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### Terrorist tag again

In response to the Maoists breaking off the truce and attacking army officers in Kathmandu, the government Thursday declared the Maoists terrorists again. It had lifted the tag in January after the ceasefire went into effect. However, the government has stopped short of re-declaring a state of emergency. In two early morning attacks on Thursday, Maoist hitmen attacked Col Kiran Basnet and Col Ramindra Chhettri, both psywar specialists in the army. Col Basnet later died from his wounds, while Sandhurst-educated Chhettri, produced the army programme on NTV, is recovering in hospital. Military analysts said the Maoists are now using assassinations in the capital to prove they can hit targets at will. The strategy still seems to be to pressure the government to yield to its demand for constituent assembly. Prachanda in his statement Wednesday kept the door open for resumption of talks. Also Thursday, armed rebels robbed Rs 4 million from a Rastriya Baniya Bank branch in Tulsipur. Security was tightened in Kathmandu, leading to mammoth traffic jams. Security personnel inspect the spot outside his house where Col Kiran Basnet was shot (top) and an army squad on patrol on Thursday. (right).

# Back on warpath

## What now?

ANALYSIS by **HARI ROKA**

The leaders of the political parties called Prachanda's withdrawal from the peace process this week a "sudden and hasty" decision. They shouldn't have been so surprised.

After all, they took the Maoist war too lightly while in power. When they did get serious, brutal crackdowns were unleashed in the midwest that only fanned the flames. Even today, as they prepare to take to the streets again the parties don't have a viable proposal to end the conflict. They are behaving as if nothing has changed, and will go back to doing whatever they were doing pre-October Fourth if they are reinstated.

For the past seven months, the government-Maoist negotiators were just trying to break the ice. Until Hapure two weeks ago, there had been no discussions on the Maoists' political demands. The government's agenda was little different from what Sher Bahadur Deuba offered in the ill-fated 2001 talks.

The belligerent ultimatum by Baburam Bhattarai and the tough talk of government negotiators Kamal Thapa and Prakash Chandra Lohani this week were indications that never were the twain going to meet. In the countryside, the ceasefire had become a formality, with daily ambushes. The attack on Deuba's convoy was the last straw. It was just a question of who was going to declare the ceasefire over first, and the Maoist beat the government to it.

The ultimate solution to this crisis, one that would take the wind out of the Maoist sails, is to find a political mechanism to bring the people into the mainstream and give them a say. The government in its

agenda belatedly addressed some of the issues of political exclusion. But the proposal that would satisfy the Maoists while giving the people full say—a constituent assembly—was unacceptable to the government. In the long run, freely and fairly electing leaders to frame a new constitution may be the only compromise that will work.

The end of the ceasefire, Thursday's attacks on army officers in Kathmandu and

the terrorist tag on Maoists have sidelined the political parties' agitation. The poor response from the public to their anti-king campaign should be a wake-up call, and they should reassess their strategy and timing.

It has been nearly one year since King Gyanendra took over. He tried one thing after another, nothing has worked. He and the country can't afford

another mistake. Time to prove he means it when he affirms his belief in the constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. Whoever holds power takes responsibility, there is no point blaming anyone else.

It is clear who is going to be the fall guy this time: the Surya Bahadur Thapa government. Just

as three months ago it was Lokendra

Bahadur Chand and his negotiator, Narayan Singh Pun.

The ceasefire gave the king legitimacy, and without, it he may be weighing his least-costly option, one of which may be to put Deuba back in the saddle. ♦



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

Timesnepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 100

Q. In case peace talk fails, who would you blame for it?

King 34.3%

Prachanda 27.8%

Deuba 21.2%

Others 16.7%

Total votes: 1,953

Weekly Internet Poll # 101. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the Maoists' demand for constituent assembly elections?

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# Constitutional tug-o-war

All short cuts in politics inevitably turn out to be despotic.

## IF THERE IS POLITICAL WILL,

It is pointless getting into a semantic discussion about Prachanda's statement on Wednesday in which he said there was "no more rationale for the time being for the ceasefire and peace talks..." The Maoists have amply demonstrated what they meant: they are now embarked on a campaign of top-level assassinations possibly leading to urban guerrilla warfare.

Thursday morning's twin attacks on two senior army officers involved in psywar operations was proof of that. The targets seem to have been deliberately selected, and the attacks showed careful planning and stakeout. So we are now back to where we left off in January with the assassination of Armed Police Chief Krishna Mohan Shrestha. Seven months of effort, a lot of time and energy have been wasted. One lesson is that a peace process cannot succeed without political will, expert mediation and a monitoring mechanism.

The fragile hopes for peace of 23 million Nepali has been dashed again. All because of a disagreement over whether the 1990 Constitution should be replaced with a new one drawn up by a constituent assembly as the Maoists say they wanted, or have the changes incorporated into the statute through reforms as the government proposed.

It was clear the Maoists were in no mood for compromise, and the government negotiators, suffering under the active non-cooperation of the political parties, gave in to almost everything except the constituent assembly. After having got that far, it is difficult to see why this particular demand should have been such an insurmountable barrier. Unless the demand itself was just an excuse to buy time to return to war. Just like the last time.

An overwhelming sense of national despair greeted Prachanda's statement. Even though the comrade left a small opening for talks to restart, it is clear that the Nepali people now have to be prepared for the worst while hoping for the best. Prepared for an escalation of the war, with all its implications for human suffering and economic losses.

No war is civil. It is by definition a nasty affair, but we must be able to control the brutality and prevent the suffering of innocents. This time, we have to get both sides to agree to a human rights covenant not just a statement of good intentions, but with a mechanism in place to directly monitor violations on the ground.

Experience from other insurgency-hit countries like El Salvador, Sri Lanka and Colombia is that the Maoists' path of assassinations will have an equal and opposite reaction from the establishment, either directly or through shadowy vigilante groups and death squads. We can't afford to go down that road.

## THERE IS A WAY.

King Gyanendra legitimised his October Fourth action for seven months with this ceasefire. Now as the conflict restarts, he will have to urgently think of other political options. Throughout all this, it was only the people who seemed to crave for peace. The army had evidence all along that the Maoists were using the talks to prepare for new fighting and was itching to get back into the fray. The rebels knew they wouldn't survive if things went back to non-violent electoral politics.

The parliamentary parties, whatever their past misconduct, is the one entity that needs peace to exist. Because their very survival is tied up with an end to conflict, they have to be a party to its restoration.

The government and Maoist negotiating teams are lead by two PhDs. Dr Prakash Chandra Lohani and Dr Babauram Bhattarai will need many more sessions to work towards the compromise. The good doctors must acknowledge the overwhelming public clamour not to let the peace process be derailed.

Every negotiating process entails give-and-take and the two owe it to society to find that middle ground. But whatever they agree on, we all know that there isn't much that either of them can do to resolve the two fundamental issues of the seven year old conflict: royal powers and the army's chain of command. These issues can only be decided by people who represent the people. But to our misfortune, the fate of the dissolved parliament continues to hang in the balance.

Hemmed in from the left and the right, the centre simply cannot hold. Things started falling apart four years ago when the rightists first weakened the legitimacy of people's representatives by skillfully manipulating politicians like Bamdev Gautam and Sher Bahadur Deuba. Then, the Maoists destroyed its capacity to handle political crises by intensifying their armed rebellion. They may not have been acting in unison, but the net effect of hardline royalists and extreme leftists was the demolition of all elected institutions.

In retrospect, the process leading to the suspension of democracy was a textbook case of giving the dog a bad name before hanging it from the lamp-post. Many of us in the media and the intelligentsia at that time became unwitting accomplices in the conspiracy of subverting popular sovereignty. The media was manipulated into

exaggerating the political silliness over the Lauda Air jet lease and blowing it out of all proportion. The purported case of corruption in high places was then used as an excuse to prevent parliament from conducting its winter session. Instead of being concerned, we shouted 'good riddance' when premier Girirja Prasad Koirala was humbled by the army brass in the wake of the Holeri debacle in 2000, and then made to bow out of office in disgrace.

His successor Sher Bahadur Deuba launched half-baked land reform, declared a state of emergency, dissolved the lower house of the parliament, refused to extend the term of local government bodies, and then went ahead and bought some Belgian guns with unseemly haste. Had he reflected upon the likely consequences of his hurried actions, he would have probably realised that a section of the royal right was just using him as a ladder.

When King Gyanendra found out he was cultivating a constituency within the army, he was sacked for being "incompetent". But by transgressing the constitution rather than reviving it, the king weakened his own position. Unlike previous Shah kings of Nepali history, King Gyanendra owes his position neither to the natural order of succession nor to the will of an abdicating monarch. His accession to the throne has occurred due to the provisions of Part 6, Article 34, Clause (6) of the 1990 Constitution, the supreme law of the land that was promulgated by his elder brother "in keeping with the desire of the Nepali people" expressed through the "people's movement". Right in its preamble, the

constitution clearly recognises that "the source of sovereign authority of the independent and sovereign Nepal is inherent in the people". In Part 5, Article 27, Clause (3), it unequivocally binds "His Majesty" by definition "to preserve and protect" the constitution.

By repeatedly invoking Article 127 without even once laying the necessary "orders" before the parliament as stipulated by the statute, the sanctity of the preamble of the constitution and the spirit of its Article 27 stands violated. (Lest one forget, no one ever escapes the scrutiny of history, and these lines can be construed as its first draft.)

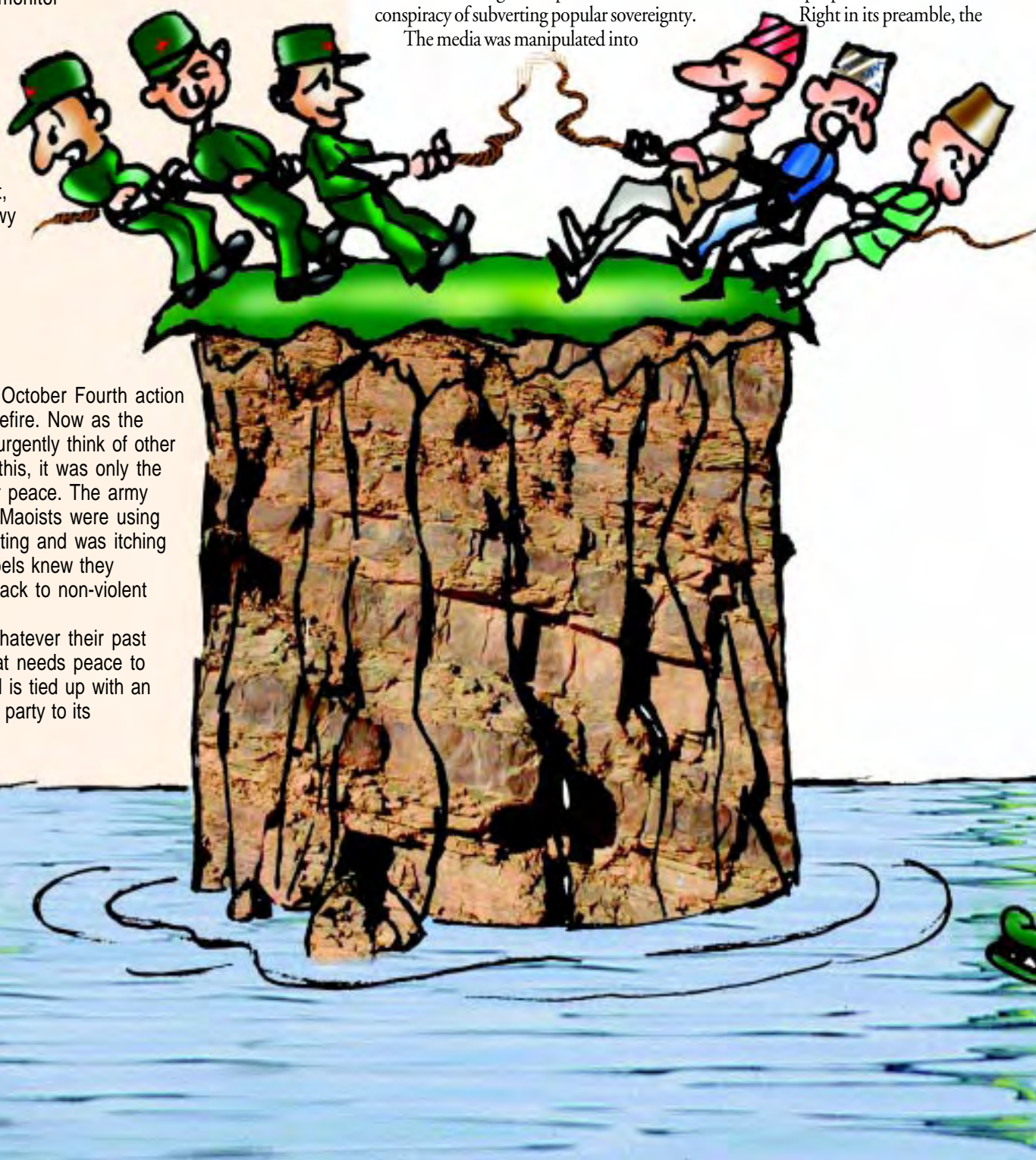
A breach of the statutes was bad enough. But by raising the issue of constituent assembly at this time, its very existence is being put to the test. The Maoists are insurrectionists, an extra-legal force, hence their views are outside the preview of law. But for all the rest, no matter how high, it's the laws of the land that reign supreme.

Any demand that seeks to abolish the supreme law is actually tantamount to treachery. As an outlaw, Prachanda wants to give himself the right to call for elections to the constituent assembly, but King Gyanendra doesn't have the authority to grant him his wish. If he did it, the king risks losing his own legitimacy in the process.

Even far-reaching amendments to the existing constitution can perhaps be justified as being in consonance with the spirit of preserving and protecting it with "the best interests and welfare of the people of Nepal". But scraping it altogether is legally untenable and morally wrong.

A constituent assembly in the present context will be a forum to debate republicanism (dictatorship of the proletariat) and a 'constructive' (benevolent dictatorship) monarchy. The Nepali people may be caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. Alas, the propensity of the Nepali intelligentsia to rush in where even angels fear to tread has come to the fore once again. We have failed to realise that just as October Fourth didn't solve the problem of 'incompetent' prime ministers, a new constituent assembly isn't likely to resolve the twin challenges of democratising the monarchy and civilising the military. Despite the lessons of history, the privileged elite tends to forget the fact that all short cuts in politics inevitably turn out to be despotic.

The alternative to the slow and messy process of democratic evolution is not a revolution through the ballot box as is being imagined by the votaries of constituent assembly. The process of reformation has to begin from within. A reinstatement of the lower house could be the first step towards democratic restoration. Until that happens, we have to sit back and let the Maoist and royalist PhDs go through the motions of talking. They are the totalitarian and authoritarian faces of the same coin.



LETTERS

PRIVATE PARKS

Naresh Newar has done a commendable job with his balanced article on an issue as contentious as the privatisation of nature reserves ('Conservationists up in arms over park plan', #159). Given the limited resources at its disposal,



the government must explore alternatives for the management of protected areas—privatisation is one option, but not the only one. While exploring alternatives, discussion and consultation must not be a closed door affair within government circles or Kathmandu-based conservation experts, but rather a multi-disciplinary, multi-layer process. There are some misleading notions and assumptions that have come up in media recently need to be clarified.

- "International conservation organisations have experience of running protected areas." I know of only two: The Nature Conservancy and WWF. Their experience is limited to a few countries and a limited number of areas.

- "Nepali NGOs are capable of running protected areas." None have the financial or technical resources and all would be dependent on overseas donors.
- "ACAP is a sustainable and replicable model of conservation." I believe that ACAP has survived to the present day due to long-term, large-scale financial support from WWF and the special privilege of retaining all tourism revenues raised.

- "Income generation and preserving biodiversity make for conflicting interests." Organisations in South Africa have shown that nature tourism or the sale of animal species does not lead to biodiversity loss.

In addition, there are a few other issues that need to be clarified before the privatisation of national parks becomes a reality:

1. Who will establish a regulatory framework that balances the conservation objectives of protected areas, the social needs of the local people dependent on the protected areas and the economic drive of the private parties?
2. Who will establish and monitor the performance standards of the private parties? And how will adherence to the approved management plan be enforced?
3. What is the incentive to private parties for managing protected areas?

I suggest the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation request the support of WWF, IUCN and other close partners of the government, to explore all alternative options for the management of Nepal's protected areas.

Devendra S Rana,  
email

LO ROAD

Re: 'The road to Lo' by Abhishek Basnyat (#159). On a recent visit to the fabled Kingdom of Lo, we were saddened to see evidence of improved trade links between Lo Monthang and China—what must have been once pristine villages are now littered with garbage of

Chinese origin, discarded plastic washing powder wrappers in streams, and everything from shoes, clothing, cans and broken liquor bottles lying on the main thoroughfares of towns like Tsrang and Lo. Even chortens marking the passes are littered. While tourists are made to account for every can and plastic item they carry into the area, locals are free to do as they please. The ACAP officials at the check point in Kagbeni seem to be aware of the problem and, apparently, have been unsuccessful at controlling the growing pollution menace. Who wants to pay \$100 a day to encounter scenes reminiscent of Kathmandu? It is time for a wakeup call. This unique environment and culture must be saved from an environmentally devastating 'invasion' that is riding the trails of improved trade links.

S Walton, email

MONARCHY

CK Lal's 'In the king we trust' (#158) was historically informative and contemporarily pragmatic. Nepal's monarchy remains a revered institution but it should quit resting on the laurels of divine reverence and evolve into a progressive and transparent institution. Lal was absolutely on the button when he said "...kingship (remains) a useful symbol of Nepali unity and nationality—no less, but nothing more". I don't always concur with Lal's views, but he does always bring fresh perspective. Thumbs up.

Abishkar Shrestha, Grinnell  
Iowa, USA

- Yet again, one read about an idea that everyone is expected to take at face value—the monarchy is the symbol of national unity. In 'In the king we trust...' (#158), CK Lal has failed to reason this is so. And I haven't found anyone so far who has provided a convincing argument in its favour. The conclusion one can draw from such an assertion is that Nepalis cannot live with each other and will be at each other's throats without a royal figure to hold them together. This not only denies the people of Nepal the capacity for rational thought, it also makes a mockery of the idea of a Nepali nation since it follows that the ties that bind the people together are not social interactions and personal relations, but a supposed common reverence for a remote institution. Nepali-speakers in India have proved that this need not be the case. That there may

be a substantial number of people who have faith in kingship cannot be denied. But the question is how can a monarchy that identifies so passionately with just one religion, one caste, one language and even one region to the exclusion of all the others in the country, be expected to fulfil the role of a 'symbol of national unity'?

Deepak Thapa, Kathmandu

GLOBAL NEPALIS

Re: Sugat Ratna Kansakar's reply (Letters, #156) to Pravesh Saria's letter (#155) regarding the indifference in NTC about extending mobile phone reach ('No freedom to roam', #153). Most Nepali migrants in the US feel guilty for leaving our homeland for the material temptation of this country. That is why we try to "cleanse" ourselves by seeing everything in Nepal in a negative light. There are a lot of academics and professionals in Nepal who choose not to go abroad. There is another group who left, were pretty successful but turned around to go back home. Does this mean that they are all "incompetent" compared to others in the US? Corruption, political connections can play

roles, but that doesn't mean those are the only paths to doing better. I am in the US now but I was just an average guy in my medical school. A lot of my academically superior friends "chose" not to come here. Does this not say something? Unlike us, there are people who stayed back and faced adversities. Can't we, for once, be more truthful and honest with ourselves?

Manoj Khatri, Chicago

KOSI

Navin Singh Khadka's informative piece on the sedimentation problem of the Kosi River ('The mother of all floods', #157) is marred by an ill-informed quote from an expert in the Department of Electricity Development. If the Kosi Barrage cannot clear accumulated sediment, how on earth will sediment in a reservoir be flushed? I am intrigued by the so-called 'new' technology available that allows deposited sediment from reservoirs to be flushed. Accumulation of sediment in reservoirs is an unavoidable consequence of the hydrological cycle. Excessive sedimentation poses both physical and economic risks. The latter is particularly important to

Nepal because projects such as the proposed Kosi Dam is likely to cost billions of dollars. Researchers all over the world are making attempts to minimise the rate of reservoir sedimentation. One of the suggested approaches is watershed management. Flushing by using outlets built for the purpose is another suggested method. Flushing works only under certain favourable conditions, depending upon a river's hydrology, shape and size of the reservoir, sediment hydraulics within the reservoir and size range of deposits. The water column in the reservoir consolidates the deposited sediment mass and introduces limitations. Heavy sedimentation triggered by the 1993 cloudburst drastically reduced Kulekhani's economic life. Flushing was not considered an option when the project was rehabilitated.


Anil Pokhrel, email

MELAMCHI

It was astonishing to see the response by MS Shrestha of the Melamchi Project ('Letters', #159) to Naresh Newar's article 'What's in it for us?' (#158). The 'Social Upliftment Programme'

(SUP) that Shrestha mentions guarantees no improvement in the socio-economic condition of the residents of 14 VDCs. The SUP has been designed so as to impose the program with no consultations with local people. The locals have been continuously protesting against the SUP and they demand that it be truly people-centred, through needs-assessment and prioritisation. Newar was right in drawing attention to the fact that the project has not guaranteed that water will be left in the Melamchi, and I have strong doubts that the water levy in Kathmandu will ensure transfer of financial resources back to Melamchi residents in return for their water, especially since Kathmandu Valley distribution is being done through privatisation. The project has also not provided local employment and the 30 percent mandatory condition for contractors has already failed. Newar has honestly portrayed the ground reality in Melamchi, while Shrestha's assertions are false.

Raju Pandit Chhetri,  
Melamchi Local Concern  
Group



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# Fee fight keeps tourists away from the Kumari

**The caretakers of the living goddess want half the income the municipality collects from tourists visiting Hanuman Dhoka.**

..... NARESH NEWAR .....

Tourists eager to catch a glimpse of the Kumari have not been allowed near the living goddess this year because of a festering row between her caretakers and the municipality over how tourist fees should be shared.

With less than two weeks to go for Indra Jatra, when the king pays homage to the five-year-old Kumari before thousands of people at Basantapur, the dispute is keeping tourists away from one of Nepal's most-enduring traditions.

The Kumari's famous window has now been shuttered

for months, and the official attendants at Kumari Bahal don't let tourists catch even a glimpse of her. The caretakers are angry that the municipality is not sharing part of the Rs 200 fee collected from every tourist visiting Kathmandu's historic heart. The fees were instituted two years ago, and the caretakers say they will keep the Kumari out of bounds until they get half of the Rs 100,000 that the municipality collects on average every day.

The caretakers stopped letting tourists into Kumari Bahal six months ago when the municipality refused to share the

fee income. The issue had not become public as the caretakers and municipality officials are strictly forbidden to speak to the media by palace priests. "Speaking against the caretakers means insulting the living goddess and we don't want to get into trouble," one municipality official told us.

The Rs 200 tourist tax allows visitors to visit the entire Durbar Square, a World Heritage Site. The municipality says the money has already been used to build a two km pavement from Teku to Chhetrapati and from Machali to Thahiti. This 'Heritage Walk' will

make it easy for the ritual annual jatra of the Kumari and Seto Macchendranath.

The municipality says it has offered Rs 15,000 per month as *dakshina* to Kumari Bahal, and even proposed to cover maintenance and other necessary costs. The *Chitaidhar*, Newari for the Kumari's hereditary caretaker, reportedly turned down the offers.

Oblivious of the controversy, a group of European backpackers this week gazed intently at the balcony windows for a view of the Kumari. Their tour guide explained the situation, but the



tourists are unconvinced and demand to see her. "We've already paid our money and travelled here just to see the living goddess," fumes one Spanish tourist.

Siddhartha Shrestha, a local guide who makes a living narrating the story of the Kumari for tourists, has been out of a job for months. "This is really sad. I hope the Kumari will find a way to help us and show herself," says Shrestha.

Inside the Kumari Bahal local devotees line up to receive blessings from the living goddess. With school books scattered in

her room, the Kumari is almost finished with homework assigned by her personal tutor from White Field School where she studied before she became goddess. The little girl flips through a few newspapers and magazines. After a while, she sits on her throne and puts *tika* on the foreheads of the devotees. She greets them solemnly and nods. Then she goes back to her homework.

The tourists may be worried but locals, especially among the Sakya and Bajracharya communities, express quiet satisfaction with the absence of tourists. They are tired of the

## HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



# Tibet, Tibet



In his latest book, *Tibet, Tibet*, writer Patrick French (left) takes aim at a cause that has long been near and dear to him. French is a veteran of the Tibetan freedom movement in Britain—as well as a superb historian and author—but he's changed his mind about the usefulness of foreign support for the people of Tibet.

He no longer thinks it helps reduce Tibetan suffering under Chinese rule. This book is a powerful, frank and moving tale of one man's painful discovery that cherished views can be mistaken.

Reading it is both humbling and valuable to all of us who think the

world can change if it only pays more attention to our favourite causes.

French is a friend of mine. I am an admirer of his writing.

His earlier works, *Younghusband* and *Liberty or Death*, are classic populist history, leavened with anecdote and the travels of the author. *Tibet, Tibet* is a book of a different sort but no less powerful, no less worth the read.

From the opening chapter on the tragic death of Thubten Ngedup by self immolation in Delhi in 1998 through his own travels in modern Tibet and the revelatory closing moments about deceit by members of the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, French takes us on a remarkable journey. Yes, it's a tale of dusty Tibetan highways and austere mountainscapes. But it's also an inner voyage by an honest man—rare enough amongst writers, I dare say.

I too was in Delhi for Ngedup's fiery end a few years ago and I remember it vividly. It was my first exposure to the odd combination of cynicism and self-righteousness found amongst the fringes of foreign free-Tibet crowd. For even as the unfortunate Ngedup was getting ready to douse himself in petrol and set it alight, a European supporter of Tibetan freedom found the time to phone me and other television journalists to urge us to cover the grisly scene. I reacted in horror, screaming at the woman who called to do everything she could to stop the protest by any means possible. She didn't. And I still feel guilty for not taking the matter further, for reading of Thubten's horrible end in the next day's newspapers.

French too began to feel uncomfortable with Tibet's foreign fellow travellers around this time. He'd spent 20 years in the Free Tibet Campaign, Britain's largest such organisation, but as a historian and sometime journalist, he was beginning to wonder if he wasn't actually just helping to prolong Tibet's agony. To prove this point, French relates tales of Chinese people who see foreign support for Tibet as yet another example of Western colonial powers coveting China's riches. He also meets Tibetan collaborators with the Communists and explores the confused and often contradictory affairs of the Dharamsala government. Through it all, French, a committed Buddhist, maintains respect and devotion for the Dalai Lama.

His Holiness, we read, is a good man surrounded by the usual array of well meaning, incompetent and occasionally wicked characters who flock to charismatic people.

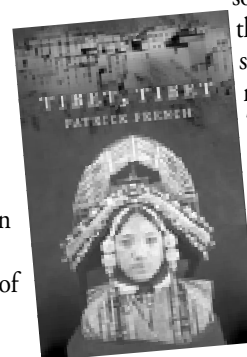
Tibet, French concludes, will never again be a sovereign state, at least not in the lifetime of anyone living now. But various options do present themselves, such as autonomy within China, like Hong Kong. And these pragmatic solutions to the agony of a people—while not erasing a horrendous recent past of pogroms, cultural genocide and oppression—need to be explored. The Dalai Lama himself has been doing so, French

**It is time for Westerners to move on, and allow Tibetans to find their own solutions to their own problems.**

points out, much to the dismay of some freedom campaigners in America and Europe.

It is time, French tells us, to do something sublimely Buddhist about the cause of Tibetan independence, sovereignty from China, territorial integrity. It is time, for foreigners at least, to "let it go", to move on, to allow Tibetans to find their own solutions to their own problems. None of this rules out humanitarian support or even subtle political backing. But the flaming fate of Thubten Ngedup must never, ever be repeated. Not to mention the humiliation and betrayal by Washington of the Khampa rebellion of the 1970s.

It's obvious that I agree with French, and this does colour my reaction to his book. But how can one not be struck by the ludicrous behaviour of some Tibetan campaigners in their foreign comfort zone? Earlier this year, this newspaper took up the columnists cudgel against one such example—the nasty call for a tourist boycott of Nepal in response to an admittedly nasty event, the deportation of 18 Tibetan refugees by the Nepali government. People in San Francisco find it very easy to be self righteous about causes far away, and this, say I and Patrick French, does more harm than good to those at the receiving end of the oppressors' wrath. ♦



***Tibet, Tibet: A Personal History of a Lost Land***  
Patrick French  
333pp, HarperCollins, £20



DEEPPENDRA BAIRACHARYA

speculation, insults and the prying that the Kumari has long been subjected to, especially in the West. Some even presented the Kumari tradition as cruelty towards young girls who are "locked up for years in a hidden palace", losing "all the privileges of a normal childhood".

When *Dyo Majhi* Preeti Sakya was enthroned as the new Kumari in 2001, the global media made a mockery of a revered Newari tradition. Perhaps one of most objectionable headlines was in the *London Guardian*: "Calls to kill off living goddess". It went on to describe the "horrific ritual involved in selecting the Kumari and the bizarre lifestyle the new goddess is expected to lead". The ethnocentric bias was aggravated by a handful of Nepali activists who called for an end to this 300-year-old custom.

An Indian filmmaker included the Kumari as part of her documentary on the exploitation of girls. Recently, the American AXN channel profiled the Kumari in its 'Believe it or not' series. The activists allege that once a girl is chosen as the living goddess, she will not be able to study or lead a normal life. When she retires, she will be left with nothing and having once been a vessel of the goddess,



Clockwise from extreme l-r: Kathmandu's living goddess *Dyo Majhi* Preeti Sakya, tourists wait for a glimpse of the goddess at Kumari Bahal, with her parents before instatement, the annual procession of the Kumari during *Indra Jatra*.

they say no man will dare marry her.

Parliament passed a bill in 1990 to pay a monthly allowance of Rs 6,000 to the Kumari till she reaches 16 years, a move that was initiated largely by Congress leader, Ganesh Man Singh. After retiring, the Kumari receives a pension of Rs 3,000 for life. Previously, the Kumari received only a gold coin during the Indra Jatra festival when the king paid her homage.

*Dyo Majhi* Preeti Sakya has a personal tutor so she can continue with her regular classes after she is no longer the living goddess. Her friends come and play with her inside the Kumari Bahal. Her

mother, Rina Sakya and nine-year-old sister visit Preeti every week. Sitting beside her mother, Preeti doesn't show any signs of homesickness. "Even when she was three, she never talked about coming home. She already knows that she is not an ordinary person but a holy figure," Rina Sakya told us. When she grows up, she will be free to marry anyone.

On the third day of Indra Jatra, starting 12 September this year, the Kumari is taken around Basantpur on a palanquin. If the dispute between the municipality and the caretakers is not settled, that is probably the only time tourists are going to get a glimpse of the living goddess. ♦

## DOMESTIC BRIEFS

## Fake notes

They're in it together. Pakistani counterfeiters and Indian gangsters are literally minting money dealing in fake and illegal Indian currency using Nepal as the transit point, police sources say. In the last five years, Rs 2.6 million fake and Rs 10 million illegal Indian notes have been seized, but sources say this is just the tip of the iceberg. The handlers of these notes who are caught, are usually small fry and the big fish get away. Recent detentions of people in possession of counterfeit and illegal Indian currency, like a Kathmandu-based Pakistani diplomat, some Indian criminals and a Nepali journalist, are reportedly low in the food chain.

The arrest of a Pakistani Embassy staff on charges of possessing fake Indian currency on 18 August has once again dragged the Pakistani mission in Kathmandu into controversy. The police claim they had no idea the man was an employee of the embassy. "Had we known beforehand, we could have recovered a bigger amount of fake Indian currency from him," a police official told us. The embassy, denied its staffers are involved in fake currency and says the arrest was part of a "conspiracy".

The business bureau chief of *Annapurna Post* Lokendra KC was arrested at Kathmandu airport on 9 August with fake currency worth IRs1.3 million in a false bottomed suitcase. Police believe the money was headed for India via Simra. Indian nationals arrested recently on fake currency charges, including known gangsters Papu Yadav, Hareram Chaudhary, Indu Singh Yadav and Raju Khan have admitted to government lawyers that they were going to exchange IRs 900,000 worth of fake Indian notes with valid currency in Nepal. Although they were caught red-handed, the police recovered only IRs 6,000.



We may have to deal with Nepali currency too, thanks to Indian and Pakistani gangs. Noor Hasan Miya, an Indian citizen, was apprehended with 35 fake Rs 1,000 Nepali notes. He told the police that he hid them at his tailoring shop at Bagbazaar after receiving them from Ravindra Aftab, also an Indian national.

Indian criminals and Pakistani officials arrested in the past five years have given police enough evidence that Nepal is a convenient conduit for counterfeiters running fake notes into India. (Shiva Gaunle)

## 70 killed during ceasefire

Both the Maoists and army grossly violated the code of conduct during the ceasefire period, according to a latest report by the human rights group, INSEC. Until 27 August, the toll stood at 23 people killed by the Maoists and 47 by the state. The state's body count was higher in August compared to the past seven months. INSEC says since the ceasefire in 30 January, at least 110 people have been killed. In that period, the state was responsible for 68 deaths, the Maoists for 42. Since the war began in 1996, 4,585 died at the hands of the Maoists and 2,306 were killed by state agencies. Politicians top the list of number of people killed followed by farmers and ordinary citizens, police and army personnel, civil servants, Maoists, students, teachers, labourers, businessmen, social workers, health workers, prisoners, photographers, journalists and lawyers.

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The Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA) has been formed to improve the air quality of the Kathmandu Valley. KEVA works to identify and eliminate constraints to the expansion of the electric-based transportation system. KEVA Office is located in Winrock International (WI), Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Please send your CV with a cover letter with 3 references to: KEVA, P. O. Box 1312, Kathmandu, Nepal or by virus-free e-mail to behapagain@winrock.org.np. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interviews. Phone or personal enquiries will not be entertained! Completed applications should arrive no later than September 12th, 2003.



# It takes three to tango

Premature expectations of peace had wrecked the third round of peace talks even before it started because both the parties had ignored the basics of negotiation: accommodation and compromise.

The protagonists had boxed themselves in, and saw negotiation simply as part of a bargaining process. Bargaining occurs within the context of values, interests and power relations. Since each party's power is limited by the power of the other, persuasion is the key currency. Hard bargaining and inflexibility work only in an asymmetric situation. When both sides are relatively even, rigidity impedes negotiations. And that is why the talks got nowhere.

Holding on to one's position without considering the other's is not negotiation, but imposition. If negotiation cannot be a process of problem solving, it can be made a part of policy-making. Without touching raw nerves on either side, both negotiating parties can jointly decide to depart from the existing framework. Towards this end, it is necessary to first agree that rigid positions are indeed irreconcilable and beyond redemption.

The second approach to policymaking is to set

## The insurgent Maoist and a resurgent monarchy can only meet popular aspirations of the people by restoring the democratic process to the centre stage of Nepali politics.

the goal first by exploring all options. If these are inadequate, evolve plausibly alternative options. Many uncertainties associated with the Third Round reflected a widening gap in approaches. Things were bound to flounder, and they did.

The constitutional monarchy, under the 1990 Constitution, functions only in case of the presence of the elected parliament and the government. This void has to be addressed first if the mandatory basis for negotiation is to be addressed. The question of constituent assembly can then be repackaged as a decision ultimately to be taken by a legitimately elected government in power.

Only an elected government made up of political parties can decide and ensure the conduct of constituent assembly elections with a popular mandate. The constitution of Nepal can be drafted, endorsed and implemented only by popular will. Neither the Maoists nor a king with executive powers can concede to the point unless the political parties representing the people comply with the decision.

If the Maoists, as they claim, are a political force, they should not fear an electoral test. Their claims of political legitimacy and commitment to peoples' sovereignty would be

indisputably justified. Otherwise they would just be a gun-totting group in the margins, whose adherence to violence would justify repression.

The monarchy, on the other hand, would certainly fail to emerge as a stabilising force in the pernicious environment of domestic politics—unable to rein in political dissent of a non-violent movement demanding political space arrayed against the spiralling violence of the Maoist insurgency.

The king needs a face-saving way to shed the executive powers he wrested. King Gyanendra said last week he wishes to be a "constructive monarch", perhaps the occasion has arrived for a constructive contribution to untangle this stalemate. Both the insurgent Maoist and a resurgent monarchy can then meet the popular aspirations of the people by bringing back the democratic process to the centre stage of Nepali politics.

There was a conspicuous absence of another integral factor in the talks scuttled by Prachanda on Wednesday: trust. Negotiators first need to allay deep-seated suspicions of each other to build confidence. In our case, neither party has taken up previous commitments and therefore mistrust can only grow.

Emotion and insecurity had enveloped the negotiation process. The previous government teams were ad hoc, self-serving and insecure bogeymen compared with the disciplined and committed Maoist team. A member of the government negotiation team even disclosed his differences on the agreed agenda, publicly exposing rifts.

The Maoists for their part had cried wolf so many times by threatening to go back to war if the government didn't agree to their demands, that it is not credible any more. They

had to do something to win back their credibility.

The government's concept paper tabled at the Third Round involved a *ménage à trois*: the king, the army and the parties. Though the document says that the ultimate decision makers of the state are the people, it asserts "the role and importance of Nepali monarchy is irreplaceable for the continuity and preservation of the sanctity of the national independence and territorial integrity of the country.... Therefore, the institution of monarchy shall continue to remain as a symbol of Nepali nationality and national unity."

This contravened the idea of people's sovereignty. The government failed to provide a meeting point for dialogue when it asked the Maoists to surrender their arms and ammunition without considering any likely options and response of the other side. To make the case more palatable, the government should have advanced the proposal for demobilisation as a part of a peace process. Conditional upon the agreement for demobilisation both parties could have explored each other's position to realise the goal. There could also have been a commitment to evolve detailed parameters through negotiation.

Third, the government's negotiating agenda was vague and was thoroughly manipulative. The objectives set by the government could not be achieved through joint decision, but by

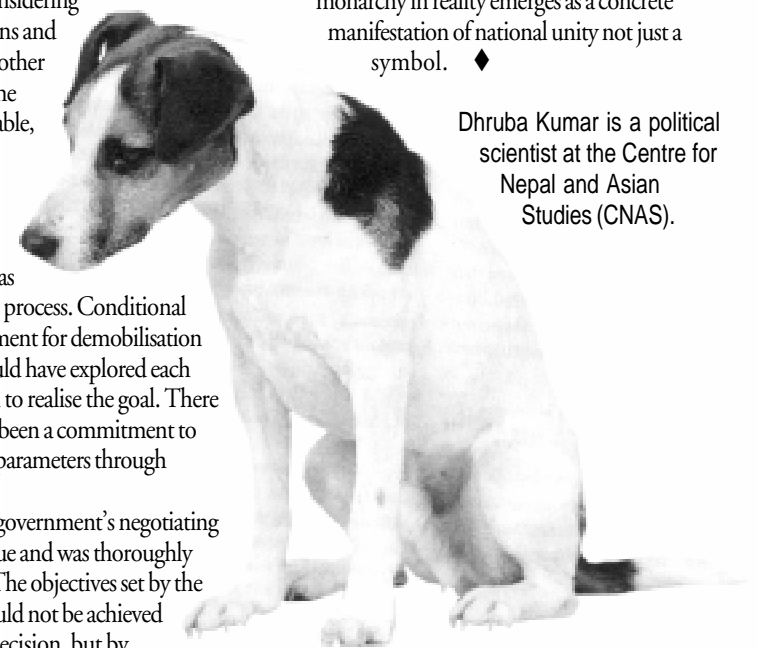
honest governance. Such stinginess showed that the parties to negotiations don't really care about the peace process. Most damaging is their rigid posturing without leaving fallback options.

But by far the greatest void in the negotiation process was the absence of political parties, and through them the popular will. Although the fallout of the negotiation process and its implications will be shared by all Nepalis, they had no real say in this ill-fated peace process. Political parties, despite their failings, have a decisive role in salvaging the country.

King Gyanendra said in his interview last week (#159) that an active monarchy was incongruous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He should translate this thought into action by winning the confidence of the political parties whose bottom line for the future of Nepal, after all is, is also a constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy.

The king can still constructively mobilise this force in sustaining his objective of independent and democratic Nepal wherein monarchy in reality emerges as a concrete manifestation of national unity not just a symbol. ♦

Dhruba Kumar is a political scientist at the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS).



# To be or not to be a Nepali

Music to my jaded ears: the first-ever conference of Global Nepalis planned for October this year in Kathmandu will seek to tap into their skills, money and knowledge for developing Nepal.

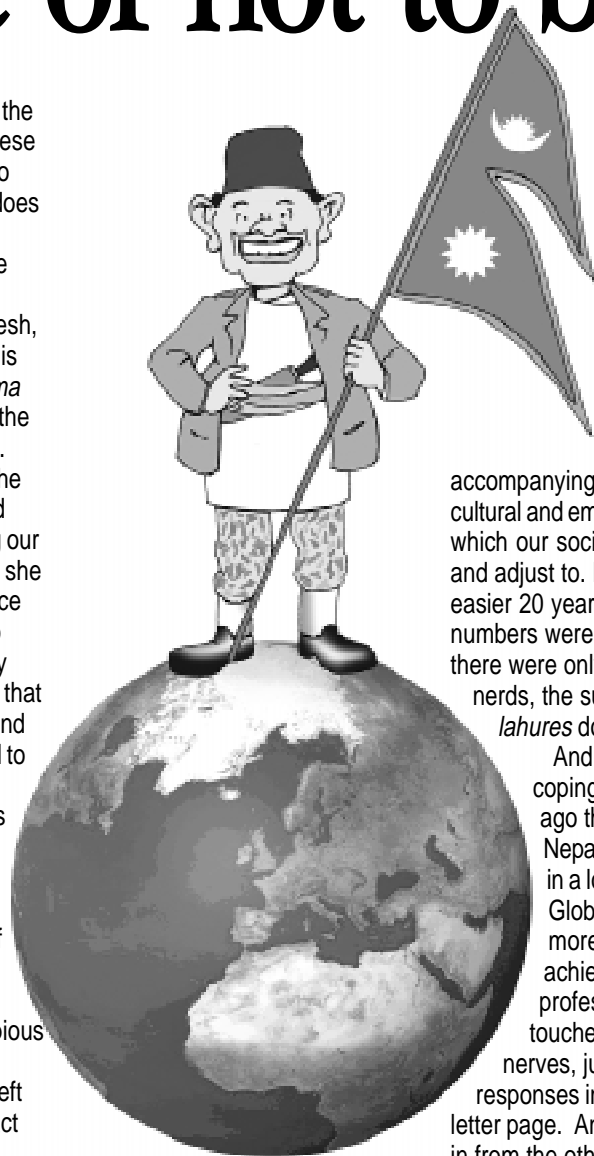
What a timely and welcome undertaking. Especially considering our ailing economy needs any propping up it can get at a time when we are about to join the WTO. It might be opportune to draw the organisers' attention to some of the underlying socio-cultural and emotional issues as well. For this, we need a modified definition of Global Nepalis to include a slightly larger diaspora: Nepalis residing outside, Nepalis returned from outside, Nepalis to-ing and fro-ing for business.

Meet Sundar, who recently returned to Nepal after spending 15 years in many parts of the world, and now lives in Gairi Dhara. Sundar is suffering from wackyness, a condition inflicted when one repeatedly endures allegations of "what a complete *kuire* you have become". The victim of this affliction get diagnosed on their '*Nepalipan*', which, like ones' immune system,

has a varying composition that the doctors define. To suppress these symptoms, Sundar has learnt to remain vigilant about what he does and says.

Then at the other end of the world, is Geeta, engaged in a dinner-time chinwag with Ramesh, a visiting friend from Nepal. All is going well with *Simsime panima* playing in the background until the topic changes to Nepali politics. Geeta raises concerns about the staleness in our leadership and growing political apathy among our youth, only to be reminded that she has "left the country", and hence "did she really have the right to raise such issues"? Sheepishly Geeta recites, for the fifth time that week, how she and her husband tried to make it in Nepal but had to leave for their kids' sake.

These aren't isolated cases about two individuals. They are becoming rather common scenes with our growing population moving in and out of the country. There is no denying this rapidly escalating phenomenon is ushering in copious amounts of revenue into the country, but what gets rather left out in our exuberance is the fact that there is also the



accompanying flood of socio-cultural and emotional complexities which our society must confront and adjust to. Perhaps it was easier 20 years ago, when the numbers were still small: when there were only the elite, the nerds, the super-rich and *lahures* doing the rounds.

And we are barely coping. It wasn't that long ago that a foreign-based Nepali journalist alluded in a local magazine that Global Nepalis tend to be more critical of the achievements of fellow professionals in Nepal. It touched many tender nerves, judging from curt responses in the magazine's letter page. And the same poured in from the other side. What was

## The social dilemma of Global Nepalis in the age of economic globalisation.

surprising was how ripe and waiting this us-versus-them debate was, how quickly came the resentment, counter-allegation and self-justification surfaced. We seem unable to accept our own rights to be global, despite the world doing it in leaps and bounds.

If Nepalis looked around the globe, it isn't just we who are struggling to come to terms with this. It is the universal play of inferiority/superiority complexes between resident and non-resident nationals, and the debate of who has the greatest ownership of views and opinions on the homeland, and to what extent.

This has and will remain a problem for countries that have a wide diaspora of nationals outside their borders, and our spread has just begun. It's not easy for a nation to face this. It takes decades. Just look at our neighbours. Indians are only beginning to grapple with this concept after 50+ years of post colonisation and subsequent transmigration to all corners of the

world. Albeit late, they are cashing-in their NRIs (Non Resident Indians), and finally seem at some ease living in multicultural spaces.

The reality is that our mass exodus is on the increase, exponentially. Children of powerful people are overseas, so is most of their money, and our youth is filling the foreign labour market. Now, it is up to us to face this, adjust those old definitions and align our social and emotional grounds. Otherwise, making policies and joining the WTO may only give us half-baked outcomes. It's time to stop shuffling with such discomfort about Global Nepalis and start addressing the real issues. ♦

Neeta Pokhrel is a water and sanitation engineer who believes in thinking globally and acting locally.

(For more on the global Nepali Conference 11-14 October 2003: [www.nrn.org.np](http://www.nrn.org.np))

BIZ NEWS

### Laxmi Bank IPO

Laxmi Bank has had to exercise an early closure option after its maiden IPO of Rs 192.5 million was over-subscribed by 2.5 times. The largest public issue in Nepali corporate history, the successful IPO came despite a slump in the economy, and a bearish stock market in which the NEPSE index touching record lows. Despite this, investor confidence has encouraged Laxmi Bank that its fundamentals are sound. Laxmi Bank's paid up equity post allotment of public shares will be Rs 550 million, the largest among all private sector Nepali banks. The Birganj-based bank started operations 15 months ago and has branches in Jeetpur and Banepa and a Kathmandu branch will open soon. Laxmi posted an operating profit of Rs 7 million during its first year of operation, with deposits of Rs 860 million. With technical and management support with Sri Lanka's Hatton National Bank, Laxmi also has internet banking facilities.

### China-Nepal air agreement

Beijing has agreed to let Royal Nepal Airlines double its flights to China to 14 a week and begin service to Tibet, Nepal's aviation minister Sharbendra Nath Shukla told media in Beijing this week. But the questions is does Royal Nepal have the capability to use those rights? Nepal is now allowed 14 flights a week to Beijing, Shanghai, Lhasa and four other points. Royal Nepal is allowed seven flights a week to Shanghai, but only operated two flights weekly. Air China operates four flights a week between Lhasa and Kathmandu in high season. About 6,000 tourists and trekkers visit Lhasa each year via Kathmandu, either flying or travelling overland through Kodari. The Nepali travel industry hopes to take that figure up to 10,000 by next year. Nepal has been trying to woo Chinese tourists and now allows them to visit Nepal without visas.

### Boss Awards for Business

Specialty Media, publishers of the Boss, a monthly business magazine, this week announced the annual Boss Top 10 Awards for 'Business

Excellence' to be held in December. "The award will be the first of its kind in Nepal and a tribute to the spirit of entrepreneurship and business in Nepal," Specialty Media said in a statement. The award will honour professionalism, encourage transparency and competitiveness amongst businesses in the country, it added. "The awards ceremony in December will not only mark the contribution of the business community towards the national economy, but also provide a platform for recognition of individual business achievements," says Shalini Wadhwa, CEO of Specialty Media.

### India's first budget airline

Air Deccan has become India's first no-frill budget airline with fares half that of Indian Airlines. The new airline will initially offer a small number of flights connecting Hubli and Mangalore and will expand to other towns in southern India. It aims to run seventy-five flights each day by November. Air Deccan used to be a helicopter charter company, but has now acquired four ATRs.

### NEW PRODUCTS

A LITTLE LUXURY: Spiff up the smallest room in your home. There is an entire range of Chinese bathroom fixtures, tiles and accessories available in the capital from the Create Bath showroom in Teku. They are durable, attractive and best of all, won't break the bank.

GET FLOORED: Tiles are more than just utilitarian flooring with the latest Colour+ selection by Orient Tiles. From parrot green to chili red, you can mix and match these hardy ceramics to create customised interiors. Check out the range at Everest International, Tripureswor.

SAIL AWAY: Opel Corsa Sail, a stylish new hatchback from General Motors India combines solid German build, well designed interiors, an extended wheelbase that ensures maximum cabin space. Suspension is a dream that glides over potholes.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



# Private sector and conflict

## It could all go up in flames.

Wednesday's declaration by Maoist Supremo Prachanda to end the ceasefire may have played like pre-Dasain music to the those who earn their keep by selling arms and military supplies. But for the majority of businesses across Nepal, the news is as cheerful as a funeral dirge as they ready themselves to shell out a monthly "revolutionary tax" to the Maoist rebels.

Leaving the failure of the third round of negotiations to political analysts, let us take a step back, survey the scene and, in this changed context, see what challenges lie ahead for business leaders. For 104 years, the Ranas kept the country locked up from the outside world, before being overthrown by leaders who had seen the world outside of Nepal. Despite its cache of foreign-educated technocrats, the nationalist Panchayat system that followed attempted to impose political uniformity, and preach the mantra of self-reliance and the so-called "Nepal-compatible system". But that too buckled down under the forces of democratic pluralism in 1990.

Through the ensuing 12 years of multiparty democracy, there was a robust growth in political pluralism. But, alas, that was accompanied by relatively little growth in economic opportunities for Nepalis, tens of millions of whom are young, illiterate, unskilled and desperately poor. The successive elected governments, headed by ambivalent socialists and communists, hemmed and hawed their way through economic reforms by consolidating power in Kathmandu and other urban centres, accumulating wealth for themselves and their allies.

They utterly failed to strengthen institutions that should have taken its mandate from the law and not from the whims of ministers on rotation. Meantime, Kathmandu's dominantly left-oriented intellectuals and the so-called members of the civil society, with their predictably knee-jerk distrust of market forces, did not help matters by being ideologues who aligned themselves along party-political lines. The overall result was such that by 1996, there was democracy in Nepal—if you defined it strictly through the number of freely elected politicians and other multiparty activities. But there also was a pervasive sense that something was not quite right as elected politicians failed repeatedly to convince the rising number of disenchanted, disgruntled and dispossessed citizens that their grievances were legitimate and then to set out to use the existing democratic apparatus to directly address those concerns.

Ignorant, arrogant and bereft of any sense of urgency, elected politicians neglected their very customers—the voters—who, in turn, started to find the uncomplicated and true-sounding messages of the Maoists more to their liking. Later, as the Maoists started to gather numerical momentum, young people across Nepal were increasingly left with only two choices—be a card-carrying member of the Maoist movement or leave the village. Though the peace talks early this year brought some hope, the current situation, with cries of war blaring over the quietly



desperate wringing of hands, is no better than where Nepal was a year ago. In this context, the challenge for those who see themselves captaining Nepal's private sector are two fold: first, they must cast aside narrow, vested interests to think hard and lay out a conceptual alternative to Maoist economics for all to see and compare. And second, they must push the government to use what's left of the democratic framework to integrate more areas of Nepal's economy, in terms of both infrastructure and information. Else, I fear that in coming days, our captains of industry will be reduced to mouthing the same old mind-numbingly dull lectures on peace and conflict-resolution in some donor-funded seminars while Nepali businesses literally go up in flames. ♦

# “Reduce dependence on external aid.”

**Nepali Times:** This is not really a new job is it, since you were already at the South Asia desk in Manila?

**Sultan Hafeez Rahman:** Yes, Nepal was one of the eight countries that I coordinated under my division. But the office focused on the overall program and the strategy, more than on the projects themselves. I feel that Nepal is a very resourceful country and one big resource is its hardworking people. You have natural endowments, tremendous water resources. There are challenges, and I come with a very serious commitment to help the government meet some of them.

**How has the insurgency hindered ADB operations in Nepal?**

We have 18 ongoing projects and two of them have been affected: the rural finance project and the Melamchi project.

**Speaking of which, Melamchi's delays are worrying.**

Melamchi is a sizeable and complex project, therefore a challenging one. This is not something we did not know. The ADB has very stringent requirements on the construction quality and resettlement. We have had to go back to the resettlement in particular to make sure that our policy is being complied with. This involves fair compensation for the affected people and is one of the reasons why progress has not been as rapid as we all would have otherwise wanted. There are 17 contractors, their supervision has to be very tight and very effective. The question of demand is a very complex subject. We remain very confident that Melamchi is very needed to fill the supply gap. In an overall water plan, this is just one source. There have to be other interventions as well, and the government and ADB are thinking about it.

**The ADB has supported the CIAA, how do you rate its anti-corruption performance?**

We place a very high priority on governance. The actions that have been taken—especially the four bills that were passed recently—we welcome those. I think this is an area when actions have only begun and this sort of concerted approach to anti-corruption is new. We would remain very much engaged in the process. We also welcome the actions that have been taken in terms of investigating senior officials and some former ministers. I frankly have no specific information as to whether this is politically motivated. But I can assure everyone that we will be watching very closely and we want actions to be anti-corruption, not politically motivated.

**Nepal's new foreign aid policy wants to reverse the present trend of more loans and less grants. Would this create problems for the ADB?**

The foreign aid policy is something all donors support, including ADB. We would, of course, like to see Nepal reducing its dependence on external

assistance. The problem, however, is Nepal has a resource gap. It cannot generate the resources it needs to develop. I think it would be extremely difficult in the present international environment to meet the entire resource gap Nepal faces out of grants alone. Therefore, Nepal, has to seek some external assistance that is concessional.

**But the policy talks about reducing loans and not dependence on foreign aid.**

The productivity of foreign aid is something that concerns me. When Nepal is taking external assistance of a magnitude of almost \$300 million a year, it has to make sure it is effectively and efficiently used. The productivity, especially of capital, must be high. At the moment it is quite low. If you look at the gross domestic investment, for instance, in Nepal it is pretty high, around 25 percent. With that figure, if one can double the productivity of external assistance, it would be possible to achieve the target of six percent GDP growth. But, with the present productivity levels it would not be possible to attain the Tenth Plan's targeted growth rate. We are pleased that the government has prioritised development expenditures that will cut waste and improve efficiency.

**Can these ideas be implemented with all this political instability?**

Our operations in Nepal were not very affected but I think the country as a whole, has been very seriously hit. One of the biggest economic activities and foreign currency earner, tourism, is down. If the situation deteriorates, Nepal will suffer more. And it will be the poorest who will suffer the most. We are all hopeful that there will be an end to the conflict that has ravaged this country. We are pleased to see that there has been some uptake in economic activity and there is some recovery, especially after the ceasefire. We are closely following and monitoring the talks and the overall peace process.

**Cancun is coming up, is Nepal in a position to benefit from WTO membership?**

It is important to know what is in one's interests. The WTO has many provisions that have phasing arrangements for joining agreements. Specific actions required can be phased as well. It will depend on how Nepal assesses its comparative advantage in the international commodities that it trades in, and how it views its economic interests. In order to be able to reduce poverty in the longterm, it's very important to have high, sustained and broad-based growth, which, unfortunately, has not been the case in Nepal. I do believe that international trade provides a major indent to sustain that sort of growth. It means that Nepal has to liberalise at a rate faster than its neighbouring countries.



**Sultan Hafeez Rahman, is the new Nepal country director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). He coordinated the Manila-based bank's policies and programs in South Asia. In this interview he says he will focus on a reworked country strategy, reaffirming ADB's commitment to fight corruption and the effective use of foreign aid. He also has a few pointers for Nepal as the newest member of the WTO.**

**The ADB was silent over payment irregularities to the civil contractor of the Kali Gandaki A project.**

The reason we did not comment was because the government is implementing the project. We have certain methods of reviewing the projects. Whatever problems we see, we discuss them with the government and ensure that the issues are satisfactorily resolved. As for the contention between the contractor and the government, we have no role in this and cannot be mediators.

**But couldn't you have blown the whistle on unrecorded payments as you have done with other projects?**

ADB has a very stringent anti-corruption policy. What you are saying is quite general. If there is any specific allegation about any project of ADB, then there is an established procedure by which cases are investigated very seriously by the bank. Somebody has to lodge a very specific complaint to us, then we will look into it.



# F Nepali Food

Nepal's cuisine is going through a gastronomic rediscovery, and is now much more than just *dal bhat tarkari*.

SRADDHA BASNYAT

It is always a surprise, and a little insulting, when people dismiss Nepali food as boring. That old joke about “dull bhat”. Actually there is no such thing as ‘Nepali food’—Nepal’s cuisine is a composite of food experiences from across this diverse land with foods to suit the tropical tarai to the arctic Himals. Even if geography alone played a role in our eating patterns, it would logically follow that each region would have a cuisine particular to what was available. And Nepali cuisine has also been enhanced by trade, which has blended and blurred our culinary boundaries.

## NEWARI

Starting right here in the Kathmandu Valley, the Newars have had links with Tibet and China for centuries. While the ancient salt route is dying out today, the osmosis of culture and taste is still alive in the ubiquitous momo-cha. It’s the smaller, spicier version of the Tibetan momo that can be found in the Valley’s *gallis*. But Newari culinary traditions are vibrant. Most Newars can reel of the dishes in the *samme bhwe*, the traditional feast: *chiura*, *shia baji*—beaten rice, *haku musya*—black soyabean curry, *bhuti*—soyabean, *palu*, *loba*—marinated ginger and garlic, *chwela*—boiled and spiced mince meat, *wala tau gu alu*—fried potatoes, *woh*—black dal fritters and *chatamari*—the Newari cross between a pizza and a dosa. All of it is eaten off *taparis*, ingenious disposable leaf plates. Judging from the average Newari clan feast, it’s a blessing there is no washing up to contend with.

There are other dishes that are eaten almost exclusively at home.

*Swo* is similar to Scottish haggis, only better. Goats lungs are force-filled with a batter of flour, eggs and spices. It is boiled, sliced and fried, to be served hot with a touch of salt and pepper, washed down with a palate cleansing shot of *clao tho*, homemade firewater.

If the English have their blood sausages and the French their escargots, the Newars indulge in *yanghu yi hau* or *tuyu yi hau*, a choice of either white or red savoury blood pudding. When it comes right down to it, everything does not taste like chicken after all. If you want to eat like the locals, and are not fortunate enough to snag an invite to a *bhwe*, follow your nose behind Krishna Mandir at Patan Durbar Square to *Ho na cha*, a Newari food haven.

## RANA

On a x-y axis, Rana food would be at the other end of Newari cuisine. The only thing they’d have in common would be unrefined mustard oil. It all began in the 1840s when Jung Bahadur returned from his victorious campaign in Lucknow with several *khansamas* in tow. The Muslim cooks specialised in the rich Mughlai tradition and divulged their secrets to the *bajais*, the only ones allowed to cook for royalty. What came about from this chain of culinary art was a distilled version that rejected heavy flavours and oils but embraced the kebab to create *sekuwa*. Ranas did not eat chicken, especially after the sacred thread ceremony for boys. But being meat lovers, their meats had to be properly cleaned, spiced and cooked. Gautam SJB Rana, who owns Baithak, the only Rana food restaurant in the Valley is not only a foodie

but a connoisseur who goes into raptures over *bafa ko bandel*, (*pic, right*) a deceptively simple sounding but exceptionally difficult dish to execute. A wild boar is boiled and its hairs plucked by tweezers. It is then steamed on a bed of *tej* leaves. The fragrant meat is wrapped in muslin cloth and allowed to rest overnight. The next day it is sliced into bite sized pieces and served with salt and chilli. Somewhat conspiratorially, Gautam reveals how many Ranas judge a feast not by the lavish variety, but solely on the *bafa ko bandel*.

Fifty-five-year-old Durga Gautam used to be a *bajai* in the kitchen of Prabhu Sumshere. From the age of 14, she served there for nearly two decades, turning out Nepali style *pulaos*, the unique *panchamukhi dal* that incorporates five different lentils and *bari*, chicken meatballs that no Italian mama could hope to rival.

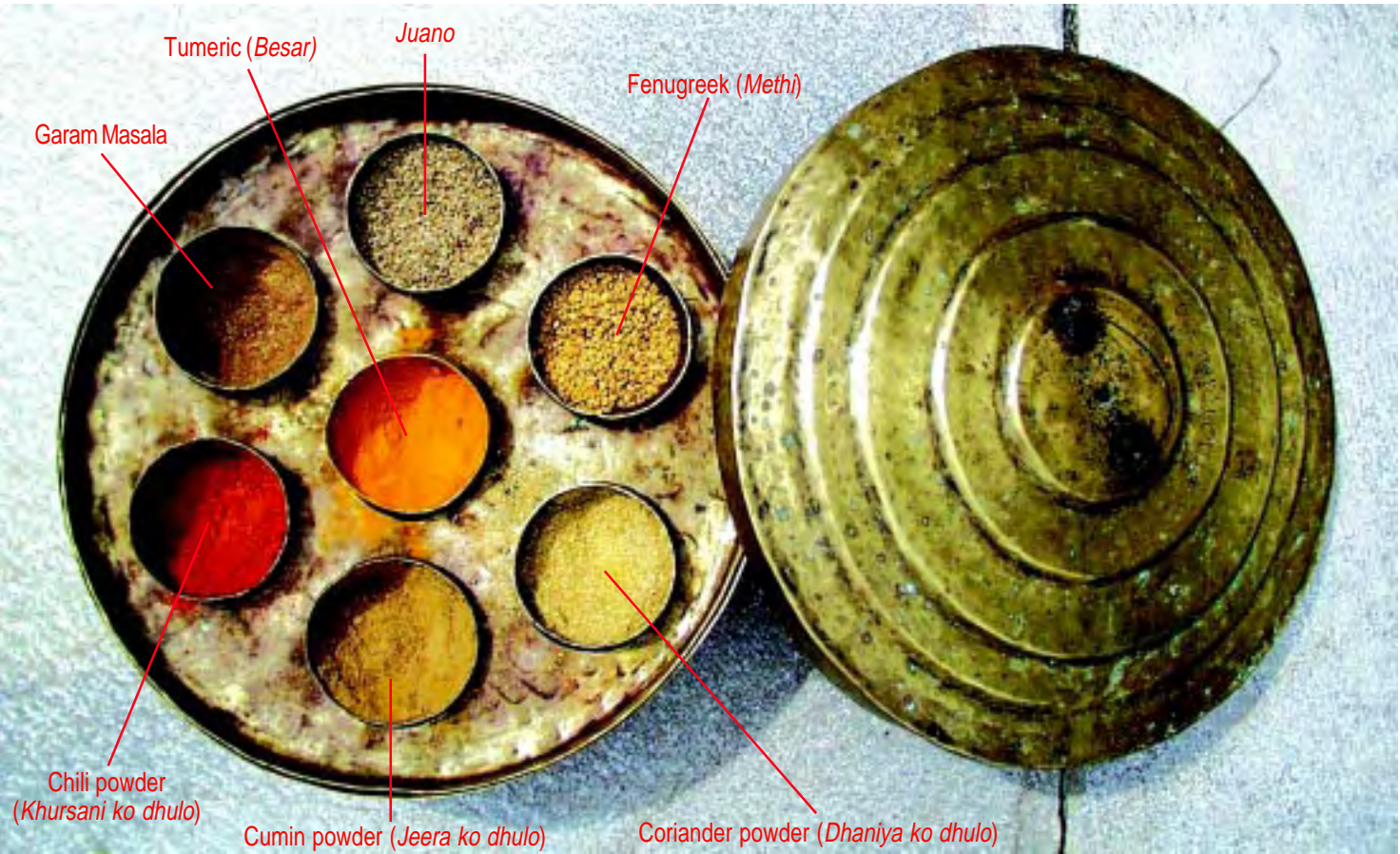
## SHERPA

More than the gourmet experience, nourishment is the foundation stone of Sherpa cuisine. For generations the Sherpa worked their arid terraces for potato, barley and buckwheat. The harsh, high terrain and cold climate called for hearty stews, and *shyakpa* is the perfect example. While Sherpa rice wine, *chang*, has many converts, their tea is still an acquired taste—hot and milky, fortified with yak butter and salt that most first timers are advised to think of as soup. When *tsampa*, barley flour, is thrown into the mix you end up with a very nutritious porridge that is good trekker fuel. Palmo Khampa’s restaurant, Dachenling, specialises in Tibetan and Bhutanese food, both close kin to Sherpa cooking. An old Tibetan cook trained her staff, and “it’s what we eat at home,” says Palmo. Another definite link between Tibetan and Newari food shows up on the menu—*lowa* is very similar to *swo*. The in-house specialities are *dapao*, minced meat steamed in soft dough buns, spicy hot garlic potato eaten with *tingmo*, meaning ‘cloud momos’ for their soft roundness, and *shabhale*, meat stuffed into flaky pastry and deep fried.

## THAKALI

When it comes to *dal-bhat*, let it be said that no-one does it better than the Thakalis of lower Mustang. As traders between India and Tibet, the Thakalis adapted dishes and together with local favourites, created a culinary tradition all their own. It’s a huge compliment to Rekha Bhattachan that since 1997, locals have been flocking to Tukkeche Thakali Kitchen to eat *dal bhat*. The secret to her *dal* is slow cooking in an iron pot, a Rana tradition too, and the ratio of tumeric to *ghiu* for a green colour peculiar to Thakali *dal*. Unlike midhill Nepalis, Thakalis pay close attention to the visual appeal and presentation of food. “You’ll never find a potato dish next to cauliflower,” explains Rekha. “It will be something green, like spinach.” Bowls are arranged to the right of the plate with the *dal* closest, followed by soup and an array of meat





and vegetable dishes. For the truly adventurous, Rekha suggests a typically Thakali item: *lyetpo khu*, head of goat soup—all organs included—diced into small pieces and cooked with *timur*, salt, garlic and chili powder.

For adventurous vegetarians there is the joy of *kinema* and *gundruk*. The first is fermented, and to be honest rather foul smelling, soyabeans that taste divine with Bombay duck in a thick tomato paste. *Gundruk* is fermented vegetable greens, usually radish tops, that makes a sour soup which is often a substitute for *dal*. Both feature in Rai and Gurung kitchens. During the full moons of Ubhauri (April-May) and Udhauri (November-December) the Rais have their *sakela puja*, a ritual for good weather and abundant harvests. The sacrificial chicken is made into *wachhippa* with ash of burnt feathers, ginger, chili and rice that is washed down with *raksi*.

## SWEET NOTHINGS

The agrarian people of the fertile plains in the south make some of the best sweetmeats. During *Chhath* most households in the tarai make *thakuwa*, a deep fried dish made of wheat flour and sweetened with cane sugar. During Holi, *malpua*, a batter of flour is made with milk, spices, sugar and coconut and deep fried, comes into its own. Then there is the special *sel roti*, made of rice flour, milk, sugar, *ghiu* and cinnamon, which is eaten during major festivals like *Dasai* and *Tihar*. *Yomari* is a unique Newari sweet, almost like a Japanese moon cake,

sticky rice case stuffed with a mixture of jaggery and sesame. When all else fails, there is curd, thick and rich like the famed *Juju dha* from Bhaktapur. It is the base for perhaps Nepal's most popular dessert—*sikarni*. Curd is tied up in muslin overnight and then sweetened, spiced with cinnamon and cardamom, and served chilled with slivers of blanched almonds.

## ETC

Every fashionista knows that accessories pull an outfit together, and so it is with the wide variety of condiments served with most Nepali food. Momos come with a fiery dip made from the red hot *dalle khursani*. Depending on what type and how *dal bhat* is made, you could have anything from *alu ko achhar*, spiced boiled potatoes cubed in yoghurt and sesame, *mula ko acchar*, labour intensive but delicious radish pickles in either mustard oil or brine, *tamatar ko achhar*, a thickly reduced tomato paste of garlic, ginger, green chili and onions. As longtime Nepal resident Dubby Bhagat remarks, "Nepal has as many pickles as France has cheeses." Quite.

If, like us, you're too impatient to make your own, the WEAN Co-operative has a wide selection of pickles that are found on tables as far away as Germany and Japan that get a thumbs up from Nepali consumers. And if you feel inspired to cook up some genuine Nepali food they also have ingredients like *bhatmas* and *masaura*.

Where to eat Nepal ➡ p15

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## Peace-loving warriors

Americans keep their soldiers busy—very busy.

about democratic preferences, Americans have shown a remarkable affinity for armed conflict during our 227-year history.

In *America's Splendid Little Wars*, Peter Huchthausen concentrates on the last quarter-century. His story starts after the Vietnam War and ends before this year's invasion of Iraq. He acknowledges that his work isn't comprehensive—he deliberately omits covert operations and peacekeeping missions—but the dozen episodes he does describe give a fairly thorough picture of what American warriors have been up to since the evacuation of Saigon in April 1975.

An initial lesson to be drawn from these crisp accounts is that the period of post-Vietnam paralysis in American defence policy was brief to the point of nonexistence. Huchthausen's first case study covers the rescue of the Mayaguez and its crew in May 1975; and though in certain respects this operation was an epilogue to the Vietnam War, the Ford administration intended for it to signal America's determination to defend its interests abroad, despite the defeat in Vietnam.

It will surprise no one that most of Huchthausen's studies involve the Middle East. He shows Jimmy Carter trying to rescue the American hostages in Iran in 1980 and Ronald Reagan sending marines to Lebanon in 1982, warplanes against Libya in 1986 and warships into the Persian Gulf in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88.

George HW Bush unleashed all the services against Saddam Hussein in 1990-91 and dispatched the marines to Somalia in 1991. Bill Clinton expanded the involvement in Somalia and intervened in the Balkans.

Huchthausen's outliers, aside from the Mayaguez affair, come from that traditional

training ground for the US marines, the Caribbean, where he follows American troops into Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989.

Huchthausen is a retired naval officer, and his professional expertise and interests show. When he writes of naval armaments and operations, he conveys an assurance that, among other things, compensates for the scanty notes. Huchthausen also served as an attache in the former Yugoslavia, and his chapters on the Balkans similarly benefit.

It is in the nature of well-crafted short histories to leave readers wishing for more. Here one wants additional information on the political context in which US military operations took place. Huchthausen's brevity occasionally leads him into questionable interpretations. He writes that the Shah of Iran was threatened by a Soviet-backed coup in 1953. In fact, the Shah was threatened not by a coup but by the popularity of the elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq.

When Huchthausen asserts that Saddam Hussein's behaviour in the months before Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait was growing more "unpredictable", he should acknowledge that this was partly because of the mixed signals Saddam was getting from the first Bush administration.

Huchthausen's judgements of the operations themselves are in the mode of a comrade-in-arms. When the operations succeed, the soldiers, sailors and air crews get the credit. When the operations fail, the politicians bear the blame.

No one reading this book today can help asking what lessons it holds for the US in Iraq. Huchthausen doubtless wasn't surprised by the rapid US military conquest. His central message is that when the US

prepares and commits, it succeeds militarily. His reticence regarding politics lets us infer little as to his view of the aftermath of the battle—which in the case of Iraq is the test of the whole endeavour.

Here a reader might take caution from Huchthausen's title. When Secretary of State John Hay described the 1898 conflict against Spain as a "splendid little war", he was speaking ironically (as he often did). The irony became evident (though it has been lost on most historians nonetheless) in the denouement to the Spanish war: another war, this time against Philippine nationalists, which proved longer and bloodier than the war that gave the US control of the Philippines. The demoralising war of occupation quickly cured Americans of their desire for empire; even Theodore Roosevelt, the arch-imperialist of that era in America, confessed that the Philippines had become America's "heel of Achilles".

But getting out of the Philippines was far more difficult than getting in, and required nearly half a century (and part of a world war). Today a similar set of ironies might also overtake the Bush administration's initial victory in Iraq. If so, the portents from America's first "splendid little war" are not encouraging. ♦

HW Brands' most recent book is *Woodrow Wilson*.

AMERICA'S SPLENDID LITTLE WARS: A Short History of US Military Engagements: 1975-2000  
Peter Huchthausen  
Viking  
254 pp, \$25.95

Because Americans like to think of ourselves as a peaceful people, we can always stand a reminder how busy we have kept our soldiers. From the American Revolution to the recent war in Iraq, hardly a year has passed in which the American military hasn't gone to battle against countries or groups considered, by the administrations then in power, threatening to American interests.

In several cases the hostilities rose to the level of regular war, but the perennial campaign has included undeclared naval war

(against France in 1798 and Germany in 1941), punitive expeditions (against Barbary pirates in the early 19th century and Mexican guerrillas 100 years later), regime-propping occupations (in most countries of the Caribbean basin during the first third of the 20th century), pacification efforts (in the Philippines after 1898), and of course the 100-years' war (counting merely from

American independence) against the indigenous inhabitants of North America.

Indeed, almost the only and even then incomplete respite from the fighting against other peoples came during the Civil War, when Americans killed one another in the most destructive conflict in the Western world between 1815 and 1914. Alexis de Tocqueville famously wrote, in the 1830s, that democratic peoples naturally desire peace; he added, less famously, that democratic armies desire war. Whether our army made us do it or whether Tocqueville was simply wrong



# History, ideology and caste struggle

India's ancient and medieval history is notoriously malleable. The country's Hindu nationalists unleashed the latest furor over the nature of India's past. They reject the widely accepted view, based on early sacred texts, that ancient believers did not ban the slaughter of cattle, and that such a ban probably became part of the Hindu moral code only around the fifth and sixth centuries AD, when the later Puranas were written. (See Praful Bidwai's 'Milking the holy cow', #159.)

The trouble with reaching definitive conclusions about this or any other contested aspect of India's distant past is that, unlike in neighboring China, there is little in the way of an objective historical record to rely upon. Some archaeological evidence exists. But the main sources for ancient India are orally transmitted literary accounts dating to the Rigveda (around 1500-1300 BC) and the subjective records of foreign travelers. The social history of ancient India, as one scholar admits, "appears to be a string of conjectures and speculations."

So it is hardly surprising that India's ancient past can be manipulated to fit alternative ideological preconceptions. Nowhere is this more evident

than in discussions about the origins and nature of India's caste system.

In the early 1980s, the predominant view on the Left was that the ancient Hindu caste system was a variant of European feudalism. The late Ashok Rudra, himself a man of the Left but an empiricist, provided the most cogent critique of this view. He pointed out a crucial difference between the conceptions of mutual social ties in the Hindu and European systems.

Where individuals were the central actors in the characteristic rituals of dominance and homage in European feudalism, in Hindu society the relationships were always defined in terms of caste groups. Rudra assumed that caste existed in ancient India because, despite the unreliable historical record, the caste system is so manifest even today.

But recent historians on the Left in India now question this assumption. A school of revisionist historians and anthropologists argue that caste is an invention of the colonial British Raj. They claim that the early British scholars and administrators who documented Indian customs and translated the



early sacred texts were bamboozled by the Brahmins—the first Indians to learn English and thus the only available intermediaries—into believing that the Hindu social order was caste-based.

This imagined order became reality when British census takers forced Indians to categorise themselves by caste. Before this, these historians argue, Hindus were allegedly no less individualistic than Europeans.

Even hitherto sensible anthropologists and social historians seem to have succumbed to this travesty of scholarship. Much of the supposed evidence that this so-called "Subaltern" school of

historians provides takes the form of contemporary anthropological studies of regions like southern India or parts of medieval central India. But, as Susan Bayley, a "Subaltern" convert, puts it, "the initial premise is that even in parts of the Hindu heartland of Gangetic upper India, the institutions and beliefs which are often described as the elements of traditional caste were only taking shape as recently as the early 18th century."

I can personally disprove this premise. While visiting Kerala in the late 1960's, I—a Hindu from the Gangetic heartland—went to the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple in

## Deconstruction is making a powerful play to rewrite India's past.

Trivandrum, where the usual 'pandas' accosted me. One asked where I came from and asked about my *jati* and *gotra*.

When I answered, he rattled off the names of at least six generations of my ancestors, while asking me to fill in the details about my cousins, the family into which I had married, and the names of our children. He did not ask for money, he was only interested in updating his records. Unless he had imagined my ancestors, he had just traced my caste-based past to well before the 17th century.

Aside from such examples, an economic rationale can also be provided for the origins of the Indian caste system as for European feudalism. The great Eurasian civilizations were all dependent on agriculture and needed to create institutional means of tying labor, which was then scarce, to the land, which was abundant. Serfdom, indenture, slavery, and the caste system all served this end.

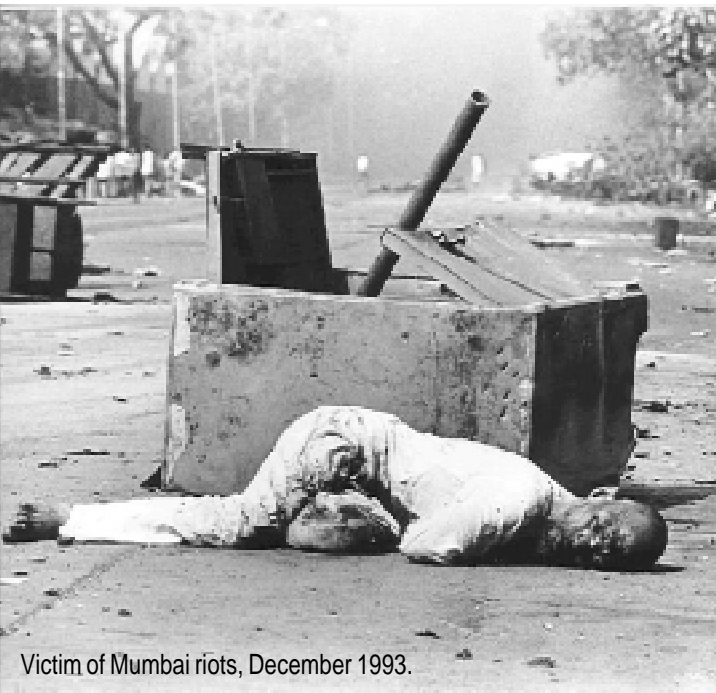
How did ancient Indian princes tie labor to the land if neither feudalism nor caste existed? Even if we are forced, *faute de mieux*, to speculate

about ancient Indian social life, we must remain true to the common facts of economic and military life among European and Asian civilisations, which imposed similar institutional responses.

These caveats, however, will no doubt leave the revisionists unmoved, for they are part of the "deconstructionist" movement that has deeply influenced the humanities in American and British universities. Deconstructionists do not believe that any settled "facts" exist.

If they are right, there is no difference between the intellectual discipline of history, founded by the Greeks 2,400 years ago to record the past truthfully, and the myths that every culture tells to affirm its self-worth. Without history, we will be exposed to the full force of the tales of our imagined pasts, which only mirror our current hates and loves. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

Deepak Lal is Professor of Economics at the University of California, Los Angeles.



Victim of Mumbai riots, December 1993.

**RANJIT DEVRAJ** in NEW DELHI

After 45 persons died in two car-bomb blasts that rocked western Mumbai city, India's 'financial capital' on Monday, authorities moved to contain possible sectarian strife that has, in the past, followed similar attacks. It was unclear who was behind the blasts. Neighbouring Pakistan, which is usually blamed for such incidents in India and with which relations have lately been on the mend, quickly condemned them as "acts of terrorism".

Since Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee extended the hand of peace to Islamabad in April, top leaders of this country have been careful to differentiate between militant groups based in Pakistan territory and their hosts. This is in contrast to past policy

under which India routinely blamed Islamabad for acts of sabotage carried out on Indian soil. After an attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, New Delhi responded by moving troops to the Pakistan border, nearly triggering off war between the nuclear-armed countries.

No group claimed responsibility for the Monday blasts, one of which went off at the historic Gateway to India monument at the seafront and the other at the prosperous Zaveri Bazaar famed for its trade in gold and diamonds. At least 150 people were injured, according to official reports. The state of Maharashtra quickly ordered a beefing up of security at its airports and vital installations as well as police

# Reprisal

patrols of communally sensitive areas. Other states, which have large Muslim populations, including Gujarat that adjoins Maharashtra, West Bengal, northern Haryana and Delhi, ordered security measures which included spot checks of vehicles.

Pakistan was 'separated at birth' from India in 1947 when it was created as a homeland for the sub-continent's Muslims following the decolonisation of what was a larger British India. India went on to become a constitutionally secular state, but one which became increasingly rocked by communal violence between the Hindu majority and Muslims who form 20 percent of the country's one billion people. Monday's blasts seemed to echo a series of bombings that hit Mumbai in 1993 as part of nation-wide sectarian violence that erupted after Hindu fundamentalist groups demolished the 16th century Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya town in northern Uttar Pradesh state. At least 2,000 people died in the post-demolition violence. Many

Hindus believe, or have been led to believe, that the Babri Masjid was built by invading Muslims over a temple which marked the birthplace of the Hindu warrior deity Ram 10,000 years ago.

In the decade since the demolition, politics in India seemed to revolve around plans to build a grand temple to Ram on the site where the mosque stood. The issue, an emotional one, helped the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) come to power in 1998 under prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

However, the BJP has been stymied in its plans to build the temple by the Uttar Pradesh High Court which has tasked a team of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to carry out excavations and determine the truth of what lay beneath the foundations of the mosque.

Monday's blasts coincided curiously with the release by the High Court of the ASI team's report which spoke of evidence of a "massive structure" below what were the foundations of the Babri Masjid and construction history of the site stretching back to the 10th

## There is a fear of sectarian strife rearing its head after the Mumbai blasts

century. The High Court, which said its main task is to decide the ownership of the site rather than whether Ram was born there or not, has not accepted the report but handed it over to experts and stakeholders who have six weeks from now to study and comment on it.

Although the ASI findings are non-committal, they are likely to exacerbate bitterness between India's two main communities over an issue which has already been at the root of much bloodshed, including a pogrom against the Muslim community in BJP-ruled, western Gujarat state last year. The pogrom, in which more than 2,000 people died, was sparked off by the torching at Godhra railway station of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims returning to Gujarat from a religious ceremony in Ayodhya. It resulted in the immolation of at least 60 passengers.

Recent acts of sabotage in Mumbai, such as the bombing of a suburban train in March killing 12 people, have been attributed to people seeking revenge for the pogrom in

Gujarat where authorities have ordered a special alert to maintain law and order. For the BJP, faced with general elections next year, the ASI findings are just the cue it has been waiting for to pursue its plans to build the Ram temple and redeem election promises it has been making over the past decade.

"The ASI report proves what we have always said—that a temple existed at the site. Muslim organisations must now do some positive thinking on the issue and come forward for a dialogue with Hindu leaders," said BJP spokesman Mukhtar Abbas, himself a Muslim. The BJP has favoured an out-of-court settlement of the ownership issue brought about by religious leaders from both sides, but their efforts have so far not borne favourable results. Hindu leaders such as Vinay Katiyar and Pravin Togadia have sworn that they would 'liberate' other ancient temple sites where mosques were built by Muslim rulers, notably in the cities of Mathura and Varanasi which also are in Uttar Pradesh.

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# “We will wake the king up.”



Girija Prasad Koirala in *Deshantar*, 24 August  
देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

“We are preparing for a decisive movement. This one will be different from previous ones. It will be quite serious, important and perilous. The 1990 movement was against the Panchayat regime, our sole aim was to uproot them and restore democracy. Now our focus is on the king. He attacked the achievements of the 1990 movement and is attempting to scrap the constitution. We have to work between the king and the Maoists’ guns, which is quite a challenge. If we side with the king we will become regressive too. And if we back the Maoists, we will be joining the cruel, autocratic and radical communist stream. We need to tread carefully.

This movement is also aimed at liberation—for the people from dictatorship and regression, and for the king from regression. True, we oppose the king, but we are not against the monarchy as an institution. Many think they are the same. They are not. The king is a person and he cannot be an institution. The sceptre and crown are the symbols of monarchy.

The monarchy will have to be made constitutional, because if that happens, the king cannot make mistakes. The monarchy should be an institution not imbued with power, but with

respect. It also needs safety and management. I stress safety because of the royal palace massacre on June 2001. Nobody took responsibility for the mass murder of King Birendra and his family. The chief of army staff even went as far as to say that the king’s safety was not the army’s responsibility.

The agitating political parties demand that the king should make his property public. What assets were left behind by the late king? How much does the present king own now? These questions are not that difficult to answer. If King Gyanendra is making money through business, he ought to pay taxes.

The 18-point program of the political parties does not aim at replacing the monarchy with a republic, the king has misunderstood us. He is the one propelling the country, deliberately or not, toward a republican state. We only want democracy in which the king will keep his position of a constitutional monarch. Regression will end and the constitution will be activated. After that, the king, parliament and Maoists can all seek a solution to the current crisis. If there is an understanding, the agreement can be ratified by parliament and elections called. It’s as simple as that.

To make the king understand our goals, we must make our movement effective. This will wake him up. One thing that the king must understand is if the constitution is scrapped, the issue of a republic will be raised again and again. If the constitution is torn apart by the force of a gun, the country will never have stability. The outcome of the dialogue with the Maoists will have to be passed by parliament. The rebels are not legitimate, and the king cannot make them so.

Thousands of people will take part in the decisive movement with its epicentre in Kathmandu. No one needs to worry about where to stay and what to eat. Revolutionaries don’t worry about such petty issues. We will be identified by our revolutionary zeal. Kathmandu streets are wider. There is Tundikhel, and we can even sleep in front of the royal palace. Save your applause, we need it to wake the king up. I will lead you through the streets. For democracy and the people’s right, I am ready to be riddled by bullets.”

## To England

Sanghu, 25 August



King Gyanendra’s trip to London 24 August-10 September is ostensibly for a routine health checkup. But what is raising questions is the timing. The country is at the crossroads again, and we must ask if it was prudent on His Majesty’s part to leave at a time of the present political mess. The five political parties are launching a ‘decisive’ movement with activists converging on the capital from 5 September.

The third round of peace talks were inconclusive. Although they have agreed on a fourth round it’s very likely both sides will become more firmly entrenched. What the talks need to be successful is flexibility, from both sides.

The issue then, is gauging how much the government will bend before it breaks. It’s up to the king whether to proceed with the fourth round of talks or to prevent the anticipated violence in the street agitation. Sources say that Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress and Madhab Kumar Nepal (UML) are adamant to go ahead with their agitation, no matter where it takes us.

## Winners

Kantipur, 20 August



Who would’ve thought Nepal could bag first prize for the South Asian category at the International Robot Competition? That’s precisely what happened at Bangkok, Thailand. It was the second year Nepal participated, and better still, the second consecutive year that the Nepali team won in their section. In the first international competition held in Tokyo, Japan, Nepal bagged the

award as the top South Asian entry. Since then, information on Nepal’s robot has been published in Japanese websites. This year in Bangkok, students from Pulchowk Engineering Campus won the finals by beating competitor India 11-2. India had sent its best team selected from the four centres of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). A total of 20 groups from 19 countries from Asia had participated in the competition. “We built our robot with a small investment and managed to even beat India, who is technologically and scientifically more advanced, but we are still not satisfied,” says Ramesh Chaudhari, team leader. “Next time, if we get a little more support, nobody can stop us then from winning the best in Asia prize.”

## Still on Lauda

Annapurna Post, 24 August



The notorious Lauda Air case is still pending at the special court because Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation has not been submitted crucial papers. Last week, the court had ordered the national flag carrier to submit its audit report of fiscal year 2000-2001 within 15 days. The auditing, which should have been completed long ago, has just begun. Assuming the auditors do their job quickly, the whole process will still take another six months. The last account RNAC had audited is 1999-2000. Meanwhile, the defendants in the case have petitioned that the court not make any decisions without first examining the audit report. Lawyers for former RNAC executive chairman Hari Bhakta Shrestha and board member Tirtha Lal Shrestha argued that the CIAA claimed the Lauda deal involved huge kickbacks and corruption before receiving documented proof

from RNAC. In October 2000, the corporation had leased a Lauda Air Boeing 767 for long-haul routes for an 18-month period, at the rate of \$350 per flight hour. After an investigation, the CIAA concluded the corporation had incurred an unexplainable loss of Rs 380 million. It also says the deal was illegal as it was done without the benefit of global bidding. The commission’s lawyers, however, say the court need not wait for the audit report since the loss incurred in the aircraft leasing deal is quite apparent. Although they have not been able to produce proof of another corruption charge levelled at the Lauda deal, the commission is confident that they can submit evidence that an advance payment of more than \$1 million was made to Lauda Air, a subsidiary of Austrian Air.

## Justice

Jandharana, 28 August



We cannot afford to take the sexual abuse of women lightly. Reports of rapes, molestations are frequently in the news, and the perpetrator is often someone the victim knew or trusted. Reputable sources say a former UML leader has been allegedly taking sexual advantage of a dalit woman for a long time. When the news was published in *Drishti*, the MP manhandled the reporter and burned a copy of the paper. A 76-year-old man from Khamari village in Tulsipur was publicly humiliated by villagers for molesting a 10-year-old girl inside his house. The locals rubbed soot on his face and put a garland of shoes on him before parading him through the streets. In Haripurba VDC of Sarlahi district, five men raped a 16-year-old. Activists have been calling for strong laws against rapists, saying we should follow China’s lead and slap a death penalty on perpetrators.

# Return to arms

Editorial, *Kantipur*, August 28



The seven months of ceasefire and the peace talks were already breaking down. At the military and political levels, there were disagreements with the Maoist terms. The Maoists announced that the government had violated the code of conduct and said they had no option but to shelve talks and break the ceasefire.

Neither side was ready to allow a monitoring committee to inspect whether the code of conduct was being followed or violated. One of the main reasons for the failure of the peace talks is due to the absence of an independent and reliable monitoring mechanism. In the last seven years, 8,000 people died and billions of rupees worth of property was destroyed. Now the government, the Maoists and the people must work to prevent impending disaster.

Prachanda’s statement does leave a ray of hope for peace. He stressed that the Maoists abandoned their demand for a people’s republic and instead asked to restore people’s sovereignty and constituent assembly, but in vain. But such critical negotiations should not have been abandoned in three rounds just because there were doubts about the government’s intentions. Moreover, without even considering the possibilities or waiting for the government’s



consideration and flexibility towards their demands, the Maoists have distanced from the talks, killing the hopes and aspirations of 24 million Nepalis.

The continuity of conflict and a return to violence will turn this country into ashes. By taking up arms, the Maoists will worsen the situation of this country. The power of the gun will increase the killing and destruction, which neither the government nor the Maoist will be able to control. The end of the peace talks has been announced but if both sides realise that peace is the only solution to any problem, there may be a chance for us all.

The government and the Maoists have distanced themselves from the talks, but the role of human rights activists and citizen’s society has still not ended. Our responsibility has increased. We can still pressurise both parties not to be a part of the destruction. Before the two sides mobilise their armies, they should re-evaluate the situation again and give peace another chance.



Baburam Bhattarai: “Many days have passed, rust must have jammed our weapons. I’ll be right back after firing a few shots.”

तरुण Tarun, 25 August

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We will do what it takes to counter the rebels’ violence.”

- Kamal Thapa, Information Minister in *Gorkhapatra*, 28 August

**K**umud Devkota's most evocative poems lie somewhere between poetry and prose—they tell stories of characters at important junctures in their lives, though they eschew the option of narrative development to offer readers, instead, the poet's emotion and insight into the human condition.

It is rare to find a poet, today, who writes in the third person, as Devkota does in his best works, and who pays more attention to the plight of others than to his or her own subjectivity. Devkota focuses closely on the inner life of his characters. In the first poem below, he writes of a Kathmandu everyman bitterly excluded from the opulence of a wedding party:

**NEM BAHADUR MUTTERS**

On the frosty  
mist covered street  
at the kind of  
dead end where I am  
a person  
freezing in silence begins in anxiety  
to add and subtract  
his desire to take some warmth  
from the lights  
in the house that stands before him  
the lights that  
glitter from the roof down to the sidewalk

This apparently  
is where the division lies  
amid  
people. The lights are lit so  
that  
someone might  
grant someone else her youth  
For the person  
who does divisions  
for he who bares  
his poverty  
for those who  
suffer the frost and mist—  
how much longer  
is the truth to be denied?

Life is

# Kumud Devkota's Kathmandu of exclusion

bountiful for those who know how to  
daub faint  
deceitful laughter across their lips  
The Sahebs at  
the gate with their palms joined  
and their faces  
made up like those of true citizens—  
they make a fine  
topic for poetry. Nem Bahadur  
mutters  
—just you  
wait. We couldn't become one of  
your own  
We were left out  
of your feasts and gatherings  
It doesn't matter.  
I've enjoyed one or two samplings  
of foreign  
spirits in my time. Does it matter  
where it came  
from? It's just the desire  
to be one of  
your people. It's just this  
time  
sprawling with  
so much darkness  
all over the  
street

Winter weather features in another of Devkota's poems, once again emphasising the helplessness of the poor against the elements.

**RISHAV BHATTARAI'S LIFE  
A COLD ROOM**

A foggy winter's  
day—

Kathmandu must suffer the rain that pours  
endlessly  
The swarming  
people must bear what comes—victory or defeat  
Amid this kind  
of whispering in a cold room  
Rishav Bhattarai is stroking life,  
making love to life  
He blows smoke  
from his mouth, targeting the ceiling  
The representative of a class,  
he is only just living  
For whom and for  
what?  
Recoiling at  
winter's sour, unfinished taste  
moving without  
shame through the street, the hut, a cold room  
as if to found a  
maxim or a truism. This is how  
to bear life  
This is how a  
person must lack faith in himself  
In order to take  
pride in his soil. Maybe it is  
solely for my poem  
that Rishav has  
lived so long here under his name  
Awareness  
doesn't rest in only one place  
The feel of  
rebellion rises and moves swiftly  
toward the war  
that hot electric currents wage against winter  
far, far beyond  
the windows with large glass panes  
Isn't this the same Kathmandu  
as that one?  
Where a story

had started to be told of the winter,  
of one who  
stroked life in a cold room  
and of recoiling  
at a sour, unfinished taste  
How long to  
cover the truth and speak  
of the purity of this soil?  
How long to hide  
the self? How long to bear this?  
This relentless  
selfish epidemic—  
Sometimes  
something arises and a question  
wants to erupt  
Why did we get  
into the habit of tolerating?  
Why is it that  
only the years stay out and get exposed?  
What harm would  
there be if a new day appeared?  
The artificial  
temperatures decked with such grandeur  
would disappear  
from the house that decorates Kathmandu  
The soil that  
has been stepped on would begin to go cold  
The life of  
Rishav Bhattarai, spent in a cold room  
will take on a  
question and spread through the entire country  
So far, the  
winter, not satisfied with fog,  
has transformed  
only into endless rain...

Devkota's poems are translated from his collection *Kumud Devkotaka Kabita*, published by the Royal Nepal Academy.

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3. Nabil Bank Vs. Nepal Industrial & Commercial Bank	3. C & k Travel Vs. Saiyu Travel
4. Yeti Travel Vs. Surya Travel	4. Manakamana Cable Car Vs. Marcopolo Travel
5. Fewa Travel Vs. Specialized Travels	5. Shangrilla Travel Vs. Seagull Travel
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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Monsoon Moods** Paintings by Uttam Nepali, Shashi Shah, Batsa Gopal Vaidya, Shashikala Tiwari, Kiran Manandhar, Ragini Upadhyay-Grela at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4411122
- ❖ **Sizzle and Shine Summer Show** paintings, prints and photographs by well known local and international artists from noon to 7PM, Tuesday through Sunday at Gallery 9, Lazimpat. 4436944
- ❖ **21<sup>st</sup> century is the century for art and peace** by Govinda Prasad Shah 'Azad' at the British Council, Lainchour till 16 September.
- ❖ **Hindu festivals:** *Dar Khane*, 29 August. *Haritalika Teej* on 30 August. *Rishipanchami* on 1 September. *Godavari Snan Mela* till 17 September.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Women in Concert** 7PM on 7 September at Dechenling Garden, Thamel. 4412158
- ❖ **Ghulam Ali live** on 30 August at the Regal Ballroom, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Tickets (dinner and drinks): Rs 2,499 single, Rs 3,999 couple.
- ❖ **Bored of the Things** Stand up comedy by Vir Das. 6PM on 29 August at the Regency Ballroom, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Tickets (cocktail and dinner): Rs 1,400 single, Rs 2,500 couple.
- ❖ **Salsa classes** with Diego, starting 1 September at Subterranea, Club Kilroy at Thamel. 981046430
- ❖ **Retro Night** 60s and 70s with DJ Austin, Mike Khadka, open bar and buffet at Hotel de'l Annapurna, 7PM onwards, 5 September. Tickets: Rs 1,099. www.partynepal.com 4221711
- ❖ **Changa Chait 2060** Kite flying competition at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6,13, 27 September. 4410432
- ❖ **China Festival 2003** handicrafts, shopping, food, photographs and more. 1-7 September at BICC, Baneshwor.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM every Wednesday and Saturday. Rs 200 entry. Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Vayu live** every Friday night, 'Friends of Jatra' jam sessions every Wednesday night. Jatra, Thamel. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Acoustic Jam** 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Café, Thamel. 4256738
- ❖ **Full Circle** acoustic jam every Friday at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4427311
- ❖ **Thunderbolt** at Rox Bar on Fridays. Happy Hours 6-PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Lights Out!** last Friday theme event at Dwarika's on the 29 August, featuring Abhaya & The Steam Injuns with R&B, Jazz, Soul, Blues Rs 699 per person. 4479488
- ❖ **Cadenza**, 29 August and **Robin N' Looza**: 30 August at The Jazz Bar, Shangri-la Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **DJ Aye** from Nigeria, 29 August at Via Via Café, Pakhnaol. Free entry.

FOOD

- ❖ **Dhokaima Café** great food at affordable prices at Patan Dhoka.
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Las Kush, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Coast 2 Coast** Coastal cuisine from Malaysia, Indonesia and South India till 31 August. Dinner only. Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999
- ❖ **Café U** Healthy Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opposite British School, Sanepa. 5552326
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Chef's Special** far east to the west for Rs 499, South Indian specialties at lunch for Rs 199, BBQ on Friday night at Rs 399. Shambala Garden, Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Café Mitra** New menu, spicy Chinese food every Saturday. Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Breakaway Buffet Lunch** Rs 325-375 (weekdays) at Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** now in Patan, opposite St Mary's School. 5521755
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 4680083
- ❖ **Singapore Malaysian food** at Singma, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 552004
- ❖ **Wet & Wild weekend lunch** Rs 444 + tax per person. Godavari Village Resort, 5560675

GETAWAYS

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- ❖ **Escape to Jomsom** this summer. Rs 3,999 per person at Jomsom Mountain Resort. 4496110
- ❖ **TGIF overnight package** \$90 plus tax for double, \$75 plus tax for single occupancy. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** a natural environment, luxurious rooms at Shivapuri Dadagaon. Email: cbbasnyat@hotmail.com 4354331

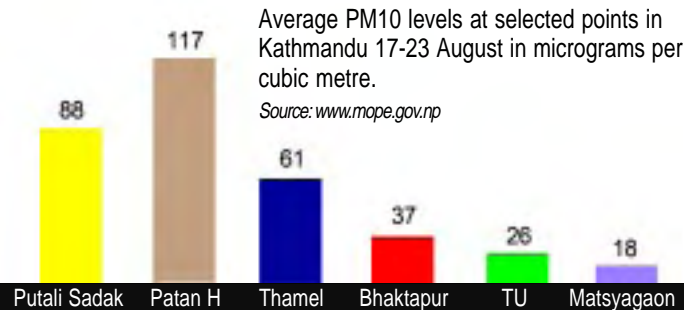
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Air quality data generated by six monitoring stations in Kathmandu last week shows that the rains cleaned up vehicular pollution. The showers last week kept concentration of particulate matter less than 10 microns (one of the most dangerous pollutants) well below national standards. But as soon as the rains stopped, PM10 levels climbed up again. On Saturday, however, with a decrease in the number of vehicles on the road, the pollution level went down to 124 micrograms per cubic meter.



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-28-08-2003 03:00 GMT



True to tradition, this is the time for *Bhadaure Jhari* a time for sharp, short bursts of isolated showers. This week's torrential downpours in Kathmandu are a sign of these characteristic showers that come at the tail end of the monsoon. To be sure, the monsoon is not spent yet, and a series of low pressure systems are still coming out of the Bay and headed our way as this satellite image taken on Thursday morning attests. But already the sun is milder, and maximum temperature next week will show a fall by a degree. Humidity, however, will still be high and things will remain sticky.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



by MAUSAM BEED

BOOKWORM

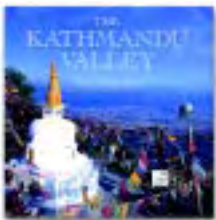


**Can a Woman Rebel?** Sangita Raymajhi  
Across Publication, 2003  
Rs 500

The essays compiled in this book combine the subtle cultural and socio-political modes of Nepali society. Raymajhi has a penchant for arguments about non-compromising and creative rebellion. Each piece reads like a personal essay because of her inventiveness and very often, her personal experiences. Her imagination and sense of rebellion is apparent in the diverse topics she writes about, from a simple road sign to existential questions on being a woman.

**Nepal Who's Who 2003** Deepak Aryal (ed)  
Research Centre for Communication and Development, 2003  
Rs 2,250

As the title suggests, this book is a directory for the eminent personalities of Nepali society. In addition to new entries, this edition presents a distinctively significant section in the Select Indices, which makes referral easy for the chosen areas of personalities' specialisation. Since such tomes usually take a few years to complete, the luminaries who died before publication have been placed under Obituaries.



**The Kathmandu Valley** Photographs by Fredrik Arvidsson  
Om Book Service  
Rs 1,450

Arvidsson's remarkable clarity is apparent in these photographs in and around the Valley. There is a mix of portraits, panoramas and landscapes, all viewed with an unerring eye to detail, light and balance of composition. With an introduction by Kerry Morgan, detailed captions for the photos, a comprehensive glossary as well as an informative chapter on recommended reading, this book will do credit to any coffee table.

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



Don't write off the 2003 summer of sequels as rehashed trash just yet. *Bad Boys II* is exactly what it should be—bigger, better and badder than the original. Eight years after their first exploits, detective Marcus Burnett (Martin Lawrence) is tiring of the pace set by his reckless partner Mike Lowrey (Will Smith). He's thinking about transferring to a less stressful assignment but puts the idea on hold when his little sister, Syd (Gabrielle Union), gets mixed up with Johnny Tapia (Jordi Molla), Miami's new drug lord. Yet beyond the extreme close-ups, past the acute camera angles and above the exploding gas tanks, what sets *BBII* apart is its comedy. This time, Lawrence and Smith mouth a script that dares you to catch the writers at faking a plot.

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# Where to eat Nepali



Kathmandu is a melting pot of cultures and cuisines. In this great melange there still are many places where you can sample a diverse range of Nepali food.

**Bhanchha Ghar** has become synonymous with a traditional Nepali culinary feast, since 1989. "Our food is a total Nepali food experience," says Kishore Raj Pandey. Over in Jamal, **Kathmandu Kitchen** offers exquisite *chatamari* served with tomato and cilantro *achar*. You might even catch a Tamang jhankri dancer eat fire, the ash from which is traditionally used to cure the sick. In Naxal, in the quiet retreat of **Wunjala Moskova** you can sample more Newari and even Russian delights. Especially popular are the savoury marinated bite sized *chwela*. In the heart of town in Dilli Bazar is **Bhojan Griha** in a Rana house built 150 years ago. Short of going to Mustang, your best bet for Thakali food is **Tukkeche Thakali Kitchen** on Darbar Marg.

For true Sherpa or Tibetan food you just can't go wrong with **Dechenling Garden** tucked in Thamel. The chili factor is pretty high so keep a chilled beer handy. Must samples are the *ama dhatsi* and *tingmo*. An all time favourite, also in Thamel, is **Hotel Utse**, still hailed for the best momos this side of the Friendship Bridge.

Around the Patan Darbar Square there are a number of restaurants that serve Nepali food. In Mangal Bazar, Layeku Kitchen is ideally located for stunning views and great food. But if you'd rather be in the centre of things, Patan Museum Café has a very good Nepali *thali* within the quiet confines of the actual darbar. For a regal dining experience that doesn't cost a king's ransom **Baithak** at Baber Mahal Revisited is quite literally the only place to go. Last but not least, if you want elaborate presentation and taste, book ahead at **Krishnarpan** at Dwarika's Hotel (*pic, top*) for a 16 course dinner that will make everyone well and truly abandon the idea that Nepal's cuisine is dull. ♦

(Sradha Basnyat)

## Bored with things?

The 23-year-old ABID, American Born Indian *Desi*, funnyman Vir Das excels at comedy. This Friday, Vir brings biting satire and cutting edge comedy to the Valley. 'Bored with the things' sounds like just the ticket to liven up this rather tedious season where everything is a tad washed out. The very antithesis of the slapstick genre, Vir breaks the rules—all of them. Parents, sex, gender, class and caste no bar. In fact, he raises the bar high enough to aim right for the jugular. Leave the kids at home, because under the spotlight and in front of the microphone, this man is fast, controversial and profane, in more ways than one. And so funny you'll need to wear seat belts.

'Bored with the things' by Vir Das on 29 August at the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.



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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Men are from Mars

Every 60,000 years or so whenever Mars and Earth come to within a stone's throw of each other as the crow flies, we know it is once more time to take a long hard look at Nepali manhood. The last time Mars was this close, our ancestors were still running around naked in their caves, fighting tooth and nail over choice medium-rare mastodon cuts and over prehistoric constituent assemblies. Fighting is something we did well, and that glorious warlike tradition has carried on to this day. We may have failed in just about everything else, but we sure excel in the martial arena.

Being a martian race, therefore, we he-Gorkhalis have never shirked from exhibiting extraordinary valour when we come face-to-face with an adversary: whether it is the East India Company, or a rival Congress faction. Fossilised remains of petrified primitive newspapers recently unearthed from 60,000-year-old caves at Ichangu reveal for the first time that the roots of many of our present-day national traits were struck in those hoary days of antiquity at the dawn of history when Man was just beginning his journey to the pinnacle of evolution.

### Collision with Mars Averted

By a Cosmic Correspondent

The Earth suffered a near-headon collision with Mars yesterday as the two planets came to within hair's

breadth of each other, and disaster was averted only because an alert astrologer was able to apply the Earth's emergency brakes.

Astrologer Mangal Raj said his namesake planet suddenly swerved towards the Earth's orbit without warning, and the two missed each other by a whisker. "Whew, that was close," a visibly relieved Mr Mangal told reporters. "Thank heavens we're not going have a close shave like this for another 60,000 years."

### Women Fed Up

By a Feminine Reporter

Thousands of women launched the first phase of their agitation against their better halves, called the 'Tij Offensive', by migrating to their ancestral caves in droves and threatening to go on a relay hunger strike until their 18-point demand was met. The demands included a moratorium on hirsute husbands running around in their birthday suits, a ban on, er, all voiding (audible or otherwise) in a confined space, and a requirement that hunter-gatherer husbands also learn to cook. "We know it won't happen in a million years," said one irate wife, "but it may get them off their butts."

### Fire Discovered

By Our Resident Arsonist

Four juvenile male hominoids accidentally discovered fire Tuesday when the woolly mammoth they were herding got struck by lightning on Chobar Hill, home ministry sources said. The mammoth was burnt beyond recognition, and the young anthropoids said the incinerated mammoth tasted much better than a raw one. "This discovery will revolutionise cooking and warfare," predicted a prehistoric military historian on condition that this would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Several disgruntled arsonists immediately started playing with fire, setting ablaze their living quarters and reducing their ancestral homeland to ashes.



## NEPALI SOCIETY

# Lajana's helping hand

In the months after her husband's death in an air crash in 1992, when Lajana Manandhar felt her world had fallen apart, she decided the best way to honour her husband's memory was to fulfil his vision. An architect and urban planner, Ramesh Manandhar always thought outside the envelope, designing cheap eco-friendly houses using mud, working on housing for the urban poor. So, Lajana turned grief into activism and started Lumanti (Newari for 'memory') to help landless squatters and slum dwellers in Kathmandu Valley.

Widowed at 30, Lajana also had to raise their son and daughter. She had just finished her MPhil in agriculture economics and had no clue how to go about addressing the issues of urban poverty. But with help from friends and colleagues of her husband, Lajana sought ideas and suggestions to find ways to promote self-help and welfare. It took three years to develop a close relationship with slum dwellers in Patan, and without any other financial support and just a skeleton staff, Lumanti hosted an international workshop on urban and housing issues. In 1997, with support from Action Aid, Lumanti began a women's

saving and credit scheme for squatter families.

Members would contribute Rs 20-30 per week to a central kitty from which others in the group could take loans at low interest to pay school fees, repair their hut, or invest in a small shop. Within six years, Lumanti set up 110 groups with nearly 2,000 female members from squatter communities around Kathmandu and Lalitpur. Today, their savings total Rs 5 million.

The difference can be seen in the slums of Patan: dirt lanes have been replaced with stone pavements, each ward has a children's library and learning centre, and all houses have toilets. With the help of Lumanti's scholarship program, children's school enrolment has reached 95 percent.

Along the way, Lajana and Lumanti have turned what was once a non-issue into a subject of national debate. The urban poor have now set up a solidarity network called Society for Preservation and Habitation in 22 districts. Says Lajana: "All we did was to show them the way, and give them moral support. They did the rest themselves." ♦ (Naresh Newar)



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