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BAR HOPPING in KTM

p 15-16

Summit of summiteers

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
in TENGOBOCHE

While gala celebrations continued in Kathmandu, Tengboche marked the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Sagarmatha with a prayer ceremony on Thursday in memory of those who died on the mountain.

Edmund Hillary's son, Peter, was chief guest at the ceremony, and in a rousing speech he said development was a bit like climbing Mt Everest. "Both need dedication and teamwork, and with that nothing is impossible," Peter Hillary told a gathering of 1,000 local Sherpas and visitors.

It was a brilliantly clear day in Tengboche, with an elegantly tilted Ama Dablam looking down approvingly on the monastery. To the north, the summit of Mt Everest peeped over the Lhotse-Nuptse ridge with a plume of spindrift blowing off the summit ridge. On the south side, climbers have been waiting out high winds and may make a push on Thursday night itself when the winds are expected to ease.

A Russian ascent from the north was the first climb of the 50th Anniversary day.

At the ceremony in Tengboche, the monastery's Rimpoché, who has been at the forefront of efforts to preserve the environment in the Sagarmatha National Park and to clean up the trails, thanked Edmund Hillary, his family and friends for their energy and sacrifices over the past 50 years to develop Khumbu.

"For the Sherpa community Edmund Hillary is like a caring parent," the Rimpoché said. "We pray for his good health and long life." The monastery was rebuilt after it was razed in a fire 15 years ago, and Michael Schmitz, coordinator of the Tengboche Monastery Development Project, said a visitor's centre and expanded sacred area are being added.

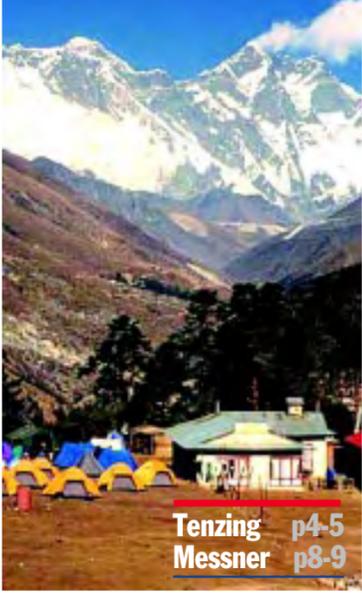
The meadow outside the monastery was the venue for a traditional Sherpa dance, and the New Zealanders reciprocated by performing a Maori dance. The field is filled with tents, and a large one in the middle was the scene of a

golden jubilee party to raise money for Hillary's Himalayan Trust which funds development work in the Solu Khumbu Region. After starting out with the school in Khumjung, the hospital in Khunde and the airport at Lukla, the Trust has built dozens of schools, hospitals and renovated monasteries in the region.

There has been a steady stream of summiteers coming off Mt Everest. Among them is Appa Sherpa, who was tearing down the mountain towards Lukla for a flight to Kathmandu after climbing Mt Everest for the 13th time. "The important thing is set a goal for yourself and fulfil it," Appa said, as he hurried off.

Some Sherpas voiced private misgivings about whether the competition to set records on Everest wasn't getting a bit out of hand. "This kind of competition is not healthy, it breeds antagonism and ill will," said one elderly Sherpa here. One-fourth of the 1,702 summits have been made by Sherpas, and 175 of them died on the mountain. ♦

Royal banquet in Kathmandu, Rimpoché's prayers in Khumbu.



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Two years later

The royal massacre left deep scars on the national psyche.

ANALYSIS by **KUNDA DIXIT**

1 June 2001 seems like a bad dream, but Nepalis have now woken up and have decided to move on.

The tragedy left scars on the national psyche that will never completely heal. All we can do is try to deal with the legacy, learn its lessons. The single most significant consequence of June First was that King Gyanendra became king. Thrust onto the throne after the death of his brother and nephew, he has tried to come to terms with a deep personal tragedy while simultaneously having to learn the essence of statecraft at the most turbulent time in the kingdom's history.

Last year, in a candid television interview, the king told Durga Nath Sharma: "I am not like my brother, I can't sit idly by while the country sinks deeper into crisis." What he meant by that was soon clear: Prime Minister Deuba was sacked a few months later. The king then appointed a cabinet of trusted political figures and technocrats, and got Col Narayan Singh Pun to forge a ceasefire with the Maoists. But he was less successful with trying to convince the political parties to join his government.

The five parliamentary parties first went into a deep sulk, but regrouped to launch a united street agitation. In reality, they felt left out of the peace process, and had dark misgivings about the country being dragged back to pre-1990 days.

It is a measure of how low the stock of the political parties has fallen that there hasn't been a groundswell of public support for the anti-royal agitation. The public generally seems to regard this as a power play, and don't want to jeopardise the peace process.

But public opinion may shift if this stalemate drags on. A recent survey (*Nepali Times*, #140) showed people overwhelmingly reject a return to absolute monarchy.

Girija Prasad Koirala was prime minister during the royal massacre. He is now leading the charge against the king, still threatening to disclose some mysterious "grand design". The UML supremo Madhab Kumar Nepal refused to join the royal commission to probe the massacre, and he is now hand-in-hand with ex-rival Koirala on the streets.

Speaker Taranath Ranabhat headed the commission and released the report that became the only official inquiry into the palace killings. He earned the nickname "Bhatatata" after re-enacting the murder scene by holding up one of the weapons used for the benefit of the press (pic, right). This week Ranabhat refused to join kangresi colleagues at the convening of the virtual parliament at the Academy Hall.



The Maoists tried to capitalise on the uncertainty and anarchy in the weeks after 1 June, 2001. But despite government bungling Baburam Bhattarai's conspiracy theories did not carry much weight with the public. The Nepali people, it seems, make a mental distinction between the institution of monarchy and the persona of the king.

This week the Maoists are all gathered in the cradle of their revolution for an extended politburo meeting in Rolpa. The comrades are evaluating the last four months of ceasefire and plotting the next course of action. It doesn't look like the peace process is in mortal danger, but it isn't in the pink of health either.

So, two years on, the palace and parties are stuck: the main obstacle is that no compromise candidate for prime minister is acceptable to anyone else. Things seem to be veering in the direction of an RPP-lead all-party coalition—that is if the powers-that-be can decide between Surya Bahadur Thapa and Pashupati SJB Rana.

This week, the parties are bent on keeping up the pressure on the king with street protests during the Everest anniversary when the world media is in town. Meanwhile, their student wings are competing with the Maoists to disrupt education. "We have to show our fangs in public, but there is a lot of behind-the-scenes efforts to find a compromise," admitted one party stalwart. The UML plans a "protest of unprecedented proportions" on Jesth 19.

Only when an all-party interim set up is agreed on and is in place can the task of planning for the next local and general elections begin. But before we get to that: the peace talks must be concluded and the Maoists agree to disarm. ♦



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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Let them eat cake

Most schools in the country are still built-owned-operated by the government. How about improving them first?

INTERVIEW WITH BP

Nepali Times: Mr Koirala, sir, it has been more than 20 years since you have been in self-imposed exile in heaven. This has given you a certain perspective on how things have turned out after your departure. How does it look from paradise?

BP: Well, let me put it this way. It doesn't look as bad from here as it probably does from ground level where you are. Yes, a lot of the stuff flying around may remind you of December 1960 when my parliament was dissolved and we were sent to jail by the present king's father. But the Nepali people have come a long way since then. The 1990 constitution was not perfect (no constitution is) but it began the process of restoring sovereignty to the people. Of course, people made jokes about it: they said Nepalis are now free, but only free to complain how miserable they are. But that was precisely the point: before that they weren't even allowed to complain.

In hindsight, you could say that our expectations were too high. 1990 was an unfinished movement, it bought us time to set things right. Unfortunately, my successors squandered that period. The people were impatient, they wanted democracy to bring immediate tangible results to their lives. And it did: maternal mortality, infant mortality and literacy all got better. But the change was not dramatic enough. The people got disillusioned. Still, public opinion polls you have done down there show that people blame the leaders and not the system. It's only the cynical Kathmandu elite that blames democracy, in the rest of Nepal democracy has struck deep roots. Democracy is the worst system in the world—except for all the others, as Winston Churchill, who is here with me, keeps saying.

Yet, there seems to be an attempt to put democracy into reverse gear, will this work?

No it won't, and for the reason I just explained. But having said that, let me add that the king has a point. You could say that his October Fourth move was unconstitutional and undemocratic, but the fact is that the Maoists were at the gates. My brother, niece and former proteges were carrying on as if the only thing that mattered was to cling on to power. Our party won an absolute majority in parliament in 1999, and what did we do? We changed prime ministers three times in two years, and kept fighting each other. Kishunji had the vision and could rule by example, but he is so disappointed he has taken a vow of silence. My brother is a good fellow, he has organisational skills. But his long-term vision is impaired by his obsession with day-to-day politics. I always had nothing but admiration and affection for Shailaja, in the family she alone has integrity and commitment. What the king needs now is an efficient and united team to conclude the peace process and lay the groundwork for the next elections.

Speaking of the peace process. Do you think the Maoists are genuine in their offer for peace?

My views on extremist communism have not changed. I would be stating the obvious if I repeated that in the dialectics of Leninism with its Maoist modifications: the end justifies the means. So the modus operandi is the same whether it is the Sandinistas or the Senderistas, they can shelve the armed struggle from time to time (even when they are winning) to infiltrate a weak government and destroy it from within because they find that an easier option. Why should our Maoists continue with a war if the cabinet cannot speak with one voice and the constitutional forces are fighting each other like cats and dogs? They can just wait for the right moment and pounce.

You've had some time to think about this: you came back to Nepal in 1977 with the slogan of national reconciliation. Is it time for another national reconciliation?

You know, I often think had I accommodated King Mahendra's ambitions, maybe we wouldn't have been in the wilderness for 30 years. But then, what kind of democracy would that be? You've got a similar situation down there now. In the row between the palace and parties, it is difficult to say which is blacker: the pot or the kettle. Both sides think they can win, but in this game there are no winners, only losers. And if both lose, what kind of Nepal will we have left? Still, it is the king who took control, and it is his responsibility to set things right. He can't say he doesn't have executive powers. There is nothing preventing him from calling that famous tea party for all the parties. That would set the ball rolling. A substantial discussion can then start on the composition of an interim administration. Of course, my brother will then be fighting with everyone else about berths in that cabinet, but that's a risk that comes with the turf.

So, a government of national reconciliation?

Precisely. It wouldn't be the ultimate solution, but at least it will take you out of this quagmire. The present crisis is a fantastic opportunity to reform our laws, our society, have a more inclusive democracy, and devolve power to the people through local government units. And I just don't see what is holding things up. Actually, I do. It is the political egos of the protagonists.

Do you sometimes wish you were back?

Not really. I can watch it all unfold from up here.

Had Maoist students suspended their agitation a little earlier, noted educationist Satyanarayan Bahadur Shrestha, 89, would have spent his last days in peace. Last week, the social reformer had to die watching the spectre of union leaders locking up school principal's rooms.

Opting out of active politics after the overthrow of the Rana regime, SB founded three prominent schools in the Kathmandu valley—Tribhuban Adarsha Vidya Mandir, Mahendra Vidyashram, and Adarsha Vidya Mandir or AVM. The Panchayat regime put a stop to private initiative in school education, and no new SB was born in the country for the next quarter of a century.

Private schools made a fresh start only in the wake of the referendum-induced changes in the governance in the early eighties. But when the lid of control was lifted after the success of the People's Movement in 1990, there was a sudden rush to open schools all over the country. Many of them began as commercial enterprises and continue to be run as such.

The comfortable class was attracted by the novelty of private schools, and the bourgeoisie began to desert public schools en masse. Shorn of their best and brightest, government schools were soon caught in the vicious circle of decreasing intake, falling standard, worsening image and dwindling reputation.

But, if public schools are in a mess, the lot of the 'English Boarding Schools' in the country aren't any better. There is an urgent need to bring private schools in the ambit of some kind of a regulatory mechanism.

The reform must begin by accepting that private schools are here to stay. They can't be wished away howsoever the egalitarians may want them to. In the medium term at least, it is pointless to bemoan the class distinction that the private schools are creating. Since even the Maoist leadership has publicly endorsed the role of private capital in its 'New Model' of democracy, the right to exercise free choice can't be denied to any discerning consumer.

Second, agitating students had erred grievously by putting all private schools in one category. All public schools may be more or less the same, but private schools can be categorised into at least four groups: Deluxe, Exclusive, Superior and Economy. In order to make them more socially relevant, each one of them needs a different approach of monitoring and evaluation.

It would be counter-productive to insist that Deluxe schools decrease their fees. These cater to the status needs of well-off parents. High fees are their USP. If they were to reduce their charges, they would immediately lose their customers to pricier competitors in Mussoorie, Shimla, Darjeeling or Kodaikanal.

Deluxe schools need to be encouraged to hike their fees and add more glamour to their bouquet—riding club, polo, sauna and heated swimming pools are not luxuries for kids likely to be chauffeured to their school in Japanese SUVs.

If status defines deluxe schools, it's aspiration that drives ambitious parents to Exclusive schools.

The rush to get into the Exclusive schools is fuelled by the desire of upper class parents in their Marutis and Santros to be keep up and be one up on the Janardan next door. A ceiling on fee is not the correct way of regulating Exclusive schools either. It would be more appropriate to oversee the

functioning of such schools by an independent body patterned after consumer courts. They should be made to open their accounts, not lock them up. All Deluxe and Exclusive schools must publish their balance sheets periodically, and pay certain royalty on their turnover.

Some of the Deluxe and Exclusive schools are akin to Export Promotion Zones for human resources. Further corporatisation of these two categories of schools would be a sensible option. If the government has no objection to the commercialisation of health services, why whine about efficiently managed quality schools?

Capacity is the key strength of Superior schools, and they can use the economy of scale to cut their prices to a certain extent. But even in this category, growth in supply hasn't been able to keep up with the spiralling demand. Most Superior schools are so overloaded that they can't fiddle with the student to teacher ratio any further. All that the government can do is to ask the management of these schools to keep their books open for the guardians and the press.

That leaves the bulk—the Economy class of private schools. Most of these me-to-enterprises are shoestring mom-and-pop operations. If they are making any money, it must be by fleecing teachers, not by over-charging parents. There is no way fees of these schools can be reduced without forcing them to pay their staff sweatshop wages.

With the parents who send their children to any of these private schools, fee is seldom the core issue. The affordability and willingness to pay govern access to private schools. The market forces govern values of their services. There is very little that the government can do except monitoring to see that these schools deliver what they promise.

Agitating students affiliated to political parties are barking up the wrong tree. To check the commercialisation of school education, it's much more sensible to begin by improving the condition of government schools—about 80 percent of all schools in the country are still built-owned-operated by the government. But that is another story. ♦



LETTERS

EXPENSIVE SCHOOLS

Re: 'Parents mobilise' (#146). As foreigners, we have the means to send our Nepali foster son to one of the best private schools—and one that runs without foreign funding. As Europeans we can testify that its educational standards are higher than those afforded to us in Germany and Austria when we went to school. We often envy the boy for the chance he has to be in such a good school and for being so happy with it.

Schools like this one are essential for the country, because they provide what most other public and private schools do not: better education. As the privileged upper classes of Nepal, its politicians, and even Maobadi leaders know very well, the only alternative is to send their offspring for appropriate education to boarding schools far and abroad. We feel strongly,

however, that children during their formative years should stay close to their families, near their rich culture.

High and "unjustified" school fees are targets of the present agitation against private schools, but "expensive" is a relative term depending on your own values, and on what to compare. If one believes, as we do, that primary and secondary education should be free for all children, then any fee may be deemed expensive. But education costs money (high standards cost even more), and Nepal is not Europe (or Cuba, just to name another poor country) where all taxpayers together share the expenses for good public education. If the state does not provide it, parents will have to. Unfortunately, Nepal has hitherto

failed to establish a well-suited educational system for all. And to claim, after decades and in spite of millions of aid funds, a literacy rate of 50 percent to be a success is a joke. What has been achieved from learning by rote is to be able to read a Sanscritised form of Nepali—that many of these 50 percent do not even speak in their homes. And where are the vocational schools, so important for the development of a country like this? Since the people of Nepal, its civic society and its private sector, have stepped in where successive governments failed, it is only natural that also the quality aspects of learning have gained importance. We deem it good for the country that at least some private schools have developed high and even international standards of education, although only a limited

number of Nepal's children have yet access to them.

It is understandable that many who want the best for their children may find school fees expensive, if they can not afford them. Yet they have a choice: to evaluate carefully what quality education means for their children, to change their values and preferences if needed, and—for the long term—to help changing the system of governance for the better. But do not go the way of Pol Pot in Cambodia and destroy one of the pillars of development, which is quality education. Pay or fight for it with whatever you can, until all children of Nepal get the same chance!

Ludmilla Hungerhuber and
 Goetz Hagmueller,
 Bhaktapur

RNA

Thanks for the article 'Why do we need tanks?' by Kanak Mani Dixit (#145), which was to the point. There are just two things for the writer to consider. The first is deduce how much of the arms spree is to "boost the capability" of the Royal Nepali Army (RNA), and how much to intimidate the Maoists? To somewhat paraphrase von Calusewitz, (re)arming is also negotiations by other means. And, second, a civilian oversight of security matters is essential. I'm surprised the writer left the paragraph unfinished. This is where the role of the Defence Council comes in. So far it has only played a symbolic role and it needs to be vested with powers to monitor security matters and determine national policy from a broader perspective, rather than on the basis of knee jerk reactions. The



Still unbecoming citizens

Bottom line: Bhutan is still playing for time on refugee repatriation.



Recent months have witnessed a certain warmth in the long-troubled relationship between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal, and a growing recognition that the two India-locked Himalayan kingdoms have commercial and political interests in common. This might have been expected to bode well for the 100,000 'people in the refugee camps in Jhapa and Morang' who have been awaiting a just settlement of their plight with extraordinary dignity and patience for up to 12 years.

Ten long years ago, the two governments agreed to divide the refugees into four categories: (1) bonafide Bhutanese evicted forcibly, (2) Bhutanese who left as voluntary emigrants, (3) non-Bhutanese, and (4) Bhutanese criminals. It took a further eight years for the actual verification process to begin, and nearly nine months for it to be completed in just one camp: Khudunabari, the home of some 12,500 people. In the monsoon rains of 2001, I watched the buses come and go between Khudunabari and the Joint Verification Team's office in Damak. Several extended families were delivered each day, their children scrubbed and polished, for this first opportunity to prove that they were who they said they were. Levels of optimism were high.

The completion of the exercise was followed by many months of frustrating silence and inactivity and its outcome remained a mystery. The process did not restart until early 2003, after Bhutanese officials reassured international donors at a meeting in Geneva of their commitment to finding a solution to the refugee problem. The two verification teams spent many weeks in secret discussions in Thimphu before presenting their report to the fourteenth meeting of the Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC), recently concluded in Kathmandu.

The announcement that followed has come as a shock. It is widely believed that only 3 percent of the population of Khudunabari camp have been categorised as 'bonafide Bhutanese evicted forcibly', while some 75 percent

have been categorised as 'voluntary emigrants'. Some 20 percent are said to have been categorised as non-Bhutanese, and 3 percent as Bhutanese criminals. According to the MJC's joint press release, the 'bonafide Bhutanese evicted forcibly', ie around 375 persons, will be permitted to return as full citizens, while those 'voluntary emigrants' who wish to return will be given the option of re-applying for Bhutanese citizenship. Non-Bhutanese will have to return to their own countries, and Bhutanese criminals will have to return to stand trial.

It is the 'voluntary emigrants' category that causes the greatest concern. It has long been known that a large number of people in the camps in Jhapa and Morang were in danger of falling into this category. It was always likely that a particularly high proportion would be found in Khudunabari, because this camp was the last to be established, well after the Bhutanese authorities had achieved a thorough bureaucratisation of the

eviction process. The 'voluntary emigrants' include people who were coerced into signing emigration forms, people who signed written commitments to leave the country in order to secure the release of relatives imprisoned for political offences, people who simply fled from a generalised state of fear and insecurity, and so on. Drawing on research published by Kanak Mani Dixit and Amnesty International, I have discussed a number of such cases in my book, *Unbecoming Citizens*.

Many of us had hoped that the long delay in finalising the verification report was being caused by protracted negotiations over such cases. We hoped that the true reasons for flight were being clarified and that a number of people were being transferred to category 1 once it was proved that their 'emigration' had been far from 'voluntary'. It seems that we were wrong, and that the Nepali side in the negotiations has taken this category at face value, without delving into the

multifarious reasons for flight. Perhaps this was because the Bhutanese authorities offered them a compromise: if the Nepalis agreed not to challenge any 'voluntary emigrant' categorisations, the Bhutanese would allow such individuals to apply for repatriation. One can only speculate.

Whatever the reasons, the people categorised as 'voluntary emigrants' will shortly be faced with a difficult choice. They may apply for Bhutanese citizenship (even though their categorisation implicitly accepts that they were citizens before they left Bhutan) but it seems that no decisions will be reached on these applications for a period of two years after their repatriation. The Bhutanese Foreign Minister has stated that citizenship will be granted in accordance with the citizenship laws of Bhutan. But Bhutanese citizenship laws stipulate periods of residence of 15 or 20 years for citizenship by naturalisation and require applicants to have a thorough knowledge of Dzongkha. How would

these requirements apply in these circumstances?

Furthermore, if these 'voluntary emigrants' returned to Bhutan, where would they live? Most if not all of them owned houses and land in southern Bhutan, but many of their houses were demolished after their departure and many others were handed over to people from northern Bhutan in government resettlement schemes. Indeed, some of the districts from which people fled over a decade ago now contain the bases of Assamese and Bodo insurgents. Is the Bhutanese government truly establishing 'transit camps' to house the returnees, as rumoured?

And how would these returnees earn a living? Would they return to their lives as self-sufficient tax-paying farmers, or would they be placed in labour camps? Would they be afforded any rights, to healthcare, education and so on? The evidence of continued discrimination against even those ethnic Nepalis who remain in Bhutan, as recently revealed by Human Rights Watch, is ominous.

Why would any sane individual choose to entrust his family's future to a government from which he once fled, when his family's basic needs are being met in an environment that may allow them no prospect of advancement or improvement, but which is essentially benign? Without any guarantees or safeguards, and in the absence of any third party involvement in the repatriation process, the Bhutanese offer begs many questions. We must earnestly hope that no pressure will be applied to those who are reluctant to respond positively to it. The fact that the government media in Nepal is presenting these talks as a qualified success raises the suspicion that HMG Nepal does not understand the processes that led to these people becoming refugees or, worse still, is uninterested in finding a solution informed by justice rather than expediency. ♦

(Michael Hutt, PhD, is the author of *Unbecoming Citizens* and reader in Nepali and Himalayan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.)

Maoist threat has made it clear that modernisation of the army is essential, but it needs to be done through capacity building that will improve the overall performance of the army. Acquiring better armaments is only one part of it, but it needs to be followed by qualitative, rather than quantitative, development of its manpower and greater intelligence capacity.

Meanwhile, the Armed Police Force is already redundant, though nothing has been done to scrap it, or partially absorb it (within the RNA and Police) after the army took the lead security role after the state of emergency. National crises can always lead to a call for arms, which unchecked can develop a momentum of its own that can drain the economy and bring in unnecessary equipment into the country. The

key in any democratic system is accountability. We cannot pretend to cling on to the system, without accepting this essential precondition.

GB Chhetri, Mumbai

NEVEREST

While the world celebrates 50 years of Everest, it might be time for Nepalis to think about naming their highest peak Neverest. Mt Everest certainly supports the image of a mountain and its people ever resting and doing nothing more. Neverest has the opposite connotation—that of Nepalis and their highest peak awakening from a deep slumber.

Jack Prasai, Cape Town

PUSKAR

It's hard enough for Nepalis living abroad to maintain their cultural identity without a journalist of your

calibre making overblown statements in 'Love thy neighbour' (#145), among them, "Most Nepalis speak better Hindi than former Indian prime minister HD Deve Gowda." At the orientation program when I first joined university I told my disbelieving Indian friends that no, I didn't speak Hindi and neither do many of my fellow Nepalis. The prevailing attitude seems to be to look upon Nepal as more than just a friendly neighbour, almost another Indian state. We may have centuries of links with India, but the current circumstances demand for us to be independent from Indian influence. Look at our politicians—if it's a rainy day in India, they get out their umbrellas. And the king is not exempt. His recent 'religious' visit south of the border was a thinly veiled excuse for a little power

play. Interdependence is a pretty political theory but we must maintain our own sovereignty. Bhusal should realise the media plays an important role in expanding, broadening and bolstering our national identity.

Surendra R Shrestha, Sydney

- The parliamentary parties don't see what is right in front of them. There seems to be a very cordial relationship between the Maoists and the government, this is extremely sinister and damaging to the multiparty democratic system. Just consider some facts:
 - IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha is murdered a few days before the ceasefire, the government is apathetic, and the confessed killer is released.
 - The Maoists seem more eager

to reach an agreement with a puppet government rather than a duly elected government.

- The government's eagerness to comply with every demand of the Maoists, including those concerning security.
- The indifference of the state towards ceasefire violations by the Maoists.
- The government's strong-arm tactics against the political parties on the streets, but its tolerance of the activities of their student wing.
- The government's negligence towards the demands of the student unions for elections.
- The Maoists gradually shedding all their major demands except those which ensure the scrapping of the democratic constitution.
- The government and the Maoists saying in one voice that

the public must not question their actions because it will damage the peace process.

The strategy seems to be clear: get the royal government to hold elections to ensure a fair amount of seats for former Panchas and Maoists. This way, they will control parliamentary proceedings by proxy. "The snake is dead, the stick is not broken." Donors who have a genuine interest in the development of democracy must not be waylaid by an illusory peace process by two groups who will benefit from democracy's demise.

Ram Bahadur Moktan, USA





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Tenzing, the world smiles
with pride at you.

Fifty years ago, Nepal's folk-singer-in-chief, Dharma Raj Thapa wrote those lines after Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Everest with his New Zealand counterpart, Sir Edmund Hillary. Today, the octogenarian singer and writer feels that Tenzing never received enough respect or credit for his contribution in making the Sherpa community and Nepal famous around the world.

Legend has it that Tenzing's real name was Namgyal Wangdi but a rimpoché changed it to Tenzing Norgay, meaning 'fortunate', a prophecy that came to happy fruition when he reached the summit of Sagarmatha and became a celebrity. From then on, he became the favoured son of the Sherpa people, their ambassador to the outside world. Tenzing's career in high altitude adventure closely reflects the hardships he went

The Fortunate Son

through to achieve the status he enjoys today.

But an increasing number, among them lyricist Thapa, believe Tenzing, the man and the climber, has been overlooked in the fanfare of commemorating the first successful human ascent of Mt Everest. A seminar organised on Tuesday by Himal Association and The Mountain Institute was an occasion to pay tribute to the man who has often been sidelined in the media.

Forestry expert Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa who has been studying Tenzing's childhood, revealed a different side to the mountaineer.

Born in a Tibetan village in Kharta Valley in May 1914, young Tenzing's early childhood was spent in severe poverty and hardship. Life on the high plateau where his parents were wage herders was so difficult that only six out of 14 of Tenzing's siblings survived into adulthood. He made the long journey on foot with his mother and brothers across the Himalaya to Thame valley in Nepal in search of a better life.

Life as a yak herder in Khumbu was slightly easier, but he later migrated to Darjeeling in India at the age of 18 to try to get a job as a mountaineering porter. Many Sherpa lads were headed that way because of the demand from British expeditions trying to explore and climb Everest from the north. Tenzing's first break was the Everest Expedition led by Eric Shipton in 1935, and he made several other unsuccessful attempts at the summit.

In Kharta, Tenzing's family was ill-treated and exploited because they belonged to the lowest economic and social strata. Some



From l-r: Tenzing's son Jamling, Dharma Raj Thapa and grandson Tashi Tenzing.

say this was why he chose not to return to Tibet, even though his father, Minga, remained there and died shortly after the family migrated. Tenzing married thrice, all of them were Sherpa women. He became an adviser and the guiding spirit at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) after his appointment in May 1976.

Sherpas make up one-fourth of those who climbed Sagarmatha and one-third of those who died there, but they rarely merit a mention anywhere. But geographer Harka Gurung says Tenzing was always different from other Sherpas. "He had a different perspective on the whole business of climbing. For one thing he understood the Western concept of 'earning a name'."

Although he spoke seven languages, Tenzing never learned how to write but dictated his books

that provide a timeless account of an era when the high Himalayan frontiers were still unexplored. In his autobiography *Tiger of the Snows, The Autobiography of Tenzing of Everest* he says, "It has been a long road...from a mountain coolie, a bearer of loads, to a wearer of a coat with rows of medals who is

Nepal remembers Tenzing

carried about in planes and worries about his income tax."

Two major points of controversy surrounding Tenzing are who got to the top first and the matter of his nationality. With regard to the first, in his

autobiography Tenzing writes, "A little below the summit Hillary and I stopped. We looked up. Then we went on. The rope that joined us was thirty feet long, but I held most of it in loops in my hand, so that there was only about six feet between us. I was not thinking of 'first' and 'second'. I did not say to myself, 'There is a golden apple up there. I will push Hillary aside and run for it.' We went on slowly, steadily. And then we were there. Hillary stepped on top first. And I stepped up after him." Throughout his life he maintained they climbed the mountain as a team. The discrepancy probably arises from a press statement following the summit where Hillary wrote they made it "almost together", adding to the speculation.

And then there is the detail of

his nationality. After 29 May 1953, everyone was keen to embrace him. "Both Nepal and India needed a hero and a role model during a time of dramatic political changes," says writer Deepak Thapa who has been researching the life of Tenzing.

When Tenzing travelled across the Himalaya in search of a better life, he did so with no regard to political boundaries. American mountaineer Ed Webster's biography of Tenzing Norgay, *Snow in The Kingdom* created quite a stir when it said he was born in Tibet instead of Thame as believed earlier. Webster says both Sir Hillary and Lord Hunt, the leader of the 1953 expedition, believed he was born in a remote mountain village in Nepal but the truth was concealed to avoid embarrassing India.

The fact that Tenzing eventually chose to settle down permanently in Darjeeling where he lived till his death in 9 May 1986 must have felt like a rejection to many nationalistic Nepalis.

"Tenzing had a simplicity and humility about him but even then he must have felt eclipsed by the adulation the world showered on Edmund Hillary," says Lhakpa Norbu. He points out that while Sir Edmund Hillary was granted an honorary Nepali citizenship earlier this week, Tenzing—who deserves the equal honour—has been largely ignored. "If the Nepali government wants to honour my father with an honorary citizenship we will welcome it," said Jamling Norgay, Tenzing's son, "but he was a personality beyond any political boundary."

For Brian Penniston of The Mountain Institute, the point about nationality is moot. He says: "Birds don't have passports." ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Old Yerp, New Europe

Inadvertently, the Bush administration may have done something rather useful as it blunders among the diplomatic and human debris of its ongoing Iraq fiasco. I say "inadvertently" because I am convinced that history will show that this gaggle of mediocrities and ideologues rarely if ever achieve the stated goal of their policies, up to and including military interventions in sovereign countries. But such blunders can produce unintended side effects, call them collateral benefits if you will.

Consider, for example, the blusterings of Donald Rumsfeld before the foray into Iraq. The Defence Secretary—once described to me by a Republican party insider as "not fit to drive the White House lawnmower"—used the term "old Europe" to deride those who opposed invading Iraq: France, Germany and so on. Others like Bulgaria and Spain, supporters of US policy each for their own rather selfish reasons, were "the new Europe". At the time, this touched off a wave of derision among that vast majority of European people in all countries who preferred to let the United Nations disarm Iraq peacefully, or at least to do so without killing thousands of people and wrecking billions of dollars worth of property and infrastructure.

Interestingly, not too many of those Euro citizens were offended by the comments of Herr Signor Monsieur Comte de la Rumsfeld. For one thing, they were pleased that he could pronounce the name of the continent in two syllables, unlike his boss, who kept telling us about some place called "Yerp". Self-confidence may be a largely American invention but the Europeans seem to be adapting many of the good things that come across the Atlantic, ignoring the bad.

Neo-liberal economic commentators, the kind that dominate the business media in Britain and America, are fond of telling us that Old Europe is about to collapse. Its post-war consensus that marries socially inclusive welfare policies with aggressive corporatism was failing, it was



affirmed, staggering under low growth rates, budget deficits and lack of market confidence. Germany is generally touted as the leading offender here but many a neo-lib looks longingly at France, willing it frail with all his flinty little heart.

But the fact is that Europe—old and new—is doing rather well, thank you. Germany continues to produce goods that the world wants: its workers, bosses and ministers pull together. There are problems, there are things that need to change, there may even be (gasp) a little labour strife. But overall, Germany remains a wealthy and humane society. Ask it's citizens about their seven weeks annual holiday, and then ask all the tourist destinations that are awash in German Euros, even as Polyanna North

Both are doing very well despite neo-liberal predictions of imminent collapse.

Americans stay at home, quivering in a post-9-11, post-Iraq funk.

What about France then? Old Europe all the way, right? Well, if old Europe means the best health care system in the world, bar none, bring on the Zimmer Frame for les citoyennes Francaise. Waiting times for major surgery in France are lower than in any other important country in the world, and the French are far, far healthier than most of the rest of us, especially we waddling North Americans. Equality of access to care, but also equality of income, are great health levelers. Okay, there are growing social tensions among a radicalised North African Muslim population but what big, open society doesn't struggle with issues of identity and culture amid growing immigration?

And just in passing, ponder Denmark's colossal aid budget, Sweden's export driven socialism, Holland's endless stability and civilised social environment, Belgium's economic success despite bitter communal hatreds. I could even praise Spain for its booming regional economies and again, a health care system that American rightists would deride as "socialised medicine".

But unlike Rumsfeld, I don't regard thrusting out the tongue and going "nyahnyah, nyah-nyah-nyah" as a substitute for civilised discourse. You may have noticed that old Europe is being rather useful in the new Iraq, and you can bet it will continue to be so. A collateral benefit, I'm sure. ♦

Gyalzen and Kanchha



Gyalzen Sherpa, 84 (pic, left bottom), and Kanchha Sherpa, 71 (pic, left top), were contemporaries of Tenzing Norgay. The *sirdar* trained and housed them in Darjeeling, and was instrumental in finding them jobs and promoting them from coolies to high altitude porters, opening the door for them to becoming *sirdars* themselves. Gyalzen and Kanchha were also a part of the British 1953 expedition with Tenzing.

The two accompanied Hillary on a horse-drawn carriage this week, just as Tenzing himself did in 1953. Both were ecstatic. They are dazzled by the pomp and ceremony of the Everest Golden Jubilee celebrations, and say this is the first time Nepal has feted their part in the success of the expedition. With pride they speak of the time Queen Elizabeth II awarded the whole team medals and Rs 500 each in cash.

As a child Kanchha was used to travelling the high passes to Tibet with his trader father. "Poverty pushed us into difficult jobs and at that time we had no alternatives," he says. In the 1953 expedition he transported food, set up tents and acted as a liaison between the porters and their employers. With a tinge of regret, Kanchha says he was never considered a climber although he made it to the South Col six times.

Gyalzen nods his head in sympathy but thanks the mountain goddess for the change in fortune of Sherpas like him. "What does remain the same is the style of mountaineering despite the increase in facilities," says Gyalzen, recalling when Sherpa porters were paid less than Rs 8 a day, Rs 10 if you were going up to South Col.

Khumbu has changed beyond the imagination of Gyalzen and Kanchha: the population has almost tripled, electricity and piped water is available and the staple diet has moved from millet to corn and now rice. Many are still poor, but tourism has brought in money and more opportunities. Today Gyalzen is one of the richest people in Namche Bazar, and his children do not need to risk their lives on the mountains. He has been on several Everest expeditions with Swiss, British and Indian teams between 1952 and 1965, but confesses the most interesting one by far was in 1956. "We set out to look for a yeti, but found nothing," he says with a smile.



RAMYATA LIMBU

Tenzing's CV

- 1935 Accompanied Eric Shipton's reconnaissance party to Everest.
- 1936 Went with Huge Ruttledge's expedition to Everest and reached the North Col.
- 1938 Accompanied HW Tilman's expedition to Everest and reached Camp VI (8,332m).
- 1939 Went with a party to Titchimir in the Hindu-Kush range and reached 7,012m.
- 1940 Carried out explorations in the Kangchendzonga region.
- 1947 Accompanied a Swiss expedition to the Kumaon Himalaya and climbed four virgin peaks.
- 1949 Explored Nepal with Tilman.
- 1950 Accompanied Doon School group in the Kumaon Himalaya.
- 1951 Went with a French expedition to Nanda Devi and reached the east summit (7,621m).
- 1952 Accompanied two Swiss expeditions to Everest with Raymond Lambert, reaching 8,600m and 8,097m respectively without oxygen.
- 1953 Joined the British Everest Expedition led by John Hunt and reached the top with Edmund Hillary on 29 May.

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DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Rewarded

The initiative taken by a group of women from Lalitpur has been internationally lauded by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Women Environment Preservation Committee (WEPCO) made it to the Global 500 Roll of Honour for its outstanding contributions towards the protection of the environment.

Established in 1992, WEPCO is a non-profit organisation that made 'disorganised garbage' its priority after identifying the growing volume of waste generated by increasing population and excessive consumption as one of the most urgent problems facing the city. Supported by the sale of recycled paper and garbage collection services, WEPCO runs training sessions on environmental awareness among community women and has formed 90 eco-clubs in schools. More than 6,000 students in six districts are involved in creating awareness in household waste management in their communities. WEPCO applies the principle of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle to the garbage they collect from more than 3,000 households in Lalitpur. The award will be presented to Sarada Vaidya, president of WEPCO, in Beirut, Lebanon by Klaus Toepfer, UNEP's executive director, at the World Environment Day ceremonies on 5 June.

Pharilapcha climbed

While the attention has been focused on Everest in the past week, an all-Nepali expedition scaled the top of the unclimbed Pharilapcha (6,017m) in Khumbu. Recently opened by the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) to commemorate the Everest Golden Jubilee Celebrations, Dinesh Deokota was the first man on the summit on 19 May. Teammate Pramod 'Goofy' Shrestha's maiden attempt was aborted due to technical problems but he made it to the top the following day. Both amateur climbers, Deokota and Shrestha showed great skill on what turned out to be a technically demanding climb up a final 80m vertical rock face. From high camp Deokota battled extreme conditions for 17 hours before reaching the peak. It took the team four days to lay fixed ropes and determine a route, and the two dedicated the climb to their spouses and planted a Tibetan prayer flag at the

summit for peace in Nepal. They were supported by Ongchu Sherpa, Namgyal Sherpa and Lhakpa Sherpa.

Let there be light

Ten Village Development Committees (VDC) in Baglung now have electricity thanks to 27 micro hydro-electrical projects with a combined output of 314.5 KW. Ghanendra Bhandari, technical officer at the Rural Energy Development branch said there are plans to increase the supply of electricity to every ward in the VDCs. A donation of Rs 315,000 was made to the local consumer groups for the construction of a second project in Rangkhani-6. Benksi will be the 'Energy Valley', supplying electricity from the three micro hydro-electrical projects already completed in the southern part of Baglung district. The project is expected to produce an additional 9 KW of power that will benefit another 120 families in the area.

Clean H₂O

A recent survey showed that 41 percent of people living along the banks of Bishnumati River in Kathmandu do not treat their water for contamination because of the costs involved. The solution could be a new campaign from the Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO) and Clean Energy Nepal (CEN) that makes clean water accessible to the poor through a simple technology called solar water disinfection (SODIS). Experiments show that exposing water in one or two-litre pet bottles (old mineral water or soft drink bottles work well) to sunlight for 6-7 hours removes over 95 percent of bacterial contamination. ENPHO and CEN say the technology not only saves lives but also lowers monetary and energy costs.

They hope to spread the practice to at least 5,000 households in the Valley, Nawalparasi and Rupendehi. "More than 200 households in Nawalparasi and Rupendehi are already practising the technology," says Mingma Sherpa of ENPHO. Anyone interested in donating their bottles can deliver them to the ENPHO or CEN offices, or call for a pick up if there are more than 50 bottles. CEN: 4242381, ENPHO: 4491052.

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Poll polemics

Why are people around the world losing faith in the ballot box? Before scurrying for an answer, savour the splendour of Ralf Dahrendorf's survey (#146). Nepalis, after all, aren't the only people in almost perpetual democratic despair. The revelation comes by the end of the third paragraph. With turnout averaging over 60 percent during partyless and multiparty polls alike, we seem to be a far more exuberant lot on Election Day than our counterparts in some of the mature democracies Dahrendorf writes about.

Voter turnout can give a misleading picture of Nepalis' sense of civic obligation, especially when elections come with considerable supplementary value. The polling station is where the next cycle of factional skirmishes, ministerial strife and desultory denunciations starts. No one who has anything better to do would want to miss the thrill. Factor in the patronage—both in cash and kind—that inspires multiple voting and you can understand how no midterm election can come too soon.

Even if popular dissatisfaction with elections is serious, it can't be something to lose sleep over. The emotion is an extension of our love-hate relationship with the political class. Think of the top 20 people you believe are responsible for the degeneration of



United party activists try to pull crowds in Sarlahi last week.

Apathy is an awful adviser because it amplifies our current woes.

report. For others, the selective hounding based on a secret list is a conspiracy against the mainstream's movement to restore democracy. (By the way, Lokendra Bahadur Chand finally won Girija Prasad Koirala's formal recognition by being listed as a key defendant in the Kangresi-in-chief's Supreme Court lawsuit.)

"Rethinking democracy and its institutions must be a top priority for all to whom the constitution of liberty is dear," Dahrendorf concludes. Since he's neither an ardent Maoist nor an absolute monarchist, critics might feel emboldened to use Dahrendorf's exegesis to excoriate the "winner-take-all" electoral system. True, proportional representation could have given smaller and disadvantaged groups the opportunity to air their grievances from the legislative podium over the last 12 years. With 13 MPs, Bam Dev Gautam's would have been the third largest party in the last house. With six members, Chand's would have ranked just above Nepal Sadbhavana Party. Even the Rastriya Janamukti Party would have had two legislators.

Apathy is an awful adviser because

it amplifies our current woes. Take the average popular vote the three biggest parties polled in the last three elections. Under proportional representation, we might be in for a perpetually hung parliament where the Rastriya Prajatantra Party—divided or united—would hold one of the keys to power. Throw in the provision for direct elections for prime minister as a safeguard. We might end up with a leader ready to dissolve the house at the first provocation. If we institute a fixed-term legislature, we can expect to be stuck with members with a precise idea of the date and time they feel they are entitled to squabble up to. What about the newfound camaraderie between Kangresis and comrades?

Once they feel they have nothing to jointly struggle for, they would return to savaging each other.

Under every electoral system, some people are always going to feel excluded. So the streets would continue to seethe and shutters would still come down. And our faith of the ballot box? We'd have to check voter turnout first. ♦

democracy. Then figure out how many of them have won at least two of the last three parliamentary polls. They'll probably be the same people we'll keep electing. The court of public opinion gives them all the strength they need to carry on.

From the erstwhile German Democratic Republic to the extant Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the d-word proved to be an adjectival misnomer. In nations with

less ostentatious names, democracy once thrived without women voters. Slave-owners could explicate without the slightest compunction how all men were created equal. Flags fluttered as emblems of equality while the empires they represented eviscerated over half the world. The scars still fester in the cultural-relativism chapter of textbooks.

That's why we need to take our deliberations a step forward and affirm

that democracy lies in the soul of the believer. For the Ranas and panchas, democracy existed in direct proportion to their proximity to power and privilege. That self-seeking definition endures, as some of our garrulous ministers illustrate almost every day. Dangle democracy and your job becomes easier. For some, the Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority is cleansing democracy by acting on the property-probe panel

COMMENT

by SHANTA DIXIT

Band-aid or death knell?

Private schools have borne the brunt of the Maoist wrath for several years. Recently, students affiliated to a 'revolutionary' union of students locked up the accounts sections and principal's offices of private schools in the Valley. They were finally opened on condition that the government determine identical fees for all private schools by the evening of 14 June. For those who care to look into the future of quality schooling in Nepal, this decision is not so much a momentary band-aid as it is a death knell.

Those who possess no serious work ethic are the ones using students as political pawns and holding education hostage. People who have neither created nor contributed anything to shape the nation's education needs are destroying what others have. As if that were not enough, we have to deal with consultants who advocate quick-fix monetary solutions. They don't seem to care that education is not about literacy, but raising concerned, responsible citizens. It is only when we create a generation of positive minded individuals by nurturing their sense of self-worth that we can hope for a better Nepal.

Private schools emerged as the public's response to the failing government education system that was the legacy of the Panchayat years. In the decade of democracy they flourished. The time was coming for a further evolution—improving government schooling using private education as a template and developing Nepal as a regional education hub.

Can a decision that needs homework, public hearings and interested party compliance be made with a Maoist pistol held at the head? Does the present government understand the implications of the ad-hoc decisions it takes. Given the lack of comprehension and concern shown thus far by the bureaucratic and political leadership, there is little room for hope.

Much of the Ministry of Education's policies are today being decided by consultants who are paid top dollar to spout easy progressive sounding slogans. They do slipshod work and get away with it because education is considered a 'dull' sector. So fly-by-nights who have no experience in running institutions, and share no empathy with students, parents or teachers are put in charge.

These 'experts' think that balancing the budget is all it takes to define policy, which is how one particular individual proposed the magic figure of \$30 per child annually as the standard school fee. Even the government spends more per child than this amount. Decisions on education are being taken with the will to punish those who are delivering quality, without an understanding of educational philosophy and its implementation worldwide. It is unnatural to set a standard fee for all private schools because no

two will provide exactly the same facility. Neither should there be a ceiling on the price of private education. Fees should be charged according to facilities provided, and standards must be maintained according to fees paid.

Another contradiction: the Maoists and the 'experts' are both keen to lower the costs of schooling for Nepalis who can more than afford to pay for it. Why? Parents who send children to cheap private schools get no reprieve. This is progressive taxation turned on its head, in which the richest get the most concessions. Is this Nepal's version of Maoism?

In a democracy, it is every citizen's right to want quality education for their children—commensurate with what they are willing and able to pay. The government, on its part, must provide standard quality education for those unable to send their children to private schools.

In Nepal, private schools pick up the government's burden by providing education to 15 percent of the student population. If government schools became centres of quality and excellence, there would be no reason for private schools to exist. The focus should be on helping the government. Instead, quality private schools are being throttled.

The international community is deeply involved in education: the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNDP, UNICEF, DANIDA, NORAD, DfID, Save the Children coalition as well as others have invested millions of rupees over the years without witnessing much advances in the actual quality of schooling. They must see how illogical it is to destroy the only thing that works. If money can't improve the quality of government schools what will? The sad state of government schools is cumulative bureaucratic neglect and direct politicisation of education by narrow-minded leaders.

In the meantime, those who have kept silent thinking that this anti-private school campaign is only momentary theatrics need to wake up. Our passivity has pushed the country's educational superstructure to the brink. Every guardian and parent, scholar and planner who recognise the country's need for a healthy private-public partnership must counter-agitate so a social 'stay order' is put on all the street drama. Only then will it be appropriate to soberly examine the strengths and weaknesses of private schools and chart out a course that will benefit the nation's future.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Unfortunately, at the moment the village that is our nation is failing its responsibility. ♦

(Shanta Dixit is an educator associated with RBS in Patan.)

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Private schools are easy scapegoats for those who failed to improve government schools.

BIZ NEWS

Collectors item



Mount Everest Brewery launched a limited edition of Everest premium lager beer in cooperation with the Nepal Mountaineering Association. The label shows Tenzing planting the flags of Nepal, India, UK and the United Nations strung to an ice-axe on the summit on 29 May 1953. The company received permission to use the historic photograph from the National Geographic Society of UK. There couldn't be better time to launch a beer named after the highest peak than during the jubilee celebrations. Jamling Tenzing, Tenzing Norgay's son who is a famous mountaineer in his own right, was also present.

Trade routes

Nepali entrepreneurs in Joghani and Sunauli will now enjoy the same trade benefits as Raxaul, till recently the only Land Custom Station with India, thanks to a new Duty Exemption Pass Book Scheme (DEPB) issued by the Government of India on 27 May.

Economic links between the two SAARC countries were strengthened when Nepal allowed the import of certain Indian goods against dollar payments to make Nepal's exports competitive. Imports under this provision were exempt from all taxes in India.

In November 2002, India introduced the scheme of DEPB to help Nepali importers

source their raw materials and intermediate products from India at more competitive rates, which worked to the advantage of exporters as well. They enjoy privileges under Duty Free Replenishment Certificate (DFRC) and advance licence scheme (DEEC). When the Raxaul Land Custom Station met with success, Nepali companies and business federations asked for similar routes to be established, leading to the incorporation of Joghani and Sunauli into the scheme.

Best chilled

It's summer and new beverages are flooding the market in a bid to be the top choice in quenching the thirst of consumers. The newest beer in the bar is Tiger Beer from Singapore, imported and distributed in the kingdom by the SOI Group. The beer is available in over 50 countries around the world and makes no bones about being "positively the best beer in the world". It has a crisp, clean taste with an alcohol content of 5 percent. The beer is available in 330ml cans and bottles.

Raising the bar

Wainscot Whisky for the discerning was recently introduced by Sumy Distillery. With a focus on quality products, this company that has been in operation for four years, created a skillful blend of Extra Neutral Alcohol and Scottish Malt for a uniquely smooth taste to match the exacting standards set by their customers. Currently available only in the Valley, the company aims at distributing it to all major cities within two months. Wainscot Whisky is available in three sizes—750ml, 375ml and 180ml and is priced at Rs 455, Rs 231 and Rs 121 respectively.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Centrestage



Politics is edging into the spotlight that belongs to Everest and squeezing economics out of the picture.

Nepal's image in the international media over the last week closely resembles Subhas Rai's brilliant illustration for Nepali Times (#146) of all the goings on at Everest Base Camp—the media spotlight rivals that which followed the tragic events of 1 June 2001.

Never one to shy away from publicity, our beloved political parties have decided to milk the situation for all it's worth: protest programs are being organised, there are rumblings from the Maoist camp about withdrawing from the peace talks and students are threatening to close missionary schools. Countrywide protests against the Commission for the Investigation for the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) in support of politicians and officials suspected of corruption is final proof that the junta are no longer thinking.

In effect we are broadcasting a clear message to the world. We support corruption but still expect funding for good governance from foreign donors. We are well aware of how reliant we are on tourism, but are quite willing to sabotage any attempt to jumpstart the ailing sector by disrupting jubilee celebrations. The Beed sees far too many cases of cutting the nose to spite the face. The past shows that we have made a habit of it. In 2000, a bandh was declared during

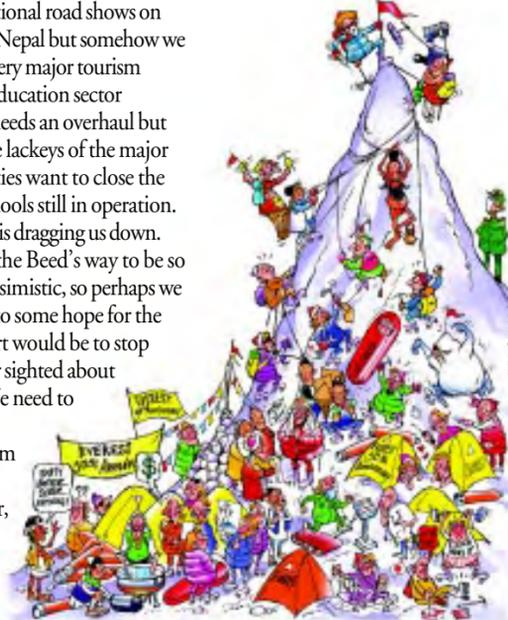
the WWF conference, the biggest in our country's history. Other popular days to shut the country down are on New Year's Eve and 1 January, profitable times for the tourism and service industries.

Assistance in corruption control cannot be justified if those accused seek refuge in loopholes of the law. We cannot talk about devolution of power as our leaders jockeying for power. It's impossible to make a show of faith to foreign investors when domestic businesses are moving out. We may have international road shows on Destination Nepal but somehow we bungle up every major tourism event. Our education sector desperately needs an overhaul but ironically the lackeys of the major political parties want to close the few good schools still in operation. Our myopia is dragging us down.

It is not the Beed's way to be so doggedly pessimistic, so perhaps we can latch onto some hope for the future. A start would be to stop being so near sighted about our goals. We need to bridge the yawning chasm between the rich and poor, create more jobs and provide better health

and education to the people. The changes brought about by a stronger economy can, to some extent, salvage this country. And the Beed is happy to suggest a course of action—at least to begin with. All the media hungry politicians and their sidekicks who are vying for the limelight should put down their placards, pipe down and let Everest have it's day. ♦

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



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50

Solo without oxygen

The blizzard of 50th anniversary events has eclipsed Reinhold Messner's spectacular first climb without oxygen and first ever solo climb of Sagarmatha.



REINHOLD MESSNER

When we proposed climbing Everest without oxygen in 1978 people told us it wasn't possible, that we were risking our lives. They said we would lose our brains up there. When the first climbers on the Austrian expedition we joined came down, they said we shouldn't even try. It was hard: I didn't know if I'd have a chance to go back to Everest, and Everest is Everest. I was determined then to try and get as high as possible.

Climbing Everest solo without bottled oxygen in 1980 was the hardest thing I've ever done. I was alone up there, completely alone. I fell down a crevasse at night and almost gave up. Only because I had this fantasy—because for two years I had been pregnant with this fantasy of soloing Everest—was I able to continue.

When you're high on a mountain you cannot be anything but what you are. Mallory said he climbed Everest because it was there. I think we go up so we can come back down again. This coming down is a very strong experience. You come back from an inhuman place. We are not made for it, this loneliness and cold. When you come back you feel

reborn, you have a new chance. The experience is so strong you want to have it again and again, but you have to suffer for it. It's addictive.

This is what I had got as a child, without even thinking: I could find a good route, understand the weather quickly, know that this rock is good, if this gully will go to the left. I had learnt the structure of the mountain.

Until I was 20 my parents helped me with my climbing. When my father realised it was going to be my life, he tried to stop me, but it was too late. And when I went to Everest in 1978 to climb it without oxygen, he would sit in his local bar and say I was crazy. When I succeeded he said: "I knew he would do it!"

My father blamed me for my brother Günther's death, for not bringing him home. He died in an avalanche as we descended from the summit of Nanga Parbat, one of the 14 peaks over 8,000m, in 1970. Günther and I did so much together. It was difficult for my father to understand what it was like up there.

On Nanga Parbat I understood the reality of my own death. I had not eaten or drunk anything for days, I was hallucinating, my toes were black from frostbite and my

brother was lost in the avalanche.

When I lost seven of my toes on Nanga Parbat and small parts of my fingertips I knew I'd never be a great rock climber. So I specialised in high-altitude climbing. It's a totally different game. I developed a 15-year passion for it and became maybe even a little narrow-minded in my desire for 8,000m peaks. It's certainly partly my fault that today 8,000m peaks are something special. To be honest, they are not that special.

After my brother died it took me a year to recover, but I knew I could do more. I knew it must be possible to climb one of these big mountains without fixed ropes and so on, so I tried to solo Nanga Parbat in 1973. But it wasn't possible then to be up there alone, having no one to speak with, no other faces. It took me a long time to learn how to do that.

High-altitude climbing is about suffering, it's about being afraid. I don't believe anyone who says there's a lot of pleasure in climbing the biggest peaks. It's dangerous, especially if there are no Sherpas or fixed ropes and camps. If you make one mistake, you die.

I was the first man to climb the world's 14 tallest peaks without supplementary oxygen, but I never

asked how high I would go, just how I would do it. Climbing is more of an art than a sport. It's the aesthetics of a mountain that compels me. The line of a route, the style of ascent. It is creative. Children have to find their own way. My way is wrong for my kids. They climb, but I'm not forcing them into it.

I was elected an MEP for the Green Party. Politics and climbing are exact opposites. But they're both games. If the world's leaders could spend a few days climbing a mountain together, then things would go better. I always take the same perspective with each new adventure. I put myself in the position of being at the end of my life looking back. Then I ask myself if what I am doing is important to me.

The Shackleton Endurance expedition was the best adventure of the last century. Though Shackleton failed, he saved all his people. Now that I'm nearing 59, I understand that failing is more important than having success.

If you look at my life, then one thing is clear. I did one activity at a time, with all my willpower, all my money and all my time. Complete commitment. (Interview by Ed Douglas in *The Observer*)

MIN BAJRACHARYA



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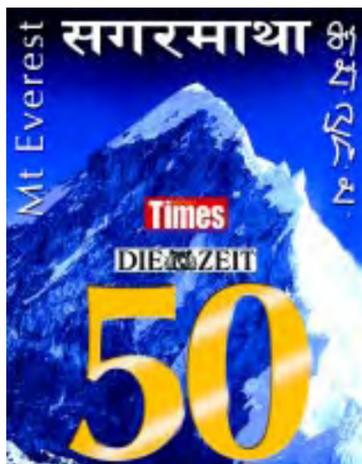


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Messner: “Don’t mess around with Everest.”



“Nepal needs tourism to survive, and tourism needs local culture and the environment to survive,” Messner said. He lashed out at Kathmandu-centric mass tourism, the corruption and the ecological erosion that has accompanied trekking and mountaineering in some areas. “Mountaineering is much more than Mt Everest, and Nepal is much more than Mt Everest,” he reminded participants.

Messner’s formula is a push towards decentralised tourism so that people in hitherto neglected areas can benefit from the jobs and incomes from trekking, especially in western Nepal. “If we don’t do this, I’m afraid we are looking at a social bomb in Nepal,” he added.

Responding, economist Pitamber Sharma said tourism accelerates the process of change, and while this could probably not be stopped there should be attempts to minimise the negative impact on cultures and the environment. “Cultures are not timeless, while they change, our basic values should be maintained,” Sharma said.

The concerns voiced at the seminar were not new: the need for equitable and sustainable tourism have been talked about for the past three decades. But the very fact that they had to be reiterated so forcefully during the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Sagarmatha showed how little has been done.

Even so, participants drew attention to the fact that while international media has focussed on trash on Everest,

Nepal had several success stories and accomplishments that perhaps had not got as much publicity: the spread of community forestry which has increased forest cover, eco-tourism models like ACAP and Nepal’s national park system. While the Maoists never directly attacked trekkers, tourism was indirectly affected by news of the violence. On the other hand, because the benefits of tourism had not been trickling down to the grassroots it had fuelled frustrations that fed the insurgency.

The seminar was organised by the German newspaper, *Die Zeit* and the *Nepali Times* at the Dwarikas Hotel. It did not shirk from tackling sensitive issues like the pile-up of expedition excreta on Mt Everest and other mountains. In response to a query about guidelines for defecation at high-altitude, Messner replied: “When you have thousands of people on the mountain like this year, shit piles up. The stuff is deep-frozen, and as it moves down the icefall and the glacier, the melted water could be contaminated.” The solution could be carrying down plastic sacks from toilets for disposal down the valley, or zapping fresh faeces with sunlight in special “solar toilets”.

Austrian Everest summiteer, Wolfgang Nairz, appealed for the rapid fusion of the Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal and the Qomolungma Nature Reserve on the Chinese side into a transboundary World Heritage Site. At the moment, only the Nepali side has been declared a heritage site.



Bernd Loopow of *Die Zeit*, Kunda Dixit of *Nepali Times*, Reinhold Messner and Pitamber Sharma at the seminar, ‘Tourism in Nepal: A Design for the Future’ on Wednesday.

MINI BARACHARVA

The over-commercialisation of Everest came up again, and participants felt the need to balance regulation with the freedom of the mountain. “Everest itself is record in itself, so everyone wants to be the first to do something new,” Messner admitted. Pretty soon, there will be the first ascent of Mt Everest by a man with his dog, and there may be helicopter ascents from base camp to a helipad on the summit with an oxygen pipeline to the south summit.

Joking aside, there was a proposal to take on Edmund Hillary’s idea to declare a moratorium on climbing Mt Everest for ten years so the mountain could “clean itself” and get back its

aura. But a problem was immediately pointed out: what if Nepal declares a moratorium and China doesn’t. At present, the world’s third highest mountain, Kangchendzonga can be climbed from the Nepali north side, but is banned from the south side in Sikkim.

Messner’s own idea was to regulate so that only one expedition be allowed on one route per season. This would ensure income from royalty, while preventing over-crowding. Said Messner: “Everest is a strong mountain. But you have to climb it in a clean way, taking risks and surviving, climbing from base camp to the top along a fixed rope is not climbing. We must let the mountain regain its power.” ♦

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Anti-logging under fire



BRUSSELS—The European Commission is coming under fire for its new action plan to combat illegal logging in the developing countries, the largest timber producers in the world. The Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) is designed to curb growing trade in illicit logging and illegally harvested timber in wood-producing countries through a series of preventative measures.

Europe's imports of illegally sourced timber are believed to be worth about \$1.4 billion a year. The Commission's latest proposals aim to combat the trade by helping partner countries to build systems to check that timber has been harvested legally and addressing the problems posed by the use of revenues from illegal logging to fund and prolong armed conflicts.

According to a report by the NGO Forests and the European Union Resource Network (FERN), presented to the Commission last year, approximately 50 percent of imports of tropical timber and 20 percent of timber from boreal trees into the EU are illegally sourced. Although FERN welcomes measures to prevent money laundering through illegal logging, it says that the EU must ensure that the practice is included in future reviews of money laundering legislation. (IPS)

Cheap RX

BRUSSELS—The European Union adopted a new regulation Monday, enabling exporters to provide essential medicines at starkly reduced prices to poor countries as part of the 'Program for Action: Accelerated action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB in the context of poverty reduction', adopted by the Commission in February 2001.

The decision enables pharmaceutical companies to significantly increase the delivery of medicines to fight the three diseases in developing countries at lower or 'tiered' prices, while keeping higher prices for the same products in the EU. They will be made available with a price cut of 75 percent off the average 'ex-factory' price, or at the cost of production plus 15 percent. The EU will provide the necessary legal framework, in order to ensure that medicines are not diverted back into EU markets.

The WHO is also discussing Trade-Related Intellectual Property rights that allow countries in need of medicine to invoke compulsory licences to manufacture them. In addition, a total of \$416 million has been approved for fighting HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and measles in all developing countries, while \$397 million has been given to debt relief in the framework of the Highly Indebted Countries (HIPC) initiative. (IPS)

ANALYSIS

by SHLOMO AVINERI



The Middle East dream map

In reality it is little more than a wish list.



The recent push given by President George W Bush to the so-called Middle East "road map" is welcome, and the fact that both Israel and the Palestinians have accepted it is a good omen. Yet the chances that it will bring real, as opposed to merely rhetorical, progress toward reconciliation remain slim.

The reasons are manifold: first, what is called a "road map" is in reality little more than a wish list of what has to be done in order to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. It is a noble set of goals, but it sometimes appears to be distant from the region's political realities.

For example, the road map rightly acknowledges that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be solved in a void; regional considerations must be taken into account. The plan calls for far-reaching Israeli concessions: withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, dismantling of settlements, some compromise about Jerusalem.

At the same time, the "quartet" that composed the road map—the US, the EU, Russia, and the UN—realises that Israel cannot be convinced to make such concessions without a fundamental change in the general attitude of the Arab world to the existence of the Jewish state. Despite

peace with Egypt and Jordan, Israel remains threatened by such countries as Syria and Libya, whose extremist regimes are deeply involved in violent terrorism against civilians in Israel and either possess or try to possess weapons of mass destruction.

For this reason, the road map premises peace between Israel and the Palestinians on normalisation of relations between Israel and all Arab countries. Can this really be achieved in the foreseeable future? Does the US—or, for that matter the Quartet—really believe they know how to move Syria or Libya from their current closed-mind position, which threatens Israel's existence? There is no indication in the road map that the initiators have thought this out beyond wishing out loud that it would happen.

Similarly, the road map is an attempt to revive the Oslo peace process. But this process, based in the 1993 Oslo accords between Israel and the PLO, has been in serious trouble since Yasser Arafat rejected the peace package offered to him by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, with the support of President Bill Clinton, at Camp David in December 2000.

This was a watershed in Middle East politics—a massive change for the

worse. The Palestinians' refusal to accept, or even continue to negotiate about, the most generous and comprehensive Israeli offer since 1967 in exchange for an end-of-conflict agreement signified that the Palestinians are not ready to accept Israel's legitimacy.

There is now much more bitterness, fear, and hatred on both sides than in 2000, when the Camp David negotiations failed. The direct and indirect support given by the Palestinian Authority to suicide bombing against civilians in Israel suggested to most Israelis that the Palestinians still view attacks against civilians as a legitimate weapon. The sometimes-brutal Israeli responses to such terrorism further embittered the Palestinians against Israel.

True, the sidelining of Arafat and the appointment of Abu Mazen as the Palestinian prime minister is an important step in the right direction. But Abu Mazen's real power has yet to be tested. Does he really control the murky financial resources of the PLO, which gave Arafat so much real power beyond the formal title of head of the Palestinian Authority? Most importantly, does Abu Mazen have the political will and power to really

suppress—harshly, if necessary—the murderous terrorist gangs that control so much of the Palestinian population? Much depends on the answers to these questions.

Last but not least: by the admission of its drafters, the road map will take a number of years to implement—in the best case two, in the worst case three or four. It would need constant follow-up on dozens of contentious points at the highest level, i.e. the US President. Is President Bush—or any US President—capable of effectively exercising his enormous authority, day in and day out for two or three years, to ensure that the parties really translate what might be just a verbal acceptance of vague language into painful, and even politically dangerous, decisions?

Past experience is not encouraging. The attention span of a US President is limited on any issue. Yet without his constant attention, the road map will run into the Middle East sand dunes that have already buried so many well-intentioned peace plans. What, then, can be achieved? Perhaps, as in Bosnia and Kosovo—where nobody talks about a permanent solution, but violence has been stopped—what is needed is stabilisation, an end to daily bloodshed, de-escalation of hostility, and some mutual confidence building.

Israelis and Palestinians are not yet ready for the tough political decisions envisaged by the road map. They need a series of stopgap measures to bring stability and safety for civilians on both sides. With such de-escalation, perhaps at some time in the future true reconciliation will be possible. However difficult or sad to admit, the moment is not ripe for more than this.

(© Project Syndicate)

(Shlomo Avineri is professor of political science at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.)

Buddha looking for Gandhi

Poster in Himal Khabarpatrika to mark its 100th issue on Friday. Peace will only come from ahimsa, a commitment to non-violence. Available in bookshops. Composite image by Subhas Rai.

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ANALYSIS

by SCOTT WALLSTEN



The labour bonanza

Globalisation stands accused of generating economic instability in developing countries and greatly exacerbating poverty, at least in the short run—which is the longest period the world's poor can afford to care about. Critics point to the string of economic crises in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in recent years, often attributing them to multilateral lenders' demands for full liberalisation of foreign trade and capital flows, privatisation and fiscal austerity.

But the debate often overlooks an increasingly important feature: the many millions of migrants who send money home. Data on families in developing countries that receive money from relatives working abroad directly demonstrate that at least one element of globalisation—migration—increases economic stability in poor countries.

Migrants from struggling countries in Latin America, Southeast Asia and other regions are increasingly securing jobs at wages that, while low by rich country standards, are far higher than they could dream of back home. In 2001, workers from low- and middle-income countries sent home a staggering \$43 billion—more than double the level of a decade earlier and \$5 billion more than that year's total official foreign aid to these countries. Whatever the reason for sending money home, these so-called "remittances"—the cash workers send home to countries like Colombia, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico and Bangladesh—act as a safety net that their governments typically need but cannot afford to provide.

In small, developing economies incomes are often considerably more volatile, owing to heavy reliance on a few commodities or industries and

Remittances from international migrant labour is the economic safety net for developing countries.



hence higher vulnerability to external shocks, including weather-related and other natural disasters. Indeed, poor countries also often lack the private insurance needed to offer emergency assistance. In developing countries, remittances from workers abroad amount to the best insurance around. In addition to providing their families at home with a much-needed source of stable income, expatriate migrant workers send home even more money when catastrophe strikes.

Such remittances enabled thousands of Jamaicans, for example, to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, when storm damage was estimated at more than one-quarter of the country's annual GDP and nearly three households in four reported damage.

The same was true when Argentina's economy collapsed last year, when violence wracked Haiti and a hurricane ravaged Honduras before that, and whenever floods submerge villages in Bangladesh. In case after case, billions of dollars in remittances from migrants have given families in poor countries what their governments (and foreign donors) could not always provide: food, safety, the resources to recover and hope.

The importance of remittances to households in poor countries, especially during periods of external shock, holds two lessons. First, it should be easy and inexpensive for migrants to send money home. Today, migrants and their families often pay 10 percent or more of the remittances in fees to financial

institutions that transfer funds and exchange currencies. Reducing these fees would, in effect, be a tax cut for the world's poorest.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, we should embrace migration as a proven method of bringing immediate relief and stability to poor nations. Given that family members are the best judge of need, migration and remittances may, in fact, constitute a foreign-aid framework that is better targeted and more effective than any government program can ever be. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Scott Wallsten is a Fellow at the AEI-Brookings Joint Centre for Regulatory Studies and a Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.)

COMMENT

by PRAFUL BIDWAI



The 'anti-terrorism' tango

India and Israel, for decades on opposing sides of the fight for Palestinian statehood, are set to become close strategic allies.



If the Indian government, led by the ultra-conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has its way, the two states would join the United States in forming "the core" of an all-new, unique, 'democratic' alliance to fight 'international terrorism'.

To this end, New Delhi has invited Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on an official visit in the second week of June. However, it is by no means certain that either a Sharon visit or the US-India-Israel anti-terrorism 'axis' will materialise anytime soon. There are too many likely impediments to the formation of the proposed triangular alliance, including the US' reluctance to antagonise other allies, including Pakistan and the Arab states. Above all, there is likely to be stiff popular resistance within India to any strategic axis that centrally involves Israel.

The US-India-Israel axis was proposed by India's national security adviser Brajesh Mishra (seen in pic, above, with Donald Rumsfeld, 2001) in Washington on 8 May. Significantly, Mishra was addressing the annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), a Zionist group considered the single most powerful lobby in the US.

White House chief of staff Andrew Card also addressed the meeting. Among the audience were several US congressmen and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. Mishra outlined his proposal while lavishing praise upon the AJC and

"celebrating" the "alliance of free societies" in combating global terrorism. He said, "The US, India and Israel face the same ugly face of modern-day terrorism". Mishra urged the three should form the core of a 'democratic' alliance, which would have "the political will and moral authority to take bold decisions", adding it has a "natural logic". Mishra's proposal is the culmination of growing political-military contacts between India and Israel since full-scale diplomatic relations were established in 1992. India is now one of the world's biggest buyers of Israeli weapons.

The 'axis' proposal represents a new kind of India-Israel intimacy based on a certain notion of "terrorism" that is a major break from India's full-throated support for numerous Non-Aligned Movement resolutions expressing solidarity with the Palestinian cause. New Delhi's motives in building a special strategic alliance with Israel are threefold. First, it wants to marginalise Pakistan and offer itself as an especially important ally of the US by endearing itself to Washington's pro-Likud Zionist lobby. The 'axis' could help India claim pre-eminence in the US scheme of things for South Asia and reap potential benefits as the United States' junior partner, especially in the 'war on terror'.

Second, the 'special alliance' will help the Hindu-sectarian BJP in further polarising Indian society along religious lines. So far, the Palestinian cause has attracted broad-based secular support in India. But after the war on Iraq, many Muslims feel alienated and discriminated against. Right-wing Hindu extremists allied to the BJP revel in this, some supported the Iraq war, which polls show that over 85 percent of Indians opposed. An India-Israel alliance will probably widen the gap—to the BJP's political advantage.

Third, the BJP is genuinely fascinated by the highly militarised nature of Israeli society and its state's willingness to use massive force against the Palestinians, and by the jingoism and machismo of Likudists like Sharon. Some BJP leaders have the same contempt and hatred for India's religious minorities as Sharon has for the Palestinian people. This was in evidence last year in Gujarat, where 2,000 Muslims were massacred in a pogrom. Some Hindu ideologues are also driven by Islamophobia to posit a historic 'civilisational' alliance between Hinduism and the Judeo-Christian tradition against Islam.

The 'axis' has dire implications not just for India's foreign policy, but for its domestic politics too. Besides globally aligning India with conservative and ethically indefensible forces, a special alliance with Israel will be a blow to secularism and pluralism domestically. The ray of hope is that this will be resolutely opposed by the Indian public. ♦ (IPS)

(Praful Bidwai is a New Delhi-based columnist and an author of several books.)

Trade diplomacy

ISLAMABAD – Trade leaders in Pakistan and India are eager to explore the business potential between their two countries and are working to exchange visits soon, as their governments make gestures of peace to break their two-year-old stalemate.

The parallel process of trade diplomacy now unfolding is underlined by recent statements by Pakistani Commerce Minister Humayun Akhtar, who has expressed his country's readiness to start trade with India at the bilateral and regional levels. His statement was a departure from Pakistan's earlier position that it would freely trade with India only after the resolution of the long-standing dispute over Kashmir.

Between them, Pakistan and India trade goods amounting to an average of \$250 million annually. Pakistan has not accorded the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to India and allows trade in just 600 items from its eastern neighbour. But Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali has allowed the importation of 78 more items after the recent thaw in the relations with India. Officials at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) said the Indo-Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry has contacted them to nominate members of a delegation due to travel to India in June. (IPS)

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The way things are

Binaya Kasajoo in *Budhabar*, 28 May



We could soon have three parallel governments in Nepal—one installed by the palace, one by the Maoists and now, another convened by the major political parties to represent the dissolved parliament. The first two are backed by military power, while the third enjoys the support of the public and democratic forces.

On 28 May, the people's representatives sat at a meeting to decide on how best to resuscitate the parliament. The Nepali Congress (D), Sher Bahadur Deuba's party that was conspicuous in its absence, could be held responsible for the current tangle. It encouraged regression that led to the October Fourth move which allowed the palace to step in. Given the unpopularity of the NC(D), it isn't strange that its prominent members are abandoning the party like rats from a sinking ship.

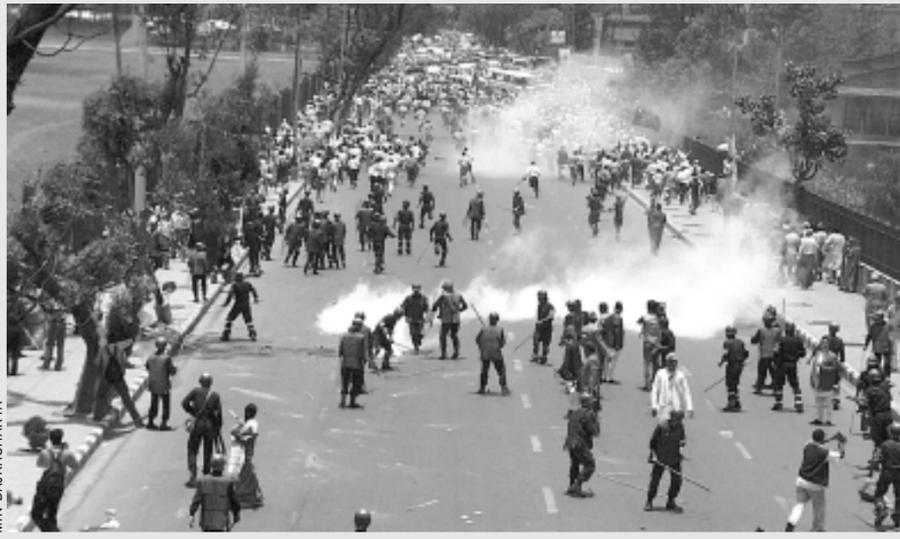
In the meantime, public curiosity and exultation surrounding the emergence of the Maoist leaders is slowly waning. It's possible the rebel leaders themselves are feeling the change in momentum. Even the media no longer considers them very newsworthy.

The unfolding national situation shows us one thing: politics is volatile and hostilities extend from schools to the parliament. Despite the rhetoric about multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy, the Panchas of pre-democracy have been standing in the wings ever since the royal move. King Gyanendra's interference surely could not have come as a surprise to the political parties who profess experience and dedication to democracy. The least they can be accused of is turning a blind eye, thereby failing to act promptly.

The haste with which Deuba evacuated his official Prime Ministerial residence after being summarily sacked by the king is an indication of the little faith he had in the people to reclaim their sovereignty—either by keeping him there or ousting him out themselves. If Taranath Ranabhat had any allegiance to multiparty democracy he would not have mocked the system by accepting official invitations as Speaker of the defunct House of Representatives. The fact that the agitating political parties have now turned to him for legitimacy is illogical.

The Chand government, limited to Singha Darbar, has become harsher towards the political parties while offering the Maoists more flexibility. Both workers and leaders have quite literally been battered since 4 May.

Where this road will lead is anybody's guess. As things stand, there is little reason to hope for a positive outcome. The people should be the decisive power, but after years of disappointment in the system and demoralised by the conflict, they will need a major catalyst to stir them into reclaiming what is rightfully theirs.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The refugee deal

Deshantar, 25 May

देशान्तर-साप्ताहिक

The 14th round of ministerial level talks between Nepal and Bhutan regarding the repatriation of refugees not only puts a stop to the possibility of Bhutanese nationals going home, but also raises questions about Nepal's integrity.

The Nepali government granted the Bhutanese discretion in choosing who it would accept and simultaneously accepted diplomatic defeat by agreeing to grant Nepali citizenship to those unwilling to return to Bhutan. "The negotiations were compromised by the lack of an elected democratic Nepali government," says former foreign minister Ram Sharan Mahat.

International lobbying and persistent demands from the refugees pressured Bhutan into conceding even these partial gains. Refugee leaders say the Druk government will try to prove a majority of the refugees are non-Bhutanese, in compliance with the parameters set by the joint verification. "If Nepal doesn't promptly amend this blunder, it will soon have to welcome Indians of Nepali origin with open arms," says Mahat. He advised Nepal to seek the involvement of the United Nations and international human rights groups in monitoring the repatriation process.

Refugee leader Ratan Gazmere accused Nepal of violating international laws by agreeing to grant Nepali citizenships to Bhutanese refugees unwilling to return home. He said this would reduce them to mere squatters on Nepali soil. "It is a gross injustice to the Bhutanese refugees," he said.

The refugees are also discontented about Nepal's agreement to imprison and try those who are categorised as criminals. Gazmere said his group will take the matter to court because the Bhutanese government has categorically labelled political and human rights activists as

criminals. He also expressed concern over where the refugees would be resettled when they are allowed back into Bhutan. Most of their houses were demolished and their lands were resettled with people from northern Bhutan.

People power

Chhalphal, 25 May

चलफल

One point for the little guys! Public pressure and protests led the Madhyapur Thimi Municipality to reverse its decision on granting forest land to the Armed Police Force. When the local community forestry group learnt the forest they stewarded was being granted to the police force they decided not to accept it.

In the absence of elected representatives, the municipality made its decision on the basis of direct instruction from Bhaktapur District Administration Office without consulting the locals, the political parties and civil society. Even the ward office and forestry users group were left in the dark. While this clearly demonstrates bureaucratic abuse of authority, it also illustrates that real people power is far from defunct.

Not that victory came easily. For two consecutive days the people sat in protest and *gheraoed* the municipality office. The chief of the municipality office, Pashupati Pokharel, had to publicly apologise to calm the crowd down. A delegation, led by local political activists, visited the chief district officer Geha Nath Bhandari and handed over a memorandum that warned they would be keeping an eye on the future misuse of public property.

On hold

Spacetime, 28 May

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

Uncertainty looms large over the Integrated Security and Development Program (ISDP) in Gorkha launched by the government two years ago that hoped to develop

Gorkha as a 'model district'. The peace and development package is gathering dust thanks to the Finance Ministry not releasing funds on time. In the initial program seven districts were selected, but the government backtracked and decided solely on Gorkha.

Although Rs 3.6 million was set aside from the budget during the current fiscal year, the bureaucracy seemed to deliberately drag its heels and is now involved in discussing the next national budget. It was estimated that the district needed Rs 15 million this year to effectively implement the program.

Out of the allocated amount, Rs 2 million was set aside for the Nageshwar-Nigel road, Rs 1 million for the Ghyampesal-Tarkukot road and Rs 700 thousand to build the road between Chorkate and Chitre. The district monitoring committee formed under the chairmanship of the local development officer has not met in a year. The newly appointed district security chief Col Prakash Kumar KC requested a meeting, but the LDO refused to convene until the funds are released.

Gopi Koirala of the DDC said the budget was delayed in last year too. The government finally granted Rs 8 million to which the DMC contributed Rs 5 million, enabling the completion of construction work worth Rs 13 million. Madhav Prasad Ojha, chief district officer and member of the DMC, revealed work had been hampered when even the DMC delayed payments.

The lack of peace and security, especially in northern Gorkha has added to problems. "The security situation and negligence from the centre is killing the very concept of developing Gorkha as a model district," says Ojha. NGOs have long deserted the area after law and order deteriorated. The ISDP was the government's attempt at filling the void left by the NGOs that bailed out.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I wouldn't have joined the crowd even if I was younger... we were true climbers who struggled to make our way to the summit. These days, if you are healthy enough, there are plenty who will show you the way."

- Edmund Hillary on why he would not climb Everest again. *Spacetime* on 28 May.



"Dear me! The parties announced in jest that they were going to form a government and he has already begun to iron his outfit!"

गौरखपात्र *Gorkhapatra*, 26 May



GP Koirala: "Sherpa bhai, won't you give us some tips on how we can take our campaign to the top too?"

नेपाल समाचारपत्र *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 28 May

A semblance of stability

कान्तिपुर

Kantipur, 19 May

By Guna Raj Luitel and Bed Raj Paudel

With the security forces restricted to district headquarters, the Maoists had a free reign in mobilising and absorbing communities. With remarkable efficiency they are fitting themselves into the very fabric of normalcy in rural areas. Their latest venture puts even the administration under their control.

In Bhojpur the Maoists are determined to make clear who is in charge: they have rapidly renamed VDCs 'Village People's Committees'. Many VDC signboards have been changed. The elected positions that fell vacant after the suspension of the local government are also being filled by former office holders instated by the rebels, among them former Bhojpur VDC chairman Durga Ale and two others in Tiwari Bhanjyang and Chyangre. A school teacher from Yangpang village, a day's walk from Bhojpur Bazar, told us that the name of VDC offices and reinstatement of officials took place at a mass meeting organised by the Maoists.

Villages are painted with Maoist slogans, flags and banners. The latter demand the election of a constituent assembly and an interim government. The presence the Kirat Workers' Party (KWP), close allies of the Maoists, is also visible. The KWP banners ask for an autonomous state. Another popular call is for a full investigation into the death of Krishna Sen.

The Maoists are trying to win the hearts and minds of the people by creating a semblance of stability. They did not have a very strong hold of the east during the seven-year insurgency, and the ceasefire has given them a chance to consolidate their political presence in these areas. The absence of the police after their posts were removed has only made their campaign smoother.

The workers of the mainstream political parties are limiting themselves to district headquarters leaving the field open to the Maoists who are slowly gaining a monopoly over the villages. "Who would risk opposing the Maoists?" asks a farmer in Gogane, a five-hour walk from district headquarters. "Everyone does what they want." He told us the rebels have even begun to help in the fields. The question is what will we harvest from what the Maoists have sown?



Back at Sundarijal >36

“The king needs to balance.”



BP Koirala is obsessed with his health, and every little ailment worries him. He is also travelling down memory lane, remembering his mother fondly and chanting the mantra that she gave him before she died. BP also confesses that he is homesick for the company of his wife and niece Shailaja. Reading the *Rising Nepal's* coverage of King Birendra's return from India, he hopes the monarch is not swayed by the flattery of his courtiers.

3 April, 1977

Sundarijal

Perhaps there is a great mental strain of which I am not aware, but which is insidiously affecting my mental and physical capabilities. Today at about 2PM the vision in my left eye became suddenly dimmed at its upper left corner. It lasted for about 10 minutes and I became very, very anxious. My anxiety is all the greater because can't get the help of a doctor at short notice—moreover the officer in charge of the camp enters the jail only 3 times a day—8AM, 12 noon and 7PM. If anything happens during the intervening hours or at night there is no help. When GM was here I had some confidence and we have mutually arranged that our rooms at night wouldn't be bolted from inside in case of need. Perhaps I need to change my spectacles because the ones that I am using aren't giving me efficient service. But this sudden clouding of my vision in the portion of the left eye which lasted for some minutes only couldn't be due to deterioration of my eyesight. The symptoms may also have been induced by Isopterin, the medicine to correct my heart beat—extra systole or whatever it is.

I did some reading in the morning and did some writing also—ie did some useful work. But I am mentally unsettled, fidgety, alternating between buoyancy and depression. I read the papers minutely—4 issues, 2 each of *Gorkhapatra* and *Rising Nepal*—nothing of importance. My mind is not very active—perhaps this is how nature helps, a kind of survival strategy to put your energy to the minimum use, to keep you alive by slowing down your tempo. I have become very forgetful also. But I feel there are temporary disabilities produced by the unnatural conditions of detention. No serious damage is occurring either to my physical or mental health—the damage temporarily sustained could be correction in normal conditions.

Since four days we got rain almost every day, hence the weather has become cool. The sky is cloudy. I have put all my warm clothes away in mothballs. I need a light quilt at night, having discarded the second one. In the day I use a *khasto* given to me by Santosh. It is a beautiful *khasto* and it is giving me a very necessary service. I am usually in *khasto* pajama and kurta, which was... for me by Sushila in December 1968 in B'bay. Sometime I don dhaka cap—a concession to the spirit of Nepalism.

4 April

Sundarijal

Peculiar unusual weather has developed for the last one week, the weather is like that of a rainy season. It has been raining intermittently accompanied by strong wind and occasional bouts of sunshine. The sky is mostly cloudy and the mornings are foggy. Such weather is not propitious for mental tranquility. Clouds are mentally very exciting and emotionally disturbing. I can now understand the banished ... homesickness at the sight of the first cloud of rains. Kalidas has composed what I think to be his best piece of poetry incorporating a lover's sentiment at the sight of a moving cloud. I am homesick again. But the homesickness is not as anguishing as it used to be in the beginning—but it is homesickness alright—a mild sadness, a desire to look at Sushila's picture again and again, revival of the memory of Shailaja's and other dear ones again and again—a pang, sense of deprivation, a poignant need for emotional company. *Dil chahata hai phir wahi phursat ke raat din, baithe rahe to sabse jawa kiye huye.*

Did a spot of writing on the history of the Nepali Congress. I am currently at the period of 1947 when mother used to be very active in politics, which resulted in her arrest during the mill women's strike. I am full of mother today. Tarini was one of us to be arrested during that struggle. As a matter of fact, he was the first one to be arrested on that date. He is also no more. We have travelled a long way from those days. As I write about that period I remember mother and Tarini's role during the initial days of our struggle vividly. Others are living but they are no more. Bal Chandra Sharma was also active in those days, but he became a treacherous renegade to the cause, hence his memory doesn't evoke any emotion in me. In the evening when I am alone I think of mother. I gaze at the darkening shadows of the *kapur* tree and foolishly—superstitiously—fervently hope that mother would emerge from darkness. She had whispered a diksha mantra into my ears when I was a child. I suddenly remember that mantra and repeat it many times over, holding a lock of her hair, which I have brought with me, in my hand expecting ardently that she would listen wherever she is and make if only fleeting appearance before me. It is all foolishness but I am assailed by her memory deeply, profoundly.

Today's *Gorkhapatra* and *Rising Nepal* is full of the king's return to Kathmandu from India yesterday and of his great doings in India. He is depicted as a great emperor to whom the leaders of India pay homage. I hope the king, impressionable as he is, will keep his balance and will not equate courtiers' flattery with truth.



Kathmandu's street cattle

PETRA THAGUNNA and LUCIA DE VRIES

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” By that yardstick, Nepal lags behind in greatness. In fact, there is almost a total absence of animal welfare in the country. The worst problem is that of wandering cattle injured in road accidents in Kathmandu's streets. For all the reverence, the fate of a fatally injured cow is unholy.

Laxmi is a kind-hearted cow found outside Pashupatinath two years ago. It took volunteers from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Nepal (SPCAN) a few hours to gently direct the limping cow to the shelter. Here it was found that not only did she suffer from a spinal injury, probably after being hit by a bus or truck, but also that she was four months pregnant.

Despite her precarious situation, Laxmi gave birth to a beautiful, healthy calf, Kamdhenu. After the delivery, Laxmi's health deteriorated rapidly. Although she was still eating, she could no longer get up. This meant that the staff, with the help of kind neighbours, had to push her up every three hours, or lift her into a makeshift harness. Her pain became more and more obvious. SPCAN volunteers pleaded for euthanasia, but the management felt that with the laws of the land (the penalty for killing a cow is Rs 20,000 or two years imprisonment) this would not be desirable. Laxmi, after a painfully slow and cruel death bed, finally passed away in April.

Although traffic accidents are the main reason for injuries, there are many cases of cruelty inflicted by children or shopkeepers. SPCAN last year received six cases of spinal injuries, both cattle and dogs. A remarkably bright dog named Baby Bear survived, but will be paralysed from the waist downwards. The intensive care of these animals places huge demands on many of SPCAN's limited resources.

The holy cows of Kathmandu, once a tourist novelty and integral part of a tight-knit, gently moving society, have become a nuisance for motorists and an embarrassment for the authorities. Nepal's national animal is traditionally a symbol of prosperity, but now are abandoned to roam homelessly on the streets.

May Lord Pashupatinath have mercy on the holy cows of Kathmandu.



Clockwise from bottom l-r: An ox suffering from a spinal injury at the SPCAN shelter, Laxmi's calf Kamdhenu lives on, a malnourished calf found in Kalanki vegetable market on its way to Karuna Rescue & Recovery Centre.



Until a few years ago one could find aging resident bulls in places like New Road, Durbar Marg and Baneshwor. During the last SAARC Summit the familiar Nandi of Naxal, together with a number of stray cows, disappeared and they have not been heard of since. But young calves and mature cows are still common at traffic intersections, standing by the side or in the middle of the road. Or they are at the garbage dumps, rummaging through plastic and organics in search of food.

Often not fully weaned, the young calves suffer the most, many do not survive.

Most bulls are abandoned by their owners because they are of little economic value in a valley where they cannot be used for ploughing. Cows are abandoned from private homes and dairies when the owners face a lack of space or fodder, or when they no longer give milk. It is said that owners from farming communities such as Bhaktapur and Godavari drive cows into the city at night and abandon them. The priests of Pashupatinath, as part of new moon and full moon rituals, continue to release a bull-calf twice a month. Most calves however return quickly, after all, Pashupati has become an ideal dumping ground for the city's unwanted, sick or injured animals.

The conflicting duality of religious and cultural notions on one hand and modernisation of the city on the other is increasing, and stray cows are among the most visible victims of this conflict. Stray cattle are

randomly picked up by the traffic police (which is why animal activists dread any international visit or meeting held in Kathmandu) to be released outside the valley. Cows from Eastern Nepal are being sold in Damak and transported to slaughterhouses across the border.

At SPCAN, staff have learned how to make the lives of injured cows as comfortable as possible. Its *gaushala* of Siphali is a beginning, but the problem is too vast. The municipalities of Kathmandu and Patan have to come up with a management plan for stray cattle with rehab for injured cows, animal birth control and a shelter for unweaned, sick and aging cattle.

Temporary solutions could include proper registration and monitoring of the cattle population, mobile veterinary services and feeding sites in a number of locations (set up with the involvement of communities, hotels and restaurants willing to donate their vegetarian left-overs). The actions must be backed by the central government, by introducing supportive animal welfare legislation and monitoring systems, possibly including a policy on humane medical intervention for dying cows.

Until then, may Lord Pashupatinath have mercy on the holy cows of Kathmandu. ♦

(Petra Thagunna & Lucia de Vries are affiliated with SPCA Nepal. The views presented here do not necessarily represent those of the organisation. Tel: 4467953, www.fospcan.org.np)

ABOUT TOWN

CELEBRATING EVEREST

- ❖ 30 May: Bhaktapur Darbar Square Festival.
- ❖ 6.30 PM 'Quomolangma: the other side of Everest' talk by Lhakpa Sherpa, manager of the Quomolangma Conservation Program on 30, 31 May. Rs 200 entry. All proceeds to cleft palate surgery for Tibetan children. Advance booking essential. Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4436944
- ❖ 31 May: Music Festival at Dasrath Stadium.

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ Quomolangma: the other side of Everest photographs and text by Lucia de Vries till 4 June at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4436944
- ❖ 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
- ❖ Exhibition and Sale carpets, thankas, handloom and pashmina at Gallery Room, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4413632.
- ❖ Orchids and Jewels of Nature Botanical art exhibit by Neera J Pradhan from 1-15 June at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 981055263
- ❖ West of the Silk Route pictures of life and landscapes from Egypt through Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal by Ben Schonveld till 2 June at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048

EVENTS

- ❖ Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman Directed by Deborah Merola at The Lincoln School 7PM on 6, 7 June, 5PM on 8 June. Tickets: Rs 300 for adults, Rs 150 for students. Available at Himalayan Java, Pilgrim's Bookshop, Hyatt Regency. Reservations: 4436458
- ❖ East meets West: the twain shall meet 30 May at Dwarika's. Fusion music, oriental and continental cuisine. 4479488

MUSIC

- ❖ Live Music Friday at 5.30 PM, Saturday movie at 4.30 PM. Jivin' Joe's Restaurant, Kupondole.
- ❖ Live Acoustic Jam 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Cafe, Thamel. 4256738
- ❖ Full Circle acoustic jam every Friday at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4427311
- ❖ Thunderbolt with Ram Shrestha and Sabu Lama. 8PM onwards Wednesdays and Saturdays at the Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. 4416071

DRINKS

- ❖ Fusion offers over 100 cocktails. Happy hour from 6-7PM. Dwarika's Hotel.
- ❖ The Jazz Bar reopens at 7PM on 30 May with Abhaya and The Steam Injuns. 50 percent discount on beverages, DJ or live entertainment through June. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999.
- ❖ The Piano Lounge & Bar features the Trio Givone for the best Gypsy music, cocktails and snacks. Yak & Yeti Hotel.
- ❖ K-tool! Special Tropical Khukri drinks Rs 125 or Rs 750 for every 1.5 litre. Free Irish Coffee with every main course. K-tool! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043.

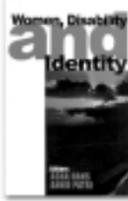
FOOD

- ❖ Summer specials smoked salmon soufflé, shrimp newburg and crispy duck breast. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ Naachghar Revisited with Myrna, an international exotic dancer, and North Indian delicacies. Every evening from 7.30 PM onwards. Rs 749 per person. Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg.
- ❖ Wood fired pizzas, Baskin Robbins icecream, cocktails and coffee at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
- ❖ Café Bahal Dieter's delight for the health conscious at Kathmandu Guest House's Food Court, Thamel. 4413632
- ❖ Kids Combo Meal at all Bakery Cafés. Kids' meals with exciting gifts.
- ❖ Weekend breakfast: Smoked salmon scrambled eggs and filtered coffee Rs 100. 9AM-12PM. Thomas Kilroy at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272
- ❖ Traditional Nepali Thali Lunch at Patan Museum Café 11AM-4PM. 5526271
- ❖ Saturday Asian Brunch at The Café, Sunday European Lunch at Rox Restaurant. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ Saturday BBQ Lunch at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 4680083
- ❖ The greenest patch Weekend lunches in the oldest and largest garden in Nagarkot at The Fort Resort, fort@mos.com.np. 226799
- ❖ Newari Bhoj Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant. Lazimpat. 413874
- ❖ Papaya salad, seasonal vegetables with fillet or chicken and Italian icecream at Sigma the Food Court, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 5520004
- ❖ Tukche Thakali Kitchen Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialities. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.

GETAWAYS

- ❖ Dakshinkali Package every Saturday Rs 500+tax. 4370714, 4371537
- ❖ Shivapuri Heights a traditional cottage with modern facilities. Rs 1,850 pp. www.escape2nepal.com, Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ The Great Godavari Getaway Special weekend packages. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ The secret of Kathmandu Overnight package \$99. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse Traditional Nepali farmhouse. 6631734.
- ❖ Writing Retreat Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 375280
- ❖ Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge Special offers for Nepalis and expats. 01-361500 TMPL Reservations - Nepali/Expat Offer
- ❖ Ride and raft with the Himalayan Enfielders on 13-15 June for Rs 3,500. Email: himalayanenfielders@hotmail.com. 4440462
- ❖ Bardia Dolphins Kiss Jungle Base Camp has special deals for expats. Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com. 061-53211

BOOKWORM



Women, Disability and Identity Asha Hans, Annie Petri (eds) Sage Publications, 2003 Rs 528

Despite the widening ambit of feminist research there is little space for disabled women in the prevailing discourse. The contributors in this volume highlight not only the discriminations faced by physically challenged women but also the transitions faced in their search for new worlds.

Narratives from the Women's Studies Family: Recreating Knowledge Devaki Jain, Pam Rajput (eds) Sage Publications, 2003 Rs 560

Seventeen scholars and activists who have initiated and nurtured centres for women's studies in India have contributed to this book. They discuss a wide spectrum of activities from teaching and networking to publishing and agitating. They also chart out possible paths for women's studies in India.



French Feminism: An Indian Anthology Danielle Haase-Dubosc, Mary E Johm, Marcel Marini, Rama Melkote, Susie Tharu (eds) Sage Publications, 2003 Rs 560

This remarkable anthology of 36 texts, freshly translated for this volume, vividly maps the terrain of French feminism in its contemporary context from the 1970s onwards. Bringing together the seminal writings of both scholars and activists, this will help readers grasp questions, challenges and the progress of reflection.

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

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विन्ति पत्र

छोराछोरी लाई भर्ना गरौं ।

- ▶ शिक्षा (अनिवार्य) एच्छिक होइन ।
- ▶ शिक्षा उपहार होइन ।
- ▶ शिक्षा वालबालिकाको अधिकार हो ।

X-Men 2 continues the cinematic saga of those strange mutant superheroes who made the smooth transition from comic book to celluloid. This sequel directed by Bryan Singer brings back Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellan, Halle Berry, Hugh Jackman, Anna Paquin, Brian Cox and Alan Cumming. It's packed with almost non-stop action and some reviewers think X2 trumps the first part. Fans of the first X-Men film will find this bigger and better.

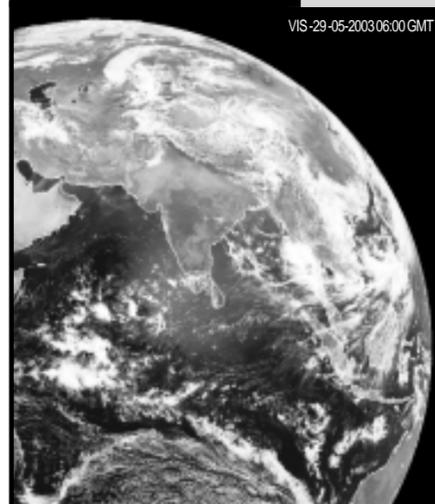
4PM, 6.30PM

Ramgopal Verma has teamed up with his golden girl Urmila Matondkar once again for what promises to be a Hindi film that is out of the ordinary. Quite literally. *Bhoot* is a supernatural thriller set in Mumbai that involves dead spirits (as the name of the movie suggests), sceptics and believers. This spine tingler that also stars Ajay Devgan, Nana Patekar, Rekha and Fardeen Khan is a refreshing change from the normal Bollywood fare.

11AM, 1.30 PM

JAINEPAL CINEMA Telephone booking: 4442220 Online booking www.jainepal.com

NEPALI WEATHER



VIS-29-05-2003 06:00 GMT

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Notice that huge high pressure system sitting over north India. This has sent temperature soaring to the mid-forties in the tarai. The searing heat is necessary to suck in the monsoon moisture, but there are no signs yet of this happening. But this time there should have been monsoon troughs forming off the Kerala and Sri Lanka coasts as well as in the Bay of Bengal near Bangladesh. Maybe next week. But till then, expect a dry and hot spell. Even so, May has been a wet pre-monsoon with above normal rainfall. All this is good news for the climbers on Everest who have a clear 'weather window' this weekend.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
32-17	31-17	32-17	31-17	31-16

BBC on FM 102.4

Mon-Fri	0615-0645	BBC World Today
Sat	0615-0645	BBC Reporting Religion
Sun	0615-0645	BBC Agenda
Daily	2045-2115	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Sun-Fri	0740- 0800	एकैछिन् (रेडियो पत्रिका)
Sun-Fri	0800- 0830	डबली (विषयगत अन्तरक्रिया)
Sun-Fri	2000- 2030	आजका कुरा (समसामयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800- 0830	शान्ति अभियान
Sat	1930- 2000	आचार विचार (षष्टाचारविरोध सहकार्य)
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रेडियो सगरमाथा

SRADDHA BASNYAT

It's summertime and the livin' is easy. Monsoon in Kathmandu: it's hitting 30 degrees and the air is so thick you can slice it with a cocktail stirrer. The most effort one can muster is to signal a passing waiter that you need a refill. *Nepali Times* takes the legwork out of bar-hopping by offering you a comprehensive guide to the best monsoon watering holes in the Valley. Chin chin.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO THAMEL

The brightly lit heartland of tourist tack offers a bonanza of bars for a casual night out that's easy on the wallet.

Past the main chowk, into one of the narrow alleys and up one flight of narrow stairs is **Maya Cocktail Bar**—a little piece of Mexico that does not make idle boasts of mixing the best cocktails in town. Get in between 4-10PM, a generously long Happy Hour, and you'll score a free drink for every one you order. Maya has genuine Mexican tequila, the worm is optional. Knock back enough of those and you may find yourself on a Tijuana-bound flight.

Just around the corner warm candlelight bathes wreaths of corn and chili on adobe walls and rough furniture at the **Roadhouse Café**. For the slightly more upscale hombre, the bartender rustles up the best daquiris and martinis. They have a decent wine list—guaranteed nothing from those icky cardboard 'casks'—liqueurs, draft beer, cocktails and the rest of the usual suspects. Excellent nibbles too. The satay, humous and woodfired pizzas

are divine.

An illuminated blackboard on a Thamel street says "Tom and Jerry Pub two flights up", not that the regulars need directions. An old favorite where travellers and locals mingle, the pub is never empty. In the tradition set by Rum Doodle, many a visitor has felt compelled to leave a souvenir at Tom and Jerry. Some return to reminisce over extra stout Guinness or a special creamy cocktail.

Far from the well-trodden path of Lonely Planet toters, **Sam's Bar** is the sort of place you stumble upon and want to keep among a select few. It's casual, laid back and has enough (nice) graffiti on the walls to fill a book. Saturday evenings is Reggae Night—Bob Marley and Peter Tosh all washed down with whatever is your pleasure. The terrace tables, shrouded by young bamboo, are highly coveted and if it rains you needn't relocate thanks to a spanking new retractable roof.

Then, there is the legendary **Rum Doodle**, the highest-located bar situated at 40,000½ft. It recently

relocated to much larger premises on a quiet Thamel sidestreet. Rum Doodle is an unofficial museum to mountaineering, trekking and adventure tourism doodads that have been bequeathed by visitors who drop in for a drink and stay till dawn. Fittingly, it hosted a big dinner for the who's who of mountaineering on 27 May as part of the Everest Jubilee Celebrations. Tall tales abound.

Another noteworthy tavern is **Tantra** in Jyatha. Its intimate ambience makes it very appropriate for a little down time. The fusion menu is a delight and the new cocktails are fast becoming the toast of the town. For sheer novelty, seat yourself on their unique saddle bar stools and pretend to be a cowboy. Between 4-8PM, the second drink is on the house.

At Paknajok, the quieter end of Thamel, is a little Nepali house that has been reborn as **Via Via**, the living stone travellers café. Philip Henderickx mixes an exotic number of drinks, including the Via Via Special, *rakshi* fused with lemon, sugar syrup and soda over ice. If you stumble in late enough

Behind bars

Hot days. Humid nights. Long, cold drinks. Kathmandu's watering holes are stocking up for the monsoon.

on the right night you'll find DJs from around the world spinning some bumping beats.

LAZIMPAT

Just a stone's throw from Thamel but a world away in ambience is the original Lodging Part. If you're looking to jazz up your evening, make your way to this street where a bouquet of bars could be just the thing.

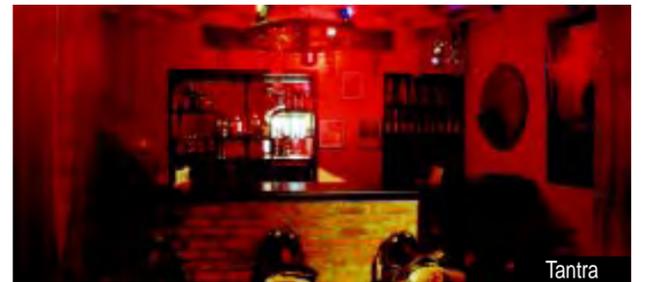
The new avatar of the Jazz Bar in Shangri-la Hotel, scheduled to reopen in the first week of June, will be known as **Not Just the Jazz Bar** and they're flying in international artists who will perform jazz combos, modern pop and blues. On alternate Friday nights come salsa with Kathmandu's resident salsero, Diego Saenz. Oh, yes, all drinks half price in June.

Upstairs Jazz Bar is home to Nepal's hottest contribution to the world of jazz. On Wednesday and Saturday nights Cadenza's music flows into the sidewalks below. Kumar, the barman, mixes a mean cocktail and has been known to redo one if it doesn't meet his personal standards. The menu is limited, not that it matters because everyone homes in on the melt-in-the-mouth momos.

➔ see p16



Via Via



Tantra



Moksh

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Business Advantage/SCP/03/05



The Red Onion Bar



Splash Bar & Grill



Rox Bar

from p15

More watering holes

At the end of the road is **The Red Onion Bar**. In its four years of operation it has earned a reputation as one of Kathmandu's best bars. The wine list has an array that spans whole continents and features more than 150 cocktails. The bar gets its name from the traditional red onion trade between Nepal, Tibet and India, and displays a scooter that was used to ferry onions 80 years ago. The regular clientele is a sober crowd from business houses, banks, development agencies, embassies and the like. They let their hair down on Wednesday and Saturday nights when live bands introduce a little shake, rattle and roll.

Just next door at the Radisson is the six-storey-high **Splash Bar & Grill** with great sunset views and the Lazimpat forest. It is gaining a Friday following with a live band, innovative drinks and their Cajun Chicken Salad.

HIGH END

No bar crawl would be complete without dropping into the **Rox Bar** at Hyatt Regency. The trendiest bar in town, on weekends the blond wood and marble floor is teeming with life from wall to granite studded wall. Drinks and food are on the pricey side but that's only to be expected because this is where Kathmandu comes to see and be seen—and don't mind paying for it either. The Friday

nights cover charge alone is Rs 300 for ladies and Rs 500 for gentlemen. The Rox has a dress code too so make sure you don't rock up in your chappals.

If an evening among sophisticates is what you desire then look no further than the **Piano Lounge Bar** at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. The resident in-house Irish band An Fainne is the perfect accompaniment to comparing the merits of perhaps the largest collection of single malts in the kingdom.

ACROSS THE BRIDGE

Patan used to be a back water. No more. Now Patan residents don't need to cross the sewer to go to Thamel.

Tucked into a quiet corner of Pulchowk, is a place where art, music, food and drink come together beautifully at a price that won't break the bank. Enter the peaceful premises of **Moksh** run by Dolly Yaktumba, former fashion model and present restaurateur. Mukut Bar offers special summer drinks like non-alcoholic celery punch. If you like vitamins with a bite try the carrot punch spiked with vodka. Music is always on the agenda with Dolly's husband Nirakar holding impromptu jam sessions with his hugely popular band 1974 AD. Regular gigs feature jHOLA on Tuesday nights and Abhaya and the Steam Injuns on Fridays. ♦

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MUKUT BAR at MOKSH

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Out of danger

A rescue group in Khumbu is saving the lives of trekking porters.

WANDA VIVEQUIN from GOKYO

Gokyo Valley is achingly beautiful with astounding views of Sagarmatha from Gokyo Ri. Lok Bahadur Karki, a porter with a Kathmandu-based trekking company, was with a group heading that way to an area locals refer to as "death valley".

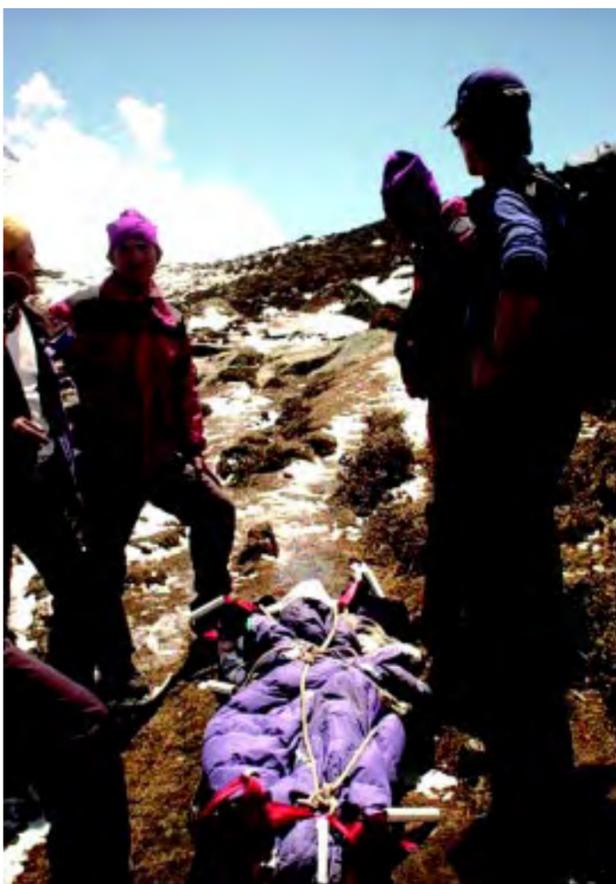
Before dawn one morning, Lok was found unconscious in his tent at the Renjo La base camp, at 5,000m. Hastily, the other porters put him in a *doko* to carry him lower down to Gokyo. Although it was still dark when they got there, the porters decided to push for Machermo where they knew the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) had recently established a rescue post for porters.

Day dawned, lighting a path that was treacherous with ice and sleet. Somewhere between Gokyo and Machermo the porter carrying Lok lost his foothold and fell. Lok sustained a head injury, worsening his already unstable medical condition. Knowing medical help was not far away, a few porters ran ahead to Machermo to alert the medical staff. Within the hour, the medical team raced back up the valley to assist the seriously ill porter.

Working to stabilise his neck, the doctors fashioned a makeshift

stretcher (*pic, right*). It took four hours to ready Lok for evacuation back down to Machermo. More than 24 hours had passed since Lok had lost consciousness. All through the night the clinic's volunteer doctors worked hard to keep him alive, administering intravenous fluids and antibiotics, and treating him in the portable altitude chamber (PAC). Meanwhile one of the clinic's volunteers sprinted down to Kunde Hospital, making the six-hour trip in half of that time. At 3AM Dr Simon Pulfrey from the hospital and Bill Brewster started for Machermo with a stretcher and extra medical equipment.

A team of eight porters, many of whom had already worked a full day, volunteered to carry their seriously ill colleague back down to Kunde. Without the excellent medical care he received in the Khumbu at Machermo and Kunde, Lok would have died. Despite a fractured neck and head injuries, the joint efforts of the staff at these Khumbu clinics and the neurosurgical team at the Teaching Hospital (*pic, below*) saved the life of this young man. On his way by helicopter to Kathmandu he remained unconscious and the prognosis didn't look good. But now he has been discharged from hospital and although he faces a long rehabilitation, the neurosurgeons are



cautiously optimistic that he will make a full recovery with time. The Machermo Porter Rescue post, which will close at the end of the spring trekking season, is the latest initiative of the IPPG which helps trekking porters. The Machermo post is staffed by a series of western doctors during the season and a trained paid Nepali worker. CIWEC clinic doctor Trish Batchelor, and volunteer doctor, Hillary Liss, who were instrumental in getting the aid post set up, said during the first three weeks of operation, staff saw 63 patients. Thirty-six were porters, 10 were locals and the rest were trekkers and a guide. "All the porters were shocked, surprised and then delighted that the treatment was free," recalls Batchelor. She said cases ranged from life threatening altitude illness to pneumonia, measles and more common ailments such as viral illnesses, diarrhoea,

dehydration, blisters and muscular injuries. "Like all projects of this nature there are some things we desperately need for the future," she added. This includes an oxygen concentrator that can run on solar power and a satellite phone to organise evacuations and relieve the pressure of getting to Kunde Hospital where there are more extensive medical facilities. Every year an average of two porters died needlessly in the "death valley" from altitude related illnesses. Twelve months ago Lok Bahadur would have been just another statistic. But his survival is a symbol of the determination of his fellow porters and the rescue post at Machermo. No porter should have to face death to give Western trekkers the holiday of a lifetime. ♦ (Wanda Vivequin is a Canada-based IPPG volunteer.)

Altitude Sickness

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.



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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Global Summit of Rogues

Having notched up a few more points in the Transparency International Corruption Index (even overtaking pros such as Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau) Nepal has won the bid to host the next Global Conference on Graft, it has been reliably learnt.

This is indeed great recognition, since some of the world's most renowned rascals will be here to deliberate for three days on how to swindle more efficiently, as well as to put finishing touches on the Universal Declaration on Plunder and State Capture.

Not only will the conference put Nepal firmly on the world corruption map, it will also boost our convention industry at a time when tourism is going through a bit of a slump. At press time, according to the conference secretariat, more than 1,000 internationally-acclaimed thieves and knaves have confirmed participation, and they include legendary biggies such as Idi Amin and Emperor Bokassa as keynote speakers. Some other up-and-coming Big Names from a certain neighbouring country have said they'll attend, but are known to be still trying to bribe the organisers so they don't have to pay the \$1,000 registration fee. "Under the table negotiations are on-going," whispered one staffer.

Meanwhile, the ex-Minister of Injustice and Malfeasance in the 1997 coalition government, as chairman of the Main Organising Committee of the Kathmandu Summit of Rogues, is trying its best to use the occasion to showcase the great strides Nepal has taken since democracy was restored in 1990 to make corruption a way of life.

"Earlier only a few people used to be corrupt, but in the past 12 years we have democratised corruption. Now, everyone is corrupt," the ex-minister boasted after pocketing a bakshesh we had to slip him in exchange for that on-the-record quote.

However, he added, there is no room for competency. With the dissolution of parliament there is real danger that corruption will once more be centralised, and that is why we have to fight that tooth-and-nail by burning tyres on the streets and stoning cars to regain our freedom of embezzlement.

Meanwhile, a draft agenda for the Kathmandu Summit of the World's Top Scoundrels has just been released which looks like this:

24 May, 2004 Delegates Arrive

Many will sneak in without paying visa fees while others will smuggle vast quantities of contraband by evading customs. This is standard operating procedure at such Summits.

Opening Plenary

Welcome Remarks by Nepali ex-Minister, broadcast live to the BICC from his jail cell.

Keynote Speech

'You Can Run and You Can Hide' by Baby Doc Duvalier

Working Paper

'How to Have Your Billions and Eat It Too' by Jeff Skilling.

Free Lunch

Workshop 1:

E-banking Your Hard-earned Cash in Zurich

Executives from a consortium of Swiss and Cayman Island banks will be on hand to answer queries from potential depositors. Resource Person: Bong Bong Marcos.

Workshop 2:

New Stealth Techniques to Combat Transparency

Technological advances in that art of theft allows greed to grow by leaps and bounds. Find out how from world famous money launderers.

Tea, Coffee with Cookies and Hard Cash.

Workshop 3

Correlation Between Corruption and Economic Growth

Dani Kaufmann of the World Bank Institute reveals empirical data for a modified inverted Kuznetz Curve showing economic growth is not possible without medium-to-high levels of corruption.

Workshop 4

Conscience and the Fourth Commandment (or Is It the Sixth?)

How to do ignore your inner voice. Guru Shri Nagadharayan Thugastakacharya demonstrates meditation therapy to indulge in hanky panky without irritating pangs of conscience.

Tyrants' Networking Evening.

NEPALI SOCIETY

The Robin sings

Nothing could be more fitting for Robin Sharma to celebrate a quarter of a century in the music business than by releasing an album. He says *Silsila*, his fourth album, is symbolic of his commitment to music and appreciation for his listeners. The eight songs are an eclectic blend of Nepali folk, classical and an experimental fusion of oriental melodies with western symphonies.

When Robin recorded his first song in 1977 he instantly became the blue-eyed boy of music lovers. Despite

winning various awards, he had to struggle for more than five years before he hit the mainstream. Till 1990 Robin was constantly in the public eye till he took a seven-year hiatus. He made his comeback with *Sungava* in 1997, which in his own words, "was not a commercial success, but it brought me back to my native element of music. It helped me rebuild ties with the music circle."

Robin enjoys an equally successful parallel career as a broadcaster with Radio Nepal where he is the deputy executive director. He joined the staterun service more

than two decades ago as a newscaster fresh out of university with an MA in English literature. A pioneer of the country's first FM channel, Radio Nepal FM, in 1995, Robin is disappointed by the increase of irresponsible broadcasting. "They forgot their primary responsibility towards educating listeners," he says.

At 43 Robin's music reflects a new maturity. He is particular about what he sings and records, preferring to "play with lyrics" before he makes an artistic commitment to it. "A lyric has to strike some chord with my life for me to feel comfortable singing it," he says. While working on *Silsila*, he strove to make sure they also represented the current trends in music. As a result, the album features

collaborations with eight lyricists and seven music directors. So, what does the future hold? "Music is something I'll be doing for a long time to come, so perhaps another album to mark my next 25 years in the field!" Says the veteran singer. ♦



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