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HODGSON

A Nepali scholar rediscovers the legacy of Brian Hodgson, the 19th century British resident at the turmoil-ridden Kathmandu court. The new findings may help rewrite Nepali history. p8-9

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 94

Q. Do you agree that enough is enough, and all political forces should now unite for the good of the nation?

Yes 85.3%

Don't Know 2.8%

No 11.9%

Total votes: 1,601

Weekly Internet Poll # 95. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

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Dark clouds again

SHIVA GAUNLE

In a serious setback to the peace process, the last remaining Maoist official in Kathmandu was detained briefly Thursday morning for questioning.

The incident came amidst reports that the entire top leadership of the Maoists who surfaced four months ago for talks had either slipped away to India, or gone underground.

The official, Bharat Dhungana, works at the Maoist liaison office in Anamnagar and was picked up near Krishna Mandir in Patan at 6:30 on Thursday morning. He was blindfolded and driven in a red van for an hour before questioning. "They asked me if our leaders are returning, whether talks will be held," Dhungana recounted. He was also asked who collected 'donation' money in the office. After this, the interrogators put a Nepali cap on Dhungana, drove him around before leaving him at the police office in Jawalakhel.

Asked how the incident could affect the peace process, Dhungana said: "It will definitely make the leaders think twice about coming back for talks without security guarantees." The questioning appears to be a crude attempt to provoke

the Maoists, and some analysts see the hand of hardline elements who want to disrupt the prospect of talks.

In the past three weeks, Maoist leaders have been disappearing one by one. Baburam Bhattarai was in Kalikot, and is believed to have gone on to attend the Revolutionary International Movement (RIM) meeting at Chattisgarh in India. He later came to the New Delhi suburb of Noida where he met Nepali human rights activists last week. This is the first time that the Maoists haven't bothered to hide their collective presence in India.

Krishna Bahadur Mahara also flew to Nepalganj and then on to Delhi last week carrying a letter from Surya Bahadur Thapa to Baburam Bhattarai. Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) told officials in Kathmandu over the weekend that he was going to Kalikot, but after flying to Nepalganj on Tuesday, reportedly took a motorcycle to Bardia and then slipped into India to join his comrades.

How long will this period of no war, no peace drag on?

Ominous clouds over the Bagmati on Thursday afternoon, and (inset) Maoist official Bharat Dhungana who was picked up for questioning.

continued ➡ p16

ALL DRESSED UP: After three hours of sleep, Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani gets ready to leave home Thursday morning to prepare his budget speech.

The Budget

The present uncertainty must end, and peace restored for this budget to work.

– Finance Minister Prakash C Lohani

In numbers:

Total: Rs 102.4 billion

Regular budget: Rs 60.5 billion

Development budget: Rs 42 billion (three-fourths earmarked for 'high priority' areas and one-third for mid-western and far-western districts)

Foreign loan and grant component: 70 percent

For security: Rs 13.5 billion (30 percent up from 2002, of which Police gets Rs 6.3 billion and Army gets Rs 7.2 billion.)

Reconstruction of Infrastructure destroyed in the insurgency: Rs 800 million.

Education: Rs 15 billion

Health: Rs 5.2 billion

Hydropower: Rs 6 billion (plus Rs 1 billion for rural electrification)

Other highlights:

- Parties get Rs 20 per vote garnered in previous polls two months before general elections
- Power Development Fund for rural producers
- Half of Nepal Telecommunication Corp shares to be sold to public
- Nepal Oil Corp monopoly ended, private oil importers allowed
- Nepal Employment Bank to channel remittances from overseas Nepalis, and help migrant workers
- Dairy Development Corp and nine other public sector firms to be privatised
- EPZs in Birganj, Panchkhal and Nuwakot
- No visas required for Chinese citizens, three day visa-free entry for other tourists
- 600 more schools to be handed over to local communities
- Income tax slab increased to Rs 100,000
- Private entities can make up to Rs 5 million tax-exempt contributions to political parties

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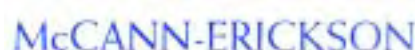
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Cheers !

ON YOUR THIRD ANNIVERSARY

NEPALI Times



“Leave our kids alone.”



RAM HARI RIJAL



Schools in Dang (left) struggle to prevent their children from being made pawns in the political games being played out in faraway Kathmandu.

RAM HARI RIJAL in DANG

Hemanta Bhandari is a nine-year-old boy who walks 10km roundtrip to a private school in Ghorahi everyday from his village. He has a heavy school bag that he slings across his head porter-style, and he is sweating and tired by the time he reaches his class. “I wish I lived in Ghorahi, so I wouldn’t have to walk this far every day,” Hemanta tells a visitor.

There are hundreds of thousands of children all over Nepal who have always walked long distances to school. But these distances have suddenly become longer for children because the Maoists have forced the closure of private schools in their home village. Hemanta’s old school in Guruwagau shut down for good after Maoist threats and extortion.

But now, parents and guardians of children in Dang are fighting back. They are tired of waiting for the government to do anything, so they got together to open some of the schools that the Maoists closed down in towns across the Dang valley last year. After the ceasefire, the parents had successfully helped open schools but in the past months the Maoist student unions have again started

visiting school after school making demands that are impossible for many educators to fulfil.

“The period of the ceasefire is not a return to normalcy,” said Pradeep Oli, a Maoist student leader who defended his group’s action saying the education system was rotten to the core and needed to be completely destroyed before being rebuilt. “We won’t allow private schools to open unless they are free,” he added.

Many parents who heard Oli’s speech last month said some Maoist demands were difficult to meet, and therefore a sign that the Maoists are getting defensive about targeting schools. Parents’ outrage over the prolonged closure of schools has now boiled over, and the simultaneous re-opening of some schools is the first sure sign that the tide may be turning because of public opinion.

“We told them, look, no one wants to go to government schools because of the poor quality, why not try to improve them instead of closing down the only alternative people have,” said Shreedhar Mahara, founder of the Scholarland English School in Guruwagau. “But they don’t listen to reason.” Mahara now lives in a rented room in Ghorahi, trying to get his

own two children through school.

Of the 50 private schools in Dang, only a handful remain open. Some of them are in Maoist-affected regions. Said one principal who did not want his name disclosed: “We have taken permission from Maoists to run our schools. All we had to do was to pay them off.”

To cater to the demand of families displaced from the interior, Ghorahi has seen three new private schools open up in the past year. It is the job of Om Bhakta Chaudhari of the Maoist student union to keep an eye on them, so he pays them visits regularly threatening them to close down or else—and then pockets their ‘donation’.

With support from parents most schools are now resisting. Some, like Rapti Vidhya Mandir, are islands of excellence in a sea of darkness. Of the 69 students who appeared in this year’s SLC from Rapti Vidhya, 68 passed in first division. “If you have dedicated teachers who believe in quality, there is no reason why all schools can’t be like ours,” says principal Ghanashyam Dangi. Rapti Vidhya Mandir is likely to bag this year’s Regional Education Award for best

performance in the SLC.

But the reality of rural Dang and other districts in Nepal is different. There are many schools where not a single student passes the SLC, almost all are government schools. The anti-private school campaign of the Maoists tries to capitalise on this inequity as well as the fact that for every good private school there are others which are over-commercialised and charge exorbitant fees.

Some private schools without a library charge library fees. There is one school in Ghorahi that charges for ‘extras’ under headings like L.F.G.S., A.I.B.C.C., D.P.C.C., E.C.E ‘Y’, with no explanations about what these acronyms mean. Many private schools cram students into airless, dark classrooms and have poor results. But because government schools are even worse, and many private schools are closed, demand for education outstrips supply, and it has become a seller’s market.

Nirmal Gautam, president of the Guardians’ Association of Dang is monitoring how different private schools are charging fees. He told us: “Education and health are the fundamental rights of every Nepali,

and they should be provided free of cost. But our country doesn’t have the money so private schools have stepped in, but some schools are over-stepping the guidelines by taking illegal fees.”

Gautam’s Guardians’ Association has submitted a 15-point memorandum to the District Education Office in Dang, and issued an ultimatum that the suggestions be implemented. But in a situation where the government has abdicated its regulatory role and left schools, parents and students to fend for themselves, it is unlikely that the demands to reign in over-commercialised schools will be met.

There is a wide disparity in fees that parents feel is irrational. The Deepshika Higher Secondary School charged nearly Rs 3,000 per month from its nursery class, while a similar category Valley Top School, charges only Rs 500. While some school owners argue that in a free market the fees will ultimately rationalise themselves because no one will go to a more expensive school of the same quality, others say the difference in fees is just too glaring and the government has to step in. “If the government doesn’t do

anything, it leaves the field open for Maoist threats,” says Gautam.

Purna Oli is the principal of Valley Top School, and says his school is proof that quality education doesn’t need to be expensive. “Our students are the children of labourers, masons and rickshaw pullers,” says Oli. “If you take out the profit-markup of greedy owners, schools can be cheaper.” Valley Top prides itself in being an innovative school with extensive teaching aids in class.

Parents in Dang, like elsewhere in Nepal, are caught between the threat of violence by Maoist students, lockout by Nepali Congress and UML student unions, and the inaction and apathy of the district education officials. “We are sick of the strikes, closures and high fees. We are losing our patience,” says Ramesh Regmi, a local guardian.

Many like Regmi believe that while the school system needs reforms, their children are being targeted by the Maoists and the parties to further their political agendas. For the guardians, the main goal for now is to prevent their children from being made pawns in the political games being played out in faraway Kathmandu. ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Stealthy superpower

The latest edition of the American highbrow magazine, *Atlantic Monthly*, features as its lead essay an eerie version of diplomatic “kiss and tell” by the widely read Robert D Kaplan, one of the most influential writers on foreign affairs in the world. Influential because his thoughts on once arcane topics like the Balkans were said to inform the opinions of Bill Clinton and other White House types. Influential then, and somewhat worrisome, because Kaplan’s latest essay, and he’s been producing hosts of them lately about America’s future interaction with the world, is called ‘Supremacy by Stealth’.

I have much admiration for Robert Kaplan. And I have many disagreements with much of what he writes. Not because I don’t admire his style or scope—I do, no one in centrist American thinking works harder on developing a thesis or a theme, or approaches them with more wit or verve—but because I deeply deplore the premise of ‘Supremacy by Stealth’.

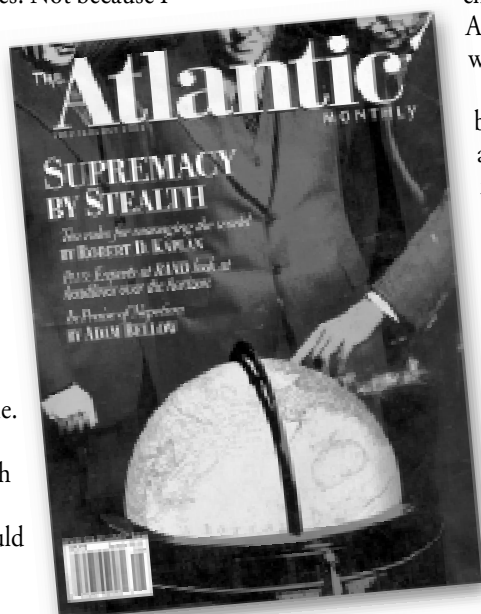
In this essay, and I fear it’s founded very much on American official thinking of the moment, Kaplan is telling the United States to accept its role as the world’s sole imperial power and to go about things more subtly, nicely if possible. Thus the title. We have supremacy, he’s arguing, it’s de facto. Now we need stealth to maintain and expand that.

American decency and generosity should be reflected more in foreign and security policy. The founding principles of the

United States are inspiring to many Americans and to the rest of the world. Given a choice, who wouldn’t choose freedom, the pursuit of happiness and concern for community over feudalism, class hatred or pure greed? The American military and its foreign policy elite, Kaplan writes, must inject more of this into the country’s behaviour on the international stage. It’s already there in the behaviour of many individual soldiers, officials and diplomats, he says. People like army ‘civil affairs officers’, and we have them in Nepal training our RNA on decent behaviour in counter-insurgency, need to have their roles strengthened. Human rights, social justice and egalitarianism need to be enshrined as benchmarks for reform of troubled societies. American policy should be to push this on an official level in word and in deed. Okay, I’ll buy some of that.

But where my two-man consensus with Kaplan breaks down is the reasoning behind all of this sweetness and light. America should be nicer, he says, not because it’s the nice thing to do, but because it’s the best way to achieve “supremacy by stealth”: a policy of we can rule the world longer and better if we’re nicer about it. To be fair, this is the crudest possible distillation of his thesis and apologies to a far more distinguished political thinker than I for my crudity. But as a working class guy from an insignificant background, I like to distill arguments down to their basics—what my dear departed mother used to call “boiling out the bullshit”. So when I turn up the heat on Kaplan, this is what remains in the pot.

America rules. It should continue to. To do so, it must be nicer. Then we’re okay for another thousand years.



America is advised to expand and rule with sweetness and light.

I don’t object to the fact that Robert Kaplan is writing this. By doing so, he is earning his living as an essayist and thinker. He is doing his duty. But I quake at the notion that he represents: American liberal opinion of the moment. Is this the best we can do? George Bush and his neo-imperialists assume their roles with just a few simple goals in mind, and apparently they include enriching cronies in the oil, security and defence industries. Oh yes, and national security too, and protecting citizens against another outrage like 9-11.

But his recent African visit aside, Bush’s presidency since the beginning has also been about expanding the role of private capital in the public sphere at home and abroad. Witness Vice President Dick Cheney’s alma mater, the oil service multinational Haliburton, and its expanding role as the US military’s largest single private sector provider of just about every logistical service that a modern army requires. At home, in Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world, American businesses have become as important as the American government—exactly the way Bush Corp would like it.

Which is why writers like Kaplan need to switch their attention from tinkering with the extremes of imperial cynicism to considering the real implications of current policy. Having a nice military regime or a nice imperial power in charge of the world makes little or no difference when the slaving warlords of private defence firms and the security industry are hiding behind the smiling faces of the ‘civil affairs officer’.

Wake up and smell the coffee, Robert. ♦

War scars children

SANJAYA DHAKAL

According to a recent study, during the last six years, 162 children were killed and around 300 injured in the war between the Maoist rebels and the security forces, while hundreds of displaced children face abuse and exploitation.

Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center (CWIN), which conducted the study, says most of the children who died were caught in the crossfire and in landmine explosions. "Some died while playing with unexploded bombs left near their houses by the rebels or security forces," the CWIN study says.

The security forces arrested hundreds of children below 18 years of age during the state of emergency last year. The children are also pressured by the rebels who have been accused of recruiting underage soldiers. Many fled to the cities, but their nightmare didn't ended there.

"While a lot of them are in orphanages, a much bigger number is forced to work in dangerous conditions at brick kilns, quarries and wool spinning mills. Others have become domestic servants," says CWIN's Gauri Pradhan. Of the 575 children at the Nepal Children Organisation orphanage in Kathmandu, 133 are the victims of the conflict. "We have opened a separate shelter for orphans in Dhangadi, and a few also stay at our shelter in Kathmandu," says Rajeshwor Niraula of the orphanage.

Apart from children who have lost one or both parents in the conflict, many more have been displaced along with their entire families. Hundreds migrated to urban areas or fled to India. Pradhan points out these children are more vulnerable: "They can be sold for sexual exploitation in brothels. These displaced children end up in worse situations than they were in back at their villages."

Most are exploited by both the Maoists and government security forces. Last week a Maoist sympathiser, Sharada Koirala, came to Kathmandu to find her two-year-old daughter, Perna, was taken away by security forces after they failed to arrest Koirala at her home in Gorkha district. She is a widow, her husband, also a Maoist, died fighting security forces over a year ago.

When the media reported the incident, the Ministry of Defense declared the child had been handed over to the Nepal Children's Organisation. This story has a happy ending—Sharada and Perna were re-united, but not everyone is as lucky. Many cases like Perna's go undetected, say child rights activists. When their parents join the Maoist fold, the children face neglect and victimisation.

They live in their own private hells in their

Despite truce, child victims of the insurgency bear the brunt.



Children play near the Musikot hospital, which has not seen a single patient.

villages. "You cannot imagine how brutal their life is. There is no one to take care of their education and so on," says a social worker.

CWIN has received frequent reports of forced-recruitment of children by the Maoists. Says Pradhan: "While we have not found children working as combatants, we have found them being used as porters and cooks." Maoists reject the allegation, saying they do not recruit anyone below 18.

Government officials say that despite a serious crunch in funds, they are doing all they can. Joint secretary in the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Gobinda Neupane, says, "The government has set up three shelter homes to house 600 children displaced by the conflict. The children receive educational materials and arrangements have been made for their education." The government says it will initiate fresh programs aimed at expanding the current one in the next fiscal year.

But the problem is so vast and relief is needed so urgently that the problem is likely to grow. Krishna Pahadi of the Human Rights and Peace Society says: "The government is using the peace process as a means to extend its tenure, and the Maoists are using it to promote violence. Both sides are setting the stage for a horrendous conflict which will further deteriorate the human rights situation, including that of the children."

Psychologist Niranjan Prasad Upadhyaya, warns that burying the issue could have grave ramifications. "These children are in their formative years and the present situation is likely to have a longterm effect on their psyche." ♦

(© Oneworld South Asia)

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Pun in London

The man from the Chand cabinet who brought the Maoists to the negotiating table, Narayan Singh Pun, spoke in London this week at a lecture organised by the Britain-Nepal Academic Council. Asked if democracy had failed in Nepal, Pun answered: "It is not democracy that has failed but the leaders who have failed to rise above party interests." Pun pledged that as leader of the Samata Party, he would work to bring the necessary changes to make democracy work, as prime minister if necessary. He blamed the government for a "lack of sincerity" in taking the talks forward.



Round three

The government and the Maoist rebels both say they are ready for the peace talks but bicker at each other for obstructing the process. The Maoist leaders insist the agreements of the second round of talks include the confinement of the army within 5km of their barracks. "We stress this implementation because it is the only way to practice the code of conduct during the ceasefire," says Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a member of the Maoist negotiation team. The government, on the other hand, argues that there should be no pre-conditions to the third round of talks. "We are ready to discuss all the issues during the third round of talks but it should be non-conditional," reiterates Information and Communication Minister Kamal Thapa. Its fate remains undecided over disputes following the second round nearly two months ago. Limiting the army's movement tops the list of disagreements. Meanwhile, the government has sent a formal letter to the Maoist fold requesting the rebels to be present at the next session. The Maoist leadership, which is believed

to be in Delhi, had not responded till press time Thursday.

Pashupati package

Royal Nepal Airlines and Nepal Tourism Board are targeting Hindus from south India to Nepal in a big way by offering the 'Pashupati Darshan Package' in the tourism lean-season in August and September for a bargain IRs 8,888 which included roundtrip airfare (normal fare is Irs 12,000). Hotels are extra, but are rockbottom at IRs 3,999 per night in five-star accommodation, IRs 2,000 in four star.

NTB says there has been a 41 percent increase in Indian tourists this June compared to last year and it has a target to reaching 150,000 Indian tourists this year. Aditya Baral, tourism marketing and promotion manager of the NTB and MP Khanal of Royal Nepal Airlines were in Bangalore this week on a trip to boost tourism. They assured Indian tour operators that security was not an issue anymore.

The focus of the south Indian campaign is pilgrimage tourism with Pashupati as the main attraction. But NTB is also trying to tell Indian tour operators about the ease of accessibility of other pilgrimage spots like Muktinath, Mankamana, Lumbini and Janakpur.

High fliers

By September the skies above the Valley should be fluttering with colourful paper kites. Taking this favourite autumnal pastime a notch higher—quite literally, at 7,200ft in Nagarkot—is the kite flying competition, Changa Chait 2060, organised by Club Himalaya Resort on 6, 13 and 27 of September. The objective of the event is to encourage healthy competition, sportsmanship, "to revive our age-old culture of kite flying and to develop Nagarkot as a new destination for kite lovers". For details, calls Club Himalaya at 4680083.



In the July Himal

- Civilising civil society: Donors and democratic space in Nepal
- Nepal's mysterious afflictions
- Review of *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal*
- Surplus and starvation in Orissa
- India-China: bhai-bhai once again
- Same-sex South Asia
- Karachi's 'illegals'
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Blind men of civil society

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in India-China: bhai-bhai once again

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Neither secular, nor Hindu

Nepal is not a theocratic state. The king is Hindu, not the kingdom.



The solution to the contemporary debate on secularism versus Hindu kingdom lies in opting for a middle ground that gives continuity to past traditions while simultaneously disassociating the state from aligning with Hinduism. This could be done by deleting the word 'Hindu' from the clause that defines the kingdom, though not necessarily replacing it with the word 'secular'.

By identifying 'Hindu' as an attribute of the kingdom, the 1990 Constitution gives the impression that Nepal is a theocratic state.

The reality is far from that. Though some Hindu elements remain in the laws, the polity at large is not governed by Hindu religious scriptures and the state prohibits caste-based behaviour, that premier Hindu governance framework. The state's claim to being Hindu in these circumstances are manifested in certain signs and symbols enshrined in the constitution or pursued through statecraft such as a ban on cow slaughter, the promotion of Hindu religious festivals, the sponsorship of

Hindu religious discourses, including the use of Sanskrit, and a ban on proselytising.

There has been a weakening of these elements and the core Hindu institution that remains in contemporary Nepal, is kingship. Nepal is de facto secular, but by positing 'Hindu' as an attribute of the kingdom, the present constitution damages the prospects for the consolidation of secular principles. There are various sections of Nepali society such as those who adhere to minority religions, the janajatis, the dalits and reformist minded Hindus who vehemently oppose the Hindu identity of the Nepali state and continue to advocate for the secular status of the kingdom.

Inserting the word 'secular' in place of 'Hindu', however, is not the solution. A 'secular kingdom' is a contradiction in terms because a kingdom implies the existence of a king and by implicit logic the king's religion. In the Nepali context, kingship has had a symbiotic relationship with Hinduism in the very emergence of the nascent Nepali state during the late 18th century. The continuity of that nation-state and of the Shah dynasty up to modern times, preclude the possibility of disassociating kingship from Hindu religion. Hence the suggestion to delete the word 'Hindu' rather than insert the word 'secular'.

There is a clause in the constitution that safeguards the position of the king and his alignment with Hinduism when it outlines that the latter should be 'an adherent of Aryan culture and a follower of Hindu religion'. When this clause in the constitution has already identified Hinduism as the religion of the monarch, identifying the kingdom as Hindu, while modern laws are not derived from Hindu religious sources, becomes a vacuous statement. It is also unnecessarily

provocative and dysfunctional.

In the debate between secularism versus Hinduism in Nepal the experiences of countries such as France, United States, Turkey and India have often served as points of reference, while other countries with monarchical forms of government, and ones with which Nepal shares some commonality as far as state structures are concerned, do not. For instance, the relationship between the state and religion in the United Kingdom, which recognises the Anglican Church as the official church and where the monarch is both the head of the state and of the church, but where the state at large is secular, does not inform the current debate in Nepal.

The experience of Thailand would be of even greater relevance than countries like the United Kingdom. Thailand, like Nepal, is an Asian country that has a monarch as the head of the state. More importantly, it has retained its independence. This in turn means there has not been a rupture between polity and religion as has occurred in many other Asian countries that have passed through colonial rule. Moreover, there has been continuity with tradition, though traditions, in turn, have been adapted and improvised to suit modern times.

There is still another similarity: the dynasty that rules modern Thailand and one that rules modern Nepal began from roughly the same period onwards beginning from the late 18th century. Both polities have been able to exist up to the present times through skilful negotiations first with colonial powers—the French and the British in the case of Thailand, and the British in the case of Nepal—and subsequently with popular forces.

Some 94 percent of the population in Thailand is Buddhist. But nowhere does the Thai constitution declare Buddhism to be the state religion. It does, however, declare Buddhism to be the king's religion, though he is also seen as the protector of all religions. Chapter II Section 9 of the constitution of Thailand states: 'The king is a Buddhist and an upholder of religions.' These are the core ideas present in the Thai constitution, learning which would be to Nepal's benefit.

The implication is that the kingdom cannot literally be declared secular when the reigning king is Buddhist. 'Kingdom' is after all an extension of 'kingship', but that it can be secular for all practical purposes. By perceiving the king to be a Buddhist while simultaneously a protector of various religions is an idea that can be traced back to Emperor Ashoka, the archetype of the righteous monarch or *dharmaraja*. Space is allowed for adherents of minority faiths to identify with monarchy. Moreover it does not portray monarchy as a zealot institution, which may have been the case had it said that the king is a protector of Buddhism.

Other Theravada Buddhist countries like Burma and Sri Lanka where colonial rule disrupted the complementary relationship that prevailed between kingship and Buddhism, have during the post-colonial era witnessed attempts to elevate Buddhism to the level of state religion (though there have been vacillations in this policy). This must be seen as a reaction against some of the policies enunciated during colonial rule.

The same could be said of the



Hindutva agenda in India. While the Buddhist population in Burma and Sri Lanka is around 85 percent and 64 percent respectively, Thailand, with a much higher Buddhist population has, however, had no need to give special patronage to Buddhism precisely because of the relationship that exists between monarchy and Buddhism that continues to this day.

Thailand is naturally a Buddhist country without having the need to consciously articulate its identity as such. In Nepal, too, the present relationship between monarchy and Hinduism has not been disrupted. There is no need to articulate the kingdom's identity as Hindu. ♦

Sudhindra Sharma is a visiting scholar at the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

FEEDBACK

Exaggerated dominance

In 'Kingdom of the bahuns', (State of the State, #153) CK Lal makes some sweeping generalisations in trying to advocate turning Nepal into a secular state. He cites examples of Nagaland and Kashmir where Hinduism is on the verge of extinction. Hindus were never present in large numbers in Nagaland, so the

argument does not arise, and most Nagas were converted by Baptist missionaries in the 19th century.

Kashmir is different. Hindus may be on the verge of extinction in Kashmir valley but not in Jammu. There was an ethnic cleansing of Hindus from Kashmir valley about a decade ago that a 'secular' government of India could not prevent. The Hindus who were left were almost all Pandits or Kashmiri Brahmins. Lal may be right to say that 'if Brahmins don't reform Hinduism, they will be the only caste left with such an archaic faith'. But how could secularism provide a remedy? Also, why is he asking only Brahmins to reform Hinduism? Couldn't non-Brahmin Hindus also be reformers?

In the 168 years of a unified Nepal from Prithvi Narayan Shah till the end of the Rana regime in 1950, there was only one Bahun prime minister, Ranga Nath Paudel. True, the number of Bahun prime ministers was to increase dramatically after the advent of democracy in 1950.

A very small proportion of soldiers in the Royal Nepali Army are Bahuns, even though there may be a psy-war expert who is a Bahun. Lal writes about traditional dominance of Bahuns over foreign relations in the Shah court by giving an example of *Jaisi Kotha*. Actually, the equivalent of the present day Foreign Ministry during the Ranas was known as *Munshi*

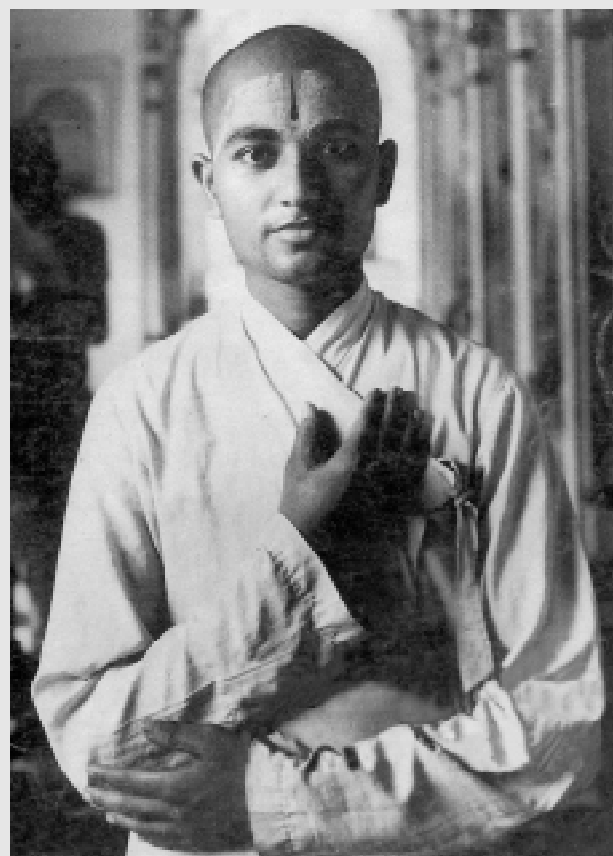
Khana, that was directly under the Prime Minister. *Jaisi Kotha* specialised in Nepal-Tibet relations and there were many Newari speaking Joshis and Rajbhandaris working in both the offices.

It is certainly true that Nepal's administrative and judicial services at present are dominated by the Brahmins. But none of our noted

mountaineers are Brahmins, nor are there any among Gurkha recruits for foreign armies. With time, there will be more janjatis and dalits in judicial and administrative services, as there will be Bahun mountaineers. There are already a large number of non-Brahmins in managerial posts in the field of tourism. The directory of Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) for the year 2001 lists 300 members, of which only 16 percent of those listed as Managing Directors are Bahuns.

One of the advantages Brahmins enjoyed was the possibility of learning Sanskrit and getting free room and board as in Teen Dhara Paksala. This facility was not available to all Brahmins, only to a select few. Some were excluded because they belonged to a different category. This discriminatory practice was removed recently, and its doors are now open to all Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

Not all of Nepal's neighbours are 'secular', and several of them are multi-ethnic. The percentage of Hindus in Nepal in the period 1991-2001 declined, and the percentage of Muslims and Christians increased. However, there are few religious riots in Nepal and the various communities live in harmony. This is why it is difficult to agree with CK Lal's argument that 'secularism is the only way to govern a caste-ridden multi-ethnic nation state'. ♦



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BIZ NEWS

Trading places

Before joining the WTO, Nepal has some 'ifs' and 'buts' that need clearing up before the meeting in Cancun, Mexico, in September. A meeting in Kathmandu this week emphasised special status to be provided to the least-developed countries, in particular landlocked ones, in terms of their integration into the multilateral trading system. Participants included government officials, civil society, farmers, private sector and academia who issued a 16-point declaration on issues ranging from patent on life forms, food and agriculture, indigenous knowledge and practices, and quota free access to products from least developed countries.

Made in Nepal

With a decline in the carpet trade, entrepreneurs, government officials and international clients all agree that Nepali carpets should have a standard national label. A recent study by a German labelling expert found that a majority of carpet importers, wholesalers, and retailers in Europe would support such a move. Nepal Carpet Exporters Association and Central Carpet Industries Association believe this will help customers differentiate Nepali carpets from the products of other countries. The industry has suffered from other exporters that wrongly brand their products Nepal-made. In 1993-94 Nepal exported 3.3 million square metres of carpet while the figure this year stands at only 1.6 million.

Thai tourism rebound

Thailand has launched a major campaign to make its tourism rebound in the post-SARS scenario. Thai Airways International and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) are flying in some 1,500 tour operators and media from around the world for a 'Mega Fam Trip 2003' and taking them around Thailand. A Nepali delegation composed of hoteliers, travel agents and media also took part in the five-day event. Nepalis go to Thailand for shopping, beach holidays and medical treatment.

"The idea is to rebuild the confidence about Thailand as a zero-SARS transmission country," said Tasnai Sudana of Thai International. Thailand gets upwards of 6 million tourists a year, and that figure is expected to fall by 25 percent this year because of SARS and terrorism-related fears. The government has said Thailand is a 'Zero Transmission' country for SARS.

From Nippon to Nepal

An emergency rehabilitation of the damaged Sindhuli Road from Dhulikhel to Nepalthok has been made possible thanks to a Japanese grant assistance of around Rs 276 million. The Embassy of Japan in Kathmandu said the fund would be used to purchase products and services to rebuild the road. Monsoon-triggered floods and landslides washed off a 50km section of the road last year.

Lollipops

Sujal Food is introducing cola flavoured Smart Lollipop and minty Sorito to the Nepali consumer. After successfully establishing Choco Fun wafers in the market, the company hopes we will take to these lollipops reasonably priced at Rs 2 and Rs 1 respectively.

Join the club

Buddha Air has launched Royal Club, its frequent fliers program that will enable members to earn frequent flier miles that can be redeemed for free tickets. The airline operates four Beech 1900D turboprops and currently commands 40 percent of the domestic aviation traffic. It hopes to increase this to 65 percent within the next few months by enticing customers with perks like the Royal Club.

Sharing life

Kodak and Photo Concern launched Rs 200,000 in two months to help the Nepal Cancer Relief Society. The money was collected from Rs 2 set aside from orders placed for developing and printing film in Kodak labs in Nepal under the slogan, "Share moments, share life".

STRICTLY BUSINESS

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



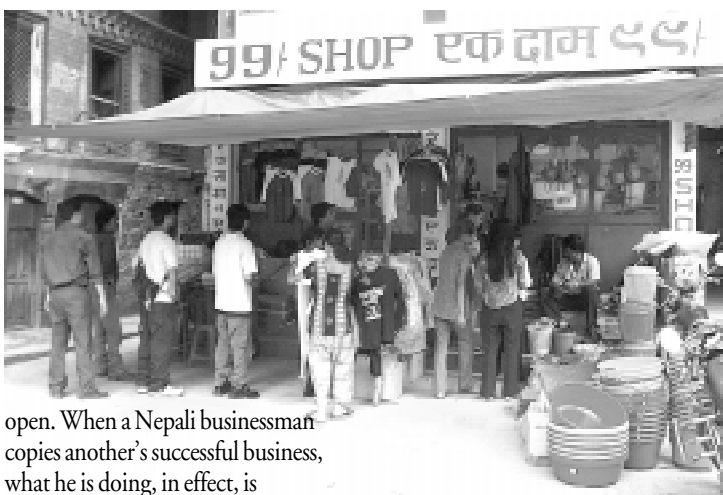
Three cheers for copycats

Imitation minimises chances of failure.

Early this spring, an unusual store made its debut at Gyaneswor in Kathmandu. With a slogan, "*Mulya Ek, Saman Anek*" (one price for sundry goods), the 99 Shop started selling everything from cups to T-shirts to bundles of stationery at Rs 99 flat. No bargaining, no haggling, but the same price for all goods that are on display. Despite a postage stamp of a parking space, claustrophobic interiors and congested aisles, shoppers from far and wide thronged the store, and goods flew off the shelves till closing time everyday. Soon, it was obvious that the concept behind the one-price shop was a profitable one.

By mid-July, a dozen or more similar outfits have sprung up all over Kathmandu. Some of these stores offer similar goods at Rs 98, some at Rs 96 and even less. The ubiquity of one-price stores makes commonplace what was until recently a relatively original retail idea. And that, for the following three reasons, is a very good thing for consumers.

First cheer: In business, being original costs money. Risk-takers are few and far between anywhere, especially in Nepal with no well-established intellectual property laws. Most businessmen do not like to throw money after the unknowns and the uncertainties, hoping for some return someday. They prefer to do what has already been proven to make money, as in the case of one-price shops, and get into that business while the window of opportunity is still



MIN BAIRACHARYA

open. When a Nepali businessman copies another's successful business, what he is doing, in effect, is minimising his own chances of failure. And thankfully, he does that by making use of his own money and people—resources that would otherwise have stayed idle rather than giving a return.

Second cheer: Copycats make for wider consumer choices because they all sell similar goods and services. Now, with a little bit of looking around, one can buy a dozen tea cups at Rs 99 or less at any one of these one-price shops. When consumers can thus compare prices and buy at rates they feel most comfortable with, they have little to complain about. True, very often, the copycats' competitors—neighbourhood retail outlets, in this case—are unhappy to have customers snatched away. But as long as customers are happy, disgruntled competitors will either have to innovate or continue to suffer losses.

Third cheer: As long as we can find a way to legally disallow copycats from

forming an all-Nepal association of their trade to fix prices, they can help keep the markets competitive by offering similar goods and services at closely varying prices. In addition, by shortening the time length during which innovators can enjoy single-player returns on their originality, copycats force them to keep on evolving to stay ahead of the pack. In this context, don't be surprised if the one-price shop soon gives way to other innovative retail practices.

Finally, if you talk to most Nepali businessmen, they complain the most about "unhealthy competition" and having to deal with copycats. Sure, illegal competition is something that should be challenged in a court of law. But so-called unhealthy (for whom? customers? sellers?) competition and the issue of copycats are, let's get real, merely the cost of doing business everywhere. ♦

INTERVIEW



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Sukhwinder Singh is the new International Monetary Fund (IMF) Resident Representative for Nepal. In the runup to this week's budget, *Nepali Times* asked him about the country's macroeconomic situation and the IMF's role in policy advice and technical assistance.

Nepali Times: How do you rate Nepal's pre-budget macroeconomic situation?

Sukhwinder Singh: Despite the security situation and difficult external environment, the macroeconomy has been managed fairly well in recent years. Fortunately, as we go into the budget we are not confronted with major imbalances, and the foreign exchange reserves position is comfortable. But of course there are major challenges that must be addressed urgently. Growth has slowed and is clearly inadequate to deal with poverty, and unemployment is unacceptably high. Trade, manufacturing and tourism are weak. Fiscal pressures have been rising in recent years and implementation problems have really held back development spending.

So what needs to be done?

I see the main challenges are to generate higher growth rates, especially in agriculture so the poor benefit, improve social service delivery through better management of public resources, raise private investment, modernise and streamline the civil service, improve the fiscal position through higher revenues, more productive use of expenditures, and a reduction in domestic borrowing, strengthening governance and anti-corruption efforts, and finally diversifying the economy away from a handful of exports.

“Nepal needs help for self-help”

That sounds like a tough job for anyone. Where do we start?

Above all, action is required by the Nepali government with concerted support from the international community. One could call it "help for self-help". First and foremost, progress in the peace process and a reduction in political uncertainty will clearly improve the environment for growth. At the same time, the government needs to move urgently on a wide-ranging reform agenda that creates the conditions for private sector investment and growth. This agenda is well documented in the government's 10th Plan/ poverty reduction strategy, which I believe has received inputs from a wide cross section of Nepali society. Industrial countries also need follow through on their trade commitments and reduce subsidies.

And what is the IMF's role?

The IMF is responsible for helping low-income members like Nepal through the provision of policy advice, technical assistance and financial support. In Nepal's case, in addition to possible financial support under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), the Fund has been providing technical assistance in areas such as modernisation of the central bank, reform of the tax system, as well as development of the money and foreign exchange markets. My role as resident representative is to make sure we coordinate closely with the Nepali government in giving policy advice so it can create conditions for growth and poverty reduction.

How come the IMF keeps getting hit for its conditionalities?

Countries don't come to the IMF when their economies are in good shape. A country usually seeks assistance when, through a combination of bad policies and bad luck, it has run into difficulties. Regardless of whether or not the country comes to the IMF, the country will need to adjust its policies. The IMF provides a country a bit of breathing room, in fact lessens the extent of the belt-tightening needed, and aims to bring about a quicker rebound in incomes than would otherwise be the case.

So blaming the IMF is a little like blaming the doctor for the patient's illness! Nonetheless, the IMF is also very aware of the concern about intrusive conditionality, and we've been devoting considerable resources to dealing with this issue. In low-income countries, the IMF is strongly committed to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process, and Nepal has developed its own poverty reduction strategy, the 10th Plan, and we've been participants in these discussions, along with other development partners. The reforms we support will not be imposed. Rather, they will be reflected in the country's own strategy and will reflect country circumstances. But let us also be realistic, there is a role for conditionality. The money that the IMF lends belongs to all of its 184 members, and loan conditions in essence provide a guarantee to the international community that its money will be repaid as an economy returns to

growth and stability.

Have you noticed any positive signs in banking sector reforms, especially in case of Nepal Bank Limited and Rastriya Baniya Bank?

Yes I have. We are encouraged by the progress being made by the management teams at both NBL and RBB. Together with dedicated Nepali staff, they have made substantial progress in assessing the financial status of the banks, improving financial performance and securing loan recoveries, strengthening internal controls and introducing modern banking practices. However, to build on this, it is now crucial that the government make decisions on key issues that affect the costs and performance of these banks. I see two issues as particularly important at this juncture: reduce overstaffing and improve the debt recovery framework.

Speaking of which, how bad is the problem of politically-connected defaulters in the Nepali banking system?

Willful default should not be excused. After all, this is the depositors' money, and the government's scarce resources should not be used for bailing out big loan defaulters. Such defaulters should be given an opportunity to first regularise their accounts within a reasonable time period. If they fail to cooperate, banks should use standard tools that are common worldwide to recover their money; for example, blacklisting defaulters and related firms for any further borrowing, or foreclosure. Where there is strong evidence of malpractice, I would expect cases to be placed before the CIAA and for them to proceed speedily to prosecution. It's difficult to compare with other countries, but the problem is certainly not unique to Nepal. Suffice to say that the origins of the problems are often similar, the magnitude of the problem at the banks is broadly comparable, and the resolution process and solutions are also similar.

Nepal's soft loans from decades ago are maturing, and we have to repay them in a situation where the loans have not been used productively. Is this a classic debt trap?

You are right that previous borrowing could have been used more effectively and generated higher returns in terms of growth and poverty reduction. That said, Nepal's debt service and debt stock ratios are reasonable compared with other developing countries. It helps that much of the external debt is on highly concessional terms. Looking forward, there is scope for prudent external borrowing but a strong effort has to be made to ensure the aid is used productively, including in support of the growth enhancing reforms. The Medium Term Expenditure Framework that the government is implementing and the poverty reduction and growth-based prioritisation that it applies to development spending is a very encouraging step.



KANAK MANI DIXIT

In his cubicle number 39 in the grand new edifice of the British Library, which houses all the papers of the erstwhile India Office Collection, Tribhuban University academic Ramesh K Dhungel is engaged in a scholarly exercise of a lifetime.

For the next three years, he will be sifting through the archives on Nepal left behind by Brian Houghton Hodgson, British resident to the Court of Nepal. In the process of cataloguing and cross-referencing, he has privileged first hand access to largely unearthed and little understood material which will help us enrich, and in some cases, rewrite the history of Nepal.

Hodgson came as a diplomat to a turmoil-ridden Kathmandu court as representative of the East India Company, and played his part in the intrigue and skulduggery between a mad king, an ambitious queen regent, the Pandes, the Thapas and the Bahuns. But he also evolved as a geographer, pioneering ethnographer, linguist, student of Himalayan Buddhism and naturalist with special flair for ornithology. Said one author, “Hodgson enriched museums, enlarged boundaries of more than one science...while upholding British diplomacy in a hostile military state.”

Hodgson was a ‘renaissance man’. Born in Cheshire in 1800, he

came from an English household visited by hard times, attended a school (Haileybury) established by the Company for educating administrators for the dominion. There, he came under the wings of Thomas Malthus, and even boarded in the house of that great pioneer of the study of political economy (besides population). In later life, he was also a champion of ‘vernacular education’ in India and was a challenger of Macaulay as well as the Orientalists who, respectively, pushed for English or Sanskrit.

Pride and poverty

So, it was to the long-term benefit of Nepal that this chronicler, archivist and multidisciplinary scholar was assigned to Himalayan climes to recuperate from the ‘fevers’ that would surely have killed him in the plains. After serving some time in Kumaon trying to undo the ravages of the imperial Gorkhalis, Hodgson first came to Nepal in 1820, was Assistant Resident 1825-33, and Resident from 1833-43. This was the cut-throat era during and following reign of strongman Bhimsen Thapa, just before the massacre at the Kot.

Of Hodgson’s personal life in Kathmandu, little is known other than that he lived a recluse with his books for company and some local scholars who came calling. But at some point he married a Nepali Muslim woman

named Mehrussin, who he must have left when he departed Kathmandu, retired to England and then to Darjeeling (1845-1858), where he married an Englishwoman.

Assigned to a court marked by, in his own words, “pride and poverty”, Hodgson’s carefully gathered collections in just about everything related to Nepali life in the 19th century, from military intelligence to study of Buddhist iconography. These, as well as his extensive notes, were deposited in various libraries in Calcutta, Paris, London and Oxford. When these archives are delved into and fully understood, Nepali history will receive the depth and breadth for a discipline that till now has been too closely linked to the chronicles of kingly successions and national “bahaduri”.

While the personal papers and the Buddhism-related documents are kept elsewhere, Hodgson gifted all his papers on Nepal-specific diplomacy and statecraft to the India Office Collection. These are the papers that Ramesh Dhungel is now studying, in a project made possible by the efforts of Nepal scholars Michael Hutt and David Gellner and the head of the Asia-Pacific and Africa collection of the British Library, Graham W Shaw. Dhungel himself is a cultural historian with particular interest in Mustang, Tibet and Bhutan, and the Hodgson Manuscripts Project is funded by the London-based Liverhulme Foundation.

“Hodgson’s interest was endless and his research was endless,” says Dhungel. “*Unlay kati doko, kati doko kagajaat jamma parey, kay bhannu*. These papers are an encyclopedic record of 19th century Nepal. He collected anything and everything, from inscriptions to family histories and religious texts. Sometimes he bought them outright, at other times he had them copied at his own expense.”

Hodgson befriended pandits and gubhajas of Kathmandu Valley (in particular the great Patan scholar Amritananda, who became a valued informant), who were impressed by his knowledge of Sanskrit and Farsi as well as his ascetic lifestyle devoted to learning. Dhungel believes Hodgson revived the interest of Kathmandu’s powerful in their family histories, or *bamshabalis*, and

A Tribhuban University scholar delves into the papers of a British Resident and finds a treasure trove of Nepali history.



From l-r: Brian Hodgson, 1800-1894, Ramesh Dhungel poses in front of a painting of Hodgson at the British Museum, and Hodgson’s own handwritten *bamshabali* notes in Nepali and English.

received copies from many *chautaria* families, and even King Rajendra Bikram.

Two of the most detailed aspects of Hodgson’s work were on Nepal’s judicial system commerce. He also studied the military strength of the army, and is considered an architect of the Gurkha induction into the British Indian Army. Hodgson is also credited, while already in retirement in Darjeeling, with having convinced a reluctant viceroy to allow an eager Jang Bahadur to participate in the quelling of the Sepoy Mutiny 1857-58.

Ramesh Dhungel: “Hodson was probably the first scholar to get excited about ethnic diversity of the country.” He called in members of ethnic groups from far and wide to the Residency at Lazimpat (from ‘Lodging Part’, according to some) and conducted interviews and meticulously wrote down everything, from linguistic attributes to physiognomy. Dhungel has discovered papers which indicate that Hodgson brought skulls from Nepal and Tibet to England, with accompanying details of ethnic

identity, place, sex and price paid. Wrote Hodgson, “My favourite amusements of the sedentary kind are researches into the origin, genius and attainment of the various singular races of men inhabiting Nepal.”

War party

The resident also kept a steady stream of friendly spies supplying him with the goings among the powerful clans, and his reports to Lord Auckland, the viceroy in Calcutta, reverted as instructions to the Kathmandu government. Through threats routed through Calcutta, he kept in check the ‘war party’ in Kathmandu that wanted to encroach upon Company-held territories in the tarai. For this, he earned enmity in Kathmandu and gratitude in Calcutta.

Worried over the takeover of the state by the military (by then totalling a hefty 19,000 men), and the prospects of inter-clan rivalry

for power, he wrote to the Viceroy in June 1837, “Civil wars have rather a tendency to feed than quench martial spirit and power.”

At Carrell No 39 at the British Museum, Dhungel has only had time to flip through 65 of the 108 bound (but not catalogued) volumes of Hodgson’s collection. But already he has discovered material of immense importance to Nepali historiography. For example, we know only of the social reforms of Ram Shah and Jayasthithi Malla, but the Hodgson papers clearly point to reforms during the times of Bishnu Malla and Siddhi Narsingh Malla. We know that Makwanpur, Chaudandi and Bijayapur were regarded as separate states by the Gorkhalis, but through Hodgson’s papers, we discover Chainpur too had a status as a rajya. Says Dhungel, “Being from Chainpur myself, I liked that.” ♦

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Mr Hodgson

The Hodgson Papers

Some of the interesting bits of information uncovered by Ramesh Dhungel so far from the Hodgson manuscripts at the British Museum.

Anglophile

In 1841, King Rajendra Bikram writes an abject letter to the Viceroy in Calcutta apologising for the belligerent attitude toward the Company and its resident in Kathmandu, and says that "as per the suggestions of Hodgson saheb, we have dismissed those who have tried to bring a distance between our two great governments, whereas we have appointed those who are for friendship between our two great governments." A list is also provided of the courtiers fired and retained.

Lumbini

Hodgson seems to make one of the earliest references to Lumbini, by referring to "Asocan Laths" (Ashokan pillars) of the tarai, in particular with reference to a site west-north-west of Bettiah, and 20 miles south of the hills. On top of this 'lath' is a couchant lion, which has long disappeared from the Ashoka Pillar at Lumbini. Because no sources are provided, Dhungel believes this may have been Hodgson's own discovery.

Two Dhararas

In Hodgson's own English handwriting (he also wrote in Farsi and in Devanagari), there is reference to two dhararas in place of the one that still stands and is called Bhimsen Stamba. The one named for Bhimsen, writes Hodgson, had 142 steps, whereas there was one taller than this, at 174 steps which was dedicated to Queen Lalit Tripurasundari. According to the historian Baburam Acharya, Bhimsen Thapa had these two towers placed at the entrance of his palace. The earthquake of 1834 seems to have taken a permanent toll of one of them.

Shree Teen Hodgson

At one point, Raghunath Pandit, who had earlier served as a stopgap Bahun prime minister during those turbulent years, writes to Hodgson referring to him as 'Sri Panch Janaab Hodgson Saheb'. Jang Bahadur himself later went as far as to refer to Hodgson as 'Sri Teen', reports Dhungel.



History

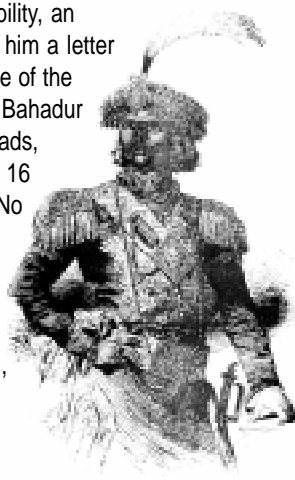
One continuous manuscript 1,200 feet long contains a history (*brittanta*) of Nepal commissioned by Mathbar Singh Thapa, the flamboyant nephew of Bhimsen Thapa, and prime minister, who was cut down by Jang Bahadur.

Spies

Through his spies in the Gorkhali court, Hodgson accessed a letter which is a demand on the vacillating King Rajendra Bikram from one faction that so many named courtiers of the other faction must be cut down ("*katnai parcha*") by Dasain-time. Their fault, being in cahoots with the British Resident. The words used to vilify Hodgson in that letter reflect the mores of the times and come across as shocking today. For, every time Hodgson's name comes up in the text, he is called with willful use of what was considered pejorative, "*Harchanya tharu musulman firing*". (*Harchanya* = derogatory Valley-speak for Hodgson.)

Jang Bahadur

In the years after retirement, apparently Hodgson became quite friendly with the post-Kot Massacre Jang Bahadur, and Dhungel has found that Jang even helped Hodgson's son during his visit to England. After Hodgson went into retirement in Darjeeling, and the Kot Massacre devastated the top layer of Kathmandu nobility, an informant calling himself 'Pahalman' writes him a letter in the Avadhi language, which gives a sense of the atmosphere in Kathmandu right after Jang Bahadur took power. Roughly translated, the letter reads, "There is not even 4 anna of security of the 16 anna we used to have when you were here. No one can speak, no one can move about freely. The real king today is Jang Bahadur, and he does whatever he desires. All the paltans are with the brothers, who are placed in Patan, Bhatgaon, Thapathali, Narayanhi. There are preparations on to invade Tibet. There are no more comings and goings at the king's palace."



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The resource curse

Many developing countries that are rich in natural resources are even poorer than other countries that are less well endowed. This is because natural resources serve as an enticing prize to fight over. Many countries with significant mineral deposits or valuable cash crops are in the grip of repressive or corrupt regimes or torn apart by armed conflict. This problem has come to be known as “the resource curse”.

Now a broad movement has emerged to tackle the resource curse. Global Witness, a small British NGO, acted as the pioneer when it campaigned to close the Thai/Cambodian border to Khmer Rouge timber exports, ending illegal trade in teak and other rare hardwoods. The resulting loss of revenue played a key role in the demise of that genocidal organisation.

Global Witness next turned to the problem of diamonds in Angola, and a campaign against “conflict diamonds” led to the Kimberley Process of Certification. Last year, Global Witness, together with more than 60 groups from around the world, launched “Publish What You Pay”, a campaign to force resource companies to disclose



Diamond miners in central Sierra Leone.

their payments to developing country governments. It was endorsed by the British government, and many oil and mining companies responded positively.

I am proud to be associated with Global Witness and the “Publish What You Pay” campaign. But that is only the first step in tackling the resource curse. Governments must disclose what they receive and, even more importantly, they must be held accountable for the way they use their revenues. That is what

Caspian Revenue Watch, which I also support, seeks to accomplish. Caspian Revenue Watch aims to build the capacity of civil society in the new states surrounding the Caspian Sea, through research, training, and partnerships, to monitor the collection and expenditure of government revenues from the extractive sector. Greater accountability could result in a greater contribution to meeting the UN’s Millennium Development Goals than most other initiatives.

Here the Chad-Cameroon oil

pipeline sets a valuable example. The World Bank financed the project on the condition that Chad commits itself to complete transparency and uses the revenues for poverty reduction. A stringent supervisory mechanism was put in place with civil society participation; almost immediately, the Chad government was caught diverting a \$25 million signature bonus for arms purchases. Unfortunately the mechanism expires when oil actually starts flowing. Obviously

Natural resources are enticing prizes that often become conflict points.

that arrangement must be extended.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced an Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg last September. The need for greater transparency in the management of resource revenues was endorsed by the G8 declaration at Evian this June. This was followed by a high-level meeting hosted by the UK government in London in June and attended by governments, major oil and mining companies, international financial institutions, and representatives of civil society.

The overwhelming majority of the 59 participants at that meeting endorsed the principles of EITI. A few producing countries volunteered to be pilot cases in which the government and all the companies involved would

disclose revenues and their use according to templates designed by the UK team. The volunteers were East Timor, Ghana, Mozambique and Sierra Leone, with other important resource-rich countries indicating that they may follow.

This is a promising step forward, but there is always a danger that a declaration of principles and a voluntary approach will turn into a sham. Public opinion must be mobilised to keep governments and companies to their promises. It is civil society that has moved the process this far, and it must become even more deeply engaged, particularly in the producing countries, to maintain the forward momentum and ensure that the movement succeeds in lifting the resource curse once and for all. ♦

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George Soros is Chairman of Soros Fund Management and the Open Society Institute.

Immigrants and AIDS

PARIS – Immigrants of African origin report an unusually high incidence of AIDS in France, and recent government measures are only making it worse. The reported incidence of AIDS is rising particularly among immigrant women, says a report by the French Health Watch Institute (INVS, after its French name) published in May. The relatively high prevalence of HIV and AIDS among immigrants has been detected only incidentally, as the infection often is “detected mostly in association with other medical studies among men, or during pre-natal and pregnancy tests among women,” the report says.

More than 40,000 have died of AIDS in France since its outbreak 20 years ago, another 25,000 are living with the condition, the INVS report says. A disproportionately large number of them are reported to be immigrants. Research also found immigrants accounted for close to a third of the approximately 1,700 new cases of AIDS detected last year. The condition of immigrants with HIV or AIDS is now becoming more precarious as the government cuts down on medical services for them. The Ministry of the Interior partially revoked an earlier law that allowed illegal immigrants who had contracted AIDS to get treatment. (IPS)

Agent Orange still killing

WASHINGTON – More than 30 years after the spraying of Agent Orange in Vietnam by US troops during the war, the health effects on US veterans and their families as well as affected Vietnamese remain devastating, experts say. Birth defects from contamination persist in today’s third generation. Though the military initially denied knowing about the terrible effects the herbicides have on human beings, military scientist Dr James Clary admitted the truth in 1988. “However, because the material was to be used on the enemy, none of us were overly concerned,” he said.

Agent Orange victims and their families have been fighting for compensation since the 1970s. The most common result has been out of court settlements after court proceedings and negotiations that dragged on for years. There are plans to introduce a new bill in the Congressional committee on veterans affairs that will focus on aiding the children of Vietnam veterans with a broader bill to follow next year. So far, the US government has given no indication that it will aid Vietnamese victims and their families. An estimated 650,000 victims are suffering from chronic illnesses in Vietnam alone, and another 500,000 have already died, researchers say. (IPS)

DUNCAN MILLAR in LONDON

Englishmen could be banned. A good idea which should have wide application, some might say. This particular threat, though, applies only to the Euro 2004 football finals.

The threat comes from UEFA, the European football authority, who propose to bar England from Euro 2004 if the violent and racially abusive behaviour of some of its more notorious fans, displayed in a match against Turkey in April, continues.

English football hooligans are an extreme and unrepresentative version of modern Britain, but their fondness for heavy drinking and casual violence, many argue, is part of a traditional English model of masculinity—which also champions promiscuity, sexism and homophobia—that is still influential.

This boorish version of English masculinity is being challenged by Britain’s best-known footballer—captain David Beckham (pic left, with son Brooklyn).

“Beckham is one of the lads. If he wasn’t, he wouldn’t cut it in English football,” says Dr Andrew Parker of Warwick University, co-author of a recent study entitled *One David Beckham: Celebrity, Masculinity and the Soccerati*. “But he also breaks traditional masculine norms. This is where his

(Gender) Bending it

influence lies. He sticks his neck out and is prepared to be different. That will encourage others to be different.”

Beckham has done many things not usually expected from a traditional male role model, and certainly not a footballing hero.

In February 2000, he was temporarily dropped by his Manchester United club for choosing to look after his sick son rather than make training (the Beckhams don’t have a nanny, preferring to share child-caring between themselves). His love of fashion, which has extended to painting his nails and wearing a sarong—considered decidedly feminine in England—has become legendary. And he has publicly acknowledged his large gay following.

All of this, and his reluctance to become involved in football violence, contrast sharply with some previous English heroes. Paul Gascoigne, who preceded Beckham as the embodiment of English sporting prowess, was violent on and off the field.

‘Gazza’s’ tendency toward violent play was a very visible part of his game—he once managed to break his own arm in one particularly brutal challenge. Even after revelations in the late 1990s that he beat his wife Sheryl (a tabloid paper frontpaged pictures of

her with a battered face and dislocated fingers after a row in a Scottish hotel), fans and commentators strove to justify his inclusion in the England squad.

Finally, in November 1999, Sheryl Gascoigne spoke out publicly about the domestic violence she had suffered, declaring she had suffered eight years of abuse from Gazza. She also joined a high-profile awareness-raising campaign for Refuge, a British charity working for women and children who face domestic abuse.

Beckham’s public image could not be more different. Two British magazines specifically aimed at young fathers, *Dad* and *EQ Magazine*, have both featured Beckham heavily. “...with the help of people like Beckham, fathers are feeling more confident about displaying their love and playing with their children,” *Dad* editor Jack O’Sullivan said in a recent interview.

But what do young Britons think about Beckham as a role model? Finding a man of between 16 and 24 years who would admit that Beckham is a role model is surprisingly difficult.

Paul, 18, would rather be like Paul Scholes, Beckham’s ManU teammate and England midfielder. “Other than being a good player, he doesn’t get himself in the paper, he keeps himself to himself, a nice

quiet lifestyle. Nothing wrong with that.”

Lucian, 18, is similarly unmoved by Beckham’s off-the-field activities. “For people of our age, he doesn’t really appeal as a role model. When it comes to the football, though, that’s when he’s most important. That matters.”

If his extra-football activities leave young British men cold (though not women by any stretch of imagination), can they really be very influential in changing their attitudes to masculinity? Professor Ellis Cashmore, co-author of the study, suggests not.

“There will be woe for anyone who tries the kinds of things Beckham has tried and got away with... He’s afforded the kinds of breaks and indulgences that other[s] couldn’t bear dream about. So, while he might challenge traditional *macho* types... he can’t pass on his status.”

But the very fact that Beckham can contradict male stereotypes and yet retain his heroic status, Cashmore suggests, is evidence that a change is already taking place in Britain. “Very recent cultural changes have made it possible for Beckham to engage in activities that have been read as wondrous, rather than as the actions of a demented popinjay.”



Mending fences

India's prime minister has taken an initiative to open a way out of the tragic, bloody morass that passes for relations between India and Pakistan. It implicitly recognises the fact that there is no military solution to the Kashmir issue.

Pakistan lacks the muscle to wrest Kashmir from Indian rule, and India cannot win decisively over Pakistan in difficult, mountainous terrain. This remains as true today as in 1989 when India's unconscionable manipulation of Kashmiri politics led to a popular uprising. Pakistan was quick to translate India's losses into its gains and the military establishment hit upon the 'bleed India through jihad' policy, to be accompanied by denials of involvement.

Post-Iraq, and 70,000 Kashmiri, Pakistani and Indian lives later, it is opportune for Pakistanis to ask whether this unacknowledged strategy is working. For the last decade this question has been off limits. So it was to my surprise that Pakistan's president, General Musharraf, recently met with a diverse group of Pakistanis for what turned out to be an intense debate focusing on Kashmiri policy. That the president is willing to listen to dissenting voices such as mine is of some encouragement.

Pakistan's rationale for covert war in Kashmir has been twofold. The first objective of the low-intensity war was to 'bleed' India so that it would cut its losses and quit. But there has been no evidence of a weakening of resolve. In fact, an unprecedented show of national unity emerged in India in response to Pakistan's infiltration of troops and jihadis across the line of control.

More significantly, confounding the



expectation of Pakistani strategists, India's economy did not collapse but boomed. Indian foreign exchange reserves stand at over \$70 billion and 11 companies alone earn India \$10 billion a year, equivalent to Pakistan's total foreign exchange holdings. This figure is expected to double in the next few years. Indian scientific institutions are now among the world's best. Pakistan's reborn economy, on the other hand, owes more to Musharraf's adroit handling of 9/11 than to any inner strength. Its industry is barely crawling, while education and scientific research seem

incurably ill. In a technologically driven world, this is a devastating weakness.

The second Pakistani rationale was to keep Kashmir in the news. The implicit hope was that a high level of tension between two nuclear states would sufficiently alarm the international community, especially the US, that India would be forced to see reason. To raise fear levels, Pakistani leaders worked to cultivate an image of Pakistan as a defiant, nuclear-armed state ready to commit suicide. But at other moments, they sought to project an image of being calm, assured and responsible.

Post-Iraq, there is a chance to end the long-running feud between India and Pakistan.

Such signals made the threat of nuclear apocalypse real enough to keep a steady stream of foreign leaders coming to Islamabad and Delhi at the peak of the tensions last year. Pakistan felt the world would rush to solve the dispute. This turned out to be a miscalculation. In fact, the principal international alarm has been over the Kashmiri mujahedin and Pakistani nuclear weapons.

This attitude preceded 9/11, but now dominates thinking. The US state department's recent declaration of over 20 jihadist organisations as terrorist includes the Hizb ul-Mujahedin, the largest mujahedin group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, with no history of attacking US interests. And in the international press Pakistan is often accused of playing the nuclear card to provoke fear, while India is blamed less often than in the past.

The consequence of waging covert war has been a steady loss of international support for the Kashmiri struggle. This fact is known to all Pakistani diplomats who represent the country in the world's capitals, including those of Muslim countries. The moral high ground—the most powerful weapon of the weak—erodes after every massacre of Hindu civilians in Kashmir. India, the occupying power in Kashmir, has successfully portrayed itself as a victim of terror.

There is little to suggest that Pakistan has any new game plan. Resistance to change has many sources, a possible backlash from the

religious parties and extreme elements within the military, and a large standing army that needs an enemy. Inertia and default dominate planning and design.

Where *should* new directions point? The two countries must abandon positions fixed 50 years ago and the your-loss-is-my-gain-mentality must be exchanged for one that values prosperity and social stability. This requires Pakistan to live up to its officially stated position, that it will provide only diplomatic and political support to Kashmiris struggling against India.

One longterm solution that makes particular sense envisages two Kashmiri entities straddling the line of control with their own governments and constitutions. These two entities, one associated with Pakistan, the other India, would have soft borders allowing for easy transit of people and goods. The details can be worked out by all three parties: Kashmiris, Pakistanis and Indians. The US could act as facilitator.

The Pakistan/India conflict is like a cancerous growth, an organism with its own logic of development, in which deadly hatreds thrive and nourish each other. With Prime Minister Vajpayee's forthcoming visit, which he describes as the 'third and last' peace effort of his lifetime, it is essential that another failure is averted. ♦ (@ Prospect)

Pervez Hoodbhoy is a professor at the Quaid e Islam University in Pakistan.

like Beckham

Boorish English masculinity is being challenged by Britain's best-known footballer.

Alan, 21, who does see Beckham as a role model, sees no problem with Beckham's fashion modelling or in his being comfortable with his gay following: "What he does in his own time is his business." This spirit of tolerance, even if it isn't wholehearted enthusiasm, may be the sort of cultural change Cashmore is talking about.

But Cashmore's argument about Beckham's influence on masculinity doesn't seem to rely on him encouraging young male football fans to consider their future childcare responsibilities.

"Because he is so empty, his fans join up the dots themselves, creating whatever meaning they desire from him." To a young male football fan he may simply be a heroic footballer; to a young girl, the dashing and stylish husband of a pop star; to a thirtysomething dad he may show it's still possible to be 'cool' and a good father.

His 'influence' on masculinity is not so much to actively eradicate traditional ideas, as to give currency and validation to

alternative views of manhood.

"There is a co-existence of different types or styles of masculinity and, while Beckham represents a new and perhaps protean form ... representative[s] of old style forms remain," says Cashmore.

On the London streets, it is difficult to confirm or deny Beckham's alleged influence on English masculinity. But if his broadcast to England fans before 3 June's clash with Serbia and Montenegro asking them to "get behind the team and do it in a nice way," is any test, then his influence is undeniable. His appeal managed to curb the worst that traditional English manhood has to offer: there was no violence. ♦

(© PANOS-UK)

[David Beckham now plays for Real Madrid.]

Duncan Millar is a British freelance journalist with a keen interest in football.



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Where can we put our guns?

Interview with Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 17-31 July

हिमाल

Himal: There have been reports of major violations of the ceasefire Code of Conduct by your group.

Badal: Soldiers who are supposed be in the barracks are patrolling the streets, is that following the guidelines? Did we import 3 billions worth of weapons? Did we have a military agreement with the Americans that invites them on our soil? Violations of the Code of Conduct are being carried out by the old regime, not us. Our activities are only political, and they are within the guidelines.

So, carrying weapons and raising money is allowed?

So, where do we keep our guns? Peasants carry guns and also till their farms. They don't let our militia stay in one place, and if they do they are accused of setting up a military camp. They don't let us carry them, what kind of Code of Conduct is this? And the army is allowed to go into the alleys with guns and

carry out searches in all kinds of places. About raising money: the Code of Conduct prohibits forced extortion, if people give us money voluntarily it doesn't say we can't take it.

Isn't it impossible not to give money to a party that is armed?

It used to be difficult to get in touch with our party. Now we have an office where anyone can contact us. And if there is proof, anyone can come and tell us we have done something wrong.

So, you have followed the Code of Conduct to the letter?

We don't say we have followed it 100 percent. Mistakes may have been made, but these are negligible. The main thing is that a party engaged in an armed struggle has come to the negotiating table and to do that it has put forth a few conditions. Even our leader, Comrade Prachanda has admitted to some mistakes, criticised those instances and apologised. What you have to understand is that we have come to the talks after

laying down our arms, not after giving them up.

How about abductions?

Who has been abducted? You have to understand that first. We have taken action against fake Maoists who have extorted people. The UML cadre are pretending to be Maoists in order to tarnish our image. How do you expect us to react only politically against such people?

Is it possible to negotiate with a government with whom you say you have reached a strategic culminating point?

It would be a big mistake to think that we have come to negotiate after reaching the culminating point. We agreed to talks because we felt that using the weapons we took up to empower the people would invite disaster. If the government or the Royal Nepali Army thinks we should give up our weapons, they are mistaken. We will give our weapons to the people, to the government constituted through a constituent assembly.



MIN BAHADUR ARYA

Already secular

Yubraj Ghimire *Kantipur*, 14 July

कान्तिपुर

Twenty-five years ago, Indian socialist thinker Kishan Patnayak asked BP Koirala of the Nepali Congress if he thought it was necessary to declare Nepal a secular country. The latter replied that although Nepal was constitutionally a Hindu kingdom, secularity was practiced, intercaste marriages were accepted and religious extremism was rare. Koirala also said secularism was not something that had to be guided by law as much as it needed to be adopted by social institutions.

During the 1990 People's Movement the UML raised the issue

of secularism again, but later decided the status quo should be maintained. A decade later, the rebelling Maoists and the agitating five parties have once again brought up the subject, except now they are brandishing it as a weapon against the king. They reason that if Nepal were to cast aside its Hindu status, it would make redundant the king's position as a Hindu ruler.

Secularism is commendable because it allows plurality of religions and teaches each to respect the other's faith. Nepali society showed a measure of its secular character when it elected GP Koirala, even after he refused to observe mourning rituals after his mother's death, and conversely by voting

communist Man Mohan Adhikari into office when he underwent all the Hindu observances on his mother's passing. Similarly, despite being a communist, Madhab Kumar Nepal offered prayers at a south Indian temple nine years ago, because as deputy prime minister on a state visit he represented a Hindu kingdom. It is in this light that we can view Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai's recent pilgrimage to Mankamana temple with his parents.

What we need now is for the political parties to explain and justify how their contradictory characters fit into the framework of secularism. Despite a few who

encourage racism under the influence of Hindu extremist organisations, Nepali society is, by and large, secular in nature. Therefore demanding state secularism is irrelevant. If this is done to leverage political ambitions, be warned: Hindu extremism could taint our country.

Un-violent Maoist

Anamika in *Punarjagan*, 15 July

पुनर्जागरण

The Maoists took up weapons to spearhead social changes, but one of its leaders Rabindra Shrestha defeated the government by observing a peaceful hunger strike. The government gave in and agreed to fulfil some of his demands for jail reform. It might seem like defeat at first glance, but the Thapa government has won the moral high ground by accepting Shrestha's demands. The party that Rabindra Shrestha represents has already killed thousands and is detested by millions of Nepalis. The Maoists are now eagerly seeking a partnership with other political parties. Rabindra Shrestha's hunger strike might have imparted some lessons to the Maoists: he has

shown that peaceful protest is much more effective than cowardly murders. That Shrestha has discarded Maoist methods to take up peaceful protest is a triumph for democracy in Nepal.

We the people

Drishti, 15 July

दृष्टि

In her recent unofficial visit to Nepal, former Pakistani president Benazir Bhutto told Girija Prasad Koirala that "democracy and Nepal and Pakistan are in danger, but the international vanguards of democracy are unconcerned". There is little doubt who she was alluding to. Pakistan has been getting pats on the back from the United States for its stand against terrorism despite President Musharraf juggling with democracy at home. And US interest in Nepal has become increasingly evident.

There have been reports of US pressure against the political parties agitating against the October Fourth move. There are double standards at work here. Even tyrants will be crowned democrats if their interests are

at stake. And a democratically elected government is expendable if US interests are not served.

In the congratulatory message to King Gyanendra on his birthday, President Bush praised the monarch's commitment to democracy and peace, and lauded his intention to hold elections in the foreseeable future. We learnt this bit of news only through Bush's felicitations. This did not come as an unexpected surprise to most Nepalis who suspect Thapa was nominated prime minister with US blessings.

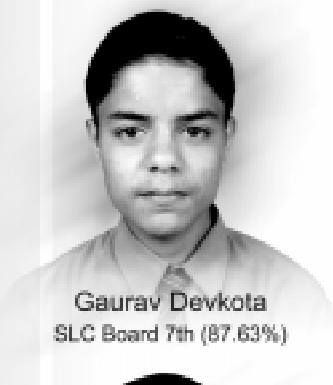
In another press release, the US embassy blamed the agitating political parties for ruining Nepal's tourism, even though it is fully aware that the protest is peaceful and demands the restoration of democracy. The US seems more concerned about Nepal's tourism than its democracy. Democracy imported from Washington, New Delhi and Downing Street can only be a 'market democracy'. Nobody doubts US commitment to democracy and peace, but its double standards have made pro-democracy forces in Nepal suspicious of its true intentions.

Toppers' Choice

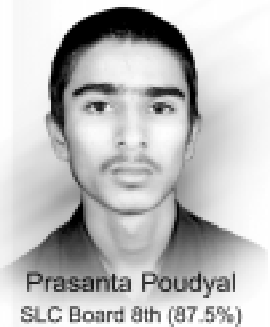
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Talks.
Talks.

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 17 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The Nepal government has taken a face saving way out in the name of resolving the Bhutani refugee issue...it is absurd that the same verification team that made this controversial and untrustworthy decision should be carrying out the appeals procedure. There should be an independent third party involved."

- German ambassador to Nepal, Rudriger Lemp, quoted in *Kantipur*, 17 July.



Some of the truest literary expressions of Nepali life today are coming not from works in the Nepali language, but from poems and stories written in the national languages.

As former Gurkha soldiers engage in legal battle to win compensation that equals that earned by their British counterparts, Bairagi Nata Magar’s poem, below, reminds us of the losses that Nepalis have suffered fighting foreign wars. The poem was originally written in the Magar language, and then translated into Nepali before it found its way into English, below.

An aged mother begs for blood alms
Bairagi Nata Magar

An aged mother begs for blood alms at the embassy
Hajoor, give me something She cups her palms
With tears streaming down her face she sobs

keeping her hands turned up *Hajoor!*
My son went to the battlefield and died
He disappeared, he never came back *That’s why*
I’ve come begging, a supplicant of pity
The wound in my heart is infected
My perspiration congeals like pus
I, a mother who has withstood birth pangs
can’t withstand the pangs of a grieving parent
My son who till yesterday filled my lap, playing—
a share of my blood, a morsel of my flesh,
my love, my joy, my womb, my affection, my child
—my son who cuddled against me is lost today:
where has he gone? *Selling his blood*
to beg for the alms of a life while wandering foreign lands
all in return for a chance to fill his empty pot
all in his eagerness to receive a handful of alms
Hajoor, my son has now mingled with the field of duty
He’s received death alms *The cannon has swallowed him*
And I no longer feel hunger
I feel no desire to patch the rags on my back
All I need now are blood alms
See how my back trembles *I don’t want to die—*
I’d rather bear these pangs of a grieving parent
That’s why I’ve come to this embassy
begging for the alms of my blood son
Pointing to a nearby statue she says—
That statue bearing a khukuri that is my son
See: there’s no blood on his body *He has turned into stone*
daubed with the colors of modernity
His eyes stuffed with sapphires *my son is now blind*
Give me my blood son *I want to clasp him to my heart*
and extract the scorching bullet that killed him
Because my son, that piece of my blood,
appears in my dreams these days *Lying on the battlefield,*
splashing in a pool of blood he tries to extract the bullet

he says, Mother! I’m dying and cries before me
And then my tears wash him away—
It’s all blood! *He says save me, mother*
and my son flows downstream, away from me
The aged mother sits crying at the embassy
begging for her son

Another poem for the times is the one below by Urmila Kumari Chaudhari ‘Udasi’, who writes originally in the Tharu language. The melancholy she expresses is one that women throughout Nepal would easily identify with, living as they do with the constraints posed upon them by society, their own families, and their own colonized minds.

My mind is not at peace
Urmila Kumari Chaudhari ‘Udasi’

How can I walk forward to dispense faith
when I am mired in a society of disbelief?
How can I start to grow scented flowers
when the behavior of our society is fetid?
How, with my inner soul, can I take pity
on those who play with the lives of women?
How can I struggle to truly define life
before a society which idealizes falsehood?
My mind is not at peace for a moment
An uproar is taking place within me
I had wanted to laugh with a brightly lit heart
but a row of tears always dims my eyes
I had wanted to traverse a world filled with flowers
But thorns and needles always bar my way

Both these poems, and other works from the national languages, are found in *Rastriya Bhasaka Kabita* published by the Royal Nepal Academy.

Red-faced Maobadis
Another compendium that tries to pare open the layers of the insurgency.

Despite what Comrades Badal and Mahara have been saying at public fora in Kathmandu after coming above ground, the Maobadis seem desperate to rescue the talks. This for no other reason than the impatience of their field cadre. Once the rains are over, the leaders better have something concrete to show for their efforts.

Surya Bahadur Thapa knows this well, so he is prolonging the preparations for talks to suit his own political convenience. The mediators and human rights activists who met the Prachanda-Baburam duo recently in the New Delhi suburb of Noida recently know that Thapa knows, so even they will not be insisting too much on any preconditions for resumption of negotiations.

Once the third round of talks begin, government negotiators are likely to discover that their Maoist counterparts have suddenly developed extraordinary sensitivity for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Alas, it’s already too late to do much about it. If Robert Kaplan’s piece in the current issue of *Atlantic Monthly* (see also *Daniel Lak*, p5) is true, the Americans are already here.

It appears that the Maoist fears of Pax Americana were not as far fetched as Comrade Prachanda had made them sound in his bombastic press releases. In an interview (<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/int2003-06-18.htm>) Kaplan brackets Nepal with Colombia and the Philippines as examples for ‘the future of US intervention in world affairs’.

Apparently, we aren’t going to be an Afghanistan, if that is any consolation. But then ‘US intervention’ is no more just a threat, it’s a hard reality of hyperpower geo-politics. The safe houses of Siliguri will never be the same again. Condry Rice just needs to turn on the burner in Washington, and it will get uncomfortably hot for Maobadi commissars in New Delhi.

It’s not for nothing that Mahara & Co are exhausting curses on the Americans while remaining unusually quiet about Indian ‘expansionists’. CCOMPOSA may urge the world to look at the Himalaya, as they just did after the RIM meet in Chattisgarh last week, but Maobadis know that after 9/11, South Asia will never be the same again.

For the government, the discomfiture of Maobadi leaders is a unique opportunity to lure the insurgents back into the mainstream. Instead of the usual brinkmanship of royal nominees, Thapa now needs to show vision and statesmanship. If handled properly, we might even see Maoist militia recruits heading for ‘stabilisation’ duty in Iraq! The necessity of ‘moral ambiguity’ is an essential component of Kaplan’s maxim of ‘Supremacy by Stealth’.

If we are confused today about Maoist motives, that is much truer of the past seven years. It is still a mystery how a ragtag bunch of frustrated politicians and social misfits succeeded in igniting a wildfire insurgency in such a short time. The importance of understanding the Maoist movement in

Nepal will only grow as the world grapples with the ever-present threat of guerrilla warfare everywhere. The best way, perhaps the only way, to fight these guerrilla organisations is not to let them form in the first place.

Kaplan may not readily admit it, but there is more to the ‘root cause’ theory than mere post-facto justification of violence. Desperados are born when grievances—real or imagined—are allowed to fester. Once that happens, there is never any dearth of ambitious leaders ready to pounce upon the opportunity of an alluring shortcut to political success.

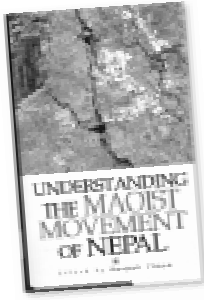
In editing the compendium *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*, Deepak Thapa has opted for variety over authority. A comprehensive introduction and five chapters cover the entire gamut of Maoist phenomenon in Nepal. But such a comprehensive treatment does have its pitfalls. There is an out and out trashy piece about Comrade Prachanda’s drinking habits (two big glasses of fresh frothy buffalo milk straight from the udder at the crack of dawn) by journalist SNM Abdi alongside a scholarly paper on the anthropology of the Kham Magar country by Anna de Sales.

Though they are grouped under different chapters, as a reader it’s very difficult to see the connection. Maoists have been adroit media managers, and


they get into the press often and usually in their own terms. But that doesn’t justify the absence of official views in this book. Two overt propaganda pieces by Li Onesto take up nearly 60 pages, but the Royal Nepali Army doesn’t even get a hearing on Dunai or Holeri. In fact this anomaly is an indication of the trend where ‘objectivity’ of journalism often translates into ambivalence towards atrocities of the insurgents on the one hand and compulsions of the government to be ruthless on the other.

It is not just the state, even civil society chose to ignore the dire predictions of a brewing insurgency by R Andrew Nickson and Stephen L Miksell. But then, did Maoist insurgency begin as a conspiracy to undermine the legitimacy of democratic regimes? This volume has nothing to offer on Koirala’s ‘Grand Design’ theory.

Even though this book is a collection of previously published material, it succeeds in broadening a reader’s understanding of the Maoist phenomenon in Nepal. (A brutal insurgency can hardly be called a ‘movement’, as the title of the book suggests.) Kaplan must get a copy, if he doesn’t have one already. ♦



Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal
Deepak Thapa (ed)
Martin Chautari, Kathmandu
pp (xx)+395
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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Poetry Festival** Mark Wyatt reads from "Snow and Other Adventures" 18 July, Pratibha Tuladhar and Smriti Jaiswal on 20 July. Both at 7.30 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Traditional and modern Nepali paintings** 4-8PM at The October Gallery, Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Imaging Everest** Photographic exhibition from the Royal Geographical Society, London, in association with The British Council, Kathmandu. 8.30 AM-4.45 PM till 31 July at the British Council, Lainchour.
- ❖ **Monsoon Moods** Paintings by Uttam Nepali, Shashi Shah, Batsa Gopal Vaidya, Shashikala Tiwari, Kiran Manandhar, Ragini Upadhyay-Grela at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4411122
- ❖ **Fresh Pair of Eyes: perspectives from volunteers working in Nepal** Paintings, photographs and drawings from 18 July at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Mithila Art Exhibition** from 19-26 July at gallery nine, Lazimpat. 4446944



EVENTS

- ❖ **Bharatnaytam in Kathmandu** Lecture-demonstration by Priyadarsini Govind, 10-11.30 AM at Padma Kanya Campus on 18 July, performance at BICC at 5PM on 19 July. Entry on passes. 4413174, 4410900
- ❖ **Martin Chautari Discussions** every 3PM Sunday on political issues, 5PM Tuesday on various topics, 3PM Thursday on media, and 3PM Friday on youth related issues. Participation is open to all.
- ❖ **Ghetto Dance Blast** International artists, DJ Arjun, bottomless bar on 18 July Yak & Yeti. Tickets: Rs 1,111 for drinks and dinner. 4248999
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** 7PM every Tuesday at the Big Pagoda, Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Kathmandu Toastmasters Club** 5.45-7.30 PM every Tuesday. Improve your speaking and listening skills. Free at IEM, Tripureshwor. 4429638
- ❖ **Kerfew** R&B, commercial and trance dance party from 7PM on 19 July at Rox, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Entry Rs 100.
- ❖ **Monsoon H₂O party: Wetter the better** 25 July at Dwarika's Hotel. 447988

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz Vocal Encounters with Cadenza** 8PM onwards 18 July at Not Just The Jazz Bar, Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Live Acoustic Jam** 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Café, Thamel. 4256738
- ❖ **Thunderbolt live** 8.30 PM on 18 July at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM every Wednesday and Saturday. Rs 200 entry. Interested musicians welcome to jam. Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Full Circle** acoustic jam every Friday at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4427311

DRINKS

- ❖ **Liquor Buffet** 7-9PM at the Splash Bar & Grill. Rs 550 per person. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Fusion** offers over 100 cocktails. Happy hour from 6-7PM. Dwarika's Hotel.
- ❖ **K-too! Special** Tropical Khukri drinks Rs 125 or Rs 750 for every 1.5 litre. Free Irish Coffee with every main course. K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043.
- ❖ **Kilroy's Monsoon Wine Festival** 14 different wines at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

FOOD

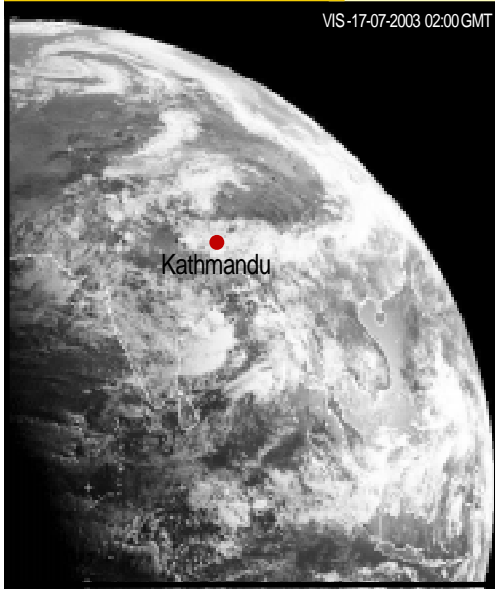
- ❖ **Weekends Late Riser BBQ** fixed lunch at the Shambala Garden. Upto 66 percent discount. Shangri-La Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Executive lunch meals** at Bhanchha Ghar Restaurant and Bar, Kamaladi. 4225172
- ❖ **Belle Momo** for more than 15 varieties of momos at Darbar Marg. 4230890
- ❖ **Exquisite dining** at the Chimney. Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Espresso Bar** newly renovated at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4419612
- ❖ **Friday BBQ** at the Summit Hotel with 6.30 PM onwards. Rs 500 + tax. 5521810.
- ❖ **Breakaway Buffet Lunch** Rs 325-375 (weekdays), Rs 650 (weekends) at the Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 4-6.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Summer specials** smoked salmon soufflé, shrimp Newburg and crispy duck breast. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Wood fired pizzas, Baskin Robbins icecream, cocktails and coffee** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
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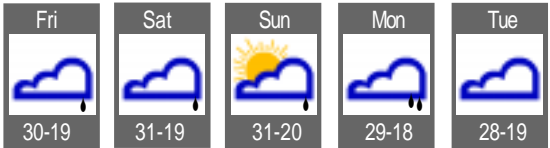
NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Following three consecutive weeks of rain, the monsoon is now taking a breather. The next low pressure circulation is hovering over the Bay of Bengal, as this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows. That mass is headed our way and should arrive by early next week to dump more rain in eastern and central Nepal. The current pressure pattern that governs distribution of rainfall indicates the monsoon is maturing, bringing hefty local passing showers without thunder and strong winds. Mostly, the rains will fall conveniently at night, leaving bright sunny mornings.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM



Living History: Memoirs Hillary Rodham Clinton
Headline Book Publishing, 2003
Rs 1,040
Clinton writes with candour, humour and passion about her upbringing in suburban middle-class America in the 1950s and her transformation into student activist to controversial First Lady. *Living History* is her revealing memoir of life through the White House years and with Bill Clinton. It is her chronicle of a surviving personal betrayal, relentless partisan investigations and constant public scrutiny.

India-Pakistan in War & Peace JN Dixit
Books Today, 2002
Rs 595

The author, a former foreign secretary of India and one of the sharpest minds in contemporary diplomacy, explores the tempestuous New Delhi-Islamabad relationship. He produces a grand sweep of history, embellished with details that only a participant can know, viewed from a perspective few analysts can match.



Who is Kalam? R Ramanathan
Konark Publishers, 2003
Rs 395
This is neither a biography in the traditional sense nor a critical analysis. The book simply aims to explore the personality of the 12th President of India through the eyes of one who has worked closely with this fascinating and multifaceted individual. Ramanathan worked with Kalam for over seven years as his Financial Adviser in the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

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It's the summer of sequels—this time round it's the onscreen trio of Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz and Lucy Liu who are back in *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*. All the absurd elements of the 1970s TV show is pushed to the maximum and there is no situation these glamorous undercover agents can't get in or out of with gleeful airheaded nonchalance. This loud, fun, dumb, funny, ridiculous movie delivers what it sets out to do—entertain—with plenty of martial arts, surprise cameo roles and a slick production. Good morning Angels!

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NEPALI SOCIETY

Bhusan's fireside

Two rival private terrestrial television channels Kantipur Television and Image Metro were launched this week. They have one thing in common: Bhusan Dahal. The suave and self-assured 37-year-old chief producer at Kantipur Television helped establish both stations. Today, Bhusan is thrilled by the strides that television in Nepal has taken, both technically and content-wise. Bhusan's career graph is impressive: from a rookie reporter at Nepal Television 15 years ago, a stint at Young Asia Television in Colombo, three years at Image Channel, to the production house Divyadrishtee, and then to Kantipur Television. Most viewers still remember Bhusan from his Sunday Pop program on Nepali TV, which at the time was the only program on English music. "I was really raw then," Bhusan recalls, "but NTV gave me invaluable experience and got me hooked

into television." In the slick new studio at Kantipur, Bhusan doesn't mind admitting that he has learnt through mistakes, using every opportunity that came his way. The Sri Lanka-based international channel, Young Asia Television enabled Bhusan to broaden his horizons, but there was something missing. "I realised the importance of working and creating something in your own country," he says. So he returned, joined Image Channel which at that time produced software for NTV and helped launch Divyadrishtee which didn't work out. Bhusan is philosophical about that particular loss. "It was ahead of its time and there weren't enough buyers for our production," he says. But at Kantipur Television, Bhusan is in his element: using his wide experience to create a vibrant,

exciting and technically superior channel for Kathmandu Valley. His colleagues say he is a hands-on boss, looking at concept, design and execution of not just his own program, *Fireside*, but other broadcasts as well. "TV is a huge challenge," he says, "one needs to be able to translate ideas into pictures continuously and effectively." Leading a handpicked team of 150 people from journalists to beauty queens, Bhusan is keenly aware of his responsibility to owners of the station who have already invested Rs 500 million in the venture. But Bhusan has his eyes set on the future, when the network will broadcast not just in the capital but to the rest of Nepal. But what of the competition? Bhusan is clear about the task ahead. "It's going to be survival of the fittest." It looks like Bhusan is doing better than just surviving. He's thriving. ♦ (Hemlata Rai)



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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Back to the gun?

from p1

Till press time, there was no answer from Bhattarai to the prime minister's letter. The future of the talks now seems to rest on that answer, and whether it addresses the points that Baburam Bhattarai laid out when Surya Bahadur Thapa became prime minister six weeks ago. These include whether or not agreements made with the earlier negotiating team about the army being restricted to five km of barracks is still valid, and the government's position on army mobilisation.

Paradoxically, there hasn't really been a major violation of the six-month old ceasefire. It's just that the peace talks started in May got stuck after the Thapa government replaced Lokendra Bahadur Chand. So who is trying to wreck the ceasefire? Some political analysts say both the palace and the Maoists may not

necessarily want to derail the peace process, but they want to delay it because conditions are not right to resume talks at present.

More than the Maoists, it appears that the government wants to deliberately let things drift a bit. The thinking could be to widen what is seen as a growing rift between the grassroots cadre and the Maoist leadership. And the Maoist response to this could be a premeditated disappearing act that will send alarm bells ringing. Those alarm bells have rung, and the Nepali public is increasingly apprehensive that fighting may resume any day, taking the war into a more vicious and brutal phase.

There have also been changes in the regional geopolitics in the past month: the India-China rapprochement after Vajpayee's Beijing visit, the strong American

reaction to the Bhutani refugee verification results which seems to have irked New Delhi no end. In the midst of heightened Indo-US tensions over Nepal, the Maoists have gone all out to attack "American imperialism" but have remained mysteriously silent about India. Kathmandu's relations with New Delhi, meanwhile, is still stuck with little or no progress in any of the bilateral border, trade, security and political issues.

On the ground, the ceasefire has been a period in which a dangerous new arms race has started between the two forces. While the Maoists have been training and smuggling in weapons, explosives and ammunition, the Royal Nepali Army has been augmenting hardware and adding men-under-arms. There have been media reports of major hauls of Nepal-bound arms and ammunition for the Maoists in Bangladesh and in Uttar Pradesh this month.

In fact, except for the absence of major battles, the ceasefire period has been characterised by competition between the two sides over who can violate more provisions of their agreed upon Code of Conduct. ♦

NEPAL IN THE FOREIGN PRESS



The New York Times

JAMES BROOKE in KATHMANDU
W ending her way through the Hindu temples and internet cafes of downtown Kathmandu, an American rara avis was spotted during Everest anniversary celebrations in late May: an elegant woman wearing a T-shirt that read, Hilton Head Polo Team. In Nepal, where affluent American tourists are few, this confirmed sighting could signify a rebirth of American tourism and trekking in a nation more associated in recent years with Maoists than with mountaineers.

Over four years of guerrilla rebellion, the number of international arrivals dropped 57 percent, down to 215,900 last year. But in January, a ceasefire was signed between the Maoist guerrillas and the government. In the four months since then 18 people in this nation of 24 million have been killed in political violence, down from about 1,800 in the same period last year.

The first to notice the decline were Nepal's neighbours, China and India. During the first four months of this year, Chinese tourist arrivals jumped by 25 percent and Indian arrivals by 31 percent. Now, with all the favourable publicity emanating from celebrations surrounding the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Mount Everest, Nepal tourism promoters are convinced that Americans, Europeans and Japanese will return for the trekking season, which starts in mid-August.

"It's upbeat," said Deepak Uprait, general manager of the Shangri-La Hotel, Kathmandu. Referring to a tourism fair in Tokyo, he said: "We have people who were recently in Japan. They were saying it is going to be an excellent season." Even before the Everest anniversary on 29 May, there were indications that tourism might be turning a corner. In April, arrivals reached 20,799, up 15 percent over April of last year. At Namche, the traditional gateway for treks in the

to Nepal

Sagarmatha National Park, which includes Mount Everest, there were 3,000 trekkers, almost double the 1,700 registered in April 2001.

In recent years, the tourism fall was as fast and as traumatic as a slip on a Himalayan ice field. "The last five years were the worst in our 25 years," said Shyam Bahadur Panday, owner of the Nepali Shangri-La Hotel Group and a member of the Nepal Tourism Board.

The guerrillas are not known to have killed any Western tourists. In interviews, their leaders repeatedly stress that they favour international tourism here. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, third ranking in the Maoist hierarchy, said in an interview in Kathmandu in May: "As far as the tourism industry is concerned, we very much encourage it. This country needs tourism."

In a country where high unemployment forces many to emigrate, the tourism industry employs 250,000 people. "Not a single tourist has been killed by the guerrillas in Nepal in the last seven years," Narayan Singh Pun, the government's negotiator in peace talks with the Maoists, said in an interview. But in two separate attacks last fall, the Maoists killed two Nepali guards at the American Embassy. The current United States Government consular information sheet on Nepal warns that the unpredictable nature of Maoist attacks "increases the likelihood that Americans in Nepal could be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time." It warns against travelling at night, on public buses and during general strikes. It also warns that guerrillas often demand "donations" from tourists passing through their rural areas.

Trekking to the base of Manaslu peak in May, five months after the information sheet was written, Scott Darsney said he saw a different side to the guerrillas. "The Maoists gave us a

letter to give to the porters at the next village," said Darsney, an Alaska-based photographer who has made at least a dozen visits here in recent years. Addressing porters who charge the equivalent of \$19 to carry a 100-pound load for six hours, he said: "They wrote: 'You are charging the foreigners too much.'"

"You see a lot of them wandering around with the camouflage, with their red flags and slogans," Darsney said of guerrillas in an area in central Nepal, far from Everest, where he hiked and climbed in mid-May. Last fall the government issued permits to 55 climbing groups, largely Americans and Europeans, a 29 percent jump over the same period in 2001, according to figures compiled Lisa Choegyal, an American who promotes adventure tourism in Nepal.

But for many Americans who have never visited, last year's toll of violence, 4,655 dead, has made them think twice about coming this year. "I would have had 12 people here; I had six," Chuck Demarest, a Colorado businessman, said minutes before receiving a Nepali government climbing medal in a 50th anniversary celebration. Demarest, who reached the summit of Everest in 1998, said that some friends and family declined his invitation to come to Kathmandu. "People were scared about the Maoists, that the ceasefire would break down," he said. But after widespread American and European coverage of the anniversary events, including interviews with Sir Edmund Hillary, hoteliers now are betting on the Everest effect. Navnet Nagpal, manager of the Yak & Yeti Hotel, said of flights that link this Himalayan capital with India's three largest cities: "The flights are coming in chockablock." ♦

MIN BAURACHARYA



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Under My Hat
by Kunda Dixit

Unconventional tourism

Efforts by the travel and tourism trade to promote Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) in Nepal finally appear to be paying off. People from all known human sub-species, political affiliations, and caste backgrounds are suddenly descending on our fair city to hold seminars, workshops and hunger strikes.

They have found that Kathmandu is an ideal venue for such events because of its scenery, salubrious climate and complete freedom to stage street protests that bring traffic to a standstill outside the International Unconventional Centre. All this augurs well for the future development of our tourism industry, and if present trends are any indication, we could even contemplate bidding to host the 2009 Allahabad Kumbha Mela in Nepal.

This week saw Kathmandu chosen as the venue for the XVII International Convention of Brahmins in which upper caste delegates from all over the world took part. After the plenary, participants broke up into sub-groups to discuss burning issues like: 'Why don't low caste people like us?', 'Untouchability can prevent future SARS outbreaks', 'Imaginative new uses for the holy thread', and 'Replacing English with Sanskrit as an

international language'. However, a delegation of Boston Brahmins which wanted to discuss 'Greater tolerance of the views of upper caste Americans' was hooted off the podium.

Aside from the fact that we Brahmins are directly descended from God (which means we have a fast-track to heaven when the time comes to go) being a Brahmin has a lot of other fringe benefits. As general sales agents here on Earth for the Almighty, Brahmins get a cut from all transactions between the spiritual and temporal planes. Being divine middlemen, we also have broadband access for all communications between heaven and earth. Lately, there has been some heavy two-way traffic and to accommodate the added workload, the International Convention of Brahmins has decided in its nine-point Kathmandu Declaration to open a permanent secretariat in Nepal in recognition of this country's ability to make no progress at all in socio-cultural reform.

This week also saw the annual get-together of the newly-formed Ex-Prime Minister's Organisation of South Asia (EPMOSA) in which deposed, ousted, retired and vanquished heads of state and government from the

subcontinent came together to push for a restoration of democracy in each others countries so that they can get back to doing whatever hankypanky they were engaged in before being unceremoniously unseated.

The closed-door conference unanimously elected ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto as Chairperson, ex-general Hussain Mohammad Ershad of Bangladesh as General Secretary and ex-prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala of Nepal as Treasurer. Deceased heads of non-South Asian countries like ex-President Dr Hastings Banda of Malawi and ex-President Papa Doc Duvalier of Haiti have been granted special observer status in future EPMOSA meetings.

MICE tourism promoters in Nepal have also got inquiries from the Revolutionary International Movement (RIM) which wants to hold its next International Convention of Underground Revolutionaries in Kathmandu. RIM says Nepal was chosen as a tribute to the rapid strides this country has taken in realising the goals of the international proletarian revolution and global solidarity against parasitic running dog imperialist lackeys, traitorous revisionist cliques and expansionist regional hegemons. ♦



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Miles Chart

SECTORS*	MILEAGE
KATHMANDU - JANAKPUR	140
KATHMANDU - POKHARA	150
KATHMANDU - BHAIRAHAWA	200
KATHMANDU - BIRATNAGAR	240
KATHMANDU - BHADRAPUR	250
KATHMANDU - NEPALGUNJ	370
KATHMANDU - MOUNTAIN	400

Awards Chart

SECTORS*	MILEAGE
KATHMANDU - JANAKPUR	1400
KATHMANDU - POKHARA	1500
KATHMANDU - BHAIRAHAWA	2000
KATHMANDU - BIRATNAGAR	2400
KATHMANDU - BHADRAPUR	2500
KATHMANDU - NEPALGUNJ	3700
KATHMANDU - MOUNTAIN	4000

*Indicated sector/vice-versa.



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Buddha Air

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