

# ‘Leave us in peace

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# Children are declared a zone of peace.

"It is really distressing that children's figure nowhere in the peace talks. So much more suffering do Nepali children have to undergo before the government and the Maoists acknowledge their plight," says Sharad Sharma of the group, Children's Development Society. Children have been forcibly recruited, abducted, arrested and displaced. Many hundreds have been

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# Love i

## Is Bollywood redis

We will watch the fight to the office, we hope our neighbours for boost. Perhaps Nepal Tourism Board *Love in Nepal* leaves off. ♦ *Love in Nepal* is slated for a Sep



at the government and the  
tent each side is willing  
ectations accordingly.  
hat have been presently  
istic our hopes will be. The  
possibility of winning their  
esilience of the state as well  
t they needed was a gesture  
e to convince their battle-

aking departure is  
y the legislative process,  
t in turn makes it  
y think of them, it is the  
enting the Nepali people

Kamal Thapa and Prakash  
the monarchy and army.  
But they could not respond  
factors even more  
an unrepresentative  
the exercise.  
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du Spring of 1990. The main  
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be better for the government to  
focus its efforts on transparent,  
accountable mechanisms and  
devolving decision making,  
including economic ones, to local  
users themselves. The  
government should focus on  
ensuring the equitable distribution  
of benefits through better  
monitoring and evaluation  
mechanisms when the CFUGs  
use the collected fund locally for

says, "But Baker's theory of the  
fear of the peace movement has  
to be taken seriously when the  
American Information Centre in  
Kathmandu provides  
reproduction rights to local  
newspapers" Let me clarify: we  
had received a number of  
inquiries over the past several  
months from Nepali publications  
as to how they could obtain  
reprint rights for articles from

To misread this  
action as one having  
been prompted by a  
fear of the peace movement  
seems to me quite ridiculous and  
I sincerely fail to see the  
connection! Quite to the  
contrary: the US Department of  
State and the US Embassy in  
Kathmandu have repeatedly,  
consistently, and openly  
supported the peace talks and  
expressed our sincere hopes  
for a peaceful and prosperous  
Nepal.

residents and contribute to their  
sustainable development, apart  
from addressing the chronic  
water shortage in the  
Kathmandu Valley. Project-  
affected people will receive  
substantial benefits and have  
access to opportunities to  
improve their livelihoods. The  
project will give priority to locals  
from Melamchi in skills training  
and employment in the project  
construction works. The project  
cannot provide employment to a  
large number of local people. All

f, and when, the Maoist insurgency  
peters out, Purandara in Dang will  
probably develop as an attractive  
destination for domestic tourism. In course  
of time, Shivaram Khatri's house at the  
centre of Hapure village may even evolve  
into a guesthouse that is a tourist attraction  
in its own right. 'Here is where the  
Abortive Third Round of Peace Talks  
Were Held', a brass plaque on the wall may  
say. The bed-and-breakfast Failed  
Negotiations Pension at Purandhara will  
serve kheer, made with rich milk straight  
from the udders of local water buffaloes.

The Dang excursion was a symbolic  
sideshow. Everyone knew the talks weren't  
going anywhere even before the negotiators  
helicoptered off. There was nothing in the  
position paper of the government that  
could open the door for a face-saving entry  
of the insurgents into the national  
mainstream. In the entire exasperatingly-  
long document there is nothing about  
curtailing the role of the monarchy, and the  
name of Royal Nepali Army doesn't even  
get a mention. Did the government think  
that the Maoist leadership was so eager to  
surrender that it would unilaterally offer to  
disarm?

It's clear that the government is in no  
mood to resolve the Maoist insurgency. It  
has no reason to do so. No sooner is the  
rebellion over, Messers Thapa, Lohani and  
their company of former Panchas will be  
out on the streets, desperately looking for  
roles. The military isn't in any tearing hurry

to usher peace either. The day negotiators  
and facilitators were helicoptering around,  
C-in-C Pyar Jung Thapa was busy  
confabulating with his Division  
Commanders and fellow generals in  
Kathmandu. Gen Thapa believes that it is  
the army's arm-twisting that has brought the  
Maoists to the negotiating table. This  
smugness is understandable, the longer the  
insurgency lasts, the more his organisation is  
ensured centrality in the public life.

On the other side in Libang, the rebels  
were equally unconcerned about the  
outcome of talks in Dang. No Maoist  
insurgent anywhere wishes for peace,  
otherwise why would they go for armed  
struggle? It would be futile to expect Nepali  
Maobadis to be any different.

Elaborating on Sun Zi, Mao Zedong  
wrote: "The enemy advances, we retreat; the  
enemy camps, we harass; the enemy fires we  
attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue." To  
that proposition, Maoist commander Nanda  
Kishore Pun could probably add with some  
justifiable pride, "The enemy begins  
diplomatic offensive, we carry out a media  
blitz; the enemy invites foreign intervention,  
we unleash civil society; the enemy holds  
talks, we let loose elite intellectuals." Let's  
face it, Maoists have outsmarted the  
establishment on all fronts. And perhaps it  
will be the resulting hubris that will be their  
undoing.

After all, guns may help get instant  
attention, but it can't confer legitimacy. As  
even Mao found out in the end, coercive

power play inevitably breeds sabotage and  
internecine purges. The rise of Gang of  
Four and the resulting backlash decimated  
Maoism from within, it wasn't anything  
brilliant that the reactionaries did. If  
politics isn't allowed to assert its  
centrality, the Maoist leadership will not  
be able to contain the demon of  
warlordism in their ranks for long.

An ambitious military is seldom an  
asset for any regime. Baburam Bhattarai's  
allegation that Royal Nepali Army is in the  
process of transforming itself into Royal  
American Army is knee-jerk rhetoric, but  
foreign advisers aren't desirable anywhere.

Popular Nepali poet Bhupi Sherchan  
writes that we Nepalis are said to be brave  
precisely because we all are so naive.  
Mainstream political parties are the only  
representatives of peace, not for any  
altruistic reason, but because their very  
existence depends on a return to peace. As  
long as the peoples' representatives don't  
get a say, enduring peace will continue to  
elude us.

By incessantly running down political  
parties for their sins of omissions and  
commissions—of which there has been  
many over last 12 years—our 'opinion-  
makers' unwittingly end up propagating  
the case for the continuity of conflict. As  
Baburam Bhattarai admitted in another  
rhetorical flourish: if the Maoists are guilty  
for the excesses of the last seven years, the  
monarchy too must own to up its past 234  
years of injustice.

After the declaration of a state of  
emergency and mobilisation of the army,  
the Maoists 40-point list of demands  
receded into the background. Now their  
cadre are unlikely to settle for anything  
less than the capture of the state,  
something that's not likely in the present  
geopolitical environment. Perhaps only a  
reassertion of the people's sovereignty can  
bring about reconciliation between the  
forces of the extreme right and the  
leftist ultras. For that to happen,  
the 18-point demand of the  
agitating parliamentary parties has  
also become the national agenda of  
progressive change. The sooner we  
all realise that, the better for all of  
us. Competitive politics may be  
inherently dirty, but other extreme  
options are far more dangerous. ♦

I s there finally a golden  
sunrise in the land of the  
Buddha? Has the veteran  
prime minister pulled out yet  
another rabbit out of his hat?

The government has gone  
further than most previous  
governments to present a  
political proposal to the  
Maoists that is more inclusive  
and representational,  
suggesting a path for far-  
reaching future  
reforms. The only  
problem was that it  
came from a non-  
elected government,  
and had to be  
rejected by the  
political parties who  
were. And it didn't go far  
enough to meet the  
Maoists' own demands.

Given the current  
state of the state, let's  
not dismiss the proposal  
outright. It does cover a wide  
range of desirable reforms with  
strong implica-tions. Even the  
initial disappointment  
expressed by the Maoists and  
the political parties is partly  
justified since it omits a set of  
crucial points all related to the  
royal duties, powers, privileges,  
and responsibilities. As for the  
rest of the issues contained in  
the proposal, the only fault we  
can find with it is that it  
should have come 10 years ago.

Despite these omissions,  
the proposed position paper by  
the government outlining  
changes in the political  
landscape of the country is a  
good start and encompasses  
some of the ideas we have  
suggested in these pages in the  
past year. Civil society  
interested in seeing liberal  
democracy foster in the  
country should find its  
provisions refreshing. And  
many of the ideas do  
encompass demands of the  
Maoists, the parties, and the

**Even if it doesn't go all the way, the government's  
political agenda is a good start.**



civil society:

- Regional level devolutionary governments to devolve the decision making power to the grassroots.
- Proportional representation system of election to help diminish marginalisation of the political and ethnic minorities.
- Setting aside 20 percent seats in both houses for women and other disadvantaged groups, land reforms, and an affirmative action program in the government jobs to ensure social justice and fairness.
- Provision of an interim government, three months prior to the election, to ensure a free and fair election.
- A referendum mechanism to give people sole power to practice direct democracy on issues of national importance.
- Transparency in party activities, financial dealings and internal democracy to reduce conflict of interests and to mitigate incentive for corruption.

- Strengthening the prime minister's executive power by allowing him or her to form a cabinet with experts from outside the parliament, and opening up other measures to lessen frequent dissolutions and enhance stability.

If implemented properly, the  
above main institutional reforms  
will make our infant democracy  
more liberal and responsible, and  
we should welcome these  
amendments. Whether it is a  
part of a negotiating strategy in  
the current peace talks, or an  
indication of a deliberate and  
rigid bottom line, there are four  
important items missing from the  
proposal.

- Protecting parliament from royal intervention
- The army under civilian rule
- Limiting royal perks
- Secularism

The success of the talks will  
depend on the approach that the  
government will take in handling

these issues. Much of the  
acrimony between the monarch  
and the political parties stems  
from the use and misuse of  
Article 127. The probability of a  
successful negotiation is very low  
if this issue is not settled.  
Without going into much detail,  
a good compromise could be to  
bring Article 127 under the  
Parliament Act (see 'Ambiguity  
to Trust', #144).

In recent interviews, the king  
has reaffirmed his commitment  
to constitutional monarchy and  
the multiparty system, but does  
acknowledge some technical  
flaws and ambiguity in both. The  
voice of the opposition forces in  
the country is quite firm and  
unified on Article 127, and it  
cannot be ignored. A mutually  
agreeable solution and a modified  
Article 127 must be worked out  
to ensure the sovereignty of the  
people's representatives.

Similarly, taking the  
commander-in-chief out of the  
current three-person National  
Security Council, or making him a  
non-voting member, and  
broadening the membership to  
include others will democratise its  
functioning. The king himself has  
said in a recent interview that the  
army is under the command of the  
civilian government—the prime  
minister and the defence minister.  
From his remarks it appears that he  
would be quite open to such  
forward-looking democratic  
reforms.

A mutual understanding in  
bigger political issues will make it  
easier for everyone to sit down and  
deal with the royal perks. A  
sensible proposal, without  
demeaning the throne and the  
crown, should not be difficult to  
prepare. King Gyanendra in recent  
interviews has shown extraordinary  
flexibility on these issues.

It is secularism that is more  
touchy. Do 80 percent of the  
people who call themselves  
Hindu, really need the country

## LETTERS

Uplift Program (SUP) specifically  
to improve the socio-economic  
condition of residents in the 14  
VDCs affected in the Melamchi  
Valley. The SUP pursues a  
holistic and participatory  
development approach,  
including buffer zone  
development, education, health,  
income generation and  
community development, and  
rural electrification. The local  
residents, community  
organisations, and/or have been  
consulted during the SUP design

project has also duly considered  
riparian flow requirements for  
existing uses and will maintain  
minimum required flow in the  
Melamchi river at any time of the  
year. Details are available at  
www.melamchiwater.org

Most of the anticipated  
benefits will be realised only  
after the project enters full-  
scale implementation. The  
project has required a long  
planning period, which is not  
uncommon for a venture on this  
scale. Understandably,

and hope it will help to build  
confidence. It is not true, as  
stated in the article, that the  
army has taken over  
construction of the roads in  
Melamchi Valley.

**M S Shrestha,**  
Deputy Executive Director  
Melamchi Water Supply  
Development Board

**INDIA-NEPAL**  
Rabindra Mishra deserves  
thanks for his thought-provoking  
opinion on Indian influence in

willingness to resolve the  
refugee problem. Will our own  
leaders be ready to sacrifice the  
post of prime minister to that of  
chief minister? Are we ready to  
be India's trans-Himalayan  
watchdog to serve her security?

**Bigyan Niva, Bishalnagar**

**TEACH**  
As I went through 'Cry, education'  
by Augustine Thomas SJ (Letters,  
# 157), for a moment I was  
dumbfounded. It was surprising to  
find a mind that can think from





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MFSC),  
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ncing that it

was going ahead with the plan. Many are now speculating that the real motive behind the move is to parcel out choice parks like Shivapuri and Rara to private entities. Except Royal Chitwan National Park, Royal Bardia National Park, Sagarmatha National Park, Langtang National Park and Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, all other parks appear to be up for grabs. In total, Nepal has eight national

parks, four wildlife reserves, three conservation areas, one hunting reserve and five buffer zones around national parks, covering 18 percent of the country. Conservationists say the decision was made without consulting experts, and are concerned about the kind of organisations that will be allowed to run the national parks, whether they have any former experience, and who is going to choose them. "In-depth planning

## The government is in a hurry to parcel out the management of national parks like Rara (left). What's the rush?

and utmost care is needed because we are talking about national parks not just forest conservation. Once we lose endangered species, it is irreversible. I wonder what the hurry is," says noted Nepali naturalist, Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha.

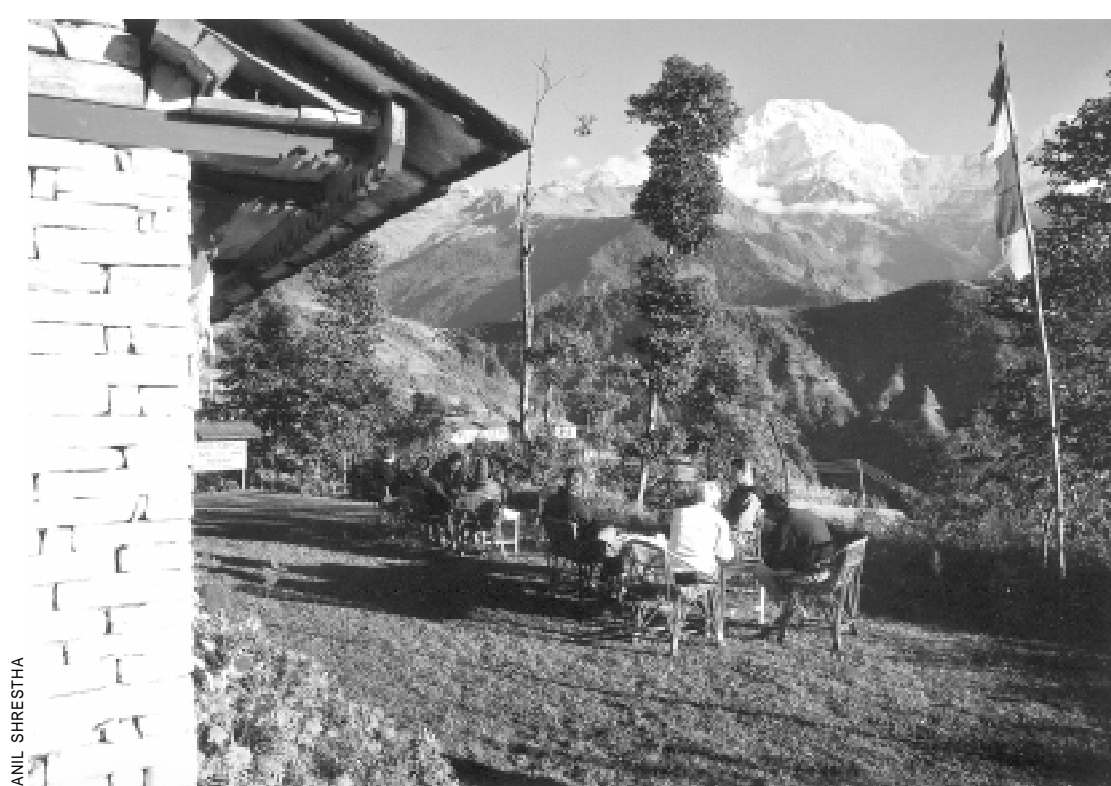
The government could have been inspired by the work of NGOs that have made their mark in conservation. The most notable among them is the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), a world class eco-tourism model initiated by the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) and World Wildlife fund for Nature (WWF) to manage the Annapurna region. A similar model is being applied in Manaslu and Kanchenjunga.

Shrestha says national parks are not the same as conservation areas. A major difference is the involvement and active participation of locals in conservation areas. In national parks, income generation and preserving biodiversity would make for conflicting interests. "How many NGOs would be willing to invest money and dedicate themselves for the sake of conserving just three rare fish

species in the 165m deep Rara Lake?" asks Shrestha.

One of the main concerns raised by conservationists is unclear phrasing in the new budget. Section 50 reads: "...interested Non-Governmental or other institutions will be provided the conservation areas." The phrase "other institutions" has raised eyebrows. Does it mean private businesses or multinational companies from India and abroad? There is special concern about the Shivapuri watershed north of Kathmandu which was declared a national park two years ago. "It is too confusing. The government has to clearly spell out what kind of agencies will be involved, and to what extent," says Keshar Man Bajracharya, president of Nepal Foresters Association.

There is dissension within the government ranks, too. Sources say that the ministry is interfering in the work of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and undermining expertise of the biodiversity experts by making quick decisions. They say most of the rangers and junior officers were never called for consultations. "They didn't share any information with a single



ANIL SHRESTHA

forester or biodiversity expert. This is reason enough to suspect the government's intentions," says forester Bishnu Acharya.

Others are convinced this move is tailored to benefit Big Business. "The policy must have been influenced by some business groups who do not value the dignity of national parks and intend to manage these for commercial interest," says Surya Bahadur Pandey, former warden of Royal Bardia National Park. With over 28 years of experience in biodiversity conservation, Pandey, who now works at the DNPWC, says he has been reprimanded by superiors for voicing personal views contrary to government policy.

His cautious senior colleagues were unwilling to make any comments to us. "We just take orders from the ministry," one DNPWC officer said. "Talk to the ministry spokesperson," advised another. They have declined invitations to attend a series of seminars and workshops organised by other foresters and conservationists to pressurise the government both at national and international levels. "We are not getting emotional here. All we want is transparency and a clear explanation from the government

as to how and where it intends to shift its huge responsibility," says Biswanath Upreti, founder warden of Royal Chitwan National Park.

Annoyed with allegations by former employees of the DNPWC, the ministry says it is tired of being made the scapegoat. "We are not handing over anything to any private sector, but to NGOs only. The so-called conservationists should stop making this a big issue," Chandi Shrestha, Secretary of MFSC, said testily. The government would not defer managerial responsibilities to an NGO unless they had experience in wildlife conservation, he said. Our national parks are not just Nepal's property but a world heritage."

"How much more transparent do they want us to be? The plan is right there, in the open, in the budget speech. We also have a working paper and anybody is welcome to come and study it," says Shrestha. The ministry contends that the controversial "other institutions" in the budget speech simply refers to international environmental NGOs.

"We have to be sure that the government is just a policy maker

and it has no intention of jeopardising decades of conservation work done by our nation," says 84-year-old TJ Thapa, a hunter-turned conservationist.

But critics are not placated, and in the current unrepresentative political environment, they suspect the government of trying to sneak out the management of nature reserves to its favourite entities. When ACAP and the national zoo were handed over to NGOs, it was neither publicly announced, nor were there lengthy consultations with government officials or conservationists. The only thing that seems certain is that the government may find it more difficult than it anticipated to find an NGO or INGO capable of taking over management of our national parks.

KMTNC, WWF Nepal and IUCN are about the only bodies with any experience in the field. Chandra Gurung of WWF Nepal, who used to run ACAP, told us: "This could be a big challenge even for organisations with experience in biodiversity since they may not possess enough managerial expertise to run the national parks on their own." ♦

Bahadur Khatri briefed participants on the difficulties faced in human rights monitoring as an important confidence building measure towards strengthening the peace process as well as adherence by the parties to the Code of Conduct.

Khatri said: "It is yet to be seen whether any tangible agreement will be reached by the negotiating parties regarding human rights issues and particularly the Human Rights Accord, which was drafted and submitted by the Commission to the negotiating parties." But he added there was now a consensus in Nepali civil society about the need to step up confidence building measures for the peace process.

Outgoing UNDP representative, Henning Karcher, stressed the need to implement the Human Rights Accord by the negotiating parties to strengthen the peace process and improve the human rights situation in Nepal. The National Human Rights Commission has decided to take the initiative and start monitoring the overall human rights situation in the country, along with the human rights issues stated in the Code of Conduct through a Monitoring Consultative Committee.

## Erratic electricity

With the recent blackout in the US and Canada, officials here have been encouraged to slack off even more than usual. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) seems to say: "When it can happen even in the US, so what if we get a few power cuts here?"

Not that the NEA doesn't have a good excuse for erratic electricity: this year's monsoons have damaged the Marsyangdi power plant and transmission lines. "The windy

# aw when the lights went out

by DANIEL LAK



prices keep workers out of downtown, business districts lost its ability to transport labour to market.

Food shops that depend on refrigeration and vast tracts of lighting had to close. Petrol pumps immediately went dry with no electricity to

## As an honrary South Asian, I wasn't at first unduly worried about a power cut.

the morning after. We'd all shown pluck and spirit and enjoyed our moment of surfing disaster successfully. But then we had to face a new day with no coffee, no cooked food. That's when the immensity of the thing began to hit. So too did journalists start uncovering stories of the local poor, the elderly, the gravely ill, and how they were hit. Hard.

A clamour arose from the ranks of the general populace. Fix this! Rumours flew of sabotage, the terrorist strike story was resurrected. Panic returned, albeit of a lesser variety than the fright of the first few moments. What was strongest was a growing sense that the ruling classes had failed miserably. First of all, they clearly didn't have a plan for such a vast failure, although as in New York on 9/11, the emergency services

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- \* Bar-b-que dinner by the poo
- \* Banquet in Banyan Ballroom
- \* Closed reception at Sakura,

The World Bank’s new vice president for South Asia muses on the choices and challenges ahead for the kingdom.

rated the outcomes as ‘unsatisfactory’ and sustainability as ‘uncertain’. In other words, something was seriously flawed in our partnership.

We took these findings into account in preparing a Country Assistance Strategy for the period beginning 1999. Unless there were substantial improvements in governance and public service delivery, more financial assistance from the Bank would not be a solution to Nepal’s problems. This is a theme that has since remained central to our policy dialogue in Nepal.

In late 2001, a multi-donor team carried out a review of development partnerships, with the objective of helping the wider community of Nepal’s external partners reflect on past assistance efforts. The overriding message of the review was that the relationship between donors and Nepal was far from ideal. While aid had provided important contributions in isolated pockets, the review noted that without strong collaboration with national institutions, the sustainability of many programs remained uncertain.

The review also noted a strong sense among Nepali civil society (including people previously in positions of authority) that Nepal’s own national institutional capacity for development had eroded in large part due to increased donor activism. The review suggested that national actors need to take charge of their programs in order to reverse the situation. These findings were broadly consistent with issues raised by the government’s own Foreign Aid Policy.

Nepal recently finalised a

Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) which, among other things, seeks to correct the issues outlined above. The process of framing the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Tenth Five Year Plan on which it is anchored, were highly participatory. The fact that the Nepali reform leaders could maintain this momentum in the face of political instability is in itself an impressive feat in consensus building.

Beyond the four sound ‘pillars’ on which the Poverty Reduction Strategy is built, what I also find remarkable is the coherence and strategic thinking that is embedded in the building blocks, designed to overcome constraints to implementation.

- First, in order to address the issue of fiscal constraint, the Poverty Reduction Strategy is underpinned by a Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The MTEF prioritises spending programs and resource allocations, protects pro-poor spending, and ensures funding predictability for deserving programs.
- Second, to address the issue of capacity constraint, the Poverty Reduction Strategy institutionalises the concept of an annual Immediate Action Plan (IAP), a set of top priority reform actions to be undertaken in a particular year.
- Third, in order to address the uncertainties associated with the political and economic realities that face Nepal at this particular point in time, the Poverty Reduction Strategy articulates a ‘normal case’ as well as a ‘low case’ scenario. Plans are also afoot to institutionalize communication and participatory monitoring and

reporting mechanisms.

These building blocks are not mere statements of intent, but most are already in various stages of implementation. For example, the MTEF is in its second year with the effort now focused on capturing all public expenditures. IAP 2002 included a set of 19 reform actions, all of which are today in various stages of implementation. This is clearly a departure from past practice. IAP 2003 includes 24 actions. Two consecutive exercises in IAP formulation and implementation have visibly enlarged the core group of reform champions. Expanding the development discourse beyond the traditional realm of the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance, the IAPs have demonstrated the ability of line ministries to rise above sectoral interests to pursue broader national development outcomes in a holistic, collective manner.

Moreover, they confirm HMG’s ability to think through and implement innovative and inclusive service delivery mechanisms. The ongoing transfer of public schools and sub-health posts to community management, decentralisation, and the effort at delineating the roles and responsibilities of political leaders and the civil service are all testament to this. While one would hope that the impact of these reforms are felt more immediately and more widely at the grassroots level, to my mind, these examples serve to enhance the credibility of Nepal’s reform efforts and help overcome skepticism about their durability.

At the last Nepal Development

Forum in February 2002, Nepal’s development partners pledged to support the Poverty Reduction Strategy and to adhere to the Foreign Aid Policy. For our part, we are currently in the process of developing a new Country Assistance Strategy, aligning our assistance along the lines of Nepal’s Poverty Reduction Strategy priorities and principles enshrined in the Foreign Aid Policy. We are also working with the government in firming up a possible budget support operation which would enlarge the availability of resources to expand pro-poor spending in line with Poverty Reduction Strategy priorities as well as to pick up the fiscal costs of reforms. We hope these should all be in place by October this year.

The path to structural reforms that Nepal has chosen is a truly homegrown one. But this is not to say it is free from challenges. In Nepal, I see a nation shaken out of complacency by a tumultuous phase in its history. A nation deep in introspection, waking up to the consequences of deep-rooted inequalities and long-standing injustices. And I see a nation seriously trying to make a clean break from the past.

To my mind the reform path that Nepal has chosen is about discovering good governance and regaining people’s trust in the state. It is about emerging from conflict and embarking on a path of national renewal and lasting peace. If development is all about social transformation, in my reading, Nepal is indeed at a special moment in its history. Nepal is at a crossroads between challenge and choice. ♦

Praful Patel is a Ugandan national and was appointed World Bank Vice President for South Asia. He wrote this commentary after visiting Nepal last week.

get to the Indian states that do not border Nepal. When one travels to cities like Bangalore, one wonders why the Indian identity in Nepal is a problem and vice-versa. No one talks about the excess export of vegetable *ghiu* or how tea exports are ruining their local market. Neither do they dwell upon issues of dams and downstream benefits. For the South Indians, Nepal is a wonderful country that, apart from Mt Everest, has the revered shrine of Pashupatinath.

Leverage

It hasn’t been a bad year for Nepal Lever Limited. The company reported a turnover of Rs 1,245 million with profits after taxes sitting at Rs 93.2 million for the fiscal year ending on 17 August 2003 (32 Asad 2060 BS). Although exports registered a slump due to adverse changes in the Indian budget of 2001, total company sales grew by one percent. However, domestic sales more than made up for that shortfall. The board has recommended a dividend of Rs 90 per share.

Excellence rewarded

For 11 years, students who excel in the SLC examination have received Tuborg Excellence Awards, established by the Gorkha Brewery as an incentive to boost morale. Eligible recipients are those who make the top ten in the annual government exam. They are formally felicitated and given a medal, certificate and a cash prize ranging from Rs 50,000 for the top spot, awarded this year to Bishal Gyawali of Butwal, to Rs 4,000 for students from fourth place through till 10<sup>th</sup>.

Vrooom

Karizma, the latest model from Hero Honda, is already winning plaudits. The 233cc machine can accelerate from 0-60km in 3.8 seconds, has unique five-spoke mag alloy wheels, a kick and self start system and a sporty body. Recently launched in the Valley, the bike is aimed at bike lovers who can shell out Rs 192,000 for this calibre of speed and style.



Thai to India

Thai Airways will now fly to two new Indian destinations beginning October. Chennai and Bangalore will join Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta on the list of Indian cities that Thai caters to. The additional flights will be effective from 26 October to 29 March next year. In a bid to promote economic ties between the two countries, Thai Airways International, together with the Tourism Authority of Thailand, hosted “Thai Night” on the Thai roadshow in India between 5 and 10 August.

“An untouched market for i

**Nepali Times:** How robust is the insurance business in Nepal?  
**SK Sakhuja:** It is virtually a virgin market, but there is a lot of potential for life insurance in Nepal. According to the 2001 census, the insurable population in Nepal is more than 12 million: these are people in the earning 15-59 age group. Considering Nepal’s 2.2 percent population growth rate, there is an insurable population of 15 million. This means there is a large group who are not covered by insurance schemes.

**What are the drawbacks then to serve this market?**  
Most people are not aware about the needs and benefits of life insurance. The upper segment have a better understanding, but the middle class and the lower strata are unaware about insurance, especially in rural areas.  
We have a mixed clientele: businessmen, service holders, even a few outside major towns and cities. The average size of our insurance policy is Rs 170,000 and that includes some policies between five to 10 million. Our minimum sum is Rs 10,000 under a policy, and the endowment plan of Rs 20,000 under the money-back plan. This ensures that even the poor can take out an insurance policy. Another thing I am happy to report is that last year we sold 24 percent of our policies to women.

**Is the business getting competitive?**  
In a competitive market, all players have to compete, that is not a problem.  
We follow sound financial practices, ethics, ground rules, corporate governance rules and the law of the land. Our vision is to be an organisation of social and economic significance to the country. This financial year, we did 9,177 policies over the first premium income of Rs 70 million and a total sum insured of Rs 1.4 billion. This comparatively

**Insurance in Nepal is still in its infancy, but it has huge potential for growth. Among the big players in this fledgling sector is Life Insurance Corporation Nepal that began as a joint venture two years ago with an Indian public sector insurance company. SK Sakhuja, CEO and managing director at LIC Nepal, spoke to *Nepali Times* about the lack of investment opportunities, future direction and other prospects.**

have introduced innovative products and offered better returns to policy and stakeholders. Today, most of the money goes into bank deposits for a few years because there are almost no investments that span a 10-year period. This is very awkward when the average term of our policy is 15 years. Bank rates are falling and depositing funds in short-term bank deposits makes for an unprofitable mismatch. It doesn’t help that certain banks refuse to accept deposits. Where can we put the money?

get to the Indian states that do not border Nepal. When one travels to cities like Bangalore, one wonders why the Indian identity in Nepal is a problem and vice-versa. No one talks about the excess export of vegetable *ghiu* or how tea exports are ruining their local market. Neither do they dwell upon issues of dams and downstream benefits. For the South Indians, Nepal is a wonderful country that, apart from Mt Everest, has the revered shrine of Pashupatinath.

The market for Nepali tourism may lie here. Although the flight to Bangalore is non-stop, we need to increase the frequency. There is already enough flow between Nepalis flying for darshan to Sai Baba’s ashram at Puttaparthi and devout Hindus flying to Pashupati to warrant it.  
Nepal could also be sold afresh in this part of India as being a destination for the youth who want value for money. If the private sector tourism industry feels the government has not done its part, perhaps they could take this on as a pilot project to prove a point instead of leaving it to the Nepal Tourism Board.  
Perhaps the best part of the South Indians is their drive and dedication towards building a good future for their children. This has created an economic growth surge in the southern states that surpasses national averages—which

unsurprising by the likes of states, Bihar. South India has power but excessive over extravagance demand is for products. M necessity, no prop, but as modern life. internet cafes in almost all. The new mobile South still believes. They feel cor national ethe careers in ter It is a trait sa young Nepa keen to take. The Bee difference it states like Ar

Nepal in the WTO  
The challenge will be to protect the interest of present producers without jeopardising future potential.

under these circumstances, identify products that will margin of critical potential put pound rate (at around 40 that can be traded off with on products that are ant. with the tariff, special duties



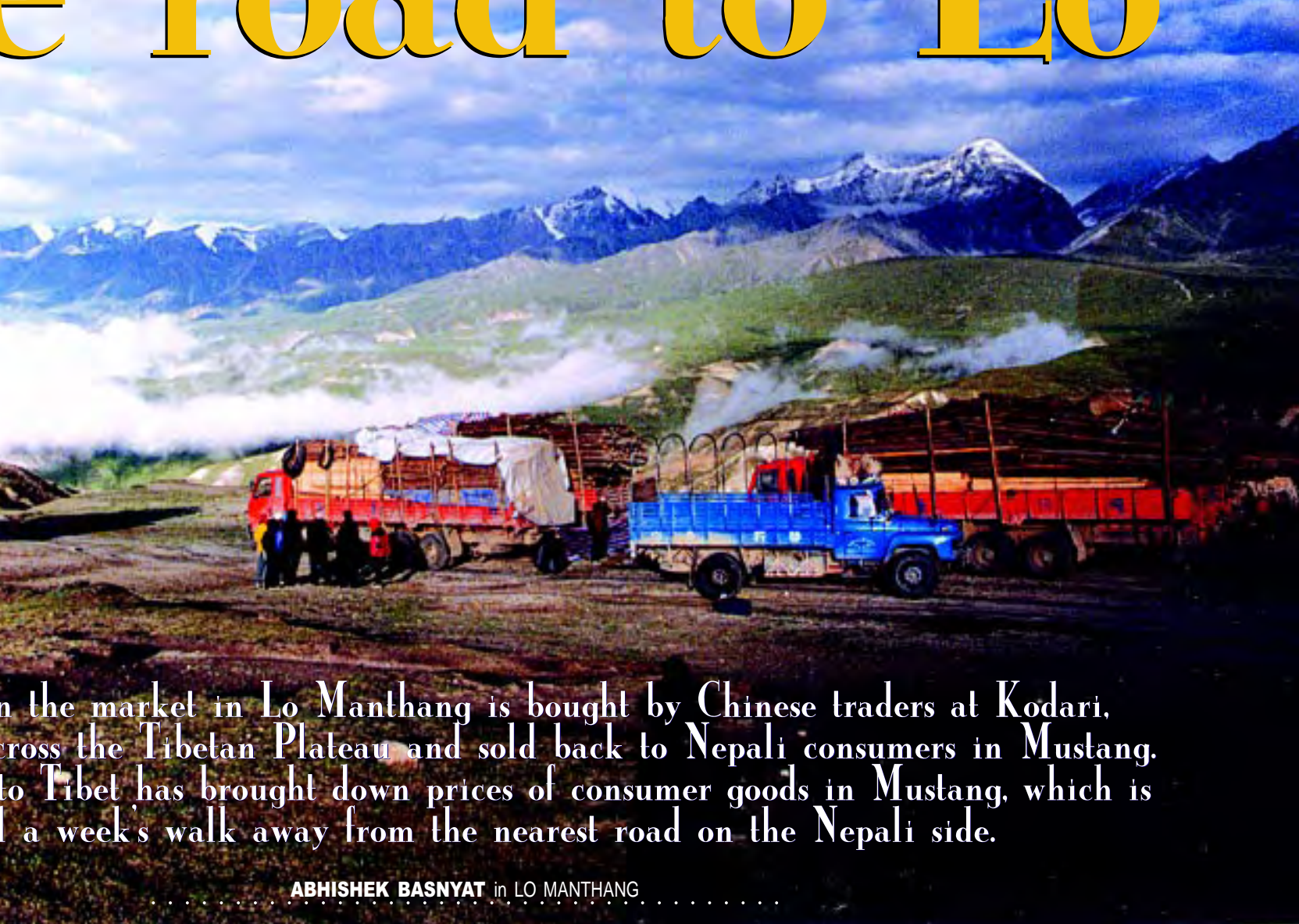
The crucial consideration for our country is the protection of the livelihood of service operators and protecting employment in an under employed country. Unlike goods, it is not possible to protect services by tariffs. While opening services may lead to greater efficiency and productivity of resources

to deliver.  
Nepal has been negotiating under tremendous pressure to adhere to other non-compulsory, often called plurilateral, agreements. Although it is left to the contracting custom territory, for a small economy like ours, the pressure to join such is immense. This is not to say we need to isolate ourselves from such agreements, but we must locate where our interests and benefits lie.  
In order to become more competitive, our challenge lies in capital

by RAJENDRA K KHETAN







in the market in Lo Manthang is bought by Chinese traders at Kodari, cross the Tibetan Plateau and sold back to Nepali consumers in Mustang. to Tibet has brought down prices of consumer goods in Mustang, which is a week's walk away from the nearest road on the Nepali side.

ABHISHEK BASNYAT in LO MANTHANG

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on foot. In the old days, trade was determined only by the weather, but in the past two years the Chinese authorities opens the borders for a week biannually, once in March-April and again in October-November. Lo-Manthang suffered another setback in the spring trading session because of the SARS outbreak, and had to wait till mid-July to make up for it.

This year, as always, Jigme Parwar Bista, the king of Mustang,

travelled to Tibet for trade negotiations, and the marketplace of his capital is awash with Chinese goods. They are found all over the district of Mustang, even as far down as Jomsom, a three-day walk to the south. There is a buzz in the thin mountain air as people examine new products, bargain, haggle and walk away with household appliances like cooking gas, stoves and solar panels, and construction material, besides

food and clothing.

Staples such as *uwa* (wild wheat) and rice, salt, cooking oil are sold alongside instant noodles, sausages, biscuits and candy. Thirst quenchers include a variety of fruit juices, tea, beer and alcohol purportedly fortified with tiger bone extract. The clothes on display are similar to Khasa apparel: cheap polyester tracksuits, splashy dresses, canvas shoes. The most popular items, not surprisingly, are the ubiquitous Chinese blanket and thermos flasks—both available in garish red and pink. Truckloads of timber are feeding the construction boom in Mustang, and much of it is actually derived from Nepali trees logged and smuggled out of the Larkya area north of Manaslu.

Indian or Nepali goods are exorbitantly priced because they have to be flown into Jomsom and taken on mule trains to Lo Manthang. They don't stand a chance against cheaper Chinese imports. Chinese rice costs at least Rs 4 per kg less, and the irony is that much of it is actually Nepali rice that Chinese traders have bought at Tatopani and hauled all the way here to resell in Nepal for a profit.

And even as consumers we don't seem to have the upper hand. Gyanendra Bista, the VDC secretary, says goods well past their expiry dates are often found because there is no one to monitor quality. There is an HMG customs house, but it lies deserted. The officers prefer to stay in Jomsom, and so Lo Manthang runs without government supervision, and the burgeoning trade generates no revenue for Kathmandu.

Amgyal Bista, a former DDC member, tells us: "The Chinese businessmen basically dictate terms to us." On the Chinese side of the border, security is unfailingly watchful and merciless towards trespassers. We are told about separate incidents of an allegedly innocent VDC secretary and a couple of policemen who were caught and imprisoned blindfolded because they had unwittingly crossed the border. They were released after four days when the king of Mustang intervened on their behalf.

With the border demarcated only by the occasional pillar, it is difficult to see where Nepal ends and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China begins. On the Nepali side, it is completely the opposite: there is no army or police



The Kingdom of Lo (Mustang): A Historical Study  
Ramesh K Dhungel  
Tashi Gephel Foundation, 2003  
Rs 2,000

The writing of 'high Himalayan' cultures in English has been mostly dominated by Western scholars, and it is in this terrain that Tribhuban University cultural historian Ramesh K Dhungel has come out with a historical study titled *The Kingdom of Lo*. The work, drawing on ancient Nepali and Tibetan sources and based largely on documents unearthed by the author in Upper Mustang, is published by the Tashi Gephel Foundation. It was launched Thursday at the Dwarika Hotel by Cho-gye Thi-chen Rinpoche, abbot of the Sakya Tshar-pa tradition. Dhungel visited Mustang in 1982-84 and 1995 to complete this work. Launching the book, the rinpoche said, "In these fearful times, when the inestimably precious cultural tradition established by the ancestral rulers of the Dharma kingdom of Mustang is in danger of being lost altogether, this book will help in the continuity and restoration of the traditions of Mustang." In the dust jacket, scholar Prayag Raj Sharma lauds the author's attempt to link the history of Lo not only with greater Tibet but also with the history of the Khasa kingdoms in the south and west, including Semja (Sinja), and subsequently Parbat and Jumla.

real figure is anyone's guess.

Back in Kathmandu, customs officials are surprised to learn of the volume of imports and variety of goods now available in Mustang. It seems they continue to view Mustang as a minor, informal trading post. Although compared to the Rs 5.3 billion import through the Tatopani border (and Rs 371 million worth of Nepali exports), Mustang's volume may seem meagre, it's probably time for the centre's indifference to change.

The new road was meant to run from this border through all three towns of Lo. Only a third of this road, from the border to Lo Manthang has been completed. The Lobas, despite their enthusiasm to complete a motorable road all the way to Ghemi, have been stopped in their tracks because there is no money from the government. Meanwhile, another road is being built by the Royal Nepali Army connecting Jomsom to Beni and Pokhara.

A new Nepal-China highway link through Mustang down to Pokhara can have an impact in districts beyond Mustang and perhaps also boost Nepali exports to the Tibetan plateau as it has at Kodari. Now what we need is something concrete to come out of talks of opening new land routes, easing visa regulations, and increasing air linkages. ♦



## Lo and behold

Lo is located between the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau. It is a Tibetan-Buddhist kingdom ruled by a monarch granted with a degree of independence within Nepal. Lo was the base of the Tibetan Khampa guerrillas during their covert war against China in the 1960s, and was classified a 'politically fragile' area and closed to foreigners till 1992. Today it is labelled a 'restricted area', and only about a 1,000 foreign visitors are allowed in annually. They have to pay \$700 each for a 10-day permit, plus Rs 2,000 to the Annapurna Area Conservation Project who use the money to boost eco-tourism in the region.

## Trade deficit

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## Inclination to nations in Iraq occupation.

**W**ere partners with the Iraqi people in this exercise," United Nations special representative for Iraq Sergio de Mello had said just last week in his spacious and comfortable office at the Canal Hotel, the UN headquarters in Iraq. He was talking about restoring the country to the Iraqi people and working on rebuilding it together with them.

On Tuesday night De Mello died in the rubble of his office in the most serious attack ever on the UN. At least another 16 people, Iraqi and international staff, died with De Mello. The UN decided in response to evacuate its entire international staff to neighbouring Jordan. This is expected to seriously affect the international organisation's operations in Iraq. It is also a blow to US efforts to normalise the situation in Iraq. The attack, a likely suicide bombing using a cement truck, fits in a pattern that has emerged lately where attackers are increasingly picking non-military targets.

Just ten days ago the Jordanian embassy was hit. Sixteen people died in that attack. In the meantime water mains and oil pipelines have been targeted. Earlier this week even a prison holding opponents of the occupation was

attacked. Six people died. Such attacks seem intended to create chaos and instability, and increase dissatisfaction among the population.

A member of the governing Council had squarely blamed supporters of the former regime and the Baath party for much of the violence, saying, "They are like Nazis." Some Iraqis agree. Outside the partly collapsed UN headquarters, a distraught Iraqi woman whose niece was still trapped in the building after nightfall screamed her rage. "The Baathists are dogs", she kept repeating.

But no one immediately claimed responsibility. Suspects are legion. Another Iraqi woman with family members inside the building said that the attackers picked that building because "they knew there would be a lot of foreigners there." The comment indicates an inclination to identify foreigners and international organisations with the coalition occupation. Even the Red Cross has not been spared. Last month two employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross were killed.

But the UN is identified in the minds of many with international sanctions and the weapons inspections of the past. Neither measure was popular inside the country. Ahead of the war earlier this year, UN international staff, like that of

other NGO s, was evacuated from Iraq. The organisations set up office in the Jordanian capital Amman to keep operations running long distance. The UN waited several weeks after the war before giving its people the green light to re-enter Iraq. But Sergio Vieira de Mello himself, in a speech to the UN in June, spoke of the continuing danger to UN personnel in the country.

De Mello had hoped to create a new bond between the UN and the Iraqi people. While the Coalition Provisional Administration (CPA) is supposed to govern and run Iraq, the UN has had to take on more and more responsibilities. UNICEF, the children's fund, has for example taken on garbage collection. This intensive involvement came despite US wariness of an increased role for the UN in Iraq.

On the morning of the bombing CPA administrator Paul Bremer dismissed talk of a UN Security Council resolution to give the UN a more active role. Such a resolution would have opened the door to participation of more countries in the coalition forces that maintain security in Iraq. The CPA may now be hard pressed to provide the services that will suffer when the UN international staff leaves. It has still not been able to restore utilities and other essentials to the pre-war level.

◆ (IPS)



**MARIO OSAVA** in RIO DE JANEIRO

He was a man accustomed difficult and dangerous situations, and that is partly why United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan laments his death as a personal loss and one that will be felt deeply throughout the UN system. Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, 55, died Tuesday in Baghdad, where he had served since May 27 as Annan's special representative to aid in the rebuilding in Iraq. The envoy was the victim of a bomb blast at the UN headquarters in the

Iraqi capital.

Vieira de Mello held the post of UN Under-Secretary-General as well as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared an official three-day mourning period when he received confirmation in Brasilia of the UN official's death, and described it as "the insanity of terrorism".

Vieira de Mello was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1948. He was not a Brazilian diplomat, but rather an employee of the United Nations since 1969,

based in Geneva. Since that time he served in official missions around the world, often in the middle of conflict. He worked to help refugees—the displaced, victims of ethnic, religious and political conflicts—in Bangladesh, Sudan, Cyprus, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, Lebanon, Cambodia, Rwanda, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 1999 he accepted a position that marked a major step in his career within the UN system. He became the interim administrator of East Timor during its transition period to independence, achieved last year after four centuries as a Portuguese colony and 26 years under iron-fisted Indonesian rule.

Vieira de Mello's 33 years of experience made him an ideal choice to take on the thorny responsibility of representing the United Nations in the reconstruction of Iraq, occupied by a US-led coalition. Sunday, the Brazilian agency *Estado* published what was his last interview with his native country's media. In the interview he

most humiliating periods in the history of the Iraqi people; I know I wouldn't want to see foreign tanks in Copacabana [Rio de Janeiro's most famous beach districts]," he said. The envoy expressed hope that in 2004 it would be possible to hold parliamentary elections in Iraq in order to pave the way for a new government and an end to the mandate of the occupying forces. "I think I have experienced more dangerous situations. Here in Baghdad I don't feel as much in danger as in other places where I worked for the United Nations," Vieira de Mello said in the interview, parts of which *Estado* did not release until Tuesday. When asked if he thought the UN offices in Iraq could be a target for terrorists he responded, "I don't think so. The UN is highly respected by the local population. The Iraqis see the UN as an independent organisation, a friend, in contrast to what they feel towards the occupying forces." ◆

## COMMENT

# Milking the holy cow

**India's ruling party beefs up for elections.**

**F**aced with uncertain prospects in elections to five state legislatures due within three months, India's pro-Hindu coalition is bringing in a bill in the national parliament to ban the killing of cows and win the sympathies and votes of Hindus, but this is likely to stir a hornet's nest.

To start with, it means pandering to a particular religious group—many but by no means all, groups of Hindus consider the cow a sacred animal—in India's multicultural, multireligious society. This can only strengthen majoritarianism and promote the fundamentalist agenda, with dangerous consequences for Indian society and politics. Indeed, the preamble to the bill exhibits a strong religious bias—unprecedented for parliamentary legislation in India. It says that "the cow is the embodiment of divine virtues like love, compassion, benevolence,

the world's buffaloes. Apart from slaughtering millions of cows and buffaloes for domestic consumption, India also exports over \$200 million worth of meat, mainly beef.

Bringing in a national law on a subject that falls within the domain of India's 32 states and territories is itself a highly questionable move. More than a quarter of these states, including Kerala in the south, West Bengal in the east, and some Christian-majority states of the north-east, and Jammu and Kashmir permit cows to be killed for their meat. Some of the states have registered an angry protest against the proposed bill. For instance, the deputy chief minister of north-eastern Meghalaya says: "A particular diet may be poison to one community, but food for another, as in the case of hill people in the north-east whose main diet is beef." Neighbouring



meat consumed. Some 80 percent of Kerala's people regularly eat beef. They include 72 Hindu communities, besides Muslim, Christian and indigenous people. Even more undemocratic is the government's crude attempt to regulate, dictate and censor the dietary habits of Indians. Banning cow slaughter involves preventing people from choosing what they eat. Permitting it would not impose a particular diet upon an individual or group.

A blanket ban upon the killing of cows, bulls and calves, irrespective of age, utility or health status is a draconian measure which will inflict a heavy burden upon the peasant-owners of such animals, besides increasing the proportion of unhealthy bovines in the total population. Animal husbandry experts have often warned against the overpopulation of cattle in India and the emaciated state of a

constitute a majority of India's population. The absence of beef will raise the food bill for the underprivileged. Even more important, surveys of butchers in different states show that three-fourths of all beef is consumed by non-Muslims, largely Hindus. A higher proportion of the sellers of cattle are Hindus. Abstinence from beef-eating is largely a caste or class question among Hindus. The low castes prefer beef to other meat for reasons of taste and habit too.

Yet, to impose this authoritarian ban upon cow slaughter, the government, led by the Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party, has conjured up, of all things, an ecological and animal rights argument. The bill seeks to shift the constitutional subject matter from the purview of the states to items common to both national and state legislatures under measures for 'Prevention of

the capital. Most are left to forage through garbage. They end up consuming rotten vegetables, meat, and above all, an enormous amount of plastic bags. India is notorious for its overconsumption and unsafe disposal of recycled, ugly plastic carry-bags, which are not required to be separated from biodegradable matter. Autopsies on cows turn up literally hundreds of plastic bags in the stomach. Indian cows suffer from a range of ailments, including foot-and-mouth disease. The bill is hypocritical in evading issues at the centre of the professed concern for the welfare of the cow.

The proposed law is open to objection on two other grounds too. It originates in the mistaken belief that cow slaughter was "brought" to India by "invading" Muslims in the Middle Ages, and that Hindu scriptures unanimously proscribe cow

Rich evidence of this found in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Dharmashastras and other Hindu scriptures. For Vedic Aryans, cows were an important form of wealth. They were gifted to the priestly class of Brahmins as fees. Cows were defined as "food" in these texts. There is evidence that in a later period, many Brahmins stopped eating beef. But they formed less than five percent of the population. In no major scripture, says Professor DN Jha of Delhi University and author of *The Myth of the Holy Cow*, "is killing a cow described as a grave sin, unlike drinking liquor or killing a Brahmin".

"It is only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the demand for banning cow slaughter emerged as a tool of mass political mobilisation by right-wing Hindu communalists, out to isolate Muslims by aggressively challenging their dietary practices as 'alien'," says

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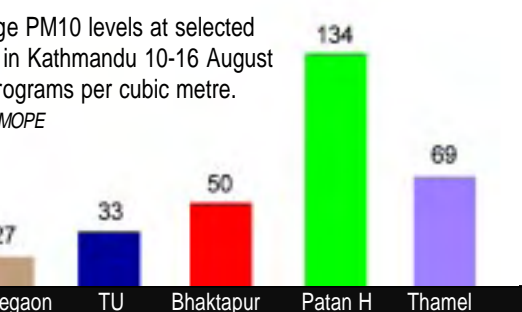
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by MAUSAM BEED

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In the land of Mustang: East of Lo Manthang Peter Matthiessen, Photographs Thomas Laird  
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In the spring of 1992, Matthiessen and Laird travelled deep in the secret valley of Sao Khola,  
tucked in the northernmost reaches of the Himalaya. From the central city of Lo Manthang,  
known as "Mustang", along with their entourage of government chaperones, attendants and  
horsemen, the two began a horseback adventure across arid plateaus and narrow river chasms that  
is captured through expansive narrative and poignant photographs.



**Mustang Bhot in Fragments** Manjushree Thapa  
Himal Books, 1992 (Second ed)  
Rs 275

The writer made the first of her two trips to this remote corner of Nepal in 1990. This book, the first  
by the novelist of *The Tutor of History*, is an account of her travels and also the story of a Nepali  
woman confronting the schisms in the communities she meets, in her country, and in her own identity.  
This acclaimed work provides first time visitors with a reference point and an insight into a region that  
once followed a strict policy of isolation.

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



*Koi Mil Gaya* is being touted as the *desi* version of *ET* meets *X-Files*. Rakesh Roshan's mega production aims at changing our comprehension of this genre in Indian cinema. The movie, starring his son Hrithik Roshan, Preity Zinta and Rekha, uses the expertise of international production teams who worked on Independence Day and Godzilla. As always, we'll have to suspend our disbelief (a spaceship that responds to the sound of "Aum") but at least we can look forward to a new experience and perhaps the slickest Bollywood sci-fi thriller ever made.

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## Traditional nail parlors adjust to modern times.

### SRADDHA BASNYAT

Indira dips a *nangini*, a thin sliver of iron used to cut, shape and clean toenails, into a delicate silver water bowl. She is a *nangini* too, defined by the tool that she wields.

Displaced by the steel nail clipper, there are fewer and fewer *nanginis* around. However, their services are still essential before many religious ceremonies. Especially in Newari homes, *nanginis* are required for death anniversaries (*sarada*), weddings, sacred thread ceremonies (*bartaman*), the first time a girl wears a sari (*gunyu cholo*), the naming ceremony (*nuaran*) and death rites (*kiriya*). Other communities also need a *nangini*'s services when nails are cut as part of purification rituals.

With deft precision, Indira handles the razor sharpness—one wrong move and a client could be a missing toe. Luckily, her mother taught her well. Although her nieces are being trained by their mothers, many other young girls refuse to learn this trade probably because being a *nangini* boxes them into a caste system that treats them as impure. Indira knows better than to enter the kitchen of higher caste homes.



"I continue doing this because I am not educated," she says as she trims the cuticles of a customer. After each nail is shaped, she uses the pointed end of the tool to clean. The nails are then buffed to a high shine by rubbing brick dust over them.

The result is astonishing—as good as an overpriced foot spa at a parlour, only all natural and much, much cheaper. Even today *nanginis* charge only about Rs 30 when clients visit their homes and roughly Rs 100 for every housecall. In addition, they may receive a few extra rupees for tea or transport and an annual salary averaging Rs 200 per client.

Her business is strictly word-of-mouth, and though Indira keeps busy with 6-10 clients visiting weekly and 50-60 homes to cover regularly, she cannot survive on her earning as a *nangini* alone. She has a day job, which is why she is reluctant to have a photograph taken. "I don't want my name and picture in the paper, everyone will recognise me... I feel shy," she pleads.

The final touch is the traditional *alta*, a red liquid said to have cooling antiseptic properties. Indira paints a ring around the outside of each foot and over each nail. In 10 minutes she has finished her work, using only her *nangini*, water, sprinkles of brick dust and a splash of *alta*. Everything fits neatly into a small pouch she tucks into her handbag.

As Indira turns to leave, so many questions remain unanswered. These are queries that she herself cannot answer: like whether one day there would be no more *nanginis* left. To that she smiles and says, "No matter how small our numbers become, whatever happens, as long as the rituals survive, we will too." ♦

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Bhagawan Koirala is between operations at the Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre in Bansbari. That was the only time he had for an interview. Between his daily surgeries, meetings with his medical team and administration of the hospital, the 40-year-old doctor has little time to spare.

Bhagawan didn't exactly choose a career in medicine: as a young boy growing up in Palpa he was no different from his friends who only had hazy ideas about the future. But unlike his peers, Bhagawan had an extraordinarily sharp mind. By age 13 he had passed the SLC exam, and his parents enrolled him into a health assistant program at the Institute of Medicine in Maharajgunj. "They fudged my

medicine," Bhagawan admits with a grin. It was the first step towards becoming one of Nepal's leading heart surgeons. Encouraged by GP Sharma, a lecturer at the institute, Bhagawan got fired up about cardio-thoracic surgery. Years later, Sharma would again encourage Bhagawan, this time to begin open heart surgery on a regular basis at Teaching Hospital. "I turned down several offers to stay abroad, I had a clear mission to return to Nepal," he says. So, two years ago, Bhagawan came home for good.

It wasn't long before he was offered the position of executive director at the heart centre. "I hate administration, but I thought it was the only way to create a platform that would enable me to give my fullest," he recalls. Today he juggles running the impeccably clean and efficient hospital with surgery. He is also on the expert committee of Princess Jayanti Memorial Trust where the good doctor waves bed, food, heart valve (costing Rs 75,000) and operation charges for needy heart patients. Despite his



name and his accomplishments, Bhagawan does not suffer from a 'god complex'.

"Working with heart patients in Nepal can go two ways," he says. "They can make you feel like a god over a routine procedure, but their unwillingness and, at times, inability to understand can also prove a formidable challenge." His team is well trained and on a good day, everything in the operation theatre goes smoothly. On a not-so-good

day they pull off 12-hour sessions of intense concentration battling to save a patient's life.

It's a high stress job, and after observing Bhagawan, we have to ask how he does it. Early morning badminton sessions obviously help. But what else? "When you're working at the edge of life and death every day, your focus is on getting things right," says Bhagawan. Now, here is a doctor whose heart is in the right place. ♦ (Sraddha Basnyat)

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