



Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd,
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Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Lalitpur
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Tel: 01-5543333/5523845 Fax: 01-5521013
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hattiban: 01-5547018/17

THE CRAFT OF GRAFT

W e as a society have so come to accept corruption as a part of life that when a businessman and ex-minister decides to come clean and make up for past sins, we dismiss him as a crackpot.

Hari Prasad Pandey had publicly confessed through media two years ago (see 'Mea Culpa', # 92). This week, he appeared on the NTV talk show Dishanirdesh to tell Vijay Kumar Pande that since the government wasn't interested in punishing him, he was punishing himself. He is still serving a three-year self-imposed house arrest in Pokhara, and surviving on a daily prison ration of Rs 15. He has set aside Rs 25 million, roughly equivalent to the bribes he says he has given and the tax he evaded during his career, which the government can use for a good cause. The government hasn't taken him up on the offer, so he is spending the money on schemes like a scholarship program for 40 young women to get college degrees.

Hari Prasad Pandey says he didn't accept bribes when he was minister, he is just atoning for the *ghoos* he gave to further his business interests. Most other politicians, bureaucrats, officials and businessmen aren't as worried about bad karma. For anti-corruption watchdogs, the most difficult part is figuring out where to start. When corruption is so endemic, so accepted, and is such a given, how do you decide which crook to run after first, without making it look like political vendetta?

After a decision to investigate is made, and if you can penetrate the secretive netherworld of officialdom that leaves no paper trails, then you hit the brick wall of public apathy. This is the so-what's-new mentality, and the conspiracy of silence allows the corrupt to lie low for things to blow over, as they inevitably do. The judiciary, civil society and law-enforcement will ignore reports because they expose inadequacies and also because it means more work. The politicians will make sanctimonious noises, but they will never rock the boat and will pretend to look the other way.

If someone gets rich quick, it always means someone else gets poor fast. All corruption ultimately affects the ordinary citizen. Often, the effect is direct: a patient who dies because of fake pharmaceuticals, pedestrians who suffer chronic lung disease because officials are paid off to allow unlimited diesel car imports, politically connected borrowers who default billions from banks and endanger ordinary depositors, children who die of measles because money for the vaccines was stolen.

Then, there is the indirect effect: the high cost of electricity because past ministers were bought off by conscienceless contractors to rip the country off, an official who tried to secretly sell Nepal's geostationary orbital slot to the highest bidder, another official who gave away our fifth freedom rights to a foreign carrier for free.

Like the garbage that lies uncollected because the municipality is now run by unaccountable people no one elected, the stench is pretty overpowering. Only by putting into place a credible mechanism to clean up graft will we ensure long-term peace.

Where shall we start?



SUBHAS RAI

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Security of secularism

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

Last 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 Tahachal casino. Their next point of call was a dance restaurant in Thamel where they wine and dined for an hour or so. Then it was time to dance. By the time they got into a famous disco in Kamladi, it was well past midnight.

Back to the casino for another round of blackjack, this time on Darbar Marg. When they staggered out into the sidewalk, it was nearing dawn so these high caste Hindus washed their faces with bottles of mineral water and headed off to pay their respects to Lord Pashupatinath.

Mid-morning Sunday the pair was driving back, on the way they lunched at a resort near Kurintar, took a ride in the cable car and arranged an elaborate puja at Mankamana. In the afternoon, a quick drive past the Chitwan National Park in Sauraha completed their Nepal visit. By Sunday evening, they were crossing the

border checkpoint at Raxaul for their long drive back to Patna.

These two businessmen spent more money in one night in Nepal than two budget trekkers probably would in a month. It is clear where the Nepal Tourism Board should be concentrating its promos, and its recent roadshow in south India shows it is clearly on the right track. Now, just make the RNAC flights to Bangalore more reliable.

When positioning Nepal in the Indian market, the Hindu prefix is our unique selling point. The product-mix of nearly a dozen casinos, dance restaurants, swanky discos, Lord Pashupatinath, and shrines of the entire Hindu pantheon offers incomparable competitive advantage. Indian tourists have the purchasing power to partake of all the vices available here, and then atone for them by pilgrimages to our holy sites.

If a country is merely a business opportunity, then there should be no reason to go secular. For Nepal, Hinduism is a logo tinged with the irresistible attractions of antiquity, exoticism, and mystery. A country, however, isn't just a postage stamp or a promotional flier of a travel agency.

Conquests may form a nation, but if it is to survive as a modern entity, it has to be a shared collective of its entire population. In order to remain peaceful and prosperous, Nepal's 'imagined communities' need to fashion an inclusive identity. Theocratic states once dotted the atlas. Today, the idea of a state religion survives only in the Arabian peninsula, the Vatican City and Bhutan. They are more archaic than quaint, and secularism in the affairs of the state is not ahead of its time anymore.

In a republican system, state theism has no justification. But in countries like Nepal where the politics of 'divine right' or the 'inheritance of conquest' are still extant, the debate over state religion is inextricably intertwined with the continuing relevance of other privileges

of birth. Religion in such societies is not dharma, the righteous path for human life, but dogmatism that breeds not love of one's own faith but hatred of others.

We like to remind ourselves that Hinduism in Nepal is more tolerant, but it has over time degenerated into ritualism. This orthodoxy is called Bahunbad after the community of priests that institutionalised discrimination in order to perpetuate its monopoly over mandatory ceremonies. Bahunism rests on the doctrine of inequality because its principles and practices are based on the accident of birth rather than merit, on the suppression of Shudras, Untouchables, and women of all castes and classes. Bahunism puts women in multiple jeopardy: they can't inherit property, learn the Vedas (Manu would have molten lead poured in her ears if she so much as even overheard a single stanza of the scriptures). They can't carry weapons, aren't eligible to preside over religious ceremonies. No Biswakarma woman can ever aspire to be the royal preceptor.

If all this isn't justification for secularism, nothing is. Recently, the crisis of legitimacy of a Hindu state has been brought into stark relief by Maobadi atheism on the one hand and monarchist dogmatism on the other. It is not a coincidence that the most vociferous propagandists of an activist monarchy are also Hindu zealots. The leaders of the Nepali Congress and UML which were primarily responsible for declaring Nepal a Hindu state have suddenly discovered the risks of a theistic political order anointed by a procession of Sankaracharyas and sundry god-men.

A paradigm is in a serious crisis when its best practitioners begin to desert it. What worked for Comrade Man Mohan Adhikari, will not work with Comrade Ram Prit Paswan. Secularism is an idea whose time has come, even in Nepal. And pilgrimage tourism from India need not suffer because of it. ♦

LETTERS

HODGSON
Kanak Mani Dixit's illuminating piece ('Looking for Mr Hodgson', #154) whetted the appetite of us Nepali historians to what other material Ramesh Dhungel can find in the archives at the British Museum. Some clarifications: Mathbar Singh Thapa was not actually 'cut down' but shot by Jang Bahadur, his nephew. Further, it seems that the 'Pahalman' informant of Hodgson Saheb was his sycophant rather than a court enemy of Jang

Bahadur and therefore not a reliable source of information. His '4 annas of security' in Kathmandu Valley after Jang's putsch is contradicted by the '*mohoria santaunna*' letter published by Kamal Dixit in his book *Parkhandai Bitla ki*? Dixit says inter alia, "....we can understand the atmosphere of terror that must have gripped the valley at that time (aftermath of Kot parba)...but no. The people seem to be least concerned by it. Barely six months later, the people are as

usual engrossed in their frivolities. They are celebrating Fagu with abandon and are merry-making in scandalous fashion. It was as if nothing untoward had happened...the public was not bothered whether it was Jang Bahadur who was raja or Fateh Jang. Neither were they worried, it seems, if the ruling power was retained by the king or was usurped by Jang Bahadur."

G Regmi, Sanepa

● I must applaud the fascinating research work of Ramesh Dhungel at the British Library delving into the papers of Brian Hodgson, and must commend Kanak Mani Dixit for successfully conveying the sheer significance of that scholarship in your newspaper. Dhungel's work is certain to not only unearth a series of interesting facts and important perspectives from a history little known and turbulent, but will also hopefully lead to some revision of established versions. They say victors write their own history, but one can

always make objective amends to the first drafts. Talking of revisiting history, William Dalrymple's new book, *The White Moghuls: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* has a protagonist, James Kirkpatrick, who as British Resident in the Court of Hyderabad converted to Islam, married a Muslim noblewoman, went native, and deeply irritated his Company masters. His brother, William, was sent to Nepal in the 1790s, and went on to write one of the first history books on Nepal in English, *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*. It would be interesting to see in these papers how Hodgson draws on Kirkpatrick's accounts, and supports or disputes them. Much later, Ram Mani Acharya Dixit, a confidante of the all-powerful Chandra Shumsher in his now out-of-print *Purana Samjhana* talks about how his Nepali draft of modern history was used liberally by another well known historian, Percival Landon. Ram Mani Dixit is too polite to accuse Landon of

plagiarism, but he does quietly hint at the importance of ethics, language and authority in scholarship. Hodgson's unseen papers might also shed light on the named and unnamed sources Landon used later for his own interpretations. Further, I have personally been very curious about the stone plaque that the British left behind in Nalapani, Dehra Dun, after Balbhadra Kunwar surrendered prior to the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 where the British generously acknowledge the valour of their Nepali adversaries. The plaque is now gone, and the Nepal of Dehra Dun have a festival on the hills every November but no one remembers the plaque. I wonder if Hodgson's papers have anything on that specific defeat that led to the signing of Article 8 of the Sugauli Treaty with the British in which the 'Rajah of Nipal' agreed that "accredited Ministers shall reside at the Court of the other in order to secure and improve the relations of amity and peace hereby established between the

two States".

From Hodgson's papers we have reason to doubt the depth of that "amity and peace", but we eagerly look forward to what else Ramesh Dhungel finds as he digs through the Hodgson papers.

Swarnim Waglé, email

NO ROAMING
In 'No freedom to roam' (#153) Navin Singh Khadka's observations about the NTC could apply to just about every government agency in Nepal: they lack competence in the technology of their departments. In the past 12 years, unqualified but politically connected people got jobs in these corporations where they promptly proceeded to make millions under the table. Technical and experienced professionals were dumped, and most of them emigrated. Nepal Tea Development Corporation (now privatised), Royal Nepal Airlines, Sajha Bus Sewa are just a few examples. The government policy is also

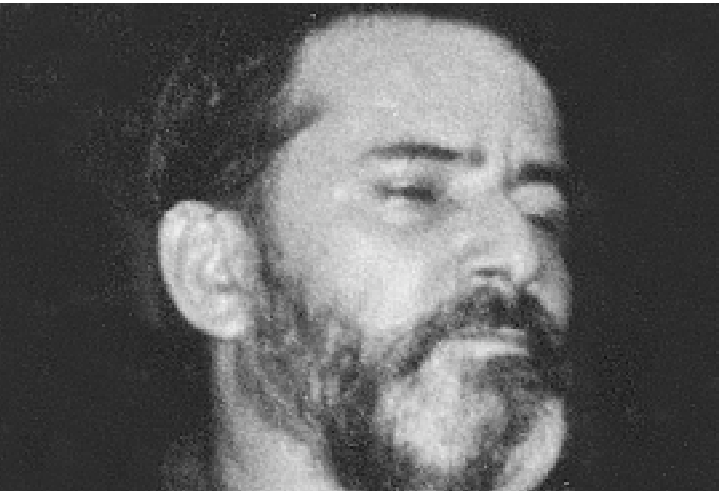


MIN. BAJRACHARYA



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Comrades at the crossroads



One can look at the present deadlock in the peace process as both sides circling each other warily, magnifying their power and reach, and build up bargaining positions ahead of forthcoming negotiations.

The past two phases of the talks have been used only for making contact, agreeing on confidence-building measures, and promising to abide by a mutually-agreed Code of Conduct during the truce. That both sides have blatantly flouted provisions of the Code is another story. The nitty-gritty issues have not yet come up in the talks, and that is the reason for the muscle-flexing before getting down to substantive political demands. Hence the delays, playing hard-to-get, the vanishing act, and sounding belligerent one day and conciliatory the next. One surefire way to put pressure on the other side is to threaten to go back to the jungle. The Nepali public has reason to be confused, and worried.

The truth is, neither side really wants to go back to war. Even the hard-nosed militaristic types on both sides know this is not a winnable conflict. But they aren't that keen on talks either, because talks are about compromise, and compromise means both sides giving something up. But neither side is prepared to do that. They don't want to derail the talks either, just delay it.

The Maoists have finally replied to the letter from the member of the government negotiating team. That letter was taken by Ram Bahadur Thapa to the leadership Delhi, and the reply took another seven days to come, probably because there must have been some discussion in the hierarchy

about it. The demand to meet the king face-to-face, and follow previous agreements is a genuine attempt to make sure that the negotiations take on momentum.

The Maoist leadership is against going back to war, but it needs to keep its impatient cadres in line, as well as ensure that they are fed and occupied. So they have to sound aggressive while bending over backwards to clarify that they are committed to the peace process.

The Maoist move last week to close down the liaison office smacks of immaturity. Among the reasons given was that military intelligence was carrying out surveillance of the premises. Actually, it would be surprising if the security forces didn't have a stakeout at Anamnagar. Then, the security chaps acted in a typically ham-handed manner by abducting Bharat Dhungana, blindfolding him, and asking him silly questions. The only plausible explanation is that it was in response to complaints from well-known businessmen that the Anamnagar office was being used as a collection point for extortion.

The Maoists opened their office after they came above ground as a public relations exercise and to establish legitimacy. They really didn't need PR anymore, so the office was expendable. Besides, closing it would send urgent signals that the talks were in jeopardy and portray the government as the side that was dilly-dallying.

It is important to understand why the Maoists agreed to the truce six months ago. The Royal Nepali Army's assertion that the Maoists sued for peace because they were under pressure from its offensive is a bit hard to swallow. Of the 21 major battles during

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

the emergency period last year, the Maoists were routed in only three: Khara, Rumjatar and Terathum.

There was some other reason, and this can only be international pressure. Internationally, the Maoists have analysed that they have to deal with three main forces: India, US and Britain. India and the United States have never seen eye-to-eye on Nepal, even without the Maoists trying to drive a wedge between them. The British, who are much more intelligent about these things, know that New Delhi and Washington working at cross-purposes would be disastrous. So, they have taken the lead in trying to forge a common position, hence the appointment of Sir Jeffrey James, the British special envoy.

It is in response to international pressure that the Maoists have shown some ideological flexibility, at least verbally, by saying that they are pro-free market, support multiparty democracy and human rights. After the last plenum two months ago, the Maoists also subtly changed their goal from 'Maoist New Democracy' to '21st Century Democracy'. However, this course-change

didn't stop the extortion, intimidation and threats at the grassroots. Hence, the exceptionally strong statement by the powerful Industrial Security Group on Monday warning Maoists to stop extortion and harassment of schools, intimidation of development projects and hospitals. The group consists of the bilateral chambers of commerce and embassies of the US, UK and India and what they have to say must be taken seriously by the Maoist leadership.

Wherever the Maoist standing committee and high command is meeting presently, it is probably discussing these developments carefully. It must be re-evaluating how, although Mao Zedong's 'longterm war' has only worked in China, Mao-style socialism was a disaster there. The present strategy of frontal longterm armed struggle is obviously not going to be successful, and there will be a school of thought within the movement that this may be the time to cash in on the gains to obtain maximum concessions. If the party leadership is responsible and sensitive to public opinion, they will take that decision and start the process of rejoining the mainstream. If they don't, they will be taking this country further down the path of total ruin and anarchy.

The Maoists will have also realised by now that the Nepali monarchy has strong support from regional and international powers. It is this support that gives the king the strength to resist not just the Maoists but also pressure from the political agitation.

Every revolutionary movement in

history has to deal sooner or later with the contradiction between an ideological leadership that sees the larger picture and moderates its stance as the revolution progresses, and a youthful, hardline and impatient cadre base that wants to strike while the iron is hot and damn the consequences.

Presently within the Maoist leadership, there exist three strands of opinion:

1. Look for a safe landing through a peaceful movement, give up arms if necessary.
2. Agree to change the nature of the struggle, but build on successes so far and keep the armed option open.
3. Deliver ultimatum to the government on demands and resume war if not met.

Moderate politburo members from an ideological bent would back Option One, while a majority would probably support Option Two, and there will be hardliners representing the cadre base which will want to go for Option Three.

These contradictions are usually patched over when a revolution is on track and there are military successes. But in times of crisis or uncertainty, fissures open up. It all depends how the top leadership handles the disagreement. Sometimes, as in the Philippines, there are violent internal purges of moderates. The nature of the response from the Maoists this week shoes Option Two won out. ♦

This commentary has been translated from the Nepali original. Puskar Gautam is a former Maoist commander.

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

Pravesh Saria, Chicago, USA

LAK

In 'Death in the family' (#154) Daniel Lak has admitted that death, like life, among the poor 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 casteism in Nepal, but Canada has racism. And even wealthy Canadians can barely meet medical and funeral facilities without insurance. If one dies in

Nepal, however destitute, at least one gets a funeral of one's faith and is not incinerated anonymously in a crematorium. The funeral procession may be made up of barefoot and dirt-poor people, but I would prefer that to the sterile and business-like reading of wills by impersonal lawyers.

D Golkhadi, Calgary, Canada

RED-FACED

I would like to thank CK Lal for his short review of *Understanding the Maoist Movement in Nepal* edited by me ('Red-faced Maobadis' #154). While I take 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 does recommend the volume to others and the error would do injustice to the writer concerned, R Andrew Nickson. The last paragraph on page xii of the Introduction contains four

references to Mashal. All these should read Masal, otherwise the argument therein does not make sense.

Deepak Thapa, Kathmandu

- Isn't it against the semblance of scholarly ethics for a contributor to review the book in which his contribution appears? CK Lal has a chapter in the book *Understanding the Maoist Movement in Nepal* edited by Deepak Thapa, yet he has reviewed it in your paper. Lal also suggests the book should have included the military's side of the story. You cannot include everything in one volume and, more importantly, what is the official version for some may not be the same for others.

Anil Bhattarai, Sujata Thapa Kathmandu

- CK Lal states in 'The times of Nepal' (#154) that "Nepal has seen in three years what most countries see in three decades or more..." A more correct statement would be "Nepal has taken three

decades or more to achieve what most countries achieve in three years or less." And we don't live in interesting times, in fact we are living in a very dull moment in Nepal's history. As Lal points out, the struggle for power has gone on in Nepal since Prithbi 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 illiterate gundas. And the intelligent ones have turned to outdated political theories.

Bhaskar Tripathy, email

RED ALL OVER

After three weeks in balmy southern Thailand, far from the corruptos and crazed Maoists that so dominate the news in Nepal these tragic days, it was with a deep sense of trepidation I 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 being

held by the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninists) in different parts of the country. They had stormed the stage, torn up the party flags and busted-up the loud-speakers, yelling slogans extolling their own weirdly specific version of the revolution. They then proceeded to tie up the Communist politicians on stage and kidnap them in front of thousands of people. Whatever 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 Marxists so much, never mind the Leninists? Aren't the reds supposed to despise and purge everyone else? Aren't they all in the same proverbial boat, no matter how leaky and pointless? And where does that leave capitalist roaders like myself? Maybe, just maybe, sidelined and forgotten to the extent that we can go about our lives and our "business-making" in peace while the various factions keep busy in persecuting and attacking each other! Hey, I could

live with that.

Oliver Jensen, email

WEATHER

I wonder why your Nepali Weather forecast is only for five days. Is it due to the five-day week in the Valley?

Deepak Dewan, email

Meteorologist Ngamindra Dahal replies: Weather forecasting is an imprecise science. Lack of data makes predictions even more difficult, and five days is the outer limit for meaningful forecasting in the Himalaya.

CORRECTION

- In 'Dark clouds again' (#154) the letter to the Maoists was written by a member of the government negotiating team, Kamal Thapa and not by the prime minister.

- In 'The Budget' (#154) we should have clarified that 70 percent of the development budgets made up of foreign loans and grants.

- In 'Looking for Mr Hodgson' (#154) 'British Museum' in the text and caption should have read 'British Library' in second references in the text and caption.

Breathing is harmful

BHUSAN TULADHAR

The arrival of the monsoon is literally a breath of fresh air for Kathmandu residents.

The rains flush out the pollutants, and air quality is much cleaner. 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 Putali Sadak station recorded 461 micrograms per cubic meter concentration of dust particles less than 10 microns, also known as PM10.

This is almost four times higher than the national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS) which is 120 micrograms per cubic meter for particles that size. The WHO guideline for PM10 used to be 70 micrograms per cubic meter (WHO does not have a guideline value for PM10 anymore because it says there is no safe limit for such fine dust).

But within a few days of the start of the monsoon, the PM10

concentration at Putali Sadak had gone down to less than 100 micrograms per cubic meter. The conclusion: the monsoon is the healthiest time for Kathmandu Valley residents, at least as far as breathing is concerned.

Records from major hospitals in Kathmandu indicate the prevalence of diseases related to air pollution is on the rise. At Patan Hospital, the number of patients admitted with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) has almost doubled in the past five years. Similar increases are observed at Bir Hospital and Teaching Hospital. The number of COPD cases shoot up in the winter when the air quality is especially bad (*see graphs*).

From November to May, PM10 levels along Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital exceeded the national standards on 99 percent of days. At these locations, the air could be classified as "unhealthy" more than 9 out of 10 days, "very unhealthy" in 7 percent of the days and "hazardous" in 2 percent of the days. These numbers should be sending out alarm signals to anyone

breathing Kathmandu's air.

The data also indicates that the air quality has deteriorated significantly over the past few years. In November 1993, Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO), a local NGO, took several 24-hour measurements of PM10 in Putali Sadak and reported an average value of 92 micrograms per cubic meter. Ten years later, the figure for PM10 in November had shot up to 270 micrograms per cubic meter.

Danish air quality expert Karsten Fungsang says that in Western countries, this level of pollution would cause the government to issue an emergency health alert requiring people to stay at home.

The main culprit in Kathmandu is vehicular emissions that get trapped because of poor air circulation. The dispersion of pollutants is especially bad in the winter when thermal inversion (where cold air flowing down from the mountains is trapped under a layer of warm air) creates a lid that keeps the pollutants sealed within the Valley.

The main sources of air pollution used to be the Himal Cement Factory, brick kilns and vehicles. Now, with the closure of the cement factory and the possibility of new environment-friendly brick kilns replacing old polluting chimney bhatts starting next year, vehicles are becoming the main culprits.

The Ministry of Population and Environment estimates that

the PM10 emission from vehicles in Kathmandu has gone up by more than 5 times, from 570 tons per year to 3,259 tons per year, in the past ten years.

At the alarming rate of 16 percent per year with which vehicles are being added to Kathmandu's congested streets the

number will double in five years. It is clear that neither Kathmandu's road infrastructure, nor its air is ready to handle this kind of increase. Still, hundreds of vehicles, especially polluting diesel vehicles, are added to the streets every day while new electric vehicles have been stuck

at the customs for over a year.

While drafting the National Ambient Air Quality Standard this year, the government promised to meet the threshold within three years—a target that is very ambitious, but not impossible. If the government is serious it needs to take more bold decisions and

Deadly Diesel

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.

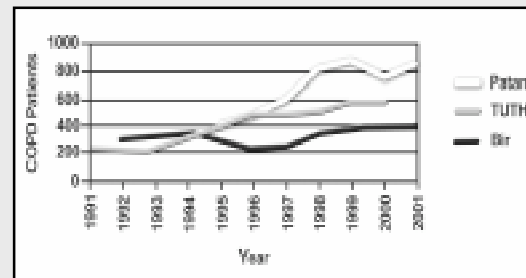
The first alarm rang when experts found up to 100 times more particulate matter in diesel exhaust than petrol. Then researchers in the UK found that 90 percent of the particles emitted by diesel engines are very tiny or less than 1 micron. This means that almost all the particles in diesel exhaust, which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

This was followed by studies indicating that of all 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

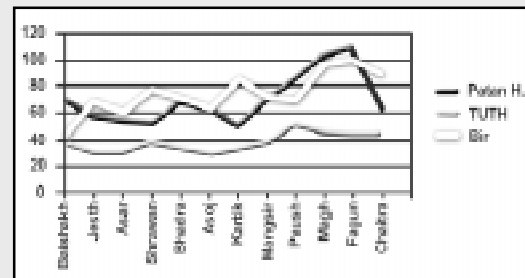
California Air Resources Board (CARB) declared diesel exhaust to be toxic air contaminants and said that chronic exposure to just 1 microgram per cubic meter of diesel exhaust will lead to additional 300 cases of lung cancer per million people.

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 SUVs is fashionable. It's not, it's deadly. Kathmandu-based international aid agencies are the largest users of these cars, followed by government ministers, projects and members of parliament who all ordered one during the Pajero scandal. Irony, isn't it, that agencies promoting sustainable development are the ones who use these cars the most.



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



The number of patients with chronic lung disease admitted to Kathmandu hospitals last year clearly shows the correlation with winter months.

DANGER: PM 10

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. PM10 is the main concern in Kathmandu in terms of air quality because its levels are way above national and international standards.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



A world of failures

Much is made in Nepal of failure. The failure of democracy, the failure of politicians, the king, the system, the foreign aid community, whatever... everything seems to be failing. The economy is flat at best, probably faltering or all too fragile, depending on your point of view. Development is stalled and has been for years. Politics is either moribund or downright destructive. All the institutions of state, up to and including the palace, aren't delivering the goods to the people. A return to war is looming. And the people... they're voting with their feet, leaving in droves and doing the one positive thing that seems to be happening in Nepal these days. Sending money home.

If it's any consolation to Nepalis, and I doubt that it is, the reek of failure is in the air everywhere else too. Look at Tony Blair and Britain. Cool Britannia is no more. The Sceptred Isle is abuzz over the suicide of a senior advisor to the Ministry of Defence, a man who was at the centre of a allegations that lies lay behind the pretext for the invasion of Iraq. George Bush's Washington is also contemplating a similar imbroglio. The president may have lied about Iraq having nuclear or chemical weapons. Or he may not have known the truth. Either way, Messrs Bush and Blair grow steadily more unpopular by the day. Fewer and fewer of their constituents believe what they say, or trust them to run the show in the best interests of the populace. When this happens in democracies, things get out of control. The social order comes under strain and the public mood is dark and ugly.

Formerly haughty global institutions are facing up to their failures too.

France, Germany and other opponents of the invasion of Iraq may have been latched onto 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 rife with failure. Some humanitarian successes in the 1990s—UNHCR 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 viral 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 40 percent of the adult population to anyone who wants to defend 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 lash 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

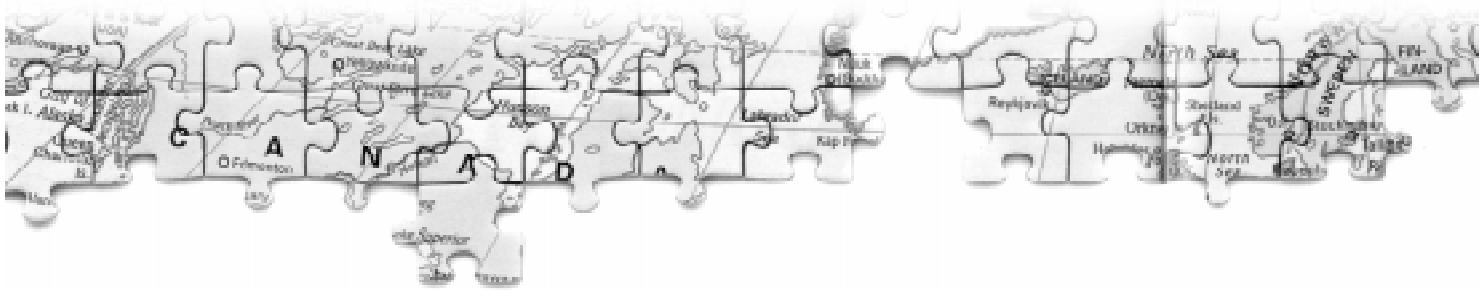
Not a great time in history, but a chance to re-invent ourselves.

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

If that's so, why has the United States itself been the greatest regulator of its own business sector? Busting trusts, smashing cartels, fining polluters, acting in the interests of workers—perhaps only when forced by circumstance and voter anger, but undeniably and admirably on occasion. Why then do successive State Departments and White Houses demand that developing countries have freer markets than are allowed in the United States? Failure, that's why.

Finally now, the media, which my detractors say—rightly, 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 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 dreck, or from the same political points of view. We rarely comfort the afflicted or afflict 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. Somebody 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 banning of the appalling Vikram diesel tempos. 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.



DINESH SHRESTHA

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 Sadak and Patan Hospital), one in a residential/tourist area (Thamel), two in urban backgrounds (Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Tribhuban 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 MOPE's web site (www.mope.gov.np) and a newly installed electronic board on Basantapur. Nepali 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 have given written instructions that news should be based on value, not on protocol. Let's see if this will be sustainable," the minister told us.

His official directives advised Radio Nepal, NTV, Gorkhapatra and RSS to exercise their own news judgement and not give into to pressure from senior government figures for coverage. "Minister Thapa has asked us to be 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 Siwakoti, 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."

(Naresh Newar)

For better or worse

When the UNDP launched its annual Human Development Report this week, government officials and donors had contradicting theories to offer on Nepal's development. While members of the donor community pointed at Nepal's demotion in the global human development rankings from 142 last year to 143 this year, officialdom 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 own spin to statistics.

"Nepal remains stubbornly 143rd in the world in terms of the HDI and large parts of the country remain extremely poor," said DfID'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."

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Tastes like eating a fruit

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BIZ NEWS

ECONOMIC SENSE

by **ARTHA BEED**

Making the grade

The new budget features the Beed’s pet peeves.

It would be presumptuous to imagine that the movers and shakers take note of this little column, but after three years of writing on economic and business issues, the Beed is happy to note his pet peeves are addressed in the new budget. Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani (*pic right, at the budget meeting*) has tried to inject life into an otherwise mundane budget format to come up with some innovative measures. If implemented, and if peace reigns, it will surely encourage economic growth.

That is a lot of ‘ifs’. Still, on top of the list is the effort to legitimise political contributions. Lohani’s measures seem to echo the frustration regarding the subject that has often featured in this space (‘Show us the money’, #113). The absence of legitimate ways for parties to raise funds and accept contributions made underhand methods—corruption—a necessity. Business people also found it easier to pass on their illegitimate earnings to them, who in turn did not disclose where it came from. Bringing political donations above board will force transparency on everyone involved.

Recognising private-public partnerships as accelerants of economic growth is laudable. At long last the government sees the private

sector as an important catalyst of economic growth. This is visible in the Build Own Operate Transfer (BOOT) agenda and the participation of private and professional institutions in policy formulation. For Nepal, the way ahead lies in partnerships and not in government, civil society, development agencies or private sector functioning each in isolation.

Lohani also announced the much-awaited divestment of government stakes in successful state-owned enterprises (‘On privatisation’, #72). The Indian experiment is proving to be successful, and by following their example, cash-strapped Nepali governments could have more liquidity. Taking the much

politicised transport and the oil sector head-on (‘The oil yo-yo’, #139) and signalling reforms would bring much needed stability to an industry that is plagued with a problems in quality, distribution and availability. The budget touched upon another Beed favourite—Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (‘Royal Nepal And Corruption’, #22). The decision to unbundle the enterprise paves the way for private investors to salvage the carrier and exploit its potential to be a cash cow. The budget also recognises the need to incorporate Bipalis into the Nepali economic mainstream. Hopefully the annual do of the Association of Nepalis in the Americas (ANA) in October will result in some concrete recommendations.

The challenge for the budget, however, is to make good on all the promises. Critics are already lining up an arsenal of writ petitions in court. Perhaps this time the national budget won’t fizzle out like damp fireworks. If the government really gets its act together, the Beed will happily eat the largest slice of humble pie regarding last year’s comments on the budget exercise (‘Who needs a budget’, #102). ♦

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

Nepal’s biggest project may also be its biggest scandal.

from ➡ p1

The power plant is located on the Gandaki Bend, one of Nepal’s most suitable sites for a run-of-the river scheme. The dam at the headworks (*right*) diverts water through a six km tunnel with a head of 124 m to the powerplant generating 144 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 seem to 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 \$130 million bid by the Italian consortium, Impreglio SpA. An open-ended bill 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 out 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 some geological complications, including the need to desand a mountain flank at Mirmi to protect the headworks. That overrun, insiders say, could have only amounted to maximum \$20 million. It was only in April when Impreglio sought a clearance letter to settle the final account of the project that the government realised that an excess \$50 million had been



paid for civil works.

Alarminglly, 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 \$130 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-Impreglio contract is under the ‘Fidic’ system, which makes the consultant all-powerful to recommend the cost of any work or equipment.

That contract was signed in 1997 during the Deuba coalition government with the RPP. MKI was allowed to recommend for the contractor \$50,000 at a time in extra costs, and if the government failed to pay the amount it was liable to pay interest on the amount. NEA sources told us 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 fox guarding the chicken coop.”

NEA

Danger zone



Conservationists battle to restore Kathmandu's ancient heart.



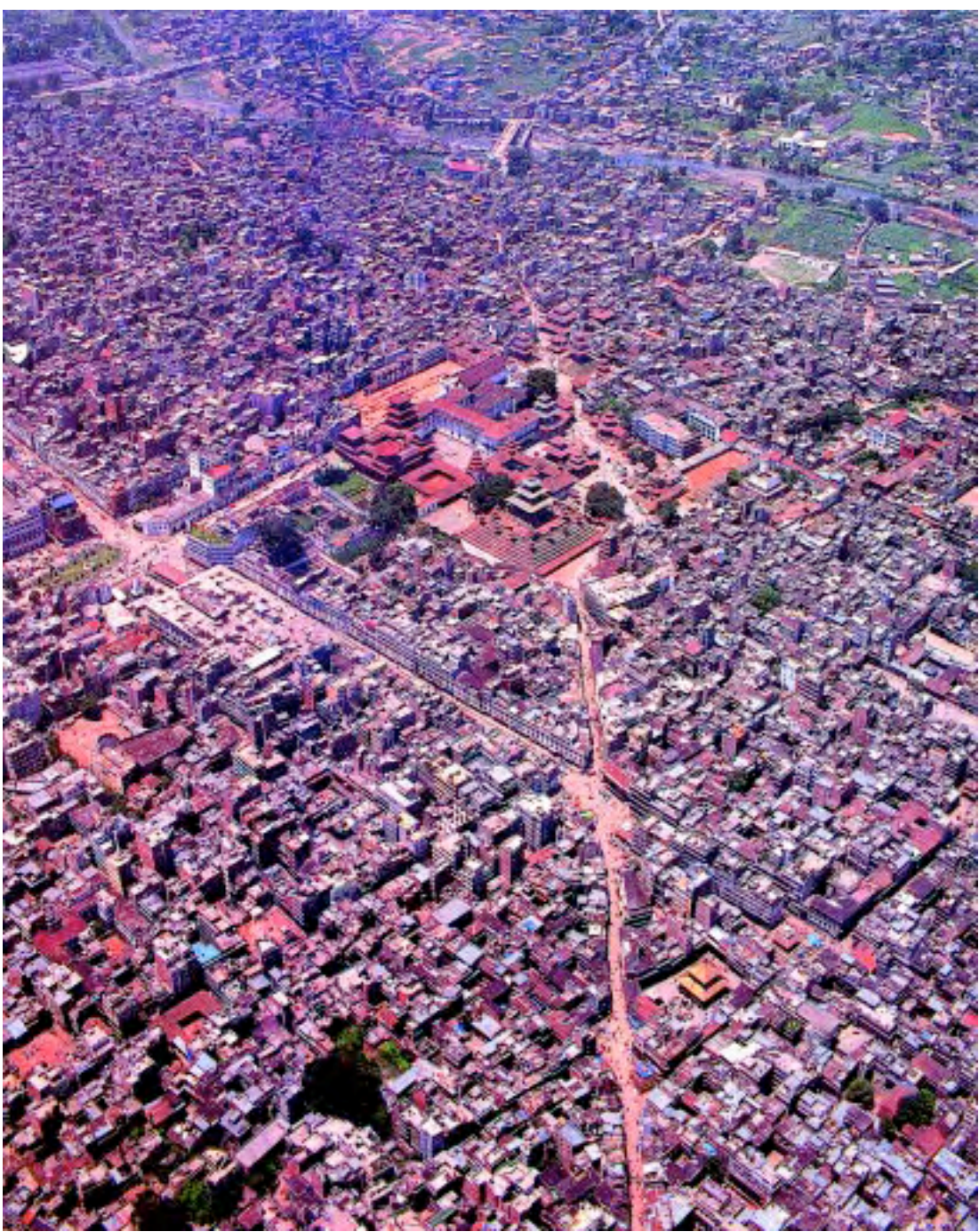
SOPHIA PANDE

The British historian, Perceval 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 epithet no longer applies. The temples have long since been outnumbered and rendered invisible 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 flying into Kathmandu today will immediately see that things haven't turned out as planned at the seven sites set aside by Unesco: the three Durbār Squares at Hanumandhoka, Mangalbazar and Bhaktapur, the stupas of Boudhanath and Swoyambhunath, and the temples of Pashupatinath and Changu Narayan.

On 4 July this year, Kathmandu was placed on the Unesco list of endangered sites—right alongside the Bamiyan



MIN BAIRACHARYA

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 *guthis*, altruistic individuals, conservation groups and even a government department are serious about 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 Charumati Stupa in Chahabil 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 Tripureshwor Mahadev Temple (*top, left*),



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OPINION

Aiding headliners

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, thrashed by drought, flood, armed conflict and infectious diseases. HIV/AIDS alone cost the continent some 6,500 human lives per day. (IPS)

Blurring the lines

UNITED 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 years 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. (IPS)

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 Anneli Jaatteenmaki, whose short-lived stint as Finland’s first woman prime minister recently came to an end. She had attacked her predecessor during the election campaign for being fork-tongued 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 investigation by his parliament for being “economical with the truth” is German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. But his case is very different. The opposition, still smarting from its narrow

Lying politicians

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



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 overstated 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 “WMDs”, as weapons of mass destruction are now called, “within 45 minutes”.

Does it matter whether this claim was strictly 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

When Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad hands over power in October to his successor, deputy premier Abdullah Badawi, he 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.

Malay’s form the largest proportion of the largest ethnic group in Malaysia—the Bumiputra (Sanskrit for ‘son of the soil’). Bumiputras make up 61 percent of the 24 million population, while the Chinese account for 25 percent and Indians (mainly Tamils) 7 percent. Some experts now say the main reason for ethnic calm is the policy of affirmative action towards Malays, which helped reduce income disparities. In a recent study, Professor Frances Stewart of Oxford University examined the links between violence and “horizontal inequalities”: social, political and economic differences between cultural or ethnic groups.

She says 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 aftermath of Chinese-Malay riots that broke out following the racially charged 1969 general election. That election saw the economically dominant Chinese making electoral gains—to the alarm of the ruling Malay-led alliance.

The NEP aimed to reduce poverty and restructure society so no occupation would be associated with a particular ethnic group (the Chinese and foreign interests controlled commerce, many Malays worked as fishermen and rural farmers 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.

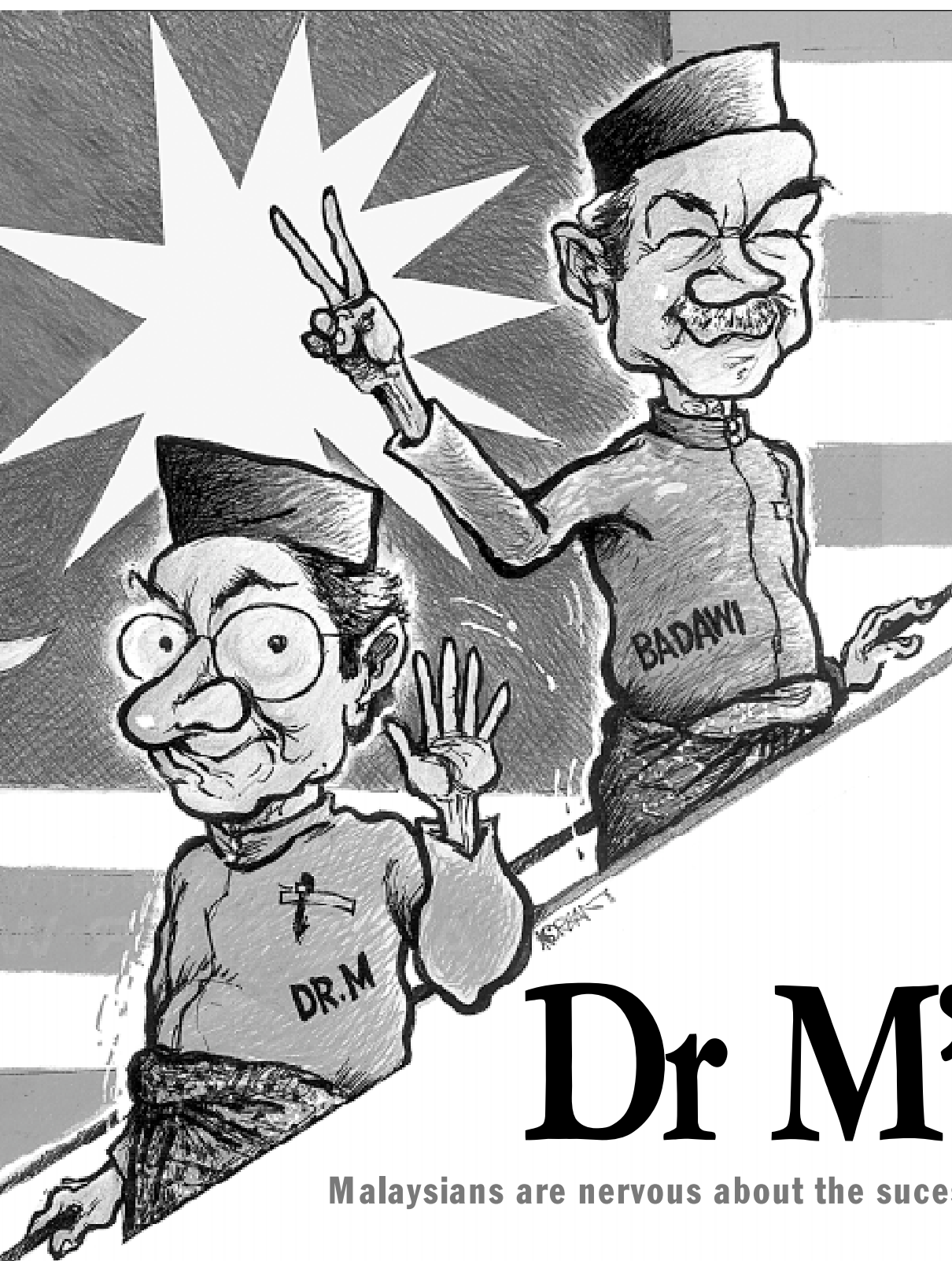
Corporations were required to employ a percentage of Bumiputras and government contracts were more likely to be awarded to Bumiputra bidders. Bumiputras dominated the public sector. Even now, newly listed companies must be 30 percent owned by Bumiputras.

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 the mid-1990s.

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

But 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.

Banks vs Big Biz

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 17-31 July

हिमाल

In line with suggestions from the World Bank, the government has handed over Rastriya Baniya Bank and Nepal Bank to foreign management. This idea hasn't worked anywhere else. In Nepal, the 'reform process' in these government-run banks has already begun, leaving us with no choice but to wait and watch.

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.

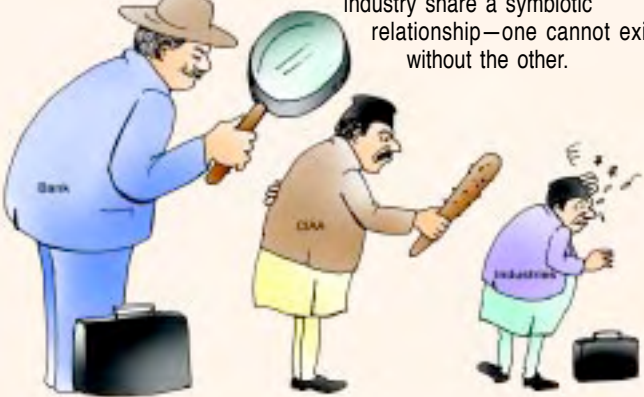
With such precedence, Nepal Bank's drive to collect 'bad debts' cannot be faulted. It has rightly targeted influential industrialists and businessmen who are defaulters. After all, how can a bank survive without repayment of loans? However, certain banking norms need to be followed. These have to do 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 forceful 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 businessmen 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 that 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 not be a mute spectator. It must come up with viable alternatives to rescue sincere and able industrialists. Banking and industry share a symbiotic relationship—one cannot exist without the other.

ROBIN SAVAMI



Royal purse

Surya Thapa in *Budhabar*, 23 July

बुधवार

The budget allocated Rs 329.2 million for royal palace expenses against Rs 116.3 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 1.82 million from the previous year. After parliament was dissolved last year, the royal palace purse was plumped up by 532 percent to Rs 619.1 million in last year's annual budget. This year the budget was decreased by Rs 58.7 million, but it doesn't document why or on what grounds. While some speculate that it had to do 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 total sum allocated for the three most insurgency-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 39,000
- One minute: Rs 635
- One second: Rs 11

Salvaging peace

Ghatna Ra Bichar, 23 July

घटना-बिचार

Former minister Narayan Singh Pun shot into the limelight when he played a key role in bringing the Maoists to the table in January. But with peace talks in limbo, the darling 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 Pun did not 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 Prakash Chandra Lohani have are a few Xeroxed 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 restart 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 instigating the Maoists to return to the jungle by fuelling their doubts 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 Maoists 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.



"This shanty'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!"

Bimochan, July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

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 (Democracy), in *Ghatna Ra Bichar*, 23 July.

Endangered Valley

Saphalya Amatya in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 14 July

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

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 responsible for their protection. More than two decades later the picture is very different from what the Unesco hoped for. Unchecked urbanisation since 1990 has taken a toll on the sites.

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

The United Nations body repeatedly warned the Nepali government to urgently implement separate workplans for more sensitive sites like Boudha, Hanumandhoka and Patan to stop illegal construction. Three years ago the DoA announced a plan to categorise houses built around heritage sites. It hasn't materialised so far, although a year later, it did blacklist a few constructions for disobeying 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.

Hints of 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 take care of what is our shared 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.

NIN BAIRACHARYA



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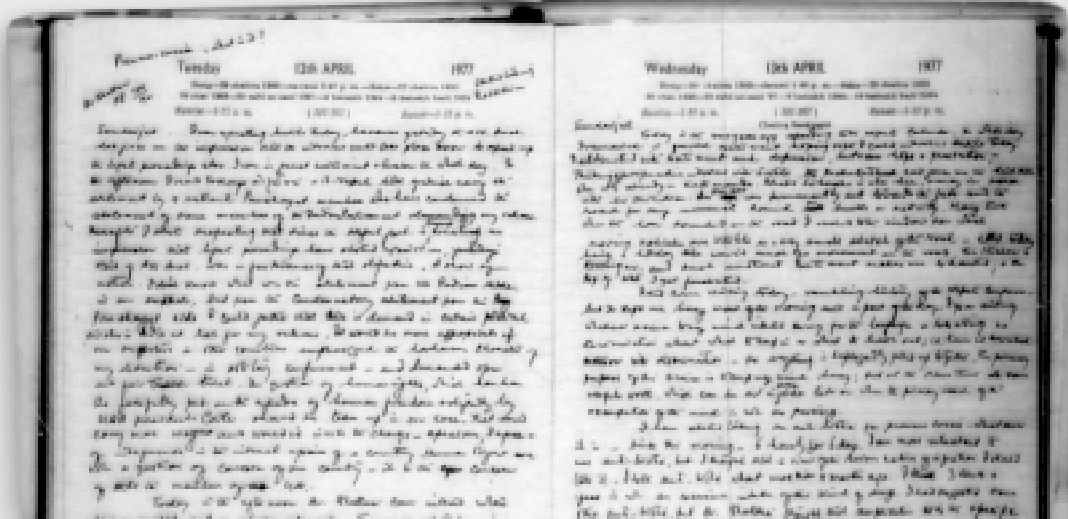
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Back at Sundarijal >40

‘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 Rastriya 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 2?
Dr Bhattarai BP 150/90
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 I read today's *Gorkhapatra* 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. Thereafter, I start suspecting that since the Nepal govt is trying to create an impression that legal proceedings have started against us, yesterday's visit of Ass Anchl 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 condemnatory 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 the agenda of human freedom and dignity by US President Carter should be taken up in our case. That would carry more weight and wouldn't invite the change—specious, I agree—of

interference in the internal affairs of a country. Human rights are not just a question of concern to our country—it is the concern of all the members of the UN.

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 ESB 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 fervid 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 Anchaldish had given me the hint that she was already in Kathmandu. Perhaps Sriharsha 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 bothering to discriminate what to keep in or what to leave out, ie leave it...wider dissemination—so 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—6 hourly for 6 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 minycillin, 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 Basnet is perhaps his assistant. Basnet is a more congenial person but he believes in overmedication.

POETIC LICENSE

by WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA

The End and the Beginning



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”.

After every war
someone has to tidy up.
Things won't pick
themselves up, after all.
Someone has to shove
the rubble to the roadsides
so the carts loaded with
corpses
can get by.
Someone has to trudge
through sludge and ashes,
through the sofa springs,
the shards of glass,
the bloody rags.

Someone has to lug the post
to prop the wall,
someone has to glaze the
window,

set the door in its frame.
No sound bites, no photo
opportunities,
and it takes years.
All the cameras have gone
to other wars.

The bridges need to be rebuilt,
the railroad stations, too.
Shirtsleeves will be rolled
to shreds.
Someone, broom in hand,
still remembers how it was.
Someone else listens, nodding
his unshattered head.
But others are bound to be
bustling
nearby
who'll find all that

a little boring.

From time to time someone still
must
dig up a rusted argument
from underneath a bush
and hail 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 cornstalk in his teeth
gawking at clouds.



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **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 the Janakpur Handicrafts Centre till 26 July at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4436944

EVENTS

- ❖ **Two plays:** *Andre's Mother* by Terrence McNally and *Dancing on Checker's Grave* by Eric Lane by the Theatre Program of the Central Department of English 1, 3 PM on 25 July at Tribhuban University, Memorial Hall, Kirtipur. Free for all.
- ❖ **Pipalboat Playback Theatre** share your stories on 17,18 August. Inside Saipal Academy, New Baneshwor. 4437746
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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. Renchen Yonzon speaks on "Environment matters" on 29 July. Free at IEM, Tripureshor. 4429638
- ❖ **ELD Training Workshops** Reporting skills, professional writing for project staff, at ELD Auditorium, Baber Mahal Revisited. For details: 4256618, 5541613. Email: eld@wlink.com.np

MUSIC

- ❖ **Acid Jazz, Live with Cadenza** at The Jazz Bar on 25 July at Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Live Acoustic Jam** 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Cafe, Thamel. 4256738
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Thunderbolt** with Ram Shrestha and Sabu Lama. 8PM onwards Wednesdays and Saturdays at the Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. 4416071

DRINKS

- ❖ **Fusion** features the Rusty Nails with their Jazz, Blues and more every Friday from 7:30 PM onwards. Happy Hour from 6-7PM. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Liquor Buffet** 7-9PM at the Splash Bar & Grill. Rs 550 per person. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **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 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 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Summer specials** smoked salmon soufflé, shrimp Newburg and crispy duck breast. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** now open in Patan opposite St Mary's School. Wood fired pizzas, Baskin Robbins icecream, cocktails and coffee. 5521755
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 4680083
- ❖ **All new buffet** for lunch and dinner at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Papaya salad**, seasonal vegetables with fillet or chicken and Italian icecream at Singma, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 552004

GETAWAYS

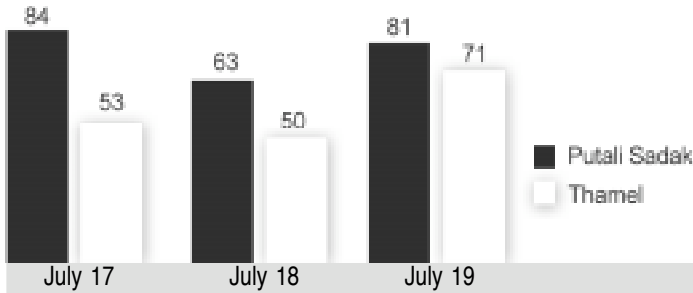
- ❖ **Five Star getaway deals** at The Fort Resort, Nagarkot. 4226799
- ❖ **Dakshinkali Package** every Saturday Rs 500+tax. 4370714, 4371537
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- ❖ **Great Godavari Getaway** special weekend packages. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **The secret of Kathmandu** Overnight package \$99. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse** Traditional Nepali farmhouse. 6631734.
- ❖ **Writing Retreat** Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 375280
- ❖ **Escape to Jomsom** this summer. Rs 3,999 per person at Jomsom Mountain Resort. 4496110
- ❖ **Reiki Level One Workshop** led by Elif Koksai on 1-3 August at the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Thamel. 4256618 Email: reiki@eld.org.uk

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



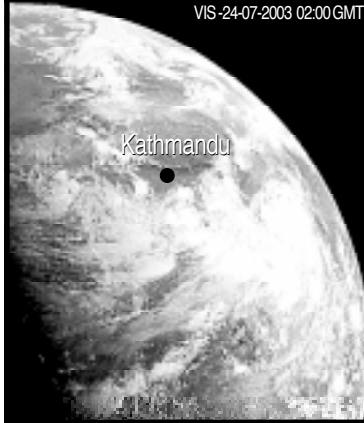
Good	< 60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	51 to 425
Hazardous	> 425

Fine dust below 10 microns (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 p4-5) as this week's figures for Putali Sadak and Thamel show. Thamel showed fine particulate concentrations 50-71 micrograms per cubic meter all of last week, 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 week the level was below the national standard of 120. Enjoy the fresh air while it lasts.



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-24-07-2003 02:00GMT



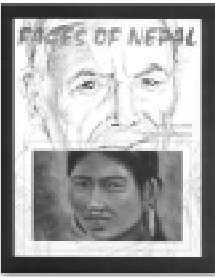
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows the pull of the double-typhoon over the South China Sea. The circulations have reinforced each other and brought dry near-Dasain northwesterly breezes, with even a night thunderstorm on Wednesday. While western Nepal is still getting some rain from the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal arm of the monsoon has been sucked away for now. The rains will pick up again where they left off by early next week. Till then, Kathmandu will get intermittent nocturnal showers.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM

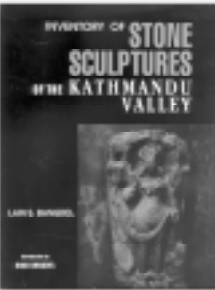


Faces of Nepal Jan Salter, Harka Gurung
Himal Books, 1999
Rs 2,1502

A unique collaboration between a British artist and a Nepali scholar, this book celebrates diversity in a country that is like no other. Jan Salter'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.

The Gods are Leaving the Country: Art Theft from Nepal Jürgen Schick
Orchid Press, 1998
Rs 1,500

Nepal has lost valuable artifacts of its cultural heritage in the last 25 years, most of which turn up in the West. Troubled by this trend, Jürgen Schick compiled a record over a period of eight years to produce concrete photographic evidence of stolen art. His work is invaluable not only as a record, but also to change purchasing policies of Western collectors and museums, and provide conclusive documentary material to support Nepal's right to have illegally removed art returned.



Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley Lain S Bangdel
Royal Nepal 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 Bangdel meticulously gathered material and took photographs. His landmark work alerted the world to Nepali art theft and inspired other research work. It concentrates on the three cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur with a few other pocket areas outside the Valley.

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

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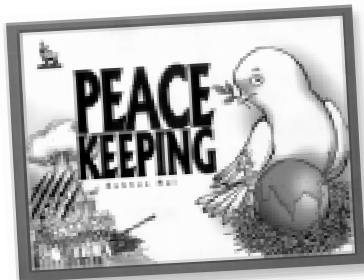
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For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5543333-36.



Peace Keepers

Subhas Rai
Himalmedia, 2003
Rs 200

The cartoons in Rai's first book cements what we already know: this is an insightful, talented artist who has a keen eye and a light touch. One of Nepal's foremost political cartoonists, his work has appeared regularly in *Nepali Times* and *Himal Khabarpatrika*. His work in *Peace Keeping* embraces a wider global perspective with a finesse we have come to expect.

Guess who's back? Arnold Schwarzenegger has returned in the third installment of the Terminator series. The last time around he said, "Hasta la vista, baby..." and he meant it. *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* more or less follows the same formula as the first two flicks: John Connor (Nick Stahl) is being hunted by a new terminator, the T-X, and once again our man Amie, the faithful but obsolete T-101, has to save him. The twist in the tale is that T-X comes in a beautiful but lethal female package played by Kristanna Loken, who is also preying upon a veterinarian Kate Brewster (Claire Danes). Why? You'll have to watch the film to find out! T3 should have Amie working some more of his action-packed magic, with a little (or lot) of help from the special effects department. Look out for some more memorable phrases delivered in his signature accent.

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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 32 minutes after it dawns 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 Bhote Kosi on

the Chinese side.

In the Malla period, Kathmandu residents had their own traditional way of 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 *pala* had submerged since dawn. Each *pala* had a tiny hole and would fill up in exactly 24 minutes. "This method was OK for us until the Westerners arrived," explains Sambaraj Acharya, professor at Balmiki Campus.

And with them came global time zones. Set in 1884, it agreed to use the Greenwich meridian as zero and measure 24 standard meridians on longitudes 15 degrees apart. But it was not till 1956 that we set our watches for the first time to Nepal Standard Time, with the meridian at Mt Gauri Shankar, 100km east of Kathmandu. It wasn't Mt Everest because Gauri Shankar was closer to Nepal's centre of gravity, as it were.

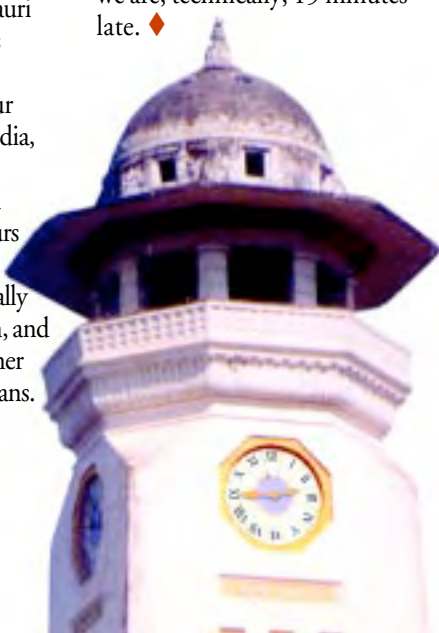
It was a choice that set our clocks 10 minutes ahead of India, which at the time used the longitude that passed through Calcutta. When our neighbours switched their meridian to Hyderabad in 1971, we officially had four degrees of separation, and presto, found ourselves a further five minutes ahead of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

With the information age, there is now some grumbling that we should set ourselves to Indian time. Acharya is unimpressed. 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 tack onto to every appointment and still consider ourselves to be "on time". Even if we are, technically, 15 minutes late. ♦



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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Updated rough guide

Since things are changing so rapidly in Nepal, many of the most popular tourist guidebooks are quickly getting out of date. Revisions 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 chapters that need tinkering.

FACTS ABOUT NEPAL: Nepal is a landlocked Himalayan kingdom of eternal fascination. Situated between India and China, it has history, geography and some arithmetic. It is 56,000 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-poned, 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 flipflops for the trek to the stupendous Khumbu Waterfall by the green meadows of the Western Cwm.

HEALTH TIPS: The good news for travellers is that small pox has been eradicated from Nepal, however there are still some exotic diseases left, like: diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis A, B, C and D, typhoid, cholera, yellow fever, rabies, giardiasis, Japanese encephalitis, kala azar, meningococcal meningitis, malaria, amoebic dysentery, whooping cough, dengue, tuberculosis,

gonorrhea, diarrhoea and motion sickness. It is recommended that you start taking your injections 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 wouldn't be able to tell because Nepalis are a modest people and they keep their energy capacity a closely-guarded secret. **NATIONAL SHUTDOWNS:** Nepal is a land of festivals and shutdowns. Predicting the exact date for shutdowns is not easy, since unlike the Gregorian calendar, the country is governed by a lunatic calendar.

USEFUL PHRASES:
Greetings and civilities:
Very beautiful! = *La-la, chha-chha!*
How's it hanging, bro? = *Bhat khanu bho?*
Hi, no money. = *Namaste, ma bideshi datri sanstha hoina.*
Whose father can do what? = *Kasko bau ko ke taga?*
On arrival at airport:
Is this the line for visa? = *Yo visa ko line ho?*
Is this the line for visa fee? = *Yo visa fee ko line ho?*
Is this the line for immigration? = *Yo immigration ko line ho?*
Is this the line for x-ray? = *Yo x-ray ko line ho?*
What the &*&#%#@! = *Ke garne.*
While trekking:
You want my binoculars and a \$100 revolutionary tax? You must be kiddin' me. = *Nai, dinna ke.*
Around town:
There are fleas in my bed, I'm going back to Tokyo = *Malai udus ra upiya le tokyo.*
I want donut and jam. = *Euta chukka jam dinos.*
Is your taxi meter working? = *Unh, bheri-bheri fast working.*
Which way to Pashupatinath? = *Pashupatinath le hami sab ko rakshya garun.*

NEPALI SOCIETY

Kishore, momo man



Arms gesturing vigorously, Kishore Raj Pandey explains the difference between Mongolian and Aryan momos lies in the soya sauce. It's easy to see the businessman 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 platefuls of momos at Jharna Restaurnat, a hole in the wall on a small lane leading towards Freak Street, he'd watch in fascination as the shopkeeper deftly pleated the delicate flour 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 Bhanchha 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 entrée or a snack washed

down with local firewater.

He was struck by its universal appeal and noticed that while 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 charts 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 so as not to imperil your system. 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-masticators will be delighted with the peanut paneer momo. ♦ (Sradha Basnyat)



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