Kathmandu Connection

Kathmandu used to be a transhipment point for narcotics, now it has also emerged as a global centre for human smuggling.

Shiva Gaunle

Not any human smuggling racket these days, and Kathmandu most likely will figure in the team.

Scams like: Nepalis travelling on fake passports, often with phony visas. Nepalis deported from cities around the world because the photos on their passports have been switched. Iraqis with fake Portuguese passports travelling to Europe through Kathmandu. Chinese nationals using fake Japanese passports bought in Bangkok transiting Kathmandu en route Kansai.

Kathmandu airport is not just where Nepalis use fake documents to get out of their country, it is also getting the reputation among the international human smuggling networks as an ‘easy’ airport to transit. Our lax controls, immigration desks with inadequate counterfeit detection equipment, rampant corruption, and a huge domestic demand for fake travel documents from Nepalis desperate to migrate for a better life make it an ideal jum-off point.

The last big losses in the Battle of the Letters, the Maoists replied Thursday to a government reply to their earlier reply to the government’s letter last week accepting an invitation to restart the stalled peace process.

The statement from Maoist leader Prachanda followed a government gesture Tuesday releasing three imprisoned Maoist leaders and giving details of the whereabouts of 35 cadres. “The government hasn’t agreed to all our demands, but overall its response is positive,” Prachanda said. “We must now move from technical issues to political ones.”

The Maoists have also asked the government to bring the political parties into the peace process.

Maoists agree to resume talks, want parties to join.

Naveen Singh Khadka

The talks may restart, but the peace process is still fragile. The code of conduct is being openly flouted by both sides, and the next round will have to move beyond confidence building measures to difficult political and military issues.

Landslides: 35 killed

OGOW—A massive monsoon cloudburst over central Nepal has left at least 35 people dead, most of them in landslides and floods near Manakamana. The Kathmandu-Pokhara Prithibi Highway has been completely washed off at two points. The Manang power house washo has been hit by landslides also buried five NEA vehicles.

The talks may restart, but the peace process is still fragile. The code of conduct is being openly flouted by both sides, and the next round will have to move beyond confidence building measures to difficult political and military issues.
The peace process was supposed to be about talking, not letter writing. Yet, the two negotiating teams are behaving like pen pals rather than negotiators by trying to find a way to get what they refer to as ‘**deadlock’’. One could argue that it is better that they fire missives at each other rather than missiles. And however provocative the language of the letters from the Maoists, there are compelling reasons to believe that they are not about to plunge themselves and the nation into a war at this time. No, it has been heaping on new demands and pre-conditions.

There is a growing crisis of confidence out there, and the government is doing very little to address it. The Maoists don’t seem to have gained either from the infighting between the palace and the parties. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why they have not gained either from the infighting between the palace and the parties. And, did you hear, it was the king who gave the Americans the necessary assurance that he intended to go for a fresh round of talks to reignite the peace process. Of course, this is an elongated east-west country, 80 per cent of which is occupied by the Mahalangur Himal. We follow ours, the king. When free medicines were distributed here recently to combat a meningitis outbreak, people gaped in awe as aid workers dished out medicines. People deride the insurgents publicly, about the excesses of the Maoists is now common knowledge. The power to roam, but none can deny us the privilege of rumour mongering.

The other day, an unidentified shopper in Jodhpur started spreading false reports, even from petty shopkeepers and officials has turned a large section of the population against them. People deride the insurgents publicly, about the excesses of the Maoists is now common knowledge. The power to roam, but none can deny us the privilege of rumour mongering.

Or is this the case of the king’s subjects in their duty to do their bit to save our ecology, our health, and our chronic lung disease and are languishing in a place where they can’t even catch a breath. As Mr Tuladhar suggests people should urgently act to reduce pollution levels. It’s an excellent article on particulate air pollution.

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**LETTERS**

**BIRGANJ** – The connectivity of NTC is no match for the speed and spread of the Nepali bus telegraph. We may not have the power to stand, but none can deny us the privilege of rumour mongering. Because of location, one of its main businesses is unorthodox. But when it comes to transmitting juicy political tidbits, Maina Chowk is not alone since Kathmandu’s Pipal Bot.

The rumour that the king granted an audience to Badri Mandal, Badri Baista and Ashok Shah, among others, at the Nagirajan Royal Retreat had already set tongues wagging here long before Kathmandu heard about it. The guessing game of the moment is not the future of the NTC-government talks, but the future of Surya Bahadur Thapa government itself.

Maoists sympathisers believe that Thapa will be relieved any day now, but even if the prime minister does give up more than two months, everybody agrees on the day on which the deed will be done: it will be a Friday, King Gyanendra’s favourite day for major decisions of state. The astounding thing about Para is that the king’s subjects in their duty to do their bit to save our ecology, our health, and our chronic lung disease and are languishing in a place where they can’t even catch a breath. As Mr Tuladhar suggests people should urgently act to reduce pollution levels. It’s an excellent article on particulate air pollution.

**NTC REPLIES**

Praveen Saha in Chicago may have little knowledge of happenings in a country run by ‘unqualified’ people (Letters #155). Nepal is among few developing countries which passed (back in 1997) a progressive and private sector-focused law to reform the telecom sector.

As Mr Tuladhar suggests people should urgently act to reduce pollution levels. It’s an excellent article on particulate air pollution.

Most of the social, political and economic demands the Maoists laid down when they started a mass movement are within the top 50 category of SLC/ISC exam results.

\[ + \frac{5}{3} = \frac{1}{3} \]

Conclusion on Birgani’s Ghat: the Para MP has confirmed the king’s interest in the matter of reinstatement of the parliament. And, did you hear, it was the king who gave the Americans the necessary assurance that he intended to go for a fresh round of talks to reignite the peace process. Of course, this is an elongated east-west country, 80 per cent of which is occupied by the Mahalangur Himal. We follow ours, the king. When free medicines were distributed here recently to combat a meningitis outbreak, people gaped in awe as aid workers dished out medicines. People deride the insurgents publicly, about the excesses of the Maoists is now common knowledge. The power to roam, but none can deny us the privilege of rumour mongering.

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Public funding of election expenditures is a noble idea, but the present calibre of our politicians, the money may be better spent elsewhere.

before elections.

7 Violations should be fixed and/or imprison.

An independent non-partisan institution like the Election Commission should have complete authority to audit, monitor, and prosecute.

8 The parties must undertake to adhere to democratic principles while running their internal affairs.

Under the current environment, state funding for elections will not deter under-the-table donations. There is no monitoring mechanism worth its name to take work, and certification by a CPA firm is not enough. Second, many parties are undermanned and rely on clubs, and would be more inclined to use money to fund these operations than reform their internal processes. Nepal lacks many of the safeguards.

In France public opinion polls are not published during the week of the election. In Britain and other European countries there are restrictions on political advertising, and political ads are broadcast only on radio. But because of the influence of soft money, campaign financing in the United States is problematic in Europe. Campaign expenditure is much higher than in the US.

In Nepal the most important parties have encouraged both intra- and inter-party struggle amongst candidates to grab power, aging them in the process. Instead, intra-party competition is stifled, rival leaderships are expelled, and supporters are lost. This allows smaller parties to band together and oppose self-serving perks by those who control the House.

Another source of corruption and nepotism is the political contribution. Private individuals are at present barred from donating, and this may constitute a violation of basic freedoms, especially in light of the fact that the business houses have been allowed to ‘influence’ legislatures through stable donations. A capped private donation should be allowed.

2 At Rs 5 million, the political contribution cap must be strictly enforced. Businesses should be made to report and explain why they spend the money on education rather than on older candidates and parties through independent television and radio ads and other media. Many European countries have put strict rules in place on campaign-related ads. In the US, such restrictions are seen as an attack on liberty and free expression.

3 The amendment should be approved by a two-thirds majority in parliament prior to election. This allows smaller parties to band together and oppose self-serving perks by those who control the House.

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In the 12-year record of parliamentary elections in Nepal, the parties have not had something to show. As stated before elections, the parties must undertake to adhere to democratic principles while running their internal affairs.

Taleju

Reading Sophie Pandel’s ‘Danger Zone’ (#115) reminded me of my own pet peeve the Taleju Temple at Hanuman Dhoka. A ugly guardian house was added to one of the corner structures during the Rana period that totally ruins the architectural harmony of the temple.

The guardian house was added to safeguard the treasures inside the temple. Today it serves no purpose, why not remove this eyesore?

This would be the simplest of resolutions and would bring peace to the tormented souls of the Taleju’s ancient builders.

Dinesh Rai, Nepal

Hodgson

I was totally fascinated by Kanak Mani Dixit’s article on the working of Ramnath convenient for looking for Hodgson (#115). It is a historical treasure that tells us a lot about our socio-economic, and political thinking during the period of our own Dark Ages.

Ironic, isn’t it, that the same national paranoia which helped us preserve our sovereignty, was also instrumental in making us miss the bus on the entire imperial revolution that was taking place all around us, including in India.

Ashyl Bhatta, email

A special code word for Nepal is the abbreviation ‘Nepal’ itself. Why does the international page which is in the hardcopy of The Hague updated since 22 April, 2003.

The architect at Dwarika’s Hotel was also instrumental in making us preserve our sovereignty, but it was the international page which is in the hardcopy of The Hague updated since 22 April, 2003.

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A mammoth scheme to unite India's rivers may end up divining India.

Conjoined rivers

A $12.9 billion plan by India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party to link the country’s major rivers by 2036 is causing a debate that has divided the country.

The project would link India’s Himalayan rivers with those in its peninsular region through 30 massive interlinking canal systems to provide drinking water, power and irrigation.

The government set up a Task Force Committee for the implementation of the river linking plan headed by former power Minister Suresh Prabhu.

The government aims to construct 30 massive interlinking canal systems to provide drinking water, power and irrigation.

pound India’s river capacity would supply water to dry areas in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat in western India.

Key Acharya, an editor of Hyderabad’s Indian Express wrote:

The government will implement the Water Resources Ministry’s project according to time and budget: a Task Force Committee has been appointed by the Indian government to oversee the project.

The eastern Indian tributaries of the river Ganges are expected to supply water to dry areas in the peninsular India, including the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Two previous plans to interlink India’s rivers failed in 1972 and 1977 for technical and financial reasons.

The scheme was designed as a part of the fifteenth plan, which included the construction of large dams and reservoirs, and the installation of pumped storage plants.

The scheme also involved the construction of water pipelines and the development of infrastructure in the states affected by the project.

Waterlogging and soil salinity, already a problem in the northern states of India, could increase with more monoculture farming and reduced natural diversity.

Water quality and microclimatic change may also affect the environment of people living in the area.

The river Ganges is the most important river in India, providing water to more than 400 million people.

The project aims to interlink India’s major rivers, including the Ganges, to provide water to the country’s dry areas, particularly in the north.

The project is expected to cost around $12.9 billion and is expected to be completed by 2036.

The Indian government hopes to create a network of interlinking canals to provide water to dry areas in the country.

The project is part of the Indian government’s “Make in India” initiative and is expected to provide water to around 400 million people in the country.

However, there are concerns about the impact of the project on the environment and the safety of the people living in the affected areas.

The Indian government has said that the project will be completed by 2036 and will cost around $12.9 billion.

The project was announced in 2014 and is expected to link India’s major rivers, including the Ganges, to provide water to the country’s dry areas, particularly in the north.

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However, there are concerns about the impact of the project on the environment and the safety of the people living in the affected areas.
This is a low risk, high profit job, international networks are involved, that is why it is difficult to control,” says inspector Gobinda Puroel Thapa of the Crime Investigation Unit. And even if traffickers or passengers are caught, they can usually buy their freedom immediately after posting light bail. A man caught at Min Bhawan two months ago with a bag full of fake rubber stamps, empty passports and citizenship certificates, was set free as he was caught after paying Rs 9,000 bail.

Human trafficking gangs use imaginative methods to change the photos on passports with genuine visas. Some use the page with the photo, and carefully peel off the laminate to change the picture. Others put the passport in the deep freeze because it is easier to change pictures. There are reports that traffickers have imparted a sophisticated laminate machine costing Rs 1.5 million that makes it even more difficult for officials to detect tampered passports.

Fuelled by a heightened job…"

According to our investigation, photo-changes went undetected in transit at Bangkok airport after their departure at Kathmandu. Hari Gurung was travelling on Tsiring Bhawan passport (no. 1004286) and also got caught in transit at Bangkok airport after their departure at Kathmandu immigration, but was released on bail as he had no substantial evidence of fake travel documents. Some iron the page with the photo, and carefully peel off the laminate to change the picture. Others put the passport in the deep freeze because it is easier to change pictures. There are reports that traffickers have imparted a sophisticated laminate machine costing Rs 1.5 million that makes it even more difficult for officials to detect tampered passports.

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Little to bank on

Political capital

Things are not going as smoothly as planned with banking sector reforms.

by Tirth Udupayay

The main task assigned to the new management was debt recovery, and it was committed to bringing down non-performing assets (NPA) to 10 percent and 5 percent of the total outstanding portfolio in the first and second year of management control, respectively. The performance has fallen short of target. It could perhaps be argued that the target itself was unrealistic, but management control was handled on a fundamental premise that the new manager would be a financial wizard with experience in turning around sick banks.

The Rasmi Bank can’t be absolved of its responsibility either, as the contract was rewarded without adequate groundwork. Bad loans amassed by these banks were not analysed, classified and materially valued to be agreed upon with the new managers. This left room for ambiguity and dispute. The new management made a smart move by making provisions to check non-performing assets in the period prior to their takeover. NRB and RBB management claims that they have recovered Rs 1 billion each from delinquent borrowers. The loan administration process has been streamlined, accounts are updated and the latest audited financial statements are available. But since bad and doubtful debts were provided for, the new management could ride over non-performing assets and highlight its success, however slight that may have been.

The major problem with loan recovery is inadequacy of information available within the banks about borrowers, including cash flows, quality of security, management and financial information, industry environment, marketability of collateral, etc. Very little seems to have been achieved after the new management took control in creating borrowers’ profiles that could be relied upon for developing recovery or crisis strategies. In a bid to cover up its lapses the management of NRB has moved to the CCR for recovery of debt that it alleged was fraudulently lent, a move sharply criticised by the business community. NRB’s move could further delay the recovery process as the borrower would become subjudice and other recovery proceedings are stalled till the final court verdict is pronounced.

The second challenge facing the banks was to stabilise the deteriorating operating results. Due to the ever narrowing spread (difference between interest income and the interest expense), the banks faced increasing difficulty in maintaining the interest on deposits from the interest income, let alone defraying other operating and administrative costs.

The auditable result of full year’s operation under the new management will take some time to be made public. The claim from certain quarters that the situation is improving is premature. The reality appears to be that very little success has been achieved in interest recovery, both from domestic defaulters and the ‘Big Fish’.

There has been some recovery from both delinquent borrowers and others are merely book adjustments by rescheduling overdrawn principal. Unless a significant portion of overdue principal and the interest are realised in a timely and regular manner, it will be hard to rescue these banks from technical bankruptcy.

The new management has concurrently runnning with the banks around, putting in place internal controls, automation projects, keeping upbeat, updating accounts, bringing everything up to international standards, modernising the management and making it capable of managing the banks independently. All this is supposed to be achieved within three years.

Going by the pace of present performance, one doesn’t look the goals will be met. There is mistrust and a crisis of confidence between employees of the banks and the new management team. Their authoritarian style has failed to win the managers goodwill and support at these banks far lower than prevailing rates in Nepal’s banking industry and, furthermore, there is a glaring gap in communications between employees and the management team.

Very little is achieved by updating accounts since major problem areas like the adjustment of reconciling items in branch accounts, inter-bank accounts, and the reconciliation of government transactions, identification of fixed assets and quantification of retirement payments remain largely unaddressed.

Plans for upgrading qualifications and skills of employees have not yet been implemented. Instead, a voluntary retirement scheme has been introduced that has angered unions about the whole reform process. The most serious concern of any management is a success management plan. What happens when the three years are up?

The highly motivated and excessively paid management team will run things as long as the World Bank is generous enough to fund them. But after the contract period, the management will again fall ‘dead wood’ — under-motivated, under-paid, unskilled and incapable employees. And we’ll be back to square one.

The Nepali public would be burdened within additional debt of over Rs 3 billion — the cost of the banking reforms — which was financed by a World Bank loan. NRB and RBB are not liable for the repayment of this loan, and it goes unrecognized in their books. This could be a classic example of innovative accounting and might draw the attention of NRB, which is advocating implementation of International Accounting Standards in the banking industry.

Tirth Udupayay is a practicing chartered accountant and a leading banking consultant. He was involved in the diagnostic review of NRB and RBB whose recommendations form the basis of the banking sector reform program.

The Valley has a long history of foreign rulers being assimilated into the local culture who are all called Newars now. Only the Shah kings and other recent rulers have not been called Newars. But look now at what they have become: feasting on buffalo meat, rakhi and non-stop bhoj—and most of them are Brahmins and other ‘high’ castes! They even imitated the Newari business skills and applied it to statecraft: the only value system the leaders have is making Newar money and having a good time. To today government holidays rival the Newari festivals. This is certainly not so in the rugged and far-flung kingdom. This is a not-so-obvious clue to keep the media from prying into the rotten mess inside.

The territorial acquisitiveness of our past leaders is mostly over. The borders of Nepal are more or less well defined, but there are other territories to conquer: controlling corruption, reducing our shameful mortality rate among children and mothers and overcoming poverty and diseases running rampant in the hinterland. But none of these campaigns are of importance to leaders embedded in the Valley. Like the strong pull of gravity within a black hole that prevents even light from escaping, their attention rarely makes it beyond the Valley rim. All roads lead into Kathmandu - nothing seems to leave from here.

Prithib Narayan Shah would have been wiser to let Gorkha remain the political capital. Kathmandu could have remained the economic and cultural capital. It’s not too late to shift back to Gorkha, which is not such a far-fetched idea considering most of our leaders, including the Maoists, seem to germinate on the Kathmandu Valley. On the day Kathmandu fell to the invading king of Gorkha, the people and the Malka of Kathmandu were celebrating Indra Jatra. Does that have a familiar ring? Our country is being brought to its knees with problems that are critical to the nation and our leaders are all involved in a perpetual jatha that has little to do with solving problems.

KABINDRA PRADHAN in BUTWAL

There is a spot in one corner of my rice field that worries me a lot. Last year some terrace eroded there and was ploughed in by mistake. This spot became so fertile that the rice and next season’s wheat did not yield anything at all—just lots of straw that was all bent over and half rotten. This plot would have been ideal for fodder grass, not for grain crops. Meanwhile the taxes the government harvests from businessmen. The crop on this spot in my field has parallels to the three years.

Kathmandu Valley was and is too rich to raise visionary leaders. Ask any farmer: a fat animal is a sterile one, good only for the butcher. And so it is with soil. Very fertile land is better for fodder or cattle—very little production is created while the land is lying fallow.

The Nepali public would be interested in knowing that the current crisis of confidence between employees of the banks and the new management team. Their authoritarian style has failed to win the managers goodwill and support at these banks far lower than prevailing rates in Nepal’s banking industry and, furthermore, there is a glaring gap in communications between employees and the management team.

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Kabindra Pradhan runs a farm in Butwal.
 strictly business

underselling MBAs

why invest in an MBA program only to market yourself shoddily?

about a month ago, I received a copy of the booklet containing the resumes of graduating Master of Business Administration (MBA) students of the 11th batch from the Kathmandu University School of Management (KUSOM). Such resumes are usually the first point of contact between job seekers and job providers, with the latter expected to scrutinize the former and judge them according to the strongest possible light to make enough of a good impression. How much information and analysis can be done in a single page or two? Anyway, I flipped through the booklet and saw that part of the introduction said, "We believe that our students will do as well as managers for companies like yours which value professionalism in management."

But after going over the contents of 26 resumes on offer, I, as a prospective employer, started to wonder whether anyone would actually want to hire these MBAs on the basis of how they came across in the booklet. The resumes were, to put it charitably, woefully long on irrelevant details and inexplicably short on information that those making the hiring decisions really want to know. Even an expert cannot sell their own skills to the job market, you ask yourself how good can they really be when it comes to offering goods and services to customers?

Immeasurably highlighted info: More than half the information on all the resumes is about the MBAs’ love, who they knew, contact addresses and other such drivel. Yes, these are necessary, but could easily have been tacked into a small section. The amount of space given to this signals that perhaps the students do not have skills to offer, which, if KUSOM knows, is a frightener. Besides, hardly any employer makes hiring decisions based on where people live and what their phone numbers are.

Vague information: One student’s typical summer project was “loyalty programs at Hyatt Regency.” An employer, you want to know whether the student helped raise the number of loyal customers at Hyatt, and if so, by how many. Vague information takes the shine off most resumes. You want to know whether he used new ways to attract business, and get other such quantitative and qualitative measures to help you to gauge the kind of skills the student possesses. Alas! The student, like all his classmates, merely put the title of his summer job and other such yearly woes, thereby masking his hard-earned business skills. Why would anyone invest time and money to earn an MBA program only to end up doing a shoddy job at marketing himself?

In this context, KUSOM might as well admit that 30 or 40 years down the road, the most important skill its graduates will have to offer will be based on the principles of marketing, finance or human resource management (all of which will change with the times), but which may and really can adapt they can adapt to the changing times. When and if KUSOM takes such a long view, it should start offering intensive “resumes workshops” to its students so that they can better sell their skills to the market throughout their lives and not just for their first post-graduation job.

a lot of room for growth?

after a recent takeover by the German company, Deutsche Post Worldwide Net, or DHL, has received a boost in strengthening its presence in the global market. Although the Nepal market is small, DHL’s country manager for Nepal, Mukunda Malla, has big expansion plans, as he told Nepali Times.

salting trading to sponsor Rokaya

Nepali Times: How do you find the market in Nepal, Mukunda Malla? A: Jumla who is trying to get in shape for the Everest Marathon this year is going to be sponsored by Salt Trading Corporation. The company announced this week, the marketing difficulties of its business to helping other young athletes in Jumla was profiled in Nepali Times (Run, Har, run, #153). Salt Trading is going to take care of Rokaya’s nutritional supplements costing Rs 3,000 a month and also pay his expenses of Rs 50,000 for the Everest Marathon. “We have always had an aim to sell our goods to a deserving and patriotic athlete like Hari,” Salt Trading said in a statement.

“I want to know. If this is how these guys those making the hiring decisions really want to know. Whether anyone would seriously want prospe.”
NARESH NEHWAR

It’s high noon. Parrot for showdown. Kollywood superstar Rajesh Hamal starts down a gang of crooks to do deals. Their charge towards the fearless hero who demolishes them with his bare hands. (Later, when the effects are put in, the sound of fire meeting thin will be ‘dikbas-dikbas’.) A crew call has gathered on the set of Jetho Kancha, a new movie being filmed in a tiny village on the western outskirts of the city, to see Nepal’s favourite leading man in action.

There is take after take of the carefully choreographed fight till the director, Daya Ram Dhakal, declares a print. He is satisfied with the day’s work and tells us, “I am convinced this movie will bring new perspective to Nepali cinema.”

After hearing the barebones of the script, it’s more likely this will be yet another tepid forgettable celluloid insanity on a growing heap of unremarkable masala movies.

Look out for yet another happy ending preceded by a lot of uneven fist fights, blood-damned being chased around pine trees, a showdown. Kollywood has already produced an average of 40-50 films a year, more than any other country in South Asia except India’s mammoth Bollywood dream machine. But for the most part, it’s quantity over quality.

Recently, cinema hall owners have begun to demand a qualitative revolution in Nepali films. They are playing hard ball, saying if they screen only Hindi movies they won’t run at all. What’s left unsaid, but tacitly understood by insiders, is that Kollywood will face very hard times without their continuing support.

The industry has already taken an indirect toll on the industry—film production has halved. The number of films made every year has plummeted to 10-15. Unlike India, there is no print rental system in Nepal to act as a safety net for investors. Prints for Hindi movies are priced according to the actor’s and the pre-release hype, and cost an average of Rs 30,000 per week. But Nepali movies lack distributors; the producer usually doubles up on this role. And cinema halls don’t pay a single paisa for rental.

The real fly in the ointment is that producers, who invest upwards of Rs 5 million on a single film, can recoup their investment only through ticket sales—50 percent at a time. The other half goes to the hall owners. With the rise in pirated movies and the spread of cable TV, people watch new Bollywood releases at home.

Consequently, there is a drop in sales soon after the opening week. On the other hand, new Nepali films like Sukho Dukha, Aamra and Aftakpur ran successfully for weeks, pulling 60 percent of the audience. The producers are now adamant to get, at most, 58 percent, of the sales revenue.

At logheads with hall owners, they stopped their films from being screened for the past 40 days. This has led to the first major dissonance between the two groups in Nepal’s 52-year-old film history. Sandeep Thapa, a veteran actor told us: “This is really sad. I’ve worked in the film industry for 27 years and realise now that hall owners never really cared about Nepali films. They are just after money.”

The Nepali Film Producers Association (NFPA) says that several hall owners are slowly beginning to show their support for the producers. Kathmandu has 40 of the nation’s 1,100 cinemas. Fifteen that were dependent exclusively on Nepali films have closed down after the strike began. Bigger venues are feeling the pinch too but don’t seem willing to reach a compromise.

“The owners are not ready to accept that the lack of Nepali films is affecting their business. No matter how bad the films, people still like to watch them,” says Naresh Poudel, vice president of NFPA.

Whether the film producers and hall owners reach an agreement or not, the audience has moved on. “Unless we go beyond aping Bollywood, we will never be able to expand the film market. It’s time to take the risks of bringing originality to our approach,” says new wave film director Nabin Subba.

Meanwhile, serious filmmakers have not really shown any keen interest to actively involve themselves in the tussle between the two parties. Tusha Ghimire, another versatile director, says the reason why the industry doesn’t receive respect is a combination of low-quality films and a less than satisfactory cine-environment.

Despite Kollywood’s prolific output, only a handful of Nepali movies have withhold the test of time. Saaya Harishchandra (1950) earned the distinction of being the first movie in the Nepali language—even though it was shot, produced and released in India. It was directed and scripted by DB Parajy, a Nepali living in India. It took another 14 years before Aama appeared in Kathmandu’s halls.

Perhaps the most beloved of all Nepali movies is ‘Maiti Ghar’ (1966), scripted on the romantic drama by Lohani. ‘Maiti Ghar’ is a Nepali living in India. It took another 14 years before Aama appeared in Kathmandu’s halls.

This movie, based on the novel by Lait Singh Bangel, is regarded as a masterpiece and part of our national film heritage. Maithi Ghar was privately produced by yogendra Jha and Nar Shumshere Rana. Directed by BS Thapa, it starred Mata Sinha and OP Lohani.

Prem Pinda (1992) was a bold production, vastly different from mainstream commercial cinema. Scripted on the romantic drama by one of Nepal’s greatest dramatics, Bal Krishna Sama, Prem Pinda received good reviews from critics here and abroad, but the audience did not warm up to it outside the capital. Director Yadav Khanal’s vision should have set a new trend among filmmakers, but it didn’t.

More recently, in Numtaling (2002), innovative filmmaker Nabish Subba wanted to prove artistic films with a purely Nepali element can put the nation on the international movie map. Numtaling is in the indigenous Limbu language with English subtitles, and it is currently doing the international circuit through Europe, having won an award at the 9th Vesoul Film Festival in France.

At their end (2003) is a rare offering that attempts to reinvent the genre. Director Athere Ritar Shepra explores the true story of an innocent woman accused of being a witch and subjected to a painful exorcism by her superstitious community. The apical movie broke every norm of commercial Nepali film with horrifying scenes delineated with sharp realism. Makara received critical acclaim at film festivals in Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, USA, Canada and India.

Unforgettables

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Upcoming Kollywood stars NIKH Upreti and Saaya Mahalai.
He dares to voice the unthinkable: “Do we really need a Nepali film industry?”

He believes that if Nepali films were of high quality, the hall owners would have no choice but to screen them. “A film should be a permanent asset. Most of our filmmakers have little knowledge about how to turn films into part of our national heritage,” he says.

The future of Kollywood looks bleak. Not even a supposedly undiscriminating Nepali audience will deign to watch some of today's movies after a few years in the archives. Filmmaker Tshering Ritar Sherpa concludes: “It’s high time we created a niche for ourselves. We have to prove ourselves.”

Vijay Lama, an airline pilot, is also an actor.

**Escapist clones**

**VIJAY LAMA**

For a long time we excused the Nepali film industry’s deficiencies, saying it was in its infancy. Then it went into pimply adolescence during which it thrived on copying Bollywood. Now, it has attained a certain maturity with creative young directors who have come up to offer original ideas.

One could say that in terms of quantity the industry got a great boost post-1990 with the explosion of film-making. Till then, Nepali movie-goers were treated to feature films produced by the Ministry of Information. With private producers entering the fray, it set out on a new growth trend. From up to 10 films a year before 1990, the numbers shot up to 50 films a year by the mid-1990s. This rapid growth witnessed the entrance of lots of new faces with eager enthusiasm to boost the industry.

New production houses along with new directors, actors, actresses, technicians, storywriters and music directors arrived with fresh ideas and approaches. Finally, one could make a living acting in Nepali films, you didn’t have to moonlight as a bureaucrat! As viewership grew, the industry became self-sufficient without having to rely on foreign technical support.

What the films lacked in originality they more than made up for with Nepali oomph. For the audience, which had grown accustomed to the glamour and glitz of Hindi films, it was a treat to watch a film in our own language, with our Himalaya as a backdrop, tackling our own contemporary social issues. So what if they were escapist and clones of Bollywood?

But the novelty started wearing off and the audience got more sophisticated with the variety availability on cable at home. The industry failed to move B-grade Bollywood musicals. Nepali filmdom also showed signs of complacency, with pampered celebrities throwing tantrums and becoming indisciplined. On the technical side, using a 16mm format and blowing it up later to 35mm for public viewing reduced the quality of the projection image. The Nepali film industry has yet to adapt to the times.

These days, every other person from the Nepali cineworld, be they actresses, directors, or technical crew, expresses dissatisfaction with the way things are run. The security situation has meant that attendance at the box office has plummeted, reducing the number of films being made. Producers are losing money, some have gone bankrupt. Then there are constant internal squabbles within the industry. The high-handedness of the exhibitors further eroded the morale. Their exorbitant charges didn’t make it worthwhile to invest in films anymore.

But all is not lost, a new generation of talented and creative artists are coming up, and sooner or later the audiences will go back to theatres and the industry will rebound.

Vijay Lama, an airline pilot, is also an actor.

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Selection of the week - Chilean Wines

Yak and Yeti presents "Uncorked" - a festival of wine that celebrates the romance and richness of some of the finest wines from the most well known vineyards across the globe. Every week, Friday to Friday, wines from one region will be chosen and made available at November's Chili & Sunsets for lunch and dinner. Featuring this week are the wines from Chile. With natural conditions ideal for wine growing, Chile produces some of the finest wines of South America ranging from "Serragno Blanc" to "Carmenere".
Global warming
Bush seeks second opinion again on climate change

The US announced a new 10-year plan last week to study the “uncertainty” around global climate change, instead of taking action to fix it, scientists and environmentalists say.

“The Bush administration is using the scientific uncertainty around climate change to delay taking concrete actions in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions,” Steven Guilbeault, a political advisor for Greenspace International, told IPS. “It’s clear to everyone that this is a delaying action.”

Eight years ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), involving more than 2,000 scientists from 100 countries, agreed that human-produced emissions of greenhouse gases, primarily from burning oil, coal and natural gas, were changing the planet’s climate.

Given the enormous ramifications of climate change, most countries, including the United States under Pres. Bill Clinton, signed on to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which commits countries in the North to small reductions in their greenhouse gas emissions.

However, not long after taking power, Bush withdrew from Kyoto and backed away from campaign promises to regulate carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants. He justified these emissions of fossil fuels would cost too much, and that the science around the causation and impacts of climate change were too uncertain.

This selective view of the fact that few things in science are ever 100 percent certain into Michael MacCracken, an atmospheric scientist who headed U.S. efforts to determine the impacts of global warming from 1993 to 2001.

“This administration appears to have no uncertainty about the safety of genetically modified foods, another new and complex scientific endeavor,” MacCracken said. “We can’t wait until we have perfect knowledge on climate change.”

An outline of the goals and objectives of the 10-year plan is contained in the 310-page US Climate Change Science Program Strategic Plan released last week. It is intended to bring together experts from 13 federal agencies that are spending $4.5 billion per year on programmes that touch on climate change.

“Under ‘CCSP Priorities’, the plan lists “three broad sets of scientific uncertainties that require further attention and effects of aerosols; climate feedbacks and sensitivity, initially focusing on polar feedbacks, and carbon sources and sinks, focusing particularly on North America.”

The plan does not mention mandatory emissions reductions or other active steps. Rather, it promises that US citizens are worried about climate change and this is a way to get more research. US citizens are worried about climate change and this is a way to get more research.

T he US Congress has voted almost unanimously (419 to 2) in the House of Representatives and 94 to 1 in the Senate to tighten trade and financial sanctions against Myanmar, whose despotic regime harasses and repeatedly imprisons the country’s rightful leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. She won the presidential election in 1990 but the military prevented her from taking power.

But sanctions are the wrong approach, for international marginalisation hurts ordinary citizens far more than it hurts dictatorial regimes. It’s time to curtail the use of economic sanctions and to make them better targeted at dictators.

The most famous sanctions in recent history were those imposed on South Africa during the apartheid era. Much of the world community stopped trading with South Africa, and stopped making investments in South African-based enterprises. Those sanctions did, it seems, help speed the demise of that racist system. But one great success does not negate the many failures. Moreover, it is quite possible that the world community could have supported the overthrow of apartheid in other ways.

Of course, sanctions can be effective in hurting the economy of the target country. Economic development in South Africa, for example, would be very much affected if each country being integrated into the world network of production, trade and investment. A national economy that is excluded by sanctions is likely to stagnate or even collapse.

Thus, the South African economy experienced an absolute decline in per capita output during the years of widespread sanctions. But sanctions were not the only reason for decline. Political unrest also devastated the economy, as did a fall in world food values that coincided with the anti-apartheid movement in the final years. Still, South Africa had brutal sanctions, and the same has been true for many other countries.

Cuba bears a heavy economic burden today not only as a result of its own internal economic mistakes but also because of the barriers to trade and investment imposed by the US since the 1960s. Haiti went into economic tailspin in the 1990s. America imposed sanctions in the 1990s, ostensibly to re-establish Democracy. Even today, the US blocked aid for Haiti because some right-wing US Congressmen are intent on toppling President Aristide, whom they abhor.

Iraq and North Korea have likewise been battered by sanctions. In Iraq during the 1990s, millions of children suffered repeated illnesses and vast numbers died because international sanctions contributed to ruining the country’s economy. North Korea’s economy has similarly collapsed in the 1990s, leading to widespread famine. Once again, this results from a combination of North Korea’s political depravity, atrocious economic policy and international sanctions.

But sanctions have also been extremely high price for its isolation. International organisations have cut back or eliminated their work in the country, and much bilateral foreign has been eliminated, too. One result is that HIV/AIDS, the world’s worst pandemic, has accelerated in the country, and much bilateral foreign aid has been eliminated, too. One result is that HIV/AIDS, the world’s worst pandemic, has accelerated in the country.

Sanctions, and the same has been true for many other countries. It’s time to regard them as a last resort, and to help ordinary citizens far more than it harms dictatorial regimes.
Myanmar's HIV/AIDS crisis is now by far Southeast Asia's worst. Although sanctions clearly create suffering in many places, how often are they aimed at the right target, or the right people? In Myanmar, Iraq, North Korea and Cuba, despotic regimes use the threat of economic sanctions as a justification for domestic repression, and even when it was their own policy mistakes and human rights abuses that brought economic sanctions, they have found it far easier to blame the United States and its allies than to admit fault or correct their ways.

Indirectly, sanctions weaken an economy and public health, but do not necessarily make it any more likely that a despotic regime will collapse. Sanctions purportedly undermine the legitimacy of an entrenched and repressive regime, to weaken a government without violence. But sanctions also weaken the ability of the private sector to finance an opposition, to cut off the domestic opposition from international sources of support, and reduce, rather than increase, international awareness of the abuses taking place.

Some additional effects are even more pernicious. When legal means of business are outlawed, illegal means become more attractive. Many countries under sanction, such as Myanmar, become sources of global illegal trafficking in drugs, arms, money laundering and forced labour. Drug trafficking or other illegal activities can overtake the whole government, turning it from despicably to international organized crime.

Does this mean that the world should do nothing about these despotic regimes? There is no easy answer, but to the extent that it is possible to weaken a government without violence, weakening the economy, such steps should be taken. For example, so-called "smart sanctions" focus more narrowly on the political leadership. Smart sanctions include denial of international travel privileges to despots and their families, and subjecting those despots to the risk of international prosecution.

Leads can then be made to punish those in their own countries. Smart sanctions can also specifically target the hard core of the military, cutting off despotic regimes' armed forces. Moreover, foreign aid can be shifted away from government towards non-governmental organizations, strengthening the civil society in such countries.

It is easy to vote against Myanmar's government, but it is harder to foster political change. Starving Myanmar's economy is unlikely to help, but it is certain to deepen the suffering of its people. Of course, countries that embrace the use of sanctions do not intend this, but that does not lessen their responsibility for the outcome. (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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The real solution...to famine in North Korea

by CHRISTINE AHN

If President Bush truly cared about ending the starvation of millions of North Koreans, he would end the peace treaty with their government and end the Korean War that has isolated the country for a quarter century.

"I have no respect for a man who staves his own people," Bush declared during his trip to North Korea last year. It is hard to see how this aggression towards North Korea and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking his own people," Bush declared during his trip to North Korea last year. It is hard to see how this aggression towards North Korea and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking his own people," Bush declared during his trip to North Korea last year. It is hard to see how this aggression towards North Korea and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictator forsaking and painting an image of Kim Jong Il as an evil dictato...
The King and I

Yukhan Chhitrin in Kautapur, 27 July

Having remained indifferent to politics for a while now, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the founding member of the Nepali Congress, recently broke his vow of silence. Bhattarai came out of his cocoon unexpectedly last week and met King Gyanendra. Bhattarai said his disatisfaction about the Oli-Thapa Fourth move to the monarch, and the king reassured him of his commitment to restore democracy. Bhattarai quoted the king as saying, "I don’t want to be blacklisted in history as the king who usurped people’s rights." Bhattarai, however, chose not to comment on the ongoing agitation spearheaded by the five parties of the dissolved parliament. He did urge the Maoists to stop the violence, adding that he believed they would abandon that road. The elderly politician, still a sharp sense of humour, and has not given up his trips to New Road to indulge in a well-made pan and buying Indian newspapers. Amita Kapil, his personal aide, jokingly complains that her charge expresses more regular with those trips than the physiotherapy.

The temporary president of the Congress, Baburam Bhattarai’s letter to the government dated 23 July did not distance himself from political disputes, and political conflicts will be resolved by elected representatives.

We sincerely believe that our viewers will themselves reject this absurd survey which has also cast doubts about the Nepali public harbours towards the leadership. The Maoists also ignored requests from the UML and the king. When the UML did the same thing and joined hands with the king and India, we said the party had betrayed the country. Now the Maoists have taken up a similar role. They have expressed their complete support to the monarch and are getting closer to India by criticising US imperialism. They are smart enough to know that side their bread is buttered. The Maoists know that protecting all those factions, they are fighting for the future, it is better for the nation to stop extortions, beatings, killing party workers and terrorising ordinary people. They reduced the code to a mere scrap of paper, thereby opening the door for violations by the government and its agencies. The Maoists also ignored requests from the UML and the Nepali Congress to stop harassing their workers. Their true intentions are now suspect.

It’s unfortunate Baburam did not express a commitment to peace in his letter. But then neither side has shown sincerity towards ending the conflict. Instead, they have used the ceasefire period to strengthen their armies. The public’s main concern now is the looming threat of war. The Maoists say the third round of talks is inappropriate because the government did not fulfill agreements reached during the first and second rounds. They reason the government failed to honour its part of the deal. Both the Chand and Thapa governments are unconstitutional bodies. They don’t have the approval, support and trust of the people. The Maoists should realise that ongoing negotiations with an undemocratic government will not be fruitful. The Chand administration’s negotiating team had incapable and incompetent people with no background in politics. The present government does not have the status to make decisions. Even so, the Maoists can’t plan new to return to the jungle. It is meaningless for the Maoists to liken themselves to Vietnam’s freedom fighters. No more killing fields, we need peace and security. The great war fought by the Vietnamese for independence from imperialism cannot be compared to the campaign that the Maoists are waging in their ‘people’s war’. We need peace and security. The great war fought by the Vietnamese for independence from imperialism cannot be compared to the campaign that the Maoists are waging in their ‘people’s war’. One thing that we have said and will continue to say is that the Maoists are waging a war of terrorism.

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I went to listen, recently, to one of the hot rock bands of Kathmandu. I had heard very high praise of it over the years, and was curious to hear whether it lived up to its considerable reputation.

Its music was, indeed, great—the drums, the bass guitar and the lead guitar were all living with occasional riffs of the flute, and I was thoroughly impressed: here, I thought, was sizzling talent. Here was a band to match Kathmandu’s verve and dash.

Until the band members began to sing. Suddenly, the sizzles spilled the performance—not because they were bad, but because they came from a very different sensibility, the sensibility of sentimental songs such as those sung by Haranay Narayan, Narayan Gopal, Damodar Pahari. The down-in-the-dumps laments and woe-is-me wails that belong to the gauzily-derived tradition of modern Nepali songs sounded plat accompanied by the raucous music of the rock band.

If this example and the songs that are daily belted out by the FM radio are anything to go by, songwriting is an art that is little evidenced in Nepali rock and pop music. To write a song, one must have a basic sense of meter and rhyme, but a songwriter must also have a poetic bent to his/her words. There must be a union of lyric and music. Writing lyrics to set to music would require one to abandon the high Sanskritic tones of written Nepali, and to begin to express the less pathos-drenched emotions of anger, lust, waywardness, rebellion. Young spirit is, after all, what rock and pop are about.

The songs below are written in the sentimental tradition, the tradition that expresses the typical South Asian mix of emotions: longing, frustration, despair, sorrows...Their author, Basanta Thapa, is a writer and well-known columnist, and is thus an emblematic figure of the sentimental tradition, in which the songwriter is a philosopher-poet, a man or woman of letters, a world-weary thinker, an intellectual.

To hear whether it lived up to its considerable reputation.

The Friends of the Bagmati, a people-based NGO, is looking for a

Minimum qualifications:
- Bachelor degree in relevant field
- Experience working with the people at the community level
- Ability to write reports and project proposals in English

Please apply with resume, and indicate your expected remuneration within one week of this advertisement. Women candidates are encouraged to apply. Only short-listed candidates will be notified. Telephone inquiries will not be entertained.

The Friends of the Bagmati
PO Box 459
Kathmandu, Nepal

Washington ko simseme panima

Prem Raja Mahat traded stardom for opportunity.

One hit in the Nepali music industry with Rekha Shahi was the number 1 song "Simsime Panima" in 1995. His music radio presenter at Kathmandu’s Hits FM 91.2. "He is very important... We must love it, so we give it our own variations. It is an albatross, it never stops hurting. It is a wound, it never ceases inflaming. It is an ailment, it never stops hurting. Life is a wound. We suffer, we live in sorrow...Their author, Basanta Thapa, is a writer and well-known columnist, and is thus an emblematic figure of the sentimental tradition, in which the songwriter is a philosopher-poet, a man or woman of letters, a world-weary thinker, an intellectual.

Some take it to be a tear and so they cry it. Some take it to be flesh and so they grab it. Some take it to be a laugh and so they expel it. Some take it to be a drug and get high on it. Some take it to be a drug and get high on it. It is a wound, it never ceases inflaming. It is an ailment, it never stops hurting. Life is a wound. We suffer, we live in sorrow...

In places it Swords and in sorrow and grief It walks on if it reaches That place where all of us take root Some take it to be a lament and so they sigh it. Some take it to be a laugh and so they expel it.

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Border Management of Nepal-Buddh Niayan Sheeha
Bhuncha, 2003
Rs 50
Nepal shares its border with two Asian giants, and compared to its boundaries to the north, the south remains porous and unguarded. Over the years this has been both beneficial and a hindrance. This book is a sequel to 'Borderland of Nepal' that won the prestigious Madan Puraskar in 2000. The author carefully analyses the emerging issues surrounding border management, together with in its history, present status and alarming problems.

The Clinton Wars Sidney Blumenthal
Penguin Viking, Rs 2,000
This is an invaluable first-hand history of an extraordinary presidency and the political odyssey of a generation. In 1997, when Bill Clinton picked the White House as his asylum, he was catapulted into the front lines of the Clinton wars. This history documents the unprecedented assault on the highly successful two-term presidency by the right. Critics are calling this a "last gasp...trying to provoke a constitutional response in 20th century history".

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix J K Rowling
Bloomsbury, 2003
Rs 1,275
The fifth installment in the Harry Potter series will not disappoint fans, both children and adults. Rowling's character is now in his fifth year at Hogwarts Schools of Witchcraft and Wizardry and is in for a million mile ride of suspense, secrets and magic.

BOOKWORM

CLASSIFIED

For insertions ring NT Marketing at 554333-36.

Peace Keepers

Sahitya Niwas, Himalinda, 2003
Rs 200
This is a reprint of Rai's first book contents which we already know. It is an insightful, talented artist who has a keen eye and a light touch. One of Nepal's foremost political cartoons, his work has appeared regularly in Asian Times and Hindu Kathmandu. His work in Peace Keepers embraces a wider global perspective with a thesis we have to come across.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

NEPALI WEATHER

by NAGAMORA DHALI

Nepal a southern flat has mostly clouded cover, as the cold air mass plucked due to Wednesday morning showing. The mass is still existing because of the stratocumulus equilibrium between her pressure patterns. However, it continues to move, for the cloud is still developing, so when it does begin to rise, it will be more and more often with several hundred of speeds over this the weekend. The Valley will have overcast skies in the early parts of next week, bringing cloud cover from the dew valley with maximum temperature dropping by an average two degrees.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Fine dust P10100 pollution in the valley is up from last week, possibly due to rains being confined to the night-time. Pollutants generated during the day from vehicular exhausts and other sources therefore were suspended in the air, especially along busy thoroughfares like Patan Hospital and Dilligast, the average weekly concentration of PM10 particulates that are less than 10 micron in size and small enough to go into your lungs in these two places was above the national minimum standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meter. All the six air quality monitoring stations recorded their lowest PM10 levels on Saturday when most vehicles stay off the road.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Average PM10 levels in selected points in Kathmandu PM10 (%)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ok</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unhealthy</td>
<td>310</td>
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<td>Hazardly</td>
<td>425</td>
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What you breathe is what you breathe.

Visit Ground Zero Fine wines, designer cards, cambis, gifts, stationery, wooden items, perfumes and darbar, Margret Hotel opposite Hotel Le-Panorama
Visit Femilines, the exclusive lingerie store for ladies undergarments, nightwear, bathrobes and more. Ladies staff, Opposite: Sajha Yatra, Harish Bhawan, Pullah. Tel: 547428
Flowerworld: Flowerworld, its FUCHSA time again. Visit 60 beautiful varieties in bloom! Our lovely flowerlovers, it’s FUCHSIA time again!!
For Social and Environmental Transformation (ISET). 5.30 PM on 1 August at Baggikhana, Yala Maya. Free entry. 10PM onwards, 2 August at Via Via Café, Paknajol.
Guest 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 one.

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Heroes' homecoming

The victorious Nepali under-19 cricket team is propelling the nation onto the international stage.

Clockwise L-R: Man of the match Sarad Vesawkar and skipper Shakti Gauchan, Nepal players grabbing stubs after winning the finals, opening batsman Yaswant Subedi, fast bowler Manjeet Shrestha.

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

The national under-19 Nepali cricket team is having a dream run. In 2001 it won the 3rd Youth Asia Cup, followed by a stellar showing at the U-19 World Cup and now the boys have emerged victorious with the 4th Youth Asia Cup.

The onus was on them to defend their title this year in Karachi, and they did it in style. Their win has gone a long way in proving that these boys are no flukes. They have either won or made their presence felt in every major tournament they played in the last two years. We are on the first track to becoming a cricketing nation.

Talking to the press at Tribhuvan International Airport on his triumphant return on Wednesday, skipper Shakti Gauchan said, “I hope this victory will add a new chapter to Nepal’s cricket history and will prove instrumental for the development of the game.” We second that.

This success is special for Nepali cricket. Not only were they defending a title, but it was also played ‘Away’. The maturity and responsibility our players displayed in the runout final against Malaysia was commendable. In earlier matches, we often displayed a tendency to falter at crucial moments. This time the team played with precision and passion. Our U-19 team was by far the best team in the tournament, and it is not just saying that, Nepal dominated none of its opponents scored over a century except in the finals. From Singapore and the UAE—the two countries thought most likely to defeat us—were dismissed with less than 100 runs.

This second victory was hard won. Batting first on the damp pitch wasn’t easy. The responsibility fell on the openers to introduce a quick start and accelerate the run rate. After the openers began, Sharad Vesawkar, who had earlier failed to hit in keeping with his reputation, played a gem of a inning cracking off 55 runs in 51 deliveries. He was ably supported by Yaswant Subedi and skipper Shakti Gauchan.

A superb 155 runs in 25 overs was a defendable target, and the Nepali bowlers led by Manjeet Shrestha ensured Malaysia didn’t reach it. Taking three Malaysian wickets, Shrestha showed why he is the strike bowler. His accuracy and out-swinger was too hot to handle for the Malayan batsmen as their three top-orders harnessed returned to the pavilion with only 12 runs on the board. Malaysia did try to make a comeback in the match but with a 66 runs stand for the fifths, wicket but lost the initiative after Affin Bin Randi and Suhartawan were out.

In the past Nepali bowlers won the heart of the audience and the team played with precision and passion. Our U-19 team was by far the best team in the tournament, and it is not just saying that, Nepal dominated none of its opponents scored over a century except in the finals. From Singapore and the UAE—the two countries thought most likely to defeat us—were dismissed with less than 100 runs.

This win should go a long way in raising the profile of cricket in a country where football is the most popular sport. Media coverage and public accolades are making heroes of these young players. The Nepal Sports Council (NSC) has announced Rs 10,000 will be given to each member, and the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) has already awarded individual awards of Rs 15,000. Other jubilant donations have jumped in.

But cash prizes are not enough. CAN must capitalise on the momentum of what the U-19 team has achieved. There has long been talk of Nepal qualifying for the next Cricket World Cup in 2007 but will the association be able to ensure and maintain steady growth? Is it the present infrastructure enough to train our cricketers to compete with world-class players from India, Australia and other cricketing nations?

We also have to graduate from one-day cricket to longer versions of the game, and players must have access to more than the sole cricket stadium in the nation. Can CAN find the sponsors?

In the Dream Team

Five Nepali cricketers have found place in the ACC dream team: skipper Shakti Gauchan, Kariska Chaugain, Sarad Vesawkar, Manoj Katuwal and Manjeet Shrestha. All of them played a crucial role in Nepal’s victory. The only player missing was Yaswant Subedi. The tournament organising committee judge opneer Kariska Chaugain and Manoj Katuwal.

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The other positive thing to come out from this Asia Cup was the emergence of Manjeet Shrestha as strike bowler. His bowling in the final made all the difference. With deadly accuracy, Shrestha put Malaysia on the defence with his three quick wickets. This win should go a long way in raising the profile of cricket in a country where football is the most popular sport. Media coverage and public accolades are making heroes of these young players. The Nepal Sports Council (NSC) has announced Rs 10,000 will be given to each member, and the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) has already awarded individual awards of Rs 15,000. Other jubilant donations have jumped in.

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I

Que sera sera
by Kunda Dixit

If the number of fantastical Indian astrologers descending upon us these days is any indication, then this country is heading into a glorious sunset. Anthropologists have long been convinced that only when a people develop an extraordinary interest in their own future do they strive for betterment. One thing we now know for sure is that Nepal has a future, we just don’t know what kind of future it is. And that is why the invasion of Indian soothsayers, each more famous than the other according to ads in the national press, is a welcome development. We need these foreign zodiacal consultants to help pull the yawning gap in our national early warning system so we can better prepare ourselves to deal with untoward incidents in the coming months.

Our own expertise in the arena of horoscopes is comparatively insignificant. Pediatricians being Nepal’s national disease, we are more preoccupied with the here and now. No doubt, when it comes to our tummies we are the world’s foremost authorities on gastronomy, while our capital can allegedly make extraordinarily accurate predictions by reading the photos or faces of clients, even without consulting their horoscopes. Wow. If you are worried about remarriage, divorce, the ceasefire, your cinematic career or even your peptic ulcers, you can have your future, however dire, foretold. Your cinematic career or even your peptic ulcers, you can have your future, however dire, foretold.

Superintendent Bimala Thapa Sharma means business. “Rules are not made to be broken,” says the cop responsible for many high profile operations in the country’s toughest and arguably most corrupt beat—Tribhuvan International Airport. Within two months this year, she made two record seizures of Rs 41 million and Rs 34 million of currency being smuggled out of Nepal. This was followed by a spate of drug hauls from foreigners, again in unprecedented quantities. With her short-cropped hair and uniform Bimala exudes an air of no-nonsense professionalism. She may measure barely over 5ft in her black boots, but her male subordinates have found to their discomfort, that they disobey her orders at their own peril. Policemen unable to control crowds milling around the arrival area are mercilessly berated in public by Bimala. She is conscious of the airport’s reputation for corruption and is determined to make her mark in cleaning it up. “If you have devotion and sincerity, the mess can be sorted out,” she told us. “I believe leadership must lead by example.”

Bimala’s beat

In the coming months this is not just a service, she practices what she preaches. At first she had to overcome cliques in her own ranks, many who ran well-oiled smuggling and extortion rackets. Then Bimala took action against 60 ‘dirty’ officers at the airport. Many were sent off to the police correction training centre. “Today, my staff is much more efficient,” she chuckles.

It took a while for Bimala to find her niche. As a schoolgirl in Nuwakot, north of Kathmandu, she wanted to join the army till she was told women couldn’t enlist. So she was a teacher for a while, and joined the civil service, followed by a brief stint in journalism before finding her true calling in the Nepal Police. This mother of two differs from most female stereotypes. Dedication to the job keeps her running around the airport troubleshooting, sometimes up to 19 hours a day. “That’s how I stay trim and fit,” quips Bimala.

Only three percent of the police staff in Nepal are female, but this does not intimidate her. “The chain of command means she is there to do a job, and it doesn’t matter what gender she is. Besides, I saw how incompetent many men were when I trained with them for the force,” Bimala recalls. She confesses sometimes using charm to extract information, but would criminals better watch out? “For crooks, I am a cop first, and then a woman.” *Renu S Hada*