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#166

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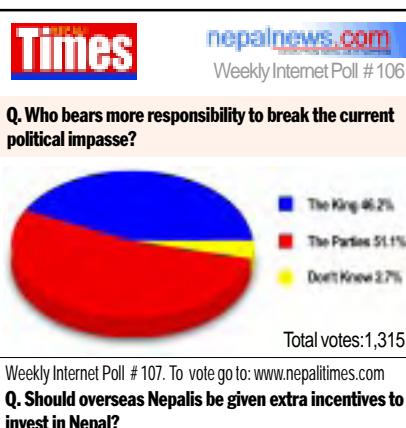
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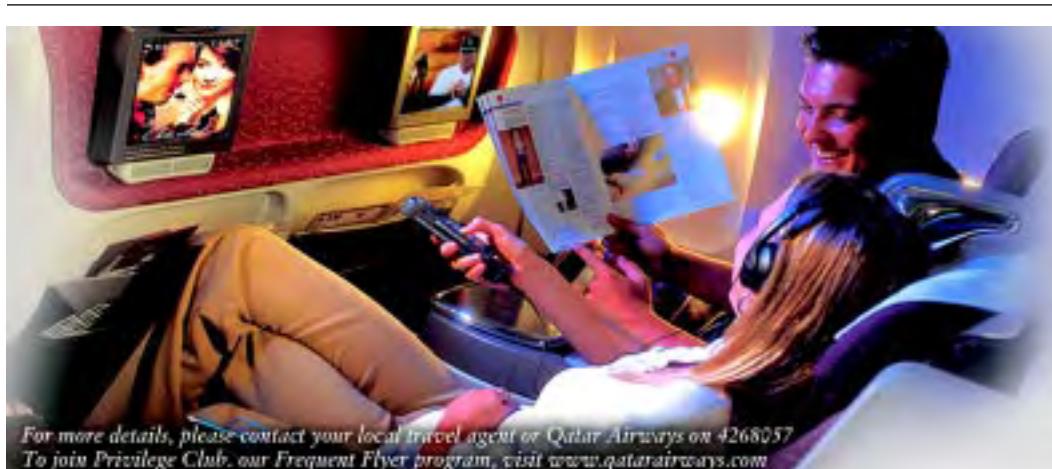
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Tek Nath takes on Thimpu

MANJUSHREE THAPA

Bhutani civil rights activist Tek Nath Rizal arrived in Kathmandu this week just as preparations got underway for the 15th round of bilateral ministerial talks to end the refugee crisis. The talks start next week in Thimpu.

Rizal is highly regarded in liberal democratic circles for his struggle on behalf of 100,000 Bhutani refugees who have been living in camps in eastern Nepal for the past 12 years. Rizal was a National Assembly member for 17 years, and in Bhutan's Royal Advisory Council where he was known for his stand against corruption.

Rizal's travails began in 1988, when he, along with DP Bhandari, petitioned King Jigme Singye Wangchuk about the discrimination against ethnic Nepali Lhotsampas in the census which was seen then as an attempt to curb the Lhotsampa who made up 40-50 percent of the population. The Sharchops constituted some 40 percent and the Nglops 20 percent. The Lhotsampas had been granted citizenship in a 1958 royal edict, but Thimpu considered them dangerous not just for their numbers, but also for their increasingly democratic politics, and their imagined or real affiliation with the

Gorkhaland movement.

Rizal was briefly jailed for submitting the petition, which was deemed seditious. Upon release he came to Nepal to head the People's Forum for Human Rights, but in November 1989 the Panchayat government extradited him to Bhutan. He was jailed under inhumane conditions for over a decade under a National Security Act promulgated three years after his arrest. In 1993, a royal edict stated that Rizal would be released only once the refugee crisis was solved. Yet, for reasons that remain unclear, he was released in 1999.

"I was really very hopeful when the government released me from jail," Rizal told *Nepali Times* in an exclusive interview.

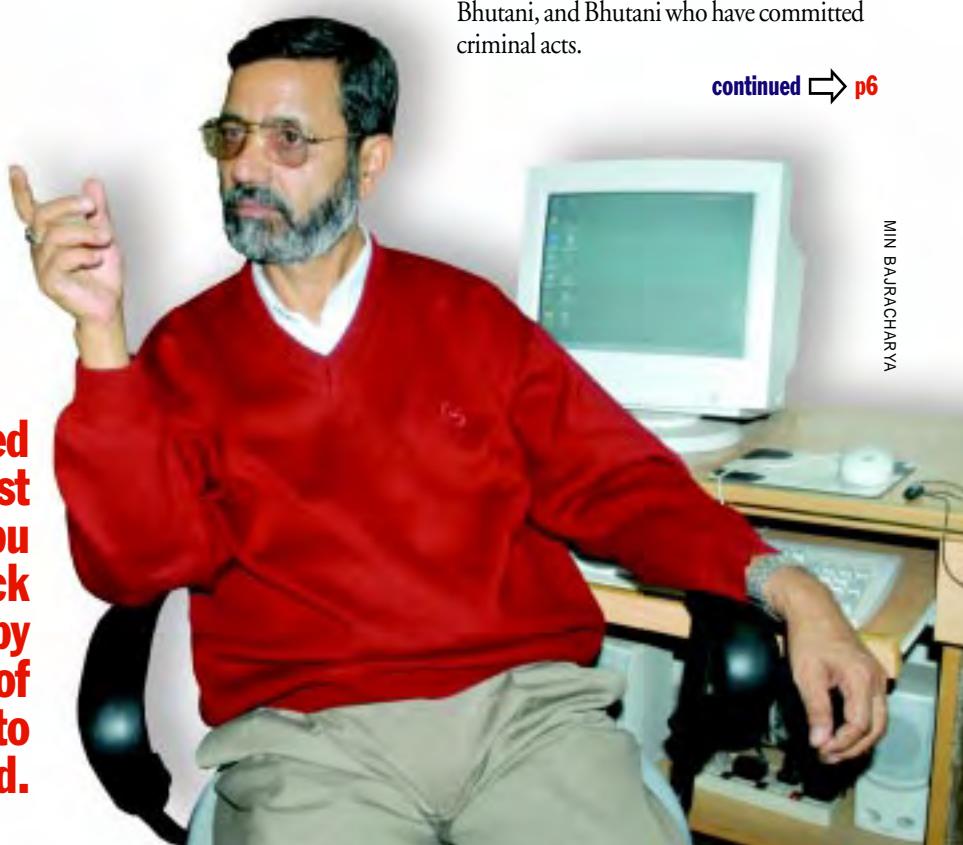
Nepal extradited Bhutani political activist Tek Nath Rizal to Thimpu in 1989, but he is back in Kathmandu to lobby for the return of fellow-refugees to their homeland.

I thought the government would also free the Lhotsampas from the refugee camps."

But 14 rounds of talks later, there has been no workable solution to the refugee crisis. The classification of refugees into

four groups, in particular, dashed hopes that they might all someday return to their homeland. The four classes are: bonafide Bhutani who may have been forcefully evicted, Bhutani who emigrated, non-Bhutani, and Bhutani who have committed criminal acts.

continued → p6



Mission impossible?

Nepali Times: Is it true that the government is preparing for elections?

Kamal Thapa: Yes, the government is trying to create the basic environment of security and hold the elections to local bodies.

How can elections be held when there is an insurgency going on?

It won't take place right away. We certainly don't claim that the environment is conducive to elections. But, we believe with adequate security, free and fair polls can be held as early as possible.

How early would that be?

I can't say, we may have to wait some time. Because of the constitutional vacuum, we need to hold elections at the earliest. If everyone cooperates, we will be able to hold it.

But everyone is not cooperating.

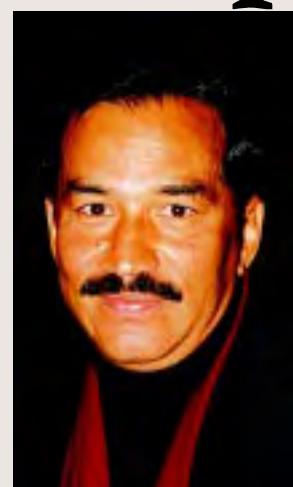
No democratic political party ever refuses to go to elections. We will try to convince the parties that we are trying to create conditions for polls to be held. Reinstatement of the house is not constitutionally possible, so the only alternative is elections.

But you have made the parties more defiant by making appointments to local governments.

It was the parties themselves who complained that the government should not have allowed bureaucrats to run local bodies. There was a political vacuum at the local level, so we requested political parties and previous officials to resume duties. This is only a temporary measure till we hold elections.

How can you win the support of the parties when you don't even have the backing of your own RPP?

I am also the general secretary of the RPP, I can assure you the party does support the government.



Government spokesman Kamal Thapa is confident he can fulfil the cabinet's three immediate priorities: security, elections, and winning over parties.

Excerpts of interview.

How do you assess the counter-insurgency operations of the security forces?

The army has not gone all out against the insurgents. But the security forces including the army have been significantly upgraded in terms of training, weapons, institutional strength and efficiency. The army will be more aggressive and effective in the days to come to control Maoist violence, murder and terrorism. We will not work in a half-hearted manner, we will make security more effective.

Yet increased militarisation has brought complaints of human rights violations.

The security personnel have been working within the framework of the constitution. Even if there is no state of emergency, the anti-terrorism act is in force and the security apparatus is working within that legal framework. The government is committed to respect human rights and the rights of citizens. We will also take action if violations occur deliberately. But we must understand that the country is going through an extraordinary situation, and in such conditions abnormal things happen.

The government is criticised for not being able to use the executive powers it claims it has.

There is no truth in this charge. The government has been using all the executive powers enshrined in the constitution. There is no need to drag the monarchy into controversy. The government bears full moral responsibility for both good and bad.

But the appointments to constitutional bodies has not been made by the king, and many people take this as proof that the king still calls the shots.

The appointments will take place in line with the constitution. Even if there has been any delay, it is not in defiance of the constitution. It must be due to some technical reason.

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DAUGHTER SLAUGHTER

Barely a month after children all over the country rang peace bells, a week after they celebrated a subdued Dasai with families, and just before sisters and brothers were getting ready to celebrate Tihar came the horrific story of four school children killed in a Maoist-Army firefights in Doti.

What happened at the Sharada Higher Secondary School in Mudbhara on Tuesday afternoon is symbolic of the utter waste of this conflict. No war is sane, but even by the senseless standards of these mad times, Mudbhara was a descent into hell. How many Doramas, Mudbaras, Jogimaras do we need before we regain our senses? How many more Dipak Gurungs, Sushila Joshis, Harina Bhandaris, Yadunath Joshis, and Mandari BKs need to be killed before they end this lunacy?

A human rights organisation has already returned from an on-site inspection in Doti, the army's Human Rights Cell will no doubt conduct its own investigation into this 'collateral damage', and the two sides bearing arms will predictably blame each other for provoking the firefights. The parents, brothers, sisters and relatives of Sushila, Harina, Yadunath and Mandira will not really care about the technical details. Their loved ones are dead. They will be grieving just as hundreds of relatives of the more than 168 Nepalis who have been killed at the hands of fellow Nepalis in this blood-soaked week of human sacrifices.

Nepal stopped being a zone of peace long ago. That is why we implored that at least schools and children be left alone. But that was obviously too much to ask. What were the Maoists doing in Mudbhara, forcing grade 5-10 students to watch their cultural revolution entertainment, anyway? Is that how you build support for your movement: by going house to house with socket bombs in your shoulder bag, forcing students to sit through your song-and-dance routine?

The army's intelligence is obviously improving: at least they can now tell that the Maoists are holding cultural programmes in high schools. But why were they so easily provoked to go in with their guns blazing into classrooms when it would have been obvious to anyone that the rebels would slip in among the students? We're not military types, but wasn't there a way to keep the school under surveillance, wait till the Maoists left and follow them to their lairs? Why this trigger-happiness?

Children have a right to education. But first they have a right to life. The state has a responsibility to protect them, not just by ensuring they are not caught in the crossfire, but also by abandoning militarisation and working towards a negotiated solution.

And do the Maoists need any more proof that a revolution devours children? Do they still need to be convinced that there are avenues other than deaths, threats, and terror to achieve the same ends? There is no need to destroy Nepal in order to save it.

Whatever their excuses, it doesn't really matter now who fired first at Mudbhara. All we ask is: if you have to kill each other please don't kill the children and the innocents.



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

LETTERS

GLOBAL NEPALIS

CK Lal bemoans the exodus of Nepalis who go to foreign lands to seek fame and fortune and then expect their homeland to welcome them as conquering heroes ('Homecoming', #165). This is the wrong attitude. Lal notes that "there is no altruism in business. In the globalised economy, investors go wherever money is safe and gives the highest return." Lal types the correct words, but implies an incorrect interpretation. Global Nepalis are not a liability for Nepal, but an opportunity. I am an American business student and consultant who had the pleasure to spend time in your amazing land. Nepal is wonderful country brimming with potential, but dearly suffering under the effects of grinding poverty exacerbated by a deadly political insurgency and depressed tourist economy. Global Nepalis are a lifeline out of this quagmire, but it is up to the powers that be in Nepal to enable this lifeline. I urge His Majesty King Gyanendra to take the bold leadership steps

needed to empower the government to take extraordinary measures to entice domestic investment from Global Nepalis and inspire confidence by offering guarantees of protection of these investments once they are made.

*Joshua Gitlitz,
Lincoln, Nebraska, USA*

Only CK Lal has seen through all the hoopla about the overseas Nepali conference, and put the event in its proper perspective. Most of these Nepalis left Nepal of their own free will to seek fortunes abroad. Now, instead of giving back to Nepali society what they took from it, they want more from the motherland. They want special treatment and profit repatriation for investments, and they want double citizenship so they don't have to pay visa fees. If foreign Nepalis want to help, why don't they help set up children's welfare schemes, girl-child scholarships, relief for victims of the insurgency, village water supply?

Nilam Ghimire, Putali Sadak

It is indeed a matter of pride that overseas Nepalis are showing a

keen interest in bringing the socio-economic transformation of our country. Even though they are thousands of miles away their Nepali heart still beats. The government should give all cooperation.

Dr Eli Pradhan, KMC

- It almost seems like Nepali Times has ODED on the NRN conference.

Overseas Nepalis are guided more by self-interest than by altruism or duty towards motherland. It is about getting the comforts and dual citizenship and repatriation of profits. One needs to evaluate their real contribution to Nepal prior to handing out freebies. Instead of wasting time on NRNs, the government needs to concentrate on the actual contributors to the Nepali economy—the blue collar workers in the Gulf, Malaysia, Korea, Japan and the US. Providing these blue workers with proper vocational training, job orientation, workers' rights, and consular services will further enhance the contributions of people who are already keeping the

Nepali economy afloat. It is time to recognise the real contributors to the Nepali economy by those who toil 80+ hours/week or sometimes 2 jobs to make ends meet and help their family at home. Nepal should have converted the VVIP lounge at the airport to the real NRN lounge to welcome and say thank you, or say good luck and good bye dedicated to these hard working neo-lahures.

SN Singh, by email

independent court and not a military tribunal.

Leopold Högländer, Nussdorf, Austria

CENTRE-STAGE

Re: 'Centre to centrestage' (#165). I agree with your editorial that we are a critical juncture in our nation's history. There is a futile conflict between the government and the Maoists, and on the other there is a needless polarisation between the parties and the palace. Peace

needs to be restored so development work and reconstruction can start. We should not have to wait till everything is destroyed to save what is left of our nationality and dignity. The ball is on the king's court.

*Bhanu B Parajuli,
Kamal Pokhari*

- One may be tempted to agree with the bottomline of your editorial (#165): 'the middle way is the only way'. But you seem to be ignoring ground realities. When 'democratic norms' prevalent before 4 October 2002 did not change the minds of 'men with guns', it will be naive to

believe that resurrection of parliament or all-party government will 'prove to the Maoists the futility of their violent path'. Thirteen years of 'bullheadedness' by political leaders is responsible for the present state of affairs, and not the one year of 'king's direct rule'. There can be only two ways out: let the 'short-sighted and narrow-minded' leaders of NC and UML rule the country once again, or give the king time to solve country's problems.

*Sugat Ratna Kansakar,
Kamaladi*

CORRECTIONS

- In 'Storm over Doramba', the last paragraph in Manjushree Thapa's interview with Brig-Gen BA Kumar Sharma (beginning 'Krishna Jung Rayamajhi, a member...') was not a part of the interview, but a section of the article itself.

- Due to a calendar-conversion error, the introduction of the interview with Bhim Udas (#165) referred wrongly to the dates of the NRN conference, it should have been 11-14 October.

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

The wobbly group

It is easier to instigate the masses against something than to persuade them to follow somebody.

In reporting human casualties, mainstream Anglo-Saxon journalism has a rule of thumb: "one American equals 10 Europeans equals 1,000 Chileans equals 100,000 Rwandans". Judging from the coverage Nepal has started getting in the western press, we must fall somewhere between the Chileans and Rwandans. After eight years of insurgency and over 8,000 lives lost, we have now been officially "discovered" by the international media.

And their correspondents all have one standard query: "What proportion of Nepal's land area do the Maoists control?", or "How much support do the Maoists have in the countryside?" Both questions are too complex to have black-and-white answers. For one thing, the Maoists regard 'public support' as a bourgeois concept, and believe political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.

Totalitarian groups do not regard the masses as self-determining human beings. It's not just the Old Regime of active monarchs that treats its subjects as objects of royal munificence. Even the pioneers of the New Regime don't believe that we-the-people are capable of rationally deciding our own fate. For the top guns of the Maoists, the masses are subjects in a war that have to be taught to toe the party line, or else.

The threat is rarely so explicit, but the message is seldom lost. It is like the Maoist with a grenade dangling from his belt who comes into the trekking lodge in Birethanti to ask tourists to 'donate' Rs 1,000 each. Ironically, the Maoists seem to have perfected these techniques from CIA-backed rightwing militias like the Freedom Commandos in Nicaragua.

In a widely-circulated letter to American ambassador Michael Malinowski, Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai claims there was "unprecedented and overwhelming support enjoyed by us among the masses both in rural and urban areas, intelligentsia, media and the international community during our seven-month overground period". But this assertion undermines Comrade Baburam's own political position. After all, it was the Old Regime that showed tolerance of dissent by allowing the meetings to take place.

If Baburam, Badal, Matrika and their comrades could openly address mass meeting in Kathmandu, Dhangadi, Janakpur, Dang, Gorkha earlier this year then why was there a need to go back to their violent path? Perhaps there is more than a grain of truth in Ambassador Malinowski's allegation that Maoists were forced to resort to arms because they didn't succeed in convincing the public that the constituent assembly was a dire necessity of the country at this moment.

An insurgency of this intensity and magnitude can't survive on the basis of enforced support. A swamp isn't enough, mosquitos also need rotting leaves to breed. Poverty and ignorance are the root causes of insurgency, but the backbone of Maoist support isn't the Nepali underclass. Maobadis derive their physical as well intellectual sustenance from what Bukharin dismissed as the 'wobbly group'—the urban petty bourgeoisie, the salariat, and the rural peasantry. "Every one of them," observes

Bukharin, "at the bottom of his heart, cherishes the hope of getting on, of growing rich." A pressure-cooker bomb is a shortcut to everything.

To ensure the acquiescence of other groups, the Maoists have adopted methods based on another axiom of political science: it's much easier to instigate the masses against something or someone than to persuade them to follow some ideology or somebody. The Maoists have intentionally left the outline of their New Regime vague, but they have very concrete plans about overthrowing the Old Regime.

Like the sorcerer hawking a single medication for all ills—buy one vial of fox's intestine or some equally revolting concoction, and it will release you from evil spirits, cure your baldness, and make you popular with the ladies.

The Maoists have a ready-made answer for every political question: a constituent assembly. It's a failsafe trick, one that has managed to fool everyone nursing a grudge against the political leaders of the Last Twelve Years. Since all questions over the potency of the constituent assembly potion are answered with socket-bombs, silence reigns supreme all over the country.

In *A View on The People's War in Nepal* from somewhere in western rural Nepal ('location cannot be disclosed for security reasons') for the anarchist internet site, Infoshop News (www.infoshop.org) Sage Radachowsky observes that ground realities have changed since the Spring of 1999 when Li Onesto of the *Revolutionary Worker* produced two propaganda pieces for her Nepali comrades. Support for the Maoists has dwindled even in their base area, Radachowsky writes, saying villagers are so scared that when "Maoists come to their door, they are obliged to provide food for them, and to agree with them when they are asked their political opinions". Those with guns, it seems, seldom have time or patience for political arguments.

Now that we know that Maoists aren't what they pretend to be, the riddle still remains: what do these armed insurgents seek to achieve by causing even more mayhem and bloodshed? If the militarisation of Nepali society continues at this rate, even a new constitution will have no meaning. Guns will rule, and as far as the international media is concerned, we will be even closer to Rwandans. ♦



The past eight years have brought nothing but violence and ruin to the country. It is a no-win situation for both sides. Even the Maoists admit that there is no military solution to the war that they have set in motion.

Just as the insurgency was gathering intensity, the royal massacre in June 2001 brought another dimension to the crisis. Today, the Nepali people do not have full faith any more in the crown, they have lost their trust in parliamentary parties and the present royal-appointed government does not represent the people and doesn't have their mandate. This is an unprecedented national crisis of confidence in our institutions.

Despite the dire situation, there is still some expectations. The Nepali people overwhelmingly desire an immediate restoration of peace. Nepal's monarchy has seen ups and downs before, and it may get out of this difficulty too. Almost all parliamentary parties have, at some point in history, taken up arms against the state, so it is not inconceivable that the Maoists too will one day give up their arms.

Nepal's communist movement is 60 years old. After 1960, the Nepal Communist Party

split and split again into many factions. Although they took part in the first general elections, a small group of comrades were not satisfied with the democratic gains of the 1990 People's Movement. They had a good presence in parliament, but dissatisfaction with the lack of good governance and transparency, unemployment and corruption grew.

Their rationale for a Maoist-style armed struggle was rooted in the ultra-left thinking that there can be a shortcut to power when the state is fractious and weak. It was a conscious decision of the leadership to begin an armed movement. What allowed it to grow and spread so rapidly was the power struggle among political parties, and between the parties and the king. The traditional exclusion of Nepal's ethnic, caste and religious minorities from the political process was also a factor.

The first round of peace talks in 2001 was used by both the government and the Maoists as an experiment. For the Maoists, it was an opportunity to test the public mood. They were more serious about the second round of talks this year, and appear to have been hopeful that there would be a breakthrough. They deputed a higher level team with a balance of racial and geographical representation that

No-win war

The only alternative to talks is talks.

could even lead a coalition government if need be. Overtly, the talks broke down because the government refused to budge on the issue of constituent assembly. But there were other factors:

- The timing of both peace talks were wrong. During the first one, the mainstream Nepali Congress had been ousted by a rival faction. In the second round, the palace and the political parties were at loggerheads. The fact that the political parties were kept outside the peace process guaranteed its failure.
- Lack of political will. The first peace talks couldn't even come up with a code of conduct. The second round had guidelines, but neither side really adhered to its spirit.
- No significant role for the facilitators. In 2001, the Maoists proposed facilitators, but the government did not take them seriously. The second time, both sides nominated facilitators, but their roles were minimised.
- Lack of trust. In both rounds of negotiations, neither side tried to understand the other's fears and interests. All three forces (palace, parties and Maoists) had their own concerns about a post-peace scenario. The royalists fear the parties and Maoists would unite. The Maoists feared the parties and palace getting together. The parliamentary parties were afraid the palace and the Maoists would get together to quash them. It is now clear that future talks should be tripartite.
- No role for victims of the insurgency. There are hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered bereavement and displacement because of the 'peoples' war'. They were kept out of both peace talks.
- No role for civil society and grassroots

people. The peace process lacked a foundation because civil society and local communities were excluded.

● No role for political parties. The parties always had misgivings about talks. They felt they had been deliberately sidelined. This undermined popular pressure for the talks to succeed.

● Lack of faith in the peace process. The Maoists felt the real power was with the king and wanted to talk to him directly. The government negotiators were suspicious all along that the Maoists were not really serious about talks, and were just buying time to restore military power.

● No timetable for the peace process. The ceasefire gave the government legitimacy, and it wanted to extend the process. Minutes about agreements were not taken, there was no political agenda. This made the Maoists suspicious that the government was not serious about implementing any agreements.

● Absence of a point of convergence. In this tripartite conflict, there was no agreement on what a consensus agreement could be. It required compromise and a fully constitutional multiparty system could have been a meeting point.

● Lack of political clarity. The government was unclear throughout about its political agenda. The Maoists insisted on a roundtable conference, an interim government and a constituent assembly. The political parties never showed any interest in this issue and were sidetracked by their confrontation with the government.

● Negative role of some external forces. The Americans made it clear soon after the ceasefire

that they would not accept a Maoist-led government. This affected the king's decision-making. Then the Americans threatened to put the Maoists on their terrorist list. The US-Nepal terrorism agreement and military assistance to the army raised hackles. As the peace talks were deadlocked, in late August, came news of the arrest of CP Gajurel in Chennai.

When negotiations resume, all parties must keep the above shortcomings in mind. A constituent assembly was not acceptable to the royalists who suspect it is a ploy to get rid of the monarchy. In addition, the ambition of the king to be active in politics has become a challenge to the democratisation process. This will complicate a future peace process. The first step should be to arrange a dialogue between the Maoists and political parties so that there will be popular pressure on the king to agree on their common agenda.

After the collapse of the ceasefire, some commentators have suggested that the king and the parties should make common cause to suppress the Maoists. They forget that this has been tried in the past, and it hasn't worked. Starting a constitutional process without the Maoists in the picture would be futile. A democratic practice cannot go hand-in-hand with armed struggle. The parliamentary democracy and the peace process must safeguard each other. The alternative to talks is talks. ♦

Shanker Pokharel is a member of the UML Central Committee, and an ex-MP from Dang.

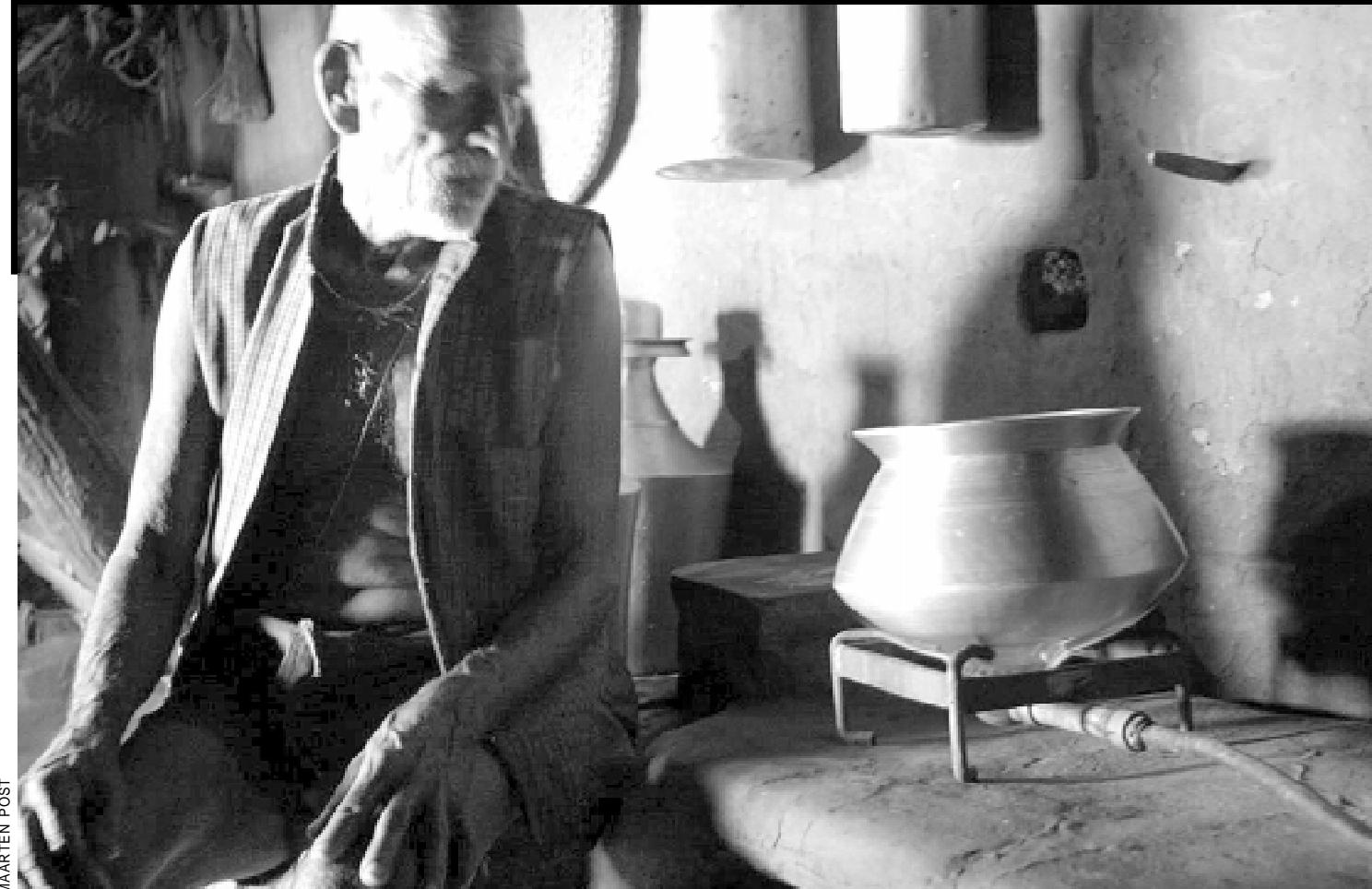
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Nepal's future is in the dung heap



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"It's a great investment," says Kamal Prasad Gautam from Kabhre. He built a biogas plant three months ago, and had to pay just Rs 14,000 because more than half the costs were subsidised.

"Here I put in the dung of my two buffaloes and some water," Kamal Prasad shows us, turning the stirrer over the inlet. He walks

to the other side of the plant. "And here slurry comes out. I'll use it after the monsoon to manure my land. It is very fertile."

Between the inlet and the outlet, a metal pipe sticks out of the ground and runs to the kitchen. Kamal Prasad's wife, Radha, shows us how it works, turning the valve and striking a match to the cooking stove. A clear blue flame lights up the dark room. "We have enough gas for five hours of cooking every day," Radha says. "I cook rice, vegetables, milk and food for the animals. We even have gas left for tea. It's nice. I don't have to sit in the smoke anymore."

In a country where indoor pollution from smoky fires is a major cause of acute respiratory infections among children and women, biogas does not just conserve firewood, it is also a major leap forward in public health.

Gautam sums up some more advantages of his purchase. "Previously, it took us at least two hours per day to collect firewood," he says. "Now we use that time to do other work, or we just relax. Also, we no longer have to go into the field to go to the toilet." The DDC sponsored the construction of a toilet, which is connected to the biogas plant,

which now runs on a combination of effluent from the goth and the toilet. The bonus is the spent slurry which is an odourless and potent fertiliser.

The first experiments with biogas in Nepal took place in the 1950s, using the Indian drum design. But the rusty drums needed expensive maintenance and the above-ground design was also unsuitable for Nepal's colder climate. In 1979, Nepali scientists modified the Chinese underground design with an air-tight dome and produced a cheap and easy-to-make prototype that worked beautifully. There are virtually no moving parts, and the

With its 100,000th biogas plant commissioned, Nepal is now the world's number one in alternative farm energy systems.

underground digester keeps the slurry insulated from the cold.

Nepal's biogas campaign really took off after 1992, when the Biogas Support Program (BSP) began to subsidise farmers who had to take out a soft loan to finance the construction of the plants. The amount of subsidy depends on the remoteness of the area and the size of the plant. It is about Rs 6,000 in the tarai, Rs 9,000 in the hills and Rs 11,000 in the remote hills.

"We also select and train construction companies," says Roop Singh Thapa, a BSP quality management officer. "We carry out random checks of the work they do. If a company fails to meet the standards, it is banned from the program." In 1992, there was only one biogas company. At present, there are more than 40 private companies involved, with branches in 65 districts.

Of the 20,000 plants that have been tested, 98 percent are functioning well. "In comparison to other countries, the success rate in Nepal is very high," says Thapa. There are no official figures for the success rates of biogas plants in India, but Thapa says Indian visitors who have inspected Nepal's program say they have a below 60 percent

success rate. In China, where the emphasis is less on gas than on fertiliser, the figure is even worse. It's probably also because donors abroad often build large plants to support a whole community. Explains Thapa: "In Nepal individual farmers actually buy plants. As a result they feel responsible and make sure it is well maintained."

BSP engineers are currently experimenting with biogas plants that can work in even colder regions in high altitude villages where deforestation is rampant. Biogas could be a solution for both cooking and heating. Above 2,500m it is too cold for microorganisms to break down slurry into methane. In 2001, BSP built two plants in Solukhumbu, with a greenhouse on top of the digester. This year more experiments will be carried out to integrate solar panels to heat underground digesters.

BSP program manager Sundar Bajgain explains: "It is a fine balance between trying out new ideas and keeping costs down." Whether or not BSP will be able to come up with an affordable high altitude plant, the potential for biogas in Nepal is still huge. Our total cattle and buffalo population is at least an

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Lak in Lukla



Outside the airport, in this village with a runway, a member of the Armed Police Force is beating a Tamang porter with a bamboo rod. "Move on," he commands and the porter, hungry enough to try to ignore the cop, stands his ground. The police officer, younger than the man he's hitting, winds up like a professional tennis player and wallops his victim on the back of the neck. The stick breaks from the force of the blow.

That decides the contest and the porter picks up his load of goat meat and moves away from the airport, muttering to himself. I suggest to the APF man that he's just helped recruit another Maoist and he laughs and ushers me past, politely, the broken stick still in his hand. On my way to the airport to catch the Kathmandu flight—at \$182, not far from the average annual income of rural Nepal—another APF man was stopping Nepalis unescorted by foreigners or Sherpas from going to the airport, cursing them and waving his rifle. Ethnic criteria seemed to apply. That is, janjatis need not apply.

Lukla closes early these days. By 7PM, the streets are deserted except for APF patrols. (See also: 'Sagarmatha's buffer zone is vanishing', *Nepali Times*, #164.) There's a curfew of sorts but it doesn't apply to foreigners or people known to the police—only to those same porters who crowd the town in search of a little work. Again, I suggest, discrimination that lends itself to Maoist recruitment better than any hoary ideology from the past.

Much that seems inexplicable is going on here. The evening before, I stopped at my hotel bar for a can of Tuborg. I proposed a game of billiards to my companion. No, no, the bartender says, the security forces have asked me to close the pool table. Close the pool table? That's right, he says, a senior policeman in plain clothes, dropped by for a drink in mid-afternoon and said no one should be playing pool after 5PM. Er, I said, um, yes, at a loss for words just that once. A pool hall down the street

frequented by those porters had a similar edict imposed by the police. Not that denying people the right to play billiards would drive them into the arms of a rebel group, but as an example of the growing and unaccountable power of the security forces, it's an interesting thing to contemplate.

And why, I wonder, is there a curfew in a tourist town like Lukla? Up the trail in Namche Bazar, the music never stops and I've got the bags under my eyes to prove it. Namche brims with energy and money with nary a Maoist in sight. No security forces to speak of either, unless you count the desultory backpack check on the outskirts from a mixed army and police brigade, more interested in chatting up female trekkers than intercepting rebel arms shipments in porters' loads.

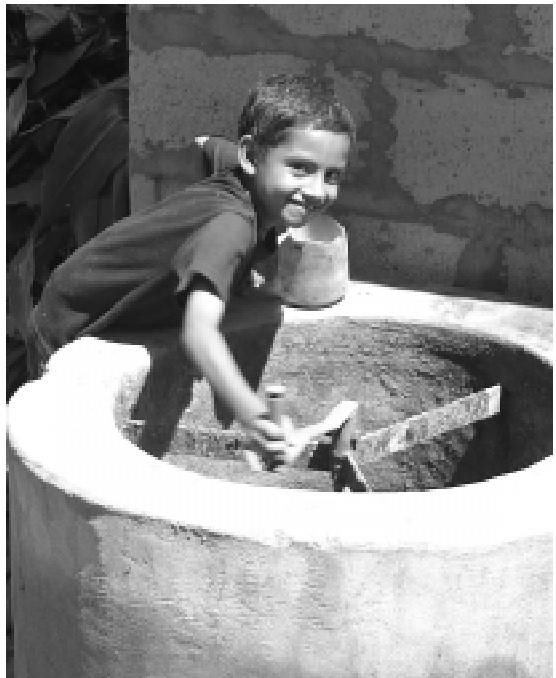
The curfew, it seems to me, is to make things easier for the police, not to keep the people safe. First of all, there is no active Maoist presence in

Our columnist finds that police mistreatment of janjatis lends itself to Maoist recruitment better than any bygone ideology.

Lukla itself, although from time to time, reports trickle in of rebel activity four days walk south towards Okhaldhunga. The APF is garrisoned there to protect Lukla airport, which has admittedly, been attacked in the past. But by simply being there, doesn't the APF make Lukla an even more tempting rebel target? Not to mention, the way that some officers at least seem to view some local people of certain ethnic groups. Can you not argue that such casual brutalities are a form of discrimination against honest men who are looking for honest work, driving them towards insurgency by treating them with disrespect?

On the good side, after watching the private airlines in action at Lukla airport, I now know that Nepalis are capable of running anything. The planes wheel up to the apron, disgorge hard currency, er, trekkers, then take on a load of the same before heading back to base in Kathmandu. A few minutes is all that's needed and only weather or mechanical problems slow things down. It all proceeds with cheery efficiency. The Twin Otters and Dorniers thunder up and down the ridiculously angled runway and keep the local and national economy afloat, at least for now.

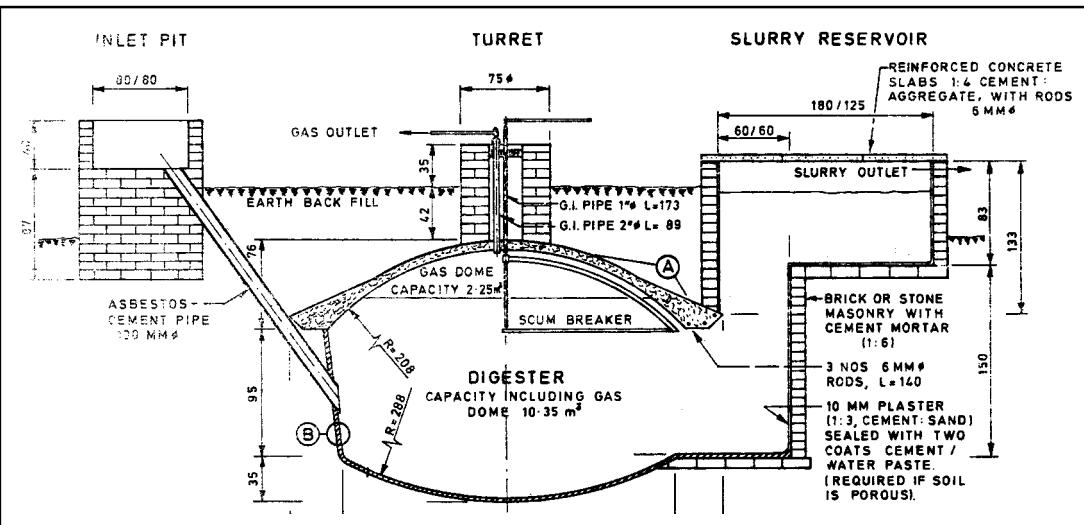
It all works wonderfully for the local elite and the foreign trekkers. It's a different story if you're a porter from another district or ethnic group. ♦



Made in Nepal

The Nepali biogas plant design uses an air-tight underground digester where bacteria breaks down the raw material in the farm waste to produce methane (see drawing below). The reaction has to take place in the absence of oxygen, and these bacteria occur naturally in the cow's stomach. The gas contains up to 70 percent methane and 30 percent carbon dioxide.

A biogas plant consists of five main components. The required quantity of dung and water is mixed in the inlet tank (*left*) and digested in the digester. The gas produced in the digester is collected in the dome. The digested slurry flows to the outlet tank and ends up in the compost pit as the gas pressure in the dome forces the effluent out. The gas is tapped from the top of the dome with a pipe that goes to the kitchen.



ANDREAS BACHMAN

estimated 9.3 million, and they theoretically produce enough dung for 1.4 million biogas plants. BSP aims to construct 200,000 new plants in the coming six years. "We've set up a loan and micro finance structure in order to reach poor people in more remote areas," says Bajgain.

All in all, biogas proves that a development effort based on a simple, practical idea, can yield excellent results. BSP recently obtained ISO certification, and by December, it will be legally independent from the Dutch aid group, SNV/Nepal which supported it. In the future, BSP

probably will not need the financial support of Western donors anymore. And with the Kyoto Protocol, it is possible for Nepal to actually trade CO₂ emission. Western countries that contaminate the environment way too much and have difficulty to keep within the limits set in Kyoto, can buy reduction of CO₂ emission from countries that don't produce CO₂.

Even though biogas plants produce methane, which is a more powerful greenhouse gas, most of it is burnt and its volume is negligible compared to emissions from fossile-fuel

burning cars. One biogas plant reduces CO₂ emission by 4.7 tons per year, and the Kyoto trade-in for one ton of reduction can be up to \$10. "Considering the increasing number of plants, we're talking about a lot of money," Bajgain says with a big smile. "The beautiful part is the money has to go back to the program which generated the reduction. The government can't buy guns with revenues. It would be enough to finance our whole program. The ball is now in the government's court." ♦

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DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Global Nepalis go local

The four-day global Nepali extravaganza in Kathmandu has ended with the organisers ecstatic about the outcome. The First Non-Resident Nepali Conference managed to get a government commitment on treating overseas Nepali investment as foreign direct investment, an agreement on a legal framework for future projects and even issuance of a special ID card for people of Nepali origin. Although dual citizenship got a lot of media attention, it wasn't pursued with too much vigour by delegates.

"We are overwhelmed by the response and by the cooperation and help shown by the government," said Bhim Udas of the international coordination committee. "It was much better than we expected."

The conference has already announced projects funded by NRNs including a 200-room old peoples' home in Bharatpur, an ICT venture and possibly a hydropower investment.

The government has promised the delegates to instate a separate law for NRNs. "An official committee is being formed to look after the recommendations made by the conference," said Yogendra Shakya, conference moderator. "But, the ball is in the NRN's court to prove that they will do what they say."

More mouths

UNFPA's State of World Population Report 2003, released last week, shows that Nepal's population more than doubled from 9.4 million in 1960, to 23.2 million in 2001. Nepal's current population of 25.2 million will double to 50.8 million by 2050, with an average growth rate of 2.2 percent. Forty-two percent of Nepalis are below 15 years, and nearly half the female population is within reproductive age. These are ominous statistics for the country's future demographic trends. UNFPA says adolescents between 10-19 years of age make up about 1.2 billion around the world. The world's population estimated at 6.3 billion will grow to 8.9 billion by 2050, with a spike in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Dead children

Four children were killed and five injured in an army attack on a school where Maoists had forced students to watch a cultural program. Rebels dragged children back to the Shradha Secondary School in Doti from their homes to force them to watch their cultural program. Fifteen minutes into the show, about 75 army personnel in civvies arrived. "We raised our hands and told the army we are just students, but they started firing," says Dharma Kumari Bhutyal, one of the injured students now at Bheri Anchal Hospital in Nepalgunj where he is undergoing treatment. "If the Maoists had not forced us to attend the program, my friends would be alive today," Bhutyal told the human rights group INSEC. One of the children is in critical condition. A delegation from the Human Rights Commission and Coalition for Children as Zones of Peace are on their way to Doti to investigate the incident this weekend. The army says it killed 17 armed Maoists in the incident.

Making connections

Last week the Dutch airline Martinair began direct air service between Kathmandu and Amsterdam every Wednesday. The flight will be operated with a stopover in Sharjah and offers connections through Schiphol airport to 75 destinations worldwide. Martinair replaced the service previously operated by the KLM charter subsidiary, Transavia.

Food day

Food-for-work programs in Nepal are running into problems because of the security situation. GTZ, the German aid group, and the UN's World Food Program are involved in food aid. Ulf Wernicke of GTZ, however, says no programs have been withdrawn so far although a rural development program in Bhojpur was suspended after its building was burnt by unknown attackers. On World Food Day Thursday, WFP warned it would consider suspending its aid if it was threatened or harmed. Maoists have resorted to occasional looting of food convoys in the midwest and blockaded others from reaching certain district headquarters.



Winrock International

Putting Ideas to Work

Announcement for travel and field research grants : Winter Session 2003

Winrock International, Nepal, is pleased to assist promising young Nepalese scholars by providing them with partial research and travel grants. The research grant is for students to carry out field research related to Masters/PhD degree whereas the travel grant is for researchers to present research papers at international conferences. **The grant program will exclusively cover aspects of equity and environmental justice in the management of natural resources.** Therefore, applications for both types of grants, should clearly state how the outcome of the research contributes to the enhancement of socio-economic equity and how it benefits the disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people in the society. Acknowledging the particular importance of women professionals in promoting sustainability in the natural resource management sector, 50% of the total number of grants i.e. both travel and research, will be allocated to women candidates.

Conditions for the grants:

A) Eligibility: Applicants, who have completed their Bachelor's degree and are actively engaged in research or in a graduate academic program in natural resource management fields viz. land, water, energy, environment, forest etc., are eligible to apply. Research proposals as well as conference papers must have adopted social science research methodology rather than natural science or technical research.

B) Types and amount of grants: In order to support as many scholars as possible with a limited amount of funds, the program is strictly confined to the partial support only. The maximum support for Ph.D. and Master research will be 60,000 and 40,000 Nepali Rupees, respectively. In the case of Travel Grant, the amount will be up to 50,000 Rupees. However, in all cases, priority will be given to the cost effective applications.

C) Announcement of award winner: The research grants applicant will be informed (by telephone, email or post) about the status of his/her application within 4 weeks of the last date of submission of applications. However, in the case of Travel grants, evaluation of the applications will be made every month. The applications for Summer Session research grants should reach Winrock by November 30, 2003. The applications for travel grants for the same period should reach Winrock by March 31 2004.

Note: Electronic application including the proposal/paper is also acceptable. Please contact Winrock International for the grants application form and other detailed information.

Applications should be mailed to:

Application for Research/Travel grant
Winrock International, P. O. Box 1312
Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 4467087, 4472839
madhikary@winrock.org.np


Winrock International
Putting Ideas to Work

Micro-finance Specialist Wanted

Winrock International seeks a micro-finance professional to promote credit for small-scale renewable energy technologies (e.g. biogas, solar PV, and pico-hydro). S/he will be responsible for capacity building of local-level micro-finance institutions (MFIs), so they can provide loans to farmers for small-scale renewable energy technologies.

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- Strong communication skills in both written and spoken Nepali and English required.
- Applicant should have a Masters Degree in Business Administration, Economics, or Business Studies. Exceptional candidates with a Bachelor's Degree can be considered.

Salary and benefits will be commensurate with qualifications, experience, and salary history. Women candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.

Please send your CV with cover letter and 3 references to: **Winrock International, P.O. Box 1312, Kathmandu, Nepal** or by virus-free e-mail to winrocknepal@winrock.org.np

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interviews. Phone or personal enquiries will not be entertained! Completed applications should arrive no later than **October 22nd, 2003**.

OPINION

The Thai model

King Gyanendra says he wants to be an 'active constitutional monarch'. We take a look at the Thai monarchy for clues about what it could mean.



both (pic, top).

There may be lessons for Nepal from the manner with which Thailand's much-revered King Bhumibol has historically used constitutional powers to intervene on matters of the state. Over his 57-year reign, he has stepped in only a few times. Had he intervened more frequently, he would perhaps not have remained a constitutional monarch. The interventions have been aimed at defusing crises, restoring stability and consolidating democracy. As soon as things have gone back on track, he withdrew from the scene.

The most recent was during the May 1992 military coup attempt when violence spread in Bangkok. It looked as if the power struggle would be long-drawn with many casualties. The king summoned Prime Minister Gen Suchinda and coup leader Col Chamlong and they were shown on Thai television kneeling in front of the king, who admonished

The effect of the broadcast was electric. Chamlong surrendered and Suchinda resigned. Interventions like these have given King Bhumibol the label of an 'active constitutional monarch'. Had he been just a literal Westminster-style constitutional monarch, perhaps he would not have intervened in 1992.

The monarchy has not always been a central institution in Thailand. It was largely eclipsed for over 25 years from 1932 to 1957, when the military marginalised the monarchy. It was primarily the present monarch who, by playing his role creatively, has brought the institution to center-stage. But he did this without exercising military or administrative control, just by using the moral authority derived from his personal charisma and popular respect.

The 1932 coup by a group of mid-level military and civilian officials forced King Prajadhipok to relinquish power, transforming absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. The coup leaders, who had studied in France, called themselves 'promoters' and viewed the monarchy as being backward and a hindrance to progress. After taking power, the junta forbade the king from interacting with the public and

discontinued royal ceremonies in which the king participated. It even prohibited home display of portraits of the king and queen.

For the next 25 years, the royalty was present in Thailand only in name. The 1932 coup group envisioned a three-phase process of political development. First, a provisional constitution establishing an assembly of 70 coup-makers was to be enacted. Six months later, a new constitution would be drafted for a half-appointed and half indirectly elected National Assembly. Finally, a full representative government was to be instituted ten years later, or once half the population had primary level education, whichever happened first. In practice things did not move much beyond the first phase and the coup-makers kept control of the state apparatus.

Once King Bhumibol returned to Thailand 1951, after his studies in Switzerland, he aspired to become closer to the people. He even became a disc jockey on a private AM radio station within the palace premises. He started visiting remote parts of the country and interacting with neglected communities, and launched development projects for their welfare. Scholars have put forth his rural development programs as one of the reasons why Thailand's Maoist movement in the 1960-70s could not take root in those regions. Military crackdowns alone would not have eradicated the insurgency.

The king began to appear more frequently in public as a part of the military's strategy to strengthen its own fledgling legitimacy. Little did they realise that through small gestures, the monarchy was moving back to centre-stage of Thai life.

The king's role in the crisis of 1973 and 1976 stands out as important landmarks in the evolution

of Thailand's active constitutional monarchy. There were massive student demonstrations against military rule in 1973, and for a new constitution. The junta cracked down on the students, and King Bhumibol intervened, forcing the generals to resign and leave the country. The king then emerged as the patron of democratic reforms.

However, Thailand's new democracy was regarded with considerable suspicion by both the right (military interests) and the left (the student movement). Communists infiltrated the students and their radicalism grew with increasingly violent street protests. Warning that the situation was getting out of control, the military demanded the declaration of a state of emergency. Dismayed by the turbulent trend of democracy, the king consented, and in the public eye, he was seen as a restorer of stability.

On 20 May 1992, as the country descended into anarchy, King Bhumibol made an address to the nation watched by 50 million Thais. He said: "The confrontation has taken a dangerous turn, it has taken a considerable human toll and caused tremendous damage to public and private property. Should the confrontation prolong, the country could be wrecked. Each side wants to emerge victorious. Who wins? No one. All become losers, those in the confrontation, and worst of all, the community, the country, the people. What is the benefit of a victory on top of ruins?"

Lately, not having to look after the day-to-day affairs of state means that King Bhumibol is able to concentrate his energies with even more vigour in rural development. He has projected himself not as a Buddhist king, but as a protector of all faiths. It has been mainly due to his efforts that the cultural and religious minorities of Thailand have come to identify themselves with the Thai nation and participate in its development. ♦

Sudhindra Sharma is a visiting scholar at The Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. sudhindra@hotmail.com

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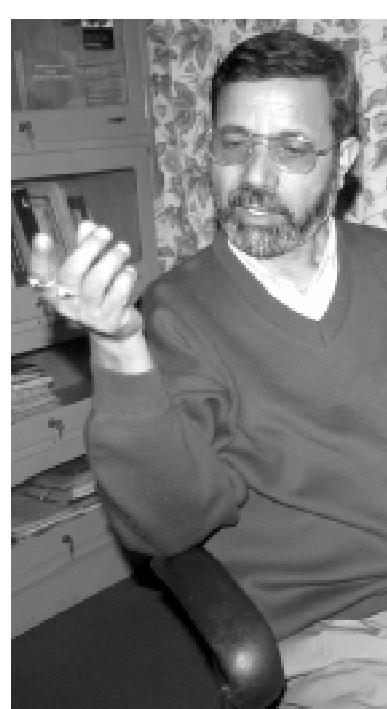
"Bhutan's donors have a role"

from p1

Says Rizal, "There was no need to divide the Bhutani people into four classes. There should have only been two classes: Bhutani and non-Bhutani." Rizal also objects to the stringent conditions the Bhutani government would place even on those who would qualify to return. "Even those who go back stand to suffer," he says.

Living precariously in exile, Rizal is cautious about not blaming any other country but his own. "Nepal didn't invite the refugees," he insists. "The Bhutani government chased them away. It is flatly to blame for this." It is critical, he says, for third countries to become more active in resolving the crisis: "India is our nearest neighbour, and is so generous in giving aid to Bhutan. India must speak out in a neutral way."

He also says it is time for Bhutan's donors to be more vocal. "It was after the UNDP came to Bhutan in the 1970s, and it was after they began rural development work that the Bhutani government chased away the Lhotsampas, calling them foreigners," he argues. "The UNDP knows how many houses there were in every village. Now those Lhotsampa families aren't there any more."



Governments providing aid to Bhutan must play a role in mediating the crisis, says Rizal. "The international community knows what happened. Donor countries have to pressure the Bhutani government." Besides India, donors include Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria and Japan. "There will be no solution until the international community becomes involved," says Rizal. "They are the center of our hopes right now."

The Nepali delegation heading for Thimpu next week includes Foreign Secretary Madhuram Acharya, Assistant Secretary Madan Kumar Bhattarai, Home Assistant Secretary Sushil Jung Rana and is headed by Ambassador-at-Large Bhekh Bahadur Thapa. In an unprecedented move, the Nepali government has invited refugee leader SB Subba and a team from the refugee camps for consultations in Kathmandu.

Rizal, who now heads the exiled Human Rights Commission of Bhutan, sees the repatriation of the refugees as a crucial step in establishing civil rights in his country. He told us: "This is not a personal matter anymore, it concerns 100,000 people living in utter frustration." ♦

"No excitement in the market."

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Cash flow becomes sluggish.

But there is huge liquidity in the market and shares are being snapped up.

Shares are a different story. Bank shares are doing well, but I don't think it's the same for others. There may be liquidity but people are not willing to spend. Cash is not moving the way it should.

Is the growth of the middle class making a difference on volume?

Definitely. Consumer electronics, even motorcycle sales, are on the rise despite the overall dip in the market. Goods that were deemed luxuries in the past have now become essentials. The moment people have some disposable income, consumer electronics is one sector that benefits the most.

But isn't unbridled consumerism bad for the environment?

All right, let's talk about, say, motorcycles. The total annual revenue the government gets out of this business is Rs 1.4 billion. Should we limit the number of motorbikes or do we start building infrastructures like flyovers and new roads? Only rich countries can think in terms of stopping vehicle growth. Can we think in terms ending a source of such profitable revenue? What are you going to offer as a substitute to the middle class when there isn't a mass transportation system?

How do you view Nepal's entry into WTO?

I feel it happened at the wrong time. The WTO could be great for Nepal because we want to attract foreign investment. But, in today's law and order situation, do you think any foreign investment is going to come into the country? Even the existing foreign investors are packing up. Now, with WTO you are also removing protection for domestic industries. We need to be competitive both domestically and internationally. Why should we make our consumers suffer? The whole reason we signed on is for foreign investment. But if that's not going to come, then what is the point? We are heading towards disaster.

How will consumers suffer with the WTO?

We are neither as competitive nor as progressive as industries elsewhere. We are probably making consumers pay for our inefficiency. Since our cost of production is higher and the economy of scale is less, consumers pay for the deficit. The industries run because the government protects them. The WTO will remove those barriers. We will be forced to become more competitive. Our cost of production will have to match international rates if we are to survive.

But isn't being competitive better for industry and better for consumers?

I would not say that we know all the tricks of the trade. The WTO is a huge thing to study. Principally, we need to be watchful and so does the government. In the broader view, if the law and order situation gets better, consumers and the country are going to benefit from the WTO.

Keeping ahead of the competition, Shekhar Golchha has his eye on the bigger, longterm prize for the Golchha Organisation. Nepali Times caught up with this busy managing director to talk about Dasai-Tihar consumerism, corporate responsibility, his views on Nepal signing up with the WTO and survival of the fittest.

Nepali Times: Are Nepali consumers consuming?

Shekhar Golchha: Right now the overall business is suffering and there is no excitement in the market. The breakdown of the ceasefire has spoilt the consumers' mood. For example, people postpone buying decisions because electronic goods and automobiles are not basic necessities. During tough times, like at present, they are not psychologically comfortable.

But then, I also see this as an opportunity for people who can sustain and keep a positive attitude towards business. We will probably become stronger because when there is a market shutdown. Those who are not focused and cannot sustain their ventures will fold up. It leaves great opportunities for established businesses. This is the time to really grow for those who can take risks. I will not roll back any of my expansion programs. In fact, we just launched a big consumer scheme.

Which of your businesses is in best shape?

Motorcycle sales are still holding. There is no problem with that segment although the overall market has fallen, we have significantly improved our market share. Last month was very good for us. Even our consumer electronic business is sustaining, but the growth that is generally expected during this season is missing.

Should customers postpone buying decisions at this time?

During tough times, people tend to save more, thinking that if the situation deteriorates they will need their savings. Businessmen postpone their investment plans.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Wanted: Talent Agents

The best way to navigate the market for success.

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



PRANAY LIMBU

marketing game. Their talent lies in singing and composing music in isolation, and not in marketing. They should not even have to play the management game anymore, as Kuber's failed attempts in the course of the film demonstrate. In today's changed times, Kuber and his cohorts now require the services of a new breed of opportunity-seeking professionals who, as agents, can help, for a fee, such talents to make strategic career decisions that have higher chances of leading to both critical and commercial success.

Else, in the absence of such agents, singers such as Kuber in spite of their stunning talent, are destined to slide into obscurity and despair, always blaming others of "unhealthy competition" and so on. But the main reason why Dhiraj's career is doing well is that he exhibits an uncanny ability to double up as his own agent, always pushing himself and his music in the marketplace. Yes, one may argue that Dhiraj is a better salesman than a singer, but that point is moot in front of his raging commercial success in Kathmandu, while his potential rival Kuber is back to herding goats in Ilam.

Many years ago, poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota wrote something to the effect that only in Nepal might Byron remain a farmer, while Shakespeare does manual labour and Shelly becomes a shopkeeper. What Devkota could not have foreseen was that to succeed commercially in 2003, even Byron, Shakespeare and Shelly, not to mention Kuber Rai, need agents who value their talent enough to help them navigate the channels of business so that they can be pushed to the marketplace for success. ♦

One of the most memorable documentary films shown at the recently concluded Film South Asia '03 in Kathmandu was "History For Winners" by the first-time documentary-maker Pranay Limbu.

The film profiles two singers impartially: Kuber Rai and Dhiraj Rai, both of whom talk about achieving success as singers. In the late 1980s and the early 90s, while Kuber was being hailed as a successor to Narayan Gopal and feted in Kathmandu's 'modern' music competitions, Dhiraj from Khotang was eking out an existence as a struggling artist, something he did for 12 long years. These days, however, Kuber bides his time, taking care of his farm in his village in Ilam (*pic, top*), with almost no hope of re-launching his musical career, while Dhiraj has established himself as a nationally recognised commercially successful pop icon.

Talking with some members of the audience after the show, I found that most were sympathetic to Kuber, and were quite dismissive of Dhiraj's success. To some extent, this was understandable. With an earnest face and early-morning practice sessions with his son at the harmonium, Kuber comes across as

understanding.

And second, most of the times,

Nepali artists themselves—no

matter how supremely talented—

are simply not able to play the

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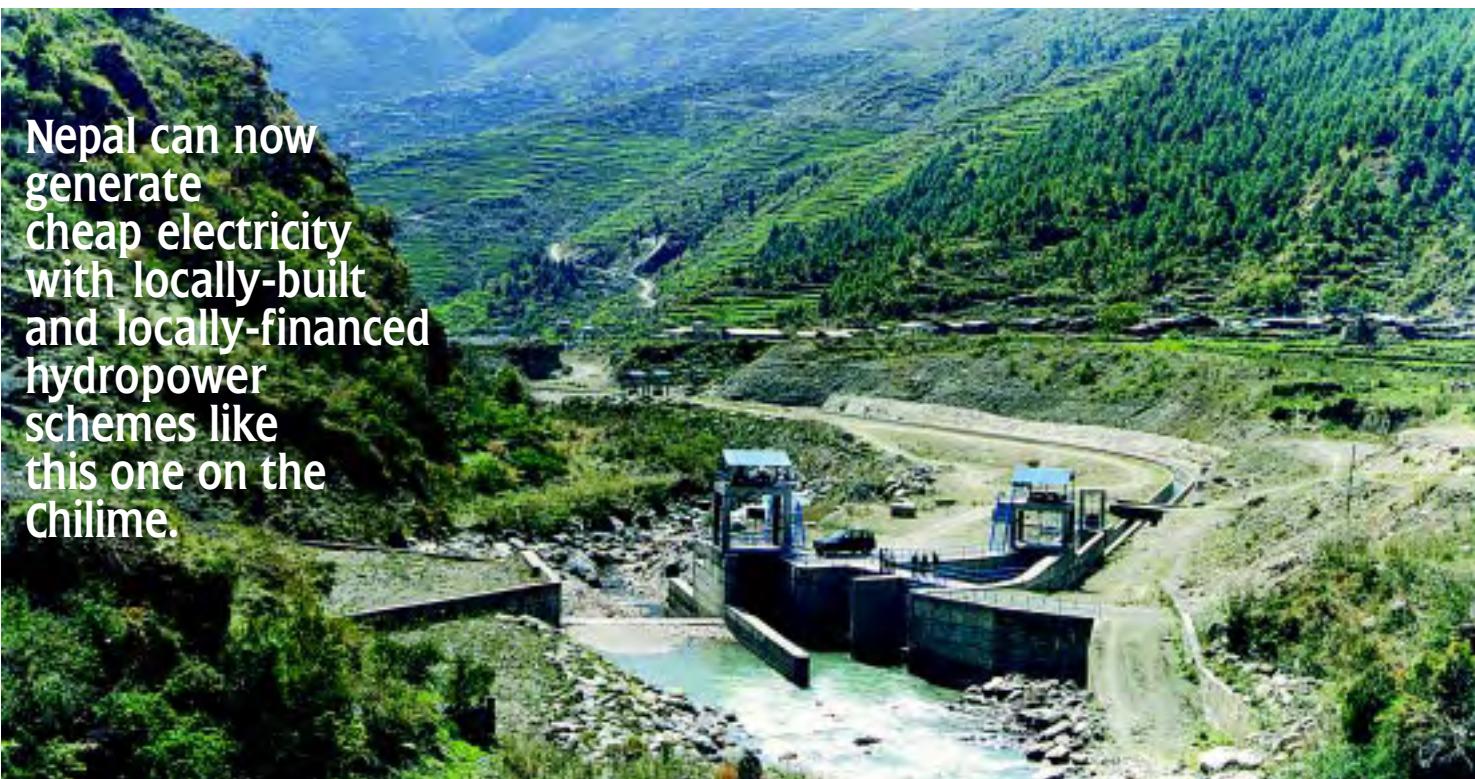
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People power



Nepal can now generate cheap electricity with locally-built and locally-financed hydropower schemes like this one on the Chilime.

BIKASH PANDEY

Last month, three Nepali power projects with substantial local rupee investments were tested and commissioned: Chilime (20MW) in Rasuwa, Piluwa (3MW) in Sankhuwasabha and Jhimruk (12MW) in Pyuthan.

Nepal's hydropower development took a wrong turn 25 years ago, and it has finally come back on track. Individual aid-funded projects are now being replaced by projects that enhance our own technical and financial capacity to meet energy needs. From the late 1970s onwards, foreign aid completely dominated the power sector. High-budget, glamorous, aid-funded projects like Kulekhani I and II, Marsyangdi, Kali Gandaki and even the ill-fated Arun III became much more attractive to politicians and policy makers than building smaller projects using local resources.

These mega-schemes were funded by multilateral banks or bilateral donors, and the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) effectively lost control over its hydropower strategy. The strict conditions of these donors meant that projects had to be designed and managed by international consultants and built by outside

contractors. Not even Indian or Chinese companies, which were building much larger projects in their own countries, could pre-qualify for construction contracts in Nepal.

Unfortunately, these externally funded, designed and constructed projects did little to enhance national capacity. The projects were expensive, and the country was forced on a path of longterm dependency and unaffordable energy costs. People began to question whether hydropower was even an asset. The irony of one of the poorest countries in the world building some of the most expensive projects was lost on our policy makers and civil society.

It took 15 years and the restoration of democracy, when Arun III exposed the contradiction between the Nepalis' need for cheap electricity and the high cost of production of foreign-built mega-projects. Nepali engineers, economists and civil society finally started looking at cheaper, indigenous projects. Although initially met with skepticism, it has now become clear that only through locally-financed, locally-built and locally-managed smaller projects would the price of electricity in Nepal come down to

How do they compare?

	Capacity	Cost	Cost per unit
Chilime	20MW	\$31m	\$1,550/kW
Piluwa	3MW	\$4m	\$1,450/kW
Kali Gandaki	144MW	\$450m	\$3,125/kW

affordable levels. Outside investment, it became clear, should supplement national expertise and resources. Not substitute for them. Today, projects like Piluwa and Chilime are living proof that the paradigm shift in Nepali hydropower planning have brought real change. These and other projects have extensive involvement of both in-country financial institutions and technical manpower. And the beauty is their cost of electricity generation is \$1,500 per kW, less than half that of larger aid-funded projects.

The success of the Chilime model is largely due to one man, Dambar Nepali (*see interview*). And it is such a success story that the management is already thinking of starting on the 26MW Upper Chilime next, and in future it wants to take on the 250MW Upper Tama Kosi for less than the per kilowatt cost of Chilime.

The Butwal Power Company (BPC), newly privatised in January

2003, is a consortium of Nepali and Norwegian investors who have invested Rs 952 million for 75 percent share of the company. The company owns Andhi Khola (5.1MW) and Jhimruk (12MW). BPC has rebuilt Jhimruk, and is selling energy to NEA at Rs 3.67 per kWh. The construction of Piluwa (3MW in Sankhuwasabha) and Syange (183 KW in Lamjung), undertaken largely by investors from the districts they are based in, were made possible under NEA's policy announced in 1998 to purchase energy from below-5MW hydro producers under a standard contract. The credit for this goes to Shailaja Acharya when she was Minister of Water Resources.

It is clear that the cost of construction of hydropower projects in Nepal depends strongly on the financing modality. The per kW construction costs of locally financed projects are lower than either large donor-funded projects or the International Independent

Power Producers (IPPs).

Interestingly, the mode of financing and the contracting that goes with it has a much stronger impact on project costs than economies of scale. Larger projects financed through aid are the most expensive, followed by medium scale projects built by the international private sector and the least expensive are the smaller, locally financed projects.

One possible reason for the relative high cost of aid funded projects is that they are generally designed for storage (Kulekhani) or for daily pondage (Marsyangdi and Kali Gandaki), and in the case of Arun III there would have been a 120 km access road whose cost was also included in the project. Such projects incur higher civil construction and land compensation costs compared to run-of-the-river projects. However, it still does not explain the two-and-a-half times higher cost compared to the rupee financed projects.

Large aid-funded projects are very expensive partly because of the rigid conditions of competitive bidding to the highest international standards. These standards are so high that only a handful of companies in Europe, the US and East Asia even pre-qualify. Many are also bound by tied-aid rules under which equipment purchases have to be made from the donor country. With international IPPs, the cost comes from dollar loan financing at interest rates ranging from 8-13%, which is higher than Nepali rupee loans and have to factor in rupee depreciation, and their perception of the risks in investing in Nepal.

There are, therefore, three main reasons why locally designed projects are less expensive:

- The cost of capital borrowed from local banks is at its lowest point in many years.
- Developers had complete flexibility in where they source their equipment and how they pick contractors, and they can get the best prices.
- Smaller projects mean fewer technical complications and the ability to breakdown contracts into small components that could be bid out among a large number of competitive Nepali, Indian and Chinese companies.

Besides being cheaper, local investments also benefit the national economy through much stronger backward linkages in construction and manufacturing. Usually, it is

only the equipment (25-40 percent of total cost) which has to be imported from overseas.

There is now plenty of evidence that Nepal's hydropower sector can attract substantial local investment both in equity and debt. Nine prominent Nepali business houses invested in the BPC, by far the largest privatisation so far in the country. Nepal is earning over \$1 billion every year in remittances from overseas workers. Channeling just 10 percent of this will meet most of our hydropower needs.

Nepali consumers suffer among the highest electricity prices in the region. The cost to the consumers is ultimately dependent on the Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) signed by independent power producers with NEA. PPAs signed in dollars will cost the Nepali consumer around Rs 25 per kWh in 2010, while local rupee based PPAs would cost less than half because of contractual escalation in tariffs and rupee depreciation.

There are some things that need to be ironed out. At present, there is a large difference between the PPAs signed between NEA and various private producers, even those with full local investment. For instance, with escalation by 2012, the PPA tariff for Chilime will be Rs 7.55, for Piluwa Rs 4.35 and for Jhimruk Rs 6.57. There is no longer any justification for negotiating different prices for energy from each supplier for future run-of-the-river schemes under 25MW.

One of the big changes in the last 10 years is that Nepal's donors have finally realised that large projects have diseconomies that make them expensive for Nepal. The World Bank's recently approved Power Development Fund will be financing smaller projects in the under-30MW range.

Future support from the international community to Nepal's power sector will be most effective if it is used to support both NEA in the public sector, and private Nepali sector companies to increase their capability to build low cost, high quality projects. The hydropower sector in Nepal needs technical support and financing to carry out projects of the size that it can manage itself. ♦

Bikash Pandey is an energy specialist and country representative of Winrock International.



Officials approved \$30 million in extra payments to contractors of the Kali Gandaki project without the board's approval.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Under pressure to get the Kali Gandaki hydroelectric plant inaugurated by King Gyanendra by next month, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is trying to hush up controversy over a shady transfer of cost overruns in Nepal's biggest power project.

The NEA board initially wanted an explanation about the

Big hydro, big hanky-panky ?

unauthorised payment of \$30 million to the project's Italian civil contractor without its approval. But management has watered down the inquiry, and only asked for reasons for the cost overrun.

"The entire issue has been hushed up," a senior NEA official told us. "The board did discuss whether action should be initiated against the culprits, but management is helping them get away." NEA has maintained the overruns were legitimate billings due to delays caused by political upheavals and geological complications during construction, but declined to comment on allegations that it is trying to sweep the matter under the carpet. Independent analysts see the Kali Gandaki controversy as a textbook case of why large foreign-funded and foreign-built projects turn out to be so expensive.

NEA insiders say both the government and the authorities are under pressure from the project's major creditor, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to have the 144MW plant inaugurated by King Gyanendra as soon as possible.

"NEA and the Water Resources Ministry are already working for the inauguration and we are in regular consultation with the ADB over the issue of Kali Gandaki and other projects," says Finance Secretary Bhanu Prasad Acharya. ADB itself has refused to get involved in the dispute, saying it is a matter between the contractor and NEA, but it is also in a

hurry to close the project. "We are supposed to close the loan file between three to six months after the project is completed," says ADB's Peter Logan. "We have been reminding the government about the difficulties of keeping the project file open indefinitely."

NEA had approved a \$130 million bid by the Italian Impregilo SpA for an open-ended bill of quantities contract. By the end of the project, Impregilo and the American engineering consultant Morrison Knudsen International Inc (MKI) racked up a total of \$180 million. The extra \$50 million was paid by NEA officials over a period of five years, between 1997-2002, without informing the board. NEA's Managing Director was allowed to hand out only up to 20 percent (\$26 million) in excess of the agreed \$130 million cost on his own discretion. "The consultant supported the contractor and the bank backed the consultant," recalls an NEA official.

The ADB believes the \$180 million amount spent on civil works was still below the initial estimate of \$236 million. "That overestimation was the excuse the contractor used to escalate costs," says the NEA official who requested anonymity in an extensive interview. The \$428 million Kali Gandaki A has already begun generation from its three units, but Impregilo is still pressing for another \$5 million it says NEA owes it for delays in the project. ♦

Yes, the Nepali can

Damber Nepali was born in Jagate in Bhaktapur, and was educated in an orphanage. Excelling in his studies, he went on to do his PhD in the United States in hydropower development. Today, at age 52, Nepali has shown what Nepalis can do when they have vision, drive, integrity and willpower.

Six years after launching the Chilime hydropower project, this indigenously-

designed, locally-built and Nepali-financed powerplant has started supplying electricity to the national grid. The road to Chilime wasn't easy, but Nepali's patience and perseverance paid off. A few more people like Damber Nepali in every arena of national life, and we are sure, Nepal would be a different place. Rajendra Dahal spoke to Damber Nepali recently. Translated excerpts:

Rajendra Dahal: Why Chilime, and why you?

Damber Nepali: I had just returned from the US to join the Arun III project. We were asked to look at thermal power until Arun came onstream. But we started surveying rivers that could generate upwards of five megawatt, and went from Ilam to Darchula. We came across Chilime, a tributary of the Trisuli. It looked ideal, lots of water, a good head and we were happy. But we didn't tell anyone except the NEA's managing director. We'd learnt this the hard way: the best project gets hijacked by higher-ups.

We proposed that Chilime should be developed by a separate private venture and to invest the pension of NEA employees. Managing director Shanta Bahadur Pun encouraged us and got the board to approve the proposal.

Who did the design and financing?

We, the NEA engineers, did everything ourselves. We even attempted something never tried before: digging a 6m diameter tunnel that was 195m long. This boosted our self-confidence. We'd initially estimated the project would cost Rs 1.2 billion, but there were over-runs. The Chinese contractor couldn't do the job, so we replaced them with India's Larsen and Turbo. The delay pushed the cost up to Rs 2.32 billion. We financed it with equity and loan. NEA has 51 percent share, 25 percent is owned by NEA employees and 24 percent will be allocated for sale to the public.

Will people buy Chilime shares in these uncertain times?

We need to raise Rs 479 million from the public and employees, but no worries. We will be giving 10 percent dividends in the first year, and we can pay back all loans and investment in four to five years by selling electricity. Chilime generates 137 million units of electricity a year, each unit costs Rs 2.19 to produce, and our agreement with the NEA was to sell each unit at Rs 3 beginning in 1996, escalating by eight percent every year for 12 years. The

costs aren't going up much, and we can already sell each unit for Rs 5. The figures look good.

Did everything turn out as expected?

We said we will build it with Nepali money, we did it. We said we will design it ourselves, we did that, too. We said we will sell cheap electricity, and it is relatively cheap.

We said Chilime will be the beginning of a process, and we are already looking at building Upper Chilime next. Yes, the power is not as cheap as we planned. The delays put costs up.

Would you say Chilime is a model project for Nepal?

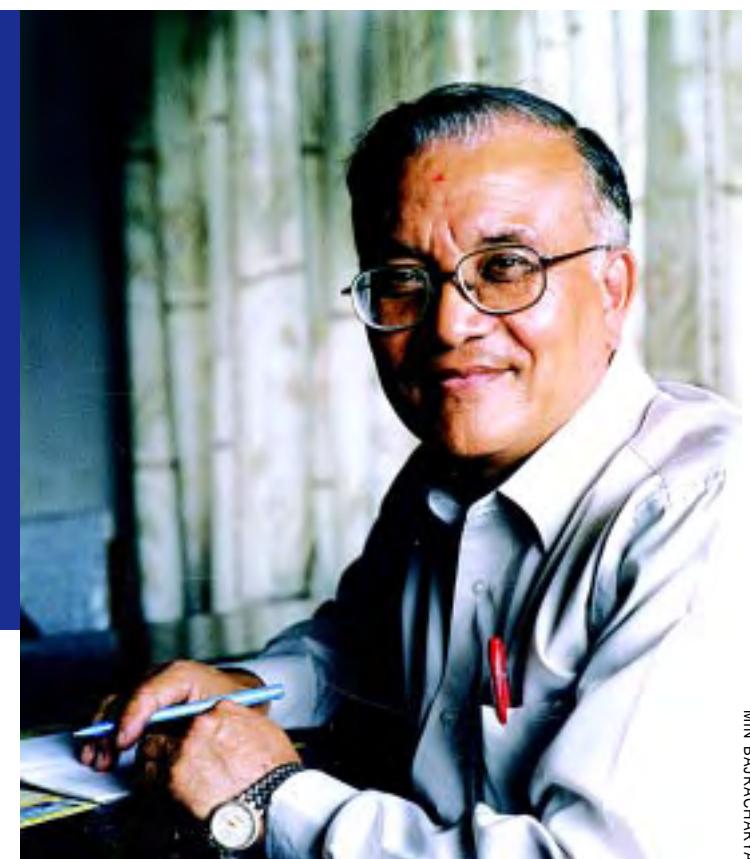
It can be, but we can't say that just on the basis of one project. After Upper Chilime, I think we can be certain. We have the expertise, the experience, the financing and we have the confidence. Money is the least of our problems—banks are lining up for financing, the pension fund is ready. We've stopped worrying about money.

What are the lessons of Chilime, then?

Those who used to say there is no money in Nepal, we need to borrow from abroad, have been proved wrong. If we need foreign engineers, we'll get them, otherwise we'll do it ourselves. We must now scale up, and go for Chilime's elder brother: Upper Tama Kosi. The geology is good, and it's just a question of whether we can raise up to Rs 22 billion locally. I think with the success of Chilime we can convince Nepalis to invest in hydropower projects. After all, Nepali workers overseas are sending home Rs 700 billion every year, we just need to divert Rs 5 billion every year. With rupee financing, we also obviate the danger of rupee depreciation for dollar denominated loans.

What were the main difficulties you faced with Chilime?

They tried to get me out of the project many times because the



MIN BAURACHARYA

higher-ups wanted to give the project to the private sector. They hassled me over the license, and they dropped a lot of hints. But I am the type that doesn't understand hints. Maybe just as well. Anyway, Bhola Chalise was the MD, and he helped me out.

So how did you save the project?

The biggest force were NEA employees. We were honest, so our morale was high, and we were proud that we had embarked on a project that would benefit the nation. I found this patriotism in the contractors, too, they didn't try to compromise on quality. As much as possible we employed local people, we didn't displace anyone and today every VDC in the area has electricity.

And personally?

This isn't just another job for me. I grew up in an orphanage, and I can't bring myself to work solely for personal benefit. I did it for my organisation and my country. And I will continue to do so. If I had become corrupt, this project wouldn't have been completed.

Have you met anyone else like you, ones who see beyond personal gain?

The NEA MD, Bhola Chalise, was one. Shailaja Acharya, who laid the foundation stone of Chilime, she was very positive about projects like these. Shanta Bahadur Pun was also a very positive director, but they didn't let him survive in NEA.

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COMMENT

by RALF DAHRENDORF



Living under occupation



An American soldier stands guard in an Iraqi market.

When I hear Americans such as US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice compare the occupation of Iraq with that of Germany (and sometimes Japan) after WWII, distant memories flood in, for I am a child of that experience. Indeed, in the twelve months following the unconditional surrender of Hitler's Nazi regime in May 1945, I lived under serial Russian, American and British occupation. Sometimes I think of myself as an expert in comparative occupation studies.

The first conclusion I draw from such experience is this: everything depends on who the occupying power is. When Soviet troops invaded Berlin at the end of April 1945, many of us went into the streets to welcome them. Such enthusiasm did not last long.

One day, Red Army tanks turned from the

main street in our quarter towards the crowd. When the crowd dispersed, the soldiers started looting, raping and pillaging. This continued for only a few days, but fear of the occupying Soviets never left even as they began to distribute food and set up a rudimentary administration. It soon became clear that they were in fact creating another dictatorship in place of the one they had removed.

In July, when Americans replaced the Soviets in our Berlin district, this changed. True, my beloved wristwatch (which I had miraculously saved throughout the weeks of Soviet occupation) was taken from me by an American soldier on my way home from school. But it soon became clear that this occupation held out hope of a better future.

This was even more evident when a few months later my family moved from Berlin to

Hamburg, then under British occupation. Suddenly, non-fraternisation with Germans—the American rule—was replaced by frequent contacts aimed at re-education, especially of the young. In those months, the seeds of my conversion to all things British were planted, which flowered decades later in my becoming a British citizen.

Such differences matter no less in Iraq today, and have done so from the first days of the occupation, when the British took Basra and the Americans Baghdad. But another difference is even more important.

When Germany was occupied, the old regime's defeat was total, utterly beyond dispute. After five-and-a-half years of war no one doubted the inevitability of occupation. That was different after Germany's Blitzkrieg against Poland. When my school was sent to

Iraq had little time to get accustomed to the notion of being an occupied country.

the Polish spa in the town of Zakopane, we were obviously enemies, unwanted in every respect. Soon a quarantine was imposed to prevent us from misbehaving towards the local people and, above all, to protect us from their wrath. I can still feel, with shame, the sense of being not only unwanted but of being an illegitimate invader in a proud country.

It could be argued that the Iraq war was too short, certainly too short for Iraqis to feel, as we Germans did, that the occupation was inevitable and bound to last for a long time. While Iraqis may be pleased to be rid of a murderous regime, they had little time to get accustomed to the notion of being an occupied country. In Germany, we thought for a while that the occupation would last forever, and that we perhaps deserved no better. I doubt whether many Iraqis share that feeling.

But the most important aspect of the German experience was the sense of where the occupation would lead. In the old Soviet zone, it soon became clear that it would lead to a totalitarian satellite regime. Those who could, left the Soviet zone and settled in the West; those who could not, faced the sullen existence of subjects rather than citizens. In the Western zones, a different set of expectations soon prevailed. As the occupying armies were replaced by civilian officials as administrators, and Germans were recruited to help them, the silver lining of Western democracy became more and more noticeable.

Again, differences mattered. In the French zone (so I learned later), the signs were less hopeful. More than that, there were hints of a desire for annexation, with

In retrospect, that turned out to be a blessing for Germany. A reviving Germany built modern factories, whereas the occupiers were saddled with old ones. But Germany revived because the Western occupation forces made clear their intention to let it do so, and helped indigenous forces on their way. After initial uncertainties, there was soon a clear and widely recognised vision of where the country should go.

Western Germany's occupation forces not only set an example of how this vision could be achieved, but found the right people and the right institutions to bring about reconstruction and progress. In principle, this can be accomplished elsewhere. In practice however, one cannot help wondering whether the German experience resulted from a unique set of circumstances, or at any rate, one not easily reproduced under the vastly different conditions of today's Iraq. ♦

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Ralf Dahrendorf, the author of numerous acclaimed books, is a member of the British House of Lords and a former Rector of the London School of Economics.

Carlsberg

Aid threatened

LONDON—New proposals over aid presented to the European Union come as a further threat to developing countries, two groups of leading NGOs in Britain and Germany said earlier this week. The new dangers come from supposedly legal amendments to an earlier draft for a pan-European constitution. BOND, a network of 280 British NGOs, expressed concern earlier over proposals that would subordinate development aid to a collective foreign policy. At the heart of the BOND objection lies the third broad section of the proposed constitution that deals with development cooperation, humanitarian aid and economic, financial and technical assistance. Similar reservations were articulated by German VENRO, the umbrella organisation of 100 independent and church related NGOs working in the fields of development cooperation, emergency assistance, development education and advocacy. According to VENRO and BOND, EU Treaty proposals on foreign and security policy imply that development and humanitarian aid will become a resource for the new EU Foreign Affairs Minister. (IPS)

Biotech and hunger

WASHINGTON—The development community is divided over the best course of action to fight malnutrition and hunger, the leading causes of death and sickness worldwide. On Tuesday, activists celebrated a \$25 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to HarvestPlus, a global research project to breed and disseminate crops for better nutrition. HarvestPlus is spearheaded by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

The new grant, in addition to \$3 million from the World Bank and \$2 million from USAID, will allow HarvestPlus to greatly expand its activities, including research into biotechnologically improved crops. HarvestPlus' work on bio fortification will focus on six staple crops that are consumed by the majority of the world's poor: rice, wheat, maize, cassava, sweet potato and common beans.

Critics in the development community say the money spent on technology would be more useful elsewhere. Anuradha Mittal, director of the Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First) believes "hunger cannot be fought by technological means alone," adding that it must be accompanied by "social change, such as access to markets, fair wages, water and land rights." (IPS)

COMMENT

by WANG GUNGWU

The man who made Malaysia

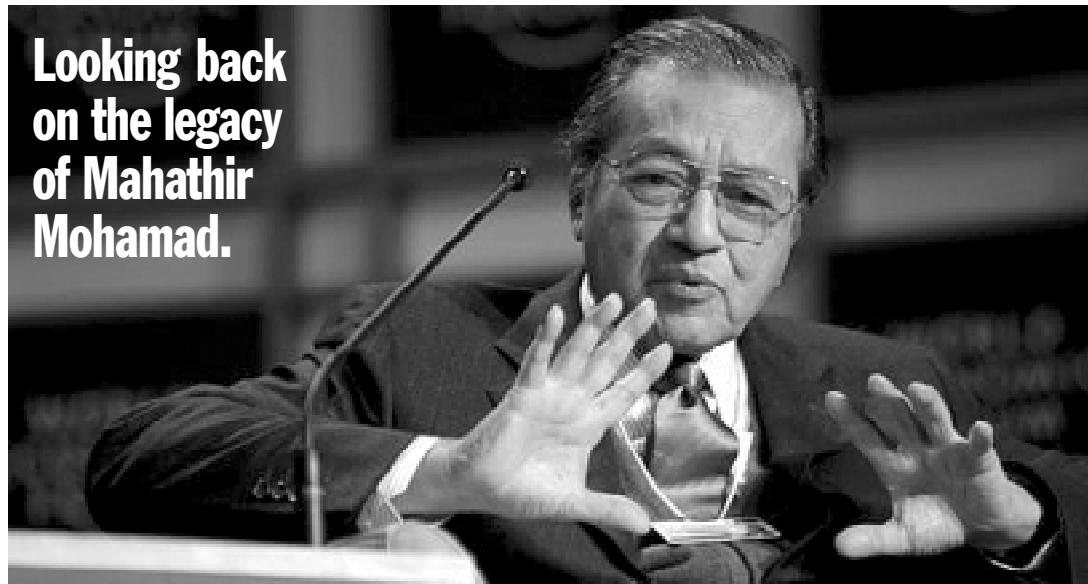
Dr Mahathir Mohamad is stepping down after serving more than 22 years as the leader of Malaysia and its ruling United Malay National Organisation (UMNO). Today's gleaming, modern Malaysia is unimaginable without Mahathir and UMNO.

Mahathir began his career as a Malay nationalist who sought to promote the rights of the Malay majority after the British left. But he also recognised that the country's sizable, and economically powerful, Chinese and Indian minorities, among other groups, were critical to the country's development and should be persuaded to accept the new Malay-led state as their own.

He became prime minister in 1981, following the end of the Vietnam War and Indonesia's stabilisation following the bloody civil strife of the 1960s. The global economic system was buoyant and East Asia, not least Mao's China, was more deeply committed than anyone expected to support that system.

This encouraged Mahathir to make a clean break with the British colonial heritage. His call to "look East" marked the beginning of an ambitious

Looking back on the legacy of Mahathir Mohamad.



industrialisation policy that culminated, during his tenth year in power, with the Vision 2020 plan to catch up with Western levels of development. By 1997, Mahathir was at the pinnacle of his power, inspiring the country to believe all of the country's communities would see themselves as sharing a common Malay nationality.

The Asian financial crisis that struck later that year halted the region's trajectory. Against most international advice, Mahathir imposed capital controls and a fixed exchange rate for the ringgit

to buy time for recovery. He shifted the sense of crisis away from economics to politics (where he retained an iron grip) by removing his designated heir, Anwar Ibrahim, who was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. Mahathir restored his authority so thoroughly following the crisis that he was able to handpick Abdullah Badawi as his successor.

The launch of the 'war on terror' provided him with another opportunity to recover politically. In the face of a world frightened by Islam, Mahathir repeatedly

reminded the world that he presided over the one country in the world where a Muslim majority and large non-Muslim minorities live in peace.

Initially, his ambitious plans to make Malaysia an economic model for developing nations exposed him to both ridicule and admiration. But he was determined to break the traditional Malay mold, spurred on by the successes of neighbouring Singapore. In many ways, he has succeeded. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

Wang Gungwu is Director of the East Asia Institute, University of Singapore.

Spaced out

BEIJING – China laid its claim to being a growing technology giant by launching its first man in space Wednesday, breaking over 40 years of galactic domination by the United States and Russia. At around 9AM local time, a single astronaut, or 'taikonaut' as known to the Chinese, lifted off in the Shenzhou V (meaning Divine Vessel) from the space launch centre in Jiuquan, near the Gobi desert. Lt Col Yang Liwei, 38, and member of the military-trained Chinese Astronaut Team, became the first Chinese astronaut in outer space.



China's space program is one of the few successful parts of the vast and costly military industrial complex which Chairman Mao Zedong created from the early 1960s and which at its Cold War peak employed 16 million people, including two million scientists. After the successful launch of Shenzhou V, Beijing is also planning to send a human being to the moon by 2010 and to establish a space station of its own. It also wants its own Hubble telescope and a sky laboratory. Chinese officials have emphasised that everything sent in space aboard Shenzhou V was made in China. (IPS)

Tougher action

CANBERRA – Community groups are celebrating their success in persuading the Australian government this week to boost efforts to counter the trafficking of women, mostly from South-east Asia, to this country for sexual slavery. A fortnight ago, Project Respect, the leading support and advocacy group for women trafficked to Australia, released its submission to a government inquiry on the trafficking of women and outlined a '10-point plan' to effectively counter the trade which is estimated to be worth tens of millions of dollars annually.

To the project coordinator Kathleen Malzhen's amazement, the Australian government announced that it would provide an additional \$14 million to an expanded program incorporating most of Project Respect's key points on countering the trafficking of women to Australia. As part of the additional efforts, the federal government will expand to 13 the existing 10-person Australian Federal Police Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Team. Malzhen is optimistic that 'Stop the Traffic', a national conference to be held in Melbourne next week, will hasten the development of detailed plans to counter the problem. (IPS)

TV news is bad for truth

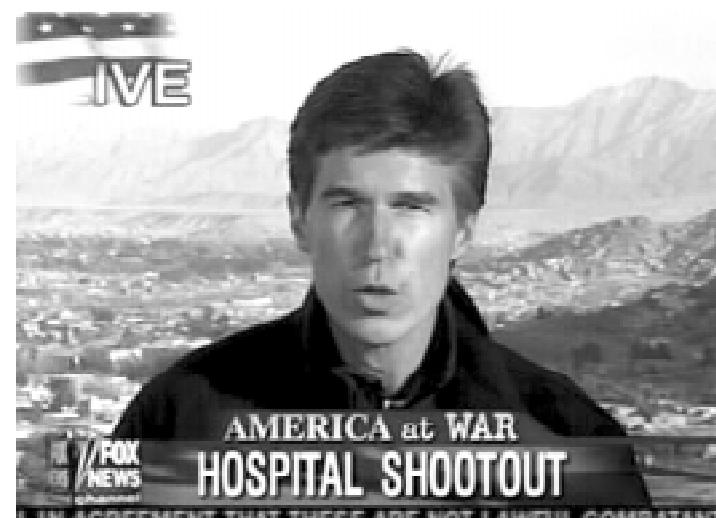
JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON . . .

The more commercial television news you watch, the more wrong you are likely to be about key elements of the Iraq War and its aftermath, according to a major new study last week. The University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) study is based on several nationwide surveys it conducted with California-based Knowledge Networks since June. PIPA found that 48 percent of the public believe that US troops found evidence of close pre-war links between Iraq and the al-Qaeda terrorist group, 22 percent thought troops found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and 25 percent believed that world public opinion favoured Washington's going to war with Iraq. All three are misperceptions.

The report, 'Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War', also found that the more misperceptions held by respondents, the more likely it was they supported the war and depended on commercial television for news about it. The study is likely to stoke a growing public and professional debate over why mainstream news media—especially the broadcast media—were not more sceptical about the Bush administration's pre-war claims, particularly regarding Saddam Hussein's weapon stockpiles and ties with al-Qaeda.

PIPA found high correlations between respondents with the most misperceptions and their support for the decision to go to war. Of those who believe that both WMDs and evidence of al-

The more television you watch about Iraq, the less you know.



Remote control

Percent of US public which believes US troops found evidence of close pre-war links between Iraq and the al-Qaeda

48%

Percent which believes US troops found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq

22%

Percent of Americans who believe world public opinion favours Bush's war in Iraq

25%

Qaeda ties have been found in Iraq and that world opinion backed the United States, a whopping 86 percent said they supported war.

More specifically, among those who believed that Washington had found clear evidence of close ties between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, two-thirds held the view that going to war was the best thing to do. Only 29 percent felt that way among those who did not believe that such evidence had been found.

News sources also accounted for major differences in misperceptions, according to PIPA, which asked more than 3,300 respondents since May where they "tended to get most of (their) news". Eighty percent identified broadcast media, while 19 percent cited print media.

Among those who said broadcast media, 30 percent said two or more networks; 18 percent, Fox News; 16 percent, CNN; 24 percent, the three big networks—NBC (14 percent), ABC (11

percent), CBS (9 percent) and three percent, the two public networks, National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

For each of the three misperceptions, the study found enormous differences between the viewers of Fox, who held the most misperceptions, and NPR/PBS, who held the fewest by far.

Eighty percent of Fox viewers were found to hold at least one misperception, compared to 23 percent of NPR/PBS consumers. All the other media fell in between.

CBS ranked right behind Fox with a 71 percent score, while CNN and NBC tied as the best-performing commercial broadcast audience at 55 percent. Forty-seven percent of print media readers held at least one misperception.

PIPA found that political affiliation and news source also compound one another. Thus, 78 percent of Bush supporters who watch Fox News said they thought the United States had found evidence of a direct link to al-Qaeda, while 50 percent of Bush supporters who rely on NPR/PBS thought so.

The study also debunked the notion that misperceptions were due mainly to the lack of exposure to news. Among Bush supporters, those who said they follow the news "very closely", were found more likely to hold misperceptions. Those Bush supporters, on the other hand, who say they follow the news "somewhat closely" or "not closely at all" held fewer misperceptions. ♦ (IPS)

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Bamdev Gautam, CPN UML standing committee member, in Kantipur, 12 October

कान्तिपुर

This is not the first time I received *tika* from the king. It should not be something that needs to be debated. This is not against the political agitation. This is something I've done ever since I became a minister. Since my childhood, respected seniors would put *tika* for me. I put *tika* for others too. Dasai is a Nepali cultural festival that is not limited to certain castes and tribes, or even to Hindus exclusively.

I have not committed any crime by receiving *tika* from the king. As usual, he asked me how I was and I replied that I was fine. We obviously could not discuss national issues in half a minute. As long as we accept the king as the head of the state, there is nothing wrong with receiving *tika* from him.

Sometimes I ignore the party's actions. No one from the party has contacted me as yet. If the king is accepted as head of the state, what logic is there in arguing that you must not take *tika* from him? Are we saying that we do not need the king? While it is true that there is a movement against his regressive move, it aims at reaching an agreement. Our fight is not for a republic neither are we moving towards discarding the monarchy.

If the movement is about bringing the king back on the constitutional track, then we must think of ways of

reaching an understanding. The Dasai *tika* has helped root out bitter feelings, which is why I believe the *tika* I received will help our movement. Leaders from all the political parties should have done so too. Maybe we would have better results. Remember, it was ping-pong diplomacy that brought the US and China closer.

The good news is that we have created awareness among our political workers about regression. Even the people comprehend it better now. The parties have been able to foil the efforts of the king and the Maoists to isolate and eliminate our existence. The reinstatement of the parliament was initially only the Nepali Congress' demand. Later, all five political parties adopted it, which is why the UML began to demand reinstatement.

I have been against the idea from the start, although I would be happy to see our general secretary become prime minister. Should the king give someone else the post, we will not derail the movement. I believe our general secretary is the man for the job. He deserves the king's nomination because he has the support of all the parties. The Surya Bahadur Thapa government is unsuccessful, I delivered this message to the king.

There is no chance of my becoming prime minister and it doesn't interest me either. Neither the five parties nor my party will agree on the

nomination.

It is untrue to say the movement lost momentum because of us. The government's undemocratic and inhumane attitude that banned public meetings in the capital and imposed curfews in many districts is also to blame. It became a problem to even travel on the highways. This was then the Maoists broke the ceasefire. We had no choice but to change the direction of our movement. It didn't have anything to do with ambition or greed for power.

We have tried to let the public know that we are attempting to reach an understanding with the king. If he ignores us, he will be the loser. If the king supports multiparty democracy, he ultimately has to coexist with the political parties. He cannot afford to ignore the political parties because we are the people. If he chooses to do so, he will have to adopt tyranny and ban us. How can the king ensure his future without the people?

The politics of boycott [of functions attended by government officials] has failed many times. If this idea is adopted, you run the risk of being boycotted yourself. Although I repeatedly opposed the idea, the five parties stuck to the strategy. Even the people do not endorse it. The politics of harmony is the culture of multiparty democracy. The parties should not adopt boycott politics. If we do, it will backfire on us.

Maoists on air

Babita Basnet in Dang
Ghatna Ra Bichar, 15 October

Locals in Rukum, Salyan and Jajarkot are tuning into the 'people's radio station', launched by the Maoists. On air everyday from 6-8PM, the program begins with an innocuous "This is the people's radio, regional broadcast centre, 95.1 MHz. Greetings to our listeners." After 10 minutes of Maoist songs, the news bulletin starts with an overview of Maoist activities around the country. The army and the police are labeled "royal plunderers", and their casualties are described with lively enthusiasm. The report section usually focuses on the future of the 'people's war', justifies Prachanda breaking the ceasefire and discusses the failure

of some Maoist missions. The people are not the only ones listening. The state security forces never miss a single roadcast. A senior army officer says the program helps the army glean information about Maoist activity, although the whereabouts of the station itself remains a mystery. The locals, however, confess the main draw are the catchy songs of the revolution.

Malpractice

Bheshraj Ghimire in
Samacharpatra, 14 October

Sixty-five-year old Tara Prasad Poudel and his family from Sindhupalchok district was suffering from severe ear infection and came to Kathmandu for medical help.

Two pathologists, from two

different private hospitals, diagnosed Poudel with cancer. They told his son, Bimal, there was no need for a second opinion. So the family made an expensive journey to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, where they learned that Poudel did not have cancer. "If we had believed the Nepali doctors, my father would have died," says Bimal. Hari Govinda Shrestha, president of Association of Clinical Pathologists, Nepal says he sympathises and suggests the family take their case to the Medical Council for compensation.

Kidnapped

Rameshwor Bohara in
Rajdhani, 13 October

राजधानी
Maoist rebels took some youth from Kusum in Banke district

with them to attack the Armed Police Force training camp last Friday. None of them have returned home and their parents are worried.

"A few hours before they launched that attack, they came home and demanded that my son join them," says Chaudhary, who chose to identify himself only by surname. "I refused but they forced my son to get dressed and leave with them. He hasn't come back." They kick-opened closed doors, dragging out those who hid inside their houses.

"They kicked my door down too," says a septuagenarian. "But, how could I meet their demand? I have no son." Those who didn't have sons were made to pay cash or kind. "They took my clothes, Rs 26,000 cash and some ornaments," said Bhadra Bahadur Thapa, a supervisor at the local

Road Department office. The locals are not worried about the money or possessions being snatched, but they fear their children were used as human shields in the attacks.

Hundreds of reported rebels took part in the unsuccessful Kusum attack, in which at least three dozen Maoists were reported killed. It isn't clear how many young men were taken from the village but now their families fear their sons are among the fallen.

Disappeared

Rajdhani, 16 October

राजधानी
Amnesty International has held the security forces responsible for the disappearance of 250 Maoists and their supporters, most of which took place during army

operations between November 2001 and October 2003.

According to an AI report, people have been randomly arrested, imprisoned and tortured. It also states that Maoists are equally responsible for the abduction and disappearances of many citizens. AI has asked the Maoists to respect the Geneva Convention and make public the whereabouts of those abducted and give compensation to their relatives. The group says that the Human Rights Commission should have more resources and has asked for help in establishing five monitoring regional offices. It has recommended that the government scrap the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Act 2002 after the reinstatement of parliament.



Headline: Prime minister at Nepali Congress tea party
Madhab Nepal (*left*): What's this? Have you forgotten everything?
Girija P Koirala (*right*): Of course not, I remember everything. A warm welcome... firm handshakes... and enjoyable tea together.

राजधानी Rajdhani, 12 October

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The steps taken by the King are patriotic acts.

- Manisha Koirala in Spacetime, 13 October

Nepalis lose employment

Annapurna Post, 11 October

अन्धपूर्ण पोष

Employers in India have laid off hundreds of Nepali employees suspected of being Maoists. The only way to get back their jobs is to produce papers verifying their innocence. Even those employed for decades in India have been targeted. Since the breakdown of peace talks on 27 August, fear of Maoist attacks has forced many Nepalis to emigrate in search of jobs. Now even that avenue seems to be closed to them. "If we stay at home, we live in fear of a Maoist attack. If we don't go abroad, there is no way to earn a livelihood," says Ramji Sigdel from Tanahu who just returned from Allahabad. Deepak Thapa from Gulmi says that Nepalis working in various companies were asked to bring documents from police authorities confirming their status. Those employed as factory workers and household servants bear the brunt of this new directive from the Indian government that authorises the investigation of "suspicious" Nepalis.

Meanwhile, young Nepalis at home are being told by Maoist workers not to attempt to leave for foreign employment. This is the first time that the Maoists have made such threats. At Bodhe in Dharan they threatened a young villager on his way to Malaysia that they would kill his family if he left. "There are not many young men left in the village and the Maoists have been forcing the remaining few to join the People's Army," says the villager.



Man Bahadur Rai The retreat from Burma

When we retreated, we found that everyone had converged at the place allotted to our unit. The British escaped at night by plane, leaving the ration godown open with no one to control it. They left us a signboard saying surviving troops were to report at Pantola near Dumdum airport in Calcutta. The difficult task was getting there across Burma.

The number of retreating forces swelled from 10, 12, 25 to 275. We followed the routes used by the Nagas. Occasionally, we had chance meetings with Japanese troops. We left quietly, often at night. Many were killed and we lost count of the dead. If someone were to retrace our route, they will surely find it marked by piles of human bones.

A new regiment, the Fourth Gurkha Rifles, was raised at Indaugyi in Burma. A regiment normally has four companies and when auxiliary personnel like orderlies are included, it numbers five. Each company had 128 heads, a regiment, therefore, would have 640 people. Only



Man Bahadur Rai

Lahurey ko Katha from Himal Books is a collection of memoirs based on oral testimonies of 13 retired Gurkha soldiers, all but one above 75 years. Translated from Nepali by Deb Bahadur Thapa for Nepali Times, this fortnightly column continues with Man Bahadur Rai's narration of fighting the Japanese in Burma during World War II. In the first excerpt, the British Gurkhas were attacked by Japanese forces on the Setang river in Burma. Casualties are very high and the Gurkhas are forced into retreat.

five men survived from that entire regiment. The Japanese knew where the Fourth Gurkha Rifles were going so they hid in the forest and lay in wait. As soon as the troops got there they opened fire and killed everyone. Subedar Mitra Bahadur was among those killed in that action.

In order to get rid off the stench, the Japanese dug a ditch on a mound and buried them. Perhaps the weight of the bodies was too much because when we got there the mound had given way. The human skulls, ribs, shinbones looked like a riverbank. It still smelled of the dead.

On our retreat we saw corpses of army personnel and civilians all over the route, on the road, many more lay inside the jungle. Dead children were propped under trees by those who fled the carnage. We became like chicks without the protection of a hen. On our departure from Burma we were 375 soldiers, not all Gurkhas. There were Maharastrian, Sikh, Garhwali and Madras regiments. We were the last of our regiments, never more than 10 from a single one.

When we reached Bhamo from Towdi our numbers swelled to form a battalion. The colonel

commanding the regiment was Jocket. He was of Italian origin and had joined the British army merely to earn his bread and butter. There we were, fleeing from the Japanese and the colonel wanted ceremonial parades with music. About a dozen of us joined his regiment. He asked where we came from and we told him our story. The colonel assured us that we would be safe and then asked us to take part in the parade from the following day.

We were in a fix. Had we known he was of Italian origin, we would have cut him to pieces

and devoured him, but a colonel is the boss of the regiment. The next morning we found ourselves in the parade. By that evening we decided to leave. Our decision was supported by others' suspicion.

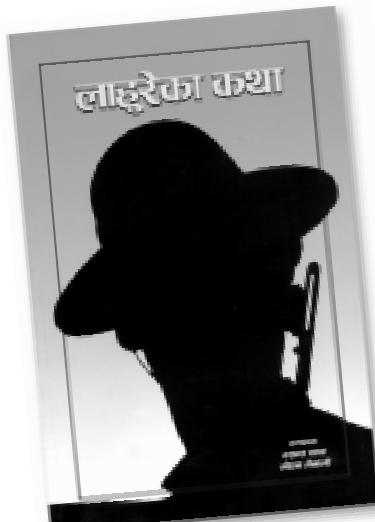
We concluded it would be folly to stay there any longer and decided to run away after dinner. The problem lay in picking a route. The Irrawaddy is a large river, one that we had to ford in any case, so we chose to go through Katha where a company of our regiment was stationed.

The only way to get there was by boat. The captain of the steamer was a Burmese who sided with the Japanese. All 375 of us approached the captain who flatly refused to operate his steamer under our command. We could not trust this Burmese, and being Gurkhas, it did not take long for us to reach a consensus. We decided to kill the captain and then order his assistant to take the steamer out. The boldest among the group, myself included, went to the captain and told him it was a

choice between conceding to our demand or forfeiting his life. We had our weapons on us: a Tommy gun can fire 22 rounds at a time.

We saw no reason to spare this rascal when so many had met with their end. He became scared when he realised that we were very serious. The captain promised to start the steamer at 9 in the evening, which would get us to our destination the next afternoon. Meanwhile we kept our weapons primed to meet any eventuality.

(To be continued)



Neruda and Nepal



poetry of *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* to the visceral and politically charged *Residence on Earth* or the delectably simple *Elemental Odes*—he was a poet of constant self-awareness and redefinition.

On the 30th anniversary of his death, Nepali Times finds that Pablo Neruda's poetry strikes a chord in present-day Nepal as much as it did in Spain when he wrote "I Explain a Few Things" after his experiences in the Spanish Civil War.

I Explain a Few Things

You will ask: But where are the lilacs? And the metaphysics covered with poppies? And the rain that often struck his words, filling them with holes and birds?

Let me tell you what's happening with me.

I lived in a barrio of Madrid, with bells, with clocks, with trees.

From there you could see the parched face of Castile like an ocean of leather.

My house was called the house of flowers, because from everywhere geraniums burst: it was a beautiful house, with dogs and children.

Raul, do you remember? Do you remember, Rafael? Federico, do you remember under the ground, do you remember my house with balconies



Connecting poetry with places to mark the 30th death anniversary of Pablo Neruda.

where the June light drowned the flowers in your mouth?

Brother, brother!
Everything
was loud voices, salt of goods,
crowds of pulsating bread,
marketplaces in my barrio of Arguelles with its
statue
like a pale inkwell set down among the hake:

oil flowed into spoons,
a deep throbbing
of feet and hands filled the streets,
meters, liters, the hard
edges of life,
heaps of fish,
geometry of roof under a cold sun in which
the weathervane grew tired,
delirious fine ivory of potatoes,
tomatoes, more tomatoes, all the way to the sea.

And one morning it all was burning,
and one morning bonfires
sprang out of the earth
devouring humans,
and from then on fire,
gunpowder from then on,

and from then on blood.

Bandidos with planes and Moors,
bandidos with rings, and duchesses,
bandidos with black friars signing the cross
coming down from the sky to kill children,
and in the streets the blood of the children
ran simple, like blood of children.

Jackals the jackals would despise,
stones the dry thistle would bite on and spit out,
vipers the vipers would abominate.

Facing you I have seen the blood
of Spain rise up
to drown you in a single wave
of pride and knives.

Traitors,
generals:
look at my dead house,
look at Spain broken:
from every house burning metal comes out
instead of flowers,
from every crater of Spain
comes Spain
from every dead child comes a rifle with eyes,
from every crime bullets are born
that one day will find out in you
the site of the heart.

You will ask: why doesn't his poetry
speak to us of dreams, of leaves
of the great volcanoes of his native land?

Come and see the blood in the streets,
come and see
the blood in the streets,
come and see the blood
in the streets!

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was famously called 'the Picasso of poetry' for his prodigious body of work and his constant search for fresh representations. Born Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto in central Chile, he adopted the pen name of Pablo Neruda, in memory of the Czechoslovak poet Jan Neruda (1834–1891), when he began contributing to *Selva Austral*, a literary journal. Neruda was a Chilean diplomat who held posts in Europe and various Asian countries including Burma and Ceylon. A staunch communist, Neruda's faith was not shaken, even in exile from Chile, except when he heard of Stalin's pogroms.

Although he may be most strongly remembered in the popular imagination for his romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied and plentiful—from the yearning cosmic love

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Personal Encounters on the Journey of Life** Paintings by Prakaash Chandwadkar till 31 October at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Exploration of the Magical Realm** etchings by Seema Sharma at Café Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **From the lens of the father, from the lens of the son** Photographs by Narendra and Birendra Pradhan from 18 October at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Glimpses** Travel photographs by Francesca Fittipaldi till 23 October at Arts Council, Baber Mahal. 4220735

EVENTS

- ❖ **Bideshiya** A Bhojpuri play by Nirman Kala Manch of Patna, Bihar. 3.30 PM on 19 October at the Royal Nepal Academy, Kamaladi. Passes available at Indian Embassy and the Nepal-Bharat Sanskritik Kendra Library, RNAC Building.
- ❖ **The God's Dance of Kathmandu Valley** 7PM on Tuesdays. Tea+Ticket: Rs 400 at Hotel Vajra.
- ❖ **Lazimpat Film Shows:** *Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker* 21 October; *Trainspotting* 23 October; 7.30 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Cine-Club:** *Everyone says I love you* 19 October. 2PM at Auditorium Molieré at Alliance Française, Thapathali. 4241163
- ❖ **Inter-Cultural Film Society:** *Numafung* (Navin Subba) 5.30 PM on 19 October at NTB, Bhrikuti Mandap. Email: icfs@wlink.com.np

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz Vocal Encounters** featuring Bobby Kapp and Cadenza at the Shangri-La Hotel, 7.30 PM on 22 October.
- ❖ **Fusion music** by Bobbin and friends 6PM onwards 17 October at Jatra restaurant & bar, Thamel.
- ❖ **Deepak Bajracharya Live in Pokhara** 17 October at Dipendra City Hall, Entry Rs 200, 18 October at The Bluebird Hotel, Entry Rs 555.
- ❖ **Never too old** for music and dance at The Club BhatBhateni from 6PM on 24 October. 4416430, 4426238

DRINK

- ❖ **Winter Warmers** at the Sumeru Bar with 25 percent discount between 6-8PM at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Festival of tropical black rum drinks** and great steaks at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043
- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015

FOOD

- ❖ **Dasai and Tihar Bonanza** 50 percent off food at The Fun Café and Splash Bar & Grill. Buy one service and get another for free at Radisson Beauty Saloon, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4423888
- ❖ **Café U** Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opp British School, Sanepa. 5523263
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for wood fired pizzas and more. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhabighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **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. 468008
- ❖ **Malay, Singapore food** at Singma, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 552004
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **BBQ in the Shambala Garden** 7PM Fridays and Saturdays. 4412999
- ❖ **Weekend Ban Bhoj** at the Godavari Village Resort. 5560675.
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** ceremonial Nepali cuisine fit for a king. Reservation recommended. 4479488
- ❖ **Smoked salmon soufflé**, Crispy Duck Breast, Shrimp Newburg and fine wines at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

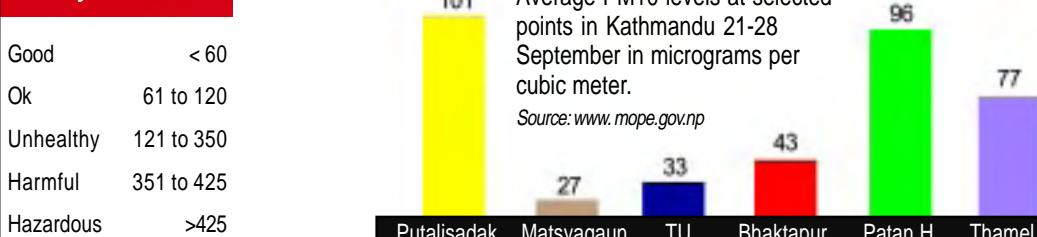
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Microlight flying adventures** with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **TGIF overnight package** at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Bardia tiger madness** Jungle Base camp has extra special deals 061-32112 Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** special offers for Nepalis and expats. 4361500
- ❖ **Weekend yoga retreat** with Carolyn from 17-19 October at the Retreat in Palanchowk. Email: carolynboch.com.np Phone: 5551455
- ❖ **Back to Nature** overnight package for resident expatriates at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

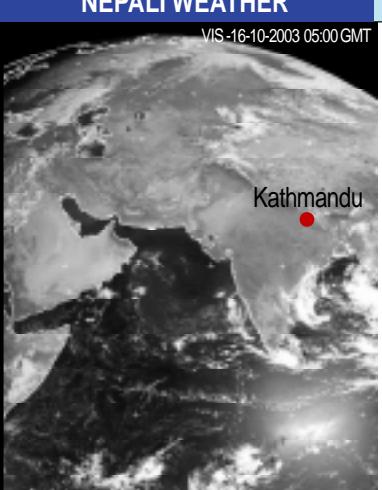
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



The air quality in Kathmandu last week was surprisingly good for this time of the year. All six of the monitoring stations in Kathmandu, including the ones located along roadsides, recorded PM10 values that were below the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meter—a direct correlation with the fewer vehicles on the roads because of post-Dasain slowdown. Kathmandu is returning to normal this week, and we can expect the pollution levels to rise.



NEPALI WEATHER

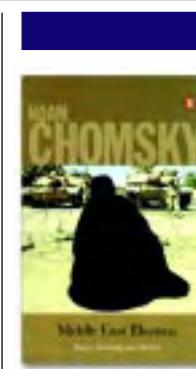


There is a large high pressure area over northern India that is bringing glorious autumn weather for Tihar. There are remnants of some troughs in the Bay but they are too far away to make too much of a difference to us. The balmy sunshine will keep maximum temperatures at highs of 26-27 degrees, but the clear nights will bring down the minimum in Kathmandu to 12-13 over the weekend and into next week. These are ideal conditions for morning mist, which will burn off by about 9AM.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



by MAUSAM BEED

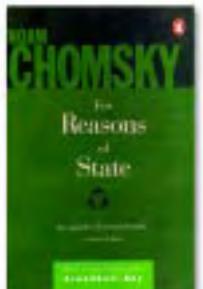


Middle East Illusions: Peace, Security and Terror Naom Chomsky Penguin, 2003
Rs 472

This latest work includes chapters written by Chomsky just before the 2000 Intifada and up through October 2002. As 9-11 and the US campaign against Iraq have added new pressures to long-standing conflicts, Chomsky's voice should be heard now more than ever.

For Reasons of State Naom Chomsky Penguin, 2003
Rs 632

An essential record of Chomsky's political and social thought as it was sharpened on the upheavals in domestic and international affairs of the early 1970s, this is a major addition to the intellectual history of the Vietnam era. It includes the now classic introduction to anarchism.



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

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Chutki (Antara Mali) wants to be Madhuri Dixit, Raja (Rajpal Yadav) wants to be with Chutki. This is not a formula triangle, but a bitter-sweet tale of Bollywood clichés. It's a no-frills story told without any gimmicks. First-time director, Chandan Arora, tells it like it is, without much song and dance. Short and slick, the film has a simple narrative and very convincing reality about it. Anjana does a decent job of a Madhuri hopeful, but Rajpal as the artless villager, sparkles. Star-maker and producer, Ram Gopal Varma, has just made his latest hero—the editor-turned-director Chandan Arora. His hero, Rajpal Yadav, is already a star.



Mein Madhuri Banna Chahti Hoon: 12PM, 3PM

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In the OCTOBER

- 'Paradise' lost in the Maldives
 - Big dams and the urge to control
 - Women and Sri Lankan peace
 - WTO Concub: waiting for the backlash
 - Governments as fishers of men
 - ET versus Kov MN Gaya
 - Failure of the neo-liberal consensus
 - Edward Said: the dissenter in exile
- <http://www.himalmag.com/2003/october>



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If it quacks...

Sample the Himalayan Rim neo-Beijing Duck in Baneswor.

I have always held him to the view that in the distant land that is Baneswor, one can, without difficulty, meander from end to end without ever stimulating a solitary taste bud. So one Saturday, while dipping into my favourite expat magazine, ECS, there I found, nestling up to an intriguing article on bead collecting, a review of the Beijing Duck Restaurant, located in New Baneswor on the side of the International Conference Centre. Such was the article's lavish and oozing praise for the restaurant, Bhatmara Bhai decided to risk the river crossing.

The restaurant, though on a poorly lit street, is hard to miss with a large gaudy red sign facilitating a safe mooring. This theme is continued in the décor choices inside. All is well thought through: draughty, overlit, impersonal and a large room rather adventurously bedecked in red lanterns and Chinese calligraphy. The owner has sought and achieved that classic icon: the 1970s Chinese restaurant look, familiar to Chinese restaurant goers worldwide. Nothing is spared in the detail, from the red wall-to-wall

carpeting, right down to the large television that sits in the corner enthusiastically pumping out pop music that competes for ear space with the Chinese elevator music of the restaurant's sound system.

My partner for the evening, a delicious vegetarian, opted for the recommendations of the waiters: a well executed deep fried tofu in sweet chilli sauce that, if eaten as it hits the table, combines the Chinese culinary ideal of contrast, in this case, crunchy and goopy at the same time. The mushroom with coriander, another Chinese classic, in theory, strives for that same ideal. The platter that arrived under Bhatmara Bhai's gaze played a strong suit in sloppy ying but foolishly discarded crunchy yang. Messy.

Bhatmara Bhai went for the signature dish of the restaurant: The Duck. The menu, and indeed the review that stimulated this whole adventure, went into elaborate detail, labouring over the minutiae of the preparation and proper serving of this classic Chinese dish. The theory starts with air being pumped between a duck's skin and flesh. The duck is

then scalded repeatedly with boiling water and then coated with a honey mixture and hung until the skin is dry and hard. After the duck is roasted the skin becomes golden and intensely crisp. While hot, the skin is served with thin pancakes and steamed buns, accompanied by spring onions, cucumber and hoisin sauce. The meat is considered a dull secondary attraction and is usually served after the skin.

Mystifyingly, the end result placed before Bhatmara Bhai suggested that the scripture on the menu was taken by the denizens of the kitchen—perhaps a little in the manner of the relationship between car and traffic light in the greater Kathmandu area—merely as gentle guidance. The cook clearly had strong ideas: perhaps an attempt at a more innovative interpretation, an interpretation that didn't work. The duck was closing on cold and dry. The skin rather than crisp, was inexplicably, but not unpleasantly, soft. The meat that should have been removed, for that traditional second course (which never materialised), remained firmly wedded to the skin. ♦

The final twist was the decision of the cook to opt for a rustic hand torn look rather than the thin precise slicing normally favoured by the orthodox. The result, a very small, very nouvelle

cuisine sized Rs 3,200 duck. At prices that match London, Bhatmara Bhai did feel justified in inquiring after the reasons for this schismatic interpretation. Apologies were readily proffered and, to be fair, a substantial discount offered. The supply of duck, it turned out, flown from China for that evening had run out and a number of skinnier Nepali ducks had found themselves the victims of this Himalayan Rim neo-Beijing treatment.

However, in fairness, Bhatmara Bhai has been assured by others that have dared the wilds of Baneswor that Chinese duck has been served (and indeed its greater fat content improves the eating experience), even if the manner of serving steers firmly away from the description in the menu. The process of making Beijing duck is extremely time consuming (at least some 24 hours), and for success, requires the guarantee of a large turnover, which in these troubled times and the restaurants locale, presents significant obstacles to perfection. So, if compromise is your thing and the edible river life of the Bagmati, rather than that of Beijing, is acceptable, then come on down to Baneswor! ♦

Starting with this issue, Nepali Times begins a fortnightly restaurant review by Bhatmara Bhai, which is the pseudonym of a Kathmandu-based culinary nomad. —Editor

by BHATMARA BHAI



NEPALI SOCIETY

Like father, like son

Lenscraft runs in the Pradhan family...

As a young boy, Narendra Pradhan (pic, left) had a way with the sketchpad, spending hours drawing. It was his love for art that led him to photography and eventually cinematography, devoting much of his time to film making. Yet time and again, Narendra always came back to his camera.

Whenever he got a chance, Narendra enjoyed shooting Nepal's varied landscape and people. Portraits became his forte but photography was an expensive hobby. To keep doing what he loved best, Narendra took snapshots of friends and neighbours, offering to photograph weddings and other ceremonies. He developed black and white film at home, where he later opened a studio to support his family. Anything left over was ploughed back into buying film and funding trips around the country. Initially Narendra's family was concerned. "They could not understand why I would go around taking photos of strangers and scenery for free," he says. All except for little Birendra who, while watching his father work, was cultivating his own passion for the camera.

Birendra (pic, right) says his father has been his sole inspiration. Unlike his self-taught dad, Birendra got a diploma in photography and went on to complete an advanced course in TV and film production at AVAS in Tripureswor. Father and son also share an interest in cinematography and Birendra assisted his father on several shoots.

Like his father, Birendra too enjoys taking pictures that show Nepali life and culture, and especially typical Nepali expressions. His best moments are those when he captures a moment the way he wanted. Now, for the first time, father and son are teaming up for an exhibition and rediscovering the joy of working together. Birendra, 30, and Narendra, 59, hope those who see their pictures get a feel for what lies behind: "Nepalis are poor and have a hard life, but we still enjoy life, carrying on with our culture." ♦

From the lens of the father, from the lens of the son, an exhibition of photographs by Narendra and Birendra Pradhan, opens 18 October at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694



MINBAJRAHARYA

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आयुर्वेदिक रहस्य !**

**१६ विमिन्न अद्भुत आयुर्वेदिक
तत्परताका साथगा !**

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कर्तव्य आयुर्वेदिक एवं वज्र कलाकारी तत्परताका मुख्य व्यापारी अद्यतात्मा... देखें र उत्साहात !

आयुर्वेदिक फेर और लोवली
अद्यतात्मा का लाइन से प्रस्तुत !



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

People of Non-Resident Nepali Origin

So it looks like His Majesty's Government is finally giving in to the 15-point demand of Non-resident Nepalis, and allowing them to have dual citizenship.

Good move. Although one wonders, if a Nepali passport was such a sought after item, why did they leave Nepal in the first place?

Then comes news that just this month two members of a government delegation in Oslo have vanished without trace, and three members of the Nepali Asian World Cup Qualifier football team have decided to stay on in Seoul. Put these two items of news together, we have to conclude that if present trends continue, in the not too distant future, there will be only two kinds of Nepalis left:

- Non-resident Nepalis who want to permanently reside in Nepal, and
- Nepalis who want to permanently reside in a non-Nepali country.

After the grand success of the first Non-Residual Nepali Conference, and seeing how smoothly it was conducted, it is pretty clear what we have to do: let NRNs run this country on a Build Own Operate Transfer (BOOT) scheme for 25 years. A NRN world headquarters is now being set up in Kathmandu, and the terms of reference for overseas Nepali subcontractors to govern this country has been drawn up.

The idea is to leapfrog the current generation of Nepali leaders who have messed things up, turn this country around in the forthcoming two decades and hand it back to the next generation of Nepalis in an as-where-is condition. Fine print: conditions apply, overseas relatives of current rulers not eligible.

But till then, HMG has shown that it is deadly serious about providing incentives to NRNs who want to invest in their ancestral domain. After all, there is an ancient Vedic saying: "NRN is God". (We checked with God, and he has no objections to the slogan.) As a first step, and in response to widespread complaints from overseas Nepalis, the Department of Immigration has decided to open a special fast-track NRN immigration desk at TIA so foreign Nepali investors don't have to queue up like ordinary Nepalis

just returning from four years of hard labour in the Gulf.

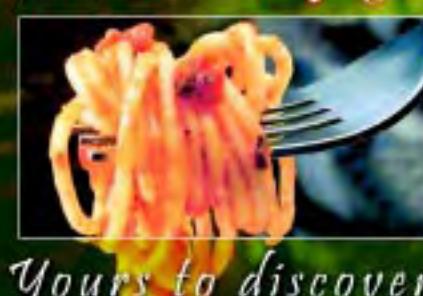
"This is a major concession, we haven't extended this courtesy to anyone else, not even NRN ex-prime ministers," said one official.

However, in the national interest, a word of caution here. There are certain sensitive sectors like Defence, Aerospace and Breweries in which His Majesty's Government cannot have foreigners (even if they are of Nepali origin) investing. Other domestic sectors which need protection and should be kept out of bounds for NRN investment are strategic industries like instant noodles, brick kilns, cabin restaurants, packaging clinker and calling it cement and Rs 99 shops. These are industries where resident Nepalis have already staked their claim, and any further competition would benefit consumers and therefore cannot be allowed.

But certain exceptions can be made, and the government is now set to approve NRN applications to set up the following industries, and will assist in lining up venture capital soft-credit financing for them:

- White Elephant Technical University for Overseers and Civil Contractors, Rato Pool, Kathmandu
"Make others drool by learning to build your own white elephant"
- Fly By Night Airlines, Pvt. Ltd., Sat Dobato, Kathmandu
"Bhadrapur or Bust. Fly Nepal's First Night Vision-Equipped Domestic Airline"
- Kinky Cheese Curl Industries, Banepa
"Nepal's Most-Nutritious Junk Food Manufactured in Technical Cooperation with Second-generation People of Non-Resident Nepali Origin"
- Monkey Business Export-Import, Inc., Swayambhu and Pashupati
"We provide one-way tickets and US business visas for all rhesus monkeys and their spouses for research purposes in Texas"

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