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DAM!

Like it or not, the future of Nepal's hydro development may depend on India's gigantic river-linking project.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

A recent flurry of hydropower diplomacy between Nepal and India has raised speculation here that New Delhi wants to rope Nepal in on its gigantic river-linking project. The super-ambitious \$12 billion scheme will take 16 years to build and will link 36 of India's rivers, taking water from where there is a lot of it to areas where there is less for irrigation, power and human consumption. But opposition to the project from environmentalists is growing within India, and murmurs of discontent are now being heard in Bangladesh and Nepal. So far, Nepali officialdom has been blissfully unaware of the plan, even though Nepali rivers would be critical for regulating lean season flow to the tributaries of the Ganga. "Up to 60 percent of the water in the Ganga comes from Nepal, so the river-linking scheme will have to get Nepal involved," says Sudhirendar Sharma, of The Ecological Foundation in New Delhi. Some Nepali activists suspect that India is already working towards large reservoirs in Nepal that will dovetail into the river-linking scheme by the time it

comes into operation. Nagma Mallick, First Secretary (Commerce) at the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, denies this, saying: "There is no linkage between the recent India-Nepal talks on hydropower and India's river-linking project." However, India's National Water Development Agency says it has already completed pre-feasibility studies of 14 links in the Himalayan component of the river-linking scheme, and says it has "taken into consideration the existing, ongoing and proposed dams on common river systems in Nepal, Bhutan and India". Suresh Prabhu, head of the river-linking task force and former power minister of India, admitted in a recent interview that India needed to get Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh on board. He added that New Delhi was already negotiating with Nepal and the reaction "had been favourable". But spokesman Bishnu Bahadur Thapa at the Water Resources Ministry in Kathmandu told us he had only "heard rumours" about the project.

continued ➡ p6



The Marsyangdi and Trisuli meet the Kali Gandaki to form the Narayani in this aerial photograph.

KUNDA DIXIT

1,092

Since the end of the ceasefire two months ago, 1,092 Nepalis have been killed. The rights group, INSEC, says 775 of them were killed by the state and 317 by the Maoists. This brings the estimated total death toll since the insurgency began in February 1995 to more than 8,000. Rights groups are worried by an increase in extra-judicial killings, disappearances and violations of the Geneva Convention by both sides that has led to civilian casualties. There has also been an alarming increase in the number of internally displaced.

Nepali soldiers keep the peace in Africa

The Royal Nepali Army is not just fighting to restore peace in Nepal, it is off to keep the peace in African hotspots as well. A massive airlift this month is ferrying nearly 1,100 soldiers, engineers, equipment and weapons from Kathmandu to Kinshasa for special UN peacekeeping duties in the Congo. Another 40 Nepali military officers will be leaving on UN peacekeeping duties to Liberia soon, while 800 Nepali blue helmets are already in Sierra Leone. The Congo operation is by far the biggest so far and is being carried out in 20 flights by mammoth heavy-lift Antonov 124 aircraft chartered from a Russian airline which can carry up to 140 tons of payload each time. Seven of the flights had been completed by Thursday. Critics say the army should not be distracted by foreign peacekeeping when there is a near-civil war in Nepal itself. "We should be careful about the kind of commitments we make for peacekeeping," says Shyam Shrestha, of the leftist

How about back home?

A chartered Russian heavy-lift jet gets ready to ferry another load of Nepali soldiers and equipment from Kathmandu to Congo on Wednesday.

magazine, *Mulyankan*. But, a senior army officer defended international peacekeeping, saying this is a commitment to the United Nations that Nepal takes very seriously. "Of course we can handle it in terms of military planning," the officer told us. "We deploy in such a way that it will not hamper our operations within the country." Another army officer at Bhadrakali said the army regards overseas peacekeeping deployments as a reward for brigades that perform well. "It is a morale thing, there are monetary benefits for the soldiers as well as for the army itself," he told us. The army ploughs peacekeeping income into its welfare fund, which is used to take care of widows and orphans of soliders killed in action by the Maoists. Critics are unconvinced, arguing that an army that constantly complains about being under-equipped and under-manned for counter-insurgency at home should not over-extend itself abroad. ♦

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NATIONAL SINKHOLE

"I became quite disheartened with Kathmandu's intellectuals, and till today the feeling persists. They love to highlight unimportant matters...they are big on discussion, but do not give a paisa of support...I think this kind of thinking is still prevalent in Kathmandu today, a mindset that does not accept democracy, one that only likes to argue and create unnecessary complications by giving importance to inane ideas."

- BP Koirala in *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Reflections*

Not much has changed since BP Koirala wrote those lines describing Kathmandu during the Rana days. Kathmandu Valley's comfortable classes are still "arguing and creating unnecessary complications". Indeed, much of the ills of the Nepali state can be traced to the capital's ingrained inability to include the hinterland.

There is something in the topography of this Valley that keeps us from feeling the anguish of the rest of Nepal. The frog-in-pond mentality used to be ascribed earlier to the NBC (Newar, Bahun, Chhetri) who made up the Valley establishment. Today it includes everyone who moves here. It certainly afflicts the business elite, and sometimes traps donors and diplomats.

Kathmandu's socio-political sinkhole sucks us in, making us blasé about death and mayhem outside. We just shrug when we hear of Maoist extermination or the security force's impunity against innocents. Development grinds to a halt, but we're not worried as long as Kathmandu's construction boom does not suffer. The rest of the country's pain has actually become the Valley's gain, as people flee to the capital with what little they have.

One of the pampered symbols of Kathmandu-centricism is the two-day weekend that the Valley enjoys that the rest of the country, for some absurd reason, doesn't. Another is the \$200 million gift Kathmandu has awarded itself to bring glacial melt through a 25km tunnel from Melamchi to quench its thirst. Plugging leaking mains, managing distribution and establishing reservoirs within the Valley would have cost a lot less. But we love to splurge.

When Sher Bahadur Deuba scrapped elected local councils two years ago, there was no outrage in Kathmandu. Since October Fourth, kneejerk party-bashing is fueled and kept alive by a jaded elite made up of clans and associations who lost their grip on the polity when village politicians-turned-MPs became the new bosses. Some post-1990 national-level politicians deserve the scorn heaped on them, but tarring the selfless and accountable elected local leaders with the same brush is not just unfair but detrimental.

The uppermost strata of the country's academia, business, bureaucracy and civil society are responsible for not raising the alarm when the political parties made a mockery of democracy. Today, as a neo-conservative backlash sweeps the capital, these classes are silent again. As if an authoritarian magic wand in Kathmandu will instantly set things right. By deliberately failing to distinguish between democratic pluralism and party antics, Kathmandu seeks to maintain its centralised power base.

The country's present crisis affords an opportunity to address devolution of Kathmandu's power once and for all. Not just as a way to stop the war, but also for Nepal's sustained development.



the Maobadi. We know the kind of people who get involved in such things, so we won't go into details. But we need to be prepared for the rise of vigilantism.

The government is also pushing the concept of a 'unified command' as a matter of urgency. It would put the entire government machinery at the disposal of the security apparatus, giving the government literally the power of 'the coercive force of the state'.

First, the military establishes itself in the 'political space immediately beneath the executive power'.

(In Nepal, the setting up of a permanent secretariat of the National Defence Council, a constitutional body envisioned to be temporary by its very nature, can be adjudged to be such a move.)

Second, the military needs a presence in the

economic life of society to prove its utility.

(The army's plan to establish a bank didn't work out, but it is hired to protect telephone towers and electric facilities. The NEA and NTC use the exorbitant fees they charge customers to pay the army to guard its facilities against Maoist attacks.)

Third, the traditional values and norms of society are bent toward military values and norms.

(Nepal was unified by the *khukuri* of conquest by a martial race. The military mindset is deeply ingrained in the Nepali psyche, and it is valour in the battlefield rather than entrepreneurship or public service that is valued by society.)

Fourth, violation of human rights becomes common.

(The insurgency has dragged our sad human rights record even lower. There is now even less respect of life, liberty and dignity of fellow citizens.)

Fifth, Tanter says, counterinsurgency operations are initiated and/or expanded by the state to rationalise the process of militarisation. (Need we say more?)

Sixth, international aggression is unleashed against perceivable enemies of the state. (In our context, the Americans seems to be only too willing to fulfil that role.)

Lastly, Tanter says, the defence forces begin to appropriate larger share of the budget. (Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani is too suave to show the pressure he is under, but bureaucrats in Bagh Durbar openly admit that it is becoming difficult to meet the growing demands of the Ministry of Defence.)

There is no doubt that the Maoists are primarily responsible for beginning the process of militarisation of Nepali society. But once this insurgency comes to an end, which we hope will be sooner rather than later, the culture of guns will pose a bigger problem than either the military or the Maoists can contemplate. Talleyrand was the foreign minister of Napoleon. He once told his emperor, "You can do everything with bayonets, sire, except sit on them." ♦

LETTERS

KIDS

Naresh Newar's 'Keep kids out of it' (#167) identifies a critical problem that Save the Children US, BASE, NNSWA, NRCS, SAFE and TWUC are addressing. In August, we began a community-based psychosocial intervention for children who have been affected by the conflict called Sanjivani, or 'New Life'. Adapted from programs designed by The

Center for Trauma Psychology, Sanjivani is a five-week, 15 session intervention for groups of 8-20 children. While this program may not work for children who have been severely affected by trauma, it has shown excellent results for children who have been generally affected. Using artwork, drama, music and games, children explore different emotions and issues. The program helps children to feel secure,

improve their self-esteem, explore their feelings and teaches them coping strategies. Local community members, not professional psychologists, are trained to be the facilitators during a 10-day program. This is highly practical, since there are only a few trained psychologists in Nepal. But perhaps more importantly, it involves the community in the healing of its children. As your article pointed out, "emotional support from the community is what is missing in many parts of the country."

Anjalee Shakya and Tory Clawson, Kathmandu ARMY

I disagree with P Rana's letter (#167) about how the Royal Nepali Army is being portrayed in your paper. Rana says the RNA is not "a Latin American military that slaughtered tens of thousands of its own people". Maybe. But it could be following in their footsteps. Most armies are not created to kill their own people, usually it is supposed to defend the country in case of war. But

with the appearance of an insurgent group, things take a wrong turn. Sometimes, there is still a possibility to halt things before it is too late. Rana points at some of those signals. Comparisons are difficult, as your editorial ('Stop it', #167) acknowledges: there are too many factors in a conflict and many cannot be interpolated from one place to another. In my own country, Colombia, the conflict is supposed to be about drugs. False. Or, only half true. The origins of Colombia's violence are rooted in the peasants fight for land and social justice. Drugs, but fundamentally, the revenues brought by their illegal trade to the rich countries, 'only' fuel the conflict. If it is not drugs then abductions, ransom money, any cash will do. Every day, more parallels spring to my eyes between Nepal and Colombia. Sadly, more than I would like. Most of them are signals that the road is going down the abyss. Nepal can choose to follow or take a detour before it is too late. Learning from other's errors may help, but

certainly closing our eyes to them does not.

Karin Eichelkraut, Dhobighat

LUKLA

Re: Daniel Lak's 'Lak in Lukla' (#166). The reason there is no curfew in Namche is because the national park headquarters has a well-prepared 150-strong presence under a major. Maoists dare not attack the base because of the absence of an escape route.

It is the curfew in Lukla that helps filter any would-be Maoist from reaching Namche. If, as Lak seems to suggest, the APF is pulled out from Lukla, the airport and the entire Khumbu region would be vulnerable. Also, Lak says porters frequent the poll house looking for work. Actually sirdars hire porters at about 10-11AM after the clients arrive in the morning.

Mingmar Sherpa, by email

NRN

Anyone who is willing to invest in Nepal and can think of a way to

make money legally in the country should be given that chance. Dual citizenship should be granted to members of any country who wish to live and work in Nepal, provided they are not criminals. Nepal needs more people who actually want to live there and be productive—why make it hard for those people? It's not like people are going to come to our country to take advantage of the excellent health care or our generous welfare system!

Anek Belbase, USA

ECS

It seems *ECS Magazine* has hit the big time. We were mentioned in the distinguished *Nepali Times* (#166) as the "favourite expat magazine" by your urbane and anonymous food reviewer, Bhatmara Bhai. But he referred to an *ECS* article giving "lavish and oozing praise" to a restaurant where he had a less than satisfactory experience, and wrote that it was next to "an article about bead collecting". The good reviewer should review the August 2003 issue of *ECS* once



NARESH NEWAR

BOOK REVIEW

by DIPAK GYAWALI



How revolutions devour their own

A book about brutal internal purges in the Philippine revolutionary movement may have lessons for our own.

Written by a guerrilla who nearly lost his life in the violent internal purges of the communist party, *To Suffer Thy Comrades* is an insider account of the Philippine killing fields. The New Peoples' Army grew out of a peasant uprising in the 1950s and has been fighting Asia's longest-running insurgency. Some 25,000 have been killed since 1986, and as this book shows, many of them died at the hands of their own comrades.

This book documents the paranoia of the party high command that triggered the snowballing Stalinist decimation of its own cadres in the vicious internal purges of the late 1980s. Unlike many similar testimonies told after the nightmare ended—from Hitler's gas chambers to Soviet gulags to Pol Pot's genocide—this one talks of the atrocities in a movement that still continues, and does so with remarkable depths of psychological insights.

In the book's introduction, a scholar at Kyoto University says one more difference is that the author, despite his traumatic ordeal, "still believes in the need to overcome human misery through a process that empowers the poor". To those ends, he believes that this book will provide a cathartic cleansing of a movement that started nobly but lost itself in paranoia, ironically at a time when the political situation was clearly in its favour.

In the mid-1980s, the Marcos dictatorship was disintegrating after the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino. But the political middle forces were in disarray, mainly because of lack of experience and incompetence. It was only the Communist Party of the Philippines and its New Peoples' Army that had a country-wide presence. How such a seemingly invincible revolution could dissipate its energies, how it could devour its own children with extreme brutality is what the author examines, often with vintage Filipino irreverence and wit, to provide for himself and many other victims what he hopes will be an emotional closure of a painful



experience.

The book comes in three parts. The first describes life in the guerrilla camp, arrest, interrogation and torture. The incredulity and shock at being denounced as an army 'deep penetration agent' by one's comrades—and often people one recruited to the cause—comes across powerfully. The description of the methods of torture is sickeningly familiar to readers of Arthur Koestler or Alexander Solzhenitsyn. If Hannah Arendt talks of the banality of evil, one can also talk of its universality across time and cultures.

The second part, aptly entitled *Methods in Madness*, is a short history of the CPP-NPA, the recruitment and indoctrination of its cadres, and the background behind the two internal purges of 1982 and 1985, mainly the latter that so seamlessly degenerated into a murderous orgy. The section includes wrenching accounts by tortured

comrades as well as a description of the various emotional phases of the victims and the techniques they used for psychological survival.

The third part is deeply analytical and is entitled *Rot in the Root*. It attempts to look at "the multiplicity of factors that converged and interacted in a given historical frame" to produce such excesses of human pain. The author argues that these purges were not an aberration, that there was something fundamentally flawed in the revolutionary movement itself that spiralled downwards towards violence.

The first was the revolutionary brand of justice, which was always swift and arbitrary. As long as it was applied to 'the other' (ie, government soldiers), it did not strain the organisation. However, once the CPP-NPA began to look within to find explanations for battlefield defeats, it entered dangerous terrain. Clandestine, underground

organisations are sustained by camaraderie of trust, wherein the boundary separating the good 'us' from the bad 'them' is sacrosanct. Admitting that the inside was infected, coupled with a revolutionary context that did not recognise due process, meant that a suspect was already guilty and confessions had to be extracted by whatever means.

Once this sacred boundary was breached, medieval torture techniques found fertile soil that was made ready planting by an autocratic culture among the leadership, mob syndrome among the lower cadres and a fear syndrome at both levels that fuelled the vicious cycle. The author describes how, despite the belief that Marxist revolutionary movements are suffused with egalitarianism, they are in reality rigidly hierarchic with all major decisions taken by a handful at the top. The ideology—despite its perfunctory

cautioning against dogmatism—is an idolatrous worship of the wisdom from on high that precludes all other schools of thought which are easily banished with pejoratives such as 'reformist' or 'reactionary'.

All these factors conspire to kill humane individualism and critical thought. The compulsions to obey, to douse independent thinking or sense of injustice, become the imperatives for survival. Tragically, they also contribute to many idealistic innocents—potential citizens of a bright tomorrow—being tortured and killed. *To Suffer Thy Comrades* won the Philippine National Book Award in 2002, and has created a sensation in the country.

This book provides interesting parallels with events in Nepal. In describing how, at the height of their strength and popularity, the CPP-NPA fell into the paranoid path, the author writes: "... certainty of struggle gave way to confusion of reality. Marcos was down, Cory was up, and we, the Left, didn't quite know what hit us."

Similar lines could be written about the Nepali Left, whether it was their boycott of the national referendum in 1980 or of walking away from the peace talks—and safe political landing—in 2003. For the discerning analyst, the book holds many insights about political cultures and (in)compatibilities of alliances between middle ground liberal democrats, welfare socialists and the paranoid fringes. It should be required reading. ♦

Dipak Gyawali was a minister in the Chand cabinet that negotiated the last ceasefire with the Maoists.



To Suffer Thy Comrades
Robert Francis Garcia
Anvil Publishing,
Philippines, 2001

again. The piece on Beijing Duck Restaurant was simply descriptive, neither positive nor negative regarding the food or dining experience. And as editor since the May issue of *ECS*, I can tell you that nary an article on bead collecting has been submitted in that time, let alone published. Being a talented humourist and having developed general impressions of local institutions does not absolve one of responsibility to get the facts straight.

Sujal Jane Dunipace
Editor, *ECS Magazine*

operational size of the hospital, and patient pool that stretches all over the world, Bumrungrad is able to personalise and attend to even the smallest needs of its patients. Individualised patient care is the perfect complement to cutting edge medical technology and very qualified manpower at the hospital. Bumrungrad's level of services, technology and human qualities, has received mention and coverage from reputed international media.

Amod Pyakuryal,
Bumrungrad Hospital

● After reading 'In our doctors we trust' one gets the impression that the health care sector has improved in Nepal, especially in cardiology and ophthalmology. Some areas of specialisation are no doubt doing well, yet in other cases it is business as usual. We have often read stories in newspapers, of complicated surgeries being successfully conducted by renowned doctors of Nepal. However,

such stories are never followed up to find out what happens after the patient goes home. While we are talking about such tertiary level care, which may be limited to the affluent class of the Nepali society, we forget that in terms of primary health care our country lags behind. Plagued by weak health infrastructure, lack of skilled human resource, lack of resources for basic supplies and very poorly managed facilities even at district level, most patients are deprived of medical care. The medical profession is fast turning into a money making business with expensive nursing homes offering good care for a price. But is it really the quality we pay for? From the doctor's perspective, quality may mean providing the correct diagnosis, but from a patient's perspective quality means much more. It means a clean environment, prompt service and most importantly, compassionate care and respectful behaviour.

Sangita Khatri, Kathmandu

PORTERS

Thank you Ben Ayers for your articles on porter welfare ('Carrying Nepal on their backs', 'Porters in distress', #165). We have just returned from a 10-day trek in the Everest region and were horrified at the size and weight of some porters' load.

At Dole campsite, I tried to find the leaders of one particular expedition to protest at the weight of the load (52kg) that one porter was carrying. Unsuccessful, I spoke to one of the 'clients', who made no comment and seemed totally indifferent to what I was saying. We later saw at least four other groups run by the same trekking company, with at least one of their porters, and yaks also, grossly overloaded. The latter were panting heavily and obviously in distress.

With this volume of tents, cooking equipment and other common baggage going up and down the trail, surely there could be a case made for more permanent sites to be set and maintained during the main



trekking seasons. Centralised depots could be positioned at several points along the main routes and porters employed to run these as well as carry the less weighty load of trekkers. At the entrance to Sagarmatha National Park perhaps larger

reminders about porter welfare could be more prominently displayed alongside other environmental advice.

Trekking clients should be made more aware of the situation. I am sure that the vast majority would be willing to pay the extra rupees necessary to hire more porters in order to spread their loads more humanely. Personally, I was unable to raise the 'pack' of one porter off the ground—one can only imagine the longterm effects on a person's back, neck, legs and general health from carrying these heavy loads.

One last thing, trekkers: get to know your porters and tip them personally—they make your holiday happen.

Helen Palmer
The British School

CORRECTION

In 'Keep kids out of it', (#167) the name of the policeman killed in Bhaktapur should have been Hari Krishna Singkhawal.

An ominous peace

There is an unreal calm in Rukum. The guerrillas have vanished, and there is no sign of the government.



GANGA BC

GANGA BC in SIMLI, RUKUM.

There is an eerie quiet in the Maoist stronghold of Rukum in midwestern Nepal. The Maoist militia have disappeared, and rumours have it that they have moved out to the eastern tarai. Once in a while, an army helicopter hovers overhead, but otherwise there is no sign of the government. In Rukum's remote mountains, the villagers are enjoying the peace as long as it lasts. While the district headquarter at Khalanga and former battle zones like Khara show a strong army presence, most villages are under the sway of the Maoists. The rebels are so confident the security forces cannot invade their strongholds, that they have left the villages under control of their 'village peoples' government'. They say the entire district,

except Khalanga, is now under the 'New Regime' and the party is turning its attention to rural development. "We now plan to develop the villages," says Surendra Budathoki, ward chief of Purtimkanda VDC under the village peoples' government. "We have already begun to construct roads, bridges and public latrines. We're also producing electricity at different places." This is in accordance with a public directive issued by Shiva Lal Pun, leader of the village peoples' government, which threatens "severe punishment" if his orders are not obeyed. Locals have to make toilets in their homes or face the possibility of being taken to the Maoist labour camp, even though they have tried to explain that their more immediate priority is

safe drinking water. In Khola Gau, the rebels have commandeered about 300 ropanis of Dharma Bahadur Shah's land. A dozen or so convicts charged with murder and facing the Maoist brand of justice are forced to work the fields, while Shah himself has fled to Nepalganj. It is now mandatory for people to take permission from the Maoist authorities for weddings, divorces and even to travel to the district headquarters. After they tied the knot two months ago, 15-year-olds Nayan Bahadur Bohara and Buddhi Kumari Mahatara were forcibly separated and sent to their respective homes by the rebels because they were underage. The couple was also forced to pay Rs 3,000 each.



"We are strictly against child marriage and polygamy," another village leader told us. But the Maoist laws change from one village to the next because they are randomly implemented without any basis. "Our laws change according to the times. It is not necessary that the law of a village should be the same as another," explains the leader. Lower ranking Maoist rebels run the day to day activities in Rukum. They say the militia and district level leaders have gone to 'special areas' and won't divulge any other details. Reports from other sources believes the leaders are gathering in the tarai. Areas of Rukum under Maoist control are officially dry. But there is moonshine available and some villagers will secretly take a swig or two when they are sure no one is looking. The Maoists also require those who want to leave to get permission first. A Maoist 'visa' is necessary for travel to Khalanga. People visiting relatives for the holidays recently needed special Maoist

permits for going from Purtimkanda VDC to Chhibang through Simli. All travellers face intense interrogations by both Maoist sentries as well as security forces anywhere they go. The government and representatives of the national political parties are conspicuous in their absence. Another remarkable sight is that in village after village, there are only older people and children. There are no young men and women, no teenagers. A whole generation has gone missing in the villages of the midwest: they have moved to the cities or left the country for safety and in search of work. Most stayed away even during Dasai out of fear of extortion and harassment. The shortage of able-bodied men and women has meant that farm production has dwindled, and there are looming food shortages. Teacher Birendra Mahatara says, "The children are forced to take on adult chores and now have little time for school." So, the schools have shut and it is the elderly who are left to fend for themselves and take care of their grandchildren. The locals have discovered that people's rule is not what they had been promised. They mutter about how their real needs have gone unattended while the rebels are comfortable because they have no real opposition. "Of course, we are scared that they may take action against us if we complain,"

whispers one local. "We just do what they tell us to do." They are weary of the compulsory activities that the Maoists force on villagers, and some admit secretly that they are sick of obeying orders and being threatened. But they are too scared to say these things openly for fear of reprisal. The villagers also remember the police and the atrocities when they were in control here, and say that in some ways their lives are better now. "At least it is peaceful, but you never know when it will begin all over again," says teacher Bhim Bahadur Oli of Chhibang. Everyone is worried about the collapse of the ceasefire two months ago and fear an outbreak of fierce fighting similar to what took place in Bhawang in neighbouring Rolpa last month. Their overwhelming desire is for peace, so their loved ones can return home, and they can get on with their lives. Bal Bir Budathoki's son and daughter joined the rebels. He says, "There is no alternative to peace, we must be allowed to live in peace." Asked about his children, he presents a carefully neutral façade. "I just want them to be safe," he tells us. There is an undercurrent of alert fear among the villagers of Rukum. They wait for what they fear most: the crack of a rifle or the deep boom of a socket bomb from the valley below, heralding the start of another bloody battle in this never-ending war. ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Missing the point

Letters. We columnists live for them. A response to a piece of writing means—at the very least—that someone has read it. Even though in my case, it's the all too frequent scoldings and scorn that crosses the desk of my esteemed editor here at the *Nepali Times*. They are most welcome. It's somewhat of a golden rule in this business that the reader should get the final word, even if he or she is sadly mistaken in their analysis of the columnists intent, as happens from time to time. The assumption in such a case is that the writer is at fault for not conveying their message clearly enough. *Mea culpas* all around. But what does intrigue, even rattle, is the reader who misses the point entirely, or chooses spurious minor quibbles over addressing the main point in question. When I bray my all too predictable opinions on the aid and development business, I get some dandies. Deservedly so. Most people I know who work in The Sector are well-meaning, erudite and have more first-hand data than an ill informed opinionist like your correspondent. When the editor prints the letters from such people, they are usually a pleasure to read. Usually they off set or perhaps even complement my own clumsy attempts at putting aid into perspective. So, too, the odd foray into art, literature, film or

the world at large that gets a response from the readers. If someone takes the time to reply to such seeming ephemera, then may their gods be kind to them forever more. Even if it's to tell me that I'm a philistine of little better than middling talent, a failed novelist, painter or screenwriter, a hopeless case who should leave his keyboard alone more often. No problem. Keep the cards and letters coming. But I have to say, at risk of breaking the golden rule, that I'm more than a little puzzled by the responses to 'Lak in Lukla' (#166) in this space about the thrashing of a porter by an APF member. So far, public opinion measured by letters to the Almighty Editor is against the piece. One man questions whether I know where my Nepali ethnic communities live and another says I'm careless with the cost of an air ticket. I am accused of breaking up the country. Uh huh, that was me with the stick, whacking the porter on the back of the neck. None of this school of thought has so far addressed the main point that I hoped I was getting across. Unwarranted police brutality or violence creates the conditions for anger, possibly militant violence. You make Maoists when you mistreat people. Especially on what can be interpreted as ethnic grounds. So many of the rebel fighters that I've met in Rolpa, for



Breaking the rule to set the record straight.

example, tell tales of parents and relatives killed or brutalised during the police action against Maoist rebellion in the early years of the uprising. That was the misnamed Operation Romeo. And it's not just me who holds this view. Similar information is found in the pages of the excellent analysis of the Maoist movement by Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati, *A Kingdom Under Siege*, this year's must read book for any and all in Nepal who care. Even more than poverty, even more than political alienation. The police should not break sticks over people's necks unless they're engaged in riot control. Curfews are a measure of last resort in a situation of desperate civil unrest, not a way to enable the evening's drinking to proceed uninterrupted in the barracks. Public harmony is the best way to achieve peace and order in a community, and for that the police and citizenry have to work together with mutual respect and dignity. A more samizdat exchange has been taking place, going along with the gist of my piece and wishing I was far more hard-hitting, more willing to slam the authorities for ethnic exclusionism and brutality and so on. One wishes that an occasional sentiment of that nature makes it into print as well. In the interests of balance, of course. Even golden rules, it seems, were made to be broken. And something tells me I'll be hearing about this in the weeks to come... ♦

Letter to a young Maoist

Dear Comrade,

I don't know your name, but we met on the sunny veranda of a *chiya pasal* in Chomrong on a recent October morning. Far above us, the icy peaks of Annapurna were thrusting inexorably into the blue, and far below the jade-gray waters of Modi Khola were cutting patiently through the bedrock.

My friend and I had just hoisted our backpacks and prepared to set out upriver to Doban when one of our porters told us that two men sitting nearby wanted to speak with us. You looked to be in your early thirties, tall and lanky, and wore a soft-brimmed hat, windbreaker, business-casual clothes and running shoes. Consensus among observers was that you probably came from a bahun family. Your younger and shorter comrade looked like he was from a Magar or other janjati background. He was accessorised with a sub-machine gun of tubular metal stock.

My friend, who speaks some Nepali, went over to negotiate with you, while I watched from a few paces back. We knew what you wanted, having heard from other trekkers and porters of the 'toll' extracted from them near Ghorepani. They described how your fellows-in-arms cleverly closed a gate on the path when they tried to return from a sunrise climb up Poon Hill and refused to open it until they paid a per capita varying from Rs 300-1,000. Bargaining was possible and there seemed to be a special discount for young women. (What would Mao say?)

After a quarter hour of heated bargaining, it became apparent that no Golden Age tariff was available for us two middle-age men, and so we ended up paying retail. As Political Commissar, you spoke passionately in stentorian tones, and your demeanor nevertheless communicated that you believe in your cause.

When the transaction was complete, you wrote out a Donation Receipt from your notebook in the name of the Peoples' Liberation Army Nepal, Western Central Command Division, Basu Memorial 4th Brigade. It is printed in red and bears a flag with a hammer and sickle balanced by the assembled visages of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Beneath the slogans 'Unite, Workers of the World' and 'Long Live MLM and Prachandapath', it reads:

Received with thanks from _____ the sum of Rs _____ as donation for the fight against feudalism, American imperialism, expansionism and all types of reactionaries.

While you spoke, your companion said nothing but smiled occasionally, arms folded over his gun. Both of you were quite civil and you insisted on shaking our hands in parting. Why was it, then, that when we recounted our tale to the other members of our party who had started down the trail before us, my friend said he felt 'violated'? And why am I sceptical that our rupees will have any positive effect on the pressing problems that afflict Nepal?

On the way back from Annapurna Base Camp, we met some more of your people near Landruk and Tolka. Your fellow cadres spoke English quite well and were as polite and verbally unthreatening as you were. None of them were visibly armed. They said they used the 'donations' to provide medical care for people wounded in the conflict. Of the 10 or so in the group, about half were women, and no weapons were visible. They moved up through a field where local people were harvesting rice and passed us on the trail, faces sober, but the last woman in line smiled and said "Namaste". One young man sent us off down the trail with a spirited *lal salam*. Clearly, some of your people have a flair for public relations.

People who had been in Landruk said that at least 100 of your soldiers, mostly armed, had entered the town and conducted physical drills in a schoolyard, then melted away into small groups. Here and elsewhere, they said, you did not pay for your food or lodging. And your tolls on trekkers seemed to be subject to galloping inflation, as the going rate per head rose from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 in just a few days.

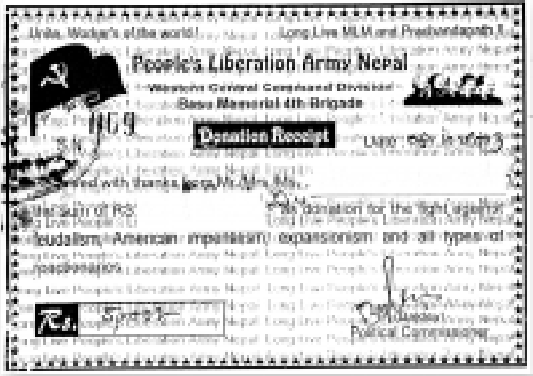
Reconstructing what was going on, it appears that your fighters took advantage of the Dasai holiday ceasefire to infiltrate into the Annapurna trail, among other areas. Not surprisingly, the army was not far behind. Returning to Chomrong from Base Camp, we learned from several sources that two army helicopters had flown over the Ghandruk area for at least an hour and had engaged your forces in a firefight.

You must be collecting a lot of money from trekkers, most of whom will not be seriously hurt by the loss of a couple thousand rupees. But will the trekkers keep coming? Still more important is how you treat your fellow Nepalis. People told us that you also exact payments from tea-house owners and trekking operators. Although they are afraid to tell you, many of your contributors resent you for this extortion. They also fear for their livelihoods if news of the fighting stops tourists from coming.

If I could talk with the army commander who ordered the helicopter mission, I would ask him: do you really think your helicopter gunners can tell combatants from civilians on the ground?

As a *bideshi* who has spent only three weeks in Nepal, I know that it is presumptuous for me to offer answers. You could easily write me off as an imperialist: I make a comfortable living in Seattle. As

An American trekker writes to a Maoist he met on the Annapurna trail two weeks ago.



a journalist, I have covered political upheaval in Latin America and Europe and have been a community activist at home.

More than 8,000 Nepalis have died in the past eight years at the hands of fellow-Nepalis. The death toll mounts every day. People are being 'disappeared' by your side and the army. Competing body-counts aside, thousands of poor Nepalis and communities in the countryside have had their lives shattered. Your leader Prachanda announced this week that he will no longer target infrastructure and VDCs. That is a good move, but who is ever going to replace the ones that have already been destroyed?

It must seem self-evident to you that political power comes from the barrel of a gun, but does it really in the long run? What about Clausewitz's dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means? Guns can't create a new order. They can't even destroy an old order if it has a strong enough hold on the minds of enough people. Mao's China has long since turned hyper-capitalist.

Your leader Baburam Bhattarai says this is a 'democratic revolution'. But that requires more than being able to recite a memorised line, it needs listening to many kinds of people and responding to their needs.

Incidentally, if I had a chance to talk to our ambassador in Kathmandu, Michael Malinowski, I would ask him: why are you adding fuel to the fire by calling Bhattarai a new Goebbels? Can't the Bush administration come up with anything more original than warmed-over World War II hyperboles like the 'Axis of Evil'? How will it help ordinary Nepalis to give military aid to an army that can't tell fighters from civilians?

Beneath the politics, however, I want to ask you an ideological question: why Maoism? Read about the Khmer Rouge, the killing fields, Sendero Luminoso. Your leaders have rejected history books as so much bourgeois propaganda. But can it all be made up? Mao was a brilliant military leader, but read the 'scar literature' by the victims of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Or read the horrors of Stalin's purges. Try to comprehend the millions of lives they wasted.

If you were able to win militarily, what would Maoism have to offer your country beyond a personality cult and slaughter? Nepal, in its present impasse, would seem to need relentless empiricism and pragmatism, along with a healthy dose of imagination, qualities for which rigid Maoism is not known. Yet there is so much progressive experience beyond Maoism to draw on.

Take a look at Latin American popular movements like Emiliano Zapata, Augusto Sandino, Farabundo Marti or Salvador Allende. Some of the movements they inspired demonstrated that revolutions can respect human rights far better than dictatorships they overthrow. Read about them in the works of the Uruguayan historian, Eduardo Galeano. In your own subcontinent, investigate Gandhi's liberation movement and go visit Kerala next time you are in India.

Drag Nepali society out of its feudal past and help dalits, ethnic minorities and women achieve their just place in it. There is a wealth of experience of non-violent movements to draw on: from the African-American civil rights movement in the US to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, from Rigoberta Menchu in Guatemala to Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar. Antonio Gramsci, the old Italian Marxist had challenging ideas about how dominant social forces manufacture the consent of subordinate ones.

How do you plan to help people in the countryside improve their lives? Nepal is at the forefront worldwide in successful application of small-scale hydroelectric power, water taps and tubewells, biogas and community forestry, in decentralised planning through VDCs and DDCs. Do you really need to destroy everything before rebuilding? Talk to the rural Nepalis who are leaders in these areas if they haven't been driven out of their homes by the war.

If you opened your mind, and looked around your country and the world for credible answers, you might save your fellow Nepalis a lot of suffering. And you just might find many more allies in the effort to build a peaceful, just and liveable Nepal for all Nepalis.

Sincerely yours,
Peter Costantini, Seattle

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

US teachers visit Nepal

Ten US public school teachers from Michigan and faculty members from Michigan State University have been in Nepal for three weeks on a Fulbright-Hays 'Group Projects Abroad' study tour. The group is studying Nepal's rivers, environment and culture, giving the teachers first-hand experience of real-life conditions in the developing world. The group visited partner schools in Pokhara and took part in water quality testing activities, and learned about Nepal's school system, especially environmental education. "It was a real privilege to live with host families and participate in their traditional religious festival," said Barbara Deslich, a teacher at Everett High School in Lansing, Michigan. Dan Pagel of Anchor Bay Middle School said, "I'll remember most the warmth and openness of the Gurung host families and the opportunity to participate in the *bhailo*."



NIN BAIRACHARYA

Reinhold Oblak said: "There is a lot to be done up there." Oblak also blamed the government's lax rules and lazy liaison officers.

Ranas of Nepal

The second edition of the book, *Ranas of Nepal*, was launched amidst a gathering of India's former royalty, Nepali Ranas and Indian officialdom in New Delhi last week. The book was released by Indian finance minister, Jaswant Singh, and was written by Prabhakar SJB Rana, Pashupati SJB Rana and Gautam SJB Rana. The former Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Karan Singh, whose wife is a Nepali Rana, was present, as was the 76th custodian of The House of Mewar in Rajasthan, Arvind Singh. Singh wrote the preface to the book, acknowledging that the Ranas are descendants of the Ranas of Mewar. The book is published by India's Timeless Books and was printed at Jagadamba Press in Kathmandu.

Austrians clean up

An Austrian expedition has brought down 250kg of rubbish from the slopes of Annapurna IV, some of it garbage thrown away by an earlier Australian expedition. Non-toxic combustible trash was burnt at base camp, and the rest brought down to Kathmandu and handed over to the Ministry of Local Development. The Saubermacher Expedition from Austria said it cleaned up to camp four on the 7,552m mountain. Leader

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Misdirected directive

The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) recently introduced a new directive blacklisting big loan defaulters. The way in which the edict was issued smacks of the lack of due process and rule of law. There is no transparency and inclusiveness in the law-making process, there is no consultation with stakeholders and the public.

The central bank's argument is that the directive is a prudential norm to safeguard the financial system. However, the regulator should have known that any law that is based on exceptions is bound to be a bad law. Aside from questions about its legality, the directive is also badly timed.

Nepal's business community is currently under siege from all sides. Sales are at an all-time low due to the insurgency and the knock on effects of a slump in tourism has hurt everyone. Businesses pay a double tax: one to the state and one to the Maoists. Now, the regulator is further squeezing them.

For any provision to be effective as a law, it has to withstand three main tests: legality, constitutionality and rationality. The directive fails all three. Legally, the bank has no authority to impose a directive of this nature under the Nepal Rastra Bank Act 2058. Even assuming

that the directive had legal basis, it would require the approval of the NRB board, which was not done.

Under the guideline, banks and financial institutions are prohibited from extending credit to businessmen and their relatives blacklisted by the directive. If a mother is blacklisted, her son or daughter cannot borrow from banks. If a private company is blacklisted, all its shareholders are automatically blacklisted too. A shareholder holding more than 10 percent share in a public company which has defaulted a bank loan is also blacklisted, whether or not such person is involved in the management of the company. It seems that the NRB, with its newfound autonomy, feels that it is above the Constitution of Nepal which guarantees the right to profession, trade and occupation as a fundamental right.

If there is a rational basis for the directive, we don't see it. There can't be any good reason to blacklist businesses just because one of their projects fails out of, say, 10 successful ventures. If the rationale was to force the businessman to divert cash from other successful projects to bail out the concerned unsuccessful project, then that would be ignoring other creditors and investors of the successful projects who have invested because of their

The Rastra Bank's blacklisting directive needs to be urgently revoked before more damage is done.



financial strength.

If this directive is implemented by the letter, Nepali banks and financial institutions would not have any one left to do business with. The directive also creates a moral hazard as it takes all the risk off the banks and financial

institutions and lets them enjoy their profit without having to take any risks. This would make our financial institutions more incompetent, because their ineptitude will be rewarded while entrepreneurship is punished.

There appears to be pressure on

NRB from donor agencies to clean up non-performing assets (NPA) to reform the banking sector. The Rastra Bank may well have thought that the directive would be a shortcut to achieve that goal, but in doing so it has cut the branch of a tree on which it is sitting.

Moreover, the directive fails to address the real reasons for the accumulation of non-performing assets. Government-owned banks have the biggest defaulters because of political lending, corrupt lending because of involvement of security valuers and managers of the banks, virtually no effective supervision of loan utilisation, and unaccountable and inefficient management. Unfortunately, the directive, still exempts the directors of government-owned corporate bodies from its ambit.

It is also common knowledge that the NRB itself has been involved in shady lending transactions in the past, and may have designed this directive as a face-saving drive or to grant itself immunity. The contents of the directive also suggest that the NRB lacks necessary leadership and dynamism to use prudence in decision-making on matters having longterm impact on the economy.

The first order of business is to immediately suspend the directive. If it can't do that, NRB should make it applicable only in cases

where fraudulent lending and misuse of the banking fund has occurred, and even then only as a temporary measure.

The system of Credit Information Bureau (CIB) incorporated by the Directive should, however, be encouraged and this institution should be strengthened. Its role should be restricted to information on credit-worthiness of individuals or companies. The provision should be made mandatory for banks to consult the information kept by the CIB before granting any credit facility notwithstanding the amount involved.

We need a system where the honest are rewarded and culprits are punished. To deal with the latter category of debtors, a law focusing on financial crime should be introduced as a priority. Under the existing law, banks and financial institutions are given a great deal of protection, but there are no standards to measure the quality of their services. There is need for self-discipline and to establish a banking code that sets standards of service. Bankers' Association of Nepal could take a lead in this. ♦

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Royal Danish Embassy, Kathmandu invites applications from qualified Nepalese citizens for a **Programme Assistant**.

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Written application should reach the Embassy P.O.Box: 6332 no later than 14th November 2003 and must include CV, education certificates and references

Interlinked rivers

from ➡ p1

"We can't comment until such time as we have been formally notified by New Delhi," Thapa told us cautiously.

Suresh Prabhu himself told India's *Economic Times* newspaper last week: "If Nepal agrees it would be the biggest beneficiary of this project. We have to convince them. Ditto for Bangladesh." That may be easier said than done. Prabhu is finding it difficult to convince even Indian state officials about the usefulness of the project. A meeting of Indian chief ministers scheduled for June to build a consensus for river-linking had to be postponed because it would be an electoral hot potato.

There is nervousness among Nepali water planners, too, because the project would mean inundate large tracts of fertile valleys, store monsoon runoff and release the water in the lean season downstream to linked rivers in India. It is still too early to tell which reservoir projects in Nepal would best suit the river-linking scheme, but logically any new project India gets involved in Nepal henceforth will be ones that will fit its river-linking blueprint.

Talk of India reviving the 269m Kosi dam, Nepali experts say, seems to be a part of this strategy. A recent Indian map of the river-linking project shows that in future, waters of the Kosi would be taken via a mammoth canal westwards into the Ghagra, which is called Karnali upstream in Nepal. It also shows a link between the Kosi and the Mechi within Nepali territory.

Officials from India's state-owned National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) were in Kathmandu this week and made an on-site inspection of the Budi Gandaki project in central Nepal. This is a storage project, and the Indian side is learnt to have agreed to go ahead with a detailed study of the facility.

The much-delayed Pancheswor project on Nepal's western border with India is also being revived. This storage project has been stuck ever since the Mahakali Treaty was signed in 1996 because of political opposition within Nepal.

Pancheswor will be a 315m rockfill dam that will also generate nearly 6,500MW of power. But more importantly, it could regulate water in the Sharada-Yamuna system downstream in India. Indian officials have also been here to talk about developing the Upper Karnali project, which the NHPC will develop jointly with Nepal Electricity Authority and the Soaltee Group.

Last week, there was a joint India-Nepal effort to remove the logjam on Mahakali through a non-governmental forum. Former Indian bureaucrat and hydro expert, BG Verghese, was optimistic that work on Pancheswor could be started. "India could offer to take over Nepal's half-share of the Mahakali project on a build-own-operate-transfer basis. It would cost Nepal nothing while guaranteeing it upgraded irrigation benefits," Verghese said.

Then there are other storage projects, like the West Seti in western Nepal which is being developed jointly by Australia's Snowy Mountain Energy Corporation, but has been held up for 10 years because of tariff disagreements with India's Power Trading Corporation.

Even without officially saying they are a part of the river-linking project, therefore, these reservoirs in Nepal would feed into India's interlinked rivers when the Indian project gets going. But if the neighbours are not consulted, the project could be a political minefield. An indication of this was a meeting of South Asian activists last week that turned into a platform to bash the river-linking scheme. "This is going to be a repeat of Farakka, it is going to bring disaster," said Asif Nazrool of the University of Dhaka, referring to the barrage on the India-Bangladesh border which Dhaka says has dried up the Ganga.

In Nepal, the UML statement this week that any agreement with India will first have to be ratified by parliament could be a sign of things to come.

India has already approached the World Bank for technical advice on the project. Mieko Nishimizu, vice president of the South Asia region at the World Bank told us last week in Kathmandu: "We have not decided yet on financing the project, but we have agreed to advise them. If the Bank gets involved financially, its rule of informing riparian states will certainly be applied." ♦

STRICTLY BUSINESS

by **ASHUTOSH TIWARI**

The billionaire next door

Media's misplaced corporate priorities were in plain view.

A small, square, black and white portrait of a man with short hair, wearing a light-colored shirt, looking slightly to the right.

But all is not lost. In fact, thanks precisely to competitive market pressures, there still remains one clear way for Nepali media houses to differentiate their products from their competitors. And that is by reporting the truth in the old-fashioned way—by vetting and verifying it before serving it to the audience. Nepali readers and viewers deserve and demand nothing less. Failing that, let me tell you about this other billionaire who lives down the street . . . ♦

[illegible]

Darj

The Queen of the Hills gears up for a carnival next week.

DANIEL B HABER
in DARJEELING

Breakfast at Glenary's is a *de rigueur* ritual for visitors to Darjeeling, and the aroma of freshly baked croissants lured me in. I recognise a familiar face at one of the tables, Kathmandu musician and RJ Yanni Shrestha with an American friend. "Have you seen the headlines?" Yanni asks, holding up the Kolkata paper which screamed: 'Horror in the

Hills: 4 Tourists Die in Cable Car Plunge'. From the photos it looked a bit like the one in Manakamana. "We'd been riding on it just the day before, and we both thought it looked a bit shaky!"

At the time, between Dasai and Tihar, Darjeeling was packed shoulder to shoulder with Indian tourists, mostly boisterous Bengalis. There were very few foreign backpacker types as in Nepal. And aside from



Glenary's, there are precious few restaurants catering to Western tastes. Unlike Dharamsala, which sees many foreigners, Darjeeling, despite its more spectacular scenery and trekking trails, isn't quite on the Muesli Trail. Hence, no banana pancakes, cheese toasties, salads, brown rice or brown bread on the menus here.

Later, after breakfast, I meet with Ajay Edwards, the 30-something Nepali owner of Glenary's. He's the main organiser of the upcoming Darjeeling Carnival, 7-17 November. It will feature a Harmony in the Hills music festival. Being a Baby Boomer generation ex-Flower-child, I couldn't help noticing and mentioning that the

wavy lettering in the posters resembles what we termed 'psychedelic' back in the 60s. Edwards grins and intimates that they'd welcome a Woodstock-type gathering of bands for which Darj already has a reputation amongst Nepali pop music aficionados.

Despite his English name, Edwards says he is a "pure Nepali" mix of Pradhan and Lepcha. His grandfather, having served in the British army, took on an English name. Edwards tells me with a sardonic grin, "Ironically, the day we invited all the Kolkata media for the carnival press conference was the day of the ropeway tragedy—so we got all this negative press." But unflappable,

optimistic Edwards must feel that any publicity is good publicity so long as they spell the names right.

As he pours me a cup of Apoorva Tips tea, he suggests that I write about the Happy Valley Tea Estates, as this year is its centennial, which is being celebrated as part of the carnival. The Darjeeling tea industry has fallen on hard times. "But," he hastens to add, "this is both a curse and a blessing. Although it provided employment, it has always been a hand-to-mouth existence." The average salary for a tea plucker is only IRs 200 per week, less than a spot of high tea with watercress sandwiches at Darjeeling's Windamere Resort, which costs IRs 800.

Even as we sip the finest Darjeeling organic tea, Edwards refers to the tea plantation work as "bondage" to the tea estate. When the British founded Darjeeling, it was totally uninhabited. Like America, it was populated by immigrant labourers: (predominantly) Nepalis, Lepchas, Tibetans and a few Bhutanis as well. So there were no traditional Hindu caste restrictions, and due to the British influence, Darjeeling became more egalitarian than other parts of caste-conscious India and Nepal.

The Nepali labourers hailed from all castes, but mostly Rai, Limbu, Tamang and 70 percent of them were uneducated (despite Darjeeling's reputation for the best schools in India), and the workers' children were not encouraged to study. After the Brits left, the estates were run by Bengalis and Marwaris whom, Edwards maintains, continued to simply extract profits and give nothing back to the plantation workers. Due to a glut in the world tea market and six months of bad business in which the workers were not paid (and a number of tea estates closed down), the owners fled. Happy Valley is now run by a committee and they want to turn it into a workers' cooperative like Amul Dairies. "Our concern," Edwards says, "is that we want to make the tea gardens economically viable. If the local people aren't making money, then we all suffer."

A few days later, I was invited to one of the planning sessions of the carnival. It was a pleasant surprise to see that the organisers—all from the private sector—are mostly hip, young professionals with an enthusiastic sense of civic pride, something which is conspicuous by its absence in Kathmandu. Also absent in Darjeeling is pollution (vehicles are banned from the touristic, pedestrian Mall area, as should be done in Thamel), the streets are swept clean daily and some of the street lighting actually work.

Aside from the Happy Valley centenary celebrations, which begins the carnival, the many events include a kite-festival, pony pageant, dog show, orchid shows, para-sailing, white-water rafting, a Darjeeling Run and a vintage Land Rover Rally which will be covered by the BBC. Each evening will conclude with bands and musical cultural performances on the Mall



Getting there

Fly to Bhadrapur, or else take the bus to Kakarbhitta, as we did. However, with curfews in Chitwan, frequent check-points and the Maoist stoppage of highway traffic, the journey to Darjeeling could take two days. If they ever open the Bagdogra airport to flights from Kathmandu, that could be a time-saver and big boon to both destinations.

overlooking (well, not quite overlooking) majestic Kanchenjunga. Visitors will be garlanded with *khata*s and presented with packets of Darjeeling tea.

Even when there is no carnival, on weekends the Darjeeling Police band, dressed in tartans, plays martial tunes on bagpipes at the bandshell and promenades around the Mall. However, for Raj nostalgia buffs, such as your reporter, it is surprising that with so many historic Raj-era buildings here, there doesn't seem to be any heritage conservation society. One old building near the Planters' Club is slated to be demolished for a new shopping complex.

For expats feeling constrained by Nepal's 150-day maximum annual stay for tourists, more liberal India wisely allows six-month stays per visit and offers five to 10-year visas. For those unable to make the Darjeeling Carnival, the Queen of the Hills is also hosting the Dalai Lama between 3-6 December for dharma talks. That is sure to draw Tibetans and dharmaphiles, as His Holiness will not be giving the Kala Chakra initiations next January in Bodh Gaya, as he usually does. ♦

Daniel Haber is an American freelance writer based in Kathmandu, currently in exile in Darjeeling.

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RECOLLECTION

by **RENCHIN YONJAN**



“Somewhere, my love, there will be songs to sing Although the snow, covers the hope of spring.
Somewhere a hill, blossoms in green and gold
And there are dreams, all that your heart can hold...”
Haunting words from the theme song from *Dr Zhivago* open the floodgates of my memories of Darjeeling. I'll always remember dancing to this song in Darjeeling because it was the first time that I felt very

My Darjeeling

grown-up. At 16, in November 1966, this was my first introduction to being part of a young go-getter crowd. I had just joined North Point College. Peter Karthak, well known writer and musician, his brother Mark who operated a travel agency in Kathmandu, Devendra Gurung, another tourism entrepreneur and Abhay Gurung, a famous football player, are four people I remember being with me that evening. I felt excited and happy because I was discovering the excitement of being young and beautiful—even though I did not know it that day. I would never have been able to stay up dancing with strangers till 10PM in Kalimpong where I spent my school years.

I went on my first blind date in Darjeeling. My dear friend Betty wanted to see a movie with her steady boyfriend at the Capital Cinema Hall but needed an excuse to get permission from her family. So she decided I would double date her boyfriend's friend! I did not like my date but I loved the chocolates and popcorn he heaped on me.

I spent most of my school years in Kalimpong, just 32 miles away from Darjeeling. Even as a child, Darjeeling beckoned with her 'city' lights. Kalimpong was studies and routine, but Darjeeling was glamour with sophisticated women who promenaded up and down Chowrasta during the day and swayed to the rhythm of Western music at the Gymkhana Club in the evenings. I adored the beautiful clothes they wore, specially the sleeveless backless *cholis* worn with panache in the freezing Darjeeling evenings. As a child, Chowrasta meant endless pony rides paid for by indulgent grandparents and aunts. Chowrasta meant hot dogs and cheese sandwiches with milkshakes at Keventer's and yummy cakes from Glenary's.

“*Yati Chokho Yati Mitho diunla timilai maya*” is the other song I associate with Darjeeling. It was penned by my husband Gopal Yonjan in the heydeys of our

romance. We met in Kathmandu but it was the few days of frequent close meetings in Darjeeling that fanned the flames of our love. This photo (*see pic, left*) was taken in 1968 at the gardens of the zoo. We decided to marry after our whirlwind romance in the Queen of the Hills.

Gopal introduced me to the literary world of Darjeeling. I met many lyricists, singers, composers, poets and writers. For someone who had grown up with Western classical and pop music, meeting these intellectuals who discussed Nepali music and literature with such earnestness

was my first exposure to the vastness of Nepali art and culture. Darjeeling, at that time, was at its height of literary activities. I distinctly remember Gopal composing Agam Singh Giri's *Yudha ra Yodha*. It was also a time of musical concerts and sitting endless hours in the cold room at Kala Mandir while he played and sang for his friends.

At the top of the hill at Chowrasta known as Mahakalthan was a shrine where a Hindu priest and a Buddhist lama sat together in total peace, handing out blessings to whoever came along. It was to this hill that Gopal took me to share some of his dreams and to woo me with undying promises of love!

Darjeeling, my Darjeeling, will always be a special place of music, romance and sophistication. ♦

Renchin Yonjan grew up in Kalimpong, blossomed in Darjeeling and now works as a self-described “social architect and entrepreneur” in Kathmandu.

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BRITISH COUNCIL



Let them go back

The plot thickens in the 13-year-old Bhutani refugee problem. The focus temporarily shifted from Khudunabari to Geneva in early October for the 54th session of the 64-nation executive committee of UNHCR where Bhutan, Nepal, India and UNHCR spoke their minds.

The statement by UNHCR High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers comforted Bhutan, provoked India to reconfirm its Bhutanese tilt, and once more exposed Nepal's ineptitude and rudderlessness.

While decrying the denial of participation in the joint Bhutani-Nepali process of verification and access to areas of potential return by Bhutan as a "totally unacceptable" situation, Lubbers announced three key measures towards resolution of the refugee problem:

- UNHCR will help Nepal with local integration of those willing to remain and to grant them citizenship.
- Support resettlement initiatives for vulnerable cases.
- Because UNHCR cannot verify the repatriation process, it will not promote returns, and it will gradually phase out its direct involvement in the Jhapa camps.

Lubber's statement was a premature and pre-emptive declaration. He possibly wanted to give an ultimatum both to Bhutan and Nepal and preempt the ongoing negotiations at the ministerial level meeting between Bhutan and Nepal.

But can the UNHCR withdraw unilaterally from its responsibilities towards the refugees in the camps? Its frustration with the negotiation process is understandable. There is compassion fatigue among refugee aid groups. The UNHCR's own

Bhutani refugees need a dignified return to their homeland through an internationally-monitored repatriation process.



budget cuts and diversion of what remains to Iraq and Afghanistan is worrying.

The results of the 15th round reconfirmed the vacillations and double standards of the Nepali government. Whatever it said for public consumption, the truth is that Nepal has steadily surrendered the repatriation rights of refugees. If the host country itself offers local integration then the UNHCR is helpless.

The Nepali representative put on a brave face, and explained that the offer of local integration was not a "stand alone suggestion"—it was for "residual cases" of unwilling returnees. But the Nepali stand was poorly thought through. Bhutan can now pick and choose "real refugees" and

determine conditions for their return.

Nepal may also have set an undesirable precedence for itself. What if a forced exodus takes place from northeast India, as has happened in the past?

Bhutan took full advantage of Nepal's ambivalent stand, when its delegate in Geneva expressed "full commitment to the bilateral process". Contrary to everyone's belief, he called it "very complex, and not a typical refugee situation". Why and who factored in matrices of complexity in this otherwise straight-forward case of state repression-led refugee exodus is itself an interesting analytical question.

Bhutan has always tried to retain its distance from the UNHCR, but it must look

beyond the offer of local integration. The refugees are Bhutani citizens, and their relocation in Nepal would only reconfirm Thimpu's ethnic cleansing drive. Besides permanently tarnishing its relatively clean image, a festering refugee issue will be politically costly to Bhutan. Once and for all, Thimpu has to do some serious introspection, there has been a lot of negative exposure for Bhutan.

Bhutani officials now admit excesses were committed. The initial enthusiasm with which they defended themselves by ly condemning Lhotsampas as *ngolops* and agents of 'Greater Nepal' has been abandoned.

Interestingly, India's representative at the UNHCR executive committee meeting in Geneva made a very direct attack on the body's proactive role in putting forward three key measures. India blamed the UNHCR for a "misguided approach" of funding the camps in eastern Nepal, saying this had led to the creation of "vested interest in their perpetuation", and that refugees had a higher standard of living than the local population was itself a source of tension.

While India's provocation is understandable, this highly subjective statement on living conditions in the camp is a mere repetition of Bhutan's decade-old stance. Bhutan always wanted the camps to be quickly dismantled so the world would not be constantly reminded of the eviction of its own citizens.

Anyone visiting the camps in Jhapa will realise how devastating it has been for the refugees. The social indicators are horrendously dismal. A new generation of Bhutanis has grown up in the camps that has never seen the motherland. What are the longterm implications of such social disintegration, the loss of faith through chronic denial of justice?

Doesn't this indicate a sharp erosion of India's large-hearted humanitarian values? The hapless refugees expect India to provide at least an objective view and suggest substantive pathways to make repatriation possible.

The ground reality of the region has been transformed since 1990. The Bhutan, Bengal, Assam, East Nepal quadrangular corridor is becoming the most volatile hotbed of militancy and terrorism in the region. The ability of the involved countries to fight militancy remain highly stretched and diminished.

All this needs fresh and creative thinking among the powers-that-be in each of the countries. Bhutan has to take all its citizens back with full respect and dignity, and this can only be done if the refugees are restored their citizenship, land holdings and politico-cultural rights.

Bhutan will have to constitute a team of independent international observers, even the UNHCR, to transparently monitor the proposed repatriation and rehabilitation process. The refugees now need a total solution, no posturing, no half-measures. ♦

Mahendra P Lama is Professor of South Asian Economies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.



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Rights groups say agreement will not resolve refugee crisis

NEW YORK — A coalition of five leading rights groups said here Tuesday that last week's Nepal-Bhutan agreement was not in the interest of the 100,000 Bhutani refugees stranded in Nepal since 1990. The two governments had called the 15th ministerial talks in Thimpu, a "historic breakthrough" in arranging the repatriation of the refugees.

But Rachael Reilly, refugee policy advisor at Human Rights Watch, said: "These talks between Nepal and Bhutan were neither historic nor a breakthrough, they have ignored the concerns of the international community and failed to provide a solution for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Donor countries must insist on the full involvement of the international community in solving the refugee crisis."

The joint statement is signed by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Lutheran World Federation, Habitat International Coalition and the Bhutanese Refugee Support Group, called on donors to urgently convene an international conference involving the two governments, refugee representatives, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

After years of stalemate, the governments of Bhutan and Nepal in March 2001 agreed to conduct a pilot screening of the refugees in Khudunabari camp, which houses 12,000 refugees, to determine their identities and eligibility to return to Bhutan. The refugees were divided into four categories. In August, refugee organisations expressed grave concern about flaws in the screening process as it excluded UNHCR, and failed to comply with international human rights and refugee standards, and risked leaving tens of thousands of refugees stateless.

The mission also identified the refugees' key concerns regarding repatriation to Bhutan. These include guarantees of safety and security, full citizenship rights, and return to original homes and properties for refugees returning to Bhutan. None of these conditions was addressed by the latest round of talks, the coalition said.

The Bhutani government agreed to allow three refugee categories to return, but failed to clarify conditions under which the refugees would be readmitted. Some refugees would have to reapply for citizenship in Bhutan after a probationary period of at least two years, even though the majority of them were forced to sign 'voluntary migration forms' when leaving Bhutan.

"The two governments look set to repeat all the mistakes of the initial screening in Khudunabari camp," said Peter Prove, Assistant to the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. "None of the fears of the refugees have been properly addressed, and the process could drag on for years, prolonging the suffering of the refugees."

UNHCR announced earlier this month that it would begin phasing out assistance to the refugee camps in the absence of a just and lasting solution by Nepal and Bhutan. "For too long donor governments have offered tacit support to the bilateral process between Nepal and Bhutan," said Eve Lester, refugee coordinator at Amnesty International. "Now they must recognise that this strategy has failed and international efforts are needed to find a comprehensive solution for the refugees." ♦

ANALYSIS

by JOSEPH E STIGLITZ



Trading places

The message: do what we did, not what we say.



Today, many emerging markets, from Indonesia to Mexico, are told that there is a certain code of conduct to which they must conform if they are to be successful. The message is clear: here is what advanced industrial countries do, and have done. If you wish to join the club, you must do the same. The reforms will be painful, vested interests will resist, but with enough political will, you will reap the benefits.

Each country draws up a list of what to be done, and each government is held accountable in terms of its performance. In all countries, balancing the budget and controlling inflation are high on the list, but so are structural reforms.

As someone who was intimately involved in economic policy making in the US, I have always been struck by the divergence between the policies that America pushes on

developing countries and those practiced in the US itself. Nor is America alone: most other successful developing and developed countries pursue similar "heretical" policies.

For example, both political parties in the US now accept the notion that when a country is in a recession, it is not only permissible, but even *desirable*, to run deficits. Yet all over the world, developing countries are told that central banks should focus exclusively on price stability.

While free marketers rail against industrial policy, in the US the government actively supports new technologies, and has done so for a long time. The first telegraph line was built by the US Federal Government between Baltimore and Washington in 1842; the Internet, which is so changing today's economy, was developed by

the US military. Much of modern American technological progress is based on government-funded research in biotechnology or defence.

Similarly, while many countries are told to privatise social security, America's public social security system is efficient and customers are responsive. It has been pivotal in almost eliminating poverty among America's elderly.

For more than a hundred years, America has had strong anti-trust laws, which broke up private monopolies in many areas, such as oil. In some emerging markets, telecom monopolies are stifling development of the Internet, and hence economic growth. In others, monopolies in trade deprive countries of the advantages of international competition, while monopolies in cement significantly raise the price of construction.

The American government also

played an important role in developing the country's financial markets—by providing credit directly or through government-sponsored enterprises, and by partially guaranteeing a quarter or more of all loans.

Occasionally, America has experimented with free-market ideology and deregulation—sometimes with disastrous effects. President Ronald Reagan's deregulation of the Savings and Loan Associations led to an infamous wave of bank failures that cost American taxpayers several hundred billion dollars and contributed to the economic recession of 1991.

Those in Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil, India and other emerging markets should be told a quite different message: do not strive for a mythical free-market economy, which has never existed.

Instead, developing economies should look carefully, not at what America says, but at what it did in the years when America emerged as an industrial power, and what it does today. There is a remarkable similarity between those policies and the activist measures pursued by the highly successful East Asian economies over the past two decades. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, and former Chief Economist and Senior Vice President at the World Bank.

ANALYSIS

by GEORGE P FLETCHER



T for Terrorism

Every age has its enemies. In the mid-20th century, Fascists were the evildoers. After WWII, Communists became civilisation's nemesis. Now terrorists have become the designated masters of malevolence. The word "terrorism" appears in law books and legislation around the world. Various civil sanctions apply to "terrorist organisations," and it can be a crime to assist one.

But it is not always easy to determine who "they"—the terrorists—are. Whether organisations are terrorist or not is largely a determination motivated by politics. The UN repeatedly passes resolutions against terrorism, but cannot agree on how to define the term.

Official definitions of terrorism are unpersuasive. The US Congress, for example, defines terrorism as including a motive to coerce or intimidate a population or influence a government. But this formula does not clearly cover even the terrorist attacks of September 2001. If the motive of the airline hijackers was simply to kill infidels, their attack would fall outside the Congressional definition.

It is a mistake to try to define terrorism in the same way that we define theft or murder. The three primary points of controversy are: the identity of the victims, the perpetrators and the relevance of a just cause. Must terrorism's victims be civilians?

There is a similar question

It's not easy to says who is a terrorist.



about the perpetrators. Can terrorists be soldiers or state agents? Islamic states within the UN favor this position, and I think they are right. The most controversial issue in defining terrorism is captured by the slogan: "One person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter." The problem is whether a good cause justifies using horrendous means. Islamic states think that it does, which puts them at odds with Western opinion.

There are troubling borderline cases. What about the Stern gang's blowing up of Jerusalem's King David Hotel in order to liberate Palestine from the British? Is there good terror and bad terror? For some the political cause counts heavily, but in fact there are only a few historical cases in which most

people actually disagree.

Behind the phenomenon, the nagging question remains: why is terrorism different, why does it require a special definition, why are we more afraid of this form of violence than other criminal acts? One reason is that terrorism is typically organized activity. In July 2002, when an Egyptian opened fire and killed two people waiting in line at the El Al counter at Los Angeles International Airport, the FBI decided that the suspect was not a terrorist because he was acting alone. Terrorists are organised, and the group can continue even after the individual is caught. That makes them more frightening than ordinary criminals.

Another reason for our greater fear of terrorism is that whereas

ordinary criminals prefer secrecy, terrorists crave publicity. Effective terrorism always captures headlines. It is unexpected, with great shock value. Like good theater, terrorism always acts out some moral drama, and to strike terror in the public mind, terrorists must act in public, without guilt or remorse.

But suppose we try to define the attacks of September 11, 2001, as terrorism by using the following formula: a violent, organized and public attack by private parties on other civilians, without guilt, regardless of the justice of the cause. Problems still remain, because there are counter-examples for each of these six dimensions.

Sometimes the victims are military and the perpetrators are states, sometimes the cause appears to be just and sometimes one person with enough weapons but no organization might wreak terror. A conspiracy to lace letters with anthrax might incite private terror. Some terrorists might feel remorse and guilt about their actions.

Complex definitions with built-in exceptions may make lawyers uncomfortable, but in the real world, they are perhaps the best we can devise. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

George P Fletcher is the author of *Romantics at War: Glory and Guilt in the Age of Terrorism* and a professor at Columbia University School of Law.

Prevention, not cure

NEW DELHI — India has just been pledged \$200 million to fight HIV/AIDS by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, but none of this money will go toward anti-retrovirals, which activists say could help alleviate the suffering of some 4 million people living with the virus. Prasada Rao, secretary in Union Health Ministry, said the emphasis would continue to be on "prevention rather than cure". But those involved in the care of HIV victims say that extra funds for treatment could greatly extend the lifespans of those already suffering and alleviate their misery.

Curiously though, India is a major producer and exporter of generic anti-retrovirals. Large Indian companies like Cipla and Ranbaxy are poised to provide medication to several countries in the Africa and Caribbean region under a deal backed by former US president Bill Clinton. Helene Gayle, director of the HIV/AIDS, TB and reproductive health program at the foundation, said India has a "very small window of opportunity within which to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic". The focus will be on 'District Focus State Impact Initiative' that will support HIV prevention programs in the six highest AIDS incidence states of India. (IPS)

Mixed bag

COLOMBO — The 20-month-old ceasefire between Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government, the longest in Sri Lanka's history, has delivered a mixed bag of blessings to people, especially in conflict areas. The absence of war has no doubt created a better living environment and increased chances for a negotiated settlement as never before, but community leaders and activists say it has yet to go further and translate into changed quality of life for many. Others point out that despite the absence of open conflict, the lives of civilians in LTTE controlled areas continue to be restricted due to landmines and the Tiger rebels' de facto tax system.

Several multilateral donor agencies and aid organisations have started projects in the north and east or revived pre-cessfire projects. The World Bank has two major projects with combined funds of \$23 million, the ADB is pouring \$25 million into the North-east Community Restoration and Development Project and the German GTZ is assisting the rehabilitation of schools. NORAD and USAID are involved in demining efforts. However, donor agencies and other observers say war-affected areas not only lack infrastructure but also basic sanitation, health and education facilities. (IPS)

Positive reinforcement

Karna Shakya, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 3 October-1 November

Despite the immense potential and opportunities that we are blessed with, Nepalis have developed a strange complex. They don't believe in themselves anymore, they lack self esteem and underestimate their own capabilities. This inferiority is becoming a national epidemic.

The intelligentsia that is supposed to lead society is gripped by negativism. People from all walks of life see nothing but despair and hopelessness in their sectors. The honest, creative people are demoralised. We must stop devaluing ourselves all the time.

Intellectuals and politicians must accept partial blame for spreading rumours that Nepal is in shambles. They misused the nation as a begging bowl among international donors for their own personal aggrandisement. Witnessing all those vested interests at work, the new generation has every reason to feel depressed, especially when their peers desert the country in droves for a better future.

Has Nepal crossed the point of no return? Is the rot irreversible? Yes, we are in a bit of a jam, but it is a crisis we can pull ourselves out of. These are problems resulting from decades of mismanagement. The country that used be one of the safest in the world a decade ago, now has a badly tarnished international image, thanks also to the Maoist insurgency.

But, let's face it, Nepal is not the only nation that has problems. We are going through a nation-building phase that has forced us to come to terms with some of the contradictions in our socio-political milieu. We have to tackle this head-on. With problems come opportunities. They demand solutions, which in turn invite progress that leads to development. Sadly, a majority of Nepalis are so put off by the state of affairs that they choose to give up.

If we analyse our past, we will be able to see some progress. Fifteen years ago, we had to go to India for simple medical-surgeries. Today, Nepal has the facilities even for open-heart procedures. A decade ago, we had to curry favour from junior staff at embassies to send our children abroad to study. Today, our children have many choices right here in Nepal. Notice the leap we made in the areas of communication and banking. Those who harp on about our non-performance must acknowledge the success stories like the apple orchards in Mustang. Nepal is not landlocked, it is brain-locked.

While Nepal occupies only 0.15 percent of the earth's land surface, we boast about 15 percent of its biodiversity. We are the second richest country in terms of water resources, with the second largest population of tigers, the biggest number of snow leopards in the world and, believe it or not, the biggest stock of wild honey. Yet we feel ashamed of ourselves. What an irony! Get on a bicycle and visit our seven world heritage sites inside Kathmandu Valley, all within an hour of each other. Is there any other place so rich in culture and heritage? Our ancestors built the Nyatapola without scaffolding, they crafted underground water channels to feed urban water spouts.

Democracy is a Pandora's box. The bad will get evil things from it, but for the majority, it will bring hope. We need to revive optimism among those who despair about the country's future. We need visionaries who can teach the Nepali people to dream again. We have to lift each other out of this morass. Each of us, in our little niches, have to maintain our integrity and our sense of national purpose.



हिमाल

Long march

Bhojraj Bhat in
Spacetime, 29 October

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

Around 800 Maoist militia have penetrated several eastern districts from their stronghold in mid-western Nepal. They reached Tehrathum, Panchthar, Taplejung and Sankhuwasava nearly six months ago, while the government was engaged in peace talks with the rebels during the ceasefire period. The rebels in the eastern districts belonged originally to the seventh brigade stationed in western Nepal. They were ordered to move east to strengthen Maoist military presence there. "The Maoists in these areas were engaged in only organisational build-up, we thought they should be ready militarily too," says Birbahadur Shahi, a Maoist guerilla from Kalikot, now in the east.

The rebels said they travelled in eight reserved buses. Security forces spotted them when they reached Salleri in Dhankuta and they asked to step out of the vehicles while it was searched. The army found photographs of them carrying guns, yet let them leave. Since then, the rebels have dispersed throughout the east. Security forces in the east say they are aware of the infiltration, but refused to comment any further.

Since most of the Maoists come from Mangalsen, Dang, Jumla, Arghakhanchi, they've been having problems communicating with the local cadre. Meanwhile, the rebels in the east complain their comrades from the mid-west humiliate them. "They repeatedly say that we in the east are not ready to sacrifice our lives," said Indra Bahadur 'Sankat' Rai, chief of the 'peoples' government' at Pathibara. "They believe hundreds of us have to die to lay strong foundation for the party here."

Why Bhojraj?

Rajdhani, 29 October

राजधानी

NAWALPARASI – Sixty-year-old Bhojraj woke up at dawn to set up his small tea stall. Just as he was stirring in some tea, a bullet hit him. With no one around, he died alone. Bhojraj was one of the first victims of the Maoists' barrage of fire that preceeded their attack on Sunuwal police station in Nawalaparasi on 26 October. Six policemen and one office staff were also killed, proving the Maoists are not paying any heed to their leaders. The incident contravenes the direct orders of Maoist supremo Prachanda who said before Tihar that the Maoists would not destroy infrastructure, kill ordinary citizens or low ranking security personnel. That should have been enough to keep safe a lonely, impoverished old man who was just passing by with his tea trolley.

Military business

Angaraj Timilsina in
Kantipur, 29 October

कान्तिपुर

Like in the Philippines, if we are unable to arrest corruption in the army, tackling corruption in civil areas will be even more difficult because corrupt military officials will protect their kind in other sectors. As in Pakistan, if the military influence in politics increases, democratic structures in the country will become weak and autocracy will gain ground. If our army gets involved in trade and construction as in Indonesia, civil society will be devalued and the army will not be involved in defence and security, but business.



Rehabilitated

Annapurna Post, 20 October

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

"Now I realise that I was living like an animal," says Ekta Mahat, a former drug addict who started shooting heroin since she was in grade eight. Ekta (*see pic*) is the first Nepali girl to have publicly acknowledged her drug dependency. After long years of addiction, she quit with the support of her loved ones. "I won't blame anyone for my addiction. The people who love me helped me build my resolve to quit."

With help of a rehabilitation organisation, Ekta is now busy counseling other female drug addicts on how to stop while there's still time. Sharing her experiences from addiction to total abstinence, young Ekta has a new vocation as an educator to lift the morale of drug addicts and motivate them to change their lives. "If we are to help them, then society should be more supportive," says Ekta who is advocating against the social stigma attached to drug addiction. There are an estimated 90,000 drug addicts in Nepal. "Many addicts are women but social fear keeps them from coming out into the open and asking for help," she says. Ekta still has difficulties relating to her own family. She is worried that, like her, a large number of addicted youth are alienated from their parents.

Headline: Pakistan to host SAARC Summit
Signboard: Road closed
We'd have better roads if we hosted the SAARC Summit in our district!

नेपाल समाचारपत्र *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 19 October

Senior comrade, our cadre have stopped obeying orders. Perhaps we should try making a request!

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 30 October

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Prime Minister Thapa has revived the Panchayati style of political nominations."
-Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala in *Rajdhani*, 30 October

Green card

Kantipur, 26 October

कान्तिपुर

There is strong evidence that several senior government officials from important ministries and state institutions have become permanent residents in the US, New Zealand, Canada and Europe. Their numbers are increasing, especially after the introduction of the Diversity Visa (DV) scheme by the US government. At least a dozen senior bureaucrats have taken advantage of their positions. Diwakar Pant from Nepal Legal Reforms Commission (NLRC) and Arjun Prasad Shrestha from the Ministry of Water Resources are already green card holders. Shrestha, who recently came from the US after a year, is already in a hurry to go back. "Once you're a permanent resident you have to return to the US every year and I'm having problems adjusting my leave of absence," says Shrestha, who adds that speed is of the essence if he is to receive benefits from the US government as a green card holder. Most officials who have dual citizenships, like Shrestha, are on leave but still associated with the government. Another report says a group of government officials have become residents of New Zealand. A year-and-a-half ago, six under-secretaries left for New Zealand on a study leave and have been extending their official leave ever since. Although the issue of whether a Nepali citizen be a permanent resident in two countries is still unclear, many officials are not worried since they have the security of an American DV.

It is difficult to estimate the number of government officials who are 'aliens' through these processes. "Once they take leave, it's not necessary for them to give details about their whereabouts. So, we will never know who is a green card holder," says Ek Narayan Aryal, a government official. The government is unsure about what kind of legal steps can be taken, especially when most relevant government units profess ignorance. More than the legality, there is the moral issue of Nepali officials swearing oaths of allegiances to other countries. It merely proves they are interested in living in Nepal only if it comes with high promotions, attractive salaries and cushy benefits. Otherwise they're off to foreign shores. "How honest do you think these officers are?" questions Madhab Poudel from the Law Ministry. "They are disloyal to Nepal."

PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD
NAME: SHRESTHA, ARJUN
BIRTHDATE: 04/07/58
CATEGORY: Diversity
SEX: M
COUNTRY OF BIRTH: NEPAL
SOCIAL AFFILIATION: N/A
CARD NO: 12345678901234567890
EXPIRATION DATE: 07/23/11

BOOK REVIEW

by MARK TURIN

Lo and behold



The kingdom of Mustang, bordering Tibet to the north and Thak Khola to the south, has long been an object of fascination to foreign scholars of the Himalaya. Although three generations of Western and Japanese travellers and professors have cut their teeth on the cultures, languages, geology and archaeology of Mustang, few Nepalis have conducted substantial research projects in the region.

Dr Ramesh Kumar Dhungel, a cultural historian at the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) of Tribhuvan University, is a notable exception. He is one of a handful of Nepali academics with professional interest in the culture and history of the high Himalaya. As Dhungel pointed out at the launch of *The Kingdom of Lo (Mustang): A Historical Study*, working in Mustang required him to keep an open mind regarding local observances. It is a tribute to Dhungel's obvious good cheer and unjudgemental approach to scholarship that the Crown Prince of Mustang, Gyalchung Jigme SP Bista, privately published the present monograph to raise money for the restoration of Mustang's ancient gompas.

Dhungel's early research in Mustang was conducted between 1982-83, so this monograph can truly be said to have had a long gestation period. Largely based on genealogical documents, the book is a historical study of the kingdom from the 7th century to about 1950. It charts both the emergence of a polity in 1440 (which came to be called Lo/Mustang) and how "key geographical, cultural and political realities had earlier shaped its regional identity". On account of both its geographical location on the trans-Himalayan trade route and the vibrancy of the local Buddhist culture, Mustang retained considerable political autonomy until its incorporation into Nepal in 1789, to which it paid tribute as a dependent until 1961, when this status was rescinded by the Dependent Principalities Act. The title of *raja*, together with a selection of traditional rights, allowances and honorary positions are still retained to this day. Including the present king of Mustang, the kingdom has been ruled continuously by 21 generations of *rajas* heralding from the same dynasty.

The book is divided into five chapters with a physical and cultural overview to the region, the background to the emergence of Lo/

A welcome antidote to the trend of condescending Nepali research on Mustang.

analysis of genealogical, chronological and bibliographical documents. Many of these texts, originating in Tibetan, Nepali or older variations, make for fascinating reading. Other disciplines, however, are a little beyond Dhungel's remit and he is misinformed when he writes: "no detailed study on the languages and cultures of the entire Lo/Mustang region (both upper and lower) has been attempted". There have been scores of detailed linguistic and ethnographic studies of the area since he conducted his research in the 1980s.

Dhungel pulls no punches, and is as critical of other scholars as he is supportive of their achievements. In his chronology of Mustang-ologists and the associated 30-page bibliography, however, there are some glaring omissions, most notably the many published works by Charles Ramble and Dieter Schuh. Likewise, while foreign scholars are lambasted for not conducting grassroots fieldwork, there is little recognition by Dhungel of the difficulty of obtaining permits for such empirical research. Given that Nepalis can travel to Mustang freely, Dhungel could have perhaps recommended that more Tribhuvan University scholars focus their research interests on this important area of Nepal.

The appendices include a fascinating discussion on the etymology of Mustang place names, 26 historical Nepali documents and 24 Tibetan ones, both reproduced in the original scripts. Readers casually interested in the history of Mustang should be forewarned: this is a serious, scholarly historical work, requiring some previous exposure to Tibetan historiography and an interest in genealogy and dates. The facts come alive through the 30 pages of well-reproduced colour plates, many of them photographs by the professional photographer Macduff Everton, while others depict a young Dhungel in various locations throughout Mustang.

The author cites the writer Victor Kiernan who has suggested that colonial scholars, in particular the British, were "bound to see the local history from a standpoint of their own". Such orientalist perspectives are sadly still quite widespread, particularly among socially-dominant and high caste Nepali scholars whose condescending research writings on Nepal's minority ethnic and linguistic communities leave much to be desired. Dr Dhungel's book, on the other hand, is a welcome antidote to this depressing trend, since his respect for and appreciation of the people of Mustang and their history pervades every page of his impressive monograph.

The Kingdom of Lo (Mustang): A Historical Study Ramesh K Dhungel

Jigme SP Bista for Tashi Gephel Foundation, Nepal, 2002
Price: Rs 2,000 (Hardback)
Rs 1,600 (Paperback)

Mark Turin is Director of the Digital Himalaya Project based jointly at the University of Cambridge and at Cornell University.

375 mouths and handfuls of raw rice



This fortnightly column continues with Man Bahadur Rai's narration of fighting the Japanese in Burma during World War II. After the rout at the Satang River, most of the British leave by plane and tell the Gurkhas and other Indian regiments to get to Calcutta on foot. The men begin a long, bloody march till they reach the Irrawady. With no other option, they hijack a steamer and cross the mighty river. Rai's story appears in *Lahurey ko Katha*, a collection of memoirs based on oral testimonies of 13 retired Gurkha soldiers, all but one above 75 years. It has been translated from Nepali by Deb Bahadur Thapa for *Nepali Times*.

Nothing of consequence happened on the way. We disembarked at Katha. We didn't pay the steamer because we had no money. As we marched ahead we saw somebody had burned bundles of Burmese currency notes. Their money looked like ours except for a little more red. When we reached Katha, we saw a heap of new rifles and rations with no signs of any troops. Only a number of Burmese families with their children were there. The men had gone to war. The British had left them there with future plans to shift them to Machina, but then fled without making proper arrangements. Only six or seven family members were from our regiment and more than 1,500 were families of soldiers from other regiments.

They implored us to take them with us. We had just escaped death and chances were slim that we'd let them tag along. We told them that they could not keep pace with us. The babies had to be carried and they would need food and clothing. We marched on. They followed. The bombardment started three or four miles out of camp. Since only women and children were in the column, they must have been torn to shreds.

It was an exhausting march to Thavettu. There was a river, a pier and boats. The Burmese boatman did not bring in the boat even though we kept hollering. I asked the Bren gun operator to fire a few volleys, which he did. After that we asked him in Burmese whether or not he would bring the boat to our side of the river, if not we would set his

entire village on fire. To substantiate our threat we aimed the tracer towards the sky and produced an enormous ball of fire. That display of firepower killed three people, and made him bring the boats. We joined four boats together with bamboo to make a barge and crossed the river. The moment we reached the other side, we received word that the Japanese were only two miles away. To prevent the Japanese from using the boat we hacked it with *khukuris* and set the pieces adrift on the current. We came upon a village and ordered the locals to bring rice and chicken. We were dead tired but had to take care of ourselves. Eating rice and chicken curry, it felt like Dasai.

We left very early the next morning, each of us carried about 2kg of rice in our bags. We walked till 10 in the morning and then entered the forest. We were in a fix about how to cook our food since we had no pots. Each of us made something like rice pudding in the mess tin, ate and then off we went. We had gone about six or

seven miles from the place where we ate our meager meal when we came upon heaps of rations dumped by Americans in the sal forest, left for retreating troops. They brought food in fighter planes and dropped it along with the troops. Rice, dal, sugar and tinned meat were stored in thick layers of sal leaves. They also left instructions for the approaching troops to eat properly and carry food with them. They had even thoughtfully left a big pot behind for cooking.

The following day, we agreed among ourselves that we'd carry only rice and salt, till we saw the new uniforms. We decided to put those on and leave the rest behind but a few opted to carry big bundles of clothes. How far could they carry that heavy load in the heat of April? There was no rain and the atmosphere was dry. We marched on and reached the foothills of the Naga range the following day. We had to protect ourselves if we encountered the enemy and so gave priority to ammunition over rations. We had less than a kilogram of rice left per person. We had to trudge nearly a week

to reach the top and descend down the other side. We ran out of food in the middle of the ascent. There were 30-32 British servicemen walking along with us. Sometimes they went ahead of us and sometimes we overtook them. They were weak. They would climb and as soon as they saw a pond, they would undress and swim around like water buffaloes. They contracted cholera, diarrhoea and began vomiting. They even smelled bad. But they were determined and continued walking with the help of sticks for three days. Later, we found them dead on the way. We decided that since the British soldiers had cholera and since it is a contagious disease, it was prudent to keep a safe distance from where they stayed.

When we reached the summit of the Naga hills, there was nothing to eat. There were 375 of us and a handful of raw rice. The hunger was unbearable. These days the Naga hill people will talk to strangers, but in those days as soon as they saw us they muttered incomprehensible words and disappeared. ♦

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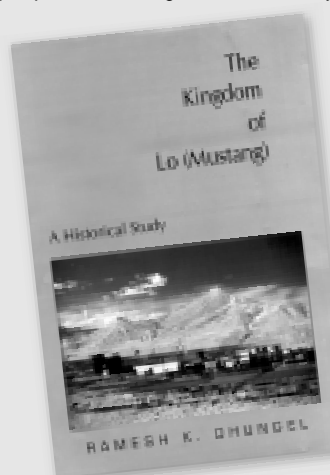


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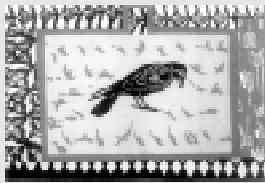
For further details contact: Ms. Bishnu Thakali (Project Co-ordinator), WEPCO Kupondole, Lalitpur, Phone # 5520617, e-mail : wepc@ntc.net.np



ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Fate and Freedom** Unique handmade carpets by John Collins. 2-23 November at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Exploration of the Magical Realm** Etchings by Seema Sharma at Café Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **My Creation** Paintings by Kiran Manandhar. 5-14 November at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Mon Regard** Photographs by Santosh FAU (Tuladhar) at Molière Auditorium, Alliance Française of Kathmandu from 3-8 November.
- ❖ **Halloween:** 31 October



EVENTS

- ❖ **Kathak:** Geetanjali Lal, accompanied by Abhimanyu Lal and Vidha Lal on 2 November at 4:30 PM at the Royal Nepal Academy, Kamaladi, Kathmandu. Bhadrapur on 7 November, Rajbiraj 9 November. Workshop at Padma Kanya 10:30 PM on 3 November. Performance at St. Xavier's College on 4 November. Invitations for RNA from the Indian Embassy Gate.
- ❖ **The God's Dance of Kathmandu Valley** 7PM on Tuesdays. Tea+Ticket: Rs 400 at Hotel Vajra.
- ❖ **Social Science Baha Library** at the Patan Dhoka, opens 31 October. 5548142
- ❖ **Cine-Club:** *Aux sources du nil* 2 November, *Le Bounty* 9 November. 2PM at Auditorium Molière at Alliance Française, Thapathali. 4241163
- ❖ **Travelling Film South Asia** presents 15 outstanding documentaries from South Asia. 3PM onwards from 31 October-2 November at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Tickets: Rs 20 at Himal Association. 5542544
- ❖ **Kids Zone** at the British Council Library opens 2 November. For books and more. 4410798

MUSIC

- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Jazz at Patan: A Concert for Peace** Nepali classical music and jazz by Cadenza and Friends. 6PM at Patan Museum, 8 November. Tickets Rs 750. 5521810, 981052968
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** every Friday at Fusion, Dwarika's. 4479488

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

- ❖ **The Grand Dosa Festival** at The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 28 October-6 November. 4491234
- ❖ **BBQ in the Shambala Garden** everyday at 7PM. 4412999
- ❖ **Sekuwa Saanjh** Friday BBQ from 7:30 PM for Rs 555 at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Weekend Ban Bhoj** at the Godavari Village Resort. Reservation recommended. 5560675.
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** ceremonial Nepali cuisine fit for a king. Reservation recommended. 4479488

GETAWAYS

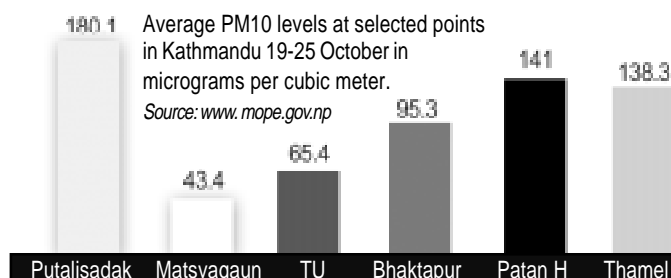
- ❖ **Microlight flying adventures** with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **TGIF overnight package** at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Bardia tiger madness** Jungle Base camp has extra special deals 061-32112 Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Back to Nature** overnight package for resident expatriates at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage, Dadagaon** Nature, peace and luxury. 4354331 Email: cbbasnyat@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Magnificent mountains** and deluxe tents at Adventure Tented Camp & Country Kitchen. 4418992 Email: advcamp@wlnik.com

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



The concentration of respirable particulate matter smaller than 10 microns (PM10) recorded at six monitoring stations last week show the correlation between vehicular traffic and pollution levels. Putali Sadak was the most polluted place in the city, where the PM10 level exceeded the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meters throughout last week, even during the weekend. Even in residential areas of Thamel, the PM10 level is now above the national standard on six out of seven days. Moral of the story: it doesn't matter where you live in Kathmandu, what you burn is what you breathe.

Good	< 60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	351 to 425
Hazardous	>425



NEPALI WEATHER



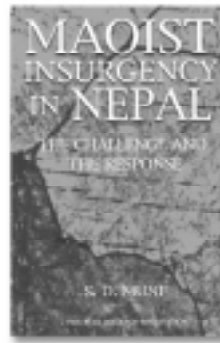
by MAUSAM BEED

October received less than normal rainfall despite those surprise showers last week in eastern Nepal. In the tug-of-war between an easterly cyclonic system and weak westerlies, the low pressure won out bringing unexpected cloud cover over Nepal. This week, the Himalaya and the plains of north India are bathed in glorious high pressure. We notice a trough active in central India, but it is too far to cause us any harm. High-pressure zones over the plateau have a key role in deflecting moisture fronts from the west, and is probably what will happen to this front currently over Iran seen in the satellite picture taken on Thursday just before noon.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM



Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: The Challenge and the Response SD Muni
Rupa & Co, India, 2003
Rs 200

After analysing seven years of the insurgency, this study critically examines the responses of the Nepali government and the international community. It underlines that India may have to radically redefine its approach to developments in Nepal and concludes that the king's military methods will not yield easy and desirable results.



Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil: Identities and Representations in the Himalayas Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, Pascal Dollfus (eds)
Oxford University Press, 2003

This collection engages with the rapid social change and acute religious and identity crises that emerged in an area extending from Gilgit to eastern Nepal. The volume asks if the rise of tribal groups within the region's elaborate caste system is indicative of an opposition to the nation-state or is a sign of modernity.

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

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Pinjar proves that a movie based on India-Pakistan relations has much more to offer than the repetitive Pak bashing dialogues or a heroic Indian making mincemeat of some deceitful Pakistanis. An adaptation of Amrita Pritam's novel by the same name, *Pinjar* meaning skeleton in Punjabi, has a beautiful body and soul. With a formal prologue in Gulzar's voice, the movie transfers you into the pre-partition period detailing the rivalry between Sheikhs and the Shahs. The movie narrates the story of Puro (Urmila Matondkar) who shares an excellent bonding with her Congress activist brother Trilok (Priyanshu Chatterjee) and is engaged to Ramchand (Sanjay Suri). But just before her marriage, a Muslim—Rashid (Manoj Bajpai), kidnaps the Hindu girl to avenge the family rivalry of generations. However, like any other Hindi film, a couple of songs could have been chopped off.



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EATING MY WORDS

by BHATMARA BHAI

Revolution in dining



Oral rehydration therapy in geo-stationary orbit over New Road.

daylight hours, raise your eyes to 15 degrees above the horizon, permitting a view of only the rooftops of Kathmandu and the mountains beyond. Once night falls, screw up your eyes just a little, preferably with the help of a beer or two, and the hidden charms

of New Road will reveal themselves.

I am reliably informed that the restaurant revolves at the maximum legal limit. The movement cannot be described as a smooth glide. In fact, it leans into the domain of jerky. But Bhatmara Bhai warmed to the restaurant's quirkiness, even to its Nepali country and western music. It is a very good place for a dusk beer, especially as the beer is served, unfashionably for Kathmandu, seriously cold. (Why oh why do so many restaurants fail to chill beer?)

The restaurant's clientele seems to be mixed. It is a good hang-out for young couples, and equally a draw for groups of young women who hanker to be part of a couple. The local clientele makes a nice change from eating out amid

unwashed backpackers or over-washed expats in Thamel. The service at the revolving restaurant is friendly, efficient and unobtrusive.

The eating, however, is a very different story. Bhatmara Bhai was horrified to discover that this was an Indo-Chinese restaurant: it offered two menu choices, Indian or Chinese. Mixing food metaphors is a Nepali disease, and like all contagions it must be quarantined immediately. Luckily, on the night Bhatmara Bhai ate there, the entire Indian Menu was, inexplicably, 'off'. Perhaps it was a revolving menu.

I could tell you that the food choices made by Bhatmara Bhai and his delightful partner for the evening were surprisingly tasty (if occasionally greasy). I could tell you that I was, all in all, pleasantly surprised by the restaurant. I could tell you all this and more, in considerable detail, but the gastronomic events that followed us the next day might put an end to your desire to listen.

Bhatmara Bhai's conclusion? Revolving Restaurant for drinks, yes. For food, maybe not. ♦



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Revolving restaurants, when invented, were a testament to the technology and optimism of the great boom years of the last century. Technology would be our salvation, delivering us from the grubby drudgery of our ugly imperfect today into a future rich in leisure and plenty. Man would ride in flying cars and we would all eat space food. As we revolved.

Kathmandu's contribution to revolving restaurants breaks with that shiny-new vision and offers its clientele a more realistic vision of the future. The realism starts with a long climb up the stairs, an ugly reminder that Bhatmara Bhai hasn't got his flying car yet. There isn't, nor was there ever, something as elemental as an

elevator here. Such an absence would surely have future man tut-tutting into his space food.

Then there is the matter of height. Revolving restaurants are supposed to tower over their surroundings. Rising a whole five floors above the metropolis obliges the word 'towering' to be an overly generous misnomer. This is a serious failing. In the world of revolving restaurants, size matters. The whole point of a revolving restaurant is its view.

Indulge me. Run these words together: 'View' and 'New Road'. What went through the minds of those who built a revolving restaurant in the centre of New Road? If you, like Bhatmara Bhai, have a demanding visual palette, I recommend the following. In

Touch 'n' text

The diaspora has found a new way to keep in touch with relatives back home.

BHAGIRATH YOGI in LONDON

Rajesh Joshi, a Nepali student in London, worried about big phone bills, especially at festival time. This Dasai Tihar he discovered texting. "Most family members in Nepal were pleasantly surprised," he told us. "It was cheap and fun." Rajesh's new channel of communication is www.nepalonline.com, which allows Nepalis to send text messages to Nepal.

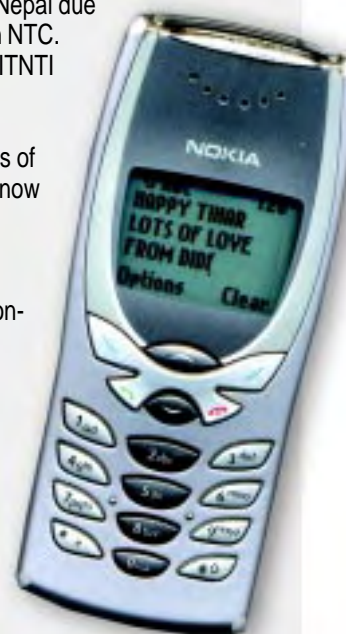
Though international texting (called SMS) is quite common elsewhere, it is not possible to and from Nepal due to technical inadequacies at the state-run NTC. Now, the software applications company ITNTI has introduced the first ever Global SMS Gateway to Nepal.

"This service is a landmark for millions of Nepalis living around the world who will now be able to reach out to their loves ones, business contacts, friends and family instantaneously at a minimum cost," Shashank Kansal, president of the London-based ITNTI, told us.

Kansal's first client was the Nepali manager at a Pizza Hut in northern London, and since then he has been overwhelmed by the response from subscribers. Users from 36 countries registered in the first week of its launch. ITNTI is the first Nepali company to bring IT-enabled services like virtual office, e-paging and e-patra.

Registering with the web-based SMS services requires only three simple steps and then selecting a package. The SMS packages range from 50 SMS to 500 SMS for \$6.25 to \$50 respectively. It also has group messaging for up to 20 people (not currently available in Nepal), an unlimited address book and a year's validity. Subscribers can pay by credit card.

By bypassing NTC, ITNTI has shown that if a state-owned telecom operator does not innovate, it will be left behind. The 5,000 mobile phone users in Nepal cannot use their phones for global roaming, they cannot SMS internationally and even have to pay Rs 1 per text message. ♦





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Visitor Feedback Questionnaire

As we strive for service excellence, the seemingly unconcerned authorities are planning to hand out Visitor Feedback Questionnaires to dear and departing tourists while they wait for their flights at Kathmandu airport.

This is an excellent idea: it helps them kill time, especially if the Loyal Nepalis' Airline has just said it regrets to announce that the flight to Dubai has been postponed till 4AM tomorrow morning, and any inconvenience caused to passengers is not unusual.

Filling multiple choice questionnaires is no joke. It is like taking a final exam, needing deep concentration, the power of evaluation and subjective judgement. The feedback will all go to help our tourist industry finetune

its product range, upgrade services, streamline procedures so that we find out the lacunae where we don't yet charge entry fees.

To start with, tourists will be required to mandatorily pay \$5 for taking the trouble to fill out this form. The money will be used to print more questionnaires for future feedback. We aim to please, and realise that there is always room for improvement to make your stay in Nepal more profitable for us.

Please be so kind as to take a few moments of your time to complete this short survey. The information you provide will be held in strictest confidence, unless of course you decide to be nasty in which case we will put your name and address on our website.

1. Did you find Nepal up to your expectations?
☐ Great ☐ Ahem, not really ☐ What expectations?
2. If you were looking for Nirvana in Nepal, did you find it?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Om
3. What was the condition of the public toilets?
☐ Excellent ☐ Needs Improvement ☐ Mfffgharrgh
4. Was your privacy respected?
☐ Go away ☐ No, I don't want to buy another bloody khukuri
☐ You want to see my khukuri?
5. What is your opinion of the promo ads about Nepal that you have seen?
☐ Lies ☐ Damn lies ☐ Statistics
6. Which of the following did you expect to see during your visit versus what you actually saw?
Expected to see Actually saw
☐ Gorillas ☐ Guerrillas
☐ Gurkhas ☐ Airport friskers
☐ Yeti ☐ Yak & Yeti
☐ Paradise ☐ Paragliding
7. How do you rate our overall service?
☐ Compared to what? ☐ You really want to know? ☐ Let's just say it was a memorable trip
8. Was the visa officer at the airport courteous?
☐ You're joking, right? ☐ Can I have my change back? ☐ \$50 minus \$35 is \$15, not \$5
9. Was the guy with the light submachine gun at Birethanti courteous?
☐ Yup yup yup ☐ No doubt about it ☐ Absolutely
☐ Sure thing ☐ Unh-huh ☐ That is affirmative
10. Who will you recommend Nepal to:
☐ Friend ☐ Foe ☐ Friend and foe alike
11. If one more guy asks you to pay Rs 300 to enter a Durbar Square, you will:
☐ Strangle him with your bare hands in broad daylight hours
☐ Embrace him tightly and execute a Heimlich Maneuvre so he regurgitates his lunch
☐ Drop verbal hints about his canine motherhood
☐ Show him the khukuri you bought

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NEPALI SOCIETY

Hoping to spread hope

"I thought that they were the most needy children," is the straightforward reason Singh Bahadur Moktan gives for dedicating his life to helping the children of prisoners. "Without committing any crimes they have to live in prison. They have no future at all."

Singh Bahadur set up Parijat Nestling Home, a place about as far from a prison environment as it is possible to get, named after the poetess known for her political and poignant verse. In Parijat, 29 girls—three quarters of whom were rescued from Kathmandu's jails—live without fear of harassment or molestation. It is a cheerful extended family in which the director is more a father figure than a headmaster.

Singh Bahadur believes passionately in providing education according to the ancient Vedanta philosophy in which children learn Sanskrit and happily recite prayers in the morning, before meals and at bedtime. As well as attending nearby private schools during the day, they are taught yoga, martial arts and handicrafts at home.

Parijat is not just a temporary refuge from the horrors of prison, but 'life membership' in the family. Things don't end when the girls leave school, they get job placements. Singh Bahadur hopes to spread hope like a "wave within the prison", astonishing incarcerated parents by the change in attitude of their children.

He tells the story of one girl, who on a visit to her mother in prison, refused to sit on the bed where she had sat before, because it was dirty. On the next visit, the bed was clean. Parijat accepts only girl children, and this is deliberate. "In Nepal the first disconnect happens when the mother gives priority to the boys," explains Singh Bahadur. "If we can make good mothers, maybe we can change Nepal." ♦
(Natalie Toms)



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धारा हेल्थ
सूर्यमुखी तेल