Maoists have also included regional autonomy in their 40-point demand.

Even though these parties and groups are not yet major players and Maoist have yet to be tested at the ballot box, their agenda needs to be addressed urgently. There are two general characteristics of federalism: territorial division of power and territorial based diversity of the population.

Changing mosaic

Our topographical regions have their ethnic and regional characteristics which are still intact despite greater internal displacement and mobility in recent years. In the last seven years, people have been displaced due to the Maoist insurgency raging in the hills and mountains, the refugees have also helped to change the cultural and social mosaic of the

economic and social power thus addressing deeply-entrenched economic and social inequities. This in turn works as a safety-valve to release ethnic, communal and caste tensions within society.

The present constitution in its directive principles and policies of the state encourage the above principles. However, even after 12 years of multiparty democracy, the people of Nepal are not satisfied with the results, and do not feel that the country is headed towards an inclusive democracy. This is mainly due to continuous upheavals at the centre that has led to disillusionment, diminishing their trust in the democratic process and the leaders who have been playing at the central arena of politics. The silver lining in this period is the overall good work elected local bodies have done throughout the length and breadth of the nation. The people have found in their VDC, DDC, and municipality representatives' real accountability and commitment to address the peoples' needs.

Nepal must move towards federalism for the sake of inclusive democracy, social justice, greater responsibility, a responsive and streamlined administration,

decentralisation and greater peoples' participation in governance. But this does not mean fragmentation and carving out the country along caste, racial, tribal, religious and linguistic lines. There are enough examples in our region and beyond of countries that have been torn asunder by centrifugal ethnic forces. And in all these places, politically unscrupulous leaders have fomented ethnicity, communalism and religious hatred for their own ends.

The answer for Nepal lies in true devolution of power to elected local bodies, with the phasing out of central interference. The local bodies will best accommodate the regional, racial, cultural and social aspirations of the people at the grassroots, and political trickle-up effect will bring this inclusive representation to the national level.

It is even conceivable in future to convert the five development regions into federal states. Creating federal states along caste, ethnic or religious lines would be a grave mistake. We may want to dismantle a monolithic unitary state structure, but we must not let this erode our integrity as a nation. A federated structure would enhance Nepal's diversity and bring us strength from balanced development, inclusion and lasting peace. ♦

(Dhawal SJB Rana, PhD, is the former UML mayor of Nepalganj.)



LETTERS

POLL Despite Nepal's incredible hardships, and the misery that we the people have been subjected to because of decades of bad governance, what never ceases to amaze me is our patience and wisdom. On this new year, 2060, I salute all fellow-Nepalis. The respondents of the Himalmedia public opinion poll you published ('2060', #140) speaks for all of us. The people have spoken, and they have told our rulers to get on with it. The message to the Maoists is that their goals may be correct, but they are going about it in the wrong way. They have told the king to be careful with getting too involved with day-to-day politics, and they have virtually rejected the political parties. But the greatest lesson of all is that democracy has now taken root in Nepal, and the people cherish their political freedom. The political parties better listen to this, and help the king with his peace process so that an interim government can announce elections as soon as possible. By dithering and fomenting street

unrest, the parties are just helping the extremists of the left and right.
GB Thapa, Hong Kong

Himalmedia deserves praise for its annual public opinion polls. It shows that the sanity that is missing among the political forces is still manifested in abundance among the Nepali people. Thank you for listening to what we have to say about these greedy, power-hungry people who are trying to lord over us in our name.
Naresh Sharma, email

SLC CK Lal's 'Beyond the iron gate' (#139) was relevant, and extremely prescient. I am fascinated by the reaction and passion that Mr Lal's pieces generate, and think that this particular one on the SLC exams as well as the equally incisive piece by Ashutosh Tiwari ('The business of SLC', #140) should be translated into Nepali and be printed in our local language press. Every year nearly 300,000 Nepali youngsters take the SLC exam. Two-thirds of them never

make it and are branded 'failures' for the rest of their lives. If they pass, it is now clear that an SLC does not guarantee a good job or a bright future. It's a heads you lose, tails I win situation. It is obviously time to completely overhaul the SLC system, and change the curriculum so that our students can use schools to learn life skills, be creative, flexible and be imbued with a value system that will help the nation make progress. The key to Nepal's future development is education reform, not the haphazard and half-hearted reform that we have seen in the past decades, but the kind that will turn education into a true agent of change.
Buddhi Pant, Coventry, UK

ROOT CAUSE Ram Sharan Mahat's piece ('Incremental appeasement', #138) while rightly considering the Maoists as opportunists (like any other political party), misses the validity of what they have been asking for in the last seven years. The root cause of the Maoist revolution is the alienation of the

poor and rural communities from the national government. Although the means the Maoist used is debatable, their motive and sincerity is as honest as the revolution of 1990. One must, however, acknowledge that what the Maoist achieved in such a short span of time would not be possible if violence wasn't one of their means. Rewriting the constitution and altering the political priority is absolutely necessary. It should be the government's utmost priority to ensure that all communities of the country are treated equally on both paper and in practice. What the elite considers *kheppas* have shown just how powerful they can be if they find a good leader. Madhesis might just be waiting for a Baburam Bhattarai of the tarai. If the people drafting the constitution and making changes to political priorities have any vision, they should start recruiting madhesis in the army and if they have vision they should declare Nepal a secular state.
Anand Jha, email

WAR AND GREED

Daniel Lak's most recent column tells it like it is. I am astounded at the arrogant brutality and cynical deception being perpetrated by 'my' government, I am a seasoned veteran of war protest having devoted several years of my life to work to stop the Vietnam war. Now, 30 years later we have an unelected president (how quickly we forget that he 'won' by a rigged election), 95 percent of our daily news is controlled by two or three mega-corporations with direct ties to our highest officials and there are rumours of the US moving into Syria. The Patriot Act has stripped Americans of many of our civil rights.

George Bush has not requested one penny for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and more than a year after our 'victory' there the people are worse off than ever. It is indeed difficult to feel any kind of optimism in the face of such mindless destruction and greed.
H Dirlam, North Carolina, USA

WAR AND PEACE

Among the people who are writing letters to your paper, I notice a certain impatience with the peace process. They shouldn't worry too much about the pace of peace talks. These things always take a long time. What is important is that the



goodwill remains and people aren't shooting each other.
T B Shrestha, Philippines

KNEE JERK

CK Lal is his usual mean and cynical self in his review of the book, *Peoples' War in Nepal: Left Perspectives* by Arjun Karki and David Seddon (The rise (and fall) of the people's war', #139). The authors do not pretend to make this a definitive work on the Maoist movement, it is a collection of writings that will shed light on how the left itself viewed the 'peoples war'. What's wrong with that? Why does he have to go on a knee-jerk left-bashing tirade? Besides, don't you think Mr Lal's conclusion about the demise of the peoples war is greatly exaggerated?
Arjun Shrestha, email

Pine

Spinal Injury A tragedy among so many



Will soon be home

Kanchi Maya Thapa, age 34, homemaker. Accident: 23 June 2002. Fell from tree while gathering leaves for her livestock near her home in Bhaisepati, Makwanpur district. Kanchi Maya came to SIRC via Shanta Bhawan Hospital, Bir Hospital and the Nepal Orthopaedic Hospital. She arrived with no sensation beneath her umbilical region, with pressure sores and no bowel control. The sores are now healed, she has attained bowel control, and she can now move on her legs with the help of a walker. She was able to achieve this recovery because her spinal column was damaged rather than severed, and she hopes to be discharged from SIRC in a few weeks.

KANAK MANI DIXIT

Nepal is one of the most vertical countries in the world, and people are falling from heights all the time. And as the road network grows, there are also those with injuries sustained in traffic accidents.

In the year since Sir Edmund Hillary opened the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Jorpati, the Centre has seen the extent of one of the most debilitating categories of injury Nepalis face. And what they have learned helps us understand just how bad things are with rehabilitation care.

The broken bones and severed spinal columns, the psychological trauma and pressure sores of the spinally injured of Nepal indicate the poor state of health infrastructure, public services and the social safety net. Certainly, just about any other developmental indicator would expose our deprivation: under-five child mortality rate, the doctor-to-patient ratio outside Kathmandu Valley, the unavailability of drugs, or the prolapsed uterus.

But there are reasons to be particularly sensitive to the spinally injured. These are once-healthy women and men who were leading productive lives and providing for their families as working parents, wives or husbands. Due to falls from

cliffs, trees, rooftops or trails, or crashes involving buses, jeeps or motorbikes, they are now paralysed—either completely as quadriplegics, or have lost control of their lower limbs and become paraplegic.

The terrible fact is that since their mental faculties are intact, the patients know that there is little hope of return to normal life. This is because the spine, once it has been severed, cannot be revived.

Able-bodied men and women thus become incapacitated while remaining mentally alert, having to rely on the sensitivity and magnanimity of family members. The burden on the family becomes heavy as the victims become complete dependents, with the result that they slowly lose out in care and comfort.

Neglect of the paralysed within the home leads to mental depression and gradual physical decline. They lose control of bodily functions and develop bedsores. In a country where even major hospitals cannot prevent bedsores, which penetrate deep into the bodies and attack bones and vital organs, the dire situation at home can be imagined.

At the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre, the focus is to try and help patients and their families to cope within the minimal support that our

A rehabilitation centre in Jorpati has just completed its first year of helping people with spinal injuries, and has shown how much more needs to be done.

society is able to provide to the paralysed. Unfortunately, there is very little to be done for patients who have broken their backs in upper sections of the spine and are completely paralysed. In such cases, there is near-total reliance on the family members. However, other patients can be given physio- and occupational therapy, and the experience of the Centre is that life-energy can be revived in these patients.

And fortunately, there are also the occasional patients who can make dramatic recoveries for not having suffered a complete separation of the spinal column, and for having been discovered early, transported professionally, and treated with care and sensitivity.

The majority of the accidents leading to spinal injury are from falls. These falls tend to be from cliffs and trees, which women and men climb to collect fodder for livestock. It would be a different Nepal where villagers did not have to risk life and limb to climb inaccessible places to collect fodder grass. Women, in

particular, are at risk because their phariyas come in the way as they reach out precariously on high branches to lop branches and leaves.

There is no data as to how many sustain injuries from falls every month across this country, and those that do find their way to Jorpati by way of hospital operating theatres are but a small number of the total. Many of those who sustain severe spinal injuries from falls die on the spot, or in villages before they are transported for treatment. Many will have their injuries compounded because of the lack of proper transport. Those who make it to hospitals to be operated by the country's handful of dedicated neuro-

Injury breakdown at SIRC		
Fall from tree	: 20	(M 14, F 6)
Fall from balcony	: 7	(M 5, F 2)
Fall from cliff	: 8	(M 4, F 4)
Fall from stairs	: 3	(M 2, F 1)
Fall from swing	: 1	(M 0, F 1)
Fall from bed	: 1	(M 1, F 0)
Road accident	: 8	(M 7, F 1)
Disease	: 5	(M 5, F 0)
Bullet injury	: 3	(M 2, F 1)
Swimming injury	: 2	(M 2, F 0)
Others	: 1	(M 1, F 0)
TOTAL	59	

by DANIEL LAK



The thunder of hooves

This is the story of a journey that filled me with dread: through out the many kilometres and continents I've been unable to sleep. I lived in fear of authority, violence and death. For I was thinking, constantly, of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—Christendom's clean-up crew, the chaps who ride on to the scene when we've made a total hash of things.

It began when I left the far side of the world, bound ultimately for Nepal. On the radio in Toronto, a litany of woes—more deaths from the pestilence known as SARS, interspersed with the "liberation" of an Iraqi people who seemed ambivalent at best, downright annoyed at worst. Not to mention injured, made homeless, killed, starved, deprived of water. Three of the horsemen alone gallop unhindered through the Iraqi desert. Their three names, according to the book known in the Christian bible as Revelations mythical dream, are "War, Famine and Death" but can anyone seriously argue that many of their victims deserve what has happened to them?

Across the Pacific Ocean, I flew on a jet full of people masked like surgeons or bank robbers. Beneath my own mask, I coughed and felt a tickle in my throat: a sign of certain death from the dreaded SARS. I was positive. Sleep deprivation and paranoia are old friends. In Taiwan, a transit point, the news was mostly about Big Brother China was covering up SARS cases and how the evil United Nations was denying the plucky little island due recognition for its own efforts against the plague.

"Pestilence", for that is the other Horseman, was a frequent flyer between Canada and Asia, it seems. For decades, a nationality that



brought me good will or blank stares now caused health officials eyes to narrow in suspicion. It didn't help that I was sniffing, suppressing the odd small cough. I argued my way into Thailand, pointing out that I didn't have a fever and had no breathing problems. Not long after, I had a chest X-ray that revealed a small patch on the left lung, "a pneumonia," said the doctor to my horrified glare, "but not SARS." It was not one of the great ways to bring instant relief but the penicillin did.

Nepal too is singling out Canadians for special attention so feeling guilty I filled out my form and handed it to the official. I was still wearing my mask. Behind me, dozens of Nepali workers from Hwang Kong moved blithely through the line. The dry, dusty air of the kingdom got us all coughing.

Three of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride unhindered through the Iraqi desert.

What struck me most, depressed me most, was the pall of gloom or deliberate denial that seems to be settling over the places where our Horsemen ride. On television news, war snapshots vary from channel to channel, reporter to reporter, minute to minute. SARS too shows the weakness of global information systems. In Canada, they treat it with immense gravity and seem to have curbed its spread. In Thailand and Taiwan, they worry—rightly, up to a point—if harsh measures don't deter what war tourism remains. In China, they cover up or search for conspiracies and do nothing about the horrific cause of the SARS outbreak: the unacceptable proximity between people and pigs in the poor countryside.

Pestilence. War. Death. And there's plenty of Famine out there too. Some aid agencies predict one in Iraq. They often do, but lingering hunger is enough to destroy lives for generations—you don't actually need starvation deaths. No, I don't believe that the Horsemen will literally ride out and bring about the Apocalypse. I'm not even a Christian, let alone one of the fundamentalists who take such delight in the apparently drug-induced Biblical dream sequence.

But sleep deprived, I'm fearful. Something feels wrong, very wrong. And occasionally, you can hear the thunder of hooves. ♦



Hopes to keep teaching

Sudarshan Shah, age 26, teacher.

Accident: 23 November 2002. While returning home in Dipayal from his work in Doti, Sudarshan's jeep fell hundreds of feet. Everyone on the jeep died except him. He lost consciousness, and remembers coming to in Nepalgarj hospital and finding his lower limbs without sensation. He was ultimately operated at Bir Hospital by Dr Upendra Devkota, and is presently being rehabilitated at SIRC. His pressure sores have been treated with reconstructive surgery and he is slowly learning to control his bowel movements. Expects to upgrade to wheelchair after recovery from various complications, and hopes to keep teaching.

and orthopaedic surgeons receive minimal counseling and therapeutic guidance afterwards.

While victims of falls continue to be the largest group of spinally injured, we seem to be in the midst of a dramatic rise in mortality and morbidity from bus and other vehicular accidents. And with the rise in the sale of motorbikes, it can be expected that there will be even more spinal accidents in a society very poorly equipped to deal with any kind of emergency and trauma.

On top of it all, many civilians and security personnel are now incapacitated from bullet injuries. Hopefully, this is one kind of spinal trauma that will not continue to rise as all other kinds are expected to. There must be

Maoist fighters and supporters who also suffer from spinal injuries, just as there are civilians and security personnel that do, and the Centre has approached the now above-ground leadership of the Maoists to consider bringing these injured to Jorpati.

Spinal injury is only one of the great and largely unaddressed tragedies of our medical and public health systems, and provides an insight into the pitiable state of these in an age of modern medicine and rehabilitation. In spinal injury, as in a score of other areas, unfortunate citizens wait for those more capable to wake up and take a look at the state of public

services in the country. And do something about it.

(Kanak Mani Dixit, who recovered fully from a spinal injury suffered during a trek fall nearly three years ago, is one of the founders of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Jorpati which runs on voluntary support from the public. spinalinju@wlink.com.np, 4470874)

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

ADB water supply grant

The Asian Development Bank this week approved a \$1.4 million technical assistance grant to help prepare a project to improve water supply and sanitation in Kathmandu Valley under a private sector participation scheme.

Of ADB's contribution, \$700,000 equivalent will come from its Japan Special Fund, financed by the Government of Japan, and \$700,000 equivalent from Norway. The remaining \$350,000 equivalent will come from Nepal. The project will be completed in later 2004, and will help the government in drafting legal and management reform in water supply. It is expected to prepare the ground for the ADB-led project for piping and distribution of Melamchi water to Kathmandu.

"To ensure the success of the MWSP, the technical assistance will address issues like governance, private sector participation, establishment of a regulatory mechanism, cost recovery, and affordability of services," says the ADB's Keiichi Tamaki.

Conflict widows

Although the actual number of conflict widows is sketchy, a study conducted by Nagarik Aawaz estimates the most affected were women between the ages of 25-35. The NGO's report shows the average age of Maoist conflict widows was 30 years. These women are entitled to compensation for deaths of their husbands but a question of accessibility looms large. Out of the 68 widows interviewed, more than one third are illiterate while a quarter do not have marriage or citizenship certificates to support their claims, while a small number are not able to travel to Kathmandu to collect their compensation.

Half of these widows were displaced from their home villages. Their reasons varied from trying to escape unpleasant memories, social stigma attached to widows, fear of harassment at the hands of rebels and security forces to employment opportunities. Almost all the widows faced a sudden financial crisis but only a small percentage had a plan to ease the strain. They experienced changes in other economic fronts too—some of them reported decreased access to loans and basic needs like food and medicine,

children dropping out of schools, and a lack of resources to celebrate festivals or last rites of their loved ones. All the women said they suffered from depression that affected their attitudes towards the community, other family members and even their own children after losing their husbands.

Numero Uno

Population Services International (PSI) is all set to use commercial marketing tools for social marketing. Their aim—to make "Number One" condoms the real top male contraceptive among Nepali youth. The goal is to offer safer sex, family planning, and protection from HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases. But Number One will be promoted as an fashionable product for young people who want to create an image among peers.

PSI's is deliberating targeting the youth. Statistics show half of Nepali population is under-25, but the main users are married, family men. The promotion of condom use among a younger demographic is also important considering almost 75 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS are under 30. A PSI official told us, "Young people take risks because older brands failed to place themselves among them. They will identify with a product that is exclusive to their age group."

A survey among more than 10,000 youths across the country was conducted last year to find colour preference, brand name, specifications and an affordable price range for the newly launched condoms. The result is three condoms for Rs 3 in black box of with the logo emblazoned in fluorescent colours. The condoms are made in Germany and tested in the US. The promoters say the condom has more lubricant than the standard specified by the WHO.

On air

Prominent Nepalis from the arena of cinema, music, sports and literature will be on air starting this week in a programme syndicated through 11 FM stations all over the country. The stations will be broadcasting the series, called *Bhinnai Kura*, every week for free. The project is being supported by PeaceNet a group made up of human rights activists.

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• **BUSINESS FINANCING**

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Date: Tuesday, 22 April 2003 • Venue: Hotel Yak & Yeti
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For details, please contact: Pravakar Rana or Iris Kobek at Nepal-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NGCCI)
Phone: 4-226-099 or 4-226-101; Fax: 4-244-417; E-mail: ngcci@wlink.com.np

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Right to rebel

Why not enshrine the right to rebel against an odious order as a basic human right?



Jacket: Republic
Trousers: Constituent assembly
"Our flexibility should not be interpreted as our weakness!"

Caught between the government's foot-dragging and the mainstream parties' hands-off stand on the peace process, Maoist negotiator Matrika Yadav has come up with a gripping idea. Why not enshrine the right to rebel against an odious order as a basic human right? It's immaterial whether he deliberately chose to float the proposal as restive students returned to their tyre-burning and window-smashing selves. The urgency of understanding the range of our inalienable rights remains eternal.

Although Yadav represents a philosophy where the party towers over everything else, his idea resonates with the political *laissez-faire* anarchists were known for before the fraternity started emitting vibes of violence. States are inherently evil, they maintained, because they are coercive. As such, they lack any justifiable claim to the people's loyalty, support or obligation to obey its laws. And democratic states?

They're all the more reprehensible because they allow the majority to coerce the rest. The state exists, we are told, to create conditions that allow people to be themselves at their best. When the tiniest minority feels disenfranchised, it has the right to make itself heard and seen in any way it deems appropriate. (Could

Baburam Bhattarai have transformed himself from a fringe radical luminary into a serious contender for premier within seven years any other way?)

Our mainstream politicians are the last people who need discourses on ways of expressing dissent. They are heirs to an illustrious legacy of rebellion perfected behind bars, underground and in exile. In varying

degrees, everyone beginning from the Rana-era Arya Samaji social reformers and Ekadasi Sabha of government officials who sought to open up the oligarchy knew they were violating the law of the day. Each time kangreis and comrades set out to deprive the panchas of power and authority, they did so with full knowledge of the categories of state offence on the

statute books. Defeat invariably brought greater government duress and deepened dissent. Their success in 1990 retroactively legalised their actions because there was hardly any legitimate form of opposition then.

To be sure, the Maoists have broken new ground in offering to place their army in the service of the mainstream parties to defend

the people's rights. That overture isn't too appealing. There is little more than anecdotal evidence suggesting that armed action must be an integral part of revolution. Historically, repressive violence has been more successful than its insurrectional equivalent.

At the practical plane, few of the armed and indoctrinated lads and lasses are likely to become kangreis or moderate Marxist-Leninists in time for the elections. Campaigning used to be nasty enough when there were few rifle-totting retinues patrolling the ideological battle lines. There is lingering suspicion, moreover, that the rebel commanders may have ordered an operational pause primarily to ensure that reaction to their violence hadn't become greater than the action it produced. The mainstream doesn't want to be swept away by the flow from the extreme left.

Revolution generally presupposes innovation, you could argue. In that sense, change cannot be conceived within the context of what we know today. Marx and Engels may have got the countries wrong, but they were correct in reckoning that parts of the world were ripe for revolution. The obscurity of Bhattarai's new model of democracy, however,

would have been less intimidating without the shadow international political history has cast on the deliberations. In the absence of credible evidence to the contrary, the mainstream will continue to consider the Maoists' bourgeois democracy to be a transitional arrangement propelled by the proletariat. In that case, freedom is likely to comprise swift retribution against enemies and purges against traitors and exploiters. And mass education would consist of self-criticism, drills on party ideology and discussions on how best to implement national policies in the larger interest of the state.

Girija Prasad Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal are in no mood to talk to Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand because they fear the emergence of similar conditions from the right end of the spectrum. They would be less inclined to walk along Prachanda's Path towards inevitable irrelevance. Especially not when the preamble to the constitution we already have sanctifies the street as the source of political change. Unless, of course, Yadav intends to incorporate insurrection in the chapter on fundamental rights as a way of building on the gains of the People's Movement. ♦

Dang's wounds are healing

BHAGIRATH YOGI in DANG

Two months into the ceasefire and the people of this gateway to the Maoist heartland are getting used to the suspension of violence.

Dang is cashing-in once more as the roadhead for Salyan, Rolpa, Rukum and Panchthar to the north as the ceasefire allows more people to move in and out. There is more traffic as villagers who had fled to India and other parts of the country return home. Agricultural produce is beginning to find its way out as good winter rains yield a bumper harvest from the valleys to the north.

To be sure, there are still security checkpoints everywhere, a seven hour night curfew is still in force all over Dang. But on the whole, everyone is more relaxed and local people say they haven't felt so hopeful in years. "Thanks to the prospects of peace, people are feeling very much relieved now," says Narayan Prasad Sharma, who runs *Naya Yugbadi* newspaper. Local fairs and festivals are being held again, there is more bustle in the market in Ghorahi. And this year, twice the usual number of pilgrims visited the annual Prasthapan Mela at Chaughera. There are only the burnt hulks of the police post and some charred remains of vehicles to show that there was once a war here. It was the massive Maoist attack on the army barracks in Ghorahi on 23 November, 2001 that marked the collapse of the last ceasefire, resulted in the declaration of an emergency, and plunged the country into an even-bloodier phase of the war.

The ensuing two years has been bloody for Dang. Locals found themselves caught in the middle between the Maoists and the security forces. While rebels killed dozens of "informers", security personnel did the same with those suspected of being Maoists.

According to the Human Rights Awareness Forum in Dang, 134 "Maoists" were killed by the state in 2002 while the rebels' dispensed their rough justice on 69 people. During this period both sides interrogated and tortured hundreds of people. "It will take time for scars of the past to heal. The people seem willing to give reconciliation a try," says Sharma.

This reconciliation is necessary for reconstruction and rehabilitation in one of the districts most-affected by the insurgency. Officials say they are waiting for money from Kathmandu so they can begin reconstruction. "The Maoists destroyed 36 out of the 39 VDC buildings in the district," says Chiranjibi Bhandari, Local Development Officer at the Dang DDC. "We now need Rs 20 million just to rebuild."

The biggest problem now is the absence of local elected representatives, and Bhandari is doing their work

In the district that is the gateway to the Maoist heartland, local people say they haven't felt so hopeful in years.



BHAGIRATH YOGI

by organising meetings at different places in the district to assess the peoples' needs. "Their foremost concern is the deteriorating quality of the government-run primary schools," says Bhandari. After infrastructure, education suffered the brunt of the Maoist offensive in the past two years, with most schools closed, students abducted and teachers chased out.

According to the District Education Office here, over 85,000 students study in 276 primary schools in the district. But the quality of education is poor, and Bhandari sees no other alternative but to let local communities run schools themselves. "We feel the community needs to take the initiative to see schools are run properly," he told us. "An official at the district headquarters will not be able to monitor the quality of teaching and learning so involving the community is the best idea."

While people are expressing concerns about their access to basic services like health and education, their overriding concern at the moment is the restoration of peace and security. Fifty-three year old Khima Lamsal from Phursekhali, whose son was abducted and killed by Maoists last year, sums up the general sentiment of the people of Dang: "I hope the peace talks are successful and nobody has to face the fate of my son anymore." ♦

Go satellite

The government finally issued licences to two companies to operate satellite phone services in Nepal, ending the state monopoly in the telecommunication sector. The new licensee, Constellation, will start selling phones within a week, while Avco International has said it would wait till next month to begin its service. ("Satellite phone still stuck", *Nepali Times*, #138)



The government called for bids from private service providers to operate satellite phone more than a year ago and four private companies applied. The unofficial explanation for the delay is the government's fear that the Maoists would use the phones. But with the ceasefire and the huge potential in rural telecommunications and the tourism industry, the delay is now getting difficult to defend. Satellite phones smuggled in from abroad are already on the black market. An estimated 300 sets with pre-paid SIM cards from Thai and Filipino companies are reportedly in use. NTA has fixed the licence fee at Rs 1.5 million that the service provider has to renew every five years by paying Rs 1.4 million. The service providers identify trekking agencies, mountaineering expeditions, the Royal Nepali Army and Kathmandu-based aid agencies as their main buyers.

To privatise, or not

It was another of those committees formed to cure the ailing national flag carrier. But, this



one ended on a different note: don't privatise the Royal Nepal Airlines. Three months ago the government put together an investigation committee which submitted its report to Civil Aviation Minister Kuber Sharma on Tuesday.

The two part document outlines long and short term recommendations. It says the corporation should follow its rules and regulations seriously, suggests there should be no government interference in its day-to-day functions and facilities for employees should be given due attention. The anti-privatisation bias of the report is in sharp contrast to an earlier report prepared by a team headed by then National Planning Commission vice-chairman Shanker Sharma. His team said the government should either privatise or establish the state-run enterprise as a public limited company. Rocked by corruption scandals and the post 9/11 slump in air travel, the airline has been scaling back both domestic and international operations.

New tittle

Shree Distillery has launched its new product Bond Black Label, a mixture of ENA (extra neutral alcohol) and scotch malt. The distillery said that the new blend is the result of a two-year project by Indian blending specialist VC Nair. Launching the new product, Managing Director Mathura Prasad Maskey promised complete satisfaction for whiskey lovers.



Home comforts

Kitchen Trading Concern promises to bring American luxury to Nepali households. Aftron brand televisions, refrigerators and stoves will be made available to all consumers in the kingdom. In the first phase, the products will be launched in major cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara, followed by national distribution in a few months.

Safe delivery

Krishni Premura promises a risk-free, inexpensive, fast and reliable service for Nepalis abroad who want to send money home. The company is recognised by state-owned Nepal Rastra Bank. Krishni Premura's services will be available and effective nationally.

Too many players?

from ⇨ p1

The foremost challenge for the new stations is to be able to reach their viewers, and for this they will have to negotiate with the cable operators. Kantipur, Image and Metro will be terrestrial broadcasters while Avenues, Shangrila and Nepal One will beam down via satellite. But either way, they need to get their signals into the cable network, since viewers find it tedious to disconnect the cable back and forth to a dish outlet or a rabbit-ear antenna.

Although there are 160 cable operators in the country, the number one Space Time Network controls most of the market and even owns its own station, Channel Nepal. Space Time is therefore driving a hard bargain to give competing channels access to its network. And once a station strikes a deal with a cable operator, chances for other channels to use the same medium become even less likely.

Since each household usually subscribes to only one cable network, new television channels grabbing hold of different networks would divide viewership and dilute impact for advertisers. Realising this, big boys like Space Time and Shangrila are frantically widening their cable or wireless networks.

Just like international channels negotiate with local cable providers to expand viewership in Nepal, on-air stations NTV and Channel Nepal have been distributing through local cable providers across northeast India, and they are looking at coverage in the Gulf and Hong Kong. "We will be going through cable operators in India to reach Nepali viewers in India," says Neer Shah, whose Shangrila Channel plans to go on air by June.

While Nepali channels look for Indian viewers, Indian channels are looking for audiences in Nepal. The Indian-owned Nepal One channel has already started uplinking via satellite to Nepal with news and footage of King Gyanendra's pilgrimage to south India. Nepal One executives say they want to tap into Indian advertisers selling consumer goods in Nepal. But for that it needs to first get viewers in Nepal, for which the cable providers have the key. "Nepal One is aggressively wooing cable operators and giving away free digital boxes," confided an engineer with a local cable operator.

Avenues TV is taking on a different tack: think small and provide high quality information to a widely disperse audience of the Nepali diaspora in 30 countries. Bhaskar Rajkamkar of Avenues told us: "We will start small, so we have no worries about getting returns on our investment."

Rajkamkar calculates that the television advertising market will grow at 35 percent per year, and he hopes to snare a five percent share of that.

The big boys, on the other hand, will need a bigger slice of that pie. Kantipur Television has tied up with Nepali-Russian investors to go into terrestrial broadcasting in a big way with news-based programming. "We believe the Nepal market is big enough for us," says Jiva Lamichhane of Kantipur, which hopes to begin broadcasts in Kathmandu later this month.

"The cake will grow, but the question is, will it grow fast enough so everyone can have a comfortable slice?" asks SP Singh, media marketer with SAMA Printers. Thomson's Shah is doubtful. "The economy is down, and when the economy is down the first thing to get slashed is the marketing budget," he says. The biggest advertiser on

television is Nepal Lever, which had an ad budget of Rs 50 million a year till two years ago. Today, according to insiders, that figure is down to Rs 10 million.

The newcomers know this, yet they are still investing huge sums in the new channels. Even Neer Shah admits: "With so many characters already in it, this venture is not all that feasible." Shah says he doesn't depend much on advertisers, his income comes from his cable clients.

What the consumers hope is that with greater competition, the quality of programming will also improve. But if the deregulation of the domestic airline industry is any guide, it may mean undercutting and cut-throat competition will only bring shoddy service.

Only 18 percent of Nepalis have access to electricity, but even among them few can afford to buy television sets. Television will therefore continue to be an urban-centric medium and its content will reflect this.

But there are no regulators ensuring that the content is public service-oriented, that commercials do not exploit children, or to enforce the rule that a certain proportion of the content should be wholesome edutainment.

"Covering development, gender and children issues, among others, must be made mandatory and a regulatory body must monitor broadcasts," says media analyst P Kharel. But in the free-for-all commercial environment in broadcasting, it looks like competition will not necessarily guarantee quality. ♦



Nepal Television Metro Channel transmission tower in Singha Darbar.

MIN. BAHADUR

The Dallas Morning News



ALEXANDRA WITZE

DALLAS—Linda Smith travels alone, carrying only a slingshot to ward off monkeys. Her real enemy, though, is poison. Arsenic is leaching from the mountains of Nepal. Slowly, inexorably, the poison seeps downstream and enters the groundwater of India and Bangladesh.

Millions of people are drinking from wells naturally laced with arsenic. Millions are suffering from what the World Health Organisation calls the worst mass poisoning in history. Smith, a geologist, hunts the source of that poison. From her homes in Dallas and Colorado, she coordinates a small group of scientists who think they can learn why so many people are getting sick.

It is the first international effort to find the arsenic-laden rocks of Nepal. By tracing the arsenic upstream, these researchers hope to discover which rocks release the deadly poison. That information could help Southeast Asians determine why some water sources are safe and others are not.

Smith is an expert in sequence stratigraphy, the details of how oil and gas deposits are layered in the earth and where they are most likely to be found. "Nepal is probably one of the most exciting places you can do work in," says the Fulbright scholar. "Everywhere you go, there's geology."

Somewhere, hidden deep within Nepal's majestic mountains, is a layer of rock that

carries arsenic. Like the rest of the sediments, it had been laid down when the area rested at the bottom of an ocean. Over the course of millions of years, geologic forces smashed India and Asia together, raising the Himalaya to their mighty height and exposing the arsenic-rich rock.

Each year, the powerful Asian monsoons drench the mountains and send masses of water flooding downstream. Carried along with it is the dissolved arsenic. No one had recognised just how far the arsenic traveled until the mid-1990s, when UNICEF tried to solve Bangladesh's water shortage by drilling shallow tube wells across the country.

These wells tapped into the layer of arsenic-rich sediment, transported oons before from the mountains upstream. Today, tainted water threatens 70 million Indians, 65 million Bangladeshis and nearly 3 million Nepalis. Those who drink from contaminated wells often succumb to arsenic poisoning, their hands and feet blackening before they die.

With students and colleagues from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Smith tackles the major rivers that flow down from Himalayan peaks. Systematically, the researchers take water and sediment samples from as many locations as possible. When narrow gorges make road travel impossible, Smith signs up for a rafting trip with tourists. When Maoist guerrillas are

active in one area, she moves a few provinces over and keeps collecting. When a friend from Colorado made a pilgrimage to gather holy water from the sacred Mount Kailash, she asked if he could spare a little for research. (He did.)

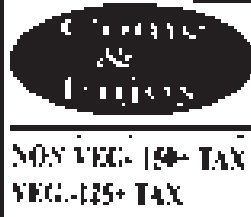
In Kathmandu, Boulder and Dallas, the information is gradually coming together in the first map of Nepal's arsenic rocks. The map reveals the arsenic's path. Rivers today do not trace the same drainage patterns that they did millions of years ago. Geologic faults in the Himalayan foothills have diverted rivers to the east, so researchers must look west to see where the arsenic used to flow.

Slowly, Smith and her colleagues are starting to see patterns. Much of the arsenic, it turns out, comes from shale and ore deposits. As the Himalaya rose, squeezing the rocks within, the extreme heat and pressure formed minerals containing elements such as arsenic, nickel, cobalt, copper, iron and magnesium.

Then the Himalaya got so high that they interrupted the weather patterns over Asia, triggering the monsoon and washing out the arsenic. The groundwater contained so little oxygen, scientists suspect, that the arsenic dissolved in higher concentrations than it usually would. This lethal combination of mountain-building and monsoon, says Smith, is found nowhere else in the world. ♦

DOHORI SANJHI

Features



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Cat man

Awesome photographs of tigers by a hunter-turned-conservationist.

SRADDHA BASNYAT

In the true Rana family tradition, Nanda Rana had always been keen on hunting and wanted to shoot a tiger. In India, on a hunt organised by family, he finally had the chance to make that dream come true. On the fateful night, Nanda was armed with a powerful gun when a majestic tigress stepped out of the dark

undergrowth into the moonlit clearing. "It looked so easy. My companions urged me to shoot but all I could see was the tigress's power and grace. It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen and I just could not destroy that beauty," recalls Nanda. And so, this great-grandson of Chandra Shumshere, dropped his gun and

picked up a camera instead. Thirteen years after that incident Nanda Rana is an internationally acknowledged expert on tiger behaviour, considered by some to be among the best. His commitment to the cats intensified when, over a 10-year period, he tracked a family of tigers for nine months of the year: the result is a rare and stupendously

beautiful documentation of tiger behaviour. In December 1997, his work as a wildlife consultant with *National Geographic* resulted in a cover story on tigers, a book and a documentary film for National Geographic Television. It was followed by Partridge Films producing two full length natural history films based on the tigers of

Bandhavgarh National Park in India, where these pictures were taken. The films, *Sita's Story* and *A Tiger's Tale* together took four-and-a-half years to make. Nanda followed Sita's saga from the time she was a three-month cub into adulthood, and when she bore six litters herself, and those cubs grew up and bore their own litters.

Nanda Rana's films and photographs showed for the first time, male tigers interacting with their cubs. A series of photographs show Sita's mate interacting very affectionately with a male cub: he nuzzles his young and even shares portions of the kill with him. This was in complete contrast to the belief that adult males feel threatened by male offspring and will kill them if they get the opportunity to do so. Nanda continues to document Sita's

legacy, immortalising five generations of tigers on film.

When his pursuit of the tiger was redirected towards conservation, he tracked one pride for over two decades. Nanda Rana is now worried about the dwindling numbers of Royal Bengal Tigers in the subcontinent. The population is down to approximately 3,000 to 4,000 from the estimated 40,000 at the beginning of the 20th century. Conservation has helped protect what is left, and the world population today stands at 6,000 to 7,000, of which there are an estimated 200 to 300 in Nepal. But habitat loss, diminishing prey and poaching continue to threaten the survival of these magnificent animals.

Although he itches to leave the urban jungle and return to photographing and following tigers, Nanda does not take his role as a conservationist lightly. He wants to increase awareness especially among the young and has presented slide shows and awareness programs that

focus on tiger conservation around the world. Recently Nanda Rana's photographs were shown at a fundraiser in Kathmandu for Wildlife Conservation Nepal. These will be exhibited for the public at the Nepal Tourism Board later this month. Rare photographs of Sita's family will be on display.

"Conservation is a purely management issue," says Nanda Rana, who now lives in Kathmandu with his wife, Latika (see box). Being the apex species at the top of the food chain, protecting the tiger also means that the entire habitat is protected.

Nanda is convinced from his experience with his resort at Bandhavgarh that the people dependent on the forest must benefit, or at the very least, their livelihood must not be hampered in order for conservation efforts to succeed. Says Nanda, "Manage the forest and its resources like a business, and we can still safeguard the future of the tiger." ♦

Wildly conjugal

When the National Geographic Channel crowned Latika Nath Rana 'The Tiger Princess' on its Truth Files program broadcast last month, the producers knew they had a winner. Seeking out women and men who identify, conserve and communicate the importance of the earth's geo-diversity, they found an exemplary candidate in Latika.

The Geographic film documents Latika's personal quest to save the tiger. Even at age seven, she knew what she wanted to do. But it was a long journey fraught with obstacles. Later she would say, "It was the sheer majesty of the animal that attracted me. I was amazed by the supreme control of the animal, its nature to lead its own existence. It was a thrill seeing something so beautiful and untamed left alone in the wild."

Much of Latika's research, beginning at the age of 24 with a scholarship from the Indian Wildlife Institute and the six years it took her to complete her PhD on tigers at Oxford, was done at the Bandhavgarh National Park in central India.

And it was there that she met her husband, Nanda Rana who was managing the Bandhavgarh Jungle Camp and photographing tigers to study their behaviour. "I was a wildlife scientist and Nanda a photographer, and we complemented each other well to understand tiger behavior previously unknown to us," Latika recalls.

Now settled in Nepal, what worries Latika and Nanda (pic, below) is the dwindling numbers of wild tigers. Says Latika, "There are more tigers in zoos than in the wild. What is going to go extinct is the wild tiger." (SB)



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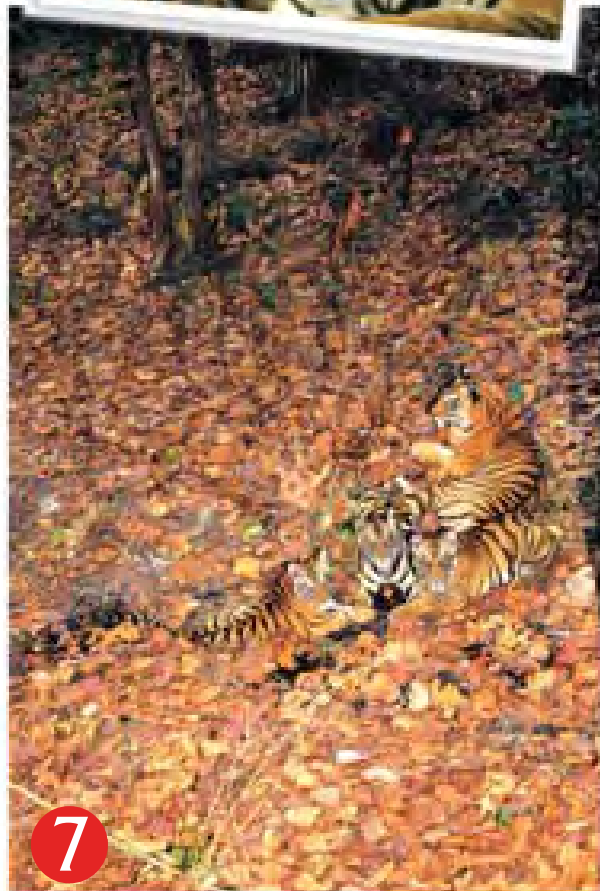
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Yes to EU

BUDAPEST – The overwhelming majority of Hungarians voted last Saturday in favour of Hungary's accession to the European Union (EU), approving the completion of the country's transformation into a democracy and its long-desired integration into Europe. Close to 84 percent of participating Hungarians said "yes" to EU entry at the referendum, which is considered an outstanding result. It will become a full member of the EU as of 1 May next year. Hungary is closing a 12-year period of negotiations with the EU and ending nearly 15 years of economic and political transformation from a centrally led country of the former socialist bloc into a parliamentary democracy with a functioning market economy.



The future EU membership promises a lot to most Hungarians, according to the Hungarian Gallup Institute. More than 40 percent expect

EU membership to bring them personal advantages, a raise in wages, more stable system of social security and pension payments, lower taxes and alternative employment opportunities. Rosy expectations on EU membership are probably unfounded say the roughly 16 percent of Hungarian voters, who voted "no". Most of them are right-wing political groups that represent small businesses and agricultural producers, who fear competition in the EU market. (IPS)

Poverty on hold

UNITED NATIONS – The situation in Iraq threatens to undermine the UN-led global war against poverty.

The deadline to achieve some of the UN-mandated social and economic goals—including the eradication of disease, illiteracy and poverty—is 2015. NGOs are expressing fears that the war on Iraq—and the projected rise in global military spending—might have a negative fallout on economic development and the flow of development aid. One quarter of the \$26 billion promised by the United States for the use of airbases in Turkey could have cancelled the outstanding debt of the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the UN Development Program (UNDP), the reconstruction of war-devastated Iraq alone could cost over \$30 billion in the first three years. But these are funds that may well be diverted from poverty eradication and anti-AIDS programs, says Saradha Ramaswamy Iyer of the Third World Network in Kuala Lumpur. London-based Actionaid says official development assistance (ODA) from the world's richest to the poorest countries has continued to decline over the last decade. At last count, it was \$53 billion in 2000, down from \$56 billion in 1999. (IPS)

COMMENT

The world's only hyper-

The US must choose between unilateralism and multilateralism.



PARIS – Is it still possible to reintegrate the world's hyper-power into a truly multilateral, multipolar arrangement? It is certainly easier to identify the deeper motivations behind Washington's decision to adopt a resolutely unilateral stance than it is to accept its justifications for doing so.

As a global power with economic interests to defend throughout the world, the United States considers itself

directly obliged to maintain planetary stability. American military might exceeds that of all the other militaries of the world, as the war in Iraq has shown once again. Indeed, one would have to go back to the Roman Empire to find a power equivalent to the US today. It is easy to understand how such a military power would create a tendency to use it.

In addition, American supremacy in technology,

information technology and culture are being progressively imposed on all civilisations of the planet. This combination of vast interests and primacy has led the US to repeatedly adopt unilateral postures in areas well beyond the sphere of foreign policy.

This attitude is manifested in Washington's rejection of the Kyoto accord, the International Criminal Court, the nuclear test ban treaty, as well as its decision

to increase tariffs on imported steel, boost agricultural subsidies, and abrogate the anti-ballistic missile treaty. The current position of the US is that multilateralism must never block or restrain American action. The statements of Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld are revealing in this regard: "The mission determines the coalition. And the coalition must not be permitted to determine

power goes hyper

the mission."

It is the United States, and the United States alone, which has the ability to choose between unilateralism and multilateralism, at its whim. It should be noted that in the eyes of the American neo-imperialists, multilateralism is merely a manifestation of the powerlessness of weak states who have no choice but to ally themselves with each other to try and counterbalance American dominance. It is important at this time that we examine the arguments for a multilateralism, which—though for certain countries it may be motivated by recent history or immediate interests, is grounded in international law.

1 It is evident, to begin with, that the US has neither the means nor the will to take charge of and resolve the problems of the entire planet. Therefore they must win the consent of their allies and increasingly of other states.

2 Though American unilateralism, sustained by its military might, tends to favour coercive policies the carrot-and-the-stick approach—at the moment the world's most pressing concerns are primarily related to economic development. It is clear that in these conditions a policy carried

out in a multilateral context and founded on dialogue, diplomacy, negotiation, as well as the promotion of economic cooperation, is more appropriate than a unilateralist approach.

3 Under international law and the United Nations Charter, all states are equal. It is therefore up to them to assume the same responsibility for adopting resolutions intended to regulate conflicts.

4 The Pax Americana violates international law to the extent that it encourages

preventive wars and marginalises at the same time the development of mechanisms to adopt international laws. Because such unilateralism—in the service of immediate interests—heavily mortgages the United Nations and the planet, it must be recognised as an extremely grave development.

5 The most important argument can be summed up in this formula inspired by the philosopher Pascal: "democracy within the US; authoritarianism outside of it." In effect, while in the domestic arena the US government recognises the separation of powers and systems of checks and

balances, particularly the restraint of the executive by the legislature and public opinion, internationally the US demands that governments and their peoples cede to their will according to the unilateralist conceit that what is good for the US is good for the world.

6 The most serious consequence of this tendency regards global militarisation. How can a unilateralist approach succeed in keeping China, India and Pakistan from strengthening their nuclear arsenals? How can small countries be discouraged from trying to acquire less expensive but more destructive weapons? How can the spread of terrorism be restrained?

In short, there is real reason to fear that terrorism will be used as the predominant motivation for all international action at a time when we should be directing our political will, energy and resources entirely towards peace, development and the fight against poverty. ♦

(IPS)

(Boutros Boutros-Ghali was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1992-1996.)

After dictatorship

The war in Iraq had barely begun when the minds of those who conceived the invasion turned to what should happen after the victory over Saddam Hussein's regime—a victory everyone assumed to be inevitable. Politicians and experts have invariably sought to draw comparisons with recent examples like Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, East Timor, but also with more remote and fundamental cases. After all, what is expected in Iraq is the fall of a highly ideological dictatorship. Is there anything we can learn from the last examples of this kind, from the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, or the end of the Third Reich in Germany in 1945 and the process of "de-Nazification" that followed? The risks of such comparisons are almost too obvious for words. Every case has its own defining features. Regarding the demise of communism, the experiences of, say, Poland and Romania are

profoundly different. As we cross even more profound cultural boundaries, comparisons become still less relevant. Yet there are a few issues that are common to the unraveling of most ideological dictatorships.

One such issue has to do with memory, and dealing with the past. This is connected with a practical question: who is in a position to build a new country on the ruins of the old regime? It is rare for a counter-elite to emerge quickly, much less for an elite-in-waiting to take over. In Germany in the 1950s, there were many complaints about old Nazis reappearing in a democratic guise and occupying important positions. Many of us fought against the apparent "restoration" of the old regime.

In Eastern Europe, the old leaders initially disappeared from the scene, but not for long. Ex-communists were often reincarnated politically as social democrats. Those who had been in the resistance—like Václav



Things are likely to get worse before they get better, says author **RALF DAHRENDORF**.

Havel in Prague—found this hard to take. Yet these communist apparatchiks were not the same people they had been. Circumstances had changed and the people with them.

This has a great deal to do with methods of dealing with the past. Post-1945 Germany and post-1989 Poland are examples of countries that moved forward without much attention to the past. Intellectuals complained that too little time and energy was spent on "mastering" the past. They had good reasons to complain. Indeed, after a decade or so, the need to draw clear lines and tell all, including the painful stories, became overwhelming. But the most successful post-communist countries moved forward first and coped with the past later. Those who could not lift their eyes from the horrors of

the past made less progress.

A second general issue has to do with priorities. There is a natural tendency—especially in Anglo-Saxon countries—to regard elections as the most effective institutional remedy for countries emerging from ideological dictatorships. To be sure, elections are important; but by themselves they do not solve problems. Indeed, if they disappoint, the very principles on which they are based—democracy and civil liberties—will be discredited.

I am a strong, almost old-fashioned believer in parliamentary democracy, but when it comes to situations like postwar Iraq, two other imperatives are equally pressing. One is the need to establish an effective administration to make certain that new policies of tolerance and market economics

are actually implemented. In East European countries, this was a major problem, and it is only through accession negotiations with the European Union that such administrative reform has been assured.

The second imperative is the rule of law. The law has a different place in different cultures, and it presents special problems in Islamic countries. However, it is crucial that every effort be made to educate and install an impartial and incorruptible judiciary. Judges must not only be honest, but must be seen to be so and, as such, trusted. The process of establishing the rule of law has been difficult and has remained incomplete in most post-dictatorial countries; yet it will be a key to successful recovery in Iraq as well.

One of the key points that I emphasized in my 1990 book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* is also valid for Iraq. The road from the collapse of a dictatorial regime backed by ideology to a more liberal order leads through a valley of tears. Things are likely to get worse before they get better.

This is notably the case in economic terms. Even post-War Germany's acclaimed, miracle-working Economics Minister, Ludwig Erhard, was deeply unpopular in the early 1950s, because it appeared as if only a few were getting rich, while most West Germans remained poor or got poorer. For a certain period in the process of recovery, it is simply necessary for people to keep their nerve. Poland is a recent example of a country that achieved this feat. It requires plausible leadership and the reasonable hope that things will get better before long.

If this time of transition goes wrong, the alternative is renewed

turmoil and the victory of fundamentalists of one kind or another. The warning "Beware of the valley of tears!" is thus the one that must be taken most seriously by those responsible for rebuilding an Iraq scarred by the terrors of dictatorship and the ravages of war. ♦

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



Back to work

COLOMBO and DHAKA – Workers from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are continuing to travel to countries like Kuwait, even as Asian labour-sending countries try to see what role there would be for their workers in the Middle East after this war.

There are 155,000 Sri Lankans in Kuwait out of close to a million Sri Lankan workers in the Gulf. If war, violence or instability continued for a longer period, it would adversely affect remittances—Sri Lanka's biggest foreign exchange earner—which totals \$1 billion annually. Some activists were also concerned about a recent proposal by the Philippines for labour-sending countries to initiate joint action to ensure their workers benefit from the opportunities that would emerge in rebuilding Iraq. But employment agencies have welcomed the proposal. Suraj Dandeniya, President of the Association of Licensed Foreign Employment Agencies, said Sri Lanka was part of the development of Iraq in the late 1970s to mid-1980s with engineers, drivers and construction workers being among the 15,000 to 20,000 Sri Lankan workers working there.

Remittance from migrant workers in the Middle East comes to about \$2.5 billion, one-fifth of Bangladesh's yearly import payments, with 75 percent of it from workers in the Middle East. At present, 1.1 million, the highest number of Bangladeshis working abroad, are in Saudi Arabia. In the United Arab Emirates, there are 325,000, and in Kuwait 162,000. Worries here focus on Kuwait, presumably because of the country's history of hostility with Iraq.

Dalil Uddin Mondal of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry, says there is no cause for alarm yet. Arrangements have been made with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to bring home at least 30,000 Bangladeshis should there be an emergency. Economist Mustafizur Rahman sees no reason to panic. He says workers' remittances were over \$700 million for January to March, or 19 percent more than the same period last year. (IPS)

Post-war plan

PERTH – Prime Minister John Howard's announcement that Australia would become an "occupying power" in Iraq came under criticism immediately, for the lack of details on reconstruction of the post-war country. Howard added some of the Australian troops would remain in Iraq for security, but wouldn't constitute a "significant peacekeeping contribution". Six senior public servants going to join Iraq's interim government would be part of that contribution.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, the primary obligations of any occupying powers, after a conflict, are to restore and ensure public order and safety in the occupied territory and to ensure that adequate medicine, health supplies and food are provided for the civilian population.

The Australian Democrats leader, Andrew Bartlett, said while his party did not support the government's decision to send troops to Iraq, Australia could not abandon the country as soon as the war was over. Greens leader Bob Brown criticised Howard's silence on Baghdad hospitals. In a statement, the WHO said that a UN appeal for \$328 million for Iraq's health needs had recently received only \$12 million. It said Iraqi hospitals urgently needed surgical items, antibiotics and painkillers. (IPS)

"Pre-emptive" potential

ISLAMABAD – For security experts here, the recent remarks made by Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha, is a cause of concern. Sinha said that India would do whatever it takes to fight "Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, including possible pre-emptive operations".

His warning came more than a week after the killing of 24 Hindus in Jammu, Indian-controlled Kashmir late last month, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-backed militant groups. Sinha rejected talks: "asking India to talk to Pakistan is just like asking the Americans to talk to Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden." He also said that India has a much better case to go for pre-emptive action against Pakistan than the United States has in Iraq. Pakistan condemned the killing, calling it a handiwork of the Indian security apparatus to blemish what it calls the freedom struggle waged by Kashmiris in India's Muslim-majority state.

Ties between the two nuclear neighbours has deteriorated since the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militant groups. A few days earlier, President Bush and British Prime Minister Blair blamed Pakistan for not doing enough to stop "cross-border terrorism" in their joint statement to condemn the killing of 24 Hindus. (IPS)

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Ram Chandra Poudel of the Nepali Congress.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

When will the movement protesting the royal proclamation of 4 October begin?

We will wait till the negotiations between the government and the rebels take shape. If the peace talk adversely affects democracy then we will begin our movement immediately. For this

reason alone we have chosen to suspend our activities at present.

Isn't it already too late?

I told Madhav Kumar Nepal (of the UML) that we should have begun the movement on 5 October last year. But they wanted to wait and see if the situation would prove favourable for them. They expected to be included in the cabinet so planning a joint movement took time.

Would this political crisis have arisen if the Nepali Congress and the UML had jointly run the country?

There is always opposition in any democracy. But opposition has its limits. The UML failed in that respect. They were in the minority and, yet they tried to dictate terms and conditions to us, the majority. Of course, we too made some mistakes. That culminated in was a loss of balance that paved the way for the rise of regressive forces.

The king didn't have an alternative because you couldn't agree.

The king has always spoken in riddles that are unclear and confusing. It is not true that we did not arrive at a consensus.

Can the Nepali Congress alone mobilise this movement?

Let's wait and see. The Congress is capable of going alone, but we will seek the support of everyone else. If there is delay in the peace process, then we will launch this movement on our own.

Madhav Kumar Nepal of the UML.

You have been harping on about the anti-4 October movement for quite a while but nothing seems to have taken place.

Right after the royal move last year, we floated the idea of a movement to the Nepali Congress. But they kept on dilly-dallying. Surya Bahadur Thapa also said he wanted to wait and see. But now, four political parties—the UML, the Nepali Congress, the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party and the People's Front will decide on a final date to launch the movement within the month.

Who is to blame?

We had invited Ram Chandra Poudel to take part in the meetings we had organised on 5-6 October last year, but he did not turn up. Later that month, Poudel agreed on a joint movement, which still has not taken place. So, you figure out what was to blame.

If the Nepali Congress and the UML had cooperated the way they are doing today, could Nepal have avoided the crisis we are in?

We ran the government for only nine months. This question should be redirected to the Nepali Congress.

Why were you unable to provide the king with a common alternative?

We have always listened to the king. But while we have the ideas, the necessary implementation has always been missing.

Can't you launch the movement alone?

Our party decided to begin the movement last November, but because of our party convention and following the advice of other leaders, we decided not to.

IMF interference

Drishti, 15 April

Foreign interference in matters of national concern is on the rise. The government remains a mute spectator to Indian encroachment and illegal construction of dams. And now an IMF delegation will arrive in two weeks to oversee the final draft of our preliminary budget. The five-member delegation will be here ostensibly to study the current status of poverty alleviation projects funded by the IMF and discuss future assistance. But independent analysts are not buying that official government statement. "This comes as an effort to establish that Nepal is incapable and incompetent to do its own planning, therefore making international intervention necessary," says an expert.

The government is in the throes of preparing an annual budget for fiscal year 2003-04. In the absence of a functioning parliament, it will promulgate the budget through an ordinance. A government official said the IMF visit was routine and the delegation may help with suggestions, but the government was not under any obligation to follow through. The official said, "The IMF's suggestions on prioritising projects shouldn't be interpreted as interference."

Comrade Awesome

Mulyankan, No 107

Extract of an interview with Maoist supremo Prachanda.

If the government fails to expand its negotiation team are you willing to talk to just Narayan Singh Pun?

We formed a high-level peace talk team to prove we are serious. We hoped the government would reciprocate in a similar manner. The failure to finalise its team not only reveals the internal conflict within the state mechanism but also hints at a deeper conspiracy. But that is not our problem. The responsibility and solution falls on the state. If the government says

Narayan Singh Pun constitutes their talk team and creates a conducive environment, then we will formally begin talks with mediators and the people as witnesses.

Do you think the king's visit to India affected the proposed talks?

Everyone is aware that Indian leaders have reservations about the ceasefire and the proposed talks. If the rulers attempt to compromise national interest and independence to stay in power then it will have a negative impact on the talks. The recent increase in army activities following the king's meeting with Indian leaders has raised our suspicions.

Will you abandon the peace process to take part in a movement against the reactionary forces proposed by other political parties?

If a movement against the reactionaries is launched, the peace talks need not be interrupted. We believe these talks can make the people sovereign in a real sense. We

envisage these peace talks as part of our struggle, this is why the peace talks and a movement against reactionary forces fall under our agenda. Neither will be successful without active public participation and involvement. A constituent assembly, would create an environment that makes all this possible. We will respond with equal zeal to any movement against reactionaries. Our main concern in the last two-and-half years is corruption of the political parties. The weakened state of one directly affects the other.

Will you revert to violence if your demand for a constituent assembly is not met?

Our ultimate aim is to make the people really sovereign. We want to remove the unchangeable clauses, free the state from the clutches of religion and bring the military under an elected representative institution in the new constitution, to be drafted under a constituent assembly. We also hope the new constitution will guarantee autonomy for suppressed groups and ethnic minorities.



SUBHAS RAI

Scapegoat

Surendra Kaphle in Annapurna Post, 15 April

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

With his adopted son serving in the Royal Nepali Army, Durga Prasad Chaudhary of Bardiya was confident that his family would be safe from the security forces. But neighbours of this 40-year-old farmer felt that he ran the risk of being attacked by Maoist rebels. Both Chaudhary and his neighbours were wrong. In a sudden turn of events on 9 November last year, soldiers came to Chaudhary's farm where he was roasting wild rodents with his eight-year-old son, Balkrishna.

Nervously, the Tharu farmer said he was not with the rebels, and mentioning that his son was a soldier. The young boy recalls how the soldiers did not listen. And then shot his father in the head and stomach, leaving him for dead. "They kicked and beat me too," recalls Balkrishna, his voice trembling. "While thrashing me they asked if I had seen any Maoists."

The Defence Ministry described the incident as the result of an encounter between security forces and terrorists. A few days before Chaudhary was killed, Maoist rebels had tried to ambush a tractor carrying army personnel on a bridge near his house, but missed after the explosion went off prematurely.

Chaudhary's family members said the army personnel returned a few days later to find a scapegoat. "They manhandled all of us," complains Chaudhary's widow Batuli. "My son still suffers from that beating." When she tried to explain to them that her son was in the Royal Nepali Army, the soldiers retorted, "In that case, you should have been staying at Gulariya." At the time of Chaudhary's death, more than 300 displaced family members of army personnel lived at the district headquarters.



QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Offers are being made to leaders of various political parties to join the cabinet on an individual basis.

-Deputy Prime Minister Badri Prasad Mandal in Rajdhani, 16 April



Iraq

हिमाल

Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-28 April

Back at Sundarrijal >32

“Unimaginativeness and ennui”

27 March, 1977

Sundarjal

[page contains entry from 10 April]

28 March, 1977

Sundarjal



Solitary confinement starts taking its toll on BP Koirala, but his jail diary is full of self-analysis in which he feels that being alone has actually helped him deal much better with his mental state. “If they think that I will break down by the application of such psychological pressure they are grievously mistaken.” But he does miss reading the newspapers.

It is amazing how one adjusts to any situation—if you imagine the kind of desolation I am left in, that segregation since Friday when GM was taken away from here, total solitariness without books and newspapers (incidentally, I haven't received even the local papers supplied to us since today) you would think that the situation is impossible. But as I live under such condition, and live more or less without added anxiety, every situation however adverse is bearable and possible. What is surprising is that I have since the commencement of the solitary confinement become less anxious and mentally [less] disturbed. So far as psychological torture is concerned the govt has gone to the farthest limit. Of course ... normal food is the last need to be supplied to us, although there has been considerable deterioration in the quality of food supplied to us—which is perhaps not intentional and may be due to the mismanagement of the local officers of the camp. If they think that I will break down by the application of such psychological pressure they are grievously mistaken. This may again be not intentional—this new condition of solitary confinement—only unimaginative policy of getting facts from us separately and then compare them for veracity. They don't understand because of their insensitive psychology that the method they have chosen to apply to us is ... extreme form of psychological torture. In effect has been the very opposite to this purpose. It has all more strengthened us psychologically.

In such a situation, it is very difficult, so difficult as to be only short of impossible, what I do is that I sleep. I had thought before that this capacity for infinite slumber had left me but no, I still have that capacity. I go to bed a little before 8 pm and leave the bed in the morning a little before 7 pm. It is not that I get sound sleep the whole time, but it is sleep all right—at least cessation of mental activities. In the afternoon, too, after lunch I lie down and try to get sleep for at least ½ hour which I do get. Since GM's departure I have to do many chores, like washing the dishes three times a day, preparing tea two times day. I try to keep the dining table and room clean—GM was particular about cleanliness in his own way. I want to be in my own way. Then I have another capacity which stands me in good stead in such situations—I lapse into reverie and start day dreaming I also indulge in fantasies and also in mental abstraction—which operation takes some of my time. My practice used to be to count numbers—and repeat them over and over again, then I thought such counting of soulless units could be improved upon by mentally uttering the names of dear people over and over again repeatedly then it has ... me that I can repeat some mantras mentally to kill time. Writing is not part of this operation, writing being an exercise of

mind, whereas what one needs is ... repetitive operation with mind put in hibernation.

29 March

[contains entry from 31 March]

30 March

Sundarjal

Exactly three months ago we landed in Kathmandu to be promptly put under arrest and lodged in the military detention camp. This was expected, I had told the people in India that most likely we would be kept incommunicado for three months, and thereafter condition of detention would be relaxed as even still better development of political nature would take place. But now it appears that we are in for a long detention, they have imposed fresh restraints and now since five days I am in solitary confinement. I told the camp commander Major it appeared the country was being ruled by small unimaginative men. What is most exasperating is that security guards have been reinforced. The new jail which was speedily constructed in record time working day and night for GM is fortified with high walls topped with naked electric wires that it appears that it was they, ie the army and police by their efforts could apprehend us with extreme difficulty. This elaborate and maximum security arrangement is amazing in the first place, as if the army, lazy and unused to its normal responsibility and suffering from some kind of ennui, suddenly woke up to a martial look which it wants to exact with elaborate care—partly as a relief to boredom and aware of its uselessness, and partly belated fulfilment of its martial responsibility. The ruler is unimaginative and the instrument of his authority, ie the army a bored organisation which need such occasional sharpening of its blades lest they are blunted through rest—this combination of unimaginativeness and ennui is extremely dangerous in a political authority.

From the enclosure of the compound of GM's new prison, I think it has a walled courtyard of the size of a middle class house on the northern side of which is a verandah leading to his cell and bathroom. The living space for him is too narrow and if he has to live in that jail for long it will be a great hardship for him as he needs an extensive area to do his constitutional walking morning and evening. Although his jail is adjacent to mine, both jail gates are about three yards apart and part of the security arrangement is common. There are two sets of persons looking after two of us and one set meant for one jail can't go to the other jail. This is a perhaps to prevent any possible communication between us. All this shows that the king has decided not to deal with us politically.

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In the April Himal

Why do the women die?

The fatal neglect of maternal health

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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.
- ✦ Kathmandu Vendors paintings by Mark Jordans at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ✦ The art of Hebrew script till 20 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4411122
- ✦ Moments photographs by Mani Lama. 12-7PM till 30 April at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4436944, 4473370

EVENTS

- ✦ Studio 7 presents Babu Raja at the Naga Theatre of the Vajra Hotel. Tickets Rs 700. 7.15 PM on 25-27 April, 2-3 May and 9-11 May. 4271545
- ✦ ASMAN Spring Mela 2003 10AM-6PM on 19 April at Hyatt Regency. 4417649
- ✦ Tennis coaching classes Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ✦ Reiki Level 1 Healing Workshop at Everest Bookshop, Babar Mahal. 5541613
- ✦ Everest Marathon on 19 May from Everest BaseCamp to Namche Bazar. Last date of entry 25 April. E-mail: info@mteverestgolden50.com, 5545900, 4443337
- ✦ Collectors Fair 2060 to promote collectable hobbies at Patan Museum from 18-20 April.

DRINK

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

MUSIC

- ✦ 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

FOOD

- ✦ Kids Combo Meal at all Bakery Cafés. Kids' meals with exciting gifts.
- ✦ A Margarita Night Churascueria BBQ, delicados, margaritas and live music by The Rusty Nails. Rs 699 pp. 25 April at the posside, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ✦ Weekend breakfast: Smoked salmon scrambled eggs and filtered coffee Rs 100. 9AM-12PM. Thomas Kilroy at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272
- ✦ Dutch food festival 21-30 April. Summit Hotel, Kupondole. 5521810
- ✦ Traditional favourites at The Sunrise Café for breakfast and lunch. Yak & Yeti Hotel. 4248999
- ✦ Saturday Asian Brunch at The Café, Sunday European Lunch at Rox Restaurant. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ✦ Saturday BBQ Lunch at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 4680083/ 80
- ✦ The greenest patch Weekend lunches in the oldest and largest garden in Nagarkot at The Fort Resort, fort@mos.com.np. 226799
- ✦ Newari Bhoj at a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant. Lazimpat. 413874
- ✦ Tukche Thakali Kitchen Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialities. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.
- ✦ Vegetarian specialities and clay oven pizza at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- ✦ Wood fired pizzas, cocktails and coffee at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.

GETAWAYS

- ✦ Dakshinkali Package every Saturday Rs 500+tax. 4370714, 4371537
- ✦ Shivapuri Heights a traditional cottage with modern facilities. Rs 1,850 pp. www.escape2nepal.com
- ✦ The Great Godavari Getaway Special weekend packages. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ✦ The secret of Kathmandu Overnight package \$99. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ✦ Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse Traditional Nepali farmhouse. 4631734
- ✦ Writing Retreat Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 375280

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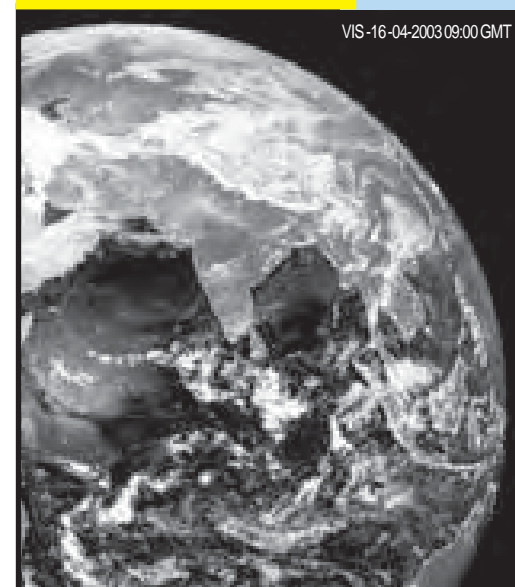
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DO NOT COMPROMISE WITH EDUCATION

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



VIS-16-04-2003 08:00 GMT

A high altitude westerly front continues to persist over the subcontinent though its features have changed distinctly, which is clearly visible in the satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning. A westerly front is heading towards the Himalaya and though most of the moisture will be shed over western India before reaching our neck of the woods, we can expect more vigorous thunderstorms like the ones we saw on Wednesday evening over the weekend and into early next week. A low-pressure belt over the southern portion of the mountains and a limited supply of moisture should see the return of clear skies and hotter afternoons towards the latter half of next week.

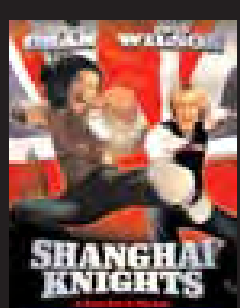
KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
30-13	30-13	29-14	28-13	30-14

The successful comic-western pairing of Chon Wang (Jackie Chan) and Roy O'Bannon (Owen Wilson) is back in the saddle in *Shanghai Knights*. This time around, the dynamic odd couple head for London after a Chinese rebel murders Chon's estranged father and escapes to England. There are plenty of twists in the tale and the lads even uncover a plot to assassinate the royal family. The movie offers great stunt fighting and several funny scenes that are reminiscent of the Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton era. Chon and Roy chase bad guys, get chop-happy and Roy even finds time to develop a serious crush on Chan's sister Lin (Fann Wong) in-between all the action. Definitely a sequel worth watching!

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BOOKWORM



Urbanization and urban systems in India R Ramachandran
Oxford University Press, 2001
Rs 360

The book focuses on the processes of urbanisation and the nature of interdependence at the macro level among urban centres and their hinterlands. The author's perspective of urban development in India inter-relates the geographical dimension with historical and socio-economic aspects.

Nepal: the living heritage, environment and culture PT Sherpa and Susan Hoivik
Keep, Nepal, 2002
Rs 300

The country's rich cultural and natural heritage is explored in this book from the Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP). The authors believe that both visitors and service-providers can succeed in promoting a mutually beneficial form of eco-tourism.



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



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ART

REVIEW

Mani's moments



MANI LAMA

Beauty dominates Mani Lama's work and sets him apart.

Gallery Nine (a collaborative venture set up by photographers, visual artists, writers, journalists and art lovers) opened this week in Lazimpat with 'Moments', a wide ranging retrospective of the photos of Mani Lama. Mani, known for his recent exhibits, his postcards, his collection 'Nepal The Himalayan Kingdom' and for his professional work for a variety of local agencies takes photos equally well in black and white and in colour.

As a working method he seems to pursue a wide-angle view that holds his zoom in check. Thus he never appropriates his subjects, but seems to have found them in the most revealing of circumstances. The viewers appreciate this, for they are allowed the space to decide on their own take of the scene and the moment.

In his photo of an old woman in Dolpo, though the photo is clearly of the woman (and we are troubled by her gaze), the basic simplicity of her circumstance and the light that heralds its way into the photo balances our reading. His signature photo of an old man sitting beneath a Shiva temple, embedded in a tree



MANI LAMA

stamps on our mind: man, history and nature in one easy glance. A 100-year-old man and his 75-year old daughter in western Tibet celebrates without intruding the starkness of life endured. His perfect group photo of Tharu girls after a hair cutting ceremony with a single head full of hair remaining among many shaved heads graphically details the event. The girl from Thimi getting water from a well draws us into her labour even as we appreciate the depth and beauty of the scene.

For me, the finest of the photos, and what sets Mani's work apart, are those where beauty dominates. Waves that display a singular consistency in the rippling waters of a lake or the prayer beads that hang down with the shapely weight of

their telling become objects in their own right. As a photographer Mani Lama seeks out not only moments that crystallise a person's place in his or her own world, but moments as well that are simply to be appreciated and seen. This is the beauty that overlays all the photos including those that invoke place more than person—the sepia photos of Lake Mansarovar and the richly detailed New Year Festival in Thimi.

This small gallery on Lazimpat, upstairs and adjacent to Darkroom Creations, has offered a gathering place for poets, musicians and performers and art lovers of all stripes. During the week interspersed between a lecture, a slide show and movie screening, were a multi-lingual poetry reading where one could hear Purna Vaidya

reading in Nepal Bhasa (with translations in English) along with other poetry in Nepali and English, a drama performance by Sunil Pokharel and a tabla/didgeridoo duet by Sarita Mishra and Kanika.

Those involved with Gallery Nine hope that "their wide range of interests and experience can infuse Kathmandu's increasingly lively arts scene with vigour and vitality". Whether Gallery Nine can accomplish this is up to them, and you. ♦

Mani Lama's "Moments" is on exhibition till 30 April at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat.

(Wayne Amtzis is a poet, photographer and a long-time resident of Nepal.)

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Just for the heck of it

Among the former colonies in our neighbourhood there has been a great wave of renaming countries, cities, streets and airports. And just for the heck of it, they keep changing the spellings of all their major cities at least once every two years.

Although Nepal itself never had the pleasure of colonising anyone (except the recent acquisition of a suburb of Doha which we wrested from the Malayalis after a brief but fierce struggle) it may be a good idea for us to follow this international trend in changing place names just for the heck of it to prove that we are not being left behind, and we are marching in goose-step with the times.



The Heralaya from Kathmandu

Some gender-sensitive people have drawn my attention to the fact that there is a male-bias in the words Himalaya and Man Sarovar, and we should start referring to the world's greatest mountain range as Heralaya and the holiest lake as Person Sarovar. After all, so many of our peaks are named after women, like Mount Annapurna, Mount Ama Dablam, and Mount Everest. Yes, you in the front row...of course George Everest was a guy, silly, that was just to test whether you're still awake. But our feminists have a point. So, with the permission of the chair, I would like to table a resolution that the Lonely Planet people alter all references to Himalaya, Himalchuli, Man Sarovar, Manang, Manakamana, in their next edition of Trekking in Nepal.

There have been half-hearted attempts in our own country in the past to rename towns after deceased national figures, but this campaign soon ground to a halt because we ran out of expired illustrious personages. We shouldn't let this deter us, there are still thousands of famous people who are still hale and hearty and thousands of towns out there waiting to be renamed. Also we have a royal government that seems to have a lot of time on its hands. The All-Nepal Renaming Towns Just for the Heck of It National Commission has put forth the following suggestions which will be approved during the next all-party mass meeting by a show of hands:

Old Name	New Name
Pokhara	Machhapuchharennagar
Khumjung	Hillaryganj
Mugling	Dalbhatbesi
Kakarbhitta	Girijakot
Surkhet	Phuket
Rampur	Rambahadurpur

Why stop at towns? Kathmandu has a lot of unimaginative names of streets and neighbourhoods that have to be brought up to date. The Commission has renamed the following with immediate effect, and anyone found still using the old name will be banished to Tulsipur, or shall we say, Tribhuban Nagar.

Old Name	New Name
Chakra Path	Prachanda Path
Bhedasing	Marich Man Singh
Jawalakhel	Jawaharlalkhel
Maharajganj	Comradeganj
Kopundole	Coupon Tol
Thankot	Octroikot
Taksar	Taskar
Bhaisepati	Rangopati
Bhaktapur	Chimni-Bhattapur
Pradarsani Marg	Baburam Bypass
Bagmati	Plasticbag-mati
Bishnumati	Sisnumati
Kanti Path	Shining Path
Tribhuban University	Arson and Pyrotechnic Institute

NEPALI SOCIETY

Emulating Rita



MIN. BANJACHARYA

Others may just lament the destruction wrought by the insurgency, but Rita Thapa sees it as an opportunity to transform society. "This war has presented us with a chance to rethink the condition of widows and change their social standing," she says. So Rita set up the group, Nagarik Aawaz, to help widows. The group's report this week found that widows are ill-treated and stigmatised, and often forced to leave their homes.

Fifteen years ago, Rita herself lost her husband and empathises with women she is reaching out to help. She focused all her energy on her work, which became an anasesthesia for pain. Then, Rita converted to Buddhism and finally found spiritual solace.

It is her ability to take a personal tragedy and channel it into something

bigger than herself that sets Rita Thapa apart. She will not allow herself to be labeled a victim. When she left a high-paying UN job to start Nagarik Aawaz two years ago, everyone thought she was crazy. She is also the founder of Tewa, which tried to raise money from Nepalis themselves to help rural women become more self-sufficient.

Rita is well aware of the 'founder syndrome' and how many organisations work under personality cults. She was determined to do things differently, and handed Tewa over to a new leadership.

If she hadn't started Nagarik Aawaz, Rita admits she may have launched a political party. What of the future? "Our situation is volatile again, this conflict can go anywhere," she says with a faraway look. "It can either transform society, or it can take us down to the bottom."

PSI