There is a government here, there is no
But Baburam’s letter seeks guarantees from
Maoists, and the letter is a hurdle. But we will
downs, it’s natural. It was going well with the
peace process in jeopardy?
their stand and I have requested them
informal talks with the Maoists, overall the
Prime Minister Thapa:
first 50 days?
government
days in office as prime minister for the fifth
Reinstatement is a matter of debate, I don’t
have any preference either way. On elections,
the entire resolution of the present political
crisis rests on holding them, the setting up of a
new parliament and the formation of a new
government. We want elections as soon as
possible and we have even budgeted for it.
What remains to be seen is how the peace
process with the Maoists goes ahead. That’s
the crux of the matter.
But can’t we look at elections also as a way
to resolve the Maoist issue? I agree. But it’s a
crude or a genuine question. You can’t have
elections without the Maoist problem being
resolved and you need elections to be
able to find a long-term solution to the problems
of representation.
The Maoists have repeatedly said that they
will oppose elections now.
The Maoists fear a new parliament will validate
the present constitution and they want a
constituent assembly. We have to work on it a
compromise with them, that is the only way we
will find a new direction.
Is it really true that the king reverted
effective power to you? Absolutely. His Majesty
has been cooperating very sincerely, and the
government has enjoyed complete executive power.
The only test of this will be to look at performance, who
makes decisions, and whether there is
delivery.
The level of criticism of the monarchy
Today is unprecedented in Nepali history.
I think it is an emotional manifestation of a
particular moment when certain decisions had
to be taken. The criticism is born out of
frustration in some quarters, and it is a
temporary thing. The ones who are raising
slogans now will get tired pretty soon.
Our headline, then, will be: no
reinstatement of parliament and no
disregard of talks.
I am certain the talks will not be derailed. But I
can’t say there won’t be a reinstatement of
parliament, so, you don’t have a headline.
(Laugh.)
Security of secularism

Inequality is entrenched because our orthodoxy bases its principles on an accident of birth, rather than merit.

L ast week, two senior executives of a leading Indian engineering company were on a tour of duty in Bihar. They decided to take an excursion to Kathmandu. They left Patna early Saturday morning by car, and by evening they were at the gates of a Tahaludh casino. Their next stop of call was a dance restaurant in Thamel, where they wired their money off to pay their respects to Lord Pashupatinath.

Money in one hand, the pair was driving back to Patna on Sunday. The time was well past midnight, and the two were already long off the road to Kathmandu. As they passed by the place where they had enjoyed their meal the previous night, they noticed a plaque set up to commemorate the visit of the Japanese ambassador during his career, which the government can use for a good cause. The government

lems of that “amity and peace”, but will also hopefully lead to the continuing relevance of other privileges

Birth. Religion in such societies is not divine but human, and thus, secularity is more than just a matter of faith or belief. It is also a matter of how one treats others with respect and dignity.

It seems that the “Pahalikam” of Hoshang Sahib was his sympathy rather than a court enemy of Jang Bahadur and therefore not a reliable source of information. They are celebrating Fagu with usual engrossed in their frivolities. They are celebrating Fagu with abandon and are merry-making in scandinavian fashion. It was as if nothing untoward had happened... the public was not bothered whether it was Jang Bahadur who was rajah of Falah Jang. Neither were they worried, it seems, that the ruling power was retained by the king or was abandoned and are merry-making in th

inequality is entrenched because our orthodoxy bases its principles on an accident of birth, rather than merit.
Comrades at the roadsides

This time, the high command needs to tread carefully, and for the nation's sake choose compromise and peace.

by PUSKAR GAUTAM

such that it does not encourage private investors. This not only ruins these monopolies, but also discourages private investors and does not build up and bring prices down to benefit consumers. Let's hope Finance Minister Mohan’s budget announcement for the privatization of NTC will finally upgrade our telecommunications sector and make it more affordable.

Pravesh Sarcar, Chicago, USA

LAK

In the family (154)

Daniel Lak has admitted that death, like alienation, is a hard business in a poor country like Nepal as compared to Canada. I would just like to add that it’s not that easy in Canada either. Just subtract the credit system here, the mortgage, credit cards, and you will find the social gap is as wide. There may be castration in Nepal, but Canada has racism. And even wealthy Canadians can barely meet medical and funeral expenses without insurance. If one dies in

RED-FACED

I would like to thank OK Lal for his short review of “Understanding the Maoist Movement in Nepal” published by the “Red-faced Maoists” (154). While I like his criticisms in the spirit they were intended, and especially so since he is one of the contributors, I would like to draw attention to a major error that has crept into the book. I do this because Lal’s references to the Maoists have included a truly naive side of the story. You cannot include everything in one volume, but most importantly, the official version for some may not be the same for others.

Anil Bhartiatra, Sujata Thapa Kanthamnu

OK Lal states in “The times of Nepal” (154) that “Nepal has seen in three years what most countries in the world have seen in three decades or more.” A more correct statement would be: “Nepal has taken three decades or more to achieve what most countries have achieved in three years or less.” And we don’t live in a world where one can be living in a very dull moment in Nepal’s history. As Lal points out, the struggle for power has gone on in Nepal since Prithvi Narayan Shah’s time, so we should be all used to it by now. What would be really interesting is if we all come together and work for the benefit of Nepal. Most current political leaders in Nepal are iliterate gundas. And the intelligent ones have turned to outdated political theories.

Bhaskar Tripathy, email

RED ALL OVER

After three weeks in bamy-day存在 from the corrupts and crazed Maoists that so dominate the news in Nepal these days, I was taken by a deep sense of impatience re-entered the kingdom a few days ago only to read with a sense of bitter humour a news item detailing how the Maoists had invaded two mass meetings held by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Maoist) in different parts of the country. They had stormed the stage, torn up the party flags and built up animosity between the tout-speakiers, yelling slogans extolling their own wretched version of the revolution. They then proceeded to lie up the Communist politicians on stage and kidnap them in front of thousands of people. What happened to solidarity in the face of the reactionary running dog hegemonistic lackeys and stooges of the imperialists? How is it that the Maoists hate the Maoists so much, never mind the Leninists? Aren’t we used supposed to despise and purge everyone else? Aren’t they all in the same political boat? But I’m not going to argue here.

Deepak Dewan, email

CORRECTION

In “In The Budget” (154) it should have clarified that a portion of the development budget made special foreign loan arrangements.

- In “Looking for Hitler” (154) British lawmakers in the two house and capitol should have referred British Library in several references in the text."
BHUSSAN TULADHAR

The arrival of the monsoon is literally a breath of fresh air for Nepal. The rain flushes out the pollutants, and air quality is much dearer. This natural phenomenon is clearly reflected in the data collected by newly established monitoring stations in Kathmandu measuring the concentration of fine dust particles in the air.

Just before this year’s monsoon arrived in mid-June, the Particulate Matter 10 (PM10) concentration at the Kathmandu High School station (near the Famous Indian environmentalist the Late Anil Agarwal called diesel vehicles “Engines of the Devil.”

In Nepal, however, diesel continues to enjoy subsidies and driving a heavy diesel powered SUV is fashionable. It’s not, it’s deadly. Kathmandu-based environmentalists say that the use of these cars, followed by government ministers, and projects and members of parliament who all ordered one during the Pajero scandal. Ironic, isn’t it, that agencies promoting sustainable development are the ones who use these cars the most.

California Air Resources Board (CARB) declared diesel exhaust to be toxic air contaminants and said that chronic exposure to just 1 microgram per cubic meter of diesel exhaust will lead to additional 300 cases of lung cancer per million people.

Environmentalists all over the world are now campaigning to ditch diesel vehicles and some countries such as Brazil, Taiwan and Egypt have banned private diesel cars. French journalists and the famous Indian environmentalist the Late Anil Agarwal called diesel vehicles “Engines of the Devil.”

In Nepal, however, diesel continues to enjoy subsidies and driving a heavy diesel powered SUV is fashionable. It’s not, it’s deadly. Kathmandu-based environmentalists say that the use of these cars, followed by government ministers, and projects and members of parliament who all ordered one during the Pajero scandal. Ironic, isn’t it, that agencies promoting sustainable development are the ones who use these cars the most.

Diesel Deadly

Until recently, diesel was considered to be a relatively clean fuel because it is up to 20 percent more fuel-efficient than petrol. But in the past 10 years diesel has taken a severe beating and now diesel exhaust is considered a deadly pollutant and a carcinogen.

The first alarm rang when experts found up to 100 times more particulate matter in diesel exhaust than petrol. Then researchers in the UK found that 90 percent of the particles emitted by diesel engines are very tiny or less than 1 micron. This means that almost all the particles in diesel exhaust, which are surrounded by toxic compounds such as poly cyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), are small enough to go deep into the human body.

This was followed by studies indicating that all of the air pollutants, fine particles are the most deadly. To make matters worse, in 1997, Japanese scientists discovered the most potent carcinogen found as of date in diesel exhaust. As a result, the number of people who are admitted to Kathmandu hospitals last year clearly shows the correlation with winter months.

There has been a dramatically increased of patients with chronic lung disease in the past 10 years.

M
danger.

DANGER: PM10

PM10 is the most dangerous pollutant in the air because it is tiny enough to enter deep into the human respiratory system. It is often coated with highly toxic compounds and metals and it hangs around in the air for a long time. In fact, the smaller the size of the particles the more dangerous they become. Fine particles not only damage the lungs but they can also enter the blood stream and cause problems in the heart and the nervous system.

Kathmandu is a main concern in Kathmandu in terms of air quality because its levels are way above national and international standards.

HERE AND THERE

A world of failures

NATION

25-31 JULY 2003 NEPAL TIMES #155

breathing is harmful

FRANCE, Germany and other opponents of the invasion of Iraq may have been lashed out by the United Nations as the excuse to oppose Washington’s war, but few of those countries put much store by the UN. Like the United States, they ignore it when it suits them. Frankly, the United Nations system is ripe with failure. Some humanitarian successes in the 1996—UNCRF in former Yugoslavia for example—were hugely overshadowed by the genocidal tragedy in Rwanda and later, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Other UN agencies have failed to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS, perhaps because this is an impossible task. But the fact remains that the vital vector of the world’s worst health crisis continues to rage. One estimate is that most African countries will see Botswana-style infection rates within 15 years and Asian countries will follow. That’s 30 percent of the adult population to anyone who wants to deny the UN on this. Never mind the effect on economies, armies (the South African Defence Force alone has a 90 percent infection rate in some regiments), cities, children and the health system. AIDS is us.

Let’s not just bash the UN system. Have a look at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These lofty organisations have been shown in recent years to be among the more destructive forces in the global system, up there with corruption and natural catastrophe. Ask newly impoverished Bolivia what it thinks of the IMF’s market fundamentalist nonsense. And that’s just one failure among many. The World Bank tries

ostensibly to curb the excesses of the free market, but ideology and the so-called Washington consensus has run its too. This failed and discredited doctrine tries to make the aforementioned fundamentalist market ideology into the New Conservatism—let the multinationals run things and we’ll be fine.

If that’s so, why hasn’t the United States itself been the greatest regulator of its own business sector? Busting trusts, snatching catch, firing polluters, acting in the interests of workers—perhaps only when forced by circumstance and voter anger, but understandably and admirably on occasion.

Why then do successive State Departments and White Houses demand that developing countries have free markets as an allowed in the United States’ Failure, that’s why.

Finally, now, the media, which my detractors say—niggishly, in some cases—I seldom hold to account. The BBC’s own role in the Iraq arms inspector suicide in Britain is currently coming under welcome scrutiny, so I would reserve judgement on that. But the media as a whole is certainly failing the audience that needs it. There is choice all right. But most of the choices are dead, or from the same political points of view. We easily comfort the afflicted or affect the comfortable anymore. We are the comfortable.

So there you have it. A world of failures. Not a great time in history. But the best thing about failure is the chance to re-invent ourselves, to learn from mistakes and to move forward. So opportunity is knocking loudly for Nepal, and for the rest of planet. Someone please answer the door.
to health

have the will to implement them. The citizens also need to raise their voices, after all it was this that led to the burning of the appalling Vitanak dussehra. Till that happens, here are a few things individuals can do to make a difference:

- Maintain your vehicle. A poorly maintained vehicle may consume up to 50 percent more fuel and emit 50 percent more pollutants than a well-maintained one.
- Use public transportation, especially the electric vehicles we have in Kathmandu. Our city has the largest fleet of public electric vehicles. Use them.
- For short trips (most trips in Kathmandu are short), leave your car at home and ride a bicycle or walk. Walking or pedaling is good for your health as well as your wallet.
- Raise your voice, since everyone’s health is affected.

Bhusan Tuladhar is executive director of Clean Energy Nepal.

Keeping tab of Kathmandu air

Adults breathe 25 kg of air in and out of their lungs every day. Kathmandu residents have felt the pollution in this air as irritation in the throat or the dirt on clean shirts. Now we can tell exactly how bad the air is, thanks to the six monitoring stations set up by the Ministry of Population and Environment with help from the Danish government. Two of these stations are located on busy roads (Putali Chowk and Patan Hospital), one in a residential/burial area (Thame), two in urban backgrounds (Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Tribhuvan University) and one as a Valley background (Matsegau). The state-of-the-art stations measure PM10 levels round the clock. Data is tabulated every week and released on Tuesdays through MOPC’s web site (www.mopc.gov.np) and a newly installed electronic board on Basantapur. Nepal Times begins publishing some key results starting this week on page 14.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Freeing state media

The new communication minister is shaking things up. When Nepal Television recently aired an uncut interview of Maoist negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara earlier this month, many were shocked. The decision to broadcast it reportedly came right from the top: the new information minister, Kamal Thapa (top) is determined to move state media from being the government’s propaganda arm towards greater independence and objectivity. “I have given written instructions that news should be based on value, not on protocol,” the minister told us.

His official directives advised Radio Nepal, NTV, Gorkhapatra and RSS to exercise their own news judgement and not give in to pressure from senior government figures for coverage. “Minister Thapa has asked us to give fairer news coverage,” Rajendra Dev Acharya, editor of Nepal Television told us.

For state media, this has come as a breath of fresh air. “He is the first minister we’ve had with a liberal approach, our journalists already feel at ease working with him,” said one senior print media editor. Thapa may be trying to ensure that state media can compete with independent private TV, FM and print media. “This is a very good opportunity for all of us, we have already started changing our programming content,” says BP Swikoti, deputy executive director at Radio Nepal.

However, some journalists are skeptical and say it will be difficult to change old ways of doing things. Said one reporter: “There was always political pressure for coverage, and managers were political appointees. Unless that changes, you won’t see more independent coverage.” (Ramesh Nawar)

For better or worse

When the UNDP launched its annual Human Development Report this week, government officials and donors had contradicting theories on the Nepali development. While members of the donor community pointed at Nepal’s degradation in the global human development rankings from 142 last year to 143 this year, officials believed otherwise. It claimed that Nepal has actually improved; from 0.490 in the last decade to 0.499. Oh well, everyone will put their spin in statistics.

“Nepal remains stubbornly 143rd in the world in terms of the HDI and large parts of the country remain extremely poor,” said ODI’s David Wood. “Nepal is currently one of the most difficult environments for development in the world. The prospect of a renewal of the Maoist insurgency is extremely worrying,” National Planning Commission’s Vice Chairman Shankar Sharma argued that the increase in Nepal’s human development index value is encouraging. “That is a substantive improvement for a poor country like ours.”

But the budget is silent on the issue of banning two-stroke vehicles by almost half. On the trolley bus, it says the system will remain in operation. Two-stroke vehicles are a better option, it promised to lower electricity tariff for electric vehicles, lift of the ban on electric vehicles in Kathmandu, clean environment. “They are a better option for fresh air for environmentalists. It finally acknowledged that electric cars offer a chance for a clean environment,” said Rajendra Shankar Paudel, Director of Clean Energy Nepal.
Nepal’s biggest project may also be its biggest scandal.

The power plant is located on the Gandaki Bend, one of Nepal’s most suitable sites for a run-off-the-river scheme. The dam at the headworks (right) diverts water through a six km tunnel with a head of 124 m to the powerhouse generating 780 MW. The saga of how such a splendid project got messed up has to do with greedy politicians probably manipulated by unscrupulous contractors, and international creditors which didn’t care how the money was spent as long as it was spent. When the civil works contract for the project was being awarded in 1997, NEA approved a $140 million bid from the consortium Impregilo SpA. An open-ended bid of quantities (BOQ) contract was signed and by last year, the contractor and the American engineering consultant Morrison Knudsen International Inc (MKI) had ended up billing NEA $180 million. The extra $50 million was quietly paid over a period of five years by NEA officials without even informing their board. The ADB and Japan Bank for International Cooperation which funded the project did not question the extra payment. During the construction period, there were several geological complications, including the need to desand a mountain flank at Mirmi to protect the headworks. That overrun, insiders say, could have amounted to maximum $30 million. It was only in April when Impregilo sought a clearance letter to settle the final account of the project that the government realised that an extra $50 million had been paid for civil works. Alarming, even the Auditor General’s report, which is yet to be made public, has not accounted for this discrepancy. Private auditors considered only the initially agreed $30 million while drawing up the AG’s report, according to insiders. “Now that even the Auditor General has failed to notice the extra money paid, the issue may just fizzle out,” he told us.

NEA sources say the main loophole for corruption was the contract itself. Instead of a fixed-price agreement in which the contractor cannot charge for major variation (similar to the contract in the private-built Khimti project) the NEA-Impregilo contract is under the ‘Fee’ system, which makes the consultant all-powerful to recommend the cost of any work or equipment. That contract was signed in 1997 in the Drugs coalition government with the RPP. MKI was allowed to recommend for the contractor $50,000 a time at extra costs, and if the government failed to pay the amount it was liable to pay interest on the amount. NEA officials say that the contractors would demand more money, the consultants would approve it, and politicians of the day leaned on NEA management to OK it. They said the ADB would always back the consultant, no questions asked. “The bank was always pressuring us to increase the threshold of money the consultant was allowed to recommend,” recalls one ex-NEA official. “The consultant supported the contractor, the bank backed the consultant. It was like a fix guarding the chicken coop.”

Both ADB and MKI representatives declined interviews for this article, saying the dispute was between NEA and the contractor. We asked NEA’s Kal Gandaki project director, Jivendra Jha, if the contract was flawed. He flayed. “Under the agreement, the price escalation is allowed according to the increase in the international price indices. The $131 million was only an initial figure; the price was subject to increase depending on conditions in the future.”

Under the BOQ system, the bidder is allowed to claim for accumulated bills under any heading. What made things easier for the contractor was a consultant that readily recommended extras. “These contracts are really faulty, the entire risk is borne by the Nepali consumer,” said another NEA ex-board member. “You are going to see the same thing happening with the Middle Marsyangdi Project because they have the same BOQ contract.”

Having not received the authorised payment of $50 million, the previous Chaud government tried desperately to recover part of it by instructing Nepal Infrascope in Milan to create Impregilo in real terms and retention bonds. Impregilo promptly took the matter to the Italian courts to free up the money. The court issued a stay order which was only vacated last week, but Nepal is still not in a position to lay hands on the bonds because it does not have the necessary counter bank guarantee here. Without that, NEA officials told us, the cash cannot be transferred.

In the middle of all this, Impregilo reportedly offered to give up $5 million claim for delays in the project caused by the royal massacre and political disturbances on condition that it get a clearance letter of the settled accounts. But NEA refused.

We also approached Impregilo’s Fabrisi Call for his side of the story, which he declined. The company’s Nepali representative refused to speak to us on the record. NEA and Impregilo are now talking about coming to an amicable settlement. But even if that happens, NEA, successive past government and the Nepal Congress, UML, and RPP that lead them have a lot to answer for.

In addition, there has to be a lot more scrutiny of the contracts for future projects so that there are no loopholes for private to allow counting costs. Otherwise, officials say, despite our vast hydropower potential Nepal will keep on having one of the most expensive electricity tariffs in the world. And that means the Nepali people once more end up subsidising the corruption of their elected leaders.
Danger zone

Conservationists battle to restore Kathmandu’s ancient heart.

SOPHIA PANDE

The British historian, Percival Landon, came to Kathmandu Valley in the 1920s, and wrote the famous lines describing Kathmandu as a city with more temples than houses, and more idols than people. Sadly, this epiphany no longer applies. The temples have long since been outnumbered and rendered invisibly by concrete buildings. And at present rates of growth, the Valley’s 1.5 million population is expected to double in 12 years.

Kathmandu’s exceptional architectural legacy was recognised as a World Heritage Site in 1979 by UNESCO. It was more than just a tourist attraction—the Valley had a vibrant, living culture with a unique urban landscape and architectural heritage.

Anyone who enters Kathmandu today will immediately see that things haven’t turned out as planned at the seven sites set aside by UNESCO: the three Durbar Squares at Hanuman Dhoka, Mangalbhaira and Bhaktapur; the stupas of Boudhanath and Swyambhunath, and the temples of Pashupatinath and Changi Narayan.

On 4 July this year, Kathmandu was placed on the Heritage list of endangered sites—right alongside the Bamyan Valley in war-torn Afghanistan.

Uncontrolled urban development, not the guns of war, has ravaged our heritage. Kishore Thapa, deputy director general of the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction, admits that although there are strict zoning laws and building codes, the problem lies in enforcing them.

The fight to save Kathmandu’s heritage needs more than controlling urban expansion. Restoration is costly, labour intensive and time-consuming. With every crumbling temple it is not just architecture that is at stake, but also the countless wooden and stone carvings and idols that they house. Thankfully, there are the first signs of a renaissance in conservation of what is left of the towns in the Valley.

Local artists, restorers, individuals, conservation groups and even a government department are active in rehabilitation and restoration. The Nepal Heritage Society, founded in 1983, strives to create public awareness, so that the people of Kathmandu understand the importance of conservation. This can’t be done without community support so they conduct public meetings to keep people informed, like they did about the newly renovated Charanuni Stupa in Chabahil that was restored by the Central Conservation Laboratory for Cultural Heritage, a branch of the Department of Archaeology (DoA).

When the DoA took on the job of restoring the Tiprahpuita Mahadev Temple (top, left),

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originally built by Queen Trupti Sundari in 1818, the three-tiered pagoda-style roof had caved in. Repairing the roof and introducing the beautifully carved eaves took two years, now the path around the temple is near completion too. The department is also working on the Talaja Bhavan Temple in Bhilus, but has most recently sought to conserve and restore the murals on the four outer walls of the Bagh Bhaiji temple in Kurkripa. Sadly, the department is under-funded and its efforts and expertise are not nearly enough to restore the 17th century paintings that depict scenes from the Mahabharata.

Surya Kumar Manandhar, a restoration artist who worked at Bagh Bhaiji, says the department’s work consists of repainting cracks and holes with plaster of paris, cleaning off the dirt and gently retouching the paintings without reinterpreting the original colours and designs. Despite the hard work, the paintings are still in a deplorable condition. Worse, the community around the temple shows little interest in the work that went on for over six months.

Five elderly Kurkripa gentlemen sitting outside a shop near the Bh blah temple entrance shrugged their shoulders when asked what they thought. “It’s outsiders who did it,” one of them said. The pujari who perform monthly rituals at the temple were also curious and pleased with the restoration. The murals had become slightly brighter, they said without interest. This apathy needs as much work as the actual process of renovation and conservation.

It is not hard to imagine Kathmandu as it should and could have been, if only we had taken a more active interest in our surroundings. Dwarka Shrestha and his family were ones who did, rescuing and rescuing antique friezes and windows from torn-down buildings to build the award-winning Dwarka’s Hotel. Shrestha believed in community contribution and involvement, and his family is now carrying on his life’s work to restore other nearby temples. Dwarka’s doesn’t actively collect wooden carvings, discounting the practice of demanding houses partly for the advantage of selling in precious wooden windows and supports.

Ramesh Mandir, just in front of Dwarka’s, was renovated with the combined effort of the Dwarka team, consisting of architect BEI Pokhrel, artists from its workshop and the municipality. Today, it is also enthusiastically supported and maintained with the help of the local community of Batin Patali, named after the 32 carved sculptures that adorn the interior of Ram Mandir.

Another encouraging example of growing local awareness and involvement in heritage conservation is the ongoing renovation of the small but elegantly proportioned Ugrachandi Temple at Jawalakhel. The local guthi there raised funds to restore the temple from various bhaks during important festivals. They also took a loan that they plan to repay by money earned from renting out the newly renovated and very pleasing Newari style hangun hall behind the temple. “Our ancestors set up ghats for each temple so they could maintain and sustain themselves for posterity, most of them have frittered away their assets, but we need to facilitate a resurgence of the old guthi spirit,” says Sangita Shrestha of Dwarka’s.

Perhaps the best known example of self-sustaining conservation is Patan Museum, once a medieval palace in the heart of Patan Durbar Square, and now a world class repository for Hindu and Buddhist artifacts. The museum itself is a bracing example of restoration, and beam eloquent testimony to our cultural and architectural heritage. It raises funds from entry fees, a restaurant, an exhibition hall and a museum shop—proving that heritage conservation combined with revenue generation is the way to go.

With more examples like this, and given political will and more alert communities, there is reason to be hopeful that Kathmandu will be struck off UNESCO’s endangered listing and become a secure World Heritage Site again. We must protect our sacred spaces, from ourselves.

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Aiding headlines

Geneva - Politics and the media spotlight have contributed toward shifting humanitarian aid to “high-profile” disaster areas at the expense of more “invisible” suffering, charges the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in its annual World Disasters Report. It says humanitarian assistance has tended to be focused on headline-grabbing disasters, diverting potential aid away from the crises that do not have a high profile in the media and do not involve the interests of the world’s major political powers.

This is not a new phenomenon, admits Jonathan Walter, editor of the report. The largest volumes of aid are channelled to the countries that have been targeted in the US-led war on terror, while those who suffer the consequences of armed conflict, disease and natural disaster in other countries go ignored, says the Federation. The humanitarian ethic means saving the lives of those most in need and at the same time respecting the dignity of each individual who has fallen victim to armed conflict, famine, disease or natural disasters, says the report. It underscores the situation in Africa, threatened by drought, flood, armed conflict and infectious diseases. HIV/AIDS alone cost the continent some 6,500 human lives per day. (AP)

Blurring the lines

UNVITED NATIONS - The United Nations is expressing fears that armed troops, notably in strife-torn countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, are increasingly doubling as humanitarian aid workers, threatening private relief operations. Secretary-General Kofi Annan says since the 1990s military forces have been assuming growing responsibilities for vital civilian functions, including delivery of food and water, provision of electricity, and distribution of medicine and other relief supplies for victims of war.

The role of the military as aid workers has been enhanced in both Afghanistan and Iraq, thereby diluting the distinction between civilian relief workers and armed troops. The rising opposition to the concept of military aid workers has also come from INGOs and relief agencies working in war zones.

After nearly three decades of deliberations, the United Nations issued a set of guidelines last month that lays down basic ground rules for military participation in humanitarian activities. Developed in collaboration with the international humanitarian aid community, the guidelines say that any use of military and civilian defence assets should be clearly limited in time and scale, and also present an exit strategy. It also admits that many international military forces provide assistance to civilian population in their areas of responsibility. (AP)

Lying politicians

Once a politician has lost trust, people will not believe him even if he tells the truth.

The suspicion that politicians are inclined to tell lies is as old as politics itself. Yet when a politician is caught in a lie, the consequences are often dire, at least in democratic countries. Indeed, proving that a politician is a liar is just about the only way to get rid of him or her quickly and terminally, which is why the attempt is so attractive to political opponents.

But what, exactly, is a lie in politics? Few cases are as clear-cut as that of Annette Juutremmaki, whose short-lived stint as Finland’s first woman prime minister recently came to an end. She had attacked her predecessor during the election campaigns for being front-rung about Iraq, saying one thing to US President George W Bush and another to the Finnish people. Her knowledge was based on Finnish foreign office records. Had she seen them? She began to equivocate and in the end said that she had not. When the opposite was proven and a secret document was found in her possession, she had to go.

Another campaigner under democratic rules for being “economical with the truth” is German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. But his case is very different. The opposition, still smarting from its narrow defeat in last autumn’s election, accuses him of not having told the truth about Germany’s weak economy and the consequences for the national budget.

Almost a year after the election, a parliamentary committee of inquiry is still interviewing “witnesses.” But it does not look as if it can get very far. At most, deputies will be able to offer the public a fresh example of a favourite trick in politics: to tell the truth, nothing but the truth, but not exactly the whole truth.

The most serious current case concerns President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. In fact, the charges of lying concern only Blair, for Bush has (so far) been absolved of all possible sins in view of the apparent success of the Iraq campaign. But Blair is under heavy fire from his parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee for having overestimated the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. Intelligence dossiers (it is claimed) were “sexed up” by Blair’s underlings. More particularly, there was no evidence for the prime minister’s claim that the Iraqi dictator could have launched “WMD”, as weapons of mass destruction are now called, “within 45 minutes”.

Does it matter whether this claim was simply true or not? Don’t we know from past evidence that Saddam Hussein was prepared to develop WMD’s and to use them if the occasion presented itself? Are not the reasons for the war overtaken by its reality? In the end, is this really a question of lying?

ANIL NETTO in PENANG... An ex-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad hands over power in October to his successor, deputy premier Abdullah Badawi, who will leave behind a legacy of peace among Malaysia’s ethnic communities—a major gain of his 22-year rule. But how exactly he achieved this and whether the peace is durable remain areas of speculation, for public debate on key ethnic issues is frowned upon in Malaysia.

Malaysia’s famed the largest proportion of the largest ethnic group in Malaysia—the Bumiputras (Sukarni for “sons of the soil”). Bumiputras make up 61 percent of the 24 million population, while the Chinese account for 25 percent and Indians (mainly Tamil) 7 percent. Some experts now say the main reason for ethnic calm is the policy of affirmative action towards Malaysia, which helped reduce income disparities. In a recent study, Professor Francis Stewart of Oxford University examined the links between violence and “horizontal inequalities”: social, political and economic differences among ethnic or economic groups. They see affirmative action policies have reduced the potential for inter-ethnic violence by reducing these horizontal inequalities. “The political success of the policies was indicated by the fact that during the economic crisis of 1997, when there were assaults on the Chinese in Indonesia, there were no such attacks in Malaysia; the only mild incidents involved Bumiputra-Indian conflict,” says Stewart.

The backbone of Malaysia’s pro-Bumiputra policies is the New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in the 1970s as a strategy for Chinese-Malay riots that broke out following the racially charged 1969 general election. That saw the economic in Malaysia Chinese making electoral gains—in the alarm of the ruling Malay-led alliance. The NEP aimed to reduce poverty and recover state control so no occupation would be associated with a particular ethnic group (the Chinese and foreign capital controlled economy): many Malay worked as fishermen and rural farmmen while large numbers of Indians worked as plantation labourers). The 20-year policy expired in 1990, but some provisions favouring Bumiputras still exist.

Because of the NEP, Bumiputras benefited from university quotas, state scholarships, preferential treatment in the civil service and special provisions in business. Corporations were required to employ a percentage of Bumiputras and government contracts were more likely to be awarded to Bumiputrahused. Bumiputras dominated the public sector. Even non-Bumiputra companies must be 30 percent owned by Bumiputras.

Before the NEP, almost every sizeable Malaysian company was under ethnic Chinese ownership or management. Now many corporate leaders are Bumiputras, and Bumiputras own 23 percent of corporate shares (compared with 2.3 percent in 1970).

[It (the NEP) improved the life chances of the Malays and contributed in large measure to improving stability in terms of ethnic relations,” agrees Toh Kin Woon, a Penang state government official in charge of economic planning. “As for the others, a growing economy saw Chinese corporate ownership increase from 27 percent in 1970 to 41 percent by 1994.”]

“Nowadays, many Chinese just aren’t bothered about affirmative action” says Ong Sinn, a software developer in the capital Kuala Lumpur. Many, like Ong, turn to the private sector for jobs or start their own businesses.

While the Chinese dominate business and Bumiputras the public sector, Indians have found it hard to keep up—Indian corporate ownership in Malaysia has increased from 1.1 percent in 1970 to a paltry 1.5 percent in Dr M’s legacy

Malaysians are nervous about the succession in October.
In the British case, the answer is not so simple. In the middle of his second term, Tony Blair is going through a bad patch. Opponents within his own party are increasing replacing the tactical Tory opposition. Blair is much more vulnerable than he was a year ago, and he must tread softly if he does not want to lose further support.

But there is another point. The reasons given for the war in Iraq were never entirely clear. WMD’s in Saddam Hussein’s possession were but one in a sequence of arguments. There was also, at least in the US, the desire to avenge the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, as well as geopolitical interests.

Tony Blair also expressed moral outrage at the way the Iraqi dictator had behaved toward his own people in making the case for regime change. Supporters of the war—often reluctant in any case—had picked up one or the other of these arguments, and if they focused on WMD’s, they now feel betrayed. The two cabinet ministers who resigned over the affair, Robin Cook and Clare Short, want their own revenge and thus continue to attack Blair for his “lies.”

So far, Blair has proven his resilience to such charges.

Indeed, he has gone on the counter-attack, notably against the BBC, which had not exactly supported the war with enthusiasm. But does the uncertainty now existing Blair like a valve now smell the apprehensively faint scent of a lie? Or is it more a question of a prime minister trying to save his own people, including some of his erstwhile friends and allies?

Trust is a vital commodity for all politicians. Once lost, it is difficult to regain. Blair has used the “I trusted you” pose, often, not least in the case of the war in Iraq. In any case, one does not have to be found out as a liar to lose such trust. It is sufficient that clouds of doubt develop.

Indeed, a politician’s reputation can be damaged even if no one doubts the truthfulness of his statements. It suffices if people feel that he is trying to mislead them, or even that he has not got things clear in his own mind.

A leader can tell the truth, nothing but the truth, but less than the whole truth and yet still be trusted. Once a politician has lost trust however, people will no longer believe him even if he tells the truth. ☐ by Project Syndicate

Ralf Gattermand is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics.

**Marc Lipsitch**

Even assuming the best-case scenario—that SARS is diminished by the end of this year—increased flu vaccination and better availability of diagnostics will benefit millions of people worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, as many as half a million people die each year from influenza.

Many more are hospitalised with severe illness. Wider vaccination will protect people from infection and block the spread of the virus. Broad use of rapid diagnostics will permit more effective treatment for flu cases at risk of developing severe complications.

If SARS is brought under control worldwide in the next few months, public health authorities will have achieved a great triumph. It might mark the first time in history that people in a person-to-person, respiratory transmission of a major pathogen has been halted globally without the use of antibiotics or a vaccine.

But we would be foolish to think we have seen the last of SARS, and it will take time for scientists to develop diagnostics, treatments and vaccines. And in the meantime, we should intensify the fight against an older nemesis, influenza, both for its own sake and as a way to prepare for the return of SARS. ☐

Project Syndicate

Marc Lipsitch is Professor of Epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health.

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1995. Among the Indians are unemployed rubber plantation workers who lost their jobs when the plantations were replaced with less labour-intensive oil palms. Although, at 112,000 a small proportion of Indians, they are part of a strong community in Malaysia today, along with other groups such as the Orang Asli indigenous communities.

In April, plantation workers were offered a guaranteed monthly wage of $92. Activists angrily rejected the offer, pointing out that it compared poorly even with the current poverty line for a household, which is about $134 a month.

“If there is an absence of violence, it is also because of pervasive laws that suppress any ill-feelings between ethnic groups,” says Murm Jafar Kamal Ambar, who teaches media studies in Penang. The Internal Security Act, for example, alleges indecent destruction without trial. And questioning the “special position” of Malay’s—garanteed by the constitution in recognition of their work economic position—is an offence under the Sedition Act.

Ironically, one of the biggest threats to affirmative action comes from an economic trend over which Malaysia, as a major trading nation, has little control globalisation.

Critics across the political spectrum say affirmative action has fostered dependency and lack of motivation. With 90,000 mainly Bumiputera graduates unemployed, there is concern that many Malaysians are falling short of the requirements of global firms.

“Globalisation is around the corner,” said a Bumiputera contractor. “Bumiputera won’t be ready and will face the problems competing in the global marketplace.”

John Saravananum, a political science professor working at the University of Malaya, observes that since the end of affirmative action in state-run universities in 2001, Bumiputera on some courses has dropped from 55 percent to below 30 percent.

There are other, wider implications. The ruling United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) is often accused of developing close links with a coterie of newly-emerged Malay billionaires, promoting the system of so-called ‘crony capitalism’. By the mid-1990s, when inequalities within the Malay’s had widend, this led to a popular clamour for reform—wides ranging political reforms to curb abuses of power.

“Affirmative action has led to the enrichment of a small percentage of Bumiputera,” says Saravananum. By the same token a new underclass across all the ethnic groups has emerged—hiring non-Bumiputera plantation workers, fisher folk, urban squatters, and tribal communities. ☐

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**Exit point**

**COLOMBO** - Relaxed entry rules into Sri Lanka for Indians and Pakistanis aimed at boosting tourism and trade has also led to the increasing use of the island nation as a conduit for human smuggling to the West. In the coming months, Sri Lanka will also become a transit point for illegal immigrants to Europe, said automate attempting to board an Italian-bound ship this month — may also be using this route for other means.

Intense patrolling by US warships on seas routes has forced immigrants to look for other places to Colombo to reach their destinations. In the past few months, police have detained some Indians and Bangladeshis with forged passports and other documents that they say may be connected to a similar human smuggling operation using the seas. ☐

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In line with suggestions from the World Bank, the government has handed over Rastra Bank and Nepal Bank to foreign management. This idea has worked anywhere else. In Nepal, the ‘reform process’ in these government-run banks has already begun, leaving us with no choice but to sit and wait.

The first move by the foreign managers was to address the exploitation of government banks by big businesses. It’s a reasonable response considering that many business houses have siphoned off huge amounts from banks ostensibly for industrial investment, but really to line their own pockets.

With such precedence, Nepal Bank’s drive to collect ‘bad debts’ cannot be faulted. It has rightly targeted influential industrialists and businessmen who are defaulters. After all, how can a bank survive without repayment of loans? However, certain banking norms need to be followed. These have to do with agreements when the initial investment was made. The police or the CIAA have no job interfering, and to do so will be to double-cross customers and erode the bank’s credibility.

If all else fails, the banks always have the recourse of seizing collateral assets and auctioning them off. These are normal banking procedures for defaulters. The question is, given the political and economic situation in the country, can banks realistically pursue such forthright methods? They may make short term recovery, but damage their overall existence.

The government and Nepal Rastra Bank are on a tightrope.

Private industries and businesses face tough times, most situations are outside their control. Not all businesses are intent on cheating banks, and the fact remains that a majority have suffered due to mismanagement and the deteriorating security situation. That said, if banks exert pressure on business houses, the latter will be probably have to liquidate. Just as well as the private banks have not started turning the screws yet.

If the industries still running with some degree of efficiency come to a grinding halt, the plight of our economy will only worsen. The government must take a more active role in shaping up viable alternatives to rescue sincere and able industrialists. Banking and industry share a symbiotic relationship—one cannot exist without the other.

**Royal purge**

_Surya Thapa in Kathmandu, 23 July_ 2

The budget allocated Rs 329.2 million for royal palace expenses against Rs 163.6 million recommended by the special session of the House of Representatives called by the five agitating political parties. The parties also demanded the dismantling of the royal council, but the new budget increased its expenses by more than Rs 1.32 million from the previous year. After parliament was dissolved last year, the royal palace budget was cut by 53.2 percent to Rs 63.1 million in last year’s annual budget. This year the budget was decreased by Rs 56.7 million, but it doesn’t document why or on what grounds.

Some speculate that it had to do with streamlining staff in the royal palace, others would like to believe criticism from the political parties had an effect.

The new royal budget allocation is still extravagant, considering it amounts to more than the sum allocated for the three most endangered-affected districts of Rolpa, Rukum and Salyan. The 2001 census shows that the total population in those districts was 814,000. Based on that number, the government set aside Rs 323.6 million for the districts. Simple arithmetic: Rs 635 will be spent every single minute for the royal palace. Meanwhile, the good people of Rolpa, Rukum and Salyan will receive only Rs 527 per person annually.

Budget breakdown for the royal palace -

- One year: Rs 329.2 million
- One month: Rs 27.4 million
- One day: Rs 914,000
- One hour: Rs 35,000
- One minute: Rs 0.55
- One second: Rs 11

**Salvaging peace**

_Ghanta Ra Bichar, 23 July_ 2

Former minister Nareendra Jha was gunned down by unidentified men in the capital on Monday. However, peace talks in limbo, the dashing of the masses has mysteriously disappeared from the national arena. He left for London a month ago, and nobody seems to know when he’ll return. What we do know is that Jha didn’t hand over documents pertaining to the second round of peace talks or brief the new cabinet before he left. All the members of the new team, Kamal Thapa and Prahlad Chandra Shrestha have a few Xerox copies of some of the agreements signed between the government and the Maoists.

Our sources say that Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) and Krishna Bahadur Mahara don’t have any of the documents. Apparently the Thapa government had to rest peace talks from scratch so it’s quite an achievement to have persuaded the rebels to sit for the third round. These latest developments indicate that an invisible power game is ingiting the Maoists to return to the jungle by tying their doubles on the implementation of the agreements reached in the second round of talks.

The table has turned and now there is a distinct possibility that the nation will ask for the participation of the security forces to ensure the government’s commitment to the talks. They should have been part of the negotiations from the very beginning. Things can still go well if the government will guarantee the safety of the Maoist negotiating team in writing as they have demanded.

Saphalya Amatya in Nepal Samacharpatra, 14 July

It is a matter of national shame to have Kathmandu on the UNESCO list of endangered heritage sites. After seven sites were identified in 1979, the entire Valley was put on the world heritage list so residents would feel more included and protected for their protection. More than two decades later the picture is very different from what the Unesco hoped for. Unesco was frozen in 1990 and has taken a toll on the sites.

Following the change in national politics, the leaders at the helm of the parties ignored the preceding set up by the Department of Archaeology (DoA), which is responsible for the protection of heritage sites. Even causes in to pressure from brushing residents who refused to dismantle buildings constructed against Unesco standards.

The United Nations body repeatedly warned the Nepali government to urgently implement separate work plans for more sensitive sites like Bhaktapur, Hanumanhoka and Patan to stop illegal construction. Three years ago the DoA announced a plan to categorise houses built around heritage sites. If material was material then on again, after a year or so, it did not last for a few constructions for disbaring building codes. This was a mere slap on the wrist as nothing further was done. Later, a committee chaired by the prime minister was also proposed to tackle the problem of illegal construction but it never saw the light of day.

Hence all what might happen were dropped at the World Heritage Committee meeting in Helsinki last year. Immediately after, a three-member team of experts visited Kathmandu and met with political leaders, government officers and the media. They examined the reasons for physical and cultural deterioration and recommended immediate protective actions. The government did not take heed.

And this is how we find ourselves on the endangered list. All of us, both the government and citizens, have a hand in this failure. Our inability to care about what is our share heritage will probably lead to the arrival of international teams to step in. To get Kathmandu off that list is a huge challenge. It requires an enormous amount of political commitment, bureaucratic determination, human resources, the involvement of local bodies and the general public.

JAN CHAUHAN

23-31 July 2003 NEW DELHI TIMES 155

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

_This charity’s budget for the fiscal year is to be used as follows: a begging bowl will be bought per person to beg for outside assistance_ 2

Bijoy Chauhan, July

_The Maoists cheated me with sweet words about finding solutions through peaceful negotiations. Girija Prasad Koirala betrayed me by saying one thing and doing another, even the king deceived me... and now, their deceit against me has turned out to be a betrayal of our country._

-Sher Bahadur Deuba, former prime minister and president of Nepali Congress (Democratic), in Ghanta Ra Bichar, 25 July.

Endangered Valley

_Bhaktapur_ 2

_Matin Bajracharya_ 2

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Back at Sundarijal >40

‘Between hope and frustration...’

Amidst a health scare while in solitary confinement, BP Koirala is nervous with excitement that his wife, Sushila, will be allowed a jail visit. But when it doesn’t happen, he oscillates between hope and frustration. The papers say that members of the Rastra Panchayat have been denouncing Indian MPs who have called for his release. BP wonders whether it wouldn’t be better to widen the international pressure for his release, with perhaps the intervention of US President Jimmy Carter, especially because of his concern for human rights. He writes: “Human rights are not just a question of concern to our country—it is the concern of all the members of the UN.”

Tuesday, 12 April 1977

[Notes on margin]

Pneumo-coccus what is it?
Dr Bhattarai BP 11.x00
Started taking Rosicillin

Sundarijal

I was expecting Sushila today, because yesterday the Ass Anchaladish had given me the impression that the interview would take place soon to speed up the legal proceedings also. I was in great excitement and tension the whole day. In the afternoon and today road today’s Gorakha and R Nepal both of which carry the statement by the National Panchayat members who have condemned the statement of some members of the Indian parliament demanding my release. Therefore, I started suspecting that since the Nepal govt is trying to create an impression that legal proceedings have started against us, yesterday’s visit of Ass Anchal was in furtherance of that objective. A show of motion. I don’t know what was the statement from the Indian side in our support but from the condemnation statement from the panchayat side I could gather that there is a demand in certain political circles, in India at least, for my release. It would be more appropriate if our supporters in other countries emphasised the barbarous character of my detention—in solitary confinement—and demand an open and fair trial. The question of human rights, which has been so forcefully put on confinement—and demand an open and fair trial. The

Today in the afternoon, Dr Bhattarai came without notice with a mobile set of x-ray apparatus. Two x-ray photos of my chest were taken. The culture finding of my sputum was positive this time—pneumo cocci—for which Dr Bhattarai has prescribed an antibiotic. What is this pneumo cocci? Something connected with a lung disease? I have been progressively feeling run down and getting emaciated day by day. Dr Bhattarai has asked me to send my 1st urine tomorrow morning. Missing of pulse beats ECG continues. Today also there was some blood in the sputum, but in diminished quantity. My blood pressure is unusually high and unusual for me who has been used to low blood pressure. I am very tired today. I did not do my usual routine work even. Partly it was due to my tension expecting Sushila any time of the day.

Wednesday, 13 April

Sundarijal

Today is new year’s day according to the Nepali calendar. The whole day I remained in keen excitement hoping that I could interview Sushila and alternated with excitement and depression, between hope and frustration thinking of a prospective interview with Sushila. As Ass Anchaladish had given me the hint that she was already in Kathmandu. Perhaps Srinivasa is also here, as may be Nona with her children. One ear was permanently set towards the gates and the roads for any unusual sound or bustle of activity. Many times when the horn sounded I rushed to the window from which moving vehicles are visible on a very small stretch of the road—although today being a holiday there wasn’t much movement. This tension is killing me, and such incessant excitement makes me exhausted, and on top of that I get frustrated.

I did some writing today—a rambling history of the Nepali Congress but it kept me busy most of the morning and part of the day. I go on writing whatever occurs to my mind without caring for the language and bother to discriminate what to keep in or what to leave out, or leave in...—therefore everything is haphazardly piled up together. The primary purpose of this exercise is to keep my mind busy, but at the same time to do some useful work which can be set in proper order later on when the primary need of the occupation of the mind is not so pressing.

I have started taking an anti-biotic for pneumo cocci whatever it is—since this morning. 4 hourly for 4 days. I am most reluctant to use anti-biotic but I thought that in view of the serious nature of the infection I should take it. I took anti-biotics more than 4 months ago. I think 3 times a year is not an excessive intake of this kind of drug. I had suggested some other anti-biotic but Dr Bhattarai thought that ampicillin to be the specific for this kind of trouble. I had suggested either Erythromycin or renfylol, or Mantidex, but he sent Rosicillin. Anyway, I have to depend upon Dr Bhattarai’s judgement now more than anybody else because he is the only man made available to me. Dr Bhattarai is very fond of new medical gadgets because at the slightest pretext he puts the patient—at least he had done so with me—on all kinds of pathological and other examinations. He is handicapped in the discharge of his medical function because all the exams have to be done here in the prison itself. He can’t take me to the hospital. Moreover, it appears no doctor from a civilian hospital is allowed, hence I am not getting an eye specialist to examine my eyes, because obviously the military hospital has no eye dept or an eye specialist. Otherwise Dr Bhattarai would have sent him here. I think Dr Bhattarai is director of the military hospital with the rank of colonel—boss of the hospital dept in the army. Dr Bhattarai is perhaps his assistant. Bhattarai is a more congenial person but he believes in overmedication.

The End and the Beginning

by WISLAVA SZYMBORSKA

Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska, 80, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1996 for poetry “that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality”.

A little boring.
From time to time someone still must dig up a rusted argument from underneath a bush and haul it off to the dump.
Those who knew what this was all about must make way for those who know little.
And less than that.
And at last nothing less than nothing.
Someone has to lie there in the grass that covers up the causes and effects, with a comicstrip in his teeth gawking at clouds.

13
HISTORY AND CULTURE
25 - 31 JULY 2003
NEPALI TIMES
155
Face of Nepal: Jan Sahar, Harka Gurung
(Bookworm)

Jan Sahar
Image: Harka Gurung

Rs 2.150

A unique collaboration between a British artist and a Nepali scholar, this book celebrates diversity in a country that is like no other. Jan Sahar’s sketches were already widely appreciated when a few years ago she began to work in oils. Her paintings and drawings of the people of Nepal are immediately recognisable for their truthfulness and soul. Harka Gurung, a highly regarded researcher and a prolific writer on Himalayan life and sciences, provides comprehensive information in this remarkable book.

Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley

5 Bangl

(Bookworm)

Academy, 1995
Rs 1.200

In the 1970s, the author, a noted painter and a leading authority in Nepali art, undertook the creation of an inventory of stone sculptures in the Valley. This book is the second and last volume in an archival project for which Bangl meticulously gathered material and took photographs. His landmark work alerted the world to Nepali art that inspired other research work. It contributed to the three cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur with a few other rocky areas outside the Valley.

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Peace Keepers

Suitable for:
Nepali madhesi, 2003
Rs 200

The cartoons in this free booklet contain what we already know: this is an insightful, talented artist who has a keen eye and a tight touch. One of Nepal’s foremost political cartoonists, his work has appeared regularly in Nepali Times and Herol Khatkaphata. His work in Peace Keeping expresses a wider global perspective with a freshness we have come to expect.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

What you burn is what you breathe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pollutant</th>
<th>PM10</th>
<th>PM2.5</th>
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KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fire below 10 even more so. (PM10) is the most dangerous air pollutant since it tends to get stuck deep within the lungs. PM10 levels in Kathmandu valley have improved because of the rains (see p.16) as this figure for Putali Sadak from Thamel.

Further reading:
• PM10: An imprecise particulate concentration of 50-70 microns per cubic meter of all last month, much lower than the pre-monsoon figure for the same location of 312. Putali Sadak is generally more polluted than Thamel, but even here this time the level was below the national standard of 120. Enjoy the fresh air while you can.

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WAKE UP

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Nepali madhesi, 2003

Peace Keepers

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Rs 200

The cartoons in this free booklet contain what we already know: this is an insightful, talented artist who has a keen eye and a tight touch. One of Nepal’s foremost political cartoonists, his work has appeared regularly in Nepali Times and Herol Khatkaphata. His work in Peace Keeping expresses a wider global perspective with a freshness we have come to expect.

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15 minutes of fame

TRISHNA GURUNG

Never mind Mt Everest and our double triangle flag. There is another thing that distinguishes us among the community of nations: Nepal Standard Time, which is 5 hours and 45 minutes ahead of GMT.

More significantly, it is 15 minutes ahead of Indian Standard Time. And that sets us apart, because it is the only time zone in the world that is only 15 minutes different than that of an adjacent country.

The sun rises in Dhangadi 33 minutes after it dawn in Bhadrapur, not really an oddity since the whole of China is one unwieldy time zone. When it is six in the evening at the Friendship Bridge at Kodari, it is already nine at night across the Bisure Kosi on the Chinese side.

In the Mallika period, Kathmandu residents had their own traditional way for telling time. If you wanted to know the exact time, you went to a pond near Hanuman Dhoka where an official would tell you how many palms had submerged since dawn. Each palm had a tiny hole and would fill up in exactly 24 minutes. "This method was OK for us until the Westerners arrived," explains Rambir Acharya, professor at Balbhadha Campus.

And with them came global time zones. Set in 1886, it agreed to use the Greenwich meridian as zero and measure 24 standard meridians on longitudes 15 degrees apart. But it was not till 1950 that we set our watches for the first time to Nepal Standard Time, with the meridian at Mt Gauri Shankar, 106km east of Kathmandu. It wasn’t Mt Everest because Gauri Shankar was closer to Nepal’s centre of gravity, as it were.

It was a choice that set our clocks 10 minutes ahead of India, which at the time used the longitude that passed through Calcutta. When our neighbours switched their meridian to Hyderabad in 1971, we officially had four degrees of separation, and pronto, found ourselves a further five minutes ahead of the Indians.

With the information age, there is now some grumbling that we should set ourselves to Indian time. Acharya is unperturbed. He told us "Why should we change something that is well established, scientific and accepted?" Apparently it’s not as simple as rounding off to the nearest zero. More nationalistic naysayers will probably dismiss the idea simply on the grounds that our perceived lead over India will narrow.

How much are those 15 minutes worth? For most Nepalis it is part of an inbuilt elasticity when it comes to punctuality—the foundation of the old ‘Nepali Stretched Time’ joke. It is our grace period, a quarter of an hour that we tend to—every appointment and still consider ourselves to be “on time”. Even if we are, technically, 15 minutes late.

+5 3/4 =

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Updated rough guide

Since things are changing so rapidly in Nepal, many of the most popular tourist guidebooks are quickly getting out of date. Reviews are needed urgently before the next tourist season so that visitors are familiar with the country and won’t feel lost. A quick rundown, therefore, of the chapter that need tweaking.

FACTS ABOUT NEPAL: Nepal is a landlocked Himalayan kingdom of natural fascination. Situated between India and China, it has history, geography and some arithmetic. It is 50,000 sq miles in area, but visitors are advised before departure to make sure it still exists.

GETTING THERE: Half the fun and excitement about Nepal is getting there. Kathmandu is connected to the rest of the world by a national flag carrier which makes the journey both unpredictable and full of surprises, giving visitors a taste of Nepal even before they get there. It is advisable to get to the airport at least two days before departure just to make sure your flight has not been pre-posted, and to stay on for a day or two after the scheduled departure in case it is postponed. Make sure you are well stocked on food and water.

WHAT TO BRING: Due to the global greenhouse effect, Nepal’s climate is changing fast. Before leaving for Nepal, it is a good idea to check the forecast and pack your flip-flops for the rule to the suspended Kumbhu Waterfall by the green mawsons of the Western Caves.

HEALTH TIPS: The good news for travelers is that small polio has been eradicated from Nepal, however there are still some exotic diseases like: diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis A, B, C and D, typhoid, cholera, yellow fever, rabies, giardiasis, Japanese encephalitis, kala azar, meningocoeal meningitis, malaria, amoebic dysentery, whooping cough, dengue, tuberculosis, gonorrhea, diarrhoea and motion sickness. It is recommended that you start taking your vaccinations at least one year prior to your intended departure date.

ELECTRICITY: Nepal has the highest per capita hydropower generation potential in the world, but you would be able to tell because Nepalis are a modest people and they keep their energy capacity a doubly-guarded secret.

NATIONAL SHUTDOWNs: Nepal is a land of festivals and shutdowns. Predicting the exact date for shutdown is not easy, since unlike the Gregorian calendar, the country is governed by a lunatic calendar.


While trekking: You want my bunuelas and a $100 revolutionary tax? You must be kidding me. = Naai, dama ko.

Around town: There are flaps in my bed, I’m going back to Tokyo = Made saha ra apirke le tokyo. I want donut and jam. = Euta chukha jam dinoos. Is your rice working? = Uhu, bhut-bhat fast working. Which way to Patanpurthur? = Patanpurthur le kami sab ko rachayala gaamu.

Kishore, momo man

A rms gesturing vigorously, Kishore Raj Pandey explains the difference between Mongolian and Aryan momos lies in the soya sauce. It’s easy to see the businessmen behind the Belle Momo chain of restaurants is a connoisseur. ‘I’m better in theory than in the kitchen,’ he laughs. ‘But I have enhanced the taste of momos using a secret combination of spices and flavours.’

For Kishore, appreciation for the delectable dumpling began in his childhood growing up near Hanuman Dhoka. As he and his friends gobbled down plentifuls of momos at Jharna Restaurant, a hole in the wall on a small lane leading towards Freak Street, held watch in fascination as the shopkeeper deftly created the delicate four wrappers.

Years later, as a young hotel management graduate from Germany, he joined the Yak & Yeti Hotel, where he worked his way up to assistant general manager before moving on to a seven-year stint at Hotel de la Annapurna. His first independent project was Bhanracha Ghar: a Nepali restaurant set in a faithfully restored aristocratic house that offered more than the routine dal-bhaat-tarkari. As locals, expats and tourists flocked there, Kishore noticed one thing: everyone loved the momos, whether as a main meal, an entire or a snack washed down with local firewater.

He was struck by the universal appeal and noticed that white food fads like the burger and pizza craze came and went, the little momo was always king. So, when the time came to expand his business he went with his gut instinct and took the momo south of the border to posh Connaught Place in the heart of New Delhi. Now, Kishore has brought Belle Momo home to Darbar Marg. In the pleasant outdoor seating area, Kishore expansively explains the momo’s journey across the mountains. ‘The momo originated in China as dim sum and was adapted by the Tibetans,’ he explains. ‘Traders returning from Tibet brought the bite-sized momos home, and that is how we find them in their present shape and form in Kathmandu.’

Belle Momo has a mouth-watering selection, the prices are wallet friendly and it’s spotless as so not to impair your syim. Kishore decided his products had to be healthier so he had his chefs work on a way to make juicy, melt-in-the-mouth momos sans the traditional dollop of lard at the core. Even vegetarians who are generally ignored by momo-makers will be delighted with the peanut and paneer momo. (shweta Bajracharya)