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# Party time

Political parties go through with toned-down protests despite fears of Maoist infiltration.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Doused by rain and doubt, five political parties went ahead with their demos on Thursday, defying a government ban on assembly and unprecedented security bandobast at Ratna Park.

Among those arrested were Sushil Koirala of the Congress and Bharat Mohan Adhikari of the UML. Parties say 1,500 of their activists were detained, while police put the figure at 400 and said some were immediately released. Attempts to hold a sit-in at Ratna Park will resume Friday.

Political leaders had softened their rhetoric ever since three Kathmandu-based ambassadors actively lobbied to head off a party-palace confrontation at a time when the Maoists are gearing up for violent protests in Kathmandu next week. But it looks like the parties had to go ahead with a previously-scheduled program for face-saving reasons, and also because many cadre had already arrived in Kathmandu.

Rifts had also appeared within the five-party alliance, with the smaller parties accusing the two biggies of chickening out. Veteran leftie of the Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party Narayan Man Bijukchhe blames ambassadors from the United States, Europe and India for intimidating the UML and Congress. "It's quite clear who's calling the shots here," Bijukchhe told us on Thursday.

In King Gyanendra's absence, the high-profile activities of the foreign ambassadors have not gone unnoticed by opinion-makers, some even say that Nepal almost appeared to be a "protectorate" of

the West and India. US Ambassador Michael Malinowsky admitted in an interview to the BBC Nepali Service on 31 August that the "US, UK and India are working closely to help restore peace in Nepal."

The party leadership denies it is dancing to the diplomatic tune, and has tried to put on a brave face. "We know the government was apprehensive that our protests would get wide public support," Congress spokesman Arjun Narsingh KC told us. "But we also don't want the Maoists to take advantage of our program."

To be sure, the diplomats have not just been arm-twisting the parties, they seem to be working on the palace too. And the message that has gone to the party bosses is that the king is ready to meet them half-way sometime after his return from London on 7 September.

The parties appear to be willing to abandon their demands for reinstatement of parliament in return for an all-party government with a prime minister of their choice. Names of second-rung candidates from both parties, Chakra Bastola from the Congress and Ram Chandra Poudel, and Madhab Nepal from the UML are being floated.

The government has said it has intelligence that the Maoists plan to infiltrate the parties' protests through the weekend, but a close aide to prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa said this wasn't a ploy to get the parties to call off their agitation. He felt, however, that the parties needed an honourable exit so their workers would not accuse them of selling out. ♦

MIN. BAJRACHARYA

Times

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Weekly Internet Poll # 101

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

Total votes: 2,804

Weekly Internet Poll # 102. To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Was the resumption of conflict avoidable?

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# Men in *daura suruwals*

## Only peaceful parliamentary politics will restore peace.

### KATHMANDU FEELS THE PAIN

Kathmandu has started feeling the terror that has stalked the rest of the country. In large parts of village Nepal, misery and death has become a way of life for those without the resources to move to Kathmandu's urban embrace.

Author Khagendra Sangraula has written vividly about the villager caught in the middle, between the Maoists' constant threats and the army's occasional but havoc-making passage. He wrote of the situation a year ago. Today, the people are cowering more than they ever did, as the war enters a more brutal and unpredictable phase.

In many villages, teachers and health workers are often the only representatives of the state (if we can call them that) still left. They are regarded suspiciously by the Maoists of being supporters of the UML or the Congress, and by the army as Maoist sympathisers for willingly paying what is, in fact, a forced revolutionary tax equivalent to a day's salary a month. Yet these teachers and health workers in, say, Ramechhap or Rolpa have little choice but to stay to teach and treat so they can send some savings home to their families in Jhapa or Chitwan.

The villagers have little foothold left. Only those without resources and contacts in Kathmandu or roadhead towns remain in the villages. The Maoists hold the countryside except when the army marches through (sometimes in civvies, which only adds to the terror), so the villagers have no option but to submit to the rebels. This makes them 'accidental Maoists', as one writer has described them: at the mercy of government forces when they arrive wielding their SLRs and M-16s. Today across Nepal, trapped Nepalis are suffering psychological trauma on a mass scale.

Then there is the daily bloodletting in which the police, army and the Maoists are being killed. The army often catches innocents in its net, and the Maoists are exacting revenge against suspected informants. The impunity is near total.

The Maoists love to coddle Kathmandu Valley because in its willingness to turn the other way, lies the opportunity to wreak havoc on the countryside. We know by now that images of dead bodies of foot soldiers, policemen, the Maoists and innocent villagers killed by rebel or army action doesn't outrage the capital. Kathmandu never felt the pain of the rest of Nepal.

But now, as the national infrastructure and Valley people are targeted by the desperate insurgents, the danger is that even those who would have mouthed liberal sentiments on human rights and Geneva conventions, are going to keep silent. Even more than before, they will look the other way.

At a time when the Maoists have given up their guise of being a political force, and when armed cadre stalk the hinterland with seemingly little control of their leaders, there is perhaps little sense in appealing to the good sense of the mercurial Prachanda or the argumentative Baburam, who once said that children, too, had a right to fight a revolution.

But perhaps we can still appeal to the army to be careful as it goes about this phase of the war. And the appeal would be this: please take care that you fight clean, that you stand by universal principles of humanitarian behaviour. This is because you represent much more than the Maoists ever can or will. It is your job to protect the people of Nepal, not pursue them.

When the Maoists began their 'people's war', Nepal had a system of governance in which:

- Rulers were selected through fairly open, fiercely competitive, largely peaceful and regularly, rather too regularly, held elections,
- Independence of different organs of state—executive, legislative, judiciary and regulatory—was ensured through a system of check and balance,
- Provision and protection of freedom, social justice, human rights, security and national progress was possible, at least theoretically, under the rule of law,
- A vibrant press was exercising its freedom with a vengeance,
- Civil society had begun to assert itself and
- Donors were influencing government decisions from the shadows.

Fast-forward seven years later to the present when everything has turned topsy-turvy. The government now consists of royal nominees. Apart from the judiciary, all other organs of the state have become interdependent. The rule of law has almost ceased to exist—a major general of the army is responsible for the security of the Valley.

The imposition of a state of emergency in the country by Sher Bahadur Deuba forced the press to adopt self-censorship. After October Fourth, there is perpetual emergency in the country. The media has internalised the cautious approach. Civil society survives by championing the cause of those engaged in subverting the rule of law. These days, envoys of diplomatic missions freely condemn the political activities of mainstream parties and openly condone every repressive act of the state.

If the Maoists' violent campaign was to dismantle the democratic set-up in the country, they have succeeded spectacularly. It has undermined the nation's independence, freedom of its people and strength of the state.

Throughout all this, the Maoists have consistently received a good, and not just fair, press despite their acts of violence and terror. The criticism of political parties dominates the public domain, but the condemnation of heinous killing by insurgents is either muted or oblique. In the Machiavellian doctrine, the major objective of any war is the destruction of the enemy's will and ability to resist, and the Maoists have proved adept at psywar.

Civil society's clamour, that the government meet the main demand of the Maoists and opt for the formation of a constituent assembly, is no less astounding. There is no evidence to believe that the insurgents will stop at a constituent assembly and discard their primary motive of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat just to please the Valley's chattering classes.

It's an axiom of political psychology that no insurgency ever ends at the achievement of any rebel group's primary demands. Violent politics is like an addictive drug where ever larger doses are needed to satisfy the stimulation. Only an administration of shock therapy, followed by rehabilitation, can cure those addicted to the politics of violence.

Recently, the Royal Nepali Army lost two of its best and brightest officers. One of them was Colonel Basnet who came from an illustrious family of loyal warriors for well over 10 generations. This is a loss that is sure to invite massive retaliation. The Maoists' coming military debacle may not be swift, but it is inevitable.

But even if the Maoist militia is shocked into submission it will not be possible to enlist all of them in the service of the government. A large number of them will need to be engaged by mainstream parties in peaceful politics. It's for this reason that parties need to be strengthened even as efforts are underway to increase the effectiveness of the armed forces. There is no

hierarchy of priorities in the challenges facing Nepali polity.

The war on insurgency needs to be fought on several fronts, each one of them as important as any other, all of them on the same horizontal plane. Nepali media's penchant for nit-picking politics while insurgents literally get away with murder is also not all that strange. Taking on armed groups that have no respect for rule of law and zero tolerance for criticism is fraught with mortal dangers. The intellectuals' wariness to discuss the dangers of the Maoist takeover of the country can also be explained—it has been reared in the hothouse of Panchayat years when conformism carried high rewards while dissent was severally punished.

Years of clinging on to others has made the Nepali intelligentsia so spineless that it's completely bereft of the ability to conduct any kind of political discourse without external support, material as well as intellectual. Most baffling is the attitude of powerful envoys, who are supposed to know better.

There is no way the current political imbroglio in Nepal can be disentangled without putting mainstream parties back at the centre. At the end of the day only democracy legitimises the use of force. Even the occupation force in Iraq has to justify itself by claiming that it will be a harbinger of popular rule. Diplomatic missions in Kathmandu and the top brass in Bhadrakali would do well to engage in some quick rethinking. Only peaceful parliamentary politics will restore peace.

Dead clauses of the constitution aren't as meaningless as they appear. Those cold letters are all that separate legitimate claimants of political power from usurpers of the left and right. ♦



### LETTERS

#### LOVE, NOT WAR

Re: 'Lajana's helping hand' (Nepali Society, #160). Lajana Manandhar's courage, assiduousness and vision in the face of the tragedy that befell her and her children are laudable and inspiring. She and other women illustrate to Nepal and the world that women have the power and capacity to change existing conditions which seem indelibly entrenched. These articles on the back page which inspire, challenge and influence are a superb antidote to what is on the front page. Choose love, not war.

Suzy Conway, Dhulikhel

#### SECULARISM

'Should Nepal be secular?' by Prakash A Raj (#158) tried to give a factual presentation of the pros and cons of the concept of secularism. I agree that secularism is not an issue

for Nepal today. The country survived without secularism and there is no reason why it cannot do without it in the future. The political and other forces which have started speaking in favour of secularism should turn their attention to the larger issues that the country faces, like threats to its security in political and economic terms. If the nation faces this challenge, the issue of secularism becomes null and void.

Hari Bansh Jha, Lalitpur

CKLAL

While agreeing with the overall thrust of CK Lal's typically incisive column 'Return to rhetoric' (State of the State, # 159) we just want to add that there is still something to be said about the proposition made by former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan when he famously said, "Jaw-jaw is

better than war-war".

Ram Limbu and Manchinari Shrestha, Sydney, Australia

- CK Lal's columns are usually written frankly, exposing the hypocrisy surrounding the plight of downtrodden Nepalis. It is not their fault that they have to seek employment outside Nepal just to provide for their families. Any serious development of the country has not gone beyond the roadhead settlements. For the present, Nepali overseas workers are Nepal's only true breadwinners. They are the ones always returning to Nepal with their savings. Some of them even give their lives and return in coffins. Yet, they are robbed, exploited and despised by the very people supposed to be protecting them. Our diplomatic services in Asia must stop being shopping guides to visiting dignitaries and devote themselves

to the assistance of fellow Nepalis in distress. It should be the moral duty of the authorities to assist the oppressed, seeking help from the very beginning. There is no shame in seeking honest work, and it is utterly immoral to be callous to the plight of fellow Nepalis.

BK Rana, email

- CK Lal is among a rare thoughtful breed of writers. But his 'Constitutional tug-o-war' (#160) took me by surprise because he comes across as an apologist for Girija Koirala and Madhab Nepal. He thinks Bamdev and Sher Bahadur were somehow misled into the current situation. Lal even thinks the Lauda case should remain under wraps. He didn't see any right wing conspiracy when Girija joined the Panchayat after he toppled the first Deuba government, but believes Sher Bahadur was a puppet of his

rightist masters. Has he forgotten the government formed by the rightists was supported by the likes of Madhab Nepal? An overwhelming majority of the Nepali people blame Girija for the present state of the country. Has he talked to anyone about this?

As for getting out of the constitutional mess we are in, Lal proposes reinstating the parliament. What is the constitutional basis for such a recommendation? Lal should explain to us, the people who are not as well versed as he is, how the king can do that within the framework of the present constitution. The parliament was dissolved by an elected government. Is Lal asking the king to use some extraconstitutional power? If that is the case, he should not complain about the king sacking Deuba and running the government. If there is to be the rule of law in Nepal, things have to be done constitutionally. The

last constitutional prime minister this country had was Deuba and the only constitutional way out of this mess would be to reinstate him. Deuba can then form an all party government or take other appropriate steps to fulfil the aspirations of the people. Two wrongs don't make a right. If Lal believes the end justifies the means, then he doesn't have to look far for like-minded people: all he has to do is call up the Maoists.

Binaya Shrestha, email

GIRIJA KOIRALA

Your translation from Deshantar of Girija Prasad





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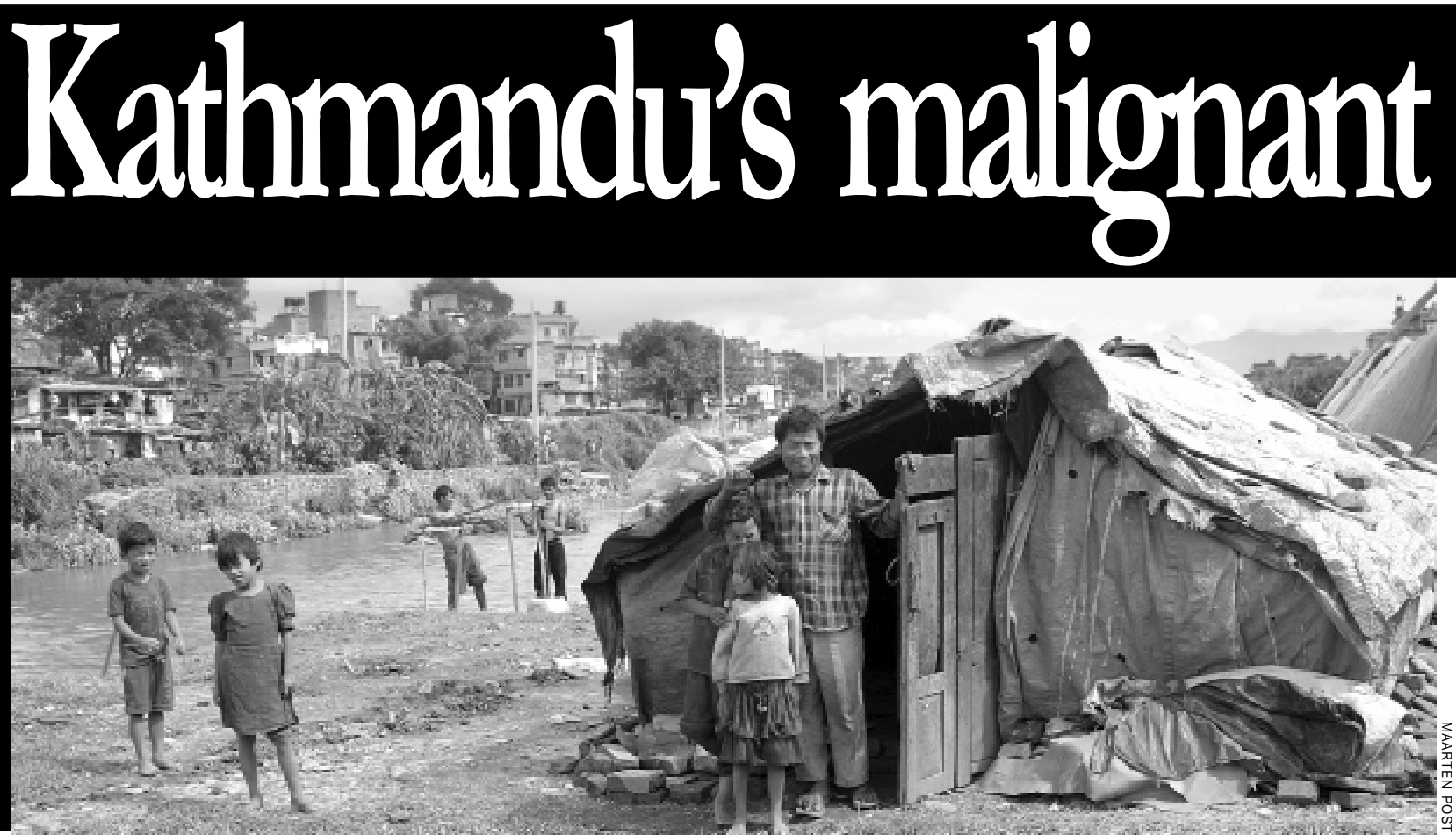
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**Kathmandu Valley has exceeded the limits of growth, but the exodus of migrants from the countryside shows no sign of slowing.**



#### MAARTEN POST

Three tents stand on the muddy banks of the Bishnumati between Kalimati and Nayabazar. Bal Bahadur Tamang recently shifted his tent and family up a couple of meters after the monsoon-swollen river swept away a part of the riverbank.

The west bank of the Bishnumati is one of the few areas in Kathmandu which is still available to for construction. A long-planned north-south link road may someday offer relief for the capital's congested traffic but till that happens, this is home to many squatters. Till last year, 142 families lived here but their houses were bulldozed away. They are both victims and symbols of this ongoing urbanisation process.

According to one survey, some 800 new squatter families in the past two years began living in public spaces in the city centre along the floodplains of the Bishnumati and Bagmati. In total, there are an estimated 2,800 families living in shacks, tents and makeshift

huts on land they do not own. While Kathmandu's slums are nowhere near the scale of Bombay's Dharavi or the notorious shantytowns of Calcutta, urban pressures triggered by insurgency-related out migration from the districts is making the crisis more serious.

Chandra Raj Bhandari came to Kathmandu from Nuwakot in 2000 after Maoists attacked him with khukuris, assuming he was an army informer. Bhandari still can't walk properly, and shows us scars all over his body. Despite the ceasefire he doesn't dare go back to his village. "My family came to live with me in Balaju. The house in the village is locked, and this monsoon nobody is working my fields." Bhandari knows of at least 150 others from his own village who have come to Kathmandu.

#### Jungle to concrete jungle

It is clear the root problem of urbanisation has always been rural under-development and a lack of jobs in the countryside. This has been

exacerbated by the violence of the insurgency. Unless that crisis is first solved, rural migration to the cities will not stop, and they will leave their real jungles for a concrete one.

Municipalities have to cope the best they can to accommodate everyone, streamline services like water and electricity, prevent squatting and ensure that the Valley's unique urban habitat is not permanently destroyed. At present, the Valley's population growth rate of 1.2 million is increasing by about 6 percent, meaning it will double by 2015. While a majority of migrants rent rooms or start living with a family, the poorest become squatters. Those who can afford to, buy land and build houses.

This fiscal year the Kathmandu municipality received 5,200 applications for building construction permits. "Until 2001, the average was 3,000," says Devendra Dongol, head of the Urban Development Department. In his office, all the shelves, the desk and even some chairs are piled high with construction

applications. "Imagine what Kathmandu will look like in 10 years with an extra 50,000 houses."

Some of the problems are being addressed. The waste disposal site at Gokarna is already full and the municipality has started dumping garbage on some riverbanks, but soon a new location in Okharpauwa just outside of the Valley will be put to use. "The biggest challenge for the next few years will be to regulate construction," Dongol says.

In the past, people who obtained a permit to build a four-storey building often tacked on another two floors. The water and sanitation system, where available, is not equipped for that kind of demand. Take Balaju for example. When the new bus terminal was built a decade ago, it was surrounded by paddy fields. Today the area is clogged with new constructions that belong to recent migrants, mostly from Nuwakot. And they demand facilities like roads, electricity and telephones. "We've tried our best, but it is extremely difficult, especially when

## A voice for squatters

As the only NGO working directly with squatters and slum dwellers in Nepal, Lumanti has changed the face of the poorest communities in Kathmandu and Patan. Women are the backbone of families, so Lumanti began by encouraging several young housewives. Today, the organisation's savings and credit scheme has become a model program for women's empowerment. Each ward in the slum areas of Patan and squatter settlements in Kathmandu now have a group that raises funds from members, which is then deposited at the Agricultural Development Bank from where loans can be taken at minimum interest rates.

Satu Shahi remembers how seven years ago she would hide when strangers came around. As a part of Lumanti, she has confronted the municipality and even former city mayor Keshab Sthapit to lobby for better roads in her ward in Khapinchen. "We had zero when we started," says Satu. "But today my friends and I have raised Rs 250,000."

A visit to slum areas like Lonhla, Imukhel, Khapinchen and Chyasal shows women are spending as much time outside the home as their male counterparts working on sanitation, education and health awareness, child development and human rights. Lumanti's founder, Lajana Manandhar (Nepali Society, #160) told us, "Our work has been possible due to their perseverance and motivation." Lumanti's latest challenge is lobbying for a national policy on housing rights.

#### HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



# Labouring for change

TORONTO, 1 SEPTEMBER — As I write this, people in North America are celebrating a holiday they call 'Labour Day'. In these days of devastated trade unions and market fundamentalism, it's little more than a day off work at the end of a summer's play: the upper, middle and working classes cavorting for one last time before getting their group nose to the grindstone. But Labour Day is far more than that. It's a chance to reflect on the contributions of labour and the working classes to what makes Western society 'developed', much of it the fruit of trade union and worker agitation in bygone days.

This is, of course, a point of view—one that right-wingers and corporate apologists would hotly contest. Unions, they tell us, reduce productivity, and the 'flexibility' of the labour market. For 'flexible', read 'cheap' but in a spin obsessed age, there's hardly a word that doesn't have a kinder, gentler alter ego. Unions also retard the growth of employment, says a recent study by the World Bank. That may have some truth to it. But what even trade union opponents can't deny, is the role of unions in social reform, and ultimately in making capitalism more palatable and communism a less likely option for development.

Worker agitation in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about massive workplace reforms. Fewer young children working in devilish conditions in British coal mines, for example. Public health improvements, sanitation, and perhaps most impactful of all, mass education: all this came about because the working class got "mad as hell and not willing to take it anymore". The writings of a then obscure German economist named Marx terrified the elite, but the masses knew nothing of him. They were Marxism in action, intuitive, and bringing about social change that continues to put most European countries and North America well ahead of the rest of the world in development indicators.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, trade unions have championed women's voting rights, civil rights for minorities, environmental protection and improvements to public health and education. Usually, on the opposite



side, there was a phalanx of big corporations headed by immensely rich robber baron capitalists predicting the end of civilisation as we knew it. They were wrong of course. In fact, each of those improvements, like the great Reform Acts of the previous centuries, enhanced the market economy, enabled trade and growth and made workers healthier, smarter, happier and more productive. Trade unions also indulged in organised crime but I suggest respectfully that even Jimmy Hoffa's Teamsters in the United States were amateurs alongside the murdering excesses of many big corporate

## There's little to celebrate in these days of devastated trade unions and market fundamentalism.

interests and their callous, cynical friends in Washington.

The 60s brought trade unionists a conundrum. The student revolutionaries all around them were largely middle class and nihilist, not their cup of tea at all. But over time, the radicals grew up, joined unions and worked for social change alongside fathers and mothers, within the system and successfully. Then Europe and America began to diverge and the rot set in encouraged by the ever-vengeful elite, the media and large swathes of paid academe.

Organised labour became an enemy of progress in the 1970s when British governments of the left failed to meet various challenges and their unionised supporters got the blame. In America, Ronald Reagan—a trade unionist and early agitator for, of all things, actors' rights in Hollywood—launched an all out assault on unions. Paradoxically, workers supported him in this, even as they lost their jobs and their rights, and watched the rich get richer while they struggled. Nineties style capitalism spread the canard that anyone could be a billionaire if they dot-commmed and scammed the market. The working classes were pooh-poohed by the same 60s radicals and their descendants, now cyber-salesmen and women on the Nasdaq track.

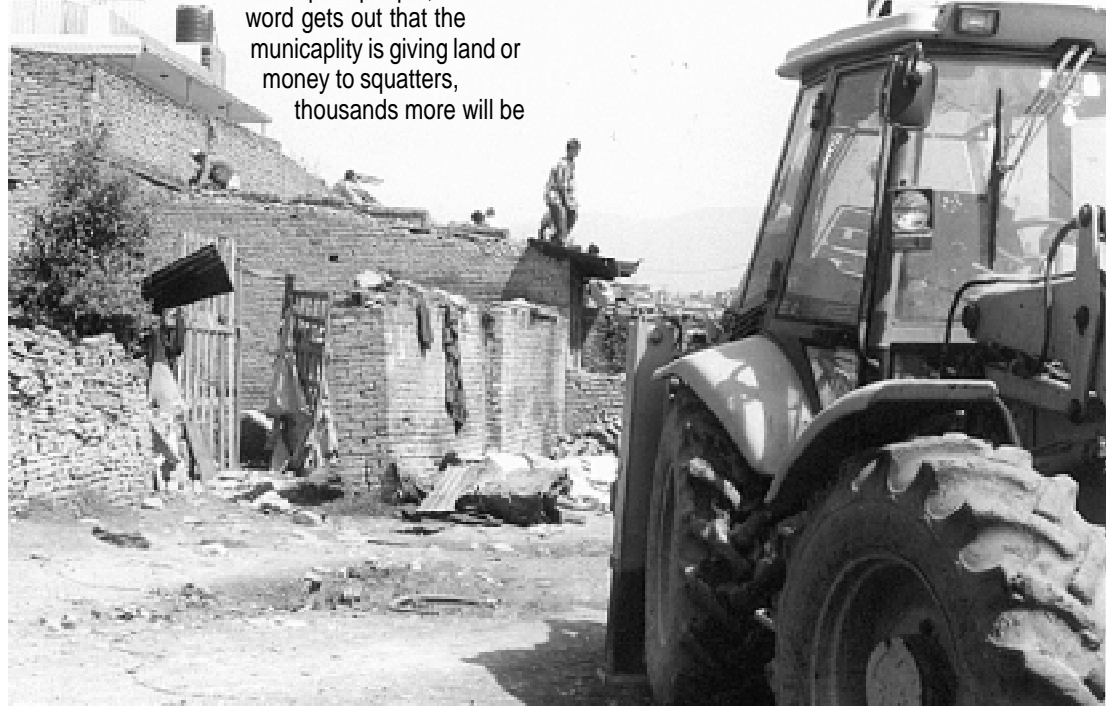
Union membership in America is now at an all time low of under 15 percent and the plutocrats are back in charge, nakedly rolling back all that labour and the working classes have worked for. There's little to celebrate this Labour Day in North America, save the incompetence of the right and its failure to leave any lasting, positive legacy beyond their own enrichment. ♦

# urban tumour

## Coming apart at the seams

The absence of elected representatives hits squatters the most. Former squatters from the Bishnumati were promised compensation by mayor Keshab Sthapit personally in April 2002. "It never happened," says Krishna Devi Shahi. The municipality's executive officer Shiva Bhakta Sharma says he will compensate the squatters, but blames them for not furnishing the necessary paperwork. "Really, I asked them six months ago to give me proof that they are landless. I am still waiting," he says. Sharma adds that Kathmandu is full of poor people, and if word gets out that the municipality is giving land or money to squatters, thousands more will be

tempted to live on government property. Squatters in other parts of town who are also have been asked to leave their settlements to make way for new roads or parks, for example in Sankhamul and Bansighat for example, are watching the Bishnumati commotion with suspicion. They don't want promises, they want to see a new place to live before they voluntarily vacate their present habitats. They know all too well that land is scarce in a city that is coming apart at the seams.



houses are already built. Demolition is almost never an option," says Dongol. Elaborate land use plans with a vision for the Kathmandu Valley in 2020 have been created, but even the municipality admits it is not realistic. It has neither the capacity nor the resources to make sure the infrastructure keeps pace with the increasing population. "We really need to stop this invasion of people," Dongol says. "This is more than the Valley can absorb."

To reduce migration, the government and the Asian Development Bank launched a \$37.5 million project in December 2002 to upgrade services and infrastructure in nine towns outside the Valley with populations ranging from 12,000 to 89,000. The most dramatic impact of urbanisation has been on Kathmandu's unique urban landscape with its living cultural heritage and architectural treasures. In July this year, Unesco put the Valley on the

'endangered' list, a move that came after a decade of alarm over the government's inability to address mounting urbanisation. In the long-term, most experts agree that Kathmandu has to give up some of its political and economic centrism and devolve power out to the rest of the country. That may help reduce some of the pressure on the Valley. It won't be easy, especially because there are no elected local bodies and this means no accountability or responsibility. Bureaucrats who are in charge of the municipalities simply are not allowed to make important decisions. Infrastructure projects are frequently postponed. It all falls to the Valley's municipalities to do their best to prevent the city from becoming a malignant urban tumour. ♦

### DOMESTIC BRIEFS

#### Back to square one

The 12-year-old Bhutanese refugee crisis is back to square one. The same issue that stumped talks in the 1990s is once again the hurdle in finding a compromise between Nepal and Bhutan. The contentious matter of the four refugee categories that the two Himalayan kingdoms agreed upon in 1993 is still the problem. This has resulted in the second postponement of the 15<sup>th</sup> joint ministerial meeting, and all the two sides can muster is an informal talk in the delegates' lounge in New York during the UN General Assembly this month.

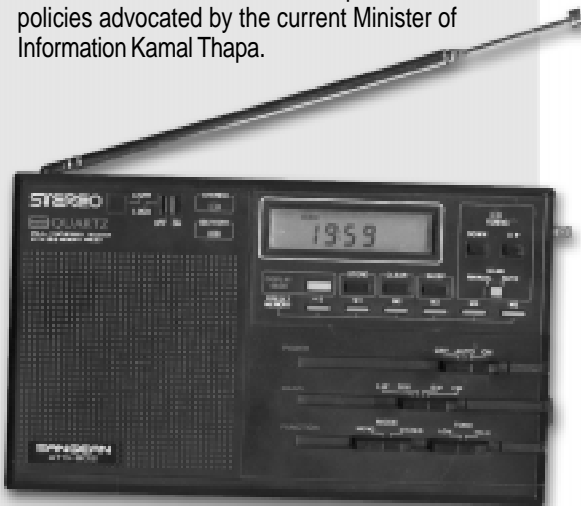


After agreeing to categorise the refugees as bonafide Bhutanese, Bhutanese who have emigrated, Bhutanese who have committed crimes and non-Bhutanese, the two nations disagreed on terms of repatriation. Thimphu said they would take back only bonafide Bhutanese, Nepal argued Bhutan should take back all but the non-Bhutanese. With both sides unwilling to compromise, the talks were at a standstill until late 90s when they swept their differences under the carpet. Now that the verification of 12,000 plus refugees has been done, neither Bhutan nor Nepal has reached a suitable agreement. Meanwhile, the refugees themselves have rejected the method and conditions attached to the verification, which showed only three percent as bonafide Bhutanese and more than 75 percent as Bhutanese who have emigrated. Nepal says it

will bring up the matter during the 15<sup>th</sup> round of talks, whenever it takes place. Refugees worry this might begin another round of diplomatic stonewalling from Thimphu.

#### Something in the air

This week the government handed out long-pending licenses to five new FM stations—Classic FM in Kathmandu, Bageswari FM in Nepalganj, Tulsipur FM and Rapti FM in Dang and Muktinath FM in Palpa. In addition to 12 new stations announced since last week, the Ministry of Information and Communication has now issued licenses to 43 FM stations. Abdul Rais Khan, under secretary of the Audio Visual and Broadcasting Section says the stations are now in the process of being classified into three categories: government owned, private and community. Community radio stations will be given concessions on start up fees and taxes. The feasibility study will also be waived for stations with a transmitting power of less than 50 watts. Khan says it may take another month-and-a-half before the classifications are finalised. For nearly three years, hardly any licenses have been issued. Mohan Bista of the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists attributes the recent spurt to liberal policies advocated by the current Minister of Information Kamal Thapa.



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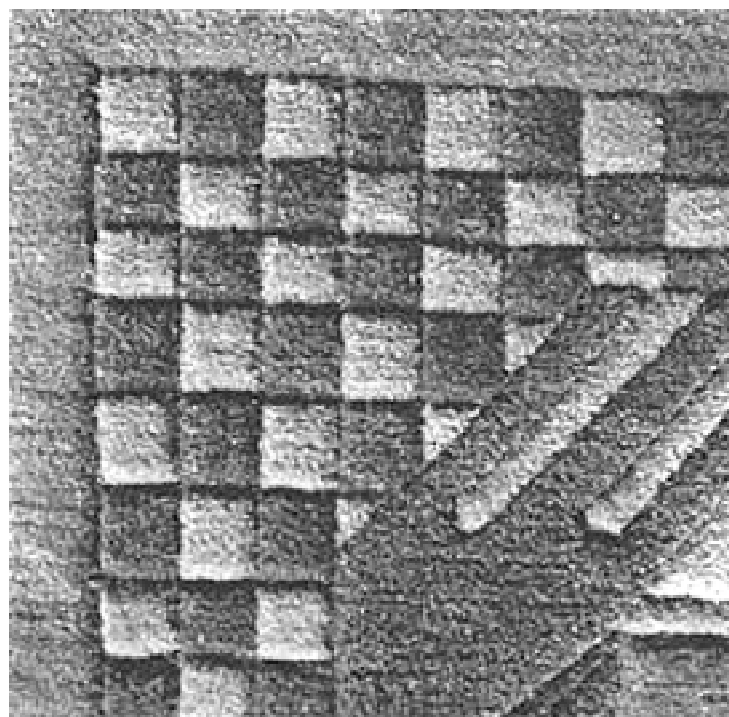
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# Tricks of the trade



## Nepal may have the rug pulled from under it in the WTO.

agricultural products will be 51 percent in the beginning and will be brought down to 42 percent later. For non agro-products, the initial tariff will be 39 percent and will be brought down to 23 percent in a few years time.

That said, they are confident Nepali industrialists will not be outsmarted by foreign manufacturers. But this is cold comfort when there is a powerful lobby, spearheaded by the US, for no tariff at all. How do we make sense of all these intrigues? Officials know that by 2015 all WTO members will have to bring their tariff down to zero. That could well be a target even for us, whether or not we can afford it.

Veterans and shrewd players know how to create non-tariff barriers. Sample this possibility: if ever Nepal becomes a competitive exporter of, say, carpets, it will not just be the quality and the price it will have to take care of. Any of its competitors could accuse Nepal of dumping products—defined as the sales or exports below the normal price—which will prompt importers to impose anti-dumping customs. Or for that matter, the importing government could come under pressure from its local manufacturers.

A senior Foreign Ministry official says Nepal had a tough time convincing US senators to reintroduce the bill for quota free and customs free market access for Nepali garments. "The lobby of their textile industrialists against import is so strong," he told us.

In the WTO arena, the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) is where a member country can raise issues or defend itself. Again, we have to become familiar with the process. Can we defend ourselves if we are accused of dumping? Who defines the normal price, especially when normal in one country may not hold the same for another? "There are too many loopholes and we have to know what to do," says Bijendra Man Shakya, chief of the WTO Cell in Garment Association Nepal.

As Joseph E Stiglitz, the 2001 Nobel Laureate in Economics wrote in this paper (#158): "If the standards

of domestic laws were applied internationally, perhaps a majority of firms within the US would be guilty of dumping. Yet America's supreme court has set standards so high for American firms to be found guilty of predation that few cases are successfully prosecuted domestically."

Hygiene, sanitation, environment, ecology: all these tags are handy tools to create non-tariff barriers. Any importer could speak out at the DSB against Nepal's carpet industry, saying we did not abide with international labour laws.

Are we ready to defend ourselves? No, say WTO experts. There is a shortage of technical experts, and the business community talks about the free trade without mentioning any of these hurdles. While the private sector is vaguely aware of the implications, they are not in-charge of representing Nepal in the WTO. The government is, and if it's at all possible, they are less clued in than anyone else.

Funds will be yet another problem. A World Bank study showed that the implementation of three WTO agreements, Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights, Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures and Agreement Customs, will cost \$130 million.

"Allowing that Nepal is a much smaller country in terms of size as well as economy, it may have to incur 10 times less than that, which is still a substantial amount," says Ratanakar Adhikary, a Nepali WTO expert. The government will have to bear the burden of the processing bill.

Then there are longterm fights like the \$300 billion farm subsidies the developed countries provide to their farmers, and the patenting of our traditional knowledge and rare plant species by multinational companies. Will we be able to bring up both short and long term issues at the WTO? Not if we are unable to solve our internal wrangling and continue blindly forth. ♦

### ANALYSIS by NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Four bilateral trading experiences, mainly with India, are any indication, handling the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) multilateral system will be a big mess.

The prevailing Nepali perceptions of the WTO swings between two wide extremes: optimists paint a rosy picture of a dramatic surge in Nepali exports once the country joins the international trading regime—we haven't looked beyond carpets and garments when it comes to perceived WTO benefits. Pessimists, on the other hand, predict a reverse flow of goods with foreign products flooding the Nepali market and giant multinational companies dwarfing small-scale national producers. Then there is the huge silent majority who either doesn't know or doesn't care.

Both sides would have had some merit were the WTO exclusively about free trade. It is not. Disputes have besieged the international trading system and despite the mechanisms designed to tackle those contentions since the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1989, not all the naysayers have been won over.

Nepal has to test the waters for itself. There is an awful lot of wading to do, with 26,000 pages of

its agreement book for the 146 member countries. As a least-developed country (LDC), we may get away without reading each statute, but it might be advisable that we do so regardless. Since we do not stand on a level-playing field, we could cash in on the WTO's provision of a generalised system of preference (GSP) under which developed countries have promised markets for industrial products from least developed countries.

International trade experts believe that the First World will make concrete commitments under GSP at Cancun this month, when Nepal too is expected to join the WTO. The GSP "free lunch" does not come with a warranty: members can withdraw the provision unilaterally without any justification. And we could end up with a situation similar to that of the garment industry. The quota facility enjoyed by LDCs like us, especially in the apparel industry, will be phased out completely by 2005. Add to that the uncertainty of the GSP. At any time the rug could be whisked out from under our feet.

This is exactly why we need to know the rules, even if the WTO revises it faster than you can say "free trade benefits". Take, for instance, the issue of tariffs. Freshly back from Geneva, our officials have confirmed that the tariff rates for imports of

### BOOK REVIEW

by CK LAL

# Zakaria's Newspeak



**The author's thesis that we need less democracy and more liberty, is an eyewash.**

During the Anglo-American war for Iraq, all independent journalists not embedded with the coalition forces were identified as "unilateralist"—a term coined by Centcom to eliminate objective and fair reporting by freelancers. This was information warfare and propaganda was a part of the arsenal.

The message that went out was of a benevolent hyperpower on a civilising mission. The reality was that America supported anyone as long as he served American geopolitical and economic interest. Thinktank strategists justified propping tinpot dictators in banana republics where, in the words of political scientist Myron Weiner, "no sense of community exists, where proclivities towards violence are extreme—where, in short, only coercive authority seems capable of sustaining order".

By the Nixon administration, American puppet regimes came in all stripes: Ayub Khan in Pakistan, Shah of Iran, Augusto Pinochet in Chile, Ferdinand Marcos in Philippines. With the sole exception of post-Shah fatwa fascism in Iran, American establishment has been complicit in the rise of almost all rightist dictatorships in the world. Yes, even Saddam Hussain, Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden were originally American creations.

Therefore, it is a little odd that even *Newsweek* editor Fareed Zakaria pretends in his new book, *The Future of Freedom*, to believe that the "United States is so often the advocate of unrestrained democracy abroad". Once that fictitious premise is dispensed with, its contents acquire an intellectual tone worthy of contemplation and debate.

The fundamental thesis of this book is that most of us would do rather well with less democracy and more liberalism. The author uses the term "liberal" in its classic sense, without encompassing welfare state, affirmative action, or any other concerns of social justice. Indeed, there isn't much here to disagree with—democracy without the rule of law is the rule of the mob that made Socrates drink poison.

The doctrine of check and balance has certainly gone awry when unrepresentative wise men in conservative attire 'elect' a head of state by a contentious decision of the court. Such a concentration of power can only breed the born-again fervour of the current incumbent in the White House who now sees pre-emptive strike as a divine mission.

It's difficult to swallow that there is a correlation between the level of income and the longevity of democracy. Does that imply that poor countries must learn to live with the Hamid Karzais of the world forever? Democracy, as Amartya Sen says, has instrumental as well as intrinsic value.

Democracy is desirable for the right of the ruled to periodically appoint its ruling elite through free, fair and competitive elections. Democratic regimes may not be too good at managing economic growth, but they are better at handling human catastrophes. Sen has the famous example of the famine in China to prove the utility of democracy, and Zakaria cites Tiananmen Square to conclude that political freedom is bound to follow in the footsteps of economic liberty. To each his own, but try telling that to the victims of state repression anywhere.

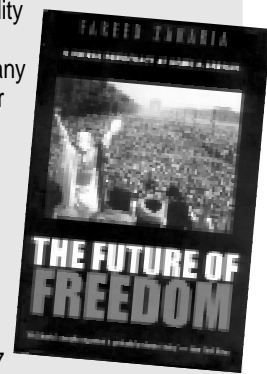
Zakaria's ominous warning at the end of his book is unsettling. He argues that just as Americans faced the challenge of making the world safe for democracy, now it must make democracy safe for the world. Has it been this 'liberalism' that led to the invention of Musharrafship in Pakistan in October 1999 and the rise of Asojtantra in Nepal three years later?

It's not just the journalists, most American intellectuals are even more deeply "embedded" with the military-industrial power elite. Fareed Zakaria, the poster-boy Muslim of the neocons manning the barricades of international capitalism, has written a book that will ensure his status in the American dream.

The flawless prose of the book is its most remarkable feature, it almost sounds journalistic. Such clarity can be dangerous in such a persuasive promoter of Newspeak.

Fareed Zakaria's fundamental thesis, that we need less democracy and more liberty, is fundamentally flawed. What we really need is to build a better democracy, tempered with the concerns of social justice, which will lead to the institutionalisation of liberty, as Larry Diamond of Stanford University argues in his call for universality of democratic principals (<http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/03-05>). We don't need any American guns to goad us down the path of either economic liberalisation or political freedom. Nevertheless, Zakaria's and this book should be required reading to those who want to understand the ideological underpinnings of Bushism. ♦

The Future of Freedom  
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BIZ NEWS

Nippon-Nepal

Japan and Nepal this week signed another aid agreement, and also decided to simplify future assistance by putting all projects under one umbrella. An agreement to this effect was signed by Japanese ambassador Zenji Kaminaga and Bhanu Prasad Acharya, Secretary at the Ministry of Finance. "Both governments deemed the necessity for a single umbrella framework on technical cooperation to ensure efficient and effective implementation of technical cooperation programs in Nepal in the future," said an embassy statement.

Tourism blues

Tourism entrepreneurs who were beginning to feel high last month are feeling low again. The last eight months of the ceasefire saw inbound tourist figures climb. July and August registered a 30 percent growth over arrivals during the same months in 2002. With more than 21,500 tourists in August alone, the travel trade was all set to usher in more tourists during the peak season beginning September. Travel agents say many trekkers and tourist have cancelled after the ceasefire unravelled two weeks ago. "Until few days ago, it looked like the autumn season was headed for a boom," said Joy Dewan, president of Nepal Association of Travel Agents. "But, the collapse of the ceasefire has dashed our hopes." Trade officials fear the situation could worsen if embassies put an alert notice in their travel advisories.

Looking ahead

They sure are far-sighted about their brand new frequent flier program at Gulf Air: passengers as young as two can rack up points with the air carrier and transfer miles from Gulf Traveller and Oman Air Flights as well. All customers get the usual perks: full First Class fares still earn triple miles, full Business Class fares double miles, and full Economy Class fares earn one mile per mile flown.

Green pastures

In a bid to increase their global reach, with a special emphasis on Asia, the makers of Marlboro, Phillip Morris, recently introduced L&M cigarettes to Nepal. Available in 70 other countries, the new smokes are available in full flavour and lights for Rs 50 for a pack of 20.

New car showrooms

Daihatsu from Japan and Korean-made Ssyangyong motors have a new showroom at New Baneshwor. The Charade, Sirion and Terious (SUV) models represent Diahatsu, a pioneer in fuel efficient and durable compact cars. SUVs have been Ssyangyong's forte for the past 50 years and caters to the high-end luxury class in Korea. Their Rexton, Musso, Musso Double-Cab, Korando and Chairman are available for test drives at the Hansraj Hulaschand and Company enterprise.

Help with bills

Suvidha Sewa takes out the stress from paying bills. No need to line up at five different offices when all of it can be coordinated from your local cornershop. Since early 2003 Suvidha Sewa members have been able to clear all their bills at any Kendra in the Valley. The lifetime membership fee is just Rs 100 and corporations can also avail of this service with additional perks like door-to-door utility bill collection and distribution services.

NEW PRODUCTS

REAL DEAL: When it comes to the mountains, you can't trust anything but the best, which is why The North Face brand has always been a popular outdoors name in Nepal. In a market flooded by fakes, quality conscious trekkers and expeditioners can now opt for the real deal at The North Face showroom in Thamel. The entire range is being imported by Sherpa Adventure Outlet.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Democracy = pluralism



Making that connection could salvage us all.

It's nigh impossible to find a Nepali organisation that has not participated in a protest program or threatened to go on strike. Trade unions and even business associations dabble in it: the cinema owner's association has horns locked with the film producer's association, the bank employee's associations are threatening to go on strike, and there even is a lurking suspicion that the bankers may shut shop like hotel owners once did.

As this Beed has mused earlier, we have taken our democratic rights post-1990 too far. It wasn't supposed to mutate into what we now see—'roadocracy' or taking to the streets in mass rallies that serve no purpose but disrupt normal life and 'mobocracy' when the rallies are just mobs in thinly veiled political agendas. It also does not mean exercising one's right to protest against the right of enterprises to do business. On labour enterprises, this pseudo-economic militancy has taken a toll on Nepal's labour, making us one of the least productive areas in the region. Another manifestation of this attitude is enterprises ganging up against the introduction of tax legislation or protesting investigations of business houses by anti-graft bodies.

One has to ask how this came to be. Is it ingrained in our education system that libraries and schools must be burned because they are feudal and part of the establishment? Perhaps our collective failure lies in



our inability to teach students to distinguish between disagreement and exercising their democratic rights. Somewhere along the way, Nepalis have failed to grasp that differences in opinions exist and pluralism only strengthens democracy. Did our history teach us elimination of contradictory opinion must be exercised through the elimination of the opinion maker? Public debate in this country is difficult, virtually unheard of, which is why we have yet to embrace economic growth.

Strong ideologies coupled with nation-stalling knee-jerk reactions carries through from university campuses into the professional arena, which explains why the attitude of the trade unions and associations like the transport entrepreneur's associations are no different from student unions. Both corrode and eventually destroy their own foundations, be it the schools,

universities or the enterprises. We cannot hope for economic growth where differences of opinion culminate in complete destruction. The cure-all could be the education system itself. The next Nepali generation needs to be taught to see shades of grey from the radical left to the conservative right. We all have the right to our opinions, but we must respect the same for other people. Our education must instil in us a respect for pluralism that democracy allows. Today's economic growth model suggests that a free economy is a better means of achieving growth. A free economy can only flourish in a free society. If our path is not to be beset by psuedo-economic militancy, then it makes democratic and economic sense that liberal thinking must stem from education. ♦

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

INTERVIEW

“Things are going to be in limbo again...”



MINI BARACHARYA

Within a year of opening its doors for business, Laxmi Bank has already inspired enough confidence to show about Rs 1 billion. Director and CEO Suman Joshi talks shop, success and explains why banking is not about to go bust.

Nepali Times: Aren't there far too many banks in Nepal for such a small market? Suman Joshi: At the moment there are 17 banks, 15 of them in the private sector. It does seem like a sizeable number for an economy like ours, but most private sector commercial banks began in the early and mid-90s when the economy was growing at an impressive rate. Sadly, that growth was not sustained. Now, we have a situation where we may think of our economy as 'overbanked'. However, we can't rule out a turnaround, and should that happen, then there is potential for every bank to operate profitably. On that subject, last year every private

sector bank posted operating profits. Banks are still making money.

We heard there was a run on the banks when the ceasefire was called off. That phenomenon is largely true for government-owned banks in remote and semi-urban areas. As far as I'm aware, no private bank has faced this situation.

But we were told otherwise, that too, right here in the capital. Then I wouldn't attribute it directly to the insurgency, after all, depositors and the business community would've cleared their accounts long before the recent fracture in peace talks. We have all been on this path before.

So how has the insurgency affected the banking sector? It definitely impacted the economy as a whole, but the ceasefire induced businesses to plan for further growth. The recent developments mean things are going to be in limbo again. Till things get a little more certain, we are not going to chase demand for credit from the business community, which means less business for us too.

Dipping interest rates must be a serious matter of concern. It reflects the economy we operate in. If you don't have other investment avenues and if your stock market remains bearish, you put your money in the bank. And the banks will give you what they can—it's a purely demand-supply situation. Interest rates in India are dropping at a faster pace than here in Nepal, but we face a further dip because of competition among banks and the lack of investment opportunities for depositors.

Which means there is plenty of liquidity in the market. Oh yes, 15 private sector banks currently hold deposits in excess of Rs 100 billion while overall lending stands at less than Rs 70 billion. Nepal Rastra Bank recently issued government bonds worth about Rs 4.5 billion, which was over-subscribed by almost four times. When we issued our IPO, we had asked for about Rs 96 million and we ended up collecting Rs 250 million. There is definitely money in the market.

Any idea where all the money is coming from, when for all intents and purposes, the economy is in the dumps? It could be a combination: annual remittances from abroad that is around Rs 70 billion plus and a middle class that is growing despite the

recession. There is a massive urbanisation drive and people are moving into bigger and better things. People have ready cash because they have not been able to invest.

How did you engineer such a great response to the bank's IPO? We floated an IPO of Rs 192.5 million that is, as of now, the largest in Nepali corporate history. From a layman's perspective, every thing was wrong about it—the timing, size, the bearish stock market, the lukewarm response to another bank's shares, but we ended up with a subscription of two and a half times more than what we expected and had to exercise an early closure. Generally, we have been pretty successful in the small business segment. We actually started this a year ago in the form of loans to people who feed into the multinational and large corporations. They are essentially small businesses so we roled out a product called supply finance. It was very well received and that encouraged us to make a strategic decision to invest upto 25 percent of our book in the small business enterprises (SMEs) because we believe that today's small businesses are tomorrow's big corporations. In doing so, we are also expanding the overall size of the market for the bank. There is still a lot of untapped potential.

Every new entrant seems to be eyeing SMEs. The Nepali economy is so basic that banks can offer only vanilla products. If we all work together, we can create benefits for everyone. Loans to SMEs have been around for a while, it just didn't receive much attention before.

Would you feel threatened if the state-owned Nepal Bank Limited and the Nepal Rastra Bank got their act together? That would possibly change the equation. Given the size of the two government banks, if they become as efficient as the private banks, they would definitely be able to take away a large chunk of the pie. That would be very challenging for all private sector banks, not just ours.

Where is Laxmi Bank headed? We are bringing in consumer finance, a fairly new phenomenon. It started three years ago and it is picking up rapidly. We offer internet banking, especially for the convenience of non-residential Nepalis (NRNs). At the moment we are looking into how we can tap into the huge remittance economy.



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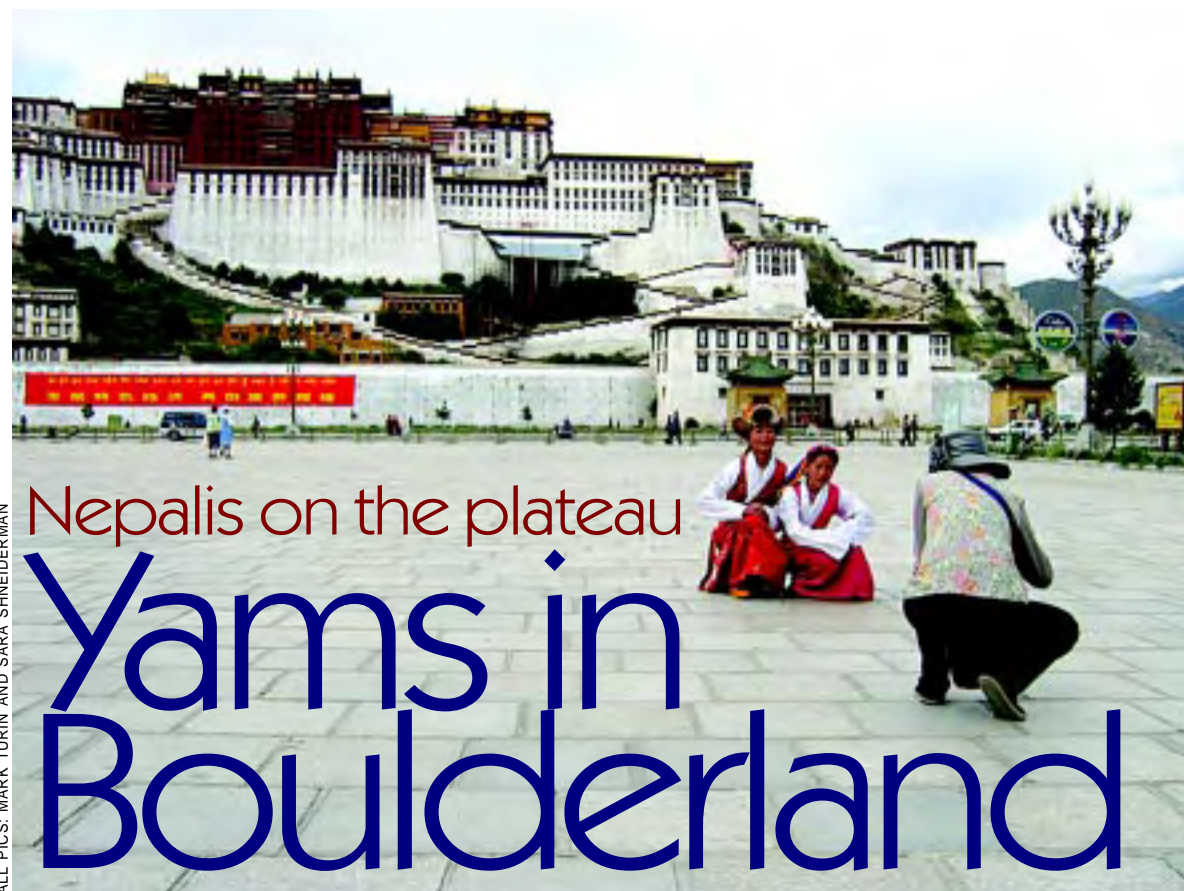
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ALL PICS: MARK TURIN AND SARA SHNEIDERMAN

## Nepalis on the plateau Yams in Boulderland

Anthropologists Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman explore Nepalis in Tibet.



LHASA – Over the past few months, the Nepali press has devoted a fair amount of column space to the situation of Tibetans in Nepal: are they guests in a host country, refugees fleeing an occupied Tibet or equal citizens in a nation in which they feel at home?

On a recent trip to the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, we investigated the position of Nepalis there to learn about the relationship between the two countries from another perspective. Nepal likes to think of itself as the proverbial yam sandwiched between two boulders, and Nepalis are sometimes sensitive to the presence of Indians and Tibetans in their country. On our travels, though, we were reminded that Nepalis have also long been residents in Tibet, playing a central historical role both in urban Lhasa and at the border trading posts.

Stereotypes and clichés endure because outsiders idealise countries that they have never visited in a way that natives rarely do. Nowhere is this more the case than among urban Nepalis discussing Tibet: “Lucky you,” we were told, “travelling in the Land of the Snows, roaming around the Roof of the World.” It seemed that for many of our Kathmandu friends, images of Tibet had fossilised around screen representations like *Caravan* (ironically filmed in Nepal) and *Seven Years in Tibet*. Newar colleagues regaled us with their grandfathers’ stories of lucrative trade and Buddhist culture, not to mention a few Tibetan wives. Funnily enough, our village friends from Dolakha and Sindhupalchok held more gritty stereotypes of modern Tibet, focussed around Chinese prostitutes and cheap electronic goods. The latter images are no doubt derived from their regular travel to and from Khasa to work as porters and carpenters in the town, and to bring cheap Chinese commodities down to Barabise for customs-free sale. With these competing notions in mind, we flew to Gonggar airport, a few hours outside Lhasa, on a ridiculously expensive one-way flight.

Contemporary Lhasa is a high-altitude, city-sized Bhat Bhateni supermarket complex with Chinese signboards. Aside from a few token old buildings, the city is largely

unrecognisable from old photos and traditional depictions. The Potala Palace, which looms in the centre of the town, is impressive and isolated, and Chinese tourists flock to the large open square in front to have their pictures taken while wearing woolly Tibetan clothes. When facing the Jokhang, the temple housing the most sacred national icon, we were momentarily taken in by the ancient veneer of faith and piety that surrounds it. On turning around, however, we were confronted with the brightly-lit Yuthok Lam shopping street, replete with flashing neon plastic palm trees, which locals understandably refer to as ‘Las Vegas’.

The historical dominance of trade by Newar merchants in Lhasa has been eroded by the wholesale influx of Chinese business, and relatively few Nepalis remain resident in Lhasa. According to the records held at the Royal Nepalese Consulate General in Lhasa, there are 338 official Nepali residents of the Tibetan Autonomous Region who are entitled to Chinese state services such as education and health.

The Royal Nepali Consul General, Shankar Prasad Pandey (see *pic, top*), is an affable man who offered us a warm welcome. His four-year term in Lhasa is almost up, after which he returns to the Ministry of Finance, whence he came. Like Shanghai, the Lhasa mission is not under the jurisdiction of the Nepali Embassy in Beijing, but is run directly by HMG in Nepal and maintains a certain degree of independence. The Lhasa Consulate is steeped in history: initially a military regiment office, it is the oldest Nepali mission abroad. The consuls continue to be a distinguished lot—including

the lost or late Professor Dr Dor Bahadur Bista (served 1972–1975)—and their photos are displayed in the dusty consulate library.

We noticed that several of the past consuls were of *janajati* origin, as evinced by the following surnames: Yakthumba (1961–1964), Ukyab (1975–1977 and 1982–1988), Sherpa (1995–1996) and Lama (1996–1998). As might be expected, there were also several Newar consuls. This all goes to show that HMG clearly realises the value of familiarity with Tibetan language and culture when deployed in its own best diplomatic interest.

Pandey himself, while not from a trading family, has clearly enjoyed his deputation to Lhasa and is impressed enough by the Chinese system to send his son to medical college in Beijing. He and his family live in the 25-year-old consulate compound, directly behind the Dalai Lama’s summer palace, the Norbu Lingka. Pandey’s lasting contribution to the Nepali community in Lhasa is a large bust of the Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota that sits prominently in the main courtyard of the compound. While local Nepali residents contributed funds for the statue, the Consul oversaw its construction and presided at its unveiling in June 2001 (see *picture, right*). We





learned that the Nepali *samaj* in Tibet also sponsored the construction of an Arniko statue in Beijing. Notably, these statues are not of political figures, and the Nepali citizens of Lhasa seem relieved to have a place to call home beyond the reach of the fickle Nepali political scene.

The Chinese, too, have built an eclectic Nepali-style Hindu-Buddhist temple named Tuladhar Bhawani within the consular grounds. The temple is the focal point of the Lhasa Dasai celebrations, at which buffaloes are replaced by sacrificial *torma* (grain effigies) out of deference and respect to local Tibetan Buddhist sensibilities.

The ethnically Nepali community of Lhasa comprises two prominent groups: the established trading families who hold residence permits, and the hotel or restaurant workers who come on short-term work visas. The latter number under 100, at least according to consular statistics, and are sought after by Lhasa hoteliers for their experience of cooking non-Asian food. Almost every major tourist hotel has a few Nepalis behind the scenes preparing cakes, lasagnes and veggie burgers. Some of Lhasa's most popular hotels are even owned by mixed Nepali-Tibetan families, known locally as *kazara*, meaning 'mixed race' in Tibetan. It is apparently derived from the Nepali (and Hindi) *khacchar* for 'mule'. Some of these families have been living in Tibet for more than 300 years, and now speak Chinese alongside Tibetan, Newari and heavily-accented Nepali. While many children attend local Chinese schools, Nepali families may also opt to send their kids to the Gorkha Primary School of Lhasa, established 65 years ago, which has two Nepali teachers and is miraculously paid for by HMG in Kathmandu.

We left Lhasa by road, travelling through Shigatse, Lhatse and Nyalam (known also as Tshongdu or Kuti) and arriving in Khasa (also called Zhangmu and Dram) after three bumpy days. It became increasingly clear, as we drove through the countryside, that Lhasa is no more representative of greater Tibet than Kathmandu is of Nepal. Although



cheap Chinese goods have made inroads into farming communities, the standard of living still seems surprisingly low. Rural Tibetan begging strategies make Nepali street kids appear positively angelic, while the begging Buddhist monks chanting 'Om mani mani money...' are a recurring feature of the landscape.

A dramatic change in weather occurs just above Khasa: the dry plateau ends and the monsoon clouds descend. The town of Khasa is home to a colourful mix of Chinese, Tibetans and Nepalis of various ethnic extractions, all trying to make a buck at the border. A treaty between China and Nepal allows residents living within 30km of the border on each side to cross without a passport or visa. The result is that Khasa has hundreds of Nepali migrant workers while Barabise sees the occasional disappointed Chinese tourist, although we heard that the situation was precisely the opposite 30 years ago. According to a popular local saying, while Khasa is 'China's Rolpa' in terms of

remoteness, this border town has been outfitted with a communications and transportation infrastructure that would be the envy of Kathmandu.

The irony was not lost on us as we crossed back into Nepal and soon met an armed local Maoist leader. Khasa may be China's Rolpa, but in our two weeks of travel in Tibet we heard no reference to Mao or his legacy. When we asked the Nepali Maoist in-charge about his ideological links with Chinese Maoism, he sighed and looked disheartened. "China lost a great opportunity," he said, "I mean, just look at it, capitalism everywhere. We won't fall into that trap." ♦

Mark Turin is Director of the Digital Himalaya Project at the University of Cambridge and is completing a grammar and dictionary of the Thangmi language spoken in eastern Nepal.

Sara Shneiderman is a PhD student at Cornell University and is conducting anthropological research on the Nepal-Tibet border.

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## Heat toll

PARIS – After two weeks of denials, the French government admitted Friday that the heat wave in August killed thousands. The heat led to the death of 11,435 persons in France between 1-15 August, the health ministry said. Most victims were elderly, and more than half of them died in homes for the elderly. The most frequent causes were respiratory or cardiac failures aggravated by the heat. Physicians say night temperatures above 23 degrees can provoke death in people suffering from heart and respiratory diseases if they are not used to such temperatures.

Experts attribute the higher death toll around Paris to a combination of heat, reduced staff during holidays, and a lack of foresight. President Chirac who reacted on 20 August after a vacation in Canada indirectly blamed the lack of family solidarity, respect for the elderly and relations between neighbours. But not everyone is buying that line. "Chirac's government has reduced all state allocations for the elderly and for the health system," says social scientist Philippe Bataille. "Under such circumstances, to accuse the victims' relatives of lack of solidarity is an insult to them." Doctors say the government ignored urgent calls for help, and reacted late. (IPS)

## Terrorist cell?

OTTAWA – The federal police force is trying to portray 19 arrested Pakistani and Indian nationals as members of an al-Qaeda-style terrorist group planning to blow up a nuclear power plant, but this week some of the allegations began falling apart under legal scrutiny. Under new immigration laws, unproven allegations were enough to convince judges and immigration adjudicators to keep the men detained although none were charged with crimes. Last week, an immigration adjudicator freed one of the men, calling the case against him "weak".

A government document submitted in court drew parallels between the arrested men and the terrorists who crashed planes into the WTC and the Pentagon on 9/11. It claims the men enrolled in flight schools, reconnoitred nuclear power plants, and gathered engineering data on courthouses and the landmark CN Tower, a 600m concrete communications tower in downtown Toronto. The case has outraged many in the city's Muslim community, who have denounced it as racial profiling. Police will not say whether they plan to charge the men with offences or will simply press for their deportations without having the evidence tested in court. (IPS)

## ANALYSIS

# Leaving Baghdad

A US soldier redirects people outside the bombed UN headquarters that killed at least 23 people, including the top UN envoy in Baghdad, 19 August.



The poison of terrorism has now ripped into the humanitarian work of the UN, with the tragic bombing of its Iraq mission's headquarters. Dozens of innocent people were killed, including one of the world's most accomplished peacemakers, Sergio Vieira de Mello. Predictably, President Bush re-stated his determination to wage war on terrorism. Other leaders declared that the UN should not abandon its mission. Yet the bombing raises political questions that demand answers. Rather than bolstering its

military occupation, the US should leave Iraq, allowing the UN to continue its mission.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, empires could suppress restive populations. No longer. Nationalist and anti-colonialist ideologies, supported by growing literacy and political mobilisation, have long since made imperial rule virtually impossible. This is especially true in the Middle East, where anti-colonialism mixes with religious fundamentalism. It was foolhardy for the US to think it could put troops on the ground in Iraq

without an extended period of violence and bloodshed.

America's leaders believed that the US would be welcomed as liberators.

The US government and many observers believe that if the US can just get basic services established in Baghdad, and perhaps catch Saddam Hussein, then the situation will quiet down. The goal seems to be to install a regime led by friends of the Pentagon, such as Ahmed Chalabi. That regime, in turn, is supposed to invite a longer stay by US troops, and to grant

concessions to the US oil industry.

But such a regime will never have legitimacy, and will be subject to assassinations, political upheaval, and terrorist attacks. In the end, it will squander human lives—such as the brave and dedicated workers of the UN—not to mention hundreds of billions of dollars. Shockingly, the US is now spending around \$4 billion per month to station its troops in Iraq, while at the same time President Bush fights like crazy to keep America's contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria to no

## COMMENT

by SIMON WESSELY

# Treating trauma

To begin with, people are more resilient than we give them credit for.

When disaster strikes, the arrival of "trained counsellors" is as much a part of the theatre of disaster as the arrival of the emergency services. What do these counsellors actually do? Usually, they perform some form of what is called "debriefing" or "critical incident stress debriefing". But do these sessions do any good?

Debriefing is invariably a short, usually single session, an intervention that is performed with as many of those caught up in a traumatic event as possible. It involves linking examination of the traumatic incident with education about the expected emotional responses and assurances that these are normal. The hope is to reduce acute emotional distress and prevent the onset of post-trauma psychiatric disorder.

Many organisations offer debriefing as part of their response to traumatic incidents—such as police officers involved in firearm incidents, or bank staff who witness robberies. In some institutions interventions are compulsory—perhaps out of a desire to reduce psychological distress, but also from a belief this will reduce exposure to litigation.

There are many reasons why belief in the effectiveness of debriefing has become so widespread. When facing disasters, all of us feel a need to do something. The idea that talking about trauma



must be better than "repressing" or "bottling up" accords with a long tradition in psychological treatment—"better out than in." Many people who have been debriefed judge the experience positively.

But does it work? There is only one way to really know if any intervention does more good than harm, and that is via randomised

controlled trials. The studies undertaken so far provide no evidence of any benefit through intervention. Perhaps the process of debriefing, part of whose purpose is to warn participants of emotional reactions that might be expected to develop over weeks and months, actually increases the occurrence of these symptoms. Perhaps for some

people not talking is the most appropriate response. Indeed, psychological defence mechanisms may exist precisely because it is not always "better out than in".

Talking to a stranger, whom one has never met before and will not meet again, may impede the normal processes of recovery that rely on one's own social networks—family, friends, priest, doctor, who may be better able to place the trauma in context. Perhaps debriefing serves merely to professionalise distress—part of the wider process nowadays by which adversity has been professionalised.

Of course, when a cherished belief is challenged, various counter claims arise—the evidence is for the wrong type of debriefing, the trials were not well done, elements of debriefing could still "work", the testimonies of those who are certain it helped them cannot be discounted, and so on. This is inevitable, but it should not distract us from the main findings.

So we must reassess how we respond to trauma. There can be no doubt that those who are attempting to help people involved in disasters and trauma have noble motives, but that is not enough. It is time that those who are asked to take part in debriefing are warned that the process has the capacity to do harm as well as good. Compulsory debriefing, which is still used in some organisations, must cease

forthwith.

But should we be sceptical of all "talking treatments"? Unlike debriefing, there is overwhelming evidence that some talking treatments, such as cognitive therapy or cognitive behaviour therapy, is effective when applied to disorders such as depression, panic disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). What is the difference then between these talking therapies and the vogue for debriefing?

Two things. First, unlike debriefing these interventions work not on normal people who have been exposed to adversity, but on those who have a definite psychiatric disorder. Second, these are skilled interventions, delivered by practitioners with well defined and well regulated professional skills, who are either clinical psychologists or psychiatrists. They are also given over a period of time. Sadly in mental health, effective treatments are neither swift nor easily learnt.

There is also a final paradox. When disaster strikes, it is the experience of all health professionals that they are often overwhelmed with offers of help. After the shootings at Columbine high school in the US a few years ago, the school received over 3,000 offers from people willing to come and "debrief" the children.

But it is the mundane, non-newsworthy traumas of life that

cause real harm. The old people shattered by a burglary. The wife driven to depression by her husband's infidelity. The bank manager who cannot get to work because of panic attacks. Or the teenager disabled by obsessive compulsive disorder. For them finding skilled psychological therapies and therapists is rarely easy, even though in all of these instances the evidence of effectiveness is beyond dispute.

So we should take a long, hard look at how we manage our resources. It seems better to concentrate on delivering effective treatments to the smaller number of people who really need them, and not on the larger number of people who don't.

The story of debriefing provides a salutary lesson. First, people are more resilient than we give them credit for. Second, no matter how well meaning our attempts to reduce distress and prevent psychiatric disorder, and no matter how self-evident the intervention, we still require firm proof of the benefits. Any health care intervention has the capacity to do harm as well as good, and occasionally the balance between the two will surprise us. ♦

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Simon Wessely is Professor of Epidemiological and Liaison Psychiatry at King's College School of Medicine and the Institute of Psychiatry, London.



by JEFFREY D SACHS



## Merely providing electricity and running water is not enough to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

more than \$200 million for an entire year.

Many American voices are already saying that, whether or not the war in Iraq was a good idea, the US (and the UN) must now stay, to preserve national honour and to show that the US will not be scared away by terrorism. These responses to terrorist attacks resonate well with US public opinion. Nobody likes to be bullied, and no American wants the US to be frightened or coerced by the brutal and thuggish actions of car bombers.

Yet the emotional response of digging in deeper simply compounds the political errors of the war itself. The US is not in a position to pacify Baghdad or to protect the UN or others that work alongside an occupying army, even those working in humanitarian activities. Terrorism in this case is not just a cowardly act; it is also a reflection of the poisoned politics of US military occupation. A political response is therefore needed.

Malaysia, a successful and stable moderate Muslim country, has put the issue just right. Rather than defending the truly heroic work of

the UN, Malaysia's Government correctly called on the US to leave Iraq. Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar wisely noted that "[t]he security threat in Iraq will remain as long as the deep-rooted resentment of the people against the occupation is not dealt with in a fair and just manner. The UN should not be seen as part and parcel of the occupation."

Even at this late date, with American soldiers being killed on a regular basis, and with the massive deaths resulting from the car bombing of the UN headquarters, the US resists greater UN authority, much less replacing US troops with UN-led forces. The Bush administration is sticking to its game plan. It is probably calculating that a few dozen casualties, or even a few hundred, will still be worth the greater prize—a US military presence in Iraq that looks over the disposition of more than 100 billion barrels of oil while breathing down the neck of Iraq's next door neighbour, Saudi Arabia.

In the end, it will prove to be a false and misguided calculation. As

long as US occupying forces remain, Iraq's politics are likely to remain unstable. Cooperation with the US will, by itself, increasingly become a disqualification for Iraqi political leaders seeking real support within their own communities.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, merely providing electricity and running water will not prove enough to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, even if the US figures out how to get these public services working. Iraqis will demand the dignity of government by Iraqis, while criminals and terrorists will prey on such sentiments by whatever means necessary.

The US invasion was a grave mistake. Committing more soldiers will only compound the error. What is needed now is the quick withdrawal of US forces, and their temporary replacement by UN-led troops, which will hand power back to the Iraqi people. ♦

(© Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

## Biosafety rules

ISLAMABAD – Proponents of biotechnology and genetic engineering in Pakistan are pressuring the government to promptly issue biosafety guidelines, but food rights and environmental groups warn that a go-slow policy is needed because of the risks and hazards associated with the products of modern technology. Scientists in public and private sectors have been busy campaigning for the approval of guidelines, which have been awaiting the government's nod since their finalisation by an official committee in 2001. The two-year-old commission estimates that biosafety laws could result in savings of up to \$50 million out of \$138 million spent on pesticides for the cotton crop alone every year. But food rights and green groups maintain that the guidelines must follow a national decision on whether to allow genetically modified (GM) seeds and food in the first place. At present, Pakistan bans these, but some reports suggest that these products are being imported illegally. Giant companies like Aventis, Monsanto, Novartis, Pioneer Pakistan Seeds, to name a few, already are selling seeds of wheat, paddy, cotton, maize, sunflower, pulses and vegetables locally. At the same time, around 500 national private seed companies and three public sector seed agencies are functioning in the country. (IPS)

## Hopes dim

NEW DELHI – The 'hand-of-peace' that Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee extended to neighbouring Pakistan in April seemed hesitant after the Mumbai blasts and a spurt of militancy in Kashmir. Vajpayee said the situation was "not conducive" for resumption of a dialogue with Pakistan. It was during his last visit to Kashmir in April that Vajpayee made the third—and what he called last—attempt at peace with Pakistan. Soon after the Mumbai blasts, Deputy Prime Minister Advani reiterated a demand that Pakistan hand over 19 persons, some of them members of underworld gangs that operate out of both countries who are suspected of having a hand in the bombings. Pakistan denied having any role in the blasts. Both Vajpayee and Advani were careful not to make any direct accusations aimed at Islamabad, but Vajpayee's sudden change of mood threw a long shadow on a thaw in relations that had been underway between the two countries since April. Another setback was the failure of talks in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, last week to resume travel links to overflights by civilian aircraft, suspended after the 2001 attack on Indian Parliament. (IPS)

## Doubtful reforms

BANGKOK – Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi appears to have delivered the perfect riposte to the machinations of her captors, Rangoon's military government. She has launched a hunger strike, according to the US government. The startling revelation made by the U.S. State Department in Washington comes in the wake of a flurry of political activity by the military regime to counter the intense global pressure it is under for its re-detention of Suu Kyi since May 30 and for refusing genuine dialogue with the opposition in Burma. News of Suu Kyi's hunger strike comes as she is about to mark another low point in political life under the junta –9 September will complete 100 days of Suu Kyi being forced to remain incommunicado after being taken into military custody on May 30. Sympathisers of the Nobel peace laureate viewing this as a measure in keeping with Suu Kyi's Gandhian approach to combat the political oppression of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). (IPS)

## OPINION

by JACQUES DIOUF



# Future directions

The whole world loses if Cancun is a failure.



A lot is riding on the outcome of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico—for example, a better global economy and the millions of jobs that increased trade would create.

For the world's 840 million hungry people, there is even more at stake. Agricultural development and improved job opportunities in rural areas could mean the difference between life and death. Their fate may decide whether we live in a stable world or one wracked by failing economies, political turmoil and social chaos.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has struggled for decades to improve the lives of the rural poor and hungry, and FAO will take their case to Cancun. Some 70 percent of the poorest people in the world live in rural areas where agriculture is their main source of income. Because of this, one of the most effective ways to reduce hunger and raise living standards in developing countries is to increase availability of and access to food through domestic and international agricultural trade.

At the 2001 WTO Ministerial in Doha, Qatar, developed countries made a commitment to reduce farm subsidies and to increase access to their markets for food and agriculture products from developing countries. Cancun should be about implementing

those commitments. While some major trading countries recently agreed to reduce their farm subsidies, they offered no specifics regarding time and the amount of reduction. Others seem to be more reluctant to roll back assistance to programs that benefit mostly the better-off farmers.

Farm subsidies and tariffs in rich countries distort the global market place, making it in many cases almost impossible for farmers in developing countries to compete internationally. They also allow food from rich countries to be sold below production costs in developing countries, putting farmers there at a competitive disadvantage.

To be fair, some developing countries have not used all the options that the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture (1986-94) gave them. They could invest in and support their agriculture more than they are currently doing. However, they find it difficult to do so, as it would effectively burden taxpayers and urban consumers by increasing public expenditure for agriculture or the price of food.

Taxpayers and consumers in rich countries often do not realise that they are not only subsidising their own farmers but also undermining the livelihood of farmers in many developing countries. The support for farmers in the developed world leads to food surpluses, resulting in unfair

competition. This is a disincentive for farmers in non-subsidising countries.

However, now is not the time for finger-pointing and name-calling. Instead what is needed is effective North-South cooperation. For trade to be an engine of economic growth, substantially reducing poverty, both developed and developing countries need to adapt their production on complementary footing based on fair competition.

WTO member countries must not allow Cancun to collapse into a polarised stand-off. Many of these countries have agreed to the Millennium Development Goals and the World Food Summit target to cut, by at least half, the number of hungry people in the world by 2015. A good place to begin would be formal recognition by WTO members that a level playing field in food and agricultural trade can play an important role in reducing hunger and poverty.

A trade agreement to cut trade-distorting farm subsidies in rich countries and lower, or eliminate, tariffs on agricultural imports would go a long way toward building a more equitable trade regime. Agreeing on trade rules that are effective, simple, and inexpensive to implement would give developing countries a chance at growing their own way to prosperity. ♦ (IPS)

Jacques Diouf is Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.



# Operation successful, but patient died



Former prime minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand in *Deshantar*, 31 August

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

It is unfortunate that the ceasefire has ended. During my premiership, the government and the Maoist rebels first discussed the code of conduct before declaring a ceasefire. The Maoists presented their political agenda even then, but we did not respond to that document. Our idea was to first deal with the areas of agreement, leaving differences for later. The new government did not follow that formula. The concept paper should not have been done so lightly, it is made to establish peace. If we had presented the paper, it would have included the essential points, unlike what the Thapa government submitted. Their approach can be summed up thus: operation successful, but the patient died.

Of course, each government functions in its own way. If there is a new government tomorrow, it will opt for a new way to deal with the rebels. It's better that we refrain from jumping to conclusions about the change in government leading to the derailment of peace negotiations. A few instances of violence marred the code of conduct during my

tenure, too. But we had every intention of discussing the matter with the rebels and we were making progress on that front. The Maoists did not break talks while I was in charge, but having said that, the continuous delays in the third round was probably the most detrimental factor.

It is wrong to say now that the declaration of ceasefire was immature. Did we or didn't we need peace? Did the people cry out for peace? I'll admit that an intensive discussion on the code of conduct did not take place, but if it was done in haste the result could have been haphazard. We were looking for a middle-path. We had decided on the extent of our compromises and were waiting for the right moment to act. It's too bad that we never received the chance to present our concept paper.

The controversy of confining the army was born out of mere discussions. The government never agreed and I never received a formal notification if there had been such a development. We thought we could keep that issue on the back burner and go ahead with other matters.

I did my best to include the agitating political parties, but that's all history now. I resigned because I believed my exit would pave the way for a resolution. It was the most I could do. The present prime minister must have his own ideas of how to approach the present crisis. He also must prove the rationale for his continuity. If he fails to do so, his presence will be meaningless.

Constitutionally, I don't think the restoration of the House of Representatives is right, but everything is possible in politics. However, what guarantee is there that all the problems will be solved once the parliament is revived? The problems did not disappear when we had an elected parliament. We cannot rule out the possibility of a constituent assembly. The thing is, if we engage ourselves in reworking the constitution every few years, when do we do real work?



हिमाल

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-17 September

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We request the United Nations to save Nepal from foreign powers and allow Nepalis to decide our own fate."

- Maoist Chief Prachanda in *Spacetime*, 4 September

## Gag rule

Anand Shrestha in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-17 September

हिमाल

Although the Indian press enjoys freedom, the same cannot be said for journalists in Darjeeling. The ones who print unflattering stories of politicians are constantly in. Mohan Lama of *Himalaya Darpan* says, "We have to be very careful in our reporting otherwise it will be difficult to survive. I have already received several threats." Five months ago, the offices of Silguri-based *Sunchari*, a Nepali daily, was bombed and the police have been unable to unearth who was responsible. A year ago, the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) banned the sale of *Sunchari* in Darjeeling, lifting it only after pressure from the Indian Press Council. *Himalchuli* and *Abaj* were also subjected to political biases. Journalist Rabin Giri says, "There is no press freedom at all. It's extremely difficult to get information from the government offices."

## London calling

Drishti, 2 September

दृष्टि

Maoist leader Mohan Vaidya 'Kiran' has reached London from Sri Lanka via Qatar. He got to the UK after Indian police apprehended his comrade, CP Gajurel, while trying to fly out to London from Madras on a fake British passport. Maoist Supremo Prachanda had issued a statement requesting the Indian government to release Gajurel in

light of Nepal-India relations. Why are the Maoists so anxious to get to England? During the critical phase in third round of talks between the government and the rebels, the latter stressed on meeting the king. Political pundits now say Gajurel was part of a team sent to meet King Gyanendra who was on his way to London for a medical check-up at the same time. Analysts believe the talks broke down probably because Kiran's London mission was unsuccessful.

## Couriers

Jana Astha, 3 September

आस्था

Pilots of the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporations hadn't imagined flying in weapons would be part of the job. Last year Captain Hari Sundar Shrestha and co-pilot Shuva Raj Shrestha brought in three tons of weapons that the Sher Bahadur Deuba government had bought from Belgium. At first they flatly declined the mission. They pointed out they needed special route permits from Iran, Pakistan and India. The Belgian company, which was required to obtain the permits,

failed to do so. The two denied signing documents early last month that they would fly the weapons into Nepal. What if the three nations—whose airspace they would be violating—came to know about the cargo? They were also worried by the possibility of discovery if the plane was forced to land in India. On 7 August RA 203 landed in Kathmandu, but the cargo did not escape the vigilant eyes of Indian spies at Tribhuban International Airport. The Indian government has already started gathering information about the weapons from various government agencies in the country. Sher Bahadur Deuba clinched the deal a year ago when he had told the people he was on his way to the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. He ordered 5,500 rifles, pocketed a hefty commission but was unable to import the weapons because of procedural glitches. The onus to get the weapons then fell on the Lokendra Bahadur Chand government. But a disagreement between the supplier and the cargo handlers extended the import process, drawing it out till after the Thapa government took charge.



# Lessons

Pradip Gyawali in *Drishti*, 2 September

दृष्टि

Innocent Nepalis in the rural areas of the country do not want to become victims again—killed by either "revolutionary" Maoist or "reactionary" state bullets. Once they are dead, the rebels will call them informers and the army, terrorists. However you look at it, those caught in the crossfire will be judged guilty without proof. Their deaths will be justified. The Maoists have made a big mistake by returning to war. They may have their reasons: the state turned down their demand for a democratic and simple constituent assembly, 19 of their cadres were killed on the same day the last round of peace talks were held and the political parties did not take them seriously and so on.

But none of this is reason enough to spurn peace. They should have asked for the people's support and discussed matters with the agitating political parties who are revolting against regression. We could have all participated in a nationwide peaceful movement that would underline our sincerity towards democracy and peace.

But like always, the Maoists just made it easier for the state to take up arms when they forsook the path of public participation and true people's power. The war has begun, opening the path even for urban warfare. With the help of international military aid, the Royal Nepali Army is much stronger and its size has doubled. Evidently, this new war will take things to extremes. The results are unimaginable. Fear is causing many to leave their homes. In a country where army officers get assassinated in broad daylight, how can ordinary citizens expect to feel safe?

Both the state and the Maoists should realise that armed violence will not make any revolution successful, nor will it protect democracy. A Peruvian report on the Shining Path movement that took 70,000 lives, said that it failed to restore people's power. It also said that despite Fujimori's Army and US support, the rebels were not controlled. Maybe now the two people behind Peru's atrocities, Alberto Fujimori (now in self imposed exile in Japan) and Dr Abimael Guzmán (leader of the People's War in Peru who is in prison) realise their mistakes. When will Nepal's Fujimoris and Doctors learn from history?

History has also placed the political parties of Nepal in a difficult position. They struggled for over half a century to restore democracy and their leaders are dedicated helmsmen. The king's ambitions lie fallow: he has been unsuccessful in using the peace talks as guise to overturn democracy. Now he faces two realities—abandon 'constructive kingship' and rectify his mistakes by listening to the parties, or invite his own destruction by following 'Mahendra Path'. Right now we wonder what is he thinking of next in London.

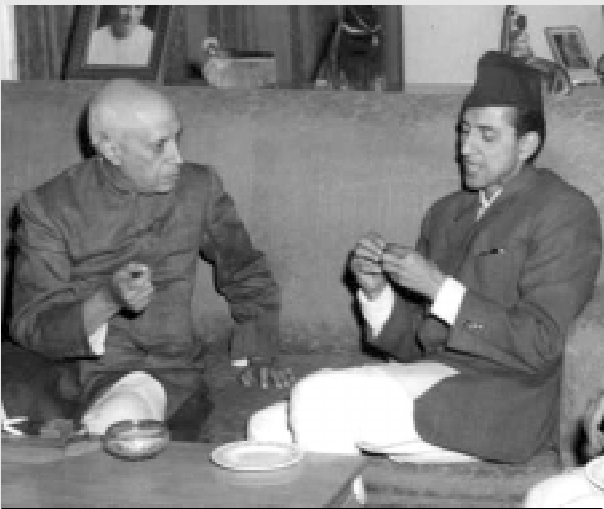


MIN BAIRACHARYA



Back at Sundarijal >43

# “Nepal will be a hotspot for international rivalry...”



**BP Koirala is analysing the geo-political implications to Nepal and King Birendra of his detention in solitary confinement. He feels coverage in the Indian media and the international spotlight will put the king on the defensive. He concludes: “Through the king’s intransigence Nepal will be a scene of open international activities and a hotspot of international rivalry.”**

**Tuesday, 20 April 1977**

Sundarijal  
I got 2 days’ newspapers today, with a lengthy report of Khadga B Singh’s press conference in which he has made an extensive reference to the demand in India for my release and observance of human rights in reg. to the condition of my detention, criticising JP for advocating my case and for comments...correspondents’ interview of the king. King’s interview is also lengthy. By reading these reports I got the feeling that a good publicity is being made for our cause in India, which I hope will percolate to other democratic countries and that the people here are a little more unnerved. The govt is clearly acting unconstitutionally and illegally in our case. Moreover it is openly propagating falsehood by stating that our case is sub-judice, that legal proceedings have already been started. Whatever little concessions they seem to give me—like allowing Shushila to see me and permitting the visit of Ganeshraj to me for a few minutes—is to provide themselves with a fig leaf to cover their blatant falsehood that they are indulging in their propaganda and publicity. That they have to resort to falsehood and a show of legality is the measure of the weakness of their legal political position and also of the state of their perplexity in view of the favourable publicity given to our cause in the Indian press and the advocacy by no less a person than JP. In a specific question about us asked by the interviewer, the king only said that the principle of non-interference in what he expected to be observed by India. I vaguely feel that China is not very vigorously supporting the king’s cause—perhaps with a view to possible improvement in her relationship with India. Russia is likely to go over to the king’s side—for 2 reasons—the present govt of India is not aligned with Russia like its predecessor govt was and India’s attitude towards China too is likely to change correspondingly. “*The Patriot*” pro-Russian Indian daily has come out perhaps editorially, with a strong criticism of JP’s espousal of our cause. This is a straw in the wind. It appears that through the king’s intransigence, Nepal will be a scene of open international activities and a hotspot of international rivalry. This may suit the king temporarily, but certainly it will be suicidal for Nepal—Nepal will cease to be effective in her own territory + will have to play a secondary role to one or the other big powers. Nationalism will be hurt + the solidarity of the people destroyed through different international forces of attraction. I think ultimately it will be the gain of India.

In the evening I had an attack of diarrhoea, which exhausted me and therefore I went to bed immediately after dinner which I took

without relish. I have started taking Erythrocine from today. (also on 16.4.77)  
[continued on 16 April page]

(from 20.4.77)  
I have been giving considerable thought to the line of defence I should adopt in the cases that are supposed to be in the process of trial in a special tribunal that has been set up more than two months ago. This is an absurd undertaking on my part, trying to formulate a line of defence, when I don’t even know what the cases are and what the charged are against me. Even if I vaguely guess as a result of the interrogation, what are the prosecutor’s stories—ie what facts they are presenting to the court, I can’t form my defence in the dark. Of this I am certain, their stories can be torn to shreds, because what I feel is that the prosecution has never been strictly careful about the preparation of such cases. Moreover, I think this will be the 1<sup>st</sup> case that they are handling which will attract some international attention. Any weakness in the prosecution’s story can be most damagingly exposed, and even if the judgement goes against us, such verdict will not carry much weight. Apart from this, this will be a political case par excellence—in which I will be able to expound our political credo. By the nature of interrogation I could gather that the prosecution’s case will rest on my articles on “Monarchy”, “Army”, “nationalism in the present context”, “The Panchayat System is no democracy”—all published in *Tarun Magazine* and some of my statements published in Indian papers, advocating violence as a political weapon against a dictatorship based on the permanent employment of the armed forces against the people, and on the statement made by Yagya B and on my last statement in which I have declared myself the president of the Congress (an illegal body). I have the impression that they don’t have a shred of evidence against me except my statement that I am the president of the Congress + and as such I am morally responsible for acts done in the name of the Congress. When I consider their limited capacity, the international audience that they will have to address through the presentation of their cases and the cost of their failure to carry conviction with their large audience, I don’t think they will be well-advised to go on with the case. I can turn the table on them + put the Panchayat System itself on trial. They may therefore decide to withdraw the case, ie just do nothing further about it and keep me in indefinite detention like they did on the last occasion when I was imprisoned for 8 years.

# Hello Dollywood

**Overseas Tibetans take to the silver screen.**

**DANIEL HABER** in DHARMASALA . . .

It was like an old-fashioned circus sideshow—a hand-painted banner proclaiming the name of the attraction—and in front, a barker on a battery-powered mike trying to sell tickets to the show. This is a movie called *Melong* (Tibetan for “Clear Light”). Curious bystanders stop to look at the posters, some pay NRs 100 for the ticket to watch the 60 minute screening.

A Tibetan-Nepali from Kathmandu named Seshi is the movie’s director and people recognise his face on the glossy poster as also the star. Seshi got some experience in filming with Eric Vallei when he shot *Honey Hunters* in Nepal. “We tried to keep costs down,” Seshi explains. The movie cost NRs 50,000 and the actors were paid Rs 2,500 every day.

I’m in Dharmasala not only to watch movies, but also act in one. Having answered a full-page ad in the *Tibet Review*, I was chosen to play the role of an American reporter in *The Four Harmonious Friends* directed by a University of Southern California graduate, 38 year-old Tibeta- American, Pema Dhondup.

Already, the *Tibet Review* in Dharmasala has another full-page ad for another Tibetan feature film, this one called *Poison Charm* and directed by Tenzing Sonam and his Indian wife, Ritu Sarin. The film-maker couple had previously made the TV Documentary, *The Shadow Circus* about the CIA involvement in the Khampa



rebellion in the 1960s. Judging from the description of characters including “an unemployed McLeod Ganj youngster” and an elderly Tibetan man, “a former resistance fighter”, both *The Four Harmonious Friends* and *Poison Charm* seem likely to treat similar themes in depicting the inter-generational conflicts within the disenfranchised diaspora community, between the first escapees from Chinese-occupied Tibet and the second-generation of Tibetans born in exile who have never seen Tibet and wonder what it means to be “Tibetan”. This conflict of interest is already quite apparent on the streets of Dharmasala, Kathmandu or wherever Tibetans live in

exile. One can see the wrinkled and weathered oldsters in traditional dress counting their rosaries or spinning prayer-wheels, and the younger generation spinning CDs and looking as fashionably hip (and rebellious) as any Harlem hip-hopster or Bollywood brat. On a recent evening, Seshi screened his video *Melong* to a young sympathetic audience at Dharmasala’s TIPA (Tibet Institute of Performing Arts) auditorium. Despite the experimental film’s home-movie amateurishness with an implausible, predictable plot, the story of an unemployed Tibetan graduate unable to find a job in Kathmandu and the troubles he falls into—bad company, drinking and

disco brawls—the movie struck a chord with the cheering audience of Tibetan youth who face similar predicament in real life. There was hardly a dry eye in the audience when the hero laments that his loving parents sacrificed everything to educate him for 20 years and now he can’t even find a job. Despite the hero’s waywardness, the film evokes traditional values of filial duty, religious values—the hero’s friend is a pious thangka painter—and in the end he decides to abandon Kathmandu’s corruption to return to his native India with his schoolmate sweetheart. Pema Dhondup, director of *The Four Harmonious Friends* introduces himself as having gone to the USA on a Fullbright scholarship to study filmmaking so that he could “tell our story, of our community, of our lost generation”. Dhondup says he shot the film on a “zero budget”, and everything was donated, nobody was paid, and much of the funding came through benefactors such as Rupin Dang of Wilderness Films, a production company in Delhi that makes documentaries for National Geographic and Discovery channels. “This is the generation that has grown up, but never seen our own country,” Dhondup tells us. “We grew up with images of torture, occupation, insult. The story is not fiction, this is our life experience, what has happened to us, it is

a reality weaved into a fictitious story.” Like Dhondup, both Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin also received their film-making training in California, with degrees in broadcasting and an MFA in film and video. The film-maker couple’s internationally acclaimed documentary *The Reincarnation of Kunsur Rinpoche* is said to have been an inspiration for Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Little Buddha* (1994). Bertolucci invited Tenzing and Ritu to Kathmandu for the shoots. Khyentse Norbu Rinpoche, a Bhutanese reincarnate lama himself, was also an advisor to Bertolucci, and went on to make his own film, *The Cup* (1999) which, although shot in India, was an Academy Award nominee for Best Foreign Language film from Bhutan. The quirky film tells the tale of Tibetan-exile monks who secretly try to watch the football World Cup on a rented television in their remote monastery. However, having organized a Tibetan Film Festival in Delhi a few years ago, Tenzing and Ritu insist Hollywood was definitely not their inspiration. “It was in fact to counter such rosy, spiritual-laden descriptions of Tibet in mainstream Western cinema, that we were driven to make our film,” says Tenzing. Their \$2 million *Poison Charm* is being supported partly by actor and Tibetan activist, Richard Gere, and Bertolucci’s UK-based producer, Jeremy Thomas. Shooting in digital video will begin in November at Dharmasala. ♦



ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **A day in Lazimpat** Photographs by Damien Murphy at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **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: Indra Jatra** on 9 September, *Godavari Snan Mela* till 17 September.
- ❖ **Sounds of Intimacy Paintings** by Manish Lal Shrestha till 23 September at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048



EVENTS

- ❖ **Women in Concert** 7PM on 7 September at Dechenling Garden, Thamel. 4412158
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Story of Chico Mendes: The Burning Season** part of the "Not Just Entertainment" series from EnvironmentNEPAL from 2PM on 6 September at Baggi Khana, Patan Dhoka. 5521393

MUSIC

- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM every Wednesday and Saturday. Rs 200 entry. Interested musicians welcome to jam. 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.
- ❖ **Fusion** at Dwarika's now featuring Abhaya & The Steam Injuns every Friday, 7.30 PM onwards. 4479488

DRINKS

- ❖ **Happy Hour** Buy one get one free at Splash Bar & Grill from 5.30-7PM. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015

FOOD

- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for wood fired pizzas and more. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Las Kush, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Godavari Singastha Mela** Special lunches till 17 September at Godavari Village Resort.
- ❖ **Café U** Healthy Japanese home-cooking, natural yeast bagel sandwich, delicious cakes and coffee. Opposite British School, Sanepa. 552326
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 4680083
- ❖ **All new buffet** for lunch and dinner at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Malay, Singapore food** at Singma, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 552004

GETAWAYS

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BOOKWORM



**A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996-2003** Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati  
The Printhouse, 2003  
Rs 350  
This is an authoritative and comprehensive overview of Nepal's Maoist insurgency. It describes how the state's neglect combined with political instability and the growth of radical left politics in mid-western Nepal led to a build up of tensions that was unleashed in the 'people's war'. The author concludes, the only way to bring in peace is to build a state that attends equally to all of Nepal's people.

**Nepal: Politics of stalemate, confusion and uncertainty** MR Josse  
The People's Review, 2003  
Rs 125

The author puts contemporary Nepal politics into perspective in this review that was also presented as an international research paper. It covers the developments from the king's intervention on 4 October 2002 till the Chand cabinet and an eye on the future. Josse also includes a chapter on the aborted peace talks of 2001 and a general backdrop to the Maoist insurrection.



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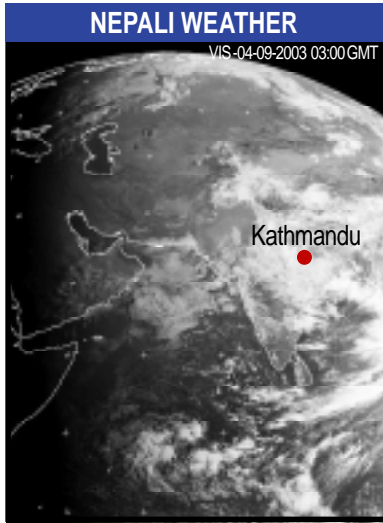
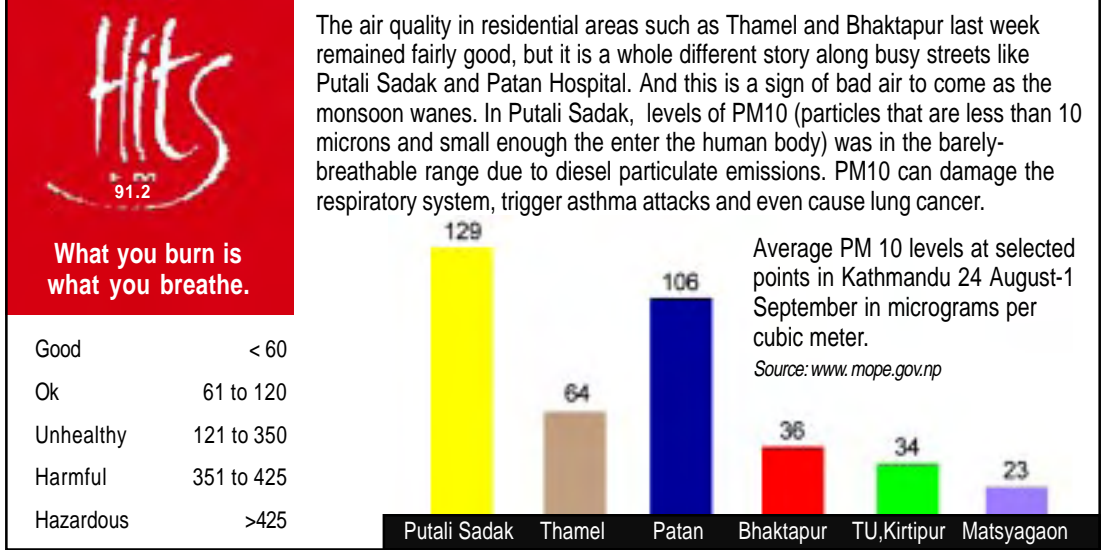
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



**NEPALI WEATHER**  
VIS-04-09-2003 03:00 GMT

by MAUSAM BEED

The monsoon is now losing its strength gradually as it retreats. Still, don't expect it to completely vanish yet. There will still be heavy passing showers across the midhills. A 'break monsoon'—a trough breaking away from the Himalaya towards the plain—means we can expect more short, strong bursts of rain. High humidity and clearer afternoons will push the mercury up, but the sun is already losing its fierceness.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Day	Weather	Temp
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Sat	Sunny	30-19
Sun	Sunny	28-18
Mon	Partly Cloudy	29-18
Tue	Partly Cloudy	28-18

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**Under My Hat**

by Kunda Dixit

# Dilli chalo!

If you haven't air-dashed to Delhi recently, you should. The first thing you notice at Kathmandu airport is that the authoritarians have instituted improvements as part of the activities in the run-up to Desolation Nepal Year 2004. In an effort to battle the dangers of deep vein thrombosis, for instance, all passengers now have to mandatorily carry holdalls and trunks on their heads like railway coolies and trek uphill from the Ring Road to the departure lounge. There, procedures have been streamlined so that passengers are whisked through queues for check-in, tax, customs, immigration and security in a little under three-and-half hours, which must be a world record. But it's all worth it because the security forces at the boarding gate have now been trained in the art of Swedish massage and give departing passengers a thorough work-over. They start at the bottom by gently kneading your gluteus maximus, moving up to the solar plexus to untangle the stress knots up to the neck muscles. (Turn around please.) Starting from the shoulder joints, the guards then go dangerously close to one's gonads, taking the recent exhortation of one particular cheeseball manufacturer to "go get the balls" a bit too literally.



Once in Delhi, one realises that at the present rate of growth of the aboveground and underground Nepali population there, the Indian capital will have more Nepalis than Indians within the unforeseeable future. The first thing to do in Delhi is to be accepted as a native for which one learns to speak like Delhi-ites and for this you must end every sentence with "yar" if you don't do so already. So, if you see a female stranger waiting in the rain at the bus stop, you say: "Why you outstanding, madam? Come understand with me, yar." This is also called eve-teasing and is a favourite timepass for Delhi's long commutes. The most visible progress one notices these days in Delhi is the breakneck construction of the Metro (a Govt of India Undertaker) which has gone into a decisive phase with signs that say: 'We Are Working Hardly' and 'Do Not Disturbing, Slow Men At Work'. We asked young native Delhi-ites returning home from their Noida Call Centre in a Qualis and stuck in traffic at the Archbishop Makarios Marg Roundabout what they thought. "So bad they are," said one. "Fully half-cracked, yar," replied another. "They got the fundas wrong, so random," said another. It needs practice to speak like a Delhi-ite. India is taking great strides in the field of agrochemicals. Farmers in Haryana have found that spraying Coke and Pepsi on their crops is an effective way to control the brown stem borer and the rice whorl maggot, although some anti-globalisation activists say India shouldn't allow multinationals get inroads into India's pesticide sector. On the drive from the airport, visiting Nepalis are also struck by the huge progress India has made in the arena of Livestock Development and Cattle-Breeding. Given the number of prize bulls taking shelter from the rain below the South Ex Flyover, we can tell that Delhi's ox population has now officially overtaken the human population, as shown by the digital counter outside AIMS. As one of India's founding grandfathers, Mahatma Gandhi, once said: "You take care of the cow, and cow will take care of you, yar." ♦

**NEPALI SOCIETY**

# In Amita's shoes

It hasn't been easy for 14-year-old Amita Sakya to think of herself as an ordinary girl. Revered as Kathmandu's Living Goddess for a decade from 1991-2001, she was anything but ordinary. Even today, below Swayambhu where she lives with her family, no one addresses Amita by her name. It's always either the honorific *Dyo Majhu* or Kumari. Amita smiles politely at neighbours who bow to her in the alley. She understands that they are proud of her and feel blessed that she was picked from amongst them. There is a serenity and calm self-assurance about Amita that sets her apart from her classmates at Ganesh Boarding School. Her teachers say she is a good student, if a little reticent. She doesn't mingle easily and prefers solitude. "It was really difficult when I first had to leave Kumari Bahal," she says in measured tones. "This was a totally different environment and adjusting to it isn't easy." Amita's closest friend is her elder sister, and despite her father's displeasure she occasionally stays overnight at Kumari Bahal. Amrit Sakya is his daughter's greatest champion. He fought to

convince the palace that the Kumari had the right to a good education and a regular allowance. He had constant battles with Amita's caretakers to hire a professional tutor for his daughter. "The Kumari is worshipped by the nation but for me she is still my daughter and her education comes first," Amrit says. Till that time little was done to equip the Kumari for a return to normal life. His constant queries and suggestions irritate Amita, and this in turn hurts him. All he wants is for the former Living Goddess to "act like a normal daughter". Walking home from school, Amita says she has no concrete plans for the future. "I like life the way it goes," she says as she skirts a muddy patch. Ideally that would mean going to school, coming home and sitting quietly on her own. She constantly ignores visitors and lets her parents do the talking. She makes a brief appearance and politely takes her leave almost immediately. Occasionally she attends special functions where she is feted as the guest of honour. She is not tempted to leave Nepal, not even when an American benefactor offered to sponsor her education in the US. "I said no," recalls Amita. "I could never leave my spiritual motherland." ♦ (Naresh Newar)



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