NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

At face value, Surya Bahadur Thapa's government appears to be in deeper soup than its predecessor Lokendra Bahadur Chand's. The NC and the UML not only spurned the offer to join his cabinet, but say they will continue their street agitation.

Within the RPP itself, Pushpawati SJB Rana is angry because Thapa has not included his men in the new cabinet. Thapa also exudes so much confidence. From the point of view of some kangresis, this will then roll shipwrecked on the rock of bad governance, the Chettris are back at the helm. What do we Thapas make of this? Mostly they are too busy to say anything, not wanting to engender caste disharmony, though the republicans among them do secretly wonder if the weight of Thapa will now lead to another regime change. The Bahuns, who are sick of being blamed for everything that has gone wrong in the past 12 years, breathe easier now that they can point out the Chettris, who did after all govern Nepal for the entire period preceding 1990. The Thapas themselves are quietly exiled, discussing at family gatherings the infinite kind of lines that ultimately—by marriage, over generations, many times—removed them all to each other. In the end a Thapa is a Thapa unless he is a Magar Thapa, in which case he should consider changing his name or at least tucking a nom de guerre.

So: The Nepali state has finally failed to be inclusive. Whatever, that is there to say! The Chettris are back in control of the court. Break out the Khukuri Rum. ♦

The day of the Thapa has returned.

important. Thapa nevertheless was Kazi Aameshwar Thapa, who led Nepal's capture of Kumaon in 1790 and of Garhwal in 1803. He finally lost to the British at Devathal in 1815, and at family gatherings the Thapa still mutter against the British for this.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal—Blair's antithesis—despite or because of his considerable charisma was shot to death in 1845 at the order of King Rajendra and Queen Rajshakti, by none other than Jung Bahadur Kansari (later to rename himself Ran). This has the Thapa muttering against the Ranas in family gatherings.

The Thapa also held lower posts in the Shah court, and when the Shah was exiled, in the Rana court. Sadar Bhakta Thapa led 2,000 troops against the British and died defending Devathal in 1853. Subedar Dalmardan Thapa survived Jung Bahadur's personal assistant during his 1850 visit to Britain and France. Harka Singh Thapa was one of two officers in charge of Lord Curzon's 1901 hunting trip to Chitwan. Now the Thapa will argue, sometimes with khukuri in hand, that all they have done is try to serve the nation. The Pandunaut you see many Thapas trying to do this many times: Surya Bahadur, Bishwabandhu, Chitar Samsher, Sadar, Bhekh Bahadur, Niranjan, Kamal Thapa (the last has returned as information minister in the present cabinet). Captain Yagya Bahadur broke the Thapa mould by leading armed Nepali Congress guerillas till his capture in 1974. For reasons too obvious to belabor, there have been few Thapas in democratic politics. (There is Ram Bahadur Thapa ‘Bada’, but Mason is hardly democratic, and anyway Badal is a Magar Thapa). Now that democracy has got massively shipwrecked on the rock of bad governance, the Chettris are back at the helm.

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The day of the Thapa has returned.
The political tragedy of our time is that history keeps repeating itself as farce. This raises the question: do we need a cabinet at all? It seems to be so difficult to come to a consensus that people are safer off not letting the king and prime minister run things by a big. The greatest objection to Surya Bahadur Thapa’s appointment of seven trusted colleagues as cabinet members comes from his own party. “Since you didn’t include us, we’re going to make life hell for you,” seems to be the political creed of those left out.

And as long as we are at it, in half jest we suggest swapping the bureaucracy as well. The terms for ten top HMG secretaries lapsed two months ago, and the Chand administration found itself incapable of replacing them because of rival pressures. So, for the past few months we have been doing without a civil service. Not that anyone noticed.

The VDCs and DCDCs were dissolved nearly a year ago, citizens don’t have grassroots representation, but Kathmandu hasn’t seen any reason for undue alarm. Police posts, schools and health posts in large parts of the country have been abandoned, closed or bommbed out and the district headquarters and the capital carry on with business as usual. Business as usual means fighting tooth and nail over who gets to be prime minister, or who is appointed home minister. If this is what democracy is, and what we fought to get back to, then the Nepali people have a right to be worried. This country’s citizens have now come to expect so little from the political forces in Kathmandu that they have tuned out, and are just tiring to survive from day to day and taking it as it comes.

This three-way lug-war in Kathmandu is taking us nowhere. Not that it is anything new, our petty politics has been completely stuck. Every sordid crisis has the stench of political deal-making, and it reeks now more of ineptitude, selfishness and greed. And because we can’t get around blaming ourselves, we blame the Foreign Hand.

It took Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa one full week to name his cabinet. There is no sign that the political parties see any need to unite despite the dire state we are in, and it includes Thapa’s own RNP where the Pashupati faction is on the warpath. There they are, duelling once more in one of his quashing the Thapa

Meanwhile, the Maoists are busy taking their anger on media-accompanied computer games, flooding frequent flier miles on Buddha Air or flying off on donor-paid junkets to Sri Lanka. At least they keep themselves busy.

No one in Nepal is satisfied with being Thapa’s dog anymore. Everyone wants to be Only Dog. Compromise, give-and-take, trade-off, middle-ground, reconciliation, interest, national interest, common good—none of those words exist in our political lexicon.

If you want to be the sole winner, it means everyone else is going to be a loser. But if you are the only winner, you may not remain for very long.

Five years ago, Surya Bahadur Thapa has been bestowed with full executive powers by King Gyanendra and that he is the most powerful prime minister he has ever been four times previously. It may be true, but how can he be powerfull if, right after his swearing in, he is dragged to a ceremony where the Crown Prince is the chief guest and he sits for hours watching a prize-giving ceremony? At the same time he should be the busiest person in Nepal, the prime minister is already following the mindless rituals of his predecessors.

If protocol requires the prime minister to wherever he is to the throne is present, then he needs to change the rules. The head of a government of 23 million people should not be made a showpiece at a time of national crisis. Not only is it a complete waste of time, but it also sends the message that nothing has changed, it is business as usual and the people are only care about form not substance. This feuility mentality is perverted by a servile and subservient bureaucracy. It is also reflected in the symphonic coverage of royal events on national radio, television and every irrelevant pronouncement that makes it to the evening news. Let’s see some genuine concern from the royal patrons and political head who grace these functions. A monarch should be called on all members of the new Thapa cabinet from attending ribbon-cutting ceremonies, book and CD launches, and empty speeches. The journalists in our state-owned media boycott events that have no news value. Where Nepal wants to move in the next couple of decades, and how it is going to get there has to be planned. Otherwise it will not happen.

Sarita Khatri, Saneja MAOSTI FEE I have trekked and climbed in your country four times in the last two years. As a foreginer, I do not believe I have the right to comment on the governance of your country, as this is for you to decide. However, I do believe that the criminal action of the Maoists against tourists cannot be forgotten or condoned. In a recent trip to the Rolwaling valley, my group was demanded Rs 4,000 per person by Maoists. My subsequent inquiries lead me to believe this was not an isolated incident. These actions in no way enhance the political claims of the Maoists that they represent the repressed and underprivileged sections of the community. Rather, they are legitimate actions of criminals that will do damage to the already depressed tourism industry. Action like these will galvanize international opinion against their claims, regardless of their merit. Trevor Bennett, Australia VAILABLE I am a great admirer of Prime minister Thapa, so I can only assume that she has been the victim of sloppy sub-editing when I read her say, at Purba Bahadur Vaidya’s nepali-bhasa. I have also seen a trend that he has translated from Nepali into English. “It is impossible to tell how close they are to their origins. Has Nepal-bhasa already gone the way of the Harappan civilization’s language—lost beyond recovery? Or does she—or any Nepali Times—think that none of Kathmandu’s trilingual intellectuals is capable of discussing the issue with her?

David Geilgud, Oxford CORRECTION With the publication of the latest ‘Kathmandu Shuffle’ (#148) the words “cultural” (#147) the words “cultural” should replace “garbage” collection.

In BP Koirala’s diary ‘The king needs to balance’ (#147) the Bollywood song ‘Alta’ should read “Akh dhumr hachi hata,” and not “Alta dhumr hachi.”

WINNER TAKES NOTHING

The value winners of the past Fourth October order. If Girija Prasad Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal look worry, they have every reason to. With Thapa comfortably ensconced in Singh Durbur, their virtual parliament will probably have to sit on the pavement for some more time.

The Koirala-Nepal clique didn’t risk the 1980 referendum and its hybrid democracy introduced by his father, Thapa ensured the victory of Panchayat system in a national referendum and thus made insurmountable odds. The deck against multiparty democracy in the plebiscite was so skewed ready that even a leader of BP Koilara’s stature failed to smell a rat.

Thapa’s close links with an influential embassy is well known, but the fact that he maintains cordial ties with other missions too is not sufficiently appreciated by its critics. It’s a tribute to his acumen in the intelligence that he is often seen as a liberal. On the contrary, once demanded BP Koilara be hanged for treason. Ministers with strong party loyalties seldom get along well with people who do not subscribe to their views. Here again, Thapa is an exception; he seems to have well-wishers in every political party. He has never revealed how he got leftist extremists to boycott the plebiscite and demolish the referendum but must have been more to it than mere Marxist-Leninist-Maoist expedition.

For a leader of his age and standing, Thapa is an extraordinary networker with functional links in every sphere of society. Never day of bickering favors when in power, he takes care to maintain a patron-client relationship. In receiving visitors to his Maligau residence, Thapa is courteous to everyone irrespective of status. His influence in the Royal Nepali Army, the Armed Police Force, the police force is so much deeper than the present heads of all these forces with with which he has such high-quality relations of the civil service are even more beholden to him—many owe their position personally to the fifth-time prime minister. With the media, Thapa has such a comfortable relationship that even Nepal Congress and UML mouthpieces have been the subject of criticism in the media who out-manoeuvred their own political masters. Many old hands now sporting the colours of different political parties know that at Dasain time Thapa will be generous with the envelopes as usual.

Now we see how the king put the hook to face the regional pawns of global geopolitics, the Maoists are likely to find themselves in a position where international border has been curtailed, if not stopped. The Maoist leadership’s repeated threats to go back to the jungle are not just an anachronism in this day and age. His 6 June message to the nation had all the barest of a sign of respect piled on an antiquate gramophone that needed cranking, his politics is from another era. Yet, he seems completely at ease.

Hiradarsi Tipal’s eulogy of Nepal’s ‘date-expired medicine’ suit Thapa even more than did Lokendra Bahadur Chand. The Maoists have been too kind in calling Thapa’s “old wine in a new bottle.” If international border may smelt like wine, but it may soon turn into vinegar. If Thapa is the pragmatic politician he pretends to be, should he recommend the restoration of the lower house of the parliament and then vacate Balsuwar to sit in a job as a metaphor for the political wilderness. That may be why Baburam Bhattarai was spotted filling up forms for Frequent Fliers aboard a Buddha Air flight last week, and then taking a car ride with his parents soon after.

With everything going for him, Thapa’s future is never in danger for thinking that Thapa is the man for the moment. There is only one problem: the secretary of the Nepal’s New Alliance for Democracy, anachronism in this day and age. His 6 June message to the nation had all the barest of a sign of respect piled on an antiquate gramophone that needed cranking, his politics is from another era. Yet, he seems completely at ease.

Sylvania Baburam Thapa has been accused of being a political chess player who does not subscribe to his views. Here again, Thapa is an exception; he seems to have well-wishers in every political party. He has never revealed how he got leftist extremists to boycott the plebiscite and demolish the referendum but must have been more to it than mere Marxist-Leninist-Maoist expedition.

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It's not just soap, it's skincare!

Soft, silky & moisturised,
Does your soap actually deliver this feeling?
Paedophilia is hidden, elusive and it is spreading.

THOMAS BELL

MAARTEN POST

Standing on a Thamel rooftop, Sudhir, a 19-year-old street vendor, points to a mule sent to him by caring hands. “He used to take me to his room and ask me to shower and he would say if you do nice things I will give you clothes, food and money. I needed those things,” Sudhir says. He counts on his fingers, and says he personally knows seven men who pick up boys in Thamel.

Until recently there was no law in Nepal against child sexual abuse. In September 2002, an amendment to the Country Code created a new offence of “unnatural sexual relations with a minor”. Depending on the age of the victim, either a boy or a girl, an offender can be sentenced up to 16 years in jail. Nobody has been convicted. Paedophiles everywhere are hidden and elusive. It is even more so in Nepal. Neither the perpetrators nor the victim want to talk about it. Usually, the children don’t dare speak out. The police say it is not aware of paedophiles currently active in Nepal. NGOs working with street children have stopped filing cases. The result is that the issue doesn’t get coverage in the Nepali press. But that does not mean it doesn’t exist, and our investigation shows paedophilia is our there and it is growing.

In the late 1990s the issue briefly flared up in the media. Five men and a woman, all from Europe, were arrested between 1996 and 1999. Some were expatriates, others tourists. All were accused of running unregistered children’s homes, where street children were allegedly exploited for sex. Others were accused of bringing children back to Thamel hotel rooms. A 1999 UN report stated, “Sex tourism is on the rise in Nepal, including increasing incidences of paedophilia, as the business appears to be shifting to Nepal from other countries in South and Southeast Asia.” Countries such as Thailand had been adopting harder legislation, and several profile cases on Sri Lanka’s west coast involving European sex tourists had increased vigilance there.

Nepal is still a safe haven, but things may be changing. Krishna Thapa, the director of the charity Voice of Children, estimates that nine out of every ten Thamel street children have had sexual encounters with one kind or another with a foreigner. Saud Sainju, mission manager of another group, Planete Enfants, agrees. “It is not isolated, it happens to a lot of children.” Both groups say it is extremely difficult to track the paedophiles down. “It is hard work. The children are very afraid of the abusive parents and the abuse will hurt them and there is also a lot of social pressure amongst the children,” Thapa told us.

Voice of Children is currently collecting testimonies against a German national running a childcare centre, but in the last three years this group and others have not been as active as they could be in investigating child sexual abuse. In fact, none of the child protection groups we spoke to knew about the September amendment of the Country Code. “We are fed up with the fact that nothing happened after we filed cases in the past,” Thapa says. “Almost all suspects were released soon after their arrest. Children sometimes changed their testimonies. In fact, some of the children accused the charities themselves of forcing them to testify, and that has deterred the activists.” The driving force behind the earlier prosecutions was Olivier Bertin, a French national living in Nepal. He told us “I was appalling by the stories I heard from the street children, but it was difficult to do anything against it. I took a long time to win their confidence. I quasi because the pressure became very big—lots of people were against me and I received threats. It is very difficult here in Nepal to target a foreigner. They can afford the best lawyers, pay lots of lawyers, and the Minister of Justice in 1996 told me in one case there was a lot of pressure from an embass. They have very good networks.” Jean-Jacques Haye, a French suspect who was released twice in Nepal, is presently in jail in France with his paedophile case pending. He is being prosecuted under a French law that allows prosecution for crimes committed outside the country. Planete Enfants and Voice of Children cooperated with the French enquiry, even sending a street child to France to testify. It is understood that the Nepali police have never attempted to share information with foreign prosecuting authorities. Twenty-three countries now have laws that allow the prosecution of their citizens for sex offences committed abroad. Most other released suspects are still free to visit or live in Nepal.

Some former street children came to tell us their stories. “They told me this English guy, he was living in Kathmandu,” one says. “He told me to take them to the embassy. They have very good networks.” Jean-Jacques Haye, a French suspect who was released twice in Nepal, is presently in jail in France with his paedophile case pending. He is being prosecuted under a French law that allows prosecution for crimes committed outside the country. Planete Enfants and Voice of Children cooperated with the French enquiry, even sending a street child to France to testify. It is understood that the Nepali police have never attempted to share information with foreign prosecuting authorities. Twenty-three countries now have laws that allow the prosecution of their citizens for sex offences committed abroad. Most other released suspects are still free to visit or live in Nepal.

Paedophilia is hidden, elusive and it is spreading.
Their nightmarish reality

India-Pakistan Roadmap

In a gathering of nawabs from India and Pakistan, or maybe just the soaring heat in the Indus-Ganga plains this summer, an Indo-Pakistan peace meet began in the cooler climes of Kathmandu on Friday.

On hand are ex-military brass, retired diplomats, media and peasants from both countries who will try to boost "confidence-building measures" between the two countries. The Indian delegation, led by Gen. Akash K. Mehta, told media in New Delhi: "The Kathmandu meeting will try to deconstruct and demystify reasons (for tensions)... and will recommend a roadmap for peace." Also attending are former Pakistani foreign ministers Hamid Ahmad, Sanjat Azeem and ex-foreign secretary Naaz Nazzir. Indian ex-foreign secretary MK Rasgotra, and former Indian envoy to Pakistan Salinder Lamba will also be present.

A Nepal foreign ministry source told us the government is watching the meeting closely, and look forward to an immediate positive outcome like the resumption of Pakistani aircraft flights to Kathmandu.

South Asian AIDS epicentre

South Asia is already the second worst area in the world with 4.2 million South Asians. Every year more than 600,000 people become infected with HIV, which is 80 per cent of the total number of people who are infected with HIV in the world.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has allocated $11 million US dollars for the development of the South Asian AIDS epicentre. The fund will be used for the establishment of a regional coordinative network to coordinate the pooling of resources and capacity for dealing with the challenge of the HIV epidemic in the region.

The Children's Day report

The Children's Day report has been published in Nepal Times. The report highlights the importance of protecting children's rights and safety. The report emphasizes the need for stronger laws and policies to prevent child abuse and exploitation.

Who goes back to Bhutan?

More than a year after the beginning of verification of Bhutanese refugees, many refugees are still returning to Bhutan. The process has been criticized for its slow pace and lack of transparency.

Domestic briefs

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NATION

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5
Ex-prime ministers speak out

The palace has never been able to get along with assertive PMs.

The palace has never been able to get along with assertive PMs. The prime minister comes with a democratic mandate or from a highly ambitious clan. (The Koalas are a perfect example of the latter.) From a purely human perspective, when you count the king as a political force when you need him, isn’t it rather implausible to expect him to play a prominent role when you don’t?

Admittedly, the Supreme Court spoiled things by systematically restricting the prime minister’s prerogative to dissolve parliament. The chief whip has more power than the premier to discipline party MPs. The palace leadership should be systematic in restraining the prime minister’s prerogative to dissolve parliament. Matirak Prasad Koirala underscored the peril of a ruling party by trying to restrain an estranged prime minister when Sher Bahadurji was about seven years old. The opposite, too, should sit and behave as if the Jana Andolan gave them the right to name every prime minister from the street. Madhav Kumar Nepal could have avoided that misguided boycott of the entire winter session of parliament two years ago simply by imagining himself on the premier’s seat. To see him send in a petition to be appointed to that job while still leading street protests broke our hearts. (An unencumbered parliament might have warded off the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority deaths all the living ex-prime ministers are dreadingly today.)

Matrika Prasad Koirala Nagendra Prasad Rajik Baburam Prasad Koirala Tanika Prasad Acharya Manmahoshadiky Mohan Samsher Rana Kunwar Indrajit Singh PS: Despite our otherworldly existence, we were too human not to squabble over the order of the signatories. Since the purpose of this joint statement is to help restore the dignity of the partnership, we decided to list ourselves according to our term in office. Despite their valuable input, Sahayaji, Govind Keshav and Satard Sundan GA chose not to sign because they did not carry the formal designation of premier.
Flying for Nepal

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the flightdeck: Will politicians please stop interfering in Royal Nepal Airlines?

A politically-appointed board with directors who had no aviation knowledge was probably the biggest setback the airline faced, and is still facing. The first order of business was to get a board that knows the business. Royal Nepal Airlines ran on taxpayers' money, it's their job to get a board that knows the business. Royal Nepal Airlines to become a service-oriented cultural landscape. Death has become a boom sector for private enterprises that work hand in hand personalising a business that it's required to attract trips are dying out. It is their duty to

by ARTHA BEED

We have our national integrity. Besides, the policy of keeping Royal Nepal Airlines to become a service-oriented operator must be abandoned for a strategy that stresses reorganisation for long-term viability. There is a limit to how much the airline can be milked for popular services when most of the top sectors, why it is the only one operating in low-margin sectors? This should be in the government's own interests, because it allows the airline to be self-sufficient and less dependent on government largesse. The present Managing Director, Mohan Khanal, is a person with 40 years of experience in the airline and has risen up the ranks. If he is given the freedom to manage the airline professionally without political interference and hassles, he is capable of pulling the airline out of its doldrums. It is as simple as that. Making Royal Nepal Airlines viable is not such a difficult task. It will need integrity and professionalism at the top. It can be done. To make that happen, the employees can start putting in quality time for the airline's reputation for quality and service. At the moment, staff morale has sunk so low that the airline's employees are its own biggest critics. No company can

The business of death

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Rajkarnikar began baking the best bakeries in town. Twelve plus one, just in case—of such a pleasure? Why resist when giving in is tempting the patron saint of dieters. Kathmandu’s bakers are turning out an array of goodies that could outdo the famous Four Horsemen, the pantomime horses that came to Nepal from India. Today, equipped with spartans, state-of-the-art ovens, a lot more experience and a high appreciation for hygiene, Kathmandu’s bakers are turning out an array of goodies that could tempt the patron saint of dieters.

When Krishna Bahadur Rajkarnikar began baking 55 years ago, Nepalis were rolling out hearty rolls but had no baked alternatives. His story began with disappointment. He never received the land that was promised him by Indra Shamsher Rana in return for years of loyal service, so destiny took him to Calcutta to learn a skill that would bring in some money. A prominent baker befriended him and got Krishna working at an English bakery. He returned home and in 1947 established Krishna Pauroti. As with all new things, there were sceptics, and true-blue Brahmins suspected Krishna contained alcohol. Actually, Krishna Bahadur used boiled hops as a leavener. Then there was the name: many thought baked goods used their feet to mix the butter although Krishna says it was always a handmade affair. Shyam Rajkarnikar, Krishna’s son, now runs the show. He recalls when asking 50 paisa for a loaf of bread was considered exorbitant as he defiantly wraps up another box of the popular fruit cakes.

While tradition is all very well, consumer tastes do change. Realising they needed to put out a bigger selection, in 1986 Krishna Bahadur’s grandchildren opened Mabacos—a clever acronym for Master Bakers and Confectioners. It has gained a loyal clientele for products that don’t stint on quality but are easy on the pocket. Rabi Rajkarnikar, the general manager, knows competition is stiff and image is essential in a brand-conscious economy. They are now looking into opening Mabaco’s Cakes and Bakes that won’t use preservatives and artificial colours.

A street away on the posh Durbar Marg is The Cake Shop at Hotel de l’Annapurna. Since 1978 they’ve turned out breads, cakes, pastries and savories that set standards for others in the business. The White Forest, recently renamed the Everest Cake, is a triumph. Thanks to a half-price scheme between 9–10 PM, The Cake Shop never has anything but the freshest temptations on display.

There are few better ways to begin your day than with the Yak & Yeti’s fruit danish washed down with a double shot of espresso. It’s a sugar and caffeine rash that nutritionists may frown on but indulgence is rarely fat-free or healthy. Ram Lal Shrestha, the pastry chef has been going about his business at the hotel since 1979. The Centere Point specialty is the custom made animation cakes topped with 3D planes, trains and cartoon characters no child (or adult) can resist. If you’re just too busy to pop over, place an online order at www.thamel.com.

The favourite venue for chocholohice is probably the Radisson Pastry Shop. In air-conditioned splendour they can be spotted with captive on their faces as they reverently bite into the Chocolate Nemesis—77 percent of pure chocolate that seeps into the blood, releasing a flood of endorphins ‘happiness hormones’ on their way.

Many a hostess has tried to pass off the Success Cake from the Shangri-la Bakery Shop at Lazimpat as her own creation. Not that anyone is fooled. The signature French specialty that involves layer of marzipan, almonds and a rich but light cream filling, is a Shangri-la hallmark that the discerning know and love. Unfortunately it only makes rare appearances but they do take orders, which is how it appears as dessert at dinner parties.

A place that is always stocked is Hot Breads Bakers and Confectioners, an international chain with five outlets in the Valley, including one in Durbar Marg. They offer variety at affordable prices, luring in students, executives and families. "We maintain international standards and only offer the freshest products because Hot Breads has become synonymous with quality," proprietor Shikhar P. Sharma says with pride. Don’t fret if your favourite cheese croissant is all sold out. Before you know it, a fresh batch will emerge from the kitchen. Good things do come to those who wait.

Shyam Kalchhap’s Nanglo’s Bakery Cafè that opened its first
endless. The pretzel and chocolate spice cake got my thumbs up. One stop over, the cake selection at Helena’s is quickly gaining respect. Patan may not have rows of bakeries, but who needs quantity when Hermann Helmer’s offers the finest quality in German bakery products? The Nepali venture has been in operation for 25 years, passing from father to sons and all three bake with the nurturing assistance of their mother, Ram Maya. Ashok KC, father and founder of the enterprise, trained in Germany and was deeply impressed by the emphasis on quality, something these bakers do not compromise on. Sons Nirmal, Kamal and Bimal now run the show. Nirmal’s true passion is white bread and the perfect little cupcakes younger Hermann’s customers love. Kamal handles the pastry department, while Bimal, the youngest, makes the puffs. The bakery has proven to be a menacing temptation to many who work out at the gym next door. Since there is so much whole grain goodness going around, the disciplined can find a snack to compliment their workout. The bakery opens its doors at 7AM, and by mid-morning the first lot is already gone. Those willing to go the extra mile won’t be disappointed if they make a pilgrimage to the Hyatt Regency, Boudha. Chef Pratap Dhaubhadel’s stunningly elaborate creations look almost too good to eat. Almost. The happiest hour at the Hyatt is between 7-8PM when you can go home with everything at almost half the price.

restaurant at Teendhara, is perhaps Nepal’s best-known eatery chain. Say ‘I’ll see you at the bakery’ and most Kathmandu residents will only ask which of the numerous Nanglo cafés you are referring to. Since 1991, Nanglo’s has become a favorite hang out for the young. The website, www.nanglo’s.com, lets students vote or comment on current issues. Those who join Club Bakery Café get discounts at various shops, recreation centres, clubs and more.

Twenty years ago, Norbu Sherpa started carting his pies to Thamel after baking them at his father’s restaurant in Boudha. Looking around his bustling Pumpernickel Bakery he remembers when it used to be all dirt roads lined by a handful of houses. Sherpa got his experience the hard way—working in bakeries across the United States, Germany and Switzerland. Each time he brought home new techniques and recipes, which explains why you can get authentic German bread in the heart of Thamel. He uses only local ingredients, and flour from Manang and Mustang for special orders. Pumpernickel Bakery has a wide selection of bread: wheats, multigrain and oatmeal to name just a few. This was the place that introduced the “proper” croissant and bagel to Kathmandu. And just by the way, this bakery also excels at homemade Italian ice cream.

Around the corner, Weizen Bakery tempts the casual passerby with a street side display of goodies: cheesecake, scones, very sizeable apple muffins, brownies...the list is
Combating child pornography

A group of international NGOs say that the EU needs to enforce stricter guidelines to curb the access to and growth of internet-related sexual exploitation of children. Interest groups from all sectors of the computer industry, including on-line protective organisations, representatives of child protection experts, and representatives of children’s organisations, expressed their concern at a public hearing "Child safety on the Internet rapidly spreading practice: how has industry risen to the challenge?"

Participants welcomed the European Commission’s recent extension of its Safe Internet Action Plan (SIAP), which aims at tackling the controversial issue of illegal, harmful and racist content on the internet. But they insisted that the plan was not enough and that a definite framework needs to be introduced. They recommended that greater promotion should be given to issues of child protection and child pornography in Central and Eastern European countries. They also proposed increased cooperation between these countries and the EU, the European Police Office. The framework includes a series of measures to be adopted by the EU’s member states to ensure that offenders are severely punished in their countries.

Burmesse sanctions

WASHINGTON – A growing number of Congress members support sanctions against the authoritarian regime after repeated serious attacks on Suu Kyi and her political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), last week. Last week, Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell introduced the “Burmesse Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003” that imposes a US import ban on goods manufactured in Burma.

The new bill will further isolate the military junta economically. The Clinton administration had imposed a ban on new investment by US companies doing business in Burma in 1997, and activists have urged a comprehensive ban on trade with the country. The proposed ban on goods made in Burma would be in place until certain conditions are met and certified by President Bush, including measurable progress to end human rights abuses, the release of all political prisoners and the achievement of an agreement between ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the NLD and ethnic minorities to transfer power to a civilian government. If these conditions are met, then sanctions can be lifted.

A Saudi survival strategy

The old regime has procrastinated so long that whatever it chooses now faces risks.

A n independent central bank focused exclusively on price stability has become a central part of the mantra of the neoliberal reform. Unlike so many other policy makers, it has been repeated often enough that it is almost unheard of. But bold assertions, even from central bankers, are no substitute for research and analysis.

Research suggests that if central banks focus on inflation, they do a better job at controlling inflation. But controlling inflation is not an end in itself: it is merely a means of achieving lower unemployment. These are the real variables that matter, and there is little evidence that independent central banks focusing exclusively on price stability do better in these crucial respects. George Akerlof, who shared the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001, and his colleagues have argued forcefully that there is an optimal size of inflations, greater than zero. So ruthless pursuit of price stability actually harms economic growth and well-being.

A focus on inflation may make sense for countries with long histories of inflation, but not for others, like Japan. America’s central bank, the Federal Reserve, is mandated not only to ensure price stability, but also to promote growth and full employment. And there is broad consensus in the US against a nominal mandate, such as that of the European Central Bank (ECB).

Today, Europe’s growth languishes, because the ECB is constrained by its single-minded focus on inflation from promoting economic recovery. That might be the case if all that central banks did was, say, choose computer software for clearing payments. But central banks make decisions that affect every aspect of society, including rates of economic growth and unemployment. Because there are trade-offs, these decisions can only be made as part of a political process. Some argue that in the long run there are no trade-offs.

Some might recognize this and know that a more populist approach to inflation is needed. They realize that the al-Saud must choose between the narrow path of repression, ethnic and religious intolerance, or adopt a more open and inclusive policy.

Both choices are fraught with danger. Open up, and they include people in Saudi public life hitherto considered unworthy for being either non-terrorists (the Shia), of impure blood (the Hijazis) or two minorities (the Ismaili and the Jada’i).

But what is the basis for inclusion in Saudi life? The challenge facing the al-Saud is to include at the heart of the political system the people they have deemed for decades. Until they begin to do so, these peoples will drift into the camp of the fanatics—not of al-Qaeda terrorists but of passive supporters, such as the Catholic community in Northern Iraq. They have been deprived of power and status that used to be theirs. When people begin to do so, these peoples will drift into the camp of the fanatics—of not active terrorists but of passive supporters, such as the Catholic community in Northern Iraq. They have been deprived of power and status that used to be theirs.

The al-Saud will undoubtedly be ruthless in their efforts to exclude—some have already been executed. For the regime to embrace peoples it has hitherto considered unworthy for being either non-terrorists (the Shia), of impure blood (the Hijazis) or two minorities (the Ismaili and the Jada’i), and to incorporate them will require a drastic change of course. The regime must change the official treatment of non-terrorists, the Shia, of impure blood (the Hijazis) and the Ismaili and the Jada’i. For the regime to embrace peoples it has hitherto considered unworthy for being either non-terrorists (the Shia), of impure blood (the Hijazis) or two minorities (the Ismaili and the Jada’i), and to incorporate them will require a drastic change of course. The regime must change the official treatment of non-terrorists, the Shia, of impure blood (the Hijazis) and the Ismaili and the Jada’i. These are the real variables that matter, and there is little evidence that independent central banks focusing exclusively on price stability do better in these crucial respects.

George Akerlof, who shared the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001, and his colleagues have argued forcefully that there is an optimal size of inflations, greater than zero. So ruthless pursuit of price stability actually harms economic growth and well-being.
banking

SATYA SWARUPAN ch CHANAN MAI — The recent attack on Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her campaigner for democracy, marks a turning point in Burm’s otherwise painfully slow and uncertain politics. Three possible scenarios of a global response are now emerging.

One is that the military junta manages to ride out the storm, for the time being, the growing fury both in and outside Burma, over their attack on Suu Kyi. In the short term, the attack could become the spark for a nationwide movement of civil disobedience against the junta. The third possibility is that the true extent of injuries sustained by Suu Kyi came out, there might be growing calls by Burmese groups in exile for UN intervention in Burma to effect a change of regime, a la Iraq. "Will Burma be next?" told the title of the Friday editorial of Irawaddy magazine, which is based in northern Thai that city and watches Burma affairs. "It is doubtful Washington will squander its political ammunition on Burma, let alone Iraq. In Iraq, it was justified as yet another case of "humanitarian intervention" similar to the one in the Kosovo by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999. For the United States, entering Burma militarily could also be a strategic move to gain a foothold at the doorstep of its only global economic and military rival—China.

If the first scenario materialises, it will show how the Rangoon regime has managed to survive crises and crises and crises. It will cost to power even after losing to Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990-general elections in 1990. In recent years, the opposition and Burma’s military sides have been locked in the NLD into a long-drawn-out process of so-called dialogue. The regular visits to the country by Razali Ismail, a UN special envoy who arrived in Rangoon on Friday, are for the benefit of the military was serious about negating a transition to some kid of democracy. The attack on Suu Kyi and her supporters came after she criticised the military for not initiating direct talks with her since her release from house arrest in May 2002. In the past six months there has been no real contact between them. Suu Kyi has been unhappy about the political meetings that Suu Kyi had around the country.

The second scenario of a popular uprising breaking out depends on how much opposition activities within Burma have been able to maintain their strength. There is a fire burning within each of one of us and it will take just one shoe to stomp it out the regime for many of us to come out onto streets," said Sintha, a resident of Rangoon.

The third scenario of foreign intervention in Burma, or at least much more external pressure on the regime, depends on the extent of physical harm sustained in the Friday attack by Aung San Suu Kyi, who reportedly has broken an arm and watched head injuries. Already, the United States and the European Union have called on the Burmese military regime to release Suu Kyi from detention and allow her to appear in public. US lawmakers are reported to be weighing a number of actions to express their displeasure with Rangoon, from freezing assets belonging to the country’s leaders to prohibiting Burma exports from entering the US. Given the precedent of the US and Britain forcing regime change in 2001 about even a UN Security Council mandate, there has been some debate among Burma groups about the idea of a UN Security Council mandate.

While the Chinese government is considered close to Rangoon, nobody expects it to take any action to pressure the United States to save her ally, unlike in the case of North Korea which is strategically far more important to China. These are still early days for such speculation and Burmese pro-democracy groups in exile are wondering whether the Burmese throw out their dictators on their own. However, they would not mind a strong reaction from the international community to tell them they are not entirely alone in their struggle.

13 - 19 JUNE 2003 NEPAL TIMES #149

Billions in aid

UNDP’s Nuclear Proliferation Task Force

UNDP is the UN’s global development network, advocating for and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, we draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.

The Kathmandu SURF is the UNDP’s Sub-Regional Resource Facility for South and West Asia. We provide UNDP Country Offices in the sub-region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) with timely, high quality substantive support for the effective design and implementation of country programmes and projects. In keeping with UNDP’s corporate vision of a knowledge-based advisory service organization, our objectives are: (a) to meet the policy advisory needs of Country Offices and (b) to enable Country Offices to more effectively develop and access knowledge and expertise.

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We are compiling a pool of qualified and interested young people for possible participation in our Young Professional Programme (YPP) in the coming months. If you are suitably qualified and interested in working with us, please send us your CV with a cover note and brief statement why you are interested in working with the SURF.

End game in Burma?
The student wings of seven major political parties have declared indefinite strikes in all educational institutions across the kingdom beginning 15 June. This at a time when the student body of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) suspended their lockout of private schools and agreed to hold talks with school operators. Things had barely begun to get back to normal before this new development sowed fresh seeds of chaos and uncertainty. The student unions are progressing on to what they call a ‘decisive’ movement, but the people don’t understand their motivation behind strikes that close schools. Judging by what has happened in the last few months, schools and colleges have become playgrounds for student unions affiliated to political parties. Temporarily closing schools and colleges have become a handy tool for student wings to spring their friends from police custody and secure free medical attention at hospitals. It is the easiest way for them to express their political dissent despite the obvious lack of logic in their actions. After all, the Ministry of Education and Tribhuvan University are currently holding talks with them on their 68-point demand list. Students bear the brunt of abuse, and we know who prompts them on their 68-point demand list.

Panda vs NEA

American investors of Bhote Kosi Power Company (BPSC) are pulling all kinds of strings in the US senate to make the Nepal government cough up the $1.5 million they claim is owed them. The Bhutanese Cotton Authority has been alerted to a radical communist outfit, similar to the Maoist rebels in Nepal, that recently announced an armed struggle in the Druk kingdom. After its formation in the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal, the Bhutanese Communist Party (BPC) announced it has already strengthened bases inside Bhutan. They have youth, peasant and student wings that have begun distributing pamphlets and posters even in urban centre like Thimphu, Pano and Ha. The king is not ignorant of these developments. There are reports that he began to call the Bhutanese refugees and there has been a call for a meeting to set up a new party in the next few weeks.

Bhutanese Maoists

The Bhutanese government has been alarmed by a radical communist outfit, similar to the Maoist rebels in Nepal, that recently announced an armed struggle in the Druk kingdom. After its formation in the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal, the Bhutanese Communist Party (BPC) announced it has already strengthened bases inside Bhutan. They have youth, peasant and student wings that have begun distributing pamphlets and posters even in urban centre like Thimphu, Pano and Ha. The king is not ignorant of these developments. There are reports that he began to call the Bhutanese refugees and there has been a call for a meeting to set up a new party in the next few weeks.

Refugees

Robin Sayami in Himal Khahapatrika 15-30 May

Oli on troubled waters

Interview with KP Oli, Central Working Committee member of the UML, Drizhti, 10 June

What created an environment that let the king install Thapa?

Madhusudan Nepal was backed by six parties including Deuba’s breakaway Nepal Congress (Democratic). The Marxist factions of the Socialist Party and the RPP came up with their own candidates. It is paradoxical that the king passed over the recommendation made by major political parties to act on the made by a minor player.

Is the new premiership unconstitutional?

Naming Thapa as prime minister was not an aggressive step. It was a continuation of the king’s October Fourth agenda. The constitution allows for three ways of electing a prime minister—the leader of a party with the majority vote, a leader unanimously selected by all political parties and lastly, the leader of the largest party. All three options require the person to be a member of parliament. In our situation the premiership would be unconstitutional no matter who is in the prime minister’s post.

However, I suggest that a solution can be found based on the present scenario instead of wasting time and energy on discussing constitutional legalities.

Will the difference of opinion between the king continue after Thapa’s cabinet is formed?

By circumventing the political parties the king eliminated an opportunity to work together and make a clean slate. We are waiting to see the cabinet that is formed will have executive powers. Thapa’s cabinet will be delinquent if it doesn’t receive what it was promised.

NEPALI TIMES #149 FROM THE NEPALI PRESS THIS PAGE CONTAINS MATERIAL SELECTED FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

When Sher Bahadur Deuba said his government should be reinstated, Crown Prince Paras interceded saying his claim was unjustified.

-Amit Kanchan of the People’s Front Nepal on the meeting between the king and political parties last month, Juha, 11 June.
Back at Sundarijal >37

“Solitary confinement is softening my mind…”

5 April, 1977

Sundarijal

When GM was here I used to discuss all kinds of political thoughts that occurred to my mind—mostly about the political situation of Nepal as we see it from prison in total ignorance. My conjecture was as good as his, but since it was a question of measuring in darkness, two measurements are double as good as one. Now my ideas are stills are bottled up inside me. Sometimes I am assailed with doubts about the correctness of our present line—GM used to be never in doubt that it was the only line we could take. Today, I am again assailed with doubt, there is no reason why I should have doubts like this about a line which had been considered thoroughly from all sides. The psychological softening, which the present solitary confinement provided, is obviously responsible for recurrence of doubts in my mind. Any mental conclusion or reaction reached or produced in the present extremely unnatural condition is bound to suffer from subjectivism. No objective assessment is possible in this state of objective assessment. Moreover, I have no news of any kind—don’t know what developments are taking place or what our people are thinking or doing. This total lack of information tells again against any attempt at objective assessment. This solitary confinement is affecting my mind—softening it most likely. Sometimes the horror of indefinite detention grips me with tears. I know such things are a psychological condition of the present state of incarceration. I also know that they won’t keep us like this for long. Still, I am sometimes gripped with horror. In my case I have to live in solitary confinement for a few months more. There is no indication that the severe restriction imposed on us would be relaxed. I don’t even hope that GM would be brought back to my camp now. How to manage to spend the time in this distressful condition? If I had books, they would have perhaps helped—perhaps, I remember Madalasai who told me last time that I should take a book. When my political and psychological solute to contemplate Infinity. Loneliness and solitude are perhaps two things or the same thing looked at from two psychological divergent points. What I am suffering from is loneliness—utter loneliness—loneliness which is horrifying. I should have practiced some yoga which would have perhaps helped me, quickening my mind. I took ‘tablet of valium as a chemical substitute for yoga—to calm my agitated mind.

6 April

Sundarijal

When on 25 March Asst Anchaladish with a team of officers and clerks had come to take our statement, I had expected that after all the train had moved and that legal process had started. They made their appearance after 3 months, and now again they seem to have gone to sleep. It is already 12 days and nothing happens. Granted that the king was away for a month on a visit of India and nothing happens without his personal order, but it is already five days that he is back here. If only they take us to the court or do something about us, decide one way or other, there would be some psychological relief from this boredom, this loneliness, this stagnant existence, this total preoccupation with one’s own psychological moments alone—all this will be lifted even if the legal process is started. I say legal process for the convenience of expression. The directive whatever it is likely to be has to be taken by the king, hence the legal process is only a formal show—but still will be going on, our movement from the prison to the court (which I expect would sit here in the prison…) some new faces seen, some arguments and counter-arguments etc.—all this will be at least a small Pebble thrown into the still scum-covered water of my present existence. There will be an element of fight also, for which I am itching—a legal fight before a bogus court, but I will give it in my own way—state my case, knowing fully well that I would be addressing a deaf judge, and therefore knowing that my pleadings wouldn’t make any difference in the judgement he has to give in any case. Therefore, when 14 days ago, the officers came, I brightened up. The Asst Anchaladish has even assured me GM wouldn’t be kept separate from me for long, a day or week or so. No more. Perhaps the Anchaladish himself doesn’t know anything about us or what orders he will have to give to execute. In his judgement he thought that we won’t be kept separated beyond a week. The pages of my diary are full of my mental agonies, even torture; and I give the impression of having been considerably weakened. The psychological condition is exactly so, but I haven’t weakened in the practical sense at all. When my political and psychological conviction and ideals are affected, I bristle up, ready for a fight. See Madalasai the early morning dream, soft, loving and exceedingly charming.

Inscribed under Sushila’s photo the immortal line of Keats: “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” This picture of hers gives me joy and morale whenever I look at it. Is a great pity that I didn’t bring a bigger picture of hers to paste it prominently on the wall of my room.

BOOK REVIEW

by MARK TURIN

The mad Carew

Disseminating deranged ideas in the volatile political climate of the present is simply irresponsible.

Mary Carew, nom de guerre ‘Kew’ after the famous gardens in London, is an American guerrilla fighter with a leadership role in the Maoist of Nepal. She is also blacked in one eye, a Buddhist spiritualist, conversant in Nepali, Chinese, and Prachanda, reproduced in their entirety by jingoistic drivel, but fascination with the first place, since no reputable book house which specialises in ‘publishing on demand’. This should have warned me away in the fact, the author’s imagination, and public

The pages of my diary are full of my mental agonies, even torture; and I give the impression of having been considerably weakened. The psychological condition is exactly so, but I haven’t weakened in the practical sense at all. When my political and psychological conviction and ideals are affected, I bristle up, ready for a fight. See Madalasai the early morning dream, soft, loving and exceedingly charming.

The spectre of their recent appearance, it appears that the author has spent ‘more than ten years travelling and working in Asia, most recently in mainland South Asia’, although what troubled him about the region remains unsigned. According to a disclaimer preceding Chapter One, ‘while all the characters are fictional, the fabric of the bloody historical events depend in this book… are a tapestry woven from known facts, the author’s imagination, and public statements’. The known facts, I should add, are almost twenty pages of the 1999 interview between Revolutionary Worker and Prachanda, reproduced in their entirety as Chapter 3 of the novel, and five pages of the special report on the 1 March massacre of the 1960s. The rest can indeed be put down to the author’s considerate imagination.

KEW, The Nepal Maoist Strain

published by 1’Books Library, an outfit which specialises in ‘publishing on demand’. This should have warned me away in the first place, since no reputable book house would go near such inflammatory and jingoistic drivel, but fascination with the title overwhelmed me and I purchased a copy anyway. Save yourself the trouble.

(Mark Turin is currently on the

Department of Social Anthropology at University of Cambridge.)

See also: The peaceful peace by Pushkar Bhusal, Nepal Times, #123.

Mary Carew, nom de guerre ‘Kew’ after the famous gardens in London, is an American guerrilla fighter with a leadership role in the Maoist of Nepal. She is also blacked in one eye, a Buddhist spiritualist, conversant in Nepali, the mistress of Comrade Prachanda, living in the forbidden Kingdom of Lo’, or Mustang. Her father and brother, ex-army and trekking types, are commissioned by the US secret services to track her down before she gets more deeply embedded with the insurgents than she already is. At the behest of Prachanda, she meets with Chen Hui, a Chinese Professor of Microbiology and Chemistry who has perfected the airborne dispersal of germ anthrax and is eager to unleash a few canisters over the United States. Aim: to sow death, misery and probably the seeds of WW III. Enough already! No, the final battle takes place in Mustang and involves a CIA operative, the American Himalayan Foundation, Tibetan Khampos and a clutch of automatic weapons. Thankfully, the bad guys are all destroyed, a requisite number of good guys die with them (to make it realistic) and the world is saved by the ingenuity and resilience of a band of Americans. Oh dear.

Anyone with a predilection towards paranoia, conspiracy theories or weapons of mass destruction should definitely purchase not read this book. There are enough half-baked, specious and entirely fictional speculations to keep the present US administration in foreign policy for a good five years. All the more reason, then, that this treatise should not enter the public discourse. Better to reduce one’s ignorance in this manner than now, to let in someone pick it up by mistake and believe even a single word of it. I also don’t believe that the writer can claim any protection by banding his book as a ‘novel’.
**BOOKWORM**

Integrated Pest Management in Nepal
Fusumadhu Paudel (ed)
Himalayan Resource Institute, 2003
Rs 500

This approach to pest management is ecological and socio-economical. It needs collaborative efforts from various experts, institutions and farmers. The contributions in this book seek alternatives to chemicals wherever possible, advocating minimal and judicious use when unavoidable.

Flora from Kathmandu Valley
Neera Joshi Pradhan
Park Gallery, 2002 (Second Edition)
Rs 250

This slim publication is the result of three years worth of extensive study of the Valley's flora by the author. Most of our garden flowers are exotic, making Pradhan's paintings a valuable natural resource. While retaining accuracy, her work reflects great delicacy and a true admiration for the subject.

The nature of underdevelopment and regional structure of Nepal: A Marxist analysis
Bahadur Bhattarai
Adishi Publishers, 2003
Rs 900

The author, a leading figure of the CPN (Maoist), probes the subject why our 'yam' nation is caught in a quagmire of underdevelopment from a historic-materialist perspective. He concludes a revolutionary rupture from the past is necessary if we are to progress into the 21st century.

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**NEPALI WEATHER**

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

These last days before the monsoon breaks sees the classic struggle over Nepal of the westerners fighting a losing battle to hold off this advance of moisture from the Bay of Bengal. In a good year, the monsoon winds prevail and the clouds mass up against the Himalaya and travel westwards. This year, the monsoon is about a week late, and is due to arrive in eastern Nepal on Thursday. Wednesday morning's brief storm was a western front making its presence felt just in time. The winds are whipping up sand in the Sagarmatha (see satellite pictures, taken on Wednesday morning) transporting it up over central Nepal in the form of hail. The monsoon is expected to arrive with a bang this weekend and with it a dramatic change in wind direction, muddy conditions and torrential showers.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

**RADIO SAGAMARTH**

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**CITY**

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**BOOKS**

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**BOOKS**

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**NEPALI WEATHER**

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

These last days before the monsoon breaks sees the classic struggle over Nepal of the westerners fighting a losing battle to hold off this advance of moisture from the Bay of Bengal. In a good year, the monsoon winds prevail and the clouds mass up against the Himalaya and travel westwards. This year, the monsoon is about a week late, and is due to arrive in eastern Nepal on Thursday. Wednesday morning's brief storm was a western front making its presence felt just in time. The winds are whipping up sand in the Sagarmatha (see satellite pictures, taken on Wednesday morning) transporting it up over central Nepal in the form of hail. The monsoon is expected to arrive with a bang this weekend and with it a dramatic change in wind direction, muddy conditions and torrential showers.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

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The Matrix, Round II

1999. Elegant martial arts, sharp and innovative cinematography, a stunningly nightmarish future world with overtones of Descartes’ Meditations: The Matrix was more than equipped to turn the popular notions of sci-fi blockbusters on its head. The movie created a mainstream that swept through urban sub-cultures. It became fashionable to discuss Neo with philosophy majors at universities. Materialism was invected with the kind of cool never associated with laser-wielding starship captains and journeys to far-off planets. Expectations were questioned but everyone knew “The Matrix got there first.” Is “crashed” there? Two parallel worlds—one of the Matrix, a computer simulated dream designed to use humans as sources of fuel and energy, and a hard reality outside the program. The creator-director duo behind the movies, the brothers Wachowskis, based the basic premise of the movie on Descartes’ analytical scepticism that questioned notions of reality. The Matrix repeatedly asks questions about the nature of truth and reality, the possibilities of choice and free will, the meaning of life and love. It offers no answers.

The first movie charts Neo’s (Keanu Reeves) “rebirth” from the womb of the computer to the responsibility of liberating the human race. He is the One prophesised by the Oracle as the only being with the power to destroy the Matrix. Together with Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) and Morpheus ( Laurence Fishburne) Neo navigates his way through an unfamiliar post-apocalyptic landscape.

2003. Four years later we are poised to enter that brave new world again. The Matrix Reloaded promises more, not only of special effects, action sequences and cutting edge technology but also a deeper journey into the real world—of course, as defined by The Matrix. This time round more humans have broken free and are attempting to live in the real world. As their numbers grow, Zion, the last real-world city, falls under siege to the Machine Army. Only a matter of hours separates Zion from the machines and it is up to Neo, Trinity and Morpheus to save the day. Neo is still a saviour in the sequel but he is forced to make difficult choices. The machines are stronger too and powerful figures on the inside offer increasing resistance, including Agent Smith who thirsts for vengeance.

The genius of the publicity-shy Larry and Andy Wachowski will hit Kathmandu 14 June when The Matrix Reloaded premieres at Jai Nepal Cinema. And just to keep you in the loop, look out for the final instalment in the trilogy, The Matrix Revolutions, due out in November later this year. Watch this space.

The Matrix Reloaded at the Jai Nepal Cinema from 14 June at 1.45, 4.15 and 6.45 PM. Bhoot at 11.15 AM. For reservations call 4442220. www.jainepal.com

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Charlie’s Angels 2: Full Throttle
July 2003
The beautiful and accomplished crime-fighting trio is revved up and raring to go.

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines
July 2003
Arnold Schwarzenegger battles a stunning and ruthless fembot (female robot) from the future.

Koi Mil Gaya
August 2003
A syrpy Bollyood love story starring Hrithik Roshan and Preity Zinta.
Fulbright Nepalis

Thursday was Fulbright Day, and some of the 300 or so Nepalis who have studied in the United States under the Fulbright Program gathered in Kathmandu for an annual get-together.

There certainly isn’t anything unique about Nepali students leaving home for a Western education anymore. More than 1,500 Nepalis went to the United States last year alone, a quarter of them to pursue post-graduate degrees. Among the latter, the Fulbright Scholarship is perhaps the most coveted and coveted. This year, there were more than 300 applicants for the Nepal-wide selection of five candidates for the 2004 Fulbrighters. The prestige attached to being a Fulbright scholar is partially due to a rigorous selection process—only the cream of the crop gets through.

In 51 countries, including Nepal, there are institutional commissions to administer the program. “It began with a simple idea, but has grown to allow an untold amount of shared knowledge, cross-fertilisation and global networking,” says Michael Gill, head of the Fulbright Commission, Nepal. In June 1963, the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal (USEF-Nepal) was formally established, but Nepali students and scholars had gone to the United States as Fulbright scholars even before that.

In 1952, Rams Candra Mallaha and Vip Purad Udayabhusn became the first Nepali Fulbrighters when they were selected to study public administration. Since then, some 260 students, 47 post-doctorate scholars and 46 travel grantees have been to the US under Fulbright auspices to study, teach and to conduct research. In a reverse flow, 122 Americans and 135 senior scholars have come to Nepal. Many Nepali Fulbrighters joined the civil service and rose up the ranks but very few got into politics. Former minister and IPP leader, Prakash Chandra Lohani, 1962 Fulbrighter, who is the new finance minister in the Surya Budhan Thapa cabinet is one of the few. “It helped me broaden my perspectives—the experience helped me become a better person and a better professional,” Lohani told us.

Fulbrighters are required to return to Nepal and work in their field for at least two years. But Dilli Devi Shakya, the president of Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal (FAAN) is concerned with the rising numbers who stay in the US, especially those who are studying technical subjects.

Shakya is a supervisor to research students at Tribhuban University’s Department of Botany. She is also the first woman to head the government funded Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST). “The Fulbright experience teaches you how best to exploit what is at your disposal,” the 1999 Fulbrighter adds.

Nepali scholars are diversifying in their academic fields of interest under the Fulbright programs. The younger generation has opted for creative writing, fine arts and media studies—a departure from the traditionally popular areas like economics, administration and the sciences. These changes have also been reflected within the American education system and their teaching values.

Former head of the National Planning Commission, Mohan Man Sainju, remembers how difficult his first two semesters were as a Fulbright scholar at the University of North Carolina in 1969. “I struggled against the rigidity of the system. I wanted to study development not as an isolated economic issue but also in light of its social, political and anthropological connections,” Sainju recalls. At least in his case, the hard work seems to have paid off.

Fulbright Nepal has benefited from the world’s most successful educational exchange. From top: Minnesota State University university magazine Today features former Nepal ambassador to the United States, Damodar Gautam (extreme right) on its cover. Illustrious Nepali Fulbrighters兰 Singh Bangdel and Dilli Devi Shakya (right). Below: US Education Foundation Director in Kathmandu, Michael Gill (at left below with former head of the NPC, Mohan Man Sainju, also a Fulbright scholar.

For more than 50 years, Nepali students have benefited from the world’s most successful educational exchange.
Wayne Amzits

Eighteen remarkable portraits taken in Nepal in 2003 by William Mebane, an American photographer and visiting Fulbright Scholar, are on display at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. The individuals in these large sized colour photos look directly at the photographer and the viewer. The people seen here speak for themselves through facial expressions, bodily gestures and the clothes they wear.

Mebane, who characterises himself as a “street photographer” went out on the streets of Kathmandu, Pokhara and other Nepali towns to meet and engage his potential subjects. He was not looking for the “decisive moment” that captures a person or an action as it is happening. Instead, he is drawn to the person, his or her persona or presence, hopefully revealed through the photographer’s lens in an unguarded and willing fashion.

On the rare occasions when Mebane fails, the photo bears the indelible feel of a studio portrait. When he succeeds, as he most often does, the individuals, with expressions and gestures and with the clothes they wear, step out of the photograph with an intensity that says this is who I am, this is who we are, this is how I want to be seen. Or sometimes, more naturally, this is the person you would see if you happened to come by just now without a camera in hand wanting to take my photo.

In a powerful and uncompromising way, the young girls in “Three Hip Hop Girls, Dragon World, Kathmandu” and the young men in “Three Young Men, Lakeside, Pokhara” present both the trappings of pop culture and the reality of being young. These teenagers define themselves by their dress and bearing. The boys are at ease with their pose while the young girls are more defiant and more guarded. In “Learning to Drive a Motorcycle, Pokhara” (top, left) a young woman and man on the bike seem comfortable with each other, yet apart and sure of themselves. They are not defiantly being young, but they are out on their own, and their dress and bearing speak of their lifestyle and free spirit.

In “Sadhu Putting Water Into His Jeep, Mugling” (top right) the irresistible sadhu appears to be more man of the world than ascetic, his jeep more necessary for his trade than a trident or begging bowl.

The man in “Man Breaking Rocks For Gravel, Hemza, Pokhara” sits with his tool in hand midst the rocks he is breaking down into gravel. He appears to be as self-contained as a statue. His body is still, but his eyes and his face seem ready to break open like the rocks he shatters. Is that T-shirt beneath his vest a token of modernity, and is his labour, his exploitation, a necessary underpinning for the modern world?

Mebane in these few portraits presents a Nepal that he characterises as “caught up in the push and pull of tradition and modern life”. He senses individuals claiming identities uniquely their own beneath the trappings and signs of pop culture. Were he to widen his gaze and recognise the situation and the difficult dignity of those like the “Man Breaking Rocks For Gravel”, his skills and aesthetic sensibility would unearth not just a changing world, but an unchanging one. A world where individuality is not proclaimed by clothes worn or lifestyle adopted, but by the situation one bears.

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

Portraits of Modern Life in Nepal by William Mebane, 13 June-4 July at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited.

Walking is a metaphor for life says photographer Ashok R Shakya of his latest exhibition at Park Gallery. “As in life, while walking, one finds ups and downs, going away and coming home,” he believes. A French language teacher and a freelance photographer whose images have won international awards, Shakya’s works have been published in magazines, calendars, brochures and postcards. Garuda magazine said, “his [Shakya’s] photographs tend to make a balance between suffering and grace…His works often inspire a discreet spirituality.”

Walking by Ashok R Shakya from 16-22 June at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. It moves to the Summit Hotel, Kupondole, from 24-30 June.
Driving me mad

by Kunda Dixit

There is nothing more chaotic than Kathmandu traffic. It is no more chaotic than our politics. But you have a point. We’re so busy being helmeted drivers that we have entirely skipped the stetephane event. So, unlike veteran democracies like the UK which took 500 years to learn to drive on the wrong side of the road, we can’t expect ourselves to get there in just 12 years. Before you go for your driving test, therefore, it is a good idea to practice this sample multiple choice test so that you can get your license without beating around the bush too much.

1. All motorcycle riders and passengers are required to wear helmet:
   a. Unless your helmet has just been stolen at Bishal Bazar.
   b. Except your three little children aged 2, 4, and 5 sitting on the fuel tank who are only required to wear fancy shades and frilly hats.
   c. At all times.
   d. Including when you are asleep, or in the bathroom.

2. The best procedure for taking a vehicle from a parked stationery position into the traffic flow is to:
   a. Swing out into the lane without looking behind to see if any other vehicle is approaching, especially if you are in traffic to move into lane, even if it means waiting till slowpoke cars from the left by cleverly employing the blind spot where they least expect you to be.
   b. If there are school kids waiting to cross the zebra, stop, don’t look, and go, go, go!
   c. At all times.
   d. Only for Safa Tempos: “Stop, don’t look, and go, the next bandh.

3. The fastest way for a motorcyclist to go from Point A to Point B is to:
   a. Overtake slowpokes by cutting into the opposite lane, accelerating so you can beat them to it.
   b. If there are school kids waiting to cross the zebra, a bus.
   c. At all times.
   d. Including when you are asleep, or in the bathroom.

4. You are driving down Putali Sadak, your mobile vibrates. Do you:
   a. Let it vibrate and enjoy the massage.
   b. Pick up the phone, shout obscenities at the caller and gesticulate recklessly. This is called Road Rage.
   c. Pick up the phone, chat with the caller and when cop pulls you over slip phone down your shirt and pretend to be excavating ear wax.
   d. Pick up the phone, chat with the caller and have a Rs 100 note ready on the dash board.

5. Seatbelts have been made mandatory for your safety and comfort. Care to comment?
   a. The belt is a good restraint while I am stuck in a traffic jam and too tired to get out of the car, run amok and start shouting and gesticulate recklessly. This is called Road Rage.
   b. Pick up the phone, shout obscenities at the caller and gesticulate recklessly. This is called Road Rage.
   c. Pick up the phone, chat with the caller and when cop pulls you over slip phone down your shirt and pretend to be excavating ear wax.
   d. Pick up the phone, chat with the caller and have a Rs 100 note ready on the dash board.

The gift of mobility

n a country where there are so many injured people in need of rehabilitation, there is a shortage wheelchairs and aids for the handicapped. Finally, a Nepali engineer has started designing and building cheap wheelchairs to meet this demand.

Shankar Man Shrestha crafts custom-designed physiotherapy machines, low-trolley wheelchairs for mothers who need to do housework and take care of babies, and other apparatus. Recently, he was even asked to design a wheelchair for Tara, a street dog paralysed when she was hit by a car. It took three months for Shankar to put together what is probably Nepal’s first canine wheelchair.

This 37-year-old teacher at Balaju Technical School has built more than 200 wheelchairs, and his innovativeness is stunning. “I listen very carefully when the patients talk about their requirements,” Shankar explains. “Then I discuss it with their doctors and therapists. I spend a lot of time designing the right device.” Shankar’s creations. An imported wheelchair costs anywhere up to Rs 70,000, but his cost ten times less. And that comes with free maintenance. “Life in Nepal is difficult enough already for the disabled. My job is to make it somewhat easier by giving them mobility,” he says.

The reason they are cheap is because it is a labour of love for Shankar. He does not aim to make money out of it. And Shankar’s reward is to see the happiness on the faces of his newly-mobile patients, including Tara as she wheels around happily.