

## The Beatles

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Great Himalayan Volkswagen Beetle Rally gets underway Saturday, 10 May and this year the theme is peace. Some 30 Beetles of all ages and from all walks of life will take part in the rally from BICC to Club Himalaya at Nagarkot. This year, the Bugs will be accompanied in solidarity by other non-Beetle VWs, vintage cars and Enfield motorcycles resident in Kathmandu. Money raised will go to the Ganesh Foundation for cleft-lip operations, the Maya Foundation and Shanti Shanti Sangh. Even if you don't have a VW, you can sponsor one. The rally will have prizes for fastest Beetle, slowest Beetle, best Beetle, prettiest Beetle, etc.

fundganesh@wlink.com.np



# Royal wrath

# King Gyanendra strikes back at the political parties with an unprecedented media blitz.

But King Gyanendra's dramatic use of the media card was welcomed by some independent analysts. "It was about time. The tirades against the monarchy by the politicians was getting unbearable," said one prominent businessman who wanted to remain anonymous. "The king has exposed the duplicity of the political parties."

The palace's media broadsides are expected to harden the stance of the parties, and bring them on a confrontation course with the king. For their part, the politicians have been using the threat of street agitation to make King Gyanendra agree to their demand of either a restoration of the dissolved house or the formation of an all-party interim government.

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**Keep the window open**

The king has also left the door slightly ajar for compromise. In the meetings, he agreed that the constitution could be amended or even replaced, if that was what the parties and the people wanted. This gives a face-saving way for parties to call off their agitation. Interestingly, this offer is also consistent with the main Maoist demand in peace talks which resume Friday. ♦

SHIVA GAUNLE

**A**fter months of stoically enduring barbs from politicians, King Gyanendra broke his silence Wednesday with a slew of on the record conversations to Kathmandu dailies.

One day before the political parties launched a sequel to the People's Movement by hitting the streets, the king used the media as a weapon to go directly to the people. This is the first time in Nepali history that a monarch has used the media so aggressively to win public support. The reason King Gyanendra could do this was because he allowed press freedom ever since sacking an elected government six months ago. The media's independence lent the king's message added credibility. Interestingly, there was no report in the state-controlled *Gorkhapatra* which was busy celebrating its 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary on Wednesday.

*Nepali Times* interviewed some of the editors who met the king, and although the meetings were all one-on-one the king's message to all of them was the same. Some editors thought they were getting exclusive interviews, and the sessions lasted late into Wednesday night.

"He expressed disappointment at the way the media has been covering the movement of the political parties," Pushkar Lal Shrestha, of *Nepal Samacharpatra* told us. King Gyanendra's message to the editors was clear: don't be misled by the rhetoric of the political leadership. "We need peace now, and the media has to help," he told them.

All the conversations were published with banner headlines on Thursday morning and publishers reported brisk newstand sales. The papers highlighted King Gyanendra's main message that he was not interested in gaining absolute power and that he firmly supported a constitutional monarchy and

parliamentary democracy. He blamed political parties for disregarding the national interest.


The king also defended his October Fourth move to sack Prime Minister Deuba, refuting the parties' claim that it was unconstitutional. He went on to blame the political parties for refusing to come on board and assist in forming a united government in October. He said they could not agree among themselves about the prime minister's position, and Lokendra Bahadur Chand was their consensus candidate.

"The political parties have a right to speak out, but there is a time and place for opposition and it should not jeopardise the peace process," the king added. On Thursday, a five-party alliance kicked off its movement with a silent march in honour of 'martyrs for democracy'. They refuted the king's claim that the agitation would jeopardise the talks.

"Our movement is not anti-peace, in fact it will strengthen peace, it is against regression to autocracy," senior Congress leader, Ram Sharan Mahat said.

**Times** nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 84

**Q. Should a Maoist representative be given a position in the interim government? Yes, No, Maybe, Don't know**



Response	Percentage
Yes	54.2%
No	43.2%
Maybe	1.8%
Don't know	0.8%

Total votes: 2022

Weekly Internet Poll # 85. To vote go to: [www.nepalnews.com](http://www.nepalnews.com)

**Q. Do you think the agitation by the parties will end the present political deadlock?**

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# The force of force

## No one is going to deliver us peace on a silver platter.

Government and Maoist negotiators are meeting again on Friday, but this touch-and-go talks don't seem to be getting anywhere. During the first round, Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai did all the talking, while all poor Badri Prasad Mandal could do was shake his head in bewilderment. Former-*pancha* Mandal has reason to be. Items on the Maoist wish list cannot be met without substantially limiting the role of the king. There is no way a government of the king's nominees would dare discuss such a possibility.

For all his pomp, Comrade Baburam didn't enter Kathmandu at the head of a victorious army. Voters of Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot haven't sent him to the capital to frame a new constitution. He has no mandate other than the support of a group of armed insurgents calling themselves Maoists. While it's imprudent to undermine the power of any rebellion, it's also a fact that a partially successful insurgency often fails to confer either legitimacy or authority on its leaders.

While entering into any negotiations, the rebels have no option other than to depend on the support of national and international public opinion. Maoists have antagonised both in the past.

It's not that the Maoists aren't aware of this hard reality—Krishna Bahadur Mahara's reaction against the decision of US government of keeping the Maoists on a 'watch list' of international terrorists betrays the nervousness of all his comrades. Maoists cadre are probably readying themselves for the next phase of their 'people's war' even as some of their leaders are busy assuaging the fears of the international community in the capital city.

Parties to an armed conflict seldom enter into negotiations unless they can do so from a position of strength. Politicians who believe that the Maoists are sincere for the talks this time need to ask themselves: has

anything changed in the rhetoric of Krishna Bahadur Mahara from the time he walked out of negotiations in November 2001?

If Lokendra Bahadur Chand's address to the nation last week is anything to go by, it's clear that he has neither the authority nor the motivation to take talks with the Maoists to its logical conclusion. In all probability, Chand isn't even aware of what's happening behind the scenes between the insurgents and the spokesperson of the government negotiating team. It's unlikely that Col Narayan Singh Pun takes the trouble to inform his prime minister about what he discusses with Mahara. Indeed, why should he? Like the prime minister, each member of the cabinet has been appointed directly by the king, and holds office at his pleasure. After the ignominious exit of three powerful ministers from the cabinet last month, the remaining ones have begun to feel the rug moving under their feet.

It's not just the prime minister, every one else enjoying the perks of executive power these days has a vested interest in keeping the issue of Maoist insurgency festering. If it weren't for the Maoists, none of the present set of ministers would be eligible for the positions that they currently hold. Should the insurgency end today, the Royal Nepali Army would lose its only justification of having the first claim on the state treasury.

In Machiavellian politics, it is said that the

most improbable explanation is often closest to reality. On the face of it, a 'tactical unity' between the Maoists (ostensibly fighting to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat) and Monarchists (clearly aspiring to prolong autocracy for as long as they can) appears highly unlikely. But both parties to the armed conflict probably find it expedient to undermine the role of major political parties at this moment. That's understandable, because any such campaign will reassert the power of conviction and weaken the forces of coercion.

The argument that People's Movement II will hamper the peace process is absurd. It's the mainstream political parties who have launched the real struggle for durable peace in the country. If the movement succeeds in making the Maoists and Monarchists understand each other's games, that will be its biggest achievement. After all, imparting education in statecraft is one of the main functions of political parties in any democracy.

It's true that, above all else, Nepalis have been yearning for peace for quite some time. Now they seem to have woken up to the hard reality that no one is going to deliver it to them on a silver platter. It's this awakening that will ultimately help establish a just and durable peace in the country.



ROBIN SAVANA

## LETTERS

### RANK AND FILE

How will the two most prominent members of the class of 1970 from United Mission to Nepal's Amar Jyoti Janata School in Gorkha be remembered? I was disappointed to read that Devkota had no plans of attending the class picnic and that Bhattarai hadn't even been informed. It would have been nice for them to put aside their differences for a few hours and enjoy the camaraderie they once must have shared as classmates.

Rajil Risal, email

Your article on the two doctors was praiseworthy. In my opinion, Devkota's contributions to Nepali society have been more valuable. Bhattarai's ideological path left the country with no future. He could have used his brilliance and contributed to Nepal's development like Devkota has in the field of neuroscience. It is easy to carry guns and hold sway through threats, but only by fair and free elections can the Maoists regain the trust of the Nepali people.

Kumar Basnet  
Sophia University, Tokyo

### RNA DEBATE

Dhruba Kumar's 'Demobilisation, demilitarisation and democratisation' (#143) and the

rejoinder made a good read. The military is a matter of national pride for every nation and that it costs money to train, equip and upgrade this 'necessary evil', like it or not. Compared to other corrupt governments institutions and ministries, the Royal Nepali Army is one of the most highly trained and disciplined outfits in Nepal, considering the meagre resources available to it. Asking for better equipment is not asking too much. Dhruba Kumar should have exposed the politics that is bringing this country to its knees.

SK Bista, email

### SHOWTIME

Re: 'It's show time!' by Navin Singh Khadka (#143). It's shocking that the political main stream parties are acting like enemies of the nation. Sadly, most Nepalis have become used to political leaders changing their actions and slogans. Nepal has suffered for many years because of their poor political decisions. The government and the Maoists are determined to re-



establish peace and we must support them. It's clear the political parties are on the streets because they want to corrupt any attempts at peace and drag our nation lower.

Buddhi Pant, email

Looking at the current situation in Nepal, it seems that there is something seriously wrong with our education system. How else could you explain the inability of our students to tell right from wrong. Who in their right mind would believe what GP Koirala and MK Nepal say?

Taira, New York

At a time when the government and the Maoist rebels are sitting for talks to end seven years of civil war, Nepal's selfish politicians are thinking of ways to get back in the driver's seat and spoil our chance for peace and goodwill. If they come to power I am sure the Maoists will walk out of the talks. Why does Nepali society so naively believe the propaganda of the political parties and especially GP Koirala who did absolutely nothing but loot our country for nine years? And why is your esteemed newspaper supporting (at least tacitly) this man and other nincompoops?

Sushil Dhital, Haryana, India

### KINGCRAFT

In 'Kingcraft' (#142) Puskar Bhusal says, "more Nepalis believe democracy is at greater risk from the palace than from the Maoists". He should have backed his statement with the source of his information. If I remember correctly, an opinion poll in *Nepali Times* (#140) suggested otherwise.

Pawan, Sydney

I agree with Puskar Bhusal's 'Meddle tally' (#143). Nepali politicians and intellectuals not only appreciate, but actively cultivate foreign intervention and interference when it helps them to undermine their domestic opponents. But when the foreign 'advice' or 'counsel' appears to go against their perceived interest, we hear unconvincing rhetoric of sovereignty and independence. As a foreigner living here, I don't understand why the Nepali intellectuals, including Puskar Bhusal, see foreign interference coming only from the West when the meddling from the South appears to be far more serious and self-interested. Or am I missing something? I would appreciate further enlightenment from knowledgeable sources.

Jurgen Mathias, Thamel

### LAK

It is disappointing to see articles like Daniel Lak's 'Closure is a good thing' (#142). Such a simplistic perspective on the complex subject of development (a process which no country, even among those in the so called developed world, has fully achieved) is insulting to your readers, whether foreign or Nepali. It is always easy to criticise, and the cheap and cynical point scoring contained in this article benefits no one, the insults hurled from every line are not backed by the quotation of a single shred of hard evidence or reasoned argument. Debate is healthy, but these ravings are irresponsible

Roop Jyoti, Kathmandu

### CORRECTIONS

The SLC ranks reported in 'Class of 1970' (#142) were incorrect. Gorkhapatra, dated 6 May 1970 (Baisakh 23, 2027), lists the top 3 as: Baburam Bhattarai from Amar Jyoti Janata Madhyamik Vidhyalaya (Gorkha), first. Prakash Sayami from Shanti Nikunj Vidhalaya, second and Jay Singh Shah from Tri-Chandra High School, third. Upendra Devkota was ranked tenth.

In 'The good, bad and ugly' (#143) the statue in the main picture was incorrectly identified. It was that of King Mahendra.



## NATION

### COMMENT

At least there is one thing everyone seems to agree on: the current political crisis requires serious changes in our constitution.

It is in the best interest of the country that the new constitution be drafted by an all-party negotiating team, and upon its completion, be brought in front of the people for a referendum. During the negotiation, issues dealing with public policies must be separated from the constitutional fundamentals. Whether we elect a Constituent Assembly or amend the existing constitution, the following seven areas must be the guiding principles.

#### 1. SOVEREIGNTY OF PARLIAMENT

The Maoists and the political parties have raised the contentious issue of who controls the army. Ignoring this point will not make it go away. In other monarchies like Spain, the parliament has supreme authority over the armed forces. In the Netherlands, the reigning monarch acts through royal decree as defined by an act of parliament. Both cases spell out the procedures very clearly. In Nepal the parliament does not have any authority to declare an emergency, and there is heavy reliance on a three-person Defence Council. A new or revised constitution must clarify this ambiguity. It is crucial that a more democratic decision-making process in parliament and perhaps the upper house must replace the Defence Council. The current Articles 118 and 115 can be collapsed to produce the following amendments:

#### Provisions Regarding the Royal Nepali Army, emergency, alarm and war

1. If a grave crisis arises in regard to the sovereignty or integrity of the Kingdom of Nepal or the security of any part thereof, whether by war, external aggression, armed rebellion or extreme economic disaster, His Majesty may, as defined by Act of Parliament, declare or order a State of Emergency with respect to the whole of the Kingdom of Nepal or any specified part thereof.
2. Immediately after the declaration of a State of Emergency and whenever it considers it necessary, until such time as the State of Emergency is terminated by Royal Decree, the Parliament shall decide the duration of the State of Emergency. The two Chambers of the Parliament shall consider and decide upon the matter in joint session.
3. A declaration that the Kingdom is in a state of war shall not be made without the prior approval of the Parliament.
4. During the dissolution of the House of Representatives, the National Assembly shall exercise the powers of the House of Representatives for the purposes of clause (1), (2) and (3).
5. The State of Alarm shall be declared by the Government, by means of a Decree agreed upon by the Council of Ministers, for a maximum period of fifteen days informing the House of Representatives, which has convened immediately for that purpose and without whose authorisation the period cannot be extended. The House of Representatives shall not extend the period beyond the additional maximum limit of thirty days.
6. The authorisation and proclamation of a State of Emergency or Alarm must expressly determine its purposes, the territorial area to which it is extended and its duration.
7. Such approval shall not be required in cases where consultation with Parliament proves to be impossible as a consequence of the actual existence of a state of war.
8. The democratically elected people's representatives and His Majesty shall have supreme authority over the armed forces.
9. His Majesty, as a supreme Commander-in-Chief, shall operate and use the Royal Nepali Army on the recommendation as defined by Act of Parliament.
10. The Royal Nepali Army shall maintain its professional-

ism according to its own organisational rules and code of conduct.

11. The Army Chief of Staff and the Commander-in-Chief shall have complete loyalty to the Constitution.

12. His Majesty shall appoint the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Nepali Army on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

These suggestions could provide the middle ground to the demands of the Maoists and the parties. Further, clause (6) provides the government with some power to act quickly in case of a grave situation.

The growing rift between the monarchy and the parliamentary forces can directly be attributed to the use or misuse of Article 127. There are two problems with this article: it doesn't clarify what constitutes 'an obstacle', and it doesn't provide an alternative in case of a dissolved house. Revised, Article 127 may look as follows:

#### Power to Remove Difficulties

1. If any difficulty arises in connection with the implementation of this Constitution, His Majesty may, as defined by Act of Parliament, issue necessary Orders to remove such difficulty.
2. During a dissolution of the House of Representatives, the National Assembly shall exercise the powers of the House of Representatives for the purposes of clause (1).
3. The Proclamation of Order, as defined by Act of Parliament, pertaining to (1) or (2) must expressly determine its purposes.

Such provisions will broaden the checks and balances by involving the Upper House in decision-making and giving it a watchdog role. King Gyanendra used Article 127 to fire an elected prime minister for "incompetence", but contravened Article 35.2 which prohibits him from doing the very same thing. And instead of using Article 128 to form a new council of ministers from the members of the major parties, the king appointed a leader from a smaller party. Major parties label his move as unconstitutional, but ironically, the Supreme Court cannot discuss the issue, because Article 31 does not allow any petition against the royal move. Article 35 therefore vests executive powers both in the king and the council of ministers, raising further questions about the functionality of the interim government. The carefully worded changes in Article 127 make Articles 128, 31, and 35 less alarming.

#### 2. POLITICAL/ECONOMIC DEVOLUTION

The grassroots must be given decision-making powers through a system of decentralised regional governments. Further, a clear division of task among the three layers (village, region and centre) of governments must be spelled out in the constitution.

**Centre:** Defence, custom and import duties, postal, regional and international matters, citizenship, science and technology, highways, big dams, waterways, income taxes, VAT, etc

**Regional:** Health, small and medium hydropower and distribution, autonomous universities, feeder roads, forest resources, tourism, etc.

**Village:** Health post, elementary schools, property taxes, business registration fees, sanitation, water supplies, local tourism etc.

#### 3. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

The current Westminster type of winner-take-all system, also known as 'first-past-the-post', should be replaced by mixed proportional representation (PR). This method allows a



## Recommended changes in the existing constitution that should satisfy everyone.

#### 5. FAIRNESS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Ethnic diversity in the country should be a source of tremendous pride and identity and we should all celebrate it. But, using that to generate discriminatory practices must be declared illegal in the strongest term in our constitution. The gender discrimination in property rights and work force employment should not be tolerated and enforced by a special commission.

#### 6. GUARANTEE OF LIBERTY

Elections alone do not guarantee democracy. In addition to establishing strong institutions with the rule of law and the separation of power, a working liberal democracy and its constitution must also guarantee the basic human rights, including the protection of private property, free speech, and religious tolerance. Proper land reform can address the issue of poverty, economic freedom and a free market are essential in spurring economic growth and creating jobs. A strong democracy cannot flourish without protecting property rights of individuals and economic incentives.

#### 7. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The amendment clause will be a thorny issue, especially under the current environment of mistrust among the three political forces. To safeguard any potential foul play and to avoid conflict of interest, the following mechanism may be implemented:

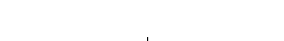
1. With a vote of at least two thirds in each Houses, an Act of Parliament shall be passed stating that an amendment to the Constitution in the form proposed shall be considered. The Act of Parliament has an option of requiring a referendum.
2. The two Houses shall be dissolved after the Act referred to in (1) has been published.
3. The newly elected Houses shall consider the Bill and it shall be passed only if at least two thirds of the votes in each Houses cast are in favour.
4. The bill requiring a referendum in (1) must have a simple majority of the votes cast in the referendum before being considered for a vote by the newly elected houses in (3).

What is urgently required is for the major political parties, the Maoists, and the king to join forces for a larger public good. They need to work together to shape a new constitution that espouses free market and property rights not a command economy, a strong judiciary not the people's courts, a professional army under civilian control that respects human rights not an errant militia, social justice not social engineering, a sovereign nation not a subservient satellite, a multiparty system not a one party autocracy and a constitutional monarch not an absolute one.

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by ALOK K BOHARA





# More power to the

**HEMLATA RAI** in DUKACHHAP . . .  
As evening falls over this small villager in southern Lalitpur, the inky darkness is broken only by the unsteady flickering of kerosene lamps and *tukis*. But outside, the sky above Kathmandu glows with bright city lights.

Shanti Kala Shrestha, a primary school teacher, misses the convenience of electricity that she had grown accustomed to in her home village. "It's little wonder that children in this village do so poorly in their exams," she says, motioning to the *tuki*. Dukachhap's lack of electricity is remarkable considering it is located across the river from Nepal's first power plant at Pharping, which will soon celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The villagers used to complain, now they are just resentful. "It is sheer negligence on the part of the government. They are happy to sit in Kathmandu with their bright lights, not one cares for small villages like ours," says Dilli Prasad Ghimire, Shrestha's neighbour. Indeed, if this is the situation for a village so close to the capital, it is easy to imagine how much worse it must be elsewhere.

Only 18 percent of Nepal's 23 million population have access to electricity. Rural areas are far down the receiving line: only six percent of people living in the hinterlands have access to electricity. With only 30,000 new connections a year, the Nepal Electricity Authority's



MIN. BARACHARYA

(NEA) rate of distribution is outstripped by growing demand. Half of the 525 MW electricity available in the national grid is consumed in Kathmandu Valley alone, and the NEA spends more than 45 percent of its income on purchasing electricity from independent power producers.

Of late the buzzword in the corridors of the NEA and other government planning offices is "rural electrification". Big power-sector donors like the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, SIDA and DANIDA have shown an interest in projects and are interested in funding schemes to take power to the villages. NEA itself is keen to replicate

the success of irrigation and water management sectors, by giving power generation and distribution to community users groups (CUGs) that will allow local involvement in electricity generation, distribution and even in the collection of revenues.

This new concept is expected to simplify electricity delivery into an effective and reliable method with CUGs responsible for distribution and collection of revenues. The government hopes local involvement will reduce non-technical losses, and cut operational and maintenance problems.

The vision to expand rural electrification with the help of local initiative is not a new idea. It was first envisaged in the 9<sup>th</sup>

Five Year Plan but was never implemented. The NEA is determined to see it through this time. Beginning July, communities can apply for the development of power projects and/or distribution systems independently or in partnership with the public sector. The directive also plans on assigning CUGs a 10 percent share from arrears collected from defaulters, and a 25 percent from defaulted fees of blacklisted consumers.

The good news about rural electrification is that Nepalis are willing to pay for it. A United Mission to Nepal (UMN) study shows that electricity is highly valued and rural users are willing to pay as much as urban residents, even though it is three

## Most of rural Nepal still plunges into darkness after sundown. Irony for a country that has such immense hydropower potential.

times higher than in industrialised countries. The study also found Nepali consumers who spend an average of about \$9 annually on kerosene lamps lit for three hours in the evening, were prepared to pay up to 30 cents, or up to \$ 1.50 per month, for every kilowatt-hour of electricity.

Senior charter accountant Ratna Sansar Shrestha is skeptical about community involvement because of the cost factor. "Even with the private sector as part of the deal, rural consumers may not get cheaper power," he says. "The NEA cannot go lower than the Rs 4 per unit that rural consumers are already charged."

There are other dangers: rural electrification has been a pork-barrel issue for politicians and is often done haphazardly. Little effort is focused on assessing whether designs and standards are appropriate for rural populations where light is the principal use and peak demand is low. "Things will not work properly unless a monitoring mechanism is put into place and is active in full capacity," warns Sridhar Devkota, of the German-funded Small Hydropower Promotion Project.

Adopting an alternative approach to producing and distributing has yielded encouraging results at Syangja in mid-western Nepal. The Butwal Power Company distributes electricity produced from the 5 MW Andhi Khola to more than 500 consumers scattered through six villages in the district at about Rs 9,600 per connection and spent about Rs 30,000 per km in materials and labour—significantly lower than global rates of \$600 per consumer and infrastructural costs of \$5000 to \$15,000 per km.

A UMN study shows that a 1 kV distribution system for villages with no ready access can save up to 30 percent in cost above that incurred through the use of the conventional 33 kV system. The only disadvantage would be consumer clusters that are usually very small and dispersed.

After a conference in March this year, nine cooperatives from Jhapa and groups like Ama Samuha from Kaski also came up with partnership proposals involving the government to develop power in their respective districts. In another attempt to attract local investment, NEA

# villages



Privately financed, locally built: a small-scale power project in Syangja, Lamjung.

announced the flat buy back rates of Rs 3 and Rs 4.25 for the wet and dry seasons respectively with an annual 6 percent escalation with 1998/99 as the base year for the under 5 MW plants. This triggered a flurry of positive responses from local developers,

contractors and financial institutions.

Local investment in micro-hydro power projects will bring down production costs. If the idea clicks, hydropower experts both in the private sector and the officialdom believe, rural

electrification can be done even without the foreign assistance donor agencies including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Community involvement has other direct benefits. Electronic current cutouts can replace the more expensive conventional energy meters, halving the cost of distribution. Power-based tariff can also be implemented, which eliminates the costs associated with meter reading and billing. This small alteration is especially practical for rural users who use less than 50 cents worth of electricity a month but end up paying an equal amount for billing services.

Unfortunately, the interest has yet to transform itself into concrete policies. The managing director of the NEA, Janak Lal Karmacharya, says the state-owned institution is caught in a Catch-22 situation. "Rural electrification and reduction in generation cost is our priority areas, but we also need to be more commercial oriented. Selling electricity to rural populace will not make us a profit, which is vital to increase people's access to electricity," he says. (See interview, *Nepali Times* #142)

While the bureaucrats, donors and engineers in the city debate on the right time, method and price for rural electrification, another dark night falls on the homes in Dukachhap. The tukis are lit and the children strain their eyes to finish homework. ♦

## DOMESTIC BRIEFS

### Undecided

Nepal and Bhutan have yet to finalise the results of the joint verification of the repatriation of more than 12,000 Bhutanese refugees. The two Himalayan kingdoms are still ironing out details for negotiations conducted in one of the seven refugee camps in eastern Nepal almost two years ago.

The joint verification team just concluded their work on the results but the governments of the two nations have yet to make up their minds. As a result, the 14<sup>th</sup> round of Nepal-Bhutan talks on refugee issue earlier scheduled for 11 May has been postponed by a week.

Foreign Ministry officials said more homework needed to be done. The verification that could lead to repatriation is still unclear on exactly how to treat the verified refugees who will be grouped into four categories.

During the first round of ministerial level meet in 1993, the two had agreed to categorise the refugees as bonafide Bhutanese, Bhutanese who have emigrated voluntarily, Bhutanese who have committed crimes and non-Bhutanese. Since then Thimpu had insisted it would take back only bonafide Bhutanese. Nepal says all but those in the non-Bhutanese category must be allowed re-entry.

If categorised, refugees believe most of them will fall into the "Bhutanese who have emigrated" category because, they claim, they were forced to fill in voluntary migration forms at gunpoint just when they were evicted in an ethnic cleansing drive from their homelands in southern Bhutan. However, Bhutanese officials say Nepali-speaking refugees left of their own accord as economic migrants.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> round of talks in Kathmandu last year, both the foreign ministers of Nepal and Bhutan announced they had overcome differences on the categorisation of refugees, but did not elaborate.

More than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees are languishing in seven UNHCR-supported camps in Jhapa and Morang for over a decade.

### Perks off

The government has decided to cull facilities provided to former prime ministers and home ministers. Sher Bahadur Deuba introduced this perk during his first tenure as a prime minister six years ago.

Now official vehicles and bodyguards will be recalled from former home ministers, but ex-prime ministers can still hold onto their government-sponsored bodyguards. Cars in the service of former prime ministers Surya Bahadur Thapa, Girija Prasad Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba have already been taken. Krishna Bahadur Bhattarai is the only one still allowed these privileges. Similarly, ex-home ministers KP Oli, Budhiman Tamang, Khum Bahadur Khadka, Purna Bahadur Khadka and Govinda Raj Joshi have been deprived of their perks. At the launch of the 'people's movement' on 4 May, the five political parties declared they would renounce those facilities. The government obviously had no problem in complying.

### On hold

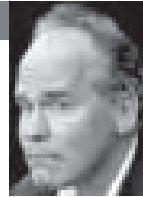
If popular demand could make our government act promptly we would have had a bicycle lane in Kathmandu a long time ago. But because the Department of Road (DoR) and the Kathmandu Valley Mapping Project (KVMP) could not agree on the modality of funding, construction of Kathmandu's first bicycle lane from Maitighar to Tinkune was suspended.

The construction cost of the project was estimated at Rs 12 million. The proposed lane, 2.5m wide and 1.8km long, was slated for completion 15 months ago. The failure of the first cycle lane project puts the future of the proposed Maitighar-Bhadrakali-Ratnapark, Bagmati-Bishnumati-Dhobikhola corridor and the Ring Road lanes in limbo. If KVMP and DoR cannot sort out their problems, these projects too will gather dust in some government office.

In a pre-planning survey conducted by KVMP, 80 percent of Kathmandu residents said cycle lanes in the city were a necessity. An estimated 15,000 bicycles ply Kathmandu streets everyday.

## HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



# Times are a-changing

To paraphrase Anup Pahari, speaking at last month's conference on the agenda of change in Nepal, democracy is a sloppy business.

He spoke of tabloids and political crises. To that, throw in scandals, irreverent art, loud disagreement with national nostrums and comedians poking fun at almost everything. Add inclusion to democracy and you end up with something even more discomfiting to the comfortable classes, now almost united in their loathing of political parties, human rights groups and all the other noisy sections of society, busy demanding their rights.

I started to think seriously about some of these things at that conference, and later at a magnificent beauty contest for men dressed as women sponsored by the Blue Diamond Society. That was, in every way, a ground-breaking event. For one thing, it was held at City Hall. Think of it, a gay men's event at a government building in Nepal! And I'm not aware of anyone raising any serious objections to it. None of the usual guardians of orthodoxy and traditional traits of nationality was given space in the newspapers to trot out their tired lies. The event screamed loudly, "WE HAVE GAY MEN IN NEPAL! MANY OF THEM ARE LEARNING TO BE PROUD OF THEIR SEXUALITY!"

Inclusion is a tough business, especially in a society like this that's been exclusionary for so long. And where, evidently, democracy has not widened the social net to include Nepali citizens from outside the caste and economic mainstream. This newspaper has reported on the scandalously mono-caste (Bahun) civil service. Add to that political leaderships from left to right, the business elite, even many NGOs and human rights groups whose boards and top people are uniformly from already-privileged sections of society. Where are the dalits, the Tharus? Hell, where are the women? This country has fewer women in economic and public life than almost any other outside of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.



MIN. BARACHARYA

There are reasons for this. Despite democracy, definitions of "Nepaliness" have remained intact from earlier days. They have also stayed as the purview of the state or a select and exclusive elite. National dress, patriotic folk songs, poetry about natural beauty and officially sanctioned history are all part of the package. More and more citizens—subject to modern pressures from media, economic migration and generational change—have noticed just how these official definitions are beginning to show signs of severe strain. Eventually, they may simply become irrelevant.

The two boulders on either side of Nepal's yam are often cited as reasons for strict definitions of citizenship. Without a careful and mandated way of expressing nationalism, Nepalis might simply start to behave like North Indians or Tibetans, much as—say—Canadians

## A gay fashion show in the capital shows "Nepaliness" is becoming more inclusive.

differ little from Americans, Belgians from the French or Dutch, and Austrians from Germans. Whoa, I can already hear the screams of outrage from those other small countries.

What helps those smaller and larger countries co-exist culturally is not state mandated culture, but inclusion. Gay men, members of ethnic minority groups and, yes, women in Canada, Belgium and Austria have fought hard for inclusive policies in their own countries. By doing so, they have strengthened their nationality. By changing traditional definitions, they have created indigenous, natural change that is resilient and lasting. They have banished outmoded, largely irrelevant orthodoxies that were frayed at the edges and in danger of becoming rotten to the core.

In Nepal, small steps are being taken to broaden the definition of society. Gay men hold a fashion show, the last census allows people to declare their religion rather than simply assume Hinduism. A few political leaders promise inclusion of dalits and other communities, some organisations work tirelessly for the downtrodden. It all helps ensure that the underprivileged will continue to shove outward against the stranglehold of a self-serving—yet massively short-sighted—elite. The comfortable classes will protest, or perhaps they will send their servants out to do so. But they will lose the contest and the nation will emerge as a stronger, more self-confident place.

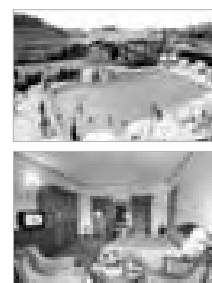
It's a sloppy business. But someone's got to do it. ♦

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**IN MEMORIAM**



**FLORENCE ANN DEVANEY**  
(1960 - 2003)

We offer our heartfelt condolences to our friend and colleague, Roger White, on the death of his beloved wife on 2 May 2003 after a prolonged illness.

We wish him, his young son Robert, and his mother-in-law, Florence, the strength to cope with this terrible loss over the years ahead.

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Kathmandu, Nepal

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL by PUSKAR BHUSAL

# Peace epistle

## Memo to: The People From: Peace

Seven years ago, beleaguered by your constant bickering, I decided to take some time off. Few took my displeasure seriously. Your home minister promised to bring me back within a week. Soon the crackles of conflict became louder. When those who could stop them stepped in, I thought my homecoming was at hand. The preparations turned out to be just another ploy in the political playground. Few deigned to gauge how far I had gone.

When the Brave Lion from Daddeldhura came full circle two years ago, he looked as if he really was on to some act of contrition. After all, he was the one who trashed that radical architect's 40-point wish list and exhausted my patience. Many of you felt the former premier was just trying to

The murder and mayhem over the next 14 months don't seem to have injected enough seriousness into your debate. A roundtable conference, interim government and constituent assembly are possible ways of ensuring that I stay for good this time. You act as if you can end the root causes of the conflict simply by dispatching disarmed lads and lasses to the Gulf. Even if you cut the manpower-agency middlemen, how many sheikhs would want battled hardened and bloodstained hands for help?

My grievances go back a little further. I was miffed by the commanders of the people's movement who ranked the withdrawal of the peace-zone proposal among the major features of the new constitution. To be honest, I, too, felt the palace was trying to use me as a prop after that



became inevitable. Isn't it human nature to prefer war on one's own terms to peace on someone else's?

Yes, I heard your next question. Does it make any difference to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, as Mahatma Gandhi reminded another generation, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy? Don't even try answering that while all three political forces feel they have goals worth staking everything on. To cut a long story short, I've decided to stay away a little longer. So don't bother calling me. You'll find me at the front door the day you discover you're too tired to fight. ♦

other Himalayan kingdom disappeared from the map. When over half of the world endorsed the peace proposal, I started feeling a little better. I know your southern neighbours didn't. By making peace the first casualty of democracy, I thought you were just trying to extend an olive branch down south. You actually ended up uprooting many things. This may help explain the ease with which the mainstream parties could today pick up from where the Maoists left four months ago.

Don't get me wrong. The grievances of the big parties are genuine. No one can be at peace

**HIMAL**

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### Shape up

"Winning with a Service Differentiation", the vision 2003 of Hyundai, led to a special service training organised by AVCO Hyundai from 5-9 May 2003. Two experienced instructors from Hyundai Motor Company in Korea, Kim Kwang Ho and Eric Song, arrived in Kathmandu to conduct the session. Trainees were invited from Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka for this course. The participants honed their skills in high scan pro, common rail engine, auto transmission system and engine management system as well as other mechanisms, both through theoretical as well as practical training.

### Kodak for cancer

The world's largest photo retail chain Kodak will put aside Rs 2 for the Nepal Cancer Relief Society from orders placed for each developing and printing in any of their labs. Processing an average of 2,000 films daily, the collection should total about Rs 100 thousand a month and will be used for the treatment and care of cancer patients on a sustainable basis. Photo Concern in New Road is Kodak's authorised local distributor in the kingdom.

### Electronic paradise

Consumers can now choose from a whole range of reasonably priced home appliances and electronic goods under one roof. Ashoka Electronics will be opening their retail showroom at the New Plaza in Putali Sadak. Prompt after sales services includes proper installation and maintenance tips so customers can get the most out of the product. Ask for a demo of the home theatre system.

### Alerting all bookworms!

Global Exposition and Management Services is organising the annual event on education and career with a collection of the latest and largest books and publications for sale. The 7<sup>th</sup> Nepal Education and Book Fair 2003 is at Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall till 17 May. The Education and Career Fair will be held in Hall A and ends on 12 May.

Talks, workshops, demonstrations and educational programs will go on throughout the exhibition. Students and parents can also look into career opportunities while book lovers will find quality books on everything from academic material to general books of their interest. Organisers hope the fair will bring together career conscious people to provide a platform for interaction with the public.

### Heinz on

Everybody's favourite ketchup brand is back in town. After staying off the shelves for three years, its tomato ketchup, baked beans, Smartones, Ore Ida and Farley's Plasmon will now feature in most grocery stores. The US-based multinational that has 5,000 products and an annual turnover of \$9 billion, claims to be one of the most well known brands today. Its affiliate in India, Heinz India, manufactures and markets Complan, Glucon-D, Complan Crunch Timers Biscuit and Nycil Prickly Heat Powder. Heinz India's authorised sales agent Amravati International, part of the Soaltee Group, will be importing at least a few dozen of their extensive products into the kingdom.



# Of jobs and politics

How times have changed! Not too long ago in Kathmandu, the police used to *lathi* charge political rallies and leave the aspiring migrant workers queuing up outside recruiting agencies to their own business.

Last week, just the opposite took place. According to local newspapers, the police had to 'control' thousands of Nepalis who wanted to be among the 800 selected for a job in small and medium private sector enterprises in South Korea. Lured by visions of a better future, they showed up in droves from all across the country. Meanwhile, a mass meeting on the future of the nation convened by various political parties at Tundikhel's Open Theatre had a thinner attendance and passed rather uneventfully.

The line of South Korean hopefuls snaked all the way from Dasrath Stadium to Maithighar. Those who made it to round two of the selection swelled into the Birendra International Convention Centre in Baneshwor. Very soon the sheer volume of Nepalis seeking foreign employment will not be accommodated in small offices in the alleys of Putali Sadak or Lazimpat.

If nothing else, the events of last week indicates that no matter what occupies our ageing political *netas*, the dominant thought among young Nepalis has to do with improving their future by getting well-paid jobs in or out of Nepal. Nevermind that the agencies charge up to Rs 100 thousand to place them in a sausage-packing factory on the outskirts of Seoul.

Given that nearly 80 per cent of Nepal's 23 million population is below 40 (with many above the age of 10

## Politicians must find where the two intersect.



either underemployed and unemployed—or what the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) cryptically calls "self-employed"), the burden of employment-related concerns will only increase in coming years. In the future this will be the single-most dominant agenda in national policy-making and politics.

That is obvious enough. But what remains unclear is the state's role in assisting the private sector in either creating more jobs nationally or finding new labour markets around the world. So far, in either case, the state's record has been meddlesome at best and downright hostile at the other extreme.

**Changing the mindset:** In Nepal, the state is a mother figure, a caretaker who caters to every whim and fancy, often by diverting funds from one needy area to another less critical sector. Our political parties too like to don the cloak of the people's caretaker, but in a country where more work for themselves than for others (as per the CBS findings), the questions are larger. Do Nepalis really want an all-

providing state that comes across as a bumbling elephant? Or do they want security, law and order, basic education, health-care and roads, while allowing competition to let the private sector provide for jobs?

Changing the state's image is important because it has a wider effect on how private sector firms—including those dealing with national and international labour markets—become more nimble in seizing opportunities for our collective prosperity. Once the state sees itself as the facilitator, then it's more likely to understand what it needs to do to make it easier for the private sector to start new enterprises or expand existing ones and hire more people.

Until then, we will continue to have the kind of disjoint we saw last week. Political parties, who are supposed to represent the people, will continue with fewer supporters. And young Nepalis will continue to leave. The political parties must address the needs of the young and the unemployed, and adapt themselves to the changing aspirations of the Nepali people. ♦



# “Misleading and inaccurate”

We have recently been presented with, a copy of the article by Navin Singh Khadka entitled 'The price we pay for power' which was published in the *Nepali Times* (#142). We find the article to be misleading and inaccurate and would like the opportunity to provide additional information which would allow your readership to clearly understand the issues that have been raised.

In the mid 1990s, international sponsors in conjunction with the government of Nepal, mutually identified a need for electricity generation and a hydroelectric power project in the Upper Bhote Koshi area of Nepal. In 1996, the sponsors including Panda Energy International, Inc (Panda) formed Bhote Koshi Power Company Pvt Ltd (BKPC) to complete development of the project. Based upon lengthy studies and negotiations with international lenders, the NEA and international contractors, BKPC successfully obtained the commitment for the financing and the construction of the Upper Bhote Koshi Power Facility, a cost-effective, clean, environmentally sound, hydroelectric generating facility.

The ability to obtain the necessary financing for the project was predicated entirely upon the economics established under the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with NBA. Without the obligation of NEA, guaranteed by His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN), to purchase power from the project at the negotiated rates, the project would not have, been built. Based upon the promises and the obligations of NEA contained in the PPA, BKPC raised the funds from a consortium of international lenders including International Finance Corp of the World Bank and DEG of Germany. BKPC constructed the project from 1997 to 2000 and has managed and operated the facility since it began commercial operation in January 2001.

Tantamount to any lender's ability to loan money for international construction is the sanctity of the

contract in the host country. International lenders will not find projects in jurisdictions where the contracts upon which a financing is based, are not honoured. Unfortunately, NEA has not honored the terms and provisions of the PPA by withholding payments for energy produced and delivered under that contract. Since the commercial operation of the facility, BKPC has not requested payment for power in excess of the 36MW as otherwise alleged in the article. BKPC has and will continue to honour all of its obligations under the contracts signed with NEA and HMGN.

BKPC and the lenders to the facility also expect the authorities in Nepal to honour their commitments under the contracts signed with BKPC. The unnamed senior NEA official in the article has mistated that BKPC has been asking for payment for extra power generated by the project. This is false. BKPC has never requested payment for energy in excess of the 36MW amount allowed by the contract. The unnamed senior NEA official is clearly uninformed or for reasons of his own, deliberately misleading your readers. More over, BKPC has made numerous attempts to correct, in an amicable manner, the outstanding payment issues with NEA. To date BKPC has not been successful.

The article is also misleading in its comparison of the tariff which NEA pays to the Butwal Power Company verses that which NBA pays to BKPC. The method of financing and nature of development of the projects operated by the two companies are entirely different, and hence any comparison of their tariffs is unjustified and improper.

The investors in BKPC, including Panda, do have a strong relationship with various members of the United States Congress and with the Executive Branch of the United States Government. It is our hope that the issues with



NEA can be resolved and that in the future BKPC and Panda can use these relationships to further support and participate in efforts to increase international business investment and other opportunities for Nepal.

Finally, the Upper Bhote Koshi Hydroelectric Project has contributed millions of dollars in taxes, royalties, construction costs, employee salaries, and community that directly benefit the people of Nepal and will continue to make a significant contribution to the people of Nepal during its useful life.

BKPC believes that it is in the best interest of the people of Nepal that both BKPC and NEA live up to their respective obligations under the PPA. BKPC has fulfilled its end of the bargain by obtaining financing, constructing and operating the facility, all as required under the PPA. It is now time for NEA to perform its side of the bargain. The failure of NEA to fulfill its obligations under the PPA go far beyond BKPC and the facility, as the fixture willingness of international investors and lenders to make significant commitments to Nepal may be adversely affected. That result is not desirable for NEA, the people of Nepal, nor BKPC.

**Todd W Carter,**  
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# Himalayan health hazards

Helicopter rescue of a trekker suffering from altitude sickness out of the HRA station in Pheriche.



JOA BEAN

Prevention, cure and intervention: a guide to keeping safe at high altitude.

## SRADHA BASNYAT

Fifty years ago when Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary attained the summit of Sagarmatha they made mountaineering history. Yet unknown to most, their feat also secured a medical coup.

In 1952, one year prior to the first successful ascent of the world's highest peak, a Swiss attempt by Raymond Lambert and none other than Norgay himself had to turn away nearly 300m from the top. Later, two Welsh doctors, Griffith Pew and Michael Ward, assessed the principle

reasons for the duo's shortcoming: their stove used to melt ice for drinking water had ceased to function and the technology available at the time allowed oxygen inhalation only while resting—the mountaineers were defeated by total dehydration and insufficient oxygen.

Learning from the experience the doctors assembled a contraption that enabled climbers to inhale oxygen while on the move. A year later, plenty of hot lemon in hand and lungs full of oxygen, Norgay and Hillary accomplished what so many dreamed of doing and so many died trying. Half a century since that celebrated climb many advances in high altitude

medical research and rescue has minimised the risks of humans who are determined to conquer, climb or just experience the Himalaya.

With years of professional experience as an adventure travel operator, Tashi Jangbu Sherpa reckons Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) can be avoided and fatality from AMS prevented all together. "Whether rooted in ego or ignorance, we continue to lose lives to altitude related illnesses," regrets Sherpa. "We have to be attentive to our body and be very honest about it. Walk slowly and the body will automatically adjust. Walking slowly is the safest way to walk in the Himalaya."

A climber himself, Sherpa was trained as a mountain guide in France. He has climbed in Europe and Nepal and takes safety on the mountain very seriously. At Everest Trekking, his two-decade-old agency, he insists on sitting his clients down for a ritual briefing prior to departure. And the mantra of the day can be a life-saver: not too high too fast. Problems usually occur when symptoms of AMS are ignored.

A clinical review recently published in the *British Medical Journal* by doctors P.W. Barry and A.J. Pollard describes altitude illness for most as a self-limiting syndrome characterised by fatigue and weakness, dizziness and lightheadedness,

headache, anorexia, nausea or difficulty sleeping. It is common in travellers above 2,500 m, particularly if the ascent is rapid. The illness can be fatal if it progresses to more severe forms such as High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACE) or High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPE), accounting for 0.0036 percent of trekkers' deaths in Nepal.

The misconception that physical fitness and youth are shields against this indiscriminate illness is a popular and dangerous one. Young and feeble, old and fit, all are susceptible to altitude related illnesses. A previous healthy experience at high altitude can mean little, while preexisting ailments and illnesses do not preclude mountain sickness. To be sure, there are risk factors involved: rapid ascent, the actual altitude gained, altitude at which you sleep and individual susceptibility.

Though the precise causes of mountain sickness continue to elude us, simple treatment is often critical: cease and stop climbing, and descend if symptoms do not ease or rather exacerbate after 24 hours. If resorting to medication, acetazolamide, known to us as Diamox, effectively reduces symptoms of AMS.

Prevention is certainly better than cure. Acclimatisation is the natural and gradual regulation by the body to cope with altitude but is a random process varying from person to person. To get the required amount of oxygen at higher altitude our heart and lungs must work harder. At 5000m they are working twice as hard as they would at sea level. Allowing the body to acclimatise over the first 1-3 days at a particular altitude requires a flexible itinerary and is worth the while. Diamox is also used to prevent mountain sickness.

A study recently completed by Nepal's foremost high-altitude medicine specialist, Buddha Basnyat,

found that 125mg twice daily of Diamox is sufficient for the prevention of AMS. This is particularly important as allergies and other side effects can result from using Diamox. Some smaller trials suggest extracts from the Ginkgo biloba tree and aspirin are also effective in preventing symptoms.

While hiking through the hills, inquiring about traditional remedies used to nip the illness in the bud could prove interesting. Hot fresh garlic soup and sprinkles of Chinese black pepper (*timoor*) are touted on many village menus as surefire natural means to help mountaineers cope.

The Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) has been working on high altitude medicine with aid posts in Manang and Pheriche (see box). This year it will also be present at Base Camp (5,000m) with a temporary clinic run by four American doctors to aid trekkers, climbers, Nepali support staff and porters. The first aid-post at this altitude, HRA will be available to the 32 expeditions already planned for this month. A cameraman with the French expedition died last month of a heart attack, and could not be saved.

There are many risks that face the mountaineer besides illnesses common at high altitudes. Trail hazards range from avalanches and rock slides to accidental death or injury while seeking that perfect photograph—especially while adjusting gadgets on a manual camera—or getting pushed off the trail by a beast of burden.

Helicopter rescues are now possible, but retrieval has been affected by phones been knocked out in remote areas by Maoists. Lack of information by trekkers about their itinerary also makes rescue difficult.

Nepali porters have an even more difficult time with rescue. Adhikari of HRA estimates that 60 percent of well-established agencies, particularly members of the Trekking Agents' Association of Nepal (TAAN), comply

with the law stating all porters must have death and dismemberment insurance. But hiking in the hills and mountains is not included in the insurance. "In many cases it is a matter of ethics. The agency is liable for the porter, paying all expenses in case of medical treatment or hospitalisation. Agencies can now buy a medical policy for porters, which solves another problem, but they are not bound by law to do so."

At Porters Progress, Arjun Dharel says there are other provisions like above 3,500-4,000m the maximum

weight is set at 20kg and 30kg below this height, which, if followed, significantly reduce risks to porters. Whoever is at risk, mountain rescue is always complicated. Bad weather can impede a successful operation. If the rescue is accident related, proper transportation is critical. Panic and mishandling can cause further damage, complicating injuries. Says Sherpa, "Search and rescue is necessary, especially given Nepal's terrain. This country does not have one well-trained standby unit dedicated to rescue."

Buddha Basnyat says high altitude

medical research is an open field and needs more Nepali doctors. "There is 'do-able research' in Nepal," says Basnyat. "We cannot do cutting edge research on the coronary artery, but we certainly can investigate altitude sickness and become a world centre for high altitude medicine research."

If medical input by the Welsh doctors partly enabled the ascent of Sagarmatha, it seems entirely possible that some homegrown high altitude research could bring us closer to help understanding this deadly disease. ♦

## Cerebral Edema

This magnetic resonance image shows a cross section of the brain of a 33-year-old man suffering from cerebral edema shortly after his evacuation from Mount McKinley, Alaska. (He made a full recovery.) The bright white shapes at the center of the brain are cerebral ventricles. In front of and behind the ventricles lie areas of tissue swollen with leaked fluid (false-colored in red). Exactly where the fluid collects depends on the root cause of the problem. A stroke, for example, can lead to fluid within brain cells. But researchers have produced compelling evidence that high altitude causes leakage from capillaries rather than swollen cells.

## Pulmonary Edema

This chest x-ray of a 31-year-old male skier evacuated from a mountain in Colorado illustrates pulmonary edema. (He also survived). On either side of his heart the red-colored foggy areas show fluid leaking from capillaries around some of the lungs' 300 million alveoli, or air sacs. Oxygen absorption into the blood is inhibited when these capillaries leak under pressure from constricting pulmonary blood vessels. Nitric oxide, a chemical that dilates blood vessels, is produced by the body and can also be administered to treat pulmonary edema. Recent research suggests that susceptibility to pulmonary edema may be linked to an inability to produce enough nitric oxide.

## A Fragile Organ

"The brain is a sentinel," says altitude physiologist Peter Hackett, who has summited Everest. "It's the organ most sensitive to environmental changes." Accounting for only 2 percent of an adult's body weight, the brain burns up to 15 percent of the body's oxygen. This view of a healthy brain shows areas that fail under low oxygen. Impaired memory and reasoning signal a neurotransmitter dysfunction in the frontal lobe. Plasma leakage from the corpus callosum, a risk at altitude, creates internal pressure. A staggering gait suggests that this pressure has affected the cerebellum, site for balance control. Coma and death can follow with further stress on the brain stem. (*National Geographic*)

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## Netting support

TORONTO—The possibility that the Liberal government of Prime Minister Jean Chretien might drop its long standing opposition to the controversial US missile defence plan and integrate its small armed forces with the giant US military machine for North America is alarming analysts. Under the plan, land-based interceptor rockets would be deployed to knock ballistic-missile warheads out of the sky before they hit North America. The purchase of laser guided bombs for the country's CF-18 jet fighters and investment in data collecting technology are other moves the Canadian military could take toward standardising its equipment and strategy with US forces.

But Ottawa's foreign policy independence is jeopardised by the government's view that economic security depends on the continued expansion of trade liberalisation. Business groups like the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) support the increased Canada-US economic and military integration. The CCCE is urging Canada to support Washington's controversial missile defence strategy, even though some military experts question its viability and cost. While maintaining defence arrangements with its southern neighbour, Ottawa has been more sympathetic towards multilateral institutions like the United Nations, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Kyoto Protocol on climate change than has Washington. (IPS)

## Art for state's sake

RIO DE JANEIRO—The Brazilian art world has risen up against the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, which it helped elect, for a provision that state cultural agencies will only invest in projects that have a "social side". Artists representing Brazilian film, music, theatre, plastic arts and literature protested Monday against what they say is "state control over culture".

The social aspect required for state sponsorship of arts projects includes "operating in harmony with government policy, particularly the Zero Hunger Program," according to a document from the public electrical company, Electrobrás, which received instructions from the government's Communications Secretariat. Other rules for state backing aim for beneficiaries to promote Brazilian traditions and identity and disseminate national culture to enhance the national image. A priority will be placed on projects that "democratise access to culture" and stimulate the social development of the poor, says the text.

Among the criticisms by filmmakers and actors were more than a few comparisons to "socialist realism", the policy of the former Soviet Union that stipulated political criteria and objectives for art.

This clash between the Lula administration and the artist community puts an end to their "honeymoon" period, say observers. (IPS)

## COMMENT

# Crony capitalists go to war

## The Bush administration is flouting every rule to give its coterie the inside track.



When financial crisis hit Asia in 1997, America's leaders changed Asian governments with practising crony capitalism. In retrospect, the charge seems like rank hypocrisy. America has shown itself to be second to none in practising cronyism, first with its rotten corporate scandals of recent years, and now in Iraq. Asian capitalists may have stolen some borrowed loot, but at least they

didn't mix finance with war.

Whatever other goals lay behind the Iraq war, the Bush Administration seems keen to line the pockets of its cronies and to capture increased control over Middle East oil and pipeline routes. Only a few pesky obstacles—the UN and the Iraqi people—stand in their way.

The Iraq war was ostensibly launched because of Saddam's

weapons of mass destruction, yet each passing day suggests that the threat was exaggerated. Another goal also loomed large: control over 11 percent (or more) of the world's oil reserves and, in the longer term, control over pipeline routes between the Mediterranean, the Caspian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The failure to locate Saddam's WMD's is putting America's grab for Iraqi oil into sharp focus. The

Cheney-Rumsfeld team is so arrogant that it acts as if it can flout the takeover of Middle East oil while brushing aside questions. In Afghanistan last year, the US installed Hamid Karzai, a former consultant for oil giant Unocal, as interim leader. It also appointed Kalmay Khalilzad, another former Unocal consultant—indeed, Karzai's boss—as special US envoy. Khalilzad and Karzai spent

considerable efforts in the late 1990s to get an American-built pipeline to carry gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Indian Ocean. Even before the bombs stopped falling on Baghdad, Khalilzad's writ as Special Envoy was extended to Iraq. Among his likely jobs in Iraq will be to secure a pipeline carrying Iraqi oil from Mosul, Iraq to Haifa, Israel via Syria. To stop Syria from objecting, the US is now threatening it as well.

Khalilzad will have plenty of support in the Bush Administration, which is heavily loaded with oil industry executives. National Security Advisor Condeleeza Rice was a Director of Chevron-Texaco before coming to the National Security Council. She even had an oil tanker named after her. Commerce Secretary Don Evans is also an oil-company CEO. Vice President Richard Cheney was in effect lead conductor of the group when he served as Chairman of Halliburton, the world's largest oil services company. Halliburton is now at the front of the line for Iraqi reconstruction projects, for which contracts are being handed out without any transparent and competitive process whatsoever.

But what is happening here is more than "guilt by association" with the oil industry. The Bush Administration is flouting every rule to give its cronies the inside track. Before joining the Pentagon, Donald Rumsfeld was a

key player as well. A longstanding sidekick of Cheney, Rumsfeld traveled to Baghdad in 1983 and 1984 at the behest of former Bechtel Corporation President George Shultz, then passing a bit of non-corporate time as US Secretary of State. Rumsfeld's hidden mission was to win Saddam's support of a Bechtel-built oil pipeline to run from Iraq via Jordan to the Gulf of Aqaba.

This is the same Bechtel that built Saddam's "dual use" chemical industry; now it has been awarded a non-competitive \$600 million mega-contract to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure. American newspapers now report that former Shell Oil CEO Philip Carroll will be appointed as the US czar of Iraqi oil. Carroll's most recent job was as Chief Executive of Fluor, the giant construction conglomerate, another company that, together with Bechtel and Halliburton, is in line for the big bucks that will soon be paid (using Iraq's oil earnings) for US-led reconstruction.

The United Kingdom can't match the US in cronyism, but Britain's support for America in the war also has a commercial logic. While Saddam gave oil contracts to French, Russian, and Chinese oil firms, UK firms such as BP were frozen out. UK firms are no doubt counting on returning to Iraq on America's coattails. Only a few hurdles remain before the US can

consummate its crony takeover of Iraq's oil. America will soon try to appoint an Iraqi regime that will aim to cancel many of Saddam's oil contracts with France, Russia and China, in order to make room for US and UK firms. But this will be harder to accomplish than simply sending in the US army.

The US can not legally market Iraqi oil, much less invest in new fields, until the old UN sanctions against Iraq are lifted. But the rest of the world believes that lifting the sanctions is tantamount to handing Iraq's oil future over to the US and UK occupying forces and their corporate cronies.

More telling, and significant in the long term, is the remarkable anti-US and anti-UK sentiment now sweeping Iraq. Rather than being welcomed as liberators, the US and UK are seen as new colonial occupiers, and the Iraqis are mobilising to push the occupiers out. The US may have done something few could have expected: united the Shi'ites and the Sunnis in a common cause. Democracy may come to Iraq, and the will of the people will be to stop the plunder of their country's natural resources by US crony capitalists.

♦ (© Project Syndicate)

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

by JEFFREY D SACHS



## Model state

TOKYO—Japanese analysts are drawing parallels between the US-designed path that Japan took after its surrender in World War II and the direction Iraq may be taking under US-led occupation. Japan, Washington's closest ally in the Asia-Pacific, is often cited as a model of the successful 'peace strategy' the United States had during the seven years of occupation. The 1945 surrender led to political reforms and a new constitution.

Iraq's history and the circumstances of the US-led invasion in March are quite different from that of Japan's but the plight of the former under US occupation is reminiscent of issues being debated in relation to Iraq. They range from how long US troops will stay in Iraq, the leadership dominated by the US military, plans for a new constitution and talk about military bases in Iraq. The *Asahi* newspaper recently asked, "After World War II, Japan embraced defeat and the United States embraced Japan. How is the United States going to embrace Iraq?" Shinsaku Nohira of the anti-war group Peace Boat says rather than follow the Japan 'model', Iraq should be able to select their leaders in order to have real democracy. (IPS)

## Victory high

BANGKOK—Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra Thaksin was on a high at the end of last week from his government's 'war on drugs', which ran from 1 February to 30 April. In all of Thailand's 75 provinces, the crackdown against illegal drugs has gone beyond the initial target, which was slashing the number of drug traders by 75 percent in each province,



government officials say. In 10 provinces, law enforcement officials say they have achieved a 100 percent success rate. In a population of 62 million people, as many as one in 17 or 5.9 percent, of Thais aged 15 years and above are hooked on methamphetamines or 'ya baa'.

But now human rights activists are bringing up another side of the campaign—an estimated 2,274 drug-related killings, averaging over 25 a day. Official statistics put the number at only 42, all drug suspects shot by the police mostly in self-defence. The human rights community also noted the lack of public outrage or the absence of civilians wanting to wage a legal battle over the rights violations carried out during the drug campaign. The police forced people at bars and nightclubs to take urine tests for traces of drug use. (IPS)

## Women to work

DHAKA—Bangladesh's decision to relax the latest restrictions on women seeking work abroad has rekindled a debate on the government's policies on women's rights, labour export, and its ability to protect its migrant workers. Between 10,000 and 15,000 Bangladeshi women have been leaving to seek work abroad every year despite the mid-1998 ban.

State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, Mohammed Qamru'l Islam said that women under 35 would not be permitted to become domestic workers in the Middle East. Other stipulations are that the workers' monthly salary must be the equivalent of \$125 or above, and that they receive accommodation and free food. The ministry also demands a "no-objection certificate" from the husband or from her family.

The ban was aimed primarily at those leaving to be domestic workers in the Middle East, where most reports of physical and other abuses have come from. It was maintained by the former Awami League government, which faced criticism from women's rights organisations and NGOs. Groups like Ain-O-Salish Kendra (Law and Arbitration Centre), Odhikar (Rights), and the Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust had called the ban a "barrier to women's empowerment, employment and poverty alleviation". (IPS)

## ANALYSIS

by MICHAEL MERTES

# How Germany lost the Iraq war

## As with people, so too with states: trust once lost is extremely difficult to regain.

Wars always have winners and losers. Saddam Hussein—dead or on the run—is, of course, the Iraq war's biggest loser. But Germany has also lost much. It is less relevant in both European and world politics than it was before the Iraq war. Repairing the damage will not be easy.

The country can no longer play the role of transatlantic mediator between France and America. It can forget about US support in its campaign to gain a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Instead of forging a "third way" for Europe's left with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder needs Blair to plead his case with President George W Bush, who feels personally betrayed by the Chancellor's conduct in the run-up to the war. In post-communist Eastern Europe, Germany is no longer perceived as an absolutely dependable advocate of the region's needs. The EU's hopes for common foreign, security and defence policies have been gravely jeopardised. Even the UN—the institution that Schröder was supposedly defending—has been diminished by his fecklessness.

But the heart of the matter is the deterioration of German-American relations. Schröder stoked the country's overwhelmingly pacifist attitudes. That political strategy left President Bush believing that Schröder had stabbed him in the back. As with people, so too with states: trust once lost is extremely difficult to regain.

Germany's opposition parties and much of its foreign policy establishment warned that the country risked diplomatic isolation, so Schröder joined an ad hoc coalition of the unwilling, along with France and Russia. Much of the world press dubbed this "gang of three" an "axis", a word with sinister echoes of the German-Italian-Japanese World War II axis. Wartime victory makes cowards of



In happier times: Schröder (l) and Bush (r).

leaders who backed the wrong side. So, with Baghdad's fall, Schröder began to send conciliatory signals to Washington and London. During a Franco-German-Russian summit in St. Petersburg, he explicitly refrained from criticising the US and Britain. "I don't want to speak about the past," he emphasised, "we should think about how the military victory can be turned to help the entire region."

Germany's traditional low-key foreign policy made the country an anchor of NATO and helped secure reunification. That diplomatic tradition was about creating and transferring stability through the strengthening of international governments and supranational structures.

Germany is too big to abstain from leadership in Europe. But it is well advised to avoid being suspected of hegemonic goals. Germany must learn that influence is based not only on soft "civilian power", but also on hard military capabilities. Only an enhanced German relevance in European and world politics will convince America that it is time to bury the hatchet. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Michael Mertes, a former policy advisor to Helmut Kohl, is an author and partner at dimap consult, a commercial think-tank based in Bonn and Berlin.)

## OPINION

# Is China opening or closing?

## China's insular reaction to a fundamentally global problem like the SARS epidemic is self-destructive.

Despite the dominance of the Iraq story, China is back in the headlines, with the country excoriated for its evasiveness about the SARS epidemic, and praised for its suddenly constructive role in convening in helping to bring about negotiations between the US and North Korea, over North Korea's nuclear insubordination. What do these two seemingly disparate responses tell us about China and its evolving place in the world?

China's response to the SARS epidemic suggests an almost automatic defensiveness when the outside world seems to impinge on it or threaten it in some potentially harmful or embarrassing way. In this sense, the legacy of China's humiliation at the hands of the West and Japan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries still exerts a powerful influence, despite the emergence of a globalised "New China" over the last two decades. These experiences became burned so deeply into the Chinese psyche that even China's current economic and political rise has not overcome an underlying sense of victimisation and grievance.

It would not be too extreme to say that China has fashioned a whole identity out of its historical

victimisation. The Maoist ideological mindset grew out of Lenin's theory of imperialism, which, aided by endless barrages of propaganda against capitalism, colonialism and foreign hegemony, tended to reinforce the sense of national humiliation. Party spokesmen still often say that some foreign intervention has "wounded the feelings of the Chinese people" when they feel that China has been

unfairly victimised.

This deep-seated suspicion of international exploitation fuels a predator/victim perspective that focuses blame on the outside world. So China's first reaction to SARS was to bury the news of a public health epidemic in the making. Such secretiveness—rooted in fear of humiliation—has been the Chinese Communist Party's traditional response to bad news. It



was better to hush up the mass famine that killed 30 million people following the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950's and early 1960's than to seem to be in need of foreign help.

Nowadays, the country's communist leaders acted as if they believed that disclosing SARS would risk tarnishing China's "economic miracle" and driving away foreign direct investment—some \$50 billion last year, or 80 percent of all FDI made in Asia. Why not just keep the fledgling epidemic under wraps and hope that it goes away without the world ever knowing?

When the SARS epidemic broke out in Guangdong in South China, the government's first impulse was, indeed, to be secretive, manipulate statistics, pressure the media into silence, distort the magnitude of the epidemic, and impede the World Health Organisation (WHO) from getting involved early. Even after the epidemic appeared in Hong Kong and then spread to Beijing, officials continued to withhold information. Only under the most biting international criticism and censure did China grudgingly admit that there were 340 cases in Beijing, with over 400 more

suspected cases.

This kind of insular reaction to a fundamentally global problem is self-destructive. It reflects lingering discomfort with a global world of greater transparency, freedom of expression, and a diminished reliance on absolute sovereignty. In short, China's initial reaction to SARS—like its disastrous early handling of its AIDS epidemic—is a throwback to its old pre-reform approach to problems.

But if the SARS epidemic exposed the retro side of China's approach to involvement in global affairs, China has shown its newer, more cosmopolitan and internationalist side by hosting the three-way discussion between America, North Korea and China. These talks, represent a more open, forward-looking, multilateral view of China's place in the world, hinting at a more pro-active and constructive diplomatic role as matchmaker and reconciler on the global stage.

In the past, China shied away from most multilateral problem solving, fearing that it might set a precedent for other countries to intervene in internal Chinese affairs. After all, if China helps to resolve the stand-off between

Pyongyang and Washington, Seoul and Tokyo, what is to prevent these same countries from proposing initiatives to resolve the Taiwan Straits problem, the question of Tibetan autonomy or the challenge of insurgent Muslims in Xinjiang?

Of course, by hosting the talks, China's leaders also tacitly recognise that absolute sovereignty is no longer a viable position, or one that benefits China. Indeed, if they are successful in bringing about some sort of rapprochement, or even if they only manage to ease the crisis somewhat, their accomplishment will be significant. Any success will confer a new sense of dignity and status on China. For this reason, China's reluctant and belated entrance onto the international diplomatic stage is a hopeful trend that bears watching. If China comports itself well, and if the meetings are productive, this will be important in its own right. But China's performance could become symbolic of a more significant long-term breakthrough—the moment when the country puts its fear of the outside world aside and began to emerge as a more pro-active agent of multilateral cooperation. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)



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# Fall from grace?

Ghatna Ra Bichar, 7 May



CPN-UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal has landed himself in a controversy for his speech at the 4 May mass rally. In a critical speech, he indirectly accused the king and the crown prince of serious crimes. In an attempt to earn applause from the crowd, Nepal came down so heavily on the monarch and the royal family that the royal palace has black listed him. "Madhab Nepal lost whatever little sympathy the king had for him...it ends any possibility of him becoming prime minister with the palace's support. He has been black listed," sources from the palace familiar with the king's temperament told us.

In an earlier incident, the palace expressed displeasure when Nepal declined to stay in a high-level team constituted to probe the royal massacre of July 2001. They have, however, conceded that Nepal's indiscreet declamation may be due to political difficulties.

There are speculations regarding Nepal's ultra-critical stance on the monarchy. Many believe Girija Prasad Koirala incited his statements. Koirala's proposal that Nepal stand as the future premier if the parliament is reinstated or an all-party government is constituted had been agreed upon by leaders from the five political parties involved in the joint movement. Nepal was obviously ecstatic about the prospect. Moreover, the nationwide attention Koirala received for his comments on the monarchy may have encouraged Nepal to be more acerbic than usual.

Strangely, Koirala, who was the last to address the rally, was comparatively soft on the monarch. Many interpret this change of tone as an attempt to kill two birds with one stone. Koirala gained support from Nepal by proposing him as a probable prime minister, but in the same stroke succeeded in diminishing Nepal's stature in the palace. With this latest development, the probability of Madhab Kumar Nepal getting the top job is very slight indeed, especially if a compromise has to be reached with His Majesty. Whether the joint campaign triumphs or not, analysts say Koirala's shrewd political tactics will see him come out on top.

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK



I will not support violence if the joint movement takes that direction. The nation cannot be subjected to anymore death and destruction.

-Ram Chandra Paudel, Nepali Congress Central Working Committee member, speaking about the joint movement launched by five political parties on 4 May in *Rajdhani*, 5 May.

Lokendra Bahadur Chand: "I am not greedy for this seat. If the need arises, I will resign from my post"

रामचन्द्र पौडेल *Spacetime*, 4 May

## Organ racket

*Deshantar*, 4 May

Hari Narayan Syangtan was arrested for selling 75 human kidneys by the Valley Crime Investigation Office. For the past five years the Sarlahi native lived in Chabahil while conducting a racket that involved doctors in India and Nepal.

In custody the 39-year-old confessed that together with his wife he convinced mental workers into having their organs removed in Indian hospitals. Detailed papers seized from Syangtan show he obtained medical recommendations for kidney transplants from highly reputed nephrologists including Dr Rishi Raj Khafle of the National Kidney Centre, Dr Pushkar Raj Satyal of Bir Hospital and Blue Cross Nursing Home, Dr Pramod Chhetri of Sidhartha Apollo Hospital and Dr Manoj Bhattarai of Chhetrapati Poly Clinic. Written proof from these medical institutions sanctioning transplants were also recovered. In India Syangtan took them to MITO Hospital and Santosh Hospital at Madras, Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Chandigarh and PGI Hospital in Lucknow for the procedures.

Under the guise of routine check-ups and X-rays, doctors working with Syangtan would tell the often unsuspecting patient that a kidney was defunct needed to be removed. The freshly obtained kidney would then be given to a genuine recipient. A healthy kidney is priced at Rs 300 thousand on the black market. The donor receives one third and the rest is divided among the network that procures the sale.

Syangtan told police that there are five such 'gangs' selling kidneys in Nepal but could not give details on who or where these groups could be found. From his meticulous records, the police obtained the particulars and photos

of all 75 donors and recipients, as well as details about the Indian hospitals where the operations took place.

Bachhu Damai and Dambar Gurung were among those who sold their kidneys. They were paid less than what was discussed initially with Syangtan but were afraid to go to the police because the law prohibits selling organs.

## Directions

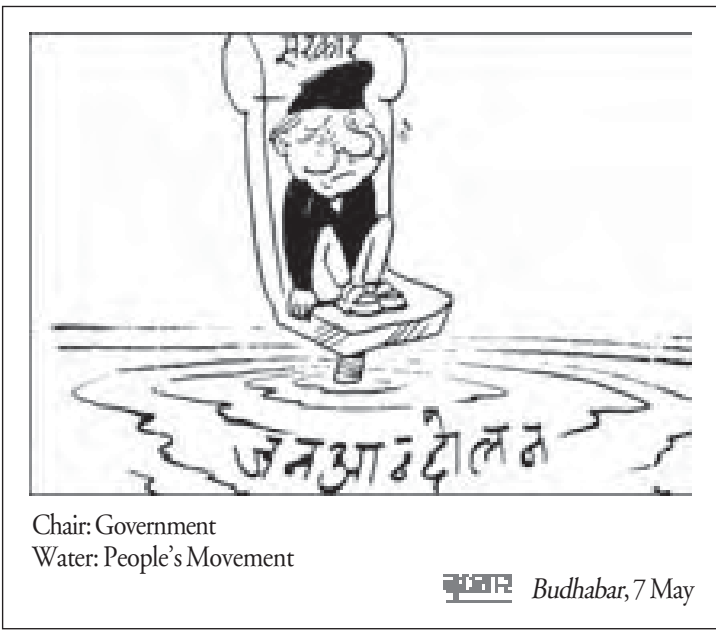
*Ghatna Ra Bichar*, 7 May

Of late the Indian press has expressed an overwhelming interest in our politics. The Nepali populace, however, does not enjoy this attention. In its 1 May editorial, *The Times of India* offers unsolicited advice to the king and other Nepali politicians. With a title that reads "Kings' Cross", the newspaper says, "King Gyanendra could strike a blow for an enduring monarchy by launching a political party that would lead the way to a more democratic order. Should he make bold to do so, he could well pave the way for a new republic where the monarchy too would



abide as a stabilising symbol of Nepal's multicultural identity".

The editorial also says the Maoist's campaign has severely curtailed the role of the monarchy in national politics. The volatile situation may compel the political parties to take



Chair: Government  
Water: People's Movement

बुद्धावर *Budhabar*, 7 May

a new tack. It suggests that if the king does not want to lose ground, he must launch his own political party.

*The Times of India* says ever since the king took over in October, there have been concerted efforts to consolidate his executive power. Extrapolating from the Bulgarian example, it describes in detail how the Bulgarian monarch who got expelled in 1946 made an unbelievable come back as a leader of the New Movement Party. The newspaper outlines ways in which King Gyanendra can win a popular mandate in representative politics on the platform of uprooting corruption, criminality and poverty. It says, "view that the king should abdicate is gaining ground". Only the Maoists have explicitly made this demand. It says the monarchy—presently unpopular with both the Maoists and the mainstream political parties—should take a "proactive step to strengthen the democratic process and, at the same time, maintain the appeal of the monarchy".

## Short changed

*Spacetime*, 6 May

Dolakha locals are angry at the sub-standard food sent by the World Food Program under the Food-for-Work scheme. "We cannot be

treated like animals," says a Thami woman. "We have been exploited. This matter has to be investigated."

More than 60 groups from several VDCs had worked at constructing a 2km road under the exchange program. The food arrived not only two months late, but was also rotten, complain the workers. Authorities had delayed the delivery of the sacks of rice by saying that they had to undergo lab tests. "How dare they give us this after taking so long with their lab tests?" asks a local who was among the few that had lodged a complaint with the District Administration Officer.

Locals suspect foul play, saying the officials involved in the transaction must have siphoned off the good rice. They say the rice is rotten and tastes bitter. Chairman of the Road Construction Committee Norsang Sherpa admits the quality of rice is lower than what was promised.

There is a discrepancy even in the amount that was handed to the villagers—it arrived with 1,000kg less than the agreed upon 35,000. Rural Community Infrastructure Development Dolakha Unit chief Damodar Pangeni admits that the rice is substandard quality, but argues that it is edible as proven by lab tests and therefore cannot be returned.

## HISTORY AND CULTURE

### NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

# The interior world of Avinash Shrestha

Avinash Shrestha writes some of the most interior, emotionally charged poetry being written today by any male poet. Eschewing the righteous, sometimes bombastic social critiques of many of his peers, Shrestha writes intimately of the experience of fear, passion and desire. In the poems below he offers us the singular lyricism and physicality of his language.

## LETTER TO A FRIEND FROM YOUTH

Neelpawan! Don't you remember?  
On the path that dipped lower and lower  
we too were lowering and  
stopping and resting along with us  
the sun and the day also lowered behind  
the mugwort and raspberry shrubs  
Neelpawan! Don't you remember?

Placing life on a dare like the trickster  
swaying back and forth on a tightrope  
the sun swayed back and forth above us  
for many days for invisible ages  
But time won't change us as it will that trickster  
whose end will surely come diseased, unsheltered  
on some dirty sidewalk

Neelpawan! Don't you remember?  
We'd collected enough dreams  
to last our days of youth Phantasms of old age  
disease and hunger come by to haunt me now  
We'd never thought of such things before  
Don't tease me Neelpawan, saying I suffer  
an attachment to Buddhahood Don't tease me  
My illusions of Siddhartha are dear to me  
My home, son Rahul and companion Yashodhara  
are dear to me I will cast aside these fantasies  
I will work to make a foundation on  
the path between attachment and detachment

Neelpawan! Don't you remember?  
That day we felt terrified, seeing the trickster  
If you don't recall—do try to remember  
You'll find the will to live like a human being

This is, it seems, our only enlightenment

## INATTENTIVENESS

The ten chariots of direction have halted  
The morning maidens have tucked off their covers of mist

The pebbles of their chuckles shower upon  
the lake of my inattentiveness Ah!  
The restless girls of spring—

Horses tied to the tree in the windy season  
A foreign word in the midst of language  
Unknown guests who have entered the house

A champagne bottle a hundred years older than I  
Foreign friends playing polo on fields of aristocratic  
chatter

The face of the sad afternoon like a whore  
The lazy wind tempted to whisper rumors in our ears

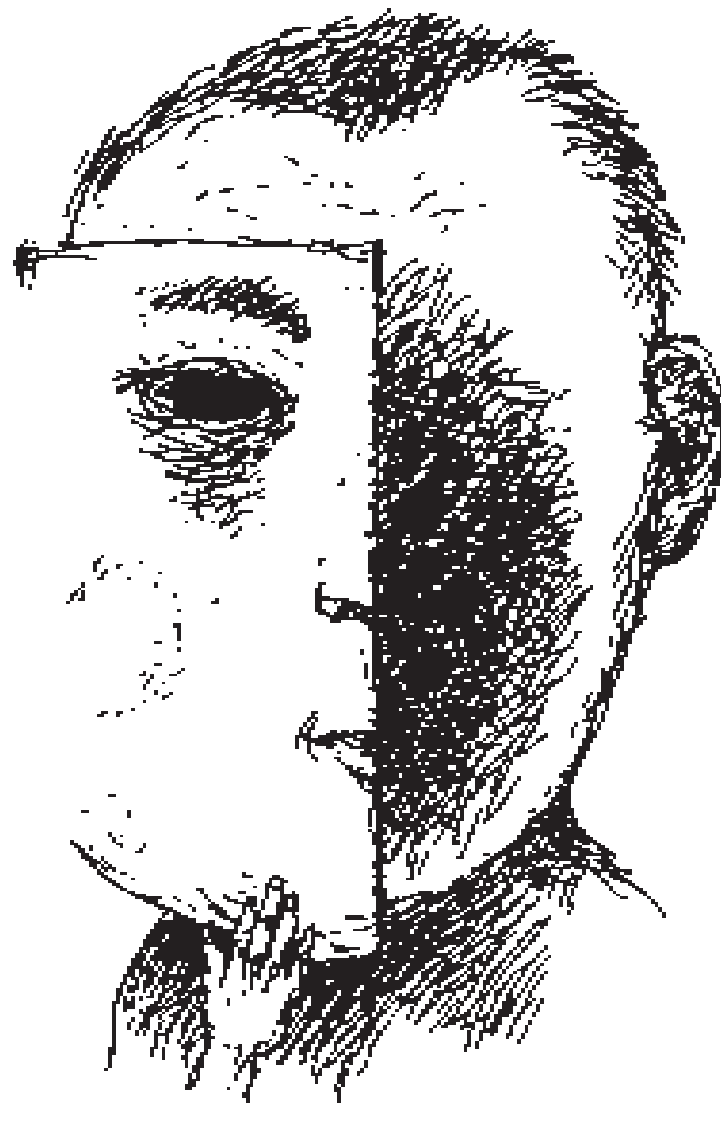
Today I'm well like the pine tree lost  
in the ancient darkness outside It's enough  
I'll shut the window that looks out onto memory  
I'll draw closed the curtains of drowsiness  
as I lie down to sleep

In addition to being a poet and playwright, Shrestha edits the Royal Nepal Academy's literary magazine, *Samakalin Sahitya*.



## POETIC LICENSE

by THOMAS LUX



# The people of the other village

Hate the people of this village  
and would nail our hats  
to our heads by refusing in their presence to  
remove them  
or staple our hands to our foreheads  
for refusing to salute them  
if we did not hurt them first: mail them  
packages of rats,  
mix their flour at night with broken glass.  
We do this, they do that.  
They peel the larynx from one of our  
brother's throats.  
We deivein one of their sisters.  
The quicksand pits they built were good.  
Our amputation teams were better.  
We trained some birds to steal their wheat.  
They sent us to exploding ambassadors of  
peace.  
They do this, we do that.  
We cancelled our sheep imports.  
They no longer bought our blankets.  
We mocked their greatest poet  
and when that had no effect  
we parodied the way they dance  
which did cause pain, so they, in turn, said  
our God  
was leprous, hairless.  
We do this, they do that.  
Ten thousand (10,000) years, ten thousand  
(10,000) brutal, beautiful years.

(Thomas Lux is an American poet whose works include *The Street of Clocks*, *New and Selected Poems* and *The Blind Swimmer: Selected Early Poems*.)

# Soldiers for the cause

*Rajdhani*, 2 May  
By Chitra Bahadur Singh

## राजधानी

Maoist child soldiers who had been underground are returning home to Daha, a village in far-western Kalikot. Back in the safety of their homes, they pray that they will not have to return to the jungle again.

Four classmates from Chulimalika Secondary School joined the Maoist rebels more than two years ago and are very articulate about *janbadi shiksha*—Maoist speak for 'progressive-people's education'. Ten-year old Jagadish Shahi said that he would continue his education if that policy is adopted during negotiations between the government and the rebels. "Hundreds of children like me contributed in bringing the 'people's war' to where it is today," says Shahi.

He claims there are 300 child soldiers who went underground for the Maoist party at Kalikot alone. Shahi says he and his colleagues suffered unimaginable hardships for their "ideals". "It is for love of my parents, grandfather and school friends that I decided to come home," he said.

His former classmate Devendra Shahi, 12, has no regrets about joining the Maoists. After more than two years underground, he regards guns and bullets as childplay. "We will be compelled to go back if the present peace process fails. I pray that a situation where children like me have to pick up guns will never arise again," he says.

Sita Kumari Singh, 14, and Bimala, 15, joined the Maoist party from Odanaku village of Kalikot and are members of the Maoist's cultural wing, Raktaranjan Cultural Troupe. "Until the valid demands of the Maoist party materialises, the contributions made by artists like us will not get due recognition," Singh says. Both of Bimala's parents and her grandparents died in the seven-year long civil war. She hopes to live with her uncle's family if permanent peace is established in the country.

News of 17-year-old Padam Bahadur Rawal's death at the hands of the Royal Nepali Army was broadcasted by the state-controlled radio recently. His parents even performed his last rites when their son, very much alive, returned home. "Even if the ceasefire is put in place, we cannot return home unless a lasting peace is established and the people's army is merged with the national army," Rawal says with certainty.





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## ABOUT TOWN

## FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Kathmandu Vendors** paintings by Mark Jordans at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Contemporary Tibetan Art from Lhasa** till 14 June at Lotus Gallery, Thamel. 4253646
- ❖ **Tibetan paintings** till 20 May at Pathibhara Art Gallery, Thamel. 4256004
- ❖ **From the sea to the Himalayas** Paintings by Ahmed Sareer till 13 May at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4436944

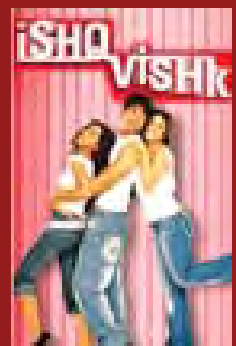
## EVENTS

- ❖ **Studio 7 presents Babu Raja** at the Naga Theatre of the Vajra Hotel. Tickets Rs 700. 7.15 PM, 9-11 May. 4271545
- ❖ **Reiki Second Degree Workshop** First Degree 10-11 May at Babar Mahal Revisited. reiki@eld.org.uk 5541613
- ❖ **Rock Nepal 2003** Guitarist Louis Bertignac and friends at Hyatt Regency Ballroom, 7PM onwards on 14 May. Rs 1250 pp. 4491234
- ❖ **3rd Annual VW Rally** Kathmandu to Nagarkot on 10 May. Rs 500 pp (lunch included) in aid of the Ganesh Foundation, Shanti Shanti Sangh and Maya Foundation. Details: 4428752.
- ❖ **Exhibition on J Krishnamurti** 9-17 May at Bhrikuti Mandap.
- ❖ **7th Nepal education and book fair** 11AM-6.30 PM till 10 May at Bhrikuti Mandap.
- ❖ **Exchange Mela Hyundai distributors** (Avco Intl) 10-11 May, 11AM onwards at Bhrikuti Mandap. Valuation of old cars, maintenance workshop, testdrives.
- ❖ **International bowling tournament** organised by NMA and NBA. 10-11 May at Bowling Boulevard, Royal Bowling and Shahanshah Bowling Centre. Details: 4443337, 981032149

Director Ken Ghosh takes us on a romp of teenage love and misunderstandings in *Ishq Vishk*. Starring Amrita Arora, ex-MTV presenter Shenaz and Shahid, the film revolves around Rajeev (Shahid) who is cynical of love and commitment. Payal (Amrita) is besotted with Rajeev and believes that hard work and honesty will snare her dream man. Things don't go according to plan when Alisha (Shenaz), a girl with looks, sophistication and class, steps into the frame.

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❖ शिक्षा उपहार होइन ।  
❖ शिक्षा बालबालिकाको अधिकार हो ।

**NEPALI WEATHER** by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

VIS-07-05-2003 10:00 GMT

The low-pressure centre, which has shifted to peninsular India, will result in an early wave of the South Asian monsoon in a fortnight. Wednesday morning's satellite picture shows extensive cloud cover over the northern Himalaya. Combined with the moisture laden western jet stream, this will usher in frequent showers and thunderstorms, higher altitudes will have strong winds and fresh snowfall. Night temperatures may drop but days will get hotter as the mercury rises and humidity increases. Rain and overcast skies will linger through the weekend and into early next week.

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# Spoilt for choice

Custom made furniture is the tempting new trend in interiors.



from iron and wood to moulded plastics. You can buy entire furniture ranges (two side tables, one sofa, two armchairs) made in Italy, made in Nepal for Italy or available in prefabricated, ready-to-assemble sets (screwdrivers not included). Designs range from Victorian cheap wood to the latest trends in wrought iron furniture. The key to the whole exercise of interior decoration is to be true to oneself. And keep an eye on your budget, unless you plan to replace your furniture every year.

Like the Hong Kong Chinese, always invest in the best quality you can afford.

Wrought iron used to be regarded exclusively as garden and patio furniture but are increasingly finding their way into people's living, dining and bedrooms. "People are going gaga over our furniture," says

Sabita Dhungana of Aakarshan, a pioneer manufacturer of custom-made wrought iron furniture in Nepal. They are so popular with the expatriate community that several Aakarshan pieces have been exported to Europe. "You can experiment with colour and design, and wrought iron is cheap here in Nepal compared to prices abroad," explains Sabita. Aakarshan has begun to make collapsible furniture so those who have to move often can easily cart them along. Furniture that can be disassembled and transported easily is popularly known in the business as knockdown furniture. "Their convenience is one reason why they are becoming so popular," says Birendra Deo of Furniture 2000, a company that specialises in office tables.

Wrought iron is even making an appearance in non-traditional areas like the kitchen. The folks at Better Homes at Thapathali claim wrought iron is ideally suited to high-use areas like kitchens because it is long wearing. The wall and base cabinets in their showroom could convert even a sceptic into a believer, especially if it comes with custom fitting. "If clients

want modifications, we can get it done for them," says Sangita. All this doesn't come cheap. Aimed at the high and upper-middle Nepali bracket, Sangita is aware that her creations don't have a very democratically priced tag.

Wood, however, caters to every budget and taste. With the plastic emulsions and metal polish paints available in the market you could even have wood furniture that imitates wrought iron! "There is no doubt that wooden furniture still tops the demand list," says Sushil Thapaliya of Padmasree, a company that has carved out a niche for itself in the wooden furniture manufacturing and retail business. His stiffest competition comes from cheap pieces imported from Malaysia, China and other Southeast Asian countries. "Nepali furniture is much stronger but some customers are swayed by the better finish on imported goods," he says.

Designing interiors is still a fledgling business says Siddharth Gopalan, a young interior designer whose clients include Sipradi, the Australian Embassy, Himalmedia, the Roadhouse Café in Thamel and recently the Khetan Group's corporate headquarters. Siddharth treads the fine line between kitsch and classic as he juggles interiors for the nouveau riche and the Scandinavian-leaning minimalists. Kathmandu is a melting pot of different concepts and for those who can't afford his services, here is Siddharth's hint to do-it-yourself designers: "You can use a lot of glitter and make a place look tacky, or you can use a little mud and have a classy place." ♦



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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Bush lands Soyuz in North Korea

*Software glitch sends Prez ballistic over the DMZ.*

BY OUR SPACE CADET

PYONGYANG (AP) — In a Reaganesque finale to his one-week stay on board the International Space Station, President George W. Bush made a ballistic reentry into the earth's atmosphere in a Soyuz capsule but landed in North Korea instead of the South Lawn of the White House, space experts disclosed Tuesday.



President Bush walks out of the Soyuz capsule after it inadvertently landed in North Korea Tuesday.

The event marked many firsts. It was the first time that a US astronaut has returned to earth on board a Russian spacecraft, and the first time in history that a sitting US president has paid a surprise visit to North Korea. A Russian space official at the cosmodrome in Star City, Kazakhstan, believed that the steeper-than-normal reentry was caused by a glitch in the guidance system in the president's cerebral cortex. "It was a software problem, not a hardware problem," he told a packed news conference.

It took helicopters hours to locate the craft near the DMZ, and when rescue personnel finally reached it they found the president walking a little unsteadily and trying to interrogate a bewildered North Korean border guard in International

Sign Language.

"As long as I was in North Korea, I figured I should ask folks here about their nuke reactors and the manufacture of weapons-grade plutonium," Bush told reporters dressed in full space regalia. Of his dramatic reentry into the atmosphere during which the Soyuz space capsule was exposed to eight Gs, Bush said: "There is a lot of pressure on the chest as you get to sub-orbital velocity, your tongue sort of slips around inside your mouth and toward the back of your throat, and at one point there I thought I hit the G-spot."

Bush added that his landing here, although unscheduled, would "send a strong signal" to all countries harbouring terrorists, contemplating the development of weapons of mass destruction, or boycotting McDonalds: that "the American president can drop in on you at anytime anywhere in the world".

In Washington DC, a senior White House official denied that the reentry was deliberately planned as a made-for-television footage for the 2004 Re-elect Bush Campaign, but added: "As commander-in-chief, the president wanted to go into space to personally look for Saddam Hussein. We had intelligence reports that the Russians smuggled him out of Baghdad before it fell to coalition forces, and secretly blasted him off into space so he could hide in the International Space Station with the \$1billion cash he stole from the Iraqi Central Bank. The president believes the war isn't over till he gets Saddam."

Asked of the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, the official revealed that the leader of Al Qaeda in fact did not exist and that was why it was so difficult to find him. "But we'll keep trying," he added. ♦

## NEPALI SOCIETY

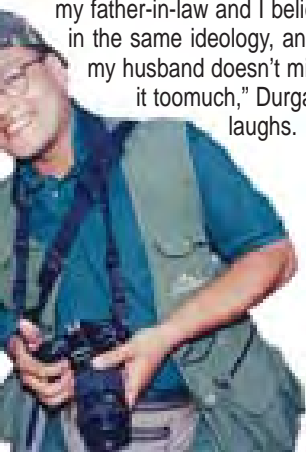
# Poster girl

**A** picture speaks a thousand words. And Min Bajracharya's picture of Durga Thapa became an icon of the People's Movement 1990. Durga was 22 then, a student at Padma Kanya Campus. Min (*pic, left*) was 19. She had joined one of the rallies that were the precursors of the restoration of democracy when the photographer's eye caught the dramatic image.

"I was shouting so much that I damaged my vocal chords, and I never fully recovered," Durga says in her hoarse voice. Initially, Durga was thrilled to see herself splashed on posters, but after 14 years she sometimes feels it has been misused. The picture was first published in the book, *Dawn of Democracy* published by the Human Rights Protection Forum in 1991. Durga finally met Min Bajracharya two years later.

"I was looking through the viewfinder, when I saw this extraordinary image and I just responded instinctively to the spontaneity and zeal," recalls Min, now the staff photographer for *Himal Khabrapatrika* and *Nepali Times*. Both are thrilled their photo earned so much recognition, but both feel they have been exploited. Now an official at the Chief Controller's Office, Durga says she has been bypassed for promotions. As a government official, she now limits her political interest to union activity. The impact on her personal life was bigger. Her family was dazzled by the sudden exposure the photograph brought—as a result she was married off even before she finished college! Recently, Min's photo of Durga enjoyed another comeback when the political parties relaunched their agitation on 4 May (see picture). Durga's

children don't understand why their mother's picture is plastered on every wall in Kathmandu. "Luckily my father-in-law and I believe in the same ideology, and my husband doesn't mind it too much," Durga laughs. ♦



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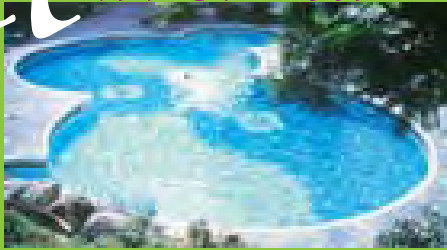


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