Tek Nath takes on Thimpu

Bhutanese 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 Thimphu.

Rizal is highly regarded in liberal democratic circles for his struggle on behalf of 100,000 Bhutanese 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 raids began in 1988, when he, along with D.P. Bhundir, petitioned King Jigme Singye Wangchuk about the discrimination against ethnic Nepali Lhotshampa in the census which was seen then as an attempt to curb the Lhotshampa who made up 60-70 percent of the population. The Sherapons constituted some 40 percent and the Ngapers 20 percent. The Lhotshampa had been granted citizenship in 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 Goilkhand movement.

Rizal was briefly jailed for submitting the petition, which was deemed sedition. Upon release he came to Nepal to head the People’s Forum for Human Rights, but in November 1990 the Punakha government extradicated 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 Nepal Times in an exclusive interview.

Nepal 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.

I thought the government would also free the Lhotshampa 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 Bhutanis who may have been forcibly evicted, Bhutanis who emigrated, non-Bhutanis, and Bhutanis who have committed criminal acts.

Mission impossible?

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.

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 up-graded 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 power it claims it has.

There is no truth to this charge. The government has been using all the executive powers enshrined in the constitution. There is no need to stay in the morass of 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.
B

arely 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 news that four school children were killed in a Maoist Army firefight in Doti.

What happened at the Sharada Higher Secondary School in Mudhara on Tuesday afternoon is symbolic of the utter waste of this conflict. No war is ever sane, but even by the senseless standards of these mad times, Mudhara was a descent into hell. How many Dorabamas, Mudharas, Jorgamas do we need before we begin to regret our sense? How many more Dalit Gurungs, Sushila, Joydev, Hari Na, Bhanu B Parajuli, and Mandir Baisi 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 not do its own investigation into this ‘collateral damage’, and the two sides bearing arms will predictably blame each other for provoking the firefight. The parents, brothers, sisters and relatives of Sushila, Hari Na, Bhanu B Parajuli, and Mandir Baisi need to be killed before they end this lunacy?

That is why we implied that at least schools and children be left alone. But that was too much to ask. What were the Maoists doing in Mudhara? forcing grade 5-10 students to watch their cultural revolution entertainment, anyway? is that how you build support for your political programme? Do they still need to be convinced that there are avenues other than death, destruction and terrorism to achieve the same end? What is there to need to destroy Nepali in order to save it?

Whatever their excuses, it doesn’t really matter now that fires are fired first Mudhara. All that is left is to have you kill each other please don’t kill the children and the innocents.

GLOBAL NEPAL C.K. Lal bemoans the exodus of Nepalis to foreign lands to seek fame and then expect a hero’s welcome as conquerors Homecoming, #165. This is the wrong attitude. Most Nepalis are not a liability for Nepal, but an asset. The expatriates, whether they have a ‘job in the service’ or not, in the long term, and as such are entitled to a hero’s welcome as conquering heroes. Homecoming, #165. This is the wrong attitude. Most Nepalis are not a liability for Nepal, but an asset. The expatriates, whether they have a ‘job in the service’ or not, in the long term, and as such are entitled to a hero’s welcome as conquering heroes.

The only correct word, but implies an incorrect attitude, is loyalty. Global Nepalis are not a liability for Nepal, but an asset. An asset that the Nepali state and consultant who had the plan of ‘Nepal First’ bore. Nepalis are wonderful countries, but they appear to be driven by the fear of dying prematurely, or by causing even more mayhem and bloodshed? If the Nepali state and consultant who had the plan of ‘Nepal First’ bore, Nepalis are wonderful countries, but they appear to be driven by the fear of dying prematurely, or by causing even more mayhem and bloodshed?

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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 Nepalese 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 end to the conflict. They were kept out of both peace talks. There are hundreds of thousands of people displaced because of the ‘peoples’ war’. 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 depict a higher level team with a balance of racial and geographical representation that 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 routed 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-war scenario. The royals fear the parties and the 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.

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When negotiations resume, all parties must keep the above shortcomings in mind. A constituent assembly was not acceptable to the royals 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 process cannot go hand-in-hand with armed struggle. The parliamentary democracy and the peace process must safeguard each other. The only alternative to talks is talks.
Nepal’s future is in the dung heap

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

MAARTEN POST

Y ou couldn’t invest in a simpler, more natural technology. Dung goes in, gas comes out. You don’t need to put anything else in; even the bacteria that break down the droppings are already present in the cow’s stomach.

“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 1,40,000 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 duty comes out. I’ll use it in the monsoon to manure my land. It is very fertilizer.”

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 toilet and the toilet. The bonus is the spent slurry which is an odourless and potent fertilizer.

The first experiments with biogas in Nepal took place in the 1950s, using the Indian drum design. But the many 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 underground digestor keeps the smell and the cold.

Nepal’s biogas campaign really took off after 1992, when the Biogas Support Program (BSP) began to subsidize 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 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 has interviewed chefs who have inspected Nepal’s program say they have a below 60 percent success rate. In China, where the technology is far more advanced, the figure is even worse. It’s probably also because donors abroad often build large plants to support a whole community.”

Exploits Thapa. “In Nepal individual farmers actually buy biogas 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 and convert the material into methane.

In 2001, BSP built two plants in Solukhumbu, with a greenhouse on top of the digester. “This year’s experiments will be carried out to integrate solar panels to heat underground digesters.”

BSP program manager Sundar Bagain 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 biogas. Our rural cattle and buffalo population is at least an

HERE AND THERE

Lak in Lukla

Our columnist finds that police mistreatment of janajatis 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 ACP is Powdered there to protect Lukla airport, which has admittedly, been subdued in the past. But by simply being there, doesn’t the ACP 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 disrespectfully?

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, disgorging hard currency, or, in 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. In contrast, the score of donkeys that now roam the dirt roads of Lukla carry loads of tourist luggage. The controversial trekkers and Domkains 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.

"Move on," he commands and the porter, hungry enough to try to eat the smoke anymore. "It’s a great investment," says Radha, showing 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.”

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Global Nepalis go local

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

“We are overhelmed by the response and by the cooperation and help shown by the government,” said Bihm Udas of the international coordination committee. “It was much better than we expected.”

The conference has already announced projects funded by NRPs including a 205-room old peoples’ home in Bharatpur, an ICT venture and possibly a hydropower investment.

The government has promised the delegates to initiate a separate law for NRPs. “An official committee is being formed to look after the recommendations made by the conference,” said Yogendra Shaiya, conference moderator. “But, the ball is in the NRPs’ 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 will have doubled from 8.8 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 Nepal’s population are below 15 years, and nearly half the female population is under 16 years of age. Women’s education level is increasing. By 2050, only 11 percent of women living in rural areas will be illiterate, in comparison with 44 percent in 1960. Nepal’s population of 25.2 million will double to 50.8 million by 2050, with an average growth rate of 2.2 percent.

The world’s population is projected to peak at 9.3 billion, and they will keep within the limits set in the Kyoto Protocol. It is possible for the world to keep global emissions below 50 percent of 1990 levels, which is about 5.1 billion metric tons of CO2.

Fuel for thought

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 Bhagpur 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.

Winrock International

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 expenses incurred in the management of natural resources. Applicants, both for travel grants and for field research grants, should clearly state how the research contributes to the enhancement of eco-economic equity and how it benefits the disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people in the society. Acknowledging the important role that women professionals can play in promoting sustainability in the natural resource management sector, 50 to 60 percent of the total number of grants i.e. both travel and research, will be allotted to women candidates.

Application: Should be submitted to:

Application for Research/Travel grant

Winrock International.

P. O. Box 1312

Katmandu, Nepal

Tel: 4467087, 4472839

madhikary@winrock.org.np
T here may be lessons for Nepal from the manner with which Thailand’s much-revered King Bhumibol has historically used constitutional powers to intervene in matters of the state. Over his 75-year reign, he has stepped in only a few matters of the state. Over his 57-year period, he has been a central institution in Thailand. He was largely eclipsed for 25 years from 1932 to 1957, when the military marginalized 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 Vyaj Phol 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, they tried to make 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 last 25 years, the monarchy has brought the institution to center-stage. Once King Bhumibol returned to Thailand 1973 after his studies in Switzerland, he aspired to become a true constitutional monarch. He sought to return the monarchy to its traditional role in the Thai nation. It was primarily the present monarch who, by playing his role creatively, has brought the institution to center-stage.

The king’s role in the crisis of 1973 and 1976 stands out as an extraordinary instance of the king’s intervention. He had been a central institution in Thailand. He was largely eclipsed for 25 years from 1932 to 1957, when the military marginalized 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.

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ECONOMY

“No excitement in the market.”

By PRANAY LIMBU

Cash flow becomes sluggish. But there is huge liquidity in the market and shares are being snapped up. Shares are in 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 now have 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 in the market 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 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 aware of 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.

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 those who can sustain and keep a positive attitude towards business. We will probably become stronger.

Which of your businesses is in best shape? Motorcycle sales are still holding. There is no problem. 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 projects. In fact, just launched a big consumer scheme.

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.

WANTED: Talent Agents

The best way to navigate the market for success.

By ASHUTOSH TIWARI

Organisation.

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 now have 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 in the market when there isn’t a mass transportation system?

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Nelson Mandela’s spirit lives on in the village of Nkulumane in South Africa. Despite facing severe adversity and hardships, this village has managed to overcome these difficulties and continue to flourish. The villagers are known for their strong sense of community and their ability to work together towards a common goal. The village has implemented various initiatives to support local businesses and encourage entrepreneurship. This has not only provided job opportunities for the residents but has also helped to reduce poverty in the area. The village is a testament to the power of community and resilience, and it serves as an inspiration to others around the world. The story of Nkulumane demonstrates that even in the face of challenges, hope and determination can lead to success and prosperity.
Yes, the Nepali can

Damber Nepal 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, Nepal has shown what Nepalis can do when they have vision, drive, integrity and willpower.

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

Damber Nepal: Why Chilime, and why you?

Damber Nepal: 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 Dharchula. 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 3.2 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 by selling electricity. Chilime generates 137 million units a year, each unit costs Rs 2.19 to produce, and our 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 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, Bholu 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, Bholu 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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Living under occupation

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

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 that: 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. We were obviously excited and happy in every respect. Soon a questionnaire was prepared to prevent us from misbehaving towards the local people and, above all, towards our new overlords. I can still feel, with shame, the sense of being not only unwanted but of being an illegitimate invader of 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; others, who could not, faced the sullen existence of a society of subjects rather than citizens. In the Western zones, differences were more noticeable.

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 Belligerent against Poland. When my school was sent to Hamburg, then under British occupation. Suddenly, non-differentiation with Germans—the American rule—was replaced by frequent contacts aimed at re-education, especially of the older people. In those months, the seeds of a 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 American Baghdad. But another difference is even more important.

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The occupation forces were soon entrusted with power. On the other hand, life changed significantly in the American zone, where the British tried to extract direct benefits by, for example, dismantling steelworks and bringing the parts to Britain. In retrospect, that turned out to be a blessing for Germany. Arriving 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 carry it out. Today, that might be more problematic. As in 1945, this could be accomplished elsewhere. In practice however, one cannot help wondering whether the German experience could be transferred to a unique set of circumstances, or at any rate, one not easily reproduced under the vastly different conditions of today’s Iraq.

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.

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.

Biotech and hunger

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 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 stocking Annarita Mitta, 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.”
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 recognized that the country's stable, 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 war of the 1960s. The global economic system was buoyant and East Asia, not least Malaysia, was more deeply connected than anyone expected to support that system.

This encouraged Mahathir to make a break with the British colonial heritage. His call to "Look East" marked the beginning of an ambitious industrialisation policy that culminated, during his tenure 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 that all the country's communities would see themselves as sharing a common Malay identity.

The Asian financial crisis that struck later that year halted the region's trajectory. Against most other 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 Defence. 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 in the face of a world frightened by 9/11. Malaysia 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 adulation. But he was determined to break the traditional Malay mold, spurred on by the successes of neighbouring Singapore. In many ways, he has succeeded. (IP Project Syndicate)

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

Spaced out

BEIJING—China said today to claiming to be 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 with 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 Habitable telescope and a sky laboratory. Chinese officials have emphasized 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 A$4 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)

The more television 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 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 favored Washington's going to war with Iraq. All three are misperceptions.

The report, "Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War," 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 stir a growing public and professional debate over why mainstream news media—especially broadcast networks—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. Off those who believe that both WMDs and evidence of al-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 (13 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 foundamura lia in London on 05-11-2003

by WANG GUNGWU

Looking back on the legacy of Mahathir Mohamad.
Bardev Gautam, CPN UML standing committee member, in Kathmandu, 12 October

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 have done ever since I became a minister. Since my childhood, respected seniors used to make me for me. I put tika for others too. Dasi 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 to do anything? While it is true that there is a movement against his regressive move, it is at reaching an agreement. Our light 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 Dasi tika has helped not out bitter feelings, which is why I believe the King received it will help our movement. Leaders from all the political parties should have done so too. Maybe we would have better results. Remember, I was part of the diplomatic team that brought the US and China closer.

The worst news is that we have created awareness among our political workers about regression. Even the people comprehended it better now. The parties have been able to tell 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 live 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. 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 Babu Thapa government is unsuccessful, I delivered this message to the king. There is no chance of my becoming prime minister and I don’t interest me either. Neither the five parties nor my party will agree on the nomination. It is untrue to say the movement last moment 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, we will have to adopt tyranny and ban us. How can he ensure his future with 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 ideology. 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.
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 occupied 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 Dum Dum airport in Calcutta. The difficult task was getting there across Burma.

The number of retreating forces swelled from 10, 12, 25 to 75. 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 surely find it marked by piles of human bones.

A new regiment, the Fourth Gurkha Rifles, was raised at Imphal 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 five men survived from that entire regiment. The Japanese knew where the Fourth Gurkha Rifles were going so they laid 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 of the stench, the Japanese dug a ditch next to the 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 return capture from Burma we were 375 soldiers, not all Gurkhas. There were 305 Maharashtrians, Sikhs, Garhwalis and Madas regiment. We were the last of our regiments, never more than 10 from a single one.

When we reached Bhamo from Towdow our numbers swelled to form a battalion. The colonel commanding the regiment was Jockey. 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 parade 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 Japanese dug 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 Boldset 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 a minute.

We saw no reason to spare this rascal when so many had met 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 eventualty.

To be continued

Neruda and Nepal

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聂尔, his pen name 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 poet, essayist, translator, and diplomat who held posts in Europe and various Asian countries including Burma and Ceylon. A staunch communist, Neruda’s faith was not shaken, even is 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—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love. His oeuvre was varied—romantic poetry, Neruda is much more than just a poet of love.
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There is a large high pressure area over northern India that is bringing glorious autumn weather for Tilaurakot. 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 heights of 26-27 degrees, but the clear nights 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.

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Nothing is spared in the detail, restaurant goers worldwide. restaurant look, familiar to Chinese that classic icon: the 1970s Chinese lanterns and Chinese calligraphy. impersonal and a large room rather choices inside. All is well thought theme is continued in the décor facilitating a safe mooring. This with a large gaudy red sign poorly lit street, is hard to miss decided to risk the river crossing. the restaurant, Bhatmara Bhai article’s lavish and oozing praise for the same ideal. The platter that classic, in theory, strives for that 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 mush, with air being pumped between a Chinese dish. The theory starts and proper serving of this classic crunchy yang. Messy. The final twist was the decision of the cook to opt for a music hand torn look rather than the thin precise slicing normally favoured by the orthodox. The result: a very small, very nouvelle cuisine sized Ro $3,200 duck. At prices that match London, Bhatmara Bhai did feel justified in inquiring after the reasons for this schismatic interpretation. Apologies were made profusely 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 skinless 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 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 turnout, which in these troubled times and the 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! 

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Sample the Himalayan Rim neo-Beijing Duck in Baneswor.

If it quacks…

Like father, like son

Lenscraft runs in the Pradhan family.

A s 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 scorn for free,’ he says. All except for little Brendra who, while watching his father’s work, was cultivating his own passion for the camera. Brendra (pic, right) says his father has been his sole inspiration. Unlike his self-taught dad, Brendra 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 Brendra assisted his father on several shoots. Like his father, Brendra too enjoys taking pictures that show Nepal life and culture, and especially typical Nepali expressions. Bhatmara Bhai did feel justified in inquiring after the reasons for this schismatic interpretation. Apologies were made profusely 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 skinless 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 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 turnout, which in these troubled times and the restaurants local, 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!

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People of Non-Resident Nepali Origin

S
o 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:

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

After the grand success of the first Non-Resident 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 sub-contractors 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 tinsier 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 open 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., Satdobato, Kathmandu

“Bhadrapur or Bust. Fly Nepal’s First Night Vision-Equipped Domestic Airline”

• Kinky Cheese Curl Industries, Banepa


• Monkey Business Export-Import, Inc., Swayambhu and Pashupati

“We provide one-way tickets and US business visas for all these monkeys and their spouses for research purposes in Texas”