



www.nepaltimes.com

NEPALI Times

#143 2 - 8 May 2003 16 pages Rs 25

TRAVEL MEDICAL INSURANCE
Covered:
Personal Accident
Medical Expenses
Hospital Benefit
Loss of checked baggage
Delay of checked baggage
Loss of passport
Personal liability

NOW OUR TRAVEL MEDICAL INSURANCE IS MORE WORTHWHILE FOR OUR CORPORATE CLIENTS

- It is more economical
- It is time saving
- It is unique
- It is backed by best securities and world class assistance service

Travelling abroad

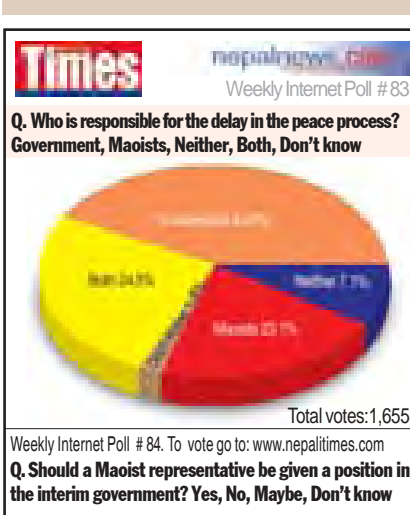
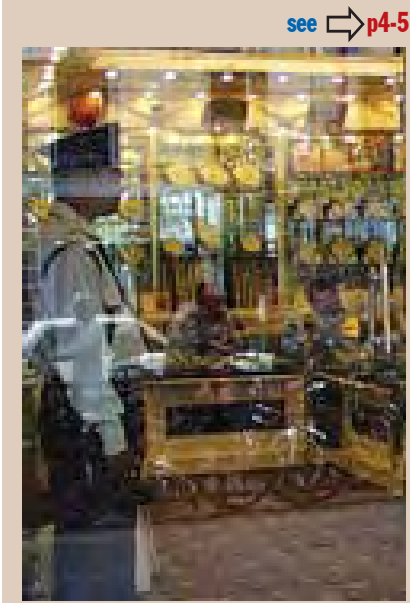
Business or pleasure, now you can travel with a free mind...

Vienna, Austria

EVEREST INSURANCE COMPANY LTD.
Sole Branch, Kathmandu Tel: 4249216, 4249217

Crime and the city

Armed robbery is the most alarming wave of crime to sweep the Valley in recent times. With a reduced number of security patrols after the ceasefire, Kathmandu residents are feeling increasingly unsafe and isolated. *Nepali Times* investigates.



Absolutely FREE
More Details on PAGE 15

McQuay

PUABERNICAL BAKERY
Thamel, Kathmandu

SUMMIT TOWERS APARTMENTS
Long stay apartment with room maid service, kitchen/dinning, spacious bedroom, lounge, bath, air-conditioning, cable TV, swimming pool and Summit Club Membership facilities. Rates negotiable.

For further information Please call Uday or Rabindra 5524094/5521810

Summit Hotel

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

How the tables have turned. Political parties that till six months ago were talking about bringing the Maoists into the mainstream find themselves on the periphery. And the Maoists are centre stage, in the limelight.

By launching street agitations fronted by their student wings and refusing to be a part of the government-Maoist peace talks, the parties have deliberately distanced themselves. Their sights are on a rerun of the 1990 uprising that turned the absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. This time, they threaten, the change may be from a constitutional monarchy to a republic.

Realising that most Nepalis blame them for the ills of the past 13 years, the parties have appropriated the Maoist agenda by borrowing their slogan and trying to appear more radical than the revolutionaries. They are all set to begin their campaign with a big mass meeting in Kathmandu on Sunday, 4 May.

Two quotes from this week could be a preview of things to come. The UML's Madhab Kumar Nepal: "Did you see the what happened outside the campuses? That is only a rehearsal. Wait for the real show. That's yet to come." Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress: "The king should decide: democracy or republic."

The Narayanhiti Royal Palace and the Chand government seem to be taking these threats seriously. The reactive reduction in fuel prices, release of detained students and the setting up of an inquiry into student beheadings in Hetauda all show they do not want the situation to get out of hand.

In the meantime, the threat of an uprising by the political parties has almost eclipsed the peace talks that began this week with the Maoists submitting their demands to the government.

Much of it is familiar and unremarkable—nothing that would prompt a political party to go underground and start a 'people's war'. The Maoists appear to have stepped down from their demands regarding the monarchy—letting the people decide the 'fate' of that

It's showtime!

As the royal palace, the rebels and the political parties circle each other warily, a possible meeting between King Gyanendra and the political parties collectively may provide a 'nikas' to the nation.



institution. "For now, the republican agenda could take a backseat," says Dhurba Kumar, a Tribhuban University political science professor. However, Kumar foresees "dire consequences" in the face-off between the political parties and the monarchy if the situation continues without a proper resolution.

The anger on the street is not spontaneous but the palace will continue to be confident about having the upper hand as long as the protests do not blossom into a mass uprising. For their part, leaders from the political blocs of the dissolved parliament are convinced they have more staying power than either the palace or the Maoists. "The UML and the Nepali Congress still represent a bigger chunk of the people," says Raghujai Panta of the UML.

The palace may be under pressure from the parties and the Maoists, but it has unprecedented support from international observers. Most Western embassies—many of whose representatives make no secret of

their disdain for Nepal's homegrown politicians—are lined up behind the palace as the talks with the rebels begin.

India has often said the palace should not sideline the political parties, but the attitude of the conservative political leadership in New Delhi is unclear. There is a hint that India may approve of a stronger position from the palace and the placement of a 'guided democracy' for a limited period.

Meanwhile, the Chand government has received a boost. On 25 April, Nepal and the US government signed the Antiterrorism Assistance program, which provides support through training and equipment to 'partner nations'. This was followed by the arrival of the Chief of Army Staff of India, Nirmal Chandra Vij, to assure the government of continued assistance. He announced additional aid in military hardware worth Rs 1.7 billion, over and above the Rs 3 billion already provided.

The palace's strategy now is to handle

the Maoists and the parties separately. Their two differing agendas makes this possible—the Maoists want to be included in an interim government while the political parties are holding out for all-party government. The crux of the issue is who will lead this 'national government'.

At press time on 1 May, there was an unconfirmed report that the king was planning to grant a joint audience to the major political parties Friday. So far he has only met political leaders one-on-one. This move would constitute a watershed, after which Nepal's politics could take a new turn.

Were that to happen, there would still be a problem. The rebels may not join the all-party government, leaving us to wonder how the Maoists would be accommodated. But before we get to that, this is the more pressing question: What is to be done regarding the protesting political parties? ♦

Editorial p2
History waits

Wainscot Whisky

Elegance is an Attitude.





Demobilisation, demilitarisation and democratisation

HISTORY WAITS

When the first round of talks between the government and the insurgents took place last week, the Maoists went out of their way to show that they weren't capitulating. To prove a point, Baburam Bhattarai arrived at the venue of talks an hour later than the appointed time. He further demonstrated his importance by grandly accepting the garland of welcome from panchkanyas while brusquely refusing the candle they offered with best wishes for the success of talks.

Formal negotiations have barely begun, but the Maoist ideologue already displays the swagger of an undisputed winner. At the closing of the talks, Colonel (Retd) Narayan Singh Pun and Krishna Bahadur Mahara, spokespersons of the government and the insurgents respectively, held a joint press conference. Protocol-conscious Bhattarai thought it fit to indulge a selected audience of fawning scribes all by himself at a separate venue across the road.

It seems that the relatively weak government at the helm is making the Maoists feel that they can get away with anything. Had there been a more articulate person than Badri Prasad Mandal handling government negotiations, Baburam Bhattarai would have had to begin the talks by apologising to the nation for the mayhem of the last seven years. As things are, the befuddlement on the part of the Chand government makes it easier for the Maoists to be tackle the obvious contradiction in their above-ground pronouncements.

Meanwhile, mainstream political parties have put further negotiations in jeopardy by insisting that an 'unconstitutional' government is not entitled to enter into any meaningful settlement acceptable to all the sections of society. The Maoists relentlessly fought with elected governments and chose to enter into negotiations with the king's nominees. That does put the insurgents in the dock as far as the sovereignty of the people is concerned. But the Nepali Congress and the UML must accept that the Maoist imbroglio can't be untangled without a consensus of all constitutional forces committed to peaceful transformation of Nepali politics and society.

The onus of keeping the ball of negotiation rolling, however, lies solely on the government. Sadly, the government didn't seem to have formulated even an agenda as it sat for the first round of talks. The newly formed teams of facilitators and monitors must impress upon the government the necessity of having at least a list of points for discussion before sitting down for the second round of talks.

At this moment, all eyes are on the king. Whether it's the 35-point agenda of change proposed by the UML, the 27-point demand put up by the Maoists or the 3-point rallying cry of the Nepali Congress, all these political claims require the king to respond positively for the rapid democratisation of Nepali polity. It's the king who must 'inspire' his government to take the negotiations to their logical conclusion. It's again the king who must take all constitutional forces on board, so that the political energy of the country is not wasted in mutual recrimination. The country is waiting for the next move of its constitutional monarch with cautious optimism.

COMMENT by **PHRUBA KUMAR**

One of the most crucial issues raised after the 29 January ceasefire and the issuance of the code of conduct on 13 March has been the integration of the 'people's army' with the Royal Nepali Army to transform it into a national army under civilian control. Arguments in favour of this idea are made both by the Maoists and influential politicians. The Maoists' interest in this proposal is understandable while resistance to it has been informal and based on the dilution of loyalty in the army to its supreme commander, the king. This fear may not be unfounded, but a large army could also have an adverse effect on the national interest.

The best option may be demobilisation of the insurgents and a significant reduction in the defence forces, either unilaterally or through negotiations between warring parties. Demobilisation can be achieved either by the Maoists laying down their arms in exchange for promises of genuine political reform, or a demobilisation compensation program or through total demobilisation of the Maoists guerrillas and partial demobilisation of the army within one year. A third option is bargaining for total demobilisation and the abolition of the armed forces (a la Costa Rica) however unrealistic that may seem today.

In the third option, we are going beyond just civilian control over the military, to doing away with the military altogether. Nepal's peaceful future can be built on demobilisation, demilitarisation and democratisation. Our history is based on conquest, control and consolidation of the power of the state by the monarchy. When constitutional practices under democracy are weakened in an absence of equilibrium in civil-military relations, instability grows. Weak democracies are therefore fraught with the dangers of being overwhelmed by powerful militaries, even when

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in a final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, from those who are cold and are not clothed.

General Dwight D Eisenhower

constitutionally controlled by parliament.

The integration of the 'people's army' with the Royal Nepali Army can be an ominous development. It will be merely an arrangement of convenience between two hegemonic political groups, as this hegemony is presently maintained through coercion and the use of violence. Such an arrangement may serve the purpose of the survival and continuity in power of the contending groups, but not the democratic aspirations of political parties who are currently in limbo. So, here is why we need to demobilise:

● **Economic Imperative:** The Royal Nepali Army has grown from about 50,000 to 63,000. There is already little money to weaponise, but as the force grows the government will have to find the funds. Between 1990 and 2002, Nepal's defence budget increased from Rs1 billion to over Rs 7 billion. From 2000 there has been a doubling in arms spending and an additional Rs 5 billion was allocated after the emergency was declared. Total security expenditure for the fiscal year 2001/02 therefore was approximately Rs 18.36 billion, including Rs 7.54 billion by the Home Ministry. All this money has been diverted from social sectors: hundreds of public schools have closed, development work in rural areas abandoned.



MIN. BAJRAHANA

demobilised soldier can contribute to the development process. The sudden influx of people in a shrinking job market has to be managed and sustained with financial compensation, occupational and professional training, and public assistance—funded by the savings made from demobilisation. The whole process can start with first collecting weapons from the insurgents, then assuring their personal security with rehabilitation, and by providing them jobs.

● **Return to Civilian Order:** If violence were to be discarded as a mode of political behaviour after a future peace accord, then the armed forces will not have a political role in democratisation. Militarism has always destroyed the social space, allowing social rifts to manifest themselves. The best option for achieving social peace therefore, is not just to put an end to violent conflict through a peace agreement but also by re-integrating soldiers of fortune into civilian life. The Royal Nepali Army and the Maoist army are both made up of rural people from similar social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. The difference lies in the officers' corps. It is unlikely that the officers of the Royal Nepali Army, which is composed of the country's elite, will approve of the induction of the Maoists into their ranks. Their survival instinct could even threaten the negotiation process if the Maoists insist on this issue. Demobilisation could get around this problem.

Demobilisation must be accompanied by a move towards pacification with these intermediary steps: repatriation, compensation for victims of war, rehabilitation and national reconciliation. Delayed rehabilitation programs and the absence of economic opportunities will jeopardise pacification and lead to a surge in criminal activities. This transitional phase will require a vision for the reconstruction of the civilian order.

Demobilisation means investing in long-term peace: in creating jobs and conditions of growth. A stagnant economy and widening poverty would be the ingredients for regression. Demobilisation must be accompanied by democratisation at the political level. Unless citizens can make decisions, there will be no development, without which there is danger of renewed violence.

● One M-16 costs \$900: enough to supply all medicine and maintain a VDC dispensary for one year, or immunise 900 children against deadly diseases
● The \$3.5 million spent on 5,500 Belgian FN Minimi guns could have provided primary education for 120,000 children for a year.
● A \$ 3 million Mi-17 helicopter could be spent on building at least 30 mini-hydro projects to provide power to thirty villages with 30,000 inhabitants.

Because negotiations on contending and converging issues have yet to commence even after three months of the declaration of the ceasefire, the situation has again become fluid and uncertain. The Maoists are expressing concern about violations of the ceasefire, and marginalised political parties are becoming antagonistic towards the monarchy. This cannot be a permanent fixture of national life and the gradual pairing of either of these forces against the other would only weaken the societal power of the contending groups. We need to transform their divergence into convergence, and this can only happen with an unflinching commitment to democracy and a peaceful social order. Otherwise the ensuing impasse could again resurrect violence and disorder in Nepal, validating the notion that 'civil war seldom ends through negotiations'.

Despite tragedies brought about by its espousal of violence, the Maoist insurgency has brutally exposed the failure of governance in Nepal. The ceasefire has given both a moment to reflect on and reassess past failures. Negotiations should not only be confined to ideological contentions for reorganising the state, but also address the question of nation building and the dilemmas of democratisation and how to refurbish the state with representation.

The crux of the problem in Nepal presently rests on the challenges to authority and national reconstruction. The monarchy as an institutional form of authority has been tested in the past and questioned by the people once it entered the political fray. The political role of the monarchy brings up the issue of the resurgent ultra-right and ultra-left which has isolated the forces of moderation. Despite differences, the radicals are united in their goal to establish a one-party state with one-man rule using ultra-nationalism.

The process of subverting democracy has unfortunately been encouraged by the forces of moderation with their overzealous self-assertion and inability to forge a consensus against both absolute monarchism and Maoism. Both the negotiating parties are currently ignoring the legitimacy that can only be ascertained through popular consent.

To conclude, Nepal is too impoverished to afford a bloated military. The internal security role can be assigned to an armed police or paramilitary forces to prevent the army from being politicised with involvement in domestic disputes. Demobilisation should therefore be integral to the peace process not just to yield a peace dividend, but also to prevent militarisation and lay the conditions for long-term peace. ♦

(Dhruba Kumar is Professor of Political Science at Tribhuban University.)



MIN. BAJRAHANA

REJOINER by **BIDUR KC**

In an earlier article, Dhruba Kumar had come up with the idea of slashing the number of army personnel, arguing that the country cannot afford such a big security force. His previous opinions on national security were, of course, thought provoking, but this latest argument is unjustified. His argument, based on the possibility of an increased security budget, overlooks the Royal Nepali Army's (RNA) historic contribution and immense responsibility and importance in the changing political scenario.

An effective and reliable mechanism to save the country from internal and external attacks, the RNA has already tackled many crises including the Khampa rebellion. It succeeded in restoring peace, law and order to a remarkable degree after it was mobilised when the state of emergency was declared in 2001. It even succeeded in recovering weapons, cash and goods looted by Maoist rebels.

Unlike traditional security forces, the RNA deserves to be viewed as a complement to development. That is why for the past three years Maoist-affected districts have had the Integrated Security and Development Program. It aimed at stepping up socio-economic infrastructures, increasing public participation and controlling terrorist activities. The program has had positive results in Gorkha and the army still has a leading role in the project. In the near future the ISDP will be renamed the Internal Peace and Development Project and will be implemented in 16 districts. The RNA will also be involved in the National Security Council's plan to rehabilitate Maoist victims.

The geographical position of our nation is another reason to maintain the army. Given our mountainous topography, we need more soldiers to guard our borders. We cannot overlook the fact that

The RNA is the most important cornerstone of national security.

criminals easily cross borders at unregulated points at three shared international boundaries. Most importantly, we must take note of an increasing Indian military presence to our south. The army needs to be alert to the scourge of drugs that plagues the South Asian region. Narcotics production and transportation, ethnic and religious conflicts can and must be controlled.

Analysis shows that Nepal already faces internal and external threats. Should these dangers rise, the present strength of the army, in terms of manpower, is quite low. The Former Chief of the Army Staff, Sachit Shamsheer Rana, has rightly suggested that the RNA must have 125,000 personnel to be effective. The army is already implementing the concept of Corps but we need more manpower. It was because of our inadequate numbers that the RNA took so long to contain the Maoists. If more complicated problems arise in the future, it could be even more difficult. Without a doubt, the army barracks in several districts have to be strengthened.

It is wrong to say the army is required only in times of conflict. I submit that Dhruba Kumar's opinion of the army involvement in peacetime politics is faulty. During periods of peace the army mobilised resources to build roads at an expenditure cheaper than what the Road Department would have spent. Rescue work during natural disasters, conservation of national parks, control of smuggling through custom points—all these are made possible only through deployment of the army. In addition, during the insurgency the RNA has guarded important national infrastructures and telecommunication repeater stations. Lastly, the army ensures democratic practices by ensuring local and parliamentary elections proceed smoothly.

Unstable politics and weak governance could allow Nepal to become a playground for foreign powers. If the RNA is allowed to modernise, it can act as a watchdog even in these affairs. We must rid ourselves of the notion that we will be helpless in the face of foreign aggression. Instead of relegating it to a mere symbol, the RNA should be strengthened in terms of both quality and quantity.

It is necessary for the RNA to have adequate resources, means, weapons and equipment to face the challenges of the 21st century. It is just as important to gradually increase the number of personnel in keeping with the unfolding national events. This should not be called militarisation.

More soldiers in the army does not mean the economy will be burdened. It is a necessary expenditure to protect the nation's freedom and sovereignty. The RNA must be seen in the same light as education, health and social welfare initiatives. In his piece, Kumar has exaggerated military expenditure, arguing the money could have been better spent on medicine, education and small hydropower projects. It is of note that he failed to correctly quote even the price of an MI-16 rifle—it is \$447 and not \$900 as he claimed in his article.

It will be difficult to merge the Maoist militia with the RNA. The two have different opinions and dissimilar training. Co-ordinating the two will be difficult, if not impossible. Serious thought must be given to where and how the rebel army can be integrated. The RNA is the most important cornerstone of national security. Kumar's analysis is illusory and biased. ♦

(Bidur KC is a pseudonym.)

(Both articles have been translated from Nepali and appeared previously in *Himal Khabarpatrika*.)

LETTERS

DEMO CRAZY

Re: Dhawal Rana's 'In a federated state' (#141). Now, here is a politician with foresight. We take comfort in the fact that we at least have some politicians that do give the future of our country serious thought, and not limit it to the innovations in money-making schemes. Nevertheless, I also feel that the idea presented by Rana is a little too premature for our state. At a time when the entire political system is in a mess (a constitutional monarchy has absolute power, a multiparty democracy has a nominated cabinet, the 'real' democratic parties have virtually nothing to do or can do, the underground insurgents are partying above ground, etc), the move towards a

federal system would, in my opinion, throw the country further into a state of confusion and chaos. Just imagining the current state of disarray multiplied by five development regions makes me shudder. What we need, is more people like Rana to first play a more active role in the untangling of the present political stalemate. The people have more or less lost faith in the 'jail-term experience' politicians of the Peoples' Movement who have proven time and again that they simply do not have the capacity to manage a system called government. Only after the country returns to normalcy can we have the luxury to dwell on the future design of governance. The need of the moment is of people who have the knowledge and skills to get more involved in the affairs

of the state.

Abhiyan Jung Rana, email

● In his column 'Right to rebel' (Somewhere in Nepal, # 141) Puskar Bhusal hints that the students are in the street protesting violently because of Matrika Yadav's comment. I think the corrupted politicians of the mainstream political parties who held the power for 12 years are 100 percent behind this unrest. They are afraid that if there is peace and stability in the country the following things could happen to them:

a) they might all be prosecuted for the corruption and might have to pay back whatever they have gathered in the last 12 years
b) they might lose in the upcoming election following the

peace because they don't have any agenda to convince people I am for democracy, the political parties are committed to progress, but their leaders have failed the Nepali people miserably. I was a student during the 1990 Peoples Movement. A handful of politicians are using innocent students to achieve their goal of gathering more and more wealth to themselves. I wish one day it will come and all the people in Nepal will start thinking independently and say what is wrong is wrong. And whoever is corrupt even though the corrupt person is from your own party. They should defy orders from unpatriotic politicians. Students, you are more educated and intelligent than most of the politicians. Don't fall for this scam.
Bimal Raj Bastola, New York

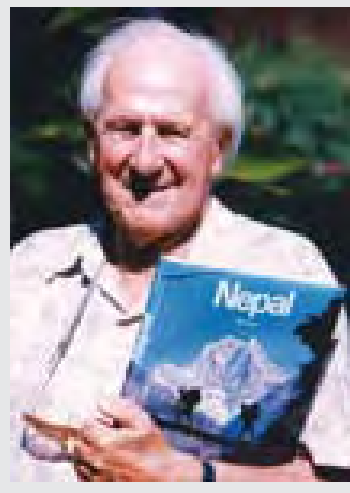
● Thank you for providing us with up-to-date news from Nepal. When we heard about the ceasefire, we were all relieved that finally our friends and family could live in peace. But, it seems like it is not in our fate to have peace. Every day we read news of strikes organised by Maoists, strikes organised by Koirala, strikes organised by Deuba, strikes organised by Nepal. Vehicles destroyed, people beaten up, libraries set on fire. My suggestion is why don't we all fight with each other, destroy each others vehicles and properties and destroy all of us to extinction. Then there would be no one to fight over. If we cannot learn to disagree gracefully and if we cannot argue with each other without hitting each other, we

probably do not deserve any democracy at all. We probably need a dictator who will whip us from time to time and put us in shape. I would like to challenge our so-called leaders to get united, address real issues of the people so that we Nepalis do not have to go through the hell we have gone through recently. We do not deserve this.
ĀJanatai, email

● I read the online edition of your paper without fail every week, and it breaks my heart to see students being manipulated by politicians in our motherland. Instead of supporting the peace process, they are adding fuel to the fire. What do they get out of it? I am a student, too, and I beseech my friends not to bring more havoc to our nation.
Kim Gyalpo, Toronto

TONI HAGEN

I was not a colleague or associate of Toni Hagen. I write as someone whose life benefited immensely from Toni's contribution. In the early sixties I was a Tibetan refugee put up at the Jawalakhel Tibetan Camp. Thickly bearded, laden with heavy cameras, fast walking, fast speaking and doing things with an air of 'let us do rather than talk' is my memory of Hagen Sa'b. I was categorised as a student, but I remember Toni asking elderly refugees "What trade are you? Can you make toys? Can you weave carpets?" At one time Toni was not very popular among refugees because he did not want them to be fed free rations but be paid in cash based on their carpet weaving and making toys. Toni and his other friends established the refugee camp on a firm footing.



He actually sowed the seeds of the now-famous carpet industry of Nepal. Thirty-five years later, by helping set up the Bright Horizon Children's Home Trust, Toni was able to fulfil his life-long wish to help the children of Nepal. Toni wanted to come to Nepal to say goodbye one last time. He had

said that if he died here, he would like to be cremated at Pashupatinath like a Nepali.
Dawa Dhargye, Kathmandu

BETTER TV

'Eight too Many?' (#141) by Navin Singh Khadka misses a very important fact. Print and radio are a great success in Nepal despite the increasing number of players. You can "feel" the increased quality and effort. Television station will also fall into that pattern: competition will result in better programs and coverage to attract viewers. As private businesses, they will work harder at protecting their investment and unlike other sectors, you cannot afford to take the audience for granted. I hope to see Nepali channels broadcast here in the US too.

At present, television is the best medium through which the Nepali diaspora can tap into what goes on in the country.
Dipak Ratna San Francisco, US

CATS

In my opinion there is nothing contrary to what Nanda Rana (#141) which led to the subsequent comment made by Badri Rai in the 'Letters' section of #142. Both are right, since what they talk of are two sides of the same coin. Our planet is being systematically plundered by humans, the earth's most dangerous species. We need more people like both of them. In the present context, even wildlife must pay for itself in order to survive. There is no other way. That's the junction

where both the opinions of both Rana and Rai intersect.
Deepak S Rana, Tahachal

STUDENTS

I agree with the editorial 'How much longer?' (#142). It's time students stopped being gullible by allowing political leaders to exploit and manipulate them to their own selfish ends. After all, it is the students and their parents who suffer and lose their hard-earned money. But political leaders have everything to gain and nothing to lose from mobilising students. No current political leader in Nepal is worth dying for. Gone are the days when leaders had vision and loved their country. Political leaders today are a new class of thugs.
What students should

realise is their activities have not brought about any positive changes. Their earlier violent protests for reducing school fees has not resulted in a decrease or even an end to annual readmission fees. If there must be protest programs, the students must come up with really justifiable, viable and no-nonsense proposals that can effect changes in the best interest of the people.
Rajeeb L Satyal, email

KUDOS

Nepali Times #142 was really worth spending Rs 25 after a long time although I am a regular subscriber. From 'Class of 1970' to 'Nepali Society', it reflected the hard work that goes into producing a quality publication.
Sudha Parajuli NICO, Kamaladi.

Crime and the city

Kathmandu is falling prey to a rise in robberies. *Nepali Times* investigates.

SRADHA BASNYAT

Daman Bahadur Sakya blames his karma. Last week 933 grams of gold worth Rs 725,000 was robbed at khukuri point from his New Road workshop. "Who can I hold responsible?" he asks. With the clear vision of hindsight, Sakya knows he should have invested in a security system. "We haven't spoken about it yet but I will probably set up something now. After what happened to me, other shops in the area are also more aware about security measures," says Sakya, who takes comfort in the fact that his workers are above suspicion.

This lack of general awareness is what irks DSP Mahesh Bikram Shah. "It seems like the public deliber-

ately turns a blind eye," he says. After 14 years on the force, he does not see Kathmandu residents protecting themselves against crime. An expert in crime scene investigation with advanced training in England, Shah believes that almost all crime in the Valley, including murder, is related to property.

A look at crime in the Valley shows that in the last nine months there have been 21 reported murders, less than half of the number brought to police notice last year. The most worrying wave of criminal activity currently gripping Kathmandu and the nation is armed robbery. With the ceasefire most people expected the restoration of a general sense of security, but reports of thieves claiming to

be Maoists and the ransacking of homes has increased. In early April, armed robbers got away with more than Rs 1 million in a single night from three villages in Bara district.

Shah believes that more often than not these are gangs of professional thieves who hide behind the reputation of the Maoists to avoid investigation. The people are afraid to antagonise the robbers and fear reprisals if incidents are reported to the police. Eyewitnesses say the gangs pose as security personnel before entering the house. Once inside they declare themselves to be Maobadis, take what they want and leave—sometimes after physically and verbally abusing the women of the house. These incidents are increasingly becoming common along towns that border India. But whether in the Valley or outside, police statistics confirm that armed robbery has increased since the ceasefire.

The police run awareness programs on NTV and Radio Nepal and are involved in community police programs. Shah recognises that the police are the public's frontline defence against crime, but he insists a little commonsense and awareness can go a long way to preventing most crimes. He believes the media, pressure



MIN. BALACHANDRA

groups, NGOs and the municipality can all work with the police to fight crime. "We must realise that society is the victim because we nurture both the criminal and the casualty."

There are no studies on Nepali criminal psychology or behaviour so we are left to draw tenuous links between a rise in unemployment, large-scale urban migration from rural areas and few chances of bettering economic prospects through the straight and narrow. In the meanwhile, break-ins, the most popular crime, occur almost every

day. The reduced number of security patrols after the state of emergency ended in November last year has encouraged thieves. It doesn't help when police vehicles in hot pursuit get bottlenecked in the narrow lanes and alleys of the city, break down or are simply unable to locate the house. It is little wonder that people are beginning to feel isolated. "I feel solely responsible for the lives of my family and property," says a house owner in Ghattekulo, a locality in the capital infamous for robberies.

Perhaps this sense of

alienation is the reason why many homes and businesses are hiring trained guards and setting up electronic systems. When NK Pradhan of Pradhan Security began his company 30 years ago it was among the first of its kind. His early clients were mostly expatriates, but today many Nepalis have signed up for his services which include hiring out trained guards on contract and security consultancy. The increase in crime has led to more security companies in the Valley. "Today there are more manual security agencies than we can count. To keep

NATION

The electronic eye

Gone are the days when the neighbourhood mutt secured your premises in exchange for a scrap of meat. Sometimes even guards armed with sticks are no match for stealthy intruders. Noting this gap in security, two years ago Shrish Man Vaidya went out on a limb and opened Security Solutions, an electronic security business. Trained in Calcutta by Hawk Securities, he is now the local distributor of sophisticated devices made in Britain and the US.



His company offers a large number of electronic gadgets to suit different budgets. "I can't understand why people who invest Rs 4 million in a car won't secure their homes for a mere Rs 20,000," he says.

His comparison charts show that a year of manual security adds up to more than the one-time cost of installing an electronic system in the long run. He believes the two can complement each other for "double safety". The business community has shown the most interest and his latest clients include the Vaidya Organisation and Shikar Manpower. Fahim Shah of the latter says, "It is a little expensive initially but very reliable, unlike Chinese products. Their response is also immediate." Excellent after-sale service is something Vaidya boasts proudly about along with a warranty and good technical support from installation to management. Vaidya's company even conducts detailed surveys and suggests economic ways of securing premises.

Security Solutions faces a serious challenge from cheap Chinese products that have flooded the market. They have no after-sale technical support or warranty, but are cheap. He says, "Most people are not open to the idea of electronic security but people must wake up to the fact that in the present context it is not a luxury but a necessity."

up we have improved our training and services and have maintained our quality," says Milan Pradhan, a staff member at Pradhan Security. The team there is well looked after, receiving accidental insurance and 30 day sick leave. No guard goes longer than a 12 hour shift and is paid overtime after an 8 hour day. But not everyone can afford to hire guards and unfortunately, even they are not always an effective deterrent. The guards of some agencies have even been accused of sleeping on the job and providing inside information—which is perhaps a reason why companies are so reluctant to talk to the press. The latest way to fortify yourself is high-tech electronic security systems that are not that expensive and complement manual security (see box).

But at the end of the day, crime busting is a police job. The newly formed Armed Robbery Investigation Team may help take some of the pressure off the Valley Crime Investigation Branch (VCIB). Specially trained sniffer dogs are also helping track down criminals. Dandapani



MIN. BALACHANDRA

Bhattarai, a trainer at the police dog squad, says even after 24 hours, a scene can bear traces of a thief. Sniffer dogs are now used in Dharan, Pokhara and Kathmandu. Jaganath Khanal of the Crime Investigation Department at Hanumandhoka says the police have a 70 percent success rate and it's just a matter of time before the thieves are given away by their friends or caught trying to sell the stolen goods.

With one theft or burglary a day to contend with, the 123 VCIB investigators for a civilian population of over 1.6 million are spread very thin—a ratio of 1:13,377. The budget of the VCIB has not

been upgraded since it was established ten years ago. They only have enough resources to run the office and no separate budget for investigations, transport and communications systems. The investigators rely on the public to help them solve their cases.

Recently there have been allegations that the police are unsympathetic, even uncooperative. Many victims have complained that the police illegally asked for fees to process their case. Last year when Binay Buddhatokehi was robbed, he went to file a case at Hanumandhoka but left without doing so after the police asked him for "kharcha-paani". The police were not willing to make an official comment on the subject. DSP Shah argues that in a police force of 50,000, there are bound to be those who are not up-to-scratch with regard to friendliness. "My own experience is that society encourages police brutality. They demand that confessions be coerced out of suspects. 'Break some bones,' they say, and yell when I don't indulge their request. The police are a reflection of society's demands." ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Facelift

Raina Park, at the centre of the capital, is next in line for a much-needed facelift according to the Kathmandu Municipal Corporation (KMC). Established 40 years ago, the park is spread over 42 ropanis and has an average of 3,000 visitors every day. The KMC plan includes putting up fences, constructing a water fountain, a green house and sheds, replanting gardens and installing garden lights. The project was designed by Hari Sharan KC and the minimum total cost is estimated at Rs. 1.2 million. KC says redesigning the park will take six months from start to finish. The government's Public Garden and Convention Hall Management Committee has already refused to fund the project citing a money crunch. The KMC is now looking for other sources to fund this facelift.

Wanted: President

The post of president at the Film Development Board (FDB) has been open for half a year after Neer Shah was removed once Ramesh Nath Pandey received the portfolio for Information and Communication. At a recent reception hosted by Udhav Paudel, a producer and the proprietor of Gopi-Krishna Movies, Minister Pandey's tart response to our query on when a new president would be instated was, "No comment." At the moment, joint-secretary Mukunda Regmi runs the show at the FDB.

Nearly four months ago the ministry called for applications and though six senior industry people applied, nothing has been announced. Insiders say

Udhav Paudel is likely to be Shah's belated successor. They have begun to complain that their sector has gone down the drain without a properly functioning government watchdog—facilities for movie-goers have become shabby, unhealthy competition has increased and absolutely nobody is paying taxes.

The FDB was established in 2001 following a long campaign by the film industry. Against everyone's expectations the positions were political appointments that led to the first president Yadav Kharel handing in his resignation to protest political interference.

Business as usual

It was business as usual in the tourist hub of the capital on 28 April, the first of a two-day bandh called by student unions that ground the nation to a standstill. Thamel residents and business people decided to defy the bandh and remained fully open and functioning. The locals began their day with a motorcycle rally organised jointly by the local Community Service Society, six youth clubs and the Thamel Tourism Development Board. They requested shopkeepers and tourism entrepreneurs to stay open and cater to tourists and local clients. "The students were very supportive, they realised that Thamel has a special place in Nepal's tourism," says Chandeshwor Baidya, the executive member of Community Service Society. Despite Thamel's collective success on day one, the following day saw many businesses shut shop after leftist students threatened violence.

Better safe

"Alertness is key," says DSP Shah. Statistics show 75 percent of domestic burglaries occur when no one is home. The biggest incentive for burglars is the lure of easily resold gold and jewellery that people keep in homes despite the safety of security lockers in banks. Preventive measures like keeping a dog, or if that isn't possible, a bluff sign saying "Beware of the dog" help. Keep a photo and identity kit of tenants and restrict all social visits to the ground floor of your house. Don't leave doors open or let in strangers till you are certain about their credentials. Keep valuables either at the bank or in a safe, install grills on windows and bright lights around the house. Thieves in the capital are adept at removing latches and grills, so poorly secured windows and doors, dim lighting and low or no boundary walls just make their jobs easier. If the thief is already inside a room try and trap him in and call the police at phone number 100 immediately.



HERE AND THERE

So far so good...

The tools of political expression are many, each with an attendant risk and expected though unlikely reward. As the reputation of politics in this country is being steadily done down by design and incompetence, let's ponder the importance of the democratic art.

Most recently, the Herculean efforts of Tony Blair come to mind. Over the years, he has emerged as one of the most able politicians of our era, possibly of all time. Blair's resolute defence of his unpopular position on the Iraq invasion was a work of sheer mastery. Combining manipulation, leadership, carefully chosen words and the dark arts of intimidation and coercion, the British Prime Minister pulled off a political coup of astounding proportions. He tamed a cabinet and caucus emboldened by public opinion polls against the business in Iraq. He led from the front on the national and international stage. He won the day, at least for now.

And how did he do that? Not with guns, money or lawyers, but with politics, the art and science of the possible. How else to marshal a free society behind an unpopular cause?

Even George W Bush—assisted by extremely able and almost nameless advisors—has steered a brilliant political course in the days since 9/11. Don't forget that before the horrible event, he was one of the least popular and most inept presidents in modern US history. Bush's predecessor, Bill Clinton, was—if anything—even more adept at politics than his friend Blair. Clinton was wildly popular for most of his latter years in power, but he began his time in office with his right wing opponents, the media and much of the public thinking him weak, vague and indecisive. His amorous dalliances—much shouted about by prurient journalists and evil, agenda-driven opponents on the right—were distractions at best. Elected with a large pool of left-of-centre support, he pushed through a succession of right wing policies: so



The gurus of the possible: Blair (l) and Clinton (r).

called welfare reform, balanced budgets, bombing a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan and so on. And he got away with it all because of a silver tongue, a vast intellect and immense political and people skills.

Which brings us to Nepal. This week began with an almost uplifting demonstration of the art of the possible. The Ministerial-Maoist peace talks at the Hotel Shankar appeared on the surface to be a sterling political occasion, with the two sides giving space for disagreement and looking first at common ground and interests. Time will tell whether one side or the other is as sincere or honest as they appeared on the first day.

The fierce disagreements that loom will be the true tests of

...but Nepal's politicians need some lessons in the art of politics.

Baburam Bhattarai or Narayan Singh Pun. But so far, so good. Look beyond the talks and it all goes to hell. I do not believe that it is constructive or accurate to blame Nepal's political parties for much of the current mess. All of society, and especially the answerable elite, must also own up to their parts. But what frustrates is the lack of political creativity displayed by the parties and their agents. Got a grievance? Make a speech. Send out your heavy mob disguised as students to disrupt normal life for everyone but the targets of your wrath. Call a torchlight procession. Declare bandhs and call them off. Threaten more violence and prey upon people's uncertainties.

Let's not forget that some of these are tactics that helped bring democracy to the country and, as such, they have emotional weight. Also, undemocratic forces have made full use of such tactics when it suited them. To decry them when the opposite is true is rank hypocrisy. But I can only wish and plead that our political forces might pause for a moment and consider their position. They are the building blocks and the critical mass of democratic space. If they could only spend some time taking thoughtful counsel and attempt to learn the lessons of politics as practised in the wider world.

I have a suggestion. Instead of aid, experts and conflict resolution seminars, can we have Tony Blair and Bill Clinton for a weekend? Perhaps our politicians can learn a thing or two from the gurus of the possible. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



STUDIO 7
BIBURAJA
HOTEL MAJRA
Sponsored by TUBORG

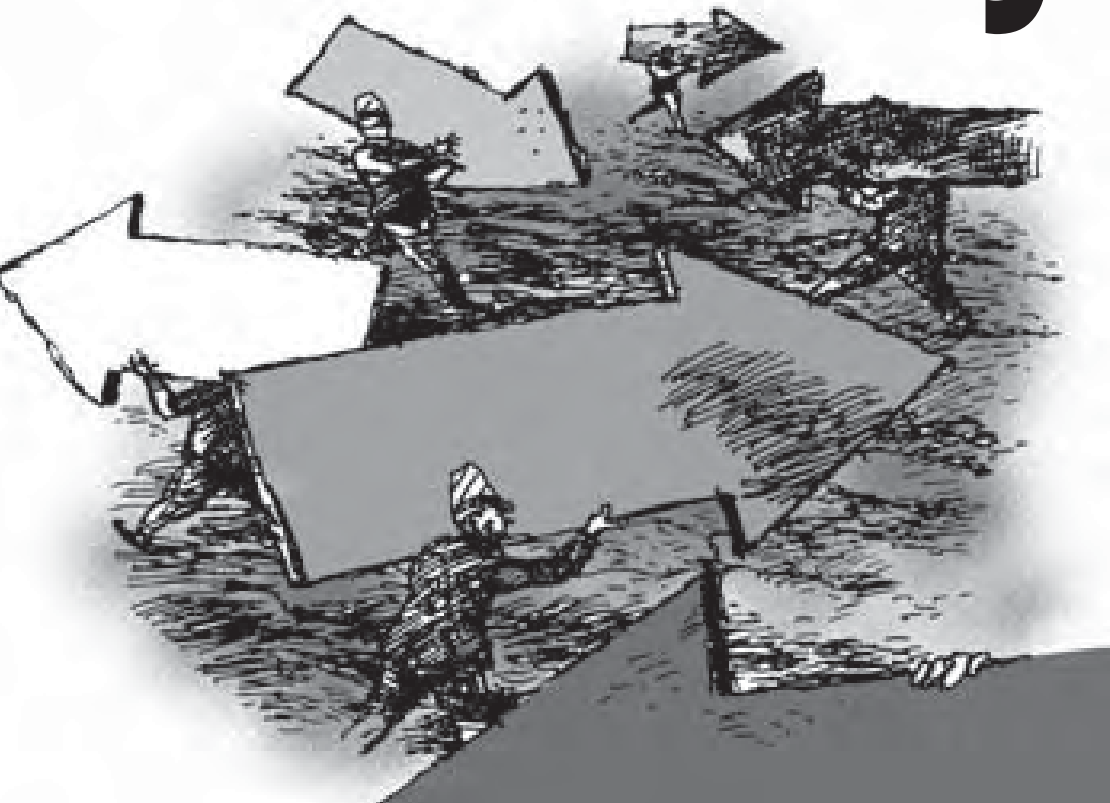
Microsoft PowerPoint
The Office XP presentation graphics program
If you need
The Power to Persuade
please join ELD for a workshop on
Making Public Presentations
using MS Powerpoint
Workshop Leaders...
Paul Reitman (USA - International Design Expert for IBM, World Bank, etc.)
Neil Kendrick (UK - ELD Director and Senior Facilitator)
May 7th and 8th, 2003, from 9:30 - 4PM
ELD Auditorium
Babar Mahal Revisited
Rs 6000 per person
Optional Pre-Workshop Day:
Basic Presentation Skills and Techniques
6 May 2003 - Rs 2000
An Education, Language and Development (ELD) Initiative
Call 5541613 / www.eld.org.uk / eld@wlink.com.np

Opening Exhibit April 18th-June 14th
For three Years, Lotus Gallery has pioneered the introduction of Tibetan Contemporary art to the West. Now we are proud to feature the largest collection of quality modern Tibetan art in the world.
The debut art of Lama Tenzin Norbu of Chamdo/Himalayas film is also in Lotus Gallery for your pleasure.
We are only place where you are able to purchase these very affordable, unique masterpieces.
Lotus Gallery
J.P. Road, Thamel, (Near Kato Restaurant) Tel: 4253646

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

Meddle tally



The political purposes of donors are becoming more pronounced.

The World Bank Country Director Ken Ohashi's glowing endorsement of the government's decision to raise the prices of petroleum products has added fuel to our students' fury. As the alliance of youth agitators began drafting a protest note demanding an apology from the dean of the donor community in Kathmandu, it emerged that the American Embassy, too, had stepped in a little too far. Washington apparently advised kangres to pull out of the joint movement against the palace arguing that they would end up helping the comrades. Now the mainstream political leaders are as infuriated as their student followers are, but they can't afford to be seen seething in the same way.

Politicians of all persuasions have benefited from external propulsions. When American ambassador Ralph Frank criticised

the virulence of corruption in Nepal two years ago in the presence of the then prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala, UML general secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal couldn't stop grinning until his cheeks twitched. A few months later, when Frank counselled opposition leaders to calm the streets and seek political change through courteous means, Nepal was outraged enough to organise a social boycott of Koirala. When the World Bank Vice-President for South Asia Miekko Nishimizu warned last year that Nepal may be soon imprisoned in a vicious circle of bad governance, Koirala and Nepal were delighted at the drubbing Sher Bahadur Deuba deserved as head of government. Now they are all in it together.

Because we were never colonised by external powers, Nepalis have a harder time understanding what we ought to protect. National liberation

has always meant freedom from the state's imperial squeeze. Revolutionaries have sharpened their vision in prison and in exile and start from the halo of heroism. When you get what you want, you're judged by what you do with it. Each political change has ended up producing a new power elite committed to preserving its turf. Our liberation struggle has acquired a perpetual motion. The Nepali claim to a sacrosanct personality is based on some of the same pre-existing sentiments of ethnicity, language and religion that have galvanised anti-colonialists the world over. These attributes are also the greatest sources of our fissures. We might not have a clear idea of who we are: we do seem to know who we aren't. Our expectation of propriety from abroad has been influenced by our political proclivities, because that's what we're preoccupied with. How many other countries have spent half a century debating such issues as sovereignty, control of the army and

constituent assembly and still don't know when its going to end? The bad news is that the carping from abroad is going to get nastier amid today's fusion of politics and economics.

Caught between two superpowers and two regional behemoths with opposing convictions, Nepal drew aid from all quarters, irrespective of ideology and politics. Our collective failure to take advantage of these opportunities has resulted in under-development and growing inequalities, but the blame game has been too convenient to give up. As our aid dependence has become more pressing, the political purposes of donors are becoming more pronounced. And so are those of the recipients in the political class. Director Ohashi's secretary might be in a better position to tell us how many senior politicians lobby with him each week for projects that would thrill constituents just in time for the elections.

True, donors have helped raise popular expectations for development. Don't expect them to take full responsibility for the concentration of prosperity in a few pockets. Expect demands for greater accountability on our side. Democracy has brought long suppressed aspirations into the open, sometimes in unpleasant forms. It's supposed to address them, too. Since it hasn't in most developing countries, the distinction between democracy and liberty is growing sharper.

Aid was never purely altruistic. In the post-9/11 world, it's going to come with more political strings attached. We may still call it neo-colonialism. From the donor's perspective, it's an investment in security. The doctrine of pre-emption places little value on the sanctity of national sovereignty. The recipient's performance will be measured in terms of good governance, investment in people, and economic development apart from regular multiparty elections and a free press. We better thicken our skin. ♦

HUMOUR

by KANAK MANI DIXIT

The seat of power



A visiting Nepali dignitary clad in his national dress was once spoofed by the British press for arriving in his long johns.

The male attire that is the Nepali national dress came to the middle Himalaya from Rajasthan: proof for Kathmandu's warrior-caste elite to trace its bloodline back to the wild western desert. The labeda, daura or mayelpose is a double-breasted kurta whose flaps are batted down in four places with ties, in a diagonal across the chest. The bottom is the surawal, the same as what the British named jodhpurs, it is skin-tight around the calves, growing to incongruous pleated proportions around the groin.

The topi was already there, and at some point during the time that Nepal was never colonised by the Company Bahadur, the Western jacket arrived, to be called 'coat'. The national dress of Nepal now comes in four pieces: the topi which can be dented and fashioned to create individual signatures; a most distinctive labeda top, the coat which completely covers whatever is distinctive about the labeda, and the surawal, an uncomfortable bottom that sometimes comes with a full legged inner (bhitri). Way back in 1980, a Kathmandu dignitary visiting London was spoofed in a television program as having arrived at Heathrow in his long johns.

In the sweltering heat of the tarai, home to some of the hottest temperatures of South Asia, civil servants have to suffer this double-breasted and jacketed nationalism. Dull and uncomfortable, the labeda-suruwal has come to represent the state and its functionaries, through years of authoritarian figures strutting about in it, large bellies accentuated by the unflattering fall of the labeda.

There is more that is comical about the dress: when the male official goes up to a sofa on the podium, he has first to reach to his rear with two hands and flip the fall of the labeda up so that it rides up the back before he can make to sit. This is to save the ironing. Once the official is properly seated, members of the audience are afforded a grandstand view of the dejected sac of pleated cloth gathered between the legs.

The greatest challenge faced by he who wears the labeda-suruwal is the visit to the water closet is a secret. For who would want to share this embarrassment with the world? Let me lead you through the ritual step-by-delicate step. First, park your topi in your coat pocket. Then unbuckle your coat and shunt the two fronts aside. Turn the two front flaps of the labeda all the way up, and hold them there firmly with your chin against your chest. Loosen the injaar or drawstring and push the surawal down. But remember to have both legs slightly akimbo so that you do not have the surawal gathered at the ankles on the (wet...) floor. If a true traditionalist, you will have a bhitri-suruwal, and will need to repeat the procedure before you are ready to water the closet.

Life was never meant to be this complicated, and we wait for the great founder nation of SAARC to modernise its national dress. There is a lot at stake. Imagine a regional summit meeting at the Birendra International Convention Centre in downtown Kathmandu. As fellow South Asians zip in, zip down, zip up and zip out, the Nepali under-secretary in the ministry of foreign affairs is still only getting started with the first stage of the disrobing operation. Think of all the time spent away from the plenary. Compute all the minutes spent struggling with the labeda-suruwal, and calculate an average two to three visits to the water closet on every workday. Multiply the minutes with the number of male civil servants in government employ, from the line ministries to the village development committees, and you will see how our Himalayan kingdom's development is retarded. ♦ (Originally published in Himal South Asian.)

We Deal in.....

INDIA'S MOST EXPERIENCED AND TRUSTED SECURITY GROUP OFFERS YOU STATE-OF-THE-ART ELECTRONIC SECURITY SYSTEMS

ECIL RAPISCAN LTD.

- X-Ray Machines
- Hand Held and Walk Through Metal Detectors
- Bomb Detectors
- Explosive and Narcotic Detectors

Ultra high performance X-Ray Baggage Inspection System

GEORGE DETECTIVE AGENCY (P) LTD.

THE REMOTE ANNUNCIATOR PANEL

Minimax STEELAGE INDUSTRIES LTD.

- Fire Fighting Vehicles
- Fire Extinguishers
- Fire Alarm System
- Fire Fighting Accessories etc.

HITCO Pvt. Ltd. 1st floor, Nitco Block, Oriental Colony Vishwavidyalaya Path, Balkhu, Kuleshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal. P.O. Box: 1464. Tel: 9810 33448 E-mail: hitco@winlink.com.np, web: www.hitconepal.com

Now Available

First organic vegetables and salad found at the Dendur Garden Restaurant, Thamel, Starting from May, every Tuesday and Saturday. Tel: 4412158, 4416387

EASY TIMES

It's never been easier to subscribe to Nepali Times. Just dial this number and leave your address.

5543333

Picture Framing at KALINTA

An excellent selection of classic & modern frames imported & manufactured by KALINTA. High quality framing materials & decorative objects also available.

East Side of King's Palace, Nag Pokhari, Kathmandu. Tel: 413107

OPEN 10 AM - 6 PM

SHOWROOM: Babar Mohal Revisited. Opening Hours 9:30 to 7:30. Tel: 4230369, Fax: 977-1-4495973 E-mail: divine@msa.com.np

ECONOMY

2-8 MAY 2003 NEPALI TIMES #143

"Donors need to be assured about repayment before making investments."



As Managing Director of the Nepal Electricity Authority, Janak Lal Karmacharya has to navigate through donor funding and hydropower projects on hold as well as restructure a parastatal entity. This bureaucrat lived up to his forthright reputation in an interview with Nepali Times.

Nepali Times: What challenges does the NEA face?

Janak Lal Karmacharya: Our first challenge is to make NEA more efficient and commercially oriented. The others are rural electrification and reduction in generation cost. We are looking for ways to tackle these challenges effectively and appropriately.

Any projects underway?

Chilime hydropower will be commissioned in a few months and the 70 MW Middle Marsyangdi is under construction. The World Bank recently agreed to help us establish a Power Development Fund and we have approached the Japanese for the construction of Kulekhani III. The NEA is trying to woo investors for the 122 MW Upper Seti. We have completed studies of the Kankai project. The other big storage projects in the pipeline are a 300 MW project in Jajarkot and a proposal for Uttar Ganga.

And what of West Seti?

Well, the promoters are focusing on trying to get a power purchase agreement with our neighbour in the south. The present discussion and differences of opinion are normal in these processes. I am confident they'll reach a point of consensus soon. It is a 750 MW project, which is too huge a storage project for our system. There is no possibility of the NEA financing such a huge project, but we can consider developing it as a joint venture. However, for the NEA to get involved we would need a few requisites: the present developer should first withdraw, the Indian power market should open and we should be able to find an appropriate investor or partner.

How do you assess your first year of tenure?

When I became the managing director of the Nepal Electricity Board, the corporation functioned like a single entity, making it difficult to assess what was running efficiently and what was a dead weight.

Among the first things I did was to make structural changes by creating three core sections for generation, transmission and distribution. Engineering was later identified as another important sector. As a result the authority, responsibility and accountability for everything was clearly defined. Implementation was arranged between these core businesses and the management with performance indicators for periodic evaluations.

These performance contracts outlined the freedom and authority each core business enjoys. About 50 percent of the performance indicators concentrate on loss reduction and

performance audit periods (PAP) are half-yearly. Our first performance contract is with the distribution sector because almost 60 percent of the NEA staff work in this revenue-generating sector.

What kind of loss-reduction methods have you adopted?

The distribution centres have to reduce losses by 0.5 to 6 percent depending on how much loss is incurred. Of the average 23 percent loss, half is due to non-technical reasons. The city of Bhaktapur registers the highest loss for us at 55 percent. We hope the Anti Theft Act is made effective soon so electricity pilfering is a criminal offence and the NEA can make arrests. At present we are restricted to petty fines after which the perpetrators get off scot-free.

Do you have any conflicts of interest with the Ministry of Water Resources?

We have full support from the ministry for structural reforms and are working on new proposals for seasonal tariffs and community involved distribution systems suggested by Minister Gyawali. We should be able to implement the community involved distribution system in the coming fiscal year. Within six months to a year we hope to bring down electricity rates on par to that of LPG.

How enthusiastic are donors about rural electrification?

Neither the NEA nor the government is in a position to expand the rural electrification drive. This is why we need donor help, and so far, they have been very supportive. Their main condition with regard to electrification is poverty alleviation in rural areas.

The Asian Development Bank gave us a \$50 million loan for rural electrification and we just signed an agreement with the World Bank too. The Swiss International Development Agency (SIDA) will also be investing and DANIDA is already working in Kailali-Kanchanpur. The NEA is not going to turn a profit by selling electricity to rural users. Whatever we earn will be ploughed back into extending the service to other areas.

Have the donors pressurised the NEA to revise tariff rates?

Every donor needs to be assured about repayment before they make an investment. They want us to achieve a certain rate of return, which I believe we can achieve through the structural changes and loss reduction attempts the NEA is making. A price hike is not on the cards for now.

BIZ NEWS

Silver lining

The 3.5 percent 'growth' rate projected for Nepal by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) may be the least among South Asian countries, but after last year's record breaking economic nosedive, the worst in two decades, things may be looking up. The ADB is cautiously optimistic that things will improve if the ceasefire holds and the peace talks are not derailed. It's annual publication, Asian Development Outlook 2003, said Nepal's GDP may pick up by 1.5 percent this year after the negative 0.6 percent downturn.

The industrial sector will see immediate benefits and a 0.2 percent growth, but agriculture and service that had slipped to 2.2 percent and 1.8 percent last year, may take time to recover. Exports fell by 18 percent last year due to a decrease in the demand for ready-made garments, woolen carpets and pashmina shawls. Imports too had fallen by around 12 percent during the same period.

SARS chokes tourism

Nepal's tourism industry received yet another blow from the pandemic Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) as it struggled to regain its balance under the negative impact of the Iraq war. Cancellations are becoming commonplace and some international airlines are axing operations between Kathmandu and affected metropolises in Southeast Asia. The Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation suspended flights to Singapore and is planning to temporarily pull out from Shanghai beginning 3 May.

Air China, that recently merged with China South West Airlines, also stopped plying the Kathmandu-Lhasa route. "The situation is getting worse," says Joy Dewan, President of the Nepal Association of Travel Agents. "We expect tourist arrivals to drop by at least 30 percent."

With a decrease of almost 40 percent in tourist

arrivals last year, the tourism industry had pinned its hopes on the Everest golden jubilee celebrations to lure visitors back to Nepal. A record number of mountaineers were expected to commemorate the first human ascent of the highest peak on 29 May.

Unfortunately, SARS dashed hopes of a tourism renaissance. Tourists arriving from the east are declining rapidly, as are those willing to go to Tibet through Nepal. The Chinese Embassy told us they would continue to issue visas for Tibet but were unsure if authorities at the Khasa border would allow tourists through.

Italian connection

You can buy any car in the world and give it that Italian finish say Euro Gears who are importing Lechler Coatings from Italy for refinishing cars.

This product meets strict European standards, is available in 20,000 shades and can be used on any vehicle. The company says Lechler is a total solution for refinishing as the single brand includes all those products that are required for refinishing such as primers, putties, sealers, fillers undercoats, base coats including mica, metallic, clear coats, thinner, hardeners and also for plastic bumper repair.

Real sports

Dabur Nepal hosted the prize distribution ceremony of the "Spot the Real Ball" and "Real Hoozzat" contests at Hotel Soaltree Crowne Plaza recently. The company said the response to both contests was phenomenal and of the 29,659 entries received, 10682 were correct. Each daily contest winner bagged a Real Fruit juice gift hamper worth Rs 1,500 and were part of the Grand Lucky Draw for the mega prizes of trips for two to Singapore and Bangkok. Real, a brand associated with sports promotion in Nepal, introduced the "Spot the Real Ball" competition during the World Cup Football in 2002.

University of Cambridge International GCE

Application forms are being given out for admissions to Malpi Institute to pursue

A Levels

the prestigious two year international General Certificate of Education Advanced Level course of United Kingdom's University of Cambridge. This course is often referred to simply as 'A Levels'. Science, Arts and Commerce streams are taught.

Students who have passed SLC, GCE O levels or any other equivalent examinations inclusive of those awaiting results of this year's SLC examinations may apply.

Selected candidates will need to attend classes commencing June 2003. Interested parents and students may contact/visit:

MALPI INSTITUTE

Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Tel: 4418206, 4425201

In the April Himal

Why do the women die?

The fatal neglect of maternal health

In the May Himal

Songs of the nations: Deconstructing South Asian anthems

Sri Lankan Tamil, European Tamil

Urban planning meets India's slums

Bhutanese refugees' long road home

Pakistan, democracy and discontents

Peace on pause in Sri Lanka

Keeping alive biodiversity

To subscribe: Call 5543-333 or write to subscription@himalmag.com



ALL PICS: MIN BAIRACHARYA

The good, bad and ugly

A look at billboards that are dwarfing Kathmandu's skyline.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

At the rate we are going, Kathmandu is going to turn into billboard-ville. The numerous billboards are blocking views of the mountains, towering over rooftops and presenting health hazards in stormy weather.

New computer technology has led to digitally designed and manufactured advertisements that have replaced the old hand-painted signs with photographic

quality reproductions. This has made hoardings more attractive, but hasn't done much to enhance the aesthetics of this once beautiful city. It's pretty much a free-for-all: there are no rules about billboards—there is even a large neon sign in front of the royal palace in Durbar Marg and temple squares are marred by advertisements for instant noodles.

There is a certain nostalgia when remembering the way it was. Painters would perch on

precarijously rigged bamboo scaffolding and recreate images from A4 size pages to fit canvases that measured 15m X 13m. It didn't matter that the airplanes they drew resembled sharks. Everyday passersby would guess at what would unfold. The end result ranged from superb to downright strange.

An example of the latter is an advertisement for a lubricant that still survives on the left-hand incline past the stadium. The face

and eyes of a tiger have been rendered with care and precision but the rest looks like the master painter had enough and handed his brushes over to a near sighted apprentice.

The digitisation of the process and means of billboard advertising has meant a revolution in costs, in terms of both time and money, which explains why driving down Bagmati Bridge towards Patan

now looks like we're reaching

saturation point. Of course we aren't, because as the people selling space realise, the sky is quite literally the limit.

Painters used to charge Rs 10,000 for messages that averaged 450 square feet and although digital printing costs almost three times as much, the quality is far better and the reproduction is much faster. In the competitive business environment time is money, and most advertising agencies and their

clients are ready to absorb the higher cost. "Digital printing is not expensive compared to what people used to spend for painting boards," says Anil K Thaman of Sea Services that specialises in computerised billboard messages. "If you want a billboard for your product today, it will be up within the next 24 hours," he promises.

But good news for advertisers does not translate into profits for the government. More than 40



percent of billboards and hoardings dotting the Valley's streets are built on private property and therefore, are exempt from prices set by the Kathmandu Municipal Corporation (KMC). The corporation has a fixed rate of Rs 60 per square feet per year for advertising products other than alcohol and tobacco at public places. Those two categories have to pay 50 percent more. Private hoardings escape these steep charges because as Deputy Superintendent of KMC's city police admits, "We are not allowed to enter private houses, especially if women own the property."

Another area where the municipality find themselves helpless is the Guthi Sansthan. The law declares that billboards must not hinder traffic, cause public threat or use offensive signs and messages—none of which is adhered to with any measure of regulation. "They are visual polluters," says RENCHIN

Yonjan, who was once part of a KMC drive to beautify the city.

Alcoholic beverages that are not allowed to be advertised through the electronic media have increasingly begun to find their niche on hoardings and billboards. The Khetan Group, for instance, spends around 50 percent of its advertising budget to market its beer and noodle products. "The idea is quite effective," says Rajendra Khetan.

Business houses believe there is a select range of products that should be put on billboards. It all depends on "the width and depth" of the products, according to Binod Chaudhary of the Chaudhary Group of Industries.

Records from advertising agencies show around 25 percent of the business is made up of signboards, a segment that is fast increasing. Big corporations are racing each other to stake their space at major points and crossroads of

the capital. Meanwhile, in the Indian capital of New Delhi, billboards and hoardings have been banned. In their quest to outdo each other, advertising agents say competitors are overdoing their messages. "The billboards should act as reminders or 'teasers' for passersby, not present the product's story," says Suraj Bikram Shahi of Thompson Nepal.

Some may be eyesores but more worrying, far too many are unsafely constructed. One stormy night last week a billboard collapsed at Maitighar but fortunately, no one was hurt as it was set away from the main road.

In a final twist of irony, the very people who exhort Valley commuters to drive safely—the traffic police—have planted an enormous hoarding at a busy traffic junction, cautioning against the use of mobile phones while driving. "It warns you of one danger while simultaneously inviting another," says Yonjan. ♦



Clockwise from top: Driving into a billboard horizon at the Thapathali junction, King Tribhuban is dwarfed by advertisements at Durbar Marg, pedestrians walk under a dangerously unhinged hoarding near Maitighar, the prolific advertisements for alcohol while crossing the Bagmati towards Patan.

New Year SPECIAL Offer

free Epson C41UX inkjet printer with purchase of

MERCANTILE Personal Computer

Quality You Can Touch.

Wishing you a very Happy New Year 2060 B.S.

Head Office: Mercantile Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
Tel: 4255415 Fax: 4263232 Email: sales@mercantilepc.com.np

Authorised Distributors:

- Himalayan Trading House, Pokhara
- Computer & Electronic Trade Link, Butwal
- Megatech Computer & Electronics Concern, Biratnagar
- Sivali Inlatch Enterprises, Biratnagar
- Techpark Center, Chitwan
- Computer Science Education Centre, Itanagar
- Marslandara Haldi, Nepalgunj
- Krishna Computer, Ghamsi

MORNING NON-STOP FLIGHTS TO

NEW DELHI

Every Sunday & Wednesday on

DRUK AIR

Royal Bhutan Airlines

Kathmandu Departure 09:05
Delhi Arrival 10:25

For instant confirmation contact your travel agent or
Malla Treks, Lekhnath Marg, Kathmandu
Tel: 4410089 Fax: 4423143

for Complete family recreation

Park Village Hotel & Resort

Exclusive Weekend Package Available

40 rooms of Woodlark 40 Suite rooms 5 Conference Halls
2 Restaurants 2 Amphitheater 2 Mini Cinema hall
4 Swimming pool 2 Recreation center

Bardhaman-Kantha Tel: 437 52 80

Park Gallery now has a new branch in Kathmandu

Approved and granted license to work and provide the service to Nepalese people by Nepal Rastra Bank

Easiest means to transfer funds worldwide

Krishi Premura Money Transfer

Sole Agent: Nepal Remittance Pvt Ltd
Tel: 4218335, Fax: 4264833
3rd Floor, Radha Bhawan
Tripureshwar, Kathmandu
Email: info@krishipremura.com
http://www.krishipremura.com

Easiest Way to Transfer Money

Hong Kong : 2369 4900, 2369 4500

Baskin Robbins

Where the world goes for ice cream

Now in the Kingdom of Nepal

The Ganesh Enterprises P. Ltd.
GA 2-512, Ganesh Bldg, P.O. Box 1906
Krishna Paurelli Chowk, Kamal Pokhari
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Tel: 4422818 / 4423444
Fax: 977-1-4418853
Email: b31r@mos.com.np

Available at:
Cakes & Bakes: 4435555
Mabaca : 4423333

Ban scuttled

PARIS – Maritime measures to prevent spills from oil tankers will be off the agenda at the G8 meeting due this June. Japan scuttled a German proposal to list the issue on the agenda, according to documents from preparatory discussions among environment ministers of the eight countries. The Russian delegation is reported to have backed the Japanese objections.

Environmental ministers from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain, the United States and the Russian Federation met in Paris last week to discuss environmental issues that need to be taken up at the G8 meeting at Evian in France in June. Japanese officials strongly opposed a ban on single hull frame oil tankers at the preparatory talks. They also opposed proposals to place greater legal responsibility on ship owners and on oil companies renting the ships.

These issues have become a prime concern among European environmentalists, governments, and fishermen since the oil tankers Prestige and Erika, both Japanese made, sank in the Mediterranean affecting marine life and coastal environment with huge oil spills. The summit will discuss development in Africa, privatisation of water, good international governance and the ethical responsibility of private enterprises. Under strong pressure from the US, terrorism will also be an important subject at the summit. (IPS)

Failing the poor

JOHANNESBURG – The South African government has been forced to defend itself from a report by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) that says although progress has been made in improving the lives of the country's poor much more needs to be done. SAHRC chairperson, Jody Kollapen, said millions of people are living in peril, partly because the land reform process is still slow. Almost 80 percent of the land is still owned by white commercial farmers. Poor implementation, corruption and lack of capacity continue to affect the land reform process. There are similar

comments on government efforts to provide food security, education and health services to its citizens and to protect South Africa's environment.

In response, the Government Information and Communication Services (GCIS) released figures that show the proportion of South Africans that have access to homes and different social services has increased since the end of apartheid in 1994. The Chairperson of the South African National Council of Provinces, Naledi Pandor, who is a member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), dismissed the idea that "blacks are worse off today" than under apartheid, a common refrain among those opposed to government. (IPS)



ANALYSIS

Relations between Continental Western Europe and the US have never been so strained in recent decades as they are now. Is the cause a short-run disagreement about a specific issue, the war in Iraq? Or is the transatlantic ideological divide deep, pervasive, and unlikely to disappear anytime soon?

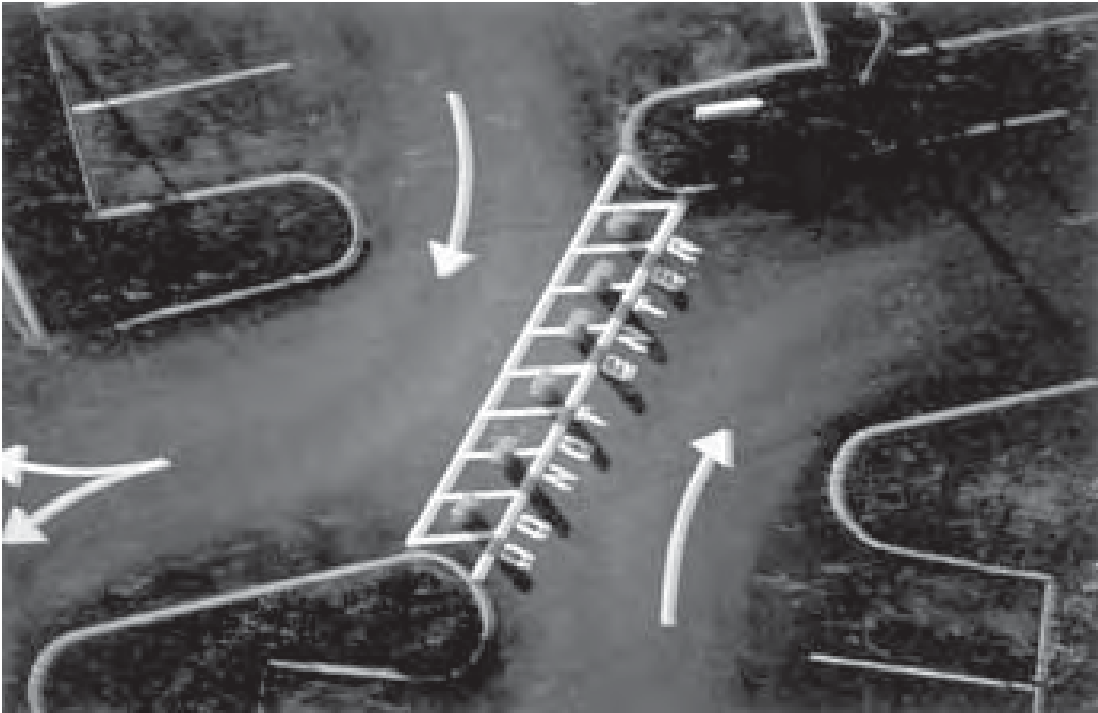
Before diplomats and pundits begin to paper over the two sides' differences, it is necessary to reflect on their sources. For we believe that the transatlantic divide does mirror fundamental differences in values—with the immediate caveat that these differences do not, and should not, bring the two sides into conflict.

The profoundly different values that America and Europe hold can best be viewed by examining how each perceives poverty, inequality, and the welfare state.

According to the World Value Survey, a respected attitudinal study conducted in about 40 countries, 60 percent of Americans believe that the poor are "lazy", a view shared by only 26 percent of Europeans. Nearly the exact opposite proportions (60 percent of Americans and 29 percent of Europeans) believe that the poor are trapped in poverty.

Similarly, evidence drawn from surveys about well being indicates that Americans are much less bothered by inequality than Europeans. In fact, even the American poor do not mind inequality, which they see as a social ladder that they can climb.

The mid-Atlantic



The European poor view inequality as an insurmountable social obstacle.

These basic differences lead to obvious consequences for social policies. Europe spends twice as much as the US on social programs, and total government spending in Europe is close to 50 percent of GDP. In the US, government consumes about 30 percent of GDP. These numbers are not just about social spending, but have implication for issues like defence and foreign policy.

If Europe wants to play a more active role in international affairs it must become a military power: the US spends about 4 percent of its GDP more than Europe for military purposes. But this is difficult for

Europe to achieve, let alone contemplate: looming deficits and exhausted taxpayers make it hard, if not impossible, to divert several percentage points of GDP to military spending.

But where do these differences in attitude toward fundamental issues like inequality come from? One explanation is that America is a more mobile society where the poor are not trapped and can seemingly get out of poverty if they really try. If the poor remain poor, Americans conclude, it must be because they are lazy. The European poor do not have such mobility and thus lack the supposed chance that poor Americans possess. Even if they try hard, they feel trapped.

The alternative, and much more likely, explanation is that these differing views reflect profound ideological differences that pay little attention to economic reality. In other words, the ideological differences across the Atlantic are much larger than actual differences in social mobility and the supposed laziness of the poor.

European culture remains profoundly affected by the Marxist intellectual tradition in which classes are viewed as cast in stone—which implies that it is almost impossible for a poor person to become rich, or apropos the tradition, for a "proletarian" to become a "capitalist". Marxism assumes social immobility to justify

rift

The Euro-American divide does mirror fundamental differences in values.

the concept of "class". In many European countries, political institutions were shaped in revolutionary periods in which socialist parties and ideas enjoyed mass support. European constitutions often reflect an emphasis on equality and redistribution.

In America, the Marxist cultural influence was very limited. Indeed, outside of universities, it scarcely ruffled American life. Instead, the culture (or myth) of the "self-made man" provides the ideological foil for America's social conservatives to justify limited government intervention. The US Constitution, though reshaped, amended, and adapted to fit changing times, reflects its origins as a document written and designed to protect private property against the predations of the State.

The second source of the transatlantic divide in attitudes toward fundamental issues like inequality has to do with racial bias. The US is a racially fragmented society, so it is convenient for the majority of wealthy whites to view the poor (many of them black) as different and lazy compared to hard-working whites.

Indeed, even controlling for income, whites are much less receptive to redistributive policies than non-white Americans, precisely because they perceive them as

favoring racial minorities. Even poor whites oppose redistributive policies, owing to racial distrust, if not downright animosity.

Historically, America's racial and ethnic divisions also inhibited the development of a homogeneous working-class culture and movement, which empowered socialist and Communist parties across Europe in the 20th century.

In more homogeneous European countries, the differences between rich and poor are much less obvious: in Sweden, rich and poor are all white, often tall and blond. Not surprisingly, the European right is beginning to use immigration as a tool to attack the welfare state. As Europe becomes increasingly multi-cultural, political pressures against the welfare state seem certain to grow.

For now, Americans and Continental West Europeans remain very different in their basic attitudes concerning poverty, inequality, and the welfare state. It remains to be seen whether these attitudes will persist in their current form, and whether the transatlantic divide widens or narrows. ♦ © Project Syndicate

(Alberto Alesina is Professor of economics at Harvard University and Francesco Giavazzi is Professor of economics at Bocconi University, Milan.)

May day, on May Day



LENNART LEVI in STOCKHOLM

Work can give structure and meaning to life. But working conditions can also trigger or accelerate the symptoms of ill health—physical and mental—that feed back into our productivity and earning capacity, as well as into our social and family relationships. In fact, an alarmingly large number of people appear to be at risk.

Of the EU's 160 million-strong labour force, 56 percent report working at very high speeds, and 60 percent to tight deadlines. More than a third have no influence on task order, and 40 percent perform monotonous tasks. This probably contributes to a host of health-related problems: 15 percent of the workforce complain of headaches, 33 percent of backache, 23 percent of fatigue and 23 percent of neck and shoulder pains, plus a host of other illnesses, including life-threatening ones.

Sustained work-related stress is also an important determinant of depressive disorders—the fourth-largest cause of disease world-wide. They are expected to rank second by 2020, behind only heart disease. In the EU, the cost of these and related mental health problems is estimated to average 3-4 percent of GNP, amounting to approximately 265 billion euros annually.

Moreover, sustained work-related stress is likely to contribute to 'metabolic syndrome', a cluster of pathogenic mechanisms characterised by an accumulation of abdominal fat, a decrease in sensitivity to insulin, increased levels of cholesterol, and heightened blood pressure, all related to the onset of heart disease and diabetes.

Of course, working conditions may be experienced as threatening even when objectively they are not, or trivial symptoms may be interpreted as manifestations of serious illness. But stress is worrisome precisely because even misinterpretations can add to, or result in, a wide variety of health problems, including heart disease, stroke, cancer, musculoskeletal and gastrointestinal diseases, anxiety and depression, accidents, and suicides.

Briefly stress consists of a pattern of built-in processes preparing the human organism for physical activity in response to demands and

Are we working ourselves to death?

influences that tax its capacity to adapt. Activation of our "fight or flight" mechanism is an appropriate adaptive response when facing a wolf pack, but not so when struggling to adjust to rotating shifts, monotonous and fragmented tasks, or over-demanding customers. If sustained, stress is often maladaptive and eventually disease provoking.

Stress-related paths to pathologies take a wide variety of forms. They can be emotional (anxiety, depression, hypochondria, and alienation), cognitive (loss of concentration or recall, inability to learn new things, be creative, make decisions), behavioural (abuse of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, refusal to seek or accept treatment), or physiological (neuroendocrine and immunological dysfunction).

To identify, prevent, and counteract the causes and consequences of work-related stress, we need to monitor job content, working conditions, terms of employment, social relations at work, health, well-being and productivity. The following areas need to be monitored:

Work schedule Design labor time to avoid conflict with demands and responsibilities unrelated to the job;

Participation/control Allow workers to take part in decisions or actions affecting their jobs;

Workload Ensure that workers have enough time to complete assigned tasks, and allow for recovery from especially demanding physical or mental tasks;

Content Design tasks to provide meaning, stimulation, a sense of completeness, and an opportunity to use skills;

Roles Define work roles and responsibilities clearly;

Social environment Ensure a working atmosphere free of all forms of invidious discrimination and harassment;

Future Avoid ambiguity in matters of job security and career development; promote life-long learning and employability.

Many companies world-wide recognise that success requires satisfying the three elements of sustainable development: financial, environmental, and social. Failure to do so leads, over time, to terminal organisational weakness, owing to lost credibility amongst employees, shareholders, customers, and communities. The challenge for science is to find out what to do, for whom, and how. The challenge to workers, employers, governments, and communities is to translate what we now know into coordinated and sustainable programs. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Lennart Levi is emeritus Professor of Psychosocial Medicine at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm and founded and directed its Division of Stress Research and the National Institute of Psychosocial Factors and Health in Sweden.)

COMMENT

by AMMAR ABDULHAMID



Is Syria next?

The recent allegation by US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld that Syria is smuggling war material into Iraq raises the ominous prospect that America's attention will turn toward Damascus the moment it is finished with Baghdad. Rumsfeld's charge tops a long list of unresolved issues in Syria's relations with the US—Syria's open-ended military intervention in Lebanon and continued support of Hezbollah there, its supposed involvement in the 1982 suicide attack in Beirut that killed 241 US Marines, its continued support of various "outlawed" Palestinian groups, and its allegedly growing stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons.

Indeed, Syria has long been included on the US State Department's list of nations that support terrorism and could well become a potential target for American military adventurism. Even before the current hostilities, the possibility was raised by parts of the Bush Administration, such as Richard Perle, and conservative media commentators, all of whom would gladly add Syria to the "Axis of Evil".

Recognising this possibility, the Syrian regime has made clear its opposition to the American war in Iraq, which has been branded by President Bashar Assad (below) and other senior officials as "a war of aggression". Assad insisted that Iraq could achieve what Lebanon accomplished two decades before—namely the forced withdrawal by American and British troops in the face of steadfast, bloody resistance. "The US and Britain will not be able to control Iraq," Assad claimed. It



Syria could be a potential target for American military adventurism.

seems that the Syrian regime is painting itself into a dark and dreary corner, a development that could set the stage for a potential showdown with the US in the not-so-distant future.

This said, however, there is also an unpublicised aspect of Syrian-American relations to consider. Since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, security cooperation between the two countries seems to have intensified. The Syrian intelligence apparatus has provided much valuable information on the activities of Muhammad Atta and others suspected of involvement in those attacks, as well as information about other al-Qaeda activities. There are even indications of some Syrian intelligence-sharing with the Americans regarding Iraqi military readiness in the weeks preceding the attacks.

The US will find it difficult to quickly resolve all outstanding issues with Syria. The latter's view of the Arab-Israeli dispute cannot be glossed over: Syrian agreement is necessary for any peaceful settlement. If the US attempts to isolate Syria, it will not have an easy time of it. Damascus maintains good political and economic relations with Russia, China, and key EU members, especially France, with its paternalistic attitude towards its former colony and its young president. On the other hand, with Americans controlling Iraq, Syria finds itself surrounded by three unfriendly and allied neighbours: the Americans, and the Turks and Israelis.

Nonetheless, outstanding issues between Syria and the US would be better resolved using smart diplomacy than smart bombs. Considering the evidence on display in Iraq, Syrian leaders must be wondering whether the Bush administration is capable of thinking in these terms. At the same time, will Syria's new rulers prove capable of striking the kind of Machiavellian bargain for which the late Syrian president, Hafiz Al-Assad, was famous? Such a possibility exists because the country's rulers include many members of his team but are the Americans willing to see it? ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

OPINION

Is it a real thaw this time?

NEW DELHI – When Atal Behari Vajpayee extended the "hand of friendship" to Pakistan last week, he was also doing something unusual. He became the first Indian prime minister to address a public meeting in the disputed Kashmir Valley since a violent separatist movement erupted there in 1989.

The Friday speech offered "dialogue" with different currents of Kashmiri opinion and was therefore widely welcomed in both Kashmir and Pakistan. By this week, however, Vajpayee started hedging on what first appeared to be an unconditional offer to Pakistan. He said the talks could not be "one-sided" and put the onus on Islamabad: it must stop supporting "cross-border" terrorism and dismantle training camps for militants so that the "right atmosphere" is created. Vajpayee confirmed on Tuesday this week that he was invited to visit Pakistan by his Pakistani counterpart, Zafarullah Khan Jamali. The invitation has not been accepted.

Is this a case of "two steps forward, one step back"? Has Vajpayee given with one hand only to take away with the other? Is the offer sincere and well thought out? Or is it being made under external goading, especially from the United States? The answers are unclear and ambiguous. But there is no doubt that Vajpayee's pronouncements is a welcome



An unmanned Pakistani post at Siachen Glacier.

departure from New Delhi's position that no dialogue with Islamabad is possible.

That is why it has been greeted with some enthusiasm in Kashmir, the subject of a dispute of more than 50 years between India and Pakistan. Even Islamabad has said it welcomes the change of tone, although substantially, "it is old wine in a new bottle". Earlier, Pakistani officials had said Islamabad would take two steps for each forward step New Delhi takes. There is a likelihood, although not a very high one, that both India and Pakistan will make tentative but positive moves in the next weeks—just

ahead of the planned visit of US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage early in May. Both governments are deeply uncomfortable with the global situation emerging after the war on Iraq and the threats held out by Washington to extend hostilities, especially to Syria and Iran.

New Delhi may come under pressure to drop its precondition (for an end to Pakistan's support to the Kashmir militancy) and start talking to Islamabad. Islamabad is worried by the United States' repeated recent statements that the cross-border movement of militants into Kashmir has not ended. In India, there are

India's overtures raises hope for a new rapprochement between India and Pakistan.

strong domestic reasons too for making the overture now. Jammu and Kashmir, as Indian-controlled Kashmir is called, witnessed relatively fair and largely free legislative assembly elections six months ago.

The Kashmiri people are exhausted and repelled by the excesses of the militants and their brutal killings—like that of the 24 Hindus in Nadimarg. Support for the militancy has sharply declined. The Kashmiris' concerns with day-to-day issues of health care, roads, schools, are gaining prominence, and they are willing to engage with, lobby and pressure, the state government. In the past, they would refuse to.

From the Indian government's point of view, this is the right moment to make a gesture for peace and dialogue. But the move's long-term success will depend on the government's larger policy or game plan (assuming it has one), and its willingness to put its anti-Pakistan prejudices aside and negotiate in good faith.

This means moving away from the stated position that Kashmir is "an inalienable part of India". It also means taking the Shimla agreement of 1972

seriously, under which all bilateral issues are to be resolved through peaceful discussion. So far, New Delhi has never once discussed the Kashmir bilaterally with Pakistan. Islamabad will have to stop insisting that Kashmir be discussed with reference to UN Security Council resolutions going back more than 50 years. It must stop using armed pressure to coerce India to the negotiating table. India and Pakistan came close to reconciliation twice in the recent past, at Lahore in 1999 and at Agra in 2001. But the Lahore summit was grossly inadequate in addressing the new dangers to regional security after the 1998 nuclear blasts by both countries. It was soon overtaken by a seven weeks-long conventional war at Kargil. At Agra, the two governments' top leaders agreed to a draft which was all but signed, but vetoed at the last minute by India's hawkish Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supports Vajpayee's peace gesture now but its first response was to oppose it and harp on Pakistan's enmity toward India. Similarly, Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant

Sinha recently said Pakistan is a fitter case than Iraq for a pre-emptive war.

This year will see four major state assembly elections in which the BJP is pitted against the opposition Congress party. Rather than embark on a new Kashmir and Pakistan policy, it may find it easier to fall back upon its hawkish line, which appeals to its constituency among the urban elite. Terrorists killing innocent citizens, whether or not provoked by Pakistan, can derail any process of reconciliation. Vajpayee will have to summon a high level of courage and firmness to keep the process on track. In Pakistan, President General Pervez Musharraf will have to show results in containing and countering militancy in order to enhance mutual confidence.

If the two leaders pull off a success, the one billion-plus people who face the threat of nuclear Armageddon in the world's most dangerous region could breathe easier. ♦ (IPS)

(Praful Bidwai is a New Delhi-based columnist who has written several books on nuclear disarmament.)

On the table



Rajdhani, 28 April
The following is an extract of the main demands made by the Maoist negotiation team during the first day of formal peace talks with the government on 27 April in Kathmandu. The preamble says the list is transitory and can be further revised and modified as the talks progress.

"The constitution that was promulgated following the 1990 People's Movement is totally defunct, and the country is without a functioning constitution. Therefore, the major agenda of the peace talks should be ways of forming a new constitution. The 12-year long experiment with the 1991 constitution showed it had serious faults like unchangeable clauses, contradictions between the sovereignty of people and the monarchy, and neglect for backward communities, ethnic groups, gender and region. Therefore, the new constitution needs to be more forward looking than the previous one in its foundations and the way it is drafted.

- A roundtable with participants from the rebel party, other major political parties and representatives of democracy should promulgate an interim legislature that guarantees the people's democratic rights achieved by the 1990 constitution and also reflects the new political balance. An all-party interim government should be created under the leadership of the rebel party.
- The interim government will constitute a constituent assembly within six months, which will be responsible for promulgating a new constitution.
- The Royal Nepali Army and the People's Army should be merged after vital structural changes to create a national army that will be brought under the elected institution.
- There should be a guarantee of self-determination along with ethnic and regional autonomy for all backward caste groups, janjatis, madhesis and other suppressed peoples. Human rights, democratic and civil rights must be guaranteed.
- The country should be declared a secular state.
- The 1950 Nepal-India Treaty along with other unequal treaties should be scrapped immediately and an independent foreign policy should be adopted on the basis of Panchasheel and non-alignment.
- The issues of monarchy and other political issues based on viewpoints and values of individual political parties should publicly deliberated and adjudication shall be the final.
- The international agreements, military aid and movement of foreign military that might adversely effect the peace process should immediately be stopped. The Gurkha recruitment, a source of national shame, will end.
- The open border with India should be regulated and administered. Encroachment will stop and work permit shall be made mandatory for all foreigners working within the boundary of Nepal. The movement of non-nationals in NGOs, INGOs will also be monitored.
- An independent probe should be carried out on incidents of human rights violation in the course of the civil war.

Official shuffle

Sanghu, 28 April

A mass transfer of under-secretaries and other officials is underway at the Chief Comptroller's Office (CCO) and it's branches. Our sources said about 35 under-secretaries, 60 other officials and nearly 260 non-gazetted personnel got their transfer orders last week alone.

They said huge bribes were paid to senior level management at the CCO to secure positions at projects that have a greater potential to make underhand deals. There are rumours among the employees that under-secretary Janardan Neupane and section officers Janak Ghimire and Chandra Kala paid a impressive amount to be transferred to "good places" like the Foreign Ministry, Birganj Custom and Kathmandu Road Division respectively. Our sources also said Comptroller Narayan Silwal made the most money in the transfer game. They claimed the CCO ignored seniority, efficiency, dedication and sincerity in considering promotions and transfers, favouring those who paid them.

There is a real possibility of unrest from disgruntled employees at the CCO who are considering taking the matter up with the Ministry of Finance and even the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA).

Campaigns, talks

Tarun, 28 April

Nepal's four major political parties are going to launch a decisive campaign against the royal move of 4 October. Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of the Nepali Congress who always supported constitutional monarchy, has publicly said this joint campaign could put an end to monarchy. Ironically the three other communist parties are silent on the subject.

Even the Maoist party seems to have softened its stance regarding the monarchy. They are banking their faith on the republican state that the constituent assembly will establish. The Maoists should have been delighted by Girija Prasad Koirala's stridency because he is trumpeting their views throughout the country. But the Maoists are withholding support for the political parties' campaign. They are

wary that it might mar the present peace process, a concern that supposes only they have the legitimate rights to begin a disrupting movement.

If the establishment of a republic is their aim, then it should upset them if there are others who are also raising their voices for the same. It is becoming clear that neither Girija Prasad nor the Maoists really want a republican state. In volatile politics everyone is racing to take credit—the Maoists want centre stage and the other parties want to remind the people that other communist parties exist in the country.

The only way out of the present fix is a political movement or peace talks. Sadly, neither the Maoists nor the government seem serious about the latter. Their main concern at the moment seems to be setting up fallback measures and possible scapegoats in the event of the negotiations falling through. This is why a vigorous political campaign can shake things up. All the political parties must agree to the restoration of what was gained by the 1990 People's Movement. It is time to put aside political differences and competition. The Maoists must accept that a peaceful political campaign can support the peace talks. They must learn to respect other's demands and sometimes hold out the hand of compromise.

A mother asks

Kantipur, 27 April

By Sharad Adhikari

The mother of late chief of the Armed Police Force, IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha wants to meet the "assassin" of her son and daughter-in-law. Eighty-seven-year-old Prem Kumari Shrestha (*pic, below*) has not stopped crying since her son was killed by Maoists three months ago. "I heard that the murderers of my son and daughter-in-law are in Kathmandu and the government let them free instead of punishing



Blanket: Peace talks
Placard: Photography is prohibited.

सुदूर Budhabar, 30 April

them," she says. "Can they come and explain to me why they killed my children?"

The government freed the three Maoist cadres arrested for their alleged involvement in the assassinations as part of the peace deal when the ceasefire was declared. "I am sad because my children were killed, but I am more disappointed that the culprits were freed. Isn't it the government's responsibility to punish the wrongdoers?" Prem Kumari asks.

She has been confined to a wheelchair because five years ago her fractured leg bone didn't heal. The loss of a son arrived at the heels of another blow—the death of her husband. She wonders aloud if the rebels understand a mother's pain at losing a child. "My son was in the police, he was their enemy, but what was my daughter-in-law's fault?" she demands. Madan Mohan, the eldest son, says after his brother's death their mother weeps constantly, cannot sleep and doesn't eat properly.

IGP Shrestha along with his wife and bodyguard were killed on 26 January when they set out for a morning walk in Bagdol. She vividly remembers that fateful morning as she anxiously waited for her son: they used to have morning tea together. Only when she insisted on the truth, her youngest son Jas Mohan told her that his brother had been shot in the head but was alive. She was told only later that he had died. Prem Kumari wishes for peace and prays the talks are a success but she wants her questions answered: "Will justice and fairness prevail in the peace process? Krishna Mohan believed in finding a peaceful

solution, but got killed, can the rebels justify their act?"

Fishy story

Rajdhani, 1 May

Before the sound of explosives detonating used to mean the security forces and Maoist guerrillas were fighting each other, but in the recent post-ceasefire days the villagers of Kusum VDC in Banke recognise it as the sound that accompanies someone's 'fishing' expedition in the Rapti River.

The army, police and even civilians are involved in the latest scheme that garners bigger catches than traditional methods. "We hear blasts night and day, and truckloads of fish are driven off daily," says a local.

The ecology of the area and the residents are both suffering under this fresh onslaught. The sound often transports them to tough times during the state of emergency. The local administration has banned bombing the river for fish through the local papers but no one pays the notices any heed. The activity is gaining popularity, partially because there is no law-enforcing unit to prohibit it. This rural area that shares its border with India has yet to see its' only police station renovated after it was bombed by Maoist rebels.

Banke's Chief District Officer Dilli Raj Joshi professed ignorance about dynamite 'fishing' in the Rapti. "Some unscrupulous persons may be doing that but we have yet to be informed about it," he says.

Back at Sundarijal >34

"Democracy will save Nepal"



31 March, 1977

Sundarijal

Yesterday I got five newspapers, the Gorkhapatra and the Rising Nepal. But they are not dated serially. The officers here are so unimaginative that they have given five random sets of papers to GM and since the segregation between us is so total that they can't correct it readily—perhaps they will have to get permission of the higher authority for the exchange of papers thus inadvertently distributed between the two detainees. The most important news so far as we are concerned is the formation of a new govt in Delhi shared by Morarji Desai—some of the members of the new govt are our friends like Madhu Dandawate, G Fernandes, Raj Narayan and not so young friends like Jagjivanram and Biju Patnaik. They are all our friends, including Shanti Bhusan. Atalbihari Bajpai is also known to us, but I don't know what attitude he will adopt in his relations with Nepal—he, as a foreign minister, is very much new in this present job. Even Gorkhapatra has admitted that the one person who has come out as the unchallenged leader of India is JP, who is however ill and can't be active. He should live for 3 years more to bring about cohesion in the new party that has won the election—then India will be safe for democracy which will be stable with 2 major political parties—Janata and the Congress. I don't hear of Chandra Shekhar, although his friend Mohan Dharia is included in the cabinet. The news from India is encouraging. Shailaja should have been there.

Yesterday towards the afternoon there was a big squall followed by a smart shower. The whole night there was intermittent rain. I am lonely and in such weather one needs desperately the company of those whom one loves. I am homesick. Had disturbed sleep also.

I was informed by the caption that since GM had marked down lines in the newspaper supplied to him it could not be delivered to me. I knew such trouble would arise, because GM is totally impervious to the atmosphere of segregation and as is his practice he marks some pertinent passages or items of news relevant to us for reference in future. There is a strict instruction that no communication of any kind should pass between us—and in order to effect this policy two sets of people are employed for us—separate cooks, separate men to serve food, etc. I was looking forward to getting those papers. Today only Gorkhapatra was supplied to me and the captain said that Rising Nepal hadn't arrived. All this is very annoying—Rising Nepal contains international news, however meagre—but something to lose your

imagination on about how things are developing outside. Gorkhapatra has published a report of a govt student conference which was inaugurated by Tulasi Giri, Vishwabandhu and others. Giri's speech is interesting as he takes pains to explain to the students that the recent changes in the [Indian] govt wouldn't affect Nepal's politics. He explicitly said that those who are happy at the formation of the new govt are India-inspired people who were in power in 1960, and they were more dangerous to national independence. Even Mrs Gandhi's government was not friendly to Nepal, and by implication, what further unfriendly action could the present Indian govt do? It appears reading between the lines of his speech there is a jubilation among democrats at the turn of events in India and some consternation among the supporters of the Panchayat because he has said [in Nepali] "Hami madhne kasai kasai ma dar dekhieko chha chhimeki deshma bhayeko ghatanako asar parchha ki bhanera." ["Some of us seem to be afraid of the changes in a neighbouring country that may affect us"].

He has tried to assuage their anxiety. He has also referred to JP about whom he said that he too had conceived of democratic partylessness and partyless election. Apart from all this he has even talked of *kranti* + *sankranti* like I used to explain to the hill people about my conception of total social change. After a long time Vishwabandhu has also spoken from the same platform and Rajeshwor Devkota too. These people are lightweights. Giri's speech is important. There is also a report of the king's inaugural speech at a reception conference at Madurai in today's paper. There is subtle, perhaps not so subtle, attempt to curry favour with India's Hindu sentiment in his speech. Otherwise the speech is most pedestrian—although there is an attempt at erudition and lofty thought in some parts of the speech which is mercifully very short. The king is stopping in New Delhi for two days. He will most certainly meet the new govt leaders of India and try to assess them. His father had a very poor opinion of their capabilities. He will further know the mood of the new govt. I am a little apprehensive at this point. The fact that the king decides to stay in New Delhi without official invitation is a ... climb down for him who never let an opportunity pass by to cock a snook at India. I hope the Indian leaders will tell him that democracy will save little Nepal, and her independence and this they must say with firmness. The king is naturally a little bewildered by the turn of events in India.

by PUNYASHEEL GAUTAM

REVIEW

The fury of family

Babu Raja mixes comedy, drama and reflection in equal measure.



Baburaja and Mama steer their troubled family through a troubled time with humour and irreverence.

For more than two decades, Studio 7 has offered audiences the most intimate theatre experience in Kathmandu. Like vernal fruit, its annual plays held at the Hotel Vajra have become a part of our spring calendar. This year's offering, *Babu Raja*, a tragic-comedy adapted from Celine Sereau's *Lapin Lapin*, examines the struggles of family life. The anchor character, the never-failing Mama (Ludmilla Hungerhuber), leads her troubled family through the crises of a troubled age, with each of her adult children returning home after giving up on or being chased from turbulent outside existences.

Reflected in this drama are the tragic failings of any family member, accentuated in *Babu Raja* by their coincidence with a surreal and unstable political climate. Each character has his or her own could-have-been story, with the culpability for unhappiness divided in varying degrees among individuals' situations, quirks of personality, and larger circumstances. On the one side are the daughters Maya (Johanna Wernicke-Rothmayer), who leaves her husband because he poses an unforgivable request to her over a café meal ("please pass the salt"), and Lula (Shahini Singh), who abandons her fiancé Toni (Saroj Dangol) at the altar for what appear to be petty domestic reasons. On the other side are the stormier, more complex personalities of the first two sons, Sunni (Eldum Dixit) and Hari (Mangal Man Maharjan), who respectively get caught up in gun-running and bomb plots. In the end, the play is less about the struggles of each character than about how to survive as a family, with ample doses of humour, life's most annoying and taxing situations.

The family's chances for survival and its ability to arrive at answers to the questions that vex it receive a boost from the outside—in this case, the third son and eponymous character, Baburaja (Sali Kanika). This science fiction-obsessed young man is truly an outsider, having been implanted in Mama's uterus by a space race conducting projects among humankind. The angelic Baburaja, however, does possess many of the answers, leading one to wonder how the arrival of a benevolent insider-outsider might help in solving life's tribulations. Vested with the most humane of human attributes, he helps keep tempers down. Being the youngest, he deserves, in Mama's eyes, the freshest bread—evidence of maternal doting and favouritism that sits uneasily with the already troubled putative medical student Sunni.

The Rajas, living in their increasingly cramped one-and-a-half room apartment, look to the leadership of the loving, shopping and all-around archetypically maternal Mama. Hungerhuber brings to life this strong central character with a self-assuredness arising from her lengthy experience on the Studio 7 stage. Temperamentally Mama's opposite, the mysterious, explosive Sunni serves as another pole in the family, leading a double life divided between being the "strong as concrete" next-in-line bread winner and his underground activities. Father (Rajendra Shrestha), at times aloof and constantly tired, wants to succeed for his family but instead is forced to break the news of his firing from a low-paying coat-and-tie job. The middle son, the gentle and nervous Hari, bursts into the family abode and back into family life a few steps ahead of pursuing police, shattering the belief that he is in Dubai earning good pay in a lawful profession. The two daughters, both lackadaisical, fill out the family.

The internal dynamics of the family are the central focus of the action, but unstable politics entangle it. As the family is pushed to the limit of its resources, an Orwellian, masked government figure (Purna Krishna Dangol) beams in over the TV to 'allay' fears and infuriate Sunni. The family dynamic is also impacted by the arrival of two outsiders, the lonely but boisterous upstairs neighbour Mrs Makhani (Sabine Lehmann) and the whining Toni.

With a bustling household and a crumbling political situation the family must draw together to face two catastrophic events—an arrest of Sunni on charges of terrorism and Baburaja's disappearance. The family succeeds in its twin tasks, with much comedy produced in the process. The play ends with a warm moral: no matter how adverse the situation is a little imagination and softening of stances can win the day.

Although the production has all of Studio 7's standard theatrical devices, like ear-splitting hullabaloo and Nepali dance *masala*, these are employed in moderation as comic relief. Unlike previous productions overpowering in sound, this one draws the audience in a little closer, even in an informal embrace. The gentle, playful touch of the production assures you that a child in the audience (there are always several present)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Donations are given out of free will but we decreed it was okay under certain circumstances to extract it by force."

-Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal), a member of the Maoist negotiation team in *Kantipur*, 27 April.



King Gyanendra: Active Monarchy
Baburam Bhattarai: Constituent assembly
Madhab Kumar Nepal and Girija Prasad Koirala: Reinstate parliament, all-party government

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 April-14 May

No refuge for Sharan

Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 April-14 May
By Gopal Dahal

Sharan Maya Rai died in the cage she was imprisoned in for five years (*see pic*). This young woman of Shilpakhi village in Baraha became mentally challenged nearly six years ago and her violent fits made her family cage her. When *Himal Khabarpatrika* first published her story three months ago, philanthropists here and abroad offered to pay for her treatment—all of which her superstitious family turned down. "Even the shaman could not treat her, what could a doctor do?" asked father-in-law Nak Bahadur.

At the insistence of local social workers, the family finally agreed to take Sharan Maya to Kathmandu, but not before the village medicine man gave another go. People contributed Rs 2200 to cover the cost of travel but by then it was too late for her. Her health, eroded by years of inhumane neglect, gave away and she died before she could leave her cage, much less her village. The fund collected for her treatment will now be used for her three children.

With no one to care for them, the children have been farmed out to relatives. The eldest one has been sent to stay with her aunt, and while the younger two wait for their turn they peer repeatedly into the cage where their mother was kept. The youngest misses her mother and tears stain her face while her brother sits in tightlipped silence.



Carlsberg Green Bar of the month

Log on to www.carlsberg.com.np and get a chance to win chilled Carlsberg.
Taleju Restaurant & Bar
Restaurant of Bar Mangal Bazar, Patan Durbar Square, Tel: 5538358

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

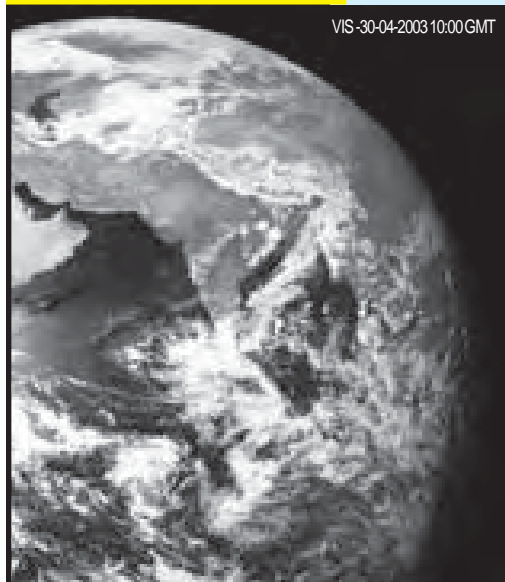
- ❖ **Kathmandu Vendors** paintings by Mark Jordans at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Contemporary paintings** by Kanchan Chander 25 April-5 May at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Tibetan paintings** till 20 May at Pathibhara Art Gallery, Thamel. 4256004

EVENTS

- ❖ **Studio 7 presents Babu Raja** at the Naga Theatre of the Vajra Hotel. Tickets Rs 700. 7.15 PM 2-3 May and 9-11 May. 4271545
- ❖ **Tennis coaching classes** Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **The Nepal Amateur Open 2003** of the Nepal Golf Association at Le Meridien, Gokarna Forest Golf Course and Sa Resort from 1-4 May. 4451212, 4450444
- ❖ **Friends of the Bagmati** Discussion Group 3 PM on 4 May at Gallery 9. Details friendsofthebagmatinepal@yahoo.com
- ❖ **AWON's Rock and Roll 8PM** on 3 May at Lincoln School. Tickets Rs 500.
- ❖ **MAHA's Dohari Geet** Madan Krishna Shrestha, Hari Bansa Acharya, Ram Krishna Dhakal and various artists in support of the Girl Child Project. 5.30 PM on 3 May Hotel Blue Star, Thapathali. Tickets Rs 800 single, Rs 1500 couple (drinks and dinner). 5527373, 981031220
- ❖ **Reiki Second Degree Workshop** 6-7 May, First Degree 10-11 May. Both Japanese and Western Reiki, at Baber Mahal Revisited. Elif at 5541613, reiki@eld.org.np

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The unseasonal storms that have been sweeping through the country in the past three weeks is correlated to a sudden rise in temperature—close to 40 degrees—in the plains of India that has led to the build up of moisture further north. Supported by two low-pressure centres, in Kashmir and Sikkim, the corridor extends over the Himalaya, creating a collision zone for the northwesterly cold front and warmer southwesterly currents. The gusty winds and sudden thundershowers will continue until the low-pressure areas diffuse. The Valley can expect a rainy weekend and clear skies early next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
28-13	28-13	29-14	30-14	30-15

CLASSIFIED

Visit Ground Zero Fine wines, designer candles, cards, gifts, stationery, wooden items, perfumes and more. Darbar Marg, opposite Hotel de l'Annapurna

Training RTC IELTS courses are taught by IELTS examiners using the very latest materials. Too good an opportunity to miss. Enroll now! Tel: 429590

To Let In Jawalakhel near Zoo Fully Furnished Apartment 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, spacious living, dining, modern kitchen individual telephone, terrace, overlooking English garden with tall trees in quiet surrounding. Contact: 524389

Visit Femilines, the Exclusive Lingerie Store

- for ladies undergarments, nightwear, bathrobes and more. Ladies staff. Opposite Sajha Yatayat, Harihar Bhawan, Pulchowk. Tel: 547428
- **Flowerlovers:** Flowerlovers, it's FUCHSIA time again!! See 60 beautiful varieties in bloom! Our lovely CYCLAMEN are also flowering. Only at THE BISHALNAGAR NURSERY, tel. 4431797; 5 min. from Bhatbateni Supermarket, 2min. from Bishalnagar Chowk (turn right and downhill).
- **Custom Made:** Generate wealth with Feng Shui! Get a tabletop fountain custom made for you. Call 981054102

For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5543333-36.

Hits विन्ति पत्र
खोराखोरी लाई गर्ना गरी ।

- ❖ शिक्षा (अनिवार्य) एच्छिक होइन ।
- ❖ शिक्षा उपहार होइन ।
- ❖ शिक्षा बालबालिकाको अधिकार हो ।

BBC on FM 102.4

Mon-Fri	0615-0645	BBC World Today
Sat	0615-0645	BBC Reporting Religion
Sun	0615-0645	BBC Agenda
Daily	2045-2115	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा

Sun-Fri	0740-0800	एकैछिन् (रेडियो पब्लिक)
Sun-Fri	0800-0830	डबली (विषयगत अन्तरक्रिया)
Sun-Fri	2000-2030	आजका कुरा (समसामयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800-0830	शान्ति अभियान
Sat	1930-2000	आचार विचार (सप्ताचारविषय सहकार्य)
Sat	2000-2030	कूटनीतिक मञ्च

Radio Sagarmatha
P.O. Box 6958, Bakhundole, Lalitpur, Nepal
Tel: ++977-1-545680, 545681, Fax: ++ 977-1- 530227
E-mail: radio@sagarmatha.org, www.radiosagarmatha.org

MUSIC



Break through

Nepali hip-hop is coming of age.

about things they know like love, ambition and 'making it', even politics, which explains why Nepali kids relate to this genre." Rappaz Union's third album has Nepali songs and a lot of Nepali musical influences—the sitar, *dhamru* and *bansuri* feature on several tracks.

A tourist walked in, bewilderment on his face. He heard the music outside on the street and came in to satisfy his curiosity. He introduced himself as DJ Mordy from Israel and said, "This is amazing," gesturing to the rappers, the audience and the sheer surprise at his discovery of the local hip-hop community that is small, tight and still redolent with an underground flavour. The support rappers show each other is evident when the Nepsydaz (*top, right*) are invited to come onstage. The six members—Kiran Shrestha (Mistah K), Gyanon (Dizazta G), Manas Ghale (MC Basic), Yengzi Sherpa (Rappayng) and Saurav (Shizo), are not all there but are well represented by the rest of their posse. They launch into a familiar tune and the penny drops—"Hell Raizer"

part of my life."

At 31, Chirag Bangdel who is the emcee at the event, could be the oldest audience member. His own preference leans toward rock and roll and jazz but points out that both were once considered renegade music, much like hip-hop today. The bad reputation came with rappers who swore allegiance to the 'thug life' with their 'gangsta' lyrics that glorified gun-blazing, Cristal-popping and designer-name-dropping—all far removed from Nepali youth who know Cristal but sip Carlsberg, dress in designer fakes and call each other 'nigga' affectionately. "It's a cliché but music is universal, and Rappaz Union is a hybrid, a positive one," he says. "They sing

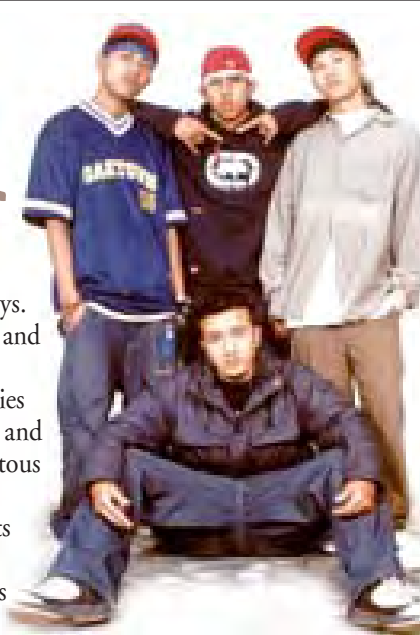
is their baby. Others were invited to join a 'battle': a hip-hop war of words locked to a recorded flow where the wittiest one wins. It is unscripted, spontaneous and breathtaking in its intensity to cow the other competitors down under a verbal barrage. Admittedly it was sprinkled with profanity but what earned the most audience appreciation were rhyme, rhythm and humour. Repartees fly at each other, and in an odd way it sounded like a close kin of the Nepali *dohari* folk tradition where male and female singers exchange risqué dialogue through song.

Susan Shrestha was dancing with abandon to American rap star Nelly and it's obvious she knows all the lyrics to "Ride with me". She is a fan of Rappaz Union and deftly makes an "R" and "U" with her right hand. It takes me a full minute to do the same. "I love this music," she says simply to my question of how she can identify with a genre of music that was born in the African American urban ghetto. "They say things we're going through, and it's a bonus that it's got a great groove too!" she adds. Susan paid Rs 300 to be there. "It's worth

every rupee and more," she says. The entry price includes food and the plate comes laden with momos, pakoras and french fries served with plenty of ketchup and washed down with the ubiquitous cola. On a small level the combination platter represents the music—a curiously bold blend of East and West that is nonetheless quite appetising.

The process of give and take is evident in Nepali rap. Girish and Pranil or GP recently put out a rap single in Nepali that defiantly celebrates the self, "*Ma yesto chhu/ma tyasto chhu/jasto panni bhaye daami chhu*"—"I may be like this or like that, but anyway you cut it, I'm da' bomb." If the popularity of the song and Rappaz Union's third album is anything to go by, hip-hop has arrived in the kingdom. The high visibility of hip-hop is only

part of the genre's popularity. It has to do with this generation carving out a niche for itself and finding a medium of expression. It may be a while before hip-hop begins to pay the bills, but there is no doubt the genre is experiencing a break through: young Nepali hip-hop acts have talent, an audience and the chutzpah to take, break and make something their own. Respect y'all. ♦



A mega event by DEEPAK BAJRACHARYA performing LIVE with his band at Dashrath Stadium Tripureshwar, On 24th May (10th Jestha) Saturday

Program Timing: 01:00 P.M. onwards :- Gates Open. 03:30 P.M. to 04:30 P.M. :- Entertain by one of the best DJs in town. None other than DJ Raju Singh. 04:30 P.M. to 05:00 P.M. :- Opening Band Music. 05:00 P.M. onwards :- It's show time. A mega event will begin by thousands of heartthrob Deepak Bajracharya, with Ricky, Bicky, Firoj & Rojan on Acoustic Guitar, Aman on Drums, Pawan on Bass, Amul on Keyboard & Saxophone, Indraman & Pujan on Percussion & many more..

Tickets: Rs. 100/- & Rs. 200/- only

Ticket Outlets: All Nanglo Bakery Cafe, Nanglo's Deli, Durbarmarg. All Nepal Dairy, Tik N'Tok Music Shop, New Road/Jawalakhel. All Dexo Music Shop, Suwal Music Shop, New Road/Lazimpat. All Momo King Restaurant. Blue Bird Departmental Store, Thapathali/Lazimpat. Bhat Bhateni Super Market, Bhatbhateni. All U.F.O., Fashion Wear, Sursudha Music Shop, Thamel, Himalayan Java, Thamel, Station Pub, Thamel, Yes Cafe, Khichapokhari DotNepal Pvt. Ltd., Teku. At **Dasharath Stadium**. Only on 24th May Saturday from 08:00 am onwards (If Tickets are available).

For further details please contact: DotNepal Pvt. Ltd. - 4247978. Mobile No. - 981036428. Email:- deepak@99nepal.com, P.O. Box - 910, Teku, Kathmandu, Nepal. Log on to : www.deepakbajracharya.com

Event Managed by: **Maita International**
In association with **Dot Nepal Pvt. Ltd.**

JAINEPAL CINEMA'S

First **Nepali** Feature

Sukha Dukha

Special Prices

Balcony - Rs 110
Rear Stall - Rs 70
Front Stall - Rs 50

Show Timings: 12PM & 3PM

SHANGHAI KNIGHTS

6PM

Telephone booking: 4442220
Online booking
www.jainepal.com

2 REASONS WHY THE WORLD'S BEST SELLING RAZOR JUST GOT BETTER.

Get 2 Gillette Mach3 cartridges worth **Rs. 235/- absolutely FREE!**

Now, when you buy a Gillette Mach3 razor, you get 2 additional Gillette Mach3 cartridges absolutely free! That's not all, because unlike other ordinary blades, Gillette Mach3 has specially positioned blades that shave progressively closer in a single stroke. Giving you a closer shave in fewer strokes and with lesser irritation. So hurry, enjoy the closest shave three times over.

THE CLOSEST SHAVE IN FEWER STROKES WITH LESS IRRITATION

* Limited offer. This offer available on special offer packs. Razors available without special offer too.

Buy any McQuay A.C. ...and take away any one of these SAMSUNG Products

Absolutely FREE (subject to limited stock conditions apply)

12 Years (subject to limited stock conditions apply)

Authorised Dealer: **AIRTECH Industries Pvt. Ltd.**
Thapathali, Kathmandu, Tel: 421 9999, 424 3997
Fax: 422 8522, E-mail: airtech@mos.com.np

Watt Mounted Split A.C.
Ceiling Cassette Split A.C.
Ceiling Mounted Split A.C.

Nepal Dealers:
Pokhara - 9850-30425, Biratnagar - 535055, Nepalgunji - 524200
Dharan - 526704, Narayanghat - 525873, Birgunj - 9850-22021, Hetauda - 525284

SAMSUNG DIGITAL everyone's invited.

TV CS-14H2, Refrigerator SR18 (18L 4 Star), Microwave Oven CE287P, Washing Machine W19100



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

We're supersonic

PARIS—A new private international airline from Nepal has expressed an interest in acquiring hand-me-down Concorde from British Airways and Air France this year to augment its fleet ahead of the Destination Nepal Year 2004, informed sources told CNN.

"This may be the right time for us to get the 12 supersonic jets since our tourism industry has so much catching up to do," the informed source said at the Paris Air Show which begins this week. Airline industry insiders say this will enable tourists to fly to Nepal twice as fast as they fly to any other place in the Asia-Pacific region. Passengers will have to take a two-hour

eating them. Domestic airlines announced further austerity measures this week under which they would no longer provide barf bags on flights. Airline sources told CNN it will be possible for queasy passengers to ask the flight attendant to open the emergency exit if they can't hold it back any longer. However, under the Warsaw Convention, there is a charge for every inflight opening of the exits to jettison gastric contents. Cash payments must be made in advance.

The rising price of aviation fuel has also prompted a Nepali company to launch the world's first airline to operate a fleet of gliders. Haba Dari Airways Pvt Ltd, based in Baglung, will have daily direct connections to destinations within Nepal. "Our fares are very competitive because we don't have any fuel costs," said CEO, Captain Badal. The gliders will use prevailing winds and Himalayan convection currents to transport passengers quietly and comfortably. The inaugural flight to Jomsom last week had to make an emergency landing in Urumqi because of adverse weather conditions.

Meanwhile, security has been further tightened at the Tribhuvan Airtight Airport to apprehend any viruses that may be trying to sneak into the kingdom without visas. Masked gunmen have been posted at the bottom of the ramp to apprehend any suspicious-looking micro-organisms. There are hostile immigration officials who will try their best to make the germs feel unwelcome in Nepal followed by accustomed officials downstairs who will carry out aggressive antibody searches. Then, there are two armoured personnel carriers parked permanently outside the airport with their 45mm cannon at the ready. It is therefore highly unlikely that the SARS virus can ever get into the kingdom, government sources said. ♦

rickshaw ride to the airport during Nepal bandhs for their three-minute roundtrip Super-Quickie Mountain Flight at Mach 2. The planes will also be deployed to upgrade flights in the domestic sector so that travel time is drastically reduced. ("Ladies and gentlemen, this is the flight deck. Welcome aboard this one o'clock Concorde shuttle to Pokhara, as you may have noticed we have just become airborne and are shattering the sound barrier. If you can still hear me, our flying time today will be approximately fifty-five seconds. Flight crew, prepare for arrival.")

Until the Concorde arrive, however, domestic airlines have announced further belt-tightening and stopped serving refreshments on board. They have also stopped the distribution of cotton for earplugs because some hungry passengers on Nepalganj flights were observed

NEPALI SOCIETY

Coming out

When he set up the Blue Diamond Society, Sunil Babu Pant thought gays were rare in Nepal, and that they would be as rare as the blue gems. Two years later he has discovered they are as common as left-handed people. Since 2001, almost 10,000 Nepalis have contacted Blue Diamond in Kathmandu alone and through its network, an even greater number have come out of the closet in other towns.

"We realised we could not afford to wait for others to speak for us. If we were to end the continuous marginalisation that we faced, we had to be prepared to struggle for our own rights and concerns," says Pant. Their efforts are already paying off—the national strategy against HIV/AIDS recently recognised men having sex with men (MSM) as a vulnerable group in Nepal. And only last week senior police officers pledged to sensitise the police force about the issue. It's a promise the Blue Diamond Society hopes will end police brutality and exploitation of the Nepali gay community.

Sunil is a computer professional who trained in the former Soviet Union, and worked in Japan and Hong Kong. After returning home to Gorkha he resigned from his technical job and turned to social service. He worked with destitute women, but it was when he moved to

Kathmandu and came in touch with the underground gay community that his idea for an organisation for homosexuals was born.

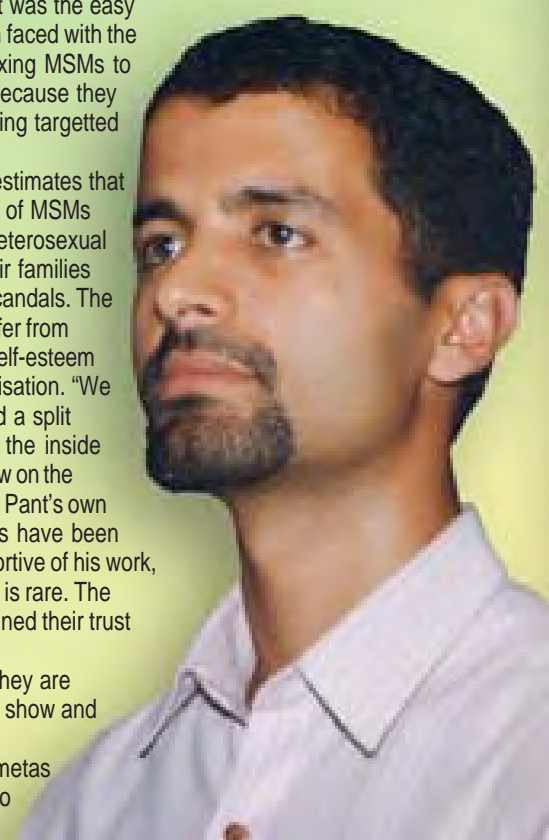
The Blue Diamond Society has had to struggle against taboos and mores. The first attempt at registering the society was denied because the officials objected to the very concept of homosexuality. Pant was pressurised to change the organisation's objective into "correcting homosexual behaviour" but finally found a loophole that allowed him to work in the area of male health. That was the easy part. He was then faced with the challenge of coaxing MSMs to join the society because they were afraid of being targeted by homophobes.

The society estimates that about 95 percent of MSMs are forced into heterosexual marriages by their families who don't want scandals. The homosexuals suffer from depression, low self-esteem and social ostracisation. "We are forced to lead a split life—different on the inside from what we show on the outside," he says. Pant's own family and friends have been "incredibly" supportive of his work, but he knows this is rare. The society slowly gained their trust over the years.

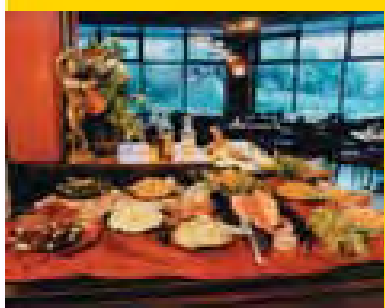
This Friday, they are holding a fashion show and beauty pageant. Participants are metas and tas (those who

assume female roles and their male partners) who are intent on carving out a social space for themselves. Pant's other concern is the plight of women who are attracted to members of their own sex.

He wonders, "If Nepali men who enjoy greater freedom, decision making and mobility are tormented so much for their sexual preferences, how much more horrendous the situation must be for women!" ♦



BUFFET AT ITS BEST



Interactive cuisine

Whether it's Breakfast, Lunch or Dinner, it's buffet with a difference. So different we have brought the kitchen to the restaurant! Now you can select your pickings and have them cooked right in front of you... just the way you want.

Summer specials-Dosas for breakfast & Chattamaris for lunch everyday.



For details & reservations contact:
Guest Services. Tel: 4248999, extn: 2865



BUMRUNGRAD HOSPITAL

World Class Medicine...

- ONE-STOP MEDICAL CENTER
Emergency, outpatient, diagnostics, therapeutics, inpatient
- INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED DOCTORS
Over 800 physicians in all medical specialties
- REGIONAL REFERRAL CENTER FOR ADVANCED CARE
Heart, Cancer, Neurosurgery...
- ASIA'S FIRST INTERNATIONALLY ACCREDITED HOSPITAL

World Class Service...

- INTERNATIONAL PATIENT CENTER
Interpreters, visa assistance, medical coordination
- INTERACTIVE WEBSITE
- EMAIL APPOINTMENTS
- ON-SITE HOUSING
14 serviced apartments

BUMRUNGRAD HOSPITAL
BANGKOK, THAILAND
World Class Medicine...World Class Service

23 Sukhumvit Soi 3 (Soi Nana Road), Bangkok 10110, Thailand
Tel: +66 (2) 667 1234 Fax: +66 (2) 667 1234
E-mail: info@bumrungrad.com
www.bumrungrad.com

